The Solidarity Movement: Mediation and Collaboration for Palestine Online in the UK and Ireland

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Introduction

1 For the activists in contemporary social and political movements, the use of interactive communication media became a requirement because of their great power to create networks for exchanging information that are beyond the control of external powers. Castells describes the importance of being able to communicate internally and externally in an independent way. He says, “social movements exercise counter power by constructing themselves in the first place through a process of autonomous communication, free from the control of those holding institutional powers”.

2 Like many other global causes, the Palestinian struggle under the Israeli control has not only taken place in the form of a political and military struggle, but has also reached cyberspace, as the Internet became another battleground for activists defending their cause.

3 The Palestine solidarity movement is no different from other social change and social movements in seeking ways of communicating autonomously, yet communicating with wider audiences and the public in general remains a crucial goal for the movement in exercising its advocacy and awareness raising on a large scale. New media-based communication became prominent in the movement’s daily solidarity actions, that includes organised boycott campaigns, awareness-raising efforts and networking with counterparts locally and via the web.
This paper focuses on the use of new interactive media for political advocacy, mainly in relation to dissemination of the Palestinian narrative on the worldwide web. It does so by examining this advocacy from the Palestine solidarity groups’ perspectives.

First, it discusses both the re-birth of the solidarity movement as transnational social movement, as well as the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) as cross groups campaign. Then it provides analysis of the mode of collaboration among these groups within the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom, on local, national and transnational levels. Furthermore, the paper touches on the introduction of new technology into the Palestine advocacy work locally and globally and discusses the notion of mediation in relation to the question of Palestine.

Mediation in the Context of Palestine Advocacy

Silverstone positions mediation in a power formula, as he describes it as “fundamentally implicated in the exercise of, and resistance to, power in modern societies”.

There are new forms of production which provide representations adapted to suit the audience and material, whether through text, image, moving image or a combination of all three. In this regard, Silverstone claims that mediation is involved in all communication, as the mediation process comprises meaning and constructing. He further explains that the mediation aspects, which carry adverse influences, involve elements of ambiguity and paradoxicality, physicality, sociability and ethics.

Another conceptualisation of mediation is suggested by Couldry, who proposes that “it may be more productive to see mediation as capturing a variety of dynamics within media flows”, explaining that media flows here are concerned with movement of production as well as circulation and interpretation. The importance of examining mediation processes is more for their ability to provide an understanding of “the social structures and agents than because they tell us about the media per se”.

Competing over the dissemination of favourable narratives is very salient on the web, and the increasing struggle over the power of information is one aspect of the Internet’s influence over contemporary forms of mediation. The market-driven growth of the internet provides an accessible and untraditional arena for the exercise of the power of information by excluded actors in all political and social contexts. The Internet is not only an arena for the exercise of the power of information – a growing arena for the struggle between the marginalised and elites – but also an arena for new forms of representation of the people, ideas and causes that are portrayed adversely by the traditional media.

One of the opportunities that new media provide for the Palestinian narrative to be advanced among global audiences is that of mediating Palestine on the World Wide Web. Mediation consists of the communicated processes through which the production of ideas and their representation take place, and it can also introduce narrative to audiences. Yet representation, whether through text, image or moving image, is also a dynamic process of framing that puts the narrative into a particular perspective, as “media representations … contain specific frames that guide interpretation and understanding”. Thus, understanding mediation requires that we pay attention to
several components, including the means of representation, the frames used and the context in which the process is taking place.

11 Following Siapera’s conceptualisation, the theory of mediation “needs a dynamic account of representation, an account that shows clearly the role played by representation in containing, controlling, and dominating cultural difference, but which also allows room for the subversion, questioning, and rejection of representations”. Thus, representation remains a key principle in the process of mediation. While representation is a main aspect of the process, she also acknowledges the roles of discourse, language and the frames used.

12 In the Palestinian context, mediation of Palestine, in particular through Twitter, has been addressed by Siapera in the context of Palestinian internal politics, in particular the efforts of Palestinian youth to protest over political divisions between the Fatah and Hamas parties. Her findings indicate that dissemination of news and information on Palestine is growing, yet Palestine is still mediated through personalised perspectives:

This mediation leads to a subjective, positioned co-construction of an affective Palestine. This kind of mediation further involves a redistribution of power from fact-based hard news and information produced by mainstream, branded media to diffused networks of news producers, who tweet during real time events as they witness or participate in them, or who tweet their opinions and reactions to the events.

13 Mediation is conceptualised as the means of representation, communication and dissemination of Palestine through the Internet, in particular those which include frames. Mediating Palestine is analysed in the light of the solidarity movement’s attempts to provide alternative representation and narration that can compete with the dominant presentations of the Palestinians by the traditional institutionalised media, better known as the mainstream media.

14 Here, mediation is examined in the light of the extensive use of social media platforms as live venues for informing, connecting and galvanising participation in the many collective actions that took place during the Israeli war on Gaza, July 2014, in major cities in Ireland and the UK.

15 Mediation of Palestine is understood as the presentation of Palestine online by solidarity activists, to provide a different narrative of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. In this narrative, Palestine is referred to as a victim of Zionism and of Israel’s displacement policies and occupation project. Those efforts also include the re-positioning of Palestine as a symbol of the global struggle against oppression and colonisation. In other words, mediation of Palestine in this work means how Palestine – with its different roles both as a place and as a symbol – is being presented by the movement on the Internet.

The re-Birth of Global Solidarity Movement with Palestine

16 Solidarity movements that were created with the notion of standing together with people who are suffering developed in the 1980s. The solidarity movements among activists in occupied countries had an impact both on oppressed peoples and on the people of the occupying force.
Since the mid-1960s, the Palestinian national movement, led by the Palestine Liberation Organisation- PLO, has been the major force confronting Israel in its endeavour to achieve liberation and self-determination for the people of Palestine. However, this national movement has managed to establish many partnerships, among which are the global solidarity organisations.

Little scholarly work has addressed the role of such groups in the Palestinian national struggle. Apart from books and research studies addressing specific stories and accounts of International Solidarity Movement (ISM) activists or BDS campaigns, little academic work has looked at the Palestine solidarity movement in western contexts as a form of collective action movement, and its input to internal Palestinian politics.

For clarification, two forms of organised solidarity collective action should be distinguished. The first is the ISM, which consists of activists who make journeys to Palestine, mainly to the West Bank and Gaza, to live with Palestinian families and participate in voluntary work and peaceful demonstrations.

The second organised form of solidarity, which this paper is concerned with, is the solidarity campaigns that are active around the world in campaigning for the Palestinian people's rights through advocacy campaigns around the world, including in Europe. Similarities are found between the two forms of solidarity organisational work (solidarity campaigns and ISM), both in their missions and in the activists involved; they are part of the extended global solidarity movement. However, each is working in a different territorial space, with the first operating in Palestine among Palestinian communities, and the other acting around the globe.

The worthy, but limited, literature that addresses the activism of Palestine solidarity groups has examined it mainly within the United States context. However, the literature that is available on this growing movement suggests that there have been some major waves of solidarity activism. These can be divided into four main periods: the 1960s to 1980s, in particular during the Israeli war against the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) fighters in Lebanon in the early 1980s; the first and second Palestinian Intifadas of 1987 and 2000; and more recently after the BDS call of 2005.

Although the idea of solidarity with the people of Palestine is as old as the conflict, solidarity as a growing and much developed global movement has been shaped during the last fifteen years. It has been argued that the new wave of solidarity movements with Palestine represented a revival after the second Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation (Intifada), better known as the ‘Al-Aqsa’ Intifada of 2000. During this time, demonstrations and meetings were held and petitions signed by activists who also later joined the movements against the war in Iraq.

Many campaigns and activities organised and implemented by various Palestine solidarity groups in Ireland and the UK have emerged as a direct response to Israeli military escalation in the occupied Palestinian territories. They have become more organised and consistent since the Intifada of 2000, and more activists have joined them after the Israeli Wars on Gaza in 2008 and 2012.

The rebirth of the movement after the second Palestinian Intifada in 2000 could also be seen as a response to the political failure of the US-sponsored talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians, in the light of US policies that are based on the Israeli vision of the conflict and aim to manage the conflict rather than solve it.
The movement has become more global, more widespread and made up of many different organisations; some have strong international ties in the form of affiliations, branches and associations, while others work similarly in different countries, sharing similar discourses, actions and goals. Others define the solidarity movement as that movement which comprises international solidarity activists and their partners, the Palestinian activists. Saba sees that “activism by internationals and activism by Palestinians has come to embody a loose but coherent social movement that is central to the advancement of Palestinian rights in a way that extends beyond solidarity”14.

Although a great deal of Palestine-related activism takes place within the Palestinian occupied territories, it has been argued that Palestinian activism has local and international extensions15. Palestinian activism includes many organisations that are associated with the global solidarity network, such as university students, trade unions and religious and peace-promoting societies.

The solidarity movement during the apartheid regime in South Africa was similar to the global solitary movement in Palestine. This has become clearer in recent years, as the Palestinians and their allies around the globe have managed to copy the example of the South African movement by endorsing and advocating the BDS campaign against Israel. In their description of the way in which the BDS call was thought of, Hanieh and Ziadah stated that:

>a real turning point took place in 2004–2005 when a variety of efforts around the globe began to coalesce around an analysis of Israel as an apartheid state that demanded a strategic response of boycott, divestment and sanctions in the manner of the struggle against South African apartheid16.

Defining the Solidarity Movement

The working definition of the movement defined by the author is as follows:

The solidarity movement is a form of transnational advocacy network that leads solidarity-oriented collective action. It is formed by multiple organisations that adopt solidarity with Palestine as their main mission in their social and political contexts. It is a combination of local, national, regional and international groups, societies and activists in and outside universities. Involved groups have similar missions of challenging media bias by advocating the Palestinian narrative, implementing campaigns that aim at changing the current situation in Palestine through raising awareness in their local surroundings, lobbying local decision makers and members of parliaments and endorsing and advocating the BDS call.

The Palestine solidarity groups in the UK and the Republic of Ireland are different in size and levels of online and offline activity. They also have different political backgrounds, areas of focus and specialisations. The four leading organisations and their branches in the UK and Ireland, which are the chosen components of the case study, form a ‘primary nerve’ of the solidarity movement network. They have similar discourses, missions, tactics and campaigns, including online activities, yet each interacts differently with affiliates, external organisations and allies, as well as with each other.
Adoption of New Technologies and Pro-Palestine Activism

For the activists in contemporary social and political movements, the use of interactive communication media became a requirement because of their great power to create networks for exchanging information that are beyond the control of external powers. Castells describes the importance of being able to communicate internally and externally in an independent way, emphasising "social movements exercise counter power by constructing themselves in the first place through a process of autonomous communication, free from the control of those holding institutional powers".

Like many other global causes, the Palestinian–Israeli conflict has not only taken place in the form of a political and military struggle, but has also reached cyberspace, as the Internet became another battleground for activists defending their cause. For Palestinians, the Internet was an opportunity to interact with a global audience and tell their side of the story, a side that the mainstream global media do not usually cover.

Even prior to the social media era, the Internet’s impact in connecting Palestinians with the outside world was found to be valuable. While social media may have reshaped online political participation, the Internet’s original influence on the connectivity of young Palestinians was studied by, for example, Aouragh. Aouragh noted that “immobility and control was partly overcome when Internet usage enabled direct transnational communication and grassroots participation in news production”. She explained that the ISM is an example of a well-organised group that works in Palestine, and has the Internet “at the core of its work”. She pointed out that recruiting new volunteers is done online, and that the official website of the movement is multilingual. However, she added that the group's activists will still travel to be involved in public speaking, protests and other activities, which indicates that offline activism was still important and non-replicable.

Earlier studies point to the beginning of the incorporation of the Internet in the activities of solidarity organisations, mainly through dedicated websites to connect and organise potential volunteers interested in visiting Palestine.

The connectivity of the Internet provides Palestinians with the ability to communicate with their immediate social surroundings and with the external world, including the Palestinian diaspora, bypassing the borders and political realities on the ground that limit their ability to have physical interaction. Social and political factors may play a recognisable role in shaping emerging virtual groups. That is not to say that communication among Palestinian Internet users is based only on social circles and political divisions, but social interaction and political activism in Palestinian society is certainly influenced by these two factors.

Aouragh also examined the role of the Internet in creating transnational links and images of Palestinian communities, and investigated how the Internet is used to mobilise local and transnational (pro) Palestinian activism. Through the Internet, Palestinian activists and groups target international, mainly western, audiences to show their side of the story, while at the same time engaging in ‘live confrontations’
with pro-Israel online users. Similarly, virtual space has been used as a means of collaboration between Palestinians and their friends, international solidarity groups and pro-Palestine activists for exchanging news and organising campaigns.

38 Although the Internet provides an open platform for Palestinians to use, in which their voices can be heard globally, Siapera finds that it does not contribute much to the issue of Palestine. She says that “rather than democratizing – or conversely radicalizing – the Web seems to contribute little to the issue of Palestine, which can then be seen as still ruled by the old-fashioned principles of realpolitik”.

39 Although digital media, particularly the Internet, proved to be assets for pro-Palestine activists, offline networking between activists is still essential for the success of the movement’s work. In the US context, Marmura explains in his research on peace camp use of the Internet and US Middle East policy that:

> although the Internet technology has clearly become essential to the mobilisation efforts of this project identity, care should be taken not to conflate the Internet’s usefulness to Arab/Israeli peace activists with its potential to alter the American political status quo in their favor.

40 He argues that, although the pro-Palestine camp in the USA is less resourced and less influential than the Zionist organisations, the Internet provides an added value to their activism.

**National Collaboration, Transnational Coordination and Networking with Allies**

41 One cannot generalise from an understanding of the solidarity movement in the UK and Ireland to solidarity groups around the globe, as each organisation is affected by local factors, sometimes working in favour of their activities and sometimes against. Cassanos’s examination of the solidarity movement in the USA, for example, suggests that in that country the movement only weakly connects local groups into a decentralised network, and the challenges that movement activists face have an impact on their ability to seize political opportunities.

42 In the UK and Ireland, the main groups in the core layer form natural alliances with similar groups and local grassroots movements, civil society organisations, as well as with unions and anti-war movements. However, collaboration with these partners is not a daily affair and is not always noticeable among the general membership. Meanwhile, cross-border collaboration among leading groups in Ireland and the UK is not as vibrant as was expected.

**Internal Collaboration at National Level**

43 One mode of collaboration and networking among the leading national groups and the students’ network is done online, including through emails. Meanwhile the annual general meetings are an opportunity for exchanging ideas, and setting the long-term agenda of activism, as well as for electing executive members.

44 On the other hand, collaboration among the students’ network components is highly noticeable, including through the Internet. Student and university societies have a higher level of coordination among themselves through annual meetings and through
interactive Internet-mediated platforms, mainly closed groups on Facebook, which they use to exchange information, resources, ideas and experiences.

**Limited Cross-Border Coordination**

The examination of the relationships and observation of the activities of the solidarity groups in Ireland and the UK suggests that bilateral coordination is limited at best. Even the expected collaboration between the major groups within the UK appears to be seasonal. More collaboration takes place across groups within the same city or country.

The solidarity groups in the UK and Ireland have a limited level of collaboration: the interviews conducted and the observation throughout the research lead to the conclusion that transnational UK-Irish coordination is not a priority. Cross-border collaboration among the countries of the UK and with Ireland has not been identified extensively during the period of the study; there have only been limited occasions in which they have collaborated through the European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine, which coordinates efforts among all Europe-based solidarity groups.

This limited cross-national collaboration cannot be due to the lack of available communication technologies: there are massive interactive Internet-based and digital communications available that would facilitate any cross-national collaboration.

It seems that the priority of empowering the movement locally, including building and capitalising on alliances, still guides the collaboration strategies of the movement’s leading groups. The existing communication technologies, close geographical location, lack of language barrier and shared goals of the Ireland and UK groups provide unique opportunities for them to increase the level of collaboration not only between leaders but also among activists: this could have a positive impact on coordinated collective actions.

**The Internet Factor on Campus**

The student network’s reliance on Internet-based platforms for collaboration, informing the online audiences and their followers and organising activities is very high. Almost every Palestine society in UK and Ireland universities has a presence on the Internet, through a blog, websites, and particularly Facebook and Twitter. The student network works differently: individual groups are not officially part of a national group, as they are only active within a specific campus. However, sharing experiences and implementing similar activities and campaigns are part of the whole approach to student networking.

A good example of cross-campus collaboration among the UK-based university societies is Israeli Apartheid Week, an annual global activity, especially on campuses. It consists of a series of activities and lectures that aim to show the apartheid nature of Israeli policies in Palestine. The 2013 version of Israeli Apartheid Week was jointly organised by several London-based university societies (UCL Palestine Society, SOAS Palestine Society, KCL Action Palestine, Goldsmith’s Palestine Society, UEL Palestine Liberation Society, LSE Palestine Society, City University Palestine Society, Kingston University Palestine Society and QMUL Palestine Society), and several Palestinian speakers toured
the campuses to deliver lectures, under the theme: ‘Voices from Palestine: resisting racism and apartheid’.

Networking with Allies

While networking with local allies is maintained, there is weak bilateral engagement with these allies at member level and this is particularly apparent online. The content found on the movement’s platforms on the web seldom addresses issues that are of interest to the solidarity movement’s allies, except perhaps to individuals in their personal capacity. Furthermore, interactions with the social bases of allies are not so evident, including online.

This limited networking between allies and the movement at the grassroots level is reflected in weak participation from non-associated/affiliated activists in many local activities organised by the movement. The exception is the massive protests and rallies that are well organised with allies during crisis times in Palestine, such as during the Israeli wars on Gaza 2008–09 and 2014. This also explains why the organising of collective action through the web is usually limited to individuals associated with the movement, with very limited online exchange of information and organising with other social change groups at national or local level.

Relations with the Palestinian National Movement

Within the solidarity movement, there is a specific sensitivity about getting involved in internal Palestinian politics, and commenting on the path that the Palestinian national movement should follow. Landy explains that the focus of the solidarity movement has been on Israeli actions rather than supporting Palestinian actions, due to internal Palestinian conflicts. That is also due to the way Palestinians are seen by groups in the solidarity movement as politically independent, with the movement showing solidarity rather than interfering.

I argue that solidarity groups, in the case of Palestine, deal with problems by ‘hiding behind the flag’ – that is, they support an uncomplicated Palestinian nationalism which sees ‘the Palestinians’ as unitary and which refuses to get involved in Palestinian politics. Groups do so for very good reasons. This refusal is a way of understanding Palestinians as autonomous political subjects with whom one is in solidarity, rather than objects to be manipulated to serve the political aspirations of activists.

The official stance of most of the solidarity groups reaffirms continually that they do not take sides in internal disputes, particularly that between Fatah, the ruling party of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), and Hamas, the de facto ruling power of the Gaza strip. However, the policies of the PNA and President Mahmoud Abbas on relations with the USA and troubling political relations with Israel including security coordination are not supported by many of the solidarity activists.

An active leader in the Glasgow Caledonian University group has pointed to the importance of embracing solidarity as a means of supporting and following the Palestinian lead (personal communication, 2013). A good example of this concept of ‘following the Palestinian lead’ is the BDS campaigns. The BDS, which is gaining momentum globally, including in European and US campuses, is a result of the BDS call
that was issued in 2005 by the Palestinian civil society organisation, which consists of representatives of the whole spectrum of Palestinian political and civil society.

**BDS Dominating the Scene**

56 On 9 July 2005, 171 Palestinian civil society organisations issued the BDS statement. These organisations included non-governmental organisations, movements, political parties and unions from all parts of Palestine. They issued a call to the international community to boycott Israel, divest from business cooperation with it and impose sanctions against it until it complied with the United Nations resolutions related to the Palestine cause. The call, which came to be known as the BDS call, was received positively by many global civil society organisations, solidarity activists, pro-Palestine organisations and supporters of the Palestine cause.

57 The statement had called on the international community to adopt BDS until Israel ended its occupation of all occupied Arab lands, recognised the rights of Palestinians living in Israel to be equal citizens and respected the UN resolutions, particularly resolution 194, which gives Palestinian refugees the right to the homes that they, their parents and their grandparents were forced to leave in 1948.

58 Ten years after the BDS call, many noticeable successes have been identified. In Europe, the USA and other parts of the world, universities, unions, academics and celebrities have endorsed the BDS and announced their support for the Palestinian national struggle against the Israeli occupation. Music performers and singers have cancelled tours in Israel as a response to the solidarity activists’ call to adhere to BDS. Student unions have passed motions that endorse the call, in which they urge their universities to cut ties with companies and institutions that are involved in any kind of cooperation with the Israeli occupation authorities, particularly those companies that are working within the Palestinian land occupied in 1967.

59 Academics have adopted the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), which is another organised boycott effort initiated in 2004 by local academics and intellectuals who urged their international counterparts to boycott Israeli academics and academic institutions that are complicit with the Israeli occupation authorities.

60 The important role that international academics and students can play in changing the current unjust situation in Palestine is assessed by Hammond, who argues that action
led by academics and students on an international level can have an impact on the situation in Palestine.

Only international action amongst academics and students will change the current conditions. In the most peaceful way possible that is open to people of conscience, a grassroots movement must be encouraged that says no to all the cosy collaboration with Israel. Academics and students have taken a lead that is allowing everyone to rediscover the importance of justice and the absolute need to speak out against Israel's occupation.

BDS's on-going successes could be due to “the links established between civil society organisations internationally and within Palestine itself [which] have also been significant.” The growing power of BDS among solidarity activists is as a mechanism to engage societies in the conflict in the absence of political pressure on Israel from the international community. One of the aims of the BDS activists, according to Hallward, is to reframe the discourse on conflict, and in doing that they use actions similar to those of social movement activists.

On the new media levels, not only the internet facilitated the flow of information from the isolated Palestinians living under the Israeli control to the outer world, it also made the debate on the question of Palestine among global online communities, particularly on social media sites a prominent matter. Within this information saturated atmosphere- where events in Palestine are being posted, twitted and shown live online, solidarity actions gained attention globally, mainly during Israeli assaults. That had several effects on BDS campaigns.

On the one hand, BDS became the main campaign that sympathizers with Palestinians are defending, justifying and calling for-as a response to Israel actions. Subsequently, that led to shedding light on the global campaign among internet users from around the globe. On the other hand, the magnifying effect of the internet on solidarity actions, mainly BDS success, has contributed to furthering and raising levels of attack on the campaign from Israel and its allies, including on social media sites.

**Concluding Remarks on Recruitment of Online Media in Solidarity Activism**

While this research paper is extracted from a wider doctoral thesis conducted by the author, the paper introduces forms of collaboration among local solidarity groups, and the recruitment of new technology in coordination and collective action.

The distinct presence of the solidarity organisations on the Internet through websites, social media accounts and other online interactive channels, has been found to be active throughout the year, and to be more active in terms of providing contents in all forms-text, image and moving images – especially during crises in Palestine.

Internet-based interactive platforms have positively contributed to making activists’ opinions widely heard and presented online, in addition to enabling them to instantly report events and news, and mobilise and organise collective solidarity actions. This presence not only contributes to the goals of awareness raising, and advocating the Palestinian narrative, but also keeps solidarity organisations in constant contact with followers, associates, activists and potential participants in future mobilising and organising efforts.
Regular solidarity activities consist of three areas of action: mobilising, advocacy, and lobbying. These forms of daily activity become more extensive and are accompanied by significant street-based action in the form of protests and vigils whenever a new wave of escalation takes place in Palestine.

These responsive solidarity actions serve two purposes for activists and supporters of Palestinian rights. On the one hand, they send a message to the Palestinians that they are not alone in their struggle, and this means a good deal symbolically to them. On the other hand, escalation in Palestine can receive great coverage in the news, which is an opportunity for creating supportive public opinion and better informing the public. The higher the tension and escalation in Palestine, the quicker these groups become active on the web, and speed up their level of organising, galvanising, and implementing solidarity actions on the streets.

That is to say, escalation in Palestine provides an opportunity not only for supporting the Palestinians and condemning the Israeli aggression, but also for intensifying action at the three levels of activism: informing, advocating and lobbying. Escalation in Palestine is found to be an opportunity for the solidarity movement to further advocate the need for adoption of BDS by civil society organisations and to engage in strengthening alliances with local organisations.

Looking at the relation between the intensification of advocacy efforts and new waves of Israeli escalation against Palestinians from the perspective of the political opportunity that Tarrow discusses leads one to look at the movement’s activism as a form of collective action that aims to change not the political system, but rather public opinion towards the Palestinian cause. In other words, seizing political opportunities may not necessarily come in the form of opportunities for implementing changes in political structure, but they also can be seen as opportunities to address public opinion. The challenges can also be tackled through pushing forward a preferred narrative through media platforms, including online media. Through seizing the opportunity of the news coverage of events in Palestine during a crisis, the movement can engage in responsive actions to defend the Palestinian narrative as a priority.

The rise of solidarity online communities, which can be noticed on social media sites, including Facebook and Twitter, shows that a different approach to mediating Palestine is taking place online, which differs from what the mainstream media provide.

Members of emerging and constantly growing online solidarity communities that consist of Palestine-based activists, solidarity activists, journalists and academics are active, especially in times of crisis, in exchanging similar Palestine-related news, pro-Palestine articles, news resources and opinions which are supportive of the Palestinian people.

Online media not only enriched the structure of the online solidarity communities, but provides interested activists with news from the Palestinian perspective, which they used to disseminate the Palestinian narrative and challenge the opposing narratives.

The Internet, which produced the online activism that is increasingly shaping the organisation of the movement’s collective action, is not limited to facilitating internal mobilisation. It advances the movement’s position within the information–power equation in relation to the Palestinians’ struggle in global arenas. In addition, the steadily growing efforts to confront the Israeli narrative and challenge the bias of the
mainstream media is no less of an important influence on the movement’s online activism.

75 As noticed in the solidarity groups online contents, the tendency to focus on the conflict only from a human rights perspective has led to limited presentation of the political and social differences of Palestinian society. Influenced by one angle of representation that adheres to the oppressor vs. victim doctrine, the movement avoids addressing the different voices within Palestinian society. The lack of presentation of the Palestinian youth’s support for resisting the Israeli military during the war on Gaza in 2014 is a good example of that.

76 Although it is viable and understandable, the approaches based on advocacy of human rights have implications for mediating Palestine. Among these is the modest representation of Palestinian cultural identity. Content and material that addresses cultural aspects of Palestine and its people is limited at best. Increasing the proportion of Palestinian cultural content could contribute to the movement’s mission to be a voice for the Palestinians in the Irish and UK contexts, and provide the public with the wider understanding of Palestinian society, heritage and culture that is usually absent from mainstream media coverage.

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This paper examines the concept of online mediation in relation to representation of Palestine through examining the UK and Ireland based solidarity movement’s contemporary collective action. Contemporary mediation of Palestine both as a location where the displacement and control of an entire people is taking place and as a symbol of an indigenous struggle that global activists relate to are prominent in the discourse of the solidarity groups, mainly in contents of their social media accounts. The paper highlights the solidarity movement’s online activism methods in relation to networking, advocacy and lobbying, and discusses the varied modes of collaboration among the diverse solidarity groups that takes place partially via online interactive platforms. It argues for the significance of the Internet as a venue for expression, for mediating messages and as a mobilising tool, as used by solidarity groups involved in the advocacy for the Palestinian cause. Through studying how online media platforms are shaping the dynamics of the movement’s communication, the text provides an understanding of the ways in which Internet platforms are contributing to the dissemination of favourable narratives. In that, the paper examines contemporary mediation of Palestine throughout social media platforms.

Keywords: Palestine solidarity movement, online mediation, Palestine, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, online activism, social media sites, BDS

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