



THE DISSEMINATION OF PALESTINIAN NEWS ON
FACEBOOK: A CASE STUDY OF PALESTINIAN
JOURNALISTS

BY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the usage of Facebook among Palestinian journalists for dissemination of Palestinian news. The study focuses on Palestine news, from both Gaza Strip and West Bank, whereby these territories have witnessed rapid updates on daily life events through social media development. This study was directed by three research questions, which are: (1) How do Palestinian journalists frame Palestinian news on Facebook? (2) What is the rationale behind Palestinian journalists' decision in choosing Facebook to disseminate news to their followers? and (3) How significant is Facebook in changing the landscape of journalism practice in Palestine?. Framing Theory was employed in this study to investigate how Palestinian journalists frame the Palestinian news on Facebook. In order to answer the research questions, qualitative research method was adopted by conducting in-depth interviews with Palestinian journalists who are currently working in Palestine, own Facebook account and disseminate news through that social media platform. Data were collected through purposive sampling and later analysed using thematic analysis. It was found that Palestinian journalists frame their news posted on Facebook based on human interest frame, attribution of responsibility frame, morality frame, political frame, and public opinion frame. They use Facebook as a medium to disseminate the news because it is broadly used and popular, user-friendly and effective application, and allowing freedom of expression. The adoption of Facebook in the dissemination of news has changed the media landscape in Palestine by being a significant journalistic tool, increasing rapidity in news dissemination, becoming new source of information and encouraging two-way communication.

ملخص البحث

تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى إستكشاف طبيعة إستخدام الفيسبوك بين الصحفيين الفلسطينيين في عملية نشر الاخبار الفلسطينية. وتتركز هذه الدراسة على الاخبار التي تتعلق بالشأن الفلسطيني في مدن الضفة الغربية وقطاع غزة، تلك المناطق التي تشهد سرعة في تحديث الاخبار والمستجدات عبر وسائل الإعلام المتطورة. حيث تقوم هذه الدراسة على ثلاث أسئلة بحثية رئيسية؛ أولاً: كيف يتناول الصحفيون الفلسطينيون الأخبار المحلية الفلسطينية على صفحاتهم الفيسبوك؟ وما هي الأسباب خلف قرار الصحفيين الفلسطينيين لاختيارهم الفيسبوك لنشر الأخبار؟ و ما مدي أهمية الفيسبوك في تغير المشهد الإعلامي الفلسطيني؟. توظف هذه الدراسة نظرية التأطير للتحقيق في كيفية بناء وتأطير الاخبار الفلسطينية من قبل الصحفيين الفلسطينيين. تعتمد هذه الدراسة منهج البحث النوعي وذلك باستخدام طريقة المقابلات عبر البريد الالكتروني (الايمل) من أجل الحصول على البيانات المطلوبة من قبل مجموعة من الصحفيين الفلسطينيين الذين يقيمون في الأراضي الفلسطينية و قائمين على رأس عملهم، و يستخدمون الفيسبوك لنشر الاخبار. وقد تم جمع البيانات من خلال إختيار عينة هادفة وتم تحليلها في وقت لاحق باستخدام التحليل الموضوعي. وتبين في نتائج هذه الدراسة بأن الصحفيون الفلسطينيون يأترون الاخبار وينشورنها على صفحاتهم الفيسبوك بناءً على خمس أطر معينة وهي، إطار المصلحة الإنسانية، إطار المسؤولية، إطار الأخلاق، إطار سياسي، إطار الرأي العام. و تبين أيضاً أنهم يستخدمون الفيسبوك لنشر الاخبار وذلك لعدة أسباب وهي أن الفيسبوك يُستخدم على نطاق واسع، و سهلة الإستخدام و تطبيق فعال، و حرية التعبير. و تبين أيضاً ان إعتقاد الفيسبوك في نشر الاخبار قد أحدث تغير كبير في المشهد الإعلامي الفلسطيني و أهمها؛ إعتبار الفيسبوك أداة صحفية مهمة لدى الصحفيين، و زيادة سرعة نشر الأخبار، أصبح الفيسبوك مصدراً جديداً للمعلومات الإخبارية، وتشجع في عملية التواصل في كلا الإتجاهين.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion; it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Communication.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved parents

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Despite the multiple ways how news is disseminated, the purpose of informing the public on events, facts and matters concerning public interest through media organizations remains the same (Quebec Press Council, 2003). Dissemination of news has undergone various transformation processes from printing to broadcasting to entering the world of social media. This is seen as a strategic tool for news dissemination as expressed by Cudis (2012) and Giannatelli (2014) in their studies. The influence of social media on today's news dissemination is undeniably important. Facebook as an example has changed the field of journalism on news dissemination (Young, 2015; Bates, 2015).

The journalism industry benefits from the use of social media such as Facebook to disseminate unfolding events to the public. Anderson and Caumont (2014) and Lynch (2015) affirm that Facebook is one of the most important news vehicle for many media organizations. The contributing factor to its fast adoption is the rate of speed on news dissemination (Osborne and Dredze, 2014 and Newton, 2015) thus reducing the monopoly of traditional media on news publishing (Kaul, 2013).

Facebook, the fastest growing social medium with over one billion and a half of active users until the second quarter of 2016, has transformed journalism practice (Statista, 2016; Urban & Bodoky, 2013). Given its profound presence and efficacy in people's lives, it has become a convenient source for people to get up to date of news

and information, and platform for users to interact with people for different purposes (Abdulahi, Samadi and Gharleghi, 2014; Bakhurst, 2011; Lenzi et al., 2015; Rouis, Limayem & Sangari, 2011).

The present study seeks to extend the existing research on the usage of Facebook in journalism industry, particularly in news dissemination. Hence, the contention of this study is to understand how Palestinian journalists frame the news using Facebook and to explore the significance of this in Palestinian media landscape from Palestinian journalists' perspective. While there has been considerable research carried out on the usage of Facebook by Palestinians in general and somewhat relevant to this proposed study (Hamooda, 2013; Al-masri, 2014; Khater, 2015), it would be interesting to address this issue from an academic perspective to shed some light on how Palestinian journalists utilize Facebook in their profession.

The journalism practice in Palestine works in a dangerous environment due to Israeli - Palestine ongoing conflict, political and social instability. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a study in Palestine in a way to enhance and uphold the Palestinian media landscape in times of turmoil concurrent with the uprising of social media. Palestinian media organizations and journalists have always been targeted by both Israeli occupation and Palestinian leadership authorities as they practice censorship and harassment toward the former. This requires the researcher to run this study for exploring how Palestinian journalists frame and disseminate news on Facebook, and to find out the changes of Palestinian media environment. Thus, the researcher's interest in this study is to examine the journalists' experience while working under pressure. Moreover, this study provide additional literature on Palestinian journalists.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The emergence of social media such as Facebook challenges the traditional practice of journalism. Nevertheless, social media hold significant function on the dissemination of news, particularly in this information age (Ciuecu, 2013; Kashi & Makki, 2013). Despite the advantage of accelerating the process on news dissemination and increasing the engagement of journalists (Franco, 2009; Lynch, 2015; Lucey, 2014), the credibility of news posted on Facebook could be questioned. For instance, Lynch (2015) expresses that the uprisings in the Arab countries have turned Facebook into a highly destructive rumour and falsehood platform. The questions on the authenticity and verification of sources pose daunting challenges for news dissemination via Facebook, even by professional journalists (Bullard, 2013; American Press Institute, 2016). Any journalist can conveniently gather news from secondary sources and republish them at the expense of his reputation (Shutterstock, 2016) which further escalates the issues of authenticity and originality.

The ease of using Facebook' platform allow the public to involve directly in every aspect of journalism practice, such as news production and dissemination. These encourage online fakery and therefore reduce the credibility of news disseminated through Facebook. As a result it has affected users' perception of Facebook news consumption. Prior to the advent of social media, journalists have been less involved with events in the location work due to their dependency on user-generated content (Bei, 2013). According to Haak, Parks and Castells (2012), using Facebook for publishing news poses certain crisis to the practice of journalism and journalists such as, it requires frequent updates, especially in Palestine, whereby the political conflict has always been the main issue being discussed among society. This situation has impacted on the increase of journalists' workload.

Users identify and follow social media that provide constant updates and news. This demands journalist to frequently update information via their public profile. Indirectly, this increases the journalists' workload while encourages higher dependency on the social media to circulate news. Due to these issues, this study aims to explore the subject of news dissemination by social media. To identify the current situation and significance of Facebook usage, a case study is conducted by focusing on news dissemination among Palestinian journalists. Moreover, the research helps to increase knowledge on social media.

Social media such as Facebook is considered as new sites offering means of sharing and discussing the Palestinian cause (Katrina, 2016). The platform creates an opportunity for Palestinians, Arabs, Muslims and international supporters to interact, sharing footages such as images and videos that are normally censored by international mainstream media. The importance of social media among Palestinians was highlighted during the War on Gaza from December 2008 to January 2009 (Ward, 2009). During this turmoil times, the Internet particularly the social media had been the main platform for debates and sharing information among Palestinians. Despite the fact that news dissemination from social media faces the issue of credibility, for many Palestinian civilians, social media provide truth in journalism compare to mainstream media (Dave, 2016). As a result, it can be seen that Facebook has helped people around the world to understand the reality and truth in Palestine, and offering opportunity for stories from both sides to be heard.

Due to unprecedented function in journalism practice, particularly in news dissemination, Facebook enables all users to publish and update the latest news and information worldwide. Therefore, the researcher in this study seeks for better and deeper understanding on the implication of Facebook uses among Palestinian

journalists. Moreover, recent updates on the features of Facebook allow every users to become a journalist. The diversify features that include sharing image, videos, news, links and writing notes allow users to share any news and updates at any convenient time (Katrina, 2016). This presents the significant role of Facebook in society, particularly among Palestinians.

Journalism challenges political stability as the writing helps to educate and increase public awareness of specific matters (Aouragh, 2008). The introduction of the social media has changed the traditional norm of living whereby society is more open to sharing their personal information and thoughts with the general public (Baker, 2009). Moreover, more constructive and innovative ideas can be found via discussion on social networks such as Facebook and BlogSpot (Smith, 2009). Increased dependability on social media influences the evolvement of journalism practice which is seeing more and more journalists using the social media to disseminate news and writings. This motivates the researcher for this study to conduct direct assessment on practicing journalists in their usage of Facebook for news dissemination. For precise and accurate analysis, the sample size focuses on Palestinian journalists.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As more Palestinians turn to Facebook for news and information (Skaik, 2014; Khater, 2015), there are some journalists who exploit this opportunity to use Facebook as a platform to deliver content. As a result, Facebook has made a profound impact on the journalism industry, particularly news dissemination in Palestine, (Bargoth, 2014). Therefore, this study would be significant in exploring the impact of using Facebook among journalists for news dissemination, which might be helpful in drawing the potential guideline for Facebook use in Palestine news industry.

Chari (2013), Hartley and Eberholst (2014) and Jonah (2015) affirm that Facebook has practically influenced and shifted the landscape of journalism. Primary data collected from professional journalists may help to provide deeper, and richer data in understanding the significance of Facebook news dissemination in changing the landscape of journalism practice in Palestine.

Facebook connect people from different demographic attributes. For example since Palestinian land was occupied in 1948 by Israel, Palestinians were forced to leave their homeland to other states around the world. Hence, with advanced communication technology, Facebook has enable them to gather and be connected on one channel. Currently, Palestinians from different parts of the world are benefiting from the rise of social media such as Facebook in order to demand for their rights through spreading the news about their home country worldwide. Therefore, the researcher in this study seeks to provide clearer and deeper understanding of professional Palestinian journalist' viewpoints of using Facebook in their work in order to fulfil the audience's needs.

Social media shifted the traditional practice of journalism which tend to focus on printed materials such as magazines and newspapers. In the 21st century, people regardless of nationality, ethnicity and religiosity communicate through social media such as Facebook, for numerous purposes that include shopping, playing online game, communicating, getting news update and sharing pictures and videos (Garber, 2016). Moreover, increased involvement by private and public sectors in disseminating news and updates has encouraged more individuals to join social media. The purpose of journalism is to provide fast, reliable and accurate information to the public. The introduction of the social media such as Facebook can help to achieve the primary objective of journalism which is to deliver news. As such, the findings of the study

help to prove the significance of Facebook in disseminating Palestinian news. This can help to encourage more Palestinian journalists to consider social media, particularly Facebook as a channel to disseminate news and updates.

On top of that, this study could be a point of reference to other researchers who intend to expand and refine the subject matter. In addition, the findings and results would contribute to the development of journalism in the age of social media, particularly Facebook.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to analyse the usage of Facebook among Palestinian journalists in disseminating Palestinian news. There are three specific objectives for this study which are:

1. To study how Palestinian journalists frame Palestinian news on Facebook.
2. To understand the rationale behind Palestinian journalists' decision in choosing Facebook to disseminate news.
3. To analyse the significance of Facebook in changing the landscape of journalism practice in Palestine.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study is guided by the following research questions.

1. How do Palestinian journalists frame Palestinian news on Facebook?
2. What is the rationale behind Palestinian journalists' decision in choosing Facebook to disseminate news to their followers?
3. How significant is Facebook in changing the landscape of journalism practice in Palestine?

1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study tries to analyse the nature of Facebook usage among professional Palestinian journalists in both Palestinian territories, Gaza Strip and West Bank. These two provinces were chosen for this study as they are the only places governed by Palestinian authorities while other cities are controlled by the Israeli occupation. The focus of this study lies in Palestine news, in which the territories are witnessing rapid updates on daily life events through social media development, whether in Gaza Strip or West Bank.

In this study, Facebook was chosen as it is the largest site among social media sites in terms of number of users in the world, especially in Palestine (Garber, 2016). On top of that, Facebook is also considered as the main news source to the Palestinian people (Najjar, 2015). It also plays a significant role among Palestinian users in various matters related to their daily lives. As Facebook is regarded as a new method for news dissemination, this study aims to evaluate the significance of Facebook usage on dissemination of Palestinian news by professional Palestinian journalists. Professional Palestinian journalists are the selected sample for this study. According to Izikovich and Pfeffer (2013), journalists who stand for a significant position on confrontations with challenges from both sides - the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian authorities - tend to provide accurate reports.

The data were collected from several interviews conducted with professional Palestinian journalists who use Facebook for disseminating news, live in Palestine and are currently working in the news industry. These interviews were carried out to identify how these journalists frame their news on Facebook; the reasons for choosing a social media site and to understand the changes of Palestinian media environment with the usage of Facebook in the news industry. Ten journalists were chosen for this

study from Gaza Strip and West Bank. In order to reach the respondents, the interview was done via. These interviews were conducted from 1st to 25th of October 2016 by the researcher.

The findings of this study is important to improve the knowledge and literature on the significance of Facebook usage for news dissemination in Palestine. Moreover, it helps to provide basis understanding for Palestinian journalists on the critical impacts of using Facebook to disseminate news. Social media such as Facebook reach every part of this world which helps to inform Palestinian refugees and citizens outside of Palestine territory on the latest and current news concerning their country.

1.7 CHAPTERS OUTLINE

This study is organized into five chapters. These chapters are briefly described as follow:

Chapter One introduces all aspects of the research namely, background of the study, problem statement, significance of the study, research objectives, research questions and scope of the study.

Chapter Two reviews the relevant and related literature pertaining to the study, namely journalism and journalists in using new media, Palestinian media landscape and the usage of Facebook in Palestinian journalism practice, Facebook in news dissemination in Palestine and theoretical framework of the study.

Chapter Three narrates the overall research methodology of this study, qualitative methodology chosen for this study, data collection, sampling procedure and data analysis.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the data analysed, and discussion of the research questions of the study.

Chapter Five is the final chapter of the study that presents the conclusion of the findings, the recommendations and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the study aims to explore the usage of Facebook in journalism practice among Palestinian journalists especially in news dissemination, and aims to find out the rationale for choosing Facebook to disseminate the news, it is also important to understand the significance of Facebook in changing the Palestinian media landscape. Thus, this chapter, highlights the literature relevant to the study. There are five sub-sections which are new media and news dissemination, journalism and journalists on Facebook, landscape of Palestinian media, Facebook in Palestinian media and theoretical framework.

2.2 NEW MEDIA AND NEWS DISSEMINATION

The practice of journalism in this era of globalization has witnessed a paradigm shift largely brought about by the transformations and innovations in new social media (Thakur, 2007). According to Salman, Ibrahim, Abdullah, Mustaffa and Mahbob (2011), journalism has witnessed a rapid evolution by means of electronic media, which distinguishes it from traditional practice of journalism. The Internet and social media therefore have a significant role in the transformation of journalism practice. The percentage of information and news coverage by the social media has increased compared to newspapers in recent years (Okon & Eleba, 2013).

Arendt, Matic and Zhu (2012) express that social media have contributed to the rapidity of news dissemination across the globe and have significantly changed the

methods of obtaining news and information. Moreover, the usage of new media channel helps to disseminate news faster compare to traditional media. The rate of more news recycled happens faster via new social media due to the features of share and publish that encourage users to disseminate news through their personal profile (Mitchell & Page, 2013).

Given the profound usage of Facebook in journalism, Ciuecu (2013) and Young (2015) argue that the traditional newspaper industry might find it hard to compete with social networking Internet services such as Facebook and Twitter on news dissemination (Frank, 2012; Hodgetts, 2009). New social media such as Facebook and Twitter provide fast and easy means for disseminating news (Krotoski, 2011). In fact, the culture and technology surrounding journalists today are different than the journalists in the past, of which the later engaged with social media frequently in their work (Hebblethwaite, 2014; Kuyucu, 2014; Obijiofor, 2013).

Utilising new media in journalism, particularly on news dissemination is largely predicated on its ability to function as a provider of public knowledge (Chari, 2013). New media such as Facebook are regarded as the most effective news dissemination tool, storage and consumption due to increasing number of users and worldwide connectivity (Alejandro, 2010). On the other hand, Bradshaw (2011) states that despite these new means in journalism, the traditional media such as radio and television remain as the main source and most referred media for news and information. However, recent studies by Najjar (2015) project that in the near future, the role of new social media will overtake the traditional roles of printed media and television news.

Worldwide, the function of social media such as Facebook and Twitter has outperformed traditional news channel including newspapers, magazines and