



## Policing Content, Censorship

The Israel-Hamas war has once again highlighted the manner in which mass media tend to favor established power structures and controlled narratives. Similarly, as it turned out, the social media walked the same path by policing user-generated content. In recent weeks, there have been multiple instances of pro-Palestinian voices being suppressed on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, X, YouTube, and TikTok. Users have accused these major platforms of censorship, citing experiences of shadowbanning and reduced reach for their pro-Palestinian content. To address these concerns, organizations like the Arab Centre for Social Media Advancement have called on tech companies to respect Palestinian digital rights, as numerous instances of pro-Palestinian censorship have been documented. They highlight the disproportionate censorship of pro-Palestinian content, which includes content takedowns, hidden hashtags, and account restrictions, posing a grave threat to freedom of expression, access to information, freedom of assembly, and political participation. Activists, civil society members, and human rights defenders have raised concerns about such blatant content takedowns and account restrictions on platforms like Instagram and Facebook. This censorship obstructs their efforts to ad-

vocate for Palestinian rights, even for those who do not share graphic images or engage in hate speech. Additionally, the censorship appears to target keywords and hashtags associated with Palestine, preventing their posts from reaching wider audiences and diminishing engagement. Moreover, several Instagram users have noticed a decline in engagement on their posts related to Palestine, despite the absence of graphic content or hate speech, resulting in grave concerns about censorship and freedom of expression. Users question why their stories highlighting the humanity and rights of Palestinians are receiving lower views. Similar experiences have been shared by individuals discussing protests and the war in Gaza, leading to complaints about shadowbanning and limited visibility. This has sparked discussions about the collaboration between governments and big tech in suppressing information during contentious conflicts. Media outlets have also accused social media platforms of censorship. Websites like Muslim and Mondoweiss experienced significant decreases in post reach on Instagram and TikTok, respectively, during the conflict. Additionally, the Palestine-based Quds News Network faced a suspension of its Facebook page.

## Countering Censorship

In response to this censorship, activists have resorted to workarounds to bypass algorithms. They have altered their writing styles, using symbols or changing letters to deceive the algorithms. Some have even developed online tools that alter sentence structures to make it harder for artificial intelligence and algorithms to understand the

text's meaning. As social media users' valid concerns about censorship grow, they are pushing back against the US and Israel's attempts to control the narrative of the conflict. Campaigns like #WeWontBeSilenced encourage users to post graphics or images that challenge censorship and intimidation. The effects of

shadowbanning, censorship, and intimidation are being felt, leading to a collective resistance against efforts to silence pro-Palestinian voices. While social media platforms have acknowledged "accidental limitations" in post reach, they deny intentional censorship. However, concerns about the suppression of pro-Palestinian voices continue, raising questions about how these platforms will respond to Israeli public relations pressure. The censorship of pro-Palestinian voices

on social media platforms during the Israel-Palestine conflict are truly worrisome. Activists, media outlets, and organizations who advocate for Palestinian rights have witnessed obstructions on the path. It goes without saying that the impact of such censorship is far-reaching, impeding the flow of information, stifling freedom of expression, and hampering efforts to establish context. As the conflict continues, the role of social media platforms in facilitating open dialogue and protecting digital rights remains

a critical issue. The constant censorship of pro-Palestinian content not only obstructs journalists but also undermines civil society and human rights defenders in their efforts to provide accurate information and context during the crisis. It is crucial for social media companies to recognize their role in facilitating the flow of information to and from Palestine, as it is essential for saving lives and mitigating the human rights impact of censorship.



ic Islamophobia and discrimination against Arabic content posters, while the reign of Israel-sponsored content on its platforms is unchecked. Critics argue that Meta's automated content moderation tools struggle to accurately interpret Arabic dialects, particularly Palestinian Arabic, leading to glitches in translation algorithms and the unjust censorship of innocuous content, mistakenly labeling it as promoting "Palestinian terrorists." While Meta acknowledges these incidents and vows to improve their algorithms, the damage to the pro-Palestinian narrative remains. Language competency and resource allocation pose significant challenges for US-based platforms like Meta when moderating Arabic content, as Arabic's diverse dialects prove difficult to navigate, resulting in inconsistencies in content moderation that inadvertently perpetuate the suppression of pro-Palestinian voices. Despite these challenges, videos from bloggers on the ground in Gaza and pro-Palestinian users providing commentary resonate strongly with younger audiences, fostering positive engagement. Individuals like Ariana, who shares her perspectives on the war from her US home, initially faced a decrease in views and lost followers when she began posting about Palestine. However, as she started exposing what she believes to be Israeli propaganda, her engagement on platforms like TikTok increased. Social media usage by the pro-Palestinian community has become essential in challenging Islamophobic narratives, exposing war crimes, and dismantling misinformation used to justify Israeli actions.



## Control of Narrative

The recent round of escalation in Israeli-Palestinian conflict has intensified the battle for control over the online narrative, with Israeli propaganda accused of quietening pro-Palestinian voices. Censorship, biased content moderation, and targeted sponsorships are among the tactics employed to limit the reach and impact of pro-Palestinian content. Within the Gaza Strip, journalists face numerous challenges, including censorship and harassment campaigns orchestrated by Israel. Despite these obstacles, dedicated individuals strive to tell untold stories. However, the struggle extends beyond Gaza, infiltrating

major social media platforms. The suppression of pro-Palestinian voices goes beyond automated content moderation. Comedian Abby Govindan discovered that expressing her pro-Palestinian views on social media resulted in lost sponsorships, as patrons distanced themselves from Middle East-related statements. Shadowbanning, a covert form of suppression, disproportionately affects pro-Palestinian content. Digital rights experts argue that biased content enforcement remains a persistent issue for pro-Palestinian advocates. Meta, the parent company of Instagram, has faced allegations of system-

## Israeli Propaganda, Bullying

The Israeli government has recently intensified its propaganda efforts, as Palestinians are constantly denied permission to narrate. The battle for control over the online narrative even attracted the attention of influential figures like Elon Musk, who faced backlash for endorsing an anti-Semitic post. An agreement was reached during his visit to Israel that Musk's Starlink satellite internet service would require Israeli government approval for use in Gaza, reinforcing Israel's control over critical resources and highlighting power dynamics at play. As the Israel-Hamas conflict rages on, platforms such as TikTok and Instagram serve as popular sources for real-time updates and firsthand accounts. However, this demand for intimate perspectives inadvertently creates opportunities for disinformation, conspiracy theories, and propaganda to flourish, and

Israel has seized the opportunity to utilize all that in order to manufacture consent. Regulators and researchers warn that these malicious influences pose a dangerous threat to public debates surrounding the war, muddying the waters of truth and perpetuating misinformation, which in turn would benefit the Israeli side. In the battle for control over the narrative, pro-Palestinian voices face significant challenges on social media platforms. Israeli propaganda and PR tactics, combined with biased content moderation, sponsorships, and language competency gaps, suppress the reach and impact of pro-Palestinian advocates. As the conflict continues, the struggle for a fair and balanced online conversation remains a pressing issue, demanding attention and action from both platforms and users alike.