Clicks and Conflict

Social Media's Role in Shaping Public Opinion on the Israel-Palestine Conflict

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become a place where every scroll and click can shape beliefs and ideologies. As global tensions persist, social media platforms have risen beyond mere information channels to become influential places shaping perceptions and increasing polarization. This research delves into the intricate dynamics of how digital narratives on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram can swape opinions and deepen divisions.

While social media has emerged as a potentially powerful force in sharing and shaping public opinion and discourse, there is only a limited understanding of how these dynamics manifest in already polarizing contexts. This research investigates the role of social media platforms in influencing public opinion regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict, exploring how digital narratives and the rapid dissemination of information can sway perceptions and fuel polarization. The research seeks to answer the question: How does the use of social media platforms influence the formation of public opinion regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict?

The study provides a comprehensive literature review focusing on framing theory, agenda-setting theory, selective exposure, and incidental exposure to understand how and when certain perspectives are seen on social media. By examining previous literary work on social media and polarization, the study further analyses this polarization with a focus on tolerance through social identity theory and attraction and repulsion theory. A quantitative approach was implemented using a survey conducted among Dutch-speaking citizens, both active and inactive on social media.

The findings reveal that exposure to pro-Palestine content on social media significantly increases support for Palestine, influenced by factors like echo chambers and agenda-setting. In contrast, pro-Israel content had less impact on support. Generational differences are also studied, with younger generations showing greater exposure to pro-Palestine content, which aligns with a wider trend of increased global empathy among younger people. Additionally, the study found that higher social media usage is associated with more participation in activist activities and, contrary to previous literature, greater tolerance towards the opposing party.

The key takeaway from this study is that while social media can amplify polarizing perspectives, it also promotes greater tolerance towards opposing views. This research

enhances our understanding of social media's impact on public opinion regarding polarizing issues.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Research Topic and Research Question

In a time where sharing photos and videos can ignite global conversations and where digital narratives shape public consciousness, the Israel-Palestine conflict has found a new battleground: social media. The virality of a single post or the reach of a viral video has the power to sway millions, often within hours. The constant stream of information, opinions, and propaganda can influence the formation of public opinion; not only regarding one of the most enduring and contentious geopolitical conflicts of our time but also for wider public discourses. Understanding the intricate dynamics of social media platforms is crucial for uncovering their significance in shaping perceptions, public opinion, and discourse, especially amidst increasing polarization in society. To understand this role of social media on public opinion this research aims to explore the question: How does the use of social media platforms influence the formation of public opinion regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict?

Understanding the role of social media in shaping public opinion is crucial for grasping the impact of modern communication technologies on society. It affects us not just individually but collectively, potentially playing a pivotal role in the rapid dissemination of information, narrative formation, emotional engagement, creation of echo chambers, and mobilization of activism. The Israel-Palestine conflict, with its global visibility, emotional intensity, diverse narratives, and significant online engagement, provides a comprehensive case study for understanding the multifaceted role of social media in shaping public opinion. It allows for the exploration of various aspects of digital communication and its societal impacts, making it a valuable case study to understand the influence of social media on public opinion formation.   What is different now than in the starting years of the conflict, is that in contemporary times, we can witness the unfolding tragedies of this conflict in real-time through modern media such as TikTok, Instagram and Facebook (Pentina & Tarafdar, 2014, p. 211). As of April 2024, there were 5.44 billion internet users globally, accounting for 67.1% of the world's population. Out of these, 5.07 billion people were active on social media (Petrosyan, 2024, p. 1). The emergence of the Internet as a powerful communication medium has significantly transformed traditional models of information and news consumption. The increase in available information channels and sources, along with enhanced opportunities for interaction and co-creation among consumers, has fundamentally impacted how news is consumed (Pentina & Tarafdar, 2014, p. 211). The emergence of user-generated content, interactive interfaces, and instant global connectivity defines the characteristics of new media.

Audiences are no longer passive consumers but active contributors (Pavlou & Stewart, 2002, p. 381). We are confronted with a persistent paradox in today's news consumption. On the one hand, social media intensifies information overload by bombarding individuals with a constant stream of news. On the other hand, it can help manage this overload through socially-mediated selection and organization of information (Pentina & Tarafdar, 2014, p. 212). Social media platforms enable individuals to share their perspectives and experiences, fostering a sense of community and collective awareness (Pentina & Tarafdar, 2014, p. 215). This capacity for widespread sharing and communication plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion. There is often consensus on two aspects regarding the definition of public opinion: it being a widespread agreement among a significant number of people, and the notion that this agreement carries some form of influence (Davison, 1958, p. 91). To contextualise this, this research will use the idea of Davidson that public opinion is formed through psychological and social processes where each person's behaviour on an issue is influenced by their belief that others share the same views. This process includes forming individual opinions, group discussions, personal interactions, and inter-group communication (Davison, 1958, p. 91).

Social media platforms influencing public opinion often serve as a catalyst for social and political movements, amplifying voices that might otherwise go unheard (Jost et al., 2018, p. 90). However, the influence of social media is not without its drawbacks. The spread of misinformation and potential echo chambers can distort public perception and polarize society (Jost et al., 2018, pp. 104-105) However, expecting social media usage to have a uniform (de)polarizing effect on all citizens is overly simplistic; just as not all individuals are equally susceptible to misinformation (Barbera, 2020, p. 47). Prior research indicates that exposure to diverse information on social media, including from weak ties, can potentially lead to political moderation. However, there is also a growing body of work suggesting that increased exposure to cross-cutting views may have polarizing effects (Barberá, 2020, p. 35). Moreover, the perception of polarization on social media may be driven by a minority of highly active and visible partisan individuals, rather than all users (Barberá, 2020, p. 38). While social media platforms have the potential to expose individuals to diverse political views, the impact on political polarization is complex and may vary depending on individual behaviours. Understanding how individuals engage with diverse viewpoints and navigate social media platforms can shed light on the mechanisms potentially driving polarization.

The dual role of social media, as both a facilitator of information and a potential generator of filter bubbles, raises important questions about its impact on public opinion

regarding contentious issues like the Israel-Palestine conflict. The conflict is referred to by various terms, such as the Israel-Hamas conflict or Israel-Gaza conflict. In this research, the term Israel-Palestine conflict is chosen and consistently used to encompass the complex and long-standing issue involving multiple parties, regions, and dimensions, refraining from a focus on a single region. A basic understanding of the Israel-Palestine conflict can help contextualize the research and clarify the dynamics of its portrayal on social media. The conflict has been ongoing since the early 20th century (Elmali, 2023, pp. 7-8) but gained renewed international attention after Hamas's attack on October 7th, 2023 which involved rocket fire and border breaches into Israel. Israel responded to this attack leading to significant casualties from airstrikes on Hamas leadership and civilian areas (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, 2023, p. 1). This is in the most simplistic terms the current situation in the longstanding and complex political and territorial dispute between Israelis and Palestinians that has been going on for decades. The conflict makes of an interesting case study while the Israel-Palestine conflict is a highly polarizing and now widely covered geopolitical issue that often sparks intense debates and emotions worldwide. Its long-standing history, the involvement of multiple parties, and the complexity of the conflict make it a unique case study for understanding how social media platforms shape public opinion

1.2 Societal and academic relevance

Understanding the role of social media in shaping public opinion and contributing to polarization and echo chambers is relevant for policymakers, academics, and the general public. By studying the impact of social media on public opinion, researchers can develop strategies to mitigate polarization, counter misinformation, and foster more nuanced discussions online. Nearly as old as the internet itself, is the debate around whether digital technologies foster ideological communities or whether they serve to unite different political groups (Barberá, 2020, p. 36.) The question of how social media influences public opinion ties into different media theories such as framing, agenda-setting, echo chambers and filter bubbles. Although these theories have been well-examined and the influence of social media on public opinion formation is also not new in the academic field, this research aims to shed new light on these formations with a focus on already polarised opinions. Previous research has explored the effect of social media on political polarization with an extensive focus on American elections and western contexts (Kubin & Sikorski, 2021, p. 3). However, there is only a limited understanding of how these dynamics manifest in other polarizing contexts such as the Israel-Palestine conflict. This research seeks to address these gaps by examining

how social media influences public opinion, polarization, and ideological bubbles within the Israel-Palestine conflict, thereby contributing to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of these dynamics across different cultural contexts.

The examination of multiple theories such as the previously mentioned agenda-setting and echo chambers aids in addressing this question within the contemporary context of the Israel-Palestine conflict. While the research topic holds significant academic relevance across multiple disciplines it is not just media studies in which the question holds a relevant position. Investigating the role of social media in shaping public opinion is crucial for understanding its impact on democratic processes and political behaviour (Sunstein, 2018, p. 25). It furthermore helps us understand how social networks influence individual beliefs and opinions, including the role of echo chambers and filter bubbles in reinforcing existing viewpoints (Sunstein, 2018, p. 9). By studying this conflict, it is further examined how social media contributes to polarization and the formation of these ideological bubbles. Using as a case study Palestine-Israel to research the influence of social media on the formation of public opinion helps to position the question in a very contemporary situation, while the focus is on the conflict after the Hamas attack in October 2023. The Palestine-Israel conflict is deeply polarized, with strong opinions on both sides (Elmali, 2023, p. 34). Moreover, the conflict has both local and global implications (Elmali, 2023, p. 34), making it a unique case for studying the transnational impact of social media. While the research participants are predominantly Dutch the study offers insights on a different level than is typically already explored.   Even though the focus of the research is on the war after October 2023, the conflict is a complex dispute over land, identity, and sovereignty that began in the early 20th century and intensified with Israel's establishment in 1948, leading to wars, uprisings, and ongoing tensions (Elmali, 2023, pp. 7-8). Understanding how social media influences public opinion is not only important to further close the academic gap but also crucial as these opinions can significantly impact day-to-day life.

This impact happens in various forms; nowadays people spend a significant portion of their time online and increasingly rely on social media for news consumption (Arguedas et al., 2022, p. 8). Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have become primary sources of information for many individuals (Arguedas et al., 2022, p. 8) influencing their views on various issues, including the Israel-Palestine conflict. This shift from traditional media to social media means that the way news is presented and consumed has fundamentally changed. The speed and reach of social media allow for rapid dissemination of information, which can shape public opinion quickly and powerfully. Understanding how social media influences

public opinion is crucial for grasping the broader impact of these platforms on societal attitudes and behaviours. Furthermore, the use of social media can lead to increased polarization, creating divisions within society that are problematic for several reasons. Polarization can hinder constructive dialogue and compromise, essential components of a healthy democratic process (Sunstein, 2018, p. 30). When people are exposed predominantly to information that reinforces their existing beliefs they may become more entrenched in their views, leading to a more divided society (Sunstein, 2018, p. 30). This division can exacerbate social tensions, reduce social cohesion, and even contribute to conflict. By studying the influence of social media on public opinion in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, this research aims to look at the aspect driving polarization. Looking at the case study of Israel-Palestine, public opinion shaped by social media can lead to significant changes in consumer behaviour. For instance, widespread support for or against one side of the conflict might result in boycotts of products, companies, or even entire countries perceived to be aligned with one side or the other (Jungblut & Johnen, 2022, p. 1092). These economic actions can have tangible effects on businesses and industries, influencing supply chains, marketing strategies, and financial outcomes. Boycotts and buycotts (intentional purchases to support a cause) can become powerful tools for expressing political opinions and can significantly impact the market (Jungblut & Johnen, 2022, p. 1091). Lastly, the constant exposure to intense and often distressing content related to the Israel-Palestine conflict on social media can affect individuals' mental health and well-being. The emotional toll of engaging with such content can lead to stress, anxiety, and a sense of helplessness (American Psychological Association, 2023). These consequences are not just hypotheticals but have been reported since the Hamas attack. These real-life political implications underscore the powerful role social media plays in driving real-world actions and shaping public opinion. As social media continues to evolve, its influence on conflicts like the Israel-Palestine issue is likely to grow, making it essential to understand and address its impacts comprehensively.

1.3 Chapter Overview

To further our understanding on this topic a survey was conducted in the Netherlands to research how social media influences public opinion formation regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict. This section gives an overview of the study. The next chapter reviews previous research relevant to establish a theoretical framework. This framework focuses on existing literature on social media and polarisation and was used to guide the data collection and analysis of the results. Chapter three outlines the research methodology, including survey

usage and concept operationalization, along with discussions on reliability and validity. Subsequently, research results are presented, followed by a concluding chapter which discusses findings in relation to the academic theories, societal implications, study limitations and strengths, and lastly suggestions for future research are presented.

The findings of the study indicate that social media has a multifaceted influence on the formation of public opinion. It acts as a place that magnifies polarizing perspectives, yet it also reveals a notable contradictory finding: individuals often show a more tolerant stance towards people of the opposing party when they spend more time on social media.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

2.1. Public opinion

To answer the research question and understand the impact of social media platforms on the formation of public opinion regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict, it is essential to ground the discussion in existing theories of public opinion formation. Public opinion is formed through psychological and social processes. In this process, each person's actions regarding a certain issue are influenced by the expectation that others in the public share similar views on the same matter. This process includes the formation of individual attitudes and opinions, as well as the formation of group opinion dynamics. Additionally, the process involves inter-group communication, and the gathering of information about one's social environment, known as personal sampling (Davidson, 1958, p. 91).

However, public opinion is not solely shared by the expectation that others in the public share similar views. According to Lippman public opinion is not a direct reflection of reality but rather a product of how events and information are filtered and interpreted by individuals (Arnold-Forster, 2023, p. 59). Lippmann introduced the concept of the "pseudo-environment," which refers to the mental image people create based on their perceptions of the world, rather than an accurate representation of the objective reality. In the realm of public opinion, pseudo-environments are seen as "interior representations of the world" with political implications both within and on society, capable of influencing and altering these representations (Arnold-Forster, 2023, pp. 59-60). According to Lippmann, individuals form their opinions based on this constructed pseudo-environment. He emphasized that these pseudo-environments are subjective and an often distorted version of reality that can be influenced by the media, personal experiences, and social interactions (Lippman, 1992, pp. 15-16).

Lippmann's observations extend to the limitations individuals face in directly experiencing and understanding complex events, leading them to rely heavily on mediated information. Media, in his view, acts as a crucial intermediary that shapes how people perceive and interpret the world. Lippmann also pointed out the inherent biases and limitations of human cognition in processing information. He argued that people often simplify and distort information to fit their preexisting beliefs and mental frameworks, contributing to the formation of subjective and sometimes inaccurate public opinions. Because these representations are not always an accurate reflection of reality, they can lead to misunderstandings, misinterpretation and flawed decision-making processes (Lippman, 1992,

p. 15). Walter Lippmann's work on public opinion emphasizes the importance of understanding the role of media, cognitive biases, and the construction of pseudo-environments in shaping how individuals perceive and form opinions about the world around them (Arnold-Forster, 2023, p. 59-60).

Even though Lippman's work stems from the 1920s and his idea of consumption of media was different from how contemporary society consumes media, his ideas on public opinion formation are still highly relevant. This understanding of public opinion formation through pseudo-environments provides a foundation to explore how media, particularly social media, influences perceptions. Agenda-setting theory and framing further clarify these dynamics by explaining how media shapes the salience of issues and the interpretative frameworks through which individuals understand them. These theories are crucial in analysing the specific impact of social media on public opinion regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict.

2.2 Understanding Agenda-Setting Theory and Framing Theory

2.2.2. Agenda-setting

Public opinion formation can be further understood through the theoretical lens of agenda-setting theory, also known as the agenda-setting function of the mass media. This theory was first introduced by McCombs and Shaw in 1972. They state that the selection and presentation of news by editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play a crucial role in moulding political reality (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 176). Readers not only acquire information about a particular issue but also discern its significance by considering the amount of information presented in a news story and its positioning (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 176). In other words, agenda-setting theory refers to the ability to influence the public's perception of what issues are important. This concept suggests that the media does not tell people what to think, but rather what to think about.

McCombs and Shaw identified two levels of this theory: the first level sets the issue's importance, and second-level shapes how people see those issues (Valenzuela & McCombs, 2019, p. 9-10). While individuals can choose their media, the theory highlights the media's powerful role in shaping perceptions (Valenzuela & McCombs, 2019, p. 9). Agenda-setting thus has an influence on the media agenda, but also on the policy agenda and the public agenda. Essentially, agenda setting predicts that the aspects highlighted in the media agenda, such as issues, prominent figures, and their portrayals, will subsequently gain significance in the public agenda (Valenzuela & McCombs, 2019, p. 2). When we engage with the world

outside our family, friends and colleagues, we deal with a second-hand reality shaped by various sources of media (Valenzuela & McCombs, 2019, p. 2). Whether it's through the work of journalists or the algorithms of digital platforms, all forms of media curate, interpret, and refine information before presenting it to their audiences. Social media platforms such as TikTok and Facebook direct attention towards topics considered personally relevant, whereas traditional news media direct attention towards topics considered newsworthy (Valenzuela & McCombs, 2019, p. 2). Consequently, trends and issues highlighted by the news media tend to influence the public agenda and policy agenda, as they gradually shape the collective priorities of both the public and policymakers (Valenzuela & McCombs, 2019, p. 2).

Relating it back to the research at hand, this theory suggests that the media has the power to influence the public agenda by highlighting certain issues, (which could be applied to either the Israeli side or Palestinian side) influencing the public perception of what is important. This case illustrates the broader role of social media in polarization and public opinion formation, highlighting how specific issues can be emphasized to shape collective viewpoints.

2.2.1 Framing Theory

Previous research has shown that besides agenda-setting, public opinion formation can be influenced by framing (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 103). Erving Goffman's framing theory focuses on how individuals interpret and make sense of the world around them. According to Goffman, people use mental frameworks or frames to organize and understand information. These frames help individuals to structure their perceptions, attitudes, and actions in response to different situations (Carter, 2013, p 1). While Goffman's theory is still highly relevant in regards to framing, it is more focused on how individuals shape and manage their interactions with others on a personal level, influencing the way they present themselves and interpret social cues. This contrasts with Entman's framing theory, which is more concerned with how framing operates in broader contexts like media and politics, focusing on how framing influences public perception and decision-making (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2019, p. 18). Entman defines framing as the act of highlighting certain aspects of a perceived reality in a communicative text, intending to prioritize a particular definition of a problem, interpreting causation, making moral evaluations, or suggesting specific treatments for the subject being discussed (Carter, 2013, p. 3; Lecheler & de Vreese, 2019, pp. 8-9). Framing involves selection and salience (Entman, 1993, 52). According to Entman, there are four framing functions, and with these functions, he describes how journalists can interpret certain events

and report on them (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Firstly, the function of 'defining problems'. In this function, it is highlighted what actions are undertaken, along with their associated costs and benefits. These costs and benefits are usually assessed through common cultural norms and values (p. 52). The second function, 'diagnose causes', focuses on recognising the factors creating the problem. Thirdly, 'make moral judgements'. If someone has caused harm or benefited others through their actions, this function would then focus on considering whether those actions were right or wrong, fair or unfair, ethical or unethical, based on societal norms, values, or ethical principles. Lastly, 'suggest remedies', where writers propose and substantiate treatments for the issues and predict their likely outcomes (Entman, 1993, 52). A text or article may not necessarily include all four functions (Entman, 1993, 52; Carter, 2013, p. 3).

Besides these four framing functions, Entman furthermore points out that frames also have at least four locations in the communication process. These locations are the communicator, the text, the receiver and the culture (Entman, 1993, p. 53). The communicators consciously or unconsciously make framing judgements when determining what to communicate and what not. The communicators are directed by frames, commonly referred to as schemata, which structure their belief system (Entman, 1993, p. 54). The text consists of frames, evident through the inclusion or exclusion of specific keywords, standardized phrases, stereotypical imagery, information sources, and sentences that reinforce thematic clusters of facts or judgments. The frames influencing the receiver's thought process and conclusions may align with, but can also diverge from the frames present in the text and the communicator's framing intention. Finally, the culture is the stock of commonly invoked frames (p. 53). In essence, culture can be seen as the observable shared ideas and perspectives that most people in a social group use regularly (Entman, 1993, p. 53). These four locations serve for comparable purpose of selecting and emphasising elements, then using these emphasized elements to formulate arguments regarding problems and their causation, evaluation and solution.

While all locations influence public opinion formation, the receiver and the culture serve as pivotal points where the interpretation and perception of news, articles and text in general, are largely shaped. It is within the receiver's mind that frames are filtered through personal experiences, beliefs, and biases, influencing how information is understood and internalized. Additionally, the cultural backdrop within which individuals exist provides a collective lens through which frames are interpreted, often dictating societal norms, values, and ideologies that influence the reception of news and articles (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2019,

p. 18). As such, these two locations hold significant sway over the shaping of public opinion and the overall impact of communication efforts. Understanding the interplay between framing theory and the agenda-setting theory which is discussed next, is important for analysing the media's role in shaping public opinion on contentious issues. The framing of news stories can guide the audience's interpretation, while agenda-setting can influence the perceived importance of these issues. Integrating these theories helps to explain how media coverage can shift public focus and opinion. In light of the research question, both the highlighting of the problem and the audiences' perspective can differentiate between offline and online environments such as social media. Framing adds depth to agenda-setting by explaining how exposure to pro-Palestine or pro-Israeli content on social media can lead to more support towards the respective sides. This means that not only does the media highlight the conflict's importance (agenda-setting), but it also influences the audience's perspective on the conflict (framing). Social media platforms often provide more personalized, interactive, and immediate content compared to traditional media. This leads to the creation and dissemination of frames that might differ significantly from those presented by traditional media outlets. Social media users can encounter a wide range of frames, including grassroots narratives, personal testimonies, and real-time updates, which might not be as prominent in offline media. These unique frames on social media can lead to distinct influences on public opinion by offering diverse perspectives and engaging audiences in interactive discussions.

2.2.3 Social media platforms and public opinion

Media consumption has profoundly changed since the theories on framing and agenda-setting were formulated in the 20th century. This change is largely due to the rise of social media platforms. Unlike traditional media outlets such as newspapers, television, and radio, social media offers a dynamic and interactive space where individuals actively participate in the creation, dissemination, and consumption of content (Castells, 2015, pp. 174-175). As opposed to traditional media, which typically follows a top-down model controlled by editorial boards or broadcasting companies, social media platforms empower users to generate and share their own content instantaneously, bypassing traditional gatekeepers (Castells, 2015, pp. 174-175). This democratization of content creation allows for a diverse range of voices and perspectives to be heard, breaking down the dominance of traditional media in controlling the spread of information.

Additionally, social media platforms prioritize user engagement and interaction through features such as likes, comments, hashtags and shares (Lüders et al., 2022, p. 7).

These functions enable users to express their opinions, participate in discussions and connect with others creating a sense of interconnectedness among users (Lüders et al., 2022, p. 7). However, this shift towards user-generated content also raises concerns about the spread of misinformation, echo chambers, and algorithmic biases, as social media algorithms often prioritize sensational or polarizing content to maximize user engagement (Lüders et al., 2022, p. 7). Consequently, while social media offers unprecedented opportunities for individuals to access and share news and information, it also presents challenges in discerning the reliability and credibility of the content amidst a vast sea of user-generated material. In line with the idea of Lippman on pseudo-environments regarding public opinion formation, social media usage can again lead to misunderstandings, misinterpretation, fake news and flawed decision-making processes (Azzimonti & Fernandes, 2023, p. 3).

These theories thus shed light on the fact that social media platforms, unlike traditional media, enable dynamic and user-driven content creation, bypassing traditional gatekeepers (Castells, 2015, pp. 174-175). This decentralized flow of information significantly affects how framing and agenda-setting theories operate. On social media, framing occurs as users and algorithms highlight specific aspects of narratives, shaping people's perceptions and actions through likes, shares, and comments (Entman, 1993, p. 52; Lüders et al., 2022, p. 7). Agenda-setting is also transformed, as algorithms prioritize engaging, often sensational content, quickly bringing certain issues to the forefront (Valenzuela & McCombs, 2019, p. 101). As stated, this can create echo chambers, where exposure to reinforcing content leads to more polarized opinions (Azzimonti & Fernandes, 2023, pp. 34-35). That repeated exposure to specific frames and narratives tends to reinforce particular viewpoints and attitudes. When individuals encounter content that consistently presents one side of the conflict in a positive light, highlighting sympathetic elements and downplaying negative ones, their attitudes are likely to align with that framing. This effect is further amplified by the interactive nature of social media, where likes, shares, and comments not only reflect but also reinforce the perceived validity and importance of the content. The unique characteristics of social media's framing and agenda-setting mechanisms lead to the following hypotheses:

H1a *People who have a higher exposure to pro-Palestine content on social media platforms will exhibit more favourable attitudes towards Palestine regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict.*

H1b *People who have a higher exposure to pro-Israeli content on social media platforms will exhibit more favourable attitudes towards Israel regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict.*

The hypotheses outlined above underscore the intricate ways social media can possibly influence public opinion. To further understand these effects in greater depth, it is important to study the broader context of how individuals engage with media today. This can shed light into the patterns, preferences and differences in media consumption, that shape exposure to various frames and narratives.

2.3 Media Consumption

2.3.1. Selective and incidental exposure

In high-income democracies, media consumption is increasingly digital, mobile, and dominated by platforms such as Google and Facebook. More than half of media time is spent digitally, with mobile usage surpassing half of that time (Hindman, 2018. p. 102; Arguedas et al., 2022, p. 8). The most popular digital media products are offered by a few large US-based platform companies such as Google (including Google Search and YouTube) and Facebook (including Instagram and WhatsApp). Despite the abundance of news available online, people spend limited time actively seeking it out. Estimates show that only a small percentage of online time is spent on news media (Arguedas et al., 2022, p. 8). Even before social media, in the mass media landscape of the 20th century, television emerged as a significant avenue for incidental news exposure (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017, p. 2). Viewers were often drawn to television for reasons unrelated to news consumption, yet found themselves inadvertently exposed to news content. With the fast-paced transition to a digitally driven and highly diversified media environment in the 21st century, many argue that the occurrence of incidental exposure will diminish, giving way to a trend of selective exposure. According to Prior and Iyengar, only those actively seeking out news will encounter it. They state that in high-choice environments, individuals with higher interest levels tend to consume and engage with more news, whereas those with lower interest levels tend to consume and engage less (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009, p. 34; Prior, 2005, p. 577). However, other scholars believe that expanding the supply of news and making it more accessible, will result in greater diversity in news consumption and higher levels of engagement compared to the mass media landscape that came before it (Arguedas et al, 2022, p. 17).

This debate on selective and incidental exposure gains relevance when considering that previous survey data indicates that only half of internet users actively visit news websites or apps, with the rest relying on offline sources or accessing news through platforms like search engines or social media (Arguedas et al., 2022, p. 8). Individuals' active choices and habits heavily influence news consumption patterns, leading to greater inequalities.

Differences in news consumption are correlated with factors such as age, gender, education, and income (Arguedas et al, 2022, p. 8-9). These demographic factors not only determine how news is consumed but also shape perceptions and discussion of certain global issues, especially on social media platforms. The next section delves into the specifics of social media habits and their intersection with global issues, using the Israel-Palestine conflict as a case study to highlight possible generational and educational disparities in media engagement and content perception.

2.3.2 Social Media Use and Pro-Palestinian Sentiment Among Younger users
Adults under 30 are more likely to use platforms like Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok compared to older age groups. Individuals possessing some college education or a college degree tend to use apps like Instagram at a slightly higher rate compared to individuals with a high school diploma or lower levels of education (Pew Research, 2024, para 3). Adults under 30 are not only more likely to use the above-mentioned social media platforms but a recent survey conducted in the United States also showed that younger people tend to express greater sympathy toward the Palestinian side than to their Israeli counterparts (Pew Research, 2024, para, para 1). Among adults under 30, one-third express predominantly pro-Palestinian sympathies, while 14% lean towards Israel. The remaining individuals are either neutral or undecided. Conversely, older Americans exhibit a greater inclination towards Israel; for instance, among those aged 65 and above, 47% sympathize mainly with Israel, while only 9% favour the Palestinians (Pew Research, 2024, para 3). TikTok, with a significant user base under 30, also shows a stark contrast in engagement between #freepalestine and #standwithisrael hashtags, with #freepalestine being used significantly more often than #standwithisrael. Younger generations' generations inclination towards supporting Palestine is shaped by several factors, including their access to diverse online information, heightened social justice awareness, and exposure to global issues like the Palestinian cause through platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok (Buheji, 2024, p. 10). The generation born between 1997 and 2012 (Generation-Z) is more attuned to human rights and empathy for marginalized groups, influenced by movements like Black Lives Matter, which foster solidarity with oppressed communities worldwide (Buheji, 2024, p. 10). Education systems emphasizing diverse perspectives and activism on campuses further expose them to pro-Palestinian viewpoints. Younger generations' scepticism towards mainstream media encourages critical thinking about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while multicultural environments instil a sense of solidarity with diverse groups. Personal narratives shared on

social media and endorsements by public figures and influencers deepen their connection to the Palestinian cause, often sparking viral engagement and emotional resonance among younger audiences (Buheji, 2024, p. 10). Regarding the different discussed demographics, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H2: Younger generations have a higher exposure to pro-Palestine content online compared to older generations.

Gaining insight into the prevalence of digital and social media usage, notably on platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok among younger age groups, offers perspective on how information regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict is shared and consumed. This understanding aids in assessing how social media algorithms, filter bubbles, but also age and educational discrepancies may influence public opinion and discussions concerning the conflict.

2.4. Social Media and Polarization

Public opinions typically evolve around a critical issue, often resulting in three distinct states as described by Cui (2023, p. 1): global consensus (GC state), where perspectives converge towards a unified viewpoint; fragmentation (F state), where opinions split into multiple distinct clusters; and polarization (P state), characterized by two opposing camps and hindered compromise. These opposing camps and hindered compromise fuels social opposition (Cui, 2023, p. 1)

Previous research on social media and polarization highlights how online platforms contribute to the fragmentation of public opinion (Barberá, 2020, p. 36). Cass Sunstein (2018, p. 7) argues that online spaces often lead to echo chamber discussions, where like-minded individuals engage in conversations within their own circles. While echo chambers can provide a safe environment for marginalized voices and foster the development of silenced perspectives, Sunstein warns that their predominant outcome is group polarization. This polarization, fuelled by social influence and persuasive arguments within homogenous groups, tends to lead individuals toward more extreme positions. Sunstein suggests that this dynamic contributes to social instability and the proliferation of extremist groups online. Overall, Sunstein cautions against the negative consequences of echo chambers on social media platforms and highlights the importance of diverse perspectives in fostering healthier discourse (Sunstein, 2018, p. 30). Earlier research proposes that users are mainly exposed to information that aligns with their political views, causing them to remain isolated from opposing perspectives (Barberá, 2020, p. 37). However, this conclusion is debated within the

academic community. Other studies suggest that online environments might actually expose users to a wider range of viewpoints than previously believed, implying that the impact of echo chambers could be less significant (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018, p. 2455) The conclusion that people are being isolated from opposing perspectives relates with the earlier stated argument by Prior (2005, p. 578) and Bennet and Iyengar, that only those actively seeking out news will encounter it. This isolation is partly facilitated by echo chambers but also by ranking algorithms that produce related filter bubbles, clickbait and partisan content (Barberá, 2020, p. 34). Eli Pariser (2011, p. 55) argues, consistent with Sunstein, that as we increasingly rely on personalized algorithms to tailor our online experiences, we become trapped in a bubble of our own preferences and beliefs. This bubble is created by algorithms that selectively feed us information based on our past behaviours, such as the articles we click on, the websites we visit, and the people we interact with online. Pariser contends that filter bubbles can have negative consequences for society because they limit exposure to diverse viewpoints and create echo chambers where people are only exposed to information that reinforces their existing beliefs and opinions. This can lead to polarization, misinformation, and a lack of understanding between different groups of people (Pariser, 2011, p. 75-76). Applied to the conflict, this suggests that a lack of exposure to diverse viewpoints on social media platforms could hinder understanding and contribute to the perpetuation of the conflict. Therefor the following hypothesis is formulated:

H3: Higher amount of social media usage per day leads to a more extreme ideological leanings toward either party involved in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

2.5 Tolerance

2.5.1 Social Identity Theory

Taking a stance on your ideology can happen online or in real life. while both online and offline avenues allow for ideological expression, how individuals navigate these spaces shapes public opinion and polarization dynamics. Taking a stance can be done in the form of activism where one takes direct action in support of, or in opposition to a social or political policy (Marchetti, 2016, p. 4). Collective identity theories provide insights into the cohesive 'we-ness' that binds people and activists together (Horowitz, 2017, p. 1). Whereas different definitions of the theory exist, collective identity focuses on the differences between 'us' and 'them' (Gamson, 1991, p. 27; Horowitz, 2019, p. 1). Furthermore, according to Polleta and Jasper (2001, pp. 283-284), it highlights an individual's cognitive, moral and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice or institution. It focuses on

belonging to a social category alongside a political interpretation of group belonging (Horowitz, 2017, p. 1).

Collective identities include a social identity. Social identities entail individuals acknowledging their affiliation with a group of similar individuals, even if they haven't previously encountered them, and recognizing that all group members share a common fate (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 21). Those who share this social identity are considered part of the "in-group," while those who do not belong to the social identity fall into the "out-group" category (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 24). Social identity serves as a driving force for people to take action to protect their self-esteem (Hogg et al., 1995, p. 257). The theory suggests that individuals are motivated to engage in (online) activism when they perceive their group's interests or values are under threat or when they identify strongly with the cause that is being advocated (Castells, 2015, p. 251). By participating (online) activism, individuals reinforce their social identity and solidarity with like-minded individuals, strengthening their sense of belonging and self-esteem. Furthermore, social identity theory explains how collective action, such as protests, can lead to polarization dynamics. As individuals align themselves with particular social groups, they can become more entrenched in their ideologies and less receptive to alternative viewpoints, contributing to polarization within society.

It is important to recognize that the digital realm is not isolated from the physical world and vice versa; instead the two are interconnected (Özkula, 2021, p. 63). People's offline experiences and identities significantly influence their engagement in online ones. Previous research has shown that the use of social media platforms can have a significant influence on public opinion, which may extend to its influence on perceptions surrounding the Israel-Palestine conflict. These platforms can often contribute to polarization through echo chambers and filter bubbles. Scholars have warned against the negative consequences of such echo chambers, filter bubbles and the rising polarization and emphasize the importance of exposure to diverse perspectives.

The Attraction-Repulsion Model and social identity theories offer insights into the mechanisms driving polarization and activism in online spaces. Understanding social identity theory is important for studying social media's influence on public opinion because it explains how group identification and belonging potentially drive online behaviour, leading to the formation of echo chambers and polarization. This theory highlights how in-group vs. out-group dynamics, reinforceable by social media, motivate activism and shape collective attitudes. Recognizing the interconnectedness of online and offline identities, helps to understand the complex impact of social media on public opinion formation.

2.5.2 Attraction and Repulsion Theory

Building on these insights, the attraction-repulsion model offers an additional perspective by clarifying the processes that drive the creation of echo chambers and polarization in online spaces. While social identity theory explains why individuals are drawn to like-minded groups and how this influences their online actions, the attraction-repulsion model delves into the dynamics of these interactions. It highlights how the attraction to similar viewpoints and repulsion from dissenting ones create environments where polarization can thrive (Axelrod et al., 2021, pp. 1-2).

The attraction and repulsion model operates on just two principles. One principle suggests that actors typically engage with others who share similar viewpoints. The second principle indicates that when similar actors interact, their differences tend to decrease, whereas interactions between dissimilar actors tend to increase their differences (Axelrod et al., 2021, p. 2). Due to the ease with which like-minded individuals connect, often without encountering opposing perspectives, the internet has become a breeding ground for extremism. Regular exposure to extreme viewpoints, coupled with the perception of widespread acceptance, tends to sway individuals towards adopting those opinions, particularly if they are already inclined towards them. This trend can lead to significant fragmentation, as people with initially varied opinions end up in vastly different ideological spaces solely based on their online consumption (Sunstein, 2018, p. 5). Individuals naturally gravitate towards others who share similar beliefs, values, and perspectives (attraction), seeking validation and reinforcement of their own views. This tendency is thus exacerbated in the digital realm, where algorithms curate content tailored to users' preferences, creating virtual communities of like-minded individuals (Tufekci, 2015, pp. 207-209; Cobbe & Singh, 2019, pp. 17-20). Consequently, users find themselves surrounded by content and interactions that align with their existing beliefs, further reinforcing their ideological stance.

The interplay between attraction towards similar viewpoints and repulsion towards dissenting perspectives forms the foundation of echo chambers, fostering an environment where polarization thrives and inhibiting the exchange of diverse perspectives essential for a healthy democratic discourse (Axelrod et al., 2021, pp. 1-2). The study by Axelrod and colleagues points out that tolerance plays a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of ideological polarization within the Attraction-Repulsion Model (Axelrod et al., 2021, p. 2). Tolerance refers to the willingness of actors to interact with and potentially be influenced by others with differing ideological positions. Higher levels of tolerance lead to larger attraction between actors with similar views, resulting in the formation of a strong central majority around a

moderate position. In contrast, lower levels of tolerance can lead to interactions between similar actors resulting in repulsion, which contributes to runaway polarization with all actors holding extreme positions (Axelrod et al., 2021, pp. 3-5). Their research showed that tolerance, along with responsiveness to interactions, influences the formation of moderate majorities, the behaviour of extremist groups, and the overall level of polarization within the population (Axelrod et al., 2021, p. 8-10).

Thus, to further illustrate this, pro-Israel individuals may gravitate towards online communities or platforms that echo their support for Israel's actions, while pro-Palestine individuals may do the same in spaces that amplify their perspectives. Simultaneously, there exists a strong aversion (repulsion) towards viewpoints that challenge one's own beliefs. In the case of the Israel-Palestine conflict, individuals may actively avoid engaging with content or discussions that challenge their preconceived notions or allegiances. This avoidance can further entrench existing beliefs and contribute to the formation of echo chambers where dissenting voices are silenced or ignored. This keeps different groups apart and stops constructive conversations (Sunstein, 2018, p. 13; Cobbe & Singh, 2019, p. 35).

To briefly summarize theories from earlier, social media use has been shown to amplify echo chambers and filter bubbles by fostering environments where individuals are likely to encounter information that reinforces their existing beliefs, intensifying polarization and reducing exposure to diverse viewpoints (Sunstein, 2018, pp. 9-12; Barberá, 2020, pp. 44-46). Based on the attraction and repulsion model, the correlated levels of tolerance and the possible results of echo chambers and filter bubbles the last hypothesis is formed:

> *H4: Higher amount of of social media usage per day leads to a lower level of tolerance towards the opposing party in the Israel-Palestine conflict.*

2.6. Control variables and Conceptual model

Control variables such as age, gender, nationality (including parents' nationality), religion, and political preference are important to further understand how social media platforms influence public opinion formation on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Age can influence perspectives due to generational differences in media exposure and life experiences, while gender can affect emotional responses and engagement with conflict-related information. Nationality and parental nationality provide insights into cultural affiliations and furthermore, the nationality of one's parents can contribute to a multigenerational influence on views about the conflict. Religion influences interpretations of historical narratives and moral considerations, impacting support for either side and, as nationality, can provide insights into

cultural affiliations. Political preference reflects ideological orientations towards international relations, guiding attitudes towards policies and conflicts. By controlling for these variables, the study aims to reduce biases, enhance generalizability across diverse demographics, and account for background influences that could affect how individuals perceive and respond to information on social media. With these control variables and the formulated hypothesis in mind, a conceptual framework is made as can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Conceptual model
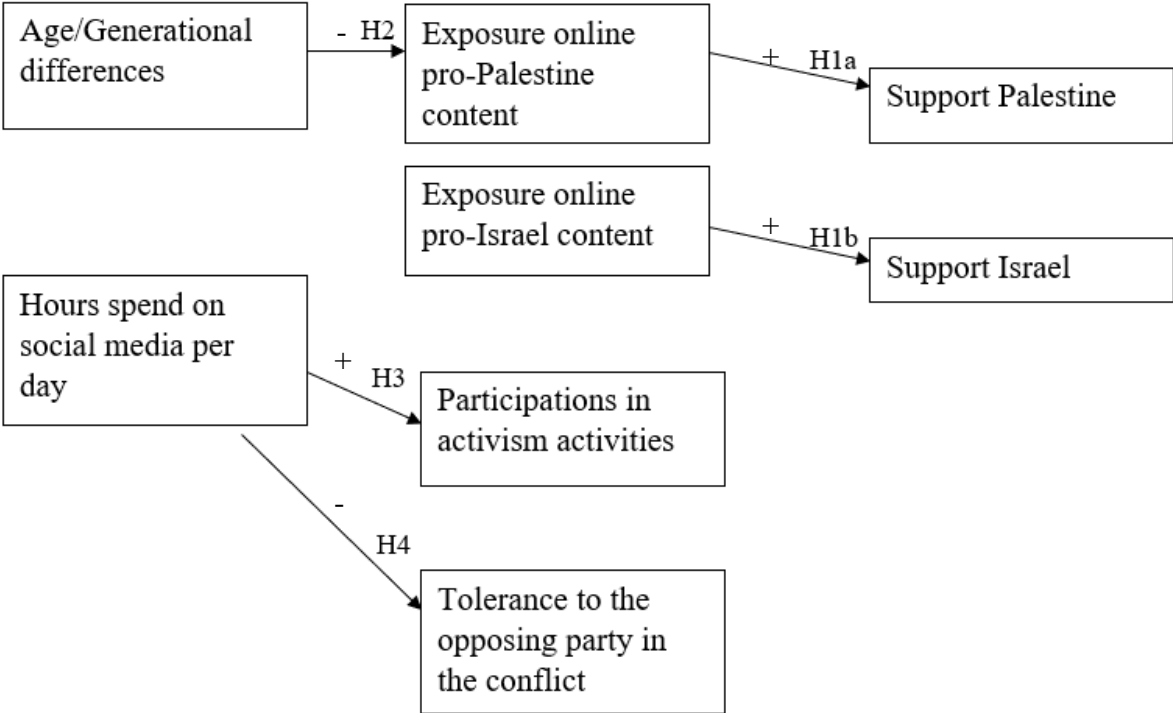
Chapter 3. Method and research design

3.1 Description and justification of methods

To answer the research question, "How does the use of social media platforms influence the formation of public opinion regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict?" a quantitative research approach was employed. Surveys were chosen as a quantitative approach due to their capacity to gather numerical data from a large and diverse sample (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 204), thereby providing a comprehensive representation of public opinion. The structured nature of survey questions allows for the quantification of responses, facilitating statistical analysis to identify correlations (Babbie, 2011, p. 126). This approach helps to objectively assess the impact of social media on public perception and attitudes towards the conflict, as well as to conduct statistical tests to determine the significance of observed relationships between social media usage and public opinion formation.

 The survey used to collect the data was created via the online platform Qualtrics and consisted of structured questions designed to assess participants' perceptions, attitudes, and information consumption related to the Israel-Palestine conflict through social media. The questions ranged from questions about the social media platforms participants use and the amount of time they spend on these platforms, to questions about incidental and selective exposure of the current conflict between Israel and Palestine. Gathering data via surveys allows for data on individuals' real-world experiences and opinions without interfering with their exposure to social media. For H1a and H1b a multiple regression analysis was used, for H2 both a multiple regression analysis and an ANOVA were conducted. For the last two hypotheses, H3 and H4, a multiple regression analysis was again used to analyse the data. The results of the analyses are explained in chapter 4. A more detailed explanation of the collected data, the survey, its distribution and the operationalisation of variables is provided later in this chapter.

3.2 Sample and sampling strategy

3.2.1 Sampling

The target population for this study includes both individuals with access to social media platforms who are actively engaged in discussions or content consumption related to the Israel-Palestine conflict but also people who rarely use any form of social media and consume the news via traditional media. Since the research and survey were conducted in the Netherlands, a high participation rate among Dutch individuals was likely. Therefore, a Dutch-speaking sampling frame was used. Using Dutch in the survey facilitates cultural

sensitivity and language proficiency, reducing the potential for misunderstandings or misinterpretations among participants. Even though the participants are Dutch-speaking, the study's target populations can be highly varied, encompassing individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds and origins. Furthermore, participants are not required to possess prior knowledge or involvement in any capacity with the Israel-Palestine conflict. To ensure that there are no gaps in the data, only participants who completed all the questions of the questionnaire were included in the final sample. The desired sample size was reached, comprising 207 usable responses. This number provides the ability to detect significant effects and correlations, thereby helping with the reliability of the analysis. Furthermore, it allows for capturing diverse perspectives within the population, ensuring representativeness. Lastly, the sample size strikes a balance between obtaining sufficient data for analysis and addressing logistical constraints such as time. To reach the desired sample size a non-probability sampling method was utilized. Participants were recruited via convenience sampling (Babbie, 2011, pp. 208-209). Convenience sampling is used for its practicality as participants are selected based on their availability. While it ensures a higher number of participants it is important to note that a convenience sampling method is more prone to generating a biased sample (Babbie, 2011, pp. 208-209). Reliance on these sampling techniques may impact the generalizability of the findings (Babbie, 2011, pp. 208-209). To still get a diverse participant pool and minimize the limitation of the sampling method, the survey was distributed via multiple channels.

The survey was distributed across various social media channels, including Instagram stories, where most responses were likely from students and individuals aged 18 to 30. To reach a broader audience, the survey link was also shared on LinkedIn and Facebook, where it was not only posted by me but also reposted by multiple others. On these platforms, the survey was more likely to reach an audience of higher age and more diverse backgrounds regarding education, religion, and nationality. By having the survey reposted by others the survey quickly gathered responses outside my own network. This diversity was also the reason for sharing the survey in WhatsApp neighbourhood groups in two different Dutch towns. Lastly, the survey was posted on SurveySwap to again engage a broader audience.

Recognizing the importance of inclusivity and accessibility, acknowledgement was given to the potential exclusion of certain segments of the population when solely relying on social media. To bridge this gap, alternative distribution methods were implemented to engage individuals who may not actively use social media platforms. Encouragement was given to word-of-mouth dissemination to tap into existing networks and expand the reach

beyond online communities. To reach this group of people, the survey was distributed in the City Hall of one of the two towns in which the survey was also shared on WhatsApp. Participants were shortly briefed on the research objectives, ensuring that they could understand and voluntarily consent to participate. Special emphasis was placed on guaranteeing the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, fostering a safe environment for honest answers. The questionnaire was designed to strike a balance between gathering comprehensive information and keeping participants engaged. It took around 4 to 7 minutes to complete, respecting participants' time while still exploring the topic effectively.

3.2.2. Relevance Time Period

The survey was distributed in May of 2024; 7 months after Palestinian armed groups from Gaza launched a barrage of rockets towards Israel and breached the perimeter fence at multiple points, infiltrating Israeli towns and causing casualties among Israeli forces and civilians. In response, the Israeli military declared a state of war alert and initiated operations within Gaza, targeting various locations including residential areas and healthcare facilities (Elmali, 2023, p. 6). Knowing this timeframe helps to provide insight into the potential influence of recent events on the attitudes and perceptions of respondents in the Netherlands regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict. During this period, there were many protests, heightened public attention, increased media coverage, and intensified discourse on social media platforms, all of which could impact how individuals form their opinions on the matter. Stating the timeframe of the survey in relation to the conflict escalation allows for a clearer understanding of the potential influence of recent events on the responses gathered, enhancing the interpretation and relevance of the survey findings. If the survey were conducted a few months later, its findings might reflect evolving dynamics and sentiments in response to ongoing developments in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Depending on the course of events, there could be shifts in public opinion, changes in media narratives, or new developments in diplomatic efforts or peace initiatives. Additionally, the passage of time might allow for a deeper reflection on the consequences of the conflict escalation and its implications for various stakeholders.

3.3 Operationalization

To answer the research question the first hypothesis looked at support towards Palestine as dependent variable and exposure to pro-Palestine content as independent variable, as well as support towards Israel as dependent variable and exposure to pro-Palestine content as independent variable. Respondents were asked to indicate where they would place themselves

on a scale from 1 to 10. The questions following this scale were based on the attraction and repulsion model and included four questions. The first of these four was 'Where do you place yourself regarding support in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?' (1 = Strongly pro-Israel; 10 = strongly pro-Palestine). To include the answer in the analyses the answers were recoded into two different variables, support towards Palestine and support towards Israel. Support towards Palestine was recoded and dived into 1. Neiter supporting nor opposing Palestine; 2. Slightly pro-Palestine; 3. Moderately pro-Palestine; 4. Very pro-Palestine; 5. Extremely pro-Palestine with $N = 133$. Support towards Israel was dived the same way with $N = 103$. Exposure to online content was first measured via selective and incidental exposure. Selective and incidental exposure were measured with 3 questions each. To measure *incidental exposure* respondents first read the following introduction before answering the question 'The next three questions are about accidentally coming across certain information on social media. This means that you come across information because it is presented to you through social media recommendations or algorithms. Friends or specific pages may also share the content with you. You are not actively looking for it yourself.' After this respondents were asked 'How many times in the past month have you accidentally come across information on social media that…' 1) was critical of Palestine; 2) was critical of Israel; 3) conflicted with your political preferences. Responses were measured using a six-point scale (1 = never; 2 = once a month; 3 = 2-3 times a month; 4 = once a week; 5 = multiple times a week; 6 = every day). To measure *selective exposure* the same six-point scale was used. Before the three questions respondents first read the following text 'The next three questions are about consciously searching for certain information on social media. This means that you saw information because you actively searched for this content using, for example, the search bar, hashtags, or clicking on accounts to see this information.' After this, respondents were asked 'How many times in the past month have you consciously searched for information on social media that…' 1) was critical of Palestine; 2) was critical of Israel; 3) aligned with your political preferences. Exposure in general was also measured with this question to see if people saw more pro-Palestine content or more pro-Israel content. The question regarding selective and incidental exposure we based on earlier research from Weeks and colleagues (Weeks et al., 2017). Both selective and incidental exposure were recoded into the same variable to measure all online exposure, one variable regarding Palestine and one regarding Israel.

The recoded variable for exposure to pro-Palestine content was also used to analyse the dependent variable for the second hypothesis. The independent variable age (also a control variable) was asked via indicating respondent birthyear and was recoded to age in years. For

the third hypothesis, participation in acts of activism was the dependent variable. To measure this people were asked to fill out the same questions twice, once in favour of Palestine and once in favour of Israel. The question was 'Which of the following activities have you done and how often have you done this activity in the past 6 months?' (1 = never; 2 = 1 time; 3 = 2 to 5 times; 4 = more than 5 times). The activities on which they had to answer were 'Having done volunteer work in a protest organisation', 'Donated money to a charity', 'Given my signature', 'Boycotted a product/organisation', 'voted for or against a certain policy', 'Took part in a protest', 'shared an online post/article on social media', 'shared an online post/article with friends or family'. To analyse this variable, the responses were recoded to create a sum of the total time people engaged in all activities in total, thus considering all actions combined. Responses indicating 2 to 5 times were recoded as 4 times, and those indicating more than 5 times were recoded as 6 times. Although these numbers may not be perfectly precise, this approach allowed for distinguishing between higher and lower levels of participation, making regression analysis possible. The independent variable for the last hypothesis was social media usage per day. Respondents were also asked to indicate the amount of time spent on each social media platform using the following scale: 1 = 0-15 minutes; 2 = 15-30 minutes; 3 = 30-45 minutes; 4 = 45 minutes – 1 hour; 5 = 1-2 hours; 6 = 2-3 hours; 7 = more than 3 hours. The research covered the following social media platforms: Instagram, Facebook, Twitter/X, Snapchat, YouTube, Pinterest, TikTok, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and Telegram. For the analyses, the social media usage per day was measured in hours. To do this times spent on each app per day were added together and the answers were then recoded to have the following scale: 0 – 2,5 hours, 2,5 – 5 hours, 5 hours- 7,5 hours, 7,5 – 10,0 hours. No respondent indicated more than 10,0 hours.

For the last hypothesis, social media usage per day was again used as the independent variable. Tolerance was measured by how comfortable one would be with discussing the conflict with someone supporting the other party on a 1 to 10 scale. The answers retrieved from the survey and the measured variables helped to test the earlier formulated hypothesis and to give a comprehensive answer to the research question.

Besides these variables and questions, participants were presented with a short introduction and needed to give consent to share their answers. After this, they were presented with multiple demographic questions regarding their background. As stated earlier, all questions were asked in Dutch and subsequently translated into English to facilitate the dissemination of the research findings. The control variables used were gender, age, education level, nationality, religion and political preference. For these variables, participants were

asked to indicate their gender affiliation, indicate their age by stating their birth year, choose their highest completed education level, and indicate their own nationality from a list of 196 countries, along with that of their mother and father. Furthermore, they are asked to indicate their religion if they have one. Lastly, their political preferences were measured by indicating what Dutch political party they voted for in the Dutch general election of 2023, these were recoded on a 5-point scale from extreme left to extreme right. Table 3.1 shows the operationalization of the research.

Table 3.1

Operationalization of measured variables

	Concepts/Variables	Measurement	Scale
Dependent variables	Support Palestine	On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is strongly pro-Israel and 10 is strongly pro-Palestine, where do you place yourself regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?	Recoded to 1-5 Likert scale. 1. Neither supporting nor opposing Palestine; 2. Slightly pro-Palestine; 3. Moderately pro-Palestine; 4. Very pro-Palestine; 5. Extremely pro-Palestine
	Support Israel	On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is strongly pro-Israel and 10 is strongly pro-Palestine, where do you place yourself regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?	Recoded to 1-5 Likert scale. 1. Neither supporting nor opposing Israel; 2. Slightly pro-Israel; 3. Moderately pro-Israel; 4. Very pro-Israel; 5. Extremely pro-Israel
	Exposure pro-Palestine content	How often have you accidentally encountered information on social media that was critical of Israel in the past month? + How often have you consciously sought information on social media that was critical of Israel in the past month?	Recoded to 1-5 Likert scale
	Activism participation	Which of the following activities have you ever undertaken, and how often have you undertaken this activity in the past 6 months?	Recoded to 1-4 Likert scale
	Tolerance	On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 stands for feeling very comfortable and 10 stands for feeling very uncomfortable, how comfortable would you feel discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with someone who has opposite views?	Scale 1 – 10
Independent variables	Exposure pro-Israel content	How often have you accidentally encountered information on social media that was critical of Palestine	Recoded to 1-5 Likert scale

		in the past month? + How often have you consciously sought information on social media that was critical of Palestine in the past month?	
	Social media Usage	How many minutes per day do you estimate you spend on the following social media on average?	Likert scale, recoded into hours per day all platforms together
Control variables	Age	Birthyear	Ratio scale
	Gender	Gender	Nominal scale, Female or Male
	Nationality	Country born in	Nominal scale, Dutch or non-Dutch
	Nationality Father	Country father born in	Nominal scale, Dutch or non-Dutch
	Nationality Mother	Country mother born in	Nominal scale, Dutch or non-Dutch
	Religion	Religious belief	Nominal scale, Christian or non-Christian, Atheist or non-atheist
	Political preference	Which political party did you vote for in the 2023 parliamentary election?	Recoded to 1 -5 Likert scale.

3.4 Validity and reliability

Ensuring validity and reliability is paramount for producing credible and replicable findings (Babbie, 2011, p. 160). In this study, several measures are implemented to ensure this validity. This is achieved by designing structured survey questions that directly address the research variables such as participants' social media usage and perceptions of the conflict. The survey questions were grounded in established theoretical concepts and prior research to ensure they capture the intended constructs accurately. The questions were adapted from Week and colleagues (2017) enhancing the criterion validity since they are established from existing research. Additionally, reliability has been ensured by employing standardized procedures for survey administration. A pilot test was conducted prior to the main data collection phase to refine questions for clarity and comprehension, thereby improving the reliability of responses. By looking at both validity and reliability, this study aims to produce findings that accurately reflect the influence of social media on public opinion regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Chapter 4. Results

This chapter presents the findings of this study, which aimed to understand how the use of social media platforms influences the formation of public opinion, using the Israel-Palestine conflict as a case study. First, a summary of the demographic characteristics of the study sample is provided, followed by multiple analyses of the previously stated hypotheses. To test these hypotheses, four multiple regression analyses and one ANOVA test were conducted. These analyses examine the relationships between online content exposure and party support, age and exposure to pro-Palestine content, social media usage and participation in activist actions, and social media usage and tolerance.

4.1. Descriptive analyses

The data collected from the survey are analysed via SPSS, a software package used for the analysis of statistical data. Descriptive statistics are employed to summarize key demographic information and survey responses. Data cleaning and validation procedures were implemented to ensure the reliability and accuracy of the collected information. During a one-week period from the 14th of May until the 21st of May, 265 started the survey with 207 respondents completing the survey. N = 207 responses are used in further analyses. In the final sample, the percentage of women is 62.8% and the male share is 36.7% (1 person did not want to say). The participant's average age was 32.10 (SD = 14.7). The most named highest education level was a University degree (46.9%) followed by HBO (30.4%) and MBO (10.1%) with the other levels including less than 10% each. The sample obtained a total of 16 nationalities with as excepted a high number being Dutch (91.3%) with the other nationalities only reaching one to a maximum of three respondents. This was also the case for the nationalities of respondents their father, with 88.9% being Dutch and the other 11.1% being spread over 15 countries. For respondent mothers, 87.9% was born in the Netherlands with 12.1% being divided over 20 other countries. The majority of the respondents reported having no religious beliefs/being atheist (74.9%) followed by Christianity (22.2%). Political preferences were more divided with 21.3% voting for GroenLinks/PvdA followed by 14.5% VVD, 11.1% D66 being equal with the 11.1% of respondents who did not vote. 7.7% of the respondents voted for Volt in the 2023 election, 7.2% PVV and 6.3% Nieuw Sociaal Contract. Other political parties had less than 5% of respondents. The parties were later divided into extreme left, moderate left, neutral, moderate right and extreme right following the Dutch Kieskompas of 2023.

The average time spent per day on social media was for more than half of the respondent between the 0 and 2,5 hours per day (52.7%) followed by spending 2,5 hours to 5

hours per day on social media (42.5%), less than 5% reported spending more than 5 hours per day on social media. Exposure to pro-Israel content is slightly lower with 26.6% stating that they never encountered this on social media compared to 14.5% pro-Palestine content. Support for Israel is also predominantly lower with 1% extremely pro-Israel, 1% very pro-Israel, 2.9% moderately pro-Israel and 2.9% slightly pro-Israel. Following the same order support for Palestine was 7.7%, 10.1%, 12.1% and 15.5%. Appendix C includes tables with these numbers, listing the numbers as well as the lower percentages.

As Table 4.1 shows, the participants' average amount of times they took part in an action in support of one's party was 3.00 times (SD = 7.58) with a maximum of 37 times and a minimum of 0 times. Regarding tolerance (measured on a 1 to 10 scale), the participant's average ranking was 5.53 (SD = 2.60)

Table 4.1

Descriptive statistics of amount of activism activities and tolerance to the opposing party

	Min	*Max*	*Mean*	*SD*
Activism	1.00	10.00	5.53	2.60
Tolerance	0.00	37.00	3.00	6.71

4.2 Results

4.2.1. Exposure and support

The first hypothesis stated that people who have a higher exposure to pro-Palestine content on social media platforms will exhibit more favourable attitudes towards Palestine regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict. To test H1 a multiple linear regression was conducted. For h1a, the regression was conducted with support towards Palestine as dependent variable. First, the direct effect of exposure of pro-Palestine content on support for Palestine is analysed without control variables. The model was found to be significant, $F(1, 131) = 28.34$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 17.8$. The R Square shows that approximately 17.8% of the variance in exposure to pro-Palestine content can be explained by the level of support for Palestine. This indicates that only a small portion of the variance is explained by the model, it suggests that a large part of the variance is due to other factors not included in this model. Exposure to pro-Palestine content on social media was found to be a significant positive predictor of support towards Palestine ($\beta = .42$, $p < .001$), the positive direction of this value suggests that as exposure to pro-Palestine content increases, support for Palestine also increases. This indicates that higher exposure to pro-Palestine content on social media is associated with more favourable attitudes towards Palestine in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Based on the statistical

significance ($p < .001$) and the positive beta coefficient ($\beta = .42$), hypothesis H1a is accepted when no other control variables are taken into account.

Another multiple regression analysis was conducted, besides support towards Palestine as dependent variable the variables gender, age, education, nationality of the respondent, nationality of the respondents' father, nationality of the respondents mother, religion and political preference were included as control variables. The model was again found to be significant, $F(9, 108) = 5.79$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .33$. The model thus accounted for 33% of the variance in support towards Palestine. This indicates that when considering the control variables, the model explains a larger portion of the variance in support towards Palestine compared to the model without these controls. Exposure to pro-Palestine content on social media still found to be a significant positive predictor of support towards Palestine ($\beta = .37$, $p < .001$), suggesting that that as exposure to pro-Palestine content increases, support for Palestine also increases. The predicting control variable Christianity was the only control variable statistically significant ($\beta = .57$, $p = .032$), suggesting that being Christian (compared to other religions) is associated with higher support for Palestine. Both model 1 and 2 show significance and a positive correlations between exposure to pro-Palestine content and support for Palestine. Based on these results hypothesis H1a is accepted. Table 4.2 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis investigating the relationship between online exposure to pro-Palestine content and support towards Palestine.

Table 4.2

Multiple Regression Analysis of Online Exposure to Pro-Palestine Content on Support Towards Palestine

		Model 1			*Model 2*		
	Variables	β	*SE*	*p*	β	*SE*	*p*
Support	(Constant)		0.29	<.001***		1.19	.99
Palestine	Exposure	0.42	0.09	<.001***	0.37	.09	<.001***
	Age				-0.10	.10	0.27
	Gender (Female)				0.06	.20	0.49
	Nationality (Dutch)				0.08	.63	0.44
	Nationality father (Dutch)				-0.09	.72	0.44
	Nationality mother (Dutch)				0.10	.53	0.38
	Religion (Christianity)				0.56	.87	0.03*
	Religion (Atheist)				0.45	.83	0.09
	Political preference				-0.12	.19	0.15
				$R^2 = 0.18$			$R^2 = 0.33$
				$p <.001^{***}$			$p <.001^{***}$

Note: *p* < .05, **p* < .01, ***p* < .001.

For H1b the hypothesis that was tested was people who have a higher exposure to pro-Israeli content on social media platforms will exhibit more favourable attitudes towards Israel regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict. The regression was conducted with support towards Israel as a dependent variable. Again the direct effect of exposure of pro-Palestine content on support for Palestine is analysed without control variables first. The regression model was not found to be significant, $F(1, 102) = 0.035$, $p = .085$, $R^2 = .00$. A non-significant positive relationship between exposure to pro-Israel content on social media and support for Israel was found ($\beta = .018$, $p = .853$) These numbers suggest that the regression model as a whole is not statistically significant. This means that exposure to pro-Israel content on social media platforms does not significantly predict attitudes towards Israel in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict. The R Square of 0.00 confirms this, indicating that exposure to pro-Israel content does not explain any of the variability in attitudes towards Israel.

When adding the control variables to the model the model was again found to be not significant, $F(9, 94) = .793$, $p = .624$, $R^2 = .07$. A negative non-significant relationship between exposure to pro-Israel content on social media and support for Israel was found ($\beta = -.016$, $p = .876$). Only 7% of the variance is explained by the model. Moreover, none of the eight control variables were found to be significant. The regression analyses, including both the model without control variables and the one with control variables, indicate that exposure to pro-Israel content on social media does not significantly influence attitudes towards Israel. Table 4.3 shows the data for this multiple regression analysis. Hypothesis H1b, is not supported by the data and therefore rejected.

Table 4.3

Multiple Regression Analysis of Online Exposure to Pro-Israel Content on Support Towards Israel

	Variables	β	SE	p	β	SE	p
			Model 1			*Model 2*	
Exposure	(Constant)		.19	<.001***		0.76	.004**
Israel	Exposure	.0.02	0.08	0.85	-0.02	0.09	0.88
	Age				0.07	0.01	0.55
	Gender (Female)				-0.18	0.17	0.08
	Nationality (Dutch)				-0.31	0.66	0.18
	Nationality father (Dutch)				-0.01	0.40	0.94
	Nationality mother (Dutch)				-0.58	0.51	0.57
	Religion (Christianity)				-1.183	0.55	0.24
	Religion (Atheist)				-1.153	0.53	0.25
	Political preference				0.29	0.33	0.78
				$R^2 = 0.00$			$R^2 = 0.07$
				$p = 0.85$			$p = 0.62$

Note: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

4.2.2 Demographic differences pro-Palestine

To test for H2, that younger generations have a higher exposure to pro-Palestine content online compared to older generations, a regression analysis is used. The dependent variable for H2a was exposure to pro-Palestine content. The direct effect without adding control variables to the model was found to be significant $F(1, 205) = 16.08$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .073$. Around 7% of the variance in exposure to pro-Palestine content can be explained by the age of respondents. Model 2 looks at the effect when more control variables are considered. Age was found to be a significant negative predictor of exposure to pro-Palestine content ($β = -.27$, $p < .001$), the negative direction of this value suggests that as people get older, exposure to pro-Palestine decreases. H2a is accepted based on the statistical significance and the negative beta coefficient when no control variables are considered.

For the second model the control variables are measured and again a multiple regression analysis was conducted. Model 4.4 show the results of the multiple regression analysis. Like the first model this model was found to be significant, $F(8, 175) = 3.06$, $p = .003$, $R^2 = .123$. The model accounted for 12.3% of the variance in exposure to pro-Palestine. While still only a small percentage, it indicates that the model explains a larger portion of the variance in exposure to pro-Palestine when control variables are taken into account. In model 2 age is still a significant negative predictor ($β = -.26$, $p = .001$), the negative beta coefficient

again shows that as people get older, their exposure to pro-Palestine content decreases. This consistent negative relationship across both models reinforces the conclusion that younger generations are more likely to be exposed to pro-Palestine content online compared to older generations and therefore H2a is accepted for both models.

Table 4.4

Multiple Regression Analysis of age on exposure to online pro-Palestine content

	Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
		β	SE	p	β	SE	p
Exposure	(Constant)		.29	<.001***		0.88	<.001***
Palestine	Age	-0.27	0.01	<.001***	-0.26	0.01	0.001**
	Gender (Female)				0.07	0.17	0.36
	Nationality (Dutch)				0.12	0.53	0.17
	Nationality father (Dutch)				-0.05	0.47	0.61
	Nationality mother (Dutch)				0.01	0.43	0.93
	Religion (Christianity)				-0.07	0.71	0.75
	Religion (Atheist)				-0.18	0.69	0.45
	Political preference				-0.03	-0.03	0.71
				$R^2 = .07$			$R^2 = .12$
				$p = <.001***$			$p = 0.003**$

Note: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

Besides a regression analysis, an ANOVA analysis is used to get more detailed information on specific age groups/generations, an ANOVA analysis is conducted to examine whether a person's generational group has an effect on the amount of pro-Palestine content they encounter on social media. These three hypotheses were formulated and tested to explore the potential connections between generations and the number of pro-Palestine content on social media:

H2b: People from Gen Z have a higher exposure to online pro-Palestine content compared to I) Millennials, II) Gen X, and III) Baby Boomers

H2c: Millennials have a higher exposure to online pro-Palestine content online compared to I) Gen X, and II) Baby Boomers.

H2d: Gen x show having a higher exposure to online pro-Palestine content than Baby Boomers.

An ANOVA was conducted with generational/age groups as independent variable and exposure to pro-Palestine content on social media as dependent variable.

ANOVA revealed a significant main effect for generational groups on exposure to pro-Palestine content on social media, $F(3, 203) = 5.99$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta2 = .081$.Turkey post-hoc comparisons revealed that respondents that were from Generation Z see significantly more pro-Palestine content ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 1.23$) than respondents from Generation X ($M = 2.22$, $SD = 0.93$), $p = .002$ (= H2b). No other comparison reached significance ($\neq$ H2bII, H2bIII; H2cII; H2d). These results showed that no generational differences are significant besides the one between Generation Z and Generation X.

4.2.3. Social media and activism

The third hypothesis indicated that a higher amount of social media usage per day is positively associated with higher ideological participation towards either party involved in the Israel-Palestine conflict. To test for this hypothesis a multiple regression analyses was conducted. The dependent variable used was the degree of participation in ideological action. Model 1 measured the direct effect of the amount of social media usage per day on ideological participation, no control variables were measured in this model. The model was found to be significant, $F(1, 204) = 16.2$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .074$. The R Square shows that this model accounts for 7.4% of the variation in ideological participation. While this shows that social media usage has a notable impact, a bigger part of the variation is due to other factors not included in this model. A higher number of social media usage per day was found to be a significant positive predictor of participation in ideological activism ($\beta = .27$, $p < .001$), showing that as social media usage increases, participation in ideological activism also increases. These numbers show H3 is accepted when no other control variables are taken into account.

As previous regression analysis also showed, for model 2 multiple control variables were also taken into account. Model 2 was also found to be significant, $F(9, 174) = 7.07$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .268$. The model thus accounted for 26.8% of the variance in ideological participation. This shows that when control variables are taken into account, the model explains a larger portion of the variance in participation in ideological activities compared to the model without these controls. A higher number of social media usage per day was again found to be a significant positive predictor of participation in ideological activism ($\beta = .19$, $p = .013$). Besides these, the control variable nationality ($\beta = .20$, $p = .016$) and control variable nationality mother ($\beta = .21$, $p = .018$) were found to be significant positive predictors. This suggests that being Dutch in comparison to non-Dutch, and having a Dutch mother in comparison to a non-Dutch mother is also associated with higher participation in activism in

regards to the ideological beliefs. Both models show that higher social media usage per day is associated with increased ideological participation. H3 is therefore accepted. Table 4.5 further presents the results of the analysis.

Table 4.5

Multiple Regression Coefficients of social media usage on participation in activist activities

		Model 1			Model 2		
	Variables	β	SE	p	β	SE	p
Participation	(Constant)		1.26	0.17		4.07	0.73
activities	Social media usage	0.27	0.8	<.001***	0.17	0.08	0.01*
	Age				-0.07	0.03	0.40
	Gender (Female)				0.08	0.79	0.23
	Nationality (Dutch)				0.20	2.41	0.02*
	Nationality father (Dutch)				0.02	2.18	0.83
	Nationality mother (Dutch)				0.21	1.98	0.02*
	Religion (Christianity)				0.10	3.33	0.67
	Religion (Atheist)				0.18	3.21	0.42
	Political preference				-0.12	0.41	0.08
				$R^2 = .07$			$R^2 = .33$
				$P <.001$***			$p <.001$***

Note: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

4.2.4 Social Media and Tolerance towards opposing views

For testing H4 a multiple linear regression was conducted as the relationship between both a continuous independent variable and a continuous dependent variable was studied. H4 stated that higher amount of social media usage per day leads to a lower level of tolerance towards the opposing party in the Israel-Palestine conflict. The regression analysis was conducted with tolerance to opposing party in the Israel-Palestine conflict as dependent variable. First, the model was analysed without any control variables as independent variables. The model was not found to be significant, $F(1, 205) = 2.36$, $p = .126$, $R^2 = .011$. The R square shows that only 1.1% of the variance in the model can be explained by the level of tolerance, showing that almost all variance is due to other factors. A non-significant positive relationship between amount of social media usage per day and tolerance towards the opposing party was found (β = .11, $p = .126$). This suggests that, contrary to the hypothesis of lower tolerance towards the opposing party, more time spent on social media may actually lead to greater comfort in discussing the Israel-Palestine conflict with someone holding opposing views. However, the lack of statistical significance (p = .126) indicates that it cannot be concluded that there is a

reliable association between daily social media usage and tolerance towards the opposing party based on the data from this study. This model showed no numerical evidence to support H4. Therefore the hypothesis is rejected.

For the second model the control variables were added. The multiple regression model was again not found to be significant $F(9, 174) = 1.91$, $p = .053$, $R^2 = .09$. However, different from model 1, time spent on social media per day was in this model found to be a significant positive predictor of tolerance towards the opposing party ($\beta = .19$, $p < .021$). This indicates that contrary to the hypothesis of lower tolerance towards the opposing party, more time spent on social media actually leads to greater comfort in discussing the Israel-Palestine conflict with someone holding opposing views. The addition of control variables in model 2 slightly improved the explanatory power ($R^2 = .09$) compared to model 1 ($R^2 = .011$). This suggests that factors other than social media usage play a role in explaining tolerance levels towards opposing views on the Israel-Palestine conflict. No other variables showed significance as seen in Table 4.6. Based on the findings of both models hypothesis H4 is rejected.

Table 4.6

Multiple Regression Coefficients of social media usage on tolerance towards the opposing party

		Model 1			Model 2		
Variables		β	SE	p	β	SE	p
Tolerance	(Constant)		0.49	<.001***		1.85	0.01
	Social media usage	.11	0.03	0.13	0.19	0.04	0.02*
	Age				0.13	0.02	0.14
	Gender (Female)				0.13	0.36	0.08
	Nationality (Dutch)				0.03	1.10	0.71
	Nationality father (Dutch)				-0.00	1.00	0.10
	Nationality mother (Dutch)				-0.06	0.90	0.55
	Religion (Christianity)				-0.25	1.51	0.30
	Religion (Atheist)				-0.11	1.46	0.66
	Political preference				-0.12	0.19	0.13
			$R^2 = 0.01$			$R^2 = 0.09$	
			$p = .0126$			$p = 0.053$	

Note: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

4.3. Summary of accepted and rejected hypotheses

        To test the presented hypotheses that were based on the current academic literature, five multiple regression analyses were conducted and one ANOVA. Table 4.7 shows an overview of the accepted and rejected hypotheses.

Table 4.7

Accepted and rejected hypotheses

	Outcome
Hypothesis	
H1a: People who have higher exposure to pro-Palestine content on social media platforms will exhibit more favourable attitudes towards Palestine regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict.	Accepted
H1b: People who have higher exposure to pro-Israel content on social media platforms will exhibit more favourable attitudes towards Israel regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict.	Rejected
H2a: Younger generations have a higher exposure to pro-Palestine content online compared to older generations.	Accepted
H2b: People from Gen Z have a higher exposure to online pro-Palestine content compared to I) Millennials, II) Gen X, and III) Baby Boomers	Rejected
H2c: H2c: Millennials have a higher exposure to online pro-Palestine content online compared to I) Gen X, and II) Baby Boomers.	Rejected
H2d: Gen x show having a higher exposure to online pro-Palestine content than Baby Boomers.	Rejected
H3: Higher amount of social media usage per day leads to a more extreme ideological learning towards either party involved in the Israel-Palestine conflict.	Accepted
H4: Higher among of of social media usage per day leads to a lower level of tolerance towards the opposing party in the Israel-Palestine conflict.	Rejected

Chapter 5. Conclusion and discussion

This study aimed to shed light on the influence of social media platforms on the formation of users' perceptions and opinions regarding the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict. This was done by trying to answer the research question: How does the use of social media platforms influence the formation of public opinion regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict? To answer this question six hypotheses were formulated. Participants' responses were gathered and analysed with a focus on time spent on social media, social media platforms used, stance on the conflict, different forms of activism that highlighted levels of extremism, and different demographic questions to shed light on variables such as generational groups. Through an analysis of this exposure to pro-Palestine and pro-Israel content, alongside multiple demographic factors and the usage of social media usage patterns, several key insights have emerged. The following chapter discusses the most relevant findings out of the results earlier presented and will discuss the theoretical and social implications that this brings. After this, the limitations and strengths of the study are presented. Finally, suggestions for future research are provided and a short conclusion is given.

5.1 Implications

5.1.1 Exposure and Support

The first hypothesis studied the effect of online exposure to one of the involved parties of the conflict and people's support for these parties. Two similar hypotheses were formulated to focus on the two different parties involved. The first hypothesis stated that exposure to pro-Palestine content on social media is positively associated with support towards Palestine. The analysis showed a significant relation to this hypothesis, meaning that exposure to pro-Palestine content on social media does affect people's support towards Palestine.

These results can be explained following earlier discussed theories. Social media namely can create an online place where users are primarily exposed to information that aligns with their existing beliefs. If users follow accounts and join groups that post pro-Palestine content, they are more likely to encounter and absorb supportive messages. This continuous exposure reinforces their support for Palestine, demonstrating how social media can perpetuate and intensify specific public opinions. This idea has been conceptualised as online echo chambers, where users are predominantly exposed to information that aligns with their political perspectives, potentially leading them to remain segregated from those holding opposing views (Barberá, 2020, p. 37). Besides these echo chambers, Entman's framing theory highlighted how media and communicative texts highlight certain aspects of reality to

influence public perception and decision-making. Selection and salience can explain the positive and significant relationship between exposure to pro-Palestine content on social media and support towards Palestine. This is because pro-Palestine content on social media selectively emphasizes specific issues, problems, causes, and solutions related to the Israel-Palestine conflict. By highlighting these aspects, such content makes the Palestinian perspective more salient and prominent in the minds of the audience. Lastly, the significant results can to a certain extent be explained by agenda-setting theory; which suggests that media influences what issues people think about by highlighting certain topics. On the first level, content on social media sets the agenda by making the Israel-Palestine conflict a prominent issue. The frequent exposure ensures that users see the conflict as a significant and important topic. Then, second-level agenda-setting shapes how users think about the issue, emphasizing particular attributes of the conflict (e.g., human rights violations, resistance), if the frequent exposure is in support of Palestine the second level will create people's own perceptions and foster support for Palestine.

It is crucial to understand these findings in regard to the impact on public opinion. By constantly viewing the Palestinian perspective, social media content shapes the public agenda, making people perceive the Palestinian cause as more important and worthy of support. As public opinion shifts, there can be broader impacts on policy and political discourse, with increased calls for governmental and organizational support for Palestine. The finding supports the conclusion of precious research on echo chambers, framing and agenda-setting.

The second hypothesis stated that exposure to pro-Israel content on social media is positively associated with support towards Israel. While the above-mentioned theory would indicate this, there was no significant relationship encountered for this hypothesis, which means that exposure to pro-Israel content does not affect support towards Israel. To explain this lack of significance it is important to note that the majority of respondents (42.5%) neither support nor oppose Israel. This high prevalence of neutrality suggests a potential lack of engagement or strong opinions about the issue, making it difficult for exposure to pro-Israel content to shift attitudes significantly. Furthermore because of the way content is framed, as the theories of Entman and Goffman present, pro-Palestine content might be more pervasive or emotionally engaging on social media, potentially overshadowing pro-Israel content. This dominance could decrease the impact of pro-Israel messages. Furthermore, for some individuals, the Israel-Palestine conflict may not be a priority issue compared to other concerns. If pro-Israel content does not make the issue seem more relevant or urgent, it may not significantly impact their support levels. In contrast, if pro-Palestine content effectively

highlights urgent and relatable issues, it might capture more attention and influence support. People's preexisting attitudes and beliefs can also significantly influence how they process new information. Due to the pseudo-environment they have constructed—a mental image shaped by their perceptions rather than an objective reality—individuals may already have a firm stance on the Israel-Palestine conflict. As a result, pro-Israel content may be less effective in changing the minds of those who already hold opposing views. Lastly, this non-significant results may be explained simply because in general less posts are shared supporting the Israeli side.

The analyses on the first two hypothesis thus show that while exposure to pro-Palestine content affects support towards Palestine but pro-Israel content does not affect the support towards Israel. These results suggest a complex interplay between the content of the messages, the pre-existing beliefs of the audience, and the broader sociopolitical environment. Understanding the specific audience and context is crucial for interpreting why pro-Palestine content might have a more significant impact on support than pro-Israel content.

5.1.2 Demographic Differences Pro-Palestine

The third hypothesis also focused on exposure to pro-Palestine content on social media. H3 addressed the effect of generational differences on the amount of pro-Palestine content they encounter on social media. ANOVA revealed that the only generational difference that reached significance was Generation Z (1997 - 2012) compared to Generation X (1965 - 1980); meaning that respondents that were from Generation Z see significantly more pro-Palestine content than respondents from Generation X. The outcome that Gen Z does have a higher exposure can be explained partially by earlier research of Pew Research (2024) that showed that younger people tend to express greater sympathy towards the Palestinian side than to the Israeli Side. The previous hypothesis (H1), studying support and exposure in regard to Palestine, showed a positive effect. This means that those who support Palestine are more likely to see more pro-Palestine content. The finding is also consistent with Buheji's theory that Gen Z are more exposed to global issues and oppressed communities worldwide (2023). However, these theories do not account for the fact that other generational differences had no significant result. One possible explanation for the lack of significance is that individuals across different generational groups may curate their social media feeds to align with their existing beliefs and preferences, leading to similar levels of exposure to pro-Palestine content if people are already pro-Palestine. The findings suggest that while generational differences may play a role in differences in opinion formations of certain

demographic groups, they are not the only determining factor. The absence of significant differences across most generational groups challenges the assumption that younger and older generations inherently consume and are influenced by social media content differently. It helps to partly answer the research question while it shows that algorithms might present similar types of content to users irrespective of their age. Furthermore, it again shows a possibility that people of all ages are creating echo chambers and that individuals from different generations who hold similar views on the conflict are exposed to comparable content.

5.1.3 social media and Activism

H3 looked at if a higher amount of social media usage per day leads to a more extreme ideological leaning towards either party involved in the Israel-Palestine conflict. The multiple regression analysis showed a significant effect which shows that a higher social media engagement indeed effects the participation in activist activities related to the conflict. By reinforcing ideological beliefs, social media platforms create environments where individuals are more likely to mobilize and advocate for their perspectives on contentious issues like the Israel-Palestine conflict. This reinforcement within echo chambers strengthens their convictions and may motivate them to take action in support of their beliefs.

Social media's accessibility and rapid information flow facilitate the spread of messages, events, and calls to action among supporters. This ease of communication encourages individuals to engage actively in movements and actions related to the conflict. Spending significant time on social media immersed in discussions, news updates, and interactions related to the conflict can intensify emotional engagement and commitment to one's cause. This emotional investment, fuelled by ongoing exposure to supportive content and interactions with like-minded peers, may prompt individuals to translate their beliefs into tangible actions, such as participating in protests and signing petitions. knowing that increased social media usage effect activism participation helps answer the research question by illustrating that social media doesn't just passively inform individuals but actively shapes their behaviour.

5.1.4. Social media and Tolerance

The last hypothesis concerned the relationship between time spent on social media and tolerance towards the opposing party in the Israel-Palestine conflict. The multiple regression analyses showed no significant result, which means that the amount spent on social media does not influence the degree to which a person feels comfortable discussing the conflict with

the opposing party and thus their tolerance towards the opposing party in the conflict. The hypothesis was grounded in the theory that, as stated multiple times before, users are often immersed in content that confirms their beliefs, reinforcing their ideological stance. This means that opposing viewpoints can be easily avoided or ignored and that an aversion towards viewpoints that challenge one's own beliefs arises. Furthermore, it was in line with the attraction and repulsion theory that suggests that individuals tend to engage with others who share similar viewpoints, and when they interact, their differences tend to decrease. Conversely, interactions between dissimilar actors tend to increase their differences and therefore decrease their tolerance towards people with an opposing viewpoint. However, the analyses point out that contrary to the initial hypothesis, which suggested that higher social media usage would lead to lower tolerance towards the opposing party in the Israel-Palestine conflict, the opposite effect was observed. Specifically, the analysis revealed that more time spent on social media per day was associated with greater comfort in discussing the conflict with someone holding opposing views.

These unexpected results can be explained by that even though immersion in echo chambers is possible, it is also possible that increased social media usage facilitates more opportunities for individuals to engage in discussion and conversation with others who hold differing views. Through interactions, individuals may develop a greater capacity for empathy and openness towards opposing perspectives. Furthermore, spending more time on social media means having more time to potentially be exposed to a wider range of information dissemination, including challenging viewpoints. These diverse viewpoints could potentially lead to increased understanding and tolerance towards the opposing party. It is important to note that the hypothesis and survey question focused on individuals' comfort level in discussing the conflict rather than the likelihood of engaging in such conversations. Positioning the results in context of the research question is interesting while the unexpected positive relationship between social media usage and comfort in discussing opposing views suggests that social media platforms might serve as spaces for fostering dialogue, empathy, and understanding among individuals with differing perspectives. This challenges the notion that social media only exacerbates echo chambers and polarization, indicating its potential for facilitating meaningful interactions across ideological divides. While this research does not exclude the previous research conclusion that online platforms contribute to the fragmentation of public opinion (Barberá, 2020) is does suggest that social media usage may also facilitate constructive dialogue and increase tolerance towards opposing viewpoints, challenging the notion that social media platforms solely exacerbate echo chambers and polarization.

5.2. Limitations and strengths

As with any research, this study presents certain limitations. However, it also boasts a number of notable strengths that contribute to its overall value and relevance. Starting with the limitations one key issue is the subjective interpretation of content. Answering but also analysing pro-Palestine and pro-Israel content on social media relies on individuals own categorizations, which can vary and affect the reliability of the findings. Furthermore, the study's focus on the period following October 7th, 2023, despite the conflict's long history, limits its scope and may not capture long-term trends regarding the formation of public opinion. While some questions came from previous research, other survey questions were adjusted for recent events, rather than being based on established studies, potentially reducing the validity of the results. Additionally, the research is geographically limited to individuals in the Netherlands, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other cultural, political, and social contexts. Public opinion and social media use can differ widely across regions, making it difficult to apply these findings universally. Lastly, some rejected hypotheses may be the result of a high prevalence of neutrality among respondents underscoring the need for more nuanced research into content consumption and perception.

Shifting the focus on the strengths of the research, one major strength is the relevance and timeliness of the research. The ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict and the widespread use of social media make this study highly relevant and important for today's day and age. The comprehensive analysis, encompassing various factors such as time spent on social media, platforms used, and demographic details, provides a nuanced understanding of how public opinion is shaped. This multifaceted approach enables a deeper insight into the complexities of opinion formation. Furthermore, the extensive literature review situates the findings of this case study within the context of previous research, thereby contributing to the broader body of academic knowledge on opinion formation. In conclusion, while this study provides significant insights into the impact of social media on public opinion regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict, its findings are tempered by temporal focus, geographical limitations, and potential biases in survey methodology. Future research should aim to address these limitations for more comprehensive results.

5.3. Suggestions for future research

This study has revealed significant insights into the influence of social media on public opinion regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict. However, several suggestions for future research remain open. First, further investigation is needed to explore the nuances behind the

asymmetric impact of pro-Palestine and pro-Israel content. Understanding why pro-Palestine content appears more effective in shaping public opinion could involve examining the emotional engagement, narrative techniques, and frequency of exposure. This can provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms driving these differences. Future studies should also consider longitudinal designs to capture changes over time. This would allow researchers to observe how prolonged exposure to specific content on social media might alter opinions and perceptions over extended periods, providing a dynamic view of opinion formation. Furthermore, as stated earlier expanding the demographic scope of the study would be beneficial. Including a more diverse sample across different countries, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds could reveal how social media's influence varies globally. Additionally, qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews or focus groups could complement the quantitative findings by providing rich, detailed accounts of individual experiences and perspectives. This approach could uncover how people interact with social media content and how these interactions influence their views on complex political issues.

Overall, these future research directions can deepen our understanding of the intricate relationship between social media and public opinion, providing a comprehensive framework to address the challenges and opportunities presented by digital communication in polarizing context.

5.4. Concluding summary

This study explored how social media influences public perception formation, focusing specifically on its broader impact on societal issues, particularly those that tend to polarize opinions. The Israel-Palestine conflict served as a case study for this examination.

Through the study of various hypotheses, including the impact of exposure to pro-Palestine and pro-Israel content, demographic differences in content exposure, social media usage patterns, and attitudes towards opposing viewpoints, several key insights emerged that are thoroughly explained in this chapter.

The findings underscored that exposure to pro-Palestine content on social media significantly correlates with increased support for Palestine. This phenomenon can be attributed to theories such as echo chambers, framing, and agenda-setting, which explain how social media reinforces existing beliefs and shapes public agenda and perception. Conversely, exposure to pro-Israel content did not significantly influence support for Israel, likely due to lower prevalence and emotional engagement compared to pro-Palestine narratives. Generational differences were also explored, revealing that Generation Z shows a higher

exposure to pro-Palestine content compared to Generation X, aligning with broader trends of younger generations expressing greater sympathy towards global issues and oppressed communities. Furthermore, the study explored the relationship between social media usage and ideological activism, finding that higher engagement correlates with increased activism related to the conflict. Surprisingly, contrary to initial hypotheses, increased social media usage was associated with greater comfort in discussing opposing viewpoints, suggesting a potential for social media to facilitate constructive dialogue and tolerance across ideological divides.

By uncovering these results, this study offers a nuanced perspective on the potential of social media not only to polarize but also to foster dialogue and empathy in a world that could use more of this.

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Appendix A – Original Dutch Survey

Beste deelnemer,

Bedankt voor uw interesse in mijn onderzoek. Ik ben Maaike van de Camp en ik ben momenteel bezig met het afronden van mijn Master in Digitalisation, Surveillance & Societies aan de Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam.
Het invullen van de vragenlijst helpt mij om onderzoek te doen naar de consumptie van politiek nieuws online en zal slechts 5-10 minuten duren. Uw deelname aan deze enquête wordt zeer op prijs gesteld!

Als u vragen heeft over dit onderzoek aarzel dan niet om contact met mij op te nemen via e-mail: 706914mc@eur.nl.

Nogmaals bedankt!

Alle verzamelde gegevens zijn strikt bestemd voor onderzoeksdoeleinden. Uw antwoorden worden vertrouwelijk en anoniem behandeld. Rapporten voortkomend uit dit onderzoek zullen geen informatie vrijgeven die uw identiteit kan onthullen.

Door verder te klikken gaat u ermee akkoord dat uw antwoorden worden gebruikt voor wetenschappelijk onderzoek.

1. **Wat is uw geboortejaar?**
   ▼2024 … 19924

2. **Wat is uw geslacht?**
   - Man
   - Vrouw
   - Non-Binair
   - Anders, namelijk:_____
   - Wil ik niet zeggen

3. **Wat is uw hoogst genoten opleiding?**
   - Basisonderwijs
   - Lbo / Huishoudschool / Lhno / Lts / Vbo / VmboB (Beroepsgericht)
   - Mavo/ Ulo / Mulo / VmboT (Theoriegericht)
   - Havo / Mms

- Vwo / HBS / Atheneum / Gymnasium

- KMBO / leerlingwezen / BBL-BOL

- MBO

- HBO

- Universiteit

- Promovendus

4. In welk land bent u geboren?

▼ Afghanistan … Zimbabwe

5. In welk land is uw vader geboren?

▼ Afghanistan … Zimbabwe

6. In welk land is uw moeder geboren?

▼ Afghanistan … Zimbabwe

7. Wat is uw geloofsovertuiging?

- Christendom

- Islam

- Jodendom

-Hindoeïsme

- Boeddhisme

- Geen religieuze overtuiging / atheïsme

- Anders, namelijk_____

8. Op welke politieke partij heeft u gestemd tijdens de tweede kamer verkiezingen in 2023?

▼ Ik heb niet gestemd … Politieke Partij voor Basisinkomen

9. Van politieke opvattingen wordt vaak gezegd dat zij links of rechts zijn. Op deze schaal staat "0" voor iemand die geheel "links" is, "10" voor iemand die geheel rechts is. Natuurlijk zijn er de tussenposities in de mate dat men meer of minder "links" of "rechts" is. Wanneer u denkt aan uw eigen politieke opvattingen, waar zou u zichzelf dan op deze schaal plaatsen?

10. Hoe vaak consumeert u gewoonlijk nieuws via radio, tv, kranten of online?

- Minder vaak dan 1 keer per week

- Een keer per week

- 2 tot 3 dagen per week

- 4 tot 6 dagen per week

- 1 keer per dag

- 2 tot 5 keer per dag

- 6 tot 10 keer per dag

- Vaker dan 10 keer per dag

- Weet ik niet

11. **Heeft u de afgelopen week nepnieuws of misleidende informatie gezien over een van de volgende onderwerpen? Indien ja, selecteer alle die van toepassing zijn.**

Politiek

Beroemdheden

Immigratie

Economie

Israëlische-Palestijns conflict

Oorlog in Oekraïne

Weet ik niet

Nee

12. **Welk, van de volgende sociale media, indien van toepassing, heeft u gebruikt om nieuws te lezen, te delen of te bespreken in de afgelopen week?**

Instagram

Facebook

Twitter/X

Snapchat

YouTube

Pinterest

TikTok

LinkedIn

WhatsApp

Telegram

13. **Hoeveel minuten per dag besteedt u, naar schatting, gemiddeld aan de volgende sociale media?**

0-15 minuten, 15-30 minuten, 30-45 minuten, 45 minuten-1 uur, 1-2 uur, 2-3 uur, dan 3 uur

Instagram

Facebook

Twitter/X

Snapchat

YouTube

Pinterest

TikTok

LinkedIn

WhatsApp

Telegram

Soms zoeken mensen bewust naar bepaalde informatie op sociale media. Dit is normaal en komt voort uit een of meer motivaties om sociale media te gebruiken, zoals het zoeken naar nieuws, tijdverdrijf, entertainment, ontspanning en meer.

De volgende drie vragen gaan over het **per ongeluk** tegenkomen van bepaalde informatie op sociale media. Hiermee wordt bedoeld dat je informatie tegenkomt doordat het aan je wordt voorgesteld via sociale media-aanbevelingen of algoritmen. Het kan ook zijn dat vrienden of specifieke pagina's de inhoud met je delen. Je bent er dus zelf niet actief naar opzoek.

Beantwoord onderstaande vragen:

Nooit, 1 keer per maand, 2 tot 3 keer per maand, 1 keer per week, meerdere keren per week, elke dag

14. **Hoe vaak bent u in de afgelopen maand per ongeluk op sociale media informatie tegengekomen die kritisch was ten opzichte van Palestina?**

15. **Hoe vaak bent u in de afgelopen maand per ongeluk op sociale media informatie tegengekomen die kritisch was ten opzichte van Israël?**

16. **Hoe vaak bent u in de afgelopen maand per ongeluk op sociale media informatie tegengekomen die in strijd was met uw politieke voorkeur?**

De volgende drie vragen gaan over het **bewust zoeken** naar bepaalde informatie op sociale media. Hiermee wordt bedoeld dat je informatie hebt gezien omdat je actief naar deze inhoud hebt gezocht met behulp van bijvoorbeeld de zoekbalk, hashtags, of op accounts te klikken om deze informatie te zien.

Beantwoord onderstaande vragen:

Nooit, 1 keer per maand, 2 tot 3 keer per maand, 1 keer per week, meerdere keren per week, elke dag

17. Hoe vaak heeft u in de afgelopen maand op sociale media bewust gezocht naar informatie die kritisch was ten opzichte van Palestina?

18. Hoe vaak heeft u in de afgelopen maand op sociale media bewust gezocht naar informatie die kritisch was ten opzichte van Israël?

19. Hoe vaak heeft u in de afgelopen maand op sociale media bewust gezocht naar informatie die overeenkwam met uw politieke voorkeuren?

De Hamas-aanval in Israël op 7 oktober 2023 markeerde de start van de oorlog tussen Hamas en Israël die de voortzetting is van het al jarenlange conflict tussen Israël en Palestina. De volgende vragen focussen zich op bepaalde emoties en perspectieven die men kan hebben met betrekking tot dit conflict.

20. Op een schaal van 1 tot 10, waarbij 1 sterk pro-Israël is en 10 sterk pro-Palestina, waar plaatst u zichzelf met betrekking tot het Israëlisch-Palestijns conflict?

21. Op een schaal van 1 tot 10, waarbij 1 geen emotionele betrokkenheid is en 10 een intense emotionele betrokkenheid is, hoe sterk voelt u zich emotioneel betrokken met de Israëlische of Palestijnse kant van het conflict?

22. Op een schaal van 1 tot 10, waarbij 1 staat voor minimale of geen boosheid of frustratie richting de tegenpartij in het Israëlisch-Palestijns conflict, en 10 staat voor intense of voortdurende boosheid of frustratie, hoe intens zijn uw emoties richting de tegenpartij?

23. Op een schaal van 1 tot 10, waarbij 1 staat voor zich zeer comfortabel voelen en 10 staat voor zich zeer oncomfortabel voelen, hoe comfortabel zou u zich voelen bij het bespreken van het Israëlisch-Palestijns conflict met iemand die tegenovergestelde opvattingen heeft?

Welke van de volgende activiteiten heeft u wel eens ondernomen en hoe vaak heeft u deze activiteit ondernomen in de afgelopen 6 maanden?

Nooit, 1 keer, 2 tot 5 keer, meer dan 5 keer

24. Ten gunste van Palestina

Vrijwilligers werk gedaan binnen de protestorganisatie

Geld gedoneerd aan een goed doel

Een handtekening geplaats

Een product/bedrijf geboycot

Gestemd tegen een bepaald beleid

Aan een protest deelgenomen

Online artikel/post gedeeld op sociale media

online artikel/post gedeeld met vrienden of familie

25. **Ten gunste van Israël**

Vrijwilligers werk gedaan binnen de protestorganisatie

Geld gedoneerd aan een goed doel

Een handtekening geplaats

Een product/bedrijf geboycot

Gestemd tegen een bepaald beleid

Aan een protest deelgenomen

Online artikel/post gedeeld op sociale media

online artikel/post gedeeld met vrienden of familie

Appendix B –Translated Survey

Dear participant,

Thank you for your interest in my research. I am Maaike van de Camp, currently completing my Master's in Digitalisation, Surveillance & Societies at Erasmus University Rotterdam. Completing the questionnaire will help me research the consumption of political news online and will only take 5-10 minutes. Your participation in this survey is greatly appreciated!

If you have any questions about this research, please do not hesitate to contact me via email: 706914mc@eur.nl.

Thank you again!

All collected data is strictly for research purposes. Your answers will be treated confidentially and anonymously. Reports resulting from this research will not disclose any information that could reveal your identity.

By clicking further, you agree that your answers will be used for scientific research.

1. **What is your birth year?**
   ▼2024 … 19924

2. **What is your gender?**
   - Man
   - Woman
   - Non-Binary
   - Other, namely:_____
   - Prefer not to say

3. **What is your highest level of education?**

    - Primary education

    - Lbo / Huishoudschool / Lhno / Lts / Vbo / VmboB (Vocational)

    - Mavo / Ulo / Mulo / VmboT (Theoretical)

    - Havo / Mms

    - Vwo / HBS / Atheneum / Gymnasium

    - KMBO / apprenticeship / BBL-BOL

    - MBO

    - HBO

    - University

    - PhD candidate

4. **In which country were you born?**

    ▼ Afghanistan … Zimbabwe

5. **In which country was your father born?**

    ▼ Afghanistan … Zimbabwe

6. **In which country was your mother born?**

    ▼ Afghanistan … Zimbabwe

7. **What is your religious belief?**

    - Christianity

    - Islam

    - Judaism

    - Hinduism

    - Buddhism

    - No religious belief / atheism

    - Other, namely_____

8. **Which political party did you vote for in the 2023 parliamentary elections?**

    ▼ I did not vote … Politieke Partij voor Basisinkomen

9. **Political views are often said to be left or right. On this scale, "0" stands for someone who is entirely "left," and "10" stands for someone who is entirely right. Of course,**

there are intermediate positions to the extent that one is more or less "left" or "right." When you think of your own political views, where would you place yourself on this scale?

10. **How often do you usually consume news via radio, TV, newspapers, or online?**
    - Less than once a week
    - Once a week
    - 2 to 3 days a week
    - 4 to 6 days a week
    - Once a day
    - 2 to 5 times a day
    - 6 to 10 times a day
    - More than 10 times a day
    - Don't know

11. **Have you seen fake news or misleading information about any of the following topics in the past week? If yes, select all that apply.**
    Politics
    Celebrities
    Immigration
    Economy
    Israeli-Palestinian conflict
    War in Ukraine
    Don't know
    No

12. **Which of the following social media, if applicable, have you used to read, share, or discuss news in the past week?**
    Instagram
    Facebook
    Twitter/X
    Snapchat
    YouTube
    Pinterest
    TikTok
    LinkedIn

WhatsApp

Telegram

13. How many minutes per day do you estimate you spend on the following social media on average?

0-15 minutes, 15-30 minutes, 30-45 minutes, 45 minutes-1 hour, 1-2 hours, 2-3 hours, more than 3 hours

Instagram

Facebook

Twitter/X

Snapchat

YouTube

Pinterest

TikTok

LinkedIn

WhatsApp

Telegram

Sometimes people consciously seek certain information on social media. This is normal and stems from one or more motivations for using social media, such as seeking news, pastime, entertainment, relaxation, and more.

The next three questions are about accidentally encountering certain information on social media. This means that you come across information because it is suggested to you through social media recommendations or algorithms. It can also be that friends or specific pages share the content with you. So you are not actively looking for it yourself.

Answer the following questions:

Never, 1 time a month, 2 to 3 times a month, 1 time a week, several times a week, every day

14. How often have you accidentally encountered information on social media that was critical of Palestine in the past month?

15. How often have you accidentally encountered information on social media that was critical of Israel in the past month?

16. How often have you accidentally encountered information on social media that contradicted your political preferences in the past month?

The next three questions are about consciously seeking certain information on social media. This means that you have seen information because you actively sought out this content using, for example, the search bar, hashtags, or clicking on accounts to see this information.

Answer the following questions:

Never, 1 time a month, 2 to 3 times a month, 1 time a week, several times a week, every day

17. **How often have you consciously sought information on social media that was critical of Palestine in the past month?**
18. **How often have you consciously sought information on social media that was critical of Israel in the past month?**
19. **How often have you consciously sought information on social media that aligned with your political preferences in the past month?**

The Hamas attack in Israel on October 7, 2023, marked the start of the war between Hamas and Israel, which is a continuation of the longstanding conflict between Israel and Palestine. The following questions focus on certain emotions and perspectives one may have regarding this conflict.

20. **On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is strongly pro-Israel and 10 is strongly pro-Palestine, where do you place yourself regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?**
21. **On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is no emotional involvement and 10 is intense emotional involvement, how strongly do you feel emotionally involved with either the Israeli or Palestinian side of the conflict?**
22. **On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 stands for minimal or no anger or frustration towards the opposing side in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and 10 stands for intense or ongoing anger or frustration, how intense are your emotions towards the opposing side?**
23. **On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 stands for feeling very comfortable and 10 stands for feeling very uncomfortable, how comfortable would you feel discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with someone who has opposite views?**

Which of the following activities have you ever undertaken, and how often have you undertaken this activity in the past 6 months?

Never, 1 time, 2 to 5 times, more than 5 times

24. In favor of Palestine

Volunteered within the protest organization

Donated money to a charity

Signed a petition

Boycotted a product/company

Voted against a certain policy

Participated in a protest

Shared an online article/post on social media

Shared an online article/post with friends or family

25. **In favor of Israel**

Volunteered within the protest organization

Donated money to a charity

Signed a petition

Boycotted a product/company

Voted against a certain policy

Participated in a protest

Shared an online article/post on social media

Shared an online article/post with friends or family

Appendix C – Descriptive Statistics

Table C1. Descriptive statistics gender with $N = 207$

Variable	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
Gender		
Male	76	36.7%
Female	130	62.8%
Prefer not to say	1	0.5%

Table C2. Descriptive statistics highest level of education with $N = 207$

Variable	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
Highest level of education		
Lbo / Huishoudschool / Lhno / Lts / Vbo / VmboB (Vocational)	1	0.5%
Mavo / Ulo / Mulo / VmboT (Theoretical)	4	1.9%
Havo / Mms	13	6.3%
Vwo / HBS / Atheneum / Gymnasium	8	3.9%
MBO	21	10.1%
HBO	63	30.4%
University	97	46.9%

Table C3. Descriptive statistics birth country, birth country father and birth country mother with $N = 207$

Variable	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
Birth country		
Belgium	1	0.5%
China	1	0.5%
Ethiopia	1	0.5%
France	1	0.5%
Geogia	1	0.5%
Germany	2	1%
Hungary	1	0.5%
India	1	0.5%
Indonesia	1	0.5%
Luxembourg	1	0.5%
The Netherlands	189	91.3%
Suriname	1	0.5%
Thailand	1	0.5%
United Arab Emirates	1	0.5%
United Kingdom	1	1.4%
United States	3	46.9%
Birth country - father		
Australia	1	0.5%
Belgium	1	0.5%
Burkina Faso	1	0.5%

Cuba	1	0.5%
France	3	1.5%
Georgia	1	0.5%
Germany	3	1.4%
Hungary	1	0.5%
India	1	0.5%
Indonesia	1	0.5%
Morocco	3	1.4%
The Netherlands	184	88.9%
Suriname	2	1.0%
Thailand	1	0.5%
Turkey	1	0.5%
United Kingdom	1	0.5%
United States	1	0.5%
Birth country - Mother		
Belgium	2	1.0%
Botswana	1	0.5%
China	2	1.0%
Cuba	1	0.5%
France	1	0.5%
Georgia	1	0.5%
Germany	2	1.0%
Hungary	1	0.5%
India	1	0.5%

	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
Indonesia	2	1.0%
Iran	1	0.5%
Malaysia	1	0.5%
Morrocco	1	0.5%
The Netherlands	182	87.9%
New-Zealand	2	1.0%
Suriname	1	0.5%
Switzerland	1	0.5%
Thailand	1	0.5%
Turkey	1	0.5%
United Kingdom	1	0.5%
United States	1	0.5%

Table C4. Descriptive statistics of Religious Beliefs with $N = 207$

Variable	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
Religious beliefs		
Christianity	46	22.2%
Islam	3	1.4%
Hinduism	1	0.5%
Buddhism	2	1.0%
No religious beliefs / atheism	155	74.9%

Table C5. Descriptive statistics of Political preference with $N = 207$

Variable	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
Political preference		
Ik heb niet gestemd	23	11.1%
VVD	30	14.5%
D66	23	11.1%
GROENLINKS /Partij van de Arbeid (PVDA)	44	21.3%
PVV (Partij voor de Vrijheid)	15	7.2%
CDA	4	1.9%
SP (Socialistische Partij)	7	3.4%
Forum voor Democratie	1	0.5%
Partij voor de Dieren	9	4.3%
ChristenUnie	3	1.4%
Volt	16	7.7%
JA21	8	3.9%
Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij (SGP)	1	0.5%
DENK	1	0.5%
BBB	1	0.5%
BIJ1	4	1.9%
Nieuw Social Contract	13	6.3%
Splinter	1	0.5%
LEF – Voor de Nieuwe Generatie	1	0.5%
Nederland met een Plan	2	1.0%

Table C5. Descriptive statistics of support Palestine with $N = 191$

Variable	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
Support Palestine		
Neither supporting nor opposing Palestine	39	18.8%
Slightly pro-Palestine	32	15.5%
Moderately pro-Palestine	25	12.1%
Very pro-Palestine	21	10.1%
Extremely pro-Palestine	16	7.7%

Table C6. Descriptive statistics of support Israel with $N = 113$

Variable	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
Support Israel		
Neither supporting nor opposing Israel	88	42.5%
Slightly pro-Israel	6	2.9%
Moderately pro-Israel	6	2.9%
Very pro-Israel	2	1.0%
Extremely pro-Israel	2	1.0%