

# THE RESISTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVISTS IN THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION ON INSTAGRAM TOWARDS ISRAEL'S OCCUPATION IN PALESTINE

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## ABSTRACT

The ongoing occupation and injustice carried out by Israel, which has been experienced by the Palestinians for 74 years, has resulted in numerous resistance efforts. Aware of this, the sense of solidarity of individuals and activists across the globe has increased. This study aims to analyze the opinions, experiences, and efforts of social media activists, vocal individuals about the Palestinian cause on Instagram, and an expert on Middle East regarding freedom of expression and human rights. Moreover, this study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological approach along with primary data (in-depth interview) and secondary data. Given the large number individuals from the United States of America, Canada, Jordan, Indonesia, Palestine, United Arab Emirates, and Germany. The findings of this research contribute to the understanding of the Palestinian cause through the perspective of communication sciences, specifically on social media in terms of their resistance efforts or struggle on Instagram. This study found that, in spite of Instagram being able to facilitate a platform to voice out about Palestine, activists and individuals are being curtailed and censored. Based on these findings, further research can be continued to analyze other aspects of the Palestinian struggle, such as the efforts of the authorities through diplomatic aspects.

**Keywords:** *Social Media Activists, Resistance, Freedom of Expression, Human Rights, Instagram.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There are various types of social issues on earth, conscious of the urgency to raise related issues and given the large number of individuals who are in support of Palestine [1], this study will raise the resistance of social media activists and vocals individuals from the United States of America, Canada, Jordan, Indonesia, Palestine, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Germany against Israeli occupation of Palestine. This will be analyzed through the phenomenological approach to Instagram that is related with freedom of expression and human rights. The strong determination to carry out efforts to fight against colonialism, now can be conveyed through social media that is able to reach a global audience. First off, Palestine existed before 1900 with good living conditions [2]. Howbeit, conditions changed after the Balfour Declaration in 1917 which pledged to establish a national home for

the Jews in Palestine [3]. Furthermore, there was *Al Nakba* in Palestine which consists of various violations committed by Israel against the Palestinians [4].

The demolition of houses, the deprivation of Palestinian human rights along with the brutal actions of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) causing bloodshed and the death of Palestinians in large numbers urgently need international action [5]. On the other hand, speaking about technology, nowadays individuals are aware on the usage of internet. Technological advances have progressed rapidly in bringing together audience's voices through various social media platforms that individuals around the world use to express their voices on several issues. This is practically due to the strong influence of social media [6]. Nonetheless, it

is crucial to take notice the updates on social media due to the emerging limitations on freedom of expression. Posts deemed not in accordance with the interests of related parties will lead to account deletion and posts removal, censorship, and other restrictions that indicate an act of human rights violations, especially freedom of expression [7].

The freedom of expression of Palestinians hasn't been fully guaranteed and there's a Cybercrime Law that increases restrictions on the freedom of expression of Palestinians, including voices and opinions of journalists, activists, and so on [8]. As a result of the crisis of freedom of expression and escalations of violence in Palestine, which is communicated on various platforms, it raises worldwide awareness, it is because the freedom of expression exercised by individuals on each platform cannot be contested. Fully aware of this issue, the solidarity of social media activists and vocalized individuals across the globe are increasing [9]. Communication between individuals is vital, this study will stress on the messages, communicators, and interactions related to this issue [10]. Hence, this study will show the importance of social media activists and vocal individuals on Instagram who are involved in the communication activities that will provide and enrich the reader's understanding of the issues raised from the perspective of communication studies.

It's mandatory for individuals worldwide to respect others' freedom in terms of expressing things such as truth in any forms as a fundamental liberty in the society which has a major role to the related outcome [11]. In line with the discussion of freedom of expression, human rights are the fundamental rights inherent to every human being in order to live in freedom. Due to the importance of human rights, individuals across the globe must stand against the injustice [12]. Furthermore, the brutality or human rights violations done by Israel towards Palestinians is getting worse [13].

There are lots of repercussions in terms of the Israeli occupation in Palestine [14]. *Al Nakba* which occurred in 1948 became a historical phenomenon that is still going on until this day followed by other atrocities faced by the Palestinians throughout their daily lives [15]. In aim to achieve something, a community can make plans in order for something to be achieved more easily, foremost is by upholding unity [16]. Besides that, Thomas stated

that cohesiveness is needed to motivate members to stay in a community [17].

The significance of this research is to fulfill the absence of previous studies analyzes of freedom of expression and human rights related with Palestine on Instagram through the analyzes of the communication studies or perspective through several crucial communication studies concepts and theories. It can be seen from previous studies, that there has been no study that truly analyzes the issue related to efforts actively expressed by social media activists and vocal individuals on Instagram from United States of America, Canada, Jordan, Indonesia, Palestine, UAE, and Germany about the Palestinian cause. Therefore, this research will attempt to fulfil the gap of previous studies regarding this issue, by analyze the resistance efforts on Instagram through several concepts (social media, human rights, freedom of expression, and resistance against the occupation) and theories (community, critical, network, and international social support for the community). The strength of this study is the depth and comprehensive analyzes of the Palestinian cause from the perspective of communication studies, specifically the cruciality of freedom of expression, communicators, messages, and Instagram as the most widely used platform for holding activism which also will fulfil the gap of previous studies on this issue. This will be carried out through interviews with 15 people along with credible sources. Based on the findings of this study, it aims to analyze and discuss the opinions, experiences and efforts of social media activists, vocal individuals about Palestine on Instagram, as well as an expert in Middle Eastern studies to freedom of expression and human rights.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Community and Critical Theory

This study uses several concepts in the study of communication that need to be clarified to build a perspective on the discussion of this study. First, according to Tracy, community is a group of people who have the same interest and activities who intend to build a sense of togetherness to pursue certain goals accompanied by a strong sense of connection between them [18]. Moreover, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger stated that community is a group of individuals who have the same goals and communicates to maintain their relations and goals to fight for certain things (conducted offline and online). Communication in the community is vital to support their activities [19].

Related to this research, online activism through social media and individuals who are vocal about Palestine from seven countries are done consistently on Instagram. Therefore, this theory fits the most to understand this research in aiming to analyze activism done by selected individuals. Social media activists and individuals' movements on Instagram have the same goal; to unite Palestinian supporters by vocalizing the Palestinian cause. The strength of using the community theory is to provide a comprehensive analysis of social media activists and individual activists on the Palestinian cause. While the weakness is the absence of recent works from relevant experts.

In addition, the critical theory emphasizes criticism of the complexity of resistance in a society-oriented individual by using individual experiences to actualize justice and changes related to resistance and oppression. Jürgen Habermas stated an assumption that the critical theory is a powerful door for individuals towards the liberation of any kind of domination. The crucial components on the critical theory include the criticism of domination and social changes. Along with it, Freudian and Lacanian stressed the critical theory on the impact and method that the group does to respond their position in marginalization [20].

Critical theory stresses that individuals' resistance efforts are to eliminate any kind of domination [21]. One of the approaches on the critical theory that will be used on this research is the psychoanalytical criticism which emphasizes on how the act of domination affects individuals [22]. This theory is suitable with this research because it aims to understand the resistance efforts carried out by social media activists and vocal individuals on the Palestinian cause to resist against Israel's occupation. The strength of using the critical theory on this study is to provide an in-depth analysis on the efforts done by social media activists and individuals to create change and eliminate the Israeli occupation. However, the weakness of critical theory is the absence of an explanation of activists and communities as interconnected parties.

## 2.2 Network Theory and International Social Support for the Community

Network theory discusses the interconnection, types of relations, and the network that might arise from shared value [23]. Referring to Castells, shared values in a group other than

centrality is incredibly important as an individual link [24]. Shared values in a community plays a huge role in shaping relations [25]. According to Borgatti and Halgin, there's structural holes developed by Burt in 1992 that observed the relationship between individuals that enabled related parties to hold activities [26].

This theory is best suited to provide an in-depth understanding of social media activists and vocal individuals' opinions on how individuals are able to unite their efforts on Instagram for the Palestinian cause. Besides that, the strength of using the network theory is to provide a sharp analysis on the efforts done by social media activists as a network on various countries and its weakness is the absence of specific explanation on activism. Furthermore, social support is an effort consisting of social integration with individuals or parties that highlights the contribution of supportive roles and interactions from individuals around the world to solve issues that will influence future actions and decisions [27]. The strength of using this theory is to provide a comprehensive understanding of individual support worldwide for pro-Palestinian communities and individuals, and the weakness is the absence of recent work from relevant experts.

## 2.3 Rationale of the Study

There are concepts used in this study, including social media, human rights, freedom of expression, and resistance against the occupation (silencing, violence, and occupation). Foremost, social media is a digital technology-based platform used by audiences worldwide that emphasizes a few components including contents and interactions among users, and the platform of content distributions (forms: messages, information, and involved individuals) [28]. Jürgen Habermas developed the public sphere concept as a place where audiences meet, communicate, and distribute ideas and voices [29]. Hereinafter, according to O'Meara, Instagram is the most used platform that consists of various features to facilitate individuals to communicate and convey their message [30]. In addition, Abusalim states that social media activists' voices have a powerful impact [31].

Human rights are parts of norms and ethics to provide justice to individuals that must be implemented by all parties. But there are numerous ongoing human rights violations [32]. Referring to McLeod, it is a mandatory to respect freedom of expression, thus, to maintain the assurance of human

rights and communicate with others [33]. Hereinafter, every medium has its policy that regulates everything within the medium, and it is made by those who are affiliated with each platform [34].

According to Lamer, freedom of expression related to the distribution of information in the globalization era through various platforms are able to strengthen audiences' relations [35]. Hereinafter, occupation is an act that causes countless negative impacts that brings out resistance efforts [36]. Refers to Bruneau, resistance linked with acts of silencing is done by the occupier [37]. Refers to Marshall, occupation is an illegal action to seize a land helped by armed forces [38], further, Seitz states that activism involves communication [39].

Research on the Palestinian cause attracts researchers from different fields, however, there's no research yet that focuses on exploring the resistance efforts done by social media activists in the struggle for freedom of expression on Instagram that analyzes from the communication studies perspective. A previous study by Hitchcock analyzed the BDS movement on social media, rhetoric, and effectiveness. However, the result didn't explore the resistance efforts of social media activists [40]. Another previous study by Karam Dana analyzed the history of Palestinians nonviolence resistance against the Israeli Zionists [41]. However, the focal point in the two previous studies is not on the resistance efforts carried out by activists in the struggle for freedom of expression on Instagram about the Palestinian cause. This study differs from the abovementioned because the analyzes involves several theories and concepts that are pertinent to the communication studies perspective. Which will complement and fulfils previous studies on the Palestinian cause through the communication studies or perspective through five dimensions (pro-Palestine freedom of expression, human rights, solidarity and international support, individual experiences, and community cohesiveness).

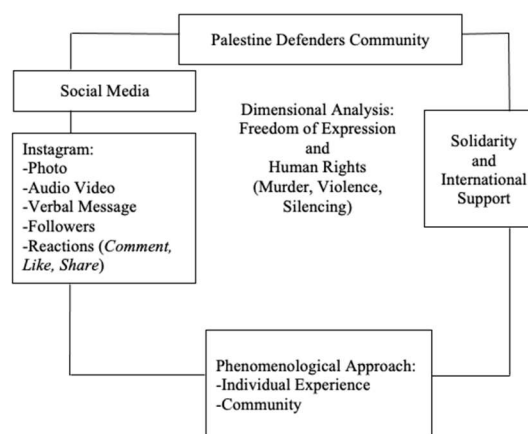


Figure 1: Research Framework.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used by the researcher is to comprehend how the research is carried out by using qualitative approach to get a comprehensive analysis outcome on the uplifted issue [42]. The usage of qualitative approach is intended to analyze and discuss the resistance efforts done by social media activists and vocal individuals in their struggle for freedom of expression on social media, particularly on Instagram towards Israel's occupation in Palestine. Besides that, this study uses the phenomenological approach which consists of primary data (in-depth interview as the major source) and secondary data.

#### 3.1 Participants

The researcher conducted interviews with 15 interviewees from the United States of America, Canada, Jordan, Indonesia, Palestine, UAE, and Germany as this are viewed as the most accurate sources for the uplifted issue, due to their richness of experience and knowledge, where Jordan and UAE are part of Arab countries [43], and the United States of America is a country known by the diversity and they also have largest population [44]. According to Eye on Palestine, lots of individuals in Canada are in support for the Palestinian cause [45]. Indonesia as a country with the largest Muslim population in the world are in support for Palestine [46]. Also, as a European country, there are people who are in support for Palestine in Germany [47]. The interviewees included activists who have done online and offline activisms, vocal individuals, and an expert in Middle Eastern studies. Simultaneously, the researcher actively observed the online activisms of said interviewees on Instagram for eleven months (June 2021-April 2022). Thus, the interviews are

recorded and noted, then will be processed through the conventional method (coding) to analyze gathered data from credible sources and interviews.

### 3.2 Interview, Document, and Observation

This study uses primary and secondary data collection through the in-depth interview (open-ended questions) chosen through the purposive sampling technique with 15 interviewees (acronyms: Hat, Gag, Tat, Hja, Lal, Ziz, Hra, Bvo, Umo, Hut, Luh, Yay, Aka, Sja, and Hka) that will be analyzed and processed through several steps. Referring to McConville and Bryson, there is an interview ethic where the researcher must protect the privacy of the interviewee, thus, the names of the interviewees in this study are written in acronyms [48]. The aim of using in-depth interview is to provide interviewees opportunity to give a deep explanation based on their personal experiences [49]. Moreover, several data in various forms (text, photo, video, and audio-visual) owned by interviewees will be analyzed. Moreover, the usage of open-ended questions is intended to address relevant aspects and to obtain a deep, accurate, and a clear answer related to their perspectives, efforts, and experiences [50].

The interviewees must be eligible to fulfil the criteria referring to the existing guidelines based on their remarkable experience and knowledge. Hence, the analysis is able to be done comprehensively consisting of five dimensions. This study shows that the phenomenological approach developed by Husserl will be analyzed objectively through the perspectives and experiences of the interviewees [51]. The usage of phenomenological approach are intended to explore the essences and in-depth meanings of individuals' experience that is illuminated with a careful, objective, accurate, and comprehensive experiences of interviewees [52]. In addition to online observations on Instagram, there are other observations on conventional media such as Cable TV, particularly news (Al Jazeera and so on) to integrate and confirm gathered contents from YouTube.

### 3.3 Data Analysis Technique

First, the researcher will reduce all gathered data. Second, the researcher will provide all gathered data related to the uplifted topic to make it clear and understandable [53]. Third, the researcher will conduct the data verification [54]. Fourth, there's a coding step consisting of momentum and interesting content which will be labelled using the initial or open coding intended to label several things to

identify whole related components [55]. Fifth, all gathered data will be categorized to classify the patterns into some category that has meaning [56]. Finally, referring to Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2014), the researcher will compare everything in conformity with several concepts and theories used in the study, process it, and convey it as findings [57].

There are five components that will be used in this study, which will be described and analyzed in the findings and discussion. Referring to Amos, Harrison, and Woods, freedom of expression must be implemented by worldwide individuals (journalists and so on) as part of personal autonomy [58]. For the human rights component, O'Bryne (2013) states that human rights are parts of norms and ethics that must be respected by all parties [59]. Additionally, for the solidarity and international support component, Borgatti and Halgin (2011) explained that network among parties is crucial [60], also, Goldsmith states that the given social support towards a community or the people will affect the upcoming taken actions and solidarity [61]. For the individual experience component, Vannini stated that experience-based towards certain issue is crucial to provide an objective and deep explanation [62]. Most importantly, Thomas stated that the community cohesiveness is essential to pursue goals [63].

## 4. FINDINGS

This study involved 15 interviewees from a diverse age range and seven countries along with online observations and interviews. Through the evaluation stated in the previous sub-chapter, interviewees from the United States of America, Canada, Jordan, Indonesia, Palestine, UAE, and Germany are viewed as the most accurate sources for the Palestine issue, due to their richness of experience and knowledge as well as their consistency in terms of their efforts to support Palestine, where Jordan and UAE are part of Arab countries, the United States of America is a country known by the diversity and also have the largest population, the plentifulness of individuals in Canada are in support for the Palestinian cause, Indonesia as a country with the largest Muslim population in the world are in support for Palestine, and Germany as a European country are also in support for Palestine which means the analysis criteria are similar. Additionally, interviews were conducted online (through calls) and in writing using

purposive sampling questions considered five relevant dimensions including freedom of expression, human rights, solidarity and international support, individual experiences, and community cohesiveness. All gathered data will be described and analyzed in the findings and discussion. The findings section will clarify and explain opinions, experiences, and efforts of social media activists, vocal individuals about the Palestinian cause on Instagram, and an expert on the Middle East regarding freedom of expression and human rights as aims and part of research problems.

#### 4.1 Freedom of Expression

Interviewees in this research are individuals from various countries who have similar stance and understanding of freedom of expression, especially on the Palestinian cause. It's mandatory for individuals worldwide to respect others' freedom in terms of expressing things in any form and through any platform. To achieve an effective communication with others, non-discriminatory participation must be implemented. Besides that, every country adopts a different law, but every country must implement the universal law. Gag as an individual who is vocal and consistently vocalizing the Palestine cause on social media Instagram said:

“To my opinion, it goes back to the law, the law is biased, the law in Israel is made to protect Israel itself and nothing more than, it has to be change, revised, abolished. They have no human rights, they're not giving the freedom of express human rights. Because everybody in Palestine is fighting for human rights and they're oppressed and suffering the most. When it comes to Palestinian, I don't think you can express anything. Everything can be censored, biased.”

Certain experiences faced by interviewees are mostly the same, as well as their stance on the importance of freedom of expression that must be done universally, including for the Palestinians. As the fundamental right to communicate with others, both domestically and internationally, freedom of expression on social media such as Instagram must be implemented with transparency. As one of the most powerful social media platforms that is universally used, Instagram is also used by social media activists and individuals across the globe to

express their voice and communicate about the Palestine cause. Gag said:

“When it comes to social media, I posted a lot of things. Unfortunately, my account was deleted three times and I'm still try to spread so much information as much as I can. So, through this channel, I can reach more people. I lost a lot of followers for being deleted, because I posted such things, because community guideline. So, I did reply to Instagram. To their view, I want them to kind of review it for something, but I don't even know somebody is really reviewing this guideline. I guess the language I use was being censored, even just the word Palestine is almost like a cursed to Instagram, which is a part of community guideline. Censorship is a big thing too. I took a live stream, so it's live, and there's a message from Instagram that says “you're not allowed to do this at the moment”, it's not only me.”

Hereinafter, Instagram is not the only platform that can be used to raise awareness and voice certain issues, specifically the Palestinian cause. But it's crucial to emphasize that Instagram has been limiting things related to the Palestine cause which indicates the absence of implementation of freedom of expression. Based on the other interviewee's experience, Lal said:

“Social media has a role in defending the Palestinian cause by spreading awareness on what is happening in Palestine, and because our lives have become dependent on the Internet, social media has a great role in spreading the truth. I see that in the recent period, the videos and photos that have been published showing the Israeli violations of the Palestinian territories have been greatly restricted. As for me, I think the least we can help them with is praying for them and helping them to make their voices heard by showing the world what is happening in Palestine of injustice and violations. The liberation of Palestine

begins with awareness and education of the whole world of the importance of Islamic sanctities and the importance of Palestine as a holy land for us.”

As one of the most influential social media platforms, Instagram is able to facilitate communication channels, but in reality, there are lots of restrictions and other barriers when it comes to the human rights issue, especially the Palestinian cause. In terms of freedom of expression on Instagram and how it goes on Instagram recently, the other interviewee, Ziz said:

“Their freedom of speech on social media we can say its restricted, removing and considering contents as sensitive to block the reach it is what we witnessed lately. The social movement social media apps is a great tool to make the voices heard, lately we saw how the social media can change and it has a great impact, example, when Muna Al Kurd was about to be displaced as the Palestinians are being displaced every single day, when she raised her voice and spoke up the truth with her brother Mohammad, they had the world’s attention and support. Instagram is an amazing platform to share and expose atrocities, despite of being restrictive lately but still gives more space than any other platform, but on Instagram we have more space to share and expose this terrorist occupation I believe, that’s why it is used and familiar more than the other apps.”

#### 4.2 Human Rights (Killing, Violence, and Silencing)

Human rights are the fundamental rights inherent to every human being in order to live in freedom. It must be protected, enforced, and implemented by all parties. As time passes by, violations towards human rights in every dimension has increased, majorly human rights violations done by Israel. Aka explained that Palestinians don’t have much freedom and constantly have to “greenlight” everything by Israel. Hra said:

“The Palestinian people are always subjected to violence and torture by the occupation forces (the Israeli occupation always violates human rights, yet we do not see the media

highlight these facts), but they are people who do not know the meaning of surrender.”

Furthermore, the brutality (human rights violations) done by Israel towards Palestinians, including but not limited to, mass killing through the siege, ruthless violence towards the Palestinians of all ages done by IDF working with Israeli settlers, forcibly expelling Palestinians from their houses, and silencing the Palestinians on social media and in real life (Al Jazeera Plus, 2021). Hka explained that there are many pro-Israel organizations and lobby groups that have a long history of silencing Palestinian student organizations and other Palestinian as well as non-Palestinian human rights organizations that speak on Israel brutal occupation and treatment of Palestinians as second-class people. Hereinafter, Hat said:

“If only, freedom of expression and human rights exist in Palestine, I told you they’re not exist. You can go to jail for life for simply speaking about what’s happening, that’s number one. Number two, you can spend your time in jail just to raise the Palestinian flag, in Palestine it did not exist, basically all of your basic necessity of human rights are out of the window. They can torture you, extract all of your organs from your body, slowly kill you, they can do anything, and nobody can hold them accountable. That’s what’s wrong, the whole administrative detention, hashtag Israeli, it’s the one thing, like there’s no human rights. Imagine, you don’t have a right to speak, even if they take you in, you don’t have a right to exist, they try to kill you, erase you from the existence of this earth.”

Under observation, researcher found that an active act of dispossession of Palestinians’ homes or land, human rights violations, and other violations towards Palestinians done by Israel are getting worse. In terms of Palestinian human rights, the other interviewee, Yay said:

“As far as I’ve seen, the Palestinian people got used to not having any human rights, they/we have this strong feeling that Palestine will eventually come back to the right owners, we resist until our very last breath because as long as the Arab community and the

Muslim world don't unite and fight for Palestine, then no human being but God will be able to give Palestine back to us. Human rights is not what we need right now, it's our land that we need."

There are lots of repercussions in terms of the Israeli occupation in Palestine (Nijim, 2022). The space for the Palestinian people to voice their opinions on various aspects of life are shrinking as a result of Israel's actions as the perpetrators of continuing human rights violations against Palestinians. Further, Htu said:

"When it comes to human rights, it's very minimum. First, Palestinian Authority, from the security aspect is still under Israel's control, Palestinian don't own any weapons, only have polices, not an army, and it's still limited. Israel's are doing arbitrary actions, build homes on the Palestinian land. Now, we can see the percentage of Palestinians land (land loss) seized by Israel. Areas that are belong and authorized to Palestine is being occupied by Israel, then they build homes for Israeli settlers in the Palestinian land. It's because Israel feels like they're above the wind, due to their weapons and international network aspect. But, as time goes by, condemnation for Israel is increasing. If it becomes a minority, Israel's will be overwhelmed to face the situation."

### 4.3 Solidarity and International Support

All acts of colonization, human rights violations, injustice, and all forms of unlawful acts against humans are unacceptable and must be accounted transparently. Amid one of the most horrific violence against humans committed by Israel against the Palestinians, worldwide awareness is rising followed by numerous efforts in all forms (online and offline). Furthermore, human rights advocates and Palestinians supporters across the globe demonstrate the consistent and extraordinary efforts made by individuals and social media activists to protect the exercise of human rights for individuals. A social media activist, Tat explained:

"A lot of people from different countries, we're all trying to understand what's happening in Palestine. We're trying to raise awareness about what is happening,

even though our families are not there but we talk to people about what's happening and try to spread awareness that Israel is not a good guy in the game."

The consistent support carried out by social media activists and vocal individuals is not only shown in one country, among the many Palestinian supporters, individuals from several countries selected in this study show their consistent actions. Hja, said:

"Social media is another way of exposing the crime of Israel, this is the people back then didn't have. To unite is to see what others see. Seeing through the camera, can actually see the truth. Some people, say the camera lies, but no, this is the real thing that we need to fight against in our society. Because Israel can shut down the media. The media is powerful, they can do anything. This is how people united, to see the bigger picture of what is going on in Palestine, what we can do to move forwards, to the situation because of what we can do to provide a better solution for the Palestinian people. Unity means peace. Based on what they're feeling, as an oppressed, discriminated society right now in Palestine by the western media, and they tend to demonize Palestinian supporters."

Solidarity is a unity that produces or is based on community interests, objectives, and standards. Instagram as a social media tool to amplify, advocate, communicate, and spread the truth of the Palestinian struggle, has been censored by Israel and those who are associated with them. These violations has been revealed by social media activists and vocal individuals through their efforts on Instagram, in addition to their efforts made through offline events, and so on. Yay said:

"Instagram is indeed a very good way to communicate with one another, unfortunately it will not free Palestine. It can help by making more people support Palestine and spread awareness and feed the curiosity of people that didn't have the opportunity to learn about Palestine. It's important to communicate with people that support



Palestine in order to teach each other more things and the knowledge will be passed onto others that would like to learn more. Because supporters will support Palestine when they really understand the history and bloodshed the Palestinian people have been and are still going through. I've had the chance to speak to many loving supporters on Instagram that showed continuous support for Palestine, though it definitely is hard to deal with Instagram's algorithm and deleted posts, it's not so hard to find kind hearted people that believe in peace."

#### 4.4 Individual Experiences

*Al Nakba* which occurred in 1948 became a historical phenomenon that is still going on until this day followed by other atrocities faced by the Palestinians throughout their daily lives (Pappé, 2020). The experience of Individuals and social media activists varies based on where they come from and the actions they take. Thus, certain experiences faced by individuals from different continents are crucial to be brought up, Bvu experienced censorship and removal of posts. The interconnection between individual experiences, communities, and movements is one thing that most activists experience, especially on Instagram. Luh as a social media activist explained:

"It's important as an activist to maintain relations, and connection, and networking with different social movements across the world. Because many of our struggles are interconnected, for example, BLM, our movement for freeing Palestine and digital occupation that are connected, because it's based on discrimination and oppression, is linked together, and when we say we want this for all because we demand justice for all these movements through Instagram and important to stay in touch, it's easier to stay connected, as many of this movements are across the world it's not always interconnected, but social media and Instagram made it easier. Also as an activist on Instagram, it's easier to spread out the fact on the ground that are happening, far away from any propaganda, the Israeli use.

Through Instagram and other social media platforms and reaching out to other like communities around the world, it's easier to tell our story, because our weapon is our phone, our camera, our microphone, and it's easier to open a live or take a picture here of what's happening and faster to reach the audience, it is more efficient, more effective. This didn't happen before, that's why like the Zionist they control the mainstream media, and there was no like really important for the social media platforms. On the other hand, it's also a challenge, because many sphere campaign are directed against the Palestinian activist in the media. It's not easy to be an activist on social media, because also Instagram they silence our voices, many of our voices, many of our accounts or our posts are being shadow banned, many of our content are being censored, this is part of the problem, but it's so much better than like mainstream media, we have more safe space to speak about what's happening in Palestine and important to maintain relations with other comrades across the world because historically we are also connected."

Interactions between individuals and social media activists such as communicating on Instagram are able to support their activities for Palestine, but it must be emphasized that there are many limitations. Referring to Hra, Palestinian supporters are currently trying to communicate or spread what is happening in Palestine via Instagram and they will continue doing so because that is the only way to resist Israeli occupation. Umo further explained that many efforts were made on personal accounts such as resharing and posting content that sheds light on the plight of Palestinian people. Besides that, movements on social media can be incredibly powerful and impactful, especially if it leads to actual physical movements on the ground. Moreover, Aka experienced getting mass hate comments from pro-Israel around the globe and yet Instagram does nothing to delete those comments or take down such accounts. Hat also said:

"We face a lot of negative comments, so much through Instagram, that basically try to limit us. But it doesn't scare us. I got censored, for example, I'm in Palestine, I share anything in

Palestine, my accounts will be censored two weeks. There's certain way that people can go beyond the algorithm, sometimes there's certain strategies and you'd rather take screenshot and video recordings, and post that, instead you actually resharing the posts. Because that's playing a big difference, its coming from you, it's not coming from the actual page. Which regardless, we get threatened and cancellation all the time, and it's up to us, to again, play that corporate game in order, for us to us send the message. There are struggles here in there of course, but with the support of the community and the hearts that you have with you see what's happening in Palestine every day. So, we face lots of hardship through that, it's not easy, it takes a lot of efforts to create content for people to follow, to be more interested, to constantly listen and watch, to see your next post."

#### 4.5. Community Cohesiveness

To achieve something, a community can make plans for something to be achieved more easily, by upholding unity (Wenger, 1999). Besides that, Thomas (2011) stated that cohesiveness is needed to motivate members to stay in a community. Sja explained that a united community on Instagram has a big role. Being a part of one of the biggest ethnic communities in the world, it is essential to try to spread the truth about the occupation as much as possible and to encourage a movement (in terms of the community). Thereupon, Hat said:

"I think it's very important to unite this movements. So, the different between my community and some pro-Palestinian organizations here in my area, is that we are very smart, we are able to align and unite with other movements. We have the indigenous people standing with us, we have people from BLM stand with us. So, this is a relationship that we are able to form from the field like outside, we are able to go to their events and they come to our events, and vice versa. Every time I post, they got my back, they share anything I do, because again we built our trust. Now I'm able to create

that relationship with them, I have their support, it's very important to aligned with movements in your social media and to be smart to play it right, don't be too aggressive, don't be too straightforward either, people decide on their own. So, it's important to, I call it "corporate game", it's like when you're working in a professional company and when you have to be a certain way, the same thing in the movement we educate for Palestine we have to be aware of all of these things."

Many attacks from supporters of Israel are faced by social media activists and individuals when they post and do things in support of Palestine. Hat explained that there are apartheid (Israeli occupation) people who are paid full time to sit behind a computer and create up to 90 different accounts to cause trouble and attack pro-Palestinian pages. Hat received death threats, in addition to censorship which is an important part when advocating for Palestine. This is shown to be the number one barrier when voicing the Palestinian cause. Hat explained that Hat got people to say "Free Palestine". What's more, is that Aka is experienced for being connected with people in Palestine. In Aka's experience, accounts are always blocked by Instagram when it comes to speaking about Palestine. Hja said:

"Palestine, when it comes to human rights, they do need our help, voices to create a huge impact in our society, because right now, in terms of my community or movement account right now, what I'm trying to post is expose certain individuals that don't have a clue what they're saying, what they're doing against Palestinians, because they're not educated enough about the Palestinian history and heritage culture. They do need our help and solution, but it's going to take a lot of steps in order to progress through and push through towards Israel's to end the occupation against the Palestinian. They only want their voices, they want them to stop being killed in their society and level up the peace with others as well around the world."

## 5. DISCUSSION

To start off the discussion, efforts in the struggle to achieve freedom of expression in terms of the Palestinian cause on social media, such as Instagram led to this study to use five aspects that are consistent and transparently by 15 interviewees (by social media activists and individuals) in response to the marginalization of Palestinians. Most of the interviewees faced censorship and restrictions on Instagram because of their pursuit for justice and change for Palestine. Referring to the interviewees, it can be analyzed that Instagram, as the most widely used social media platform, must be able to accommodate users' freedom in conveying messages and communicating with followers in a non-discriminatory manner, especially when it comes to the Palestinian issue. Referring to Ozohu-Suleiman, non-Western media have a role as peacemakers on the Palestinian-Israeli issue [64]. However, it does not explain the importance of social media activists and individual efforts to the Palestinian cause. Also, referring to Zahoor and Sadiq, the Palestinian-Israeli issue changed after the emergence of digital media [65], but it did not explain that Instagram is used by social media activists and individuals to communicate about the Palestinian cause and its updates as this study does. The finding in this study is in line with the discussion of previous studies about the restrictions by Israel as well as barriers experienced by individuals who are vocalizing the Palestinian cause.

Israel has been violating Palestinians human rights, and they include but not limited to killing, daily violations, and silencing the Palestinians from speaking up about the Palestinian cause both offline and online (mainly on Instagram). Interviewees have the same explanation and strong stance that Israel has been violating Palestinian human rights in all aspects of life. The absence of respect towards Palestinians human rights must be held accountable. Information spread by the Palestinians on Instagram are being censored. There are lots of Palestinian resistance efforts due to the brutality they experienced done by the IDF, that can be seen through Instagram, YouTube, Cable TV, etc. Referring to Spielberg, Dajani, and Abdallah, the brutality done by the IDF towards the Palestinian men are rising [66], but it fails to explain other violations against Palestinian human rights. Further, referring to Hill, Ben Hagai, and Zurbriggen, non-Palestinian activists are in support of Palestine [67], but it did not examine the cruciality of

communication among Palestine supporters on Instagram as this study does. The finding of this study is in line with the discussion of previous studies about the human rights violations committed by Israel toward Palestinians.

International solidarity and support towards Palestinians are increasing worldwide followed by various consistent activism (by non-Palestinians and Palestinians). Communication with individuals and communities is carried out to maintain solidarity with Palestinian supporters. The network of individuals from various countries to support Palestine indicate a positive relationship between them. Social media activists across the globe plays a major role that helps to organize strategies and unite individuals. Subsequently, international support for the community is still going strong through active communication on Instagram. This is in contrast to the findings of Kelley which only emphasizes the solidarity of several countries related to the Palestinian issue in the context of solidarity as worldmaking [68], as it does not only involve individuals and activists from various countries and continents as this study does. The finding of this study is in line with the discussion of the previous study about the importance of international solidarity to resist against Israel's occupation that involves communication activities among individuals.

Outspoken individuals and social media activists have shared experiences in their struggle to convey messages related to the Palestinian cause on Instagram. The main issue is censorship, apart from other restrictions (on various Instagram features). Despite this, they remain consistent. As Instagram is one of the most widely used digital media, it should be able to accommodate activists, but this must be followed with transparency and non-discriminatory policies. In contrast to the findings of Abu-Ayyash, which emphasizes the connectivity of Palestinian activists with Irish and British activists [69], Abu-Ayyash does not mention activists from various continents as this study does. In contrast to the findings of Erakat and Hill which emphasizes the Black-Palestinian transnational solidarity [70], it does not explain the experiences of activists and vocal individuals from several countries that is raised on this study who also play an important role on the Palestine cause as this study does. The finding of this study is in line with the discussion of two previous studies about the various experiences faced by worldwide Palestinian supporters.

To execute activisms, community cohesion and strategic plans are vital to support Palestine and sustain the community for the long term. Strong connection and communication must be well-managed to maintain the togetherness among individuals to help liberate Palestine from Israeli occupation. This is different from the findings of Abushbak and Majeed which only stresses the role of Instagram to organize protests and distribute information to unite pro-Palestinians [71], but it did not analyze the evolution of Instagram from 2021-2022 in terms of the Palestinian cause, including censorship towards social media activists and individuals as this study does. Furthermore, in contrast to Siapera's findings which only analyzed the hashtag or tweet #Palestine on Twitter [72], but it does not discuss recent experiences and all components related to the recent Palestinian human rights on Instagram as this study does. The finding of this study is in line with the discussion of two previous studies about the importance of community cohesion, both offline (on the ground) and online (social media).

## 6. CONCLUSION

The importance of resistance efforts carried out by social media activists as well as vocal individuals from the United States of America, Canada, Jordan, Indonesia, Palestine, UAE, and Germany on Instagram is raised and analyzed in this study using five dimensions (freedom of expression, human rights, solidarity and international support, individual experiences as well as community cohesiveness) and a phenomenological approach, several theories (community, critical theory, as well as network and international social support for the community) as well as several concepts (social media, human rights, freedom of expression, and resistance against the occupation). The need of this research is to understand the Palestinian cause through the perspective of communication sciences, specifically on social media in terms of their resistance efforts on Instagram as the most influential and widely used platform in the digital era that contain information and enable to accommodate individuals' communication activities. Also, this study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological approach. The facts based on the findings through observation and analysis in this study prove that there are many absences of freedom of expression experienced repeatedly by social media activists and vocal individuals on the Palestinian cause, such as censorship, and other

limitations to communication including not allowed to interact with followers, being curtailed to voice Palestinian issue on a story, post, live, direct message, and so on. Moreover, to accomplish effective communication with others on social media, especially on Instagram, non-discriminatory participation must be well-implemented and done consistently.

In addition, human rights are the fundamental rights inherent to every human being. There are human rights violations committed by Israel against Palestinians. These atrocities affect all aspects of Palestinian livelihood that can be seen on every social media platform, specifically Instagram which is documented and spread to audiences around the world. The human rights violations committed by Israel against Palestinians include killing and silencing the voices of Palestinians which occur every single day, and it's getting worse. Human rights violations in every aspect of life committed by Israel must be held accountable.

Moreover, international solidarity and support for Palestine and pro-Palestinian communities is carried out consistently by all parties through the communication feature on Instagram. Human rights advocates, activists, and Palestinians supporters across the globe show their efforts to protect the implementation of human rights. The existence of a network that unites Palestinian supporters in numerous countries plays a major role in supporting Palestine, this includes the importance of social media activists. Thus, communication, transparency, and consistency are the keys to voice the Palestinian cause. Especially, the development of technology nowadays is getting advanced and make the activisms a lot more effective through any social media platform, specifically on Instagram.

Furthermore, the experience of social media activists and vocal individuals regarding the Palestinian struggle are largely the same in the context of voicing and communicating with supporters about the Palestinian struggle on Instagram. But censorship is the main problem, apart from other restrictions. Thus, a transparency and non-discriminatory policy must be implemented by Instagram due to the importance of fairness in terms of the treatment towards individuals. Moreover, maintaining communication with others who are in support for Palestine is vital.

As a final point, community cohesion is vital to support Palestine. Maintaining community solidarity to achieve goals must be emphasized. Communication in the community held both online and offline by members is still going strong. Consistent and well-managed communication are the keys to sustaining communities and individuals who stand up for justice and human rights, especially to help liberate Palestine. Besides that, strategic plans within the community are needed to stand against injustice and to support Palestine to encounter any issues.

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