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Facebook Community Standards: The New Gatekeeper For Palestinian News Networks?

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Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this thesis is substantially my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the Arab American University or any other institution.

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Date of Submitting the Final Version of the Thesis: 14/1/2025

Dedication

To my family, before all else,

To Palestinian journalists, the martyrs, the prisoners, and those silenced by digital war,

Nidaa Basem Saeed Bassoumi

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Abstract

This research examines the influence of Facebook Community Standards and alogarithms on the discourse of Palestinian news networks, and how such standards forced changes in editorial policies and self-censorship exercise when posting content on the platform. It aims to analyze the relation between Palestinian news networks and Facebook platform, with a focus on how these networks deal with the restrictions imposed by the platform, how these restrictions influence the type and method of display of the content posted, and the networks' use of soft tactics (appeal). The researcher depended on two tools to collect the data; interviews (10 participants) and content analysis (240 posts), and used Gatekeeping theory. The research results showed that Facebook Community Standards impose major restrictions on freedom of expression and publication among Palestinian journalists. The analysis showed that news on Palestinian death tolls due to Israeli assaults, and the resistance are usually changed or ignored to avoid being restricted as a news page on Facebook. Facebook Community Standards were found to exercise a role similar to that of the conventional Gatekeeper but using complex digital mechanisms that force new challenges on Palestinian media instead.

Keywords: Palestinian news networks, Facebook community standards, digital violations, Gatekeeper, Self-censorship.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The media sector has witnessed significant changes in communication methods due to the advent of the digital age. This phenomenon has led to a scenario where traditional media and emerging media coexist. The term "traditional media" refers to established communication channels such as television, radio, newspapers, and magazines, which have long served as the primary means of disseminating information. In contrast, new media represents a fundamental shift, encompassing digital platforms like social media, websites, podcasts, and streaming services that have significantly disrupted the traditional media environment. Digital platforms have radically transformed the consumption, distribution, and production of news. These platforms now serve as access points to news, a role previously filled by traditional media institutions.

This shift has led to significant changes in how news is gathered, produced, and disseminated. Digital platforms like Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) now dictate many editorial choices that were once the domain of newsrooms. Consequently, the influence of algorithms and platform community standards has intensified, complicating the relationship between platforms and media. News organizations now must adapt their content to meet the policies of digital platforms. This transformation has also introduced new challenges related to censorship, self-regulation, and the broader gatekeeping role that these platforms now occupy.

In the Palestinian context, social media platforms have significantly influenced both the production and consumption of news. Palestinian media outlets have created accounts and pages on various digital platforms, and some of these outlets have even originated primarily on digital platforms. The reliance of Palestinians on these platforms for news has increased, as demonstrated by a report from Ipoke, which stated that 85% of Palestinians depend on Facebook for their news.

While the platforms provided Palestinian news networks with an opportunity to break free from the burdens of funding and high costs, these networks encountered conflicts with Facebook's community standards after 2015, especially as events escalated in the Palestinian arena following the "Knife Intifada." Facebook began banning Palestinian news coverage that reported on acts of Palestinian resistance. The situation worsened significantly during the outbreak of the war in Palestinian territories in May 2021. Facebook banned certain symbolic words related to Palestine, such as the names of historical Palestinian figures, current leaders and factions associated with Hamas or Islamic Jihad and their military wings, Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, as well as NGOs and institutes supporting Palestine (Biddle, 2021). This poses a problem for journalists as they try to report stories without injecting their personal opinions. Palestinian news networks find themselves caught between losing their presence and being restricted on Facebook on one hand, and being forced to adopt a different discourse on the other

Due to the aforementioned, journalists, on Facebook, tend to change their editorial choices such as avoiding posting content regarding the Palestinian arena and changing their styles of coverage to avoid being spammed; examples are breaking words with symbols to temporarily deceive the algorithms, using emojis, blurring words related to the Palestinian cause, and blurring slogans of the military Palestinian factions. These tactics function as a self-censorship tool to avoid whatsoever possible act deemed as a 'violation'.

1.2 Research Problem

After the exacerbating events in the Palestinian arena since October 2023, Meta Platforms –owner of Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Threads and Messenger– rushed into changing its Community Standards only after 6 days of the beginning of the war on October 7, 2023. The Company updated its Community Standards again three times: on October 18, December 5 and December 7 of the same year. It gave its updates the title 'Meta's Ongoing Efforts Regarding the Israel-Hamas War', which included updates on the Privacy Policy and Community Standards around Dangerous Organizations and Individuals, Violent and Graphic Content, Hate Speech, Violence and Incitement, Bullying and Harassment, and Coordinating Harm (Meta, 2023).

Sada Social Center documented over 11,000 digital violations of Palestinian content in one month (Sada Social, October 2023: Blatant bias towards genocide). The violations included deletions of news pages, pro-Palestine activists' accounts, and documented Israeli occupation's assaults. In 2023, the digital violations of Palestinian content multiplied by 14 times, as documented by the Center, in comparison with the total number of digital violations documented in 2022 with a total of over 15 violations; 4700 of which were on Facebook, and 45% of them were against journalistic institutes and journalists (Sada Social, 2024).

The Arab Center for Social Media Advancement (known as '7amleh'; i.e., campaign in Arabic) documented 4400 digital violations on social media platforms in 2023, with Facebook alone committing 41% of them. The violations varied to include deletion of pages and accounts, restriction on access, ban on posting for a specific period, and blocking access to features like live streaming and advertising (7amleh, 2024).

These complications require the implementation of a scientific research that examines the role of Facebook's Community Standards as a Gate Keeper of Palestinian networks. The question posed is, 'to what extent do these standards and algorithms influence and intervene with the editorial choices of a news network regarding the news on the Palestinian arena and the Israeli occupation of Palestine?'. Another important issue for examination is how such standards and algorithms constitute a form of external pressure on news editors in Palestinian news networks pushing them to exercise self-censorship to avoid any issues affecting their digital presence on the platform.

The researcher examines Facebook's Community Standards and algorithms and how they could function as a factor that influences the decision to publish\ not publish news to the audience and how such news be published if approved. This means that the standards and algorithms could act as a Gate Keeper in the journalistic process. This is a new scientific approach that the research seeks to prove through examining the editorial practices of Palestinian news networks.

1.3 Research Objectives

The main objective of this research is to understand how Facebook's Community Standards act as a gatekeeper for Palestinian news networks. From this main objective, a set of sub-objectives emerges, which include:

1. Examining the relationship between Palestinian news networks and Facebook, as a publishing platform, and challenges faced by the networks.

2. Identifying the factors influencing the editorial policy of Palestinian news networks when covering the news on Facebook.

3. Analyzing the impact of Facebook's Community Standards and algorithms on Palestinian journalists' level of self-censorship.

4. Investigating how the subject matter of the news impacts the decision of Palestinian news networks to publish it on Facebook.

5. Understanding the shifts in the discourse of Palestinian news networks to comply with Facebook's Community Standards.

1.4 Research Questions

The main question of this research is: How do Facebook's Community Standards function as a Gate Keeper of Palestinian news networks?

A set of questions branches out from the main question, which are as follows:

1. What is the nature of the relationship between Palestinian news networks and Facebook as a publishing platform?

2. What kind of challenges do Palestinian news networks face on Facebook?

3. In what ways have the editorial policies of Palestinian news networks been influenced when covering news on Facebook?

4. In what ways have Facebook's Community Standards and algorithms influenced Palestinian journalists' levels of self-censorship?

5. In what ways has the issue being addressed influenced the Palestinian news networks' decision of whether to post about it on Facebook?

6.   In what ways has the discourse of Palestinian news networks shifted to align with Facebook's Community Standards with relation to:

A.   Content display

B.   Soft tactics

C.   Multimedia

D.   Terms and definitions.

1.5 Research Significance

The importance of this study lies in two areas:

First –Theoretical Significance:

One main result of conducting this research is introducing theoretical scientific content on the role of Community Standards and algorithms as modern tools in the Gate Keeper theory with relation to the Palestinian content. This is the first research to address the Palestinian news networks and how they are influenced by the Community Standards and algorithms. Literature on the Gate Keeper and Digital Media focuses on the examination of the Gate Keeper with relation to media networks or the audience; literature on algorithms focuses on Facebook's posts reach and posting tactics. The researcher could not find any studies or research on the role of Community Standards with relation to the Gate Keeper theory.

Second – Empirical Significance

This research can be leveraged to initiate new studies on the shift of gatekeeping from traditional journalists and media organization policies to the policies of global corporations. Furthermore, It is a reliable scientific content for whichever party or legal entity that wishes to study issues relevant to Community Standards and algorithms with relation to the Palestinian news networks.

1.6 Limitations

The main Limitations encountered by the researcher are as follows:

1.   Difficulty of access to the sample due to the war on the Gaza Strip, which has been going since October 7; and constant deletion of Palestinian content which forced the

researcher to exclude major Palestinian news networks after Facebook's deletion of their pages.

2.   The Israeli occupation army's closure of the office of one of the Palestinian news networks that was included in this research resulted in forcing restraints and cautious interaction with the interviewee to ensure the safety of the source.

1.7 Research Terms

Community Standards: They outline what is and is not allowed on Facebook. These policies are based on feedback from our community and the advice of experts in fields such as technology, public safety and human rights (Meta, 2023).

Algorithms: "a step-by-step procedure for solving a problem or accomplishing some end." It is "commonly used nowadays for the set of rules a machine (and especially a computer) follows to achieve a particular goal." In the case of a social media platform like Facebook, algorithms may, among other things, decide what content any given user will see at any particular time, and in what order, when using the platform" (Presuel & Sierra, 2018).

Restriction on content: Facebook's removal of content that contradicts or violates Community Standards (Meta, 2023). Content removal follows a series of restrictions: Restricting user from posting for a limited amount of time, from streaming live, using paid ads, interacting (commenting on or liking posts), messaging on messenger, joining groups, sharing posts and posting on groups; sending posts to the end of the homepage; hiding the account, page or group from search; sending a notification to page followers that it may have dangerous or inappropriate content; deactivating the account for a while; or completely deleting the account. These restrictions may be applied one at a time or altogether (Board, 2023).

Palestinian Content: All news that address the ongoing Israeli war on the Palestinians in the Palestinian arena; and all relevant field incidents, factions, political parties, terms, pictures and videos.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter covers the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the research. The first part introduces relevant previous studies; the second part examines the similarities and differences between this research and other studies with relation to their methodology, framework, and examined variables; the third part showcases the research gaps this study aims to highlight and study from a scientific perspective; and the final part examines the variables of the conceptual framework which address rights organizations (their emergence and nature of work).

2.2 Previous Studies

After reviewing a plethora of libraries and websites, the researcher found some relevant studies, which enabled her to further examine the research problem, and arranged from the most recent to the oldest:

1. **'Snapping the news: Dynamic gatekeeping in a public service media newsroom reaching young people with news on Snapchat', (Røsok-Dahl & Kristine Olsen, 2024) :**

In this study, the researchers relied on ethnographic fieldwork at the Norwegian Public Service Broadcaster (NRK) which publishes news to the youth on Snapchat. They dug into the Gatekeeping theory, incorporating recent developments; explained how journalists deal with the Gatekeeping algorithm on Snapchat; and shed light on the interaction between human selection of news and algorithm-based spread of news on Snapchat at different news production levels. The research results showed a complex relationship between news media outlets and social media platforms; which leads to consequences and conflicts. Being present

on such platforms is useful as it increases views and shares, especially by younger audiences. Nevertheless, these platforms function as Gatekeepers as they impose their own directive principles and selection algorithms which influences the spread of news content.

The results also showed how to avoid being flagged when posting news content on Snapchat. Basically, content creators can share important news stories, since the broadcaster's main goal is to reach the younger generation with important content and maintaining presence on the platform. However, the platform's community guidelines lead to the content's deletion. The research recommends scholars to conduct further research on how journalists adapt news sharing strategies to bypass interventions such as reports by users.

2. Media Frameworks of Palestinian Digital Rights Organizations for Highlighting Meta's Policies on Banning Palestinian Content (2022-2023), (الغورنة، 2024).

This research identifies the media frameworks which are followed by Palestinian rights organizations interested in digital rights, and examines the nature of the messages they present to the audience when addressing violations practiced by Meta towards the Palestinian digital content. It also introduces the most important mental and emotional persuasion tactics used by these organizations when communicating with the audience.

The researcher employed a mixed-method approach by adopting the descriptive-analytical method and drawing on framing theory. He used content analysis and interviews as the two primary tools for data collection. The study results showed the presence of Israeli control and influence in Meta and the latter's adherence to Israeli laws and regulations, over-reviewing Arabic content. The words which are banned by Meta with relation to the Palestinian content include names of Palestinian factions, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad; names of Palestinian martyrs; and names of Palestinian towns and cities under the Israeli occupation. The researcher interprets such results highlighting Meta's use of algorithms that trace words, pictures and videos which display such Palestinian content.

3. Algorithms of Digital Platforms and Their Role in Shaping the Public Opinion (Palestine Crisis as an Example) (عبد الجواد، 2024)

This study explored the virtual relation existing over the impact of digital platforms' algorithms on the shaping of the public opinion, and the psychological and social impact of algorithmic personalization on users. The researcher qualitatively analyzed three platforms: Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. One of the main results showed that the algorithms tend to promote information bubbles, and confirmation bias based on users' browsing trends. The algorithms were found to influence users' behaviors and interaction with the content; hence influencing the public opinion.

4.   **Digital Occupation: Role of Facebook's Policies in Restricting the Palestinian People's Digital Rights, (شومان، 2022):**

This study aimed to identity the extent to which Facebook's polices have violated Palestinian digital rights through restricting Palestinian content during May 2021 events and the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip. The researcher applied a qualitative methodology applying the analytical descriptive approach and using purposive sampling. She selected 30 professionals and adopted the agenda-setting theory. The research covered the time period of May in 2021, and Facebook platform only. Its main results showed that Facebook's policies contribute to the determination of the receiving audience's agenda, violation of freedom of speech, misrepresentation of the Palestinian situation, and violation of right to access and receive information. The research also found that Facebook became a main tool for audience's follow-up with news.

5.   **'Let's dance the news! How the news media are adapting to the logic of TikTok', (Vázquez-Herrero, López-García, & Negreira-Rey, 2022):**

This research studied the influence of TikTok on news outlets which adapt to platforms' logics in a context marked by the incidental consumption of news, their spread and use of technology in accessing information. The researchers examined news outlets and programs on TikTok from around the world. They selected 234 accounts and analyzed the content of 19 media and news programs. Results showed gradual integration of news outlets since 2019 with the aim of positioning their trademark and adapting to TikTok logic, presenting a new journalistic approach for younger generations. Media outlets, therefore, are

faced with a new challenge, which is using the platform's language in expressing their content to ensure the loyalty of their audience in the future.

6.   **'Google News and Machine Gatekeepers: Algorithmic Personalisation and News Diversity in Online News Searc', (Evans, Jackson, & Murphy, 2022):**

In this research, the researchers used the mixed-methods approach to see whether search personalization and news diversity are evident on Google News in the UK. The research sample included 78 participants who were asked to look up four keywords on Google and reply with the first five articles that appear in the search for each keyword. Little evidence was found for personalization of news which refutes the claim that search algorithms contribute to reducing diversity in perspective.

The study results showed a high level of homogeneity in the news search results; older brands having more dominance. The researchers did a manual analysis of the content of articles recommended by Google for the keywords they had given to the participants; it was found that favorability was prioritized for each keyword. Results also showed that, although there was little correlation between the bias of the articles and the political affiliations of the participants, there were two exceptions: Participants who identified themselves as right-wing were more likely to see unfavorable news about immigration and the left-wing. This poses the question of how news search engines contribute to the attraction of users and diversification of some news readers' perspectives.

7.   **'Logics in social media news making: how social media editors marry the Facebook logic with journalistic standards', (Lischka, 2021):**

This research examined how Facebook's algorithms, Facebook users, journalistic standards, and news brands determine the news making process on social media. The researcher used interviews and surveys as the data collection tool, and social media editors in Finland and Switzerland as the study sample. Results showed that social media editors highlight emotional stories and surprising elements in their posts to comply with users' preferences and Facebook's algorithms logic. Conventional journalistic standards and news institutes' visions limited users' interaction. Social media editors estimated that Facebook

news fits more for entertainment and little for foreign politics and news or economic stories. Still, the editors seek to bring 'good mixture' of news that meet Facebook's logic and journalistic professional standards. Users' interaction is one way for journalists to identify Facebook's reach algorithms, hence adapting news based on such feedback. As a result, the editors would select certain news and posts that lead to users' active interaction.

8. 'Reclaiming Control: How Journalists Embrace Social Media Logics While Defending Journalistic Values', (Walters, 2021):

This research aimed to analyze the evolution of strategies for sharing news content and interacting with audiences on platforms in the past decade. It also examined the methods and techniques journalists use to circulate content and create internation with the audiences on platforms, and how such methods have shifted since the emergence of social media. The researcher used semi-structured and in-depth qualitative interviews as the data collection tool, interviewing 16 American newspapers; depending on the Gatekeeping theory. Results showed that journalists followed their conventional journalistic instincts and somewhat random methods in sharing and interacting on platforms. However, they later became more strategic depending on logics of social media than journalistic instincts, focusing more on algorithms and audience metrics.

The study further demonstrates that despite relinquishing some gatekeeping control to platforms and adapting to social media dynamics, journalists still uphold core traditional journalistic principles such as speed, objectivity, and fairness. It shows that newspapers are trying to restore some control over their content through applying a ban on unpaid subscriptions and identifying their websites' priorities on the internet. Generally, the study provides evidence that American newspapers have adopted the platforms within their institutional structures and editorial practices.

9. 'Social media and Newsroom Production Decisions', (Cagé, Hervé, & Mazoyer, 2020):

This research assumed that social media outlets did not only influence the way we consume news, but also influenced the way news are produced; including the presence of

conventional media outlets on these platforms. The researchers examined the spread of information from social media networks to main media outlets, and the extent to which news editors' decisions are influenced by news stories trends on social media.

To test the assumption, the researchers designed a new database that included a representative sample comprising all French tweets posted from August 1, 2018 and July 31, 2019 (i.e. 1.8 billion tweets; about 70% of total tweets in French), and the content posted online by 200 main news outlets. New algorithms were developed to identify and link between incidents covered on social media and those covered in main media outlets; mainly to isolate the causative influence of content popularity.

The researchers depended on Twitter, currently known as X, and then proposed a new tool that depended on the interaction between user centrality metrics and news mainstream on social media at the time of the event. Results showed that the popularity of a news story had a positive impact on media coverage, and that such impact varied depending on the features of the media outlets. The results showed that editors' decisions with relation to stories coverage are also influenced.

10. 'Censored, suspended, shadowbanned: User interpretations of content moderation on social media platforms', (West, 2018):

This study examined content moderation practices through the collection of users' reports, when their content or accounts are deleted from social media; how the users interpret the role of companies in curating or deleting their content; and how it affects freedom of expression.

Several users expressed their dissatisfaction with the suspension of their accounts as it negatively affected their careers and caused irrevocable harm; especially for users who depended on data analysis and ads' profit for financial income. In some cases, all users' followers would be removed from their lists, which would require rebuilding an entire community of new followers. As a result, users developed their own popular theories on how administrating platforms should be as humans are to blame, for they are the reason behind the removal of content from the first place not the complicated wide-range socio-technological factors that make up content moderation systems. Some users expressed their

desire to change their behavior and learn how to handle content so as to avoid risking the deletion of their accounts. In other words, this is a new form of self-censorship.

11. 'Algorithms and the News: Social Media Platforms as News Publishers and Distributor', (Presuel & Sierra, 2018):

This research investigated the influence of algorithms in relation to spreading certain content at the expense of another for financial and commercial purposes. The research assumed that social media networks semi-completely control the dissemination of news on the internet through controlling the news making process itself online, and forcing other players, such as in-print news companies and multimedia news networks, to depend on them in circulating the news. However, the negative consequences and impacts of disseminating news online remain unadmitted. The research results showed that social media networks companies play the role of an editor through the algorithms they employ on their platforms. Therefore, they have to accept their role as news publishers and follow the conventional guidelines of journalists when they do their classical editorial job.

The researcher followed qualitative analytical-descriptive approach through which she observed the impact of the status quo of the news market online with social media platforms, deeming them as active and major players; and the responsibilities they should bear due to the central role they play in keeping the public informed.

The research also assumed that the algorithms may use information and opinions they deem significant when circulated. An example is whether the information satisfies the advertisers or not, and whether it intrigues the users. The algorithms can also be used to prioritize certain content whether through determining the time when a certain piece of news should appear and under what order. Considering how algorithms automatically make decisions regarding the content, it can be said that they simply 'follow orders' of their programmers and posters on social media networks. It can also be said that these algorithms simply impose the editorial policy preferred by the person who owns them.

12. 'Modelling Contemporary Gatekeeping: The rise of individuals, algorithms and platforms in digital news dissemination', (Wallace, 2017):

In this study, the researcher attempted to combine the classic Gatekeeping theory with modern methods through providing a framework for future research on controlling and disseminating information. The research proposed a digital model for Gatekeeping summarized into three steps: First, identifying four primary models for the Gatekeeper with different access methods, selection criteria and publishing choices. Second, the Gatekeeping should often include the platforms on which the Gatekeeper operates; these platforms either apply censorship strategies of the Gate controlled by a central authority or depends on collaboration among several micro-level interactions for news publishing. Third, deriving the digital Gatekeeping model for the modeling of the original four Gatekeeper models and the selection procedures in relation to platforms using the Gatekeeping mechanisms.

The study emphasized the importance of changing the conventional Gatekeeping theory since social media platforms and algorithms (such as new recommendation systems) have the ability to radically change not only how we select the news we read, but also our perspective on it. The appearance of algorithms and systems that enable users to share news led to a major shift in the selection and flow of news.

13. 'Managing Social Media Use: Whither Social Media Guidelines in News Organizations?', (Opgenhaffen & d'Haenens, 2015):

Concerns over the impact of news media outlets' and journalists' use of social media on key journalistic principles such as objectivity, Gatekeeping and transparency motivated the researchers to conduct this study. Therefore, they examined the relation between a selected group of news media organizations and limited use of social media outlets through the application of content analysis of 12 existing social media guidelines.

They addressed the types of different rules relevant to key journalistic principles, and aimed to provide a vision for media outlets administration and journalism experts to better understand how social media networks should be used and media organizations' guidelines be implemented.

The research results showed that there were diverse guidelines for editors regarding bias, Gatekeeping and transparency when sharing news on social media networks. There appeared different ways to involve the audience in the production and news-making process which were found in these organizations' guidelines on the use of such platforms.

14. 'Digital Gatekeeping: News media versus social media'; (Bro & Wallberg, 2014):

This paper, classified as empirical, examined for a whole year the news processes related to using Facebook. It covered analytical data on how over 200,000 news stories were shared on major news companies' websites in Denmark from June 2011-June 2012. The research also explored how such stories were recommended and commented on in different social contexts. It attempted to describe the changes in Gatekeeping practices and principles upon the spread of digital technologies inside and outside the newsrooms. In addition, it focused on the news values that appeared among the new generation of Gatekeepers who use social media platforms to produce, publish and distribute news stories.

The researcher divided the digital Gatekeeping theory to three models, which will be referred to in the Conceptual Framework section of this research. The researcher recommended the conduct of future research on the relation between news media outlets and social media platforms, and the relation between the Gatekeepers and their news values; which is essential to deepen the understanding of the types of news stories shared, recommended and commented on.

15. 'The online audience as gatekeeper: The influence of reader metrics on news editorial selection', (Vu, 2013):

This study explored the influence of web and readers metrics on editorial decisions, whether the journalists were willing to adapt to readers' reading preferences, and the type of editorial decisions made to the selection of news for receiving more visits and views. A poll was conducted to collect news editors' opinions from all around the USA.

Research results redirected focus to the hierarchy of influence model by Shoemaker and Reese (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) through comparing audience' importance to other factors in influencing the editorial decision-making, perceiving the Gatekeeper role as a professional journalistic one. The study provided an analysis of the method such technologies used to help in the reemergence of this role, and it being shared by professional

Gatekeepers who increasingly allow some groups of audiences to influence their editorial choices.

2.3 Commentry

Literature on the analysis of news publishing in light of the emergence of social media platforms varied. The study by Walters (Walters, 2021) seems to be the most relevant to this research because it directly examined the role of social media platforms as a Gatekeeper of social media workers, and how the latter used conventional journalistic instinct at first but shifted to social media networks' logic later; focusing on algorithms and audience metrics.

(Vázquez-Herrero, López-García, & Negreira-Rey, 2022) study is similar to this research as well. Its results showed the challenges news networks face in adapting their role and using TikTok language to gain more audience for the future. Another similar study is by (Røsok-Dahl & Kristine Olsen, 2024) which explained that reporters' main goal was reaching younger audiences and posting important content through being present on the platform itself, but Snapchat community guidelines would simply delete it. Both studies recommended the importance of conducting more research to examine how journalists adapt their news sharing strategies to surpass the social media networks' interventions with the content itself; and this is one of the expected results of this research with relation to Palestinian news networks.

(West, 2018) study reinforces the researcher's viewpoint on how Facebook Community Standards increase the levels of self-censorship among Palestinian journalists. The study showed that users who experienced digital violations expressed their desire to change their behavior and learn from their mistakes to avoid the risk of having their accounts deleted; which is a new form of self-censorship.

(Lischka, 2021) and (Vu, 2013) studies focused on how news networks' desire to reach more audiences influenced their editorial decisions. The networks would observe the content reach on their websites or social media accounts. This aligns with the results of (Presuel & Sierra, 2018) and (Cagé, Hervé, & Mazoyer, 2020) studies which focused on the influence of algorithms on reach.

Both (Bro & Wallberg, 2014) and (Wallace, 2017) provide insight for the researcher on how to reflect the Gatekeeping theory on social media networks, and for adding Community Standards as a new player; despite (Evans, Jackson, & Murphy, 2022) disagreement with such assumption as their study explored Google's news algorithms.

These studies can be made use of with relation to the applied theories, methodology and nature of news coverage within a digital framework. However, they did not explore the nature of influence Facebook Community Standards has on the performance of Palestinian news networks and such Standards' role as the Gatekeeper which imposes certain editorial choices on the organizations, and self-censorship on the Palestinian organizations and journalists. This is what the researcher expects to find out at the end of the research.

2.4 Research Gap

Upon her review of relevant literature and previous studies, the researcher found a research gap with relation to the examination of algorithms and Community Standards as a key player in the decision-making of the Gatekeeper in news dissemination due to political criteria linked to 'Terrorism, Dangerous Organizations and Individuals, Hate Speech and Violence and Incitement'. The previously cited researches focused on algorithms as a factor in news networks' decision making with relation to reach and desire for expansion on the platforms. However, the researcher could not find any research that explores the influence of Facebook Community Standards on journalists' levels of self-censorship.

The researcher also could not find research that discusses the influence of algorithms and Facebook Community Standards on editorial policies of Palestinian news networks with relation to the Palestinian context and Israeli occupation of Palestine. The only work available in this regard is remarks made by rights organizations interested in tracing and documenting such violations.

Conceptual Framework

2.5 News Networks

News networks can be understood as a dynamic group of relations between actors (humans and in-humans) to produce, use and disseminate the news. The literal meaning of the term 'news network' is directly linked to 'network journalism' (Heinrich, 2011). The news network integrates all traditionally defined internal and external facts into the newsroom, dismantling the concept of internal and external substitution in favor of a network of translations, practices, and actors that themselves constitute the very reality of the news (Hemmingway, 2008, p. 27).

The news network attempts to adopt the practices and discourses delivered by individuals (reporters, managers, activists, PRs and citizens) to produce, circulate and use news (groups of ideas, facts and common grounds over a community's shared-interest issues such as reports, articles, comments and pictures); and perceive professional values (independence, quality, transparency, democracy and the public sphere), symbolic potentials (newsworthiness, shares and feedback) and manually-created materials (technologies, tweets, newspapers and newsrooms) as main elements in news productions (Domingo, Masip, & Meijer, 2014).

As media outlets expanded their scope into the digital realm via the internet, news networks increasingly focused on the extent to which their coverage reaches the audience (Opgenhaffen & Hendrickx, 2024). They prioritized audience' interaction with and dissemination of news on digital platforms, due to the resulting increase in the spread range of news on social networks online, hence increasing the number of users who receive and interact with it (Napoli, 2014).

The presence of news networks in the digital realm created a source of news for the audience. (Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010) study revealed that people subscribe to old and conventional media outlets' pages online on X, for example, and directly consume the news they produce.

Similarly, the news and content shared on social media networks contributed to shaping the agendas of conventional media outlets news production. For instance, some

channels dedicated segments of their main schedule to broadcast issues which were trending on social media; while other channels dedicated entire bulletins for such purpose (خديم، 2019). In addition, the news networks' digital content was affected as the networks post content about trending issues, encouraging the audience to interact with them.

2.6 Palestinian News Networks and Digital Media Discourse

With relation to media, discourse describes what is used in the production, exchange, selective investigation, information management, and reflection of social, cultural, political, ideological and economic reality (Wodak & Forchtner, 2018). It is an interactive system where language and symbols combine; and where linguistic and nonlinguistic signals meet in a socio-cultural structure that increases influence and reinforces authority. Discourse becomes an effective channel for the transfer of ideas, identification of trends, reinforcement of attitudes, shaping of awareness, and promotion or undermining of principles and values based on the guiding objective (الخضير، 2022).

Discourse can receive its authority from how it is formulated; the public opinion ignores how the event is worded or journalistically produced, even though the formulation of discourse is itself ideological (whether religious, national, Marxist, liberal… etc.) making a political impact which leads to the production of knowledge. There are no conditions that dictate having the truth or law as sources of discourse, instead it usually comes as the result of power (عويضة، 2022).

Media discourse assumes greater power when coupled with refined linguistic and communicative elements, especially when the audience accepts the content's components; which are presented in an acceptable and convincing manner. This can lead the audience to engage, reflect, and ultimately shift their priorities, beliefs, and perceptions. The significance of content elements in discourse may stem from the shifting the focus of human attention to a specific discourse that contains a sample of experiences from around the world (الخضير، 2022).

When discussing media discourse, we refer to news values, which differ from one news network to another. Values, as defined by news networks, are the set of criteria based on which the truth can be identified and prioritized for publication; and they are the

guidelines or rules followed by news workers when identifying what 'news' is and what audience preferences may be. Values are used in determining which events and facts are more worthy of publication, and what features/ elements are necessary to make a story worth publishing (Bednarek & Caple, 2012).

Palestinian news networks joined the rise of digital advancements and moved to the internet, which encouraged the emergence of new news networks that made use of websites, forums and finally social media platforms. These channels managed to reduce construction costs of establishing TV or radio channels.

Palestinians' access to the internet at high degrees encouraged Palestinian news networks to make the decision of digitalizing their content. In 2023, 89% of Palestinians had access to the internet, and 92% of Palestinian families had internet access at home (الإحصاء، 2023). The fast spread of social media apps was a major factor as 65.7% of Palestinians used social media apps in 2022 with Facebook receiving the highest percentage 92%, followed by WhatsApp 90%, then YouTube 81%, Instagram 67%, Snapchat 40%, TikTok 38%, Telegram 37%, X 26%, and LinkedIn 17% (ايبوك، 2022).

Palestinian journalists were influenced by social media platforms and started listing them as news sources. According to (الفروخ، 2022), 25% of Palestinian journalists completely depend on social media as a news source, 40.5% depend on it largely, 27% occasionally, 5.5% rarely and 2% never. However, most of them (98%) depend on them. Palestinians are highly inclined to receive political, social and cultural news from social media.

The Palestinian discourse, generally, and media discourse, particularly, was greatly influenced when the Palestinian Authority was formed by virtue of 1993 Oslo Accords. Bassam Ewida, professor in Palestinian media, explained that the resistance' national discourse shifted to an international address of the public opinion. The discourse was no longer limited to elite journalists, but started including all groups of the Palestinian people. Only through public media outlets did Palestinians express their rejection of the occupation, and exposure and documentation of its practices. These media outlets cross national boundaries and allow interaction with and live broadcast to the Arab and western public opinion; they are influential and do not require the acquisition of certain skills (عويضة، 2022).

Other factors that influenced the Palestinian discourse was the continuous Israeli assaults against the Palestinians, so the media discourse adopting the resistance' narrative was delivered in most Palestinian news networks. These media outlets resumed their use of national dictionary to describe the Israeli occupation as fascist, nazi, aggressive, Zionist extremist right-wing government, oppressive Zionist entity, barbarism and ugliness of the occupation and its crimes, and the new nazis (شاهين، 2016).

2.7 Social Media Platforms Community Standards

Historically, political discussions about emerging technologies and information mediators have been characterized by key structural and spatial metaphors around which regulation was organized (Horwitz, 1989). For example, before deregulation, telephone companies had two obligations: first, they had to operate as public information carriers, agreeing to provide services to the public without discrimination; and second, they had to avoid liability for the informational activities of their users, functioning as a channel rather than content producers.

Both obligations point to a role similar to that of 'platforms', i.e. being responsible for sharing content without discrimination, and providing sufficient momenta of discourse on contemporary information policy. Although these terms in such discussions appear as a means to demand limited responsibility for the shared information, these are simply tactics to enact specific organizational frameworks (Sandvig, 2007).

The term "platform" is derived from the cultural vocabulary made available by stakeholders with specific goals, who are concerned with ensuring that it resonates with particular audiences within certain discourses. These efforts are not aimed at selling, persuading, protecting, succeeding, or condemning; but at making claims about what these technologies represent or not, and what we should or should not expect from them. In other words, they seek to establish the standards by which these technologies will be judged, and these standards are directly embedded in the terms by which we know them. The extent to which these terms become rooted in popular imagination—whether in industry discourse or legalese—is partly the result of this discursive work (Berland, 2000).

Despite the given promises, 'platforms' are quite similar to conventional media outlets at a larger degree than they like to admit. These platforms attempt to model sustainable works and collide with conventional systems, raising debates on the new systems. Once the network becomes popular and attractive, pressure increases; and it begins to balance between 'safe' and 'controversial', between social and financial value, and between specific and wide-range attractiveness (Gillespie, 2010).

When starting an account on any social media platform, including Facebook, the platform's administration depends on the users' approval of three major organizational articles: Terms of service, which must be approved upon registration; Community Standards, which determine discourse standards; and moderation policies and procedures, upon which terms of service and community standards are applied. Terms of service largely enable the platforms to remove content or close accounts. Social media networks usually call this 'organization of content, limitation of undesirable content, and creation of a safe space for individuals (Meta, 2023; Flew, Martin, & Suzor, 2019).

Even though Community Standards are clear in platforms that operate based on accounts and public pages; they begin to diminish on platforms where private conversations take place such as Telegram. The idea of Community Standards and what is allowed or not contradicts the principle of users' privacy and decryption of their conversations and messages, and inability to trace them via AI (Telegram, 2024).

However, Community Standards are very clear in Meta's messenger and threads. Sada Social documented 23 blocking incidents of WhatsApp users, despite the company's claim of inability to read users' data or messages exchanged via the application (سوشال، 2024) .

2.7.1 Facebook Community Standards

In 2021, Facebook changed its name to Meta after owning Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Messenger and Threads. All of these platforms started following the same Community Standards which Meta defines as what is allowed and what is not on Facebook. These Standards depend on individuals' comments and experts' advice in the fields of technology, public safety and human rights. The Company explains its careful procedure in

setting criteria that ensure diverse viewpoints and beliefs; especially by individuals or communities that are generally ignored or marginalized (Meta, 2023).

Meta continuously updates its Community Standards, following up with whatever recent events or issues. It depends on four main bases: originality, safety, privacy and dignity (Meta, 2023). Under these main areas of work, the classification given for each criterion is violence and criminal behavior, safety, objectionable content, integrity and authenticity, respect for intellectual property, and content-related requests and decisions.

With relation to the Palestinian situation, most of Facebook's Community Standards for Palestinian-related issues are, directly and indirectly, classified under 'violence and criminal behavior', especially Dangerous Individuals and Organizations, Violence and Incitement. As for objectionable content, the focus is on hate speech, violent content, and privacy violations. Finally, "content-related requests and decisions," which are based on government requests or user reports (شومان، 2022) .

2.8 Restrictions on Content on Social Media Networks

Social media platforms' interventions with what can be shared, how it is organized, how it can turn to be criticized, what and why it can be removed, and what the algorithms can allow or restrict are real and generally objective interventions. They pose real conventional issues regarding freedom of expression and public expression, along with other new ones with little explanation and context (Gillespie, 2010).

Meta claims it could allow content that contradicts its standards if it is worth publishing and serves the public interest, after weighing the value of public interest against the resulting harm. In other cases, however, it removes the content that uses mysterious or vague language when extra context can add to its meaning, reasonably, showing it contradicts its measures (Meta, 2023).

In Meta's content policy, violating standards of Dangerous Individuals or Organizations would lead to longer or additional restrictions, like disabling creating ads feature. Less severe violations like (Violation Incitement and Hate Speech) would result in minor restrictions such as lowering the possibility of using search box or reducing the visibility of content (reducing the content appearing on the homepage of the platform). Meta

notifies users when their search feature is disabled, but not when the visibility of content is limited. When users submit successful pleas on content removal and Meta changes its decision, the relevant restrictions are removed (BSR, 2022).

Therefore, (Opgenhaffen & d'Haenens, 2015) argued that the potential influence of social media on widely accepted journalistic principles should not be overlooked, and there is a need to develop guidelines for social media to regulate the behavior of journalists. These guidelines can outline the advantages of social media, such as motivating journalists to attract social media users to news websites or traditional media outlets, encouraging interaction with the audience, conducting research, and increasing transparency. Additionally, the guidelines may remind journalists of the core standards of their profession and help prevent social media from undermining any nonpartisan principles, gatekeeping, and freedom of action.

2.8.1 Restrictions on Palestinian Content

The Palestinians started to notice Facebook's restrictions on their Palestinian content when Quds help began in the late 2015 'Intifada of Knives' as posts about the resistance operations were met with violation notifications (Abu Watfa, 2024). Meta's reaction exacerbated until 2021 (شومان، 2022). Palestinian rights organizations traced Facebook's continuous and large-scale restriction of Palestinian pages and accounts after the Israeli aggression on Gaza in May of the same year. Sada Social received 1593 complaints about violations of social media platforms that showed 32% increase when compared with 2020 (سوشال، 2022).

7amleh Center traced the restrictions against the Palestinian content at that time and the intensified oversight of social media networks over the Palestinian content which resulted in the removal of a huge part of it from the platforms, especially with relation to Sheikh Jarrah content, assaults against Jerusalem, and later the aggression on Gaza and consequent protests and demonstrations. The platforms did not provide a logical explanation for such behavior, but it is most likely that the Israeli Ministry of Justice' Cyber Unit is behind it (حملة، 2021).

BSR admitted in its 2022 investigation that Meta's enforcement of the content policy (Community Standards) in May 2021 had a negative impact on human rights with relation to Palestinian users' rights such as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and political participation, and non-discrimination. This negatively influenced the Palestinians' ability to share information and insight over their experiences when they happen, and that was reflected in the conversations with affected stakeholders, who said that Meta was just another entity that toned down their voices and they could not change its behavior (BSR, 2022).

The types of violations varied to include content removal, accounts' deletion and restriction, hiding badges, reducing access, and removing archived content. The reasons behind such deletions or suspensions were never given in many cases, but sometimes the given reasons were Hate Speech or violation of Community Standards followed by request of ID proof (حملة، 2021).

As the situation in Palestinian territories escalated, the types of imposed restrictions on the Palestinian content increased. As armed resistance resumed in the West Bank in Jenin after May aggression in 2021 and killing of Jameel Al-Amouri, Facebook users were blocked because of sharing his pictures or name. Facebook also inserted the names of the six Palestinian prisoners who attempted to escape Jalbou' prison under the blocking list. Whenever a user would search, for example, Zakariya Zbeidi, they would be notified that they were searching for dangerous individuals.

After the beginning of October 7 war in 2023, Facebook updated its Community Standards three times on October 18, December 5 and December 7 under the title 'Meta's Ongoing Efforts Regarding the Israel-Hamas War', which included updates on the Privacy Policy and Community Standards around Dangerous Organizations and Individuals, Violent and Graphic Content, Hate Speech, Violence and Incitement, Bullying and Harassment, and Coordinating Harm; and added a new standard 'Supporting Terrorist Attacks' (Meta, Meta's Ongoing Efforts Regarding the Israel-Hamas War, 2023).

2.8.2 Palestinian News Networks and Content Restriction

The platforms' Community Standards were programed to detect words and pictures without which the Palestinian user, especially journalists, could not speak about certain news

such as the word 'martyr' (Board, 2023). This word is highly symbolic in the context of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. According to documents leaked from Facebook with relation to 'List of Dangerous Individuals and Organizations' in October 2021, names of Palestinian historical figures, factions and current leadership of Hamad, Jihad, their military wings, Shuhada Al-Aqsa Brigades, NGOs and pro-Palestine organizations were listed (Biddle, 2021). All of this poses a major obstacle for journalists when they write the news and share it without adding their own voices to it.

The Palestinian news networks and users started to circumvent Meta's ban algorithms through coding words like 'resistance', writing it like 'resi@stance'. They continued to create new coding methods of words they assumed may get them banned, and they replaced clear statement of Palestinian political or military factions' names with words that refer to them instead (Al-Qabaj, 2024; Huwari, 2024).

Because Facebook used AI to detect pictures and videos, Palestinian news networks started blurring Palestinian factions' slogans when they appear in pictures, avoided sharing resistance' operations videos or videos that contain banned content on their Facebook accounts. They resorted to alternative platforms like Telegram (Al-Zawahra, 2024).

The Palestinian news networks perceive Telegram as their safe haven as no ban violations were received on the Palestinian content; this is due to the app's programming that does not read messages and automatically decrypts it. Still, in October 2022, Telegram removed 6 posts shared by the Lions Den group, which started to operate in Nablus as an armed resistance group, under direct request by the Israeli government.

When the war started in October 2023 in the Gaza Strip, Apple and Google stores, along with other European governments, pushed Telegram to ban access to Palestinian military factions' accounts. The platform notified the users that they could access such accounts safely via direct opening of the platform from browsers instead of apps. Facebook removed Quds News Network which is a major Palestinian news network that had over 10,000,000 followers. The deletion was after a 'political decree' issued by the Israeli government (قدس، 2023).

The result of Facebook's restrictions was not having the content banned only. The effect of such behavior caused Palestinian news networks financial losses. In a poll, Sada Social found out that 75.5% of participating media organizations expressed a setback in

traffic on their website due to restriction of content on social media; 36.7% said they had to layoff some of their employees to adapt with the setback in profits; 34.7% said the profits they gained from views reduced; and 30.6% lost plenty of individuals interested in creating ads on their pages due to restrictions on ad creation and access; and 24.5% lost their funders' interest in refunding them due to their setback in digital performance (سوشال، الإعلام وتقييد المحتوى: خسائر اقتصادية ، 2023) .

Theoretical Framework

2.9 The Gatekeeper

The Gatekeeping theory first appeared when Kurt Lewin, social psychologist, introduced it in 1943. He was conducting a study on the factors behind people's eating habits and posed the question, "Why do people eat what they eat?". He concluded that housewives are among the key Gatekeepers who control what food is presented at the table; whether the food one brings from the garden or the grocery shop. Lewin pointed to 'channels' and how each channel is divided into sections and surrounded by gates, which determine what food to be allowed. These forces exercise pressure along the way on what food to be approved or rejected (Lewin, 1943).

After Lewin, David White (WHITE, 1950) came as the first to implement the Gatekeeping theory in the field of communication. He compared between the carbon copies which were received by news agencies like International Wire, United Press and Press, and the news they actually published for one week in February 1949. White suggested that the decision-making behind the publication and selection of stories is controlled by the single editor, the Gatekeeper (Mr. Gates).

(Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) proposed a five-level model for partial and complete influences on Gatekeepers, claiming that Gatekeeping no longer operates at one gate only as White suggested, but at many gates. The first, lowest, level focuses on individual factors of the editor (his background, experience, circumstances, beliefs… etc.). The second level is the routines level, which is affected by the audience' metrics and newsroom measures. The

third level is the organizational level which is affected by the internal structure of the organization, intellectual property, objectives and policy. The fourth level is the extra media level where social norms and external forces influence the process (the sources, advertisers, the audience, government censorship, market competition and technology. The last level is the social system level, which is represented by the ideology of the media outlets.

(Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim, & Wrigley, 2001) defined the Gatekeeping theory as the process through which a vast array of potential news messages is filtered, shaped, and motivated into the few that are actually disseminated by the media. It is often defined as a series of decisions upon which the news is processed or cancelled as they pass through news channels; from the source to the reporter to a series of editors. Nevertheless, the Gatekeeping process consists of more than just the selection of news, but rather includes how the messages are written, and when they are published or processed. The reality the media outlets broadcast is not just a series of decisions that fall between 'input and output'.

Later, (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009) combined the different Gatekeeping models into one model which suggested that raw information flows through three channels that include gatekeeping: the source, the media organization and the audience. The information is sent to the source channel by experts, reviewers, participants, commentators, and relevant parties. The information is sent to the media channel by the reporters, editors, production employees, active employees, and editing and marketing assistants. Furthermore, the source and media organization channels are quite similar in function as news content. Then, the audience pick the news content they like and read it (الصبحي، 2021).

When studying gatekeeping authority, it is important to consider two fundamental concepts: selection and control. (Walters, 2021) Gatekeeping has been referred to as a "control system" over the information that can be obtained from the newsroom to the public domain. However, gatekeeping revolves around selectivity, which encompasses the ways in which "gatekeepers selectively gather, sort, write, edit, position, schedule, reiterate, and otherwise massage information to make it news." (أبو الحمام، 2019)

While discussing gatekeeping theory, it is essential to address the media framing framework, which is defined as an interactive process between communication operations aimed at highlighting specific aspects of a particular issue while downplaying other parts of the issue to align with the communicator's ideology (Entman & Usher, 2018).

This process interprets ongoing events in a way that fits the editorial policies of the media organization. Media framing is characterized by the focus on certain aspects by the communicator to influence the target audience while neglecting other aspects of the issue without presenting the complete truth. Through media framing, the audience is guided toward what the organization wants them to understand, analyze, and infer, rather than what they perceive themselves; thus, it intervenes in their thought process to align positively with its goals (الغورنة، 2024).

Additionally, both gatekeeping theory and media framing are linked to agenda-setting theory, as the latter was developed in the American context to understand how American media prioritize issues for the public and influence their selection of candidates in presidential races. (Princen, 2018).

2.9.1 The Gatekeeper on Social Media Platforms

The classical Gatekeeping theory is no longer sufficient to describe the emergence of algorithms and users as information determinants on social media networks. Both algorithms and users operate as decision-makers and reach high levels of insight through decentralized Gatekeeping mechanisms. Recent Gatekeeping methods are not combined under one coherent theory, instead they are separated into different categories (Wallace, 2017).

Social media networks do not operate at a technical level only, but also as part of a communicative method that outlines its services and mechanisms (Sterne, 2003). The networks operate strategically to place themselves in a position that allows seeking current and future profits, to find a suitable point that brings together the legislative protection they need and commitments they do not, and to provide a cultural conception they can operate with (Wyatt, 2004).

The term 'platform' refers to leveling up, advancing and easy access. These are both ideological and tangible features; meaning, they interfere with and influence the making of ideologies. The platforms' discourse, "works against us developing such precision, offering as it does a comforting sense of technical neutrality and progressive openness" (Gillespie, 2010, p. 360).

Upon the enactment of Digital Millennium Copyright Act in the USA, (Office, 1998) assigned limited responsibility for internet providers and search engines: As long as you are a neutral distributor of information and unaware of certain violations, you are not responsible for users' violations. If, however, you become aware of certain violations, you shall exert reasonable efforts to intervene, whether they be strategic or instant; beneficial or harmful. These are purposeful decisions that lead to the formation of online general discourse (Gillespie, 2010).

(Bro & Wallberg, 2014) study suggested three Gatekeeping models for the digital age. The first model is a linear one where information moves in one direction. The news stories pass through several gates, starting with the news source to the news audience. The second model is non-linear where the news reporters communicate with individuals outside the newsrooms; these can be news sources or viewers, who can operate as potential news reporters. These can help transfer content and report new stories on their own platforms. This means the audience can contribute to maintaining conventional news media outlets' presence on social media, through the gates and on platforms. Individuals and organizations outside the news institution can contribute to the dissemination and distribution of information and operate as news reporters. Still, such gates and digital platforms pose problems and challenges to news media outlets.

The emergence of social media platforms has played a significant role in redistributing information, resulting in a major change in information dissemination between media outlets and the general public. These platforms are considered non-neutral due to their characteristics, such as the limited number of characters allowed for writing and the algorithms that selectively curate the type of information presented. (Entman & Usher, 2018)

This research focuses on the Gatekeeping theory suggesting that Facebook Community Standards operate as Gatekeepers with relation to Palestinian news content. They determine which news can be allowed through Facebook gates, and can restrict news networks and Palestinian journalists' access to full publication of content, or force a shift in their discourse to suit the platforms' Standards (See Figure 2.1).
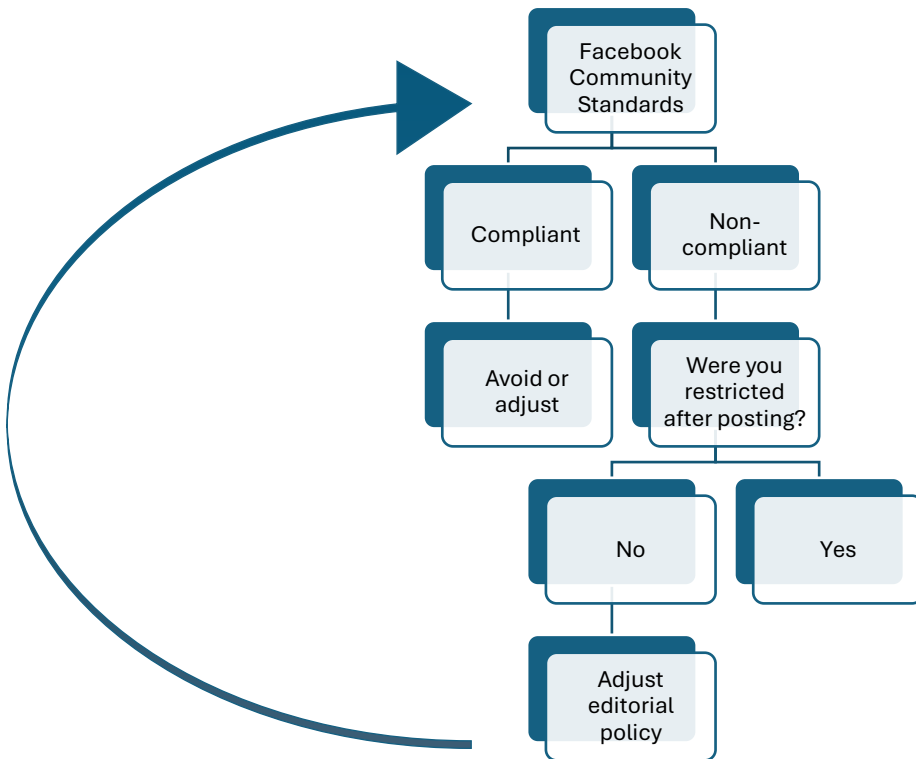
Figure 2.1 Facebook Community Standards as a Gatekeeper

2.10 Self-Censorship in Media

This research presents self-censorship as one of the results of the Gatekeeping process. Individuals conceal information, verified correct, despite the absence of official censorship that may prevent its dissemination. (Farquhar & Carey, 2018) suggested a various group of 'circumstantial and cognitive factors' that may influence a person's desire to share or conceal information, including self-censorship where the individual fears consequences or possible discomfort. Individuals examine the possible reaction of recipients before expressing their opinions and are influenced by the possible gain or loss of the audience or peers.

Self-censorship means individuals' obtainment of new information that is concealed from the audience. They must realize that they have correct information which may influence the entire community, other community members, a group of people, or content approved by the world (Bar-Tal, 2017). Censorship as an act reflects individuals' willingness to

perform self-censorship that conceals such information despite the absence of a real, external censorship that may prevent the dissemination of such information. This behavior displays how individuals unofficially control and organize the flow of information; or in other words: prevent free access to information, freedom of expression and free flow of information.

The reasons behind performing self-censorship include having certain characteristics, wishing to avoid uncomfortable social events, being lazy, avoiding complications, lacking training, abstaining from following professional criteria, fearing personal or organizational conflict of interest, having concerns over personal or organizational vendettas, facing market forces, undergoing peer pressure, or assuming readers' lack of interest in the presented story (Lieberman, 2000).

As for the Palestinian issue, Palestinian reporters place themselves under several scopes of censorship, understanding the different fronts they may face; beginning with the Israeli occupation forces which killed from October 7, 2023 – May 1, 2024, 141 male and female journalists (الإعلامي الحكومي، 2024), and arrested 70 male and female journalists from the Gaza Strip, West Bank (الأسرى، 2024) and Jerusalem; all to the security bodies in the West Bank (الجزيرة، 2024) and the Gaza Strip (وفا، 2020). Other restrictions include those on social media networks; 45% of restrictions after October 7 were against media organizations and journalists (سوشال، 2024).

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Research Methodology

The researcher adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative methodology, which allows for deep understanding and comprehensive analysis of the research problem—namely, how Facebook community standards function as a gateway to Palestinian news networks—and quantitative methodology, which consists of a series of steps taken for measurement purposes.

This approach is characterized by flexibility in research and selection of suitable tools for the interpretation and understanding of data. It allows deeper understanding of the phenomenon under examination and the identification of trends, incentives and patterns that cannot be uncovered with numbers. It is more influential in the theoretical aspect of social sciences (الهراس، 2002).

3.2 Research Design

Following the descriptive research model, this research proposes a scientific question that aims to reach conclusions on self-censorship, Gatekeepers and their relation with Community Standards and how these Standards influence editorial policies. One of the main objectives of descriptive research is to describe a certain phenomenon or events after the collection of data using tools such as observation, interviews, tests, or polls employed as suitable per each phenomenon. Explaining phenomena and identifying the existing relations and conditions between the variables as they are in reality; identifying the values and trends among individuals and groups; and helping predict the future of such phenomena are all made accessible by this type of research(أحمد و العباس، 2017) . The research will be a case study, which is a design that enables the researcher to examine the research problem from different angles and delve into its various aspects. The Palestinian news networks will be the

case under study, and she expects that the results can be generalized to similar media contexts.

3.3 Research Temporal and Spatial Limitations

This research is limited to the Palestinian news networks available on social media platforms. The research focuses on 10 Palestinian news networks on Facebook and Telegram. Sada Social and 7amleh classified these networks as the most exposed to content restrictions because of the Palestinian content they share on Facebook in 2023. The research covers the time period from October 7 until May 2024. The researcher will use systematic random sampling to analyze the content of these platforms by examining the first post from each Sunday, starting from October 8, for 30 weeks. It was during this period that restriction and removal of Palestinian content was more visible, and Facebook updated its Community Standards.

3.4 Research Tools

To answer the research questions, the researcher used the following tools:

3.4.1 Interviews

The researcher conducted structured interviews with the editors-in-chief of 10 Palestinian news networks and the admins responsible for content sharing to gain deeper insights into their publishing experiences on Facebook, the challenges they face with sharing, and the impact of such challenges on their self-censorship.

Structured interviews, which are a form of in-depth qualitative interviews, typically involve asking key questions (Hackett, Schwarzenbach, & Jürgens, 2016).

According to Herbert Wainwright Rubin, interviews are key research tools where researchers speak to experts and professionals in the field of the research problem. Through these interviews, researchers explore in detail the experiences of people, their motives and opinions; and learn to see the world from different perspectives. Interviews help reconstruct

events which were not observed by the researchers. By collecting data from the interviewed individuals, researchers draw on better and more comprehensive conclusions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Seidman believed that researchers must ask themselves about what they learned from the interviews they had conducted and the texts they examined; and they must be able to make conclusions and classify the results into groups. They must ask, "What patterns exist between the interviewees' experiences? How do they interpret and explain these patterns? What things they understood after conducting the interview they had not previously understood? Were there any surprises? What confirmations did they have? How were the interviews compliant with the literature? How were they non-compliant? How did they solve that? (Seidman, 1998)

Due to her success in conducting in-depth interviews, after good preparation and research, the researcher managed to identify general questions which she asked the interviewees from the Palestinian news networks. She managed to direct the interviews, delve into key issues mentioned by the interviewees and relevant to the research topic, and encouraged them to discuss each idea separately and reveal the elements which constitute each concept (Rutledge & Hogg, , 2020).

3.4.2 Content Analysis

The researcher used content analysis as a tool to support the results she collected from the interviews. She analyzed the news posts on 8 Palestinian news networks (Quds Press, Maan News Agency, Al-Qastal, Al-Jarmaq, Al-Fajr TV, Raya Network, Ajyal FM radio, and Radio Alam) on Telegram and Facebook from October 7, 2023 – first day of the war – until May 1, 2024.

Content analysis is a research method that helps researchers make conclusions by identifying patterns systematically and thematically (Ogilvie, Stone, Smith, & Dunphy, 1966). Neuman classified content analysis as a key inactive research tool and described it as a technique for the collection and analysis of text content. Content, here, refers to words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, topics or any deliverable message. Text, however, refers

to anything written, visual or spoken and operates as a means of communication (Neuman, 1997).

Berelson (1952) suggested five key objectives of content analysis: describing the essence of the message content, describing the features of the message form, obtaining content-makers conclusions, obtaining content-audience conclusions, and predicting content influence on the audience (Berelson, 1952).

Neuendorf believed that conclusions about content producers' intentions or audience interpretation of it cannot be made from content analysis alone. He explained that content analysis can facilitate the understanding but cannot directly prove it. He also said that content analysis can provide predictions but can also give descriptions, give self-assessment, help in making conclusions, and assist in prediction (Neuendorf, 2002).

Content analysis comprises several steps (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992): 1) selection of analysis unit, 2) creation and definition of groups, 3) pre-test of each group's definitions and rules, 4) assessment of reliability and validity, 5) review of rules' coding if necessary, 6) pre-test of revised groups system, 7) coding all data, 8) reassessment of reliability and validity.

Content Analysis Groups

According to Downe-Wamboldt, the researcher can map the categories for exploring and understanding certain phenomena; these maps depend on the research question, selected unit of analysis, relevant theories, and review of literature (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992). On the other hand, Abdulkarim Al-Dibisi categorized content analysis in media studies into two main groups: What was said? How was it said? (2017 ،الدبيسي). This is the perspective the researcher adopted in this research as a starting point for the preparation of the content analysis form.

First: What was said?

All the news topics posted by the selected sample of Palestinian news networks on their Facebook and Telegram pages and channels.

Second: How was it said?

This includes the multimedia tools used; such as the patterns and methods, shifts in sentence formulation, selection of terminology, and use of pictures and videos for each post on Telegram and Facebook.

First: Categories of What was Said

1.   Issues addressed in the news content:

●Martyrs: covers all the individuals who were killed by the Israeli occupation forces in different combat settings.

●Palestinian prisoners: covers all Palestinians arrested by the Israeli occupation forces from the Palestinian territories.

●The injured: covers all individuals injured or wounded in different combat settings.

●Asset damage: covers all the results of Israeli war on the Gaza Strip, including the destruction of houses, infrastructure, and educational and health institutes.

●Israeli assaults: covers all assaults carried out by Israelis, whether by the military, settlers in the West Bank, and officials who make inciteful statements against Palestinians.

●Palestinian factions: covers all political Palestinian factions such as the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), Islamic Jihad, Fatah, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (General Leadership), Democratic front for the Liberation of Palestine, Palestinian Liberation Front, popular resistance committees and Muhajideen Movement (ياسين، 2005).

●Palestinian authority: covers all statements and reactions made by the PA.

●Resistance' military statements: covers all statements issued by the Palestinian factions' military wings, the Islamic resistance in Lebanon (Hezbollah), Dawn forces (the military wing of the Islamic Group in Lebanon), the Lebanese resistance brigades (supported by Hezbollah), Ansar Allah Huthi group in Yemen, and Hezbollah Iraqi Brigades.

●Resistance operations: covers all operations that target Israeli forces, locations, cites, and settlers in all combat areas.

●Israeli human losses: covers all the news about the death toll among the Israelis and Israeli captives in the Gaza Strip.

●Israeli internal affairs: covers all the news about the Israeli community such as governmental disputes, Israeli economy and statements by the Israeli opposition.

●International statements: covers all statements made by international institutions and foreign governments worldwide.

●Israel boycott: covers all boycott calls against Israel economically, culturally and academically worldwide.

●Palestine advocacy: covers all statements and popular actions intended to advocate for the Palestinian cause worldwide.

●Arab-Israeli normalization: covers news about Arab-Israeli affairs.

●Others: topics not mentioned above.

Second: Categories of How They Were Said

2.   Disparities

Here, it refers to all the differences in display of content, texts, media, and soft tactics for the same post on Telegram and Facebook.

A: Disparities in phrasing and terminology: it refers to the changes Palestinian news networks make to words and terms posted on Telegram when posted on Facebook.

• Using equivalent words

• Decrypting the same words

• Deleting certain words

• Maintaining the same phrasing and terms

B: Disparities in patterns: This refers to the patterns of posts on Facebook and Telegram selected for the research sample.

●Text: posts that have words only.

●Video: posts that have videos only.

●Picture: posts that have pictures only.

●Text and picture: posts that have pictures and caption.

●Text, link and picture: posts that have a text, link and picture.

●Text and video: posts that have videos with captions.

●Text, video and link: posts that have texts, videos and links.

●Infographic: a visual aid that provides data and information such as charts or designs used by the news platforms such as 'breaking' and 'news coverage'.

●Infographic and text: posts with infographic and caption.

●Infographic, text and link: posts with visual representation of information and data with a caption and link.

●Graphic video: posts with visual representation of information using videos.

●Graphic video and text: posts with video representation of information and caption.

C: Disparities in Pictures: This refers to changes Palestinian news networks make to pictures posted on Telegram when reposted on Facebook.

- Replacing pictures with less-clear ones when the topic is banned on Facebook.
- Blurring pictures, logos or symbols that may be banned such as logos and flags of Palestinian factions, pictures of leaders and weapons… etc.
- Cropping pictures: this includes cropping the videos' margins as they may include the logos of the military factions.
- Using alters for 'sensitive content'.
- Making no changes

D: Disparities in videos: This refers to the changes Palestinian news networks make to videos posted on Telegram when reposted on Facebook.

- Replacing scenes with less-clear ones when the topic is banned on Facebook.
- Blurring scenes, logos or symbols that may be banned such as logos and flags of Palestinian factions, pictures of leaders and weapons… etc.
- Cropping videos: this includes cropping the videos' margins as they may include the logos of the military factions.
- Using alters for 'sensitive content'.
- Replacing or muting the sound on the video.
- Making no changes.

E: Disparities in soft tactics: This refers to the changes Palestinian news networks make to soft tactics and contexts of the news posted on Telegram when reposted on Facebook.

According to Maxwell, there are six soft tactics for influencing others: rational persuasion, socializing, exchange, personal appeals, consultation, and inspirational appeals. Increasingly, they focus on the affected individuals as a source of energy to carry out the required actions. (Maxwell, 2016) The researcher will rely on two types: rational persuasion and inspirational appeals.

- Inspirational appeals: is the core component of inspirational leadership. They are by far the most personal in terms of understanding others' perspectives because they focus on what lies deep in others' minds: their values and emotions. Leaders who

use this tactic appeal to people's values and ideals or seek to stir their emotions to gain commitment to a request or proposal.

●Rational persuasion: a straightforward tactic. It combines a pressure-style request with logical arguments supporting the request.

●Mixed: tactics that use both reason and emotion.

●Free of tactics: does not use any of the aforementioned.

3.5 Research Population

The researcher selected conducting interviews as the research tool. She interviewed the editors-in-chief of 10 Palestinian news networks and the admins responsible for content sharing on their social media accounts. These networks were selected based on the common data received from Sada Social and 7amleh, and they all have suffered from digital violations during the war on Gaza. The researcher chose the 10 most followed networks that operate on both Facebook and Telegram.

The researcher will conceal the name of the interviewee from Qastal because of the Israeli occupation's ban on the network under a military decree issued at the beginning of the war on the Gaza Strip. Revealing the name may risk the interviewee's life (see Appendix (2) for the names of the interviewees).

The researcher analyzed news posts from the Facebook pages of Palestinian news networks with whose managers she had interviewed. She followed the systematic random sampling, selecting the first post published each Sunday after 12 pm Palestine time on Telegram, and the corresponding post on Facebook. This analysis covered the period from October 7, 2023, for thirty weeks until May 1, 2024. Telegram was chosen as the primary platform for collecting posts to examine "the extent to which news networks avoid posting news content entirely on Facebook". The total number of analyzed posts on Telegram was 240, from 8 news networks. The researcher excluded Quds News Network due to its account's deletion by Facebook in the second week of the war and Palestine TV because of its automatic monthly deletion of posts on Telegram, which made accessing the archive difficult.

3.6 Unit of Analysis

Berge believed that the unit of analysis determines what the case study focuses on; here, the unit of analysis is both the Palestinian news networks and Community Standards (Berg, 2007). This involves identifying the relationship between the issues addressed in the news content of the networks and the decision to share it on Facebook. This is achieved by analyzing the content that the news networks chose to avoid sharing on Facebook and posted it on Telegram alone instead. Additionally, it includes examining how the issue being addressed influences its presentation on Facebook in terms of phrasing, terminology, soft tactics, and multimedia types.

3.7 Validity and Reliability

3.7.1 Validity

Validity refers to the appropriateness of the method or tool in measuring what it is intended for it to measure. It is the extent to which a research tool achieves the objectives of the study, thereby increasing the level of trust in the results obtained by the researcher so as to be later generalized (المشهداني، 2019، صفحة 167).

Validity can be tested through a two-step process according to Potter and Donnerstein. The first step is developing a coding scheme that guides the content analysis procedures. If the scheme correctly leads the researcher to the essential terms of the research, then it is valid. The second step is the assessment of decisions made by programmers against certain criteria. If the codes align with the correct decision-making criterion, then the coding produces correct data (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999).

To ensure the validity of this research, the researcher designed a content analysis form based on the unit of analysis and Gatekeeping theory. She submitted the form and interview questions to three academic reviewers with experience in journalism and media for assessment of questions and form and their inclusion in the research. The reviewers' observations were considered and changes were made accordingly (see Appendix (1)).

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3.7.2 Reliability

Reliability refers to stability, accuracy and repeatability. Reliability or "stability is the degree to which a process is invariant or unchanging over time" (Krippendorff, 1980, p. 130).

The researcher analyzed 15% of the randomly selected posts under examination. She selected the posts along with another analyst; both having trained together for a week. They calculated Holsti's reliability coefficient as follows:

- Reliability coefficient = points of agreement\ (number of categories analyzed by the first analyst + number of categories analyzed by the second analyst) * 100%
- Reliability coefficient = 5.74 / (6 + 6) * 100% = 95.67%

Table 3.1: Agreement rate between the research categories

Category	Agreement Rate
Addressed issues	0.89
Disparities in phrasing	1.0
Disparities in patterns	1.0
Disparities in pictures	1.0
Disparities in videos	1.0
Persuasion tactics	0.85

Results in (Table 3.1) show that there is complete agreement between the researcher and the analyst on the categories of phrasing, patterns, pictures, and videos.

Chapter Four: Results

This chapter presents the analysis of the results of the research questions, including the content analysis of the Telegram and Facebook posts of 8 Palestinian news networks, and interviews with editors-of-chief of ten networks along with the admins responsible for sharing content on these platforms. The ten Palestinian news networks are Quds Press, Maan News Agency, Al-Qastal, Al-Jarmaq, Al-Fajr TV, Raya Network, Ajyal FM radio, and Radio Alam.

4.1 Interview Results

The researcher conducted structured interviews with the editors-of-chief of 10 Palestinian news networks that faced publishing restrictions and pages' deletion due to the Palestinian content and news they had posted. The interviewees answers were as follows:

Answering the **first question** on the nature of the relation between Palestinian news networks and Facebook as a publishing platform, the editors and page admins agreed that at the beginning of their posting on Facebook, sharing was easy, and the organizations did not have to enact editorial guidelines for fears of restriction or ban. This was 'the good times of Facebook' from 2011-2014, as described by Ramzi Al-Qeeq, editor at Ajyal. At that time, there were no strict restrictions on posting, whether the news content, words or pictures that had violent scenes or displayed blood (Al-Qeeq, 2024).

Yusuf Abu Watfa, Chief Editor of Quds News Network, agreed with Al-Qeeq and said that the Network did not face any difficulties from 2011-2015, as it did not have to fear restrictions or constraints; until the 'Intifada of Knives' or 'Intifada of Jerusalem' in 2015. Facebook then started imposing restrictions on Palestinian content (Abu Watfa, 2024).

Facebook's policy and Community Standards started marginalizing news content and making content irrelevant to major issues more visible, especially when the matter at hand is the Palestinian cause. According to the interviewee from Qastal, a post about Jerusalem that is attractive and has excellent promotional features (its design, montage, phrasing and

style) does not receive one quarter of the popularity a post about food, for example, gets; even if both are posted on the same page (AlQastal, 2024).

Most of the interviewees agree that the importance of Facebook as a publishing platform for Palestinian news networks emerges from three key aspects: First, having been on Facebook for a long time enabled the networks to create an enormous base of audience; Quds News Network, for example, had 10,000,000 followers (Abu Watfa, 2024). This audience built a sense of trust with the news network, as Mohammed Al-Zawahra, e-media publishing admin at Palestine TV, said. The audience depends heavily on the news posted by the Channel's page and considers it a main source of information (Al-Zawahra, 2024).

Second, the audience' age group on Facebook varies, unlike X and Telegram. Alaa Al-Zaro, supervisor of social media platforms at Al-Alam Radio, said Facebook was used by all age groups, making it Alam's main platform for reaching its audience (Al-Zaro, 2024).

Third, Facebook has become the leading platform in the Levant and Palestine, according to Sameh Abu Dayya, publishing admin on social media platforms at Raya network (Abu Dayya, 2024); but Anas Huwari, Chief Editor at Jarmaq, disagreed. He explained that the audience has been turning away from Facebook and heading to other platforms such as Telegram. Nevertheless, Jarmaq continues to post on Facebook and ensures to be present on all platforms to reach the maximum number of viewers (Huwari, 2024).

Another reason was given by Mohammed Al-Qabaj -head of social media team, publishing and website at Fajr TV- who said that Facebook brings the Channel income due to paid ads, ad breaks, and diverse news and Journalistic arts (Al-Qabaj, 2024).

As for Amjad Abu Seedo, chief editor at Quds Press, he explained that Facebook was no longer significant to the Network. In fact, it completely ignored it and now focuses on Telegram and WhatsApp as a tool to reach more audience due to the restrictions imposed by Facebook on Palestinian content, which exhausts the Network's time and effort (Abu Seedo, 2024). Al-Qeeq also explained that Facebook became less important to Ajyal when compared to its website and accounts on Telegram and WhatsApp (Al-Qeeq, 2024).

Regarding the fairness of Facebook's Community Standards for Palestinian news networks, there is a consensus among all interviewees that Facebook does not provide any fairness through its Community Standards for Palestinian news networks and Palestinian

content. The interviewee from Qastal described Facebook's standards as having a "zero fairness" rating, likening them to "walking on thorns."

All interviewees from the other platforms also agreed that Facebook exhibits clear double standards towards Palestinian content. This manifests in allowing Israelis to widely publish discourse that clearly violates Facebook's Community Standards and contains incitement and violence against Palestinians without Facebook enforcing its content moderation to remove it. In contrast, Facebook implements strict moderation and removes content from Palestinian news networks, even when the news is presented in a professional and journalistic manner without violating the standards.

Al-Qeeq, Al-Zaro and Abu Seedo stressed Facebook's double-standard Community Standards explaining how Facebook's standards do not apply to all pages the same. Arab or foreign news networks can post news on Palestinian affairs without being met with the same level of restriction as Palestinian news networks do.

All interviewed employees from the ten news networks agreed that Facebook imposed far more restricting Community Standards on Palestinian content after October 7, 2023. Sameh Abu Dayya said that the restriction on Palestinian content largely increased after October 7, and that Raya network suffered a lot from restriction on access on its page; to the extent that every post was censored. The network had to reduce the size and number of its posts on Facebook and Instagram, both owned by Meta.

Before October 7, several Palestinian news networks managed to adapt to Facebook's Community Standards and orchestrate their discourse to fit the criteria. However, after October 7, explained Alaa Al-Zaro, the Community Standards became too vague that the network had to think a thousand times before posting anything on its page. She said, "We understood Facebook's Community Standards. We knew words like 'martyr', 'resistance fighter' and 'Hamas' were labelled as 'inciteful' and promote what Facebook considers terrorist organizations. However, during the war, everything became blank and unclear" (Al-Zaro, 2024).

The news networks reduced the size and density of posts shared on their Facebook pages after October 7. Abu Seedo said, "After October 7, the coverage was mainly dedicated to the Israeli massacres and resistance' operations. Today, the resistance is a key player in the war, and you, as a news network, cannot post anything about it, nor share its pictures or

refer to it; therefore, you are paralyzed from posting about major incidents in the war on Facebook". (Abu Seedo, 2024), Huwary also explained, "I cannot post a news report and say, 'Al-Qassam Brigades announced killing five Israeli soldiers'; even though this is simply a news item that follows journalistic standards".

Al-Qabaj noticed that Facebook reduced viewers' access to content shared from Gaza on the Channel's page despite its effectiveness and power of expression, but at the same time other content shared by the TV's reporters in the West Bank was almost naturally accessed without being notified for access restriction.

All interviewees agreed that Facebook, while having imposed new restrictions on publishing, cut all ropes of communication between these networks and Meta administration for pleas against restrictions. All relevant flexibility that was shown before the war when dealing with news networks and retraction from restriction disappeared.

Regarding **the second question** on the challenges these Palestinian networks face on Facebook, the networks were exposed to different Community Standards restrictions such as being banned, restricted or completely removed. The Community Standards which were reported are:

− Dangerous individuals and organizations: Al-Fajr TV covered the funeral of one of Jenin martyrs live, and in the video a picture of Islamic Jihad flag appeared, so Facebook cut the live broadcast and removed it. It sent a violation notification to the Channel informing it of promoting dangerous organizations. The Channel also received a violation notification when it posted about the death of a leader affiliated with the Popular Front. Facebook said it was flagged because of 'glorifying dangerous organizations and individuals" (Al-Qabaj, 2024).

The same thing happened with Jarmaq when the latter posted a piece of news about the Islamic Jihad movement and the Yemini demonstrations supporting Palestine where a picture of Abdulmalik Houthi appeared in the demonstration. Furthermore, Ma'an and Palestine TV were flagged when they posted the picture of Ibrahim Al-Nabulsi, from Nablus, in 2022 with a caption about his martyrdom. Quds Press was also flagged after posting a picture of Khaled Mash'a, Head of the Islamic Resistance abroad, with a caption about his visit to Jordan before the beginning of the war on Gaza – even though the news was normally shared on official Jordanian news outlets; as reported Abu Seedo.

−Supporting terrorism: Facebook notified Raya network for its support of terrorism in several political posts. It also notified Quds News Network even though it always added 'press release', 'press coverage' or 'news report' before the statement of the news to stress its conveyance of news without expressing opinions (Abu Watfa, 2024). Qastal was restricted due to posting about the arrest of the son of the martyr Mesbah Abu Sbeih and adding a picture of his father and him.

−Hate Speech: Facebook notified Quds Press over posting a video of a Palestinian from the Gaza Strip saying, "In your dreams, Netanyahu!". The network was deeply surprised and said, "You would not even let the victim speak! Do not democratic communities allow the criticism of political figures? Or Facebook sees political figures above the law of criticism?" (Abu Seedo, 2024). Alam Radio also received a violation report when it posted a picture from a radio interview with a leader from the Islamic Jihad. The picture had his face, name and position in the movement.

−Violent and shocking content: After the Israeli massacre in At-Tabi'een school in Gaza in August 2024, Fajr TV posted scenes from the massacre without any visible bodies of martyrs. The scenes had stains of blood and destruction and a Quran that was stained with blood. Facebook blurred the picture describing it as 'shocking'. As a result, Fajr TV had to remove it. Facebook also covered scenes that documented settlers' attack against a Palestinian family in Masafer Yatta in south Hebron, claiming that the content was violent and shocking, and flagged the Channel for having posted it.

−False news: Fajr TV was flagged multiple times under the pretext of posting 'false news', when the news reported were very true. Al-Qabaj explained that such behavior is inline with Facebook's bias against Palestinian content, describing, hence, real news as false. The same Channel was also flagged for posting a picture from the archive with a recent news item, despite having clarified in the caption that the picture was from the archive. Facebook considered the post false news.

−Copyrights: Raya network received violation notifications with relation to copyrights even though the network's crew takes its own pictures. Ajyal also received the same report for posts that were shared during the early days of registration on Facebook.

–Shadow ban: All interviewees agreed on the presence of restrictions kept hidden from the public leading to the limitation of access to their pages during the war due to what they called, "unannounced policy by Facebook against Palestinian content".

–Retroactive ban: Ajyal was retroactively restricted for posts shared by the network in 2009. Palestine TV pointed out that most of the restrictions enforced today are because of old posts shared between 2015-2020.

According to Huwari, these restrictions have significantly impacted the ability of media outlets to perform their role in delivering news and covering events as they should. They have also drained time and effort from journalists working in news networks, who are now forced to constantly check every news item before posting it, especially on Facebook, as noted by Abu Seedo from Quds Press. For Dawood Tarawa from Ma'an News Agency, the agency is then compelled to devote considerable time to dealing with Facebook-related issues, which has hindered its ability to focus on self-development (Tarawa, 2024).

The situation for Quds News Network was different since its page was deleted upon an Israeli political decree days after the beginning of the Israeli war on Gaza. This Network is considered one of the most prominent in the field. Abu Watfa said, "A few days after our page was deleted, we created an alternative page that had a similar name. We had 65,000 followers, but was also removed a few days later. Their response was, "Are you making fun of us? You are same network we had blocked!". So returning under the nsame Quds News Network became somewhat difficult (Abu Watfa, 2024).

Raya reduced its use of pictures and resumed its focus on written texts because of the restrictions imposed by Facebook and Instagram. The network had to continuously keep an eye on the posted content, which required a lot of hard work and effort by the editorial team and administration (Al-Qabaj, 2024). About 50% of important news on Jerusalem disappeared due to concerns over possible deletion or restriction of the page.

Amid these challenges, the ten publishing admins and editors-in-chief highlighted the intensified efforts of Palestinian news networks to focus more on other platforms, particularly Telegram, and to a lesser extent, WhatsApp. Despite the restrictions they face with WhatsApp—since it is owned by the same company, Meta, and subject to similar standards, though to a lesser degree due to its private nature as a messaging app—these concerns persist. Abu Seedo from Quds Press expressed such concerns openly, noting that

his network is the only Palestinian network to manage 51 WhatsApp groups with a total of 51,000 subscribers, who receive news updates every 15 minutes. If the network were banned, they would risk losing this vast audience, so the network often finds it safer to refrain from publishing certain topics.

Answering the **third question** on the extent to which editorial policies at Palestinian news networks are influenced when covering news on Facebook, Ma'an agency confirmed that it continuously updates its editorial policy and method of publishing on Facebook to ensure alignment with the platform's continuously-updated Community Standards. After every restriction, the team meet to understand the reasons. Jarmaq decided to avoid posting any news items that contradict the Community Standards of Facebook. Alam Radio decided not to share the statements made by Palestinian factions on Facebook, even if they are made exclusive to the radio; it would just post them on Telegram. Quds Press started posting foreign statements and general news on Facebook without posting any pictures of Palestinian resistance factions' leaders.

Quds News Network was very careful to avoid being restricted, and the editors would always emphasize avoiding topics it would be restricted for. It would always avoid sharing content that would result in limiting audience' access to it; for such reason the Network believes the platform imposed a punitive measure. If the page recovers, it would return to its usual policy, with the attempt to reduce content that may lead to a ban.

In Ajyal, posts were limited to radio interviews, with sound and picture, on Facebook; and focused on posting social topics instead, like the results of public high school exams, and news on power cuts. However, news about martyrs, killings, violence and disasters were completely avoided on the platform.

Adjusting the editorial policy to meet Facebook Community Standards was Raya's top priority, especially after noticing the reduced access of viewers to its posts during the first days of the war; believing that it was a 'punitive measure by Facebook'.

Once a channel realizes that Facebook reduced access to its page because of the Palestinian content it shares, it is forced to filter and censor the content it publishes. It would return to old posts that have similar context and remove them. Reducing access to Ajyal's page is deemed a major punitive measure for the Channel because Facebook ads are one of its main sources of income.

Palestine TV tries not to stay far away from daily news, but it occasionally posts content that discusses Palestinian daily life to activate interaction and increase reach. For example, it would post videos about life in Gaza, tents and food. According to Mohammed Al-Zawahra, this type of content is not banned by Facebook and it receives good interaction.

Regarding the difference between Telegram and Facebook, Dawood Tarawa informed his team at Ma'an News Agency that Telegram is the least restrictive concerning Palestinian content. He emphasized that content on Telegram is not met with any restrictions, unlike what happens on Facebook, which requires continuous review and immediate censorship, especially at the occurrence of major events. Palestine TV prioritized posting on Telegram during the war on Gaza, using the platform to post content that it had avoided sharing on Facebook.

After the deletion of its page on Facebook, Quds News Network sees its Telegram channel as the true umbrella of Palestinian content, when compared to its production on Facebook and other Meta Platforms. What fits Telegram does not fit Facebook. All the statements and military operations which Facebook categorizes as terrorist are allowed on Telegram, as explained by Abu Watfa.

Raya and Qastal focus their publishing on Telegram, and then see what fits Facebook Community Standards and share it there to avoid any restrictions due to pictures or visual content.

Abu Seedo posts on Telegram scenes from military operations and media shared by the resistance, and massacres news and relevant pictures. All of these cannot be posted on Facebook. He always tells his team, as he stressed, that if the team member has 1% doubt of the possibility of resulting in a ban on Facebook, then abstain from posting the intended content.

All ten networks adopted the strategy of promoting Telegram via Facebook by sharing Telegram post links on Facebook, even if those posts contained videos, images, or texts that were banned on Facebook. They would often accompany the links with phrases like "To watch the video" or "For full details see link." However, Ajyal Radio Network confirmed that it writes one caption that suits both Facebook and Telegram so as to avoid changing its captions from one Platform to the other.

Al-Zawahra, Abu Watfa and Al-Qeeq expressed their concerns over the possibility of Telegram shifting into a platform that also traces and deletes Palestinian content. For such reason, Palestine TV decided to activate automatic deletion of posts one month later on Telegram. It fears the day Telegram decides to trace Palestinian content and ban it retrospectively.

Alaa Al-Zaro, said that she explicitly uses the word 'martyr' on Telegram, but she sometimes has to use expression like 'a person's spirit ascending' or 'identifying the ID of the man whose soul ascended after a bombing' when writing the same news on Facebook. She also has to leave hints and circumvent Facebook's standards to avoid being banned or restricted. This, of course, would affect the clarity of the news she posts. Raya and Jarmaq decided to replace the Palestinian factions' names such as (Hamas) and (Islamic Jihad) to 'the movement in the Gaza Strip' or the 'military resistance in the Gaza Strip' with hints to indicate it.

When Al-Zawahra senses that a particular word might lead to the banning of Palestine TV's Facebook page, he instructs the design team to place the word within images instead of the caption. Meanwhile, Qastal resorted to encoding certain words, especially when related to resistance operations, military statements, faction names, or martyrs.

Dawood Tarawa monitors Facebook's Community Standards updates daily to identify which words can be used in Ma'an News Agency's coverage. If he wants to post news about a person classified as "dangerous" under Facebook's standards, he avoids using that word in the headline. Instead, he carefully selects words that indirectly refer to the person within the news content without explicitly mentioning the name.

Even though Fajr TV avoids posting the resistance' military statements on Facebook, it posts them Telegram. When it changes some words in the news item on Facebook, the message becomes vague and incomprehensible. Sometimes, the audience expresses its dissatisfaction in the comment section when the TV uses words like 'a soul ascending' instead of 'being martyred' (ascending is originally an Arabic term to indicate the high status of the dead person).

Sometimes the Palestinian news networks post texts with pictures on Telegram, but only the text on Facebook. Other networks blur pictures or videos when they include scenes of sensitive symbols or views classified by Facebook Community Standards as terrorist

organizations or acts of violence. These include logos and flags of military and political Palestinian factions, pictures of weapons, pictures of political Palestinian figures, pictures of martyrs or massacres, or scenes of resistance operations – even though the Israeli media posts the same pictures without blurs or adjustments.

Abu Watfa explained that Quds News Network used to post videos and pictures on all platforms but soon after removes them from Facebook while notifying the viewer that they could watch them elsewhere. The Network did this to ensure the audience' access to the scenes even for a short while before Facebook's banning algorithms detect them.

To answer the **fourth question** on the influence of Facebook's Community Standards and Algorithms on Palestinian journalists' levels of self-censorship, Huwary refers to 'intellectual terrorism' as an accurate description of the influence of Facebook's Community Standards on the Palestinian journalists and news networks. These Standards make them fearful and always concerned when they wish to share content, even if the content shared is free from personal views.

All publishing admins and editors-in-chief agree that Facebook's Community Standards forced self-censorship on media organizations with relation to their public pages and the journalists' personal accounts, forcing them to make certain decisions due to Facebook's policies in fighting content. These Standards had major impact on individuals and organizations pushing them to think thoroughly before posting anything online.

According to Abu Dayya, the most severe form of self-censorship began when he had to delete posts that contained links to news articles or reports, anticipating that these links might cause problems for Raya News Network with Facebook's administration. Abu Seedo affirmed this, saying, "Facebook's Community Standards have tied the hands and feet of Palestinian journalists and then told them to walk away. There is no freedom.".

Dawood Tarawa noticed, after discussing the matter with fellow journalists, that they often abstained from publishing for fear of restriction. Their Facebook accounts or pages have thousands of followers, so they do not want to lose them over one piece of news that might not meet Facebook's Community Standards.

4.2 Content Analysis Results

The researcher conducted a comprehensive overview of 240 news posts on the news networks' Telegram accounts and looked for the corresponding posts on their Facebook pages to analyze the differences between them. This analysis aimed to determine the extent to which news networks avoid sharing news content entirely on Facebook. According to (Table 4.1), Palestinian news networks avoided sharing approximately 59% (i.e., 141) of the 240 posts examined on their Facebook pages, opting instead to post them on Telegram only.

Table 4.1: Differences in number of posts shared only on Telegram and shared on both Facebook and Telegram

Category	Number of Posts	Percentage (Frequency)
Yes, posted	99	41.3%
No, not posted	141	58.8%

Regarding the nature of the issues addressed in the news content included in this research sample, analysis showed that 'Israeli assaults' was the topic mostly addressed, as 63 out 240 posts were dedicated to it. The second most addressed topic was 'the martyrs' as 39 posts addressed it; followed by, in order, the resistance operations in the Gaza Strip and south Lebanon 26 posts; human stories and damage of assets resulting from Israeli assaults 20 posts; military statement of the Palestinian Lebanese resistance 16 posts; Israeli death toll (in combat or in captivity) 16 posts; international statements 14 posts; Palestinian prisoners 11 posts; internal Israeli affairs 8; other topics like the weather, power cuts, education and water distribution schedule 8 posts; the injured Palestinians due to Israeli assaults 7 posts; PA's official statements 6 posts; the Palestinian factions 4 posts; pro-Palestine advocacy stories 2 posts, Arab-Israeli normalization 0 posts; Israel boycott (economically, culturally and academically) 0 posts. See (Table 4:2).

Table 4:2 Frequency of addressed issues in the research sample

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Martyrs	39	16.3%
Palestinian prisoners	11	4.6%
Israeli assault	63	26.3%
Palestinian factions	4	1.7%
Palestinian Authority	6	2.5%
Military statements	16	6.7%
Israeli death toll	16	6.7%
Injured Palestinians	7	2.9%
Damage of Palestinian assets	20	8.3%
Resistance operation	26	10.8%
Pro-Palestine advocacy	2	0.8%
International statements	14	5.8%
Israeli internal affairs	8	3.3%
Others	8	3.3%
Total	240	100%

The analysis of the relation between the addressed issue and having content posted about it on the Facebook pages of the Palestinian news networks showed the following:

Table 4.3 Relation between the addressed issue and decision of sharing its story on Facebook

Category	Frequency	Mean	Lowest Value	Highet Value
Martyrs	39	1.74	1	2
Palestinian prisoners	11	1.36	1	2
Israeli assault	63	1.59	1	2
Palestinian factions	4	1.75	1	2
Palestinian Authority	6	1.00	1	1

Military statements	16	1.94	1	2
Israeli death toll	16	1.69	1	2
Injured Palestinians	7	1.71	1	2
Damage of Palestinian assets	20	1.65	1	2
Resistance operation	26	1.58	1	2
Pro-Palestine advocacy	2	1.50	1	2
International statements	14	1.29	1	2
Israeli internal affairs	8	1.25	1	2
Others	8	1.13	1	2
Total	240			
Significance	>0.01			

(Table 4.3) shows that there is a difference between addressing the issue and having a post about it on Facebook, with a Significance value of less than (0.5). This indicates that the variable, which is the issue being addressed, has an impact on the constant, which is the sharing of the post on Facebook.

This answers the **first question** of the content analysis questions, that the addressed issue in the news content influences the decision of whether to be posted on Facebook, which would indicate how Facebook Community Standards impose themselves as the Gatekeeper of Palestinian news networks. As a result, the news networks are forced to avoid sharing news content that addresses certain topics, and share other topics instead.

(Table 4.3) shows that the closer the mean is to the lowest value (1), the Palestinian news networks did not avoid sharing these issues on Facebook; but the closer the mean is to the highest value (2), the networks abstain from posting the issue on Facebook and keep it on Telegram only. (Table 4.3) also shows that all posts included in the research sample and covered the PA's official statements were shared on Facebook and Telegram.

(Table 4.3) indicates that Palestinian news networks often avoid sharing content on the resistance' military factions' statements (both from Palestine and Lebanon) on Facebook, and just post them on Telegram instead. They also avoid, at a less degree, sharing the news about martyrs and injured on their Facebook pages.
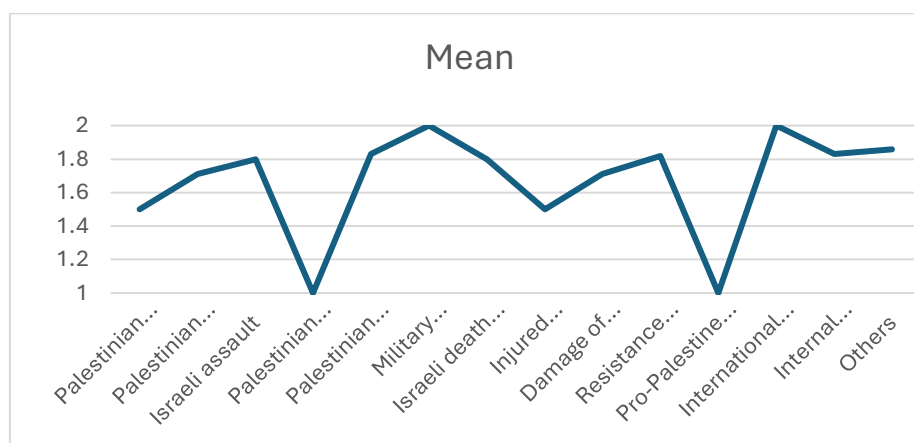
Figure 4.1 Relation between the addressed issue and decision of sharing its story on Facebook

Results show that 99 news items were shared by the Palestinian news networks the same on Telegram and Facebook. (Table 4.4) indicates that the Palestinian news networks did not change the way they displayed their news content when shared on Facebook and Telegram. 76.8% (frequency: 76) of the posts were shared the same on both platforms, and 23.2% (frequency: 23) were displayed differently.

Table 4.4 Percentage of frequency of changing content display of posts when shared on both Facebook and Telegram

Category	Frequency	%
Changed the content way of display	23	23.2%
Did not change the content way of display	76	76.8%
Total	99	100%

To answer the **second question (A)** of the content analysis questions on how the discourse of Palestinian news networks is influenced and changed to meet Facebook Community Standards, (Table 4.5) shows that the news networks did not change their display of content entirely when posting on Facebook statements made by international figures, organizations or governments (frequency:10); content on Israeli assaults (frequency:25); PA news (frequency: 6); Israeli death toll (frequency: 5); the Palestinian prisoners (frequency:7); damage of Palestinian assets (frequency:7); news on the weather,

power cuts, water distribution schedules and education (frequency:7); and news on the Israeli entity (frequency:6). However, they sometimes changed it when they posted about martyrs (frequency:10) and injured Palestinians (frequency:6); and they completely changed the method of display when addressed the Palestinian factions (frequency:1) and Pro-Palestine advocates (frequency:1).

Table 4.5 Relation between the addressed issue and decision to change its method of display when posted on Facebook

Category	Frequency	Mean	Lowest Value	Highest Value
Palestinian martyrs	10	1.50	1	2
Palestinian prisoners	7	1.71	1	2
Israeli assault	25	1.80	1	2
Palestinian factions	1	1.00	1	1
Palestinian authority	6	1.83	1	2
Military statements	1	2.00	2	2
Israeli death toll	5	1.80	1	2
Injured Palestinians	2	1.50	1	2
Damage of Palestinian assets	7	1.71	1	2
Resistance operation	11	1.82	1	2
Pro-Palestine advocacy	1	1.00	1	1
International statements	10	2.00	2	2
Internal Israeli affairs	6	1.83	1	2
Others	7	1.86	1	2
Total	99			
Significance	>0.2			

(Table 4.5) shows there is a difference between the method of display of the addressed issue when posted on Facebook and Telegram, with a statistical value less than (0.5). This indicates that the variable, which is the issue being addressed, has an impact on the constant, which is the change in the method of display.

(Table 4.5) shows that the closer the mean is to the lowest value (1), the Palestinian news networks changed their methods of content display of the addressed issues when posted on Facebook; but the closer the Mean is to the highest value (2), the networks did not change the method of display of the content when posting on Facebook; instead, they maintained the same content they shared on Telegram.
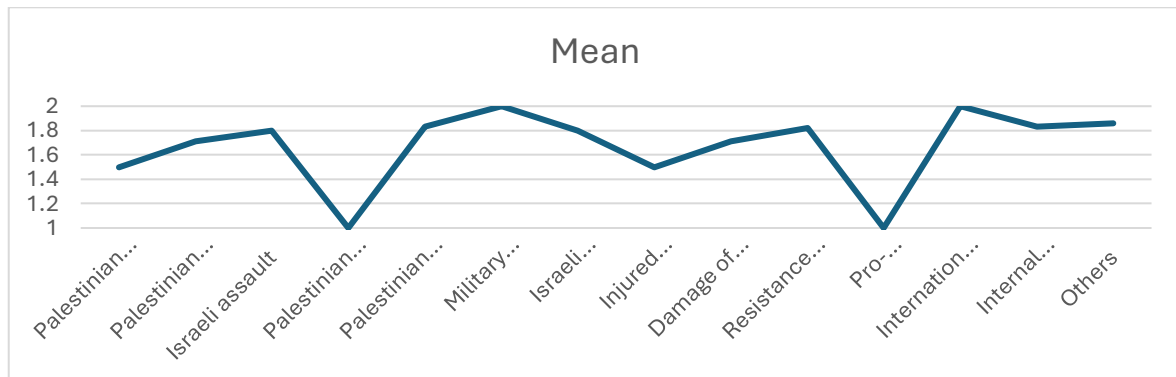
Figure 4.2 Relation between the addressed issue and decision to change its method of display when posted on Facebook

(Table 4.6) shows that 22 posts were shared after changing the phrasing of the post and its terms (frequency:18), changing the pictures (frequncy:4) and changing the multimedia used (frequency: 1). The researcher did not trace any posts that had changes in the videos.

Table 4.6 Elements that change when content is displayed on Facebook

Category	Frequency	%
Change in phrasing and terms	18	78%
Change in pictures	4	17%
Change in multimedia used in post	1	4%
Total	23	100%

As for the changes in terms, pictures and multimedia; (Table 4.7) shows that Palestinian news networks depended on coding words 61% of the times; changing terms (frequency:14); replacing the pictures they had posted on Telegram with others less clear when the addressed issue is banned on Facebook 17% (frequency:4); replacing words with equivalents (like displacement: movement; breaking: press coverage); and deleting entire words (like Gaza, martyr) 9% each (frequency: 2). In one incident only, the web link was deleted because it included the word 'martyr'.

Table 4.7 Changes made to the content method of display

Category	Frequency	%
Using equivalents	2	9%
Using and coding the same words	14	61%
Deleting certain words	2	9%
Replacing pictures with other less-clear ones of topics banned on Facebook	4	17%
Deleting the website link	1	4%
Total	23	100%

To answer the **second question (B)** of the content analysis questions on how the discourse changed to meet Facebook Community Standards with relation to terms and phrasing. (Table 4.8) shows that there is a difference between addressing the issue and changing its phrasing and terminology when posting it on Facebook and Telegram, with a statistical value of less than (0.5). This indicates that the variable, which is the issue being addressed, has an impact on the constant, which is the change in terminology.

(Table 4.8) shows that the closer the Mean is to the lowest value (1), the Palestinian news networks changed, deleted or decoded these issues when posted on Facebook; but the closer the mean is to the highest value (2), the networks did not change, delete nor decode these issues when posted on Facebook and kept it the same as they were on Telegram.

The Palestinian news networks changed the phrasing and words they used whenever they posted about martyrs (frequency:5); Israeli assaults (frequency:5); damage of Palestinian assets (frequency:2); resistance operations (frequency:2); Israeli death toll

(frequency:1); injured Palestinians (frequency:1); and pro-Palestine advocacy (frequency:1). The networks sometimes made necessary changes when posted about the Palestinian prisoners (frequency:2). The networks did not make any changes when posted about the Palestinian Authority (frequency:1), the Palestinian factions (frequency:1), Internal Israeli affairs (frequency:1), and others (frequency:1).

Table 4.8 Relation between the addressed issue and change in terminology when posted on Facebook

Category	Frequency	Mean	Lowest Value	Highest Value
Palestinian martyrs	5	1.00	1	1
Palestinian prisoners	2	1.50	1	2
Israeli assault	5	1.00	1	1
Palestinian factions	1	2.00	2	2
Palestinian Authority	1	2.00	2	2
Israeli death toll	1	1.00	1	1
Injured Palestinians	1	1.00	1	1
Damage of Palestinian assets	2	1.00	1	1
Resistance operation	2	1.00	1	1
Pro-Palestine advocacy	1	1.00	1	1
Israeli internal affairs	1	2.00	2	2
Others	1	2.00	2	2
Total	23			
Statistical significance	0.002			
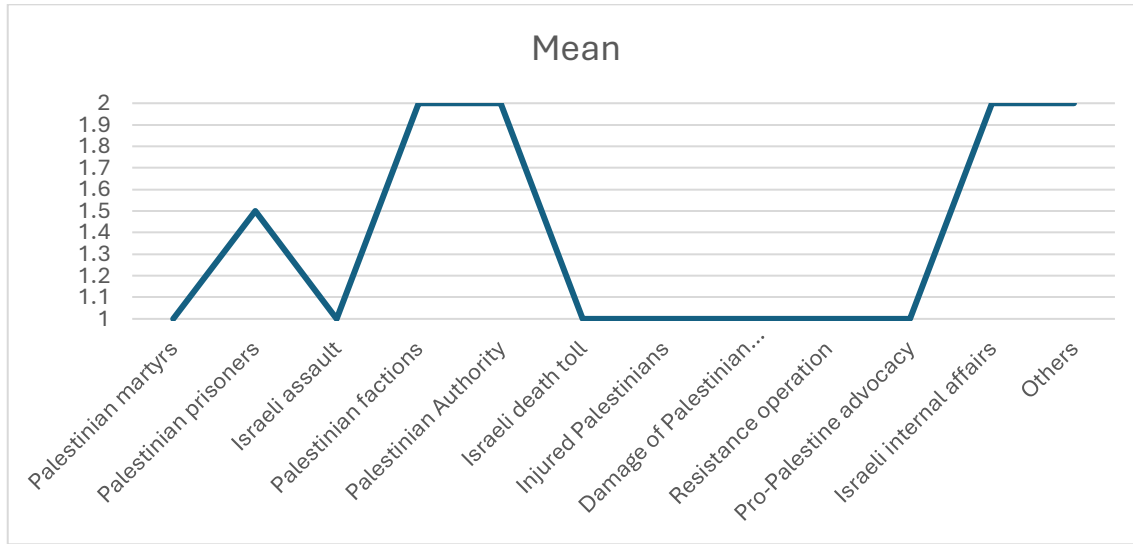
Figure 4.3 Relation between the addressed issue and change in terminology when posted on Facebook

As for the types of multimedia used in the display of news posted by the Palestinian news networks on Facebook and Telegram, (Table 4.9) displays the type of these means and shows how one Palestinian news network deleted its website link after posting it on Facebook because the word 'martyr' was in the headline. In addition, some pictures were posted on Facebook but not on Telegram.

Table 4.9 Changes in multimedia tools used when posting

	Telegram		Facebook	
Category	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Text	8	34.8%	4	17.4%
Text + link	1	4.3%	1	4.3%
Picture	1	4.3%	0	0%
Picture + text	8	34.8%	13	56.5%
Text + picture + link	1	4.3%	1	4.3%
Video + text	4	17.4%	4	17.4%
Total	23	100.0%	23	100.0%

To answer the **second question (C)** of the content analysis questions, (Table 4.9) shows that the addressed issue influences the decision to change the multimedia used when posting on Facebook after posting on Telegram. (Table 4.9) indicates there is a difference between addressing the issue and changing the pictures posted with them when posting about it on Facebook and Telegram, with a statistical value of more than (0.5). This indicates that the variable, which is the issue being addressed, has less impact on the constant, which is the change in pictures.

(Table 4.10) shows that the closer the mean is to the lowest value (1), the Palestinian news networks changed, deleted or added pictures when posting on Facebook; but the closer the mean is to the highest value (5), the networks abstained from changing, deleting or adding pictures on Facebook, and instead maintained the ones posted on Telegram. The Palestinian news networks tended to change the pictures when the issue was about martyrs (frequency:3), Israeli assaults (frequency:3), and damage of Palestinian assets (frequency:2). The networks did not make any changes when the issue was about Palestinian prisoners, Palestinian factions, the PA, resistance operations and others (frequency:1) each.

Table 4.10 Relation between the addressed issues and changes in multimedia used

Category	Frequency	Mean	Lowest Value	Highest Value
Palestinian martyrs	3	2.33	1	5
Palestinian prisoners	1	5.00	5	5
Israeli assault	3	3.67	1	5
Palestinian factions	1	5.00	5	5
Palestinian Authority	1	5.00	5	5
Damage of Palestinian assets	2	3.00	1	5
Resistance operation	1	5.00	5	5
Others	1	5.00	5	5
Total	13			
Statistical significance	0.9			

The researcher did not find any changes in soft tactics when posting the news on Facebook, except for one news item about Palestinian damaged assets and humanitarian stories which was posted by the network in an Inspirational content on Telegram but without soft tactics on Facebook. (Table 4.11) shows that the news which included Inspirational appeals came first at 52% on Telegram (frequency:12) and 48% on Facebook (frequency:11). The news without any soft tactics came second at 43% on Telegram (frequency:10) and 48% on Facebook (frequency:11). Finally, Rational persuasion soft tactics appeared only in one post on Facebook and Telegram which answers the **second question (d)** of the content analysis questions.

Table 4.11 Distribution of persuasion tactics on posts

	Telegram		Facebook	
Category	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Inspirational appeals	12	52%	11	48%
Rational persuasion	1	4%	1	4%
No soft tactics	10	43%	11	48%
Total	23	100.0%	23	100.0%

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1 Interview Results Discussion

The analysis of the interviews' answers shows the major influence of Facebook Community Standards on the editorial policies of Palestinian news networks. These standards played the role of a Gatekeeper, pushing the decision-making process to be compliant with Facebook's algorithms and Community Standards, which somewhat agrees with (Walters, 2021; Wallace, 2017) studies. This new authority exercises pressure on the journalists forcing them to exercise self-censorship to avoid restriction or ban from the platforms they work with; similar to what the users experienced as presented in (West, 2018) study.

This resulted from a complex interaction between technology, politics and social censorship, and it sheds light on the major challenges Palestinian journalists face. News networks are deeply rooted in social media platforms, which function as key publishing spaces; especially that the operational costs of other media outlets have risen and audiences are more inclined to browse online platforms instead.

Reach rates influenced journalists' decisions, making them change their content to be compliant with Facebook's reach algorithms. This was examined by (Presuel & Sierra, 2018; Lischka, 2021) studies whose results indicated actual change in website traffic. Similarly, (Vu, 2013) study showed that the editors observed posts' reach rate on Facebook. This shift reflects change in the audience' reception of content. The audience now depends more on social media platforms to receive the news, which made journalists adopt new strategies that guarantee their presence and expansion on this always-shifting digital realm.

The influence of reach rates on journalists' decisions is a natural outcome of the current digital media environment, which encourages us to rethink the concept of Gatekeeping in our digital world. Journalists alone are no longer the ones in control of the information flow; nowadays, alogarithms have become essential partners in the process, which poses new challenges to freedom of expression and dissemination of information.

The analysis of the interviews also showed journalists' awareness of Facebook's double standard Community Standards. The interviewees confirmed how the Palestinian

content is under great censorship, far more than what other content gets. This indicates that the double-standard nature of Facebook Community Standards is not just a technical issue; rather it is part of a greater system where politics and economy are major players. It can also be influenced by external forces that influence the publishing process where political and economic interests intervene with the guiding of publishing criteria (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). In other words, Facebook Community Standards can very well be under external pressure, which agrees with the results of (Biddle, 2021) study on the intervention of political considerations with what determines what may be allowed for publication on social media. This result also agrees with the findings of (2024 ،الغورنة) on how Meta is affected by Israeli authority inside it, and how it adheres to the laws and regulations of the Israeli government, over censoring Arabic content.

Journalists have expressed concerns about how changes in their editorial policies might impact the clarity of their message to the audience and its effectiveness in achieving its media objectives. They worry that adapting to these changes could lead to a loss of cultural identity for the news networks. This concern is not without merit; even minor adjustments in editorial policies can significantly affect the clarity and impact of the media message and its ability to meet its goals. Journalists understand that any shift in presentation style or content could distort or diminish the media message's effect, potentially alienating their target audience. This highlights a challenge that necessitates adopting new strategies to balance maintaining their identity and content with adapting to increasing digital restrictions.

One of the significant findings is the concern raised in the interviews about a future problem for Palestinians: the potential disappearance of their digital news archives from Facebook and other restrictive platforms due to Facebook's removal of their posts. The news networks tend to delete their own old posts for fears of retrospective deletion of their posts by Facebook. These networks' archive is not just a collection of posts; it is a historical record reflecting Palestinian experiences, struggles, and achievements. The loss of this archive could create a substantial gap in the digital historical memory of Palestinians, making it difficult for future generations to access reliable sources that once documented their history.

5.2 Content Analysis Results Discussion

The platforms' posts shared on both Telegram and Facebook (99 out of 240 on Telegram alone) indicated how much the Palestinian news networks' decisions are influenced. It also indicates relative lack of interest in Facebook as a platform for news coverage, and more focus on Telegram as an alternative platform; mainly because it does not ban Palestinian content.

Despite the fact that changes in content display were not frequent—only 23 out of 99 posts were changed—this can be explained by the platform officials' statements about their efforts to avoid sharing news that might harm them significantly. Additionally, some posts did not even require change because they did not contain unallowed content. Finally, some news networks found it easier to make one text suitable for all platforms according to Facebook's standards, so no changes are made.

A. Addressed issues: Results showed that the type of the addressed issues influenced the decision to whether have them posted on Facebook or not. The issues relevant to the Palestinian occupation of Palestine; martyrs, prisoners and injured; and the resistance, military statements and occupation's losses were less posted about on Facebook. The news networks focused their publishing on general issues like the PA's statements, international statements or internal Israeli affairs.

B. Terms: According to the analysis, the Palestinian news networks depended heavily on coding or deleting the words that were relevant to the martyrs, or Palestinian factions and their armed wings. The networks were forced to follow such strategy despite having been advised otherwise. News that is allowed for publication with relation to the resistance operations are generally similar to, "sirens heard in Tel Aviv", 'Hebrew sources: Rockets fired from Lebanon at Meron military base', or 'Israel Hayom: Six Israelis Killed in Stabbing in Alexandria'.

C. Types of Content: Results showed that there are changes in the way the content is presented and displayed, including the shift in using multimedia content on Telegram and Facebook. News networks generally avoided pictures that had logos or sensitive content on Facebook, but posted them freely on Telegram.

D.   Soft tactics: Due to the relatively small size of the sample, it is not possible to infer news networks' trends towards changing their soft tactics. However, the sample showed that the networks avoided Inspirational appeals on Facebook, so that they would not be classified as 'inciteful' by Facebook's algorithms.

5.3 Conclusion

Facebook plays a major role in the shaping of the Palestinian news content, and its Community Standards have created a new form of digital censorship, not just on information but language and discourse as well.

This research showed how Palestinian news networks face complex challenges that require balancing between freedom of speech and reach without being restricted or banned. These challenges forced Palestinian news networks to adopt new strategies, including changing the content's wording and finding alternative platforms like Telegram to protect the media message from digital constraints.

There is still room for further studies that can explore the long-term influence of such digital censorship on Palestinian media and free journalism in oppressed countries.

5.4 Recommendations

The researcher recommends the following:

1.   Developing a rights and media policy: Collaboration among international rights organizations must be promoted to defend digital freedom of expression and ensure Community Standards are not utilized as tools to oppress and silence Palestinian voices. This requires forming a media rights front that can exercise pressure on major technological companies to ensure fairness and transparency are implemented.

2.   Conduct further research about the long-term influence of Facebook Community Standards on Palestinian media and freedom of expression in oppressed and occupied countries, and on the Palestinian digital archive.

3.   Conducting further future studies on the long-term effects of Facebook's community standards censorship on Palestinian news coverage and its role as a gatekeeper.

4.   Conducting focus groups, opinion polls, and expanding the research tools used in further studies related to the new gatekeeper role in social media platforms are advised.

5.   While the gatekeeping theory was central, integrating concepts from agenda-setting theory, framing theory, or even algorithmic bias could provide new insights into how digital platforms control content and influence media practices.

6.   Conducting comparative studies on the performance of Palestinian news networks and journalists across other digital platforms with restrictions, as well as those that enjoy a degree of freedom, is recommended. These studies could provide valuable insights into how different regulatory environments impact news production, dissemination, and the overall journalistic practices in various contexts.

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Appendices

Appendix (1): Names of the reviewers of the indicator and content analysis

No.	Name	Title	Specialization	University
1	Prof. Hussein Al-Ahmed	Professor	Press and digital media	Arabic American University
2	Prof. Hatem Alawna	Professor	Press and digital media	Al Yarmouk University
3	Prof. Amer Ahmed	Professor	Press and digital media	Al Zaytouna University

Appendix (2): Names of interviewees

	Name	Position	Organization
1	Ramzi Al-Qeeq	Editor of electronic content	Ajyal Radio Network
2	Yusuf Abu Watfa	Editor in chief	Al-Quds News Network
3	Interviewee	--	Al-Qastal News
4	Mohammed AlZawahra	Head of publishing in e-media	Palestine TV
5	Alaa Al-Zaro	Supervisor of social media platforms	Alam Radio
6	Sameh Abu Dayya	Publishing admin on social media platforms	Raya News Network
7	Mohammed Al-Qabaj	Head of social media team, publishing and website	Al-Fajr TV
8	Amjad Abu Seedo	Editor in chief	Quds Press
9	Anas Hawari	Editor in chief	Al-Jarmaq
10	Dawoud Tarawa	Manager of publishing and monitor on social media sites	Ma'an News Agency

Appendix (3): Request for Reviewing Interview Questions and Content Analysis Coding Scheme

Dear professor,

My name is Nida' Basem Bassoumi. I am a post-graduate student currently conducting an analytical study about " **Facebook Community Standards: The New Gatekeeper for Palestinian News Networks?**", under the supervision of Dr. Naheda Makhadma. I request that you may review the structured-interview questions and content analysis coding scheme.

With all due respect,

Nida' Basem Bassoumi

The Arabic American University- Ramallah

Appendix (4): Interview questions

Structured interview questions included asking the following questions to the editors in chief of the digital departments at the news networks included in the research sample:

1. The relationship between news networks and Facebook platform.

1. How do you describe you experience in publishing Palestinian content on Facebook?

2. Why is Facebook platform considered important to the network?

3. How fair are community standards of Facebook regarding Palestinian news pages?

4. During the war on Gaza, what changed in the network's approach to dealing with Facebook before and after the war?

2. Digital restrictions and publishing challenges

5. What are the most prominent community and privacy standards that you were restricted for?

6.   How has the restriction affected the digital workflow of news networks?

3. Community Standards of Facebook as a Gatekeeper.

7. When the network's posts are restricted because of Facebook Community Standards, how does that influence the future decisions regarding publication?

8. How do the reach percentages affect the editorial decision-making process?

9. How does making the editorial decisions differ between Facebook and Telegram?

10. Has the network ever needed to change some words on Facebook while keeping them the same on other platforms? Like what?

11. What are the procedures followed before posting pictures and videos related to Palestinian content on Facebook?

4.   Journalists' Self-Censorship

12.   How do digital restrictions affect the level of self-censorship of the journalist?

Appendix (5): Content analysis coding scheme

How the discourse of Palestinian news networks has been affected by Facebook Community Standards and algorithms

A. Subject number:…………….

B. Name of the news network: ……………..

C. Is it on Facebook?

1.   Yes

2.   No

D. Addressed Issue:

1.   Martyrs

2.   Palestinian prisoners

3.   Injured Palestinians

4.   Damage of assets

5.   Israeli assault

6.   Palestinian factions

7.   Palestinian Authority

8.   Resistance military statements

9.   Resistance operations

10.   Israeli death toll

11.   Internal Israeli issues

12.   International statements

13.   Israel

14.   Pro-Palestine advocacy

15.   Arab-Israeli normalization

16.   Other

Was there a difference in the method of content display when posted on Facebook and telegram?

1.   Yes

2.   No – stop the analysis

F. Were there changes in phrasing and terminology?

1.   Yes

2.   No

G. How were the changes in terminology made?

1.   Using alternative word with the same meaning

2.   Using the same words with encryption

3.   Deleting certain words entirely

H. What was the most prominent word that was been changed or deleted?

1.   The word on Telegram.

2.   Its' equivalent word on Facebook/ nothing

I. Soft tactics on Telegram:
1.   Inspirational appeals
2.   Rational persuasion
3.   Mixed
4.   With no soft tactics

J. Soft tactics on Facebook:
1.   Inspiutt appeals
2.   Rational persuasion
3.   Mixed
4.   With no soft tactics

K. Type of post on Telegram:
1.   Text
2.   Text + Link
3.   Picture
4.   Text + Picture
5.   Text + Picture + Link
6.   Audio
7.   Video
8.   Video + Text
9.   Video + Text + Link
10.   Link
11.   Infographic
12.   Text + Infographic
13.   Video Graphic
14.   Text + Video Graphic

L. Type of post on Facebook:
1.   Text
2.   Text + Link
3.   Picture
4.   Text + Picture
5.   Text + Picture + Link
6.   Audio
7.   Video
8.   Video + Text
9.   Video + Text + Link
10.   Link
11.   Infographic
12.   Text + Infographic

13. Video Graphic

14. Text + Video Graphic

M. How were pictures changed when posted on Facebook after Telegram?

1. Replacement of pictures with less-clear ones in contents banned on Facebook.
2. Blurring pictures, logos and symbols that may be banned.
3. Cropping pictures.
4. Using symbols to alert "sensitive content".
5. No change.

N. How were videos changed when posted on Facebook after Telegram?

1. Replacement of scenes by others with less clarity in contents banned on Facebook.

2. Blurring scenes, logos and symbols that may be banned.
3. Cropping videos.
4. Using symbols to alert "sensitive content".
5. Replacing or muting audio in the video.
6. No Change.

End of Scheme

Appendix (6) Content Analysis Form

Content no.	Network On Facebook (1-2)	Addressed Issue (1-16)	Change in Method of Display (1-2)	Change in terminology (1-2)	Type of change in terminology (1-3)	Change in words Telegram	Change in words Facebook	Multimedia on Telegram (1-14)	Multimedia on Facebook (1-14)	Changes in pictures (1-5)	Changes in videos (1-6)	Soft tactics on Telegram (1-4)	Soft tactics on Facebook (1-4)

معايير مجتمع فيسبوك: حارس البوابة الجديد لشبكات الأخبار الفلسطينية؟

نداء باسم سعيد بسومي

د. ناهدة مخادمة

د. حسين الأحمد

د. إبراهيم الحروب

ملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في تأثير معايير مجتمع فيسبوك والخوارزميات على خطاب شبكات الأخبار الفلسطينية، وكيف أن هذه المعايير أجبرت على تغييرات في السياسات التحريرية وممارسة الرقابة الذاتية عند نشر المحتوى على المنصة. تهدف الدراسة إلى تحليل العلاقة بين شبكات الأخبار الفلسطينية ومنصة فيسبوك، مع التركيز على كيفية تعامل هذه الشبكات مع القيود المفروضة من قبل المنصة، وكيف تؤثر هذه القيود على نوع وطريقة عرض المحتوى المنشور، واستخدام الشبكات لتكتيكات ناعمة (استمالات) استخدمت الباحثة أداتين لجمع البيانات: المقابلات مع 10 مشاركين وتحليل المحتوى لـ 240 منشورًا، مع تطبيق نظرية حراسة البوابة. أظهرت النتائج أن معايير مجتمع فيسبوك تفرض قيودًا كبيرة على حرية التعبير والنشر بين الصحفيين الفلسطينيين. وأظهرت التحليلات أن الأخبار المتعلقة بضحايا الفلسطينيين نتيجة للاعتداءات الإسرائيلية ومقاومتهم غالبًا ما يتم تغييرها أو تجاهلها لتجنب تقييد صفحات الأخبار على فيسبوك. كما وُجد أن معايير مجتمع فيسبوك تلعب دورًا مشابهًا لدور الحراس التقليديين، ولكن باستخدام آليات رقمية معقدة تفرض تحديات جديدة على الإعلام الفلسطيني.

الكلمات المفتاحية: شبكات الأخبار الفلسطينية، معايير مجتمع فيسبوك، تقييد المحتوى الفلسطيني، حارس البوابة، الرقابة الذاتية.