

Young Children in War-Time: Making Sense of Palestine-Israel Conflict Impact on Instagram

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Abstract

The dissemination of conflict-related issues on Instagram extends beyond mere informative communication, offering a detailed examination and assessment of the impact of conflicts on children, a particularly vulnerable demographic. Such discussions, however, frequently receive inadequate attention within academic discourse. This study aims not only to address these scholarly gaps but also to elucidate and reflect upon the specific conditions, circumstances, and repercussions of the Palestine-Israel conflict on the welfare of children as a vulnerable group amidst conflict, as represented on Instagram. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive methodology, this research delves into the various facets of the Palestine-Israel conflict and its effects on children, as portrayed on Instagram. The findings of this investigation highlight three critical aspects concerning the portrayal of children's issues during the Palestine-Israel conflict on Instagram. Firstly, the platform serves as a medium for depicting repressive behaviors, acts of resistance, and direct engagements between children and military forces within conflict zones. Secondly, the study underscores the risk of psychological trauma, physical harm, and mortality among children in these areas. Lastly, it provides insights into the profound loss of parents, relatives, and familial structures endured by children in these conflict-ridden regions.

Keywords: young children, war, conflict, Palestine-Israel, Instagram.

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1. Introduction

The conflicts between nations frequently garner significant attention and are immortalized in media as pivotal historical events (Parry & Pitchford-Hyde, 2023). The dissemination of the Palestine-Israel conflict on Instagram, however, serves not only to visually preserve these moments but also to highlight the often-overlooked conditions and situations of children affected by the conflict. Galuh Larasati et al. (2023) assert that discussions of social issues in media spaces act as evaluative expressions concerning the current states and circumstances within the framework of political and socio-political conflicts. Consequently, the portrayal of children's issues during the Palestine-Israel conflict on Instagram is a critical area for exploration and reflection. Hauter (2023) adds that while discussions of conflict issues on social media are informative, they also mirror the real-time social situations and conditions within conflict zones. This premise underpins the current study's objective to analyze and reflect on the experiences of children amid the Palestine-Israel conflict as portrayed on Instagram.

Children are among the most vulnerable groups affected by armed conflict, often facing devastating physical, emotional, and psychological consequences. According to Save The Children in 2022 more than 473 million children globally live in conflict zones, with many experiencing displacement, injury, loss of family members, and limited access to education or healthcare. In the context of the Palestine–Israel conflict, children have been consistently exposed to violence, trauma, and exploitation in both physical and symbolic forms. The widespread use of social media, particularly platforms like Instagram, has transformed the way these experiences are represented and circulated. Visual content especially memes frequently objectifies children as symbols of suffering, often stripped of context or agency. This study argues that public understanding rooted in media literacy is essential to critically engage with such representations.

Existing research on conflict issues shared via social media has primarily concentrated on three areas. Firstly, the role of social media in visually disseminating conflict-related content (Bahar, 2020; Geissler et al., 2023; Shu et al., 2020). Secondly, the role of social media in symbolically describing conflict issues (Pleska et al., 2019; Talabi et al., 2022; Williams et al., 2023). Thirdly, the exploration of social media's role in linguistically narrating conflict scenarios (Jan and Khan, 2023; Leban et al., 2021; Uyan, 2023). In essence, scholarly inquiries into conflict issues on social media have predominantly addressed the themes of dissemination, depiction, and narration. This indicates a gap in comprehensive discourse on conflict issues within social media environments, especially given the critical nature of such discussions as highlighted by Hauter

(2023). This includes the imperative to delve deeper into the conditions affecting children during the Palestine-Israel conflict, as captured through Instagram imagery.

The depiction of the Palestine-Israel conflict through Instagram posts serves as a medium to critically assess the plight of children directly engaged in, or potentially affected by, the conflict, encompassing physical, psychological, and social harm. Thus, Hauter (2023) emphasizes the importance of social media in offering a vital lens through which to examine and reflect upon the social implications and conditions of vulnerable groups during conflicts. Nonetheless, scholarly attention to conflict issues on social media has predominantly focused on visual representations of conflict, symbolic interpretations, and the linguistic portrayal of conflict events. This study seeks to bridge these gaps by concentrating on the portrayal and implications of the Palestine-Israel conflict on children's welfare through Instagram posts, addressing a significant oversight in existing literature.

This research not only aims to be informative but also seeks to critically analyze the conditions, situations, and broader implications of the Palestine-Israel conflict on children's welfare as disseminated on Instagram. It poses three investigative questions: the nature of children's confrontations with military forces as depicted on Instagram; the potential for children to become victims within this conflict context; and the broader implications of the conflict on children's welfare, all within the specific backdrop of the Palestine-Israel conflict. The foundational premise of this study is that social media, particularly Instagram, not only serves an informative function but also evaluates the impacts and conditions of vulnerable populations, with a specific focus on children whose welfare and rights are crucial yet frequently overlooked during conflicts.

2. Background

The conceptualization of childhood within the international discourse identifies individuals below the age of 18, thereby placing children's lives at the intersection of legislative regulations and their social environments (Adriany et al., 2021). This framework identifies children as inherently vulnerable, significantly increasing their risk of victimization in conflict or war scenarios — a phenomenon extensively documented throughout history (Zachs, 2019). Cameron (2023) elaborates that in the midst of conflict or war, children are often subjected to violence, which can have enduring effects on their well-being from multiple dimensions, including psychological stress, loss of resources and shelter, and the death of family members. In times of conflict and war, children

commonly experience both physical and mental suffering, a reality evidenced by some of the most distressing records in history (Gaber et al., 2022). Fundamentally, the experiences of children in conflict and war zones reveal a pattern of vulnerability arising from the neglect of their welfare, both during and post-conflict (Carpiniello, 2023).

Conflicts and wars place children in precarious situations, jeopardizing their basic rights as well as their physical and mental health, with potential long-term repercussions (Bürgin et al., 2022). Garry and Checchi (2020) note that the instability generated by conflicts and wars not only endangers the immediate safety of children but also poses a threat to the future prosperity of a nation due to the significant involvement of children as victims. Despite this, scholarly inquiries into the plight of children in such contexts are notably scarce (Zachs, 2019). Existing research often narrows its focus to the reporting of refugee movements by mainstream media, aimed at fostering a sense of solidarity (Sajir and Aouragh, 2019). Concurrently, social media emerges as a powerful medium for not only disseminating information but also for the systematic assessment of the real-time conditions and circumstances of children in conflict and war zones.

The definition of conflict or war encompasses situations and conditions dominated by ideological or cultural hegemony enforced through violent measures. Mann and Janis (2021) further assert that conflicts and wars, characterized by their destructive and interpersonal nature, can manifest in various forms, including international disputes, domestic altercations, ethnic tensions, and gang conflicts, often triggered by socio-economic and political instability. This view is supported by Rahim (2017), who suggests that conflicts or wars emerge when social entities act in defiance of normative behavioral expectations, when there is a mismatch between expectations and reality, and when there is unconstitutional competition for natural resources. Consequently, Islam et al. (2023) demonstrate in their research that conflicts or wars not only negatively impact a country's developmental trajectory but also significantly influence the destiny and future of a nation, particularly when a substantial number of children are implicated as potential victims. This reality is poignantly illustrated in the case of children during the Palestine-Israel conflict.

The situation and conditions stemming from the Palestine-Israel conflict have led to long-term implications for the relational dynamics among involved groups (Hasler et al., 2023). Since its inception in 1948, a comprehensive resolution to the Palestine-Israel conflict remains elusive (Nabulsi, 2023). Furthermore, Alqaisiya (2023) highlights that beyond the absence of a resolution, the conflict has inflicted enduring consequences on the future well-being of children. This is due to the conflict inducing various forms of long-term instability across political, economic, educational, familial, and child

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welfare sectors (Docherty et al., 2023). Yet, scholarly inquiry into the Palestine-Israel conflict has largely concentrated on resolution efforts, often overlooking the lived experiences of children within this tumultuous context (Thiessen and Darweish, 2018). The portrayal of these children's realities, particularly through Instagram, offers a vital lens for examining the impact of conflict on young lives, necessitating a thorough evaluation and reflection on the treatment of children amidst hostilities.

Instagram, as a platform, is increasingly utilized for the communication and evaluation of present realities online (Appel et al., 2020). Grover et al. (2022) note that Instagram's features enable the sharing of photos and videos, facilitating the dissemination of specific evaluative ideas or ideologies. This occurs as Instagram transcends its role as an information source to become an inspiration hub for public engagement with current realities (Karadžić & Ristić, 2022). Consequently, issues like conflict and war are extensively disseminated on Instagram, aiming to mold collective perspectives and narratives through linguistic and symbolic means (Cinelli et al., 2021). Instagram's open and participatory nature (Mohajerani et al., 2015) renders it an effective channel for broadcasting conflict- or war-related issues, unbound by spatial or temporal limits. The dissemination of children's issues on Instagram in the context of the Palestine-Israel conflict offers a compelling area for scholarly reflection (Kim, 2023).

As a prominent platform in the post-modern era for spreading ideas and ideologies, Instagram emerges as a strategic venue for addressing the plight of children in the Palestine-Israel conflict through its informative yet evaluative capability (Haque et al., 2022). The platform's portrayal of children's issues within this conflict reveals that Instagram content is imbued with symbols, language, and meanings that are inherently non-neutral towards the actualities of the conflict (Golbeck, 2019). Such portrayals often provoke through language and symbols, highlighting the real conditions and experiences of children in conflict zones (Goyanes et al., 2021). However, this critical aspect of children's experiences tends to be marginalized in media, war, and conflict studies (Hauter, 2023), which predominantly address conflicts or wars from an informative standpoint, thereby neglecting the nuanced and profound impacts on children caught in conflict zones.

3. Method

This research was conducted against the backdrop of the intense conflict between Palestine and Israel in the Gaza Strip in October 2023. The study's primary objective is to analyze and reflect on the portrayal of children's issues

during the Palestine-Israel conflict as disseminated through Instagram. Fernando & Larasati (2023) argue that the dissemination of issues via Instagram, employing photos, videos, and hashtags, encapsulates the characteristics of both actual and contextual situations, rendering them significant for socio-cultural and media analysis. Consequently, this study is predicated on three critical considerations. Firstly, the depiction of children's issues during the Palestine-Israel conflict on Instagram represents a pivotal yet underexplored area within the domains of media, conflict, and war studies. Secondly, the complex nature of the messages concerning children's issues during this conflict necessitates a thorough examination. Thirdly, these Instagram posts offer valuable insights into the situations, conditions, and social implications for children caught in the conflict, warranting in-depth reflection.

Adopting a qualitative descriptive methodology, this study relies on both primary and secondary data sources. The primary data comprised an investigation of 1,500 Instagram posts. This search and review process spanned from October 3 to October 30, 2023, utilizing the hashtag *#jalurgaza* (*#gazastrip*) — a tag predominantly used by Instagram users to describe the extensive conflict between Palestine and Israel in the Gaza Strip through visual posts. Each post was analyzed for both its visual and textual components, including image content, captions, and hashtags. A systematic content analysis was applied to categorize the posts. The three predefined thematic areas: (1) conflict situation, (2) conflict conditions, and (3) conflict implications. These themes were selected due to their relevance in capturing the progression of the conflict and its multidimensional effects on children. For instance, the theme of conflict situation included images showing direct confrontation, protests, or visible military presence involving children (498 posts); conflict conditions involved portrayals of children as victims or under threat (503 posts); and conflict implications included depictions of trauma and loss (499 posts). Secondary data from books, journals, and websites provided contextual support.

Data analysis followed the systematic approach proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) encompassing three fundamental steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the data reduction phase, 1,500 Instagram images were sorted based on visual patterns into three key themes conflict situations, conflict conditions, and conflict implications. Each image was examined for recurring visual elements such as military presence, emotional expressions, destruction, and humanitarian cues. To enhance the reliability of the data, a filtering process was incorporated to distinguish between posts that appeared to present factual information and those potentially containing misinformation or manipulated content. This involved cross-referencing image metadata (e.g., timestamps, source accounts), assessing consistency with

verified news reports, and identifying signs of digital alteration or sensational framing. Posts from known misinformation sources or lacking credible context were excluded from the final dataset. The resulting themes were then refined through inductive coding to create meaningful subcategories. Next, in the data display stage, the categorized images were organized into visual matrices. Each matrix included anonymized images with descriptive notes, enabling the identification of thematic patterns and relationships. In the conclusion drawing and verification phase, the researcher interpreted these patterns, revisiting the data to ensure consistency and analytical depth. This process involved iterative reflection and cross-checking with theoretical frameworks (Fernando et al., 2025; Larasati et al., 2025). The analytical procedures facilitated the derivation of conclusions regarding the depiction of children's issues during the Palestine-Israel conflict on Instagram, contributing valuable insights to the field.

4. Result

The dissemination of the Palestine-Israel conflict on Instagram reveals intricate scenarios, conditions, and ramifications for children caught in the conflict. This study has identified and examined three pivotal findings that illuminate the multifaceted impact of the conflict on children, as portrayed through the social media platform.

4.1. Children's confrontations with the military during the Palestine-Israel conflict

The portrayal of the Palestine-Israel conflict on Instagram often includes depictions of confrontations between children and military forces during the conflict. Haer et al. (2020) note that conflicts targeting residential areas not only cause damage to public infrastructure but also frequently lead to direct confrontations between children and military personnel, resulting in increasingly adverse effects. This scenario is depicted in Table 1.

Table 1 presents instances of direct confrontations between children and military forces within the context of the Palestine-Israel conflict, as shared on Instagram. Analysis of Table 1 reveals three critical aspects of these confrontations. First, it is observed that children are frequently subjected to repressive measures by military forces (refer to Images 1 and 2). Second, there are instances where children exhibit aggressive behaviours towards military personnel (refer to Images 3 and 4). Lastly, children are often directly engaged in altercations with military forces (refer to Images 5 and 6). These observations

underscore the complex dynamics of direct confrontations between children and military personnel during the conflict, highlighting the need for reflection on the nuanced portrayals of these interactions on Instagram.

Table 1. Children's confrontations with the military during the conflict.

Coding	Image 1	Image 2	Description
Repressive	<p>Submetidas a todos os abusos e violações!</p> 	<p>A maioria das mortes por tiro e estrangulamento</p> 	Images 1 and 2 depict children experiencing repressive treatment from the military during the Palestine-Israel conflict.
Resistance			Images 3 and 4 depict children blocking a military tank during the Palestine-Israel conflict.
Altercation			Images 5 and 6 depict children in altercations with the military during the Palestine-Israel conflict.

Source: Instagram social media.

4.2. Children as potential victims in the Palestine-Israel conflict

The depiction of the Palestine-Israel conflict on Instagram often underscores the vulnerability of children as potential casualties amidst the turmoil. Wagner et al. (2019) have articulated that conflict scenarios, especially those involving military hardware, not only escalate the risk of civilian casualties

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but distinctly exacerbate the vulnerability of children to victimization. This concern is systematically illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. *Children as victims during the conflict.*

Coding	Image 7	Image 8	Description
Trauma			Images 7 and 8 depict children who have become victims of the conflict and are experiencing trauma.
Physical injuries			Images 9 and 10 depict children who have become victims of the conflict and have sustained physical injuries.
Fatalities			Images 11 and 12 depict children who have become victims of the conflict and lost their lives.

Source: Instagram social media.

Table 2 underscores the heightened risk faced by children during the Palestine-Israel conflict, as evidenced through Instagram dissemination. Analysis of Table 2 elucidates three critical vulnerabilities of children in this context. Firstly, there exists a pronounced risk of children undergoing trauma because of the conflict (refer to Images 7 and 8). Secondly, the potential for children to sustain physical injuries is significantly elevated during these times (refer to Images 9 and 10). Lastly, the grim possibility of children succumbing to fatal outcomes highlights the utmost risk they face amidst the hostilities (refer to Images 11 and 12). These findings compel a deeper reflection on the grave

implications of the conflict on children, as vividly captured and disseminated on Instagram, emphasizing their heightened susceptibility to harm.

4.3. The losses suffered by children during the Palestine-Israel conflict

The representation of the Palestine-Israel conflict on Instagram extensively documents the adverse effects experienced by children amidst the hostilities.

Table 3. The losses suffered by children during the conflict.

Coding	Image 13	Image 14	Description
Loss of parents			Images 13 and 14 depict the sorrow of children who have lost their parents due to the conflict. These images were shared by the accounts @periodismodeizquierda (Image 13) and @lenteramuslim_ (Image 14).
Loss of relatives			Images 15 and 16 illustrate the grief experienced by children who have lost their relatives. These images were disseminated by the Instagram accounts @zhrfonna (Image 15) and @vozesemluto (Image 16).
Loss of family			Images 17 and 18 describe the devastation of children who have lost their families. These images were circulated by the Instagram accounts @cariustadz.id (Image 17) and @anita.lap22 (Image 18).

Source: Instagram social media.

El-Khodary et al. (2020) further argue that the conflict between these two nations not only results in formal destruction but also inflicts significant material and psychological losses on children ensnared in the turmoil. This scenario is depicted in Table 3.

Table 3 illustrates the multifaceted losses suffered by children during the Palestine-Israel conflict, as portrayed on Instagram. Analysis of Table 3 reveals three critical aspects of the losses incurred by children in this context. First, the loss of parents represents a significant emotional and psychological trauma for many children embroiled in the conflict (refer to Images 13 and 14). Second, the loss of relatives constitutes another layer of profound distress for children during these challenging times (refer to Images 15 and 16). Third, the loss of entire family units is a common calamity that befalls children caught in the crossfire (refer to Images 17 and 18). These insights compel a deeper reflection on the extensive losses borne by children amidst the Palestine-Israel conflict, as depicted on Instagram, underscoring the profound impact on the most vulnerable and innocent segment of the population. This analysis not only sheds light on the immediate effects of the conflict but also underscores the long-term psychological and social ramifications for the affected children.

5. Discussion

The research presented herein delineates three pivotal dimensions related to the dissemination of issues affecting children amidst the Palestine-Israel conflict as portrayed on Instagram. Firstly, the platform extensively circulates depictions of repressive behaviors, acts of resistance, and direct confrontations between children and military forces, offering a vivid portrayal of the hostilities characteristic of the Palestine-Israel conflict. Secondly, the sharing of visuals and narratives depicting children undergoing trauma, sustaining physical injuries, and enduring loss of life accentuates the precarious situation of children as a demographic particularly susceptible to the adversities of the conflict. Thirdly, the widespread dissemination of content showcasing children who have suffered the loss of parents, relatives, and family members endeavors to highlight the profound ramifications of the conflict on the welfare of children during this turbulent period. This examination compels a critical analysis of the modality through which issues concerning children are propagated on Instagram amid the Palestine-Israel conflict. This dissemination transcends mere informational exchange, aiming instead to critically assess the conflict's situation, conditions, and repercussions on vulnerable populations. Despite the recognition of children as a vulnerable cohort whose welfare warrants

protection and provision, their needs are frequently marginalized during conflicts.

The positioning of children as a vulnerable and subordinate group prone to victimization and familial loss underscores a pervasive disregard for their welfare in conflict settings. Masten (2021) identifies children as among the most vulnerable individuals in disaster or conflict zones, highly susceptible to intimidating behaviors. Furthermore, Bürgin et al. (2022) argue that a lack of societal and governmental commitment and collective action towards safeguarding children's rights emerges as a principal factor contributing to the infringement of these rights during conflicts. Instagram serves as a significant medium for articulating the conditions, experiences, and consequences of the Palestine-Israel conflict as it affects children, thereby elevating the discourse beyond simple information sharing to function as an evaluative mechanism regarding the treatment of children in conflict scenarios.

The dissemination of issues concerning children amidst the Palestine-Israel conflict underscores the imperative for comprehensive societal and governmental engagement and awareness in upholding the rights of children within conflict zones. This approach is pivotal in safeguarding the welfare of children as the progenitors of the nation's future post-conflict. Garry and Checchi (2020) highlight the perils posed to a nation's future by neglecting the rights of children in conflict-affected areas, advocating for the use of visual, symbolic, and catalytic language on Instagram to provoke discourse on children's issues during the Palestine-Israel conflict. Thus, the dissemination of these issues not only provides an accurate representation of the situation and its implications but also fosters reflection on the nation's condition and prospective future. Karadžić and Ristić (2022) posit that the issues disseminated on Instagram reflect not only the present reality in a visually accurate manner but also serve as a framework for evaluating potential future implications. Yet, this critical perspective is often overlooked in existing media, war, and conflict research (Hauter, 2023).

The outcomes of this study represent a departure from earlier scholarly inquiries. Prior analyses of conflict-related content on social media platforms have been limited to examining the dissemination, description, and narrative presentation of such issues, primarily from an informational perspective (Jan and Khan, 2023). Nevertheless, the present study elucidates that the discourse surrounding the Palestine-Israel conflict on these platforms extends beyond mere information dissemination. It aims to critically assess the situation, the prevailing conditions, and the consequent implications for children, identifying them as a particularly vulnerable group to intimidation and discrimination within conflict settings. This perspective is reinforced by Golbeck (2019), who argues that the portrayal of conflict issues on social media utilizing visual,

symbolic, and linguistic strategies conveys nuanced meanings that transcend neutral descriptions of reality. Thus, the dissemination of war-related content on social media not only endeavors to inform the public about conditions in conflict zones but also engages in a visual narrative that seeks to evaluate the real-world impact of these conditions on children amid the Palestine-Israel conflict.

Public understanding grounded in media literacy becomes crucial in responding to and interpreting the production of meaning related to the Palestine-Israel conflict, particularly when it involves the objectification of children as victims disseminated through memes on social media platforms such as Instagram. Amidst the rapid flow of emotionally charged digital content, many social media users become captivated by touching visual representations without critically engaging with the context, motives, or underlying narratives. Memes, as dense forms of visual communication often satirical in nature can shape public perception instantly, yet they also risk reducing the complexity of conflict into simplistic symbols that manipulate emotions and may reinforce political stereotypes or biases (Fernando et al., 2025). When children are used as symbols of suffering, they become not only physical victims of the conflict but also symbolic victims of mediated political narratives. Media literacy serves to foster the public's critical awareness, enabling individuals to move beyond passive consumption toward the ability to discern, analyze, and ethically contextualize the representations they encounter. In doing so, the public is better equipped to resist provocation or propaganda, and instead cultivate a more humane, just, and informed perspective.

6. Conclusion

The outcomes of this study demonstrate that the dissemination of issues related to children amid the Palestine-Israel conflict on Instagram extends beyond simple informative communication. This extension is evident in three pivotal findings. Firstly, the portrayal of children's issues within this milieu on Instagram not only reflects repressive behaviors and resistance but also delineates direct encounters between children and military forces in conflict zones. Secondly, this dissemination brings to the forefront the potential for children to endure trauma, sustain physical injuries, and face mortality in these locales. Thirdly, it illuminates the plight of children who endure the loss of parents, relatives, and their familial networks within conflict territories. These insights imply that while the dissemination of children's issues during the Palestine-Israel conflict on Instagram serves an informative purpose, it

concurrently seeks to depict and critically assess the circumstances, conditions, and ramifications of the conflict on children in these zones.

Contrasting with prior research, which predominantly concentrated on the dissemination, description, and narration of conflict-related issues on social media from a purely informative standpoint, the present study reveals that the dissemination of conflict issues on Instagram transcends informational communication. It also endeavors to describe and critically evaluate the situation, conditions, and implications of the conflict on vulnerable populations in these regions. In this context, critically evaluate refers to a reflective inquiry into how these digital representations frame suffering, mediate power relations, and influence public understanding of conflict. Thus, it is anticipated that the findings from this study will catalyze a dialogic foundation for forthcoming research that aspires to more reflectively and solution-orientedly address war-related issues propagated through social media. Acknowledging a limitation, this study's data collection was exclusively conducted via Instagram using the hashtag *#jalurgaza* (*#gazastrip*). Despite this constraint, it is expected that this limitation will pave the way for future inquiries into conflict-related issues disseminated on social media, employing a more diversified and comparative array of hashtags, thereby enriching the academic discourse on this subject.

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