



Unpacking the Dynamics of Youth Digital Activism and the Mediating Power of Social Media in Occupied Palestine

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Abstract: Objective: This research seeks to examine how social media mediates the connection among three forms of digital activism, namely, spectator, transition, and gladiator, and the youth civic engagement in Palestine. It answers to the lack of researches on the ability to transform the varying degrees of online activism into offline civic and political activities on the restrictive and politically repressive conditions of the Israeli occupation. **Method:** Guided by Hierarchical Model of Political Commitment and Positive Youth Development (PYD) model, this was a cross-sectional study. An online survey containing data on 400 Palestinian youth (aged 18-29; both genders), inhabiting the Occupied West Bank was used. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to test the direct and mediated effects of the three forms of digital activism, and the social media use on the degree of civic engagement. **Results:** It was found that all types of digital activism were significantly positively connected to youth civic engagement. Gladiatorial and spectator activism had the most significant impacts on them, and transitional activism did have equally significant effect. These relationships went through social media which partly mediated and played a role of amplifying online political expression, identity development, and mobilization. Such mundane behaviors as activity on social networks, as well as the viewing or liking of political content, were shown to increase political awareness and lead to even further offline actions. The result explains why social media is a tactical resource which could be applied in the spread of alternative stories and avoid censorship in the environment where there is occupation. **Conclusion:** The paper shows that social media has gone beyond being a communication means, rather it has become a structural and strategic facilitator of engagement through civic participation among youth in Palestine. Policy proposals encompass widespread incorporation of digital literacy and civic educational amalgamation and creation of non-privately owned secure and censorship proof digital infrastructures to safeguard strategic activists and maintain interest. The results provide wider application to the comprehension of youth activism in other politically circumscribed or occupied situations.

Keywords: Digital Activism, Youth Activism, social media, Palestinian Youth, Digital Participation.

تحليل ديناميكيات النشاط الرقمي للشباب والقوة الوسيطة لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في فلسطين المحتلة

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ملخص: الهدف: تبحث هذه الدراسة في دور وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي كوسيط في العلاقة بين النشاط الرقمي بأنواعه المختلفة، كالناشط المتفرج، والناشط الانتقالي، وأخيراً الناشط المقاتل من جهة، والنشاط الشبابي الفلسطيني من جهة أخرى. وتهدف إلى فهم كيف يمكن لأشكال مختلفة من النشاط الرقمي أن تتحول إلى مشاركة مدنية وسياسية فعلية في ظل ظروف القمع السياسي والاحتلال. **المنهجية:** أجريت هذه الدراسة معتمدة على النموذج الهرمي للالتزام السياسي والتصنيف الذاتي، وفي إطار التنمية الإيجابية للشباب (PYD)، وهي دراسة مقطعية استهدفت أربع مئة شاب فلسطيني تتراوح أعمارهم بين 18-29 عاماً، من كلا الجنسين، على أن يكونوا مواطنين في الضفة الغربية المحتلة. أداة الدراسة عبارة عن استبيان إلكتروني، وتحليل البيانات تم اعتماد نمذجة المعادلات الهيكلية للمربعات الصغرى الجزئية (PLS-SEM). **النتائج:** تشير النتائج إلى أن مستوى اهتمام المشاركين بالنشاط الرقمي واستخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي يرتبط ارتباطاً وثيقاً بنشاط الشباب فيما يتعلق بالأنماط الثلاثة للنشاط الرقمي، وكانت أقوى النتائج هي الأنشطة الرقمية للنشطاء من فئة المقاتلين والمتفرجين. تؤكد هذه النتائج على أهمية وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي كأداة للتعبئة الجماهيرية، ليس فقط من الناحية البيئية، بل أيضاً من الناحية الاستراتيجية في ظل حالة من القمع السياسي تحت الاحتلال. **الخلاصة:** شملت الدراسة توصيات حول التدخلات السياسية والتدابير الواجب اتباعها، مثل ضرورة ربط جهود محو الأمية الرقمية بالتربية الوطنية، وضرورة إنشاء بني تحتية رقمية آمنة لتمكين الشباب في حلبة الصراع القائم. كما أن للنتائج آثار على سياقات أوسع، وتوصي بضرورة وضع استراتيجيات للتدخل في مشاركة الشباب في الثقافات الأخرى التي قد تكون محدودة أحياناً أو منتشرة عالمياً.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النشاط الرقمي، النشاط الشبابي، وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، الشباب الفلسطيني، المشاركة الرقمية.

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Introduction

Youth activism or the civic and political action of those less than 30 years old has come to be one of the highlights of modern resistance trends in democratic and non-free countries. The Israeli occupation and the inability to build a Palestinian state as well as the diminishing civic space are deemed structural constraints imposing on this activism in the occupied Palestinian territories (Khatib, 2022; Sayigh, 2019). Whereas First Intifada can be cited as a formative point in the mobilization of Palestinian youth organized, recent decades have seen an expansion in the causes depth and breadth, including anti-occupation struggle, to gender equity, environmental injustice, and inclusion (Abu-Zahra & Kay, 2013; Sa'd, 2018). Such future forms of action are sometimes conducted outside official politics and out of surveillance, repression, and limited physical space to protest (Tawil-Souri & Matar, 2016; Shehadeh, 2023).

The unique role of Palestinian youth in shaping their society and determining its future is multifaceted and profoundly impactful. Palestinian youth have been at the forefront of social and political movements, driving change and innovation within their communities against the backdrop of a protracted conflict. Their contributions can be highlighted in several key areas (Mokadi & Yousef, 2024).

In this respect the use of digital activism has proved to be an important option and complement to the physical involvement. Scholars speculate on which category of digital activism- a range of activity, emphasising the spectator, through inactive actions, such as watching or liking a political message, transitional, through partially active acts, such as commenting, sharing, or signing a petition, and gladiatorial, such as high investment, developing content, or organising an online campaign- best explains the patterns (Bennett

& Segerberg, 2023; Christensen, 2011). They differ not only in intensity of effort but also in the political risk involved, especially those relating to conflict areas where surveillance and internet suppression are typical (Melki, 2024; Kelsch, 2022; Brandtzaeg & Chaparro-Dominguez, 2020).

- In that context, social media is a significant element in that space/platform in its role as a means of expression and a facilitating environment of mobilization. One might define platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and X/Twitter, among others) as digital infrastructures that enable the formation of identity, communication, and political organization (Castells, 2015; Boyd, 2007). Palestinian youth extensively make use of such sites to circumvent censorship, publicize alternative narratives, and mobilize the world on a global digital ground (Tawil-Souri & Matar, 2016; Dabashi, 2018). However, they also operate under the policies of algorithms and moderation that have the ability to hide or put resistive content behind its walls (Cristiano, 2022; Ryan & Tran, 2024).
- Although scholarly interest in digital activism in Palestine is increasing, as yet there is rarely any disaggregation of forms of activism, nor of how they correlate, or are related, to offline civic activism. Besides, only limited research has been conducted on the mediating influence of social media as the channel and sieve between online and in-person activism in conflict-affected and occupied environments.
- To fill these gaps, two complementary theoretical frameworks will be applied in the study, the Hierarchical Model of Political Commitment (George & Leidner, 2018), which contains a scale of anti-system activism as a rising scale of

engagement, and the Positive Youth Development (PYD) model (Lerner, 2005; Holsen *et al.*, 2016) that focuses on youth agency, identity, and ability to be resilient despite the situation.

The following are the five major variables of study:

- Spectator activism: it is the passive or online political activism related to the digital consumption of political information (likes, views)
- Transitional activism (expressive productive intermediate online task, e.g. leave comments, sharing, sign petitions)
- Gladiatorial activism: political components and content merging on the internet
- Reproductive health needs: the prevalence and dedication to political involvement through the use of the digital media
- Youth civic engagement: long term participation in advocacy, volunteer or popular campaign against a repressive political regime

The proposed study is significant since it introduces novel empirical and theoretical doctrines on the processes of navigation of digital and civic spaces through occupation by Palestinian youth. It is a reaction to the necessity of diversified digital activism models and how the activities on the Internet can lead to actual political participation.

Research Objectives

- To determine the relationship that exists between the various forms of digital activism, spectator, transitional, and gladiatorial, and the level of civic participation of youth in the West Bank of Palestine.
- To examine how social media mediates how digital activism relates to offline civic engagement with political repression.

- To determine what type(s) of digital activism can best translate into truly civic or political action back in the real world of conflict areas.
- To determine the impact of demographical elements such as age, sex, level of education, location of residence, and the frequency of use of social media on patterns of digital and civic activism among Palestinian youth.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do spectator activism, transitional activism, and gladiatorial activism deal with the youth civic engagement experiences in the West Bank?
2. What is the degree of social media in mediating the connection between digital activism and the political activities of the youth?
3. What type of digital activism has been the most effective predictor of offline civic engagement in war-torn areas?
4. What meanings do Palestinian youth make of social media as a political tool of the occupation?

Research Problem

Under politically repressive conditions such as those witnessed in the occupied Palestinian territory, where the traditional civic spaces have disappeared into the night or become policed, young people find themselves using the virtual space more and more as the next available scene to express and participate in politics. The use of social media has come to play a central role in the expression of dissent, building of support, activating reinforcement, and participation in civic matters by the Palestinian youth. Still, the concept of digital activism is visibly growing, but what appears to be lacking is a critical hole in how online activism brings results to the face value and how engagement leads to meaningful offline

civic engagement in the environment of controlling repression.

The research that has already been done on the topic has mostly been concentrated on digital activism in either completely open or semi-democratic states and has paid little attention to the situations where civic activism comes with personal danger, surveillance, or even governmental retribution. The use of online platforms by youth in Palestine, where the younger demographic is a large and politically conscious group, begs the question of the efficacy, inspiration, and integrative abilities of the digital interactions. More precisely, what is not established yet is how various types of digital activism are based on a continuum that extends between being more passive (i.e., a spectator) and a more participatory (i.e., a gladiatorial) form, to the actual civic or political participation brought about in an institutionally constrained landscape.

Furthermore, the mediation aspects of social media in the context of forming or magnifying these types of activism have been under-theorized in conflict-occupied settings. This paper fills this important gap by looking at the connecting factor between digital activism and youth civic actions and critiquing the role of social media that bridges the gap between digital advocacy and actual civic practices within the West Bank. It tries to decode the mechanisms that empower or disable a digital presence to be reconstituted into an influence in civic life in a domestic sphere of political repression and institutional marginalization.

Significance of the Study

Theoretical Contribution to Youth Activism and Digital Media: The potential theoretical prospect of the proposed study is that it will equally result in a better understanding of how digital activism operates under a politically repressive and conflict-sensitive environment.

Although most of the literature on the use of social media and youth civic engagement is based in a democratic or semi-open society, the study places the Hierarchical Model of Political Commitment and the Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach in the situation in occupied Palestine. Empirically indicating differences between spectator, transitional, and gladiatorial digital activism, the research diminishes the informational suppositions about the internet infliction and the way the features of online activism blend and connect to greater citizen procedures within the restricted democratic communities. Further, the study is based on the already acquired knowledge regarding the concept of mediating power of social media as the digital lands, which landscape found, contested, and generated by the youths in protest and the making of the identity in occupation.

Practical Implications for Civic Education and Policymaking: In practical terms, the results of the study are practical to educators, NGOs, and policymakers interested in youth empowerment in Palestine and other zones of conflict. All the evidence of utilizing social media to increase youth activism has shown that there is a necessity to introduce digital literacy and civic education programs that will help young people understand online engagement as strategic, safe, and able to contribute to their goals and the wider society they live. To the civil society actors and the international stakeholders, the findings underscore the possibilities of already investing in digital infrastructures and young generation-led online struggles as alternative means of avoiding the limited physical space to pursue civic engagements. Policymakers can also use the evidence to come up with frameworks that identify and institutionalize the digital shapes of participation so that Palestinian youth can be able to contribute positively to public life notwithstanding structural oppression.

Literature Review

The issue of youth activism has recently become the focus of interest of scholars and practitioners occupied with the problem of civic engagement, political change, and social equity. One can think of youth activism as the political or civic activity of young individuals that are committed to combat systemic oppression or advance rights, which have been significant in the transformative social movements throughout the world (United Nations, 1985; Steve Rose, 2019). Palestine is a paradigm of continued occupation, partitioned political arena, and weak civic space whose circumstances distinctly impede the dire and complex nature of youth activism in Palestine. This activism has extended to Street, as well as digital grassroots mobilization, which has included the global adaptation of different manifestations of political practice (Khatib, 2022; Sayigh, 2019).

In the Palestinian context the youth activism is rooted within the national struggle to have freedom and self-determination. The Palestine young people have been playing key roles since the First Intifada of 1980s in the mobilization of collective action and the development of resistance narratives (Abu-Zahra & Kay, 2013). Because it frequently takes place outside formal political institutions, it is the result of political leadership and occupation-related constraints that are frustrating (Ahmed & Basyouny, 2021). Today, the environment, women, and social inclusion are subjects of discussion in the 21st century as the youths of Palestine demonstrate alternative interests to the occupation (Sa'd, 2018). There is the violence, political surveillance, restriction of movement, and electronic restriction of languages (Kelsch, 2022; Mokadi & Yousef, 2024). Without institutional backing, the youth movements seek safer grounds to campaign and reach more people, in informal settings, namely online (Tawil-Souri & Matar, 2016).

The study of digital activism is the means of using the digital technology during political and social movements that involve not only online replicas of offline actions (such as e-petitions) but also actions, which are unique to the digital environment (such as viral hashtags) (Mercea *et al.*, 2016). Bennett and Segerberg (2023) as well as Christensen (2011) single out three kinds of spectrum spectator (passive), transitional (moderate), and gladiatorial (high effort). On the one hand, digital activism increases resistance in Palestine where it finds international support through such sources as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Such hashtags as preserving Sheikh Jarrah and Free Palestine also lead to the attention of other Palestinian voices (Dabashi, 2018; Pace, 2023). Having been empowered by digital activism, youth decentralize stories, develop political voices, build power with respect to structural power, and strengthen a sense of the collective (Frodeson *et al.*, 2019).

The kind of impact youths are able to make in politics through social media is substantial (Ansar & Khaled, 2023). It can be viewed as a medium of communication, identity construction area, and an area of strategy (Boyd, 2007; Jacqmarcq, 2021). It is also used to evade the censorship in Palestine and emerges as the easy entry into social action and activism there. Facebook is being used to update political news, connect with each other and mobilize in resistance by Palestinian youths (Melki, 2024). The social media permits resource mainland, consistent engagement, and flexibility (McCabe & Harris, 2021) to observe consciousness and participate via the out-of-door and digital world (Vogels *et al.*, 2022; Velasquez & LaRose, 2014). It enables secure organization, preservation of identity, and broadcasting messages to other parts of the world, in confined physical places (Tawil-Souri & Matar, 2016; Al-Haj, 2015; Shehadeh, 2023).

Although it is significant, there are empirical gaps in the connection between the online activism to real life activity. Research is mostly directional comparing correlation rather than causal processes such as formation of identity, or trust in society. There is a lack of distinction between types of digital activism or evaluation in the actual political transformation. Goals and processes involved in mediation in the domain of digital marketing (Odoom *et al.*, 2025) may provide useful lessons on the role of online behavior in subsequent civic behavior that is less immediate and more sustained. In Palestine where the use of social media is high and the political context is an area of disagreement, it provides an essential case study in how digital campaigns interact with the politics of young people.

Methodology

Research Design: This is an analysis of how social media is involved as an intermediary in digital activism by the youth in occupied Palestine, where political action is brought to its knees through surveillance, movement restrictions, and repression. Using the approaches of the Positive Youth Development (PYD) and the Hierarchical Model of Political Commitment approaches, the research group identifies the three trajectories: spectator, transitional, and gladiatorial, following the seven models Bennett & Segerberg (2023) and Christensen (2011). These are indicators of rising stages of digital interaction in loyalty watching behavior to leadership behavior.

A descriptive-analytical approach was used, which is quantitative in nature, and it was done through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique analysis, used to examine mediation effects and the link between digital activism, social media use, and youth civic participation.

Sampling Process and Rationale: The West Bank Palestinian youth, aged 18 to 29, were seen as the target population. The given age segment was chosen due to the demographic indicators provided by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS, 2023), stating that this segment is the youth who is the most active in digital interaction and politically involved.

Sample size was set to 400 because it would be large enough to allow PLS-SEM analysis (it requires a sample of at least 10 times the number of indicators in the most complex construct) (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Considering the structure of the model and the exploratory nature of the research, the given sample size permits estimation and generalization of the findings on the dynamics of youth in other conflict areas.

The snowball method of sampling was adopted, which is appropriate in sensitive research settings. The first respondents were chosen based on digital activist platforms and non-governmental organizations, and were expanded based on referrals. It was sampled geographically in five cities of the West Bank, namely Ramallah, Nablus, Hebron, Bethlehem, and Jenin, and evaluated in terms of gender and urban-rural balance in order to be representative and diverse.

The criteria of inclusion were:

- Palestinian nationality
- Age between 18 and 29 years
- Digital or real-life political activity as an active or passive member
- The daily use of social networks such as Facebook, Twitter/X, or Instagram

Measurement and Measurement Tool

The responses were self-collected through a structured questionnaire released on the internet on trusted and secure digital platforms. The format reduced the chances of surveillance

and also allowed the participants to comment anonymously and securely.

Three areas were dealt with using the instrument:

1. Demographics: old age, gender, education level, place of residence, regular use of social media
2. Social Media Usage: Preferred platform, political interest, and time spent viewing the platform online
3. Digital Engagement with Activism
 - Spectator behavior: Being a fan of political content
 - Transitional practices: Content sharing, commenting, and petitions
 - Gladiatorial activities: Holding campaigns, making advocacy materials

Data Analysis: These data were examined by means of PLS-SEM, the analysis method that fits the requirements of exploratory models and non-normally distributed data, which is a common trait of surveys in a conflict zone (Hair *et al.*, 2019). The approach had enabled examining the effects both of direct functions and the moderating presence of social media in the association of types of digital activism and results of civic engagement.

Ethical Considerations and IRB Approval

Formal ethical clearance was obtained by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Universiti Putra Malaysia (Approval Code: UPM/IRB/2024/87) with regard to this study. Ethical compliance with international research guidelines was in place during the measurement of human subjects in the studies.

A digital informed consent form was issued to all the participants, listing:

- Objectives of the study
- Free will participation
- Confidentiality of information

- The right to withdraw at any given moment with no repercussions

There was no identifiable data. Data security protocols were applied by involving encrypted data collecting devices, enclosed servers to save the information, and anonymized reporting of facts to ensure the safety of the participants, because of the politically sensitive environment.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability were considered in a systematic way to affirm the validity of the electronic questionnaire that was used in this study. The content validity evidence was achieved through expert review, which means that the developed items would be evaluated by the competent professionals involved in the area of digital activism and youth studies regarding the clarity of the items, cultural comprehension, and the theoretical alignment with the ideas investigated. Construct validity was assessed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Each of the standardised factor loadings was much higher than the prescribed 0.70, thereby confirming the claim that the items were good proxies of the latent variables. Additionally, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs were above 0.50, demonstrating satisfactory convergent validity. It was proved by using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which indicated that there was the existence of discriminant validity since the maximum variance of any construct was found with its indicators compared to other constructs. Reliability was verified through Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), with all values exceeding 0.80, affirming strong internal consistency across all measured constructs.

Findings and Results

It focuses on the Palestinian case to better reveal how digital activism can be

characterized along the engagement types, as well as how social media can facilitate this effect on the civic life.

Items of Palestine youth digital activism dimension, e.g., the spectator activities (SA), transitional activities (TA), and the gladiatorial activities (GA) as the relationship suggested that there were strong associations among them and youth activism (YA). In addition, SM as well as the relations between the latter partially proved all the dimensions of the conceptual framework and all of the mentioned relationships in the hypothesis.

Demographic Differences in Digital Activism and Youth Engagement

In order to understand how significantly the engagement in digital activism and the participation of the young population differ in terms of people/groups of various subgroups of the population, the current research has examined the contribution of demographic measures such as age, gender, the level of education, place of use and frequency of use of social media to the significant research variables. Descriptive statistics and inferential tests (ANOVA and t-tests) were employed to examine group-level differences across the three dimensions of digital activism—spectator, transitional, and gladiatorial—and youth activism scores.

Age: Youth aged 18–22 years exhibited significantly higher levels of transitional activism ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.62$) compared to those aged 27–29 ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.71$), $p < 0.01$. In this case, we can suspect the younger generation is more motivated towards posting, commenting, or being digitally semi-active, maybe, due to the higher fluency in the digital reality.

Gender: Female participants reported higher mean scores for spectator activism ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 0.48$) than males ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.51$), $p < 0.05$. In contrast, male youth were

more involved in gladiatorial activities (e.g., organizing protests or campaigns), indicating a possible gendered approach to activism styles in conflict zones.

Educational Level: University students and graduates showed stronger engagement in both transitional and gladiatorial activism, with statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) compared to youth with only secondary education. Education appears to be one of the things that will enhance civic awareness and online resources in activism.

Place of Residence: The urban youth provided a higher reporting of all the forms of activism compared to the rural youths especially in gladiatorial activism. Such an aspect as a rural-urban divide may indicate the difference in digital infrastructure, accessibility, and political exposure.

Social Media Usage: Respondents who used more than 3 h of social media in the day got a much better score in all three digital activist styles. Notably, frequent users had the highest youth activism scores ($M = 4.76$, $SD = 0.43$), reinforcing the role of intense online engagement in fostering offline civic behaviors.

Interpretation

These demographic indicators prove the different tones of digital engagement where digital activism cannot be discussed as a homogenous manifestation, but it is rather age, gender, education and access heavy. Such differences between subgroups should be mentioned because it is possible to design policies and interventions to cater to them in a manner that will support digital civic engagement initiatives.

Direct Effects of Digital Activism on Youth Civic Engagement

The path analysis confirmed significant and positive direct effects of all three dimensions of digital activism on the youth civic engagement. Spectator activity was most influential ($\beta = 0.595$, $p < 0.001$) and can have the greatest impact in the reduction of conceptual knowledge, whereas gladiatorial ($\beta = 0.524$, $p < 0.001$) activities were the second most influential, and Transitional ($\beta = 0.354$, $p < 0.001$) activities were the third most influential. These results point to the civic affordance of even the bare minimum effort of online activities, like clicking, watching, or liking political expressions, even in what are by definition politically constrained sites, such as the occupied West Bank. This is in tandem with the body of literature that contends; online exposure to political materials expands political agency and political awareness (Velasquez & LaRose, 2014).

Comments and petition sharing were also transitional acts that did not have an insignificant relation to participating in the civic sphere. The behaviors seem to fill in the gap between passive involvement and active involvement in line with the model of incremental commitment and engagement by Christensen (2011). Correspondingly, there was a strong correlation between gladiatorial activities, including the creation of content and cataloging of online campaigns and high-intensity civic commitment, as parents may argue about youth-led connective action (Bennett and Segerberg, 2023).

Table (1): Direct Effects of Digital Activism on Youth Civic Engagement.

Digital Activism Dimension	Standardized Direct Effect (β)	Significance (p-value)
Spectator Activities	0.595	$p < 0.001$
Gladiatorial Activities	0.524	$p < 0.001$
Transitional Activities	0.354	$p < 0.001$

Direct and Indirect Effects of Social Media

The correlation of social media with civic engagement of the youths was also strong and direct ($\beta = 0.407$, $p < 0.001$), with the effect size being substantial ($f^2 = 0.358$). It means that online platforms play not only the role, but the role of civic mobilization intermediaries. Whether through content consumption, or both its own and shared organisations, representative acts, and behaving in concert, it seems that Palestinian youth exploit such social media platforms for more than simply providing opportunities to monitor, trace, and control their every moment.

Using the bootstrapping analysis (5,000 samples, 95% bias-adjusted intervals), it was established that social media mediates the relationship between digital activism and the association between youth civic participation to some extent in all three types of activism. The indirect effect is $0.180[0.076, 0.328]$, $p < 0.01$ in the case of a scenario of spectator activism. The influence in the case of transitional activism was more significant at $\beta = 0.278$ (CIs $[0.106, 0.673]$) and $p < 0.01$. Statistically, though, this indirect effect on gladiatorial activism was still somewhat significant but lesser (0.096 , CI $[0.023, 0.296]$, $p < 0.05$), which in this case is an indication that, to some degree, gladiatorial activism was linked to an ability to predict doping in sport.

Table (2): Direct and Indirect Effects of Social Media on Youth Civic Engagement.

Path	Standardized Effect (β)	95% CI	p-value	Effect Type
Social media $\rightarrow$ Civic Engagement	0.407	—	< .001	Direct
Spectator $\rightarrow$ SM $\rightarrow$ Civic Engagement	0.180	[0.076, 0.328]	< .01	Indirect (Partial)
Transitional $\rightarrow$ SM $\rightarrow$ Civic Engagement	0.278	[0.106, 0.673]	< .01	Indirect (Partial)
Gladiatorial $\rightarrow$ SM $\rightarrow$ Civic Engagement	0.096	[0.023, 0.296]	< .05	Indirect (Partial)

Results

All in all, the structural model had the acceptable fit and this made the theoretical framework that strong. The fit indices-Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.922, Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.924, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.072 should be interpreted such that the model is a good fit and it is within the desirable ranges of structural equation modelling.

Research Question 1: How do spectator, transitional, and gladiatorial forms of digital activism relate to youth civic engagement?

The results were that all three categories of digital activism, spectator, transitional, and gladiator, were positively and significantly related to the youth civic engagement. The overall impact of activism by spectators on civic participation (beta = 0.595, $p < 0.001$) displayed that the probability of youth participating in real-life civic action is influenced by even the slight involvement online and engagement with political content in either form of viewing, liking, or following political content. This would imply that passive engagement can lead to ultimate participation by providing platforms through which individuals can enter active engagement.

Continuous Citizens Transitional activism was also found to positively correlate, doubtlessly with a negative relationship with the civic commitment of the young citizens and the civic engagement of the youth citizens (beta=0.354, $p < 0.001$). Activities like commenting on posts, sharing content, or even getting involved in online petitions seemed to raise the likelihood of youth engaging in civic

life, and again, the magnitude of these activities was slightly lower than that of the spectator and gladiator forms. It implies the value of semi-interactive involvement as a strategy of political socialisation and mobilisation.

A strong influence was also on those whose activism requires much effort and responsibility (e.g., organisation of campaigns, the preparation of digital content, maintenance of political pages) - gladiatorial activism (beta = 0.524, $p < 0.001$). These findings contribute to the thinking that the Palestinian youth are not only taking part in the symbolic actions online, but they are also forming the leadership in the digital activism sector. All these findings put together show the importance that the entire continuum of digital activism has played in shaping the civic behaviour of the youth in Palestine, This form of digital activism has been increasingly recognized as a critical component of transnational resistance movements, particularly for displaced populations (Nazir, 2025).

Research Question 2: Does social media mediate the relationship between digital activism and youth civic engagement?

It was revealed that the relationship between each form of digital activism and civic engagement was partially mediated by social media. The indirect effects were significant, as pointed out by the analyses performed with the use of bootstrapping. The indirect effects of the spectator activism on social media were 0.180 ($p < 0.05$), 0.278 ($p < 0.01$), and 0.096 ($p < 0.05$), respectively, on transitional activism and gladiatorial ones.

This implies that as much as digital activism in itself increases civic participation, it is amplified through the use of social media platforms. This mediation was especially impactful to transitional activism- implying that the interactive elements of social media (shares, reposts, hashtags, and comments) can enhance the visibility, legitimacy, and emotive appeal of the youth political speech. In particular, the direct effect of social media usage on civic engagement was also helped to be significant ($\beta=0.407$, $p < 0.001$), which once again proves the crucial role of the platform in the form of a source of civic learning, affirmation of identity, and collective action.

Research Question 3: Which form of digital activism most strongly predicts youth civic engagement?

To learn which modality of activism is stronger than the other, total effects were compared (i.e., direct and indirect effects). The most painful forecasters in general were that of spectator activism, next was gladiatorial, and finally, transitional. Spectator activism, though limited in its effort level, was the most impactful over time since it has been adopted widely and has a low barrier to entry. This means that what may appear to be the passive type of political activities, such as the consumption of activist material, can lead to the emergence of political consciousness and desire to act in the physical world, particularly in repressive political regimes where overt activism is risky.

Being a more intense form of commitment, fewer people were at the base of the activity of practicing as a gladiator, but it held a high predictive value, particularly in young people who were already enveloped in the network of activists. Transitional activism came last in terms of impact-wise, yet it still was a transitional force where the youths could

alternate between passive and active instruments.

Research Question 4: How do Palestinian youth perceive social media as a tool for political engagement?

Open-ended questions gave an insight into how Palestinian teenagers understand what role of and the worth of social media in politics. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter/X are the three platforms that are most commonly termed as such by the respondents.

Safety to freely express political views in a country where the majority of the political aspects are highly controlled, whether through the streets or by taking part in politics.

Lenses of magnification to marginal narratives particularly come in handy to transfer the local scenes of injustice to foreigners.

The organizational tools in regards to real-time mobilization, internet campaigning, and development of networks of solidarity cutting across geographically divided qualities.

At the same time, the youth demonstrated awareness of the risks involved in online activism. A few of them mentioned how much Israeli and Palestinian governments have deployed surveillance technologies, social media corporations have blocked content, and people have been demobilised through algorithmic censorship (e.g., the shadow banning of Palestinian content). And all these were accompanied by the hope that digital activism could have a certain political force, especially when it was combined with its counterparts in reality.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The current study has identified the relationship between the various forms of digital activism, including spectator, transitional, and gladiatorial, and the term

youth civic engagement in Palestine, with a focus on social media being a mediator. The findings confirm that each of the three types of digital activism is related to civic participation, but as a select predictor, spectator activism emerged. The results confirm the theoretical model suggested and offer original empirical evidence of youth agency along occupation and digital repression. Less demanding levels of involvement based on maintenance participation, or use and exposure to digital content, such as watching or liking political items on political services, are highly associated with offline civic participation (Velasquez & LaRose, 2014; Bennett & Segerberg, 2023). In the Palestinian context, where open political participation is physically and legally risky, activism through spectatorship is an avenue to safer forms of political participation, especially by rural and marginalized youth since it is correlated with the Hierarchical Model of Political Commitment, which states that even the least active tasks in political engagement, such as being an occasional voter, may precondition further political participation in the future (George & Leidner, 2018). Following upon this, the second level of activism will be one that is of an interactive but still a rather low-profile form of activism, one termed transitional activism.

The concept of transitional activism is also associated with civil participation, but to a lesser degree, which proves the incremental commitment theory as discussed by Christensen (2011): such activities as sharing, commenting, or signing petitions can ensure that a person transfers his/her passive observation into active leadership. This sort of involvement has the power to promote political confidence and belonging, as in the case of Hong Kong and Iran, whose slow digital participation led to bigger civic participation (Lee & Chan, 2020; Jafari, 2022). Such a stage

of activism enables the young generation to explore how they can express themselves politically in less intimidating settings, developing a feeling of agency and acclimating them to greater-level persistence of political engagement. Based on this stepping-stone of participation, some youth advance into the most active and risk-prone form of engagement, which is the gladiatorial activism.

With the strategies regarding political content made or digital campaigns organized, the machinery of gladiatorial activism has the greatest direct impact on civic movements, as Palestinian younger people have proven ready to take risks such as surveillance, doxing, and legal punishment. This is akin to what has transpired already in Myanmar and Belarus and where online leaders have mobilized in aggressive contexts (Ryan & Tran, 2024; Martsenyuk, 2022). The findings bring out the exceptional strength of online leadership as a civic action practice in authoritative or oppressive digital conditions. One of the reasons behind understanding these types of activism is tracing the digital mediums that facilitate these, namely the social media as the gateway between online and offline active engagements.

All types of digital activism and civic participation partly rely on social media with a belief that social media is an arena constituting expression and mobilisation (Castells, 2015). According to Bradley (2024), Jacqmarcq (2021), Palestinian youth engage in the creation of political identities on social media, publishing counternarratives and creating transnational solidarity through campaigns such as Save Sheikh Jarrah, which was rapidly globalized even though the online spaces were fragmented and policed. The transitional activism had the highest mediation effect, implying that interactive online activities like commenting and sharing are most improved by the use of social media, whereas the gladiatorial

one tends to exist even with less dependence on mediation within the context of visibility. To contextualize Palestine in the larger global context may shed some light on the comparison of global practices with the digital practices in such a landscape of repression.

The Palestinian case compares with other repressive arenas in which youth are forced to juggle their political messages and pursuit of safety. Plaintext messages and memes made it possible to organize mass actions of protest even in the presence of censorship in Hong Kong (Lee & Chan, 2020). The Mahsa Amini protests also saw the necessity of young women in Iran staging online protests on Instagram and Twitter even after the internet was shut down (Jafari, 2022). Heartwarming stories played their role in Myanmar as people retained their hope that it is still alive after the coup (Ryan & Tran, 2024). Such examples demonstrate the way the young people in oppressive states learn to use symbolic and strategic digital strategies (or they are personally emotionally charged). However, even with this ingenuity, Palestinian youth continue to suffer systematic obstacles around which acts and directions their activism can and cannot take.

Nonetheless, obstacles on a structural level still exist. Palestinian activism is exposed to the malpractices of platforms, threats of information removal, and the question of algorithmic censorship, which raises a threat to the future of youthful digital activism (Kelsch, 2022; Cristiano, 2022). There continues to be an issue of inaccessibility, as there are infrastructure and cultural barriers to access for the disadvantaged, rural, and female populations (PCBS, 2023b). The rates of online abuse, burnout, surveillance, etc. of gladiatorial activists and vulnerable groups are not even, following trends in Egypt and Belarus (Faris, 2020; Martsenyuk, 2022). These issues need a consistent policy, technology, and educational

solutions, and appropriate action is needed to protect and increase civic digital environments.

To shift the digital energy into sustainable civic impact, one should work on the platform responsibilities, algorithm transparency, repressive-context digital literacy, and investment in the safe digital infrastructure and the broadly participative civic tech, which is immune to geographic, gender, and socio-economic discrimination.

Empirical and theoretical contributions

The paper offers empirical knowledge on the present-day theory of youth activism and digital mobilisation. Contributing to the Hierarchical Model of Political Commitment and the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework in non-democracies, it quantifies the difference in the three specific modes of activism and in determining the mediating role of social media. It also deepens the way to see the Palestinian youth agency as civic engagement itself can happen in a broad range of activities in digital space- passive consumption to active and proactive leadership - even in an unfree society.

Conclusion

The paper provides an empirical explanation of how the youth participation in Palestinian civic activism is manifested in different forms of digital participation, namely as spectators, transitional, and gladiatorial viewpoints, under the context of military occupation and digital repression. It proves that even the low-threshold digital actions, which include content viewing and liking, can factor significantly into building political awareness, whereas more intense activities, like online campaigning and content production, can be used to increase civic identity and engagement. Social media partially, but forcefully mediates this process by giving young Palestinians a voice to make themselves heard and by enabling them to

mobilize in circumstances of physical and political constraint.

Theoretically, the researches extend the Hierarchical Model of Political Commitment and contributes to the study of the theme of digitally mediated activism in repressive environments. Practically, it would underline the significance of the defence and strengthening of the digital civic places. Policymakers, educators, and youth organizations are advised to invest in computer literacy, safe online infrastructures, and inclusive mechanisms of participation to ensure that activism becomes more accessible, effective, and safe. In the fragmented and policed context of Palestine, online spaces are one of the last existing public spaces; digital places now operate as a site of intent, presence, and participation--a place to go, a place to be, to act in a space of silence that becomes a unifying force.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The limitation of the study by incorporating youth in the West Bank makes it less applicable in Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the diaspora, and it would be advisable that in future works, comparative cross-regional methodologies be used. Its cross-sectional dimension does not enable it to trace the changes across time, and therefore, longitudinal studies are hallmarks in tracing the changing patterns of activism. By considering social media as one thing, the social media research disregards platform-specific dynamics; future research needs to look at how the different affordances and algorithms of Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and other platforms influence activism. The probability of bias in self-reported surveys is high in repressive situations; therefore, the mixed-method data collection approach is advisable because it includes digital ethnography or narrative inquiry.

Intersectionality, such as differences in gender, rural-urban, or socioeconomic status, is also factors that need to be examined to gain a better insight into access, participation, or exposure to surveillance.

Practical Implications

The results propose important measures that the civil society, teachers, and policy makers can use to enhance youth civic participation in Palestine. To empower the youth to resist the highly sophisticated dominant narrative, digital literacy should also extend to meaningful communication strategies, critical media reading, and content framing. Safety on the web is essential to guard against censorship, spying, and doxing, and requires digital training. Online campaigns organized by the youths must be considered a valid form of political speech, which should be funded, mentored, and given a place of assembly. Lastly, safe, inclusive, and sustainable engagement can be achieved through the inclusion (in the curriculum and policy) of digital civic activity. Online activism can become a successful civic force with the help of a multi-sector strategy, which will integrate digital platforms into Palestinian political life.

Disclosure Statement

- **Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate:** All participants provided informed consent before their inclusion in this study.
- **Availability of Data and Materials:** The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The authors will ensure compliance with any restrictions related to privacy and ethical considerations.
- **Author Contributions:** Tarik Mokadi contributed significantly to this research by developing the research concept, designing the methodology, conducting data analysis, and drafting the manuscript. Prof. Dr.

Haslinda Abdullah provided a scientific review, engaged in proofreading, and ensured adherence to scientific standards.

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