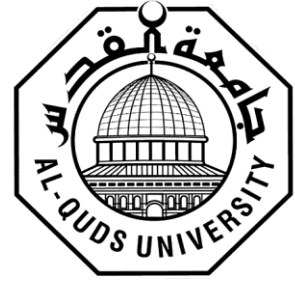


Deanship of Graduate Studies  
Al-Quds University



Digital Resistance on TikTok and the Palestinian Narrative  
# Sheikh Jarrah clashes in Jerusalem as a case study

Zafer Jameel Saleem Sabbah

M.Sc. Thesis

Jerusalem - Palestine

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Digital Resistance on TikTok and the Palestinian Narrative  
# Sheikh Jarrah clashes in Jerusalem as a case study

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the  
degree of Masters of Media / Digital Media and Communications  
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1444 / 2023

Al Quds University  
Deanship of Graduate Studies  
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## Thesis Approval

Digital Resistance on TikTok and the Palestinian Narrative  
# Sheikh Jarrah clashes in Jerusalem as a case study

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Jerusalem- Palestine

1444/2023

## **Dedication**

To my mother, who gave me strength, tenderness, and love and is the source of my courage;  
to the soul of my father and all the loved ones I lost this year; And  
the perpetual bond: my sisters and family;  
my dear wife and kids, as well as my friends, for their unwavering support and  
patience.

I bow before you all to dedicate this endeavor.

Sincerely,

Zafer

## Declaration

I, the author of the thesis, declare that it was submitted to Al-Quds University to obtain a master's degree, and that it is the result of my own research, except for what has been referred to wherever mentioned and that this thesis, or any part of it, has not been submitted to obtain any higher academic degree for any other university or institute.

Zafer Jameel Saleem Sabbah

Signed: 

Date: January. 21.2023

## Acknowledgment

All glory belongs to Allah, the Almighty of God, who has blessed the completion of this thesis and everything else. Grace and generosity flow to Him, and success flows from Him.

I am *pleased and honored to extend my sincere thanks, appreciation, and gratitude* to my supervisor, Dr. Hanna Kreitem, for his effort, time, and valuable advice and guidance that had a significant impact on completing my thesis. My meritorious professors, who have enlightened with knowledge other's' minds, you were and are a candle illuminating the path of darkness. Please accept my sincere gratitude and thank.

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*Much obliged, without your support, I would not have succeeded.*

The researcher,  
Zafer J. Sabbah

## Abstract

The Sheik Jarrah neighborhood events, followed by the war in Gaza in May 2021, had a particular foothold on social media, including TikTok. This research looked at content published on the social media platform TikTok and its interactions to analyze how TikTok was used as a tool of digital activism and resistance in relation to these events. The research also covers the effect of this activism practice on the Palestinian narrative through sentiment analysis of comments with relevant hashtags. A review of what factors affected the media selection for digital activism, from motivation to perceived effectiveness. For motivation, users are influenced by utilitarian, hedonic, and social reasons. For perceived effectiveness, reach, interaction, and instant gratification are keys. TikTok provides an easy-to-use and fun content creation interface with a higher potential for highlighting content from creators with low followings and not only from within-network and leading influencers.

The research utilized mixed methods through content analysis of the top 100 videos on TikTok of users' accounts of the ten most used hashtags. Later, sentiment analysis was conducted on the top ten hashtags among the study sample of 8,364 videos covering 64,549 comments to determine the direction of sentiment in relation to the Palestinian narrative, whether positive, neutral, or negative. It was found that sharing stories of everyday minor struggles of Palestinians on the Internet, as an act of digital resistance, allows the reach to the world to communicate the Palestinian narrative, maintain their history, and help establish or reconnect Palestinian narratives. The research concludes that Palestinian digital resistance adopted social media platforms, including TikTok, to promote the narrative successfully. This use was not always unidirectional, as anti-Palestinian activities also directed the sentiment to the same hashtags through hashtag hijacking and flooding. Hashtags relevant to Sheikh Jarrah and Palestine maintained a positive trend converging with the Palestinian narrative, while those applicable to the Gaza event diverged toward a negative sentiment.

## المقاومة الرقمية على تيك توك والرواية الفلسطينية، اشتباكات حي الشيخ جراح بالقدس كحالة دراسة

إعداد: ظافر جميل سليم صبح

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### ملخص

كان لأحداث حي الشيخ جراح، التي أعقبتها الحرب على غزة في مايو 2021، موطئ قدم خاص على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، بما في ذلك تيك توك. نظر هذا البحث في المحتوى المنشور على منصة التواصل الاجتماعي تيك توك وتفاعلاتها لتحليل كيفية استخدام تيك توك كأداة للنشاط الرقمي والمقاومة فيما يتعلق بتلك الأحداث. يغطي البحث أيضًا تأثير ممارسة النشاط على السرد الفلسطيني من خلال تحليل المشاعر للتعليقات باستخدام الوسوم على الفيديوهات ذات الصلة. ومراجعة العوامل التي أثرت على اختيار الوسيط الاعلامي للنشاط الرقمي من التحفيز إلى الفعالية المتصورة. من أجل التحفيز، يتأثر المستخدمون بالأسباب النفسية والمتعة والاجتماعية، وللفعالية المدركة فإن الوصول والتفاعل والإشباع الفوري هي المفاتيح. يوفر تيك توك واجهة إنشاء محتوى سهلة الاستخدام وممتعة مع إمكانية أعلى لتسليط الضوء على المحتوى من منشئي المحتوى ذوي المتابعة المنخفضة وليس فقط من داخل الشبكة والمؤثرين الرائدین.

استخدم البحث أسلوب الطرق المختلطة (Mixed Methods) من خلال تحليل المحتوى لأفضل مائة مقطع فيديو على تيك توك لحسابات المستخدمين التي احتوت على الوسوم العشرة الأكثر استخدامًا. لاحقًا، تم إجراء تحليل للمشاعر على أكبر عشرون من بين عينة الدراسة المكونة من 8.364 مقطع فيديو تغطي 64،549 تعليقًا لتحديد اتجاه المشاعر فيما يتعلق بالسرد الفلسطيني، سواء أكان إيجابيًا أم محايدًا أم سلبيًا. لقد وجد الباحث أن مشاركة قصص النضالات اليومية البسيطة للفلسطينيين على الإنترنت، كعمل من أعمال المقاومة الرقمية، يسمح بالوصول إلى العالم لإيصال الرواية الفلسطينية، والحفاظ على تاريخهم، والمساعدة في إنشاء أو إعادة ربط الروايات الفلسطينية. وخلص البحث إلى أن المقاومة الرقمية الفلسطينية اعتمدت منصات التواصل الاجتماعي، بما في ذلك تيك توك، للترويج للرواية الفلسطينية بنجاح. لم يكن هذا الاستخدام أحادي الاتجاه دائمًا، لأن الأنشطة المناهضة للفلسطينيين وجهت أيضًا للمشاعر إلى نفس الوسوم من خلال اختطاف الوسوم والدفق بكمية النشر. حافظت الوسوم ذات الصلة بالشيخ جراح وفلسطين على اتجاه إيجابي متقارب مع الرواية الفلسطينية، في حين تباعدت تلك التي تنطبق على حدث غزة تجاه المشاعر السلبية.

## Table of contents

Dedication.....	
Declaration.....	i
Acknowledgment.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Arabic abstract.....	iv
List of tables: .....	vii
List of figures: .....	vii
List of Abbreviations .....	vii
Chapter one.....	1
1.1 Introduction: .....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem: .....	2
1.3 Contribution / significance: .....	3
1.4 definition of terms: TikTok, Digital, Resistance: .....	4
1.6 Limitations of the study:.....	5
Chapter 2 Theoretical framework:.....	6
1.2 Introduction: .....	6
2.2 Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) .....	8
3.2: TikTok society, affordances and activism.....	12
4.2 Digital resistance .....	15
Chapter 3 Previous Studies:.....	20
3.1 Grassroots of resistance: .....	20
3.2 Forms of Digital Resistance: .....	22
3.3 Social Networking service (SNS) role in Resistance: .....	23

3.4 TikTok App and its Technology:.....	27
Chapter 4 Research Methodology: .....	32
4.1 Introduction: .....	32
4.2 Research design/ Methods: .....	33
4.3 Data Collection Methods .....	35
4.3.1 Primary Data:.....	37
4.3.2 Study Sample:.....	38
4.3.3 Population & period: .....	38
4.4 Limitations:.....	39
Chapter 5 Results and Discussion: .....	40
5.1 / Q1: What are the factors that influence the selection of a specific social media platform to practice digital resistance? .....	40
5.2 / Q.2: To what extent TikTok allows users to post digital stories that are part of the digital resistance, whether it is automatic or systematic.....	46
5.2.1 TikTok, and Self-Expression:.....	46
5.2.2 For You recommendation system, and the App Affordances: .....	48
5.2.3 TikTok, Algorithms and Hashtags: .....	51
5.3 Q3: What is the level of interaction with the content related to the Palestinian cause on TikTok, and what is the direction of interaction “negative or positive”? .....	53
5.3.1 Data collection:.....	53
5.3.2 TikTok, and Hashtags influence:.....	58
5.3.3 The study sample analysis: .....	60
5.3.4 Digital resistance engagement on TikTok: .....	62
Chapter 6 Findings and Conclusion.....	65
6.1 Platforms and Digital Resistance.....	65

6.2 TikTok Affordances and Digital Resistance .....	66
6.3 Hashtags influence in Sheik Jarrah and Gaza events.....	67
6.4 Engagement and the Palestinian Narrative .....	68
6.5 Way Forward .....	69
References: .....	70
Appendix: .....	92

Appendix 1: list of most used hashtags on internet.

Appendix 2: list of the highest 10 commented users' accounts.

Appendix 3: list of 8364 videos published by 5062 users.

Appendix 4: the highest accounts which published highest number of videos

### List of tables:

**Table 1:** Recommended videos

**Table 2:** Number of videos for each hashtag

**Table 3:** Final number of scrapped comments

**Table 4:** Published videos in response to the oscillation of events before, within, and after the war on Gaza

### List of figures:

**Figure 1:** Embedded design method

**Figure 2:** Research methodology design

**Figure 3:** Qualitative content analysis

**Figure 4:** Number of videos for each hashtag

**Figure 5:** sentiment analysis results of all hashtag

### List of Abbreviations

**UGT:** Uses and Gratifications Theory

**NLP:** Natural Language Processing

**PLO:** Palestine Liberation Organization

**Muqawama:** resistance against occupation

**SNS:** Social Networks Service

**Lone Wolf Attack:** is a kind of individual attack, some Palestinians adopted it as a kind of militant resistance

**UGC:** User Generated Content

## Chapter one

### 1.1 Introduction:

Technology, social media, and mobile phone technologies have become integral to our social lives and their role in shaping how we understand and share our culture as citizens. Social media is a digital assembly where information is weighted, evaluated, and commented upon (Jacobs, 2016). Meanwhile, social media users leave a footprint on social media that provides insights into communities' social attitudes and states (Pavalanathan et al., 2016).

The ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict for decades took various forms and characteristics of resistance, civil, popular and armed resistance. Furthermore, Palestinians used media and literary resistance in the beginning of nineties, strikes, boycotts, tax refusal as a common type of resisting the occupation. With the development of information and communication technology, digital media and the Internet; social networks services (SNS) are recruiting and directing the public from one hand, and used to produce a digital content that forms a new type of nonviolent resistance within the Palestinian national context on the other hand. For a few so-called tactical media groups, "digital resistance" refers to a form of protest that mimics how digital technology has, in effect, made information itself a new medium. Most often, however, resistance has arisen through necessity and opportunity (Critical Art Ensemble, 2001).

During the recent clashes in Sheikh Jarrah Jerusalem, users posted videos, stories, and lives from the field, as others did the same from Al-Aqsa Mosque and Gaza. Thus, it is considered a state of resistance, rejection, and protest against reality on the one hand, and a contribution to fostering a somewhat the Palestinian narrative on the other hand to refute other narrative that eliminates the Palestinian right of identity and land, on the time. In this study, the researcher found after extensive reading on this topic that there is a gap about digital resistance on TikTok in Palestine and literature that discusses the Palestinian narrative. Especially since many studies utilize the uses and gratification theory to study users' motivations for using social media for entertainment and amusement or material needs only, and the majority use the quantitative method. Finally, not many studies define "social media" more in-depth by exploring users' motivations for using a particular platform like TikTok.

However, TikTok is a social network video-sharing service that aims to stimulate "creativity" and "bring joy to users" (TikTok, 2022). In addition, TikToks' affordances and its recommendation system called "For You" allows users participate in TikTok, by viewing, sharing, and commenting on the videos created by others (Yang & Zilberg, 2020).

TikTok is a widely spread social media platform, with large concentration among youngsters. In the US, 48% percent of TikTok users are between 18 and 29 years old. Worldwide, the number of monthly TikTok active users by February 2021 was (110.41) million active users (MAU), while in Palestine, the estimated number of users is 450,000 per month. By March 2021, the number was (be 3.2) MAUs in Israel.

Groshek and Han (2011) pointed out that alternative media tend to report on activism and create counter-publics or spaces that enable resistance. Therefore, Palestinian activists and users used TikTok to film and live broadcast real-time events and personal stories reflecting crucial lives during the occupation. Since Yang (2020) claims that content on this platform has the potential to reach millions of users, as microcelebrities and influencers on TikTok aggressively attract followers while shaping the message of their followers; (Mühler, 2008) also explains that, this occurs at a time in young people's lives when the role of the media as a socializing agent is of great importance.

Furthermore, this thesis will investigate TikTok's role in promoting Palestinian online digital resistance; thus, the researcher will use the mixed method embedded design to scrap data using the API method. Qualitative content analysis of the most commented hashtagged videos which are one hundred videos, and quantitative sentiment analysis of 64.549 comments on the same videos is also executed. Thus, the study proves how the application is used and deployed in the digital resistance within the study period to support the Palestinian narrative

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem:**

Live videos and stories from Jerusalem, with their violent and comprehensive content, present a new image of TikTok and demonstrate a new concept to users about TikTok and the potential role it can play. In contrast, feelings attract more attention (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2019).

With their aggressive and detailed content, live videos and stories from Jerusalem give a new image of TikTok and demonstrate a new notion to viewers about TikTok and its possible function. On the other hand, feelings attract more attention (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2019).

As a result, this study investigates the mechanism by which TikTok operates and the extent to which TikTok users use it in promoting digital resistance and spreading the Palestinian narrative during the Sheikh Jarrah events in Jerusalem, as well as the extent to which the user is sometimes a producer or a consumer of content.

**The research problem is** to study to what extent TikTok was used in the digital resistance and dissemination of the Palestinian narrative during the events of Sheikh Jarrah in Jerusalem. This research problem gives rise to the following **main research question**:

How did Palestinian activists use the TikTok application to promote the Palestinian narrative during the Sheikh Jarrah clashes in Jerusalem?

To answer this question, the researcher devised the following sub-questions:

- 1. What are the factors that influence the selection of a specific social media platform to practice digital resistance?**
- 2. To what extent TikTok allows users to post digital stories that are part of the digital resistance, whether it is automatic or systematic.**
- 3. What is the level of interaction with the content related to the Palestinian cause on TikTok, and what is the direction of interaction “negative or positive”?**

### **1.3 Contribution / significance:**

Practically, the significance of the study is to show the importance and role of exercising digital resistance on social networks, especially on TikTok, by using various forms of attractive content for the Palestinian cause. Moreover, it aims to explore the liking and also the advocacy, the size and the role that TikTok plays in this direction, as well as the technical features and possibilities of the application that attract young users on the one hand and how they help in the rapid spread of the Palestinian narrative.

Due to a scarcity of scientific studies in this field, this study presents new research on using the TikTok app in the Palestinian digital resistance arena as an emerging notion that must be examined. This study may be one of the first Palestinian and Arab studies to discuss using the TikTok platform

in Palestinian digital resistance. It looks into the role of application features and successful content in spreading the narrative and the extent of Palestinian digital activity, and what opportunities and threats played a role in the rise or fall of the level of Palestinian digital activity and obtained support.

#### **1.4 definition of terms: TikTok, Digital, Resistance:**

##### **TikTok conceptual meaning:**

TikTok, a mobile video creation and sharing application formerly known as Musical.ly, has captured the attention of young audiences around the globe. Due to its design, technology, and cultural environment, TikTok has become the most downloaded Apple iOS video app, with teens between the ages of 13 and 18 making up half of its 500 million monthly users (Bresnick, 2019).

##### **TikTok procedural meaning:**

It is a social media platform that allows young people to express their needs and wants, as well as satisfy their desires by communicating with family and friends from around the world. It provides the ability to chat, share, tag, and post, as well as allow users to create an account and control their privacy.

##### **Resistance conceptual meaning:**

Resistance, also called Underground, in European history, any of various secret and clandestine groups that sprang up throughout German-occupied Europe during World War II to oppose Nazi rule. They included civilians who worked secretly against the occupation as well as armed bands of partisans or guerrilla fighters (Britanica, 2021),

Also<sup>1</sup> :

**A:** dislike of or opposition to a plan, an idea, etc.; the act of refusing to obey  
resistance to somebody/something: There has been a lot of resistance to this new law.

**B:** the act of using force to oppose somebody/something  
resistance to somebody/something: The demonstrators offered little or no resistance to the police.

**C:** resistance (to something) a force that stops something moving or makes it move more slowly: Wind/air resistance (= in the design of planes or cars)

**D:** (often the Resistance) [singular + singular or plural verb] a secret organization that resists the authorities, especially in a country that an enemy has control of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/resistance?q=resistance>

**Resistance procedural meaning:**

It is the act against surveillance, control, extensive use of firewall and privacy violation on internet users under the name of national security. Technologies that facilitate collective political and cultural practices are shaping internet use and integrating it more deeply into the lives of internet users around the world – through instant messaging, so called ‘smart’ email, collaborative weblogs, wireless wide-area networks,

‘wiki’ open-editor websites, and social networking platforms. For a few so-called tactical media groups, ‘digital resistance’ refers to a form of protest that mimics the way in which digital technology, in effect, has made information itself a new medium (Russell, 2005)

**Digital conceptual meaning:**

Word Origin: late 15th century from Latin digitalis, from digitus ‘finger, toe’.

A: using a system of receiving and sending information as a series of the numbers one and zero, showing that an electronic signal is there or is not there; connected with computer technology

B: Digital technology has shifted photography from a chemical process to an electronic process. The simplest digital signals are obtained when the binary system is used<sup>2</sup>.

**Digital procedural meaning:**

It is an ability to understand and to use information from a variety of digital sources and regarded it simply as literacy in the digital age. It is therefore the current form of the traditional idea of literacy. the ability to read, write and otherwise deal with information using the technologies and formats of the time and an essential life skill. Bawden argument was that since a digital source could generate many forms of information—text, images, sounds, etc.—a new form of literacy was necessary, in order to make sense of these new forms of presentation (Bawden, 2008).

**1.6 Limitations of the study:**

**Objective Limitations:** The study faced some limitation in the identification of the role of the TikTok application in strengthening Palestinian digital resistance and spreading the Palestinian narrative through the creation or publication of content by Jerusalemite activists and others during the study period.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/academic/digital>

**Spatial boundaries:** The spatial boundaries in this study revolve around the activity of TikTok application users in Jerusalem, specifically in the neighborhood Sheikh Jarrah, as a result of the clashes and confrontations between Palestinians and Israelis due to the settlers' seizure of Arab homes in the neighborhood and the attempt to evict residents outside the neighborhood under the pretext that the homes do not rightfully belong to

**Time limits:** the period between (April 1 to June 30, 2021) was chosen because it was during this period that the peak of political actions and the high frequency of the conflict between the Palestinian and Israeli sides took place. Moreover, there was a remarkable digital activity on social media platforms in general, which helped to create public opinion toward or against one of the parties in the dispute.

## Chapter 2 Theoretical framework:

### 1.2 Introduction:

According to Judith Butler, the world frequently fails to respond appropriately to human suffering because the "grievability" of human existence is unequally distributed (Butler, 2015). While Bosch et al. (2020) refer to the researchers as "techno-pessimists," they feel that social media cannot be a solution to political involvement. In contrast, others according to Lamoureaux and Sureau (2019), claim that ordinary citizens may provide "oversight such as election monitoring, constitution-making procedures, and human rights reporting" (Lamoureaux & Sureau, 2019, p. 35). They also stated that social media enables followers to express and develop their ideas without being constrained by the formal constraints present in conventional media.

As a result, Africans have biographized citizenship, allowing them to negotiate in the political field (Bosch, 2017). For instance; the hashtags #ThisFlag (Zimbabwe) and #RhodesMustFall (South Africa) highlight the necessity of organization in internet movements. The two cases are significant not only for their influence in their respective nations but also for demonstrating the value of Internet activism in addressing similar concerns in other circumstances (Sebeelo, 2021). Immediacy is a powerful force in social media. Ordinary citizens have discovered a "consciousness of opportunity" (Ewick & Silbey, 2003), using these platforms to communicate, mobilize, and utilize resistance.

Internet social media sites (SNS) like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp attract users to spend as much time possible on their platforms (Boczkowski et al., 2018). One way of keeping us, the

users, engaged it to feed us with a steady flow of content suited to our online social connections and interests based on our searches and interactions. TikTok behaves in the same way, personalizing the material it delivers to consumers to increase engagement.

The tools TikTok provides to users are, in a way, the secret of its attraction and strength, and the videos that users may readily share, including mockery videos, are a tool of resistance. TikTok has become a key motivator in recent incidents in Jerusalem and around Israel, resulting in substantial public debate regarding the application's role in the flow of events (de Vries, 2021).

Moreover, TikTok has recently become a key motivator in recent incidents in Jerusalem and around Israel, resulting in substantial public debate regarding the application's involvement in the flow of events (Leshem, 2021). Many more videos of violence between Israelis and Palestinians flooded TikTok during the most recent war between Israel and Gaza in May.

This dissertation studies digital resistance on TikTok and its role of promoting the Palestinian narrative. by applying the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973; Katz & Foulkes, 1962). Therefore, the researcher used the theory's theoretical framework to better understand users' motivations and consuming, participating in, and creating user-generated content on TikTok, as well as explore user's perception of resistance content on TikTok. Furthermore, it aimed to address the gap in current literature that lacks discussion of the digital resistance content related to Palestine and the uses and gratifications of social media. This gap was found by reading extensively on the topic, especially that many studies employ the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) to study users' motivations to use social media, and a majority use quantitative method.

Moreover, multiple studies that apply UGT to social media and describe usage behaviors focus on one level of usage (content creation) before contextualizing that type of use by examining motives to consume and interact on social media (Heinonen, 2011; Shao, 2009). In this dissertation, the motives for using resistant content for Palestine are primarily clear, especially with the hashtags used, with slightly different directions when studied qualitatively. At the same time, the researcher intends to study the perception and behavior of content producers (who were consumers at one time) on TikTok, which was also analyzed through quantitative methods and natural language processing (NLP) for sentiment analysis.

Lastly, several studies do not define "social media" more in-depth by exploring users' motives to use a particular platform like TikTok.

## 2.2 Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

The uses and gratifications theory is one of the modern communication theories that indicates the role assigned to the public in communication with the media. It focuses on studying mass communication in an ordered and functional manner; the awareness and consequences of individual variations and societal variance on the perception of behavior, linked with the media in the 1940s, led to a fresh perspective on the correlation between the public and the media. These factors went from viewing the audience as passive and inactive to viewing them as active in identifying preferred media messages and content for their users. In contrast, early theories, such as the magic bullet theory and the theory of unified effects, portrayed the public as a passive, separate entity acting according to a single pattern. On the other hand, the significance of variations in knowledge, perception, and subcultures made the receiver an essential factor in that the Uses and Gratifications Theory is a mass media theory that focuses on what people do with media. UGT specifically addresses the need to comprehend "what people do with the media, what uses they make of what the media now provides them, what satisfactions they enjoy, and, indeed, what part the media plays in their daily life" (Katz et al., 1973; Katz & Foulkes, 1962, p. 377).

Moreover, UGT makes numerous critical arguments: media competes with other sources of need satisfaction to fulfill a broad spectrum of human needs; the consumer is the link between gratification and media choice (Katz et al., 1973). People are active, not passive, media consumers (Katz et al., 1973; Katz & Foulkes, 1962, p. 377); they employ mass media to achieve a specific aim. Considering the methodology for determining the applications of media cited by consumers, many of the purposes of utilizing mass media are derived from speaking to audience members themselves; in general, they are self-aware of their motives (Katz et al., 1973). Lastly, "value judgments about the cultural importance of mass communication should be suspended when exploring the audience" (Katz et al., 1973, p. 511)

Furthermore, it can be inferred from the educational level and cultural standards prevailing in a society. The uses and gratifications notion has gone beyond the prevalent concept that the audience is just a passive recipient. Meanwhile, the concept of the active audience emerged with the rise of this approach, which seeks media content that satisfies its gratification and suits it in terms of culture, income, gender, and orientation. Indeed, the implication is that a single piece of media content provides varying gratifications for different audience segments. The contrary is also correct, depending on the motivations that led the recipient to be exposed to this or that program; the result depends on the gratification exposure achieves for the recipient (Makkawi & Alsaid, 1998). In the same context, Mazahreh (2012) notes that the uses and gratifications theory is one of the modern communication theories that highlights the role handed to the public in communicating with media. Furthermore, needs and motives are among the primary drivers of communication, particularly those the individual expects to be met or supplied by others to accomplish environmental adaptation.

According to Makkawi & Alsaïd (1998), the uses-and-gratifications theory is one of the modern communication theories that indicates the role entrusted to the public in communicating with the media. Needs and motives are among the factors that drive communication, especially those that the individual expects to be satisfied or fulfilled by others (to achieve adaptation to the environment). This was established by Eliyahu Katz, as it diverts attention from the media message to the audience receiving it. Thus, there has become a weakness in the media power concept that was prevalent at the time, where the belief was that the audience's viewing and following up on the media was due to getting used to the media and not for logical reasons. Based on the differences in uses and gratifications, the receiving audience chooses the media material that it sees as satisfying its needs and then chooses the media or messages that satisfy those needs (Makkawi & Alsaïd, 1998).

Rosengren (1974) presents the set of elements that comprise the perspective of uses and gratifications, which begins with the generation of human biological, psychological, and social needs. These needs interact with individual characteristics and the social framework in which the individual is embedded. These needs produce individual issues of varying severity, as well as potential answers to those difficulties, and hence generate incentives to solve problems or satisfy demands. Gratification is accomplished through media exposure or participation in other activities that result in gratification or dissatisfaction. Then more demands are born that go through the same phases as the previous ones (Rosengren, 1974, pp. 269–286).

What the theory does is establish a set of rules that may be used to investigate consumer usage of mass media; it might be considered a model (Katz et al., 1973). UGT also offers early motives and uses such as escapism (Katz & Foulkes, 1962). Since UGT's rise in popularity, it has been used to analyze consumer usage of advertising (O'Donohoe, 1994), websites (Eighmey & McCord, 1998), and social media (Athwal et al., 2019; Flecha-Ortíz et al., 2021; Knoll & Proksch, 2017).

Katz et al. see that the perspective of uses and gratifications depends on five assumptions to achieve three main goals, and these hypotheses are (1973, pp. 11–35):

1. The members of the public are active participants in the mass communication process, and they use the means of communication to achieve intended goals that meet their expectations.
2. The use of means of communication expresses the needs that members of the public are aware of, and this is controlled by the factors of individual differences, and the factors of social interaction, and the needs vary according to the different individuals.
3. Emphasizing that the public is the one who chooses the messages and content that satisfies his needs. It is the individuals who use the means of communication, and it is not the means of communication that use the individuals.

4. Members of the public can always identify their needs and motives, and thus choose the means that satisfy those needs.

5. Prevailing cultural norms can be inferred from the audience's uses of the means of communication, and not only from the content of messages.

Meanwhile, Katz et al. added that uses and gratifications perspective achieves three main goals (1973, pp. 11–35):

1. Seeking to discover how individuals use the means of communication, in view of the active public who can choose and use the means that satisfy their needs and expectations.

2. Explain the motives for exposure to a particular means of communication, and the interaction that occurs as a result of this exposure.

3. Emphasis on the results of using the means of communication in order to understand the process of mass communication.

Criticisms of uses and gratification theory: Some researchers and media theorists have criticized the theory and its theorists based on the theory's ability to manage the public and public opinion in terms of the means and content chosen. Among the most prominent criticisms leveled at the theory are (AlHadidi, 2009):

1. It is similar in that it employs the same approach, which is based on open questions to researchers about gratifications provided by the media.

2. Contributed to using the qualitative approach to collect saturation data from the public in classified categories whose distribution is delayed iteratively and gradually according to density.

3. These studies should have attempted to uncover the links between approved satisfactions and the social and psychological origins of the needs being met.

4. Studies using the UGT should have investigated quantitatively and conceptually the interrelationships between the various functions provided by the media.

5. These studies did not provide a more detailed and progressive picture of media gratification, nor did they result in the formulation of theoretical generalizations (Al-Mashaqbeh, 2015).

6. "Denis McQuail" (1984) emphasizes that the findings of this study can be used as a pretext to create low-level content to meet the public's needs in the fields of entertainment and entertainment.

7. Plumler finds no need to define the concept of the activity used to describe the beneficiaries, whether it is deliberate, beneficial, or chosen.

8. The introduction of new methods, such as the Internet, requires developing new ideas to understand the medium's relationship with its audience.

9. Theory study examines the individual outside of his environment and the impact of each on the other (Hijab, 2010, p. 301).

Despite its detractors, the UGT is an important theoretical tool for studying the early stages of a new mass communication phenomena; it provides a cutting-edge methodology for comprehending media content uses of that new social platform (Ruggiero, 2000). As a result, it is an excellent approach to studying not only social media but also TikTok.

Meanwhile, referring to Katz et al.; Katz and Foulkes (1973; 1962, p. 37), UGT is discussing "What people do with the media, what uses they make of what the media now provides them, what satisfactions they enjoy, and, indeed, what part the media plays in their daily lives." While all the above-mentioned scholars show that UGT makes many vital arguments, one of which is that people are active, not passive, media consumers. Hence, people are not just passive recipients of media but actively seek out media that satisfies specific needs or wants. The perspective of uses and gratifications begins with the generation of human biological, psychological, and social needs. These needs interact with individual characteristics and the social framework in which the individual is embedded to produce individual issues of varying severity. These issues, in turn, generate incentives to solve problems or satisfy demands. Gratification is accomplished by media exposure or participation in other activities that result in gratification or dissatisfaction.

Moreover, Makkawi & Alsaïd (1998) explain that the uses and gratifications theory is one of the modern communication theories that indicates the role entrusted to the public in communicating with the media. The theory states that people have certain needs and motives that they expect to be fulfilled by others and that they choose the media material that they see as satisfying these needs.

Katz et al. again emphasize that (UGT) is a set of rules that can be used to study the perspective of uses and gratifications work, and these are: 1. *The people using the mass communication method need to be active participants in the process and use the means of communication to achieve intended goals that meet their expectations.* 2. *The use of means of communication expresses the needs that members of the public are aware of, and this is controlled by the factors of individual differences. The factors of social interaction and the needs vary according to the different individuals.* 3. *Emphasizing that the public is the one who chooses the messages and content that satisfies his needs.* The individuals who use the means of communication, not the means of communication, use the individuals. 4. *Public members can always identify their needs and motives and thus choose the means that satisfy those needs.* 5. *Prevailing cultural norms can be inferred from the audience's uses of the means of communication and not only from the content of messages* (Katz et al., 1973)

In light of the objectives of this thesis, and the dimensions of the study problem, it was feasible to determine the theoretical framework that helps to achieve the set of objectives that the study intends to achieve, as well as research the different dimensions of the research topic, since the uses and gratifications theory is related to the concept of an “individual job”. This concept is concerned with looking at the functions of mass media from the viewpoint of the masses, focusing on their needs and motives through their exposure to these means. (Al-Mashaqbeh, 2015, p. 84).

As a result, the researcher finds, based on the elements and goals, that the uses and gratifications theory is suitable to study how the engagement of users on TikTok contributed to raise the knowledge and then the support of the Palestinian narrative.

### **3.2: TikTok society, affordances and activism**

In April 2021, Israeli troops displaced Palestinian citizens from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah area. In reaction, Palestinians took to social media, particularly TikTok, to endorse a call to action under the hashtag #Save-SheikhJarrah (Pace, 2013). While this was not the first time Palestinians tried to be heard (Pace, 2013), it was the first time they conveyed a pro-Palestinian message without limits, inequalities, or alteration of facts (Ward, 2021). Furthermore, other TikTok users, who afterward formed emotional publics in solidarity with Palestinians, erupted with social, political, and cultural material to express their connecting collective action through creating these short videos (Ward, 2021). Moreover, connective action is a set of digital technologies that enable the formation of self-organization in virtually networked societies that engage in public affairs online (Bennett & Segerberg, 2015).

Today's youth are utilizing social media to invent new ways to oppose and mobilize the globe to support positive social change (Dwonch, 2019). During previous Israel-Gaza conflicts, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter were utilized to report and tell factual events (Ward, 2021). One of the first viral videos on YouTube was about the West Bank community of Nabi Saleh and the ascent of Ahed Tamimi as an online figure of Palestinian youth resistance to the occupation (Dwonch, 2019). However, with the advent of TikTok, viewers grew more interested in what the platform offered, specifically "playful methods of doing politics," allowing for the birth of new types of participatory action (Vijay & Gekker, 2021, p. 714).

Jost et al. (2018) propose three critical elements of political protest social media platforms: (1) they provide details, which facilitates political activism; (2) they transmit potent messages in support of or opposition to political activities; and (3) they are critical in information distribution

because social networks have a distinct structure through which the spread of online messages can assist in the success or failure of political activities. Moreover, TikTok has significantly influenced adolescents because they use the platform's ability to express themselves, utilizing the application as a back channel. The phrase "back-channeling" refers to the dialogues, movements, and trends in digital areas (Seglem & Haling, 2018). According to Vijay and Gekker (2021), "the non-serious tone of TikTok further obscures its actions as a playfield for political persuasion" (2021, p. 714). This amusing political participation, whether through satire, parody, or memes, democratizes politics and engages otherwise difficult-to-reach populations (Hartley, 2010). Furthermore, Hautea et al. (2021) indicated that TikTok's short films were seen as a tool to express one's individuality and transmit feelings. TikTok, according to Patel and Binjola (2020), is a medium for showcasing skills, expressing ideas on diverse themes, and expressing emotion and unity without regard for national boundaries or other constraints.

Individuals may have a more significant influence if they collaborate and share their experiences and voices broadly, reaching a more comprehensive number of people (Vivienne, 2011 b). This is now readily accomplished by uploading real stories or experiences in video, text, or photo format on the Internet, mostly on social media networks. This is why the online sphere is so powerful; it allows the narrator to discuss various aspects of their personal life with various types of hearers and overhearers who associate with and listen to different sections of the tale. (Jones, 2015). On the other hand, Caldeira et al. argue that self-representation online might "normalize diversity and challenge restrictive beliefs" by "acknowledging disparities in age, color, ethnicity, and culture" (2018, p. 25).

TikTok has been operating for a few years under several names that were well-recognized and utilized by a few. However, with its rebranding from music.ly to TikTok, the app gained popularity among young adults and teens in 2019 (TikTok Community Guideline, 2022). Instagram, like Facebook and Twitter, was rejected and abandoned by these generations of social media users. As a result, TikTok's video format and sound bite characteristics gradually become more appealing to young adults and teens (Sandler, 2022). TikTok's affordances are highly particular and unique, as there are essentially two streams of content: one displays the users' videos from the accounts that they follow, including their friends, celebrities, and any other producers; the other displays videos from the accounts that they do not follow (TikTok, 2021).

To address the study's central question, the following concepts and ideas must be applied to the research: (1) the TikTok platform in particular, (2) the broader notion of the platform society, and (3) social media and its affordances.

TikTok's ubiquity can be related to a growing trend in "social media video production and sharing, from brief looping videos to live-streaming" (Anderson, 2020, p. 7). In addition, TikTok and Instagram have comparable affordances and interfaces. They both allow sharing of short, vertical

videos, where users may participate by leaving comments or liking the content, and the user interface is considered mobile-friendly (Omar & Dequan, 2020).

Furthermore, the other feed, known as the "For You" page, does not only recommend videos with the most views, likes, or comments; it also features videos from any creator. Regardless of the user's following size, recommendations fit their preferences, determined by whom or what they have previously watched, followed, or interacted with. The "For You" method is how some TikTok video artists swiftly grew enormous followers despite not being social media stars or celebrities (Anderson, 2020; Kennedy, 2020).

It should also be mentioned that most platforms fall into one of two categories: infrastructure platforms or sectoral platforms. Infrastructure platforms at the heart of the internet ecosystem are controlled by one of the Big Five firms (Apple, Alphabet-Google, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft). Sectoral platforms serve a technical specialty or sector but still require or use information services from the Big Five ecosystem (Caldeira et al., 2018). TikTok is a sectoral platform because it is not owned by one of the Big Five. However, it incorporates components like music, making profiles using login information from other social networks, and sharing content with others via social media, all of which are part of the infrastructure platforms.

Vijay and Gekker pointed that: "What distinguishes the platform is that replication and virality, or 'spreadability,' are embedded as platform characteristics; every TikTok video has the potential to inspire the production of another." (2021, p. 4) This component of video virality may be viewed as a metric of online success, which is what makes TikTok appealing to young people and teens (Omar & Dequan, 2020). Moreover, another important aspect of social media networks such as Instagram, Vine, and TikTok is that the platform's shared user-generated material generates a unique form of communication. This allows any user to produce and share content, perhaps growing a larger following (Omar & Dequan, 2020).

TikTok videos are especially powerful because, like GIFs, they are "self-contained narratives that provide the viewer the set-up, resolution, punchline, and affect all within a little clip" ( Highfield, 2017, p. 6). however, to counteract TikTok's successful and innovative sides, the site also has a vicious and extreme side (Brittain, 2020). It has attracted harmful users such as far-right extremist organizations, terrorists, and pedophiles to abuse TikTok's young followers. The platform's poor security in terms of rules, regulations, and aggressive removal of these accounts has made it simpler for these organizations to become more active (Brittain, 2020). Moving forward from TikTok, it is critical to comprehend social media networks as platforms within the context of the platform society. As described by Caldeira et al. (2018) in their book *The Platform Society*, platforms are creators of both the online and offline realms in which society exists.

Understanding the theoretical basis of social network features and affordances is critical. This thesis will conduct a modest affordance study of TikTok to comprehend how digital resistance content creators utilize the platform. The possibilities of usage revealed when an agent interacts

with an object are referred to as social media or platform affordances (Harindranath et al., 2015). Platform affordances are classified into three types: (1) physical affordances, which are built into the platform so that people use it in a specific way, (2) relational affordances, which cover interactions between people on the platform; and (3) transactional affordances, which cover any business exchanges between users (Harindranath et al., 2015). Social media affordances must be seen and understood by users; otherwise, users may not realize that a specific activity or behavior is available and will be reluctant to interact again (DeVito et al., 2017). It is also well known that the affordances of various social media platforms influence how users appear, express themselves, and participate online. This participation may be shown, for example, by liking, sharing, or commenting on information, all of which are methods to show support or interest in others (Lerat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019). This thesis will use the mixed method for video content analysis and the sentiment analysis of the commented text to precisely understand the physical and relational affordances of TikTok and its users. In addition, transactional affordances are essential to this research.

The mixed-method approach for video content analysis and sentiment analysis of the commented text will be used in this thesis to accurately comprehend the physical and relational affordances of TikTok and its users. Indeed, transactional affordances are critical to this study.

As previously stated, platforms functioned to arrange the flow of data and interactions between users. TikTok is a platform that allows people to express themselves to others online through the creation of videos, generating a space inside society where users can connect, engage, and obtain information. This leads to test the influence of these published materials on the Palestinian narrative in the digital resistance arena, whereas other studies assure that Tik Tok prevent and restrict posting and even blocks accounts as the researcher found in the research analysis section despite that some scholars claim that TikTok platform encourages aggression and terrorist organizations.

## **4.2 Digital resistance**

It is difficult to imagine a public sphere in the Palestinian context since the Palestinian lands are fractured and partitioned, disconnecting individuals from their own families and communities (Nabulsi, 2014).

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has significantly influenced the lives of children, adolescents, and young adults in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). This region includes the West Bank and Gaza, and the majority of Palestinians residing there are under the age of 30. While conflict and occupation have restricted access to school and the economic possibilities of these young people. The post-Oslo generation recalls the two Intifadas (uprisings) of 1987 and 2000, the Oslo Accords of 1993, and the Palestinian Authority (PA) establishment in the West Bank. Studies on

the consequences of violence and conflict on children's health in the OPT have been conducted, but they do not address the fundamental causes of violence and conflict. Moreover, a recent research study has examined how the conflict has affected children and young people regarding trauma, distress, and resilience (Asthana, 2017). Asthana states that humiliation is associated with a loss of dignity, honor, and justice. Other studies have looked at how Palestinian adolescents have built strength in the face of the occupation and expressed their opposition via creative acts of chanting, music, and theater. "Sumud", an Arabic word which means steadfastness and endurance, is essential to this struggle (2017).

Resistance and sacrifice have been equated as the actual cost of a present sense of life, living disconnected in the hope of a better future; rites honoring martyrs have become necessary to aid people in coping with constant loss. In Palestine, martyrdom has gradually evolved into a heroic act of resistance that produces its secular ethics; the martyr has become increasingly sanctified. The current conflict is to bring the Palestinian people to independence. It is not an issue of achieving paradise (Abu Hashhash, 2006).

In the digital field, 'Film, video art, photography, installation, and so on remodel the frame of our perceptions and the dynamism of our emotions,' argues Rancière (2008, p. 14). As such, they may pave the way for new types of political subjectivization. 'According to Reguillo (2009, p. 33), young people's social media behaviors, such as blogging, decentering, and regionalization meanings, "produce estrangement." From another hand, using short digital movies, digital networking, social media, and blogging habits, young Palestinians cross socioeconomic and cultural divides to dispute Israel's occupation of their country and decenter the PA's influence in the West Bank.

In the same context, Hirschkind (2010) studied people in Egypt using the internet and blogging. He found that young people in Egypt changed the way they used media, like blogs and cell phone videos, and also changed the language they used, creating a new type of realism seen in both mainstream and alternative media.

In April 2021, Israeli forces evicted Palestinian families from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. In response, Palestinians used social media, particularly TikTok, to spread awareness and call for action using the hashtag #SaveSheikhJarrah (Pace, 2013). This was the first time Palestinians were able to spread their message without restrictions or censorship. Other users joined in solidarity, creating short videos to express their support. This is an example of connective action, where digital technologies allow people to organize and engage in public matters (Pace, 2013). TikTok has become a key motivator in recent incidents in Jerusalem and around Israel, resulting in substantial public debate regarding the application's involvement in the flow of events. On TikTok, for example, videos with the hashtag #freepalestine received 6.6 billion views, for example, De Varis explained, that one video of a young Palestinian slapping a young ultra-Orthodox guy on a train in Jerusalem went viral, sparking further incidences of Palestinian violence in the city. In contrast, many other videos of the Israeli attack and violence against Palestinians were filmed and documented. More videos of violence between Israelis and

Palestinians flooded TikTok during the most recent clashes between Israel and Palestinians in Gaza in May 2021.

In addition to numerous "live updates" of recent events in Gaza, quotes from Israeli media outlets on rocket attacks on Israel and Israeli attacks on Gaza, these social media groups began to post and disseminate pictures and videos of the official spokesmen of the "Palestinian Resistance" factions, as well as images and videos of the Palestinian Authority (Jovany, 2021). In fact, Palestinians had tried to have their voices heard before, but this was the first time they were able to do so without any restrictions or changes to the truth. Additionally, other TikTok users joined in to show their support for Palestinians by creating short videos with social, political, and cultural content (Ward, 2021). Other TikTok users, who supported Palestinians, created a lot of social, political, and cultural content to express their collective action. TikTok is an example of connective action when digital technologies allow people to create self-organized virtual networks and engage in public matters (Bennett & Segerberg, 2015). TikTok is a political movement that uses satire, parody, and memes to make politics more accessible to different audiences who, under other circumstances, would not be able to communicate (Hartley, 2010). Additionally, Hautea et al. (2021) found that people use TikTok to communicate their emotions, express their identity, and share their talents, opinions, and feelings without being limited by national boundaries or other barriers (Hautea et al., 2021).

Social media has been used in many parts of the world to support political protests. These protests are often identified by specific hashtags, such as #Jan25 in Egypt and #OWS for Occupy Wall Street, Hashtags give access to both content and users (Jost et al., 2018). Moreover, Jost et al. (2018) suggest that social media platforms can have a big impact on political protests. They say that social media can provide information which makes it easier for people to get involved in political activities. It can also spread emotional messages, either in support of or against the political activities. Finally, social media networks have a unique structure which can help spread information quickly, which can be important for the success or failure of political activities.

Content virality is essential to the growth of social and political internet movements. TikTok's core is that the platform encourages replication and 'spreadability' using design aspects, with each video having the potential to promote the production of another (Jenkins et al., 2014). TikTok has many features that make it an excellent platform for youth activism. Also, the application affordances that make the content spread quickly will be discussed in the next section.

Activism, according to Chon and Park (2020), is "a sequence of contested performances by which ordinary people try to address societal challenges via collective action" (2020, p. 74). Because the Internet has no geographical limits, the digital revolution has reshaped activism (Mwaura, 2017) Anti-government protests and upheavals such as the Arab Spring and Black Lives Matter were made feasible by communicative action on digital media, as social media aided communication, planning, and assembly (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011). Activists have been able to call for action by projecting the ongoing dialogue, inspiring and guiding people towards particular action, referencing victims who were affected by the incident, mobilizing individuals for demonstrations,

and disseminating information to increase visibility and outreach through the use of hashtags and frames (Pramana et al., 2020). "Hashtag activism" as Tombleson and Wolf (2017) explain, are a sort of internet activism that uses hashtags to support a cause and spark online conversations about it. According to Hon (2016), internet activism using hashtags is an efficient method for influencing public opinion on important problems. Moreover, TikTok users have increasingly become producers of entertaining and individualized political material (Vijay & Gekker, 2021). This research will investigate how they utilized engagement on the TikTok platform to support a pro-Palestinian narrative.

The logic of linked action, on the other hand, is a result of digital technologies, which have enabled the rise of virtually networked societies. These networks are self-organized and linked together by weak links (Bennett & Segerberg, 2015). Individuals engage in connected action by acting on their own personal beliefs and expressing themselves through memes, hashtags, and customizing their own online profiles to represent their opinions (Bennett & Segerberg, 2015). According to Bennett & Segerberg (2015), the online public is engaged individuals who contribute information and consume material. In support of this notion, the literature suggests that the public co-creates meaning during online social movements by utilizing hashtags that connect them to specific concerns. As a result of the messages broadcast across various audiences, frames might arise in this process (Himmelboim et al., 2014; B. G. Smith, 2010; Xiong et al., 2019).

"Hashtag activism" describes gatherings centralizing these new experiences among Africans. While these recent advancements have brought about change and carry a lot of potentials, it is yet unclear how Africans have seized and "weaponized" these new digital tools to perform resistance. (Sebeelo, 2021).

Conversely, a substantial body of research has shown that Africans have used social media platforms to their advantage (Baragwanath, 2016; Cinnamon, 2020; Namasinga Selnes & Orgeret, 2020). According to this collection of experts, social media has created new engagement tools that ordinary Africans have used to confront political leaders. One of the essential characteristics of social media is the ability it provides individual users to publish and consume content at their places. Lamoureaux and Sureau (2019) state that social media platforms enable African individuals to be active, particularly during elections. Regular people can provide 'oversight such as election monitoring, constitution-making procedures, human rights, and reporting' (Lamoureaux & Sureau, 2019, p. 35).

In many African countries, political leaders view social media as a threat. To try and control it, they have put in place regulations and have even gone as far as to shut down social media sites during elections. This is done in an attempt to prevent unrest or the spread of false information. In some cases, political opponents and online activists have been arrested or killed for speaking out against the government. In other African countries, the government has passed laws and regulations to control what people can post on social media. For example, in Angola, the former leader Jose Eduardo dos Santos said that social media should not be used to hurt people or spread offensive content. In Sudan, the government created a unit called the Cyber-Jihad to monitor online activities and block, control, jam, and slow down certain websites, as well as hack private accounts

(Sebeelo, 2021). Also, in Africa, hashtag activism is a type of activism that takes place on social media platforms. It addresses various issues, such as corrupt political leaders, feminist issues, access to education, and other related social issues.

Examples of hashtag activism in Africa include #CatchKony in Uganda, #MenAreTrash in South Africa, #BringBackMutharika in Malawi, and #BringBackOurGirls in Nigeria. The #BringBackOurGirls campaign was particularly successful, as it gained the attention of influential people outside of Nigeria, including Michelle Obama, the former first lady of the United States. Although hashtag activism has become popular in Africa, it still needs to be determined how effective it is in enacting real change (Sebeelo, 2021). Sebeelo argues that the Zimbabwean instance highlights the ability of social media to motivate individuals to political engagement. It demonstrates that seemingly individualistic resistance actions should be seen as nested inside more significant societal challenges. In some ways, the Zimbabwean instance indicates that although social media-based activism helps individuals to organize and mobilize themselves, it also allows governments to crack down on such movements, in addition, "Hashtag activism" describes gatherings centralizing these new experiences among Africans. While these recent advancements have brought about change and carry a lot of potential, it is still unclear how Africans have seized and "weaponized" these new digital tools to perform resistance (2021). The key benefit of social media-based advocacy is the fast transmission of messages and the increased reach. Immediacy is a powerful force in social media. Ordinary folks have discovered an "consciousness of opportunity" (Ewick & Silbey, 2003) using these platforms to connect, mobilize, and implement resistance. In the same context, Lim (2017) discovered that internet access provided Malaysians with the chance to engage in civil disobedience through what she refers to as "mob tactics on social media." He claims that the internet's 'rhizomatic' character has been "important in the establishment of sub-movements/activist groups of Malaysians (and non-Malaysians) overseas" (2017, p. 223) Sebeelo (2021) explains that Zimbabwean instance highlights social media's ability to mobilize individuals for political engagement. It demonstrates that seemingly individualistic resistance actions should be seen as nested inside greater societal challenges. In some ways, the Zimbabwean instance demonstrates that although social media-based activism helps individuals organize and mobilize themselves, it also enables governments to crack down on such movements.

In a related context, Erick Skare limits hacktivism to politically and socially motivated hacking as part of an existing resistance against the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories.

The evolution of the conflict embodies the change of a people and a resistance movement. Namely, Palestinians initially believed they could liberate themselves through violence by turning to the international community as the best medium to find and impose a solution. Exciting findings from his interviews with hacktivists include the realization that resistance to Israel has become the universal right of Palestinian youth. It is not limited to or monopolized by decisions taken by established political parties such as Fatah, Hamas, and PLO. However, on the other, leaderless resistance can also indicate the loss of belief in the ability to exist political parties to resolve the protracted conflict (Anderson, 2020). Young people humorously engage in political activities by using social media platforms such as TikTok. This tendency is altering people's perceptions of

digital activism. The TikTok Intifada is an example of this, as it has enabled young people to express themselves about the Palestinian situation in novel ways. The present study looks at how TikTok features have been utilized to assist young people in campaigning for change. The current study looks into how social media, namely TikTok, might help create a sense of "shared reality," which can lead to people acting in the real world. It specifically looks at how users used digital resistance on the TikTok platform for social action.

## Chapter 3 Previous Studies:

### 3.1 Grassroots of resistance:

Palestine was subjected to trusteeship, Mandate, and Occupation by several countries and governments over several decades. The first of which was the Ottoman rule (1517-1918), followed by the British Mandate (1918-1948), leading to Israel's Occupation of the Green Line areas in 1948, and then the annexation of Jerusalem and the rest of the lands in the West Bank to the Occupation in 1967 (Wafa, 2022) In 1967, Britain urged all parties (including Israel, which is backed by the US, and Egypt, Syria, and Jordan) to end territorial claims, respect, and international sovereignty and for Israel to withdraw from occupied territories. Furthermore, the resolution stated that the establishment of just and lasting peace in the Middle East must include the application of certain principles, among other things. (security council, 1967) In the same context, following Israel's second occupation, the Security Council expressed its continued concern for the Middle East by passing Resolution No. 242 on November 22, 1967. This includes the inadmissibility of acquiring a region through war and working for a just, long-term peace in which each state can live in security. Furthermore, it affirms that fulfilling Charter requirements necessitates the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. It also emphasizes that all UN members have agreed to act in accordance with Article 2 of the Charter. 1. Reaffirms that the fulfillment of the charter principles necessitates the establishment of a just and lasting peace, which must include the implementation of the following principles:

- (i) *"Withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict;*
- (ii) *Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force;*
2. *Affirms further the necessity*(a) *For guaranteeing freedom of navigation through international waterways in the area;*( b) *For achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem;*( c) *For ensuring the*

*territorial inviolability and political independence of every State in the area."*  
(security council, 1967)

In early December 1947, Jews launched several ethnic cleansing attacks on Arabs after the protests of the Palestinians rejecting the United Nations partition resolution; these early attacks were intermittent and violent and caused the deportation of many Palestinians (About 75 thousand people). As a result, Zionist movements occupied a few Palestinian villages, expelling nearly a quarter-million Palestinians. With the end of the British Mandate on May 15, 1948, the Zionist movement announced the creation of the State of Israel and won recognition from the two superpowers (the United States of America and the Soviet Union). Furthermore, the Zionist force can deter any Arab threat since Israeli settlements were built quite far apart and detached from the Palestinians. Security zones were founded to thwart any Arab threat. Moreover, they constituted Israeli forces to build their Jewish state as a practical tool and take over the cleansing operation of the indigenous Palestinians after that. (Pappé, 2020)

Furthermore, Due to the historical significance of the League of Nations decision, this division was unfair to the Arab side because it equals the Jewish immigrants with the state's original inhabitants. This division formed an infraction of the rights of the Palestinians and declined the situation in Palestine after that decision; consequently, the clash between the two sides was an unavoidable reality. (Pappé, 2020) The International Criminal Court has associated genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes with ethnic cleansing because all of the above crimes under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court can result in ethnic cleansing. Later on, comes new extortion for the Palestinians, which is the apparent bias of the Nations League towards the Zionists, that is the partition plan issued by the inexperienced "two years old" United Nations ("as Pappé describes it") ignoring the composition and ethnicity of the original inhabitants of Palestine. (Pappé, 2020)

Recently, as a result of global peace efforts to resolve the ongoing Israeli/Palestinian conflict, particularly following the first intifada<sup>3</sup> in 1987, Israel and the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) signed the Oslo Declaration of Principles in September 1993, which became the Oslo Accords. (*Two-State Solution | Definition, Facts, History, & Map | Britannica*, n.d.) Regardless of the peace agreement, the two sides engaged in intermittent escalation until the scenario exploded with the outbreak of the second intifada in 2000.

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<sup>3</sup> Intifada, either of two popular uprisings of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip aimed at ending Israel's occupation of those territories and creating an independent Palestinian state. The first intifada ended with the signing of the Oslo Accords, while the second ended after simply running its course. (Source: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/intifadah>)

### 3.2 Forms of Digital Resistance:

The word "resistance" comes from the verb "to oppose, to take a stand." (annfw, 2014) Resistance frequently consists of challenging, dismissing, and opposing a government's entirely forced political, social, and policy actions, as well as opposition to a dominant culture's values and strictures. n.d. (*APA Dictionary of Psychology*, n.d.) Resistance has evolved and taken on multiple characteristics, including devout, social, military, and possibly other forms. The Palestinian resistance to the occupation has been going on for decades. It is now time to show the Israeli occupation as defined by the United Nations resolution and universal pledges.

In addition, nonviolent anti-occupation resistance in Palestine was active, namely in 1978-1989. Furthermore "Yael Zeira" demonstrates that civil society institutions did not in and of themselves create that kind of resistance. Instead, help in spreading, coordinating, and sustaining it through boycott, strikes, tax refusal, prison visits (that mean the prisoner's families refused the visits distribution program for a monthly visit for the Palestinian detainees), demonstrations, clashes, graffiti, and other activities. Similarly, in Palestinian history, "a strong Palestinian civil society developed after and in response to an increase in protest activity rather than the other way around." (Shils, 2020, p. 154)

However, the concept of resistance [Muqawama] in the media among Palestinians was not the result of the first intifada (uprising) in 1987 or the second in 2000, nor was it the result of globalization processes. On the contrary, Palestinian cultural and media resistance dates back to 1908, when Najib Nassar published the Carmel newspaper in response to Jewish immigration and settlement in Palestine, which was followed by his book [Al- suhyonia] (*Zionism: Its History, Objectives, and Importance*, 1911). Since then, the Palestinian press and journalists like Issa and Youssef Al-Issa have carried a nationalist message of resistance to all forms of occupation (in pre-1948 Palestine: Ottoman Turkish and British). Until Israel's occupation of Palestine in 1948, which resulted in the seizure of 77 percent of their homeland and the expulsion of indigenous Palestinians. Similarly, many Palestinian poets who produced committed poetry known as "poetry of resistance" appeared, including Abu Salma, Ibrahim Toukan, and Abd al-Rahim Mahmoud, Palestine's first martyr and poet. This occurred in the first half of the twentieth century (Khoury-Machool, 2007).

Resistance literature, written by Ghassan Kanafani, a Palestinian author (1936-1972) ("Ghassan Kanafani," 2022) is one of the main forms of resistance in the Palestinian Arena. He developed his resistance literature theory (*Adab al-Muqawama*; Arabic) a year before lecturing at the AAWA (The Afro-Asian Writers Association), a Soviet-sponsored conference held in Beirut in March 1967. Kanafani spoke about resistance literature, drawing on his recent critical book-length studies *Adab al-Muqawama fi Filastin al-muhtalla* (Resistance literature in occupied Palestine) and *Fi al-Adab al-sahyuni* (On Zionist literature), both of which were published the previous year and addressed Third World writers in the context of the Cold War (Elizabeth M.

Holt, 2021) Kanafani reflected on Palestine's disintegration following the Nakba, saying, "When Palestine fell into the hands of the enemy, there was almost no Arab culture left that could be a nucleus for a new literary revival." A whole generation, or more precisely generations of intellectuals, had fled Palestine for exile, leaving only a predominantly rural Arab community subject to a cultural, social, and political siege rarely seen elsewhere in the world p.66." Kanafani shifted his focus from resistance literature to fiction, criticism, and the editing process. (Kanafani, 1968).

The potential for broadly spread diaries to break colonially and imperially forced social attack is clearly apparent in Kanafani's publication work with Filastin and afterward Al-Hadaf, the organ of the Prevalent Front for the Freedom of Palestine, Kanafani's theory of resistance literature was not the Palestinian battle but in solidarity with worldwide national freedom struggles and against radical black thought. He put his theory and poems by Palestinian poets such as Mahmoud Darwish and Samih al-Qasim into a coordinated discussion with Asian, African, Latin American, and African American resistance movements, and they possess radical critiques. (Nassar, 2014)

Meanwhile, resistance, as described by David Sholle more than three decades ago, plays a role in digital humanistic inquiry: "At its root, as an activity, resistance is a defensive contestation, an act of refusal." If we remove the superfluous from the resistance inflections described thus far, it is clear that they are all, at heart, defensive activities in that they work to limit power's ability to define the parameters of action." (Sholle, 1990, p. 99) Although effective resistance in Sholle's formulation is rare, resistance opportunities abound. Nonetheless, success is speculative due to the thorny issue of power. Power, on the other hand, is not hegemonic, tightly controlled, or even planned. Instead, it is perplexing, shifting, contingent, and diffuse. (Sholle, 1990)

### **3.3 Social Networking service (SNS) role in Resistance:**

Social networking service (SNS) is online platform that people build social networks or social relationships with people who share similar personal or professional content, interests, activities, backgrounds, or real-life connections. (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Obar & Wildman, 2015) For more than a decade, information and communication technologies have dramatically changed the world. Media and communication scholars, political scientists, sociologists, and international relations scholars have conducted hundreds of studies on various aspects of social media usage. (Golan et al., 2018) Chorev empiric study contributes to the ongoing discourse, particularly since the Arab Spring, regarding social media's ability to recruit and mobilize individuals to collective political action. Three main streams make up this discourse, The *cyber optimist*, attribute novel, even revolutionary recruitment powers to social media. (Shirky, 2011) The second, *dubbed cyber-pessimist*, maintain that social media's ability to mobilize is limited. (Fuchs, 2012) Nestled

between the two poles are *the cyber-realists*, who acknowledge the influence of SNS but argue that their advent does not necessitate new theoretical frameworks. (Earl et al., 2010). Palestinian resistance had pass in different arenas and used different methods like the lone-wolf attacks.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of group polarization, on the other hand, users have lost interest in the vibrating APP's content due to similar content, and then launched the APP, the user's viscosity is reduced. (Xu et al., 2019) Meanwhile, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has had a significant impact on children, adolescents, and Youth in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the West Bank and Gaza. In mid-2021, the percentage of Youth (18-29 years) in Palestine was approximately 22 percent (1.16 million) of the total population (22.3 percent in the West Bank and 21.8 percent in the Gaza Strip). The sex ratio was 105 males for every 100 females. (PCBS, 2021)

Meanwhile, (Reguillo, 2009) asserted in her claim that young people's social media practices, such as blogging, decenter and deterritorialize meanings in order to 'produce aversion.' Indeed, through short digital videos, digital networking, social media, and blogging practices, youth challenge Israel's occupation of their land and decenter PA power in the West Bank through distinct modes of youth agency and resistance. Meanwhile, it is consistent that Palestinians are increasingly using ICTs (Web Communication Innovations), computerized media forms, and the internet; in addition, Palestinians are increasingly reliant on ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies), digital media, and the internet. Their resistance to the Israeli occupation has been variously referred to as 'e-resistance' or 'cyber-resistance,' allowing for new forms of participation and alliances among Palestinians. (Aouragh, 2008; Khoury-Machool, 2007; Najjar, 2010)

Indeed, (Shirky, 2011) assumes that discussions in different groups and forums can be conducted on a wide range of issues, not just media recognized as appropriate based on their intrinsic values and purposes. Helga Tawil-Souri (2009: 182) asserts that "Palestinian youth are involved in producing new forms of expressions that combine aspects of alternative and oppositional practices to question dominant forms of power, whether located in the west, in Israel, or in their own cultural traditions" in response to the Israeli raid, fratricidal brutality, and religious fundamentalism. (Tawil-Souri, 2009)

As a result, this thesis will investigate the role of youth digital resistance via TikTok participation during the study period to examine the significance of video or image in fostering the Palestinian narrative.

The lone wolf approach<sup>4</sup> was seen extensively between October 2015 and September 2016 more than other times, while most lone-wolf assailants were against Israeli security forces. Apart from not a new intifada but another type of Palestinian resistance, namely in Jerusalem. On October 3rd, 2015, Muhannad Halabi, a young Palestinian, committed a lone-wolf attack on two

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<sup>4</sup> A **lone wolf attack**, or **lone actor attack**, is a particular kind of mass murder, committed in a public setting by an individual who plans and commits the act on their own.

Israelis in Jerusalem; he marked a sparked wave of lone-wolf assailants. Unlike the previous bombing patterns used in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict among the first and second intifadas (uprisings), which are characterized by a widespread popular spirit in which large sectors of the population participated. In this regard, Chorev (2019) notes that the community's growth via SNS in recent years has provided assailants (the Palestinian resistance's "Muqawama") with legitimate alternative sources rather than the traditional authority of families and political institutions. The assailants operated as individuals. However, their peer's online interactions suggest that they view themselves as emissaries of supporting groups rather than lone wolves; thus, the emergence of online communities as a source of legitimacy is one of Palestinians' distinct social and political conditions. Equally important, it has reversed global trends such as the expansion of social media, the spread of the power of traditional hierarchies, and the emergence of a new generation sharing similar distinguishing features. In other words, the place is Palestinian, but the emergence of influential Internet communities also reflects a broader global condition. (Chorev, 2019)

In the same context, Chorev (2019) argues that SNS is not responsible for the fundamental motives for lone-wolf attacks; it only reflects and shapes reality by growing and amplifying it in a way that ultimately helps build its dynamics. Furthermore, he added that the increasing SNS community became a legitimate alternative source for the assailants of the traditional families, authorities, and political organizations. Again, assures that assailants took action as individuals. The researcher agrees with the argument that social media plays an essential role in shaping behavior and creating a new discourse that intersects the user's reality without amplifying or increasing the climax in events of Sheikh Jarrah's; on the contrary, live images and deeds deliver actual events on the ground. In addition, social media platforms and TikTok, in particular, may play an essential role in mobilizing individuals for collective political activity.

once again, Chorev contends that SNS empowers the concept of lone-wolf assaults to spread virally in a functional, which is practically equivalent to epidemics and manifests in two designs. The primary; is the epidemiological structure of disease, flare-up, containment, and low-grade progression; that permitted the assaults to proceed for an expanded term, despite the need for organizational bolster. The second is the clustering of assaults. Both patterns depend on the auxiliary characteristics of SNS and the development of an internet subculture supporting the aggressors. Utilizing an inward dialect that reflected recognitions, images, and pseudo-ritual codes, this subculture made a difference in both dispersing the thought of executing assaults as well as forming their specific designs of action. (Chorev, 2019)

moreover, Chorev also adds that change came with the emergence of a grassroots subculture, complete within inner language that framed the logic of the lone-wolf attacks and converted it into a viral idea. A salient feature of social media is its ability to bridge physical divides and provide a tangible sense of community to supporters of a particular ethos. An inner language and symbols unique to a given subculture or imagined community are vital in generating this feeling. He also mentioned that similar divisions exist in public and semi-academic discourse regarding the role of SNS in the Palestinian lone-wolf attacks. One side maintains that SNS holds a vital role in

violence. In contrast, the opposite voice argues that SNS merely reflects reality rather than shapes it and that the motives driving attacks must be sought in the fundamental circumstances of the Israeli occupation, as well as vengeance and other personal causes. Meanwhile, Nahon and Hemsley note the intrinsic relations between viral ideas on SNS and creating an atmosphere that influences the field. All viral content begins with an individual decision to share it, and the potential to influence perceptions and behavior is inherent to this interaction. Although social practices and norms are generally slow to change, the connectivity and rapid propagation of SNS hubs can accelerate change by virally disseminating models of desirable behavior. In such situations, even if most of the population does not support attacks, people are more likely to remain silent than risk being ostracized for expressing a minority opinion. (Nahon & Hemsley, 2013)

No longer has the traditional mass media been the only major players in the information business. In contrast to established communication media, social media can reach a large audience low-threshold and without a gatekeeper (Jacobs, 2016). Moreover, Spaces for online identity creation, performance, and sociality created time requirements of users, as work needs to build and maintain online personas, especially on social networking sites. Principally, research suggests that social networking sites are evolving increasingly necessary in creating and sustaining interpersonal relationships. (Shapiro & Margolin, 2014)

Similarly, some studies such as (Alshrfat, 2015; Sarhan Sayel & Ahed Mashaqba, 2016) have seen social networks as a source for access to information in mass movements that would influence public opinion and motivate the participation in the mass movement. With the launch of the live broadcast service on social platforms; it replaces the news channel with content that meets users' needs and interests. Studies also show that the service provided by social media platforms had contributed to the success of protests in Arab countries where similar movements were unsuccessful before they became available to all users. In the same way, social network services (SNS) provide the perfect foundation for studying the relationship between exposure to telecommunications networks and polarization. As (SNS) form a space for knowledge interaction and dialogue (Park et al., 2009) On the other hand, individuals respond to peer pressure in both real life and on social media. Furthermore, they are subjected to peer pressure on social media. Social media has an impact on one's ability to think for oneself. A Hewlett Packard Labs study of social impacts on online recommender systems looked at how people changed their choices when subjected to varying degrees of validation and compliance pressure. . The findings indicate that people's opinions have a significant impact on the decisions of others. Furthermore, individuals are likely to change their minds over time and will encounter a small number of dissenting voices. People use their decisions to forecast whether or not they will be reversed later. (H. Zhu et al., 2012) Likewise, users of social networking sites are obsessed with it, which leads to addiction and harms people's brains and mental states. According to Daria Kuss and Mark Griffiths, people use social media for varied purposes and online activities, leading to addiction. (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011).

Scholars discover a link between media exposure and polarization. The amount of time (more or less) that individuals spend exposed to certain media; whether it is a like-minded or diverse viewpoint and communication networks as a link, the polarization level effect will be equal to the time spent on that media. Citizens are now exposed to a broader range of social media spaces, which has stimulated the interest of academics and has political ramifications. (Kim, 2011; Valenzuela et al., 2012) In response, a group of deliberation theorists has argued that diverse communication networks may have depolarizing effects (Carpini et al., 2004b). They argue that the presence of political differences encourages critical thinking or deliberation.

On the other hand, individuals are more likely to expose themselves to like-minded points of view; while avoiding the opposing. That Leads them to form more extreme opinions in the direction of their initial inclinations due to online space characteristics such as more media sources and networks to choose from and more effective filtering tools. (Alstynne & Brynjolfsson, 1997; Sunstein, 2001)

Therefore, the researcher predicts that followers and users of TikTok in Palestine, mainly during the acts in the Gaza strip and Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in Jerusalem, are not necessarily biased. Both live or recorded videos and hashtags related to the dramatic events at that period show the fluctuating interaction of the followers is associated with the moment of the event and not its continuation. Among these opportunities, the essence is the ability of the Internet to bring “people from different cultural backgrounds, states, or countries to virtual political discussions in a matter of minutes, often expanding each other’s horizons with culturally diverse viewpoints” (Papacharissi, 2020, p. 23).

### **3.4 TikTok App and its Technology:**

TikTok app was first released in September 2016 by ByteDance company in China; the company’s main product in China is “Toutiao,” which means “Headlines.” Toutiao began as a mobile news recommendation system but has grown into a medium to convey content and targeted advertising in other formats as well (e.g., text messages, images, question-and-answer posts, microblogs, videos). In 2017 ByteDance, the owner of TikTok, acquired Musical.ly app for one billion \$ to enter the US market, and on August 2nd, the two apps were merged. Videos were 15 seconds long, and now users are allowed to link jointly four 15 second segments. Users can upload longer videos recorded outside on the app platform. It is worth noting that the TikTok app is available in 39 languages in more than 155 countries and has approximately 800 million monthly active users. (Figliola, n.d.)

In addition, more than half (54%) of those who download Tik Tok do so because of the people they know. Similarly, if people are inconsistent, they will feel disconnected from the collective and will experience a sense of lack. (Hui, 2020) Otherwise, China took a specific action on August 31, 2020, that could prohibit the sale of TikTok's underlying technology and processes. Text analysis, content recommendation, speech modeling, and voice recognition are among the technologies covered by the new export regulations. Because the "For You" feed and algorithmic recommendation engine is regarded as critical components of TikTok's success, a prohibition on transferring the technology and processes used to create it may make selling the app quite difficult, if not impossible. (T. B. Lee, 2020) Moreover, TikTok uses videos to represent content rather than static photos, images, or text. In the same regard, videos capture the viewer's attention because the user's eyes are more sensitive to movement than static images and text. Furthermore, videos are textured multimedia messaging tools because they contain dynamic graphs and text. Videos can satisfy the desires of all learning styles, regardless of whether the viewers are visual learners, auditory learners, or readers. (Hui, 2020)

Also considering that TikTok has one billion active users worldwide (Dean, 2022), with the majority of them being women. (Xu et al., 2019) In Palestine, TikTok users' number is 1,324,680, accounting for 27.7 percent of social network internet users; 53.2 percent of them are male. 46.8 percent are females. (ipoke, 2021) In addition, the "Tik Tok" APP analyzes the user's preferences using powerful algorithm technology and accurately recommends short video content. One reason that pushed the youth to use TikTok is boredom and the desire to find new ways to make social connections; more people began to join TikTok to find an innovative outlet or to see what others were doing during the lockdown period. (Parivudhiphongs, 2020) furthermore, Elihu Katz mentioned that "People contact and use the media for the purpose of satisfying their own needs, which are related to social factors and personal psychological factors." (Blumler & Katz, 1974) According to (Hui, 2020), Tik Tok, as a media, capitalizes on people's desire for "interaction" by uniting the entire nation on a single platform for mutual understanding and interaction, thereby increasing not only the user's social range but also bringing satisfaction to the users. Because of the increasing pressure on young people in today's society, people urgently need a place to calm down and remove the stress. Each video in Tik Tok has charming music and beautiful scenery to help users **modify their temper withinside the day-by-day anxiety** of life.

Moreover, TikTok app invites new users to choose categories of interest, such as pets or travel, to help tailor recommendations to their preferences. This process enables the app to develop an initial feed. It will polish recommendations based on user interactions with an early set of videos; for users who do not select categories, the app begins by offering a generalized feed of popular videos to get things started. As the system learns more about the user's content preferences, the system will initiate an early-round of recommendations based on the user's first set of likes, comments, and replays. (TikTok, 2020)

In a related context, TikTok's recommendation algorithm is based primarily on the collaborative filtering recommendation algorithm and tagging. The collaborative filtering algorithm's core idea is as follows: "for two users have the same interests, when user "A" likes an item. User B may have a similar interest in this item at that time." Hence, the video content recording by TikTok upon user's taste, comments on, and follows to continuously tag the user whenever there is a video in the background that matches the user's favorite. (Shichang, 2021)

When a user watches short video content from a similar label, he or she notices a homogenization of the content. On the one hand, there is the "information boudoir." Therefore, the researcher studies the widespread use of videos on TikTok, conveying specific events in Jerusalem and Gaza during the recent clashes and conflicts in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and the subsequent war between Hamas and Israel, whether live or recorded. Social media and the internet allow one to notice harmonious people while thinking about any virtual interest or topic. In this way, you can discuss alternative topics and innovative models. From there on, the researcher will try to determine whether TikTok users have a common tendency toward event expansion, whether this contributes to the event, or whether the TikTok platform leads to the spread of Palestinian novel. It is a novelty that tries to find out if it can contribute, and its principles promote digital resistance in an innovative Palestinian way. Users leave information about themselves on social media as well as comments. Therefore, social media activities are often linked to other data that may be unknowingly exposed. (Moehlecke de Baseggio et al., 2020) A study by Pavalanathan et al. (2016) Military personnel were found to be more likely to geotag tweets than non-military controls. (Pavalanathan et al., n.d.) In TikTok, investigating relationships and associating user behavior through network analysis can be a challenge for researchers if the application does not allow this feature. indeed, knowledge of the motives behind the publishing and resharing (exploration) of specific videos in this thesis within the digital resistance process will reinforce the findings. However, (Moehlecke de Baseggio et al., 2020) argue that anonymity on social media platforms encourages cyberbullying and attacks on comrades and superiors, which harms the Army's spirit and effectiveness. On the contrary, anonymity has aided Palestinian resistance fighters in avoiding surveillance and being a target for Israeli authorities.

TikTok's mission, as the company declares, is to inspire creativity and bring joy. We create a global community where users can authentically create and share, explore the world, and connect with others. The "For You" feed is a component of what allows for that connection and discovery. It is at the heart of the TikTok experience and where most users spend their time. Furthermore, the "For You" page on TikTok is powered by a recommendation system that delivers content to each specific user concerning their interest. As previously stated, part of the magic of TikTok is that there is no single "For You" feed – while different people may see some of the exact standout videos, each person's feed is distinctive and tailored to that precise individual. Above that, these systems generally recommend content based on user preferences expressed through interactions with the app, such as leaving a comment or following an account. Furthermore, the system

recommends content by ranking videos based on a combination of factors – beginning with user expressed interests as a new user and adjusting for things user indicate is not interested in – to form his personalized "For You" feed. (TikTok, 2020)

In the same regard, Dr. Bondy Kyne<sup>5</sup> mention that TikTok works by recommending content to users based on their activity on the app, so the more he scrolls through the app, the better the recommendations tailored to the user's specific interests. Rather than selecting the content that the user wishes to view, as he would on YouTube or Netflix. On TikTok, users primarily axis content through one main feed called the "For You" page, which is essentially just an endless scrolling algorithm curated videos that refreshes each time the app is opened. He adds, that as soon the user signs out, the app begins collecting data about the user, such as location, gender, and age, and it uses visual data to determine what types of videos the user wants to see (ABC News In-depth, 2021)

And from another angle, Dr. Niels Wouters<sup>6</sup> explain that user’s face is a form of biometric information, and can be analyzed to distinguish a range of personality and demographic traits. TikTok collects users’ facial data every time he makes video or using a filter on the app, and can even access photos or videos saved on your phone that are not been used on the platform that build on AI system based on a snapshot to create assumption of the user’s face. (ABC News In-depth, 2021)

The following factors (**Table 1**) are included to ensure that the system is optimized for performance. However, they receive less weight in the recommendation system than other data points we measure because users do not actively express these as preferences:

- \* User interactions, such as the video user likes or shares, the account's user follows, the comments user leaves, and the content user creates.
- \* Video data, which may include details such as captions, sounds, and hashtags.
- \* Account and device settings include language preference, country setting, and device type.

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Elements</b>
User interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Videos liked or shared</li> <li>▪ Accounts followed</li> <li>▪ Comments posted</li> <li>▪ Content created</li> </ul>

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<sup>5</sup> Dr. Bondy Kyne, Digital Media Researcher at Queensland University of Technology

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Niels Wouters, research fellow in Human Computer Interface at the university of Melbourne.

Video information/details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Captions</li> <li>▪ Sounds</li> <li>▪ Hashtags</li> </ul>
Device and account settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Language preference</li> <li>▪ Country setting</li> <li>▪ Device type</li> </ul> <p>These factors are included to make sure the system is optimized for performance, but they receive lower weight in the recommendation system relative to other data points because users don't actively express these as preferences</p>

*Table 1 Recommends Videos*

**Source:** “How TikTok Recommends Videos #ForYou,” TikTok Blog, June 18, 2020, at <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/how-tiktok-recommends-videos-for-you>

All these factors are processed by our recommendation system and weighted based on their value to a user, a robust indicator of interest, such as whether a user ends up watching a longer video from start to end, would obtain greater significance than a weak indicator, such as whether the video's watcher and maker are both in the same homeland. Videos are then rated to define the likelihood of a user's interest in a segment of content and delivered to each unique For You feed.

While a video is likely to acquire more views if posted by an account with more followers, that account has built up a more extensive follower base. Neither follower count nor whether the account has had previous high-performing videos are direct factors in the recommendation system. Therefore, this thesis will test to which extent has the content on TikTok played a role in fostering and spreading the Palestinian narrative.

Scholars investigate a link between media exposure and polarization. That is, the amount of time (more or less) that user spends subjected to certain media; whether it is a like-minded or diverse viewpoint and communication networks as a link, the result of the polarization level effect will be equal to the time spent on that media. Citizens are now exposed to a broader range of social media spaces, which has piqued the interest of academics and has political ramifications (J. K. Lee et al., 2014). In return (Carpini et al., 2004a) mentioned that a group of deliberation theorists has argued that diverse communication networks may have depolarizing effects. They assert that political disputes tend to stimulate critical thinking or deliberation.

On the other hand, individuals exposed to similar views while avoiding the opposite, causing them to form more extreme views in the order of their basic predispositions, with an appreciation of these characteristics of online space such as more choices in sources and networks of

communication, and more suitable filtering tools. (Sunstein, 2000) The researcher denotes, that followers and users of TikTok in Palestine, mainly during the acts in the Gaza strip and Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in Jerusalem, are not necessarily biased. Both live or recorded videos and hashtags associated with the dramatic events at that period indicate a fluctuating interaction of TikTok followers correlated to the instant event and not constantly persists. Therefore, it may not contribute to the dissemination of the Palestinian narrative.

Julie Norman (2009) probed Palestinian youth media as a site of alternative production understanding and as a means of creative activism, drawing on some recent work on pluralist participatory media. (Norman, 2009) From a different perspective, Nitin Sawhney et al. (2009) examined how kid and youth-driven artistic and media programs in Jerusalem could be envisioned as forms of participatory media for urban regeneration in their article. (Sawhney et al., 2009) While it is well established that these analyses provide sensitive narratives for youth media and support for the arts and media, for the most part, they do not examine the universal premises that underpin the biographies of Kids and youth. They do not shed light on the complicated political and cultural situation in Jerusalem, particularly the restrictions imposed on all activities that Palestinian youth may engage in Jerusalem under the guise of security, and the charged atmosphere that could lead to an escalation at any time. (Asthana, 2017) Meanwhile, according to Rancière (2008) "film, video art, photography, installation, etc., reformulate the framework of our perceptions and the dynamism of our influences. As such, they may pave the way for new forms of political subjectivity." (Ranciere, 2008, p. 14)

## **Chapter 4 Research Methodology:**

### **4.1 Introduction:**

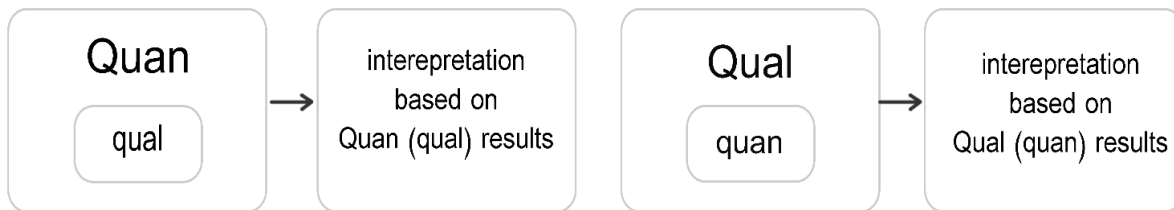
A scientific and methodical search for relevant information on a particular topic is known as research. It is an art of scientific investigation; therefore, research methodology is an approach to

giving a solution to a research problem or issue systematically and deliberately. According to Creswell (2014) "Research is a process of steps used to collect and analyze information to increase our understanding of a topic or issue" (Creswell, 2014). Theoretical reviews and inferences should be studied to achieve the study's aims. This chapter outlines the selected research methodology and explains the research design, approaches, population, sample size, data source selection, and data collecting methods.

Indeed, the goal of this thesis is to explore how affordances and the design of TikTok platform encourage users to comment, share and play videos and thus using the video content as a digital resistance to promote or help promoting the Palestinian narrative within the clashes of Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in May 2021. Also, it examines the video content (image, sound) and how this content might help in supporting the same goal that mentioned above.

## 4.2 Research design/ Methods:

This study used an Embedded Approach (see Figure 1), a mixed-methods design in which



*Figure 1 Embedded Design method*

one data set plays a supporting, secondary function in a study predominantly based on the other data type. The principles of this design are that a single data collection is insufficient, multiple questions must be answered, and different types of data are required for each type of query. Researchers adopt this design when they include qualitative or quantitative data to address a research question within a quantitative or qualitative study. This design is practical when a researcher has to incorporate a qualitative component into a quantitative design (Creswell & Clark, 2006)

At the design level, Embedded Design combines various data sets, with one type of data embedded within a methodology framed by the other data type (Caracelli & Greene, 1993). A researcher, for example, may embed qualitative data within a quantitative approach, as in an experimental design, or quantitative data within a qualitative methodology, as in a phenomenological design (see Figure 1). The collection of quantitative and qualitative data is part of the Embedded Design. However, one of the data types has an additional purpose in the layout.

The mixed method approach was the best way in this study of TikTok users' utilization as a tool for digital resistance; the comments on the high ranked hashtagged videos that supports Palestinians were quantitatively analyzed as a primary data within the sample period during the sheikh jarrah neighborhood and Gaza strip clashes from one hand, and using the qualitative method of analyzing the top ten hashtagged videos which contained digital resistance images and sounds, as listed in the data classification, to prove or refute the level of support to the Palestinian narrative. However, Quantitative research is a kind of research method that quantifies research problems through a large amount of data and analyzes their inherent patterns or code of behavior (DeFranzo, 2020). Therefore, Data of this thesis was quantitatively scrapped using Python codes and classified in data sets then Data Sentiment Analysis process was implemented by utilizing Natural Language Processing (NLP). Moreover, Krippendorff (2018) points out the significance of content analysis and text classification, which provides a reliable basis for research on the visual content of short video.

Subsequently, qualitatively approach was used to analyze the top ten hashtagged videos which obtained the highest comments and examine to which extent the video content has supported the Palestinian narrative or only took advantage of it. Meanwhile, According to Miles and Huberman (1994) sampling strategies for qualitative research should be guided by a conceptual inquiry rather than a concern for "representativeness" (1994, p. 29)

On the other hand, Quantitative content analysis gathers data about media content such as topics or concerns, the number of mentions, 'messages' defined by keywords in context (KWIC), media circulation (audience reach), and frequency. Media form should also be considered in quantitative content analysis (e.g., visual media such as television use more sophisticated semiotic systems than printed text and, thus, are generally regarded as having a more significant impact). According to Neuendorf (2002): "What matters is that any content analysis should take into account both content and form characteristics. Form qualities are frequently crucial mediators of content elements" (p. 24). Furthermore, Shoemaker and Reese (1996) stated that, a wide range of phenomena describe media content, including the medium, production processes, messages, sources referenced or referred to, and context. According to them, content analysis is "to impose some type of order on these events to understand their meaning." "Part of this sorting process consists of separating the essential aspects that we believe are significant and that we want to pay attention to," they explain. Researchers approach the material in various ways, employing various conceptual and methodological methods" (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 31)

Furthermore, Lasswell et al. (1952) explain: "... content analysis operates on the view that verbal behavior is a form of human behavior, that the flow of symbols is a part of the flow of events, and that the communication process is an aspect of the historical process ... content analysis is a technique which aims at describing, with optimum objectivity, precision, and generality, what is said on a given subject in a given place at a given time" (Lasswell et al., 1952, p. 34)

### 4.3 Data Collection Methods

What data collection tools in scientific research have in common is that they are many methods utilized by the researcher to acquire information and data in scientific research while employing one or more distinct methodologies (Buhoush & Elthnebat, 2007). Unlike social media platforms like Twitter and YouTube, TikTok does not provide an official API to share data on TikTok users and their behavior. In this study, variant procedures were implemented to collect data and analyze it, despite there were a number of limitations and obstacles during the scrapping process which took more than 150 working hours.

Figure 2 (**Research Methodology | Design**) is an overview of the data collection and analysis methods. The first stage is reviewing the all used hashtags on TikTok and other social platforms manually, then checking by special analytical and statistical website (see list 1 in appendix) the most used hashtags to determine the most used ten hashtags.

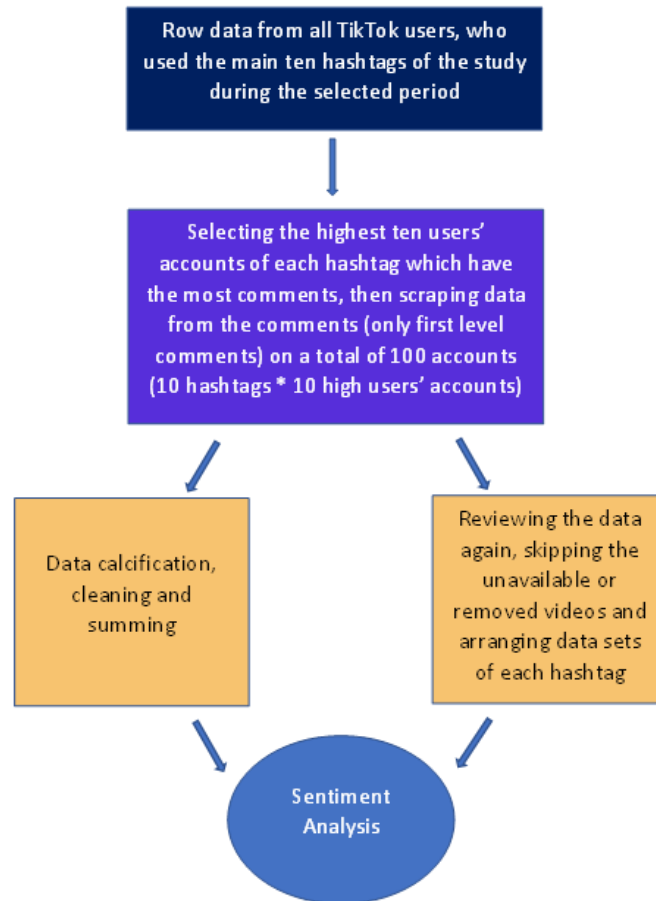


Figure 2 Research methodology design

Furthermore, python initially used to scrap all the videos on TikTok that have used the main hashtags of the study which are ten. Moreover, to convert all the comments data from the second phase of selected videos, which are the most commented accounts videos among all hashtags in the study sample into (CSV) data sets.

Afterwards, top ten videos of each hashtag were chosen (100 videos in total) and comments of which were scrapped using JavaScript (<https://github.com/cubernetes/TikTokCommentScraper>). Finally, after cleaning and organizing the data, a sentiment analysis process using the natural language processors (NLP) and python where implemented (<https://colab.research.google.com/drive/1Kn0sDvHyD8qvd4GDZcJ9T51XEvEtZBDL?usp=sharing>)

to examine the behavioral tendencies of followers and users, Hence the indications that can be drawn that the public supports the Palestinian narrative or does not agree with it.

From the other hand, to support the research claim, a qualitative Content analysis (see figure 3) was applied to the top ten videos (see appendix 2) that received comments within all hashtags, aiming to prove or denying that the users' activity on TikTok enhances or supports the Palestinian narrative or vice versa.

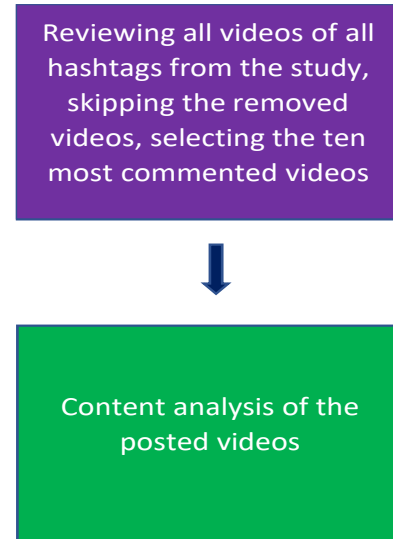


Figure 3 Qualitative content analysis

#### 4.3.1 Primary Data:

Data of this study were scrapped directly from TikTok website in regard to the study sample period, taking in consideration that TikTok do not allow API scrapping method and applying continuous and changeable obstacles to reduce or prevent the data collection as the researcher will later review the most important determinants and limitations of the research. In addition, it is important to mention that the python code, that used to scrap all the hashtags (videos), has not only imported the videos related to the study period only **but also scrapped other videos with the same hashtags before and after the study period until the date of November 2021, which is the date that the researcher has started the scrapping process, which determined cleaning of data to concise it only to the three months period of the study.**

Alternatively, the method of data collection (videos and comments) using JavaScript simulates the user experience (i.e., what the user views or is shown to him). That is, the results of the search are close to reality because what is shown to the viewer is similar to what was collected.

Moreover, it has been tested to explore if TikTok app provides "social network analysis" like other social media platforms such as twitter to examine the potential coherence between users, if there, and found no results. It turns out we can't scrape followers (a logged in user may see his following only - not like Twitter). There is a possibility that TikTok 'friends' @ (mention) each other in their posts and this could be a proxy of organized efforts.

### 4.3.2 Study Sample:

Sampling for media content analysis includes three steps, as Newbold et al. (2002) suggest:

1. Selection of media forms (i.e., newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, film) and genre (news, current affairs, drama, soap opera, documentary, and so on);
2. Choice of issues or dates (the period);
3. Sampling relevant content from within those media (2002, pp. 80–81)

Meanwhile, the research population is defined as: it is all individuals, things or people who constitute the subject of the research study problem, and it is all the elements related to the problem of the study that the researcher seeks to generalize about the results of the study (Obeidat et al., 1999). In this thesis, the sample consisted of all TikTok users as a selective representative sample who are engaged in posting about Palestine in general, the Sheik Jarrah neighborhood in Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip too. Since no literature connected demographics to the activities, it was considered a representative sample.

Moreover, a 36 hashtags (see appendix 1) were frequently used during the study period since the clashes was existing on the field at the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in Jerusalem, after the manual review and online testing of other social media platforms including TikTok; the highest ten hashtags that have been used were (# **freepalestine**, # **Gaza\_Under\_Attack**, # **palestinelivesmatter**, # **savegaza**, # **savejerusalem**, # **Savepalestine**, # **Savesheikhjarrah**, # **انقذوا\_حي\_الشيخ\_جراح**, # **أنقذوا\_فلسطين**, # **غزة\_تحت\_القصف**).

The researcher extracted comments of the main ten hashtags of the study that used on 8364 videos (see appendix 3) published by 5062 users during the study period. the number of the scrapped comments from these videos was 64.549 comment

### 4.3.3 Population & period:

The population of this study consisted of TikTok application users, who are 755 million active users without limiting the geographical areas (Statista, 2022). In Palestine, 27.7 % of Palestinians are using TikTok (ipoke, 2021) while the total number of social media users is 3.40 million users (Datareportal, 2022)

The number of users who published hashtagged videos was 5062. Although, the most posted videos were during the study period from (April 1<sup>st</sup> – June 31), the number of videos they

published was 8364 videos in general. The reason is because the war on Gaza was in May 11<sup>th</sup> which was preceded by clashes and tension in April (also Ramadan month) at the Sheikh Jarrah and Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.

The targeted period of this research is aimed to examine whether the Palestinian activists took role in publishing videos, images, or music that supporting the Palestinian cause (narrative) during the incidents in Jerusalem and Gaza in particular and Palestine in general, and how was the audience response.

#### **4.4 Limitations:**

1. TikTok imposes restrictions on data sampling and the blocking of API functions. As a result, I had to prompt other programs and texts to collect as much data as possible; in the meantime, TikTok systems were seizing and blocking each new way I tried.
2. **Research Period:** The lack of prior research and literature on TikTok might be attributed to TikTok's limitations. Despite these obstacles and technical restrictions, the researcher completed a study on the Palestinian arena since this is the first study that covers TikTok usage in Palestine for digital resistance.
3. Financial constraints, such as limited computer resources, meant that if there were more than one device, such as servers, the process of gathering data and gaining more information would have been simpler, especially because the data scraping process was frequent, resulting in a long and tedious process.
4. The Internet's frequent speed was stable in particular times over day and night, as well as the necessity to use more than one TikTok user account and internet browser during the same day. Also, restarting the program and the computer constantly helps prevent error alerts and keeps the scraping process running.
5. The difficulty of conducting interviews with TikTok influencers was bypassed by expanding the size of the collected data (in the study sample) to ensure an accountable and reliable rate in the results.

## Chapter 5 Results and Discussion:

### **5.1 / Q1: What are the factors that influence the selection of a specific social media platform to practice digital resistance?**

The Palestinian resistance movement, aided by social media, has recently established a clear understanding that political activism and sustained resistance may result in tangible change. In contrast, Online activism and citizen journalism, both facilitated by social media, tend to influence perceptions of uprisings and violence while giving ideas, interests, and other forms of expression through virtual communities and digital networks. (Monshipouri & Prompichai, 2018). There is no one standard definition of social media, although a broadly-based understanding of social media encompasses how new technological tools provide "a two-way street that allows us to communicate and share our thoughts with others."(Kulnazarova, 2014).

According to the Social media definition, Kaplan & Haenlein (2010, p. 61) elaborated that it is “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content,”. (2010, p. 61)

We Are Social's (2020) report mentioned that 3.8 billion people use social media worldwide as of January 2020, a 9.2 percent increase over January 2019, and 87 percent of social media users surveyed are actively engaging with social media or contributing their content to social platforms. According to the most current, We Are Social (2020) survey; the following social media platforms are the most popular by active monthly users: Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Instagram, and TikTok (social, 2020).

According to Monshipouri & Prompichai (2018), social media is a fantastic tool for Palestinians to organize and disseminate ideas. Furthermore, according to Monshipouri (2019), social media and the internet [function as] a debate engine with democratizing powers. The scientific opinion on the extent to which social media has had a substantial impact, on the other hand, varies greatly. Since the collapse and failure of the Oslo Accords, Palestinian civil society organizations have explored a paradigm shift in their resistance strategy, claiming ownership of their fate rather than relying only on foreign players, stakeholders, and interest groups. This transition generated a flood of new grassroots organizations aimed at substantially shifting Palestinians' focus of power away

from externally driven issues and toward a broad domestically motivated involvement with their destiny (Monshipouri, 2019). Indeed, social media and ICTs are pervasive and capable of crossing borders to penetrate and spread ideas, therefore replacing borders and traditional media. The unique influence of social media, aided by ICTs, is that what drives political narratives and online exports are usually organically formed and have similar characteristics. Weaponized social media has added to the confusion of the Palestinian resistance movement. Similarly, the expansion of digital activity helps the Palestinian cause to be conveyed on a larger scale. However, growing social media involvement is political and propagandistic, and it has benefited the uprising's trajectory by boosting opposition. Digital activism allows for the easy interchange of ideas, photographs, and information while allowing marginalized individuals to interact and voice their opinions. Most importantly, it enables the development of an organically produced 'leaderless revolution.' Also, Increased understanding leads to more successful grassroots activities, Israeli concessions, and international condemnation of the occupation and settlements. (Monshipouri & Prompichai, 2018).

Additionally, SNS users frequently desire to satisfy personal and social demands such as information searching, social engagement, freedom of expression, enjoyment, social presence, belongingness, and social identity (Al-Jabri et al., 2015; Cao et al., 2013; C. M. Cheung & Lee, 2010). Another study on mobile social networks revealed that different forms of satisfaction, such as cognitive gratification, affective gratification, tension-released gratification, and social gratification, influence user behavior (Gan et al., 2017). Furthermore, Hsiao et al. (2016) showed that the persistence of usage of mobile social applications is influenced by utilitarian, hedonic, and social motivation (Hsiao et al., 2016). According to Athwal et al. (2019), the gratifications sought by those consumers are primarily affective and cognitive but also include gratifications such as passing the time and escapism; such findings are consistent with Whiting & Williams (2013), who discovered that people use social media to pass the time. Whiting and Williams (2013) report ten uses and gratifications for social media, including social interaction, information seeking, passing the time, entertainment (for humor, jokes, listening to music), and expressing one's opinion, which they describe by people liking posts or being able to criticize others anonymously and vent through consumer interviews. Several motives described by Whiting and Williams (2013) related the reasons to studies stated in earlier sections, demonstrating that motivations can overlap regardless of context.

Most SNS research has recently added the uses and gratification theory (UGT) to assess the intention to continue using social network sites (SNS) (Al-Jabri et al., 2015; Hsiao et al., 2016). Earlier research has shown that various gratifications, such as social, content, and hedonic gratifications, are driving factors in determining user behavioral intentions. Furthermore, earlier research has found that habits (Hsiao et al., 2016; Limayem et al., 2007; Woisetschläger et al., 2011) and subjective norms (C. M. Cheung & Lee, 2010; G. Choi & Chung, 2013) are important in the creation of usage intention. Indeed, few researchers have individually found the impacts of UGT, habit, and subjective norm on use intention (Al-Jabri et al., 2015; Gan et al., 2017), but no attention has been devoted to habit and subjective norm, which are two significant factors that

mediate SNS usage intention. As a result, it would be more pertinent to analyze SNS usage intention via the lens of the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), as well as various mediation effects. On the other hand, the study of the gratifications or advantages that attract and retain users to various media and diverse content that meet the user's psychological and social demands is called UGT (Dunne et al., 2010). The fundamental goal of (UGT) is to clarify why individuals pick a particular form of medium to improve their knowledge of social and individual gratifications, as well as to explain users' motivations while engaging with media. For example, Cheung et al. (2011) argued that the UGT explains why individuals utilize particular media as an alternative communication medium and identifies the demands that inspire the user to use a given medium. They also observed that consumers are well aware of their wants and that their conduct is goal-oriented. Researchers have used UGT to assess the motives for utilizing various conventional media such as newspapers, telephones, radios, and other media outlets (C. Cheung et al., 2011). It has recently been widely utilized to investigate new media and communication technologies such as social networking sites (Al-Jabri et al., 2015; Hsiao et al., 2016), mobile social networking sites (Gan et al., 2017), online games (Li et al., 2015), and virtual communities (C. M. Cheung & Lee, 2010). So, the UGT method supports a homological network for study rather than giving a preset set of constructs.

Furthermore, researchers evaluated various gratifications in predicting user behavioral intentions. For example, (Dhir & Tsai, 2017) stated that the intensity of Facebook usage is motivated by the following gratifications: enjoyment, exposure, escape, knowledge-seeking, and social influence. (C. Cheung et al., 2011) hypothesized that we want to leverage online social networks in similar investigations.

Karahanna et al. (1999) noted that subjective norm is caused by the normative beliefs that the individual characteristics of what others expect of a person concerning the continued use of information technology and their motivation is to comply with those beliefs (Karahanna, 1999). According to G. Choi & Chung (2013), subjective norm directs the degree to which an individual perceives the demands of significant or referent other individuals on him to use social media. The subjective norm is the perceived social pressure to act on distinct behavior and the motivation to comply with those pressures (Hyde & White, 2009). In addition, the perceived social pressure is significantly correlated with the behavior. meanwhile, from the researcher's perspective, user's exposure to Palestinian digital stories on TikTok is an important reason to publish further Palestinian digital resistance content.

T. R. Choi & Sung (2018) further claim that people driven to post about themselves for attention may prefer Instagram to meet this psychological demand. The studies of (Flecha-Ortíz et al., 2021) and (T. R. Choi & Sung, 2018) are essential because their focus on Snapchat and Instagram shows that people are motivated to use image/video platforms for personal and self-expression reasons rather than the "social" aspect of social media that draws people to Facebook

Other studies that distinguish platform specific motivations, Quan-Haase & Young (2010) study find that people join Facebook for reasons related to social inclusion; they don't want to feel left-out. Y.-Q. Zhu & Chen (2015)'s study provides a "social media matrix" that explains the different

types of social media in particular interesting way, how people use it and how they differ; they elaborated these types as follow: (Facebook) is Relationship, Self-Media is (Twitter), (Reddit) is Collaboration, and (YouTube and Pinterest) are Creative Outlets. People use social media various forms for different motivations; people use Facebook to build relationships and connect with others, while they use YouTube as an outlet to share creativity and hobbies with other likeminded people (Y.-Q. Zhu & Chen, 2015). Based on Zhu and Chen (2015)'s matrix, TikTok can be understood as a creative outlet, similar to YouTube (Lawrence, 2020). In a quantitative survey, Phua et al. (2017) argues that Snapchat users use Snapchat to pass the time and improve social knowledge, while Instagram users use it to show affection (Phua et al., 2017).

Distinguishing between user motivations for certain social media platforms and consumer behavior on those platforms is critical for users when seeking to publish digital resistance videos on social media platforms since it tells them what materials perform on those sites. Certain platforms and motivations, according to the research, have a more social character; for example, individuals prefer Facebook to retain social links in their lives offline and to fulfill a want for social inclusion (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). In addition, Presi et al (2014) investigated consumer motivations for producing user-generated content after a bad customer service encounter and found that altruism or revenge are the primary motivations for posting such material, followed by economic incentives. According to Ham et al (2014), there are five primary reasons why customers create social media content: Aspects of social cognition include entertainment, self-expression, social connection, and communication.

The most significant influence on consumer attitudes toward generating social media content is entertainment, meaning consumers' motive is to have fun while creating social media content (Ham et al., 2014). Furthermore, Daugherty et al. (2008) contend that individuals are inspired to produce their material online and on social media by a need to connect with others; content creation allows them to communicate with friends and family while also connecting with others. He also argue that consumers are more likely to create UGC in the form of blogs or websites, which is impressive since this research was performed prior to the mass emergence of popular social media sites today, but still claim consumers are motivated to post by a need for self-expression (Daugherty et al., 2008). According to Baines et al (2021), this is the core of user-generated content UGC since consumers become content creators at a time when the nature of social media allows contact with brands, family, and friends alike. While Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) explore the different components that characterize the content and claim that three essential elements are required to constitute material "UGC": free and available to the public, amateur, and demonstrates creativity. Oxford University Press defines UGC as "digital material generated by unpaid contributors" (Bullock et al., 2019, p. N/A). As a result, knowing the motives beyond common uses and gratifications is critical. Furthermore, because social media makes it so simple for users to become content creators, motives to create material may differ from motivations to consume. Lawrence (2020) notes in the same context that one of the most common motives for posting is entertainment or enjoyment of the TikTok platform. According to his research, users consume TikTok via viewing others' material to either start or end their day and to give stimulation when

bored; moreover, he stated that TikTok helps users fill a hole of loneliness that some are certain to have felt during the COVID-19 lockdown. Furthermore, TikTok allows people to express themselves through video creation on an unlimited variety of subjects and themes (Vecchio, 2020). TikTok's entire essence is to empower amateur content makers. It provides insight and depth to Omar & Dequan (2020) claim that TikTok users utilize TikTok for amusement because the authors could not offer instances or describe what they mean by entertainment. This result also ties to Whiting & Williams (2013) notion that consumers use social media for entertainment (comic relief and humor) by outlining the sorts of content that users describe as comedy or humor and by defining "use" as consumption.

These findings, like those of Omar and Dequan (2020), indicate archiving as a motive to engage. Omar and Dequan (2020) define archiving as a method for users to preserve and combine videos from all TikTok levels. Although Lawrence (2020) presents significant evidence of archiving usage, it is evident that, as entertainment, archiving use is unique to each and meets distinct requirements. He exhibits proof of TikTok videos being saved and compiled (definition of archiving) on a user's phone and then sent to others who do not use TikTok. However, the motivations of users (consumers) for this go back to Heinonen (2011)'s discovery that consumer actions on social media are linked to many motivations. Users not only preserve and store a video they have viewed, transitioning from consuming to participation, but they also initiate a social connection by sharing. Lawrence (2020)'s example adds more meaning and context Omar & Dequan (2020)'s archiving motive, demonstrating how a single motivator may take on several shapes. According to Omar & Dequan (2020), archiving was the most essential reason across all levels of use.

Lawrence (2020) stated another motive called "participants behavior," in which users interpret commenting to be a method to engage, which is a unique discovery that exposes two sorts of users in his study: those who use TikTok as a resource and those who establish communities. In contrast, Omar and Dequan (2020) did not investigate users' motivations for engaging in actions like commenting. With relation to Whiting & Williams (2013) as respondents in the Lawrence (2020) research stated, people like sharing TikTok videos directly to friends, which is a practice known as communicative utility (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Another concept is that TikTok users comment on videos to show their support or enthusiasm for the content or to form a community. In respect to my research, these data back up my prediction that the TikTok platform could be used to assist digital resistance and promote the Palestinian narrative.

Similarly, TikTok culture supports honest self-expression and people who share content that celebrates their actual selves (Omar & Dequan, 2020). Above that, social media may provide methods for resistance, much as the Internet can give young people of color tools for institutional and individual resistance against racism. The most apparent instances come from large-scale opposition actions, such as using Twitter to amplify activist efforts against police violence against Black people in Ferguson and elsewhere (M. Brown et al., 2017; Ray et al., 2017). Also to give the space online for the queer of color (QOC) and the LGBTQ groups resist the Persecution and

alienation from others (Reid, 2021). Furthermore, social media, namely Instagram, has been an effective tool for Black travel influencers in changing racist notions inside the white travel imaginary. Liking and commenting on postings served as a means of demonstrating; Overall, like and comments can be used to resist Black location myths, especially in light of these Black travel influencers' attempts to debunk the white travel imaginary. Solidarity, digitally agreeing with the post and alerting the influencer that the content impacted them (Arthur, 2021). Sobande (2020) noted how Black women in Britain engage with 'alternative' media (Couldry & Curran, 2003) rather than what is accessible in mainstream mass media in Britain. However, while discussing alternative images entails reflecting on media that "provide divergent points of view and cultural choices" (Lievrouw, 2011, p. 1), from those available in mainstream markets, such discussion is frequently associated with news and current affairs rather than entertainment and lifestyle-based media. Furthermore, the term 'alternative' does not entirely reflect the proactive, resistant, and political attitudes engaged in Black people's digital activities and turning to online information as part of an attempt to 'decolonize my mind.' These ideological roots of certain Black women's digital participation in the Britain indicate varied degrees of (medi) activism, or, at the very least, resistance (Sobande, 2020).

In addition, Saeb Kasm (2018) and Jeff Deutch & Hadi Habal (2018) describe the numerous ways in which local reporting helps sustain and build resistance movements, as well as the critical role that citizen journalists play in documenting the evolution of contentious political events via digital media in the context of resisting repressive state authorities. They proceed that Digital documentation allows marginalized people to put their views in the mainstream discourse, may help develop community and a new public sphere, and can give a visual record of human rights violations that would otherwise go neglected.

Again, Groshek & Han (2011) contend that alternative media are more likely to cover activism, establishing counter-publics or places for resistance; they used online social media to construct spaces of critical resistance to racial microaggressions. Other research studies, on the other hand, underline that peer-based and interactive online political participation is beneficial and can improve traditional political activity among teenagers (Cohen & Kahne, 2012). Thus, students on college campuses have used social media to resist racist events and expose microaggressions (Rema Reynolds & Darquillius Mayweather, 2017; W. Smith et al., 2007). Hill (2018) explores the digital counter-publics of Black Twitter, which challenge dominant structures and narratives. Similarly, Jackson et al. (2020) contend that intersectional and Black feminist analytical frameworks in Twitter-based counter publics may aid in forming resistance networks and advancing social movements. Furthermore, Tynes et al. (2011) discovered that race-related groups on Facebook and Myspace could generate racial shelter and spaces for race-related discourse.

Palestinians may use the internet to communicate their claims, maintain their history, mobilize, and help establish or reconnect Palestinian narratives. It is also a virtual place in which people imagine, sustain, and negotiate the existence of a country and a state. While the internet may be an empowering venue for a grassroots movement, technology can also be a disempowering reality that shapes such activity (Tawil-Souri & Aouragh, 2014). As a result, the Palestinian resistance

movement adapted, weaponized, and propagandized social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. At the same time, the Israeli government exploited them to oppose the new digital dimension of activity (Monshipouri & Prompichai, 2018). Nonetheless, earlier research did not discuss the relevance of TikTok in digital resistance or its contribution to the promotion of the Palestinian novel, which this thesis will address, examine, and answer later. In the same context, social media and ICTs have the unique ability to penetrate and disseminate ideas across boundaries, thereby abolishing the function of borders and traditional media. Significantly, because of the particular influence of social media, assisted by ICTs, what comes to inform political narratives and online exports are frequently organically created and have comparable traits.

## **5.2 / Q.2: To what extent TikTok allows users to post digital stories that are part of the digital resistance, whether it is automatic or systematic.**

### **5.2.1 TikTok, and Self-Expression:**

Young social media users have found a new creative, activist and comedic outlet through the platform TikTok. TikTok's international version was formally introduced worldwide and gained a lot of attention with a monthly global active users surpassed 500 million in June 2018, surpassing Twitter and about half of Instagram (Yaqi et al., 2021). According to Fannin (2019), the four-year-old Musical.ly app was combined with TikTok by ByteDance, the app's owner, and released as a single app with the TikTok identity. The combined app attracted 30 million new users three months after its debut. Furthermore, the app earns revenues through advertisements and the selling of virtual products to fans such as emojis and stickers. Moreover, the app's popularity has been powered by an easy-to-use design that combines click-bait news and entertainment with strong AI (Artificial intelligence) to perfectly match users rather than offer material based on their watching habits and "likes." The homegrown content has gained popularity, especially among rural and impoverished inhabitants in China, India, and other emerging economies where access to alternative digital entertainment options is restricted. Meanwhile, in China's smaller cities and countryside, where state-owned media has dominated, TikTok reaches far beyond other successful Chinese apps such as the WeChat app, which is widespread but used mainly by Chinese communities. However, ByteDance founder Zhang Yiming strategy of creating multiple versions

of Tik Tok - one for China's regulated internet market and the rest of the globe - might serve as a new model for other digital content firms seeking similar global reach (Fannin, 2019).

The short videos content shared on TikTok have the opportunity to become viral if it is shared with the right audiences. The virality is what makes TikTok unique and drives its users to constantly produce content. Just like on other social media platforms, many different minority groups have found their place and their people on TikTok where they share information, produce relevant jokes and communicate with each other. Moreover, TikTok is attempting to age its user base by attracting more middle-aged people to the app; nonetheless, the bulk of TikTok users are 41 percent between the ages of 16 and 21 (Beer, 2019). From a different perspective, social media users considered Instagram as old news, just as Facebook and Twitter had done years before. As a result, TikTok steadily gained popularity among teens and young adults because of its attractive soundbites and video format (Sandler, 2022).

Indeed, young Palestinians, are among the groups and content producers on TikTok who are attempting to raise the platform's potential virality affordances to convey awareness, draw people's attention, and educate others on sensitive or unfamiliar themes related to the Palestinian cause and narrative. Because TikTok and its affordances are the subjects of this thesis, it is critical to comprehend its increase in popularity as a social media platform, particularly among teens and young adults. As previously said, TikTok has been operating for a few years under several names that were well recognized and utilized by a few. However, with its rebranding from music.ly to TikTok in 2019, the app acquired appeal among young adults and teens (K. Jackson, 2021; TikTok by the Numbers, 2022). TikTok has encouraged certain people to retry social media content production following negative experiences on sites such as Facebook and Instagram, demonstrating how TikTok has addressed an unmet demand of users seeking to express themselves securely on social media. Furthermore, while not all TikTok users utilize the site for its social components, TikTok has satisfied a demand for the community when other social platforms have failed. That community continues to attract users' engagement on TikTok (Lawrence, 2020). Additionally, TikTok users are motivated to produce or at least feel creative due to TikTok's creative potential; without having to work too hard, having a background in video production, or having expertise in coming up with innovative ideas.

On the other hand, Kaur (2020) observed in his study's Questionnaire Method that most individuals became familiar with TikTok via Social Networking Sites (SNS) like; YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and even WhatsApp, with around 75% of the people familiar. Only 22% of the population received ideas from their close friends and varied friend circles, while only 3% received information from their families, indicating that families were less interested in these groups (Kaur, 2020).

Experienced researchers like Qiyang & Jung (2019), for example, analyzed TikTok users' behavior concerning the user interface. They observed that TikTok users are more eager to create and post material on TikTok than on other platforms and are more willing to copy, repeat, and imitate content generated by others, which TikTok's intentional design functionalities may influence; they also discovered that the number of followers a person obtains has nothing to do

with the user's reactions and awards. As a result, TikTok's content distribution tends to be a decentralized UGC platform (a user-generated content platform) that recommends content to users not based on likes and comments of the video.

Also, several researchers have looked at TikTok addiction: (Zhang et al., 2019) stated that social interaction anxiety and social isolation positively affected short-form video apps. At the same time, (Kumar & Prabha, 2019) foresee that narcissism and insecurity would lead to excessive TikTok use. These studies, however, concentrated on the sorts of personal characteristics and traits of users who are sensitive to TikTok and did not consider the design of the platform's interface, which may promote addiction. Similarly, Yang and Zilberg (2020) explain that users use TikTok after a day of work and before going to bed to relieve tension and clear their minds. TikTok serves as a buffer for people to fall asleep. Moreover, during the day, when there is a time gap between activities, such as taking buses, waiting for courses to begin, and in-between study time, users will open TikTok to pass the time, raise emotions, or cope with tension. They explained that Boredom is another reason users play TikTok; however, Boredom in their narration might be interpreted as an emotional condition that leads to delay in homework or job planning and frustration during coronavirus quarantine. TikTok helps people escape reality and enjoy a moment of gratification in these situations. Another reason people use the app is when discussing interesting TikTok content and want to display and share it with others. Above all, TikTok may be viewed as a tool to help users with their socializing activities. Other reasons consumers play TikTok include finding and following new trends and just wanting to dance (Yang & Zilberg, 2020). In this research, I will discuss how technology, especially the App interface and affordances, influences the consumers' app usage.

### **5.2.2 For You recommendation system, and the App Affordances:**

TikTok defines the synthesis of three clear directions in social media: the televisual medium that has always been the most vastly popular and influential; algorithmic recommendation that structures the user's experience to a more significant extent than any central social media platform to date; and a mobile-only interface designed to take advantage of a smartphone's user-facing camera (Guinaudeau et al., 2021). Mentioning that the primary format for the political TikTok they describe is the vlog, where the creator's bedroom is visible, speaks into the camera, and either dances or emotes along with music or overlays textual images. This is a development of the credibility-through-relatability idea put forth by Lewis (2020), Abidin (2018), and other theorists of "influencer" or "micro-celebrity." The creator needs to convey a "mood" or "feel" that tells the audience to take them seriously since it is clear how difficult it is to transform the situation verbally rather than send info in one single TikTok Feed.

Consequently, it is critical to recognize the definition of affordances to realize their crucial role in the TikTok app. The qualities of certain functionalities, buttons, and pages inside the TikTok app are examined because the fundamental attributes often impact how a user understands

these items and are referred to as affordances. According to Davis & Chouinard (2016), Affordances are the qualities of certain functionalities, buttons, and pages inside the TikTok app that are analyzed since the fundamental properties generally affect how a user interprets this element. Affordances are also considered variables since they represent the link between a feature's actual attributes and what users do with those properties (Davis & Chouinard, 2016). Additionally, It may also describe the interaction between the system and the user (Curinga, 2014).

TikTok's affordances are particular and one-of-a-kind. In essence, there are two content feeds. One shows videos from friends, celebrities, and producers, while the other shows videos from accounts the user does not follow (Sainsbury, 2021). Similarly, the "For You" feed page does not recommend videos based primarily on the number of views, likes, or comments; rather, it features videos from any creator that fit the user's preferences, regardless of the number of followers, which are determined by who or what they have previously watched, followed, or interacted with. As a result, despite not being social media stars or celebrities, several TikTok video creators quickly gained massive followings (Anderson, 2020; Kennedy, 2020). Furthermore, TikTok's popularity is based on its "addictive" video stream, For You (Herrman, 2019).

Referring to TikTok, the "For You" The algorithm suggests material by rating videos based on various characteristics, beginning with the user's interests as a new user and adjusting for topics the user indicates he is not interested in, to produce the user's tailored For You feed. There are recommendation systems all around us. From shopping to streaming to search engines, recommendation systems underpin many daily services we use and enjoy. They are meant to help customers have a more customized experience (TikTok # For You, 2020). These algorithms generally recommend material based on user preferences expressed through interactions with the app, such as posting a comment or following an account. TikTok reiterates that its recommendation system is based on various factors (Table 1) such as user interaction, the videos the user likes or shares, accounts he follows, comments on a post, and content the user creates. Moreover, video information such as captions, sounds, and hashtags, and device and account settings such as language preference, country setting, and device type. These parameters are included to ensure that the system is optimized for performance. However, they are given less weight in the recommendation system than other data points measured by TikTok because users do not actively express these as preferences. A vital sign of interest, such as if a user watches a longer video from start to finish, would be given more weight than a weak indicator, like whether the video's viewer and author are from the same country. After that, videos are ranked to define the degree of a user's interest in a part of the video, and they are delivered to each distinctive For You feed.

While a video is more likely to attract views if it is posted by an account with more followers, due to that account having a bigger follower base, neither follower count nor past high-performing videos are primary variables in the recommendation system (TikTok # For You, 2020). This recommendation feature was one of the reasons that films from Sheikh Jarrah and Gaza circulated widely among Palestinians and TikTokers alike; which was a crucial component, or so it was meant to be, in the dissemination and fostering the Palestinian narrative.

TikTok moved from being the punchline for jokes about "kids these days" to being a strong influence in American politics in a short amount of time. Even in the rapidly growing sphere of digital politics, the speed of this growth is unparalleled (Karpf, 2012). According to Guinaudeau et al., (2021), a number of video stories regarding TikTok's political influence have been released. He further said, "TikTok Users, K-Pop Fans Say They Helped Sabotage Trump Event with False Registrations," explaining how a planned misinformation effort undertaken by political TikTok users led to an unsatisfactory size of the audience at President Trump's first rally after the start of the corona epidemic (Guinaudeau et al., 2021).

TikTok culture supports honest self-expression (Omar & Dequan, 2020), and individuals who upload content expressing their actual selves, which Palestinians from Sheikh Jarrah and Gaza participate in through live streaming and sharing on TikTok. People bravely put themselves out there, such as when LGBTQ+ people share details about their life. These remarks also appear to imply that TikTok addresses a social media demand for a community that consumers believe other platforms have failed to reach (Lawrence, 2020). Participants report a variety of motivations for creating their content in Lawrence (2020) study, among these motivations include creativity, self-expression, amusement, archiving, and so forth. The TikTok app is simple and ideal for social interaction if you want to go viral. She also stated that Commenting is a tool to engage in social interactions with other TikTok users, supporting Omar and Dequan's (2020) finding that TikTok users participate for social reasons. In another example, (Lawrence, 2020) discussed how the TikTok culture supports honest self-expression, while (Omar & Dequan, 2020) stated that people who share content expressing their actual selves are more likely to succeed.

Omar and Dequan (2020) propose that self-expression motivates TikTok users to generate UGC. These findings validate that argument by providing instances of how and why users express themselves on TikTok. In this context, I noted that Palestinian users and supporters created video content during the study period to illustrate the continuing events in Sheikh Jarrah and Gaza. Some of these videos were live broadcast, displaying the Israeli army's harsh actions against Palestinian civilians, particularly youth. As a result, TikTok, as (Omar & Dequan, 2020) argues, is a refuge for self-expression due to the evolved community and the deeply ingrained value of honesty and vulnerability.

One of the most vital elements in users' decisions to create their TikTok videos was the ability to be themselves more openly and publish their thoughts, feelings, and creative ideas without fear of persecution (Lawrence, 2020). These findings relate to Choi and Sung (2018)'s argument that Snapchat provides similar benefits to users. One may argue that short-form video allows people to express themselves more freely than plain images (T. R. Choi & Sung, 2018). Lawrence's (2020) comments are related to Choi and Sung's (2018) argument that Snapchat users portray their true selves because the environment is conducive to raw self-expression; it appears TikTok is similar in that regard; TikTok fulfills a need for community on social media that users believe other platforms have failed to provide (Lawrence, 2020).

TikTok gathers a variety of user information, including location data and internet addresses, typing habits, and the type of device used to access the program, according to its privacy

policy(Privacy Policy, 2022) . The program also gathers and saves a user's browsing and search history, as well as the content of any conversations sent through the app. With the user's consent, the following information can be collected: phone number, phone book, and social-network contacts; GPS data; user age; user-generated content (e.g., photographs and videos); store payment information; and videos "liked," shared, watched all the way through, and re-watched. TikTok claims that the app gathers fewer personal data than many other applications, like Facebook and Google which track user behavior across devices (Figliola, 2020), whereas TikTok claims that it does not (McMillan, 2020). It is crucial to note that the data TikTok gathers from users tends to be equivalent to what other social news outlets collect and utilize in many ways (DEGRIPPO, 2020).

### **5.2.3 TikTok, Algorithms and Hashtags:**

Algorithms are now used to regulate internet communication. In turn, academics advocate for more research into algorithmic moderation's emotional elements and perceptions (Bucher, 2012). To anticipate, categorize, and filter, algorithmic control relies heavily on 'black box' machine learning methods, which introduce faults and opacity. Meanwhile, people find it hard to hold the site responsible due to the mix of algorithmic opacity and faults. Improper algorithmic content moderation execution also creates feelings of unfairness, insignificance, and distrust among users. (Gillespie, 2020; Jhaver et al., 2019; Myers West, 2018). At the same time, (Chen et al., 2021; Gillespie, 2017; Suzor, 2019) argue that Platforms may successfully govern user-created content without removing it by purposefully pushing, amplifying, and prioritizing the exposure of material seen as more relevant and suitable. It should be noted, that TikTok employs platform-wide recommendation algorithms to personalize, curate, and prioritize content. The For You Page (FYP), the mobile app's main content viewing interface and home page, sends highly tailored feeds to individual users based on their interests and use statistics. The For You algorithm, the FYP's core algorithmic recommender engine, chooses and matches content with viewers by evaluating video interaction statistics and user characteristics (TikTok Recommendation, 2020). Moreover, the For You algorithm identifies which videos will impact the platform using its 'power to grant visibility' (Gillespie, 2017, p. 63). Within this system, unless a video is 'favored' by the For You algorithm, it will not influence the platform. This algorithm's capability is immense, but so is its bias when considering the human subjectivity and ideals embedded in its structure.

Zeng & Kaye (2022) commented that videos with limited visibility would not be recommended by the For You algorithm outside the users' native country and could not be viewed more than 10,000 times (Zeng & Kaye, 2022) . Similar allegations claim TikTok's For You algorithm hindered content that stated 'Black' or 'Black Lives Matter' in TikTok Creator Marketplace profiles (A. Brown, 2021), as well as blocking LGBTQ+ content from getting widespread (Bacchi, 2020). in the same context, TikTok restricts Palestinian "resistant" content by removing it, as I viewed in my study sample, and narrows the scope of a broad geographical reach. According to Zeng and

Kaye (2022), TikTok employs visible moderation at the meso level by encouraging creative communities and users toward social justice initiatives, mainly those that support the platform's total corporate image by fulfilling socially accountable purposes. However according to (Kaye et al., 2022), TikTok has become a leading online arena for youth-led activism, such as racial injustice and climate change, in the years after its international launch in 2018. Because hashtags that are officially supported by the platform are thought to be preferred by the For You algorithm, band wagoning such campaigns has become a shortcut for producers to acquire visibility (Hautea et al., 2021; Zeng & Abidin, 2021). TikTok believes that by developing and approving 'positive' trends, the platform can indirectly manage content production practices that benefit its own image. TikTok allows video producers to moderate their comments directly, and viewers may participate in rating comments through interaction. The influence of communal comment moderation is 'both semiotic and tangible' (Davis & Graham, 2021, p. 652). TikTok views, likes, and answers imply approval, interest, and dispute. Such reactions are materially converted to metadata, which aids the computer in making ranking calculations to determine how much exposure to provide specific categories of content.

The TikTok user experience as Guinaudeau et al. (2021) explain may rely more on algorithmic recommendations than on any other site. Like YouTube (and unlike the main functions of Facebook and Twitter), TikTok's recommendation system can choose from all posts, not only those made or uploaded by accounts the user has "following" or "liked." The requirement for sorting to determine the order in which information pieces are exposed to the consumer and, eventually (given a fixed period), which content pieces are even viewed at all, is a component of any social media feed in contexts with great content. TikTok's user interface, which makes its internal architecture opaquer, concentrates recommendations (on the "For You Page") much more than other platforms do (Guinaudeau et al., 2021). In the same context, it is well known that virality is inconsistent in context where algorithmic recommendations are well established. Upworthy and other early web-native media companies rely on Facebook viral posts to spread their content. They adopted a shareability-focused approach and relied on user recommendations to raise their visibility. Then, in 2014, they witnessed Facebook's algorithm changes take down their readership (Munger, 2020). TikTok can go further than Facebook's network-based model because every time users visit their "For You Page," they can select from any trillions of TikToks stored on their servers. Facebook's network-based model could only alter the "rank" at which a particular post would appear in the user's News Feed.

In this study, it is crucial to discuss how affordances and recommendation algorithms interact. Because of this opacity, researchers find it challenging to gather information about how the algorithm works regarding who gets given what kinds of content. For instance, algorithmic curation on YouTube raises the visibility of extremist content and acts as a catalyst for far-right radicalization (Tufekci, 2018). Nevertheless, TikTok is primarily available as a mobile phone app specifically tailored for the front-facing, vertical-orientation camera that its mobile-native target audience finds most comfortable. This type of camera improves the user's sense of immersion and social presence (Wang, 2020). While YouTube stands out because it has a significant number of

media producers compared to users, enabling the platform to offer many affordances for producers (Caplan & Gillespie, 2020), TikTok attempts to speed up this procedure by ensuring an audience for each post. TikTok begins playing as soon as the user installs and enters the app. The "For You Page," which serves as the default feed, will recommend new films based on how much the viewer interacted with earlier selections. This approach includes suggesting videos with a very tiny number of views. Furthermore, TikTok production has a variety of menus with audio and visual effects designed to allow users quickly and easily make inventive types of videos. Like Instagram's early growth strategy, which involves giving users "filters" to beautify their images, each TikTok has a "sound," enabling users to participate in well-known meme genres. Guinaudeau et al. (2021) consider TikTok's most theoretically important feature from the content creation perspective as the result of the combination of algorithmic recommendation and mobile-first design: it lowers entry barriers and encourages many viewers to become posters. Empirically, it is difficult to pin down the denominator; it is almost impossible to measure how many people without accounts are watching these videos. One reasonable restriction is only those who leave comments on other people's videos. Each of these has a particular ID that can be matched to a user profile (or channel); the vast majority never upload any videos, but they argue that variation in this ratio across platforms is one implication of several theories (Guinaudeau et al., 2021). Over and above, the final part of the analysis will focus on using particular hashtags in the study sample used by users and to what extent hashtagging helped promote the Palestinian narrative.

### **5.3 Q3: What is the level of interaction with the content related to the Palestinian cause on TikTok, and what is the direction of interaction “negative or positive”?**

#### **5.3.1 Data collection:**

Data was collected from TikTok as detailed in the study's sample design, Methodology chapter, that covering a period of three months between 1 April and 30 June 2021. Reviewing the top ranking 2021 hashtags for Palestine on social media websites<sup>7</sup>, and testing whether users have used the same hashtags on TikTok. The researcher noted that tens of hashtags of videos related to

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<sup>7</sup> <https://tiktokhashtags.com/hashtag/palestine/>  
<https://displaypurposes.com/hashtags/hashtag/palestin>  
<https://top-hashtags.com/hashtag/palestine/>  
<https://displaypurposes.com/hashtags/rank/best/country/ps>

the actions and clashes that occur in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, war on the Gaza strip, and al-Aqsa mosque raids by Israeli forces were used, whether directly and indirectly. Moreover, the researcher tested other potential and common hashtags like: **#palestine #freepalestine #gaza #jerusalem #israel #islam #palestina**.

The analysis looks into the level of engagement with content related to the research questions to understand the direction of that engagement. This part of the study is conducted using content analysis of the videos (10 videos of each hashtag) and sentiment analysis (Natural Language Processing (NLP)) on the videos with the highest number of comments.

The researcher gathered the most-used hashtags on TikTok and other social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook. After reviewing the most related hashtags that cover the geographical distribution of the study's central locations (Jerusalem, Gaza, and historic Palestine), the most used were ten hashtags with 8363 videos on TikTok. Specifically, during the clashes in May 2021 at the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in Jerusalem, followed by the war on Gaza. Each hashtag was used for many videos, as shown in Figure 4.

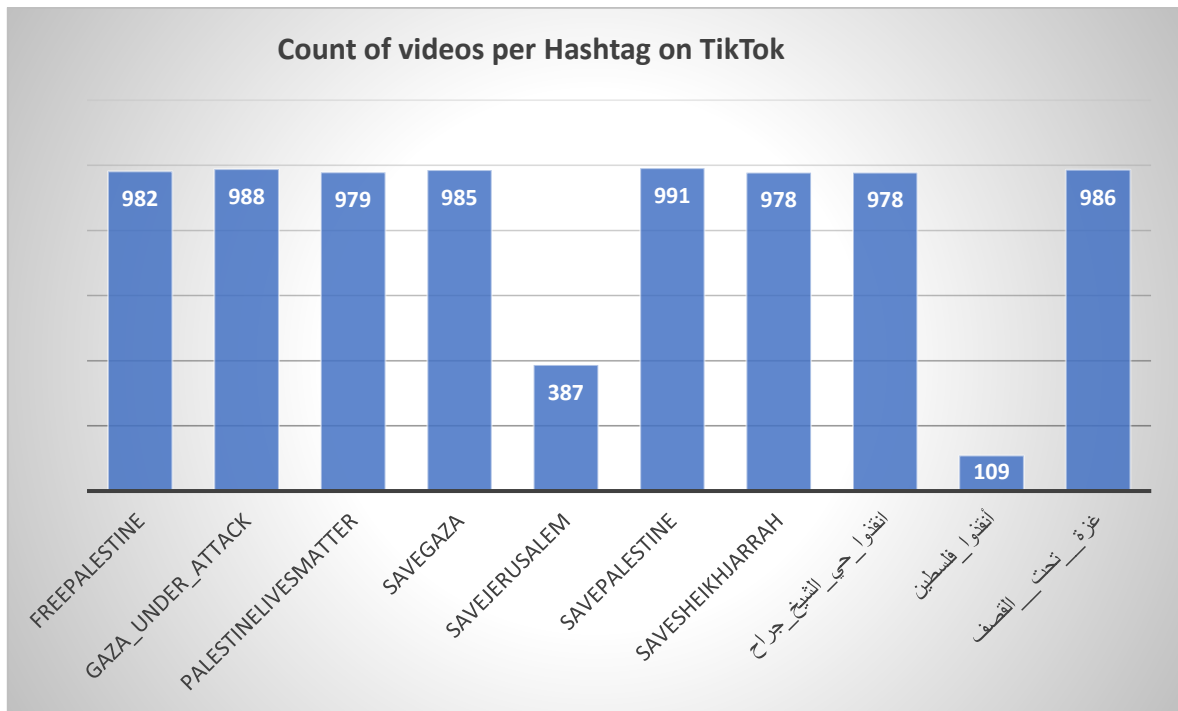


Figure 4 Number of videos for each Hashtag

The length of the published videos ranged from 4 to 180 seconds, with only two videos that are 1 and 300 seconds long. The majority of the videos are less than 60 seconds. The length average of all hashtags videos is 30 seconds.

Data was scraped from TikTok and not obtained through an API because TikTok does not permit API queries to users and researchers, the API available is intended to integrate TikTok into their product and embed videos from the App. However, an unofficial API was used to scrape the videos metadata and a JavaScript code was used to scrape comments for top videos from each hashtag.

Furthermore, the data collection process took longer than expected due to TikTok limiting behavior and the code failing due to unexpected content or format. To overcome these restrictions, I tried different methods and steps; like frequently rotating the web browser and the internet IP address, the APP logging times, using more than one TikTok user's account.

The analysis above gave us insights into the level of engagement with content related to the issue in question as part of wider engagement with issues related to the Palestine cause. To understand the direction of that engagement, thus fulfilling the to answer the research question number 3, and providing additional support to the analysis results, I conducted sentiment analysis using Natural Language Processing (NLP) to analyze comments on top videos. Since the language of the comments varied (Arabic, English, Hebrew and other languages), I used a multilingual sentiment analysis model from the Cardiff NLP group<sup>8</sup> (Cardiff University) hosted at Hugging face<sup>9</sup>.

The language model (twitter-XLM-roBERTa-base for Sentiment Analysis) trained using nearly 198 million tweets and fine-tuned for sentiment analysis. The sentiment fine-tuning was done on 8 languages (Arabic, English, French, German, Hindi, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese) but it can be used for more languages as explained in the reference paper: XLM-T: Multilingual Language Models in Twitter for Sentiment Analysis and Beyond<sup>10</sup>. The base model (XLM-Roberta-Base) is a masked language model (trained on predicting a hidden word from a large unprocessed multilingual language corpus). Such language models are trained on natural language texts from the public domain (like Wikipedia and open text corpora) and are tokenized using a fixed size vocabulary based on term popularity (popular terms are tokenized as single words and less popular ones as chunks of letters).

Since the prediction model is based on raw (unprocessed) text, comments were fed into the model as is<sup>11</sup> (no pre-processing). The Transformer language technology from Hugging Face takes care of tokenizing and preparing comments for the 'text classification' task. The output is a label (positive or negative) along with confidence (probability between 0 and 1).

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<sup>8</sup> <https://huggingface.co/cardiffnlp>

<sup>9</sup> <https://huggingface.co/cardiffnlp/twitter-xlm-roberta-base-sentiment>

<sup>10</sup> <https://arxiv.org/abs/2104.12250>

<sup>11</sup> [https://colab.research.google.com/drive/1ga6pZW-s\\_FzwOYS2zp9d8ntxJkwNlSqH](https://colab.research.google.com/drive/1ga6pZW-s_FzwOYS2zp9d8ntxJkwNlSqH)

There are no similar tools available for TikTok as it does not allow for large scale sample collection. However, this tool, although trained on Tweets, should provide similar rigor with our sample, as comments on TikTok and tweet responses are similar in general.

Data were collected in accordance with the research methodology. As shown in (Figure 1), I selected the most frequently used hashtags during the research period.

The number of videos distributed for each hashtag, as shown in (Table 2) was supposed to be higher than 8363 videos in total published by 5064 users unless there were no ongoing restrictions from the TikTok application policy within the data assembling process. Moreover, the Hashtag language was not related to the producer's origin or citizenship, which I tested manually on the users' accounts.

It should be noted that the TikTok application does not support or provide researchers with user personal data such as address, IP address, or geographical location.

#Hashtag description	Number of published videos
#Savepalestine	992
#Gaza_Under_Attack	989
#غزة_تحت_القصف	987
#Savegaza	986
#freepalestine	983
#Palestinelivesmatter	980
#Savesheikhjarrah	979
#انقذوا_حي_الشيخ_جراح	979
#Savejerusalem	388
#انقذوا_فلسطين	110

Table 2 Number of videos for each Hashtag

Sample selection hashtags is relying on number of factors listed as follow:

- Selecting ten frequent hashtags, related to the action's places, and used in all other social platforms.
- Valid in the study period; still useful afterwards
- The Hashtag name is derived from the action (clashes) place ex. #savesheikhjarrah and so on.
- Hashtags are strongly correlated to the content of videos Hashtagged videos were selected upon the highest comments on each hashtag from the whole 8363 accounts. The highest ten users' video accounts of each hashtag were gathered.

Thus, the top ten videos were selected from user accounts for each hashtag so that the number of selected videos became one hundred videos taken from one hundred accounts on TikTok based on the highest number of comments on each video entrusted with the hashtag.

As a result, the selection process is the result of the following equation:

$$(10\# * 10 \text{ videos} = 100 \text{ hashtagged videos.})$$

While selecting the top ten users' accounts of each hashtag in the sample, I noticed that TikTok had removed some video accounts. Moreover, other videos rejected scrapping and never responded. Despite testing different methods, results were all negative; therefore, the procedure was to move further to the second video in a row to preserve the sample correctness, quality, and power as a representative sample.

The number of scrapped comments on each hashtagged video in the study sample was varied, referring to the Data amount or traffic permission that TikTok allows. I repeated the same lengthy process on each video feed many times. The process was not finally guaranteed; I kept trying to obtain the maximum comments until the TikTok system blocked the operation. Afterward, I tested all the scrapped comments from the same video to ensure no repetition. Moreover, only one user's video containing the highest number of comments was taken on the same date, as explained in the study method; for example: (a user named "Muslem" used the #savesheikhjarrah hashtag on two videos by 11.5.2021). However, the highest commented video on that date only was scrapped. On the other hand, for users who have a vast number of followers like "moezeindtb", when using the #freepalestine and #savesheikhjarrah hashtags on a posted video with thousands of comments, also in this case, one hashtag of two is counted, regardless of the tagged video has more than one hashtag.

Finally, the total comments were 64.549 scraped comments, divided into the ten hashtags (see table 3); although some comments in foreign languages, the majority of them contained Arabic, English, and Hebrew text with numerous emojis and signs in the text. Furthermore, it is essential to mention that only first-level comments, also called "Top level", were scrapped from the videos because TikTok terminated the scrapping process. I repeated the code to scrap comments at least three times for each video, but however, TikTok prohibited that action (image of the error on screen while scraping)

# Hashtag title	Number of comments/ on top 10 users
#freepalestine	27,874
#savesheikhjarrah	13,796
#انقذوا_حي_الشيخ_جراح	12,374
#غزة_تحت_القصف	2479
#Gaza_under_attack	2097

#save_gaza	1703
#save_palestine	1604
#palestinelifesmatter	1154
#save_jerusalem	1059
#انقذوا فلسطين	409

*Table 3 Final number of scrapped comments*

### 5.3.2 TikTok, and Hashtags influence:

Hashtags are a significant feature of both Instagram and Twitter and may be considered user-generated content (Courtois et al., 2009). A hashtag is a word or phrase followed by a hash (#) to establish a hyperlink. Therefore, video posters or creators used the hashtags in the clashes in #sheikh jarrah and Gaza to shed light on the conflict in these areas and to make it viral. Initially, Hashtags, created by Twitter users, provide a search, grouping, or tracking function (2015): By clicking on a hashtag, users may browse and search photographs uploaded with that hashtag (Scott, 2015). Furthermore, hashtags are primarily used for browsing: users may utilize hashtags in current postings to sell their content ((Page, 2012). A wholly original and self-generated hashtag can be chosen above a generic hashtag, a well-known and often used hashtag noted in the videos in the study sample to spread more of the videos among the audience.

Furthermore, Co-hashtag maps may be created and labeled to demonstrate the subcultures or discourses; in a particular movement or problem space, such as 'settler superiority' in Canada's indigenous lands (Karsgaard & MacDonald, 2020). The same method implies the Palestinian case to make an insight into what is happening in Sheikh Jarrah and Gaza. Whereas, Bechmann (2017) argues that when studying social media images, the labeling of image content has been criticized for failing to recognize the 'social value of the picture,' which contains the uploader's goal, such as 'social capital, self-image, and memory' (Bechmann, 2017). Conversely, in Palestine, the power of images and videos is more illustrative of the facts on the ground and promotes the Palestinian side narration. Observing the content of the study sample shows that videos and soundtrack strongly impact the viewer to drag advocacy and to understand the actual situation in Sheikh jarrah and Gaza.

Hashtags are almost always associated with social media content. Erz et al (2018) declared that more than 125 million hashtags are shared on Twitter daily, while including at least one hashtag in an Instagram post boosts average reach by 12.6 percent (Erz et al., 2018), which assists in virality (Lipsman et al., 2012). Hashtags are no longer just "trending," but also a pervasive, apparently permanent, and essential component. According to statistics, hashtags are an essential

currency for all users, serving primarily as a broadcasting function to boost content exposure (Page, 2012).

On the other hand, academic research has generally been muted on the concept that other explanations, and hence hashtag usages, may exist. Furthermore, while the broadcasting function of hashtags may be particularly appealing to social media influencers, hashtags may be used by different user groups for various purposes. To conclude, the present research mostly ignores why social media users use hashtags and whether there are variations in the reasons and kinds of hashtags used by different types of users.

Conversely, users may view and search for posted images with any hashtag by clicking on them. Moreover, hashtags are used mainly for browsing; users can use them in existing postings to market their material (Page, 2012).

Also, users can choose between a wholly unique and self-generated hashtag and a generic hashtag, a well-known and often used hashtag. Therefore, throughout the clashes in Sheikh Jarrah, TikTok users employed the same tactics as mentioned above to call attention to the situation in Palestine and to gain support and advocacy.

In general, hashtags are being used to connect, organize, and promote content, making hashtags "a critical currency that facilitates exposure" for its users (Page, 2012, p. 184). While Page (2012) considers hashtags to be transmitting (one-to-many) rather than a conversation language construct, Zappavigna (2015) underlines their interpersonal aspect: Hashtags can fulfill relationship-enacting functions, such as directly addressing individuals in a hashtag, or normative functions, such as communicating bad feelings believed to be shared by others (Zappavigna, 2015).

Furthermore, a hashtag organizes functioning the content as a sort of punctuation that distinguishes the hashtag from the rest of the text. Finally, on an experiential level, a hashtag denotes the topic of a post or what the communication is "about." In contrast, by expanding these descriptive responsibilities, Scott (2015, 2017) argues that hashtags accomplish more than just marking a topic. Hashtags can also be used to stress a topic (without defining it, so it lacks "aboutness") and contribute to a post's relevancy by allowing the author to make implicit or explicit meanings or contextual assumptions available to her audience (Scott, 2015, 2017). Again, a poster can use "the tag space to direct the viewer towards the intended interpretation" (Scott, 2017, p. 3). Significantly, in this thesis, the researcher will explore the usage of hashtags connected to the clashes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and Gaza on TikTok in the final section of the analysis and how they may be a tool in the digital resistance employed by Palestinians in promoting the Palestinian narrative.

### 5.3.3 The study sample analysis:

In the same context, after testing the main sample comments (top ten video hashtags), the researcher counted that 86 videos of the sample were pro- Palestinians relative to the hashtag. In contrast, ten videos were irrelevant to the hashtag, and TikTok removed four videos after scrapping the comments. One more thing is the number of comments on any video (Appendix 2) has no relation to the user-generated content (UGC) but depends on how familiar or publicly well-known is the user; like the case of (moezeindtb, miakhalifa, or muslim as examples)

Notably, when reviewing the top hundred videos' total comments (64,549), as seen in the Appendix, the highest comments were of videos tagged with the (#freepalestine, #انقذوا\_حي\_الشيخ\_جراح, #savepalestine, #savesheikhjarrah). In addition, analysis proved that TikTok users have intensively used patriot and emotional hashtags in their videos, such as: (save, free (liberate), lives matter, and under attack). Right on time, the related videos' content immediately came after the Israeli military strike on Gaza on May the 10th, 2021, as shown in (Table 4). Most comments were in the English language despite the content in Arabic, and the commenters, as noted from their names and bios, are Arabs. However, the most important thing is the high number of comments connected to oscillated actions on that day.

As the majority of comments were pro Palestinians (Figure 5), sentiment analysis was used to support the results of this question analysis as explained in the appendix.

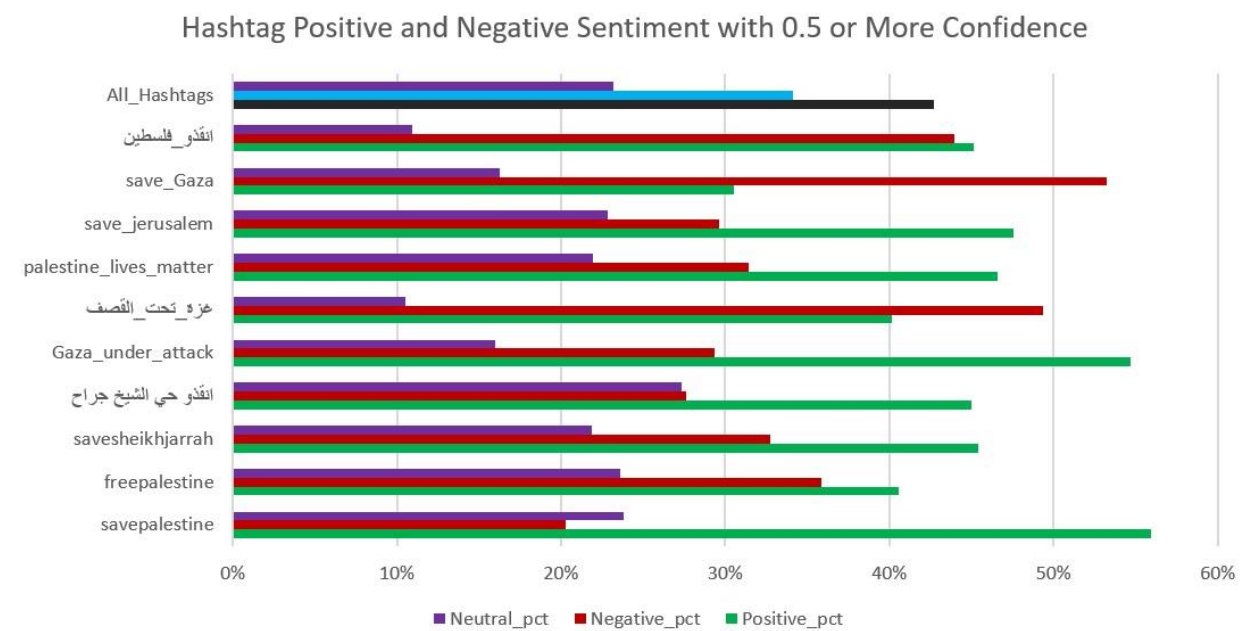


Figure 5 sentiment analysis of all study comments with 0.5 and above confidence

Date	Published videos on that date	Date	Published videos on that date
5.5.2021	4	18.5.2021	446
6.5.2021	4	19.5.2021	361
7.5.2021	14	20.5.2021	312
8.5.2021	91	21.5.2021	183
9.5.2021	205	22.5.2021	111
10.5.2021	308	23.5.2021	81
11.5.2021	560	24.5.2021	68
12.5.2021	764	25.5.2021	75
13.5.2013	469	26.5.2021	72
14.5.2021	596	27.5.2021	54
15.5.2021	610	28.5.2021	82
16.5.2021	542	29.5.2021	63
17.5.2021	465	30.5.2021	51

Table 4 *Published videos in response to the oscillation of events before, within and after the war on Gaza*

The Israeli aggression on Gaza resulted from successive security and field developments in the Palestinian territories. Direct causes were the Israeli measures against the residents of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and the settlers' attempts to organize large-scale incursions into the Al-Aqsa Mosque. However, other reasons were represented by the armed group's attack on the Taffouh Junction, which killed and wounded Israelis, and the attempt to attack the settlers near the Salem checkpoint. (Abu Amer, 2021).

Since the outbreak of Israeli military operation on the Gaza Strip in May 2021; Israeli conclusions were that the creation of a "perfect storm" by the Palestinians; was a combined effort to storm Al-Aqsa Mosque in the last ten days of Ramadan; also, the arbitrary decision of the Palestinian president to postpone the elections, and finally the escalation of tensions over the residents' deportation from Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. Furthermore, the entire region was set on fire, up to the occupied Palestinian cities in the 1948 regions, in a sight that had not been seen in years and decades (Abu Amer, 2021).

The Israeli-Palestinian clashes or the Jerusalem confrontations began with the tension between Palestinian demonstrators and the Israeli police on May 6, 2021, as a result of the Israeli Supreme Court's decision regarding the eviction of seven Palestinian families from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood on the eastern side of the Old City in Jerusalem to accommodate Israeli settlers (Kingsley, 2021).

The consolidation of Palestinians' right to remain on their land, especially in the issue of forced displacement from the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, was a motive for publishing videos supporting the Jerusalemites, namely in the period before the war on Gaza, which took place at the night of May the 10th, 2021. By tracking the flow of published total 8363 videos, particularly in

the five days before the war, the researcher noticed that only four posts in two days among all the 8363 hashtagged videos were published on TikTok on the 5+6 May 2021. Also, on May the 7th, only 14 videos were published, whereas the number jumped to 91 on May the 9th and became almost the tribble on May the 10th, which is **the day of the war**, carrying 305 video hashtags. At this point, it is important to mention that all published videos on TikTok afterward have doubled. In (Table 4) comments show the level of users' activity short before, also during the eleven days of the war and after. Numbers are decreasing towards the end of May, which implies that TikTok users produce supportive videos as a sort of digital resistance, to empower the Palestinian narrative which is intimately tied to the developments on the ground. Furthermore, the researcher discovered while writing this thesis, that such activity increases with tension and development on the ground and decreases when the situation calms down or there is some quiet. Moreover, it is clear that the values of the shares and likes of each video are oscillating; one may be superior to the other, or vice versa. These values have no constant relation that constitutes a reason to make one video has more likes and shares rather than another.

Based on that, it was noted that TikTok users have frequently used the titled hashtags, despite its which bears a linguistic connotation that supports Palestinians in conflict areas during the hot clashes in Jerusalem; namely Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and Al-Aqsa Mosque, and also in Gaza. Most of these hashtags have had the same meaning in Arabic and in English alike) eg. #savesheikhjarrah that means in Arabic *حي الشيخ جراح*, #أنقذوا\_حي\_الشيخ\_جراح, also #savepalestine which means *فلسطين\_أنقذوا* and so on.

In the same context, TikTok users produced lively and active shows which contain songs, images, graphics, and videos in their posts. That is tied with Hashtags to support the Palestinian resistance and to consolidate Palestinians' right to remain on their land, especially in the forced displacement conflict from the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, which was a motive for publishing videos supporting the Jerusalemites.

#### **5.3.4 Digital resistance engagement on TikTok:**

After reviewing the users' accounts that published the most videos from all relevant hashtags, which contain 8363 videos, we should be aware of the factors that significantly influenced the exact number to be less than the real one. The following elements influenced the data scraping when determining each user's video hashtag. First, the hashtag on the video may have the same connotation as the hashtags in the study; however, despite the different calligraphy, it has the same meaning as the specific instance of the "hakam soufan" user account when using the "#saveshaikhjarrah" hashtag rather than the "#savesheikhjarrah" hashtag. With a slight change in writing, the amount of scrapped data is reduced due to the inequality of the hashtag's shape. Second, the number of published videos

is dynamically changing while scrapping whenever the user removes a video or TikTok's (AI system) reports a video as improper according to TikTok's policy and removes it.

Within this study, it was vital to examine users' "performance" on the TikTok platform to comprehend the significance of social media, particularly TikTok, in Palestinian digital resistance and its contribution to disseminating the Palestinian narrative. Therefore, the researcher has counted the number of all published videos by all users, as noted in (Appendix 4), then analyzed the top ten active users who have published the most videos. After reviewing all the accounts, the researcher found that the top user "[Palestine\\_18](#)" has published 71 videos on his account. He repeated a few of them on different dates by changing the hashtags on videos at least once a week, namely in 2021, during the Sheikh Jarrah crisis and the war on Gaza. It happened that he posted four times a day, one time every week, or once every ten days. Notably, the re-posted videos were graphics and paintings he produced, most of which are the artwork of the Palestinian flag that the user himself produced. Meanwhile, the other videos published in the same account were re-posts of other users' productions.

After submitting 47 videos, another user named "[alinezad](#)" comes in second position. He published the first video of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood on May 8, 2021. Furthermore, in the same month, he published extensively by addressing the audience with hashtagged speeches, similar to the research hashtags, and spoke in Indonesian in front of a virtual background. Only three of them were associated with Palestine at the time. Following that, he ceased sharing any videos or hashtags relating to Palestine. The next account in the row is "[smaraa komede](#)" from Gaza; he produced 46 videos, the bulk of which had the hashtag "غزة تحت القصف"; the content of images, videos, or soundtracks had no relevance to the current events on the ground. He only posted from 16.5 until 5.6.2021 using the same hashtag, and nothing else related to the study's hashtags or conflict areas since then.

In fourth place, the Palestinian activist "[rafifrayyan](#)," who used to create content about Palestine, published 41 videos between 7.5 and 10.6.2021, using three hashtags from the study sample (#savegaza, #savesheikhjarrah, and غزة تحت القصف) to support Sheikh Jarrah and Gaza while continuing to produce more general introductory videos about Palestine. Then there's the Indonesian user "[ardhoni\\_](#)," who submitted 28 videos with hashtags ranging from 12.3 to 7.8.2021 with significant gaps in between; the majority of the content in these videos was similar to a talk show series and had nothing to do with Sheikh Jarrah or Gaza.

From another angle, "[hakam soufan](#)," a Palestinian user, has posted almost a hundred videos, 27 of which only include the hashtag "Gaza Under Attack" between 16.5 and 8.6.2021. Even though the remainder of the videos had various hashtags or implications, he continued to produce supportive content for Sheikh Jarrah and the Palestinian narrative until September 2021, but with distant times between each video.

Then there is "[anas ahmmad1](#)" from Gaza, a young Palestinian athlete constantly posting videos of himself doing gymnastics leaps. The hashtag "غزة تحت القصف" has appeared in 27 of his videos. The content, however, has nothing to do with the political situation in Gaza or the Sheikh Jarrah area. Furthermore, "[sultan.xcc](#)," an active user from Gaza, has created tens of sarcastic and humorous videos that have nothing to do with the case study of this research; he only re-shared twenty-six hashtagged videos concerning Gaza from 12.5 to 29.5.2021. The same was valid for the user

"remrbx7," who published twenty-six videos in August and September 2021 that had nothing to do with the research topics; most of his videos were humorous and featured graphical cartoon videos.

Finally, user number ten, "irsyadicute," an Islamic preacher, posted twenty-six religious' videos with the hashtag "#savepalestine." He uploaded his videos between 13.6 and 18.8.2021, even though the content he utilized had nothing to do with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Back to the primary users' accounts, and following Data cleaning: removing irrelevant videos with the digital resistant content and videos that are no longer available (see table 6 before cleaning). Despite receiving the most comments, the researcher accredited the next ten users' accounts in the row with the most commented videos, as indicated in Table 7 after cleaning), and analyzed the video content. As illustrated when comparing the top ten publishing video producers (also consumers as well) among all hashtags (Appendix 4) and the top ten highest comments acquired by users (Appendix 2). In Appendix 2 a user account called "Muslim" has received the most comments on his video, which was published on 11.5.2021, the same day the airstrike began in Gaza. "Muslim" only posted during the first three days of the war on Gaza (May 11, 12, and 13, 2021); he posted three videos on the first day, three on the second day, and one on the third day.

The "moezeindtb" account, a popular Lebanese musician on TikTok, finished in second with the most comments on his video. Notably, sixteen clips from his uploaded videos relate to the Palestinian digital resistance, and the video with the most comments was published on May 16, 2021. At the same time, four of his videos were rebroadcast twice with different hashtags. Indeed, the hashtags (#انقذوا\_حي\_الشيخ\_جراح, #freepalestine) received the most comments on one video; consequently, **only one hashtag (#freepalestine) was picked to maintain authenticity**. Furthermore, the "moezeindtb" video was released on May 19, 2021, and ranked third with the comments.

Another user, "rami ja1," who placed in fourth, posted one and only relevant video on 20.5.2021 using the "غزة\_تحت\_القصف" hashtag, despite having released tens of videos. The user "shibbu mamme" from Africa came in fifth place with only one video relating to Jerusalem, which was released on 28.4.2021. On 10.5.2021, the user "fionzed," who has produced multiple movies relating to Palestine and Syria, published a video that is not directly related to the situation in Sheikh Jarrah or Gaza, but rather underestimating and mocking Israeli army soldiers. This video had the sixth most comments.

The "monther alsamhuri" account was ranked seventh; he is a truck driver, and all of his videos are about his life and profession; nevertheless, he only released one video on May 18, 2021, with the hashtag "Gaza Under Attack." Following that, the user "draw.minecraft3" started to publish drawings on the computer. He only released two art videos about the Palestinian flag and one about the Israeli flag, with the one with the Palestinian flag being published on May 15, 2021, and ranking eighth. Another user, "djhasanfares," has videos that have nothing to do with Palestine and only feature DJ music and entertainment content. Using four hashtags, he only posted one video on May 16, 2021, of a supportive march to Palestine in the United States.

Finally, the tenth user in the table was "[miakhalifa](#)," a porn star who only released one video in support of Palestine on May 12, 2021, putting the hashtag "#freepalestine" on her dancing video.

## Chapter 6 Findings and Conclusion

### 6.1 Platforms and Digital Resistance

As we have seen in this research, Social Networking Sites (SNS), including TikTok, offer a remarkable venue for organization and dissemination of ideas. Monshipouri and Prompichai (2018) further iterated this argument with focus on Palestinians and the Palestinian narrative. The practice of organizing and dissemination of ideas is part of the overall practice of digital activism and resistance, but it can also add additional confusion and water-mudding through the weaponization of social media.

Research covered in this study demonstrated that factors influencing choice of platform for digital activism and resistance span from motivation to effectiveness. For motivation, users are influenced by utilitarian, hedonic, and social motivation in addition to instant gratification (Athwal et al., 2019; Hsiao et al., 2016; Whiting & Williams, 2013). For effectiveness, subjective norms direct the degree to which an individual perceives the demands of significant or referent other individuals on them to use social media, reflecting the perceived effectiveness of online interaction and participation (G. Choi & Chung, 2013; Hyde & White, 2009).

Generating media, an act essential to grass-root activism, is likely influenced by experience during creation, ability to self-express, and reach and interactions received as part of connections with others (Baines et al., 2021; Daugherty et al., 2008). In the same vein, the need for archiving and documenting events that are perceived as important pushes users towards more content generation and sharing (Omar & Dequan, 2020).

Among these factors, TikTok stands out as a platform that allows easy content creation with an experience highlighted by fun, even when the subject is dramatic. Allows for vast reach within and outside of a person's networks, and provides a perception of effectiveness of the message through higher reach and interaction.

For Palestinians, use of the Internet implies an act of digital resistance, to reach to a world that transcends immediate occupation. Palestinians may use the internet to communicate their claims,

maintain their history, mobilize, and help establish or reconnect Palestinian narratives. It is also a virtual place in which people imagine, sustain, and negotiate the existence of a country and a state. While the internet may be an empowering venue for a grassroots movement, technology can also be a disempowering reality that shapes such activity (Tawil-Souri & Aouragh, 2014). As a result, the Palestinian resistance movement adapted, weaponized, and propagandized social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, and as proven in this research, TikTok as well.

## **6.2 TikTok Affordances and Digital Resistance**

TikTok reaches far beyond other successful Chinese apps such as the WeChat app, which is widespread but used mainly by Chinese communities. The short videos content shared on TikTok have the opportunity to become viral if it is shared with the right audiences. TikTok steadily gained popularity among teens and young adults because of its attractive soundbites and video format (Sandler, 2022). One of the success factors of TikTok is how its users are more eager, and encouraged, to create and post material on the platform compared to other platforms that reward passive participation. TikTok users are more willing to copy, repeat, and imitate content generated by others as a result, TikTok's content distribution tends to be a decentralized UGC platform (a user-generated content platform) that recommends content to users not based on likes and comments of the video.

Kumar & Prabha (2019) foresee that narcissism and insecurity would lead to excessive TikTok use. These studies, however, concentrated on the sorts of personal characteristics and traits of users who are sensitive to TikTok and did not consider the design of the platform's interface, which may promote addiction

TikTok serves as a buffer for people to fall asleep. Moreover, during the day, when there is a time gap between activities, such as taking buses, waiting for courses to begin, and in-between study time, users will open TikTok to pass the time, raise emotions, or cope with tension.

TikTok defines the synthesis of three clear directions in social media: the televisual medium that has always been the most vastly popular and influential algorithmic recommendation system. Unlike conventional SNS, the "For You" feed page of TikTok does not recommend videos based primarily on the number of views, likes, or comments; rather, it features videos from any creator that fit the user's preferences, regardless of the number of followers, which are determined by who or what they have previously watched, followed, or interacted with. As a result, despite not being social media stars or celebrities, several TikTok video creators quickly gained massive followings (Anderson, 2020; Kennedy, 2020). Furthermore, TikTok's popularity is based on its "addictive" video stream, For You (Herrman, 2019). TikTok believes that by developing and

approving 'positive' trends, the platform can indirectly manage content production practices that benefit its own image.

In this study, the researcher showed how affordances and recommendation algorithms interact allow for it to be selected as a preferred platform of digital resistance for many Palestinians. However, because of the opacity, researchers find it challenging to gather information about how the algorithm works regarding who gets given what kinds of content. For instance, algorithmic curation on YouTube raises the visibility of extremist content and acts as a catalyst for far-right radicalization (Tufekci, 2018). Nevertheless, TikTok is primarily available as a mobile phone app specifically tailored for the front-facing, vertical-orientation camera that its mobile-native target audience finds most comfortable. This type of camera improves the user's sense of immersion and social presence (Wang, 2020). While YouTube stands out because it has a significant number of media producers compared to users, enabling the platform to offer many affordances for producers (Caplan & Gillespie, 2020). TikTok attempts to speed up this procedure by ensuring an audience for each post. TikTok begins playing as soon as the user installs and enters the app.

### **6.3 Hashtags influence in Sheik Jarrah and Gaza events**

In Palestine, the power of images and videos is more illustrative of the facts on the ground and promotes the Palestinian side narration. Observing the content of the study sample shows that videos and soundtrack strongly impact the viewer to drag advocacy and to understand the actual situation in Sheikh Jarrah and Gaza. The researcher explored the usage of hashtags connected to the clashes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and Gaza on TikTok and how they served as tool of digital resistance employed by Palestinians in promoting the Palestinian narrative.

Among one hundred sample videos studied; the researcher found 86 videos of the sample were pro- Palestinian based on hashtags attached. In contrast, ten videos were irrelevant to the hashtag, and TikTok removed four videos after scrapping the comments. One more thing is the number of comments on any video (Appendix 2) has no relation to the user-generated content (UGC) but depends on how familiar or publicly well-known is the user; like the case of (moezeindtb, miakhalifa, or muslim as examples)

Notably, when reviewing the top hundred videos' total comments (64,549), as seen in the Appendix, the highest comments were of videos tagged with the (#freepalestine, #انقذوا\_حي\_الشيخ\_جراح, #savepalestine, #savesheikhjarrah). In addition, analysis proved that TikTok users have intensively used patriot and emotional hashtags in their videos, such as: (save, free (liberate), lives matter, and under attack). Right on time, the related videos' content immediately came after the Israeli military strike on Gaza on May the 10th, 2021, as shown in (Table 4). Most comments were in the English language despite the content in Arabic, and the

commenters, as noted from their names and bios, are Arabs. However, the most important thing is the high number of comments connected to oscillated actions on that day.

By tracking the flow of published total 8363 videos, particularly in the five days before the war, the researcher noticed that only four posts in two days among all the 8363 hashtagged videos were published on TikTok on the 5+6 May 2021. Also, on May the 7th, only 14 videos were published, whereas the number jumped to 91 on May the 9th and became almost the tribble on May the 10th, which is the day of the war, carrying 305 video hashtags. At this point, it is important to mention that all published videos on TikTok afterward have doubled. In (table 4) comments show the level of users' activity short before, also during the eleven days of the war and after. Numbers are decreasing towards the end of May, which implies that TikTok users produce supportive videos as a sort of digital resistance, to empower the Palestinian narrative which is intimately tied to the developments on the ground. Furthermore, the researcher discovered while writing this thesis, that such activity increases with tension and development on the ground and decreases when the situation calms down or there is some quiet. Moreover, it is clear that the values of the shares and likes of each video are oscillating; one may be superior to the other, or vice versa. These values have no constant relation that constitutes a reason to make one video has more likes and shares rather than another.

Based on that, it was noted that TikTok users have frequently used the titled hashtags, despite its which bears a linguistic connotation that supports Palestinians in conflict areas during the hot clashes in Jerusalem; namely Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and Al-Aqsa Mosque, and also in Gaza.

In the same context, TikTok users produced lively and active shows which contain songs, images, graphics, and videos in their posts. That is tied with Hashtags to support the Palestinian resistance and to consolidate Palestinians' right to remain on their land, especially in the forced displacement conflict from the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, which was a motive for publishing videos supporting the Jerusalemites.

## **6.4 Engagement and the Palestinian Narrative**

Within this study, it was vital to examine users' "performance" on the TikTok platform to comprehend the significance of social media, particularly TikTok, in Palestinian digital resistance and its contribution to disseminating the Palestinian narrative. After reviewing all the accounts covered, and 35,354 comments with a confidence rate (0.5) collected over 8364 videos shared, the sentiment analysis showed that there was a push towards positive engagement with the Palestinian narrative. Interactions with positive engagement were 41%, negative 33%, and neutral with 23%. It is worth noting here that many of the neutral interactions were slightly leaning towards positive engagement but did not make the threshold of positive sentiment as analyzed.

Sentiment direction differed by hashtag topic, with hashtags clearly connected to Sheik Jarrah showing the highest positive sentiment, followed by hashtags generally related to Palestine, and tailed by hashtags related to Gaza.

More on this aspect

Hashtag	Total	Neutral	positive	negative	Positive_pct	Negative_pct	Neutral_pct
Sheikh Jarrah	10329	2742	4669	2918	45.20%	28.25%	26.55%
Gaza	4421	617	1208	1585	27.32%	35.85%	13.96%
Palestine	20604	4826	8553	7225	41.51%	35.07%	23.42%

As a conclusion, this research proved that TikTok was chosen as a competent tool for digital resistance and was used successfully to promote the Palestinian narrative during the Sheikh Jarrah events of May 2021. The research also showed that practices of hashtag hijacking and flooding were also active as a countermeasure by anti-Palestinian narrative and that was successful in flooding hashtags related to Gaza with negative sentiment.

### 6.5 Way Forward

Although the sample and analyzes covered by this research covered a strong sample particularly to events of Sheik Jarrah, it comes short in analyzing larger engagement and interaction with the larger Palestinian narrative. This is due to, in part, available resources and ability to scrap and analyze large sets from TikTok. The inability to link directly to TikTok for research purposes through a matter of API did not help either. It is recommended that further research is conducted where fixed data collectors archive publications and engagement related to the Palestinian narrative and analyzed on constant basis to determine Palestinian digital strategy towards what the just cause deserve from international attention and engagement.

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## Appendix:

### All hashtags that used on internet (Appendix 1):

1. #Savejerusalem	20. #Savejerusalem
2. #Freepalestine	21. #Freepalestine
3. #Savegaza	22. #Savegaza
4. #Savesheikhjarrah	23. #Savesheikhjarrah
5. #intifada	24. #intifada
6. #save sheikh jarrah	25. #save sheikh jarrah
7. #gaza	26. #gaza
8. #freepalestine	27. #freepalestine
9. #GazaUnderAttack	28. #GazaUnderAttack
10. #Gaza_Under_Attack	29. #Gaza_Under_Attack
11. # انقذوا_حي_الشيخ_جراح	30. # انقذوا_حي_الشيخ_جراح
12. # Savesheikhjarrah	31. # Savesheikhjarrah
13. # لا_لتهويد_القدس	32. # لا_لتهويد_القدس
14. # لن_نرحل	33. # لن_نرحل
15. # انقذوا_غزة	34. # انقذوا_غزة
16. #Gaza_Under_Attack	35. #Gaza_Under_Attack
17. # انقذوا_فلسطين	36. #genocideingaza
18. # غزة_تحت_القصف	
19. #Islam	

A sample of most 36 hashtags used in multiple social media platforms

Instagram: #palestinian #palestine #freepalestine #gaza #jerusalem #palestina #savepalestine #palestinewillbefree #israel #alquds #westbank #alaqsa #savesheikhjarrah #freedom #gazaunderattack #savegaza #longlivepalestine #palestinians

TokTok 2021: these are the most used hashtags on TikTok as I reviewed in some websites (Below is some of it), I also checked all the hashtags that I suggested in the list below in addition to the followed: (# freepalestine, # Gaza\_Under\_Attack, # palestinelivesmatter, # savegaza, # savejerusalem, # Savepalestine, # Savesheikhjarrah, # # انقذوا\_حي\_الشيخ\_جراح, # أنقذوا\_فلسطين, # غزة\_تحت\_القصف).

<https://tiktokhashtags.com/hashtag/palestine/>

<https://displaypurposes.com/hashtags/hashtag/palestin>

<https://top-hashtags.com/hashtag/palestine/>

<https://displaypurposes.com/hashtags/rank/best/country/ps>

1	user_name	user_id	er_nick_na	video_desc	video_time	time of publis	video_leng	video_link	n_likes	n_shares	n_comments	n_plays	hashtag	comment relative to Hashtag	scrapped comments
2	moezeindtb	13325796	Moe Zein	Ay ! This is	5/16/2021	18:09	22	<a href="https://w">https://w</a>	5200000	180800	164100	39400000	freepalestine	y	15960
3	muslim	67534522	Muslim	AIRSTRIKE	5/11/2021	2:01	7	<a href="https://w">https://w</a>	4300000	155700	101700	47900000	Savesheikhjarrah	y	3921
4	miakhalifa	67805640	Mia Khalifa	I had to im	5/12/2021	17:38	22	<a href="https://w">https://w</a>	1500000	87300	101700	20700000	freepalestine	y	8561
5	shibbu_mamme	67036217	Shibbu Ma	#palästina	4/28/2021	22:02	33	<a href="https://w">https://w</a>	1500000	121900	89400	20200000	freepalestine	y	1724
6	rami_ja1	68849862	rami_ja1	#فلسطين	5/20/2021	16:16	19	<a href="https://w">https://w</a>	101600	5580	75000	3100000	غزة تحت القصف	y	496
7	moezeindtb	13325796	Moe Zein	"I'm just a	5/19/2021	20:05	34	<a href="https://w">https://w</a>	4600000	226000	64000	24300000	Savesheikhjarrah	y	475
8	fionzed	69210009	Fion Zed	#palestine	5/10/2021	22:51	17	<a href="https://w">https://w</a>	787700	18500	61900	7100000	Savesheikhjarrah	y	441
9	monther_alsamhour	67809552	البياني الأردني	#jordan#	5/18/2021	8:23	49	<a href="https://w">https://w</a>	63500	3926	60900	927200	Gaza_Under_Attack	y	436
10	draw.minecraft3	69553327	draw in Mi	Reply to @	5/15/2021	4:21	10	<a href="https://w">https://w</a>	903300	5562	55200	6600000	freepalestine	y	379
11	djhasanfares	67864757	DJ Fares	#savegaza	5/16/2021	20:36	25	<a href="https://w">https://w</a>	18300	783	55200	114000	savejerusalem	y	379

Appendix 2 list of the highest 10 commented accounts (column n\_comments)

5052	adamofficial166	1	345	812	174900
5053	amalinamarz	1	598	544	281600
5054	adamsaleh93	1	2578	2599	892500
5055	Otear	1	31	178	22600
5056	_fan_____girl_	1	2397	185	287900
5057	amandakluk	1	870	7706	26100
5058	_firdaus.ouh_	1	4471	7496	1900000
5059	Ouar5	1	160	141	53800
5060	adhamalz3ym	1	2715	4177	839200
5061	amani.dspam	1	2240	2779	962300
5062	adhamelshaarawi	1	7857	13100	1100000
5063	adhamnour	1	375	229	342100
5064	abo_alnibras	1	69	662	91300
5065	abo_alwaleed3	1	24	34	42900
5066	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>8363</b>	<b>14784052</b>	<b>23210863</b>	<b>6046708837</b>

Appendix 3 list of 8363 videos on all hashtags published by 5066 users

Users	Number of published videos	Sum of n_comments	Sum of n_shares	Sum of n_plays
palestine__18	71	1687	13359	23883679
alinezad	47	485541	98960	113022900
smaraa_komede	46	10560	8272	4024600
rafifrayyan	41	10197	16508	1526568
ardhoni_	28	71433	51743	128207000
hakamsoufan	27	117	153	20796
anas_ahmmad1	27	1527	546	1643935
sultan.xcc	26	1827	958	642002
remrbx7	26	3119	4917	542267
irsyadicute	26	28932	214545	19404100

*Appendix 4 the highest accounts which published highest number of videos*