Digital Solidarity and Online Protest: A Sociological Study of Global Youth Mobilization during the Israel-Palestine Conflict

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Abstract

The Israel-Palestine conflict, which has been epidurally reinforced after the occurrences of October 7, 2023, set the stage of a new era of digital solidarity activism among young people worldwide. The paper is a qualitative investigation of the youth between the ages of 18-30 years by analyzing their online protest, solidarity actions, and counter-narrative production on the large social media networks, namely Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and Tik Tok, in direct reaction to the developing conflict. Based on interpretivist epistemological approach and using digital ethnography with qualitative content analysis, researchers study the meaning, motivation, discursive tactics and perceived sociopolitical implications of youth-led digital activism. Instead of getting human participants to take part, the study utilizes around 100 publicly available posts, hashtags, comment threads, solidarity campaigns, and artefacts in visual media that circulated through the three platforms throughout the conflict period to sample the most relevant and a thematic variety of posts. Thematic analysis of the gathered digital data provides four intersecting themes, namely construction of global moral witnessing as a type of political action, creation and distribution of counter-hegemonic discourse that disrupts mainstream media frames, the use of digital aesthetics, such as memes, infographics, and images of solidarity, as a tool of political persuasion, and experience and strategy of circumventing algorithmic censorship and platform governance. It is suggested in the study that global youth digital solidarity is not a performative alternative to political engagement nor an unconditionally transformative process, but a complicated, structurally determined and symbolically meaningful type of political agency that transform the terrain of transnational youth politics in the digital era. The conclusions have significant implications to sociology of digital activism, platform governance research, and the research of transnational youth politics in a time of increasingly rapid geopolitical crisis.

Keywords: Digital solidarity, online protest, Global Youth mobilization, Israel-Palestine conflict, digital ethnography, qualitative content analysis, thematic analysis, social media activism, algorithmic censorship, counter-narrative, connective action, transnational youth politics, platform governance, political witnessing.

Introduction

The digital media, geopolitical crisis, and political identity of young people is one of the most analytically productive and acutely relevant spheres of modern sociological research. Social media platforms around the world were immediately turned into venues of mass political speech, solidarity action, information conflictfare, and counter-narrative making when the Israel-Palestine conflict entered its most destructive phase, when the Hamas-led attack on Israeli territory on October 7, 2023, and the Israeli military response reversed the situation and resulted in a civilian body count around forty thousand dead people in months (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2024). The youth, who make up the majority of social media activity in the world, became the most active and vocal group of online activists, using the affordances of Instagram, X (previously Twitter), Tik Tok, and others to testify, organize solidarity, take on the oppressive discourse, and make governments and global institutions accountable. The combination of geopolitical disaster and digital political culture requires severe, theoretically advanced sociological study.

Digital activism sociology has evolved at a very fast pace within the last twenty years producing a rich theoretical base to explain the way digital technologies are changing the nature, scope, and political implications of collective action. In his classic description of the networked social movements, Castells (2012) maintained that movements designed around horizontal networks of digital communication signal a new organizational morphology of collective action with unique characteristics: viral circulation of information, coordination that lack leader, and the creation of affective community that carries on even after the traditional organization of collective action is exhausted. In order to illustrate digitally-mediated political participation that is structured not by shared collective frames but by personalized and individually tailored manifestations of solidarity circulated through social media networks, Bennet and Segerberg (2013) have expounded the concept of connective action. These theoretical frameworks supply critical analytical resources in the realization of the nature of youth digital activism within the Israel-Palestine conflict, despite the fact that the cultural, religious and geopolitical dimensions of this particular dispute have to be critically extended and contextualized to the theoretical frameworks.

Youth have a special place in modern digital political cultures. Being digital natives, who have been socialized with social media as a part of their social, cultural, and political infrastructure, young people aged 18-30 exhibit advanced capabilities of producing political content, navigating the platform, assembling counternarratives, and forming transnational solidarity networks, which are no longer restricted by geographical barriers of traditional political organizing (Loader and Mercea, 2011; Vromen, 2017). Meanwhile, youth digital activism is often dismissed in popular and scholarly discussion as some shallow form of slacktivism (Morozov, 2011) or the way of finding an emotional fulfillment in online action instead of the hard work of truly political action. It is the tension between positive and negative descriptions of digital activism that makes up one of the primary theoretical problematic with which this research had a first-hand interaction. Another major challenge highlighted by the escalation of the Israel-Palestine conflict in October 2023 was the political aspects of platform governance the choices made by big social media firms regarding content to promote, demote, or delete. A report published by Human Rights Watch (2023) provided extensive records of systematic censorship of Palestine-related information on the Meta-owned platforms, such as the diminished algorithmic visibility of the posts with the Palestinian solidarity hashtags and the de-monetization of the posts that did not breach the platform rules. These recorded tendencies of platform censorship themselves became a target

of digital activism among youth activists around the world, and this led to what can be termed a second-order activism, which revolves around the freedom to express solidarity on social media platforms without being algorithmically obstructed. This is a significant analytical aspect of this work as it is important to understand how young digital activists maneuver, live in, and strategically bypass these platform-level limitations (Gillespie, 2018; Roberts, 2019).

The research fills a critical gap in the current literature by doing a profound qualitative research on the digital content created by young activists around the world in the circumstances of the October 2023 escalation and its aftermath. In contrast to research that considers survey methodology, automated content analysis, or metrics of digital engagement as its data collection approach, this research conducts a digital ethnography and qualitative content analysis to produce in-depth contextually-grounded insights to understand the meaning, practices, and political imaginaries embodied in youth solidarity content that circulates on Instagram, X, and Tik Tok. By analyzing the social media posts, hashtag campaigns, comment threads, and visual solidarity content as valuable sociological data, the research sheds some light on the discursive, affective, and political aspects of digital activism by young people across the globe in a manner that cannot be quantified by solely quantitative methods. The paper falls within an interpretivist sociological tradition where social phenomena are seen as necessarily defined by practices of meaning-making, and where the nature of qualitative approaches to access and interpretation of the meanings is claimed to be necessary (Geertz, 1973; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Digital media contents, posts, hashtags, captions, comments, solidarity images are not read as clear data on social reality but rather as socially constructed, culturally coded and politically significant text and must be analyzed through the lens of context, platform conventions, and power relations that inform digital expression. This epistemological investment sets the study apart in the computational methods that conceptualize digital content as raw data that can be aggregated and analyzed statistically and anchors it in the qualitative sociological tradition.

Research Objectives

The research objectives in this study refer to the following:

O1: The purpose of the investigation to focus on the motivational, affective, and political aspects of the global youth digital solidarity activism within the Israel-Palestine conflict with references to the publicly available social media posts on Instagram, X, and Tik Tok.

O2: To analyze the discursive practices, visual activities, and narratives, by which young digital activists develop counter-hegemonic narratives of the conflict and disrupt mainstream framing of the conflict in information spaces.

O3: To critically examine the encounters and strategic reactions of young online activists concerning the censorship of the platform, repression by algorithms, and content oversight, and evaluate the perceived political effectiveness of global youth activism of online solidarity.

Research Questions

The inquiry is structured in three matching research questions:

RQ1: What are the motivational, emotional, and political meanings that young people around the world associate with their activism of digital solidarity in the conflict between Israel and Palestine, and how do they manifest and communicate their meaning using publicly available social media content on Instagram, X, and Tik Tok?

RQ2: How, by what discursive means, narrative frames, and visual practices do youth online activists create counter-hegemonic stories about the Israel-Palestine conflict that question mainstream media narratives and provide the political agency of youth interested in the world?

RQ3: What are the experiences, experiences, and tactical responses of young online activists to platform-level censorship and algorithmic control of Palestine-related content and how do they evaluate the politics and constraints of their online solidarity activism?

Literature Review

Digital Activism and the Paradigm Shift of Collective Action.

The connection between digital media and collective political action is one of the most fruitful and debated spheres of sociological study since the social media became a mass phenomenon in the mid-2000s. The most influential theoretical explanation of such relationship was provided by Castells (2012) in his idea of networked social movements since he believed that the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street movements were the qualitatively new forms of collective action that are organized not around vertical structures but horizontal digital networks. He argued that these movements are defined by their ability to traversing geographical borders at an impressive rate by spreading via viral communication, maintaining emotional and political devotion via networked solidarity and the ability to occupy both physical and digital spaces at the same time. The framework provided by Castells laid the background understanding of the fact that the digital media not only support the already existing modes of political action, but create new forms of organization and political possibilities.

Bennett and Segerberg (2013) came up with the powerful terming of a collective action and connective action to define any given digitally-mediated political participation. Connective action acts based on personalized digital networks where collective action needs membership in an organization, collective ideological frames, and collective identity formation, where individuals customize and share action frames based on their own values, identities, and social connections. They contended that this change in organizational mobilization to network mobilization allows massive mobilization of the political groups without the resource expense and organizational overhead of conventional social mobilization. Connective action has been extensively used in studies of digital activism, but critics have observed implications of implicitly individualist and secular assumptions which are particularly acute when it comes to studying activism in situations where collective religious identity, community commitment, and postcolonial political consciousness are the main forces of mobilization (Gerbaudo, 2012; Loader & Mercea, 2011).

Morozov (2011) has constructed a long-lasting and extensively discussed critique of what he calls cyber-utopianism the predisposition to laud the digital media as democratizing and transformative in nature, suggesting that online political involvement is often a replacement for offline action instead of a supplement or catalyst to it. His theory of slacktivism, or the low-cost forms of online activism including signing e-petitions, posting solidarity content, or changing profile pictures, sums up the fear that digital activism is giving people the head rush and satisfaction they need, without effecting any political impact. This criticism has received a lot of scholarly discussion; scholars such as Earl et al. (2022) or Tufkeci (2017) have shown that the connection between online and offline activism is empirically complicated and context-sensitive and that online political activism can lead to political mobilization, norm change, and institutional accountability in forms that simplistic slacktivism arguments are unable to explain. The current research is in direct relation to such a theoretical argument by empirically examining the concept of youth digital solidarity across the world, with the Israel-Palestine case.

Newer research has moved the analytical focus to the infrastructural forms and political economies of specific platforms, focusing on how the platform-specific affordances, the

organizational properties that make and limit certain forms of social action possible, define the possibilities of the political communication (Bucher, 2018; van Dijck et al., 2018). This platform studies acknowledge that Instagram, Tik Tok and X are not a blank medium into which already existing politics is projected but actively provides the forms, reach and visibility of digital activism in terms of algorithmic curation, content recommendation systems, content moderation policies and logics of monetization. In an analysis by Gillespie (2018), these technical and policy processes are examined as the manifestation of the so-called custodial power of the platform companies, claiming that every decision between amplifying or suppressing content are acts of consequential political governance even in cases when the operations are framed as technical or neutral.

Political Participation of the Youth in the Online Era

The connection between the youths and political involvement has also been redefined greatly with regard to digital media. Studies in several countries settings reported a trend where the young are no longer interested in traditional institutions of politics- decreased affiliations to political parties, decreasing the prevalence of young age categories in most democracies to vote, and at the same time show great rates of engaging in other forms of political participation which are issue based, mediated through the internet (Norris, 2002; Dalton, 2008). Bennett (2008) hypothesized this movement as a generational change in the form of citizenship as a duty, institutionalized within the structures of civic engagement and social responsibility, to the form of citizenship as an actualization, formulated through expressive connectedness, networked relations, and identity based forms of civic engagement. In this respect there is no way that digital media are leading to youth political disengagement but, instead, facilitating a qualitative change in the manifestations in which youth political engagement occurs.

Digital citizenship has become a prominent construct through which theorizing politically active uses of digital media by young people has become a central concept (Mossberger et al., 2008; Choi, 2016). Digital citizenship refers to the technical skills, normative orientations and social practices in which people get agency as political actors in online space. The construction of advanced content-generating, platform-browsing, information-appraising, and transnational advocacy networks of youth digital citizenship has been documented as challenging simple notions about youth as passive media consumers (Mihailidis, 2018; Vromen, 2017). These abilities become especially clear when discussing the case of the Israel-Palestine crisis, where digital youth activists have established sophisticated systems of solidarity content creation, avoiding algorithmic censorship, and creating cross-platform proliferation channels of counter-hegemonic information.

Studies that specifically study engagement of youths as a site of digital activism in the Israel-Palestine conflict have a substantial albeit comparatively new literature. Lim (2012) has reported the role of digital media in facilitating transnational solidarity content dissemination during the Gaza conflict in 2008-2009, and Hoconflictd and Hussain (2013) have reported that the conflict can be seen as a strong transnational issue frame that mobilizes solidarity on and across national, cultural and religious borders. Later studies have looked at the unique place of visual content, including photography, video footage, infographics, in the mobilization of digital solidarity and opposition to mainstream media frames of the conflict (Mortensen, 2015). The October 2023 ripple effect resulted in the largest and the most widespread wave of youth digital solidarity activism recorded in history, setting the stage of the type of qualitative analysis that this study aims to perform.

Platform Governance, Algorithmic Censorship, and Digital Rights.

The control of the political speech on online platforms has risen as one of the most disputed locations of modern media politics. Gillespie (2018) compared platform governance to a kind of "custodial" power where commercial technology firms insist on consequential choices regarding what material is visible, amplified or suppressed without necessarily any democratic responsibility or clear standards. In her work about the commercial content moderation, Roberts (2019) demonstrated the labour that goes behind the seemingly algorithmic content governance processes, reporting on the thousands of content moderators, who are mainly based in low-income nations, to make fast judgments about content removal that carry with them substantial political implications. All of this background research has been used to provide the theoretical framework of understanding the taboo patterns of Palestine-related content that turned out to be a significant subject of digital activism in their own right after October 2023.

In-depth reporting on systematic censorship of Palestine-related content on Meta-owned platforms, such as Instagram and Facebook, by Human Rights Watch (2023) revealed that Arabic content, posts with Palestinian solidarity hashtags, and accounts belonging to Palestinian journalists and human rights workers were all disproportionately removed and algorithmically downgraded. The aftermath of these findings was very controversial and was widely disseminated within the circles of activists, which helped develop a bigger crisis of the political biases of the platform content moderation systems. Kaye (2024) has examined the effects of these reported trends on the freedom of expression and democratic accountability and concluded that platform firms exert considerable and under-examined influence over the information environment of high-profile political battles.

A related notion, the algorithmic imaginary (Bucher, 2018), comes in especially handy to explain how young digital activists go through platform governance. According to Bucher, even when platforms companies do not make their workings transparent, users of social media acquire practical theories about how algorithms work and change their own practices in line with this theory. Digital activism studies have already recorded the elaborate tactical responses that activists are devising in reaction to their exposure to algorithmic governance, such as symbol substitutions and alternative spelling as evasion of keyword-based blocking, parallel distribution networks on a variety of platforms, and deliberate exploitation of platform-specific algorithmic logics to get as much content of solidarity as possible to circulate (Tusekeci, 2017). This is fundamental to the analytical agenda of this study because of the need to understand how such tactical adaptations are manifested and conveyed in accessible digital content online.

Affective Digital Solidarity and Political Witnessing

The research on the affective aspects of digital activism has expanded significantly over the past few years, in reaction to realizing that emotions, moral outrage, empathy, grief, and solidarity are not accidental effects of political activity, but defining forces and mobilizing resources of digital collective action. Jasper (1997) found that the experience of moral shocks, such as events or images that appear to go against basic moral intuitions, can serve as a potent source of political mobilization, a point that has been applied in the context of the digital environment by researchers who have been studying how the distribution of traumatic images and accounts may trigger political action by audiences far away (Mortensen, 2015; Sontag, 2003). The graphical visual content flowing out of Gaza on social media after October 2023, videos of air attacks, photos of human victims, testimonies of displaced families, set the circumstances of unprecedented affective depth among the young demographics of the world,

and the Israel-Palestine conflict was an analytically significant example to study the mobilizing force of digitally mediated moral shock.

Chouliaraki (2013) has constructed a critical model of the analysis of what she describes as the ironic spectator, i.e. the ways in which digital media generate distinctive, frequently ambivalent kinds of political engagement with distant suffering, in the guise of a complex blend of the feeling of genuine empathy and aesthetic appreciation, as well as political aconflicteness. Her discussion brings up some crucial questions regarding the essence of digitally mediated versions of solidarity as being real political action or rather, post-humanitarian acts whereby emotional manifestation is replaced by political devotion. Dean (2009) also examined the affective circuits of online political communication on the basis that the circulation of political intensities such as emotions of outrage, solidarity, and indignation, through networked digital media, is a form of communicative capitalism that can generate subjective sense of political agency but drain energy that could otherwise be used to generate structural political change. These critical visions present vital displays to more glorifying narratives of digital activism and feed the analytical method of the study question of political efficacy.

Studies of the visual and aesthetic aspects of digital solidarity activism have captured that memes, infographics, solidarity images and aesthetic content are driving forces behind mobilizing political involvement among the youth demographics. Milner (2016) discussed internet memes as a type of participatory political culture where humor, irony, and remixing as a political tool to use humor and irony to criticize their political views and express solidarity. One of the most notable types of youth digital activism in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, in particular, was that of solidarity infographics, the visual summaries of the background and context, victim counts, and legalizations, as one of the most significant forms of political education accessible and shareable, in a situation where there is a lot of competition for attention and claims over historical fact are contested (Kaur-Gill & Dutta, 2017). Another significant analytical aspect of this paper is to understand the way these visual practices can serve as political communication.

Global Solidarity Networks and Transnational Youth Politics

Historically, the Israel-Palestine conflict has been a potent source of transnational youth solidarity activism, marshaling the youths in various national, religious and political settings, via its linkage with the wider decolonization, human rights, and international accountability struggles (della Porta, 2005). This transnational aspect has radically increased with the digital media since youth activists in various nations are able to exchange information, plan actions, build solidarity networks and build a common discursive structure in real time even across geographical frontiers. Al-Rawi (2019) reported the intervention of social media in uniting Muslim communities all over the world via the collective interest in the conflict, and Poell et al. (2020) analyzed how the structures of platforms influence the creation and the nature of transnational digital solidarity networks.

The theory of transnational advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink, 1998), which earlier was created to explain the concept of NGO-driven international human rights activism, has been revised and reformulated significantly by academics who study digitally-mediated manifestations of transnational youth activism. Digital networks can facilitate quick, informal, and participatory types of transnational solidarity mobilization which are theoretically open to all young people with access to a smart-phone and a social media account, whereas traditional transnational advocacy networks have necessitated organizational infrastructure, professional coordination and access to institutional channels (Tarrow, 2011). Nevertheless, the literature

has reported the structural inequalities which define access and engagement into transnational digital networks, such as unequal access to the internet, language, and the algorithmic structures of platforms based in Western countries that give precedence to English-language content and to the views of the Global North (Wasserman, 2020).

Methodology

Research Design and Epistemological Framework

In this research, the investigator uses a qualitative research design based on an interpretivist epistemological paradigm. Interpretivism, as developed in the schools of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), interpretive sociology (Geertz, 1973), and constructivist views on social inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011), follows the initial assumption of the interpretation that the social reality consists of the practices of meaning-making and that the main role of social research is to understand, interpret and theorise the meanings through which social actors constitute, traverse, and make sense of their worlds. This epistemological promise is not simply technically fit to the analysis of digital activism, but epistemologically obligatory: a social media post sharing solidarity with Palestine, a hashtag campaign organizing world protest, or an infographic sharing historical facts about the conflict, are not opaque data points that can be meaningfully aggregated but immensely informative communicative practices embedded into complex social, cultural, and political situations, needing interpretation. This paper is thus completely qualitative in its orientation and there is no statistical analysis, numerical tables and other forms of quantitative analysis.

The qualitative content analysis and digital ethnography are merged in the methodology. Digital ethnography (Pink et al., 2016) is a method of systematic, theoretically-grounded observation, documentation, and analysis of the social practices and cultural meanings of digital spaces, which considers online spaces as valid social locations that can be approached using modified ethnographic methods. Qualitative content analysis, in the view of Mayring (2004) and Schreier (2012), is the theoretical-directed interpretation of communicative material-texts, images, videos- aiming to find pattern of meaning, discursive strategy and cultural systems in the said material. These two approaches are especially appropriate in the context of studying digital activism because it allows the researcher to both observe the practices and context of online solidarity expression and to also methodically examine the content, form, and meaning of the digital artefacts that are being created.

Data Sources

Data used in this research was gathered in three social media entities, i.e., Instagram, X (previously twitter) and Tik Tok. The choice of these platforms was due to the fact that they are the main arenas of youth digital activism in the world, each with its own unique affordances to political communication, and each one of which contributes to the spread of solidarity content in the Israel-Palestine conflict. The visual focus and the Story option of Instagram provide unique possibilities of solidarity expression in the form of photography, infographics, and the creation of visual stories, which have a short duration. X offers a text-oriented and real-time service that is best fitted to share news quickly, comment politically, and organize campaigns with hashtags. The short-video format of Tik Tok, coupled with its strong recommendation system, precondition the appearance of viral content in solidarity with which individuals can reach significant masses in a short time, including those who are not engaged in politics but accidentally come across political content in the discovery systems of the application.

The research exclusively uses publicly available digital material. There was no personal participant recruiting, no respondent was approached or interviewed, and no personal or limited material was viewed. The methodological and ethical choice to work with the entire

open online content publicly available is an acknowledgement of the practical viability of analyzing mass data, as well as an acknowledgement that the publicly posted information on open sites is a legitimate type of public discourse that can be subjected to the techniques of sociological analysis without the need to have informed consent on a case-by-case basis, so long as ethical concerns on anonymity are strictly enforced. This method aligns with the codes of conduct of internet research formulated by the Association of internet Researchers (Association of Internet Researchers Ethics Working Committee, 2019) who acknowledge that it is ethically valid to conduct an analysis on publicly available digital data; the only condition being that these data have to be appropriately anonymized and they have to be sensitive to the context.

Purposive sampling (non-probability sampling) was chosen as a strategy of data collection, and the selected strategy allows ensuring that the chosen content is directly relevant to the research questions and is reflective of the scope of activist practices, discursive strategies and platform dynamics that define global youth digital solidarity under the Israel-Palestine conflict (Patton, 2015). The purpose of purposive sampling was to use instead of random sampling or systematic sampling, as the interpretivist objectives of the study demand analytical insights instead of statistical representativeness. It is not aimed at generalizing about a population based on the sample in the statistical sense but, rather, to produce theoretically based guesses into the definitions, practices, and forces of digital solidarity activism that could be added to the construction of sociological theory.

About a hundred data items on digital data were chosen to analyze them on the three platforms. These included a wide variety of types of content, such as individual posts and captions of solidarity and political commentary; hashtag campaigns, such as #FreePalestine, #StandWithPalestine, #GazaUnderAttack and ceasefirenow, and the thread or comment discussions that these have attracted; solidarity infographics with historical background, casualty information and political analysis; visual solidarity content of images, photographs and short videos; thread comments pinned to high-engagement posts that are indicative of collective sense-making, debate and community-building; and content that has been flag The sample was chosen to reflect different geographical backgrounds of creators of content, different degrees of activist participation (between spontaneous shows of solidarity and campaign content that is planned and structured), and different discursive and aesthetic levels of political expression.

Data collection was performed during six months between October 2023 and March 2024, which included initial shock of the October 7 events and long term military conflict that followed. This period was observed on digital ethnographic field notes, which presented observations about the nature and dynamics of online solidarity activism as it changed over the course of the time. The ethical principles of ethical archiving were used to save screenshots, text transcriptions, and copies of posts and the threads of choice as this could avoid the unintentional distribution of sensitive information. The researcher kept a reflexive research journal in which he/she recorded methodological choices, analytical revelations and developing theoretical shedding of light on the data collection and analysis process.

Thematic Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis was used to analyze the data that have been collected as explained by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019). Reflexive thematic analysis sees the production of themes as a dynamic, interpretive, and theoretically-informed process where disciplinary expertise and analytic standpoint of the researcher is accepted as an asset to be exploited as opposed to biases that should be avoided. In fact, this method is especially well-calibrated to the

sociological analysis of digital content since it allows the researcher to go back and forth between the distinct textual, visual, and discursive aspects of individual posts and the larger social, cultural, and political systems of meaning in which the particular aspects are situated. The steps in the analysis were as follows: familiarization with the dataset by repeatedly reading, viewing and annotating the material; creation of preliminary codes which reflect the semantic and latent characteristics of the material; development of possible themes by collating and comparing similar codes; revision and editing of themes by the entire dataset; definition of themes and naming them to reflect their analytical and theoretical importance; actual writing of the analysis as a process in which themes were developed and expounded upon using selected examples in the dataset. Semantic analysis is concerned with the explicit, surface-level content of posts and comments what is said, shown or claimed literally. Latent analysis takes care of the underlying assumptions, cultural systems, political imaginaries which inform and organize the explicit substance, what is presupposed, normalized or strategically produced by specific decisions about language, image and discourse. Such a dual-level analysis method is necessary in a sociological study of digital activism as a great deal of the political activity of solidarity content is achieved not by explicit political argumentation but by the circulation of images, emotional appeals, historical parallels, and cultural allusions that bear political significance at an implicit and presuppositional level.

Ethical Considerations

The research paper is strictly ethical and respects the principles required by the internet research. No one informed consent was needed since the analysis will be based solely on publicly accessible content. Nonetheless, the latter does not exclude ethical duties regarding the individuals, whose publicly expressed data the data are. In line with the AoIR code of ethics (AoIR Ethics Working Committee, 2019) and other, more general principles of research ethics formulated by the British Sociological Association, the research carries out solid anonymization measures to ensure that no individual content creators are identified. All usernames, handles, account names, and biographical information that are present in the content they were collected are anonymized or described generically in the analysis. Posts are direct quoted and paraphrased or with some changes where needed in order to curtail the possibility of digital search of the original text. Special attention is paid to the work of users who might be at risk of harm such as legal or professional or personal harm as a consequence of their online political expression given the fact that the status of content as public does not negate the presence of harm that may occur as a result of its reproduction in scholarly environments.

The paper also notes the principle of contextual integrity (Nissenbaum, 2010), according to which the information flows properly when they fit the norms of the context of the information sharing. Although the content shared on publicly accessible social media accounts can be accessed by anyone, the researcher understands that when users share solidarity content in digital activist groups, they may not expect or even want their solidarity expression to be analyzed academically, and that the spirit behind their communicative actions should be respected and treated with proportionality in terms of the application of their public content. The research does not recreate any content in a way that can expose some individual activist to harassment, surveillance or targeting and it avoids reproducing any content that might be used to contact vulnerable people in situations where political expression is legal or high-risk of being targeted.

Analysis and Findings

Reflexive thematic analysis of a sample of about one hundred purposively selected digital objects of data, including posts, captions, hashtag campaign posts, comment discussions, infographics, and solidarity visuals on Instagram, X, and Tik Tok, identified four main themes, each revealing a different, albeit inseparable aspect, of the global youth digital solidarity activism in the Israel-Palestine conflict. These have been outlined below as: (1) Moral Witnessing and the Duty to Speak; (2) Counter-Narrative Production and the Contest over Historical Truth; (3) Digital Aesthetics as Political Practice; and (4) Algorithmic Resistance and the Politics of Platform Censorship. The themes are discussed in detail and with references to particular examples of the dataset, which is understood in the context of theoretical frames created in the literature review.

Theme One: Moral Witnessing and the Duty to Speak

The Construction of Witnessing as Political Action

The most widespread and analytically consequential aspect of the digital solidarity content of young people around the world in the dataset was the establishment of online witnessing - the seeing, recognizing, and publicly witnessing of the reality of Palestinian suffering - as a form of political action with both moral and practical values of its own. This construction is working against a backdrop of what most posts described as a concerted campaign by most of the mainstream media houses and political elites to make the Palestinian civic plight invisible, to put it into the status quo or to put it in discursive contexts in which its moral seriousness does not exist. Through posting, sharing, and commenting on images, testimonies, and reports on Gaza, youth digital activists were doing what they described as an act of counter-witness with both inherent moral and instrumental political significance, that is, in ensuring the dissemination of information that might be otherwise suppressed.

This interpretation of witnessing as political action was manifest in the dataset in various discursive registers. The act of seeing and sharing on TikTok was repeatedly framed as a political task by the creators of short videos that were packaged as news and voice-over commentary by young creators in various national settings: the phrases of "if you are seeing this, you cannot unsee it" and your silence is a choice have become common and strikingly used, forming spectatorship as a morally charged and politically demanding practice. Things like threads assembling documentary evidence, casualty counts, satellite shots of ruined infrastructure, the statements of medical workers and journalists, were framed as an act of baring witness to what the poster claimed was being overlooked by the international community as a whole. The Story functions on Instagram were widely exploited to develop series of pictures and text that led the followers through a visual and textual experience that was meant to generate moral shock and political consciousness.

This sociological meaning of the construct of witnessing-as-activism is not limited to its communicative purpose at hand. By making the very experience of seeing and testifying political, young digital activists are dismantling the assumption, not only ingrained in the mainstream political culture but also in discourses that critique the importance of digital activism, which only forms of political action that are offline or institutionally recognized are considered genuine forms of political engagement. Witnessing is redefined as a kind of political work: it needs emotional investment, the intake and assessment of information, the creation of public testification, and the establishment of audiences who can be inspired to take more action. This rethinking can be echoed in the analysis presented by Chouliaraki (2013) that digital solidarity is a unique type of political practice despite complicating her more

critical explanation of digital humanitarianism by foreshadowing the political, as opposed to purely humanitarian, aspects of witnessing.

Affective Intensity and Mobilizing Power of Digital Grief

The second dimension of the witnessing theme has to do with the position of collective grieving, moral outrage, and affective intensity in the process of online solidarity mobilization. A significant percentage of the data consisted of content that was specifically structured around the expression and communication of emotional reactions to Palestinian suffering: posts where people lamented at the deaths of civilians, were outraged at what they saw as international inactivity, and sympathized with Palestinian families and communities. This expressive material was not only a personal expression of emotion but an expression of a shared emotion work, an expression and distribution of common emotionality which could maintain political unity despite geographical separation and without any direct personal attachment to the struggle.

Of importance in this respect was the visual contents present in the dataset. The posts that garnered the most views, in the form of comments, shares, and affective reactions, were always those which included photographs and video footage of civilian victims, as well as the photographs of children. Some of the comment threads on these posts demonstrated collective emotional processing processes in which participants were forced to exchange their distress, confirm each other in their reactions, and create a system of shared sense-making about the suffering as both historically contextualized - related to the longer histories of dispossession and colonial violence - and politically actionable via collective solidarity action. This emotional working together in the form of digital comment threads can then be seen as what Jasper (1997) describes as the affective infrastructure of social movements, and creates the emotional solidarity needed to maintain collective action in the long term. The online platform offers the terrain upon which such affective infrastructure is built and sustained between the geographically dispersed youths who might never see each other face-to-face.

Theme Two: Counter-Narrative Production, Counter-Narrative and the Contest of Historical Truth.

Fighting Mainstream Media Framing

A second broad theme that traverses through the dataset has to do with the production and distribution of counter-hegemonic discourses that directly question the framing of the Israel-Palestine conflict by mainstream media. Digital activists among youth in the three platforms exhibited profound understanding of the strength of narrative framing- which is the choice and arrangement of information in a way that creates specific sense of causation, responsibility, and moral relevance- and used their digital content as tools to create alternative frames than those that were being disseminated in the mass media.

The dataset had a number of variants of counter-narrative production. The most common one was the publishing and dissemination of historically-based contextual information: the posts that offered easy access to the history of Palestinian dispossession since the 1948 Nakba, the legal status of the occupation according to the international law, the situation in Gaza before October 2023, and the history of the past military campaigns and civilian victims. This contextualization of the past was overtly defined as a response to mainstream media narratives on the October 7 events that, as activists saw it, cast the events as the unprovoked violence with no historical or political context. The sociological importance of such a practice of contextualization is that it ideally constructs historical memory as a political resource: by disseminating the narrative about the Nakba, the Oslo Accords, and the decades-old blockade of Gaza, the youth digital activists were disrupting the temporalization of

dominant memory and forcing it to adopt a longer historical perspective within which the current events of October 2023 presented the next chapter in the historical struggle.

The second kind of counter-narrative production was the conscious elevation of the Palestinian voices, journalists, academics, doctors, ordinary civilians, to the fore in a situation where activists claimed that the Palestinian voices were being sidelined systematically in the mainstream media of the West. Quoting, sharing Palestinian content creators and commentators was precisely theorized in most of the posts as a kind of political intervention: a refusal of the representational silencing of Palestinian voices and an insistence on the epistemic authority of those who have a direct experience of the conflict. The practice is echoed by feminist and postcolonial academic practices that have theorized the politics of representation and voice and is an example of how youth digital activists look backconflictds to critical intellectual traditions in their social media practice, which is usually implicit.

The place of Comparative Historical Framing

One of the most analytically interesting and unique discursive strategies outlined in the data set was the use of comparative historical analogies whereby the Israel-Palestine conflict is contextualized by analogies to apartheid South Africa specifically and to histories of settler colonialism more broadly. Such comparisons served rhetorical purposes to mobilize the audiences whose political aconflicteness was shaped by other histories of anti-colonial resistance to create a Palestinian resistance as a historically familiar narrative rather than a culturally specific or religiously particular conflict. The apartheid comparison was especially common in the works produced by or aimed at African and diaspora youth audiences to capitalize on the appeal of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa as a global symbol of effective resistance against colonial racial oppression.

These types of comparative frames are an advanced rhetoric and political approach that demonstrates the aconflicteness of youth digital activists that they are trying to address various audiences and convince them. Through translation of the particular history and politics of the Israel-Palestine conflict into the narrative structures of various political communities, digital activists strive to create wide alliances of solidarity among various cultural, national, and ideological groups. The analytical simplicity of this strategy is not without its own analytical cost: the simplifications of analogical reasoning put the Palestinian historical experience at risk of being obscured by the specificities of its history and the effectiveness of comparative framing in politics is very much dependent on cultural literacy and political disposition of the audiences in question. However, as a communicative approach to transnational politics mobilization, the use of comparative historical frames is a complex and socially meaningful type of digital politics.

Theme Three: Digital Aesthetics as Political Practice.

The Aestheticization of Political Information, Visual Activism, and Info-graphics.

The third significant theme is the discussion of the role of digital aesthetics, the visual and aesthetic aspects of the content of solidarity, as a tool of political communications and mobilization. A significant portion of visually advanced content was represented in the dataset: professionally designed infographics outlining historical data, casualty numbers, and legal arguments; graphic solidarity images that were based on iconic protest visual traditions; illustrated maps that described the geography of occupation and displacement and digitally composited images that combined textual commentary with photographic documentation. The visual literacy and digital production capabilities of youth content creators and their perception of the importance of aesthetic appeal in attracting attention and inspiring sharing

in the algorithmically competitive landscape of social media were reflected in the quality of production and aesthetic sophistication of a good deal of this content.

The most analytically important kind of visual that appeared in the dataset was the infographic. Infographics involving statistical data, historical timelines, and political analysis in visually understandable formats were widely distributed in all three platforms, and were intended to be saved, shared, and reposted by followers with little time or interest in reading more in-depth analyses. The sociological value of the infographic as a political communication element is its ability to convert and present the intricate historical and political data as a consumable, easily shared and emotionally engagements visual expression without degrading the content of the political message. Epistemic and political interests of this translation were tacitly acknowledged by youth digital activists who created infographics that needed to be attractive and scholarly to the eye but also frequently designed in a manner that the rebuttal they faced was foreseen and countered in advance.

Memes, Hashtags, and the Language of Digital Solidarity

In addition to the more serious register of documentary and educational content, the dataset consisted of a considerable amount of content using humor, irony, and the vernacular aesthetics of internet meme culture as the tools of political satire and solidarity assertion. Popular cultural references and television clips as well as familiar internet formats with the memes adaptations attacking political leaders, international bodies, and mainstream media portrayals of the conflict were viral, especially on TikTok and X. Such sociological importance of political meme production is the ability to talk to the audience since they may be hostile to direct political argument via the more emotional medium of humor, common cultural identification, and the joys of recombinatory creativity.

Hashtag campaigns were also a unique type of online solidarity practice jointly comprising aesthetic coordination, information aggregation, and political expression. Such campaigns as #FreePalestine, #GazaGenocide, #CeasefireNow, or the one about the blockading of ships ferrying military goods into Israel, called BlockTheBoat, provided digital platforms where youth activists around the world could share a symbolic action and add their own content and voice to it. The hashtag not only serves the purpose of a search engine allowing one to find content of solidarity but also serves as a symbol of collective identity and political orientation and a data structure that brings scattered individual acts of expression together into a visible collective political act. The realization that the hashtag campaigns can serve as the tools of political organization and the construction of solidarity is a valuable aspect of the digital activism study, and the case of Israel-Palestine can offer especially fruitful resources to analyze the dynamics of this movement.

Theme Four: Navigating Algorithmic Censorship and the Politics of Platform Governance

Documenting and Publicizing Platform Censorship

The fourth and the last significant theme is about the experience, documentation, and political analysis of algorithmic censorship and platform governance by youth digital activists. A large percentage of the data consisted of that which did not necessarily declare support to Palestine directly but instead recorded and criticized the censorship of Palestine-related material on large sites, an unusual meta-level level of activism fixing on the politics of digital infrastructure instead of the conflict itself. This meta-activism also took various forms: posts about personal experience of being removed off content and having their account restricted, threads of reported experiences of shadow banning, as well as analysis of the political implications of platform censorship using documented experiences and Human Rights Watch reporting; calls to boycott certain platforms or to migrate to other spaces.

The empirical data presented in the literature of algorithmic governance is significant, as the platform censorship that is documented in the publicly available digital material. Several instances in the dataset have creators directly contrasting their engagement analytics between Palestine-related and non Palestine-related material, which offers a visual representation of significantly lowered reach to solidarity material. The text of automated content removal notifications received after the posting of material that they contended did not breach the platform community standards were documented by others. This amateur form of documentation practice - carried out by a single creator with no research methodology whatsoever and only the analytics tools made available to all platform users - resembles and even predicts the more formal form of documentation carried out by the human rights organization, as making it indicate that the youth in digital activism are advanced practical researchers of the platform ecologies within which they act.

Tactical Responses and Aesthetics of Evasion

In addition to the reporting and analysis of platform censorship, a rich repertoire of tactical response was also seen in the dataset of which the youth digital activists tried to get around the algorithmic suppression whilst continuing to circulate solidarity content. A combination of these tactical adaptations would constitute what could be called an aesthetics of evasion an arsenal of creative strategies of generating politically useful content within and in opposition to the platform governance. The variety and level of these strategies are analytically important and reflect practical digital literacy and adaptive smarts of youth activists in circumstances of structural constraint.

The most widespread means of evasion that have been documented were the substitution of potentially filtered text with images of text, defeating content moderation algorithms based on keywords, the strategic use of non-English languages, especially Arabic and Urdu, in captions and hashtags to escape filtering systems that were primarily tuned to English content; a variety of alternative spellings, typographical word replacements and symbol replacements in sensitive keywords; and the strategic use of trending sound on Tik Tok - associated with attaching political solidarity text to popular non-political audio snippets to ensure it is All these practices demonstrate the dynamic, reactive, and informed-technologically-based nature of digital activism in circumstances of platform censorship, and offer tangible empirical support to theoretical assertions of the interaction between algorithmic power and activist agency in digital politics.

Figures 1: Mapping Youth Digital Solidarity
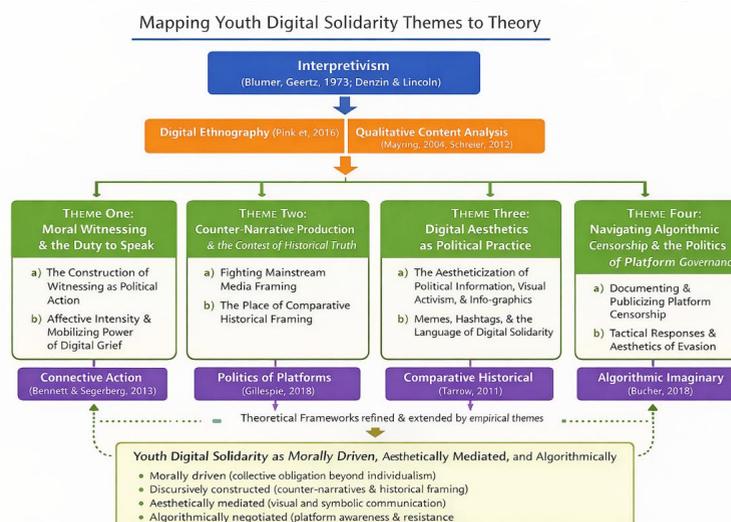
Discussion

The four themes revealed as a result of thematic analysis of the content of youth digital solidarity in the world shed light on a phenomenon of significant sociological importance and theoretical intricacy. The former theme: moral witnessing as political action, builds upon the framework of connective action introduced by Bennett and Segerberg (2013) by showing that digital solidarity is not driven and structured by shared ideological frames or individualized political utterances but rather by a collective moral orientation that forms online witnessing as a kind of political responsibility. This observation can be taken to question the secular individualism of the connective action theory and offers an indication that structures of collective moral obligation, be it religious, ethical, or postcolonial, continue as key organizational forms of digital political engagement even in the era of social media personalization.

The second theme, counter-narrative production and the struggle over historical truth, is empirically contributing to the platform studies literature because it shows how youth digital activists can engage in what Gillespie (2018) refers to as the politics of platforms by employing advanced discursive strategies to undermine the informational authority of mainstream media institutions and form other epistemic communities. The observation that young activists employ comparative historical analogy as an instrument of transnational solidarity-making follows the discussion by Tarrow (2011) about the dynamics of the scale shift as transnational advocacy, in which youth producers of digital contents are able to convert the localized political conflicts into globally intelligible accounts.

The third theme is that of digital aesthetics as political practice integrates into the emerging literature on the visual and aesthetic aspects of digital activism by revealing the importance of visual production capabilities, aesthetic sensibility, and platform literacy to youth online protest. The infographic turns out to be a unique and analytically meaningful genre of political communication which provokes the supposed antagonism of ease and intellectuality of digital political information. The fourth theme of the algorithmic resistance and platform governance introduces valuable empirical substantiation to the theoretical framework of the algorithmic imaginary, proposed by Bucher (2018), and proves the practical knowledge and strategic skill which the youth activists use to find their way in the realm of platform algorithms and their resistance. Combined, the four themes confirm the main argument of the study that global youth digital solidarity is a complicated, structurally determined, and symbolically laden political agency that cannot be viewed with light celebratory and heavy cynical criticism and needs serious sociological consideration.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This qualitative analysis has discussed youth digital solidarity activism around the world regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the lens of digital ethnography and qualitative analysis of publicly-available social media posts on Instagram, X, and Tik Tok. The thematic analysis produced four major results, namely: that youth digital activism is structured around a construction of online witnessing as moral and political responsibility; that it is structured around the use of advanced counter-narrative strategies that politically challenge mainstream media frames through historical contextualization, voice amplification and comparative framing; that it is produced through visually and aesthetically expert content-especially infographics and meme-based forms of political critique- which serves as portable political education and performance of collective solidarity; and that it involves creative, adaptive, and technologically informed tactical responses to platform.

All these findings indicate that global youth digital solidarity is a profoundly entrenched, structurally oriented and politically earnest mode of collective action, which plays a part in the re-formation of transnational youth politics in the digital era.

The following recommendations are put forconflictd based on these findings. Digital activism scholars, media studies scholars, and the sociology of youth must allocate resources to qualitative and digital ethnographic studies of online solidarity activism in a variety of Global South and non-Western contexts, to build theoretical sufficient frameworks which could explain the religious, postcolonial, and non-liberal aspects of digital political action that Western-based frameworks of connective action poor capture; such study must be undertaken through genuine methodological plurality, which incorporates both computational analysis of large-scale digital data and the interpretive eloquence of qualitative and ethn The companies of digital platforms, namely Meta, ByteDance (Tik Tok), and X Corp, are long overdue receiving independent and external auditing systems of their systems of content moderation and content amplification, and such processes should be applied in detail to the reported patterns of suppression of political speech regarding armed conflicts and human rights situations, and should create transparent and accessible systems of appeals to allow ordinary users to challenge the unjustified content removal; these reforms are necessary not only as a commercial interest but as a liability of the quasi-public communicative infrastructure that major platforms have become. Platform regulation of conflict-related political speech should be a primary advocacy focus of civil society organizations addressing digital rights, freedom of expression and media justice, and they should establish an evidentiary relationship with researchers and youth activist communities to record the patterns of censorship, develop accountability campaigns targeting platform companies and the regulatory conditions in which they operate, and create educational resources to empower youth digital activists with the practical knowledge of their rights and the tools that they can use to protect their online political speech. Lastly, teachers and agencies working with young people ought to appreciate the role of digital activism as an important location of political agency, critical literacy, and civic articulation to the articulate young people of today, and encompass digital media literacy lessons focused on platform politics, algorithmic authority, information judgment, and the ethics of political online activism into educational institutions, including in non-formal contexts, collaborating with youth activists whose continued practice and investment in political activism is invaluable teaching assets.

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