

Article

The Voice of Silence: Patterns of Digital Participation Among Palestinian Women in East Jerusalem

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Abstract

Facebook is one of the world's largest social networks, with more than 2,7 billion active users globally. It is also one of the most dominant platforms and one of the platforms most commonly used by Arabs. However, connecting via Facebook and sharing content cannot be taken for granted. While many studies have focused on the role played by networked platforms in empowering women in the Arab world in general and on feminist movements in the Arab Spring, few have explored Palestinian women's use of Facebook. During and after the Arab Spring, social media was used as a tool for freedom of expression in the Arab world. However, Palestinians in East Jerusalem using social media witnessed a decrease in freedom of expression, especially after the Gaza war in 2014. This article focuses on the Facebook usage patterns and political participation of young adult Palestinian women living in the contested space of East Jerusalem. These women live under dynamic power struggles as they belong to a traditionally conservative society, live within a situation of intractable conflict, and are under state control as a minority group. Qualitative thematic analysis of 13 in-depth interviews reveals three patterns of usage, all related to monitoring: state monitoring, kinship monitoring, and self-monitoring. The article conceptualises these online behaviours as "participation avoidance," a term describing users' (non-)communicative practices in which the mundane choices of when, why, and how to *participate* also mirror users' choices of when, why, and how to *avoid*.

Keywords

Facebook; Israeli-Palestinian conflict; Jerusalem; participation; women

Issue

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1. Introduction

Ten years after the Arab Uprisings (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011), it seems that these events are an area upon which expressing one's political opinions or participating in political activities depends on context, circumstances, and gender. Critical perspectives point to networked platforms as sources of constant surveillance and control (Lyon, 2007; Morozov, 2012), emphasising the extent to which networked platforms are intertwined with the power structures in which they operate, thus emphasising the limited opportunities for political mobilisation while the offline circumstances of asymmetrical power

relations remain unchanged (Dahlgren, 2013). More so, the increasing public discourse about surveillance and the "death" of privacy among internet users is leading to what Gillespie (2018) terms "moderation," in which access to content is limited by content moderators who censor or promote it.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has witnessed waves of escalating violence for more than 100 years (Bar-Tal, 2007). In recent years, especially since the 2014 Gaza war, discourse about the conflict has been accompanied by a heated debate regarding the role of social media as a tool for the mobilisation and participation of both Israelis and Palestinians (Al-Masri, 2015); in Israel,

this issue reached a climax when new legislation was advanced to remove offensive content from social media sites in cooperation with Facebook, including digital profiling on the lookout for indications of potential violent attacks (Hirshauga & Sheizaf, 2017). Restricting policies and practices of Israeli and social media companies, especially Facebook, have led to the continual censorship and take-down of Palestinian content, leading to reduced freedom of expression for Palestinian activists (7amleh—The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media, 2019). Following heavy monitoring by Israeli authorities, Facebook removed two major pages operated by East Jerusalem Palestinians. Moreover, 250 Palestinians were arrested in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Nazareth (a Palestinian city located in the north of Israel), during the period October 2015–December 2016, because of political posts that were interpreted as incitement (“Daring to post,” 2016). However, recent events in East Jerusalem concerning evictions from properties in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood were heavily broadcast through social media platforms, especially Instagram and TikTok (de Vries, 2021; Leshem, 2021). The broadcasting was part of a digital campaign and activism of local and international people (e.g., Mona al Kurd’s Instagram profile). Sheikh Jarrah’s hashtag demonstrates the intensive online solidarity with the families who were at risk of eviction. The social media platforms had to host the virtual struggle of the Sheikh Jarrah eviction with all sorts of content. Such extensive online political participation of Palestinians has somewhat posed a different reality than our initial study proposed. Against this backdrop, we re-established contact with three of our interviewees, asking them about the latest events, and we incorporated their responses in the finding and the conclusion sections.

The main focus of our article is the Facebook usage of young adult Palestinian women living within the contested space of East Jerusalem. We ask: Why do these women prefer not to participate online, and what are their (non-)communicative practices? Delving into these queries, the article further discusses the patterns of digital participation and avoidance which emerged, focusing on the interviewees’ mundane choices of when, why, and how to *participate* as reflecting choices of when, why, and how to *avoid*.

Before going deeper into the findings, we frame the case study considering the local geopolitical context and a theoretical overview focusing on networked platforms and online participation. A discussion about the broader implications of digital media usage by underprivileged groups in contested spaces will be found at the end.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. The Contested City of Jerusalem

The city of Jerusalem has been considered contested since the end of the 1967 War, when the Israeli gov-

ernment voted in favour of annexing the Jordanian part of Jerusalem to the Israeli western part of the city, in the face of condemnation from the international community (Benvenisti, 1996). However, according to international law, East Jerusalem is an illegally occupied city, and the international community and any final resolution should be taken as part of an Israeli-Palestinian negotiation (Klein, 2008; United Nations, 1997). The Israeli and Palestinian narratives are intertwined like a “double helix” (Rotberg, 2006, p. 205) but should be acknowledged as separate (Halperin & Bar-Tal, 2011; Maoz, 2011), especially when it comes to Jerusalem/al-Quds: A city that evokes national and religious feelings in both people. It is our objective in this study to look at the Palestinian narrative of East Jerusalem. The power relations between Palestinians and Jews in Jerusalem are asymmetrical. Israelis are full citizens whose status and residency cannot be revoked; the Palestinian residents who remained in the city after the war were given the status of “permanent residency,” enabling them to work within and move around Israel and to receive social rights such as welfare and health insurance, but this permanent resident status is contingent upon proving continuous physical presence in the city (Shtern, 2016).

The number of Palestinians living in the city has increased from approximately 68,000 people in 1967 to 341,453 in 2019 (Association for Civil Rights in Israel, 2019). The Palestinian community conforms to one-third of the city’s population, alongside the Jewish community. This community, which is a poor, neglected, and marginalised group, is a cause of concern to the authorities (Appadurai, 2006). Civil society in East Jerusalem has become weaker in recent years, specifically since the outbreak of Al-Aqsa Intifada in the year 2000. Poverty, crime, and violent resistance have increased (Alyan et al., 2012; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2011). This has been exacerbated by the fact that official and formal Palestinian institutions are prohibited from operating in Jerusalem, leaving Palestinians in East Jerusalem with nowhere to turn in times of trouble (Cohen, 2011; Dumper, 2011; Klein, 2001; Tamari, 2003). Furthermore, the construction of the separation barrier, also called the “Wall,” around Jerusalem has had a fundamental impact on the functional and economic viability of East Jerusalem as a regional metropolitan centre (Cohen, 2011; Shtern, 2016). The palpably tense relationship between their status as semi-citizens of Israel and their Palestinian national identity is reflected in this study.

2.2. Internet in East Jerusalem

There is very little research into the internet infrastructure in East Jerusalem, as most of the corpus refers to the West Bank and Gaza. In the Oslo Peace negotiations, there was an attempt to establish a Palestinian telecommunications platform (Ben-David & Bahour, 2009; Khoury-Machool, 2007). However, it was not an independent Palestinian communication network

as it was conditional upon the consent of Bezeq—Israel’s national communications company (Aouragh, 2011; Ben-David, 2012). We embrace Aouragh and Chakravartty’s (2016) approach about communication’s infrastructure as *both* the material stuff of cables and wires that have long been seen as modern public goods as well as the “soft” and more amorphous networks of cultural exchange shaped by colonial powers (Aouragh & Chakravartty, 2016, p. 564). Hence, existing landlines or Wi-Fi networks in Jerusalem are an integral part of the internet infrastructure of the Palestinians living in the city. As Palestinian institutions and companies are prohibited from operating in Jerusalem, Palestinians there have no choice but to use an Israeli-owned internet network. During the Oslo talks, the Israelis refused to allow Palestinian telecommunications infrastructure into East Jerusalem, and the Palestinians refused to wire a separate network if East Jerusalem is not included (Ben-David et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, Palestinians in East Jerusalem and the West Bank are considered heavy internet users, and in 2016, 62.7% were connected to the internet (Internet Live Stats, 2016). According to the digital report in Palestine, conducted by Ipoke (2020), 76.9% of the participants declared that Facebook was their favourite platform, making it the most popular network platform for Palestinians. Women users of social networks in Palestine constitute 46.8% of the total. They also constitute 46% of the total Facebook users in Palestine (Ipoke, 2020). From looking at these two statistics alone, we can understand that Facebook use occurs daily. However, the conception of scholars, politicians, and “ordinary users” that Facebook helps to promote democracy has been undermined recently, as Israeli surveillance of Facebook and other social media platforms has become more sophisticated and effective (Gillespie, 2018; Hirshauga & Sheizaf, 2017; Tawil-Souri & Aouragh, 2014; Yaari, 2017). Moreover, while looking on Twitter, Siapera (2014) demonstrated how online news sharing about the Palestinian struggle and the calls to action co-construct homophily instead of engagement with opponents. Also, there are questions regarding young Palestinian activists’ use of social media for campaigns and protests due to Palestinian politics developing outside the structures of official parties and formal political organisations (de Vries et al., 2015; Dwonch, 2017). While most of these researchers referred to Palestine as a whole, in this article, we discuss these issues from an as yet under-researched perspective, that is, of Palestinian women.

2.3. *The Use of Networked Platforms by Arab Women*

Women in the Arab world use social networks, but the number of users is relatively low. For example, in 2017, only 32.3% of Facebook users in the Arab world were women (Salem, 2017), while more than 50% of Facebook users in Western countries, such as the United States, Britain, and Spain, were women (Al Omoush et al., 2012).

One of the main reasons for this inequality and the gendered digital gap between men and women in the Arab world is the social and cultural norms in Arab societies that construct the roles and expectations of women. Another major reason is family pressure and monitoring of how women use social media (Choudhury & Al-Araj, 2018; Odeh, 2018).

However, most reports and studies dealing with the use of social networks do not emphasise the gender aspect, making it difficult to obtain statistical data regarding the use and online activities of Arab women (Sreberny, 2015). Other studies have focused on the role of social networks in promoting and empowering Arab women, and on feminists’ and feminist movements’ use of social networks during the Arab Spring (Mourtada & Salem, 2012). As the patriarchal and conservative Arab society and the presence of authoritarian regimes in some countries restricted the freedom of expression of Arab women, they expressed their identities, views, and positions on social media because they had no other place to do so (Radsch & Khamis, 2013).

During the Arab Spring, they used social networks to disseminate information, encourage participation in protests, and highlight the desire to bring about political change. In addition, they used them to raise citizens’ awareness of issues related to human and women’s rights (Odine, 2013). The identities of some of these Arab users were known, but others preferred to share content anonymously, meaning they often used fake names for safety whilst hiding their political participation on social networks from their families (Radsch & Khamis, 2013).

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2017), women constitute approximately 48% of the total Palestinian population living in Jerusalem. Palestinian women living in Jerusalem have low participation in the workforce: only 22% in 2016. Their low employment rate is recognised as one of the main causes of the high poverty rate within the Palestinian population in Jerusalem (Naftali, 2018). Women have limited access to education, less chance of gaining fair employment conditions, and they also face the conservative expectation that women should stay at home to take care of the housework and children (Alyan et al., 2012; Berger, 2017). There is little research about Palestinian women and social media (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2011); hence we aim to broaden the knowledge about online participation, or the lack of it, by this specific group.

2.4. *Online (Non-)Participation*

Networked platforms have opened a window onto examining practices of online participation. Jenkins (2006) describes a set of digital tools and skills based on different modes of participation in media cultures. One of the salient features of online participation is political action and activism (Boulianne, 2015); “ordinary” users can take an active part in creating political campaigns and mobilising people to participate in various forms

(Gerbaudo, 2012; Gillespie, 2018; Lim, 2012; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013). The platforms' affordances allow users to convey information and potentially raise social awareness (Vraga et al., 2015).

Nonetheless, the same affordance that potentially renders Facebook for political expression may also pose challenges, as expressing political views may result in polarised debate and damaged relationships with friends or family (Gearhart & Zhang, 2015; John & Dvir-Gvirsman, 2015; Mor et al., 2015).

Zuckerman (2014) suggests looking at online participation as a *continuum* as individuals switch between modes of participation throughout the day according to the user's political circumstances, conditions, and social structure (Fuchs, 2014; Pearce et al., 2014; Rosenbaum, 2019). An "extreme" decision is that of disconnectivity (Light, 2014) based on a social critique of media use known as "media refusal" (Portwood-Stacer, 2013). The recent political events in East Jerusalem were, and still are, accompanied by local and global digital activism, mainly on Instagram and TikTok (de Vries, 2021; Leshem, 2021). We are not sure why these events were characterised by increased online participation; is it the mimetic element of TikTok (Hautea et al., 2021)? Is it the timing of evictions and the 2021 Gaza war that put the Palestinian struggle in the headlines? As we attempted to understand media within the context, we tended to answer "yes" to all of the above; thus, we determined Instagram and TikTok to be the best platforms to examine.

With this context in mind, we now turn to the online practices of East Jerusalem Palestinian women, revealing what is left out of the Facebook feed. In what follows, we hope to shed light on the continuum of online participation deriving from the socio-political conditions in East Jerusalem.

3. Methods

The research population comprised 13 Palestinian young adult women interviewees, recruited for the research through social and professional networks at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. All interviewees are residents of East Jerusalem; their ages range from 20 to 36. The small sample of interviews is related to the challenge of reaching out to interviewees. Individuals were afraid to talk about their social media usage habits; it was just too risky to share such information at that time. Knowing this is not a representative sample, this research draws on these as a set of narratives expressing individual experiences (Salem, 2017). But even these narratives, which we describe below, should be read with caution as our stance as academics is that research in itself is a powerful intervention, even if carried out at a distance. When conducting research, whether across cultures or within a minority culture, researchers must recognise the power dynamics rooted in the relationship with their research subjects (Smith, 1999). All the interviewees either hold an academic degree or are studying towards

one. Interviews took place in 2016 and 2017, following the 2014 Gaza war and violent clashes in East Jerusalem in 2014–2015; this period was not characterised by an escalation in the ongoing conflict. We conducted them very carefully, as the political situation in East Jerusalem is violent as this is an occupied territory and there are periods when violence escalates, as frequently happens in intractable conflicts (Kriesberg, 2007). Although the time frame when the interviews took place was not particularly close to that of the Arab Uprisings, their relevance becomes clear if we consider the Palestinian context. Here, the Arab Uprisings were certainly an important event, but the political structure of the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian internal division kept the "Revolution" afar (Dorra, 2014).

All interviews were held at a location chosen by the interviewee, either at a café located in East Jerusalem or at the Hebrew University. Meeting at participants' homes was not a preferred choice of the interviewees, presumably for privacy purposes, as they all lived with their families. It was not easy to find women who were willing to talk with us freely at that time: they were suspicious, mainly because of the research topic. The first part of the interview was open and dealt with the interviewee's individual story, while the second part addressed the topics of social media usage and online participation (Briggs, 1986). The one-and-a-half-hour interviews were conducted in Arabic or English, according to the interviewee's preference. The option of English was offered as one of the authors is not a native Arabic speaker. Three of the interviews were conducted in English, and 10 in Arabic. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed by both authors. All interviewees were presented before the interview with a consent form written in Arabic clearly explaining the research, stating that their anonymity would be maintained and that they did not have to answer any questions that caused them any inconvenience. In addition, interviewees received the authors' contact details and had the opportunity to contact us directly with any request or query concerning the research and their interview.

The initial analysis revealed numerous thematic categories emerging from each interview (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). After rereading a given interview, the number of categories was reduced by combining similar categories and focusing on those emerging as most relevant. Next, the various interviews were integrated via categories they had in common. These categories were scrutinised again for centrality, for the connections between them, and their relevance to the subject of the study. The analysis process revealed three major themes, presented in the following section.

4. Findings

Qualitative thematic analysis of 13 in-depth interviews reveals three patterns of usage, all related to monitoring: state-monitoring, kinship-monitoring, and

self-monitoring. The article conceptualises these online behaviours as patterns of digital participation, describing users' (non-)communicative practices in which mundane choices of when, why, and how to *participate* also mirror users' choices of when, why, and how to *avoid*.

4.1. State Monitoring

By state monitoring, we mean the political regime's control over the freedom of speech and expression of its residents, citizens, and others, including that of social media platforms specifically and internet content in general. We could have referred to it as state censorship, but we see the penetration and control of the state as a long-term method to oversee the activity of its citizens; hence, the notion of monitoring was chosen as it includes observation over a period of time. It is one of the central themes that emerged and is related to the notion of online self-censorship. As reflected in the quotes below, interviewees describe practices of choosing *not* to engage with politics online from a young age. These practices are mainly described as a reaction to Israel's internet monitoring and surveillance.

Najwa (F, 23) said: "I don't write anything political on Facebook; I have been aware of this since I was a child and since I opened my Facebook [account]. We are not allowed to go into anything political. Anything!"

Fatma (F, 25) described the effect of the monitoring on her online participation action: "Recently many friends and people I know have been arrested because of posts they wrote on Facebook. My mother warned [me] not to write anything. And I also didn't want to write anything."

Dana (F, 22) has concerns that posting political content on Facebook will indirectly or directly harm her academic studies and later also her livelihood and future, so she refrains from sharing political content:

I believe that the content that people post on Facebook can harm them, especially the political content. I am always hesitant about whether to publish certain content, for example, whether to publish a post about a protest, because I believe that such a post could harm me as a student at the Hebrew University [an Israeli university]. I also know people who were not hired for certain jobs because of the content they posted on Facebook. Sometimes we decide not to post certain content or to express our opinions because we are aware that this content can severely damage our lives.

Maisa (F, 22) stressed that the period in which some young Palestinian women began to use Facebook was a period of political tension, which led the parents and teachers of these young women to warn them against using it:

When we [women in their 20s] started to become aware and started using Facebook and social net-

works, it was in a time of war in Gaza. During this time, our parents and teachers and most people we know warned us about Facebook. They believed that liking a particular post could endanger our lives and that comments on Facebook were sometimes considered as support of a particular party.

According to the digital report on Palestine (Ipoke, 2020), 76.9% of the respondents said they were aware of Israeli security control over social networks. 66.1% of them said that they took into consideration the Palestinian security control over social media sites.

The theme described above is consistent with these findings; it demonstrates how users are aware of the blurred lines between their online and offline activity, thus stressing the importance of the political context when examining social media. Such heavy surveillance is fully discussed within the family, indicating that elders are also aware of the risks of publishing political content. Despite arguments made by scholars such as Castells (2007) on how user empowerment undermines the authority of traditional media hierarchies and the state hierarchy, users rarely have any measure of control over information flows (Proferes, 2016). Nonetheless, in the quotes above, we see that users are more informed about this situation and that although they choose to remain on Facebook, they either do not write about politics or they moderate their content.

Maisa's (F, 22) choice of how to write about politics is interesting: "I do not directly share posts about political or military topics and events, but I do address the human side of these events."

These mundane, minor actions of avoiding any writing about politics online may indicate a situation in which users are taking control of their personal opinions and information. It does not mean that they have lost their political views or activism; they simply do not share their views or their activism online, as might be expected. By doing so, they may alter, in a small way, the social structure in which they operate. Furthermore, as observed in places such as Mardin, Turkey, social media reflects the strategies of political "silence" already developed offline (Miller et al., 2016). Hence, when the online context correlates with the offline one—in terms of political and sociological power relations—communicative actions may become non-communicative ones, thus limiting Facebook as a platform for social or political change (de Vries et al., 2015, 2017; Nemer, 2016). Where the above theme shows how interviewees perceive the state as a dominant actor in the online sphere, the second theme demonstrates another aspect of online control that comes from the interviewees' families.

4.2. Kinship Monitoring

Kinship monitoring is the family and relatives' unofficial guardianship. In our case, it is when family and relatives closely monitor and control the activity of family

members and the content they share on social media. Family members and relatives also influence individuals' actions and choices. All interviewees reported that they had blocked or even unfriended family members: This was usually because they were unwilling to have their privacy disrupted by their relatives' supervision or because they were trying to keep their family members safe.

Eman (F, 23) said she was very careful with her posts: "You have to be careful with what you write. Mostly I am careful with what I write because I am trying to be sensitive toward my parents."

Yasmin (F, 20) noted that she opened a new Facebook account, reclaiming her privacy:

I do not remember why, but I still have access to it [her old Facebook account] and can open it, but I do not. Maybe because I had many relatives on it: I had the entire family on my friend list, all my cousins—and as you know, the family is always watching you.

Dana (F, 22) is uncomfortable when using Facebook. She felt stared at by her many relatives on the platform, so she shared little information:

I have many relatives on Facebook. I feel that they are always watching over me: this makes me feel uncomfortable, so whenever I want to share something that I prefer them not to see, I choose the option to hide the post from them.

In some cases, Palestinian women are subject to patriarchal authority in the virtual space, limiting their freedom of expression and shaping their interaction within this circle (Odeh, 2018). This is the case with Dana, who tries to maintain a conservative social behaviour and attitude on Facebook. To cope with the family's close control, she makes every effort to ensure that the content of her Facebook activity complies with the roles and expectations of a Palestinian woman. She adapts to the cultural and social norms that were constructed in Palestinian society over the decades: "I usually try to make the content I post on Facebook compatible with the values of Palestinian Arab society. I consider that we are a conservative society."

Razan (F, 21) notes that if she publishes content that does not match society's values, she will be exposed to a lot of criticism and opposition. As a result, she ultimately decides not to publish such content:

I express my opinions on social issues. A lot of people do not accept it and criticise me because I criticise the values of our society. So sometimes, I hesitate whether to publish content specifically related to feminism that arouses religious sensitivity in some people, as if I am criticising the religion. This content may provoke strong opposition and criticism, and in the end, I decide not to publish.

The quotes above show how interviewees attempt to regain control over their privacy, as there is always some information they wish to hide from their family. It is important to mention that family members watching over other family members via Facebook is not unique to the Palestinian society; boyd (2014) reflects on this issue extensively in her research into the internet usage of youngsters. Furthermore, this theme indicates that social media platforms such as Facebook can be seen as ultra-conservative platforms for their users (Al-Maimani, 2021; Ghannam, 2011; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2011). As demonstrated here, in certain instances, women are obligated to hide or moderate their online activities, even while participating anonymously, in order to create a sense of safety and freedom for themselves (Al Omoush et al., 2012; Radsch & Khamis, 2013).

4.3. Self-monitoring

Self-monitoring is people's control of their own discourse and behaviour in different social media platforms over a period of time. The third theme raises another aspect of online avoidance in which interviewees use practices of filtering content, either their own content or that of others that appears on their Facebook feed, even at the cost of disconnecting from their online friends. Such actions thereby create a new "personal public sphere" (John & Gal, 2018), following the notion of online participation as a continuum, and adhering to what Gillespie (2018) frames as digital moderation. Amal and Rabab describe such self-monitoring and its implications:

No, I'm not like the rest. I prefer posting pictures of people who are alive, because it's not respectful to post photos of them dead, and I posted a lot about this and some friends blocked me. (Amal, F, 36)

We saw people burned and distorted bodies, body parts, hands, legs, and children under attack. Look at how mentally distorted we have become. I talked about this with my friends, how wrong this is for us to become a part of it. I see myself as responsible, and I have intelligent followers who trust me and my news. I will never share such photos, even if they are influential. (Rabab, F, 25)

Eman (F, 23) raises another issue relating to Facebook as a platform and to the ethical dilemmas of fake news and unfiltered content: "First, I do not trust them [Facebook pages], and second, I don't like seeing that on my page, like you know the bleeding: every time something happens, they post the picture with no filter."

These actions of self-monitoring may create a unique world moderated by its user, as explained by Razan (F, 21): "I feel like I can post what I want on Facebook; I can create a world that suits me."

More so, by avoiding emotionally disruptive content, the interviewees also indicate a larger problem of ethical

standards faced by networked platforms, thus revealing their own ideological stance and their functioning as self-sufficient trackers, and to some extent, they fulfil the role of a monitor, but of themselves. Further, the quotes above may provide a partial explanation of why 37% of Palestinians surveyed about their social media usage considered closing their Facebook account at least once in 2015. Does self-monitoring empower our interviewees? We will discuss this in the following sections.

5. Discussion

Summarising the findings, three themes were identified as driving the cautious behaviour of online avoidance: state monitoring, kinship monitoring, and self-monitoring. The first two themes concern the interviewees' adoption of online avoidance techniques and self-censorship based on the power structure relations in which they operate—Israeli state monitoring and the dominance of the family structure and conservative social bonds. The interviewees' behaviour suggests that the Facebook platform has become, in certain ways, a dangerous space where anything posted may come back to haunt the user. The third theme stresses the social price that comes with the act of filtering and moderating content on Facebook.

This study aims to shed light on one of the most contested and sensitive areas in the Middle East, the city of Jerusalem, focusing on young adult Palestinian women. By presenting some of the online practices of the women we interviewed, we can understand how this population, which belongs to a marginalised and vulnerable group, uses Facebook in the context of the intractable Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The findings provide us with an opportunity to contemplate the role of networked platforms in women's lives, thus rethinking concepts such as democratisation and liberation, which were, and to a certain extent still are, connected to networked platforms.

5.1. Limited Freedom of Expression

It emerged from the findings that the interviewees try to use Facebook as a space for expressing identity and expressing opinions regarding social topics and issues (Al Omoush et al., 2012). However, as our findings point out, there are also social and political restrictions on Facebook use which restrict individuals' freedom of expression, especially women. It was clear that the interviewees are expected to behave conservatively while using Facebook, so they are expected not to share content that contradicts the patriarchal values which women in Palestinian society might experience (Odeh, 2018). Sharing content that does not conform to the community's cultural values is highly likely to expose them to criticism and opposition. The interviewees unequivocally stated that they refrain from sharing content that contains public political statements, as a result of both state digital monitoring of political content posted by

Palestinians (de Vries et al., 2015) and of their families' monitoring of their political content due to a fear of consequences; thus, they are in effect monitored both by the state and the family. Therefore, their political freedom of expression on Facebook has become very limited (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2011).

5.2. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite the importance of our findings to the understanding of Facebook and other networked platforms as limited spaces for expression, this study also has certain limitations. First, the research is limited because it is built on one case study based on a small number of interviews. Further research should broaden the number of interviews, thus exploring more diverse practices of non-participation among other marginalised groups to better understand the inherent tension facing social media users living in asymmetrical conflict and within contested spaces. More so, as recent events in East Jerusalem reveal, other networked platforms such as Instagram (another platform now owned by the Facebook corporation) are increasingly used by young Palestinians; according to 7amleh—The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media (2019), 45.7% of the Palestinian youth use Instagram. Nevertheless, we hope that this study will contribute to the emerging discourse focusing on non-participation and digital moderation as a continuum of options (Gillespie, 2018)

6. Conclusions

This specific case study demonstrates that users understand the impact of these platforms. They adopt a critical perspective toward the platform, based on the incursion of reality into their digital spaces (Benkler, 2016) and thus employ different kinds of online participation—such as *not* posting, *not* sharing, and moderating political content—which all involve avoidance of participation. While choosing to engage in non-communicative behaviour in the digital age is becoming more and more prevalent, not long ago it was considered subversive (Portwood-Stacer, 2013).

Whereas research about online participation has focused on the importance of “having a voice,” Crawford (2009) offers the metaphor of listening as a productive way to analyse the forms of online engagement which have been overlooked. She also suggests these listening practices as a part of a continuum of online participation, as it is not a binary situation of only two options—having a voice or being silent. We adhere to Crawford's distinction, thus suggesting that our interviewees adapt their voices according to the bindings of the structure within which they operate, deciding when to be heard and when to be silent.

But it is also an individual choice of the cost a person is willing to pay, whether now or later. The cost that an individual will pay can vary; a person will have to

bear the consequences of challenging their society, such as exclusion. Arrest is another possible price an individual might pay when challenging the authorities. Looking at the recent events in East Jerusalem, we also think that choosing to participate online is also a matter of the relationship between an individual and the collective. Perhaps, collective action is the motive in this case. Participating in an activity that contributes to a common community goal makes it easier to bear the consequences. We conducted three brief follow-up interviews to examine how virtual avoidance was shaped in the light of recent events. The three interviewees explained that they did not share any political content on Facebook; they even said they had begun to reduce their participation on Facebook. This was clear from Maisa's words: "I still don't share any political content on Facebook, I have also started reducing my Facebook activity." They started using other platforms such as Instagram more frequently. Dana confirmed:

The platform I use most nowadays is Instagram. I have been sharing political content on Instagram for a while; I believe that it's important to share this kind of content. It's important to state that my family and I are enthusiastic about sharing certain political content on Instagram because Instagram stories are deleted within 24 hours.

In addition, looking back, a decade ago at the Arab "Spring" uprisings, it is common to say these events produced modest political and economic changes and gains for some of the region's inhabitants (Robinson, 2020). Nevertheless, the continuum of online participation and digital activism, as our case study presents, may contribute to the ongoing struggle against constructed socio-political inequalities, pointing to how networked platforms are not the only cause of the Arab uprisings and other online struggles, and to how they contribute to the counter-revolutions till today.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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