

The Contribution of Social Media to the Development of Political Awareness Regarding the Palestinian Issue - A Review of Trends and Influences -

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Abstract:

Facebook is considered one of the most important social media networks, widely recognized for providing rapid information and news directly from the heart of events. It is also a vital tool for raising awareness about various social, political, cultural, and economic issues, due to its ease of use, which keeps individuals constantly informed about what is happening around the world as soon as they log into the site.

One of the most prominent issues currently being discussed is the Palestinian cause, which has garnered significant attention from various segments of society on Facebook. The platform has contributed to the widespread dissemination of information about the Palestinian issue, allowing Palestinians to share their experiences and struggles under Israeli occupation. It has also helped break the media blockade imposed on the Palestinian cause and spread the Palestinian narrative to the world. Additionally, it has been used to organize solidarity and boycott campaigns against Israel in support of the cause and to enhance global political awareness in particular.

Keywords: social media, development, political awareness, the Palestinian issue.

Study Problem:

The rapid developments in the Internet have contributed to the emergence of a new form of media, which has multiple classifications and names among media professionals and specialists, who refer to it as new media or alternative media. This includes virtual social networking sites, blogs, electronic forums, mailing lists, and other various forms and types.

Social networking sites are among the latest and most popular products of communication technology, possessing a set of characteristics that distinguish them from traditional websites, making them the most widespread on the Internet. This has encouraged Internet users from all over the world to increasingly engage with them.

Technological advancement has also extended to political life. At a time when events are accelerating and information is flowing in a significant cumulative manner that makes it difficult to control, social networking sites have taken a distinguished position in liberating individuals from various forms of political oppression and tyranny, freeing them from political, economic, and social pressures. Consequently, new media has begun to influence political life in societies, creating a virtual world that opens the door for individuals, groups, and organizations of all kinds to express their opinions on issues that matter to them with unprecedented freedom. Citizens have become content creators, discussing various issues, especially through Facebook, which has become one of

the strongest platforms for presenting various humanitarian and social issues. By the end of 2023, the number of active users on Facebook reached over two billion daily users worldwide, making it a widely used and active site in various countries around the globe. (www.bbc.com.cn.ambbrojejecct.org.v.s)

It has become a virtual space for exchanging various opinions and news on many current issues, with one of the most prominent issues being the Palestinian cause, which has humanitarian, social, and religious dimensions. This topic has taken a significant place on Facebook, where the platform has played a role in highlighting certain events related to the Palestinian cause by sharing images, videos, and information from the site of the events, leading to widespread global circulation.

These platforms have also played a crucial role in motivating the public to support the Palestinian cause, restoring the image of its struggle, raising awareness about the origins of the issue, exposing the falsehoods of the Israeli narrative, and revealing the violations experienced by Palestinians. They have also uncovered the Israeli propaganda that many influencers in the West have attempted to use to present a positive image of Israel, portraying it as the victim to justify its aggression against Gaza. Additionally, they have countered the misleading information and fabricated news disseminated by Israeli media through manipulated clips using artificial intelligence technology. Consequently, many influencers have sought, through social media platforms, to expose the Israeli aggression on Gaza, amplify the voice of the Palestinian people, and reveal the destruction, killing, and starvation occurring there, while debunking the lies of the media that supports Israeli aggression. They have employed various methods to convey their messages, including video clips, drawings, images, and hashtags, sharing them in multiple languages across social networks like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok.

Many Arab and Western influencers have contributed to promoting boycott campaigns against products and companies that support Israel, warning that purchasing these products is a contribution to the killing of Palestinian children, such as the McDonald's restaurant chain, Starbucks, and Zara. This boycott has caused significant losses to these companies and forced retailers worldwide to stop selling products that support Israel.

Thus, this study aims to explore: How do social media platforms contribute to raising political awareness about the Palestinian issue?

Importance of the Study:

Social media platforms are among the most widely used applications in light of technological advancements in the world. Facebook, in particular, has had a profound impact on conveying the events of the Palestinian issue and the lived reality in Gaza, given the daily killings, massacres, and bombings by the occupying Israeli forces. Facebook has also played a role in delivering and disseminating news and events that the Palestinian reality endures. With the use of Facebook, the picture and many hidden aspects of the issue have become clearer, suggesting that Facebook has led to an increase in conceptual gains and the development of political awareness regarding the Palestinian issue among communities and the world as a whole

Study Concepts:

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Social Media:

- The High Tech Dictionary briefly defines new media as "the integration of computers, computer networks, and multimedia." According to Lester, new media is succinctly described as "a collection of communication technologies that have emerged from the fusion of computers and traditional media, such as print, photography, audio, and video" (Abbas Mustafa Sadiq, 2008, p. 31).

Virtual Reality:

- Virtual reality is a new form of computer-based experience, where the term "virtual" refers to the computer's ability to provide identical or similar copies of real physical objects. It is referred to as the virtual world, artificial reality, or virtual environment. This reality signifies a simulation of real or imagined environments in which the learner interacts with and experiences these environments with all their senses, rather than merely using devices and machines.

- Al-Hosari defines virtual reality as (Al-Hosari Ahmed, Dar Al-Wafa, 2000): "one of the technological innovations that utilizes computers, along with certain devices and software, as an integrated system to create a three-dimensional imaginary environment that allows an individual to experience, interact, and engage with it through their senses and other tools, making the individual feel as if they are living, interacting, and dealing with real reality in all its dimensions. The degree of realism, immersion, interaction, and experience provided by virtual reality varies depending on the type of virtual reality itself Facebook

- It can be described as: "A website on the internet for making new friends, connecting with school friends around the world, or joining various groups on the web. Users of the site can subscribe to one or more networks such as: schools, workplaces, geographical areas, or social groups. These networks allow users to connect with members who are in the same network, and they can add friends to their pages and allow them to view their personal pages" (Al-Hadif, Asim, June 30, 2010).

Concept of Development:

- Development means providing productive work and a better quality of life for all peoples, which requires significant growth in productivity, income, and human capacity development. According to this vision, the process of development becomes a process of enhancing capabilities rather than merely maximizing utility or economic welfare; it also involves raising the cultural, social, and economic levels (Qassem, 2007, p. 19). Based on this, development requires careful planning in shaping its policies and sustainability in its projects and impacts on society, as well as consistency in implementing its programs to maintain its achievements (Ghoneim, 2009, p. 23).

Concept of Political Awareness:

- The concept of awareness is both philosophical and sociological, and it is fraught with ambiguity due to its interconnection and overlap with many other concepts. Therefore, this study will attempt to clarify it as much as possible, as the lack of clarity in concepts poses a significant danger to the integrity of thought. It is noted that clarity of concepts does not necessarily lead to an understanding of reality, but at least it frees the researcher from uncertainties. Awareness has been defined in the social terminology dictionary as perception.

The individual perceives himself and his surroundings directly, which is the foundation of all knowledge. The manifestations of awareness and consciousness can be traced back to three dimensions: perception, feeling, and will and inclination. These manifestations are interconnected. It also refers to the state in which an individual or members of society represent political life issues in their various dimensions, adopting a cognitive and emotional stance towards those issues. This means it is a pattern of ideas, values, and attitudes through which the existing conditions are defined, reflecting the sense of social existence of a particular class or social movement, as well as the extent to which its political stance aligns with the necessities of change and fulfills its objectives of controlling society. It is also described as a mental state that manifests in the individual's perception of the world around him in a rational or emotional manner.

The Palestinian issue:

- It is a term that refers to the political, historical conflict and humanitarian problem in Palestine, starting from the year 1897 until the present time. It is considered an essential part of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the resulting crises and wars in the Middle East (Fadl, 2008). Consequently, it is an Islamic ideological issue that erupted with the occupation of the first Qibla, the noble Al-Quds, by the Zionist entity, along with the displacement and persecution of the indigenous people of the land.

Previous Studies:

Study One: "The Use of Social Media in Political Awareness of Peoples' Right to Self-Determination: A Study on Algerian University Students' Engagement with Facebook in Following News on the Palestinian Cause," prepared by Lilia Chawi.

- The study aimed to highlight the role of Facebook in enhancing youth participation in societal issues, particularly concerning political awareness of the right of peoples to self-determination in general, and the Palestinian cause specifically. It sought to identify the reasons behind Algerian university students' reliance on social media platforms (Facebook) to follow political issues. This study employed a descriptive methodology and utilized a purposive sample of 100 individuals from the fields of Media and Communication at the University of Algiers (3). A questionnaire containing 19 questions was distributed. The study concluded that Arab youth use this platform to develop their political awareness regarding the right of peoples to self-determination, with a focus on the Palestinian cause.

Study Two: "The Role of Social Media in Shaping Awareness of the Palestinian Cause," prepared by Hilal Muhammad Abu Jahjough.

- This study aimed to understand the nature of the role that social media networks play in increasing citizens' awareness to engage in activating the role of social media and the virtual world regarding Palestinian issues, which is the primary objective of this study. **It aimed to:**

1. Statement on the role of interaction with social media networks in increasing awareness and participation of Palestinian youth regarding their community issues.
2. Understanding the role of media in raising awareness about the Palestinian cause.
3. Identifying the reasons for the media's shortcomings in increasing awareness of the Palestinian cause among youth.

This study belongs to descriptive studies, as it describes the roles of media in educating citizens about the Palestinian cause. An analytical approach was used to identify the underlying reasons for spreading awareness about the Palestinian issue. The study population consists of a number of users and followers of social media platforms, selected randomly. All participants use Facebook, 50% use Twitter and WhatsApp, 25% use LinkedIn, 25% use Bib, and 80% use Instagram.

Study Methodology:

- The methodology is defined as "a set of mental procedures that the researcher embodies in preparation for the knowledge process they are about to undertake, in order to reach the truth of the material they are targeting" (Mohammed Taha Badawi, 2000, p. 115). This methodology helps organize, analyze, and present ideas, ultimately leading to reasonable results and facts about the phenomenon under study. It is also defined as "the method used by the researcher to study a specific phenomenon, through which diverse ideas are organized in a way that enables them to address the research problem."

- The scientific methodology obliges the researcher to adhere to a set of rules and regulations for decision-making and to follow the procedures necessary for their research journey, within the framework of the curriculum and conducting the necessary experiments. The researcher relies on the most suitable research tools for their study, clarifying relationships and causal factors within the framework of analyzing observations and conducting comparisons.

Logical reasoning is employed to reach conclusions and test their validity, followed by the formulation of these results within a coherent theoretical framework, presented as established rules proven to be true, akin to scientific facts that lead to resolving the phenomenon under investigation.

Based on the above, this study falls within the descriptive analytical approach, which allows for the provision of data and facts regarding the problem under study, as well as their interpretation and understanding of their significance. It also offers detailed information about the actual reality of the phenomenon or subject of study.

The Importance of Social Media in the Political Sphere

Social media has brought about a qualitative shift in media, initially used for entertainment purposes, and has since evolved into a professional medium that conveys information and news to individuals. The media landscape has become accessible to everyone, no longer limited to a specific group of people, and media content has become more widespread and quicker to reach a larger audience, making social media easier and closer for individuals.

In the direct transmission of events and facts, and the broadcasting of news in real-time, including images and video clips, social media has gained the power and freedom that enables it to play a prominent role in shaping local, regional, and international policies. It has also become a part of the political process, influencing and being influenced by it (Halas, 2010, p. 152).

Social media platforms have emerged as highly influential channels, providing the people of the region with opportunities they had not experienced before to express their opinions and organize themselves not only against authoritarian regimes but also on issues affecting their lives, such as rising prices, domestic violence, human rights, and combating corruption. These platforms have contributed to mobilizing and succeeding in changing these issues.

The growing engagement with social media and its recognition as an important source of news and information, along with its ability to influence public opinion due to its rapid dissemination, low costs, and ease of communication, has made it a quick access source for achieving goals and forming pressure and advocacy groups for various issues (Al-Draymi, 2013, p. 49). Experts in modern technologies emphasize that the impact of social media is growing at an unprecedented rate, having made significant strides in mobilizing people and encouraging their participation in public and political life specifically (Nairat, 2014, p. 152).

Moreover, the use of social media, particularly Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram, has become clearly evident in the political life of Arab societies. Its widespread use has contributed to enhancing political awareness, resulting in active political participation against corrupt Arab regimes such as those in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Libya, Syria, and others. Social media has provided individuals with the opportunity to express themselves and their views on various issues.

The Role of Social Media in the Arab Uprising

The development of communication and technology has enabled all Internet users to benefit from various applications and services. The Internet has become one of the most powerful tools used by political forces to liberate people from tyranny and political, economic, and social injustice by providing new means of communication and activism, eliminating information monopolies, and delivering information quickly and at a very low cost.

The Internet has opened new and broad horizons for many social groups, interest groups, and activists around the world. The popular protests that occurred in the Arab world in recent years, fueled by social activists and utilizing social media platforms, underscore the importance of social activism in the electronic space and its ability to penetrate many barriers and obstacles, giving voice to the oppressed and marginalized in ways that were previously unavailable (Al-Dreamly, op. cit.).

Public opinion professor at Ain Shams University, Mohamed Shoman, believes that the Internet has become a tool for Arab opposition to express viewpoints against the dominance of Arab regimes, media hegemony, and the suppression of freedom of expression and opinion (Shoman, 2005). The widespread proliferation of the Internet has weakened the grip of states in favor of political movements and civil society organizations, by reducing their ability to control and monopolize information and providing new means of communication and activism that cannot be easily controlled (Al-Shanqeeti, 2002).

As a result of the inability of Arab regimes, political parties, and civil society associations to fulfill their roles in mobilization due to the repression of ruling systems and the absence of democracy, a disconnect has emerged among citizens, leading to the rise of alternative means.

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Alternative or electronic media have contributed to creating a "wake of freedom of expression" that has entered the political sphere, creating an open space for popular demands for political reform and breaking the state's tight grip on media. Additionally, it has mobilized and shaped public opinion.

Social media played a significant role in the outbreak of Arab protests by providing the technologies and capabilities that enabled youth to organize themselves and articulate their ideas away from censorship and security crackdowns. Through these platforms, they were able to expose the practices of ruling regimes, whose methods of concealing the truth became ineffective against the vast amount of messages disseminated through social media. It also helped to pull a generation of Arab youth out of the state of alienation they experienced due to the absence of political awareness.

Social media has transformed into a primary source of information, images, videos, and testimonies from the general public. Citizen journalists have resorted to capturing events on mobile phones or cameras and sharing them on social media, to the extent that major media institutions like CNN and BBC rely heavily on the information and videos available on these platforms. For example, when CNN requested...

Starting from this point, their voices reach all corners of the world through these platforms, where the free spread of information via social media has created a significant opportunity for popular movements based on a broad and accurate understanding of political events, thus influencing citizens' perceptions of politics.

Social media platforms have emerged prominently in the recent events that swept through the Arab world, and recent occurrences in the Arab region have demonstrated that social media is a latent power that has escaped government control, contributing to changes in the political landscape. This is due to its ability to mobilize the masses, which established a virtual state on the internet, serving as a suitable venue for discussing conditions among everyone and coordinating efforts to protest at the right time.

Social Media and Political Awareness of the Palestinian Cause

Social media has permeated all aspects of life in all societies, including Palestinian society, where a significant number of Palestinian youth have become engaged with the activities and programs available to them through social media, interacting with them to cultivate a sense of awareness and responsibility. Through their participation on these platforms, serious dialogue emerges among users, as they recognize their mission and message regarding their cause, striving to explore available means in all fields to discuss their wounds, pains, tragedies, and sufferings.

In light of the difficult Palestinian reality, it was essential for Palestinian youth to promote their cause, defend it, and expose the crimes of the occupation against their people to ensure their voices reach all corners of the world. Thus, Palestinian youth resorted to exposing the crimes of the occupation through social media, which has seen thousands of pages, images, and clips highlighting these issues.

Social media has rapidly addressed local and global events more than any other media outlets, playing a significant role in highlighting the Palestinian issue. Conversations and comments on social media, stemming from the sharing of images and videos, have transformed into tangible actions on the ground. Social media has invigorated Palestinian youth to articulate their cause and

aspirations for freedom through visuals, words, and videos, as well as to organize campaigns advocating for the Palestinian cause.

Palestinian youth can now launch calls and campaigns via social media platforms, successfully gathering support and mobilizing on the ground for ongoing campaigns in support of the Palestinian cause. These campaigns and calls have served as a powerful message to Arab nations in general and to the Palestinian people in particular, urging them to change the reality of Zionist occupation and to liberate Islamic holy sites from the defilement of the angry occupier, while supporting the Palestinian people's demands for resistance against this occupier and for the liberation of their land.

Social media has contributed to enhancing political and social awareness, reinforcing political values, promoting political participation, and educating people about the events and situations surrounding them, both externally and within the Palestinian context related to the Palestinian cause. The Palestinian people continue to face fierce Zionist campaigns aimed at erasing their history and heritage, in addition to aggression, destruction, and the killing of both people and nature (Tabil, 2006).

- Those who follow social media will find that there are thousands of pages discussing the Palestinian cause. Many serious pages have taken on the national Palestinian burden and addressed many important issues, foremost among them the issues of refugees, prisoners, Jerusalem, settlement, and division. Notable examples include (Ahrar 15 March, Free Palestine, Intellectuals of Palestine for raising national awareness and resisting division and normalization with the Zionist enemy, Security Glory, Shihab, Quds News Network, People's Day 29 April) and many other pages that have provided a platform for receiving and shaping news, creating a free space for discussion, analysis, and exchanging opinions among individuals.

- These platforms have also been used to mobilize and rally support for specific ideas, as well as to promote participation in various campaigns, events, and activities aimed at instilling correct concepts and values among Palestinian youth. One such campaign was launched under the hashtag #SpeakItInPalestinian, initiated to reconsider some terms used in Palestinian discourse and to prevent them from becoming tools for entrenching the occupation's terminology in the minds of the Palestinian people and erasing their civilization. Additionally, there have been numerous advocacy and support campaigns through hashtags such as

If - Palestine is not occupied, #We_are_going_to_Jerusalem, #Gaza_under_fire Gaza resists #Al_Aqsa_in_danger

(#Gaza_Under_fire #free_palestine) A group of Palestinian activists launched several pages that contributed to raising political awareness among individuals, the most important of which are "Kuzdoura" and "A Photo from Um al-Rashrash to Ras al-Naqoura," which is not just called the Palestinian Photo Club; it represents youth initiatives that carry a valuable collection of information about Palestinian heritage, as well as Palestinian cities and villages, especially those that have been displaced.

- The importance of social media in supporting the Palestinian cause and raising political awareness among Palestinian youth is evident. Social media has enhanced the presence of the Palestinian state in the virtual world and supported the Palestinian cause through the interaction of Palestinian youth, launching many activities such as hashtags, pages, and campaigns that raise

awareness and promote meaningful political culture, support Palestinian national issues, and strengthen Palestinian identity and belonging. Social media has become a window through which Palestinians can break the siege imposed on them by the occupation and reach out to the world.

Using social media for Israel's benefit against the Palestinian cause

Despite the media significance of social media, there are many challenges facing Palestinian youth due to the widespread and overwhelming flow of information through these platforms.

It becomes difficult to filter this information and assess its reliability and accuracy, as social media can be a breeding ground for rumors and misleading information, leading to the dissemination of illusions. Some may use it to promote specific policies that serve certain ideologies, distancing themselves from transparency, credibility, and objectivity.

- With the widespread proliferation of social media, particularly Facebook, concerns have increased regarding the hidden entities responsible for the platform and benefiting from the information and secrets shared by users on their personal pages, especially with the rising warnings about Israeli presence on this site.

The Zionist enemy has recognized the dangers of social media and its impact on them, exploiting these platforms for espionage and surveillance. Therefore, they attach great importance to everything published on these sites, especially content related to the Palestinian cause.

- Social media has become a window and an effective tool, allowing Israel and its intelligence agencies to obtain information about Palestinians in various matters, aiding in the recruitment of some for the objectives of the occupation and its agencies. It is one of the most important tools aimed at ensnaring Palestinian youth and pushing them towards collaboration with the occupation, in addition to influencing the youth and Palestinian society to serve specific leadership agendas regarding certain issues, to achieve defined goals. Social media can provide indicators about an individual's political inclinations, psychological and social state, and their susceptibility to being targeted. All information published on these platforms is subject to study and scrutiny by Israeli experts, in order to find the quickest and most efficient ways to target individuals (Hajjar, 2013).

- Social media has facilitated the work of clients and spies in terms of quickly and directly contacting Israeli intelligence, as well as in reporting events through live broadcasts and real-time photography. Additionally, Israeli intelligence has worked to lure Palestinian youth through these platforms (Rumi, 2014, pp. 331-332).

- Furthermore, new media, specifically social media, represents a qualitative addition to traditional media. It provides faster and more widespread means to promote issues, exchange opinions, mobilize public opinion, and raise and develop political awareness. However, despite this, social media platforms are filled with risks that we may be unaware of, and therefore users must exercise greater caution when engaging with these sites, especially in light of the spread of fabricated and misleading news and information, as well as the contradictions surrounding the privacy of these platforms. This necessitates diversifying verification and fact-checking methods and avoiding the temptation to rely solely on the virtual space.

Conclusion:

- Social media has become a new force in the digital society, playing a significant role in shaping public opinion and raising awareness on many issues, particularly in the Gaza conflict. It

has been shown that the activation of social media during war is as powerful as weaponry, as supporters of the Palestinian people have contributed to significant changes in global public opinion and transformed the digital landscape into a space of support and solidarity for Palestinians.

They conveyed the Palestinian narrative and widely reached the world, significantly impacting the course of events and leading to the failure of Israeli media.

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