



## CYBERACTIVIST REPERTOIRES IN SUPPORT OF PRO-PALESTINE FROM TIKTOK

JAIME ANDRÉS WILCHES-TINJACÁ <sup>1</sup>, HUGO FERNANDO GUERRERO-SIERRA <sup>2</sup>, CÉSAR NIÑO <sup>3</sup>

Institución Universitaria Politécnico Gran Colombiano, Colombia

<sup>2</sup> Universidad Militar Nueva Granada, Colombia

<sup>3</sup> Universidad de la Salle, Colombia

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*Cyberactivism*  
*Slacktivism*  
*Clicktivism*  
*Palestine*  
*Israel*  
*TikTok*

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### ABSTRACT

*The historical trajectories of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict have recently found new forms of expression mobilized by the social network TikTok. Using Van Laer and Van Aelst's method of analysis of cyberactivism repertoires, 200 TikToks with hashtags associated with the pro-Palestinian cause were examined. The results show that there is viralization of communicative pieces in which emotional narratives prevail, but also contents that make pedagogy of the conflict from reasoned arguments. The discussion highlights how TikTok has redefined social mobilization strategies and the architecture of the international system through digital collective action.*

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## 1. Mediatisation of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

The traditional approach has been to distance individual emotions from global strategic concerns. Society exhibits minimal interest in the tensions inherent in the reconfiguration of the balance of power and the international order (Sasley, 2013). However, it is drawn to the ways in which great powers demonstrate dominance over less favoured ones or when individual integrity is violated (Crawford, 2000). For example, the nuclear taboo within the Cold War framework capitalised on negative emotions surrounding the implications of assured mass destruction and the risk of extinction as a species (Tannenwald, 1999). This resulted in a shift within the pop industry, with a notable change in the types of music being produced, the emergence of superheroes as a popular cultural phenomenon (Waid, 2013), and the securitisation of various forms of media, including cinema (Niño & Sánchez, 2020), television, and comics (Williams, 2003). (Williams, 2003). This demand for attention is largely attributable to the influence of art, the press, and the role of the media, platforms, and social networks. The dissemination of images of war has been shown to elicit emotional responses surrounding the tragedy (Sontag, 2010). In this sense, the collective imaginary tends to crystallise more easily what war looks like (such as destroyed buildings, dead bodies piled up, shell casings on the ground, children crying, etc.) than what peace looks like. There is now a consensus that the atrocities of the 20th century World Wars are repudiated by archival images and multimedia tools about the events.

In the field of international studies, the question of emotions has been marginalised by the dominance of the canonical rational choice thesis for the conduct of politics (Agnew, 2014; Banton, 1995) and has been overlooked as an analytical category. However, the advent of the media and digital information tools has resulted in a repositioning of the role of emotions in contemporary international analysis. Brodersen (2018) refers to the recent shift in epistemological focus towards the study of emotions in global dynamics as the 'emotional turn'.

In light of the aforementioned evidence, it can be argued that the intricate dynamics of power in the Middle East have transcended the boundaries of conventional strategic analysis. The dissemination of emotions has been facilitated by the emergence of cyber-activism on social media. In this context, the ongoing crisis between Israel and Gaza, in relation to the Palestinian enclave, has prompted a re-evaluation of the prevailing discourse on the nature of the state system in the region. This has led to a shift in focus towards the thesis of an artificial and oppressive state, juxtaposed against an oppressed and marginalised one.

In this way, the networked narrative has served to amplify these views, thereby creating a public sphere in which historical injustices and responsibilities are subjected to debate. The voices of activists, academics, journalists and ordinary citizens converge, offering a multiplicity of perspectives that both mediate and polarise the conflict. Furthermore, the utilisation of cyberactivism has facilitated an unparalleled degree of visibility for Palestinian narratives, which have historically been marginalised within the mainstream media. The images and testimonies shared in real time have generated a global empathy that transcends geographical boundaries and materialises through the actions of internet users and the algorithms that govern the dissemination of information online. However, this extensive dissemination of information has also introduced the potential for adverse consequences, including the proliferation of misinformation and the radicalisation of audiences.

On 7 October 2023, over 1,200 members of the Hamas terrorist organisation infiltrated Israel's defensive perimeter, orchestrating one of the most audacious assaults on civilian populations in recent times. The coordinated Hamas attack, which resulted in the deaths of 1,200 civilians, was broadcast live on social media (Euronews, 2023). The atrocities included residential kidnappings, the execution of women and the elderly, sexual violence in public spaces, and indiscriminate shooting. These events were broadcast live. In the aftermath of the attack, global outrage ensued, prompting a series of diplomatic speeches advocating for a multilateral response and condemnation of the terrorist act. Nevertheless, the media concentrated on the response of Tel Aviv a few hours later.

Israel's incursion and assault on Gaza deviated from the principle of self-defence and any legality in warfare (Child, 2024). The action promised to bring down Hamas members and leaders, who, according to some intelligence reports, used underground tunnels in the city as a rearguard and refuge from the Israeli offensive. The Israeli government, under the leadership of Benjamin Netanyahu, initiated a series of air and ground attacks, resulting in the deaths of over 2,700 civilians within the first week (BBC, 2023). In the name of combating terrorism, the Israeli government contributed to the intensification of

the humanitarian crisis in the region. The targeting of medical facilities, the deaths of children, the disruption of electricity and drinking water supplies, and the obstruction of humanitarian aid by non-governmental organisations were widely reported in the press and on social media.

The media crisis was not precipitated by conjecture regarding prospective diplomatic and military alliances between Israel and the Arab world, as such interstate agreements hold little interest for the general public. However, the disproportionate use of force by Israeli security forces facilitated the formation of empathic connections between certain social groups and the Palestinian cause. The issue of the hostages taken by Hamas on 7 October rapidly receded from public consciousness, while the humanitarian crisis resulting from Israel's bombing of civilians rapidly assumed centre stage. Consequently, the notion that Palestine has been historically tainted by Israel and Western powers, to the extent that it has not been recognised as a state despite being acknowledged by most countries, began to emerge in online discourse (BBC, 2023). The Israeli government's dehumanising statements about its enemy prompted a rejection of these remarks by numerous prominent world leaders and human rights organisations. The conflict subsequently assumed an intriguing media aspect. While Israel's special operations in the Gaza Strip achieved modest successes in the neutralisation of Hamas members and the rescue of hostages, the networks became increasingly polarised. Those who labelled Jews as the new Nazis were on one side of the debate, while those who accused Netanyahu's critics of being anti-Semitic were on the other (The Guardian, 2023).

## 2. TikTok in the Pro-Palestinian Cause

The digital revolution has redefined the nature of social interactions and their communicative projection (Kaul, 2012; Levin & Mamlok, 2021). In this sense, the exercise of politics and, in particular, activism and social mobilisation are not exempt from the conditioning factors and opportunities offered by this new scenario (Hill, 2013). Among the numerous resources offered by the digital world, social networks have been consolidating their role in the construction of a new political language for several years (Gilardi et al., 2022; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). Consequently, the design of political campaigns (Dimitrova & Matthes, 2018), the mechanisms of communication between governors and the governed (Khan, 2017), and the expression of discontent and social criticism (Alperstein, 2021) are all inextricably linked to the new and complex communicative agoras that have emerged in the digital age.

In the context of pervasive criticism of the media as a conduit for the interests of the established order, the growing penetration of the Internet into everyday social life has led to the utilisation of social networks as an alternative source of information and a platform for political interaction (Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2017). Conversely, the ease of access, deregulation of content and impressive capacity for viralisation make social networks an ideal space for the expression and discussion of social discontent, with the capacity for virtual mobilisation (Boulianne, 2019), as well as the potential to export or reinforce protest demonstrations in the real world (Cintra Torres & Mateus, 2015). In this regard, the extensive reach of social networks in the dissemination of discontent has led to the emergence of a new category in the study of social mobilisation: digitised protest movements (Tufekci, 2017).

The advent of social networks has enabled the circumvention of intermediaries such as political parties, traditional media outlets, and other formal organisations. These entities are increasingly perceived as impediments to the cohesion of citizens with shared identities or motivations (Earl & Kimport, 2013). The Arab Spring (2010-2012) has been a seminal event in the study of the impact of social networks on social mobilisation processes. In this context, while there is a significant debate surrounding the extent to which social networks facilitated and amplified the protests by providing citizens with a platform to voice their concerns in the face of mass media controlled by traditional political powers, or whether their role was limited and secondary to other social, political and historical factors, it is evident that they played a pivotal role in the development of the events (Smidi & Shahin, 2017). Similarly, in addition to the Arab Spring (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013), there are numerous international cases that have prompted the study of social networks, including the Indignados in Spain (Postill, 2014), the Aganaktismeni in Greece (Prentoulis & Kyriakidou, 2019), and #YoSoy132 in Mexico (García & Treré, 2014), among others. These cases have highlighted the potential of social networks to disseminate discontent or to facilitate its management.

In the case of Palestine, social media have played an important role that is neither new nor limited to the wave of global outrage against the disproportionate reprisals adopted by the Israeli government in response to the attacks perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October 2023. In this regard, Abuzayyad (2015) presents a noteworthy finding in his research: in 2015, social media had already become the primary source of news for Palestinians, with the majority of reporting being conducted by "citizen journalists".

Conversely, studies such as Wulf et al. (2013) demonstrate that Palestinian activists have employed digital tools, including Facebook, to advance actions aimed at denouncing and mobilising against Israel's settlement policy and the separation wall in the West Bank and Gaza. Similarly, Monshipouri and Prompichai (2017) examine the utilisation of social networks as a means of resistance by the Palestinian movement. Additionally, research such as that of Seo (2014) examines the propagandistic utilisation of images by Israel and Hamas on the social network Twitter (now "X"). The findings indicate that, in the case of Israel, the content emphasised the value of national unity, whereas in the case of Hamas, the emotional impact of attacks against civilians was a prominent factor. It is also noteworthy to mention the work of Hitchcock (2016), which aims to assess the efficacy and attributes of the utilisation of social networks (namely, Facebook and Twitter) by the transnational Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement in opposition to Israel.

Although the utilisation of social media as a platform for advocacy and protest by the Palestinian people and international activism in support of their cause has historical precedents, the events of October 2023 represented a pivotal shift in the scope and nature of this phenomenon (Kaur, 2024). The considerable resources invested in Israeli propaganda, known as "hasbara", have resulted in its pervasive presence and message in the mainstream media (Murphy, 2015). This has led to advocates of the Palestinian cause seeking greater access and less censorship in social media as an alternative arena (Qarjoui, 2023).

Consequently, Palestinian "citizen reporters" disseminate information from the ground via social networks to cybernauts, thereby affording the latter substantial, immediate, unfiltered and real-time access to the Palestinian crisis. This is with the objective of creating a phenomenon that has been termed an "Instafada" (Haddad & Chalabi, 2023). This dynamic has facilitated the emergence of a pro-Palestinian solidarity movement, even in social sectors of Western countries that previously appeared disconnected or indifferent to a decades-long crisis. This is evidenced by the widespread protests at several universities in the United States and Europe.

Among the plethora of social networks providing coverage of the contemporary pro-Palestinian movement, TikTok's recent pervasive presence is noteworthy. Although initially established as a platform for the dissemination of personalised, short and pleasant content, primarily in the form of memetic remixes (lip-syncing, dance routines and parodies) (Wilches et al., 2024), the role and mode of dissemination of different crises and social mobilisations has given this social network new scope. An illustrative example is its role in the context of the movement that emerged in the wake of the assassination of George Floyd in the United States (Janfaza, 2020). Another notable instance is its utilisation in the context of the Ukraine-Russia war (Chayka, 2022). Additionally, the dissemination of the crisis in Palestine (Maheshwari, 2024) represents a further example of its impact.

Since the May 2021 crisis between Israel and Hamas, the use of the TikTok platform for video editing by young Palestinians to advance what has been termed "playful activism" has demonstrated that Israel is far from victorious on the social media front (Yarchi & Boxman-Shabtai, 2023). Indeed, the capacity of this digital mobilisation to project itself led to it being dubbed the 'TikTok Intifada', an allusion to the Arabic term used in previous Palestinian uprisings (Abbas et al., 2022).

Similarly, the movement in support of Palestine that originated at Columbia University and subsequently proliferated across over 50 universities in the United States and several more in Europe (Cabral & Faguy, 2024) has identified TikTok as its principal medium for dissemination. A plethora of videos on this platform demonstrate the overwhelming support for Palestine among university students, and their rejection of economic and military assistance from countries such as the United States to Israel (Pequeño, 2024). The use of editing techniques supported by well-known musical backgrounds, a more sophisticated video production than is typically used on the platform, and a focus on the playfulness of mobilisation have all contributed to the viral dissemination and digital support on a global scale for these expressions of protest.

Additionally, TikTok has recently become the setting for a movement of denunciation and censorship by the platform's users against "celebrities" who are accused of supporting Israel or remaining

indifferent to the humanitarian crisis in Palestine. The "#Blockout2024" movement, also known as "Operation Blockout" or "Celebrity Block Party", emerged in the wake of the annual Met Gala in New York (the most powerful annual fashion show), while significant protests in support of Palestine were taking place just a few streets away (Paton, 2024). The absence of references to the entertainment industry and the manner in which it is perceived in the context of the crisis provoked a wave of indignation on TikTok, which in turn prompted an unprecedented strategy of open exposure (funeo) and blocking of figures from the entertainment industry on social media (Hamed, 2024).

In accordance with the aforementioned referential framework, the research proposes a structure of objectives and hypotheses that seek to articulate the proposed repertoires of cyberactivism, which will be outlined in the methodology section.

GO: The general objective is to examine the role of TikTok in the context of cyberactivism originating from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The specific objectives are as follows:

- SO1: To identify the repertoires of digital activism in TikTok from four repertoires of advocacy based on or supported by the personalization of claim narratives on the Internet.
- SO2: To analyse the communicative and visual intentions of TikTok content related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- SO3: To establish the implications of digital activism in TikTok for the challenges facing theories of social mobilisation and the international system.

Hypothesis:

- H1: The TikTok platform plays a pivotal role in the dissemination of information and the promotion of activism related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- H2: The utilisation of emotional narratives and rational arguments on the TikTok platform has the potential to educate and influence public perception of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- H3: The use of hashtags serves to disseminate content on a global scale and to garner international attention on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

### 3. Methodology

In the context of digital activism, it is possible to categorise the range of actions undertaken for the purpose of advocacy and protest, which are facilitated by the use of communication technologies and social networks. In this way, the selected research method is based on the proposal of Van Laer and Van Aelst (2010), which has been adapted for use in the work of Rodríguez-Romero (2022). This proposal concerns the repertoires of digital activism and puts forward four dimensions of analysis for the study of social movements that occur through digital media.

#### ***3.1. Internet-Supported Action with Explicit Personalisation***

The initial dimension pertains to the actions of leaders of social movements, political sectors, or critics of social movements or the actions of demands, who opt to present themselves individually in digital narratives. The utilisation of virtual tools has facilitated the consolidation of personalisation in digital action, thereby expanding the range of tactics that can be employed by social movements and enabling the emergence of dynamics in which initiatives rely on the charisma of the issuer. Internet-based actions are characterised by the following:

The use of temporary social networks that are primarily focused on communication, rather than other forms of interaction. This category encompasses groups and organisations engaged in activities related to new conflicts and technologies, such as intellectual property, freedom of expression, and social computing (Sádaba, 2012, p. 782).



### ***3.2. Internet-Supported Action without Explicit Personalisation***

The second dimension pertains to those who utilise digital tools to advance a social cause, without seeking to establish a personal connection with the cause itself. This dimension emphasises the internet's capacity to facilitate the development of innovative and adapted strategies, thereby expanding the repertoire of tactics available to social movements. In the view of Millaleo and Velasco (2013), the tactics that rely on the internet are designated as 'e-tactics'. These comprise a series of technologies that 'integrate with existing forms of action but make it possible to scale them up at low organisational and mobilisation costs, resignifying existing forms of collective action' (Millaleo and Velasco, 2013, p.18).

In this way, internet-supported actions serve to amplify the reach of social movements in terms of levels of citizen participation and facilitate the possibility of replicating the repertoire of action in other social movements with diverse demands or objectives. As McAdam et al. (2005) observe, "small-scale innovation changes repertoires continuously, especially when one or another set of participants discovers that there is a new tactic, a new message or a new presentation" (2005, p.153).

### ***3.3. Internet-Based Action with Explicit Personalisation***

The third dimension of analysis proposed by the authors pertains to low-risk forms of collective action, which rely on the influence of individuals within social networks with the capacity to disseminate challenges (which may range from humour to denunciation) on a viral basis. As Passy and Giugni (2001) posit, one of the key factors influencing a citizen's decision to engage with and remain committed to a social movement is their individual perception of the risks and costs associated with implementing the repertoires of action. Additionally, their research indicates that '[...] individual perceptions also affect differential participation, or the intensity with which one is involved in movement activities' (Passy and Giugni, 2001, p. 125).

The utilisation of digital tools has enabled citizens to perceive a reduction in the perceived risk associated with their participation in social movements, as they necessitate a lesser degree of commitment and offer the potential for spontaneous and temporary contributions (Bunnage, 2014, p. 441). Consequently, actions that entail lower risks, costs and levels of commitment facilitate citizen participation and allow the social movement to disseminate its demands and ideas.

### ***3.4 Internet-Based Action without Explicit Personalisation***

The fourth dimension is associated with forms of high-risk action that are based on the creation of a collective narrative with the intention of challenging the established structures through which a social event is narrated. The subjective perception of risk is informed by a range of factors, including context, the trajectory of citizen mobilization, and the capacity to adapt to evolving social movement conditions (Massal, 2019). Consequently, low-risk activities, which require less effort, experience and commitment, are undertaken with greater frequency than those that represent high risk. In other words,

As in the offline world, there is evidence of the existence of what can be called a 'ladder of online participation', in which less costly actions, such as informing, are more widespread, while more costly activities, such as debating and protesting, are less practiced (Mosca, 2010, p. 5).

The perception of risk associated with the tactics employed by the social movement in question gives rise to a shift in the level of participation, whereby high-risk actions serve as a deterrent to individuals' engagement and permanence. This is evidenced by the assertion that "the perceived risks of certain movement activities have a negative impact on individual participation, as they increase the costs of involvement" (Passy and Giugni, 2001, p. 126).

**Table 1.** Digital Activism Repertoires

<b>Q1. Internet-supported action with explicit personalisation</b>	<b>Q2. Internet-supported action without explicit personalisation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Donation of money</li> <li>• Change in consumer behaviour</li> <li>• User's protest speech from his profile</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizen mobilisation</li> <li>• Marches, protests</li> <li>• Sitting or sit-ins</li> </ul>
<b>Q3. Internet-based action with explicit personalisation</b>	<b>Q4. Internet-based action without explicit personalisation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Viralisation</li> <li>• Challenges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of alternative media</li> <li>• Dramatisations of news events</li> </ul>

Source: Rodríguez-Romero (2023), based on Van Laer and Van Aelst (2010).

In the dimensions corresponding to the internet as a support or base, it is possible to identify tactics that are perceived as an extension of an existing protest technique. It is frequently the case that action groups deploy a multiplicity of tactics, both offline and online. Consequently, the transition towards new internet-based and internet-dependent actions and tactics has not entailed the replacement of older forms of action, but rather their supplementation.

In terms of the dimensions of explicit and implicit personalisation, the authors cite activities or forms of political participation that necessitate varying degrees of intensity, contingent on the extent of collective commitment, the formalisation of the civil society organisation, or the charisma of the leader representing social protest or denouncing the current event.

### 3.5 Methodology

TikTok boasts approximately 1.56 billion monthly users, a figure that has experienced unusually high growth during the period of the pandemic and social isolation. In 2021, it surpassed Instagram in popularity (Datareportal, 2024), thereby establishing itself among young audiences as an app for the creation and consumption of short videos, which can be viewed in an infinite number of iterations. However, its value is not limited to entertainment and leisure; it has also been recognised for its capacity to sensitise and activate users' everyday emotions, thereby establishing itself as a medium that allows them to diversify and express these emotions (Cárdenas-Mata and Veytia-Bucheli, 2023).

In consequence, the role of social media in the context of global conflicts, such as those in Russia and Ukraine, has become a topic of considerable interest, particularly in relation to the impact of such platforms on the media, communication and dissemination levels (García, 2023; García-Jiménez et al., 2024; Rodríguez, 2022). The prominence of this social network in contemporary affairs led to the publication of a report on the role of social media in the Palestine-Israel conflict, which gained renewed attention following the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023. In response to the allegations, TikTok provided the following clarification: "It is critical to understand that hashtags on the platform are created and added to videos by content creators, not by TikTok" (TikTok, 2023). Furthermore, TikTok disseminated surveys indicating an increase in support for the Palestinian cause among young people since 2010, a period preceding the inception of the app.

It is anticipated that the proposed methodology will facilitate discourse on the contemporary challenges posed by the platform regarding novel (or traditional) forms of digital activism and the advancement of democratic spaces. Some of these challenges are elucidated.

There is a growing inequality in terms of access to algorithmic visibility between activists and brands, influencers and interest groups. Additionally, there is a need to complement playful activism with alternative digital media work that allows for more stable forms of collaboration. Finally, there is a necessity to protect activists from the growth of hate speech. In a recent publication, (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2023, p.1).

In accordance with the classification proposed by Van Laer and Van Aelst (2010), the four dimensions proposed by the authors and the corpus of 200 TikToks created between 7 October 2023 and 13 July 2023 are left. The corpus revealed several trends, including the creation of filters and challenges, as well

as movements and images and videos in which fragments of the Palestine-Israel conflict were depicted from a variety of perspectives.

3.6. Materials

In conducting this research, the TikToks were selected based on the following hashtags: "#freepalestine", "#savepalestine", "#palestina" and "#palestinalibres". Firstly, the hashtag is recognised as an element that the TikTok algorithm prioritises in order to reach users with common interests, categorise communities and favour its appearance in the "for you" feed (Martin, 2023). Secondly, analysis of the data revealed that the hashtag #freepalestine (with more than 5 million posts) was identified by TikTok as one of the most effective in mobilising pro-Palestine information on the social network. The other three hashtags were used to highlight the shift in language and the geographical location of activism.

The selection of hashtags was based on the frequency of likes and shares, which serve to indicate their value in the positioning of the TikTok algorithm for the viralisation of content (Martín, 2023). The videos were selected based on the number of likes and shares, with the first 50 for each hashtag being included in the analysis. This resulted in a total of 200 videos being analysed. The period of analysis commenced on 7 October 2023, coinciding with the resumption of hostilities, and concluded on 13 July, marking the completion of the data collection for this study. It is noteworthy that numerous TikToks identified in the course of this study featured two or three of the selected hashtags in a single publication, thus enabling their inclusion in more than 50 posts, a figure that exceeds the initial objective.

Table 2. Labels analysed

Tags	# of label
#freepalestine	96
#savepalestine	59
#palestine	71
#palestinianfree	50

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

4. Results

Table 3. Classification of the analysed Tiktoks

Category	# of TikToks
Q1	42
Q2	72
Q3	18
Q4	68
TOTAL	200

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

4.1. Q1: Internet-supported action with explicit personalisation

In this category, the predominant type of video was explanatory and contextualised. Of the 42 TikToks subjected to analysis, 26 employed a format in which a person acted as the narrator, recounted events, or delivered a condemnation of the situation in Palestine. Some common examples depicted an individual in front of the camera, devoid of sophisticated editing, personalising their discourse in favour of Palestine. This was often accompanied by an educational or emotional mobilisation in favour of the Palestinian cause. The language employed was straightforward and intelligible, facilitating an accessible understanding of the situation. Furthermore, personal experiences were elucidated, including accounts



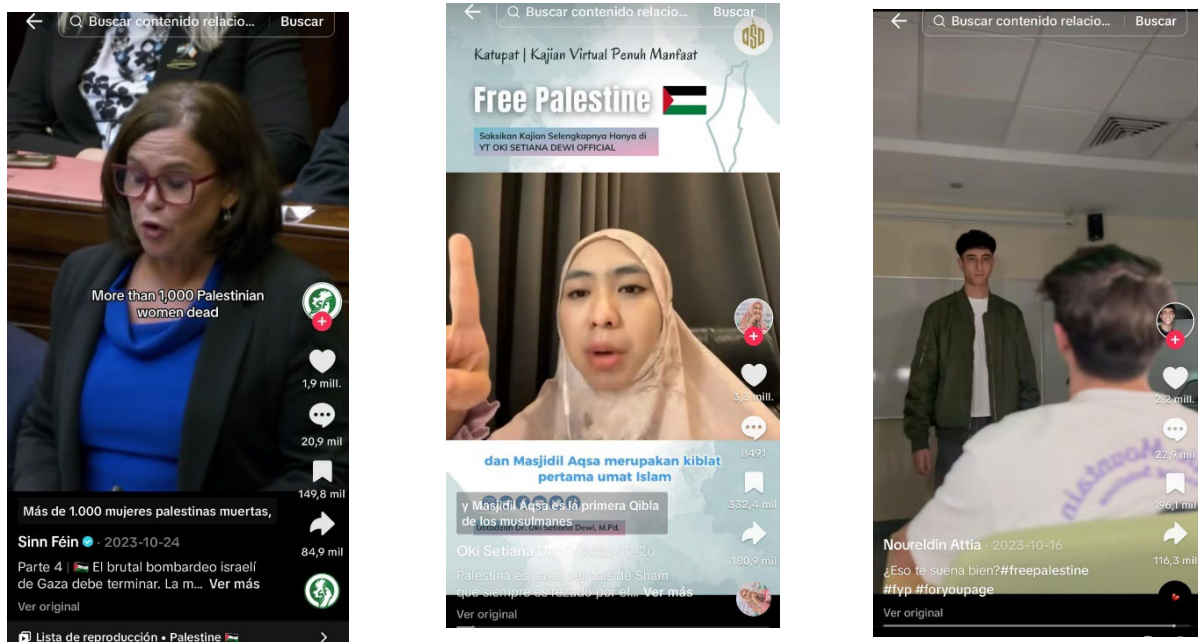
of traversing the Gaza region with family members and narrations of observing the demise of loved ones and the subsequent depletion of resources (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Subcategories of the Q1 classification

Subcategory	# of TikToks
Dramatisation of media manipulation	1
Tiktokers respond to another TikTok on not supporting Palestine	3
Artistic displays, make-up or allusive to support Palestine	5
Explanation, experiences and denunciations of the conflict in Palestine	26
Donation of products	1
Man writes insults to Israel's networks	1
Power figures speaking: press officers, journalists, ex-footballers, artists or politicians.	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

**Figure 1.** TikToks frames from category Q1



Source: Own elaboration, 2024

Secondly, regarding the number of TikToks within this subcategory, a number of videos were identified which featured professionals with a high degree of follower or recognition numbers, who expressed their support for Palestine through speeches or interviews. These influential figures included journalists, press officers, former footballers, politicians and singers, who denounced the facts in front of a large audience or facilitated their replication. Additionally, a comparable number of videos in the category featured artistic expressions, including drawings, makeup, and songs, which exemplified another form of support for the Palestinian struggle.

Thirdly, in terms of quantity, videos were identified that responded to other users who did not support or question the Palestinian cause. The dynamics observed in the three cases under study were consistent. In each instance, a portion of the TikTok was presented, and through the use of arguments, the veracity of the original statement was challenged. This interaction even prompted followers of the TikToker to view the original video and leave offensive comments, create additional duets by responding to the pro-Israel videos, and, in some instances, result in the video creator deleting the pro-Israel content or disabling comments.

Additionally, individual TikToks were identified within the subcategory, which, despite being distinct, garnered a considerable viewership and reach on the platform. The videos typically comprised individual acts that achieved significant online visibility, including the use of abusive language directed at official Israeli accounts, financial contributions to the Palestinian cause, and the dramatisation of the media's selective portrayal of attacks on Israel, while overlooking comparable incidents on the Palestinian side.

4.2. Q2: Internet-Supported Action without Explicit Personalisation

This category yielded the largest number of videos and encompasses two primary aspects. Primarily, it features the replication of distressing events pertaining to the situation in Palestine. Secondly, it documents global mobilisations in support of Palestine.

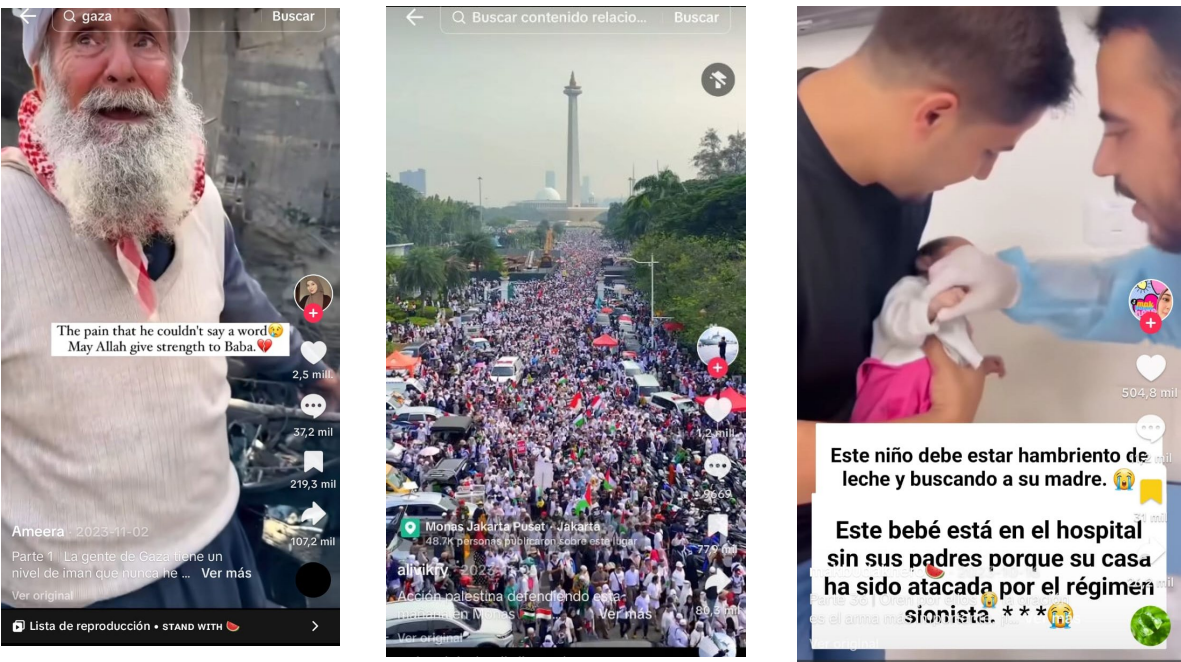
In examining the initial aspect, a multitude of videos emerge that illustrate children in a state of distress, weeping amidst the ruins, visibly distraught by the bombings, and orphaned infants in medical facilities following the demise of their parents in the attacks. Additionally, numerous Palestinians are observed expressing grief amidst the turmoil, upon learning of the demise of their loved ones. It is not uncommon for multiple instances of the same video to be circulated, with the same child crying and evoking a strong emotional response on numerous occasions (see Table 5). It is acknowledged that videos featuring children tend to garner greater reach and virality, as it is more readily evoked in the audience to empathise with a wounded infant than with an adult in a similar situation.

Table 5. Subcategories of the Q2 classification

Subcategory	# of TikToks
Replication of videos on: attacks, survivors, grief of loss of family members or discrimination	33
Protest situations: leaving enclosures, taking down flags	4
Mass mobilisation	27
Replication of speeches and endorsements on accounts other than personal accounts	8
Total	72

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Figure 2. TikToks frames from the Q category 2



Source: Own elaboration, 2024

In the second aspect, 27 TikToks in the subcategory demonstrate the phenomenon of mass mobilisation in a variety of geographical locations across the globe. The countries most prominently featured in the data set are Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, and the United States. It is also noteworthy that children are depicted in some videos of marches, either carrying flags or shouting slogans. Furthermore, the religious dimension is evident in the congregation of individuals in mosques for the purpose of prayer for Palestine, which serves as an additional indicator of protest.

Another subcategory identified is the replication of pro-Palestinian speeches that do not originate from the personal accounts of those who deliver them. Instead, they generate a wide reach among the platform's users. These TikToks, like the replication of videos of children and survivors in Gaza, disseminate a discourse that they did not originate, but which they propagate across the network, thereby generating sympathy and allowing the same words to be reproduced on repeated occasions.

Finally, the subcategory with the fewest videos analysed comprises instances of protest in support of Palestine that do not fall within the category of mobilisation. Such instances include politicians vacating the premises when Israeli representatives are speaking, the display of the Palestinian flag in public spaces, and the removal of the Israeli flag when it is observed.

#### 4.3. Q3: Internet-based Action with Explicit Personalisation

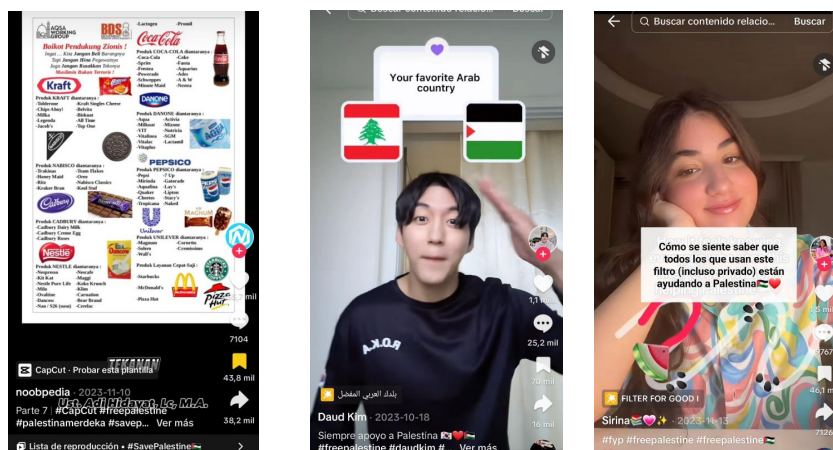
The number of videos identified in the Q3 classification was lower than in the other three classifications, reflecting the narrower scope of this particular classification. The emerging categories of TikToks analysed in this classification exhibit two main focal points: one centred on aid to Palestine and the other on boycotts or the so-called "funa" of supporters of Israel (Table 6).

**Table 6.** Subcategories of the Q3 classification

Subcategory	# of TikToks
Filter, watermelon game	4
Trend, comparing Palestine with Israel	2
Trend, celebrities and brands supporting Palestine	3
Boycott of pro-Israeli or pro-Israeli products	5
Filter, freepalestine mouthpiece	3
Trend, supporting Palestine	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

**Figure 3.** TikToks frames of category Q3



Source: Own elaboration, 2024

One illustrative example of the first approach is the creation of a filter on TikTok called "FILTER FOR GOOD" by the creator @xojourdanlouise. The filter is based on a straightforward watermelon game, and the creator has stated that, when utilized on a large scale, she will donate the revenue generated by TikTok to foundations that support the Palestinian cause. She posits that, in the absence of a clear path to providing assistance in the context of armed conflict, this represents a straightforward means of offering support. At the time of analysis completion, the filter had been utilised in 12 million videos. Furthermore, the creator disseminates updates and references the organisations to which she makes donations. An illustrative example is the donation of \$7,000 to Médecins Sans Frontières in December 2023.

In contrast, the second approach is characterised by the articulation of a clear point of view and the implementation of tangible actions. In the analysed videos, brands of make-up, clothing, food, or other products derived from Israel or explicitly supportive of Israel are exposed. This is done with the aim of encouraging consumers to cease purchasing these products as a form of protest, with the intention of reducing sales and affecting brands that support Israel. A comparable phenomenon can be observed among celebrities, whereby those who express support for Palestine and those who express support for Israel are exposed in order to encourage followers to unfollow pro-Israel celebrities or leave comments on their posts.

The remaining publications analysed refer to trends such as the use of filters that indicate support for Palestine through the display of masks or flags. In other instances, there is a trend whereby individuals opt to discard refuse rather than express support for Israel.

#### 4.4. Q4: Internet-Based Action without Explicit Personalisation

The final category demonstrated a greater degree of diversity with respect to the identified subcategories. This specific classification pertains to self-created products that integrate multiple elements, including music, image creation, illustrations, and videos, which collectively advance a narrative in support of Palestine.

One of the most pervasive themes in the videos was the depiction of destroyed Palestinian landscapes, territories, and mosques, accompanied by messages of support and, for the most part, religious prayers. Some videos emphasised the cultural heritage of Palestine, showcasing its aesthetic appeal, whereas others depicted the transformation of urban centres that were previously popular tourist destinations into ruins. Similarly, collections of images and explanatory videos with voice-overs about the situation in Palestine were created, providing educational and creative content for those interested in understanding the conflict through the platform (Table 7).

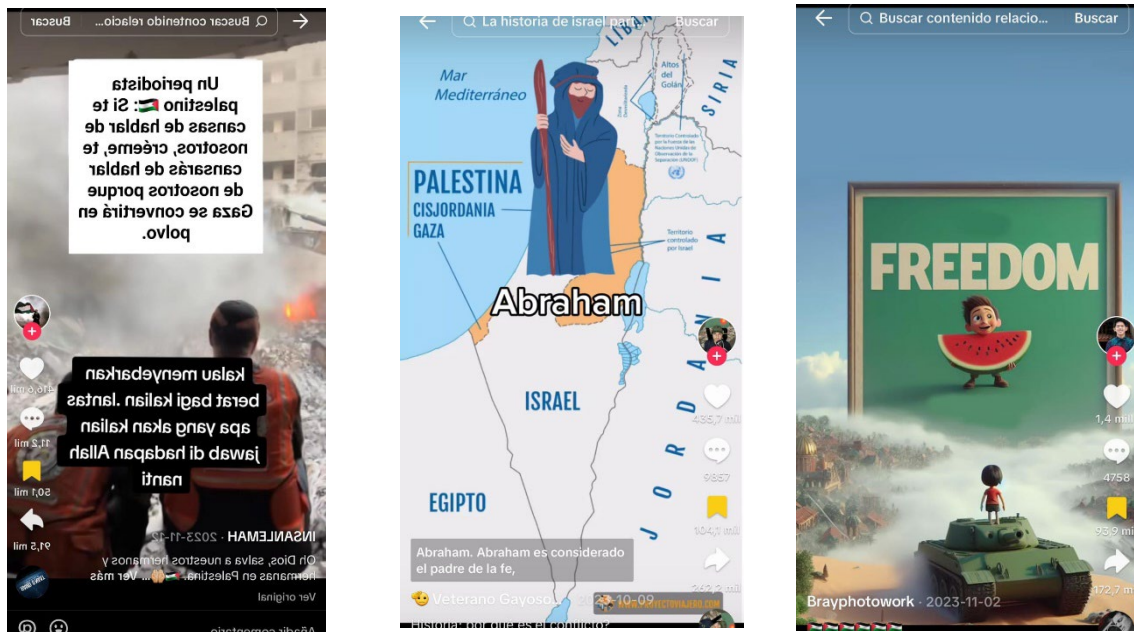
**Table 7.** Subcategories of the Q4 classification

Subcategory	# of TikToks
Cultural and destroyed Palestinian landscapes with messages or prayers	22
Voice-over with background images and explanation of events	10
Artistic demonstration or prohibition: Illustration, drawing, animation or song created.	7
Messages about bombings or massacres	4
Edits of support videos (own situational)	9
Support from countries or leaders	14
News	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.



Figure 4. TikToks frames of the category Q4



Source: Own elaboration, 2024

Another notable category in this ranking pertains to videos and images that illustrate the endorsement of senior leaders from countries that have expressed support for Palestine, both in their rhetorical statements and in tangible actions undertaken during the conflict with Israel. The most frequently referenced leaders included Russian President Vladimir Putin, Prince William of Wales, North Korean President Kim Jong-un, Indonesian President Joko Widodo and Chilean President Gabriel Boric.

Furthermore, artistic demonstrations, including musical compositions, visual artwork and sketches, were observed in support of Palestine. One noteworthy instance was the removal of Mohammad Assaf's song "Dammi Falastini" from Spotify and Apple Music, which narrates the Palestinian nationalist narrative. Additionally, video edits were created that depicted creative scenarios expressing support for Palestine. These included depictions of a crow taking down an Israeli flag, portrayals of a hypothetical future without Israel, and imagined scenarios of Israel occupying other countries.

To a lesser extent, messages about the bombings and massacres in Palestine were also disseminated through images and news stories published by the media, which achieved significant reach on the platform.

## 5. Discussion

The objective of the research was to examine the role of TikTok in cyberactivism, with a particular focus on its impact in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The results obtained serve to confirm the hypotheses initially proposed and fulfil the objectives set out at the outset of the study. As a consequence, the existing body of knowledge on cyberactivism in social networks is enhanced.

H1 provides evidence that TikTok plays a significant role in cyberactivism related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is achieved through the social media narrative of the platform and its amplification of views on the conflict. This, in turn, creates a public sphere where responsibilities are debated by leaders who assume the role of discourse bearers. This process is mostly catalysed by their charisma on social media and their position in public-private institutions or civil society organisations. This phenomenon has provided a platform for voices that have traditionally been marginalised or ignored in traditional media to express themselves and be heard. In this sense, 42 TikToks were identified as examples of internet-supported digital activism actions with explicit personalisation (Q1), and 72 TikToks were identified as examples of internet-supported digital activism actions without explicit personalisation (Q2).



H2 posited that the utilisation of emotional narratives and reasoned arguments on TikTok can exert an influence on public opinion when elucidating the causes and consequences of conflict. This hypothesis was also corroborated by identifying the voices of activists, academics, journalists and ordinary citizens that converge on TikTok, offering a kaleidoscope of perspectives that both mediatise and polarise, but also broaden and reflect the debate, in what could be termed pedagogical activism. These narratives, whether emotional or reasoned, have the potential to educate the audience about the complexity of the conflict and to influence their opinion about it. However, this does not preclude further explanations or interpretations by TikTok social network users. In this regard, it is evident that TikTok has facilitated the emergence of novel forms of media and the presentation of news events (Q4), which reinvigorates the role of citizens as both creators and consumers of content. This, in turn, gives rise to opportunities for discourse and the offering of interpretations that, while potentially influenced by the algorithmic processes, can also challenge the prevailing official narratives.

In regard to H3, which posited that hashtags are instrumental in disseminating content and garnering global attention on the conflict, this study corroborates that assertion. It is evident that the use of TikTok for the purposes of cyber-activism has resulted in a significant increase in the visibility of pro-Palestinian narratives. This is due to the crucial role played by tags in facilitating the dissemination of content and mobilising international attention on the Palestinian cause (Q3). Additionally, they have enabled the redirection of funding for humanitarian activities, bypassing the involvement of non-governmental organisations. In response to this phenomenon, TikTok issued a statement affirming that the views expressed on the platform regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are subject to constant regulation and that the network's objective is not to promote biased opinions.

In terms of objectives, the general objective (GO) aim was to analyse the role of TikTok in cyberactivism and its impact on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This objective was achieved through the implementation of a content analysis. The specific objectives (SO1, SO2) were also met, as it was possible to categorise digital activism on TikTok, analyse the content related to the conflict and discuss the implications of narratives that are no longer limited to entertainment, but seek to inform and create learning communities.

Regarding SO3, while the study identifies a phenomenon of an atmosphere concerned with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, it is important to recognise the potential for extrapolating an interpretation of the current situation. The rapid pace of content changes on TikTok may result in the study losing relevance or being influenced by biases in the selection of material due to the visibility regimes that operate in an algorithm that has not yet been operationalised.

Nevertheless, it paves the way for new avenues of inquiry into the role of social networks in international conflicts and how they can be harnessed to advance freedom of expression and the right to information. It also illuminates the responsibilities inherent in elucidating such intricate conflicts through concise yet evocative narratives. It is therefore necessary to establish a more rigorous methodology that does not treat Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4 as independent entities. Instead, they should be considered as potential components of a larger, integrated category, such as Q1q2, where q represents a dependent but influential variable in determining Q.

In essence, the research contributes to ongoing discussions surrounding the impact of TikTok on the evolution of digital cyberactivism strategies and the emergence of narrative spaces that challenge the authority of information in traditional media. However, it is also important to avoid idealising the role of TikTok in catalysing cyberactivism. Instead, there is a need to focus on the necessity of developing information literacy skills in order to address the growth of fake news, hate speech and historical revisionism.

## 6. Conclusions

### 6.1. *Connected Concern Atmosphere*

The ongoing crisis in the Middle East has contributed to the creation of an atmosphere of interconnected concern. In contrast to previous crises, the focus of attention in the networks is not on security concerns, energy resources or the geopolitical interests of the major powers in terms of their domination of strategic zones. Instead, the current context has brought about a cause that unites emotions and empathy in the midst of a war situation.

In other words, the violation of human rights perpetrated by the State of Israel on the Gazan population allows for the configuration of a geopolitics of emotions (Moïsi, 2009). This indicates that, within an international system characterised by a multitude of conflicts and humanitarian crises, the emotions of humiliation, fear and hope are the most prevalent among the general public.

This connection is achieved when the Palestinian cause appropriates claim-making elements from other common social causes. Discrimination, poverty, student movements, self-determination, recognition and the right to exist (Vidmar, 2015). Nevertheless, the existence of justifiable emotions and claims to be upheld does not preclude the emergence of new violent narratives directed towards others, as evidenced by the transition from advocating for the people of Gaza to invoking the extermination of Jews worldwide. Consequently, the interconnected concern can rapidly evolve into a distinct fracture and dislocation. The perpetuation of cycles of destructive discourse and narrative serves to legitimise polarisation and the perpetuation of cycles of violence.

## **6.2. The Relativisation of Paradigms**

The social interactions that occur within the digital domain are represented by a set of attributes that are assigned within the framework of the social construction of communicative culture. The terms "interconnectivity," "flexibility," "de-hierarchisation," "decentralisation," and "viralisation" are characteristics that are almost automatically associated with the digital world, particularly in the context of social networks. However, other, more critical adjectives have also contributed to the formation of the social network imaginary, including terms such as apathy, vanity, superficiality, triviality, and ephemerality (Ozkula, 2021).

These characteristics have also been ascribed to digital activism or initiatives that have constituted the primary means of expression and social mobilisation in the context of dissent, utilising social networks (Karatzogianni, 2015; Ozkula, 2021). Digital activism has frequently been disparagingly labelled with neologisms such as "clicktivism" and "slacktivism"<sup>1</sup>. This is done with the intention of reducing it to a trivial, low-risk, low-commitment, ephemeral form of activism, and consequently with little chance of translating it into effective possibilities of success for its demands (Karpf, 2020; Morozov, 2009; Rotman et al., 2011).

It is nevertheless important to note that throughout history, social movements have depended on and reinforced their exercise with the technologies available in their context. The utilisation of various media platforms, including the printing press, radio, television, the internet and, most recently, social networks, has provided activists with the tools to advance their agendas and drive social change (Carty & Reynoso Barron, 2019). It is important to note that the levity attributed to certain forms of activism on social networks should not be confused with a general adoption of triviality and ephemerality as structural elements of activism in its new digital dimension (George & Leidner, 2019). Conversely, social media has become an effective instrument for raising awareness and garnering mass support on a transnational scale, irrespective of the level of involvement of the supporter. At a minimum, the visibility of the protest exceeds any expectations of media coverage that could have been anticipated prior to the digital age.

It is evident that sustaining the interest of supporters in the aftermath of the peak periods of engagement observed on social media represents a significant challenge. In this regard, as Leong et al. (2019) posit, the objective of leadership in digital activism subsequent to the apex of support is to consolidate and expand the support base by identifying the most dedicated cyber-activists and devising novel strategies for the utilisation of social networks in the context of evolving scenarios with a proclivity for mediatisation. It is this type of instrumentalisation of social networks that has enabled the growth of support for the pro-Palestinian cause in scenarios that would have been unimaginable until recently. The pro-Palestinian movement provides a paradigmatic example of the recent capacity for the

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<sup>1</sup> These concepts have been employed to describe actions undertaken with the objective of providing support for a political or social cause through the utilisation of social networks, which require minimal effort or commitment. Some of the modalities include the act of providing a 'like', sharing or 'tweeting' or 'retweeting' criticisms or messages of support, modifying profile pictures, sharing hashtags or creating spontaneous, low-quality micro videos or 'reels' through the tools offered by social networks such as TikTok, Instagram or Facebook.

instrumentalisation of social networks at different stages of the crisis. It has successfully re-edited, multiplied and deepened support for its cause on each occasion.

Therefore, an analysis of the pro-Palestinian movement's utilisation of social media over time challenges the notion that these tools are ephemeral and superficial. Since 2008, Palestinians have utilised Facebook and YouTube as a means of disseminating their counter-narrative to the events unfolding in the context of Operation Cast Lead. In 2014, in the aftermath of Operation Protective Edge, Palestinians employed the social media platform Twitter with the hashtag "#GazaUnderAttack" to disseminate information about the events in real time. Subsequently, in 2020, Instagram was utilised to denounce the murder by the Israeli army of the autistic young man Eyad al-Hallaq, through the campaign "#JusticeForEyad". Furthermore, the extensive utilisation of TikTok in the context of the intensification of the conflict in May 2021 and the events of October 2023 exemplifies that a presence on social networks is a conduit for prominence and permanence in the new processes of social activism (Cervi & Divon, 2023).

### **6.3. Changing Paradigms**

The results demonstrate the interconnectedness and rapid dissemination of social networks, while simultaneously challenging the notion that they are superficial and transient in the context of social mobilization. In this sense, despite the pejorative neologisms used to describe digital activism, such as "clicktivism" or "slacktivism", which have been used to brand it as trivial, of low impact and with little temporal projection, evidence has shown that it is, in fact, effective in raising awareness and mobilising on a global scale via social networks. Consequently, social networks, like numerous other communication tools and technologies throughout history, have been employed by social movements to enhance the reach and impact of their demands (Rodríguez-Romero & Cuello, 2022).

In the context of pro-Palestinian activism, these hypotheses are particularly pertinent and valid, as evidenced by the strategic use of social networks (Facebook and YouTube in 2008, Twitter in 2014, Instagram in 2020 and TikTok in 2021 and 2023) to maintain and amplify support over time, challenging perceptions of their supposedly frivolous and ephemeral nature.

This study puts forth an alternative perspective on the intricate landscape of Palestine. The use of social media, particularly TikTok, has been instrumental in drawing attention to and disseminating information about the violence endured by Palestinian citizens. This has permitted the configuration of two principal scenarios, which form the basis of this research.

Firstly, it is emphasised that geopolitical tension extends beyond the conventional boundaries of military operations, affecting a significant number of citizens on a global scale. In other words, the strategic question is becoming increasingly complex, extending beyond the conventional geopolitical, tactical and operational dimensions. Consequently, the Palestinian question has acquired new dimensions that have elevated the issue of war and human rights violations to the forefront of the international public agenda.

Conversely, the utilisation of TikTok as a medium for the dissemination of information has facilitated the elimination of geographical distances, thereby enabling the construction of a cyberactivism that has resulted in a significant redesign of the international system through the performativities of collective action from social networks. Both contexts indicate that the depletion of conventional conduits has permitted digital media to serve as both conduits for communication and performative platforms for cybernetic social movements, thereby restructuring and adapting the fundamental tenets of the established international system.

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