Palestinian Youth Engagement with Online Political Contents Shared by Citizen Journalists—The Case of Save Sheikh Jarrah

Rola Khalid Yousef

Abstract

Initial research on online political activism reveals that new information and communication technologies (ICTs) have increasingly become a growing and supportive space for political participation, which has influenced the conception of political activism. Furthermore, ICTs have become a facilitator for the formation of online political networks and communities. The shocking images of young children killed in the latest genocidal onslaught by Israel against Gaza in 2021 and the clashes that broke out in Sheikh Jarrah and Al Aqsa Mosque dominated the global news and online media platforms. Online political activists, such as Muna El Kurd, who represents the phenomenon of "Citizen Journalism" in Palestine, took to the internet and social media channels to ardently express their discontentment about the unhumanitarian actions and human rights violations being committed. This article aims to map out the Palestinian youth engagement with online political content disseminated by Muna El Kurd' Instagram and Twitter accounts, by employing an empirical approach using a quantitative research method to collect primary data while relying on the literature review to discuss in-depth online activism and the concept of Citizen Journalism in the Middle East. An online survey, in Arabic language, was conducted following the simple random sampling technique, targeting one hundred college-educated and technologically advanced Palestinian youth respondents (18–29 years old). The data collected was used to examine and address specific research questions related to what information sources the youth use to acquire political information and to what extent they rely on social media platforms

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belonging to citizen journalists. The study concluded that Palestinian youth participate in many online activities and rely on social media platforms for information; their interests and knowledge of politics are growing; the surveyed youth in Palestine are highly interested in political matters and are moderate participants in online political discussions.

Keywords

Online Activism, Political Participation, Palestine, Citizen Journalism, Social Media Platform, Sheikh Jarrah

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Introduction

Human access to information has significantly changed over time and through the ages. We have witnessed numerous sources being used to spread information and news until recently, especially in the 20th century, represented by newspapers, radio, and television. People have gathered around the television or radio or waited for the newspaper to be delivered, all in order to satisfy the human yearning for information and knowledge, as well as to keep up with the latest news and events in their tiny communities or the entire world. People can now connect with the entire globe anywhere, at any time, and read or listen to about any issue with the touch of a button on a computer or mobile device, thanks to technical advancements and the rise of social networking sites. This is due to the rapid and continuous development of information communication technologies, which has led to a shift from traditional sources of information such as newspapers and radio in favor of more modern forms of technology such as the internet, mobile phones, and social media networks, which are characterized by their speed of communication, intellectual exchange, and social and political activities (Vegh 2003).

In relation to these modern social media platforms, they are one of the pillars of online political and social activity around the world and the Middle East, which is the focus of this article. These sites contributed to changing the way political activity and social initiatives were planned and implemented. Furthermore, it changed the traditional role of individuals from a recipient of political information and messages to a producer and an active participant in presenting events and producing news, whether political or social, particularly in countries where political oppression, occupation, and suppression of freedoms of expression are prevalent (Dwonch 2021). As a result, the phenomenon of online political activism emerged, as we saw in the Arab Spring and recent events in Jerusalem and the neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah, to name a few examples (Noor 2017).

In fact, social media platforms represented a qualitative leap in the lives of Palestinians and other users around the world. This is true, particularly for

people whose freedoms have been stripped and who suffer from oppression. Activists for the Palestinian cause who were looking at Palestinian activists on the ground through screens without having the capabilities to interact with them, theorize with them, or mobilize for their implementation were disconnected until the winds of the Arab Springs blew and demonstrated the efficacy of social media platforms in promoting and motivating online political activism (Hoigilt 2013). Indeed, the Palestinians followed in the footsteps of the rest of the Arab world, using these sites for purposes other than entertainment. Palestinian youth interact with many issues and events via social media, and their interactions with political issues gradually peaked in 2014 and 2021, when human rights violations worsened in the Gaza Strip and conflict heightened in Jerusalem (Nasasra 2022).

Youth political participation and activism can be driven by different motivations and objectives. In Palestine, youth participate and engage in political activities in order to show signs of resistance to the occupation, create change in their societies, and gain recognition. If more youth become more engaged in different political activities that lead to a better understanding of the political situation, they can influence political decisions and strategy (Dwonch 2021). As a result of this political persecution and suppression of free speech, particularly in the case of Jerusalem, which is the focus of the study, Palestinian youth took it upon themselves to play the role of journalists, collecting, documenting, and disseminating the Palestinian narrative through their social media channels to the entire world. Pages and social media accounts supervised by young Palestinian activists were activated in many languages describing to the world what was happening in Palestine and Sheikh Jarrah in particular (Nasasra 2022).

Methodology

This article aims to investigate the relationship between social media platforms and political activism in Palestine and to examine the role of citizen journalists in using social media platforms to support and promote online political participation and activism among the youth. We witnessed the role of social media platforms in the 2011 Arab Spring events, and their unique features in initiating, facilitating, and organizing demonstrations and protests

both offline and online. This was a clear representation of the new role of social media in political activism and participation. The latest clashes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood inspired us to investigate in more depth this relation with Palestinian youth political activism. Based on this, the proposed hypothesis for this study is designed to test the relationship between the various variables involved in the study, primarily political participation and activism, social media platforms, and citizen journalists, all within the specific context of Palestine and with a focus on the case of Sheikh Jarrah, with the goal of enriching our understanding and bringing new valid information to the field.

Hypothesis

H1: There is an association between political participation and social media platforms as a tool for activism.

H2: Youth in Palestine trust Citizen Journalists' social media platforms as a credible source of political information.

H3: Political participation is widely spread among youth in Palestine.

In order to test the validity of the three hypotheses discussed above, the research design for this article used a quantitative research method and limited the research context to the case of Sheikh Jarrah and the Palestinian activist Muna El-Kurd and her selected social media accounts.

The researcher created an online questionnaire to collect data to analyze in depth the relationship between Palestinian youth and social media as platforms to practice online activism and identify their online political participation and concerns. Ten questions in Arabic were created and shared with the target audience to fulfill the objectives of the research and to test the hypothesis. The targeted population (respondents of the research) were one hundred respondents who belonged to the youth category in Palestine and fell in the age group of 19–29 years old. They are primarily from two main cities in the West Bank (Ramallah and Hebron), where social media platforms and specific political backgrounds can be found. The sample of participants was chosen using the simple random sampling technique.

The data collected was used to examine and address specific research questions:

1/ What information sources do the Palestinian youth use for political information?

2/ To what extent do they rely on new social media platforms belonging to citizen journalists for political exchange?

3/ What is Palestinian youth perception towards the credibility of political contents shared by citizen journalists on social media platforms?

4/ Do Palestinian youth assert that new media channels enhance their political participation?

The Case of Sheikh Jarrah

Since the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem in 1976, Israel has sought to reduce Palestinians' geographical interdependence, particularly with the occupied city of Jerusalem in order to establish a coherent Israeli settlement entity. The city of Jerusalem's village of Sheikh Jarrah was also under occupation in 1967. Due to its strategic location on the dividing line between the City's eastern and western sides, the village was the target of arbitrary Israeli practices that sought to expel its original owners from their lands and homes and completely seize them (Image 1). Since then, al Quds (Jerusalem) has experienced a massive number of demonstrations and protests that shape and reflect the daily routine and practices of its Palestinian population. Recently, al Karama demonstrations during Ramadan 2021 indicate a dramatic shift. The main reason for the 2021 protest movement is Israel's policy of expelling an increasing number of Palestinians from the borderland zone, in an effect to attempt to control the most important geopolitical space in East Jerusalem—the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood—and imposing supremacy over the Damascus Gate and its steps (Nasasra 2022).

Image 1: Sheikh Jarrah (Sky News 2021)

As previously stated, problems in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood can be traced back to its occupation in 1967. In 1970, the Israeli parliament passed an unjust law claiming that the ownership of the land in Sheikh Jarrah belonged to Israeli Jews, and based on this decision, the Israeli government constructed settlements and housed religious Israeli Jews in them. In addition to filing legal cases claiming Israeli Jews' ownership of this land and homes built in Sheikh Jarrah, the Israeli government demanded the evacuation of Palestinians and the expulsion of Palestinian resettles. The first official eviction decision was issued in 2022 against a number of Palestinian families. Currently, three thousand Palestinians live in this neighborhood on a small portion of the land that remains after thousands of dunams were confiscated from their original residents. There are pending cases in Israeli courts where 28 families are awaiting possible evacuation in order to build more settlements (Nasasrah 2022). Sheikh Jarrah is an example of Israeli arbitrariness and continues to be a vivid view into the perpetually tense regions where we witness the many forms of Palestinian struggles to preserve their land and Palestinian identity.

Muna El-Kurd

As a result of the unjust and equally questionable treatment experienced by Palestinian citizens in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, massive, yet peaceful

demonstrations in solidarity with the residents took place in Jerusalem, additional Palestinian cities and towns, the Gaza Strip, and Palestinian towns in Israel. Despite the Israeli army's efforts to prevent the leakage of news and events from inside the neighborhood by cordoning off the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and prohibiting anyone from approaching or entering the neighborhood unless the individual could verify that they were a resident (Edwards 2021). Palestinian activists have been merged inside the neighborhood, particularly young Palestinian twins Muna and Muhammad El-Kurd, whose houses are under threat of evacuation and who were able with their online activism to advocate the continuous Palestinian struggle. The El-Kurds were able to transmit daily events and clashes with the help of the internet and social networking platforms such as Twitter. Hence, I argue that Muna and Muhammad's initiatives are a true representation of the phenomenon of online activism, Palestinian youth political participation and the phenomenon of citizen journalists.

Muna El-Kurd, a 23-year-old Palestinian woman, was a young activist who took on the responsibility of informing the world by documenting and disseminating what is happening in East Jerusalem, particularly the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, of inhumane practices against Palestinian citizens. Through her political work, the world could observe the present-day attempts to forcibly expel Palestinian families at the hands of the Israeli government. Furthermore, she also led a successful Twitter and Instagram campaign to save Sheikh Jarrah. Mona El-Kurd's initiative and political activity on the internet were widely publicized and covered by Arab and international media networks, making this young woman a symbol of the phenomenon of citizen journalism. Due to her dedication, motivation, and most notably, bravery, to relay the truth to the world, she was selected as Time Magazine's 100 most influential figures in 2021 (Edwards 2021).

Therefore, and in line with the study goals which are to examine Palestinian youth perceptions and political participation and its relationship with political information and political content shared by Muna El-Kurd, it is critical to study the content of her social media accounts, particularly her Instagram and Twitter accounts. Muna joined Twitter in March 2021 and has over

100 thousand followers. The first analysis of her account shows that she created and dedicated this Twitter account to advocate for Sheikh Jarrah as her first Twitter post (Image 2), marked March 12, 2021, states: "From the day I became aware of the world, and I lived in a state of fear and the threat that I would be evicted from my home, especially since Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood is one of the most Jerusalem neighborhoods threatened with eviction and displacement. Every day I was asking myself where we want to go." Through the accumulation of her daily posts of texts, images, and videos, Muna promoted and contributed significantly to the spread of the #SaveSheikhJarrah hashtag, which went viral nationally and internationally.

Image 2. Muna El Kurd Twitter Account (@kurd_muna 2021)

Muna El-Kurd's Instagram account has 1.6 million followers, the initial analysis of her Instagram account besides the high numbers of viewership, followers, and comments reflects her eagerness to advocate and disseminate the Palestinian reality on her Instagram account. Instagram, as a platform that focuses on media content, being a visual medium, the storytelling features, and the impact of photography on the audience, has made Muna feel more comfortable dedicating her time and efforts to creating posts that illustrate causes and initiate dialogues, if not boycott and actions, as illustrated in (Image 3), "No to the siege of Sheikh Jarrah. The people of the neighborhood invite you to stand by them against the illegal closure imposed on them. Saturday May 22 at 5 PM."

Image 3. Muna El Kurd Instagram Account (Muna.kurd15 2021)

Literature Review

This literature review section will focus on discussing activism within cyberspace and the current debate on the internet in relation to activism. Additionally, this section will introduce and discuss the concept of citizen journalism with a special focus on the Middle East region and Palestine.

Online Activism in the Middle East

The debate on the relationship between the internet and activism has both supporters and detractors. Vegh (2003, 71) argues that the internet facilitates the process of political activism, enhances tactics, disseminates information

that enables faster and more effective communication and defines online activism as a "Politically motivated movement relying on the Internet." This argument is valid in the case of the Middle East. In fact, Arab societies have gone through a series of transformations and changes on technological, political, and social levels. Therefore, and with the assistance of the internet revolted against the dictatorial rules aiming to achieve political and social justice. The mass protests in Egypt during January and February of 2011 for example, were led and organized by virtual activist communities as a representation of the online political activism phenomenon. This is reflective of the relationship between technology and activism. "As may be expected with any technology-enabled phenomenon, the patterns of activists' online behaviors shifted with development in technology" (Eaton 2013, 4).

On the other hand, other scholars such as Diani (2000) and Polat (2005) argue that the internet and social media platforms never had a direct relation with political activism, but they became one of the most supportive components in activism. They claim that trust is the main element that maintains action and that trust cannot be established easily through online interactions only. This argument is strongly related to this study because the collected data analysis confirms that social media platforms are important for online political activism. However, participant trust in the online activist is also important for strengthening their online political participation and activism.

In relation to this debate, the researcher argues that Howard (2011, 145) definition of online activism: "the act of using the Internet to advance a political cause that is difficult to advance offline" can be applied to the Arab Spring movement and the Sheikh Jarrah demonstrations, where insurgent politics, created by online activism compounded the effect of political protests and movements. This argument is supported by Khamis and Vaughn (2011) investigation of how the use of the new information communication technologies and the internet during the events of the Arab Spring helped to advocate and inform the world about the ongoing protests, supported the political movements online as well as offline, and contributed to organizing the massive protests of January 25.

Cyberspace spawned new styles of representation and interaction that included many social and political aspects (Gibson 1996). It is represented by the internet and new information communication technologies, it allows for a new style of social and political interaction and activism, which affects the nature of human experience as it allows for a more efficient, fast, and cost-effective communication tool accessible to the general population (Chinnasamy, Ramli, and Hashim 2017). As a result of the existence of cyberspace and the continuous development of information communication technologies and social media platforms, and in order to keep pace with the times and communicate and live in the required modern and technological way, ordinary citizens in the Middle East were able to experience new cultures, forming new levels of consciousness, and becoming highly engaged in various political and social issues in cyberspace, forming a whole new experience that overcame the traditional political system and authorities (Bayat 2017).

Citizens of the Arab world have utilized blogging technologies and social media platforms to develop and distribute media and opinions faster than governments can control, censor, or regulate (Eaton 2013). Early Arab activists opted to write in English after adopting and embracing the internet-based technology of activism. The 2003 Iraq War was a starting point for several activists to depict the situation while reporting on the war on a daily basis (Sifry 2006). As a result of their awareness that they had an audience, several of these early activists took on sensitive political, human rights, social, and economic issues. They learned that their blogs could be a valuable source of information, a supplement to traditional media, a vehicle for lobbying and networking with like-minded citizens. In certain cases, they were capable of bringing a cause to the notice of the international community (Levinson 2005). As the technology for writing in the Arabic language improved and became more widely available, a flood of Arabic-language activists arose, allowing them to reach a larger, more domestic audience. Authorities were irritated by the strength of some of these activists, leading to a crackdown and outrage among academics and activists over the lack of protection for those who freely use this technology (HRinfo 2006).

As discussed by Eaton (2013) and Ben Moussa (2013), the younger wired generations of activists in Egypt, influenced by the revolution in Tunisia, dedicated their time and efforts to establishing and organizing massive political and social protests using social media platforms. The brutal murder of Khalid Saeed, by the Egyptian police, started the first online activism community page on Facebook, "We Are All Khalid Saeed," which mobilized demonstrations against the regime demanding freedom and justice. According to Giglio (2011, 2), this Facebook page was "the country's largest and most active online human-rights activist group" and led to the removal of the Egyptian president from power. Although Arab activists have succeeded in deposing authoritarian rulers in some countries, such as Egypt and Tunisia, they have failed to depose others, such as Syria's Al Asad.

Furthermore, following the 2011 revolution, most authorities in the Middle East passed new legislation that allows for mass censorship and media blocking. Various restrictions on freedom of expression and the implementation of censorship practices have been observed. Egyptian authorities' practices and judgments are harsher in application. It is now more dangerous to criticize Egypt's government than at any other time in the country's recent history. "Egyptians living under President al-Sisi are treated as criminals simply for peacefully expressing their opinions" as claimed by Najia Bounaim, Amnesty International's North Africa Campaigns Director (Amnesty International 2018).

The government's censorship practices and regulations on social media speech remain a source of concern. Censorship will be implemented on these platforms as governments accuse them of supporting terrorism and extremism and spreading false information (Amnesty International 2018). In Palestine, the situation is similar, if not worse. Palestinians living under occupation are subjected to regular, if not, daily checks via mass surveillance technologies, checkpoints, and face recognition software both offline and online, imposing restrictions on Palestinian freedom of expression and resistance (Taha 2020).

The Concept of Citizen Journalism

Citizen journalism is a media concept centered on how ordinary citizens engage in journalistic activities such as reporting on specific issues and raising awareness about issues that are important to them; these individuals lack professional journalism training but have a strong ability to produce and distribute news to their communities via the internet (Miller 2019). Many critics, however, continue to be concerned about the phenomenon's news credibility and inability to authenticate news content, as well as citizen journalists' lack of professional training (Noor 2017). In relation to this, most studies on the phenomenon of citizen journalism have focused on concerns about the extent to which it has reached in producing journalistic content and news qualities that match traditional journalistic standards. For example, traditional journalism has a variety of news sources based on official sources where citizen journalism identities are being communicated more freely (Miller 2019).

Furthermore, Chinnasamy, Ramli, and Hashim (2017) examined the relationship between the phenomenon of citizen journalism and news reliability, claiming that as a result of the increase in audiences' trust in the news provided by citizen journalists, their ability to freely share their experiences online, and their ability to highlight sensitive issues and imposed them to the news agenda, all of this has impacted the trust and credibility of traditional-official journalists and news sources. Simultaneously, it has helped to strengthen the concept of "citizen journalism," which emphasizes the process of gathering, reporting, evaluating, and disseminating news and information in several existing definitions of "citizen journalism" (Muhamed, Omar, and Krauss 2021). As a result of this rise, the journalism industry and academics were forced to reconsider what defines journalism and how to identify reporter characteristics and roles. Citizens journalists' involvement in news gathering and reporting undermined the traditional media newsroom by calling their credibility into question; however, citizen journalists' impact extended beyond the constitution of journalism to include a comparison between them and their professional counterparts (Miller 2019).

It was noted that for many years practicing journalism was restricted to a select group of professionals with specialized education and training, as well as a journalism degree; however, because of the internet and information communication technologies development, the field of journalism has undergone a significant shift, allowing ordinary citizens to be citizen journalists, gathering, and producing news content (Channel 2010). As new information communication technologies are becoming a part of our everyday life practices such as education, communication, consumption, and entertainment and with the advent of digital modernity, social media platforms, and smart devices, it has become very common to be involved in the creation and dissemination of news content (Lyon 2017). According to Balaraman et al. (2016) social media platforms such as Facebook offer novel ways to increase ordinary citizens' involvement in public and social issues, while advances in information communication technologies and internet penetration aided the concept of the public acting as journalists and the rise of online citizen journalism. The 9/11 attacks provided an early example of the phenomenon of citizen journalism, as we witnessed how ordinary citizens shared images, videos, and news about the attacks, and how the internet's capabilities spread the same beyond the borders of New York and the United States (Muhamed, Omar, and Krauss 2021).

Arab activists, like their international counterparts, do not consider themselves journalists and do not believe they should follow journalistic conventions, rules, or ethical standards. Instead, they are specialists at establishing unfiltered, raw communication flows, and they are known as "citizen journalists" (Hamdy 2009). They don't have the same resources or standards as professional journalists, but they share the global blogging culture's values of outspokenness, humor, intellectual honesty, and openness to different viewpoints, as did other "citizen-blog reporters" around the world (Domingo and Heinonen 2008).

With Israel's attacks on Gaza, the region is entering another politically turbulent period, bloggers and activists are ramping up their coverage, analysis, and commentary on the conflict. Ordinary citizens and activists wield significant power, and they are seizing the opportunity to represent

this new concept of citizen journalism. We observed how Al Jazeera, the Arab world's most powerful news organization, has combined rapidly updated citizen journalists' images, reports, videos, comments, and links from conflict zones such as Gaza with verified news sources.

From another perspective, today, over 3.8 billion people use the internet; 70 percent of them live in countries where posting and disseminating information on political, social, or religious matters can lead to arrest; and 65 percent live in countries where people have been attacked or killed as a result of their internet political activity (Al Jazeera 2019). The author claims that this is exactly the situation in the Middle East, particularly since the Arab Spring. The expansion of citizen journalism's roles and goals has irritated authoritarian regimes in the region, who have tried to limit and control this expansion, which will have a severe impact on the region's political and social movements, as well as online activism (Eaton 2013).

Data Analysis and Discussion

As a result of the data collected from the online questionnaire being analyzed and statistical data being extracted, this section will discuss the research findings. Table 1 depicts the respondents' social demographics background, which discusses the respondents' socioeconomic background, such as age, city, education, and sex. This study concentrated on two major cities in Palestine's West Bank, which are Ramallah and Hebron, as they have the highest population and political activity. While 53 percent of those surveyed live in Ramallah, 47 percent live in Hebron. All questions in this online survey were answered by all the participants. The participants reflect a variety of levels of education as summarized in Table 1.—66 percent of respondents were highly educated as they were either studying at a university or had graduated from it, which indicates the importance of education in Palestinian society.

No.	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Respondents' Age			
I.	18–22 years old	50	50%
II.	23–25 years old	34	34%
III.	26–29 years old	16	16%
Respondents' Sex			
I.	Male	55	55%
II.	Female	45	45%
Respondents' Education			
I.	Highschool	34	34%
II.	At university	22	22%
III.	Graduated	44	44%
Respondents' City			
I.	Ramallah	53	53%
II.	Hebron	47	47%

Table 1. Respondents' Social Demographics (Age, Sex, Education, City)

Palestinian Youth Online Activism

According to the United Nations, youth is defined as the population sector that falls between the ages of (15–24 years old). However, the United Nations allows countries to adjust this age group to fit the nature and special circumstances of each country. As a result, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) defines youth in Palestine as the population that falls between the ages of 18–29 years old (PCBS 2018). Palestinian youth are politically, socially, and geographically divided into three groups: those in the West Bank who are under the control of the Palestinian Authority, those in Gaza who are under the control of Hamas, and those in East Jerusalem who are under the control of the Israeli government. What these groups have in common is their activism for the Palestinian cause, and they are said to constituents what is called the

Palestinian State (Daibas 2021). Youth age group (18–29 years) constituents make up 22 percent of the total population in Palestine and age group (15–29) years constituents are 30 percent of the total population. Due to these numbers, we can describe the Palestinian society as a young society, and they are almost evenly divided between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (PCBS 2021).
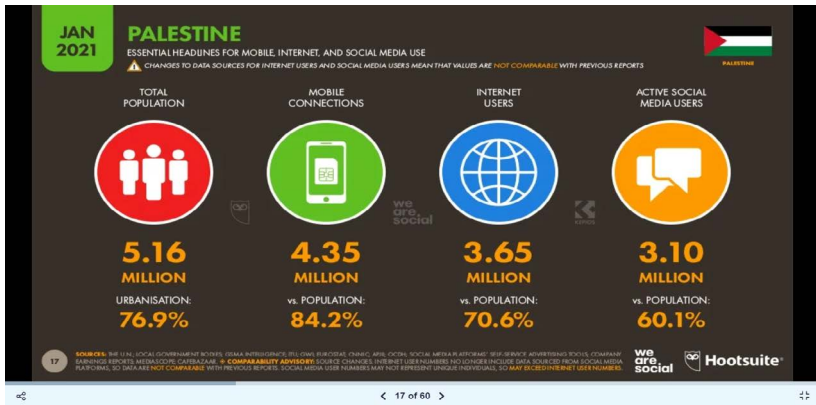

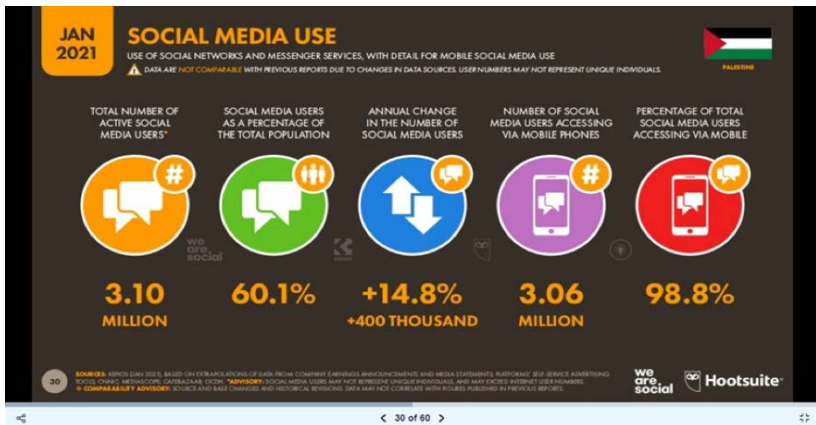
Figure 1. Digital 2021: Palestine (Kemp 2021)

Figure 2.Digital 2021: Palestine (Kemp 2021)

This segment of the population age group (18–29 years) who are the target of this study suffers from a very high unemployment rate, as well as many social, economic, and political forces. On the other hand, they can be described as a technologically savvy generation where 86 percent of the youth population in Palestine are internet users and 94 percent are active social media users (PCBS 2021). Furthermore, according to Kemp (2021) the use of the internet and social media networks is very popular in Palestinian society. The total population in Palestine is 5.16 million where out of this total population 84 percent are mobile users, 70.6 percent are internet users, and 60.1 percent are active social media users (Figures 1 and 2).

Analyzing the internet and social media usage figures in Palestine shows that the same figures are unique, and they keep pace with global figures and trends as Palestinian society is heavily influenced by international trends. There is an annual increase in social media users of 15 percent, and nearly 99 percent of social media users access these platforms through their mobile phones. Furthermore, 100 percent of interviewees indicated that they have a social media account and 70 percent stated they use social media to follow political information (Figures 3 and 4). Since nearly 99 percent of users access platforms from mobile phones, this access is instantly available 100 percent of the day, and can be available to pass on information with current timing.
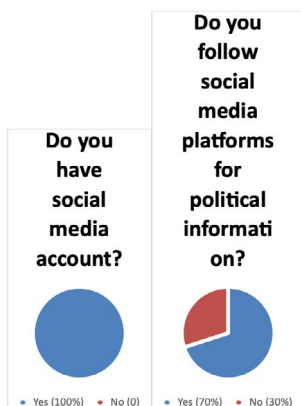

Figure 3 and 4

In the context of Palestine and aside from using the internet and social media platforms as a source of political information, it is important to highlight how the same tools and platforms were and continue to be used by the Palestinian youth to form what we can call the electronic resistance, aiming to overcome the daily struggle of checkpoints and curfews in Palestinian territories implemented by the Israeli occupation, overcome the difficult social and political atmospheres surround them and benefit from this electronic resistance and activism by advocating for and broadcasting the Palestinian situation (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2012).

In addition, it is important to note that while Palestinian youth use the internet to access knowledge and challenge the implemented restrictions on freedom of speech, freedom of expression, freedom of movement and mobilization, and to challenge the unjust and unbalanced existing dominant power systems in Palestine, they unintentionally contribute to the strengthening of the powers of those who already control it (Fatafta and Nashif 2017). In this case, we're talking about the Israeli occupation and their hold on power in the political, economic, and social spheres. By using the internet and social media platforms to express their knowledge and opinions, they allow the oppressor to learn more about them, and in exchange, the Israeli forces gain more control over them through advanced surveillance, monitoring, and censorship technologies (Taha 2020). In this regard and to demonstrate the above point of view I would rely on Fatafta and Nashif (2017, 2) study as it states:

> This happened particularly in October 2015, when Haaretz, the prominent center-left daily newspaper explained that the reason for attacks of Palestinian teenagers was that they were incited by social media and therefore, the Israeli security system began to watch Palestinians' social media accounts tightly and punish Palestinians based on their online expression. Israel has arrested around 800 Palestinians because of their posts on social media, particularly on Facebook, Palestinians' preferred platform.

Palestinian Youth and Political Participation

Political participation is defined as "ordinary citizens' behavior aimed at influencing some political outcomes" (Brady 1999, 737). This behavior and motivation may vary depending on demographics, sociopolitical surroundings, and environments, which affect how people use social media platforms for political information and participation; however, most studies measuring the use of social media platforms for political participation discovered a positive relationship (Nekmat, Gower, and Zhou 2019; Schmiemann 2015). In relation to this many authors such as Gibson and McAllister (2012) and Schmiemann (2015) investigated the relationship between social media platforms and political participation, concluding that social media platforms contributed positively and increased political participation, interactions, and communication due to the ability to discuss political issues freely and openly online.

Respectively, youth political participation refers to engaging them in a variety of political activities and viewing them as active participants in political systems, particularly in Western democracies that develop special political programs to encourage and advocate for youth political participation and political empowerment (Bessant 2004). However, in the absence of these political programs in the Middle East, youth political participation can be linked to the concept of "wired citizen," which refers to how communication attitudes change and follow new trends as a result of the new technological era, new communication users or wired users and the change in their perception and participation in the social and political systems (Herrera 2014).

Since 2011 and the Arab Spring events, the role of new information communication technologies and their influence on youth social and political participation and their effectiveness for both online and offline political activism and participation has many supporters (Bayat 2017; Ghonim 2012; Cole 2014). Furthermore, Towner (2013) and Vitak et al. (2011) emphasize the distinction between online and offline political participation, on one hand, they define online political participation as political activities conducted through the online space, such as sending a political message to political

authorities, while defining offline political participation as participating in physical demonstrations and argue that it is important to pay attention to the effort and motivation behind practicing political participation on social media platforms.

In relation to this, effort is defined as the measurable time and energy required to perform an activity related to political participation. This political participation effort can be high or low, with low effort political participation requiring less energy and time, such as signing a petition, and high effort political participation requiring more energy and time, such as protesting (Table 2). In fact, measuring the effort, motivations and objectives is crucial when analyzing political activism as a behavior of participating or not. The achievement of this objective is determined by the amount of effort (time and energy) put in (Krishnan, Netemeyer, and Boles 2002). The author argues here that (Krishnan, Netemeyer, and Boles's study's) examples for the low and high effort participation can justify why only 45 percent of the survey participants answered yes when they had been asked if they participated in political discussions conducted on social media platforms. In my opinion, they were not completely aware of the different kinds of political participation (low and high effort) especially when the majority confirmed that they consider social media platforms as a tool to perform political activism (Figure 5).

	Low effort	High effort
Off-line	Displaying campaign signs (buttons, stickers, posters, etc.)	Attending a political meeting
		Attending a political demonstration
	Signing a petition on the street	Contacting a political candidate
	Reminding someone to vote	Working for a party/candidate
Online	Liking a political actor or cause	Sending an Email to a politician
	Sharing political information	Writing a political blog entry
	Posting short political comments	Engaging in political discussion
	Signing an online petition	Creating a political group on social media

Table 2. Examples of low and high effort online and offline participatory activities (Krishnan, Netemeyer, and Boles 2002, 287).

However, this newer wave of online political activism and participation in Palestine, which can be described as digital and nonviolent, was able to overshadow the traditional and historical resistance movement and demonstrations such as the first and second intifadas, which occurred in the early 1980s and early 2000s, respectively (Dwonch 2021). This fact and perception were confirmed by the response of the participants where 87 percent of interviewees considered and perceived social media platforms as a tool for political activism and participation in Palestine (Figure 6).
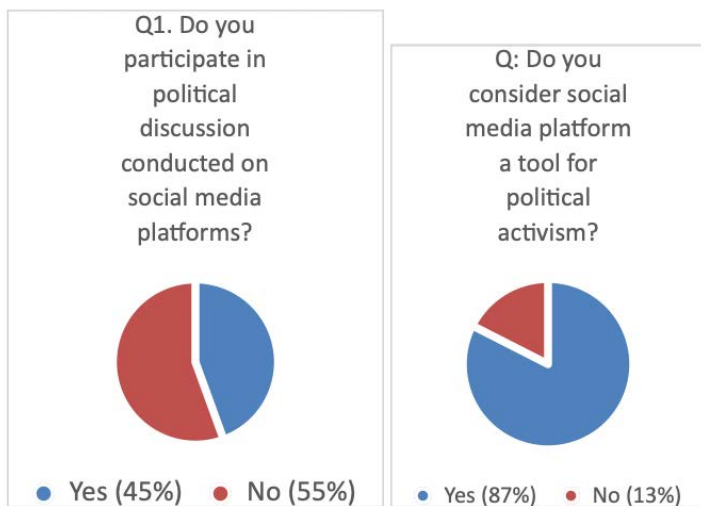

Figure 5 and 6

Furthermore, beside the low–high effort political participation justification for Palestinian youth's online political participation, we argue here that youth and online political activism in Palestine cannot be studied without considering the unique historical and sociopolitical contexts, as well as the theoretical implications of the internet and social media platforms. This approach will help to understand the motivations and hesitation of youth political online activism and participation in that unique context, such as corrupted political authorities, occupation, and segregation in Palestinian society (Dwonch 2021).

The continuous Palestinian struggle against the Israeli occupation, the corrupted political leadership and system, and the uncertainty towards the Palestinian State's future have been crucial factors that affect Palestinian youth political participation negatively. Palestinian youth online political participation through social media platforms in Palestine is not only controlled by Israeli intelligence forces, but it is also restricted and monitored by Palestinian authorities, particularly when it comes to criticizing the leadership and political system, and spreading political dissent in Palestine. It does so by circumventing new laws such as the electronic crimes law, which further restricts freedom of speech and expression. Justifying such laws by claiming that they aim to protect state security and social harmony, while such laws have put Palestinian activists, internet and social media users, and journalists at risk of arrest (Fatafta and Nashif 2017).

As for the phenomenon of "citizen journalism" which became popular in Palestine, particularly during the recent events in Sheikh Jarrah and the War on Gaza in 2021, when ordinary citizens, such as activist Mona Al-Kurd, turned to social media to provide a true and realistic content about the events through writing and creating audio and visual content that aimed at creating interaction, introducing the Palestinian cause and raising awareness about it, particularly among Palestinian, Arab, and Western youth who support and sympathize with the Palestinian cause.
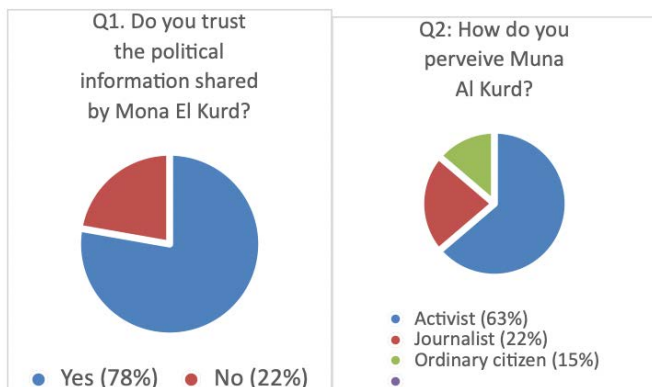

Figure 7 and 8

It was important to examine the relationship between youth and the phenomenon of citizen journalism which we found in this research as highly connected. We witnessed an uprising and an electronic revolution that began with a distress call published by Mona Al-Kurd to save Sheikh Jarrah from a wave of Israeli settlers, and this reflects and justifies why the majority of Palestinian youth in this study (78 percent) confirmed that they do trust the political information shared by Muna El-Kurd (Figure 7) and they perceive her as an activist as 63 percent confirmed the same (Figure 8). Results show that those who engage in social media and follow Muna El-Kurd are aware that this is political information being shared. The majority trust the information to be of an activist nature, rather than a reporting one. Thus, the sharing of information comes with an intent to be politically involved in some form. Depending on the activity, this could include low or high effort participation.

Conclusion

The role of the internet and information communication technologies, particularly social media platforms, in political activism and participation has sparked intense debate among academics. Supporters of social media's positive role in organizing protests, documenting events, and disseminating news base their case on the platforms' ability and potential as a cyber public sphere, platforms for free speech, its ability to overcome distance, enable ordinary citizens to be news producers, overcome fear and build efficacy, and reduce transaction costs. Other schools of thought, on the other hand, hold that there are many limitations and risks that surround the ability of social media platforms to create change alone, claiming that it is the people, not the platforms, that influence people to feel good about online participation while decreasing offline participation, which can have a negative impact on democracy and reform movements, and, most importantly, authoritarian governments control and mollify.

Inspired by the techno-utopianism perspective highlighted above, the goal of this article was to examine and explain the positive relationship between social media platforms, youth online political activism and participation, and the phenomenon of citizen journalists within the Palestinian context in

particular, focusing on the cause of Sheikh Jarrah and the activism of Muna El-Kurd to support this cause. The revolution in internet and information communication technology has a massive impact on marginalized individuals and societies, such as the Palestinian community. Since the beginning of the Second Intifada in 2000, there has been a massive increase in the number of internet users among Palestinian youth, who rely on the internet and online sphere to articulate new approaches for online politicization and resistance.

The sample of active youths presented reveals the three hypotheses that were developed and tested in this study. The high proportion of those who used social media platforms reflects the widespread use of social media platforms as a source of political information and activism. Youth is a tech-savvy and digitally educated population with the ability to use new information communication technologies. Their familiarity with cyberspace enabled them to provide greater freedom and a broader scope in the media environment. The sample shows that those involved are aware that these platforms belonging to citizen journalists are transparent and can be trusted as a source of political information. By confirming their awareness of the venues' political rather than reporting nature, and their perception of them as citizen journalists.

Furthermore, the study demonstrated the extent to which the internet and social networking sites have infiltrated Palestinian youth's lives. Participants unanimously agreed that they are linked to social networking accounts and that these platforms are a source of political information, particularly about the Palestinian struggle and resistance. They also respected and accepted the work of citizen journalists, believed the political information they published, and saw them as political activists.

According to the participants' responses to the hypothesis of the spread of political participation among Palestinian youth, political participation and the expression of political opinion via the internet have not been proven, as political participation via the internet is still subject to several restrictions, some imposed by the occupation and others by the Palestinian Authority, aside from the social constraints imposed by the family, the fear of being subjected to legal accountability and reprimanding the family may be a reason for not participating in politics.

In contrast, the relationship between the three elements of citizen journalism, youth, and new media platforms merits further investigation. The author suggests that more research be conducted and that a qualitative research method, such as focus groups and interviews with selected participants, be used to understand in depth youth perceptions of the phenomenon of political participation and activism within online and social media platforms, identify and clarify the different types of political participation, and investigate the reasons for hesitation in online political participation in order to fulfill the author's call.

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