Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis: A Case of a Palestinian Movement

تحليل خطاب نقدي متعدد الوسائط: دراسة حالة حركة فلسطينية

"Mohammed wesam" Amer

"محمد وسام" عامر

Communication and Languages Faculty, Gaza University, Gaza, Palestine

كلية الاتصال واللغات، جامعة غزة، غزة، فلسطين

Corresponding author: mw.amer@gu.edu.ps

Abstract

The paper examines digital discourses of and on the Palestinian movement, Hamas on Twitter. The data corpus contains tweets and retweets by Shehab News Agency (Hamas's agency), and all tweets associated with the hashtag #hamas and produced by any tweeter. The data resources were extracted in January 2022. The paper uses Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996 & 2006) social semiotic approach and critical discourse tools to examine online, textual and visual features of tweets. The findings show that the word occupation الاحتلال is the most frequent word in the tweets of Shehab News Agency, and it is associated with hashtags such as Hamas, Jerusalem, among other words. The result of world cloud shows that the hashtag #Hamas is associated with frequent words and hashtags, e.g., #gaza, #palestine, #israel, #terrorism, #terror, #hamasterrorists, ##thegazayoudontsee, #theykidnappedgaza. This discursive strategy leaves a negative representation on Hamas and legitimizes any actions conducted by Israel or any actors against Hamas. The analysis shows while Hamas's discourses such as resistance of the Israeli occupation, Hamas is linked with terrorism as seen in tweets associated with the hashtag #hamas.

In conclusion, as expected in party-loyal media, the digital discourse on twitter on and of Hamas is understood as a struggle between Hamas and Israel a fight between Hamas and Israel rather than a war against Palestinians who pay high prices. This is because Twitter blocks Hamas's accounts and mostly remove Palestinians' materials and contents that criticize Israel.

Keywords: Hamas, Twitter, Social Media, Israel, Discourse Analysis

ملخص

تبحث هذه الورقة في خطابات حركة حماس الفلسطينية والخطابات عنها على منصة تويتر. تحتوي مجموعة البيانات على تغريدات وتغريدات أعادت مشاركتها وكالة شهاب الاخبارية (وكالة حماس للأخبار على الانترنت)، وجميع التغريدات المرتبطة بالوسم Hamas# أو التي غرد بها أي مستخدم على منصة تويتر. تم استخراج البيانات في يناير 2022 عن طريق استخدام NVIVO NCAPTURE. تستخدم الورقة منهج Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996 و2006) السيميائي الاجتماعي وكذلك أدوات الخطاب الناقد لفحص الميزات النصيّة والبصريّة للتغريدات. تشير النتائج إلى أن كلمة "الاحتلال" هي الكلمة الأكثر شيوعًا في تغريدات وكالة شهاب، وترتبط بالوسوم مثل حماس، القدس، من بين كلمات ووسوم أخرى. تُظهر نتيجة سحاب الكلمات أن الوسم Hamas# مرتبط بالكلمات المتكررة، والوسوم مثل gaza, #palestine,# israel, #terrorism, #terror, #hamasterrorists, ##thegazayoudontsee,# theykidnappedgaza# . تترك هذه الاستراتيجية الخطابية تمثيلًا سلبيًا لحماس وتضفي الشرعية على أي إجراءات تمارسها إسرائيل أو أي جهات أخرى ضد حماس. يوضح التحليل أن خطابات حماس تركز على مقاومة الاحتلال الإسرائيلي. أيضًا، يجد التحليل أن حماس مرتبطة بالإرهاب كما هو موضح في تغريدات مرتبطة بالوسم Hamas#. في الختام، كما هو متوقع في وسائل الإعلام الموالية للأحزاب، فإن الخطاب الرقمي على منصة تويتر لحماس وعنها يُفهم على أنه صراع بين حماس وإسرائيل بدلاً من أنها حرب ضد الفلسطينيين الذين يدفعون أثمانا عالية. وذلك لأن تويتر يغلق حسابات حماس، ويزيل بشكل كبير المحتوى الفلسطيني الذي ينتقد إسرائيل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: حماس، تويتر، الإعلام الاجتماعي، تحليل خطاب.

Introduction

Social Media has been taken up by various movements (social, political, radical, religious) to reinforce, produce and distribute diverse materials, ideologies and perspectives, where there is an unprecedented access to individual audiences globally. In using social media, there are

several dynamics, tactics and strategies to distribute certain discourses employed by social movements (individuals and/or groups) and/or political parties. Cambridge Analytica's involvements in both Brexit (Scott, 2019) and the 2016 US primaries and presidential elections (Rossini, Hemsley, Tanupabrungsun, Zhang, & Stromer-Galley, 2018) can be seen as examples of how social media data used to target and influence people. Also, social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter and YouTube) have significantly played a major role in the Arab Spring (Arab revolutions), e.g., Egypt (Bhuiyan, 2011), Tunisia (Wulf, Misaki, Atam, Randall, & Rohde, 2013), Syria (Ahmad & Hamasaeed, 2015), Libya (Morris, 2014). That means, social media has made effective changes in political transformation in the Middle East. In this regard, I see that social media is a good resource for organization and social movements.

Social media has given populist, nationalist, Islamist, extremist, radical and/or right-wing actors, leaders and movements extended opportunity structures (see detailed discussion in KhosraviNik & Amer, 2020) to mobilize people and reinforce their ideologies, ideas and thoughts. I claim that the dynamics of communication and political struggle on social media platforms differ from one country to another, from movement to movement and from region to region to achieve certain sets of objectives e.g., construct self or other identities, to appeal to and recruit as many to their movements.

Research Objectives

Within this context, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not exceptional. It is a very heated and long-term conflict (74 years). It is highly debated during the history, and remains so not only in its origins, but in the goals and motivation of each side and the effects it has on politics in the Middle East (Farsakh, 2016). In Israeli discourses, Israeli spokesmen legitimize their wars on the Gaza Strip by different strategies to influence the media and public opinion worldwide. One legitimation strategy is that the Israeli war is portrayed as a war on terrorism and a war on Hamas. The Israeli war and bombings claim to target the houses where Hamas stores its rockets. Usually, Israel puts the responsibility on the Palestinians mainly Hamas, even without any evidence to justify its pre-planned wars. These

claims reflect the Israeli version of reality that does not necessarily reflect the facts on the ground.

In the Palestinian views and mainly Hamas, Palestinians see the events as an Israeli offensive against them. This offensive has claimed the lives of many civilian Palestinians, injured many people and destroyed many houses. In the wars, Israel wipes out entire families almost every day by bombing civilian areas: mosques, schools, hospitals, agricultural areas, industries, and even the only power plant station in Gaza. As we can see, there are discrepancies/differences between the two discourses. This paper focuses on the discourses of Palestinians, mainly Hamas. To be specific, this paper examines and explores online discourses on and of Hamas –the Islamic Resistance Movement –alongside their multiple trajectories on 'Twitter'. More specifically, this paper analyzes digital practices, and linguistic, discursive and multimodal structures that construct Self and Other in discourses of and on Hamas. This will be done by focusing on the hashtag #Hamas and on @ShehabAgency account mainly on the social media platform, 'Twitter'. More specifically, this project aspires to:

1- deconstruct the digital linguistic and discursive structures and practices in building discourses on and of Hamas to reinforce (political) ideologies, mobilise people and propagate agenda on social media platforms (Twitter).

2- analyse and examine meaning-making resources (e.g., construction of self and other, legitimisation strategies).

3- explore consequences and conclusions of discourses on Twitter on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israeli-Palestine conflict and Media

Media is an integral part in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. So, the media war is another form of war besides the physical war (see Makhortykh & Bastian, 2022; Nohrstedt & Ottosen, 2014). In its media war, Israel controls the channels of communication in a way to determine contents and forms of messages, and thus shape the journalistic discourse directed specifically to the western audiences. The conflict has been

covered and reported in media locally, regionally and internationally. Ever since the beginning of the Israeli- Palestinian conflict, Israelis and Palestinians always aim to use all means to propagate their narratives either to the internal or external audiences. Israel, with no doubt, has a better and much advanced sophisticated technological infrastructure than the Palestinians. This infrastructure is reflected on the better use of media worldwide. In response, Palestinians turn to use social media as a way to encounter the Israeli media machine that influences international news outlets in their coverage of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict (see Amer, 2017; Philo & Berry, 2004).

Mostly, media coverage has been criticized by lack of objectivity and excessive bias to Israeli viewpoint of the conflict (see Amer, 2017) and "privileging the Israeli narrative over that of the Palestinian" (Shreim, 2015, p. 2). The role of mainstream media is still influential though there is a significant increase of the social media in treating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The International (western) media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is characterized by bias to the Israeli narrative and huge disinformation of the reality on the ground. The majority of research focused on the Western media perspective as it widely covers the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To support such a claim, I give examples for bias indicators. CNN reports fail to use words such as 'occupied' or 'occupation' (Ackerman, 2001), The BBC also fails to highlight the illegality of settlements and uses nominalization and transitivity in titles to hide the responsibility of the Israelis for Palestinian deaths. The BBC highlights Israeli voices to defend their positions and explaining their actions far more frequently than Palestinian ones (see Barkho, 2008).

Social media and the Israeli-Palestine conflict

In the light of the advancement of information technology and online platforms, Israelis and Palestinians use social media to their best to revive the battle on social media. Many Palestinians and Israelis alike use social media platforms to counter the mainstream narrative of the Gaza Crisis – what has been referred to as the weapon of choice in the conflict. Both Palestinians and Israelis usually intensify their presence and participation during crises, and hardship times as can be seen in the Israeli wars in

Palestine in 2014, 2021 and 2022. Their participation attempts to reinforce their narratives by constructing and distributing certain discourses to affect local, regional and international audiences. Also, they aim to represent themselves or the others in certain images that can reflect their ideologies and thoughts. For the development of the information technology, social media plays big roles in Palestine specifically. What is perhaps most significant and important about social media and its role for future conflicts, is the speed at which it is able to disseminate information to audiences, and for those audiences to provide feedback (see Makhortykh & Bastian, 2022). Though, social media would not be a surrogate for real resistance in the Palestinian context as argued by (Aouragh, 2008). In contrast, Najjar (2010, p. 25) concludes that in the Israeli war on Gaza in 2008-2009, social media contests the Palestinian discourse and identifies "who is a Palestinian or the meaning of Palestinian identity".

Palestinian factions and activists intensify their use of social media communication to encounter 1) the Israeli narratives, 2) respond alternatively to the mainstream bias to Israel, and 3) reach out their narrative to wide audiences around the world. Also, social media has sought to alert people to the plight of Palestine, while also advocating its cause (see Etling, Kelly, Faris, & Palfrey, 2010). Further, Palestinians can create virtual Palestinian communities and connect parts of the Palestinian diaspora (see Amer, 2022; Christou & Sofos, 2019; Hanafi, 2005). Palestinians use social media to actively reconstruct their identities.

To claim, social media can allow Palestinians to tailor their messages to their international supporters and monitor their feedback extremely quickly. Palestinians use social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter and YouTube) to counter traditional narratives by mainstream media or Israel on the Palestinian Crises. In Palestine, social media is important not only for democracy and social communication, but also it is used for resisting the Israeli occupation and reinforcing Palestinian narratives. The events have been covered on social media by ordinary people more than on mainstream media by professional journalists. The participation of Palestinians become as insider perspectives to the Israeli aggressions and all events in Palestine.

During the various Israeli wars on Gaza, thousands of people have been killed, injured or displaced (Amer, 2017). The large numbers of victims attract widespread mainstream media attention worldwide as well as social media activities. Social media platforms, e.g., Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and mobile applications, e.g., WhatsApp and Telegram are used during the wars by Palestinians despite the fact that Palestinians have shortage of electricity, a very limited access and low internet speed in comparison with Israelis. In consequences of these obstacles, Palestinian lose the chance to widely encounter the Israeli official and unofficial narratives.

Socio-politico Contexts: Hamas

Hamas, the Movement of the Islamic Resistance [1], operates in a certain socio-techno/digital-politico contexts in Palestine. It has been almost three decades since its establishment in 1987 as a wing of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine (for details, see Abu-Amr, 1993; Frisch, 2010). Over the years, significant events have occurred, including the First Intifada (1987–1993), the Second Intifada (2000–2005), and the Israeli wars in Gaza in 2008-2009, 2012, 2014, and 2021. A significant moment for Hamas was in 2006 when it won the majority in the Palestinian parliamentary elections (Hroub, 2006), which led to major obstacles from opposing Palestinian party Fatah (Schanzer, 2008) and many world powers, including the US, UK, EU, and Australia that consider Hamas as a terrorist entity (Brown, 2008). As a result of the conflict between Hamas and the Fatah party, Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip in 2007. Since then, Israel has imposed a tight land, air and sea blockade on Hamas and all the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip (Migdalovitz, 2010). Despite these challenges, Hamas established a stable government that has been responsible for the life of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

To respond to the Israeli aggressions, internal and external challenges, Hamas employs a communications strategy through various mainstream media outlets, social media platforms and mobile applications. This communication process is mostly based on the Arabic language, with some

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(1) Harakat al-Muqawwama al-Islamiyya.

attempts to publish materials or use social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) in English language. Hamas operates Al-Aqsa TV and has run several social media campaigns to convey messages and capture the world's attention. Before being suspended, Hamas had official accounts on Twitter (@HamasInfo and @HamasInfoEn) aimed at responding to Israeli accusations and reinforcing its narratives. Hamas has also organized campaigns using hashtags. Such campaigns included online question-and-answer sessions with the political leader Ismail Haniyeh and other members.

Theoretical Considerations: Social Media and Discourse

Social media has been used widely in all aspects of our life, including political, economic, and social ones. Social media is powerful for political mobilization and engagement in the public sphere (Koc-Michalska & Lilleker, 2017) with an impact largely on different dimensions, e.g. political, cultural, economic, and social. It increasingly becomes a challenging hub of aggressive social and political conflicts with extremist thoughts and various prejudice discourses on certain topics such as Islamophobia, immigration, Brexit, Xenophobia, etc. as well as advocating a form of exclusionary nationalism.

Social Media: An electronically mediated communicative paradigm

The evolution of information technology changes the way people around the world communicate and/or mediate communications (see Bardici, 2012). Such a change in social media communication introduces digital/online communication patterns, contents, practices and forms of (unobserved) expressions, empowerment, civic participation and collective actions. All these forms of changes challenge people to expand their participation, collaboration, mobilization, networks, views, social norms, and societal changes. Social media is based on user-generated contents. The users contribute various interactive and multimedia texts and interact and network with others users through the many social media platforms and applications. The emphasis on user-generated content leads to relations and turns the control of information and content to be decentralized (O'reilly, 2007). In the light of ICT revolution, social media

can be characterized as followed: multimodality, interactivity, and hyper-textuality (Gunther Kress, 2003). In participation and interactivity, users intersect and communicate their materials both online that could possibly reflect offline realities. With the advancement of ICT, the new media tools allow wide flow of participation.

Social media are characterized by multiple points of production and distribution for both individuals and media actors to publish or access information in equal terms. Social media technologies are simple to use and accessible to people with minimal technical skills, anyone with access can operate such means and alter content instantaneously. Consequently, the notion of user-generated content constitutes a new canon that is reshaping power relations between individuals and media actors. Users can have some control over the information they provide on Web 2.0 (social media) sites (see O'reilly, 2007). Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, and Silvestre (2011) contend that social media introduce substantial and ubiquitous changes to communication between and among individuals, communities and organizations. Social media has now created and sustained substantial new, indigenous and novel dynamics and types of communication across the social, political and commercial spheres. This has been done within the principle of freedom from the shackles from time and place, blurring the boundaries between offline and online worlds, work and leisure, hyper connectivity across platforms, practices, and spaces (each taken up and elaborated within various scholarships).

To understand social media, this paper is based on the idea that it is a form of communication rather than just a group of platforms or mobile applications. Some definitions refer to social media as digital technologies that emphasize user-generated content or interaction (e.g. Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Additionally, social media is considered directional in the way messages communicated (Kent, 2010), using specific tools like Facebook or Twitter to exemplify modes of interaction. From a communicative perspective, social media is defined in terms of its afforded dynamic of interaction across both mass and interpersonal communication. As opposed to the linear source-message-audience flow of traditional media, KhosraviNik (2017, p. 1) defines social media communication

(SMC) as an electronically mediated communicative paradigm across any electronic platforms, spaces, sites, and technologies in which users can: (a.) work together in producing and compiling content; (b.) perform interpersonal communication and mass communication simultaneously or separately – sometimes mass performance of interpersonal communication and; (c.) have access to see and respond to institutionally (e.g., newspaper articles) or user-generated content/ texts.

In light of the definition, this paper applied the model of *Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis* on social media data (twitter data in this paper, see the methodological note section). Many scholars try to give a definition to multimodal discourse analysis. Focusing on the visual analysis and the link to the discourse, Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis is concerned with "analysis of discourse which make use of multiple semiotic resources; for example, language, visual images, space and architecture" (Çoşkun, 2015, p. 41). Van Leeuwen (2005) points out that "multimodality means the combination of different semiotic modes—for example, language and music—in a communicative artifact or event". A more specific definition is that "multimodal discourse involves the interaction of multiple semiotic resources such as language, gesture, dress, architecture, proximity lighting, movement, gaze, camera angle, and so on" (O'Halloran, Tan, Smith, & Podlasov, 2011).

In brief, O'Halloran (2004, p. 1) states that Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis aims to "investigate meaning arising from the integrated use of semiotic resources and represents the early stages in a shift of focus in linguistic enquiry where language use is no longer theorized as an isolated phenomenon" (O'Halloran, 2004, p.1). Similar to Critical Discourse Analysis, Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis also claims that visual communication is shaped and can shape society in return. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis is also "interested with the role that visual semiotic choices play in power relations" (Çoşkun, 2015, p. 42). Here are the basic steps of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis that is summarized from David Machin and Andrea Mayr's enlightening work *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction:*

1. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis considers basic lexical

analysis of the texts. And then uses analysis of individual visual semiotic choices in texts.

2. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis looks semiotic resources representing the attitudes of speakers. Analyzing quoting verbs, representation of the attitude of speakers through visual semiotic resources, gaze, poses, etc.

3. Linguistic and visual semiotic resources available for representing people and naming strategies. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis looks how through language and image, some participants are individualized or collectivized, made specific, generic, personalized or impersonalized, objectivated, anonymised aggregated and suppressed.

4. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis finds out the way linguistic and visual semiotic resources represent what people do. There are several resources available for representing the same action. Some participants are always represented engaging in mental type actions, while others are being represented engaging with material actions.

5. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis deals with metaphorical tropes in discourse, i.e., with the issue of how different kinds of metaphors and other rhetorical tropes are used in different contexts to attempt to shape understandings.

6. Nominalization and presupposition in language is a study area of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis as well.

Discourse theorizations

Considering that there is a change in our life communication, also there is an engagement in both language and other social semiotic daily communication. Fairclough argues that language is an inseparable part of life, and it relates to the other aspects of social life, thus social analysis and research should always take language into consideration. He adds that one of the most productive ways of making social research is to focus on the language and discourse analysis. He also rejects the approach that says, "everything is a discourse" and reduces social life into language (Fairclough, 2003, p. 2). That is, language in use, whether this is in the

form of spoken language or text, is always and inevitably constructed across multiple modes of communication, including speech and gesture not just in spoken language but through such "contextual" phenomena as the use of the physical spaces in which we carry out our discursive actions or the design, papers, and typography of the documents within which our texts are presented (Scollon & Levine, 2004).

Gunther Kress and Van Leeuwen (1998, p. 186) indicate that "all texts are multimodal to mean paralinguistic means of communication such as rhythm, intonation, facial expressions, gesture etc. accompanying spoken language, and written language is always a visual composition of marks on a page". This means the visual elements in texts are linked to written elements. Both visual and written elements complete each other. In this case, Çoşkun (2015, p. 41) states clearly that "without taking account of visual communication, discourse analysis might not only miss out on information but lead to inaccurate conclusions". Also, "discourse is inherently multimodal, not monomodal" (Scollon & Levine, 2004).

In critical discourse analysis, discourse is considered as a form of social practice. Discourse is socially constitutive and socially conditioned. It constitutes situations, social identities, and relationships between people. Discourse reproduces the social status quo and contributes to transform it. Discourse gives rise to important issues of power as well. Discursive practices may have major ideological effects like producing and reproducing unequal power relations among the society (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, p. 258).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) "offers interpretations [and explanation] of the meanings of texts rather than just quantifying textual features and deriving meaning from this; situate what is written or said in the context in which it occurs, rather than just summarizing patterns or regularities in texts; and argue that textual meaning is constructed through an interaction between producer, text and consumer rather than simply being read off the page by all readers in exactly the same way (Richardson, 2007, p. 15).

Methodological Note

Research Questions

This is an empirical and exploratory research paper that aims to deconstruct multimodal dynamics and online discourses of and on Hamas on Twitter. To achieve so, the paper aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What discursive practices and structures are found in the discourse of and on Hamas on Twitter?

2. What are the online multimodal patterns of discursive identity (self and other) construction employed by Hamas on Twitter?

3. What implications and conclusions can we learn about Hamas's multimodal discourses and practices of the digital media?

Data Collection and Sampling

This paper focuses mainly on Twitter platform as it is one of the most popular social media platforms in Palestine and in the world. It enables its users to send short tweets (280-characters). Twitter is a social media platform. In the last reported quarter, the number of global monetizable daily active users (DAU) on Twitter amounted to 211 million users (Statista, 2022)[2]. Through the publicly accessible Application Programming Interface (API) services, the platform allows analysts to mine the tweets that users post online, in compliance with the privacy regulations set by the platform programmers[3]. Siapera (2014, p. 544) states "social media present formidable methodological challenges: the volume of information, as well as its dynamic character, makes it extremely difficult to pin them down".

This paper examines and compares discourses of and on Hamas on Twitter. The collection data comprises tweets from the hashtag #Hamas

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(2) https://www.statista.com/statistics/970920/monetizable-daily-active-twitter-users-worldwide/ (published Jan 18, 2022).
(3) Developer Agreement and Policy: https://developer.twitter.com/en/developer-terms/agreement-and-policy.

and tweets produced by Shehab News Agency with the username/ID @ShehabAgency. The collection of tweets has been done on 17 February 2022 on the hashtag #Hamas and on 17 January for Tweets of Shehab News Agency. Also, a collection of photos published by Shehab News Agency on Gaza war between 10th and 21st May 2021 has been collected randomly only to do the visual analysis to get a better link between the textual and visual discourses. The tweets were collected by Nvivo NCapture, installed on the Google Chrome.

The random photos were collected manually. The selected analyzed photos were chosen with consideration of the social actors of Hamas as the main participants. It is worth mentioning that this would not be the most reliable or right way to collect social media data. This is because of the availability of software programs for the researcher. Also, Twitter does not give access without having API. This makes the collection of Twitter historical data is a challenge. In this case, the researcher sees that cooperation between critical discourse analysts and data scientists is highly required in such a case or research.

Analytical Framework

To answer the research questions and in relation to the theoretical discussion above, selective tools from multimodal and critical discourse analysis have been considered and employed. Multimodality connects both discourse and visual communication analysis. The tweets and photos are brought into Nvivo software 12. All the tweets and photos were coded. The data then was compared. The analysis starts by quarrying the most frequent word. The analysis then focuses on the textual and multimodal aspects in texts.

In the light of Kress and van Leeuwen works (1996, 2000), this paper applies their patterns and analyzes the representational, interactive, and compositional meaning of the collected data. To analyze the constructed meanings, the major indicators of the visual elements are prominence, frames and information value with the help of visual grammar. "*Prominence*" is defined as the interaction of several factors (such as the choice of color, placement/location of the images, the image/letter

size) and compares the size of the image with the written text. "*Frames*" signify whether the present images in the texts are placed together or not. Mayer (2008) defines frames as the "spatial contiguity" principle relying on the motive that corresponding words and images should be placed near each other from the perspective of visual representation. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) point out that this relation is realized by *contact* (realized by "gaze offered" and "gaze denied"), *social distance*, and *modality*. "*Information value*" concerns the dimensions of visual space, that is how the spatial organization is arranged along three components: left/right; ideal/real; and centre/margins' (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 197). Kress and van Leeuwen (1996:122) describe a gaze as follows: A gaze can be of two kinds: in a "demand" gaze, one or more represented participants gets into a direct visual interaction with the viewers, hence demands some kind of response from the viewer. This gaze is in the form of a vector obtained by the look of one or more of the represented participants outwards to the direction of the viewer of the visual. An "offer" gaze does not have the direct gaze of any represented participant to the viewer. This gaze offers the viewers items of information (G Kress & van Leewen, 1996). In offer gaze, the represented participants are always looking away from the viewer. The concepts of offer and demand can be related to the concept of speech acts in linguistics.

For the linguistic choices, the transitivity pattern of representation is employed. These are the indicators to be considered: Social Actors/Participants, i.e., who is the actor/goal? What the actor does to the goal (the recipient) is seen visually (as in all texts) which might be compared to a transactional clause verbally.

Findings and Discussion

Word Frequency and Text Search

The analysis shows there is intensive use of Twitter during the major events of the Israeli war in 2021. Running NVivo word frequency for the most frequent words, the analysis shows the word 'occupation' 'الاحتلال'

is one of the most frequent words. It is associated with hashtags, Hamas, Jerusalem, among other words as we can see in figure 1.
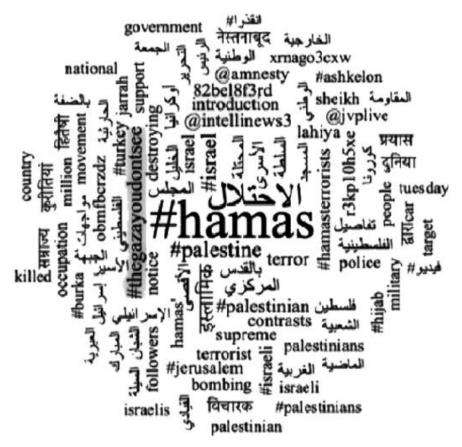

Figure (1): Word Frequency in Tweets of @ShehabAgency on Twitter.

By running a query for the word frequency, and word cloud, the analysis shows that #Hamas is associated with most frequent words and hashtags, e.g., #gaza, #palestine, #israel, #terrorism, #terror, #hamasterrorists, ##thegazayoudontsee, #theykidnappedgaza.
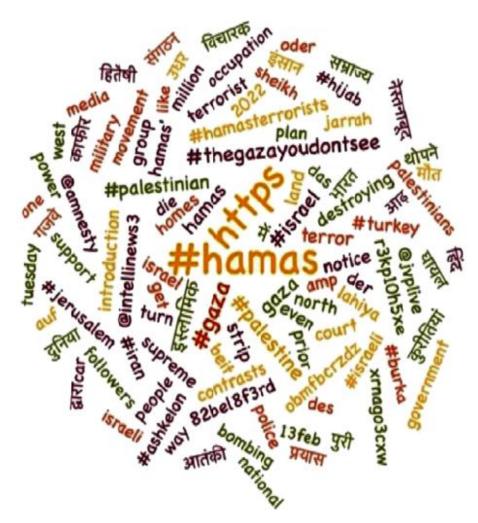
Figure (2): Word Frequency in Hashtag #Hamas on Twitter.

From this diagram, we see the major hashtag associated with Hamas is terrorism as we can see in the following table 1.

Table (1): Most Frequent Associated with #Hamas on Twitter.

From this table no.1, we can see Hamas is mainly associated with terrorism and associated with the hashtag #Hamas. This would leave a negative representation of the Palestinian movement. This negative label and discourse would legitimize any actions by Israel or any other actors against Hamas. Also, such representative discourse would portray any action of Hamas as violent, unacceptable, and illegal. This discourse on Hamas would come in a similar mainstream media representation that is based on ideological perceptions (see Amer, 2017). Media representation conceals and/or legitimizes truths by constructing and labelling identities and linking them with some patterns of behaviors and attitudes in the interest of certain people or governments. This construction builds certain discourses about people. Fairclough (2003, p. 124) sees discourses as "ways of representing aspects of the world – the processes, relations, and structures of the material world, the 'mental world' of thoughts, feelings, beliefs and so forth, and the social world".

Analysis of Shehab Agency: Textual and Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Discourse of Hamas's legitimacy: A resistance to the Israeli occupation and blockade

This part answers the first two questions in this paper on discursive practices and structures as well as the online multimodal patterns of discursive identity (self and other) employed by Hamas on Twitter. The textual and multimodal analysis of Hamas's Shehab Agency shows that the discourse focuses mostly on highlighting the Israeli actions against the Palestinians either in Jerusalem, the West bank and/or the Gaza Strip. For example,

1. قوات الاحتلال تعتقل الشابين عرفات مصطفى بشارات ومحمود ابو دية من قرية عاطوف بعد الاعتداء عليهم بالضرب

The occupation forces arrest the two young men, Arafat Mustafa Bisharat and Mahmoud Abu Dayyeh, from the village of Atouf, after beating them.

2. الاحتلال يقتحم أقسام معتقلي "عوفر "و"مجدو" ويعتدي على الأسرى

The occupation storms the sections of "Ofer" and "Megiddo" detainees and assaults the prisoners.

3. "بن غفير" يصب الزيت على النار و"إسرائيل "تضع يدها على قلبها من تكرار "سيــف القـــدس "

"Ben Gvir" pours oil on the fire and "Israel" puts its hand on her heart from repeating "Sword of Jerusalem".

Hamas considers the resistance of Israel as a natural response to the Israeli aggressions and crimes in Palestine. In such discourse, the representation is based on attributing the agency of crimes to the Israelis, and thus Hamas positively presents itself as a self-defender and a defender of the Palestinians. This representation comes in sequence with Hamas' declared objective which is to liberate Palestine from Israeli occupation.

Linguistically, transitivity agency can be seen in the questions: who does what to whom? As Halliday puts it: meaning as representation. Meaning is implied in in the sense of content, i.e. things happen, and people, or other actors, do things, or make them happen (see Halliday & Mathiessen, 2004). The analysis shows that the representational meaning is constructed to focus on Hamas's resistance to the Israeli violence and aggression in Shaikh Jarrah in May 2021.

In Hamas's legitimacy discourse, Hamas represents its resistance to counter Israel's brutality and crimes shown in the Israeli policies in Shaikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem. In this way, Hamas justifies its narrative laying the groundwork to protect the Palestinians anywhere. In an illustrative statement, Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem, in response to suggestions that Hamas might have committed war crimes, stated that "the real crimes were committed by the occupation by targeting civilians in the recent aggression on the Gaza Strip, killing more than 100 children and women and demolishing residential buildings.

Discursively, by such discourses, Hamas target (local and international) audiences to address internal and external stakeholders. In this representational discourse, Hamas represents itself as a legitimate political actor through its governance members/actors during the Israeli

war in 2021. Those actors claim the engagement in negotiations with Arab regional actors, e.g., Egypt, Qatar as well as with international actors, e.g., Russia. From such engagement, Hamas presents itself as a legitimate protector not only for the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, but also for all Palestinians including the residents of Jerusalem. This engagement bolsters Hamas standing in Palestine and internationally. See the following tweets:

4. الحية: أبناء حركة فتح الذين ينخرطون مع شعبنا في مقاومة الاحتلال، يعلنون أن المقاومة هي الخيار

Al-Hayya: The people of the Fatah movement who are involved with our people in resisting the occupation, declare that resistance is the choice.

5. حماس: جريمة قتل الفتى محمد شحادة بدم بارد، وبالرّصاص الحيّ، ومنع طواقم الإسعاف من الوصول إليه، ثمَّ اختطافه، تؤكّد مجدداً وحشية الاحتلال وساديته وإرهابه ضدّ الأطفال والأبرياء العزّل من أبناء شعبنا.

Hamas: the cold-blooded murder of the boy Muhammad Shehadeh, with live bullets, and the prevention of ambulance crews from reaching him, then kidnapping him, once again confirms the brutality, sadism and terrorism of the occupation against children and the defenceless and innocent of our people.

6. #عاجل| الحية: سياسة حماس تقوم على حصر مقاومتها داخل فلسطين

#Breaking| Al-Hayya: Hamas' policy is based on limiting its resistance to Palestine.

Analysis of the hashtag #Hamas: Discourse of Terrorism

This paper also focuses on recontextualizing Hamas on Twitter by analyzing the hashtag #Hamas. The analysis shows that the discursive construction of Hamas is a terrorist movement. The analysis shows that some tweets celebrate Australian government's decision of putting Hamas on the list of the terrorist movements.

1. Australia has proscribed #Hamas. Can't begin to tell you how happy and relieved I am. I was honored to speak to the Intelligence and Security Committee when they were deliberating the issue.

2. We applaud the @ausgov for their intention to list the entirety of #Hamas a terrorist organization. Hamas is a brutal terrorist organization predicated on destabilizing the region & destroying Israel.

3. Home Affairs Karen Andrews has announced the whole of Hamas will be listed as a banned terrorist group, stating the government has "zero tolerance for violence". #Hamas

4. As the Australian Government seriously considers listing all of #Hamas as a terrorist organization, we know the Gaza-based group remains active in our region following recent reports of a thwarted Hamas-led attack in the Philippines.

From these example tweets, we can see how Hamas is linked with terrorism. The tweets refer to the Australian government's decision to consider Hamas a terrorist movement. That is, Hamas is listed in entirety as a terrorist organization by Australian government. This is to further the Australian government's former decision of considering Hamas's military wing. Hamas' paramilitary wing, the Al-Qassam Brigades, was first listed as a terror organization in 2003. Somehow, you can feel some twitter users' tendency to celebrate such decisions, e.g., "how happy and relieved I am", "We applaud". Israel welcomes Australia's move against Hamas while Hamas condemned the decision and considers it as a bias in favor of Israel. Also, the analysis of tweets shows that there is a major focus and tweeting on Turkey closing Hamas's office. In tweeting or retweeting this event, Hamas is represented as a terrorist group. For example,

1. #Turkey closes the #Hamas Terror Group's office to improve ties with Israel. Hamas reportedly moving its office to Northern Iran.

2. #Israeli counter-terror stops over $30 million from reaching #Hamas

3. #Israel did not condition improved relations with #Turkey on #Istanbul no longer harboring #Hamas terror cells, a senior diplomatic source said overnight on Tuesday.

4. #Turkey to expel the terror-designated #Iran-backed #Hamas members from the country, as per latest reports.

These tweets refer the Israeli demand from Turkey to close Hamas's office in Ankara. We can see in the following figure 3 that Turkey is contextualized with statements to link Hamas with terrorism.
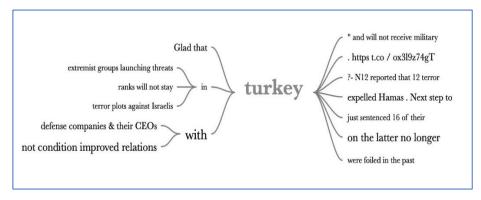

Figure (3): Tweets about Turkey and Hamas.

We can see that Israel wants Erdogan to act on Hamas. However, Turkey says it will not abandon Palestinian support for closer ties to Israel. Generally, Turkish government supports Palestinians and Hamas particularly. It hosts Hamas leader, Mr. Ismail Haniya. Moreover, the analysis shows that Hamas, mainly the military wing, is presented as causal agents of violent actions (negative representation). These actions are foregrounded as firing rockets into Israel. This meaning reveals the consequences of such actions in other to blame Hamas.
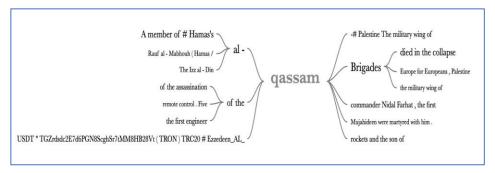
Figure (4): Tweets about Al-Qssam.

The analysis shows that the tweets focus on Hamas's actors. Since the activities of Hamas and its military wing (Al-Qassam brigades) are viewed as self-defense and could be naturally national assignments, their actions are generally represented as violent and terrorist. On contrary, such meanings would make Israel's illegal actions are not condemnable. (Tasseron, 2021, p. 10) The lexical constructions used for this purpose such as terror army, terror targets and terror sites not only depict Hamas negatively, but also, they have a de-legitimating function. In addition, Hamas's capabilities are elevated by describing them as an army, and Israel responds to rockets. This kind of representation exaggerates the ability of Hamas. Hamas is a non-state actor (Lind 2004) without conventional military capabilities (see McLaughlin 2016). In fighting against this significant terrorist threat in Gaza, the discourse conveys that Israel is purportedly embarking on legitimate military actions.

The multimodal Discourse Analysis

Hamas's representative discourse of resistance is supported by multimodal discursive strategies. The main actor seen in the posters (figure 5) is the military spokesman of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas. He is called Abu Ubaida. This man becomes an icon for Hamas and for the Palestinian resistance not only during the war times, but also during all troubles and events.

Figure (5): the military spokesman of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades.

نقول وبشكل واضح بأننا قد أعددنا ضربة تغطي كل فلسطين من حيفا حتى رامون ولكننا استجبنا لوقف إطلاق النار لنرقب سلوك العدو حتى الساعة ٢ من فجر الجمع (أبو عبيدة، الناطق العسكري باسم كتائب القسام)

We clearly say that we have prepared a strike that will cover all Palestine from Haifa to Ramon, but we have responded to a ceasefire to observe the enemy's behavior until 2 a.m. on Friday (Abu Ubeida, the military spokesman for the Qassam Brigades).

In such a discourse, Hamas's military spokesman insisted on that the leadership of the Israeli occupation is facing a real challenge and the decision to strike the missile is on the table until 2 in the morning. Also, Hamas sends a challenging message by stating that it has been able to dehumanize the enemy and its army, whose leadership committed crimes and bragged about killing children and destroying residential towers. As we can see in the figure (5), the image is located in the top-middle of the poster followed by an Arabic text and referred to the spokesperson. The poster is backgrounded with an image of people glorifying the victory of Hamas as well as with the image of Jerusalem at the bottom of the poster. The centrality of the image of the military spokesman shows him as a central element. Also, the size of the fonts of the text is big. This pays attention not only for the image, but also for the importance of the announcement of the spokesman. Also, we can see a social distance shown in the distance between the depicted (the masked man) and the viewer.

This portrayal shows a power relation between the viewer and depicted persons. The social distance is also realized by the gaze of the masked spokesperson. This is an "offer" gaze that gives the viewers items of information (G Kress & van Leewen, 1996, p. 122), i.e. a warning to strike Israel from Haifa to Ramon, but Hamas responded positively to the truce.

It is important to look how crucial the choice of words selected to linguistically frame the visuals and it is also important to look how the images/posters are composed, i.e., what elements (icons, texts, fonts, etc.) are found. Both the linguistic and visual elements are key features in the construction of representational discourse. Backgrounding the poster with the image of the dome of the rock highlights the Palestinians' and mainly Hamas's consideration and support for Jerusalem which is always described as the Muslim holy city, and it is in the heart of the conflict, a battle icon, and the trigger for uprisings. Also, this discourse comes in line with the discourse of resistance as Abu Ubaida added that "our weapons and our accumulation of power are for the sake of our land, the defense of our people, and the victory of our sanctuaries". By such discourses, Hamas creates a heroic impression and shapes a valiant image and stereotype.

Conclusion

Struggle over Twitter: A struggle between Hamas and Israel

This section refers to the implications and conclusions that we can learn from the discourses of and on Hamas on Twitter. The overall image we can see is that it is a struggle between Hamas and Israel rather than a war against Palestinians who pay high prices. In such a social media war, Palestinians are lost. We can say that Twitter is a battlefield. It gives a space to Hamas to reach audiences that can understand Arabic. It does not tweet in English. In contrary, the major Israeli outlets tweet in English. Also, Twitter shows a major Palestinian weakness in using English language in their narratives. These outcomes result from some factors:

– Twitter blocks Hamas's official accounts.

– Twitter removes or hides Palestinians contents resisting Israel.

– Hamas's members mostly do not tweet in English.

Based on these factors, I claim that the tweets against Hamas are much more reachable than the tweets of pro-Hamas in the period of data collection. This results in concealing Hamas's views on the events and preventing Hamas's members or its supporters to spread its word on Twitter.

Also, the discourse on Hamas by users anti-Hamas focuses on portraying the movement as a terrorist movement. This portrayal shows all the resistance actions as terrorist attacks made by Hamas's military wing known as the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades. The discourse portrays the actions as if they were targeted only to launch rockets and more attacks against civilian targets.

In conclusion, this paper tries to shed light on using interdisciplinary approach to examine discourse of and on Hamas on Twitter. Hopefully, despite the major challenges in data collection and treating various social media (Twitter) data, this paper contributes to methodological aspirations and explores the mutual benefits of using CDA in analyzing (big) data. What we can learn from this paper is that the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis is a struggle over the narrative as much as it is a struggle on the ground. The conflict was never only political, but rather a struggle of history, culture and survival, and the winner is the one who writes the narrative.

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