

## VOICES MARGINALIZED: DISENTANGLING SOCIAL MEDIA PERSPECTIVES IN THE PALESTINE-ISRAEL WAR THROUGH IMAGES OF POWER AND IDENTITY

Komal Ishtiaq

[komalishtiaq97@gmail.com](mailto:komalishtiaq97@gmail.com)

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### ABSTRACT

Social media is bringing to light various narratives and global issues. However, these narratives are framed to show a particular stance and affiliation with one group. Similarly, the Israel-Palestine conflict is framed on social media, which involves two distinct narratives and divides them into two social groups. The two social groups represent two ideologies, which further distinguish their identities. However, Instagram captions were selected for the analysis, a total of six captions were selected, three from Pro-Israeli pages, i.e., CNN and BBC, and three captions were selected from Pro-Palestinian pages, i.e., Al Jazeera and TRT World. The narratives in pro-Israeli captions revolve around classifying out-groups as terrorists. However, they justify their actions against Palestinians in these narratives. Moreover, the frames that are used include the conflict frame and the morality frame. The narratives in Pro-Palestinian include their marginalization, dehumanization, and subjugated identities. The frames that are used include conflict frames to show their internal and external struggles. The morality frame is also used so the world can sympathize or empathize with them. Overall, both groups identify one another as out-group and associate negative words with each other. The language is at the center, which depicts the images of power and identity in social media narratives.

**Keywords:** power, identity, marginalization, social media, Palestine, Israel, conflict.

### INTRODUCTION

Digital spaces are increasing rapidly these days due to globalization. It engages people in conversations on various topics. People in this advanced technological world, are also using social media platforms, to share information. Hence, social media has become a powerful tool (Osterrieder, 2013). It is used extensively in our society. Like various global issues, the Palestine- Israel conflict is highly debated on social media platforms these days. It has been the issue for the last seventy-five years, but the issue has become prominent due to social media coverage. Various resistance movements in Palestine started against injustice and inequality. People are vocal on social media platforms (Huda, et al., 2022). However, social media is creating awareness among the masses about the subjugation of Palestine by Israeli forces.

Moreover, social media posts content on the issues, and people share that content. They like and comment on the post, which enhances its reach. However, these social media movements create

solidarity among many people. Further, based on that people are divided into two groups, i.e., in-group and out-group. Therefore two types of content are generated which show alliance with each group separately. However, posts and captions are designed accordingly by choosing relevant linguistic conventions, showing an alignment with a particular group's interests. Moreover, at the center of it is power and identities at play.

### 1.2- Problem of the Statement

Social media is used everywhere in this world. It brings people from all across the world to either converge or diverge on various trending topics. People hold certain beliefs some of which show alignment with one group and others contradict. Similarly, social media grabs the attention of the research field too. Many studies have been conducted on social media to discuss various global issues, including the Israel-Palestine conflict. The existing study analyzes it from a different angle, where it

looks at the social media framing of narratives, i.e., Instagram captions to highlight the power, identities, and subjugation of marginalized groups. It also talks about the linguistic choices used by two particular groups to represent their social identities, which represent them differently from their opponents.

### **1.3- Research Questions**

1. What are the central narratives in the Pro-Israeli and Pro-Palestinian Instagram captions during the present conflict?
2. How do Pro-Palestinian and Pro-Israeli captions contrast in their framing of the combat on Instagram posts?

### **1.4- Research Significance**

The research is significant because it analyses the two viewpoints on social media sites and the media's role in propagating certain ideologies, which shows their adherence to certain groups. It also analyzes the power dynamics linguistically. It also makes us aware of the role of media in framing narratives. So, in this way, it is informative and insightful.

It also fills the research gap. A lot of research has been done on the Palestine-Israel conflict, but there is no research in the repository about the framing of the Pro-Palestinian and Pro-Israeli captions to look at opposing views and ideologies. Moreover, it also looks at the linguistic choices used by the two groups to represent their social identities.

### **1.5- Delimitations**

The present study is delimited to six captions of Instagram posts related to the Palestine-Israel conflict. It looks at the two types of captions, Pro-Palestinian and Pro-Israeli. It analyzes the differences in their ideologies. It looks at the variations in the narratives of marginalized and powerful groups, the framing of those captions linguistically, and the way their social identities are presented.

## **1- Literature Review**

### **2.1- Israel-Palestine War**

The historical instance of the Holocaust was the central element in the birth of the Israeli state and the ideology of Zionism. The state declared its independence from the genocide on May 14, 1948. However, it gave birth to militant and radical Jews with a siege mentality. The violence Jews committed against Palestinians was justified through the notion

of anti-Semitism. Due to this violence, Israel made its birth possible. Israel and its allies claimed that the existence of Jews was indispensable (Turner, 2019). However, Jews' existence would be possible through the survival of Israel. Moreover, the American discourses were glorified with the imagery of the Holocaust to develop massive support for the Zionist actions among the American community. The Israeli Military power and revenge then suppressed Palestinians. However, Nazi imagery was also used by Palestinians, sometimes to equate Israelis' actions with the Nazi regime (Turner, 2019). An analogy was drawn between the struggles of South Africa and the struggles of Palestine. Therefore, Palestine was declared as an apartheid state.

### **2.2- Social Media and Discords**

Social media communication allows users to recruit target groups for political campaigns. It also influences the ideologies that persist in society. Social media narratives are powerful. According to Zeitzoff (2017), social media puts forth certain ideologies. Various world leaders have used it to establish their political regimes. It can be considered a tool that uses soft means of power to control the public's minds. However, communication and social media consist of a great connection. In other words, social media facilitates communication around the globe.

Social media is used to disseminate useful information. On the other hand, it is also responsible for creating chaos in society. Plenty of fake information is available on social media nowadays. Similarly, Reuter et al. (2019) stated social media has its benefits, but abuse of social media also exists. It depends on the users to extract the relevant information, particularly during discord and alarming situations. The way messages are designed and reached to the audience should be pertinent. However, text mining can be helpful in this regard, where data is sorted. The redundant themes are grouped. Sentiment analysis helps categorize comments related to emotions (Reuter et al., 2019). It can draw a line between fake and original. Several software programs have also been developed to extract authentic information from the bulk of false information. Overall, social media contributes a central part to political establishments globally.

## **2- Language, Rhetoric, and Ideologies**

Social media provides its users a chance to reflect on their internal struggles. Language is fundamental in this regard. However, media discourses contain their socio-political agendas in the background. The major discourses that highlight the abuse of power include racism and capitalist ideologies. Media discourses are designed in a way to achieve maximum benefit from them. However, for that purpose, stylistics is maximally utilized in these discourses. On a broader level, to address the 9/11 issue, animal imagery was extensively used to equate the behavior of Muslims with animals. Media discourses also play an integral part in bringing to light social inequalities, such as gender disparity (Abdullah, 2014). In this research, the researcher discusses the rhetoric used in media discourses to reveal certain ideologies. It also hints at socio-political agendas without any explicit reference.

Social media channel is a platform for political debates as well. Twitter is the most common channel for such political talks. However, it is used by many political leaders around the world. Similarly, Masroor et al. (2019) analyzed the tweets of two famous political leaders of Pakistan. They tweeted against each other. However, to address the other, negative terminologies are used frequently. On the other hand, to address oneself, positive metaphors are used. They justified their arguments through the excessive use of metaphors. However, they used emotional vocabulary where required. However, their tweets are not restricted to emotional language only. They also use rationale in their tweets. However, all the persuasive language tools represent their hidden political agendas. So, the language used on social media plays a substantial role in propagating certain ideologies.

## **3- Identity in Digital Spaces**

Identity is an important phenomenon globally. However, identities are presented differently in this world. Therefore, with the growing use of social media, there is an alteration in the representation of identities. Identities become multimodal with the growing digital spaces. The concept of identity is not easy to define, as it takes on various forms (Deh & Glodjovic, 2018). Moreover, Identity is another name for self. However, self-representation in digital spaces is the focus of this paper. Nevertheless, in the digital world, all the semiotic and linguistic modes contribute to forming identities. These include

profile updates, pictures, biographies, and interaction with friends online. However, the social self might contradict the actual self. However, social identities are not an outcome of only one individual; the role of others is equally significant in shaping those identities.

## **4- Palestine-Israel Combat and Social Media**

Social media is a weapon to put forth certain ideologies. They shape and influence the minds of their users. Social media users are involved in these communications. However, virtual communication is dynamic. Similarly, Palestine-Israel combat is another highly debated issue on social media. According to Raza et al. (2023), social media brings a change in the discourses revolving around this combat. The discursive strategies used by the article writers bring empathy and realizations among the users. The writer of his social media article used discourse strategies to criticize the Israeli government's actions. Further, he also uses the rhetoric to pinpoint the abuse of power. However, the comments below the article posts show multiple opinions of people. However, some comments are Pro-Palestinian and others are Pro-Israeli. Overall, this research is significant because it shows the role of social media in aversion to global politics and the discourse surrounding it.

All of the previous research is linked to the existing study, but different at the same time to fill the research gap. The existing study focuses on the two types of captions, i.e., Pro-Palestinian and Pro-Israeli. The way they are framed. The way they represent different ideologies and their connection to power and identity.

## **3- Conceptual Framework**

Components from two theories have been selected and integrated to identify the power and identity images holding certain ideologies in those captions. The first selected framework is the "Framing theory" given by Ervin Goffman in 1970. It focuses on two components natural and social (Arowolo, 2017). Here, the social aspect is more relevant to analyzing the captions because the occurrence of events is more social than natural. Frames are used in media to focus on a particular piece of news and to convey it to the public. However, frames are interpreted differently by different audiences. However, these frames are used frequently by people whether consciously or unconsciously. Certain elements help to identify

frames, including a conflict that exists between two parties (Chong & Druckman, 2007). The second aspect is personalization, where an event is given a human face. Consequences, morality, and responsibility are also aspects of framing theory. Arowolo (2017) also mentions that framing is sometimes used to curtail the audience to thinking outside, from another perspective. However, in Framing some elements are selected, and other gets downplayed.

The second selected theory is the “Social Identity Theory” which was given by John Turner and Henri Tajefel. It was also presented in the year 1970. Social Identity Theory is positioning ourselves to other groups. Identification with one particular group is a sense of relief that we belong somewhere (Islam, 2014). Belonging to one particular group also fosters self-identity. However, this theory divides the people into two groups one is in-group and the other is outgroup. Nonetheless, positive characteristics are attached to the in-group, and more negative aspects to the outgroup. However, it also brings bias with it. However, media also consists of the power to attach a certain value to a particular group and to determine its status. Further, this media representation of certain groups also leads to the marginalization of one group and the granting of power to another one (Harwood, 2020). However, the elements of this theory consist of group affiliation, which means to show adherence to one particular group. The second aspect is perceived correspondence and variations, it involves the comparison between the groups. The third aspect is social categorization, the identification of oneself and others in a particular social group. However, the captions related to the Israel-Palestine conflict are analyzed through these theories. Various components of these theories are seen in these captions. However, social identity theory looks at how identities are shown and which group is granted more power than the other. It also looks at the marginalization of certain groups based on their affiliations, nationality, or interests. However, framing theory analyzes various frames whether it is conflict, personalization, responsibility, and morality. Language is at the center of all aspects, which highlights the power agendas and social identities.

#### **4- Methodology**

##### **4.1- Research Design**

The present study is qualitative. This study is about the power and identity analysis of Pro-Palestinian and Pro-Israeli captions below Instagram posts. The selection of the qualitative research type consists of the plausible reason that it gives a more in-depth analysis of the research questions to be investigated. Kerlinger states research design is a type of design, plan, or approach to scrutinize and gives the researchers the required answers to the research questions (Peniel, 2016). This research design is descriptive-analytic, as it describes and analyzes the power ideologies and identities reflected in these captions.

##### **4.2- Method of Data Collection**

Data for the present study consists of Pro-Palestinian and Pro-Israeli captions related to the Palestine-Israel conflict. These captions have been collected from Instagram pages, i.e., “Aljazeera English” with 4.1M followers, “TRT World” with 1.9M followers, and “CNN” with 19.8M followers and “BBC News” with 26.9M followers, from the period of October 7, 2023 to Dec 7, 2023.

##### **4.3- Population and Sample**

The population of this study consists of all the Pro-Palestinian and Pro-Israeli captions on the selected Instagram pages. The purposive sampling technique has been used here because the selected captions contain certain characteristics. They must be related to the Palestine-Israel conflict. However, they must present the two ideologies separately. Nevertheless, the existing study consists of a total of six captions. Three of the captions are Pro-Palestinian, and three captions are Pro-Israeli. The one Pro-Palestinian caption has been selected from “Al Jazeera English” and the other two from “TRT World.” However, two pro-Israeli captions have been selected from “CNN News” and the other one from “BBC News.” Nonetheless, these captions are further selected based on the number of likes on the post.

##### **4.4- Method of Data Analysis**

The selected captions are closely analyzed. Framing theory and Social Identity theory are integrated to find out the images of power and identity, reflecting certain ideologies.

### **5- Analysis of Pro-Israeli and Pro-Palestinian captions**

The Pro-Palestinian captions are selected from Al Jazeera and TRT world because they describe the Eastern cause and their opinions, and highlight the marginalization of the groups and the suppressed identities. However, the pro-Israeli captions are selected from CNN and BBC News. They mostly show the pro-Israeli side and the use of language is to mitigate the oppression of Israelis by giving it a cover term of self-defense. They also show adherence to Israelis and their cause and explain the necessity of the preservation of Israelis' identities.

#### **5.1- Pro-Israeli Captions**

##### **Caption no 1**

"Israeli defense forces have entered Gaza's largest hospital which the Military says, is a "targeted" operation. Israeli forces are going from room to room and interrogating people, but not harming people. Israeli believes Hamas is running a command center in tunnels under the hospital to carry out its terrorist activities."

In this caption, the narrative is about terrorists' acts of Hamas and ground operations for these people. It also talks about the defensive steps of the Israeli military. Moreover, this caption shows a frame of conflict that exists between the in-group, which is Israel, and the out-group Hamas. BBC shows its adherence to Israel and allies with them. Therefore, they are in groups. They justify all the actions of Israel by mitigating it through the use of moderate language. They mention in the caption that "no harm" is done to the people. However, the story is otherwise, the civil casualties are the most vulnerable ones. Their identities are presented in a positive light where Israelis are fighting for their cause to preserve their identities against terrorist activities carried out by Hamas. They categorize Israel as socially positive. However, to mention the out-group, which is Hamas, and the indirect implication for the whole of Palestine, they used the term "terrorist", which has a strong negative connotation. They represent their identities as brutal. However, they use the term "targeted operation", which is a reference to the terrorist activities carried out by Hamas against Israel. They also justify Israel's use of power against Palestine to fight against these terrorist activities and to preserve their Jewish identities. Overall, the conflict exists between the

two groups which divides them based on their ideologies. However, the IDF has the right to interrogate people, which shows the supremacy of the in-group and the power they contain.

##### **Caption no 2**

"In the opening days of the war, two-four-year-old Israeli boys were killed when Hamas attacked on October 7. But many posts on social media were not mourning their deaths. Instead, they were trying to deny the killings had taken place."

This caption is taken from CNN, which also presents the pro-Israeli stance. The narratives of this caption revolve around the war and destruction, the death and chaos. However, it shows the frame of morality. Here, the captions sound more didactic and use emotional language to highlight the sufferings of the in-group, which is Israel. However, they mention the killing of Israel. Moreover, they also use the indirect reference of many Pro-Palestinian posts, who mourn the killings of their children, which is greater in number. They say that out-groups are denying the killings of their children, which took place on 7<sup>th</sup> October, as an outcome of the Hamas attack. Once again they refer, to Hamas as a terrorist organization that separates and draws the line between two groups of people. However, the actions of the in-group are justified in that if Israel is killing casualties and children, they are carrying out defense operations against the leading terror organization. However, Hamas's killing of their casualties is not justified because they are posing a threat to their identities. However, their actions are directly linked to the act of terrorism. Overall, the caption is framed to invoke sympathy for Israel and also to justify their actions against Palestine. It also implies that it is the moral responsibility of Netizens to condemn the attack carried out by Hamas on October 7<sup>th</sup>.

##### **Caption no 3**

"The IDF says warplanes hit 150 underground tunnel targets in northern Gaza after announcing it would expand its ground operation following the October 7 Hamas attack. The Israeli airstrikes came after three weeks Hamas massacred 1400 people in Southern Israel and more than 200 hostages being held by Hamas in Gaza."

This caption is also taken from a CNN post. The central narrative states the actions of Israel after the

October 7 attack by Hamas. It also talks about the hitches Israel faced after that attack. Moreover, the frame of the narrative is conflicting. It shows the rift between the two groups with opposite ideologies. However, CNN claims that Israel's actions are defensive actions to prevent its community and citizens from any further, terror attacks. They destroyed all the terrorists' underground tunnels, which they used for the out-groups. However, several citizens died including children and women, but they equate all as one, which is a terrorist group. The negative connotations are attached to out-groups. However, they mitigate their actions by using moderate language. For instance, they say "Israeli airstrikes came after three weeks Hamas massacred 1400 people in Southern Israel." Their all actions, they say are retaliation against Hamas's action. They also imply that their retaliation comes in stages, which grants time to the opponents to save the citizens. This caption presents the identities of Hamas as terrorists and Israeli social identities as victims and survivors. They further justified it through the losses they bear in the loss of 1400 lives and the abduction of 200 hostages. The in-group actions of killing the civilians are stated as a defense to preserve the Israelis' identities. However, the captions indirectly imply that Hamas's actions granted that power to the Israeli Defense Forces to carry out these actions against Palestinians.

## **5.2- Pro-Palestinian Captions**

### **Caption no 1**

"Daily life in Palestine's Gaza remains a challenge amid Israel's blockade and the 74-day onslaught that has killed nearly 20,000 Palestinians and forced more than 90 percent of the besieged enclave's 2.3 million people from their homes. People in Gaza described begging for bread, paying 50 times more than usual for a single of beans, and slaughtering a donkey to feed their family as food aid trucks remain unable to reach most parts of the bombarded Palestinian territory, if and when Israel even allows them to enter at all."

The caption above is taken from the TRT World post. The central narrative in this caption is the challenges and destitution of Palestinian citizens due to ongoing war. The frame which is used in this caption is the conflict frame, which represents the internal and external struggles of Palestine. The Pro-Palestinian

caption has used intense vocabulary to show the situation. However, the in-groups are presented as a marginalized community with no power and decision. The food and other necessities are not granted to them because the decision and power are in the hands of Israel, which they represent as an out-group. The word "besieged" means their own homes are captured by Israeli forces, and they are forced to take refuge in camps. However, it also refers to the idea that this war granted power and the upper hand to the out-group, taking the freedom from the in-group. However, the killing they mention is of the Palestinians, which consists of a large figure, and not Hamas. It tells us about the conflict the Palestinians have to confront internally because of the war on a broader level. However, the narratives and vocabulary focus on the sufferings and pain of the in-group rather than extreme criticisms of other out-groups. It shows their status as a marginalized community with no access to power. Moreover, their social identities are also subjugated to which people either empathize or sympathize.

### **Caption no 2**

"If it were us, we would have stood with them. A Palestinian woman calls on the world to stand with the people of Gaza, where Israel Occupational and Illegal forces have killed more than 18,800 Palestinians since October 7."

This caption is also taken from TRT World. The narratives of this caption talk about the unjust killings in Palestine. The frame that is used in this caption is morality, as the woman is asking the world to stand with the people of Palestine. Here, the pronoun is "we" and the reversal of the situation is used to intensify its impact. However, she is referring to the world both Muslims and humans, who identify with them in any way. However, the caption talks about reversing the situation to create harmony and separate the evil from the unveiled. To refer to the out-group they used two negative connotations, such as "Occupational forces" and "illegal forces" to refer to the unacceptable acts of Israel. All the settlements of out-groups are referred to as illegal. However, the caption once again highlights their marginalized and subjugated identities, which are torn apart by the powerful out-group, such as the illegal Israeli settlers and forces.

**Caption no 3**

“To do inhuman things to people, you first need to dehumanize them. To kill 7000 children, you need to unchild them by creating a rhetoric that their lives don’t matter. So, you can commit these atrocities against them. The Western journalists representing Israeli propaganda and your job as a victim was to disapprove it continuously. Your job as a victim is not just to accept the death but to show beyond the shadow of a doubt that is what the Ministry of Health did before Shifa Hospital collapsed.”

This caption is taken from the Al Jazeera English post. The narratives revolve around the difficulties the victims faced at the hands of the oppressor. The frame that is used here is a conflicting frame as well as personalization. The conflicting frame is used because it represents a lot of conflicting ideas throughout. However, it also used the personalization frame because the caption itself is the experience told by a Palestinian journalist, who encounters those things, as belonging to a marginalized group. The caption consists of a lot of negative vocabulary when talking about the actions of the Israeli regime, i.e., dehumanization, atrocities, and propaganda. When talking about in-group, he talks about their sufferings and agony. It used painful images to show how power acts upon their people, the marginalized community. It refers to the idea of their subjugated and marginalized identities through the vocabulary of dehumanization, unchild, and that their lives are not valuable. The caption talks about the out-group that developed rhetoric to convince the people about their actions. The caption also regarded the Western media as an out-group by calling it a “propaganda” media. The Western media is a mouthpiece of Israel, which represents their ideologies. However, the caption also states the marginalized and victim community, which is in-group has a double responsibility to accept their deaths and to prove them as well. However, these words indirectly highlight the cruelty and power of an out-group.

**6- Findings and Discussion**

In the captions, both Pro-Palestinian and Pro-Israeli frames have been used. However, the most widely used is a conflicting frame, which represents the idea of power and identity. However, the Israeli captions justified their use of power against Palestinians by equating them with terrorists, which in turn is an out-

group. They believe that their death is necessary for the existence of the Jewish community of Israel. Identification with one particular group is a sense of relief that we belong somewhere (Islam, 2014). Belonging to one particular group also fosters self-identity. However, the narratives and frames used in Pro-Palestinian captions represent the absence of power and dependence on the Israeli regime for food, water, and access to other necessities of life. The Israeli Military power and revenge then suppressed Palestinians. The violence Jews committed against Palestinians was justified through the notion of anti-Semitism (Turner, 2019). However, Nazi imagery was also used by Palestinians, sometimes to equate Israelis' actions with the Nazi regime (Turner, 2019). However, to describe the killings and destructive imagery, the frame that is used is the conflicting frame on social media. However, the morality frame is used to generate sympathy for in-groups and rage for out-groups.

This media representation of certain groups also leads to the marginalization of one group and the granting of power to another one (Harwood, 2020). However, the social affiliation with one group results in the criticism of another group to draw the line between two groups in digital spaces. According to Raza et al. (2023), the discursive strategies used by the article writers bring empathy and realization among the users but also lead to discords. However, these frames and narratives used on social media bring diverse responses from the audience. Social media is a weapon to put forth certain ideologies. They shape and influence the minds of their users (Raza et al., 2023). Overall, the frames used in pro-Israeli captions represent the power and justification of their use of power against others. However, the Pro-Palestinian captions represent their marginalization and destruction. Overall, language is at the center of putting forth certain ideologies and identities. In the digital world, all the semiotic and linguistic modes contribute to forming identities (Deh & Glodjovic, 2018).

**7- Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study draws our attention to the role of social media in highlighting global issues. Similarly, social media seems to be a great tool for pinpointing the Israel-Palestine conflict. However, social media itself is divided into two groups showing affiliation with one particular ideology. Therefore, there are two types of narratives revolving

around social media. One is Pro-Palestinian and the other is Pro-Israeli. Their stance is represented through the use of frames, i.e., conflicting frames and morality frames. One side represents the power and the other is marginalized. Pro-Israeli captions justified their use of power against the other because of the necessity of their existence, which they believe is a threat, due to the existence of another group. On the other hand, the other group represents their marginalization and dehumanization by the powerful group, which they consider an out-group. They believe their identities are suppressed. Their killing is justified through the false rhetoric created by the Israeli regime. Overall, social media is highlighting this global issue through various frames, which represent two sets of identities, and it also creates a divide on social media.

### 8- Recommendations

In the future, the researcher can explore the other prevalent global issues on digital spaces and social media through the use of a similar conceptual framework. The researcher can also explore the comments and threads how they are analyzed through various frames and how they identify with one particular group. Their linguistic choices on social media sites.

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