



Instagram Citizen Journalism on Palestine–Israel Conflict: A Systematic Literature Reviews and Content Analysis

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Abstract

Instagram has emerged as a significant platform for citizen journalism, enabling individuals to disseminate firsthand information and alternative narratives during armed conflicts. This study examines the role of Instagram in disseminating information about the Palestine–Israel conflict through citizen journalism and explores public responses to such content. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed by combining thematic analysis of Instagram comments with a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). Public comments were collected from selected Instagram posts published by prominent Palestinian citizen journalists, while relevant literature published between 2016 and 2026 was systematically reviewed following the PRISMA framework. The findings indicate that Instagram functions as a strategic medium for documenting humanitarian issues, amplifying Palestinian voices, and fostering global awareness beyond the agenda of mainstream media. Audience responses primarily reflected humanitarian concerns, solidarity, emotional engagement, calls for collective action, and evaluations of information credibility. However, the study also identifies significant challenges, including algorithmic bias, content moderation, shadow banning, and account restrictions, which reduce the visibility of Palestinian narratives and constrain citizen journalism practices. The study contributes to the literature on digital communication by demonstrating how Instagram facilitates citizen journalism in conflict settings while highlighting the importance of journalistic ethics, digital rights protection, and collaboration with professional media organizations to strengthen information credibility and counter misinformation.

Keywords: Citizen Journalism; Instagram; Palestine–Israel Conflict; Social Media; Digital Communication

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INTRODUCTION

Participatory movements through citizen journalism conducted by Palestinian journalists demonstrate how firsthand reporting can challenge unbalanced global narratives surrounding the Palestine–Israel conflict (Kotířová & Deuze, 2022). By reporting directly from affected communities, Palestinian citizen journalists provide more authentic and comprehensive accounts of humanitarian conditions, while social media platforms such as Instagram bridge the geographical distance between conflict zones and global audiences. This phenomenon illustrates how digital technologies, combined with the commitment of citizen journalists, have transformed the ways in which international audiences access and interpret humanitarian issues in Palestine.

Citizen journalists have taken importance in the last years, especially during the Palestinian-Israel Conflict by using social media as weapons extending the conflict to a public opinion war. Many journalist died and were targeted to die during the conflict. They possess vulnerability to speak the truth. Therefore, citizen journalists use their social media as a way of voicing the narratives against the Israeli and US media power. The way journalists are bearing witness on social media is innovative because they will be more connected and drive greater engagement to their audiences.

Stuart Allan describes citizen journalists as “ordinary individuals (who) temporarily adopt the role of a journalist in order to participate in news-making, often spontaneously during a time of crisis, accident, tragedy or disaster when they happen to be present on the scene.” Citizen journalism allows citizens to create, collect and share information on their own, without the implication of legacy media. In contexts of political and informational restrictions, it can be used to reconfigure power in the ‘network society’ (Garfias, 2024, p. 19). Citizen journalism cannot exist without witnessing. In the digital era, witnessing was a distant action gatekept by using social media and citizen journalism. The digital has democratized witnessing, allowing anyone with a phone and Internet to share information (Garfias, 2024, p. 20). Now, covering conflicts is both a way of informing and of using the camera as a “weapon in the very conduct of conflict”. It also makes it easier to reach global audiences (Garfias, 2024, p. 20). The development of media allows connective platforms and platform-mediated advocacy is used to share information. Instagram has consequently become an important medium through which Palestinian citizen journalists bypass traditional media gatekeeping and directly communicate their experiences and perspectives on the conflict to a global public.



visibility of Palestine-related content, while Lewis (2023) documented approximately 1,500 cases of alleged digital rights violations across Meta platforms during 2021–2022, including content removal, account suspensions, and shadow banning. These findings are used in this study as context for understanding the structural challenges faced by citizen journalism on digital platforms, rather than as direct evidence that all Palestinian content on Instagram is subject to censorship or shadow banning.

Meanwhile, the primary data of this study consist of selected Instagram posts and public comments on those posts. Accordingly, the analysis focuses on how Instagram is used to disseminate information about the Palestine–Israel conflict through citizen journalism and how audiences respond to such content. Audience responses are analyzed based on emerging themes, including humanitarian concerns, solidarity, emotional engagement, calls for collective action, and assessments of information credibility. If issues related to content moderation, restricted visibility, or shadow banning emerge from the analyzed data, they are discussed only on the basis of evidence available within the dataset and are not generalized beyond the scope of the study. This distinction between evidence from previous literature and findings from the Instagram data analyzed in this study is maintained to avoid unsupported generalizations. Previous studies provide the broader context regarding platform-related challenges, while this study specifically examines the role of Instagram in citizen journalism and public responses to content concerning the Palestine–Israel conflict.

Reports have also documented broader restrictions on Palestinian voices across social media platforms. Palestinian journalists and activists have experienced internet disruptions, content takedowns, and temporary or permanent account suspensions, all of which constrain the circulation of eyewitness information during periods of conflict. According to AlAashry (2022), these forms of digital censorship threaten the fundamental rights to freedom of expression and access to information while simultaneously undermining the capacity of citizen journalists to document human rights violations and advocate for justice in international public discourse.

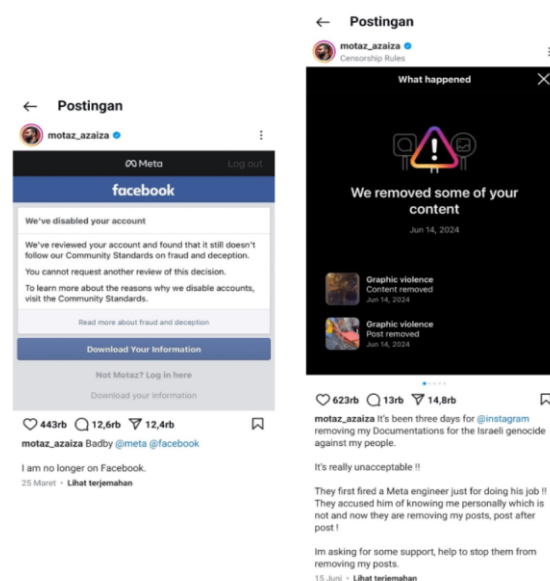


Figure 2. The Shadow Banning Phenomenon on Palestinian Journalists' Instagram Accounts

(Source: Social Media Instagram @motaz_azaiza)

To complement the literature review, this study compiled a selection of prominent Palestinian citizen journalism Instagram accounts for comparative analysis. The three selected accounts of Motaz Azaiza, Wizard Bisan, and Wael Eldahdouh were examined based on their follower numbers, communication characteristics, and the primary issues addressed in their content. They were also very active in sharing information. Furthermore, the conflict involving these three individuals has garnered widespread attention from audiences and the global public, as evidenced by their Instagram followers counts. The comparison also considered similarities and differences in communication strategies, thematic focus, and audience engagement, providing a broader understanding of how Instagram has been utilized as a platform for disseminating information related to the Palestine–Israel conflict.

Table 1. Instagram Account Journalism

No	Account Instagram	Followers	Equality	Difference
1	motaz_azaiza https://www.instagram.com/motaz_azaiza/	17,5 Juta	This statement describes Israel's treatment of Palestinians and highlights the urgent need for humanitarian aid for the conflict-affected population of Gaza.	An analytical approach can be applied through the use of infographic videos or short documentary videos that highlight the theme of Gaza's infrastructure development which has been affected by the conflict.
2	wizard_bisan1 https://www.instagram.com/wizard_bisan1/	4,8 Juta	Highlighting humanitarian issues in Gaza, such as limited access to food, water and health services.	An approach that emphasizes the emotional side or psychological impact of the issues raised can help attract audience empathy, using the style of a human interest journalist. This also highlights the resilience of women in facing the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.
3	wael_eldahdouh https://www.instagram.com/wael_eldahdouh/	4,5 Juta	Focuses on humanitarian issues in Gaza by providing the latest analysis and information regarding the ongoing conflict.	Tends to provide a more in-depth perspective through interviews with local residents. This approach provides a more personal and direct picture from the perspective of the people involved in the conflict.

(Source: Instagram, 28 November 2024, 15:16)

Citizen journalists in Palestine are not limiting themselves by sharing information but also addressing the audiences to incite changes. Palestinians are using the vulnerability they have been forced into to create resistance discourses against their oppressor. In these same lines, witnessing turns into a tool for resistance, as the acts of documenting and bearing witness oppose the censorship

that oppressors often exert (Garfias, 2024, p. 8). Many youth in Palestine use their mobile phone to share information by using their eye witnessing and vulnerability in the conflict to take part in using their social media to shape the public opinion. They apply various methods to circumvent platform restrictions or agenda bypassing on Instagram. They apply methods of modifying text and visuals, so that the systems do not detect their content as a violation of guidelines such as (1) Algospeak or keyword modifications; P4lest*na, G4z4 or using special symbol ğaza (2) visual symbolization; water melon symbol to represent Palestine flag, (3) Engagement fishing; inserting text or image about Palestine between neutral photo, and (4) Text segmentation on graphic. They apply this way to keep the flow of reel information in Palestine accessible by the public globally.

A journalist from Gaza, Motaz Azaiza, chose to remain there despite facing many challenges. Motaz expressed his sadness about the long-standing conflict in his hometown through his upload on Instagram @motaz_azaiza. His works document the realities and suffering of Gaza civilians amidst the conflict. Some of his works have received world recognition and raised concern for Palestine. In addition, he emphasized that his responsibility as a journalist is to give voice to those who are not heard. Young journalists are not the only people who have difficulty reporting war conditions via the @wael_eldahdouh account. He is a senior member of the Al Jazeera media, still actively reporting on the war situation in Gaza. Although there is no definite information about when Wael started covering the war in Gaza, he still regularly shares information about the latest conditions in Gaza on his social media accounts in November 2024. Motaz Azaiza, Bisan Owda, and Wael Eldahdouh demonstrated extraordinary commitment to their social responsibility by documenting the conflict in Gaza. The three of them not only convey the facts, but also try to draw the world's attention to what they are facing through platforms such as social media, documentaries and direct reports. Their courage to continue speaking out even though threats continue to lurk shows the important role of journalists: they not only convey information, but also act as witnesses and agents of change who show the world a reality that is often forgotten.

The three prominent journalists deliver their humanitarian framing messages that presents conflicts, poverty, migration as matters of human suffering and basic needs and systemic injustices. The messages focus on individual pain, hunger, or displacement to draw public sympathy and aid such as food required, medical care, or charity. They also use their messages to counter the narrative about the humanitarian crisis in Palestine. Counter-narrative production about Palestine involves reclaiming narrative sovereignty and challenging the dominant Israel and Western. They bypass mainstream media filters, documenting daily life, military actions, and humanitarian conditions directly for a global audience.

Based on previous research, an analysis has been carried out on the use of Instagram media in spreading the issue of the Palestine-Israel conflict. However, previous research did not focus on the concept of news on Citizen Journalism. In this research, researchers will examine the media used by the community. Not only that, researchers will also analyze comments from several contents to analyze people's emotional responses. Previous researchers did not specify the social media usage they wanted to analyze. However, in this research Instagram will be used as a tool that can increase awareness. (Abdullah & Sundari, 2025) focused the research concept on public opinion on the Palestine-Israel conflict but used several social media. (Weninggalih & Pramiyanti, 2025) discusses digital journalism but focuses on communication patterns and social relationships. Based on this view, the aims of this research are (1) to analyze the role of Instagram media in spreading the issue



of the Palestine-Israel conflict through citizen journalism on Instagram. (2) to analyze the public's response to the spread of the Palestine-Israel conflict issue on Instagram.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to examine Instagram as a medium for disseminating information about the Palestine-Israel conflict through citizen journalism and to explore audience responses to such content. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables an in-depth exploration of digital communication practices and audience responses within their social context. The study integrated two complementary qualitative methods: thematic analysis of publicly available Instagram comments and a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). The methodological integration was designed to use the SLR primarily to establish the theoretical and empirical context of Instagram-based citizen journalism and to inform the interpretation of findings derived from the Instagram data, rather than to constitute a separate strand of analysis. The SLR provided evidence from previous studies on citizen journalism, social media, conflict communication, audience engagement, and platform-related challenges, which was subsequently used to contextualize and critically interpret the themes identified in the Instagram comments. In this study, the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was not conducted as a separate strand of analysis but was used to establish the theoretical and empirical context and to inform the interpretation of the thematic analysis of Instagram data. The SLR identified relevant concepts and previous findings on citizen journalism, social media, conflict communication, and audience engagement, which were used to contextualize the themes emerging from Instagram comments. Thus, the SLR does not directly validate the empirical findings but provides a scholarly context for interpreting and relating them to previous research, while the thematic analysis of Instagram comments serves as the primary source of empirical findings.

Type of Research

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore how Instagram functions as a medium for disseminating information about the Palestine-Israel conflict through citizen journalism. The study combined empirical thematic analysis of Instagram comments with a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to provide contextual understanding and strengthen the credibility of the findings through methodological triangulation.

Research Focus

This study employed an exploratory case study design to examine how Instagram-based citizen journalism presented the Palestine-Israel conflict and how users responded to these posts through comments. The case study approach was selected because the research focuses on a bounded and context-specific set of Instagram content rather than attempting to generalize public opinion toward the conflict as a whole. Accordingly, the findings are interpreted as an exploration of communication patterns and audience responses within the selected Instagram cases. The research focused on three Instagram posts published between March 2023 and March 2024 by Palestinian journalists. The posts were selected purposively based on four criteria: (1) the post was published by an identifiable Palestinian journalist or journalist-led Instagram account; (2) the post directly addressed the Palestine-Israel conflict or related humanitarian and political developments; (3) the post generated user comments that could be examined as audience responses; and (4) the



post was publicly accessible during the data collection period. The three posts were selected to provide information-rich cases relevant to the research objectives rather than to represent all Instagram content concerning the Palestine–Israel conflict. Therefore, the comments associated with these posts were treated as case-specific expressions of audience engagement, not as statistically representative evidence of public opinion.

The empirical data consisted of the selected Instagram posts and their publicly available comments. The comments were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes, patterns of response, and forms of engagement expressed by users toward the content concerning the Palestine–Israel conflict. Thematic analysis was used to organize the qualitative responses into meaningful categories and to identify patterns emerging from the selected cases. The analysis focused on the content and interactional characteristics visible within the comments rather than estimating the prevalence of particular attitudes among Instagram users generally. In addition to the Instagram data, this study incorporated a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to establish the conceptual and empirical context of citizen journalism, social media communication, Instagram, and public engagement with conflict-related information. The SLR followed a systematic and explicit process for identifying, selecting, and evaluating relevant studies using the PRISMA framework. The literature review was used to contextualize the findings from the selected Instagram cases and to identify how previous research has conceptualized social media's role in information dissemination and audience engagement.

VOSviewer and Gephi were also employed as supporting analytical tools. VOSviewer was used to construct and visualize bibliometric relationships among the selected literature, while Gephi was used to assist in network visualization and the examination of relationships within the relevant communication or bibliometric data. These tools were used primarily to support the mapping and contextual interpretation of the literature and network structures rather than to establish causal relationships or generalize audience responses. The analytical process therefore combined three components: (1) thematic analysis of comments from the three selected Instagram posts, (2) an SLR to contextualize the empirical findings within existing scholarship, and (3) bibliometric and network visualization using VOSviewer and Gephi. The integration of these components enabled the study to explore how citizen journalism on Instagram can function as a space for disseminating information about the Palestine–Israel conflict and how users respond to such content within the selected cases. Because the empirical analysis was limited to three purposively selected Instagram posts, the study does not claim to represent the overall public response to the Palestine–Israel conflict on Instagram. Instead, it provides an exploratory account of communication and response patterns observable within the selected cases. The limited number of posts also allows the study to maintain a focused analysis of the contextual characteristics and thematic patterns emerging from the selected content and comments.

Data Sources

This study employed two categories of data sources, namely primary and secondary data, to provide a comprehensive understanding of Instagram's role in disseminating information about the Palestine–Israel conflict through citizen journalism.

Primary Data

The primary data consisted of publicly accessible Instagram comments associated with three purposely selected posts published by prominent Palestinian citizen journalists, namely **@motaz_azaiza**, **@wizard_bisan1**, and **@wael_eldahdouh**. These accounts were selected because they actively documented humanitarian conditions during the Palestine–Israel conflict and attracted substantial audience engagement. The posts were selected according to the following criteria: (1) the post was published between March 2023 and March 2024; (2) the content directly addressed the Palestine–Israel conflict, humanitarian conditions, or related developments; (3) the post was publicly accessible; and (4) the post generated a sufficient number of public comments for qualitative analysis. To strengthen the rigor of comment sampling, the study employed **systematic purposive sampling**. All publicly visible comments associated with each selected post were initially screened according to predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Comments were included when they (1) directly addressed the content of the selected post or the Palestine–Israel conflict; (2) contained meaningful textual content of more than five words; and (3) were written in English or Arabic. Comments consisting exclusively of emojis, advertisements, promotional material, duplicate comments, spam, or discussions unrelated to the post or the conflict were excluded.

After the initial screening, eligible comments were organized according to their displayed order on Instagram. To avoid relying solely on Instagram's algorithmically prioritized “Top comments,” the researchers sampled comments systematically across the available eligible-comment pool. Where the volume of eligible comments permitted, comments were selected at regular intervals from the screened list, while ensuring that comments appearing at different points in the comment stream were represented. This procedure was intended to reduce overreliance on highly visible comments and to capture a broader range of responses. A target of approximately **20–50 eligible comments per post** was established based on the volume of available comments and the need to maintain sufficient qualitative depth for thematic analysis.

The final comment sample was therefore determined after applying the eligibility criteria rather than by selecting comments solely according to popularity, number of likes, or Instagram's “Top comments” ranking. The sampling process focused on obtaining information-rich comments relevant to the research questions while maintaining a manageable corpus for close qualitative analysis. The number of comments included from each post was recorded and reported transparently in the results or data description.

Because the selected posts contained comments in both English and Arabic, Arabic-language comments were retained as part of the dataset rather than excluded because of language. Arabic comments were translated into English for the analytical process. The translation was conducted while preserving the original Arabic text so that the translated version could be checked against the source text. Particular attention was given to context-dependent expressions, political terminology, emotional expressions, and culturally specific wording. Where ambiguity occurred, the translation was reviewed against the original Arabic wording and, where necessary, cross-checked to reduce the risk of altering the intended meaning. The analysis therefore considered both the original-language comment and its English translation. The sampling procedure was designed to ensure that the analyzed comments represented a structured selection of audience responses within the three selected Instagram cases, rather than a statistically representative sample of Instagram users or



Secondary Data

Secondary data were obtained through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2025. Relevant literature was retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, DOAJ, and Google Scholar using combinations of the keywords *Instagram*, *citizen journalism*, *Palestine–Israel conflict*, *social media communication*, *digital activism*, and *conflict communication*. Additional supporting sources, including scholarly books and authoritative reports on citizen journalism, digital communication, conflict reporting, and social media governance, were also consulted to strengthen the theoretical framework and contextual interpretation of the findings.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using a documentation technique by archiving publicly accessible comments from the selected Instagram posts. Only comments containing meaningful textual content consisting of more than five words and written in languages understood by the researchers, including English and Arabic, were included in the analysis. Comments consisting solely of emojis, repetitive spam, advertisements, or unrelated discussions were excluded. Approximately 20–50 eligible comments were selected from each post to ensure sufficient variation in audience perspectives while maintaining analytical depth.

Research Instruments

The primary research instrument in this qualitative study was the researcher, who was responsible for collecting, selecting, organizing, interpreting, and synthesizing data obtained from Instagram comments and scholarly literature (Bandara, et al., 2015). In qualitative inquiry, the researcher functions as the key instrument because data interpretation relies on the researcher's analytical competence, reflexivity, and methodological rigor (Goodman, et al., 2015, Creswell & Poth, 2018). To ensure systematic data collection and analysis, several supporting research instruments were employed.

a. Instagram Comment Extraction Protocol

A structured documentation protocol was developed to collect publicly accessible comments from selected Instagram posts published by prominent Palestinian citizen journalists, namely @motaz_azaiza, @wizard_bisan1, and @wael_eldahdouh. The protocol specified:

- 1) Selection of posts directly related to the Palestine–Israel conflict;
- 2) Inclusion of comments containing meaningful textual responses (more than five words);
- 3) Exclusion of spam, duplicated comments, advertisements, emoji-only comments, and unrelated discussions;
- 4) Recording of metadata, including account name, posting date, comment date, and engagement indicators (likes and replies where available).

This protocol ensured consistency during the documentation process.

b. Literature Review Extraction Matrix

To support the Systematic Literature Review (SLR), the researchers developed a literature extraction matrix based on the PRISMA framework. Each selected publication was systematically coded according to:

- 1) Author(s) and publication year;
- 2) Research objectives;
- 3) Theoretical framework;

- 4) Research methodology;
- 5) Data source;
- 6) Principal findings;
- 7) Identified research gaps; and
- 8) Relevance to Instagram, citizen journalism, conflict communication, and the Palestine–Israel conflict.

The extraction matrix facilitated comparison across studies and improved transparency during evidence synthesis.

c. Thematic Coding Framework

A thematic coding framework adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006) was employed to analyze Instagram comments. The coding process involved:

- 1) Data familiarization;
- 2) Generation of initial codes;
- 3) Searching for themes;
- 4) Reviewing themes;
- 5) Defining and naming themes; and
- 6) Producing analytical interpretations.

Codes were grouped into several major themes, including:

- 1) Humanitarian concerns;
- 2) Solidarity and justice;
- 3) Emotional responses;
- 4) Calls for collective action;
- 5) Public engagement;
- 6) Credibility and trust;
- 7) Media criticism;
- 8) Algorithmic censorship; and
- 9) Perceptions of citizen journalism.

The coding framework enabled systematic identification of recurring audience narratives.

d. Data Management and Analysis Software

Several digital tools were employed to enhance research accuracy and transparency:

- 1) Microsoft Excel for organizing Instagram comments and literature databases;
- 2) Mendeley Reference Manager for reference management and citation organization;
- 3) VOSviewer and Gephi for bibliometric network visualization;
- 4) Python (NetworkX) for constructing keyword co-occurrence networks and calculating network metrics;
- 5) Microsoft Word for coding documentation and analytical memo writing.

These supporting tools facilitated data organization, visualization, and interpretation while improving the reliability of the analytical process.

e. Researcher Reflexivity

Because the researcher served as the primary instrument, reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process. Analytical decisions, coding procedures, and interpretation of findings were continuously documented through reflective memos to minimize personal bias. Data interpretation was further strengthened through methodological triangulation between Instagram comment analysis and the findings obtained from the Systematic Literature Review.

Validity of Findings

To ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of the qualitative findings, this study adopted the quality criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In addition, methodological triangulation was applied by integrating empirical findings from Instagram comment analysis with evidence obtained through the Systematic Literature Review (SLR).

a. Coding Reliability and Credibility

To strengthen the credibility and reliability of the thematic analysis, the study employed methodological triangulation and independent coding review. Methodological triangulation was conducted by comparing themes emerging from the Instagram comments with findings identified through the systematic literature review. This process was used to contextualize the empirical findings rather than to treat the literature as evidence of audience responses. The coding process was conducted in several stages. First, the researchers repeatedly read the eligible Instagram comments to become familiar with the data and identify preliminary patterns. Second, an initial coding scheme was developed based on the research objectives and the meanings expressed in the comments. Third, related codes were compared, grouped, and refined into broader categories and themes. The researchers then developed a coding table and thematic matrix containing the comment identification number, original comment, translated text where applicable, initial code, category, emerging theme, and analytical interpretation. The matrix was used to maintain consistency between the original comments and the subsequent interpretation. To assess coding consistency, two researchers independently reviewed and coded of the final comment corpus, with the reviewed sample distributed across the three selected Instagram posts. The independently coded sample was selected to include comments from each post and, where applicable, both English- and Arabic-language comments. The independent review focused on whether the same comments were assigned to comparable codes and thematic categories.

Disagreements primarily concerned the interpretation and categorization of comments that contained multiple meanings, emotionally charged expressions, implicit references to the conflict, or overlapping thematic content. Differences also occurred in determining whether certain comments represented expressions of humanitarian concern, political positioning, criticism, support, or general emotional reactions. Rather than treating these differences as errors by one researcher, the researchers compared their coding decisions with reference to the original comment, its contextual meaning, and the operational definition of each code.

Consensus was reached through iterative discussion between the two researchers. When disagreement occurred, both researchers revisited the original comment and, for Arabic-language comments, the original Arabic wording alongside the English translation. The researchers then discussed the rationale for their respective coding decisions and refined the code definitions where necessary. A comment was considered resolved when both researchers agreed on the most appropriate code and thematic category. If a disagreement reflected ambiguity in the coding scheme rather than a difference in interpretation, the coding definition was revised and the affected comments were re-examined to maintain consistency across the dataset.

The coding process was supported by an Instagram Comment Extraction Protocol, which standardized the recording of post identification, comment identification, comment text, language, eligibility status, translation, and coding information. The protocol reduced variation in data extraction and provided an audit trail for the analytical process. The coding table and thematic



matrix were also used throughout the analysis to document the progression from raw comments to codes, categories, and final themes. The final themes were established only after the coding scheme had been reviewed and disagreements resolved. Thus, the reported themes represent the researchers' agreed interpretation of the selected comments rather than an automated classification or a claim of statistically measured inter-coder agreement. Given the exploratory case-study design and the limited corpus of three Instagram posts, the coding reliability procedure was intended to enhance analytical consistency, transparency, and credibility rather than to establish statistical generalizability.

b. Transferability

Transferability was enhanced by providing a detailed description of the research context, including the characteristics of the selected Instagram accounts, comment selection criteria, data collection procedures, and analytical processes. Such rich contextual descriptions enable readers to determine whether the findings may be applicable to other conflict communication settings, citizen journalism practices, or digital activism studies conducted on different social media platforms. Although the findings are specific to the selected Instagram accounts and reviewed literature, the transparent documentation of the research design and analytical procedures enables the methodological approach to be transferred to comparable research design.

c. Dependability

Dependability was ensured by maintaining a comprehensive audit trail documenting every stage of the research process. This included search strategies used in the Systematic Literature Review, PRISMA screening procedures, inclusion and exclusion criteria, coding manuals, thematic development, and analytical decisions. All procedures were conducted systematically and consistently to enable future researchers to replicate the methodological approach under similar research conditions.

d. Confirmability

Confirmability was established by ensuring that the findings were grounded in empirical evidence rather than researcher assumptions. Throughout the study, analytical interpretations were continuously compared with the original Instagram comments and the synthesized literature. Reflexive memos were maintained during data analysis to document analytical decisions and minimize personal bias. The integration of empirical data with evidence from previous studies further strengthened the objectivity and neutrality of the research findings.

Methodological Triangulation

To enhance the overall trustworthiness of the study, methodological triangulation was employed by integrating two complementary qualitative approaches:

1. Thematic analysis of publicly accessible Instagram comments to examine audience responses toward citizen journalism during the Palestine–Israel conflict.
2. Systematic Literature Review (SLR) following the PRISMA framework to synthesize existing scholarly evidence regarding citizen journalism, Instagram, digital activism, and conflict communication.

The convergence of findings from these two data sources increased the credibility of the interpretations and provided a more comprehensive understanding of Instagram's role in disseminating information during armed conflict.

Data analysis

The collected comments were analyzed using thematic analysis following the stages proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), including data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and interpretation. During the coding process, comments were categorized according to recurring themes, including humanitarian values, justice and solidarity, emotional responses, audience engagement, calls for collective action, and perceptions of information credibility. Audience positions were subsequently interpreted by identifying patterns of emotional, critical, reflective, and action-oriented responses to citizen journalism content. The analysis focused on understanding how Instagram users constructed meaning, negotiated narratives, and expressed support or criticism toward the conflict.

The second stage consisted of conducting a Systematic Literature Review to contextualize and validate the empirical findings. The review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews. Literature searches were conducted in Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, DOAJ, and Google Scholar using combinations of the keywords *Instagram*, *citizen journalism*, *Palestine–Israel conflict*, *social media communication*, *digital activism*, and *conflict communication*. Publications between 2020 and 2025 were included to ensure the review reflected recent developments in digital communication research. Articles were screened according to predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Eligible studies were required to be peer-reviewed journal articles focusing on citizen journalism, digital activism, or social media communication in conflict settings and published in English or Arabic. Two independent reviewers evaluated article eligibility to reduce selection bias. The selection process was documented using a PRISMA flow diagram to ensure methodological transparency.

Data extracted from the selected studies included research objectives, methodological approaches, theoretical frameworks, research contexts, principal findings, and identified research gaps. The extracted information was synthesized using descriptive thematic synthesis to identify recurring patterns and conceptual relationships across previous studies. Finally, the empirical findings from Instagram comment analysis were triangulated with the synthesized literature to strengthen the validity of the interpretations and provide a comprehensive understanding of Instagram's role as a medium for disseminating information about the Palestine–Israel conflict through citizen journalism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Instagram Media in Spreading the Issue of the Palestine-Israel Conflict Through Citizen Journalism on Instagram

Communication has evolved rapidly due to the use of technology. Individuals will prepare detailed information regarding what needs to be conveyed to the public. This situation necessitates strict oversight of social media use by the government (Pradika, 2024). The role of communication is to convey messages and gain support from others. The ease of communication through social media increases individuals' opportunities to disseminate news.

Information is needed to increase public understanding of an issue. The rapid development of social media has had a significant impact on journalism. Instagram has become a useful platform for voicing public opinion. The media helps people obtain information. People connect and voice their opinions using Instagram (Nuswantari & Alyasuci, 2023). Social media is used as a



communication tool to interact with audiences. The use of social media provides an opportunity for the public to express their feelings. Furthermore, journalists can provide transparency in the news they obtain (Apul & Krisdinanto, 2024).

Journalists have a role in gathering and delivering news. However, the role of journalists is that of professionals. Therefore, the term "citizen journalism" exists, describing individuals who can shape news in society. Citizen journalism plays a role in creating and analyzing information in the community through the use of social media. Citizen journalism can also create content and share diverse information on social media. Essentially, citizen journalism enables messages to be conveyed to the target audience (Nuswantari & Alyasuci, 2023).

(Asy'ari et al., 2024) state that audiences, as citizens, are individuals who produce and consume messages on social media, but without payment. The content created requires a precise strategic design to capture the audience's attention. Creativity in content helps increase engagement with the audience (Zenobia & Christin, 2024). According to (Fahlevy et al., 2024), content uploaded to news stories on social media can influence audience views. Different perspectives are implanted in the minds of audiences by considering cognitive processes that can influence human behavior. Content is created to go viral, so that the public displays similar perspectives. Each uploaded piece of content carries a unique message (Arif et al., 2024).

The Palestine-Israel conflict has become a protracted conflict and has even led to war. Numerous media reports depict the various losses resulting from this conflict. This situation has garnered significant attention due to its widespread distribution on social media, particularly Instagram. Social media plays a significant role in the Palestine-Israel conflict, providing significant information and providing an opportunity for public expression. The use of social media to disseminate information helps to exacerbate and arouse feelings of fear and anxiety in others (Ismail & Zanalhuddin, 2025).

Politics, war, and division can worsen due to social media's ability to present a negative perspective to the public. However, social media can raise public awareness of the Palestine-Israel conflict. The Palestine-Israel conflict is a highly sensitive issue. Many individuals express emotional responses to actions taken against Palestinians. Instagram is an ideal platform for targeting a global audience. Not only does it offer compelling visuals, but it also provides a platform for citizens to engage in citizen journalism. This situation is possible because individuals have the opportunity to create content and comment. Social media is able to provide viral news so that it can reach people from all countries (Smith, 2025).

Public Response to the Spread of the Palestine-Israel Conflict Issue on Instagram

Instagram has become a platform used by Generation Z to change perceptions. The presence of social media has made individuals more aware of environmental conditions (Audrew & Herdiansyah, 2024). The Palestine-Israel conflict has dominated social media, giving rise to the concept of boycotts. Numerous individuals have participated in boycotts of products that support Israel. According to (Ramadhan et al., 2024), boycotts on social media create the power of public opinion to garner more support. Boycotts arise from disappointment due to a lack of concern for oppressed communities. Humans express their emotions using social media for others to see. The varying responses of society create a need to provide a platform for expressing these feelings (Dong et al., 2025). (Sharkar et al., 2024) show that the Palestine-Israel conflict has increased public awareness through social media. Public participation in support of Palestine has had a significant



impact on political conditions in several countries. The act of boycotting is carried out to gain attention from brands and the surrounding community to support individuals affected by the action.

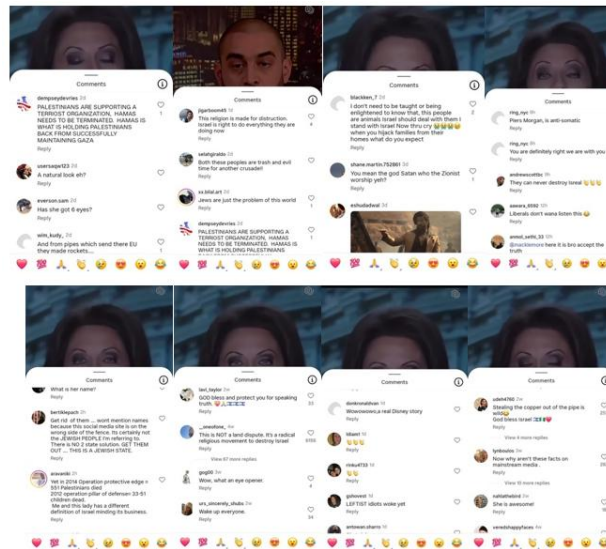


Figure 4 Expressions of People's Feelings on Social Media

Public Responses to the Palestine–Israel Conflict

The comments accompanying the selected Instagram posts reveal several recurring forms of audience response to the Palestine–Israel conflict, particularly solidarity with Palestinians, emotional reactions, humanitarian concern, distrust of mainstream media, and political positioning. Rather than treating these comments as a homogeneous expression of public opinion, the analysis organizes the responses according to the meanings conveyed in individual comments. A prominent response in the selected comments was the expression of solidarity with Palestinians and with individuals reporting from the conflict zone. Support was expressed through statements that affirmed the courage of the content creator and conveyed prayers for their safety. For example, one comment stated, “God bless and protect you for speaking out.” This comment was coded under *solidarity/support* because it combines recognition of the communicator's role in speaking about the conflict with an explicit expression of personal support and protection. The response indicates that audience engagement was not limited to receiving information but also involved effective identification with the person communicating the situation.

Anger and Emotional Response.

Other comments expressed anger toward actors perceived as responsible for violence or oppression. The statement “Get rid of them” represents an explicitly confrontational emotional response. Rather than interpreting this statement as evidence of a general public position, it is more appropriately understood as an individual expression of anger within the comment environment. The presence of such emotionally charged language demonstrates how Instagram comment spaces can become sites where audiences articulate immediate affective reactions to violent political events. This interpretation is consistent with research showing that social-media exposure to the Palestine–Israel conflict can be associated with emotional responses and concern among audiences (Ismail & Zanalhuiddin, 2025).

Distrust of Mainstream Media and Credibility Evaluation.

A third theme concerns audience questioning of mainstream media coverage. One commenter asked, “Now, why aren’t these facts on mainstream media?” This response was coded as *distrust of mainstream media/credibility evaluation* because the commenter explicitly questions the visibility of information in established media outlets. The comment does not independently demonstrate that mainstream media failed to provide factual information; rather, it provides evidence that at least one audience member perceived a discrepancy between information encountered on Instagram and information available through mainstream news media. This finding illustrates how citizen-generated content can become a reference point against which audiences evaluate the completeness and credibility of conventional news coverage.

Political Positioning and Narrative Contestation.

The comments also demonstrate that audiences interpreted the conflict through different political and moral positions. Expressions of support for Palestine, anger toward perceived perpetrators, and criticism of mainstream media indicate that the comment section functioned not only as a space for information exchange but also as a site of narrative contestation. These responses should therefore be understood as audience interpretations of the conflict rather than representative measures of public opinion as a whole. Individual responses were shaped by the commenters’ perceptions, emotions, and existing understandings of the conflict. Overall, the comment analysis demonstrates that audience responses to the selected Instagram posts operated across interconnected dimensions of solidarity, anger, humanitarian concern, media distrust, and political positioning. The findings suggest that Instagram facilitates direct audience participation in conflict-related discourse by allowing users to respond publicly to citizen-generated information. At the same time, the diversity and emotional intensity of the comments indicate that audience engagement involves both information evaluation and affective interpretation. Therefore, the selected comments provide evidence of how audiences negotiate meaning around the Palestine–Israel conflict, but they should not be generalized as representing the views of Instagram users or the wider public.

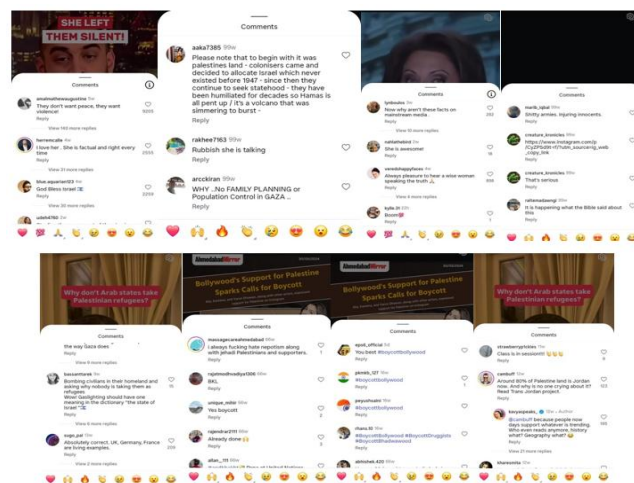


Figure 5 Forms of Public Response on Social Media

Audience Positioning, Emotional Expression, and Calls for Accountability

The responses presented in Figure 2 predominantly reflect expressions of concern and support for Palestinians, accompanied by criticism of the humanitarian and political dimensions of the conflict. These responses were analyzed as individual audience positions rather than as evidence of a uniform public attitude toward the Palestine–Israel conflict. Several comments combined humanitarian concern with criticism of perceived inequalities in international responses to the conflict. For example, one commenter stated, “bombing civilians in their homeland and asking why no one is taking them as refugees. Wow, gaslighting should have a meaning for Israel.” This response was coded under *humanitarian concern and political criticism*. The comment draws attention to civilian vulnerability and simultaneously questions the way responsibility and displacement are discussed. Rather than interpreting the statement as an objective assessment of the conflict, the analysis treats it as an audience member's evaluative interpretation of humanitarian events.

Another response, “#boycottbollywood,” was coded as *boycott advocacy*. The use of a boycott hashtag indicates an attempt to connect the conflict with a form of consumer or cultural action. Similarly, the comment “around 80% of Palestine land and why no one is crying” was coded as *territorial concern and perceived international indifference*. The comment expresses concern regarding territorial inequality while questioning the perceived lack of international attention. These responses demonstrate that audience engagement extended beyond emotional reactions and included calls for accountability, solidarity, and forms of symbolic action.

The responses should also be interpreted within the ethical sensitivity of conflict communication. Expressions of anger or criticism in conflict-related social media discussions do not necessarily demonstrate aggressive behavior or indicate that audiences intend to escalate the conflict. Instead, they may reflect attempts to articulate moral concern, perceived injustice, political disagreement, or solidarity with affected populations. Hendra (2024) discusses the relationship between individual emotional and motivational processes and expressions of attitudes; however, such psychological interpretations should not be directly inferred from isolated Instagram comments without additional evidence concerning the commenters' psychological states.

From this perspective, the comments in Figure 2 indicate audience positioning rather than psychological escalation. The Instagram comment space provided an arena in which users could publicly articulate humanitarian concerns, criticize perceived injustice, support particular political positions, and advocate symbolic actions such as boycotts. Social media can facilitate the rapid circulation and amplification of emotionally salient conflict-related content (Jaiswal et al., 2025), but the present study does not establish that these particular comments caused conflict escalation. The findings are therefore limited to the observable expressions contained in the selected comments and should not be generalized to represent the broader public. Emotional responses to Palestine weaken Israel. Support for justice for Palestine is based on public belief that Israel has committed crimes and violence against Palestinians. Social media disseminates news and information, influencing millions of individuals to provide appropriate support. Journalism plays a role in conveying public appreciation, thus creating a sense of community (Ismail & Zanalhuddin, 2025). According to (Santiago Jr. et al., 2024), the viral Palestinian-Israeli conflict heightens sentimental emotions in some communities. This action can be seen when individuals begin boycotting brands that support Israel. This action is a form of emotional response demonstrated by the public, conveying their disapproval of support for Israel. The presence of boycotts triggers conflict with



brands, resulting in decreased revenue. Some brands experience significant losses due to low revenue.

Keyword Network Analysis as a Bibliometric Supplement to the SLR

To complement the thematic analysis of Instagram comments, this study incorporated a bibliometric keyword network analysis as a supplementary analytical layer within the Systematic Literature Review (SLR). The bibliometric analysis was not conducted on the Instagram comments and did not constitute a second analysis of audience responses. Instead, it was used to map the conceptual landscape of the literature included in the study and to contextualize the empirical findings obtained from the selected Instagram posts and comments.

The network analysis was conducted using the 63 references included in the literature corpus. Keywords were extracted from the titles of these references and examined according to their co-occurrence across the literature corpus. Only keywords appearing in at least two reference titles (occurrence ≥ 2) were retained to ensure that the network represented recurring concepts rather than isolated terms. The resulting network contained 18 interconnected keywords and 58 links (edges). The network was visualized using VOSviewer and Gephi, while cluster detection was conducted using a modularity-based approach to identify groups of keywords that were more strongly connected to one another. The analysis resulted in three major thematic clusters, as presented in Figure 6.

The bibliometric network therefore serves a different analytical function from the Instagram comment analysis. Thematic analysis was applied to the primary empirical data—the comments associated with the three selected Instagram posts—to identify audience responses and recurring meanings. In contrast, the keyword network analysis examined the secondary literature corpus to identify dominant and interconnected concepts surrounding Instagram, citizen journalism, content moderation, public opinion, and the Palestine–Israel conflict. The two analytical layers were subsequently brought together at the interpretation stage rather than being statistically combined.

This distinction is important because the keyword network does not provide evidence of audience attitudes, public opinion, or comment behavior. Instead, it provides a conceptual and contextual map of the scholarship surrounding the research topic. The three clusters identified in the literature corpus were therefore used to contextualize the empirical findings from the Instagram comments and to explain how the selected cases relate to broader scholarly discussions concerning citizen journalism, platform governance, and public responses to conflict-related information.

Accordingly, the overall analytical framework consists of three interconnected but analytically distinct components: (1) thematic analysis of Instagram comments as the primary empirical analysis, (2) systematic literature review to synthesize previous scholarship, and (3) bibliometric keyword network analysis as a supplementary layer within the SLR. This design enables the study to connect empirical audience responses observed in the selected Instagram cases with broader conceptual patterns identified in the existing literature, while avoiding the assumption that bibliometric relationships directly represent user behavior on Instagram.

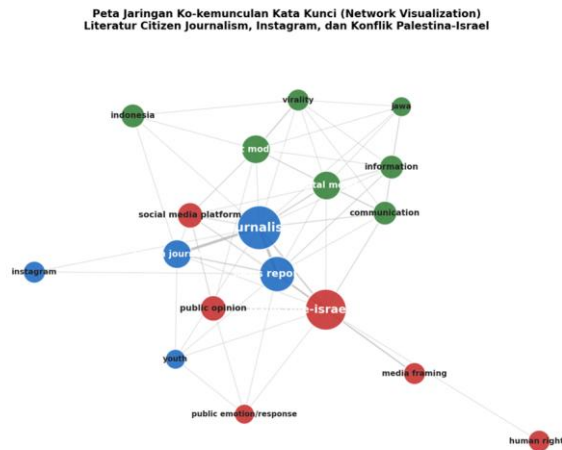


Figure 6 Network Map of Co-occurrence of Literature Keywords Based on VOSviewer/Gephi Analysis

(Source: Processed by researchers from 63 references using Python Network X following VOSviewer/Gephi principles, 2025)

Figure 5 shows that the terms journalism (20 occurrences) and Palestine-Israel conflict (17 occurrences) are the nodes with the highest frequency and degree of connectivity, which function as the main link (hub) between clusters. This condition indicates that literature on journalism and literature on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict have strong intersections in this field of study, in line with the research focus which places citizen journalism as a bridge in conveying conflict issues to the global public.

The cluster detection results show three groups of interconnected themes, as summarized in Table 2.

Tabel 2. Thematic cluster from keyword analysis result (VOSviewer/Gephi)

No	Cluster	Primary Key Terms (Frequency)	Theme Interpretation
1	Cluster 1(Green)- Content moderation & Digital Media	content moderation (7); digital media (7); communication (4); information (4); virality (3); indonesia (4); jawa (2)	Describes technical themes regarding how algorithms, content moderation, and the characteristics of digital media influence the dissemination of information; relevant to the findings on shadow banning and algorithmic censorship discussed in the introduction.

2	Cluster 2(Red)- Public Opinion & Conflict Framework	palestine-israel conflict (17); public opinion (5); social media platform (5); media framing (3); human rights (3); public emotion/response (2)	Representing the themes of public emotional response, issue framing, and human rights; in line with the findings of pro-Palestinian and pro-Israel responses in Figures 2 and 3.
3	Cluster 3 (Blue)- Citizen Journalism & Instagram	journalism (20); news reporting (12); citizen journalism (7); instagram (3); youth (2)	Emphasizing the central role of citizen journalism and Instagram as a direct reporting channel that bridges local journalists with global audiences, is consistent with the discussion in the first sub-chapter.

Thematic Clusters and Their Contribution to Instagram Citizen Journalism

The cluster detection results identified three interconnected thematic clusters that help explain the role of Instagram in citizen journalism during the Palestine–Israel conflict. Rather than representing three independent themes, the clusters can be understood as three dimensions of the same communication process: citizen journalism practices produce and circulate conflict-related information; Instagram's platform mechanisms shape the visibility and accessibility of that information; and audiences interpret, respond to, and potentially reproduce these narratives through public engagement. This relationship provides a conceptual basis for understanding Instagram citizen journalism as a process shaped simultaneously by content production, platform governance, and audience response.

Cluster 1—Content Moderation and Digital Media (Green) is associated with content moderation, digital media, communication, information, virality, Indonesia, and Jawa. This cluster represents the platform governance dimension of Instagram citizen journalism. Citizen journalists may produce and upload conflict-related information independently of conventional newsroom structures, but the circulation of that information remains influenced by platform mechanisms, including content moderation and algorithmic visibility. Therefore, citizen journalism on Instagram should not be understood simply as the ability to publish information. The ability of that information to reach audiences is also conditioned by how the platform organizes, recommends, restricts, or makes content visible. Issues such as algorithmic suppression, content removal, or reduced visibility are consequently relevant to the democratic potential of citizen journalism because they can affect which narratives become publicly accessible. The relevance of Cluster 1 to the central argument is that Instagram functions not only as a publication space but also as a gatekeeping environment. While citizen journalists can bypass some traditional editorial barriers, platform-based forms of gatekeeping may emerge after publication. This creates a paradox: Instagram can broaden



opportunities for independent reporting while simultaneously introducing new forms of algorithmic and policy-based control over information visibility. Thus, the democratizing potential of citizen journalism is dependent not only on users' capacity to produce content but also on the conditions under which that content can circulate.

Cluster 2—Public Opinion and Conflict Framework (Red) includes the Palestine–Israel conflict, public opinion, social media platforms, media framing, human rights, and public emotional response. This cluster represents the audience and interpretive dimension of Instagram citizen journalism. Conflict-related posts do not simply transmit information to passive audiences; they become objects of interpretation, emotional reaction, discussion, and contestation. The presence of terms associated with public opinion, human rights, framing, and emotional response indicates that social media communication around the conflict is connected to processes through which users interpret competing narratives and express their positions.

This cluster therefore connects citizen journalism with the formation and articulation of public responses. The comments analyzed in the selected Instagram cases illustrate how audiences can respond to citizen-produced content through expressions of support, concern, disagreement, humanitarian solidarity, or political interpretation. However, these responses should not be interpreted as representative of global public opinion because the empirical analysis was limited to selected posts and comments. Instead, they demonstrate how Instagram provides an interactive environment in which conflict-related narratives can be publicly negotiated within particular cases.

Cluster 3—Citizen Journalism and Instagram (Blue) contains journalism, news reporting, citizen journalism, Instagram, and youth. This cluster constitutes the content-production and dissemination dimension of the conceptual model. Its prominence, particularly the frequency of the terms *journalism* and *news reporting*, reinforces the central position of citizen journalism within the literature corpus. Instagram provides users with visual and networked affordances through which eyewitness-oriented information, images, videos, personal accounts, and interpretations can be published and circulated without requiring direct access to conventional news organizations. For the selected Palestinian journalists, these affordances are particularly relevant because visual documentation can connect locally produced accounts of conflict-related events with geographically dispersed audiences. Instagram therefore facilitates citizen journalism through the combination of content production, visual storytelling, direct publication, networked distribution, and audience interaction. Nevertheless, the platform should not be regarded as a neutral technological channel because the visibility of such content is subsequently shaped by the mechanisms represented in Cluster 1.

The findings from the network visualization analysis reinforce the results of the preceding qualitative analysis while demonstrating that research on Instagram, citizen journalism, and the Palestine–Israel conflict has evolved along three principal dimensions: the technical algorithmic dimension, the emotional and public opinion dimension, and the citizen journalism practice dimension. These three thematic clusters are not independent; rather, they are interconnected through the central nodes of *journalism* and *Palestine–Israel conflict*. This interconnectedness highlights the interdisciplinary nature of the issue and underscores the need for analytical approaches that integrate perspectives from communication studies, platform technology, and social psychology.



CONCLUSION

This study provides an exploratory account of how Instagram facilitates citizen journalism within the specific cases examined through posts published by @motaz_azaiza, @wizard_bisan1, and @wael_eldahdouh, their selected audience comments, and the literature corpus reviewed in the study. Rather than demonstrating how Instagram users in general respond to the Palestine–Israel conflict, the findings indicate that Instagram can facilitate citizen journalism through several interconnected affordances: visual self-publication, rapid dissemination of eyewitness-oriented content, direct audience interaction through comments, and the circulation of narratives outside conventional newsroom structures. These affordances allow the selected Palestinian journalists to document humanitarian conditions, communicate information to geographically dispersed audiences, and provide perspectives that may complement or challenge narratives available through mainstream media.

The analysis of the selected comments further indicates that Instagram functions as a space in which conflict-related content can generate expressions of support, concern, interpretation, and engagement. In this sense, the platform's contribution to citizen journalism extends beyond content publication to the formation of an interactive environment in which audiences can respond to and discuss conflict-related information. The literature reviewed in this study similarly contextualizes social media as an important environment for the circulation and public engagement of user-generated information. However, the democratic potential of Instagram should be understood critically. Algorithmic visibility can influence which citizen-produced accounts and narratives become more prominent, while content moderation policies can affect the availability and circulation of conflict-related material. Misinformation, selective representation, limited verification, and the absence of conventional editorial oversight can also constrain the reliability of citizen-produced information. Consequently, greater visibility does not necessarily equate to greater informational accuracy, pluralism, or democratic deliberation.

The contribution of this study therefore lies not in establishing that Instagram universally represents public opinion or consistently strengthens democratic communication, but in showing, through the selected cases, how specific platform affordances enable Palestinian citizen journalists to document, disseminate, and engage audiences around conflict-related events while simultaneously exposing these practices to significant informational and platform-related constraints. The findings should be interpreted within the boundaries of the three selected accounts, posts, analyzed comments, and literature corpus. Future research should examine a larger and more diverse set of Instagram accounts and posts, incorporate longitudinal data, and compare audience responses across languages and platforms to determine whether the patterns identified in these exploratory cases are observable in broader contexts.

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