#Hashtag 2024

Hashtag Palestine

2024

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Introduction:

During the genocidal war on the Gaza Strip, the digital space witnessed a virulent battle in which the Palestinian narrative was subject to systemic attempts of marginalization. In a world where technology has become a tool of communication and conveying facts, Palestinians found themselves not only subjugated to occupation and discrimination but were also under a strict digital control that hindered their ability to express their suffering under harsh reality.

The report #Hashtag Palestine documents the digital violations against Palestinians in 2024, targeting and silencing their voices on social media platforms. Their posts were deleted or restricted in a manner that reflects a striking bias that favors the Israeli narrative. Many such platforms allowed for the dissemination of an unrestrained hateful and violent discourse against Palestinians, despite their dangerous implications on the ground.

In this context, the present report observes the tight bond between the Israeli government and the technology companies which deploy digital infrastructure to enhance military control and achieve political goals, to the detriment of Palestinians. The report also sheds light on the discriminatory policies and practices on digital economy platforms that further marginalize Palestinians in the digital space and enhances their isolation from other parts of the world, as in the case of PayPal.

The report aims to depict a whole picture of the digital challenges Palestinians and their proponents faced in 2024, and places the documented violations within a broader context, to understand its impact on civil, political and economic rights. The report also seeks to provide practical recommendations for enhancing digital justice, and for urging the international community and technology companies to adhere to human rights and transparency standards, and guarantee Palestinians a free, secure and fair access to the digital space.

The importance of this report lies in the urgent need to shed light on these ongoing flagrant violations and call for a global action to guarantee the protection of Palestinians' digital rights, which are an integral part of the broader struggle for achieving freedom and justice.

Executive summary

#Hashtag Palestine 2024 report depicts a whole picture of the digital reality of Palestinians, considering the ongoing bloody Israeli attacks and the ongoing violations of their digital rights. The Israeli war on the Gaza Strip persisted throughout the past year, bringing about 150,000 casualties including injuries, let alone the near-total destruction in most areas of life and infrastructure in the Gaza Strip.[1]

This had a large impact on the digital space and the Palestinians' digital rights, as social media platforms, -such as Meta, still restrict Palestinian content, deleting it or limiting its visibility, further silencing Palestinian voices and enabling the Israeli narrative to gain hegemony in the digital scene, especially during wars and major crisis. Meanwhile, and as this report demonstrates, different social media platforms, especially Telegram and Meta allowed for the unrestrained dissemination of violent and hateful speech against Palestinians on a large scale.

The report addresses the contribution of the Israeli authorities to the restriction of digital rights, through their action and practices on the ground, like phone and social media inspections at Israeli military checkpoints, and the enhancement of surveillance systems, like facial recognition security cameras in Palestinian cities and neighborhoods, and punitive laws like the "Computer Data Intrusion" law.

The report also shows the Israeli authorities' misuse of technology to further enhance their control over Palestinians by weaponizing AI tools. These tools are used to develop techniques and technological systems based on artificial intelligence, not only to collect personal data and violate individual privacy but also to achieve military goals. These tools include systems like "Lavender" and "Habsora" for the unconsented collection of personal information about Palestinians and the achievement of military goals. These tools, promoted as security and crime-control systems, are used for killing Palestinians, targeting civilians without real human intervention, reflecting the systemic discrimination practised against them.

Concerning infrastructures, the report points out the massive damage to internet and communication infrastructure in Gaza, as 75% of this infrastructure was partially or completely destroyed, in addition to the frequent complete or partial internet outages, and the strict limitations on internet services, severely limiting access to vital information during the war.

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1. Al-Jazeera.net. "An updated count of Gaza's martyrs and the largest declared losses of the occupation forces since the War of October 7", 02/01/2025. Link is available here.

The report also points out the role of digital economy platforms, like PayPal and Go Fund Me in restricting the transfer of financial aid to organizations and individuals in the Gaza Strip, due to strict censorship measures and removal of accounts associated with the Gaza Strip, thus hindering the rapid arrival of financial aid, considering the urgent need for this aid, as a result of the war that caused an unprecedented human crisis in the Gaza Strip.

The report also addresses the prosecution of human rights organizations, media platforms and activists on the ground by Israeli Authorities and online by the platforms themselves, to intimidate and silence Palestinian voices while preventing them from revealing the Israeli practices in the Gaza Strip.

The report calls on the international community and human rights organizations to take immediate actions that guarantee the accountability of prominent technology institutions regarding their contribution to digital occupation. It also emphasizes that these institutions should adhere to international human rights standards and conduct independent and transparent evaluations of their policies impact on the digital rights of Palestinians.

The report concludes with an urgent call for bridging this digital gap in a way that guarantees digital justice for the Palestinians and enables them to express their narrative freely. Achieving this goal necessitates collective efforts by the international community, human rights organizations and Palestinian civil society organizations, to tackle these ongoing violations and enhance the protection of digital rights in Palestine

Research Methodology

In its examination and evaluation of the state of Palestinian digital rights, this report relies on a comprehensive literature review, including articles, reports and research papers published by experts and organizations specialized in the digital domain, in addition to statements and position papers by technology institutions and governments. The report revolves around Palestinians' digital rights in the context of the current shifts intermingled with security/military, political and economic dimensions concerning Palestinian people within Israel, the West Bank or the Gaza Strip. The methodology is based on an analysis of the literature review and the media coverage, with a special emphasis put on statements, documentation, reports and research published by 7amleh, considered a major reference in this field.

Freedom of Speech and Opinion

The Israeli Authorities

The Israeli authorities have witnessed an unprecedented wave of campaigns of prosecution and suppression targeting Palestinian students because of their opinions expressed on social media. According to a report published by Adalah Center, disciplinary measures were taken against 124 Palestinian students in 36 university and educational institutions, where 5% experienced suspension or expulsion after they had published posts that sympathised with Gaza or expressed their identity and belonging. Supported by right-wing extremist groups within the campuses, the campaign has particularly targeted female students, who constituted 79% of the cases. The report also demonstrated that these measures, approved by the Israeli Minister of Education, targeted only Palestinian students, where no measures were taken against Jewish students who published hateful content.[2]

Recent data released by Israeli Authorities shows that 92% of the investigations opened by Israel, under the pretext of "incitement", against Israeli citizens, mostly because of social media posts, targeted[3] Palestinian Arabs, and they have all ended up with convictions in court.

Moreover, Israel conducted mass arrests of hundreds of Palestinian male and female students within Israel and occupied Jerusalem because of social media posts; by the end of April 2024, indictments were filed against 162 persons for social media posts.[4]

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2. Report: Repression of Palestinian Students in Israeli Universities and Colleges. Adalah, 05/09/2024. Link is available here
3. This is the way: A purely right-wing government: 92% percent of the files opened for incitement targeted Arabs; all lawsuits ended with conviction. 16/12/2024. Link
4. This information was obtained from Adalah center.

For example, Prof. Nadira Shalhoub-Kivorkian was arrested, interrogated and accused of inciting violence and terrorism, and praising "terrorist" organizations[5] because of her academic activism.

This incident is merely a small part of a broader Israel campaign against freedom of speech, especially for Palestinian citizens. Since October 7, Palestinians in Israel have been subject to suspension from work, expulsion, arrest and surveillance because of social media posts supporting Gaza, with a major aim in mind: silencing Palestinian voices.

Moreover, Palestinian youth in the West Bank and Jerusalem have been subject to increasing pressures reflected in self-censorship of their digital activism. A report published by 7amleh showed that 40% of the youth deleted political posts, while 50% reduced their online activity because of content moderation practices by platforms like Meta. This has narrowed the safe digital space for freedom of expression, representing thus an increasingly repressive environment. The report also pointed out the increasing fear and self-censorship among Palestinian youth, due to this degradation of digital security. Sixty percent of the respondents reported that they practice self-censorship on their digital activity, while different parties, including the Israeli occupation, digital platforms, the Palestinian authority and private entities take part in violating the digital rights of Palestinians, rendering the electronic space increasingly unsafe for expressing political opinions.[6]

The same applied in Israel. It was demonstrated that feelings of insecurity on social media platforms and lack of trust towards technology have deepened, leading to a reduced digital activity on different platforms. Seventy percent of the respondents in a research conducted by 7amleh reported they were verbally aggressed on social media platforms, which ceased to be a safe place.[7]

Social Media Platforms' Companies

Targeting Palestinian content on social media platforms is a direct violation of freedom of speech. These suppressive practices included deletion of posts, suspension of accounts, "shadow banning" and algorithmic manipulation. These measures deprive the audience from accessing precise information about the Palestinian cause, thus restricting the public debate and supporting biased narratives. This digital suppression does not only violate the principles of freedom of speech and transparency, but also further enhances the

5. Arab48, "End of investigations with Prof. Nadira Shalhoub Kivorkian", 02/05/2024. The link is available here.
6. 7amleh Center. Digital Security Among Palestinian Youth Citizens of Israel: A Study on Threats and Challenges in Light of the War on Gaza, 19/08/2024. Link is available here.
7. 7amleh Center. Digital Security among Palestinian Youth citizens of Israel: A Study on Threats and Challenges in Light of the War on Gaza, 19/08/2024. Link is available here.

digital marginalization of Palestinians and influences the global view of their suffering. It also hinders their ability to communicate and practice online economic activity or seek professional development.[8]

During the war on Gaza, the social media platform "X" stood out as an alternative to the traditional platforms that impose disproportionate content moderation on Palestinian voices. But despite the platform's claimed commitment to respect freedom of speech, its policies contradict this claim. While Palestinian users experienced fewer restrictions, compared to other platforms, like Facebook, many accounts of journalists and left-wing activists supporting Palestine, were surprisingly suspended, before all accounts were retrieved following the great tumult caused by this measure. Accounts of prominent groups and movements, like PalAction, were unjustifiably restricted, provoking questions and doubts about the platform's commitment to equality and freedom of speech. Moreover, the updated policy on "abuse and harassment" was particularly worrying, as it might imply restrictions on Palestinian content, as it was the update that enables categorizing any content denying the so-called "violent incident" as abuse, leading to the suspension of accounts.[9]

Meanwhile, "Meta" practiced disproportionate and discriminatory content moderation and on Palestinian content throughout the past year, greatly restricting its visibility and dissemination, especially considering this intensified censorship since the beginning of the genocidal war on Gaza. Pages and accounts of journalists and media outlets, like Radio Raya FM, 24 FM, Mondoweiss and others, were greatly impacted following the deletions and suspension of their pages.[10]

7amleh published a report presenting testimonies of twenty male and female journalists and influencers about Meta's censorship measures and their direct impact on the visibility and dissemination of Palestinian content, in addition to its social, mental, economic and professional impact on them, including Arab48 website and the journalists Amneh Khandaqji, Ali Obaidaat, Adnan Barq, Muthana an-Najjar and others. According to the different testimonies, the accounts of these users and many others were subject to unprecedented restrictions and suspensions on social media platforms, without any justification, and they all agreed that Meta silences Palestinian voices, regardless of their professionality, genuineness and precision in portraying the real image of what is happening in Palestine.[11]

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8. Sidqi Abu Dhair. "Digital Oppression: How Do Social Media Platforms Impede the Palestinian Narrative's Access to the World?". Al-Quds, 06/07/2024. Link here.
9. 7amleh Center: "Position paper on the Impact of X Platform's Content Moderation Policies on Palestinian Digital Rights", 14/03/2024. The link is available here.
10. "Palestinian Digital Rights in the Context of Genocide and Big Tech Accountability One Year After the War on Gaza, 15/09/2024. Link is available here.
11. 7amleh Center: "Erased and Suppressed: Palestinian Testimonies of Meta's Censorship". 18/12/2024. ". 18/12/2024. Link is available here.

This was confirmed by a BBC investigation showing that Meta has remarkably reduced the visibility of Palestinian media outlets, thus reducing interaction with this content 77% compared to pre-Gaza war figures. Meanwhile, the visibility and interaction with the pages of Israeli media outlets and pages of Arab media outlets have increased. This demonstrates that Meta targeted the Palestinian content and narrative. The report also shows that Meta imposed stricter measures on the ability to comment on posts published on Palestinians' Instagram accounts, implying flagrant discrimination against Palestinian content.[12]

Jordana Cutler, Public Policy Director for Israel and the Jewish diaspora, faced harsh criticism for her supposed attempts to censor Instagram posts by "Students for Justice in Palestine" (SJP), a group criticizing the Israeli policies in Gaza. Internal records show that Cutler categorized posts according to the "Dangerous Organisations and Individuals" policy in Meta, hence the worries regarding her influence, considering her previous role in the Israeli government and her position which she deems representative of the Israeli interest within Meta. Experts warn that such participation implies a restriction of freedom of speech and raises questions about the influence of foreign governments on Meta's policies. The appeals for further accountability and fair representation in content governance shed light on the broader challenges of maintaining justice in managing politically sensitive issues.[13]

However, positive progress was Meta's announcement that it will start considering the term "Shaheed" a conditionally neutral term, thus enabling its use on Instagram and Facebook, without content deletion in most cases, unless it is associated with what the company deems violent. This change follows the recommendations presented by the company's Oversight Board, which had previously called for revoking the ban imposed on this term, considering the previous approach erroneous and unjustifiably oppressive of the discourse of millions of users, following consistent advocacy efforts by organizations concerned with Palestinian digital rights. It is worth indicating that Meta used to categorize the term "Shaheed" under what it deems "terrorism" before its recent transformation into a neutral term, after a review that lasted for a whole year.[14]

In a different context, Meta's Oversight Board asserted that the use of the expression "from the river to the sea" does not violate the company's content policies. The council reviewed three cases of Facebook posts that contained this slogan, expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people, and concluded that the content does not imply any hateful discourse or incitement to violence; therefore, there is nothing that necessitates its deletion. These reviewed cases represent peaceful support of the rights of Palestinians. This occurs amid the context of the polemic about the slogan, which Israel considers "anti-Semitic." Meta

12. BBC. "How Facebook restricted news in Palestinian territories", December 18, 2024. Link is available here.
13. Report. Meta's Israel Policy Chief Tried To Suppress Pro Palestinian Instagram Posts. The Intercept, 21/10/2024. Link is available here.
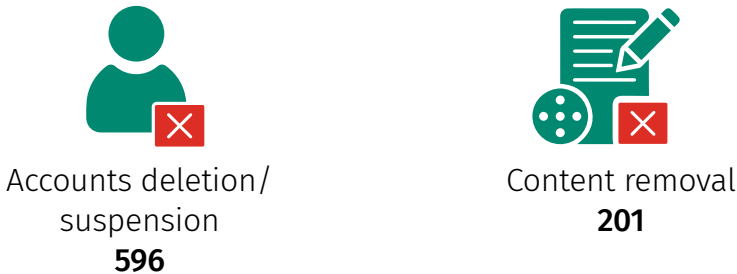14. "Meta. PAO on the treatment of the term Shaheed", 02/07/2024. Link is available here.

approved of the recommendation presented by its board of advisors to allow for the use of the term on its platforms, as long as it is dissociated from calls or praises of violence and hatred.[15]
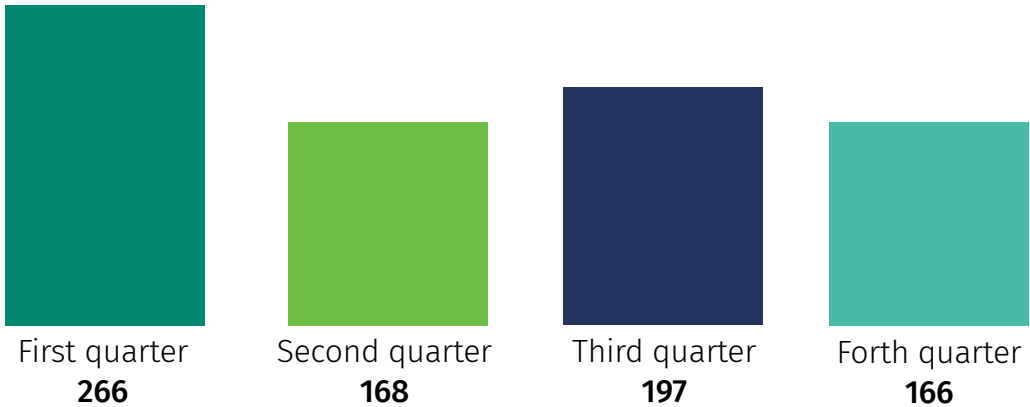
As for the "TikTok" application, it encountered major challenges in the United States, as Congress voted in favor of a bill for banning TikTok, leaving the holding Chinese "Bytdance" with two options: selling the application to American entities or facing the risk of banning, which would cut off 170 million American users. While the banning was justified by the worrying Chinese influence, reports point out that the drive behind this decision is related to the increasing support of the Palestinian cause on the platform, especially as the United States House of Representatives paralleled anti-Semitism to anti-Zionism. Legislators accused "TikTok" of publishing content supporting Hamas, fearing its impact on American youth. According to media reports, like "NBC" and "The Independent," the increasing support for the Palestinian cause on "TikTok" was a major reason behind the intensified calls for banning the application.[16]

In this regard, 7amleh has documented 797 violations, deletions, and suspensions by social media platforms against Palestinians in the past year.

Type-based categorization of violations:

Accounts deletion/
suspension
596

Content removal
201

Categorization of violations according to quarterly periods:

First quarter
266

Second quarter
168

Third quarter
197

Forth quarter
166

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15. "Meta. From the River to the Sea Bundle", 01/11/2024. Link is available here.
16. Al-Jazeera.net "TikTok and the war on Gaza... Is the United States targeting the platform for security reasons", 06/04/2024. Link is available here.

Categorization of violations according to the platforms:

Facebook
163

Instagram
428

Twitter
9

TikTok
166

WhatsApp
7

Google
(YouTube)
6

Other
18
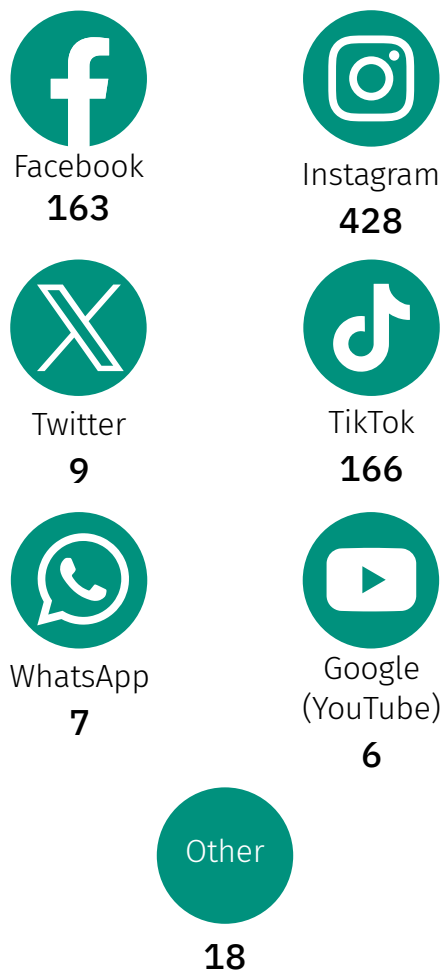
Categorization of measures according to the type of deletion/restriction:
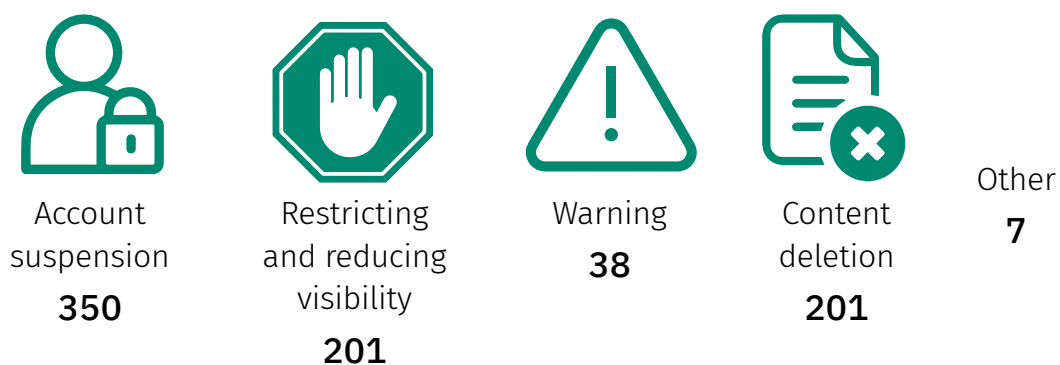
Account
suspension
350

Restricting
and reducing
visibility
201

Warning
38

Content
deletion
201

Other
7

Categorization of violations according to the type of the targeted audience:

Individuals | **576**

Media outlets | **103**

Businesses | **23**

Social/political movements | **55**

NGO's | **34**

Other | **6**
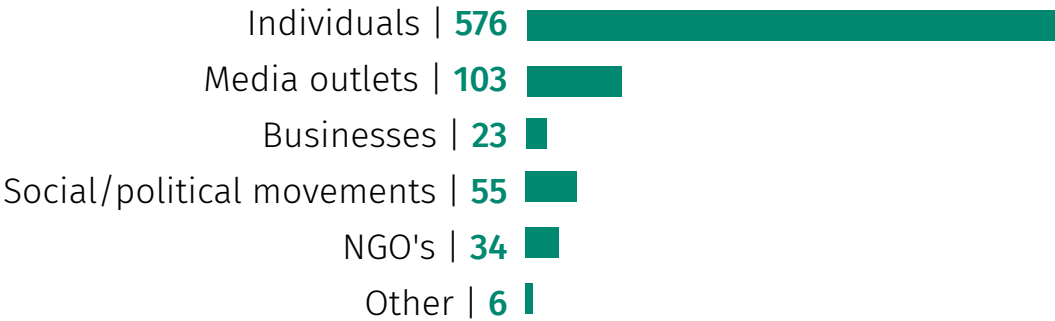
Categorization of violations according to the type of victims:

Journalists | **58**

Human rights advocates or activists | **251**

Influencers | **34**

Academic authors | **28**

Other | **205**

Gender-based categorization of victims:
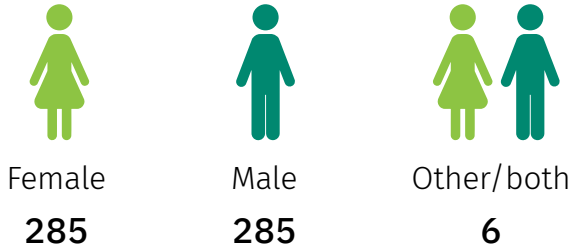
Female	Male	Other/both
285	285	6

Categorization of victims according to the type of account on social media platforms:

Personal account (profile) | **565**

Page | **208**

Group | **8**

Account (Other) | **5**

Channel | **11**
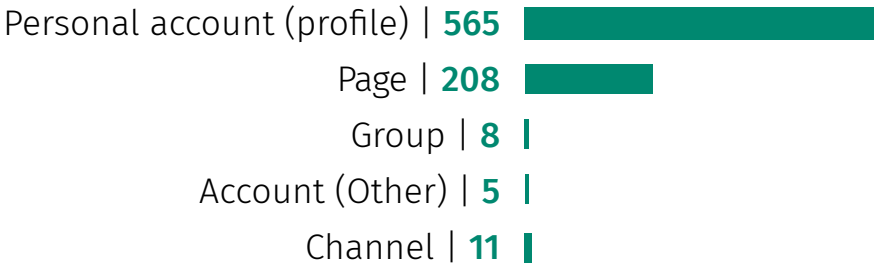
Number of violations followed up by the company:

Followed-up	Not followed-up
✅	❌
634	**163**

The Duty to Ban Hateful and Discriminatory Content

Meta has updated its "hate speech" policy in a way that will likely lead to further conflation of the political ideology of "Zionism" with Jewish and/or Israeli identities, running the risk of severely restricting freedom of expression and stifling legitimate political criticism of Zionists and Zionism by inaccurately equating it with antisemitism.. This change, reflecting the pressures exerted by pro-Israeli lobbies adopting the definition by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), led to the deletion of posts targeting "Zionists" and banned calls for ending the war, thus silencing the Palestinian narrative. Moreover, the new policy fosters a full conflation between Zionism, Judaism, and Israeli identity, highlighting the double standards in tackling digital discourse and protecting the state of Israel, as a political entity, from accountability, while Palestinian voices are targeted disproportionately. Considering the increasing tensions between Gaza and Israel, this update reflects Meta's recurrent bias against Palestinian content, as the platform is continually accused of suppressing voices favoring the Palestinian narrative. Instead of fairly combating hate speech, it seems these policies serve to protect the state of Israel and its allies, while silencing the voices that seek to accentuate Palestinian suffering under occupation. While free debates aimed at achieving justice are urgently necessary in the present reality, this censorship reinforces the power imbalance and violates basic human rights.[17]

The "X" platform has also updated its "abuse and harassment" policy in 2024 and started taking disciplinary measures against accounts publishing content that denies violent or terrorist actions or mass murder. This update worried human rights advocates, especially as it took place within the context of the genocide in the Gaza Strip and the platform's conduct that allows for the mass publication of violent speech against Palestinians without censorship, thus provoking further fears regarding the potential use of this update for further oppression and marginalization of the Palestinian narrative and content.[18]

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17. 7amleh. Digital Rights Advocates Share Concern over Meta's Updated Hate Speech Policy. 11/07/2024. Link is available here.
18. X's Abuse and Harassment policy, March 2024. Link is available here.

During the war on Gaza, the YouTube platform has been accused of restricting pro-Palestine content while providing space for Israeli propaganda that incites hatred and violence. More than 200 Israeli ads on the platform targeted American and European audiences, with a clear emphasis on France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. These ads featured emotional messages and controversial visual content. While some ads were deleted after harsh criticism, others were maintained, raising questions about YouTube's commitment to human rights and transparency policies. Moreover, content creators, like "Abu Fulla," were subject to punishment for addressing the situation in Palestine, demonstrating the flagrant discrimination in implementing these policies. The report accuses YouTube of systemic bias against Palestinian content, pointing out the contribution of algorithmic manipulation and human moderation to exacerbating these violations.[19]

OpenAI announced that it banned an Israeli influence campaign that published hateful content that is hostile to Palestinians. Organized by the Israeli tech company Stoic, the campaign involved the creation and dissemination of anti-Palestinian and pro-Israeli narratives. It also targeted UNRWA and Pro-Palestine protesters in American universities. By using AI models belonging to OpenAI, this network created articles and posts that were published on social media platforms. Meta (Facebook's parent company) had previously deleted fake accounts associated with the name of the same company.[20]

Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, and "X" have not sufficiently protected Palestinians from violent and hate speech, highlighting their contribution to the dissemination of content inciting violence and genocide during the war on Gaza. During the past year, 7amleh documented a huge amount of violent and hate speech against Palestinians and Palestinian rights' advocates, using two main tools: the 7or platform and the Violence Index. What follows is the main data collection, with the intention to publish later a deeper analysis in 7amleh's annual report "The Racism and Incitement Index."

The overall violent content documented by using the Hebrew Violence Index: 12,154,579
The overall violent content documented by using the Arab Violence Index: 1,180,906

The overall violent content manually documented through "7or" platform: **2779**

Categorization of violations according to quarterly periods:

19. 7amleh's position paper on "YouTube's Impact on Palestinian Digital Rights during the War on Gaza, 25/04/2024. Link is available here.
20. Muhammed Yasin Güngör. OpenAI disrupts Israeli firm over propaganda content. Adalah, 31/05/2024. Link is available here
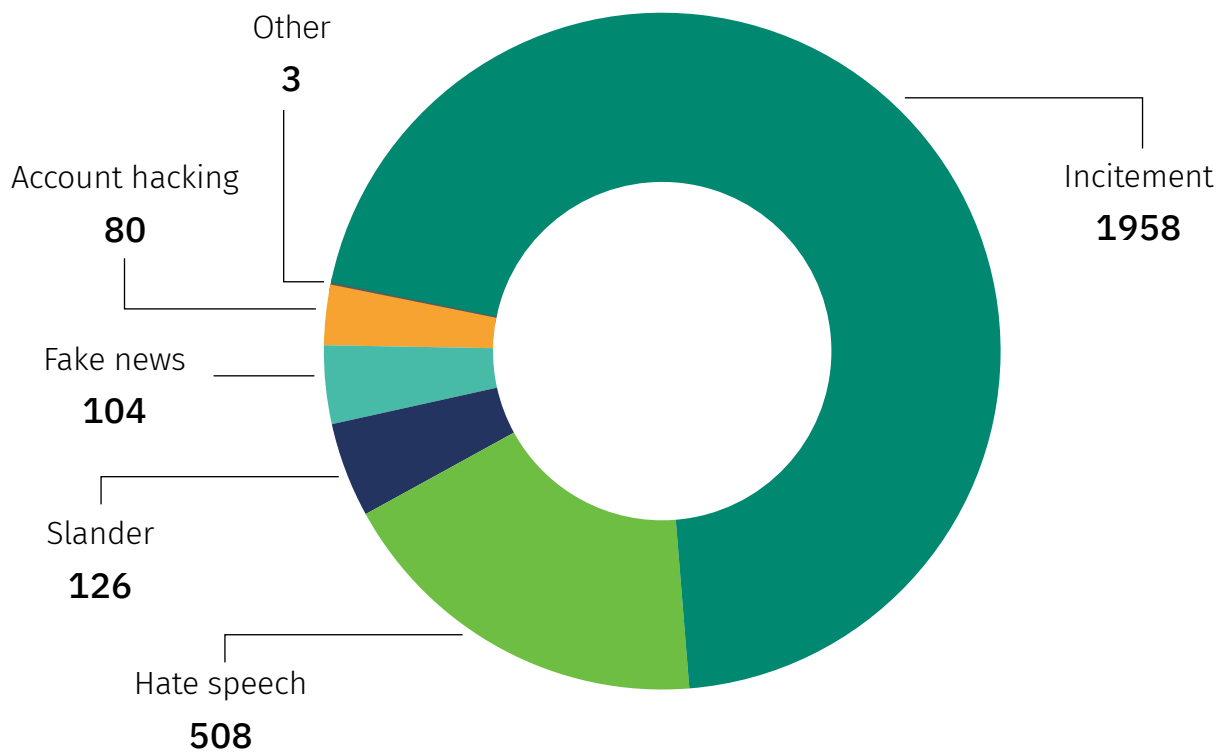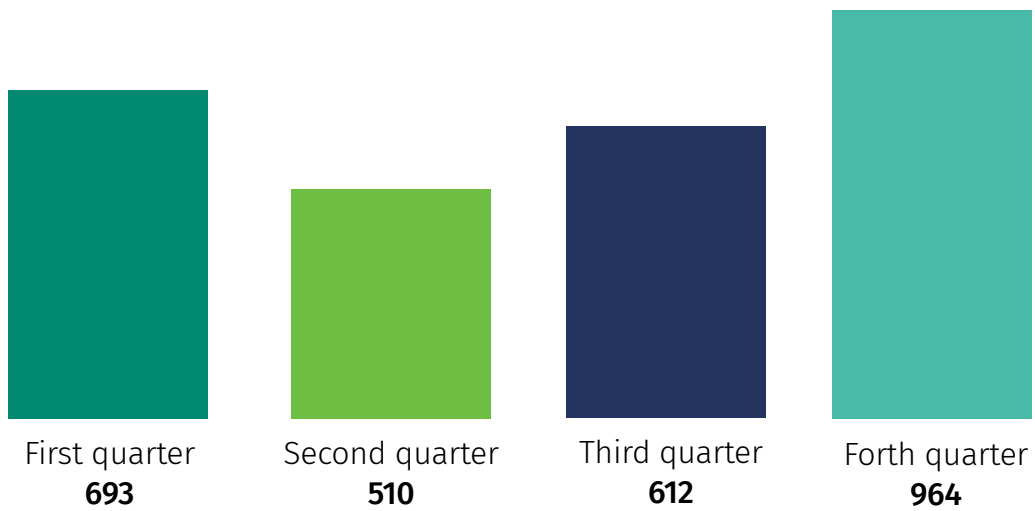
Other
3

Account hacking
80

Fake news
104

Slander
126

Hate speech
508

Incitement
1958

Categorization of violations according to the platforms:

First quarter
693

Second quarter
510

Third quarter
612

Forth quarter
964

Categorization of violations according to the type of the targeted audience:

Facebook
527

Instagram
255
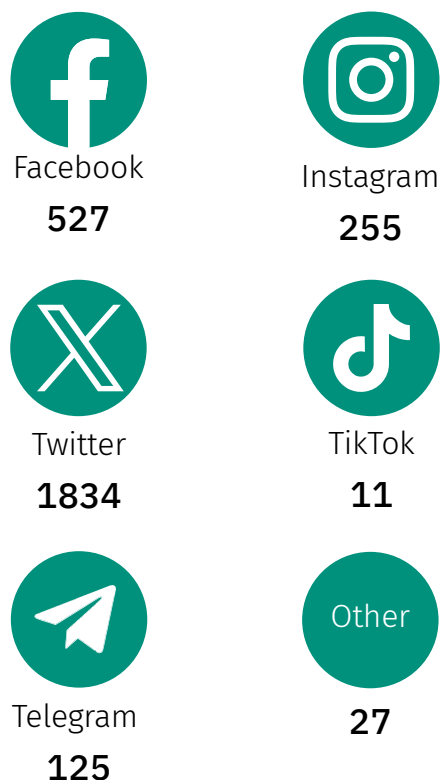
Twitter
1834

TikTok
11

Telegram
125

Other
27

Categorization of victims according to the type of account on social media platforms:

Individuals | **2708**
NGO's | **12**
Private companies | **19**
Media outlets | **33**
Other | **7**

Number of violations followed up:

Personal account (profile) | **2627**
Page | **108**
Group | **15**
Channel | **28**
Account (Other) | **1**
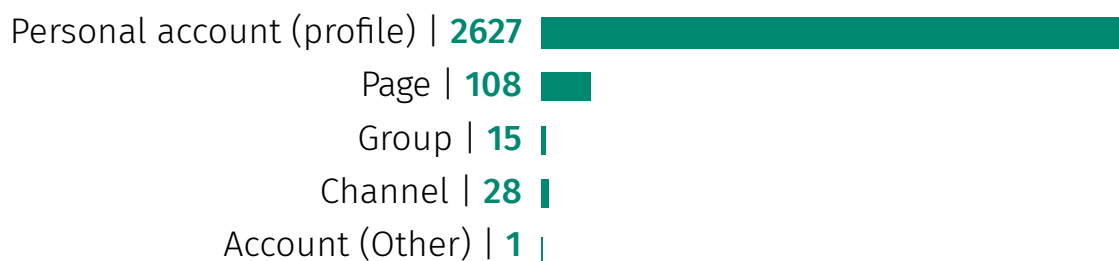
Followed-up
2442

Not followed-up
337

Categorization of the companies responses to 7amleh's follow up until now:[21]

Other
14

Negative
80

Positive
369

Under review
1979
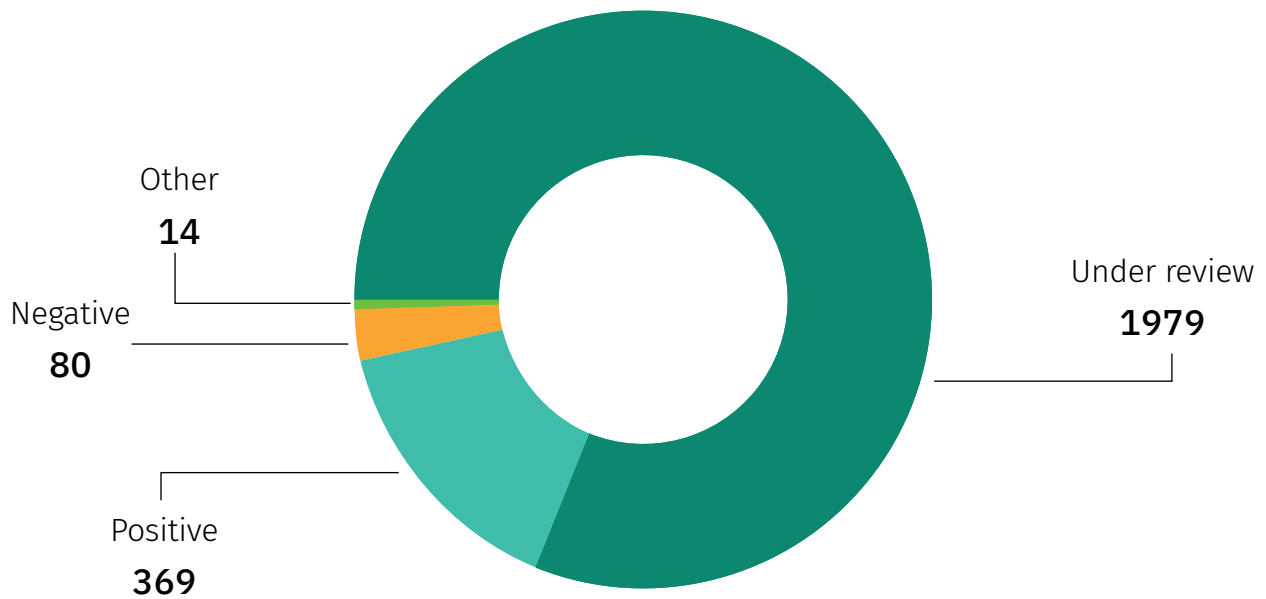
Privacy/surveillance

The scene has remarkably changed during the past year, following the Israeli war on Gaza since the end of 2023. Mobile phones have become a main tool for prosecuting Palestinians at checkpoints in the West Bank. Phone search campaigns at Israeli military checkpoints have intensified, as Israeli soldiers order Palestinians to hand over their mobile phones to search for photos or chats that indicate political affiliations or actions on platforms like "Telegram." Daily experiences during the past year show that Israeli soldiers can arrest people, beat them, and confiscate their phones to search the applications installed on them, checking the Palestinians' content and interaction on social media platforms.[22]

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21. The low responsiveness rate is due to the reluctance of X platform to respond to any communication attempts initiated by human rights organizations, and the internal transformations that followed Elon Musk's takeover of the company

22. Al-Majalla "From a paper-based copy, to the digital, via the electronic version… "identity" as a surveillance and punitive tool against Palestinians, 31/12/2024. Link is available here.

In East Jerusalem, a report published by 7amleh revealed the intensified Israeli use of surveillance systems, such as facial recognition systems, drones, phone searches, and surveillance on social media platforms. This has led to arbitrary arrests, dismissal from work and college, restricted freedom of movement, and increased self-censorship. The report showed that 70% of Jerusalemite Palestinians practice self-censorship regarding their content, as they might be under surveillance, while 37.4% reported that they do not believe their digital privacy is protected.[23]

On the policy level, the government discussed the Computer Data Intrusion Law act that allows the police to spy using tools like "Pegasus". This law broadens the scope of spying, reaching phones and computers without notifying their owners, thus threatening digital rights, especially considering the flagrantly increasing racism against Palestinians in Israel. 7amleh has warned that this act could be misused to oppress opposing voices and enhance control over Palestinians.

Meanwhile, according to Meta's data, the company received 865 requests to obtain information about accounts/pages on the company's different platforms during the first half of the past year. The demands included data about 2,656 accounts, and the company's responsiveness rate reached 79%. However, the type of the requested data and how it is used by the Israeli authorities are unknown.[24]

The Freedom of Assembly and Association

Staff working in different technology companies were subject to very strict censorship and restrictions due to their supportive position towards the rights of the Palestinian people. Major technology companies like Meta, Google, Apple, and Microsoft used many practices aimed at suppressing all kinds of support for Palestinians in the workplace. Workplace bullying: targeting employees who express support for the Palestinian cause, subjecting them to frequent harassment and unjustified disciplinary warnings. Personal censorship: the companies collect personal information about their employees and track their activity outside the workplace to determine their political position. Silencing: these companies prevent their employees from discussing the Palestinian cause or expressing their solidarity with Palestinians in meetings or on internal platforms. Administrative restriction: hindering the promotion of employees identifying with the Palestinian cause or excluding them from important projects. Adaptation of internal policies: policies are formulated in a way that serves the companies' political and economic interests related to Israel, leading to the oppression of content or positions supporting Palestinian narratives.

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23. 7amleh Center, Intensification of Surveillance in East Jerusalem since October 2023, 09/12/2024. Link is available here.
24. Government Requests for User Data, July 2024. Link is available here.

Censoring digital content: the companies interfere to delete or suspend pro-Palestinian content published by their employees, including posts published on social media platforms.[25]

On a different note, Google announced a mass dismissal of fifty of its employees due to their peaceful protests against Project Nimbus, a project worth **$1.2 billion** aiming at cooperation with the Israeli government and army and providing cloud-based services and technologies. This mass dismissal followed a three-year peaceful protest by a number of the company's employees **against Project Nimbus** and its partnership with the Israeli army, due to the company's continuous cooperation with the Israeli government despite the genocide and the unprecedented use of technology in its war efforts.[26]

At the same time, 7amleh Center documented 103 deletions and suspension measures against media outlets, 55 violations by social media platforms against social and political groups and movements, and 34 violations against NGOs and human rights associations. The restriction of these pages and groups is an explicit violation of the freedom of online assembly and association, as the activity of media outlets and organizations on social media platforms is among the main forms of digital assembly and association.

Militarization of AI

Israel has used advanced technological tools in its attacks against Gaza. These tools seek to collect information from different sources, like mobile phones, artificial intelligence, and machine learning, to determine military targets and anticipate threats. However, the problem is that the information relied on by the Israeli army is mostly inaccurate, thus increasing the risks of military attacks, as this leads to inaccurate targeting of civilians. The four digital tools include one that relies on mobile phone tracking to oversee the evacuation of the population, and "The Gospel," which determines structural targets like buildings that should be targeted; "Lavender," which classifies individuals according to their suspected affiliation with armed groups; and "Where is Daddy?," a tool that determines the right locations and time to attack military targets. For example, the mobile phone tracking tool relies on estimated data from cellular towers to determine people's locations in Gaza. This might lead to false predictions of locations and, ultimately, to incorrect targeting.
 As for "Lavender," it uses machine learning technologies to classify people based on their probable affiliation with armed groups; yet, these classifications might be wrong, as they rely on unreliable data and on inaccurate or irrelevant behaviors. While the declared

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25. Delete the Issue: Tech Workers Testimonies on Palestinian advocacy & Workplace Suppression. 2/12/2024. Link is available here.
26. STATEMENT from Google workers with the No Tech for Apartheid campaign on Google's mass, retaliatory firings of workers. Medium, 17/04/2024. Link is available here

purpose of these tools is to improve the accuracy of military operations and reduce civilian damages, their use might instead increase the risks to civilians, as inaccurate algorithms might lead to their targeting based on incorrect assumptions. Moreover, dependence on these digital tools raises concerns regarding the use of technology during wars and its impact on human rights, especially in contexts where the accuracy of the data and the derived information is questionable.

The use of these digital tools provokes legal and human concerns about the commitment of the Israeli army to international human rights law and complicates the mission of ensuring differentiation between military targets and civilians, thus increasing the probability of human rights violations during wars.[27]

This dependence has led to extensive destruction of Gaza's infrastructure and to thousands of casualties among civilians. Moreover, several reports pointed out the direct consequences of these tools, with a special emphasis on privacy violations and comprehensive surveillance of Palestinians. AI systems used by Israel collect and analyze huge amounts of personal data and produce lists of targets that might lead to airstrikes based on automated decisions, with limited human intervention. This automation does not only violate Palestinian digital rights but also further deepens their isolation and prevents them from communicating their narrative and sharing their suffering freely.[28]

In addition to the widespread surveillance cameras in the West Bank, the Israeli army announced that it intends to start the installation of electronic systems, including smart cameras and machine guns, around settlements and Israeli military bases for surveillance and remote shooting of Palestinians. This system is called the "See-Shoot" system. Technology is being increasingly and irresponsibly used for killing and violating the right to life in a way that involves many mistakes and risks without any legal grounds.[29]

27. A report titled "Israeli Military's Use of Digital Tools in Gaza". Human Rights Watch, 10/09/2024. Link is available here.
28. Natasha Karner. Israel accused of using AI to target thousands in Gaza, as killer algorithms outpace international law. The Conversation. 11/04/2024, Link is available here.
29. Israel expands use of dystopian technology in the West Bank, regardless of impact on Palestinian lives. The New Arab. 26/12/2024. Link is available here.

The right to Internet/information access

Since the war on the Gaza Strip, communication infrastructure has been severely damaged, as first estimates show that %75 of this infrastructure was completely or partially damaged, 50% of which was destroyed. Communication services witnessed frequent disruptions since the beginning of the war and reached its peak with the full outage at least 15 times. Cellular phones network was severely impacted, and the main network of optic fibers was damaged too, leading to a serious disruption of internet services. Underground infrastructure was damaged too, hence the difficulty to evauate the extent of damage, given its increasing connection to the destructing of the housing sector. According to estimated damages and the assets value, the restoration of the communication infrastructure would cost 146 million USD: 68 million USD to the fixed infrastructure and 78 million USD for the mobile infrastructure.[30]

Internet disconnection, alongside the "complete" siege imposed by Israel, and which cut fuel and vital supplies, deepened Gaza's isolation. The long-term Israeli siege restricted Gaza's technological capacities, rendering the old and 2G networks more susceptible to surveillance. Although internet access might not seem as vital as food and water supplies, it has become a lifeline for those who needed to escape military attacks, move through safe roads ans call emergency services. In response to that, Palestinians in Gaza adapted to this situation by establishing pop-up power points, which enable people to have signal for a fee. Many have also resorted to offline means, like radios, to keep up with news updates, especially concerning humanitarian aid deliveries. Platforms like Telegrams have had a major role, as local channels provided real-time updates concerning military maneuvers and available services.[31]

30. Gaza Telecommunication Infrastructure: Assessment of Damages and Humanitarian Impact, 29/10/2024. Link is available here.
31. Matthew Leake. "Palestinians struggle to connect and get news amid digital shutdowns in Gaza: "Without the internet everything stops", 06/03/2024, Link is available here.

⌗ Digital economy

Paypal has blatantly continued depriving Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories of its service. A report published by 7amleh critiques PayPal's position which deprives Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza strip of its services, and present arguments that refute the companies attempts to justify its decision. The report show that this decision involves a violation of human rights, especially the right to access financial services. The report also points out the readiness of the Palestinian economy to handle electronic payment by evaluating the available technical and legal infrastructure. It also indicates that PayPal's restriction is not based on logical commercial reasons, put rather on political discrimination against Palestinians, hindering thus economic growth in the region.[32]

As crowdfunding campaigns became main tool for fundraising to support Palestinians, they have become a target for pro-Israeli groups that use different subversive tools. These tools use systematic and organized efforts to diffuse fake news in funding campaigns, claiming they were fraudulent, leading thus to their closure, in addition to the mass withdrawal of donations to frustrate fundraising efforts. "PayPal" was harshly critiqued for the suspension of accounts associated with fundraising campaign for Gaza, mostly without giving any clear reasons, hindering thus fundraising and slowing down or prevention delivery of urgent aids.[33]

Fundraising efforts for Gaza on "GoFundMe" have also met serious challenges due to strict scrutiny and bureaucratic obstacles. Organizers of these campaigns met rigorous requirements, including providing detailed information about beneficiaries and the use of money. These measures, based on commitments to sanctions and money antilaundering law, led to delayed delivery of aids and provoked confusion, especially that the campaigns related to Gaza remained visible and available to donation when the review was conducted. This contradiction, limited only to 19 countries, undermined trust between the campaigns' organizers, the donors and the platform. Experts indicated the strict reviews conducted by GoFundMe, although their legal inevitability, rely mostly on incomplete data, leading thus to delays and wrong results, especially in crises' regions that have popular names.[34]

At a time when Palestinians suffered from a genocidal war, Microsoft deleted email and skype accounts of Palestinian users, flagrantly violating their basic rights. These measures deprived Palestinians of social, professional and economic opportunities, alongside the extreme pain, the extensive destruction and the frequent internet disconnections and the inability to connect with the external world.[35]

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32. 7amleh. "Unravelling PayPal's Bias: Position Paper on Digital Discrimination Against Palestinians ", 08/05/2024. Link is available here.
33. The New Arab. How pro-Israel saboteurs are derailing lifesaving Gaza fundraisers" 17/04/2024. Link is available here
34. The Verge. As Gaza is bombarded, GoFundMe donations are stuck in limbo. 29/02/2024. Link is available here .
35. 7amleh center. "Condemning Microsoft's Unjust Blocking of Palestinian Skype and Email Accounts", 18/07/2024. Link is available here.

In June 2024, Israeli military officials revealed in "IT for IDF" conference their increasing dependence on cloud-based dependence provided by companies like AWS (Amazon Web Services) to enhance Israeli military operations. The event shed light on the use of these platforms to manage and analyze huge amounts of data collected during the war on Gaza. The officials indicated that cloud-based infrastructure provided "unlimited storage and processing capacity", leading to a great improvement of its capacity for collecting intelligence data, surveillance and making decision based on data during the genocidal war. This dependence on private technological companies for enhancing military capacities reflects a broader approach to integrating advanced technology in the occupation and genocidal efforts. It is worth mentioning that AWS and Google encountered protests by its employees and activists due to their participation in Project Nimbus- a cloud computing agreement worth 1.2 billion dollars, signed with the Israeli government. Opponents of this agreement say that these companies facilitate military measures that involve collective surveillance and potential violations of human rights. This increasing interaction between digital economies and militarization led by the state raise important questions about the companies' accountability during global conflicts.[36]

The European Union has sought to deepen its collaboration with Israeli companies, including IBM Israel, IBM continued providing technological support to the Israeli army, especially in the domains of artificial intelligence and robotics. The European Union also signed a collaborative project with the company in 2023, and it was not stopped later despite the use of technology and artificial intelligence in the genocidal war on Gaza Strip. The International Court of Justice pointed out that Israeli probably violates the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the European Union largely disregarded that, taking minimal measures to hold companies accountable for their involvement in the conflict.[37]

#️⃣ Conclusion

To conclude, the report presents the multiple dimensions of the violations of Palestinian digital rights, which extend from targeting the communication infrastructure to tracking personal data and censoring content on social media platforms. The facts presented in the report show that technology has become a suppressive tool deployed by the Israeli authorities, in cooperation with major technology companies, to deepen military and political dominance, reflecting a systemic violation of basic rights, including the right to privacy, freedom of speech, and access to information.

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36. Yuval Abraham. 'Order from Amazon': How tech giants are storing mass data for Israel's war. +972Magazine, 04/08/2024. Link is available here.
37. David Cronin, "Genocide profiteer IBM wins big on EU funding". The Electronic Intifada. 24/04/2024 , 24/04/2024. Link is available here.

These violations apply to all aspects of the Palestinian digital life, as they involve the use of artificial intelligence and mass surveillance to restrict digital freedoms and targeting individuals and institutions. Restrictions imposed on the Palestinian content on social media platforms, under the pretext of fighting terrorism, contribute to silencing Palestinian narratives and deforming facts in favor of the Israeli narrative. At the same time, technology companies exploit this situation to market its technologies used in the occupied Palestinian territories, rendering Palestinians a testing ground for these suppressive digital tools.

Despite the military escalation and the genocide against the Palestinians, major technology companies, like Meta, still practice strict censorship on Palestinian content. There are numerous documentations of cases in which posts were deleted or restricted under the pretext of violating "community guidelines," while it did not apply the same measures on content inciting against Palestinian, reflecting this double-standards and unfair policy.

Moreover, advanced technologies like Lavender and Habsora are used to collect personal information about Palestinians and target them, increasing the security threats and restricting their digital freedoms. The ongoing cooperation between the Israeli government and the technology companies in projects such as Nimbus increases the use of these technologies to support the occupation, despite the harsh criticism due to their negative impact on human rights.

Simultaneously, the Israeli authorities took intensified security measures relying on technology, artificial intelligence tools, predictive systems, and facial recognition cameras to control Palestinian residents, surveilling them and justifying their arrest or dismissal from work and educational institutions and restricts their freedom of movement and speech, deepening their feeling of being under ongoing surveillance and permanent fear.

Recommendations

Major technology companies, online platforms and communication companies:
7amleh calls for:
Commit to:

1. Streamlining the process for addressing digital violations reported by civil society actors, ensuring that reports are based on solid foundations and addressed in a timely manner.
2. Allocating additional efforts and resources to prevent further harm and to safeguard the rights and safety of all platforms' users and other rights holders. This includes hiring personnel with regional, linguistic, and socio-political expertise to ensure localised decision-making, especially concerning content moderation in a way that respects human rights.
3. Engage in meaningful and regularly scheduled cooperation with Palestinian civil society and stakeholders, beyond periods of escalated hostilities.
4. Conduct recurring, comprehensive and transparent Due Diligence to assess the impact of content moderation and curation on individual and collective digital rights in Israel/ Palestine.
5. Fully implementing all recommendations arising from independent human rights impact assessments within a transparent, detailed, and time-bound framework..

Ensure:

1. Proportionality and accountability through due legal processes, as an additional safeguard for the protection of Palestinian digital rights.
2. That users are given the opportunity to respond to content removal decisions and are provided with detailed, timely explanations of the reasons behind content moderation actions.
3. That deleted content is retained for a proportional period.
4. That user data privacy is protected and that personal data is not weaponized to harm individuals, especially marginalized residents.

Guaranteeing:

1. Non-discrimination and avoiding policies and practices based on the principle "One size fits all."
2. Respecting freedom of the press and acknowledging the newsworthiness of content produced by citizen journalists. Such content should be allowed on platforms, even when referencing banned organizations or violent events, to ensure information access.
3. That services and technologies with known military use cases are not employed to facilitate war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.

Provide full transparency on:

1. The implementation of content notification and removal mechanismspractices.
2. Governmental (both legal and voluntary) requests for content removal and user data.
3. Transparency in reporting about agreements signed with state actors, especially police and military entities, using clear accountability mechanisms to prevent the misuse of technologies for known military purposes.
4. Transparency on the use of automation and machine learning algorithms in content moderation, including comprehensive data on moderation and specific keywords or hate-speech lexicons applied for both Arabic and Hebrew.

International actors:

1. Call on the international community and the United Nations to take immediate and effective measures to halt systemic violations of Palestinian digital rights, and to establish accountability mechanisms for severe violations of Palestinian digital rights, such as the deliberate targeting of telecommunication and internet infrastructure.
2. Urge the European Commission to ensure that online platforms' compliance with the Digital Services Act (DSA) is evaluated in a non-discriminatory manner, with systematic consideration of contextual details, fully aligning and complying with the DSA's requirements and principles.[38]
3. Urge the European Commission to bridge the gaps in its regulatory frameworks, such as the Artificial Intelligence Act, which currently lacks obligations for technologies sold outside Europe. We also call for alternative regulations to compel online platforms and major technology and communication companies to put an end to discriminatory measures against Palestinians.
4. Require major technology companies, online platforms, and telecommunication companies to adhere to business principles and human rights, as well as International Humanitarian Law when developing and implementing their policies, with a special focus on due diligence obligations during times of crisis.
5. Encourage active engagement with civil society and stakeholders to address concerns about safeguarding and advancing Palestinian digital rights effectively.

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38. Itxaso Domínguez de Olazábal, "Palestinian Digital Rights and the Extraterritorial Impact of the European Union's Digital Services Act", 7amleh Center, April 2024, available at: 7amleh.org