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Shattered lives, unbroken stories: journalists' perspectives from the frontlines of the Israel–Gaza war

Abstract

Purpose: This study sheds light on the unprecedented complexities of the Israel–Gaza war, offering insights into the challenges that journalists face in this conflict zone. It employs the Hierarchy of Influences Model to analyze the factors influencing conflict reporting within the dynamic landscape of contemporary war journalism.

Design/methodology/approach: Rooted in the Hierarchy of Influences Model, the research is informed by interviews with 18 Palestinian journalists in Gaza. It examines the multifaceted influences on war coverage, encompassing individual, media routines, organizational, and societal factors, offering detailed insights from journalists' firsthand experiences.

Findings: The research unveils semi-hierarchical influences within the model, illustrating the intertwined nature of micro and macro-level factors impacting war reporting. It sheds light on the complexities of journalistic practices amidst conflicts, underscoring the importance of safety, ethics, and the intricate relationship between personal experiences and professional duties as well as the evolving role of technology, acting both as a facilitator and a limitation in journalistic endeavors.

Practical implications: The study holds substantial implications for war journalism practices, providing valuable perspectives for educators, policymakers, stakeholders, and media practitioners engaged in conflict reporting. It highlights the

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importance of understanding and addressing the challenges faced by journalists in conflict regions to enhance the quality and accuracy of war reporting.

Social implications: By uncovering the challenges and influences affecting war reporting, this research contributes to the broader discourse on media ethics, safety protocols, and the societal impact of conflict coverage. It emphasizes the need for comprehensive support systems and ethical guidelines to safeguard journalists operating in volatile regions.

Originality/value: Bridging academic and practical perspectives on conflict reporting, this study offers unique insights into reporting complexities in the Israel–Gaza War. It emphasizes the critical role of journalistic practices in navigating hazards and limitations, amid evolving challenges for the media in portraying conflicts accurately.

Keywords: Israeli–Palestinian conflict; hierarchy of influences model; journalistic ethics; war coverage; journalism safety; Israel–Gaza war

1 Introduction

The Israel–Gaza war that began in October 2023, has had notable implications for journalists (UNESCO 2024). As of October 7, 2023, a minimum of 107 journalists and media personnel – comprising 102 Palestinians, two Israelis, and three Lebanese, have tragically lost their lives, underscoring the grave dangers inherent in war reporting (CPJ 2024a). Additionally, 32 journalists have sustained injuries, with two individuals reported missing and 38 facing detention (CPJ 2024a). These challenges have been exacerbated by physical assaults, intimidation tactics, cyberattacks, censorship, and even the targeting of Palestinian journalists' families and acquaintances (CPJ 2024a). This starkly highlights the significant risks journalists encounter, symbolizing the obstructions to freedom of the press in conflict zones.

In recognition of their courage and unwavering commitment, Palestinian journalists reporting from Gaza have been honored with the prestigious 2024 UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize (UNESCO 2024). Amidst the Israeli ground offensive in Gaza, these journalists have put their lives on the line to document unfolding events. They have navigated through devastating aerial bombardments, compromised communication channels, limited resources, and widespread power outages (CPJ 2024a). This predicament has positioned locally-based journalists as solitary beacons of information from the frontline. Furthermore, the restricted access for international journalists, predominantly limited to those embedded with the Israeli military, further limits the comprehensive coverage of the war (IFJ 2024; Tobitt 2024). This has accentuated the obstacles that the media

encounters in presenting a nuanced portrayal of the conflict, reflecting Tasseron's (2023) insights on the intricacies of war reporting.

In such challenging circumstances, the relevance of war journalism across all media becomes more pertinent amidst ongoing debates on war coverage, particularly in the Middle East. The current study delves into insights from interviews with Palestinian journalists in Gaza, informed by the Hierarchy of Influences Model (Reese and Shoemaker 2016; Shoemaker and Reese 1996, 2014), to disentangle the texture of complex and nuanced processes typifying the news-making enterprise of conflict reporting. In this context, the work delves into discussing the factors influencing conflict reporting, which include individual factors, media routines, organizational factors, social institutional factors, and social systems factors. These factors encompass ethical dilemmas, ensuring journalists' safety, and grappling with the personal aspects in war reportage.

By analyzing the perspectives of local journalists in Gaza, this research bridges academic theories with on-the-ground realities, enriching the current literature on media coverage of war. It provides valuable insights for media practitioners, policymakers, and researchers. Ultimately, this research highlights the unwavering dedication of journalists to document and chronicle events amidst the demanding conditions of wartime, emphasizing the critical importance of supporting their endeavors in perilous environments.

2 Literature review

2.1 Journalism amidst conflict: an overview

During conflicts, the media plays various roles, not limited to being mere observers but also serving as sources of intelligence, participants, tools, targets, and arenas (Allan and Zelizer 2004). The ability of reporters to cover unfolding events dates back to the inception of war journalism itself (Høiby and Ottosen 2017). The absence of journalists reporting directly from war zones and conflicts hinders the media's function as the Fourth Estate (Høiby and Ottosen 2017; Nohrstedt and Ottosen 2014). Journalists, as active social agents, are deeply involved in the crises they report on, particularly wars (Morrison 1994).

War journalists, covering conflicts, face physical and psychological risks, including being in the line of fire, exposed to threats directed at them or their families, and at risk of becoming casualties themselves (Charles 2022; McLaughlin 2016; Obermaier et al. 2023). Data from the Committee to Protect Journalists shows that between January 1992 and February 2024, 2,171 journalists globally lost their lives while undertaking professional duties (CPJ 2024b).

While most studies concentrate on war correspondents and freelance journalists covering international conflicts, it is significant to note that the majority of journalists harmed or killed while on duty are domestic journalists (Unesco 2020; Tejedor et al. 2020). Unesco's report on the safety of journalists in 2020 reveals that a high number of local journalists were targeted, emphasizing that "local journalists continue to be the primary targets" (Unesco 2020, sec. 2.5). Unlike their international counterparts, local journalists often lack the means to escape threats or traumatic environments, making them both witnesses and victims (Betz and Beighley 2020).

Attacks on journalists during conflicts not only violate press freedom but also impede the public's right to information (Horsley 2020), posing a prolonged threat to the media's role as an independent governmental watchdog, the Fourth Estate (Frey 2023). Ensuring the safety of journalists is paramount in shaping war reporting (Tasseron 2023). Tasseron's research on journalists' risk perceptions during the 2014 Gaza conflict revealed that while safety measures were essential, they often constrained journalists' movements, hampering their ability to freely report on specific aspects of the war. Although international humanitarian law theoretically safeguards journalists in conflict zones (Council of Europe 2023), the practical reality highlights that reporters frequently lack adequate protection and encounter mounting hazards (Høiby and Ottosen 2017; Tasseron 2023). Furthermore, war journalists are at a heightened risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression in comparison to their peers (Aoki et al. 2012; McMahon and Lyall 2019). They experience primary trauma as direct targets of violence, secondary trauma from witnessing war atrocities, or tertiary trauma from interviewing victims (Feinstein et al. 2014; Obermaier et al. 2023).

Beyond these challenges, conflicts bring about complexities that put traditional journalistic standards, especially impartiality, to the test (Şahin 2021). Journalists who align with one of the conflicting parties find themselves in a delicate balancing act, juggling their professional duties and national loyalties (Zandberg and Neiger 2005). This duality places them in a challenging position, caught between the demands of their profession, moral dilemmas, and the tug-of-war between detachment, autonomy, impartiality, and emotional engagement with their community (Boudana 2015; Kotisova 2020; McLaughlin 2016; Nygren et al. 2018; Zandberg and Neiger 2005). Boudana (2015) contends that, in times of conflict, the choices between detachment and involvement are not always deliberate, influenced by the journalists' beliefs and the specific circumstances they face.

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Zelizer and Allan (2011) argued that journalists lacked a detached standpoint from which to objectively observe the crisis. Tumber and Prentoulis (2003) highlighted the significant impact of 9/11 on war journalism, blurring traditional boundaries, raising objectivity questions, and potentially fostering a more emotionally expressive reporting style, embracing a more human-centric approach to war reporting (Tumber 2011).

Additionally, national contexts significantly mold journalistic practices and viewpoints, where patriotic sentiments can sometimes override professional ones, leading journalists to align with their national or ethnic community, shaping their coverage of conflicts (Şahin 2021). Fahmy et al. (2022) discovered that on social media Yemeni journalists, deeply connected to the Yemen conflict, tend to present a more personalized narrative by sharing personal stories focusing on the human toll, whereas non-Yemeni journalists often emphasize international politics. This trend of personalization is not entirely new; historical instances, such as news anchors wearing American flag pins after 9/11, illustrate journalists' proclivity to express personal ties to events (Deggans 2021). In situations where patriotism becomes a prevailing public sentiment, individual journalists may struggle to remain detached from patriotic displays (Şahin 2021; Zelizer and Allan 2011). Sometimes, patriotism is viewed as virtuous, especially during conflicts (Al-Najjar 2011). In the Arab media, patriotism could be seen as 'a virtue and not a breach of journalism ethics' (Al-Najjar 2011: 754). Kotisova (2020) proposes that objectivity may not be a fixed ideal but a concept that journalists adapt based on circumstances, suggesting that journalistic professionalism in such scenarios may revolve more around ethical decision-making and fulfilling journalistic roles effectively rather than strict neutrality.

The recent wars, like the one in Gaza, not solely highlight these complexities but also shed light on the significant threats faced by journalists on the frontlines. These threats have compelled many journalists covering the war to leave Gaza since there were no secure refuges for them (See CPJ Staff 2024). A report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights indicates that "Gaza has seemingly become the deadliest place for journalists – and their families – in the world" (OHCHR 2023, para. 3). This war has been identified as the deadliest for journalists covering conflicts since records began in 1992 (CPJ 2024a). Despite protections under international law, nearly one in ten Gaza-based journalists has been killed, reflecting the grave risks faced by local Palestinian reporters (Acosta 2024).

3 Theoretical framework

3.1 The hierarchy of influences model

Within such complexity and meticulousness of the theater of conflict, where the narrative is constructed and deconstructed at the same time, local war journalists raise their role as an indispensable nexus of both exploration and elucidation. This study situates itself within the evolving terrain of the enduring Palestinian-Israeli conflict, guided by the hierarchy of influences model proffered by Shoemaker and Reese (1996). This model organizes influences on news content into a nested

hierarchy of five levels: individual, routines, organizational, extramedia, and ideological. These levels often interplay and intersect, creating a multi-layered tapestry of determinants that mold the storytelling of frontline journalists. Anchored on this spectrum of influences, the study delves into how these layers collectively impact the narrative constructed by local war journalists.

Building upon this foundation, the improved and refined model (Reese and Shoemaker 2016; Shoemaker and Reese 1996, 2014) provides a framework within which one can disentangle the threads of influences shaping journalists' work amidst war. The model clearly reflects that the origin of news content journalism is not plain, simply unidimensional but a result of a continuum range of determinants from the micro-level of individual journalists to the macro-level of societal structures (Reese and Shoemaker 2016).

The paradigm steps out from the stratum of the individual by doing due scrutiny to the characteristics inherent and life trajectories of journalists, postulating that these nuanced dimensions hold capabilities of subtle, yet deep influences over news reportage. This underlines – with a heavy sense – the role that personal characteristics play in sustaining and even the enrichment of the larger field of journalism (Weaver et al. 2007).

Ascending to the level of routine, it examines traditional habits and standardized practices in the journalistic field; not belonging to any organization, it is, for example, the valorization of certain news values together with professional standards that influence the journalistic output (Shoemaker and Vos 2009). For example, Tuchman (1972) makes clear how, while the strategic ritual of objectivity is the basic norm for journalism, it is actually much less connected with the search for an objective truth but rather with compliance to a certain set of procedural norms created to steer professional hazards that are always inherent in journalism.

Proceeding up the organizational level, scrutiny is first partitioned to the inner processes and demands of the media entities, including their policies, financial challenges, and management structures, which reveal their cardinal role in determining how news is shared (Shoemaker and Vos 2009). In such complexity, the real formidable challenge is balancing the inner demands with the fundamental values of journalistic integrity, reflecting strategic imperatives of media ownership (Reese 2019).

Advancing further, the social-institutional layer - formerly known as "extra media" contemplates external or outsider vectors like regulatory frameworks and advertising patronage, elucidating their sway in narrative selection and presentation (Reese and Shoemaker 2016; Shoemaker and Reese 1996). Simultaneously, the engagement of actors, such as public relations professionals, journalism's audiences, and the government or other powerful news sources, introduces additional dimensions of complexity into the nexus within which journalistic output is conceived and promulgated (Ferrucci and Kuhn 2022).

Culminating at the most social systems macro level - previously known as "ideological," the framework recognizes the influence of societal norms and ideologies, contemplating their ability to shape news framing and media messages in accordance with or opposition to dominant social convictions (Shoemaker and Reese 2014; Shoemaker and Vos 2009). Journalism at this level is seen as an integral part of a broader sociocultural entity, capturing a critical analysis of news dissemination where journalistic actors craft narratives founded on "ideas in the service of interests," (Reese 2019, p. 2).

Notwithstanding the linear presentation of the above five levels within the framework, it may be construed that the macro strata inherently wield greater influence. However, Shoemaker and Reese (2014) contend that the demarcations between these levels have become increasingly indistinct, particularly amidst the changing dynamics of contemporary journalistic environments. Consequently, the trajectory of influence has become elusive, challenging the assumption of hierarchical dominance. Thus, the model is not crafted to analyze all levels of influence concurrently, as nuances in the comprehension of these analytical tiers persist. Nevertheless, the hierarchy of influences model retains its utility, as it facilitates the identification of systemic patterns and disparate social structures crucial for comprehending the intricate dynamics shaping journalistic practices (Reese 2019).

3.2 The dynamics of micro and macro level influences on war journalism

In examining the interplay of micro and macro influences on war journalism, studies have primarily focused on reporters in conflict zones, predominantly aligning with the hierarchy-of-influences paradigm through an embedded journalist approach (Fahmy and Johnson 2012, 2005). However, this focus often disregards the contributions of local non-embedded journalists. Precisely in this area is the aim of the present study – one that must seek to integrate, therefore, some of the insights from those who worked on the ground with mainstream discussions.

Fahmy and Johnson's research on embedded journalists, beginning in 2005 and revisited in 2012, critically examined the applicability of the hierarchy-of-influences model. Their initial investigation employed a quantitative survey to assess the perceptions of 159 journalists from 22 countries, mainly serving as embedded correspondents during the Iraq war. Their study challenged the expected direction of hierarchy proposed by Shoemaker and Reese (1996), which suggested that extramedia factors have a greater role than individual traits. However, Fahmy and Johnson (2005) concluded the opposite.

In their 2012 follow-up, Fahmy and Johnson found that journalists' positive perceptions of their embedded reporting persisted, echoing their 2005 findings. Yet, they again noted minimal support for the hierarchy-of-influences model as initially conceptualized, affirming that professional values and norms hold the most significant sway over embedded reporters.

This persistent theme highlights the intricate dynamics within war journalism, where both internal convictions and external pressures shape the narrative, despite occasional acknowledgments of biased or sensationalized reporting (Fahmy and Johnson 2012, 2005). That's why subsequent discussions by Shoemaker, Reese, and others, including in 2014, 2016, and 2019, recognized the complexities and intertwined nature of these influences.

All of these considered, the present study applies the last-edited version of the model (Reese and Shoemaker 2016), with the focus being on the five levels that encompass the most micro to the most macro, within a context of local non-embedded reporters that report for different local and international outlets. This study seeks to explore how the model is working within the distinctive setting of an extended conflict that has changed to include a new element: local journalists who emerged as the sole communicators to the international community. This is not a question of control or that local journalists are better but very much a function of the current conditions of this conflict.

At the time this study was conducted, written and published, the Gaza Strip, which is the epicenter of the conflict, was closed, specifically for the entry of non-local reporters: a combination of both safety and logistics, together with other opaque reasons. With the Gaza conflict entering its eighth month, international journalists remain mostly prevented from reaching the territory unless going on escorted trips with the Israeli military (IFJ 2024).[1]

4 Research questions

This study aims to explore how individual characteristics and journalists' backgrounds, including previous experience, influence their narrative style as DeFacto

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[1] On February 28, 2024, more than 55 global journalists sought permission to enter Gaza through Israel and Egypt, underlining the significance of supporting local journalists facing safety challenges (Tobitt 2024). Two days later, on March 1st, 2024, leaders of over 30 international media organizations released a public letter to express their solidarity with journalists in Gaza (Tobitt 2024). The letter raised concerns about the continuous limitations on access for foreign journalists, except for intermittent escorted visits with the Israeli military. The journalists emphasized the ongoing constraints on access for foreign reporters, aside from sporadic accompanied trips with the Israeli military determining the route, location, duration of stay, and regulating journalists' access and interactions, thereby often impeding communication with Palestinians (Tobitt 2024).

local reporters in Gaza. Further, it explores the point of how adherence to the professional norms of reporting within such critical times becomes a challenge and a matter of their reportage, even if it means from the same organization. This does take into account the fact that at the organizational level, representation is done by different newsrooms' policies. It does explore how external sources of influence, blockades and war dynamics do shape their reports. Lastly, it examines the role of ideology in shaping the final narrative.

We specifically focus on Palestinian journalists living in Gaza, where international access has been challenging (IFJ 2024, Tobitt 2024). Gaza is now acknowledged as the most perilous place globally for journalists and their families, marking the deadliest period for conflict journalists since the Committee to Protect Journalists started collecting data in 1992 (OHCHR 2023; Committee to Protect Journalists 2024a). Despite international legal protections, the stark reality underscores the significant risks faced by local Palestinian reporters in this conflict (Acosta 2024).

Our research questions, then, based on our review of the literature and the Hierarchy of Influences Model, are as follows:

RQ: How do Palestinian journalists in Gaza perceive the influence of 1) Individual Level factors; 2) Media Routines Level factors; 3) Organizational Level factors; 4) Social Institutional Level factors (Extra media level factors) and 5) Social Systems Level factors (Ideological level factors) on their coverage of the Israel–Gaza war that started on October 7, 2023?

5 Method

We applied a qualitative inquiry focused on how journalists' work is shaped within the Israel–Gaza war and approaches to their work. We drew on the qualitative data analysis methods outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). The empirical data was collected through structured interviews with frontline journalists in Gaza, whose main purpose is to illuminate how the conditions in such troubled environments exercise their many influences on the practice of journalist reportage. We developed an analytic framework based on a model to dissect the news production continuum from individual journalists to societal echelons informed by Shoemaker and Reese's systematic 'Hierarchy of Influences', offering an intensive critical analysis of how journalists operate under pressure. This approach significantly contributes to the discourse surrounding journalists working in conflict areas.

To overcome the logistical challenges of contacting journalists in these conditions, we employed a comprehensive strategy to acquire and verify contact details for 80 journalists through professional networks, securing phone numbers and verified social media profiles. Despite the transient nature of war reporting and

Table 1: Selected journalists in Gaza reporting on the Israel–Gaza war that began on October 07, 2023.

Name	Title	Organization
Abdullah Obead	Journalist	An-Najah (NBC)/Al-Ghad TV
Ahmed Alzard	Photojournalist & Program Producer	Al-Kofiya Channel
Youmna El Sayed	Journalist	Al Jazeera English
Wissam Ibrahim	Photojournalist & Sound Engineer	Screen Media Production
Salman Al-Bashir	Journalist	Palestine TV
Noor Harazeen	Journalist	CGTN
Mohamed Awad	Journalist	Al Arabiya
Mohamed Al-Akhras	Photojournalist	CGTN and Media 24
Al-Hassan Selmi	Photojournalist	Media 24
Basel Alatar	Journalist	AlMamlaka TV
Abdul Aziz Al-Afifi	Photojournalist	Screen Media Production
Aziz Al-Kahlout	Journalist	Freelancer
Amir Al-Maghary	Photojournalist	Freelancer
Ahmed Ghanim	Journalist	Al Mayadeen
Ibrahim Qanan	Journalist	Al-Ghad TV
Safaa Al-Habil	Journalist	Palestine TV
Haneen Harara	Journalist	Paltoday TV
Anonymous	–	–

intermittent communication services, a multi-channel approach utilizing WhatsApp and other digital platforms proved effective in establishing communication with 18 journalists, selected via purposive sampling for their direct and firsthand engagement within the prevailing conflict zones in Gaza, a criterion that guarantees an empirical comprehension of their operational practices under these specific circumstances. This selection process ensured a diverse sample of 13 men and 5 women journalists, each aged between their 30s and 40s, with approximately 10–20 years of professional experience. The participants have educational backgrounds in journalism, with some holding Master's degrees in journalism and media studies. They are employed across a diverse spectrum of organizations, including freelance roles, local news outlets, and international news agencies, all united by a shared Palestinian identity. Table 1 details a complete list of the selected journalists in Gaza, along with their job description and the news organization/s they are working for.

The interviews extended from January to March 2024, following the onset of hostilities on October 7, 2023. Our methodology flexibly adapted to a three-month engagement with the journalists, a strategic response to anticipated communicative challenges arising from the ongoing and intensifying conflict. This extended engagement, although not initially planned, was crucial for ensuring continuous dialogue amidst the shifting dynamics of the conflict. To this end, and with the objective of optimizing respondent convenience while simultaneously enhancing the data

collection process's efficacy, a rigorous evaluative procedure was implemented. This procedure ascertained that the dissemination of standardized inquiries, articulated in written Arabic – the primary communicative vernacular – represented the most judicious approach for conducting interviews. As a corollary, the acquisition of responses was facilitated through offering various modalities for response including voice audio, written communication, or through virtual meetings. Responses were predominantly obtained in the form of individual voice notes or video recordings, with some cases in written format, each spanning a duration of 15–30 min. Two exceptions were virtual interviews lasting 1 hour or more. The data emanating from these participants' responses underwent an automatic transcription process, subsequently subjected to meticulous verification to ensure accuracy. Following this, the transcribed scripts were translated into English if originally conducted in Arabic. The translated content underwent rigorous scrutiny by the native Arabic researchers who are bilingual in English and Arabic ensuring the fidelity and precision of the translations and facilitating communication with the journalists.

The researchers involved in the project have backgrounds in academia and journalism, especially in war and peace journalism, which were crucial for constructing the interview guide. This melding of theoretical insights with practical expertise enriched the research methodology, categorizing the interview questions into five thematic areas: journalists' individual experiences and values, media routines and editorial policies, the structural and ownership dimensions of media organizations, and the impact of broader social institutional forces, including government, economy, culture, and the overarching influence of political ideologies and cultural systems.

To uphold the ethical integrity of our methodology, clearance was secured from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Furthermore, the study's methodological rigor extended to the formulation of interview questions, designed to foster openness and candor among participants while minimizing emotional bias. Our approach was complemented by strict confidentiality measures and ethical considerations, including informed consent and the provision of trigger warnings, to accommodate the sensitive nature of the subject matter. Only one journalist chose to remain anonymous. To ensure the confidentiality of interviewee data, additional precautions included routine uploading of interviews and field notes to cloud-based storage solutions.

6 Findings

6.1 How Palestinian journalists in Gaza perceive the influence of Individual Level factors on their coverage of the Israel–Gaza war that started on October 7, 2023

Exploring the individual level factors entails examining the elements that might shape journalists' perspectives, especially when they find themselves in dual roles as

witnesses and victims of the ongoing conflict. These factors include personal background, values and beliefs, professional experiences, threats faced, and their understanding of their role in this war.

6.1.1 Personal background

The journalists share a common Palestinian identity shaped by witnessing multiple conflicts over the past three decades. Their personal experiences drive their motivation to report on the Palestinian cause. Over the past three decades, the journalists have witnessed multiple conflicts, starting from the first and second "Intifada," and the conflicts of 2008, 2012, 2014, 2018, 2021, and 2022, all the way to this ongoing war. Living through wars not only as observers but as members of the community has fostered a distinct perspective that has shaped their reporting. For example, witnessing journalists being exposed to tear gas bombs and gunfire on television during the second "Intifada," as mentioned by Abdullah Obead, and seeing the killing of Fadel Shana'a, a Palestinian journalist working as a cameraman for Reuters, by a shell fired by an Israeli tank on TV, as recounted by Amir Al-Maghary, strengthened their resolve to pursue journalism. For most of them, journalism is not merely a profession but a lifelong vocation. Salman Al-Bashir, for instance, pursued academic enrichment to deepen his grasp of responsible war reporting, stressing the importance of navigating the complexities of conflict coverage thoughtfully. Despite facing challenges, the journalists interviewed assert that their commitment to their profession endures undiminished.

6.1.2 Values and beliefs

Diverse approaches among journalists in handling graphic content reveal a nuanced interplay between personal and professional values. Some argue for the primacy of ethical treatments and the mitigation of audience distress resulting from exposure to graphic content,[2] while others emphasize the necessity of depicting reality and ensuring the audience's right to know. These divergent views underscore the influence of personal convictions and professional principles on journalists' understanding of their roles and responsibilities within society. Furthermore, a significant emphasis on faith was evident in their responses, showcasing how personal beliefs can influence professional practices and coping strategies. Their belief system was perceived as a source of strength and resilience, molding their perception of risk and

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2 For example, Youmna El Sayed expresses her reluctance to share graphic content: "because I know the amount of damage that they cause inside you as a human being and as a person, I would never share them."

protection amidst the perilous environment of war reporting, as articulated by Abdullah Obead: "God is the sole protector … and that's it."

6.1.3 Professional experiences

The expertise of the journalists sheds light on how their professional backgrounds inform their approach to reporting on conflicts. Having covered previous Israeli-Palestinian confrontations in 2021, 2018, 2014, and 2012, most possess substantial experience across various media platforms. Some, such as Basel Alatar, Youmna El Sayed, and Abdul Aziz Al-Afifi, expressed a desire to showcase stories beyond the war, focusing on the positive aspects and aesthetics of Gaza, highlighting tales of success and achievement. This inclination underlines how individual experiences and aspirations can shape journalistic outputs.

Despite their collective experience, all journalists acknowledged the unprecedented nature of this war. Salman Al-Bashir noted, "In this war, things are completely different," while Mohamed Awad emphasized, "We are covering a war that no one had any experience about … I mean, we are the ones with the experience, if we survived, of course." This acknowledgment of the distinctive challenges underscores their dedication to their profession amidst such unprecedented and exceptional circumstances.

6.1.4 Threats

Examining the challenges confronted by Palestinian journalists in Gaza illustrates the profound severity of threats in the ongoing conflict, which has substantially affected these journalists' personal lives and hindered their capacity to provide comprehensive news coverage in the public's best interest. While 12 out of the 18 journalists interviewed received safety training for war coverage. In general, they found it inadequate and even incapable in helping them face the realities of the current war. Al-Hassan Selmi, Mohamed Al-Akhras, and Noor Harazeen called for more effective safety training programs tailored for Palestinian journalists.

6.1.4.a Physical threats

Palestinian journalists in Gaza confront severe physical threats with inadequate protective measures. It is notable that by May 2024, six out of the 18 interviewed journalists had fled Gaza. Despite safety protocols and gear such as press vests and helmets, they have expressed feeling vulnerable and unprotected. Wissam Ibrahim points out: "We are all under fire, despite all the laws and norms that guarantee the freedom and safety of journalists."

The interviewees sense being specifically targeted due to their journalist status.[3] Some even opt to separate from their families while sleeping to ensure their safety, as highlighted by Abdul Aziz Al-Afifi. These journalists often regard their protective equipment as a safety liability, as explained by Abdullah Obead, who has faced multiple targeting incidents: "sometimes we remove the press shields out of fear for our lives."[4] Salman Al-Bashir further elaborates on a well-known incident when he removed his protective gear while reporting live on air upon learning of the death of his colleague Mohamed Abu Hatab (PalestineTV 2023). He recalls:

> When I took off the press vest, I took it off because it was heavy. By the way, it is very heavy in weight, but at this moment [I felt] it was heavier than mountains. You are wearing this weight on your body, and you think that all this weight will protect you from being targeted, but to discover that it is only for identification.

The persistent physical threats undeniably challenge the journalists' approach to their professional duties and their perception of their role in conflict zones.

6.1.4.b Emotional challenges

Beyond physical perils, journalists grapple with overwhelming emotional and psychological strains stemming from witnessing harrowing events, such as witnessing gruesome scenes of killed and injured people, as well as body parts and animals feeding on dead bodies. The recognition of the need for therapy by 16 out of 18 interviewees underscores the mental toll of war coverage. Salman Al-Bashir suggests that erasing memories might be essential for coping. The emotional burden is palpable in the profound expressions of journalists overwhelmed by the unceasing suffering they witness[5] and the perils and uncertainties they confront. Haneen Harara reflects, "The mind is constantly preoccupied with thoughts of family. Are they safe? Are we safe? Will all of us return unharmed? Will I make it back home alive? Who among us will live to tell the story?"

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3 Haneen Harara notes, "Unfortunately, there was a clear intention to target journalists in specific body parts, like the hand, to prevent them from holding the microphone. Photographers, too, were targeted in their arms and hands to hinder their ability to shoot."
4 Haneen Harara points out, "Freelance journalist Mustafa Thuria, along with his colleague Al-Jazeera journalist Hamza Al Dahdouh, were deliberately bombed because they owned a camera drone." In addition, Noor Harazeen highlights that several journalists relied on Thuria's services because of his possession of the drone, leading to speculation about the motive behind his killing.
5 The anonymous journalist interviewed who learned of their friend's death expresses: "We are being emotionally murdered, but the martyr rests. We are the ones who are killed every day by living … the world is unjust, and no one is helping us."

6.1.4.c Malnutrition

In this war, the Palestinian journalists also endure malnutrition, adding an extra layer of fatigue that underscores the hurdles they face in meeting their basic needs while fulfilling their professional obligations. Noor Harazeen notes: "We could stay for 24 hours and 48 hours with very little food".

6.1.5 Role perception and personalization

A distinct aspect of role perception and personalization emerges as these journalists straddle the line between reporting and being part of the affected community. Their primary concern extends beyond personal safety to the well-being of their families, imbuing their professional responsibilities with an emotional depth. Among them, three journalists recounted the loss of multiple family members in the ongoing war: Haneen Harara, who mourns the loss of over 50 relatives and Amir Al-Maghary's poignant contemplation encapsulates this dual existence, highlighting the emotional turmoil they endure while documenting the chaos and fretting about their dear ones amidst the turmoil. Amir Al-Maghary recounts:

> Every moment while working inside Al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir Al-Balah, covering the martyrs and injuries, I was imagining my children and my family. My heart was trembling with worry and fear for them because of the indiscriminate Israeli bombing that affected every place and every house in Gaza. I had reached a stage of psychological and physical exhaustion, as if I were over 100 years old.

This exceptional scenario shapes their journalistic practices, instilling a heightened sense of national obligation and personal commitment that transcends standard objectives. Salman Al-Bashir articulates the dual role they embody, as both victims and reporters deeply engrossed in the unfolding tragedy in Gaza. Mohamed Awad emphasizes the shared experiences and displacement, reinforcing their dedication to documenting the realities of life in Gaza. Mohamed Awad elaborates: "Undoubtedly, the sense of national responsibility is present … since I have become a part of this war. Meaning that I have been displaced with those who were displaced, and I am exposed to what the residents here are exposed to."

For these journalists, the risks they confront act as potent motivators to persist in reporting on the conflict, driven by a profound sense of duty to their country and people. Their work transcends mere employment to become a national imperative, underscoring the pivotal role they play in safeguarding their community and homeland.[6]

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[6] Youmna El Sayed articulates: "For us as journalists from the Gaza Strip, it's more of a duty because this is a war on every single Palestinian civilian in Gaza. So, you're reporting or you're defending your people and your land. It's more of that mindset that we have."

6.2 How journalists in Gaza perceive the influence of Media Routines Level factors on their coverage of the Israel–Gaza war that started on October 7, 2023

This question delves into journalists' experiences in navigating media routines in conflict zones, where customary norms, values, and practices of the profession are being tested and redefined. The analysis revolves around three main themes: the ethical dilemmas impacting journalists professionally and personally, the emotional toll incurred and the equilibrium between professional ethics and personal considerations; and the substantial effect of the emergence and incorporation of social media platforms.

6.2.1 Ethical dilemmas

Journalists often grapple with ethical challenges, particularly regarding the use of graphic content. Some opt against using such images to respect the victims and shield the audience from trauma, while others feel compelled to showcase the harsh reality of the situation to raise awareness. These dilemmas encapsulate the essence of war reporting: the challenges of when, how, and whether to publish stories in their raw form. Journalists frequently report dilemmas in deciding whether and how to present the harsh realities of war, particularly the deaths of children, without undermining the gravity of the situation or causing further distress to the audience and victims' families. Basel Alatar elaborates, "I strive to steer clear of depicting scenes of mutilated children's bodies, and if they are shown, albeit sometimes inevitable, they are presented with restraint, not in their entirety." Furthermore, Ahmed Ghanim adds a layer to this ethical navigation, noting, "Initially, there exists a slender margin distinguishing between our professional conduct and national allegiance." This further points at the complex dynamic between journalistic integrity, ethical responsibility, and at the same time, the personal possibly in some cases, or national identities at other times within the reporting.

6.2.2 Emotional impact and professionalism

Journalists repeatedly highlight the emotional toll and the challenge of maintaining objectivity when personally connected to the conflicts they report on. This complicates their role as impartial observers. The interviews reveal a constant struggle between their professional duty and personal emotions like sorrow, anger, or solidarity with the victims. The vivid accounts shared by Abdullah Obead and Ibrahim Qanan depict the profound emotional impact of witnessing suffering and death in

Gaza. Abdullah Obead shares a vivid example of this tension, noting, "there were numerous images of human blood, corpses, martyrs, skulls … I shot a segment of a human body in Khan Younis being consumed by dogs, birds, and also cats …" Similarly, Ibrahim Qanan recounts, "I saw a woman whose fetus was outside her abdomen due to her being bombed by an F-16, and I saw the entrails of a child outside his body," highlighting the severe emotional impact such scenes have on journalists. Despite the distressing scenes they encounter, as pointed out by Haneen Harara, there is no "time to feel sad or shocked" as they must quickly go live to report on the unfolding events. Harara recounts a horrifying experience:

> There was a bombing just a few meters in front of me, with body parts flying and landing at my feet as I stood there. I was in shock; I couldn't even grieve. There was no time. I didn't have time to feel sad or shocked. I just wanted to act quickly. There were people we needed to report about in the news, live reports. There was no time for sorrow. We had to act swiftly.

Amid these challenges, Ahmed Ghanim stresses the importance of ensuring information accuracy, emphasizing the need for reliable sources when reporting on events that involve human lives. This commitment to accuracy is further echoed by Ibrahim Qanan, who emphasizes the role of professionalism in presenting unembellished accounts of the atrocities against civilians. Qanan asserts, "We are professionals attempting to cover events objectively, yet professionalism dictates that we relay precisely what the camera captures, without embellishment or omission, and these are scenes of massacres against unarmed civilians." Such reflections illustrate the intricate balance between professional ethics, emotional resilience, and the dedication to tell the story with integrity.

6.2.3 The role of social media

Interviewees discuss the impact of social media and citizen journalism in sharing content from conflict zones. This shift towards decentralized reporting raises ethical concerns and challenges, as unfiltered information reaches a broad audience without the traditional oversight of journalistic outlets. Social media is recognized for its dual-edged sword: facilitating immediate and widespread news distribution while also complicating efforts to maintain accuracy and ethical standards due to the rapid circulation of unverified or graphic content. This observation underscores the significant influence of digital platforms on news dissemination, where the swift propagation of unverified or graphic content disrupts conventional journalism practices. In response to these complexities, journalists have formed collaborative groups to uphold professional standards, emphasizing trust and mutual support within the journalistic

community.[7] This proactive approach highlights the importance of solidarity and verification among journalists in navigating the evolving landscape of social media and ensuring integrity and accuracy in reporting conflict events.

6.3 How journalists in Gaza perceive the influence of Organizational Level factors on their coverage of the Israel–Gaza war that started on October 7, 2023

This question explores the organizational influence experienced by journalists in media structures, ownership, and editorial policies. The analysis highlights four key themes: Editorial Independence and Organizational Structure, Impact of Editorial Policies on Content, Pressures and Challenges in Conflict Reporting, and Safety Considerations.

6.3.1 Editorial independence and organizational structure

Journalists uniformly express a higher level of editorial independence within their media outlets compared to organizational structure or ownership. Abdullah Obead and Ahmed Alzard emphasize their dedication to reporting on the [Israeli occupation] without any organizational influence. Ahmed Alzard emphasizes, "There is no pressure from the organization's structure to hinder my publishing activities, and they do not interfere with my work in any way." Additionally, Aziz Al-Kahlout clarifies:

> There is significant collaboration between myself and the media organizations that I have worked with and still collaborate with in terms of publishing and coverage guidelines. Certain institutions focus on events, while others emphasize narratives, and I retain the authority to choose.

Abdullah Obead similarly stresses his editorial autonomy in the face of organizational structure or ownership.

6.3.2 Impact of editorial policies on content

Editorial guidelines concerning humanitarian issues related to the Gaza conflict are aligned with the essence and relevance of the content. Basel Alatar emphasizes the

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7 Basel Alatar reveals, "Groups have been established among us as journalists in the Gaza Strip … We operate on the principle of trust among ourselves as fellow journalists."

significance of portraying the human aspect of the conflict, shaped by the organizational focus on humanitarian reporting during his tenure at Al-Mamlaka TV.[8] This illustrates how editorial policies influence the content presented to the audience.

The alignment between journalists and their organizations in addressing different story angles, such as the opposition to [Israeli occupation], targeting various stories such as civilian narratives, underscores the profound impact of organizational values on reporting styles and focus. Statements by both Ahmed Ghanim and Salman base themselves on the organizational vision towards portraying [resistance] and supporting the Palestinian people. Ahmed Ghanim underscores this stance, stating, "Our organization prioritizes the narrative of resistance and highlights the resilience of Palestinian people." Similarly, Salman emphasizes the importance of discretion in broadcasting sensitive locations to avoid aiding potential adversaries.[9] This approach demonstrates the selective publication of content that conveys victims' suffering without compromising operational security.

6.3.3 Challenges and pressures in conflict reporting

While journalists, like Mohamed Al-Akhras, acknowledge pressures to publish or conform to internal expectations, the overall picture suggests a selective portrayal of reality influenced by organizational culture.[10] These perspectives highlight the delicate balance journalists maintain between external pressures and internal editorial guidelines, shaping their reporting practices and narratives.

6.3.4 Safety and other considerations

Some reporters exhibit a high level of discretion when it comes to managing safety and potential risks in conflict situations. Safaa Al-Habil describes how certain measures, such as providing on-site support for independent decision-making regarding safety

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8 Basel Alatar records, "I collaborate with a Jordanian channel that greatly supports my work. Jordan's political stance favors the Palestinians, aligning with our channel's focus on human stories rather than the military aspect."

9 Salman points out that not all footage, for example, showing tactical or sensitive locations, "should be broadcasted to avoid inadvertently aiding enemy targeting".

10 The anonymous journalist articulates this dynamic, saying, "My channel doesn't prevent me from posting information and doesn't reject any report I wish to submit. However, I rely on intuition to determine what is suitable for publication. The only limitation I face is that I cannot broadcast citizens' political views to maintain internal unity. For instance, I stay clear of reporting on incidents like tent theft or fuel hoarding, as such coverage can contribute to their scarcity in the market."

and coverage perspectives, are critical in conflict zones.[11] This assistance becomes crucial when journalists must make prompt judgments regarding their safety in evolving situations. It highlights the significant and often challenging decisions journalists face in conflict areas, balancing their professional duty with personal safety concerns.

6.4 How journalists in Gaza perceive the influence of Social Institutional Level factors on their coverage of the Israel–Gaza war that started on October 7, 2023

This question delves into the institutional level factors (Extra media level factors) experienced by journalists. The analysis underscores two key themes: Logistical and Communication Disruptions and Algorithm Bias Experiences in Social Media.

6.4.1 Logistical and communications disruptions

Journalists invariably express concerns about the challenges of logistical and internet access affecting their roles, particularly amidst soaring prices of essential goods. For instance, the surge in diesel fuel prices impedes their mobility to gather and share information, leading to reporting delays. Ahmed Alzard highlights the physical strain of extensive travel without a vehicle. The scarcity of fuel and frequent power outages present significant obstacles, notably impacting internet connectivity. Mohamed Al-Akhras and Basel Alatar emphasize the severe consequences of electricity cuts due to Israel's blockade on necessary journalistic equipment. Mobile phones play a vital role in capturing urgent situations, while disruptions in internet and communication systems force some journalists to use international or Israeli sim cards for content transmission. Climbing tall buildings to enhance signal reception exposes them to drone risks. Noor Harazeen recounts, "We had to ascend taller structures to improve the reception of network signals, making us vulnerable targets for flying drones. We had to scale higher buildings in the hope of catching any mobile signal that could transmit content." Haneen Harara illustrates another risky method of gaining access by moving closer to the border, likening it to: "throwing yourself into a minefield.[12]" TV

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11 Al-Habil emphasizes, "They gave us the choice to stay and continue working or to leave for our safety. Many stayed to depict the situation to the world despite challenges. We share the burden of the displaced."

12 Harara vividly states, "To access the internet, individuals can buy an electronic chip and position themselves near the border. However, this method is like playing with fire, as the border area is notoriously hazardous." Another option involves climbing to a high point, which comes with its own set of risks. In both situations, individuals face considerable danger.

reporters increasingly rely on expensive satellite transmission trucks (SNG) during internet broadcast disruptions. Basel Alatar elaborated on how communication delays impacted live broadcasts to newsrooms, with the limited availability of SNG units posing challenges in content distribution during internet downtimes.[13]

6.4.2 Algorithmic bias experiences in social media

Journalists frequently encounter algorithmic censorship on social media platforms, with field reporters using these platforms to send recorded materials to news organizations. Many media outlets retransmit content initially posted on journalists' personal accounts. Notably, international news channels like Al-Jazeera rely on videos and photos from individual journalists in inaccessible locations. This active participation in instant digital publishing has resulted in the suspension of all respondents' accounts on popular apps in Gaza, including Facebook and Instagram. This restriction poses an additional obstacle to their war coverage, as articulated by Haneen Harara: "The restrictions imposed by Meta platforms, limiting content and access, feel like battling on multiple fronts.[14]" The journalists all have experienced algorithmic censorship on their personal accounts, highlighting that content rejected by digital platforms can still be shared through traditional media channels. The anonymous journalist shares their experience:

> Facebook repeatedly blocked my account when I posted videos about conflicts, prompting me to abandon Instagram for similar reasons. The constraints are limiting our reach. If I include terms like 'occupation, deaths, killed, massacre,' my posts receive fewer views.

Despite facing challenges, journalists like Youmna El Sayed have found ways to navigate restrictions. She notes, "I phonetically express English terms in Arabic to convey the message, although this workaround falls short when visuals are required." Ahmed Alzard also shares his tactic: "I insert spaces or characters between letters to bypass algorithm bias, for example, typing 'Ai.r ra id'." While some websites and the interviewed journalists recommend substitute terms and emojis such as the watermelon symbol (which symbolizes Palestinian resistance), to evade detection, these strategies have not completely mitigated algorithmic biases. Consequently, journalists have been compelled to either discontinue platform usage

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13 Basel Alatar clarifies, "We send the video via the Satellite News Gathering Vehicles and inform the newsroom workers that we will be live, for instance, in exactly 10 min, and they prepare to receive us on time."

14 Harara explains, "We face censorship challenges. How do we combat them? Through persistence. We mustn't halt our efforts. Even if the video we intend to release today ends up being delayed by a couple of days, it doesn't matter. The crucial aspect is conveying the image and the message effectively."

or conform to prescribed content guidelines. Some have adjusted to meticulously reviewing social media posts, while others have faced difficulties with platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram, leading to some journalists leaving these platforms. The imposed censorship, coupled with algorithmic hurdles, has spurred journalists to explore alternatives and adjust the content shared with their audience, including followers and online contacts, amidst what resembles a digital blockade.

6.5 How journalists in Gaza perceive the influence of Social Systems Level factors on their coverage of the Israel–Gaza war that started on October 7, 2023

This question focused on journalists' ideologies and their connection to their journalistic work, focusing on the fifth level of the hierarchy of influences model. Surprisingly, at least four respondents chose not to respond directly to this question. However, insights from others highlight three key themes: The Dilemma of Remaining Neutral and the Ingrained Ideology, the assertion of Identity and Resistance Narrative, and the pivotal role of Ethical Considerations.

6.5.1 The dilemma of remaining neutral and the ingrained ideology

The dominant theme of neutrality and the ingrained ideology stands to the fore. Journalists like Abdullah Obead, Basel Alatar, and Ahmed Ghanim articulate how they attempt to separate personal biases and national identities from their professional practices in the context of the current war. The pressure of failing to convince the people to accept the occupation and conflict turns this challenge into a more unattainable mission, and render objectivity or neutrality potentially un-achievable and extremely complex. Ahmed Ghanim, for instance, identifies as an "independent journalist" in a "Palestinian environment," highlighting the challenge of maintaining a neutral stance amid the prevalent narrative of resistance and solidarity with the Palestinian cause. Ghanim acknowledges the difficulty and illogicality of achieving neutrality within a highly politicized atmosphere, noting, "I work in a media outlet that has a specific political stance, advocating for all forms of resistance worldwide." Abdullah Obead further questions the feasibility of neutrality:

> Honestly, how can we adhere to the principle of neutrality? We are always inclined towards the Palestinian people because there is no neutrality in covering this war. I am Palestinian, there is an occupier on my land, so neutrality is not applicable in this context.

Similarly, Basel Alatar acknowledges the struggle for neutrality while witnessing the harm done to children but strives for objectivity in his reporting.

6.5.2 The identity and resistance narrative

Aside this, the construction of identity and resistance in the journalists' reporting approaches is emphasized. Their devotion to document the essence of the Palestinian fight for human rights, and recognition through their journalistic work reflects the ethos of working towards a common cause. In this regard, Amir Al-Maghary and Abdul Aziz Al-Afifi underline the strategic importance of presenting the Palestinian struggle and narrative on the global stage to promote justice and humanity.[15]

6.5.3 Ethical considerations

Lastly, ethics are paramount, as demonstrated by Noor Harazeen in balancing Palestinian identity with journalistic principles:

> I believe there's a direct equilibrium between my identity as a Palestinian and commitment to neutrality. Because reporting the news in Gaza, in Palestine, is to convey the reality of what is happening in Gaza. So, when I describe something specific as a massacre, it's because it is a massacre.

Youmna El Sayed further enriches the discussion by highlighting the journalist's responsibility to report both sides honestly and with integrity. Haneen Harara emphasizes the importance of cultural awareness in thoroughly documenting war crimes and exposing human rights violations. While discussing a further dimension of ethical considerations regarding cultural norms and values, Harara emphasizes "the sanctity of the dead, and also respect for the families." She further explains the perceived obligation to record and share information:

> At times, we refrain from sharing images of blood and children. But how far can we abstain?! Amid witnessing and enduring these circumstances for months on end, the imperative for the world to witness the reality becomes paramount. Beyond honoring the deceased and respecting their families, full transparency in depicting the situation is essential […] In times of war, this flagrant violation of human rights must be meticulously documented.

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15 Al-Maghary further elaborates on the journalists' role in supporting the oppressed, stating, "In the face of Palestinian blood and our people's cries, the strength of the Palestinian journalist must emerge to support the oppressed … but Palestine deserves it, and the message must reach the world regardless of the cost."

7 Discussion

This research aimed to show the challenges that journalists face when reporting from war zones, focusing on the current Israel–Gaza war. It looked at the experiences of local Palestinian journalists in Gaza to understand how reporting conflicts has changed in the dynamic landscape of contemporary war reporting. Employing the Hierarchy of Influences Model (Reese and Shoemaker 2016; Shoemaker and Reese 1996, 2014), the study explored the different factors that affect war reporting at different levels. It revealed how individual, media routines, organizational, social institutional, and social systems level factors impact their war coverage, enriched with detailed narratives from the journalists' first-hand experiences.

At the individual level, the journalists' coverage is shaped by their personal backgrounds, values, and professional experiences. Their Palestinian identity and their sense of national duty, coupled with direct experiences of conflict, deeply influences their reporting motivations and perspectives. This finding aligns with the literature suggesting that journalists' individual values and experiences in conflict zones significantly impact their work (Fahmy and Johnson 2005; Fahmy et al. 2022; Høiby and Ottosen 2017). These findings not only align with previous research about conflict reporting and the possibility of detachment (e.g. Boudana 2015; Kotisova 2020; Şahin 2021; Zelizer and Allan 2011), but also reflects broader trends in the media landscape towards partisanship and advocacy (Hartley and Askanius 2020; Ojala 2021) which intensified during the Trump presidency in the United States (Ferullo 2020; Tett 2019). These results underscore the need for a nuanced understanding of journalistic impartiality in contemporary war coverage, situating this study within a global trend of shifting journalistic norms and practices. The dual role of being both witnesses and victims, facing threats to safety, and enduring malnutrition underscores the harsh realities of war reporting, highlighting a complex interplay between personal experiences and professional responsibilities.

Furthermore, journalists in Gaza encounter physical threats that have compelled them to navigate hazardous terrain, resulting in significant changes in the practice of war reporting. These threats have led to two distinct outcomes. First, they have restricted their entry to critical areas, impacting the extent and comprehensiveness of news coverage. Consequently, specific incidents or locations have received inadequate attention or remained unreported, resulting in information gaps. Second, these threats have prompted numerous journalists to depart from Gaza due to the absence of secure refuge options (CPJ Staff 2024). Remarkably, by the summer of 2024, one-third of the interviewed journalists had no recourse but to flee the Gaza Strip, driven by the imperative to escape the ravages of war and preserve their lives.

The media routines level reveals the ethical and emotional dilemmas journalists face, balancing the imperative to report neutrally and objectively against the potential trauma inflicted by graphic content. These dilemmas resonate with the ethical quandaries that war correspondents commonly encounter, where the line between professional obligation and personal emotions becomes blurred. This also reflects how professional norms such as objectivity became less about the pursuit of unprejudiced reality and more as a strategic ritual (Tuchman 1972). Moreover, the emergence of social media has added another layer of complexity to this equilibrium. While these platforms have brought about fresh opportunities for real-time war reporting and provided substantial benefits in news dissemination, they also have given rise to apprehensions regarding accuracy and ethical norms. These platforms frequently propagate inaccuracies, placing a responsibility on journalists to authenticate information. This prompts the question: can social media be deemed a reliable news source amid conflicts and information scarcity? Is it an inescapable circumstance or a precarious undertaking? Upholding journalistic standards remains crucial, relying on the diligence of the journalist or the media institution.

At the organization level, journalists exhibit a degree of editorial and organizational independence, yet their reporting is inevitably shaped by the media outlets' policies and the overarching socio-political environment. However, this seemingly moderate to absolute independence is still deterministically affected by the media outlets' preferences and closing ranks around issues, such as the Palestinian cause. This observation supports the notion that organizational structures and editorial policies play a substantial role in shaping news content and journalistic practices (Shoemaker and Reese 2014). The alignment of journalists' reporting with the organizational values, particularly in the portrayal of the humanitarian aspects, underscores the influence of institutional affiliations on war coverage.

Logistical and communication disruptions, as well as algorithmic biases on social media, pose significant challenges at the social institutional level. Digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram have presented new possibilities for war journalism by allowing journalists to navigate media blackouts in Gaza. These platforms have empowered journalists to share content widely and connect with a global audience, surmounting the logistical barriers of traditional war reporting. However, these advantages have come with notable hurdles that affect the ability to report effectively and safely. Communication blackouts and internet shutdowns in the Israel–Gaza war have imposed severe stumbling blocks, compelling journalists to jeopardize their safety for online access. Additionally, journalists have faced algorithmic censorship, leading to account suspensions or content limitations on social media platforms. This censorship has hindered their ability to disseminate vital information, limiting their impact and reach. These challenges have not only impeded journalists' information gathering and dissemination efforts

but also underscored broader issues around media freedom and the impact of technology on journalism. The reliance on digital platforms and the struggle against algorithmic censorship highlight the intricacies of contemporary conflict reporting, where technology serves both as an enabler and a constraint on journalistic pursuits.

Finally, the social systems level sheds light on the internal struggle of journalists to maintain neutrality and objectivity amidst ingrained ideologies and identities. The tension between personal beliefs and professional ethics is a recurrent theme in war journalism, reflecting the inherent challenges of reporting in conflict zones while striving for impartiality. The journalists' commitment to ethical reporting and their efforts to convey the Palestinian narrative exemplify the profound impact of cultural and ideological factors on war coverage. This scenario underscores how news workers' professional perceptions and praxes are shaped by their ideological beliefs (Deuze 2008).

Although the Hierarchy of Influences Model was instrumental in deciphering the multifaceted factors affecting the journalistic work in wartime contexts, this study, did not aim to challenge the model's directional or hierarchical influences, as undertaken by other researchers in the context of war (Fahmy and Johnson 2005, 2012). Instead, it prioritized understanding the nuances of the current conflict, which the model adeptly captured. Nonetheless, the study reveals semi-hierarchical influences within the model, where different levels, such as the ideological, are intertwined and pronounced in this study's context – a less directional influence also discussed by Reese (2019).

Overall, our findings carry substantial implications for the realm of conflict journalism and media research, highlighting the necessity for ongoing support and resources to empower journalists in fulfilling their vital role effectively. The insights into the intricacies of conflict journalism in the digital age and the ethical dilemmas confronted offer valuable lessons for media professionals, educators, policymakers, and stakeholders engaged in conflict reporting. Recognizing and addressing the emotional strain on journalists operating in high-conflict environments is crucial, underscoring the importance of suitable training, mental health assistance, and safety measures to safeguard their well-being.

While the study sheds light on the unprecedented complexities of the Israel–Gaza War, offering deep insights into the challenges that journalists face in this conflict zone, it is crucial to recognize its limitations due to the nature of the sample. The research was limited to local journalists, who, because of the blockade, were the sole information source from the ground, with international or non-local journalists either banned from entering the conflict areas or limited to embedded reporting. This constraint may narrow the perspective to one side, despite the sample's diversity. Thus, future research should leverage the current study's findings, incorporating interviews or other data from embedded journalists or those who could

cover the war from border areas or close to the conflict scenes, to provide a broader and comparative analysis. Additionally, investigating the long-term effects of conflict reporting on journalists' mental health and well-being could be valuable for future research to inform support strategies and interventions in this critical field.

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