



حملة - المركز العربي
لتطوير الأعلام الاجتماعي

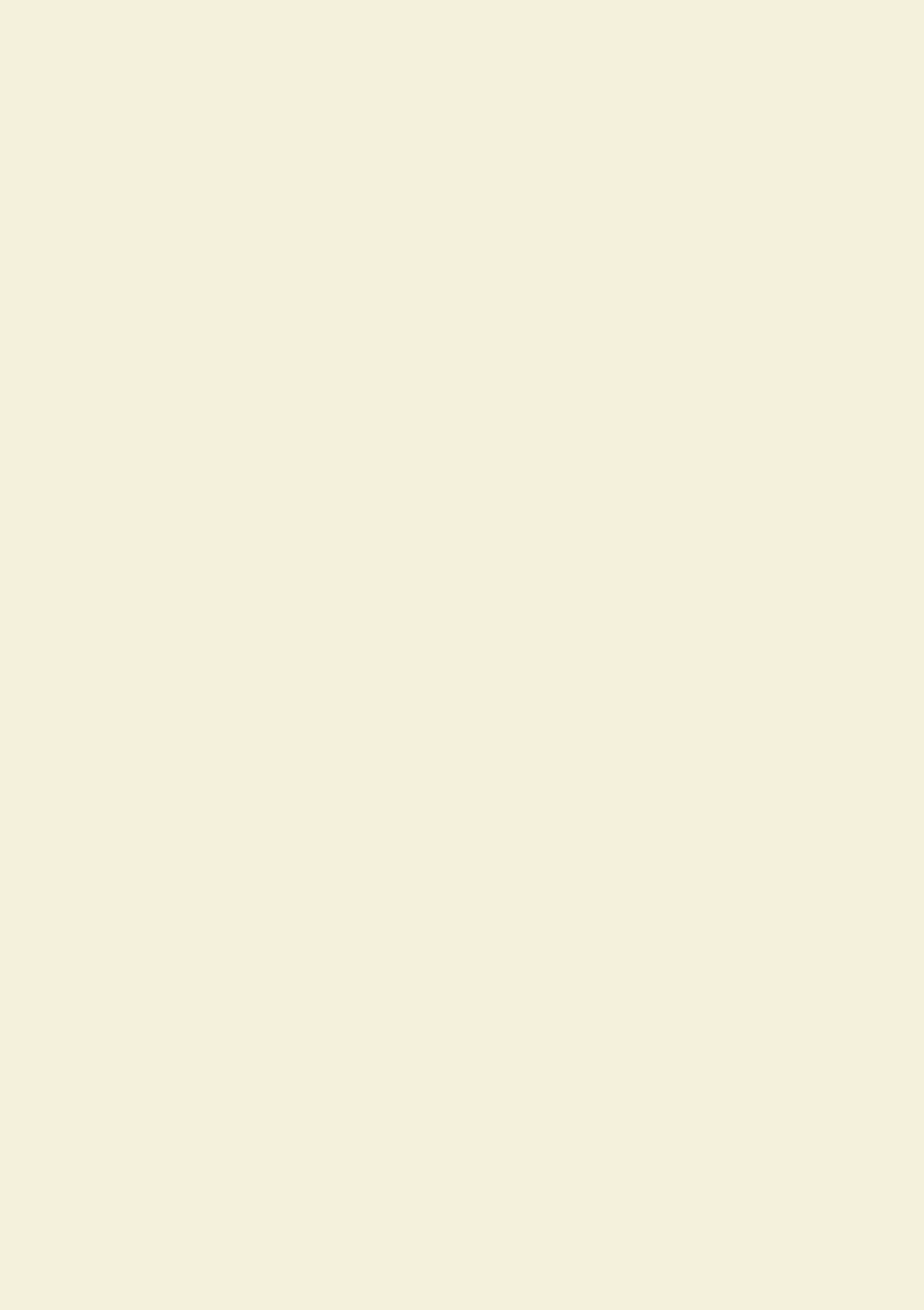
Palestinian Social Media Activity during 2015



PALESTINE

By Hanadi Qawasmi and Dalia Othman

March, 2016



7amleh - Arab Center for Social Media Advancement

Hashtag Palestine:

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INTRODUCTION

In the "Hashtag Palestine" report, 7AMLEH¹ presents an analysis of Palestinian social media activity during 2015.

In the first chapter, we present statistics on internet and social media usage by Palestinians in both the 48' and 67' areas. In the second chapter, the report outlines the most prominent Palestinian social media activities and campaigns, highlighting their topics and the influence of political events on them. In the third, and final, chapter, the report deals with the concept of digital rights and the right to internet access, as well as the arrests of Palestinians on grounds of their Facebook posts.

When speaking of the 48' and 67' areas, we relate to the different areas of Palestinian residence, and their particular status vis-à-vis Israel. In other words, this report deals with two groups of Palestinians that live under direct rule of Israel, thus excluding the majority of Palestinians worldwide, namely the Palestinian refugees. Palestinian citizens of Israel live in the areas occupied in 1948: present day Israel. Palestinians living in the 1967 occupied territory (the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip) live under military rule (with the exception of the Jerusalemites who are considered residents). These divisions are the product of a gradual process since the 1948 Nakba. Today, social media has made it possible for Palestinians, wherever they may reside, to defy these divisions by connecting with one another, and sharing each other's struggles. For this reason, it was important for 7amleh to cover these regions as a single unit (historic Palestine), despite difficulties in data collection. Palestinian refugees are not covered in this report, due to their various locations around the world, and the lack of sufficient data on their communications and social media usage.

Palestinians of the 48' areas hold Israeli citizenship, and receive all communication services from Israeli service providers. Palestinians in the 67' areas are further divided into three groups - those living in the West Bank, those living in the Gaza Strip, and those living in East Jerusalem. The first group holds Palestinian Authority identification cards, and receive most communication services from Palestinian telecommunication companies. Some, however, receive services from Israeli companies, as a result of the West Bank's economic dependency on the Israel's economy. Palestinians in the Gaza Strip also hold Palestinian Authority identification cards, and receive their communication services from different Palestinian companies. However, Palestinians in the Gaza Strip live under the jurisdiction of the Hamas government, and are therefore restricted by its regulations in regards to communications. Palestinians from East Jerusalem receive all communication services from Israeli companies, since the city was annexed to Israel in 1981, thus giving them Israeli residency. Nevertheless, according to international law, East Jerusalem is an occupied territory and is supposed to be under the control of the Palestinian Authority.

The significance of this report lies in its attempt to survey the most prominent issues in Palestinian social media activity during 2015. Moreover, the report deals with the digital rights violations of Palestinian social media users, especially in relation to the right to internet access. It also provides additional information on the arrests of Palestinian internet users during 2015 for their digital activity.



This report is part of a wider vision, which values the significance of ensuring the right to access information, freedom of expression, and the right to internet access. In accordance with this vision, this report looks at Palestinian electronic and social media campaigns (on Facebook for example), as an expression of their need to publicize their opinions across these platforms - a need which is usually amplified when people feel that their voices are being silenced and their stories are being told by others.

¹ The English equivalent to the word 7amleh is Hamleh, which means campaign in Arabic


CHAPTER ONE:

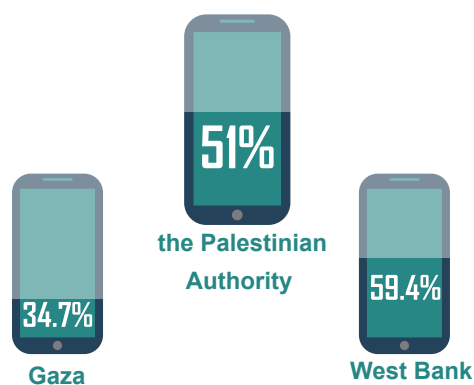
FIGURES AND STATISTICS

In this chapter, we present statistical data on the internet and social media usage of Palestinians within historic Palestine. It is important to note that accessing accurate and conclusive figures in this field, is not an easy matter, due to a variety of reasons. Primarily, the reality of the Israeli occupation and its different manifestations in the 48' and 67' areas. Palestinians in the 67' areas receive internet services from Palestinian companies, whereas Palestinians in the 48' areas receive these services from Israeli companies. This means that, technically, the data on internet usage in the different areas of Palestinian residence is scattered between several bodies. Thus, there is not a single body that is able to provide this data in a unified form.

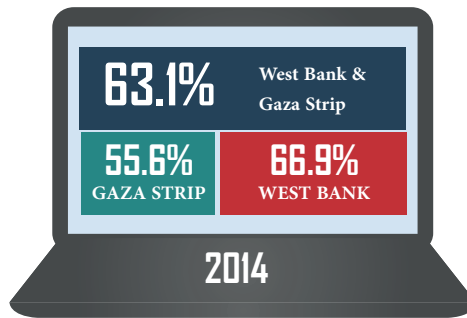
Furthermore, there is an intersection between the Israeli and Palestinian markets, especially in the West Bank, where some Palestinians receive internet services from certain Israeli cell phone and communication companies. This makes the task of determining the accurate figures of the percentage of internet usage amongst Palestinians somewhat complicated. Additionally, using the internet today is no longer limited to acquiring a wired or a wireless communication network inside the house, since people are now able to connect to the internet through their smartphones, as part of the third generation (3G) services, especially in the 48' areas. Hence, the figures presented below are divided into two parts: the first part presents the figures and statistics related to the Palestinians living in the 67' areas, whereas the second part relates to the statistics on Palestinians living in the 48' areas.

On World Information Society Day (17 May 2015), the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, in cooperation with the Palestinian Ministry of Telecommunication and Information Technology, published a report² summarizing internet usage in the 67' areas:

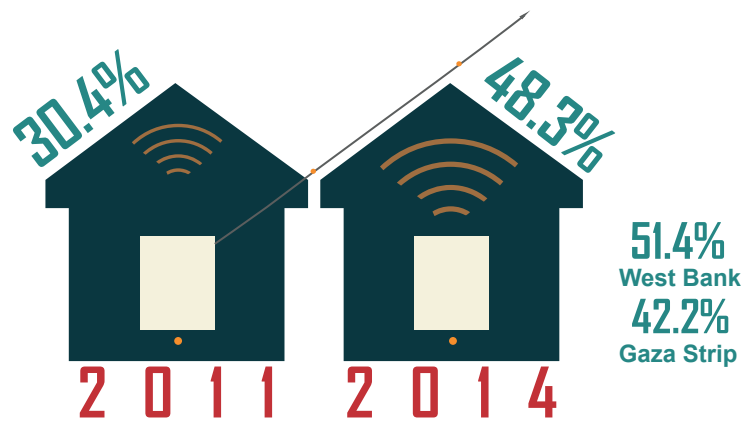
 More than half of the residents of houses in the areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority hold a smartphone, with the percentage being 51% (59.4% in the West Bank and 34.7% in the Gaza Strip).



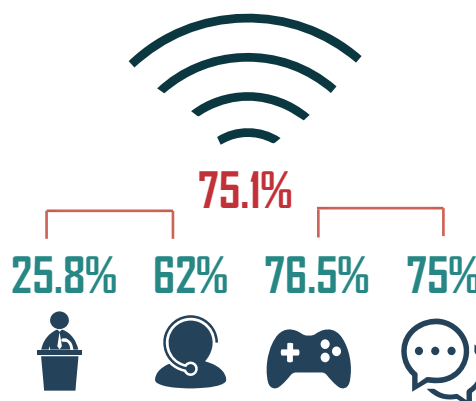
The percentage of houses with a computer, be it a laptop or a desktop computer, in the 67' areas is 63.1% (66.9% in the West Bank, and 55.6% in the Gaza Strip). This figure marks a significant increase from that in previous years, since in 2006 the percentage of Palestinian houses in the 67' areas with a computer was only 32.8%.



In 2014, 48.3% of Palestinian houses in the 67' areas were connected to the internet (51.4% in the West Bank and 42.2% in the Gaza Strip), versus only 30.4% in 2011.



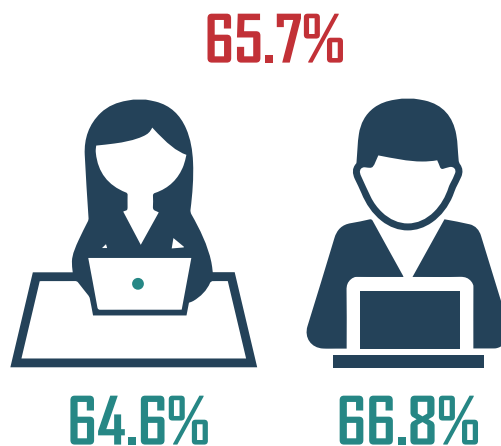
The percentage of social media users amongst those connected to the internet are 75.1% during 2014. And according to the report, 75% of those have used social media in order to meet new people, 76.5% used social media for online games, 62% used it to make free phone calls, and 25.8% used it for political purposes.



As for the Palestinians living in the 48' areas, according to the annual statistical abstract released by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics for 2015³, 47% of Palestinians above the age of 20 use the internet, which is more than 807,000 individuals⁴. And according to the Rikaz Databank's fourth social and economic report⁵ for 2014:



65.7% of all individuals above the age of 5 use computers, with 66.8% amongst males and 64.6% amongst females.



77% of computer users said that they are able to use it on an advanced level, whereas 20.3% said that they are able to use it on a moderate level.



90.4% of all computer users (above the age of 10) use the internet, with 91.4% amongst females and 89.4% amongst males.



76.9% of internet users use social media networks: 83.7% of those use social media for educational and knowledge acquisition purposes, 65.1% of these use it to read news, and only 14.2% of these use it for trading and shopping.

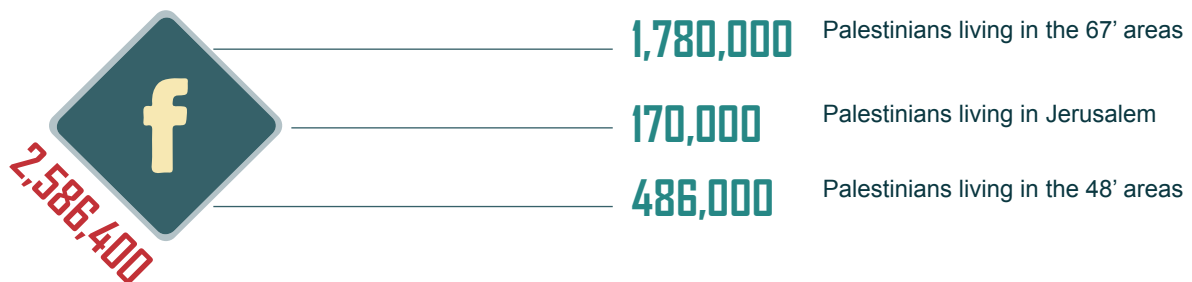
SOME FIGURES ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA:

According to a report published by the Palestinian company Concepts⁶, approximately 1,700,000 Palestinians use Facebook, and 1,007,000 use WhatsApp in the 67' areas. Additionally, according to the same report, only 343,000 Palestinians use Twitter, and almost the same number (343,000) use Instagram in the 67' areas.

The report also presents the overall number of Palestinians (both in 48' and 67' areas) on Facebook, which reaches almost 2,586,400 users, of which 1,780,000 are Palestinians living in the 67' areas, 170,000 are Palestinians living in Jerusalem, and 486,000 are Palestinians living in the 48' areas.

It is worth noting that these numbers are approximate and inconclusive, since it is difficult to determine the exact number of Palestinian social media users, due to the lack of one agreed upon method of data collection. For example, when asking Facebook about the number of Palestinian users in Jerusalem, it will limit the number to those using the Arabic version of Facebook. This is obviously not a sufficient criterion, since some of these users may not mention that they are from Jerusalem, in addition to the fact that not all Palestinians necessarily use the Arabic interface of Facebook.

West Bank & Gaza Strip



³The page of the Israeli annual statistics report on the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics' website: http://www.cbs.gov.il/reader/shnatonhnew_site.htm

⁴ It is important to note that these figures may include Palestinians in East Jerusalem and Syrians in the occupied Golan Heights.

⁵"Palestinians in Israel: the fourth social and economic report, 2014", published by the Rikaz databank on the Palestinian minority in Israel. The details of the report can be seen here: <http://www.rikaz.org/ar/index.php?s=publications>

⁶The full report can be accessed here: <http://socialstudio.me/digital-and-social-media-report-in-palestine-2015/>

CHAPTER TWO: THE MOST PROMINENT PALESTINIAN SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS OF 2015

The role of social media networks in Palestinian daily life has intensified in recent years, making these networks central arenas for the launching of media campaigns supporting a variety of issues. In light of what Palestinians face daily as a result of the Israeli occupation, they are concerned by many issues, thus the plethora of Palestinian media campaigns. Additionally, social media provides a free space and easy-to-use platform to express opinions, therefore it is full of political, social, and other discussions. As soon as an event occurs, different social media users rush to take part, creating a hashtag as a title for the discussion, or a theme to which all opinions and contributions are attributed. And as soon as someone is bothered by a certain matter - especially if it is a public issue - they write about it on Facebook, or launch a Facebook campaign for the promotion of change.

Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms witnessed a number of Palestinian electronic media campaigns during 2015. Most of these campaigns were politically oriented, occurring in their majority in the second half of the year, after June 2015. In this chapter, we will review the most significant of these campaigns, presenting a short description of each one.



#it_will_not_be_divided

In terms of time and space, the most important Palestinian social media discussion during 2015 centered on the issue of al-Aqsa Mosque and the Israeli attempt to divide it. This discussion accompanied the Israeli escalation on the ground, which was manifested in Israeli officials preventing Palestinian men and women from entering al-Aqsa Mosque, while Palestinian youth insisted on remaining in al-Qibli Mosque in order to prevent settler break-ins to the holy site. August and September witnessed a hardening in the occupation's policies of sealing al-Aqsa Mosque. The occupation police prevented Palestinians from entering the mosque between 7 and 11 a.m. for two weeks, and then only allowing a small number of people to enter, the majority of whom are elderly men.

With the development of events concerning al-Aqsa Mosque, new hashtags began to spread in order to keep up with newly arising issues. For example, after the decrease in the frequency of the closures of al-Aqsa Mosque from prayers, about 40 Palestinian women have been banned from entering the mosque (until the time of writing this report), as per the occupation police's orders. This group of women was called "the golden list", in reference to a list of names carried by members of the occupation police at the entrances of al-Aqsa Mosque, which includes the names of these women. Consequently the most popular hashtag launched is the #golden_list.



#Mohammad_Alan

The ex-prisoner Mohammad Alan (31 years old) was detained twice, spending more than three years inside the occupation's prisons. During his last detention on 6 November 2014, he was administratively detained for six months, with his detention then being renewed for an additional six months. After this renewal, on 17 June 2015, Alan launched a hunger strike, in protest of his administrative detention.

This hunger strike was accompanied by an electronic social media campaign, under the hashtag #Mohammad_Alan. The role of Palestinian activists on Twitter was especially apparent in regards to this issue, since a number of these activists accompanied Alan's mother in her protest with her son in the Ashkelon hospital. This often made these activists the first and central source for information on Mohammad Alan's situation and the developments in his case. These electronic campaigns contributed in activating the issue of Alan's hunger strike, and mobilizing more activists and others to join the protest in front of the hospital.



#returning_the_martyrs_bodies

This hashtag was launched by Mohammad Alian, the father of Baha'a Alian, who orchestrated an attack on an Israeli bus in Jerusalem on 13 October 2015. According to Palestinian terminology, particularly in the media, the word 'martyr' is used to describe any Palestinian who dies from any cause related to the conflict. This hashtag comes as part of a national campaign demanding the return of the bodies of the Palestinians killed during 2015, in the most recent popular uprising. These bodies were held by the occupation authorities for varying periods, and until this moment (7 March 2016), the bodies of nine Palestinians from Jerusalem are still being held. Alian launched this hashtag as part of his activism as spokesperson for the parents of those killed, calling on people to participate in the activities to create pressure for the release of the detained bodies.

#Mawtini

Mawtini in Arabic means ‘my homeland’ and is the name of the Palestinian national anthem. This is one of the most interesting hashtags, especially when talking about the power of social media to mobilize and gather people around a particular cause. The story of this hashtag goes back to an initiative launched on Facebook by the three siblings, Iyad, Ruba, and Reem Al-Masrouji⁷, in an attempt to draw attention to the Palestinian cause through a “positive and peaceful way of resisting the occupation”⁸. This activity is considered an example of an idea that began on Facebook and was then applied on the ground, gathering people in more than 10 Arab and international cities, including Jerusalem and Ramallah, to sing the Palestinian national anthem.



⁷ To get more information on this initiative through this report on Al Jazeera’s website: <http://bit.ly/1KIHQnw>

⁸ Ibid.

#they_burned_the_infant

This hashtag appeared after the murder and burning of the Dawabshe family in the village of Duma in Nablus district, at the end of July 2015. The hashtag refers to the infant Ali Sa'ad Dawabshe (1.5 years old), who died immediately after a gang of settlers threw bottle firebombs and caused a fire at the Dawabshe home. Palestinians and others tweeted about the event under the hashtag #they_killed_the_infant, #Ali_Dawabshe, and #Ali_Dawabshe_was_burned_alive. Most posts and tweets under this hashtag relate to the crime against the Dawabshe family, as well as the settler gangs' attacks in the West Bank. Some of these tweets and Facebook posts included pictures, caricatures, and designs expressing the Arab outrage at the crime, which first took the life of Ali Dawabshe, and then his parents, who later succumbed to their wounds.



#the_intifada_continues

This hashtag appeared with the rise in the acts of resistance against the occupation forces and settlers, after Muhannad al-Halabi stabbed a settler in al-Wad Street in Jerusalem. For a long period of time, this hashtag was attached to all the news and posts related to the most recent popular uprising. It was also prominently used with regards to a new attack, which happened shortly after these acts of resistance against the occupation stopped. This hashtag was often accompanied by other hashtags, such as #Palestine_resists and #the_intifada_of_knives.

#we_are_not_afraid

After the attack carried out by Muhannad al-Halabi in the old city of Jerusalem, there was a huge increase in the numbers of Israeli occupation forces (IOF), border guards, barricades, and checkpoints, making everybody susceptible to search and harassment. In the first month after the attack, the streets of the city seemed almost completely deserted and empty of their Arab residents, while the settlers intensified their presence in al-Wad Street during the first 10 days after the attack, amid the Israeli restrictions on Palestinians and settler incitement against the residents and passersby.

This was accompanied by a decline in the trading activity and presence of Palestinians at the Damascus Gate steps⁹. During the past few years, Damascus Gate became an Arab Palestinian space, in which the Palestinians of Jerusalem carried out a variety of activities and events. It also became common for many young men and women to meet their friends in this location, as a patriotic act contributing to the affirmation of the Palestinians right to the city, as well as intensifying their presence in it¹⁰. After the increase in the numbers of occupying soldiers, the surroundings of Damascus Gate were almost completely empty, except for those who had to go through the area, since people tried to avoid the occupation soldiers' assaults. This situation worried some of Jerusalem's Palestinian youth, pushing them to launch the hashtag #we_are_not_afraid, in an attempt to motivate people to frequent Jerusalem's old city, and not be affected by the Israeli security policies.

This hashtag was used in mention of many, mostly spontaneous, Palestinian activities in front of Damascus Gate. These activities included the gathering of friends on the Damascus Gate steps and involved singing patriotic songs, drinking coffee, eating cakes and reading books. These spontaneous gatherings were usually met with the Israeli occupation soldiers' attempts at dispersing them. Similarly, a cultural activity planned to take place at the Damascus Gate by a group of young women was also cancelled after one of the organizers was called in and threatened by the Israeli occupation police, leading her to withdraw the Facebook invitation and cancelation the activity.

This campaign was also accompanied with the publishing of pictures of Damascus Gate and al-Aqsa Mosque, along with calls to go to the old city and revive Palestinian presence in it. Some of these calls came with sentences such as "we will drink our coffee at Damascus Gate". Many also made sure to "check in" at Damascus Gate, while others published photos of people giving out dates to passersby in memory of those who died in the popular uprising, as well as photos of young men playing football on the Damascus Gate steps.



⁹ "The Judaization of al-Wad Street in Jerusalem, a new priority for the occupation and its settlers", the New Arab, published on October 7, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1QC9zAq>

¹⁰ "It is clear that for the people of Jerusalem a change has occurred in the significance of Damascus Gate. Although in the past it did not carry special cultural significance, in the last five years, the Gate has become a regular location for demonstrations and protests against the occupation, and a space for social and entertaining activities and gatherings, especially for youth and children."

#why_are_you_not_protecting_her

This campaign was launched by women activists from the Gaza Strip in order to expose the assaults of Palestinian women by the occupation forces. According to those who launched the campaign, it is one with “political, moral, and legal dimensions, whose purpose is to mobilize youth and twitter users all over the world in solidarity with Palestinian women who face outrageous crimes from the occupation”¹¹. This hashtag was usually used when talking about the arrests of Palestinian girls and



women, or when the Palestinian women expelled from al-Aqsa Mosque were assaulted. For example, it was used when Zinat Awida, one of the women expelled from al-Aqsa Mosque, was arrested and accused of “giving services to an outlawed organization” by the occupation police, who then released her three days later.

#al_Aqsas_gold

This is an international electronic campaign launched by the group “Youth for Jerusalem”¹², in cooperation with several international organizations, in April 2015. It strives to shed light on the restrictions facing the Palestinian Morabitat; the women who insisted on remaining in al-Aqsa Mosque, and who are now prevented from entering it. As one of the campaign organizers put it, the campaign aims to “acquaint [people] with those who insist on remaining in al-Aqsa Mosque, and especially the women amongst them [the Morabitat]”¹³. Posts and information were published under this hashtag, which relate to the repeated settler break-ins at al-Aqsa Mosque, the role of the educational circles and the Morabitat, the attempts at expelling them from the mosque’s grounds, information on the occupation forces’ measures against the prayers at al-Aqsa, and the occupation police’s attacks against those who insisted on remaining in the mosque. What distinguishes this campaign is the

participation of social media users outside historic Palestine, particularly in Algeria and Kuwait. Additionally, this campaign was accompanied with on the ground activities, implemented in different countries in order to raise awareness on the al-Aqsa issue (for example, one of these activities was in Malaysia).



#not_leaving

In January 2015, two Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, Hijazi Abu Subeh and Samer Abu Aisha, received expulsion orders from the city by the occupation police; Hijazi for six months and Samer for five months.

Hijazi and Samer refused to submit to the expulsion order, and started a sit-in protest at the Red Cross headquarters in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood in Jerusalem. This protest was an affirmation of the Palestinians' rights in their city, as well as an attempt at stopping the occupying forces from effectuating this policy of expulsion against activists and Jerusalem's Palestinians in general.

Samer started the hashtag #not_leaving through a post on his personal Facebook page, announcing his refusal to submit to the expulsion order. The hashtag spread widely amongst the people of Jerusalem, in order to express their attachment to the city and their insistence on staying strong when confronting the Israeli plans of expulsion. The hashtag #not_leaving became the name of the Facebook page¹⁴ reporting on Samer and Hijazi's sit-in protest at the Red Cross tent. This page was active in publicizing the activities held in the protest tent, aimed at mobilizing people and activating them to stand in solidarity with Samer and Hijazi as a New Year's Eve celebratory activity, as well as a variety of intellectual and cultural talks and lectures. This hashtag was sometimes accompanied by another hashtag, #not_moving, taken from a famous Palestinian song called "I am Jerusalem's son".



¹¹ "a Palestinian campaign for the support of the endurance of women", al-Ray Palestinian Agency for Media, published on November 26, 2015, <http://alray.ps/ar/post/142444>

¹² "Al Aqasa is Gone: an international solidarity campaign with the Morabitat in al-Aqsa Mosque", Al-Quds City website, published on April 9, 2015, <http://goo.gl/Ds94dA>

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ The #not_leaving Facebook page: <http://on.fb.me/10XEAJA>

#it_does_not_matter

This hashtag spread as a result of a video of an old Palestinian man named Shiekh Ziad Hlel, who was arguing with the occupation soldiers because they were pointing their guns at Palestinian youth during clashes at Bab al-Zawya in Hebron. The cameras shot Shiekh Hlel saying to one of the officers “bihimish” (it doesn’t matter), in response to the officer saying that the youth were throwing rocks at them. The word “bihimish” became a sarcastic symbol used by many Palestinians during the last popular uprising, to express their disregard for the governments actions and policies of oppression against Palestinians.

Many phrases spread under this hashtag on Facebook, ridiculing the oppressive measures of the occupation, the arrests of youth and children, and the threats of cutting the income and social security allowance of those expelled from al-Aqsa Mosque, while others ridiculed the house demolitions, village blockings, and checkpoint policies.



#I_cannot_remember

This hashtag was launched after the release of a video showing the occupation police’s interrogation of the boy Ahmad Manasra, who was accused of committing an attack in the Pisgat Ze’ev settlement north of Jerusalem, on 12 October 2015. On 9 November, a video documenting one of the interrogation sessions with Manasra was leaked to the press. In the video the words “I cannot remember” stood out, since these are the words repeated by Manasra in response to the investigators successive questioning. Also seen in the video is Manasra's small body exhibiting signs of extreme exhaustion and stress, as well as the investigators’ terrorizing and repeatedly shouting at the boy.

Facebook and Twitter users discussed and shared the video under the hashtag #I_cannot_remember, differing in their opinions on whether the video should be shared, and the benefit of sharing it. Some saw it as a way of shedding light on the Israeli violations against Palestinian children in interrogation rooms, while others saw it as spreading fear amongst families and children, considering it a moral weapon aimed at preventing any act of resistance. Others used this hashtag to publish posts on the interrogation methods used and how to face the investigators’ coercion tactics, emphasizing the importance of publishing this information amongst both young and old.

Other activists launched two other hashtags in solidarity with Manasra, which are #Ahmad_Manasra and #freedom_for_Ahmad_Manasra. The second hashtag was used extensively during an electronic campaign launched by the Palestinian Prisoner’s Movement, aimed at giving voice to Palestinian child prisoners and demanding their freedom¹⁵.



#hand_over_the_crossing

This hashtag was launched at the beginning of December 2015, in order to put pressure on the government in the Gaza Strip to hand over its control of the Rafah crossing to the Palestinian Authority, in an attempt to resolve the crossing closure crisis, which prevents the movement of thousands of Palestinians. Through this hashtag, many Palestinians, mostly in the Gaza Strip, demanded the transfer of the administration of the Rafah crossing to the security forces of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, instead of those of the government in the Gaza Strip, considering the crossing a strictly humanitarian issue, which should not be controlled by politics. Others expressed their rejection of this logic, considering this demand a disregard of the real cause of the blockade, which is the occupation.



#why_did_they_kill_him

This hashtag started on 26 December 2015, in order to shed light on the story of the Palestinian Ishaq Hassan. Hassan was killed by Egyptian soldiers when he attempted to illegally enter Egypt through the sea, after he gave up on trying to enter through the Rafah crossing (which is closed most days of the year), in order to receive medical treatment. The launch of this hashtag coincided with Al Jazeera's release of an exclusive video showing the Egyptian soldiers' shooting the unarmed young Palestinian man walking towards them. Most of the tweets and Facebook posts under this hashtag focused on the humanitarian side of the blockade on the Gaza Strip, and Egypt's role along with the occupation authorities in enforcing it, as well as the crippling of the movement of thousands, preventing them from studying and receiving medical treatment.



¹⁵ An international electronic campaign for the release of child prisoners in the occupation prisons, Ma'an News Agency, published on December 20, 2015, <https://www.maanneews.net/Content.aspx?id=816499>

Life in the West Bank on “Snapchat”

Regularly the Snapchat application chooses a country, and encourages its users to publically post videos depicting their everyday lives under the title “life in. . .”. At the beginning of July 2015 videos spread across Snapchat, depicting daily life in Tel Aviv. Palestinian and Arab activists and users on Twitter and Facebook criticized this move, demanding a space to show the lives of Palestinians under occupation, reminding the application’s administration that the photographs of Israelis taken in Tel Aviv were actually taken on occupied Palestinian lands. In response, many tweeted under the hashtag #TelAvivLife in order to publish photos documenting the Israeli occupation’s violations against Palestinians, such as photos of those who were killed, arrests, and others.



Two days after the publishing of these Palestinian posts on life under occupation, Snapchat released a campaign calling on people to publish photos under the hashtag #WestBankLife. Palestinians answered this call by publishing videos of daily life in several cities in the West Bank, which mostly related to the reality of the occupation, through the documenting of checkpoints, the Apartheid Wall, home demolitions, etc.

The Check Initiative

“Check” is one of the most notable initiatives on social media, which directly relates to the credibility of social media publications¹⁶. It is a media initiative led by two Palestinian young men, named Laith Tamizi and Baker Abed al-Haq, which aims to check the credibility of news published on the internet, and especially on social media.

2015 witnessed a long discussion about social media’s role in covering the ground developments in Palestine, especially after the outbreak of the popular uprising. Media coverage is no longer limited to specialized journalism and traditional outlets, since anyone with a Facebook account or the ability to use social media, can publish news or create a specific media conversation. There are many examples of the misusing these tools, such as with the publication of incorrect news, the use of old photos unrelated to events on the ground, or the publication of the expected names of martyrs, who later prove to be alive.

In light of such misuse of social media, the “check” initiative was launched. It uses its private Facebook page to alert activists and users to the fact that not all that is seen on social media is accurate and credible, and that it is the responsibility of an informed user to check the news received and the sources providing them. Most of the page’s posts focus on clarifying the circumstances of some of the news published on the internet, or warning of their lack of credibility, as well as attempting to find alternative sources, with accurate news concerning the same events.

Enough with Women's Killings

A Palestinian campaign organized by Baladna - Association for Arab Youth in cooperation with Kayan - Feminist Organization, was launched with the aim of decreasing the phenomenon of women's killings or femicide in Palestinian society, particularly in the 48' areas. The campaign was partly a response to an increase in the number of victims killed because they are women, usually by one of their family members, and under the pretense of "family honour". The campaign constantly publishes media content, videos, and publications opposed to all forms of violence against women. It also follows up with all media coverage related to the killing of women, in which their murderers are not prosecuted, as well as cases involving forced marriages, teenage marriages, and other issues concerning women in Palestinian society. This campaign is also accompanied by an on the ground campaign implemented by several associations and feminist organizations in the 48' areas, such as awareness-raising campaigns, workshops, rallies, and other activities¹⁷.



"Bint al-Balad" Campaign

This campaign was launched by the "Taghyeer for Social Media" NGO¹⁸ at the end of 2014, but was more widely active during 2015. It aims to shed light on the issue of violence against Palestinian women, in an attempt to defend them in the face of violent practices such as murder, beatings, harassment, assaults, etc. The campaign became much more than a Facebook page, since it launched a smartphone application, which allows its users to add content and comments that contribute to the elimination of violence against women.

The campaign also includes stories and information about leading Palestinian women, presented in creative and eye-catching infographics. Through its application and website, the campaign allows interested contributors to sign a petition directed at the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, demanding the issue of a legal program to fight femicide, passing a penalties law and prosecuting the murderers, in addition to activating the safe social network through the civil status and alimony laws¹⁹. The campaign also publishes videos and information targeting women, in order to assist them in confronting assaults, such as the video "How to protect yourself?", which focuses on protection from electronic harassment²⁰.

¹⁶ The "Check" initiative's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Check.Pal/>

¹⁷ The campaign's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/khalas6/>

¹⁸ The NGO's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/TaghyeerSM>

¹⁹ The petition can be seen here: <https://www.facebook.com/TaghyeerSM/app/854335284596857>

²⁰ The video can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hfz-gEc5FrM>

CONCLUSIONS

After surveying the most important electronic campaigns in historic Palestine during 2015, we can conclude that political and social events are quickly reflected on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms, before having an effect on the ground. For example, the “Mawtini” campaign began as an idea discussed by social media users on Facebook, to mobilize people and sing the national anthem, and was only later implemented on the ground in more than one location.

We also conclude that social issues and campaigns (for example women’s issues) are often neglected in the Palestinian electronic sphere for the benefit of political issues and campaigns, especially during the eruption of clashes with the occupation forces. When following the content of social media platforms since September, 2015 and afterwards, one can notice that the rate of the discussions and campaigns aimed at social, legal, or economic issues declined in benefit of those concerning direct political events and issues happening on the ground.

The results also show that political events cause interactions within the different social media platforms, which means that interactions do not only occur between users, or on the ground, but also between the platforms themselves. For example, Palestinians quickly interacted and mobilized on the social media level, when “Snapchat” began publishing videos about life in Tel Aviv, and responded by posting videos on Snapchat, Facebook, and Twitter about life under the occupation in the West Bank. This means that a particular electronic campaign on one social medium was followed by similar campaigns on other social media networks, which exposes the current news to a wider audience and increases their interaction with them.



CHAPTER 3:

DIGITAL VIOLATIONS IN PALESTINE

This chapter addresses digital rights violations committed against Palestinians throughout historic Palestine. These violations are highlighted by the arrest of Palestinians for their activity on social media. The chapter will also address notable stories and events that occurred throughout 2015, significant to violations on digital rights.

Digital rights are recognized as an integral part of the Universal Declaration of Human rights, guaranteeing the right to internet access, the right to safe and open networks, and the right to create content and publish it on social media. Digital rights also guarantee the right to privacy and freedom from surveillance, as well as freedom of expression on digital platforms. These rights are the foundation of digital connectivity and communication²¹.

ARRESTS BECAUSE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITY:

2015 witnessed a surge in arrests based on social media activity throughout historic Palestine. The arrests include those committed by Israelis, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas. It is worth noting that since October and the start of the popular uprising, the number of arrests conducted by Israel based on social media activity has more than doubled. Between October 2015 and January 2016 the number of Palestinians arrested by Israel on the basis of “Incitement through Social Media” reached 150²². The Jerusalem Committee for the Families of Prisoners has recorded at least 45 arrests of residents of Jerusalem based on posts on Facebook in 2015 alone. Most of those who have been arrested have received sentences from 11 months up to a year after being charged with “Incitement through Social Media”.²³ One example of the longer sentences is that of the prisoner Adi Al-Bayoumi, from Jerusalem who was arrested in 2014 and was charged with 12 months in 2015 based on the content of Facebook posts.

Those detained also include administrative detainees who are held for months at a time without trial. To this day, there is no legislation detailing any legal actions that can be taken against an individual under the pretense of incitement through social media. The fact that there is no legal framework becomes even more obvious when one studies the cases and realizes how arbitrary they are. Some Palestinians were held under administrative detention without any evidence being released, though it was indicated to them during the interrogation that the arrest was linked to social media. In other cases, Palestinians are charged based on the number of shares, likes and the prominence of their Facebook posts²⁴. It is thus becoming clear that, in many cases, the Israeli government is stretching the definition of “incitement” with the mere goal of suppressing activist voices and political opponents.

²¹ <https://www.apc.org/node/5677>

²² Addameer Interview conducted on January 28th, 2016

²³ Interview conducted with Amjad Abu Assab, director of Jerusalem Committee for the Family of Prisoners on February 29th, 2016

²⁴ Interview conducted with Addameer on January 28th, 2016

The absence of a legal framework regarding social media activity is cause for significant concern. As more Palestinians rely on social media to report and communicate with other Palestinians, their actions may be deemed dangerous by Israel simply based on their nationality²⁵. It is worth noting that Palestinians living in the West Bank are tried under military rule, whereas Palestinians who carry Israeli citizenships are tried under the Israeli criminal law.

2015 also saw an aggressive campaign to censor content online by Israel. During the final months of the year, the Israeli government has on a number of occasions contacted large online platforms such as Facebook and Google to remove content it claims to incite violence²⁶. In one occasion, Hamas declared that its YouTube video channel was taken down based upon the request of the Israeli Foreign Ministry.²⁷

In November, the Israeli Foreign Ministry issued a press release declaring that they met with the CEO of YouTube and had agreed to collaborate together and develop a mechanism that would monitor content posted on YouTube²⁸. However, Google denied these reports a few days after the press release was published²⁹.

The following is a survey of the most notable arrest cases during 2015.

ARRESTS BY ISRAEL

Name: Tamara Abu Laban

Age: 15

Gender: Female

City: Jerusalem

Date of Arrest: November 5th, 2015

Circumstances: In November, the Israeli military arrested 15-year-old Tamara Abu Laban based on a one-word post on her Facebook profile. Abu Laban posted the word “forgive me” and was arrested under the pretense of incitement on Facebook. Tamara was held for a few hours before being released as her post was personally driven and not political.



²⁵ <http://972mag.com/imprisoned-for-incitement-on-facebook-only-if-youre-arab/108720/>

²⁶ <http://www.reuters.com/article/uk-israel-palestinians-socialmedia-idUKKCN0S21JW20151008?irpc=932>

²⁷ <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Hamas-says-YouTube-shuts-down-channel-upon-Israeli-Foreign-Ministry-request-422598>

²⁸ <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/22471-israel-meets-with-google-and-youtube-to-discuss-censoring-palestinian-videos>

²⁹ <http://www.timesofisrael.com/google-denies-agreement-to-monitor-anti-israel-videos/>

Name: Asma'a Hamdan
Age: 19
Gender: Female
City: Nazareth
Date of Arrest: October 5th, 2015

Circumstances: Asma'a Hamdan was requested to present herself to the Israeli intelligence headquarters in Nazareth. Once present Asma'a was interrogated for five hours, then held for 10 days and eventually transferred to three months of administrative detention. Her interrogation centered around poetry she had posted on her Facebook profile.

Name: Dareen Tatour
Age: 33
Gender: Female
City: Reneh
Date of Arrest: October 10th, 2015

Circumstances³⁰: On 2 November 2015 the poet Dareen Tatour was charged with a list of charges that include 'incitement of violence, and supporting terrorist groups through Facebook'. Evidence showed that Tatour had posted images of martyrs on her Facebook page and videos of the martyrs with her voice in the background reading her poetry.

Name: Donia Musleh
Age: 19
Gender: Female
City: Bethlehem
Date of Arrest: November 15th, 2015

Circumstances: Donia Musleh, a university student, was arrested from her house in the late hours of 15 November and charged with incitement using social media. The Israeli courts charged her with three different accounts: (i) Posting images of martyrs, (ii) posting an image of a protester accompanied with a poem, and (iii) posting an image of a martyr accompanied with text.

Name: Tareq Barghouti
Age: 40
Gender: Male
City: Jerusalem
Date of Arrest: December 1st, 2015

Circumstances: The lawyer Tareq Barghouti who works as a legal advisor for a number of Palestinian detainees was requested to present himself to the Israeli intelligence headquarters. He was held and interrogated for hours and then held for 24 hours until his court hearing. He was held based on "incitement on social media", his bail was set at 5,000 shekels (\$1,400) and was denied the use of his Facebook page for three days.

³⁰ <http://bit.ly/1KNOF0A>

The arrests listed above occurred after the start of the popular uprising in October, however, there was also a number of arrests conducted prior to the uprising, which indicates an increased pattern of arrests by Israeli authorities. Other notable arrests that happened prior to October include:

Name: Omar Shalabi
Age: 44
Gender: Male
City: Jerusalem, Ezaria
Date of Arrest: May, 2015

Circumstances³¹: On 12 May 2015 an Israeli court sentenced Omar Shalabi to nine months for “incitement on social media”. This was the first instance³² where a Palestinian was charged by an Israeli court based on social media activity, and particularly posts on Facebook. It must be noted, however, that there is no legal framework according to Israeli law or in the military rule implemented in the West Bank and Gaza that addresses the issue of incitement via social media.

Palestinian Authority

In addition to Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas also arrested multiple people for their activities on social media. One notable case was that of Bara`a Al Qadi³³, a media student at Birzeit University who was held in January after a number of previous arrests.

Name: Bara`a Al Qadi
Age: 23
Gender: Male
City: Ramallah
Date of Arrest: January 23rd, 2015



Circumstances³⁴: Bara`a Al Qadi, a media student at Birzeit University and the head of its Media Club, was requested to present himself to the police headquarters in Ramallah on 23 January³⁵. He was held and interrogated for over 48 hours regarding a sarcastic post about the Palestinian Authority he had posted on Facebook. The post itself mocked the head of intelligence and senior Fatah official Jebril Rjoub. This was not the first time Al Qadi was arrested; he was previously arrested in 2014 and charged with defamation of the Palestinian Authority on social media.

³¹ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/israel-jails-palestinians-facebook-comments-150521082135363.html>

³² <http://www.timesofisrael.com/in-first-palestinian-official-jailed-for-facebook-posts/>

³³ <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/patrick-strickland/palestinian-authority-arrests-student-lamponing-sports-official-facebook>

Name: Ahmad Al Deek
Age: 23
Gender: Male
City: Kafr Al Deek
Date of Arrest: 3 July 2015

Circumstances³⁶: Palestinian university student Al Deek was summoned to the authorities on 5 July after posting a critical statement about local authorities on his Facebook page. Al Deek was detained for five days. He is currently suing the Palestinian Authority for torture conducted throughout his detention, and the two officers that beat him are being put on trial.

HAMAS

There is little public information about arrests conducted by Hamas in Gaza over social media, however, it is estimated that at least five people were arrested based on their social media posts. One of the notable cases was the arrest of journalist Mushira Al Hajj.

Name: Mushira Al Hajj
Age: 28
Gender: Female
City: Gaza
Date of Arrest: 5 August 2016



Circumstances³⁷: The journalist Mushira Al Hajj who works for a number of local media outlets in the Gaza Strip had published a damning report against the Ministry of Health in Gaza and had posted the story on Facebook. Months later, the Hamas police arrested and held Al Hajj for at least 48 hours, interrogating her on the report and the Facebook posts.

³⁴ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/palestinian-authority-war-facebook-dissent-151114105846783.html>

³⁵ <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/patrick-strickland/palestinian-authority-arrests-student-lamponing-sports-official-facebook>

³⁶ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/palestinian-authority-war-facebook-dissent-151114105846783.html>

³⁷ <https://www.maannews.com/Content.aspx?id=766876>

NOTABLE STORIES OF 2015

In August, 2015 the Mada Center for Development and Media Freedom conducted a campaign with the aim to raise awareness about digital rights in Palestine and the importance of freedom of expression³⁸. The campaign also launched the hashtag #لازم_يطير, meaning “it must fly”; the campaign advocates for the Palestinian’s right to access the internet.

Finally, on a positive note, after years of blocking Palestinian access to 3G wireless networks, the Israeli government announced in the fall that they will allow Palestine to have access to 3G³⁹. Palestine is one of the last countries to have access to 3G technologies after years of Israeli restrictions. It is unclear why Israel is now allowing Palestinians to evolve beyond 2G, especially since it is easier to keep track of users via 2G technologies⁴⁰, however, it is assumed that this change is related to the popular uprising that erupted in September.



MADA center launches Digital Rights Campaign in Palestine

³⁸ <http://www.madacenter.org/news.php?lang=1&id=209>

³⁹ <http://qz.com/554746/israel-is-finally-allowing-palestine-to-have-3g/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2015/11/palestine-3g>

SUMMARY

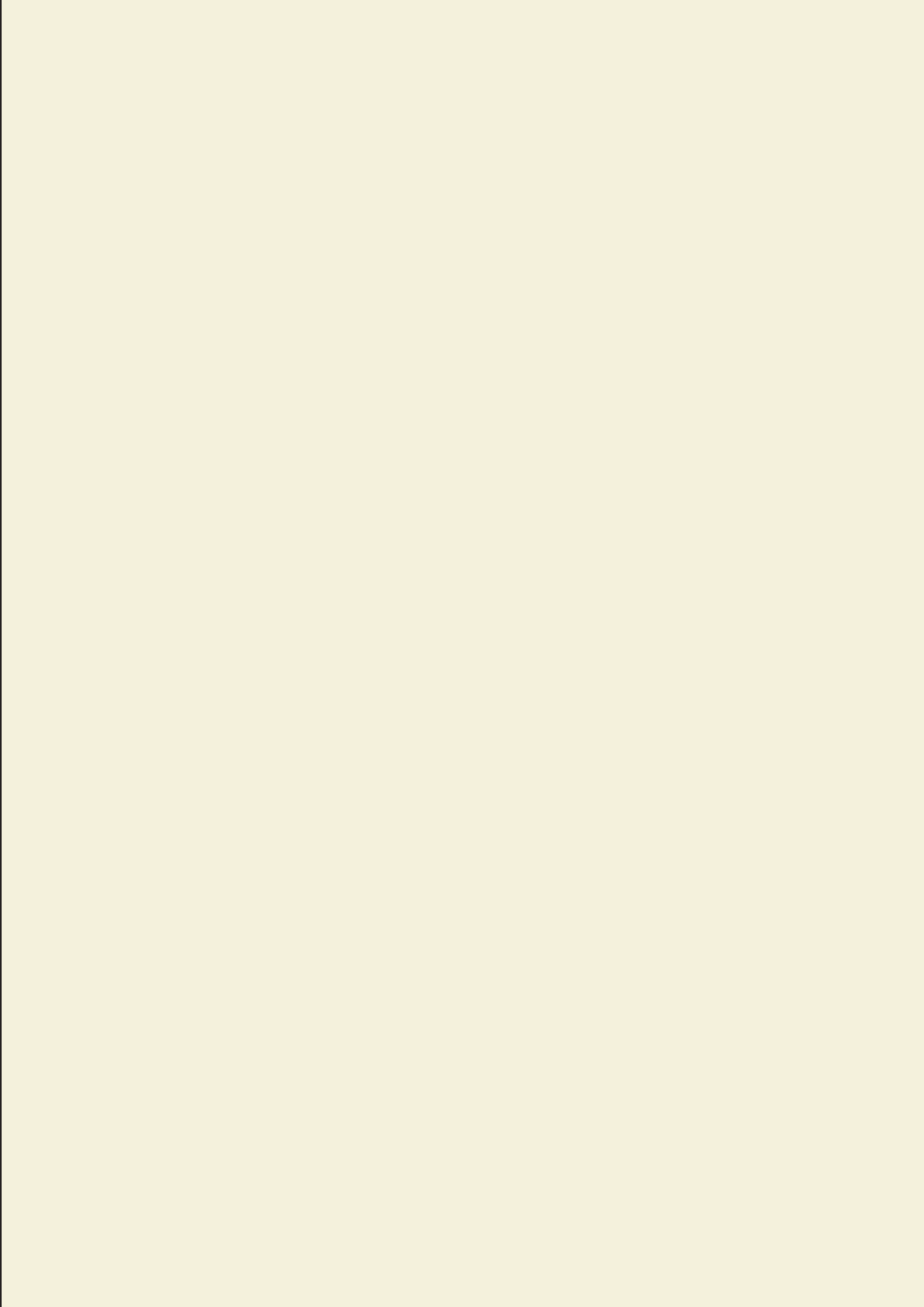
In this report, we have presented the most notable events related to internet and social media usage throughout historic Palestine during the year 2015, whether they are related to the arrest of Palestinians on grounds of their Facebook posts, or to the media campaigns launched on social media.

It is clear that since the eruption of the popular uprising in September of 2015, there has been a rise in the number of those arrested by the Israeli security forces, on grounds of their Facebook posts. This meant accusing those whose posts carry political opinions that can be interpreted according to the Israeli security outlook, as “incitement” on Facebook, even if these posts were phrases or general statements, without a clear and precise meaning. It seems that the Israeli authorities have resorted to these widespread arrests in an attempt to repress the popular uprising, prevent Palestinians from expressing their opinions, and spread a culture of fear and worry over any post shared with friends on Facebook, even if it has an informative message.

On the other hand, as indicated in the second chapter, the Palestinians’ activity in expressing their opinions and highlighting the details of their lives under the occupation through social media, is pronounced and widespread compared to previous years. This can be seen through the large numbers of electronic campaigns on these social media networks, which usually relate to the occupation authorities’ policies and the Palestinian national cause. This activity naturally increases with the increase of Israeli attacks against Palestinians and their sacred locations, which was the case during 2015, in which social media platforms became a space for the exchange of videos and photos documenting the arrest, injuring, or killing of many Palestinians.

At the end of this report, we emphasize the importance of seriously working to guarantee the right to internet access amongst the different sectors of Palestinian society, including providing third generation (3G) services, and lowering the cost of connecting to the internet in the 67’ areas. Additionally, legal organizations need to follow up on the cases of Palestinians arrested on the grounds of “incitement” on social media, as per Israeli terminology, as well as raise awareness about safe ways to use the internet.

This is especially significant in light of the Israeli intelligence social media campaigns, which rose after the eruption of the most recent popular uprising. Furthermore, we demand the termination of these policies of silencing and oppressing the right to freedom of expression, as well as the termination of the political security prosecutions of Palestinian activists, journalists, or other users of social media, throughout historic Palestine.





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