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MEDIA AND MISINFORMATION: THE POWER OF FRAMING IN THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

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INTRODUCTION

Information warfare and media framing play a pivotal role in 21st Century conflicts; the so-called "media wars" evolved into a key strategy during field combat. The current most explicit and well-known case of joint cyberwarfare and information warfare in the Ukrainian war demonstrates the aforementioned importance of technology in fourth-generation warfare.

Nonetheless, the increasing influence of media in conflictual politics is not as recent; it has been exponentially growing since the 1920s, thanks to research in the psychological field, in relation to social psychology and psychological warfare (Hutchinson, 2006).

In light of a more publicly dichotomic news as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it is crucial to take into account other influential crises of the present century, such as the Arab-Israeli one.

Said war's momentum in daily news has decreased in recent years. 40 Years after the massacre of Sabra and Shatila it is however crucial to underline the relevance of that conflict, its unnoticed human rights violation, its scarce permanence in the media nowadays despite the ongoing attacks.

The use of media and appeal to public opinion to shed lights on the humanitarian crisis was used during the Intifada (Hutchinson, 2006)

As introduced, the opinions concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict are less explicit, and sometimes argued as more "confusing". For this reason, I deem crucial further research on the theme, mainly concerning the effect of media usage (and manipulation) on the battlefield.

The aim of this thesis is to discuss the influence of information warfare and media framing in relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict, concerning the impact of news and public relations (especially on new media) on foreign citizens.

The dissertation will be divided into 3 Chapters, each of those subdivided into subchapters to analyse specific scenarios and elements.

The first Chapter will address the concept of perception management and information warfare, offering firstly a definition, and then examining how media framing influences social representations and the way certain news and events are interpreted.

The subheading of the chapter will be devoted to journalistic techniques for the manipulation of information or the exploitation of language for propaganda purposes, referring to how the ideology of journalists outside the conflict leads to the exploitation of these techniques. Said instruments encompass the use of emotive and rhetorical language, selection, and composition, decontextualisation, and fake news.

The analysis of these components is pivotal to the understanding of practical examples of journalistic devices in relation to Israeli and Palestinian media and point of view.

The second Chapter will cover the latter themes, namely citing cases of media framing from both sides of the conflict. Furthermore, the consequences of said technique will be examined. The latter part will be divided into 2 subheadings: the first one covering the manipulation in “local” sources (that is to say Arab and Israeli), whereas the second analysis concerns international and Western media, specifically British and American tabloids.

The analysis of the aforementioned strategies will be at a general level, commenting on e.g. the use of Israeli language in reference to the occupied territories, or American language in reference to violence against Palestinian citizens.

With regard to fake news and decontextualisation, however, reference will be made to two examples, one for each side:

- Netanyahu's denunciation of rockets fired by Hamas
- fake video of the al-Aqsa mosque fire

The academic findings will be compared and contrasted, in order to assess whether media framing applied to the Arab-Israeli context is objective and if not, whether it manipulated the public perception into rooting for one of the sides.

In conclusion, the elements brought up for analysis will be summarised, highlighting the major bias in favour of the Israeli cause.

Lastly, the third Chapter will consist of field research, led to analyse the impact of Arab-Israeli media manipulation among younger people nowadays, with a focus on Italy.

The research method is a questionnaire addressed to young people to analyse how and what medium influenced their opinion. The choice of the group analysed is based on exposure to more social media.

Additionally, by studying younger students, it is possible to quantify the influence of the media without referring to in-depth knowledge through academic curricula. The study will investigate the reference sources of this information and their views on it.

Some of the criteria taken into account will be, for instance, place of residency - to ascertain that the findings pertain to Italy - age, and education. In a more specific matter, the questions of the proposed survey encompass the sources and degree of knowledge and favoured side.

This result will then be compared with the aforementioned academic studies in order to understand the impact on Italian and international youth.

CHAPTER I

1.1 Rise of modern media

The influence of new mass media has become increasingly relevant, due to their ubiquity in citizens' private and social life. Their impact, however, is not restricted to daily life, but pervades the socio-economic sphere, and subsequently the political one (Safdar, Shabir and Jamil, 2015).

To have a deeper understanding of how they shaped the "information age" and its society, it is crucial to provide a definition for mass media.

The term envelops an array of means of communication, from 1400s books to the recent World Wide Web (Treccani). Mehsood (2006, in Safdar, Shabir and Jamil, 2015) defines media as "the channels, the mean or forums using for disseminating information, providing entertainment with time motto to create awareness among the masses".

In fact, old and new media both contribute to the circulation of ideals and news, as well as providing (in the case of early years of television) an extended education to adults. As far as literacy is concerned, on the positive side, the rise of media contributed significantly to the spread of literacy, this is to say the "ability to write and read" (Oxford Dictionary). This is especially the case of television in the late 60's, with daily educational television programs (like "Operation Alphabet") aimed at teaching literacy to adults. (Maddison, 20- UNESCO).

Therefore, mass media are not a recent actor in the socio-political educational landscape, however, their functions and features have drastically shifted.

The rise of mobile has been addressed as "ubiquitous computing" (Moffit, Jones et al, 2020) , hinting at the pervasion and accessibility of hand-held devices, in strict relation to the aforementioned mass self-communication, due to channels such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.

As mentioned, mass media have always provided a combination of education and information. However, a substantial difference has arisen with recent technologies, which makes information transformed compared to the 1990s is the change in

network dynamics: while once media users were only consumers (in the words of critical theorists), nowadays, in the era of mass self-communication, citizens are also producers.

This production is not limited to general content, such as daily life posting, but also shapes itself as information; factually, new networks have undoubtedly impacted not only social communication, but also provided a new source of information. This is proved by the statistic which underlines that a significant number of demographics use social media platforms as a reliable source of information, unfortunately, however, without questioning their authenticity (Olaniran and Williams, 2020).

The impact of technological transition in shaping the 21st century as "the information age" generated a new perception of social media in the cultural and socio-political landscape.

Castells (Shaw, Lynch and Hackett, 2011) states that media is a social space where the power is decided. Precisely, political actors and governments worldwide are employing both people and software to shape public life (Forelle *et al.*, 2015).

1.2 Effects on socio-political information: positive, negative, and examples

Undeniably, mass media and politics are in a co-dependent relationship, one shaping the other to their needs.

Originally, social media had useful and positive overtone for political participation, since it provided "citizens journalism", namely a source of information ridden of governmental and editorial biases (Shaw, Lynch and Hackett, 2011).

More recently, the use of the Internet contributed even more exponentially to the speed and directness of communication, which became evident in the past biennium with the COVID-19 pandemic and invasion of Ukraine.

Social networks in the present century contribute guaranteeing a "voice to the voiceless" against oppressive regimes, mobilising large-scale social protests around the world (Gil de Zúñiga and Chen, 2019) as the recent cases of Ukraine, Taiwan and Myanmar, and historically to North Africa, and the Middle East.

As for the latter, that is the case of Arab Springs, namely “wave of pro-democracy uprisings that took place in the Middle East and North Africa in 2011” (Britannica). During such uprisings, media and networks served as an agitator where pre-existing conditions for revolution already existed, such as Egypt.

There, protesters used social media to organise demonstrations, spread local and global awareness of events and values. This led academics to claim that social networks guaranteed "mobilisation, empowerment, shaping opinions, and influencing change" during the Arab Spring (Salem and Mourtada, 2011).

One example of social movement that gained momentum via social media is the Egyptian “April 6 Youth Movement”, the largest human-right activist group, who used such global platforms to spread offline dissent (Salem and Mourtada, 2011).

However, social media can also silence dissent, contributing to the expansion of power for those who already hold it. In fact, during the Arab Springs, the Iranian and Syrian government accessed online activist networks to spread misinformation about organisation and ideals, therefore weakening the legitimacy of uprising movements (El-Nawawy and Khamis, 2012).

The case of Arab Springs is emblematic since it represents the qualities and flaws of new media and their unbiased accessibility, which can be both used as a source of information and as a tool for undermining and oppressing minorities.

Therefore, no matter the new media’ contribution as a channel for vulnerable individuals to participate in democracy, and more broadly in civic and political life, the customary rules of social networks and its inherent fallacies hinder the growth of democracy.

In a broader sense, the circulation of political information through social media develops fast and cross-cutting exposure, namely contact with political content and viewpoints the user does not agree with (Goldman and Mutz, 2011). Nonetheless, despite having such a positive effect on civic engagement and quality of democracy, it also promotes the spread of misinformation.

In fact, despite the opportunities for critical individuals and social movements to share their situation at unprecedented velocity and wideness, social networks

contributed to the dissemination of right-wing propaganda and populistic ideals. (Pedro-Carañana, Broudy and Klaehn, 2018; Olaniran and Williams, 2020)

These ideals, it is fundamental to highlight, are not only broadcasted by governmental and journalistic agencies but also narrow minded citizens and alternative media. For this reason, the trustworthiness of the Internet has been discredited, making it hard to envision a hierarchy between sources of information, giving the same platform to actual headlines and comments by other users.

1.3 The downsides of the information age: propaganda, misinformation, and disinformation

Claiming that endlessly accessible information leads to a lack of factual knowledge might seem far-fetched, however, it is undeniable that social media acts as a catalyst for the circulation of fake news and altered propaganda. The authenticity of the information shared on new media is malleable and hard to discern, as well as rarely questioned (Engesser in Olaniran and Williams, 2020).

Media, as a whole, have always been conveyors of propaganda, for instance, the American far-right exploited the radio in the 1950s to push their anti-communist agenda (Tucker *et al.*, 2018).

Nonetheless, fabricated and framed pieces of media now have the means to spread at an unrivalled rate, outpacing their detection (Bell, 2018, in Reisach, 2021) and regulation provided by journalistic rules and accountability standards (Olaniran and Williams, 2020).

As a matter of fact, the convergence between communication and technology guaranteed access to every individual, and organisation – which is undeniably positive - along with the debatable ability to manipulate information and diffuse it to the rest of users. Said phenomenon diminished the role of journalists as gatekeepers of information (Pedro-Carañana, Broudy and Klaehn, 2018) and devalued the legal responsibility of publishers (Takeshita, 1997).

The consequences of undisciplined information and lack of monitoring generated what Wardle and Derakhshan (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017) named “information

disorder", namely an umbrella term for false or unchecked information propagated online (Bracciale and Grisolia, 2020)

To understand the information disorder and modern information crisis, it is pivotal to take into account the 3 main actors (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017):

- Agents, namely those who created the source, their bias and stance on the matter
- Interpreter, this is to say who and how receives the message and their reaction
- Message, this is to say the content, its veracity, and the language used

Message

Informational messages spread through new media is a founding pillar of the present century, denoted by its ubiquity and speed, but constitutes a problem as well.

These same categories that make new media a vehicle of knowledge and diversity, are the cause of a fragmented environment populated by unbridled disinformation and manipulated content. (Hameleers *et al.*, 2022).

As already stated, Born and Edgingnton (2017) addressed this as the "information problem", consisting of three akin components: disinformation, i.e., deliberately propagated false information; misinformation, which is false information that may be unintentionally propagated; or online propaganda, namely potentially factually correct information, but packaged in a way so as to disparage opposing viewpoints.

Misinformation and disinformation, despite being used interchangeably in daily conversation, carry different connotations as for their intentionality.

Misinformation consists of inaccurate information (deemed as unfounded or misleading based on scientific evidence) that may be both unintentionally propagated and unknowingly false. (Hameleers *et al.*, 2021, 2022). Generally speaking, misinformation might have a positive influence on healthy scepticism, whereas disinformation enhances users' mistrust in media and journalists. (Hameleers *et al.*, 2022). Nonetheless, this depends on the news ecosystem of the country taken into account.

On the other hand, disinformation implies the *deliberate* circulation of false information. Wilful deception is the purpose of disinformation, achieved through "manipulation, decontextualization, and fabrication of untrue information" (Hameleers, 2021).

To the concept of disinformation is strictly linked the broad and voiced phenomenon of "fake news", despite its name being considered too ambiguous by scholars like Zuckerman, who denounce its vague nature, since it includes false balance, propaganda and *disinformatzya*, namely, information whose purpose is to strengthen mistrust in institution (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017).

The adjective "fake," additionally, may also not be suitable to indicate all types of disinformation.

As pertaining to actual "fake news", there are two types of untrue news: completely false, partially false, and mal-information; namely the three types of "information disorder" (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017).

The former one indicates the fabrication of completely false narratives and documents to push political objectives, and it is usually addressed as disinformation (Bennett and Livingston, 2018). This category is embodied by imposter or manipulated text. (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017)

Secondly, "partially false" information, which is more often indicated as misinformation, it is mostly related to nonpartisan facts placed in a different context (i.e., decontextualization and recontextualisation) or using an emotive or biased language to alter the receiver's perception (Hameleers *et al.*, 2021). Examples include false connections and misleading information.

Lastly, mal-information indicates objective information shared to cause harm, being therefore less subtle but certainly as hazardous as the aforementioned categories. (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017). Such category encompasses are leaks, harassment, and hate speech. The distinction between the second category and mal-information is that the latter does not imply recontextualization.

As far as the effects are concerned, the implications of fake news are hazardous to the civic and political landscape, having as much resonance as factual information.

In fact, misperception and disinformation are not only matters of concern as standalones, but they can affect perception of the political world, as well as policy making and harm democratic quality (Tucker *et al.*, 2018).

In other words, the reach of fake news has equal magnitude to major headlines since network communities believe in them to an equal or greater extent. This complication is summed up by American sociologist William Thomas' (Thomas, 1938) theorization that "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences", therefore claiming that actions are influenced by perceptions.

Since recontextualized content is partially true, it is deemed as less harmless; nonetheless, by being unnoticeable, credible, and verifiable, it is often believed as true, spreading false knowledge (Hameleers *et al.*, 2021) . This is enforced by quoting government sources in recontextualized articles, seemingly becoming more trustworthy (León *et al.*, 2022a).

These threats generated by decontextualization are, however, not appropriately tackled by platforms since this type of communication is not part of the flagged misinformation on common media and not the aim of policymakers that want to reduce disinformation (Hameleers *et al.*, 2021). Nonetheless, when citizens seek additional fact-checked articles on the topic, the perceived credibility of misinformation is reduced (Hameleers *et al.*, 2021).

The distinction between disinformation and misinformation, despite being essential on the moral plane, will not be investigated further since it is hard to discern when untrue content has been shared unmaliciously, still acknowledging that this behaviour may be caused by assorted reasons – being it unawareness or intention. Only the effects and characteristics of false information will be analysed, because of the likewise effect produced by both misinformation and disinformation. Additionally, both will be used interchangeably.

The third element of Born and Edgington's (Born and Edgington, 2017) information problem is propaganda. Propaganda is defined as strategic narratives (Kalsnes, 2018), constituted by correct information presented in a way not to inform, rather to obtain approval and support (Tucker *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, it can be

intended as a "systemic attempt to shape perception" and alter power balance (Kalsnes, 2018).

This purpose is achieved through manipulation of information and context (decontextualization), use of language, becoming a blend of mal-information and partially false information.

The features of propaganda and its communicative style are employed in populism, linked disinformation to, mainly, right wing populism.

Said parties' propaganda is constructed upon exaggerations and othering language, besides misinformation and disinformation, spread by tabloids that conform with populist thought are endorsed, for instance Fox News in the USA, or the Daily Mail, which expressed strong anti-EU sentiments in the event of Brexit (Levy, 2016).

On a general level, however, populist parties and movements slant the media's role, claiming their support to the "corrupt elite," and referring to them as "fake news media" plotting against the people, as *tweeted* by former American President Donald Trump.

Moreover, the bond between populism and disinformation lies in the "people-centric, anti-expert, evidence-free" method of communication (Hameleers *et al.*, 2021).

Precisely, populistic leaders prioritise people's emotions and diminish the role of specialists and authorities; this translates into an emotion-based language and political communication, instead of fact-based journalism (Hameleers *et al.*, 2021).

Therefore, populistic parties - mainly alt-right leaders - not only base their propaganda on misinformation (e.g. around immigration or anti-EU sentiment), but also advocate against informative journalism, supporting disinformation to their own profit (Jang and Kim, 2018).

Interpreter

In the distinction provided by Wardle, the interpreter is the active receiver of the message.

Perception

Interpreters react and decipher messages differently.

The action taken by the interpreter can be ignore content, share in support (therefore strengthening the message), and share in opposition – which technically still gives resonance to the content

Moreover, messages are deciphered by receivers in different manners, namely, hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017).

Hegemonic indicates the *total* acceptance of the message in the way it was encrypted, whereas "negotiated" implies only partial approval of the content. On the other hand, an oppositional reception means the rejection of the method in which the message was encoded (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017).

The reception, as shown by the possible opposition or support, is inevitably biased by the identity, ideology, and (in real life or online) connections of the user.

In social network bubbles, due to the tight bonds between like-minded individuals, it is mainly a hegemonic perception

Echo chambers

The diffusion of propaganda and misinformation in social networks surely has the implication analysed above.

In case of support, they are magnified by the unspoken rules and dynamics of new media, including algorithms that display content kindred to user's preferences and strain dissenting posts and partisan communities of like-minded individuals (Cinelli *et al.*, 2021; Pariser in Tucker *et al.*, 2018)

In fact, despite the diversity of users, connections in social media are between homophilic individuals, generating predominantly strong ties (using the terminology of sociologist Mark Granovetter). This dynamic strengthens what are defined as "politically partisan news echo chambers".

In sociological terms this is defined as "a bounded enclosed media space that has the potential to both magnify the messages delivered within it and insulate them

from rebuttal (Jamieson and Cappella in Arguedas *et al.*, 2022). In other words, clusters in which users with common interests and political beliefs are amplified.

Additionally, a factor contributing to the creation of said clusters is not only media supply and distribution but also the receivers' behaviour, as for instance their own demand for information – which is not as diverse as the media supply.

These definitions highlight two key components of echo chamber: magnification of messages and lack of counter information, namely selective exposure.

As for the first one, these chambers are proved to propagate rumours faster than other connections (Choi *et al.*, 2020): social networks act as a catalyst for rapid dissemination of fake news, more than factual and fact-checked information: arguably, misinformation spreads faster, as proved by greater engagement on false Facebook stories, compared to major tabloids (Tucker *et al.*, 2018).

As for lack of cross-cutting exposure, in these communities, from an information processing perspective, partisan and hyper partisan news outweighs objective and balanced points of view, since "one-sided arguments are more likely to be accepted uncritically" (Earle and Hodson, 2022).

Furthermore, there is also a lack of intention in seeking objective headlines but rather relying on news that support previous stances, namely *self-selected* news. This latter social phenomenon is a key characteristic of said clusters, called selective exposure, which consists of users' consumption of strictly news they would believe (Choi *et al.*, 2020). Precisely, political selective exposure is the attitude of "selecting pro-dispositional media content for political reasons" (Barnidge *et al.*, 2020).

The capacity of engagement in selective exposure is facilitated by the high-choice environment in social networks, as well as posing a threat to them. As a matter of fact, academics have advanced critiques of this phenomenon's democratic implication of echo chambers (Saez-Trumper, Castillo and Lalmas, 2013). Particularly, said rejection of news not adhering to their worldview, is a cause of formation of polarised echo chambers around a shared narrative (Cinelli *et al.*, 2021).

Thus, we can conclude that users' behaviour affects their pursuit and comprehension of news and more broadly of content shared on media, reinforcing their beliefs, and spreading misinformation, instead of seeking cross-cutting exposure and balanced information.

Lastly, due to fact-free partisans echo chambers, clusters generated by right-wing populism have the potential to harm democracy, as shown by Donald Trumps' voters and the January 6, 2021, Capitol Attack. Precisely, the rally is deemed as a direct consequence of the former President's tweets, spreading disinformation concerning hypothetical fraud, spurring the mail-in ballots and vote counting system (Timm, 2020).

Agent

In the "information disorder" theory, agents are the party that encode, produce, and spread the message.

These are defined by Wardle and Derekhshan (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017) as the three phases of information disorder, namely, creation, production, and distribution.

Their characteristics may differ, based on what type of agent they are and what purpose they have.

As for the former, agents can be official (e.g., political parties, tabloids, governmental and intelligence service), or unofficial, for instance groups of citizens or bots.

Bots - short for "software robots" - are automated accounts, this is to say, "software agents that interact on social networking services" that interact with users in a human-like manner (Lokot and Diakopoulos, 2016).

Many bots contribute to circulation of false information as well as manipulating perception of political communication (Lokot and Diakopoulos, 2016).

Their technical features condition them to become fast spreaders of disinformation, re-sharing articles immediately after being posted and mentioning relevant network users, such as politicians (Himelein-Wachowiak *et al.*, 2021).

Such behaviour is detected in bots more often than in humans.

Statistically, bots embody 33% of the top parties that reposted unchecked sources, more than those who re-tweeted factual information (Himelein-Wachowiak *et al.*, 2021) This was demonstrated by the enormous activity done by social bots in sharing antivax information during the COVID-19 pandemic (Yuan, Schuchard and Crooks, 2019; Himelein-Wachowiak *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, social bots have pervaded online political discourse, influencing opinion trends. This is aggravated by them being hardly distinguishable from their human counterpart - only 25% of participants in a study conducted by Himelein-Wachowiak and colleagues (2021) was able to correctly identify them - unlike traditional spambots.

Besides their features, it is also pivotal to take into consideration the agents' motivations to spread misinformation. Mainly, they fall into 4 categories: psychological, social, political, and financial.

Agents might in fact be seeking reinforcement (psychological), a connection with a determined group or amelioration of social status (social). (Olaniran and Williams, 2020)

Furthermore, they may employ disinformation to defame politicians or manipulate public opinion (political), in the guise of propaganda (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017).

Lastly, a widespread and versatile application pertains the financial goal, i.e., to increase and profit through advertising and engagement. Such behaviour, previously addressed as "yellow journalism" has always been achieved through sensationalism and manipulated content and linked to unethical news gathering method. (Ulum and Al-Ansi, 2021)

Nowadays, this phenomenon is even more widespread, to enhance profits gained from viral uncontrolled information posted on social media (Kalsnes, 2018).

In this dissertation, only verified agents will be considered. Additionally, the investigation will refer mainly to the political field.

Having analysed the actors of Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) "information disorder" and interpreters' behaviour, it is crucial to investigate the features of the message and the influence of agents' bias.

1.4 Structure of media

Iyengar and Simon (1994) discerned three classes of media effect, namely agenda setting, priming, and framing.

The term agenda indicates "objects accorded to saliency in the media content and people's consciousness" (Takeshita, 1997).

Therefore "agenda setting" refers to the ability of mass media to highlight the order of the day as for information (Hutchinson, 2006) . However, its influence on news media isn't restricted only to focusing the target's attention on a subject, but also affects users' perspective on the topics in the news and emphasis associated with them, based on the coverage of certain topics (McCombs, 2002).

As a matter of fact, Lin et al. confirm that an unequal quantity of coverage is a form of bias.

Moreover, as applied to mass media, priming refers to "the repercussions of the content on media (e.g. extensive coverage caused by agenda setting) on citizens' conduct and beliefs" (Preiss *et al.*, 2006). In other words the relationship between coverage and criteria for public evaluation of political situations and politicians (Hutchinson, 2006).

The structure of modern media facilitates priming, as for their ubiquity. An example is a situation where the television is on, and despite not actively listening, it generates the ideal situation for priming: as a matter of fact, the awareness of a prime mitigates its effects (Preiss *et al.*, 2006).

Lastly, media framing indicates how political issues are presented, more specifically, Robert Entman (1993, in Vliegenthart, 2012) defines it as selecting "some aspects

of perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular definition of a problem, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Vliegenthart, 2012)

To summarise, all three methods impact political communication, respectively dictating the level of concern for certain issues, influencing moral judgement, and broadly assigning a perception and point of view to such news.

1.5 Bias

Having evaluated news from a social perspective, and introduced the concepts of agenda setting, framing, and priming, it is pivotal to scrutinise the linguistic and objective features of information spread on mass media. De facto, the journalistic composition of headlines serves the manipulation of information (to whatever degree), either for their personal bias or to receive more engagement.

As for the first one, sociologist Denis McQuail defines bias as lack of slant or objectivity, however some scholars extend the latter concept to also neutrality and balance (Hopmann *et al.*, 2010).

In fact, equitableness is opposed to propaganda or personal and partisan bias (Shaw, Lynch, and Hackett, 2011).

Objectivity embodies the values journalists should pursue, such as accuracy, completeness, detachment, impartiality, and avoidance of personal bias. (Shaw, Lynch, and Hackett, 2011).

Balance and bias are in fact antithetical terms, since the latter indicates a lack of the former; in other words, being objective implies not distorting information and therefore not having any attachment to the issue presented (Starkey, 2017).

Following Williams' theorization (1975, in Hamborg, Donnay and Gipp, 2019), media bias must both be intentional, namely be consciously chosen, and sustained, i.e., not be an isolated episode but a systematic choice.

McQuail theorised four types of bias: partisan, propaganda, unwitting, and ideological. As discussed above, partisan indicates explicit support for a side, whereas propaganda is not as noticeable.

The latter two kinds are inevitable, and therefore, following the definition given by Williams (1975) must not be considered proper bias since they lack intentionality (Hamborg, Donnay and Gipp, 2019). Unwitting bias is related to the physical limits of their bulletin, preventing them from tackling all issues. Ideological bias, on the other hand, indicates journalists' preconceptions and beliefs that bring them to focus on a specific side. This bias is not easily detectable, not even by those who produce it, and might therefore be unwitting, however it has an impact on users' perceptions.

Bias is, as stated, not inherently bad and in some measure inescapable – in fact, it is not possible to include every voice when tackling a problem, however it must be managed and serve the purpose of producing balanced and informative pieces ('Understanding bias', ND).

Lastly, the effects of bias in tabloids are amplified by the media, because of the aforementioned echo chambers, algorithms suggesting similarly biased issues, and users' behaviours, i.e. self-selected news (Hamborg, Donnay and Gipp, 2019).

Bias is also related to the second journalistic issue, which is to say reach for engagement at the cost of truth; in fact, "spin bias" is the attempt of a tabloid to create a memorable story, through sensationalism or emotionalism, to create more engagement.

As far as engagement is concerned, one-sidedness has brought success to sources as Fox News and MSNBC in the United States of America ('Understanding bias', ND) and on mass media, fake news receive more shares than objective information. In official tabloids, to serve this purpose there are key characteristics that the media can assume to frame information in ambiguous manners, in addition to the most explicit way, i.e., fake news, which has been investigated in depth above.

Generally speaking, major headlines and journalists control mass perceptions in numerous manners, with different techniques and effects.

Having introduced the manipulation of news from the source and journalistic biases more broadly, it is pivotal to investigate more in depth the tactical methods used by journalists to frame and shape the news and pursue their "agenda".

These methods are incorporated into the media framing selected by tabloids and introduced in the editing and selection procedure (Junqué de Fortuny *et al.*, 2012), displayed by "the organisation of discourse according to a certain perspective" (Carvalho, 2009).

D'Alessio and Allen (2000) theorised 3 main bias metrics employed in partisan coverage: coverage bias, gatekeeping bias, and statement bias.

Coverage bias

The term indicates the concession of a larger coverage to stories about one party and the attention given to them (Saez-Trumper, Castillo and Lalmas, 2013). In other words, coverage bias computes the physical amount of addressing an issue receives, for instance in reference to the number of headlines.

In traditional media, i.e., newspapers, this is calculated by column inches, whereas for television, it concerns the broadcast time (Junqué de Fortuny *et al.*, 2012).

Balanced coverage is connotated by what De Fortuny (2012) defines as the representation of all entities involved.

Gatekeeping and selectivity bias as selective reporting

Arguably, Carvalho (2009) claims that selection, and consequently framing is an inherent part of journalism and carries no moral value, since mass media have space and temporal constraints, despite said limits being more malleable on the Internet (Saez-Trumper, Castillo and Lalmas, 2013). Therefore, the investigation must focus on how selection and composition impact the veracity of tabloids.

As already tackled, the phenomenon of self-selected news and selective exposure to information is hazardous, particularly it includes misleading content. (Carvalho 2009).

Its counterpart, selective reporting, worsens the issue, reducing the availability of balanced information.

As a matter of fact, selection indicates the inclusion and exclusion of facts; on the other hand, composition involves "the arrangement of elements to produce a certain meaning" (Carvalho, 2009); precisely, respectively how and which stories are reported (Saez-Trumper, Castillo and Lalmas, 2013).

Selection bias is also referred to as "information gatekeeping", namely guaranteeing access only to like-minded media sources and denying it to antithetical ones (Eraslan and Ozerturk, 2017).

This partisan media bias metric indicates how, through selection - and subsequent deselection - causes some issues or topics not to be mentioned in media coverage (Junqué de Fortuny *et al.*, 2012).

However, De Fortuny *et al.* (2012) suggest that said bias is difficult to determine, as it is unattainable to ascertain the availability of sources at the time of selection.

Statement bias

Statement bias is less evident than the previous categories. Expressing more favourable (or disfavourable) statements for one party or side in the issue is defined as "statement bias". Therefore, it can be determined by analysing the sentiments utilised in the various contexts and in relation to different people.

This metric is of associative nature, i.e. a side is to be considered negatively presented only when most of the coverage contains dissenting and antagonistic statements (Junqué de Fortuny *et al.*, 2012).

The origin of statement bias is not evident since only its existence can be proven, and not whether it is generated by the news source or the entity/side in question.

Strictly linked to such bias is the usage of **emotive and evaluative language**. As a matter of fact, the employment of extralinguistic factors can shape users' thoughts and opinions (Absattar, Mambetova and Zhubay, 2022).

Reporting the aforementioned Egyptian uprising of 2011, Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira introduced the term "affective news", to depict the fusion of news, opinion, and emotions (Koivunen *et al.*, 2021). Until recently, emotions have held

a negative undertone within the journalistic profession (Koivunen *et al.*, 2021), but there has been an "emotional turn", bolstered by the increase of digital media that highlighted the effective use of social networks (Wahl-Jorgensen and Pantti, 2021).

Arguably, emotivity in the field is not as recent, due to the purpose of generating engagement and involvement, through the depiction of "heroes and villains." However, the current mediatic landscape eroded boundaries and degenerated into a blur of information and entertainment, therefore making the distinction between facts and opinion less explicit. (Peter in Koivunen *et al.*, 2021) This phenomenon is indicated with the pejorative term "infotainment" or soft news, to discern them from serious journalism and denote its downturn (Baym, 2008).

As for engagement, both in soft and hard news, appeal to emotions is exploited to gain attention; namely, scholars underline how emphasis is put upon factors that could provoke an emotional response at the cost of differing from non-evaluative reporting (Burgers and de Graaf, 2013) , characteristics better known as "sensationalism". (Uribe & Gunter in Otto, Glogger and Boukes, 2017).

Therefore, this type of journalistic coverage strives to evoke sensations by using sensationalists features within news items (Otto, Glogger and Boukes, 2017) , for instance the lack of neutral language and presence of "language intensity" (Hamilton et al, in Otto, Glogger and Boukes, 2017).

The key dimension of said intensity, argue Hamilton & Stewart (1993, in Burgers and de Graaf, 2013), are specificity and emotionality, with the second being "degree of affect expressed in the source's language" (Hamilton & Stewart, 1993, p.1993).

In the latter field, examples of lexical and semantical intensifier are the use of extreme versions of adjectives (gigantic instead of large), hyperboles, and exaggeration of noun and verbs.

Apart from their engagement purposes, emotive language can have hateful and propagandistic purposes.

Emotions are employed in excluding social groups (Ahmed in Wahl-Jorgensen and Pantti, 2021) and for this reason they are strategically "mobilised" by actors to alter their position ((Wahl-Jorgensen and Pantti, 2021). In this context, "hate journalism"

has spurred, to discern between those who belong or not, thus reinforcing intolerant views. The distinction between "those who belong or not" highlighted by Siapera and Papadopoulou (Wahl-Jorgensen and Pantti, 2021) stems from the infamous othering-populism ideal of "ingroup and outgroup", i.e., a group whose positive feature are underlined – usually the one the point of view identifies with – and one whose negative connotations are emphasised (Rooduijn, Bonikowski and Parlevliet, 2021).

Namely, "othering language" is one of the 3 components of populistic speech (beside rhetoric terms and anti-elite appeals), its aim is to dichotomize the so called "ingroups and outgroups" (Hughes, 2019), favouring the ingroup and libelling the outgroup (Rooduijn, Bonikowski and Parlevliet, 2021).

In wartime, the rival is portraed as animal-like or unhuman, to publicly reduce the importance of their killing (Jowett, O'Donnell and Jowett, 2012).

Decontextualization, contextualisation

Decontextualisation indicates a process through which an element is removed from its specific content; additionally, if said content is placed in a new framework, we witness a process of recontextualization, and the element acquires new meaning since they are formed based on the use of language (Koivunen *et al.*, 2021).

Decontextualization and recontextualisation may be of both unintentional or intentional nature, therefore becoming either misinformation or disinformation.

In the latter case, the circulating content is not inherently untrue, however it is placed is an incorrect context (Möller, Hameleers and Ferreau, 2020). Said partially false information may in fact represent objective information but the wrong frame of reference alters their definition and essence (Hameleers *et al.*, 2021).

As far as method is concerned, this deception often employs images, decontextualized from their original purpose. (León *et al.*, 2022b), as well as including incorrect chronological and geographical coordinates.

Based on its definition, recontextualization is subsequent to the aforementioned practice of selection, since it consists of "selecting and extracting" correct information, generating a manipulative narrative, and disseminating it to uphold a political ideology (León *et al.*, 2022). The dissemination of decontextualized contents is pervasive in all media, with a high frequency in new media due to users' behaviour.

Politically speaking, recontextualization can be detected when comparing a political speech and its selective reporting in tabloids (Koivunen *et al.*, 2021), however it can be applied to any headline, being frequent in the health and science field.

An example is the theory that the Spanish Prime Minister was aided by a personal medical equipe of 14 people as an exceptional measure during COVID-19 however it was a regular practice unrelated to the pandemic. (León *et al.*, 2022).

As investigated, the mediatic landscape is characterised by manipulated and biased content. The causes are generally imputable to political and socio-economic factors and ideologies (Derman, 2021). An additional perspective on messages is related to their effect.

Martemucci claims that strategic communication is conjoint with perception management. the former prioritises the content and its delivery, whereas the latter aims at the target's interpretation (Derman, 2021). Both components collaborate in shaping communication, particularly commercial and political ones.

Precisely, perception management indicates a multidisciplinary practice, whose purpose is to influence the target's emotion and actions (Derman, 2021) This practice is pursued with deception and misdirection, using mainly mass media; namely, mass media have pivotal effects (Johansson & Xiong in Derman, 2021).

The fusion of perception management techniques with the mass features of contemporary society grants the influence of media.

Additionally, modern society is characterised by an increased number of media, ranging from the press to social networks, guaranteeing a broad spectrum of action.

The practice of perception management is not limited to organisations and individuals, but also pertains to official political communication. As a matter of fact, States strive to influence each other and the public, creating an image and seeking support. In this latter case, perception management is often named "public diplomacy". (Derman, 2021)

Following Nye (2004) definition, public diplomacy is an expression of "soft power", namely the "ability to achieve an expected goal based on voluntary participation, not by constraints". These goals are not only achieved by governmental communication (such as diplomats) but involve foreign journalists.

Spaiser (2008, in Derman, 2021) defines this phenomenon as a "genre of information wars", as well as a psychological operation based on persuasion and propaganda (Derman, 2021). Officially speaking, however, the term propaganda applied to the US Information Agency acquired negative meaning, therefore pushing the program's purpose to be addressed as "public diplomacy". (Derman, 2021)

This demonstrates the lack of empirical difference between propaganda and perception management or public diplomacy, as for their definition.

In order to hide the sophisticated means of spreading propaganda, there has been a shift in language. On a political level, the terms public affairs and strategic influence label modern propaganda, whereas this function is bestowed upon "information operations" and "perception management" on a military level.

The term information operations hints at actions taken to disrupt information channels against a political antagonist, through psychological warfare.

Psychological warfare indicates the use of information against people's minds through information, disinformation, manipulation, propaganda, and subliminal techniques in order to change their conception, attitudes, choices, and behaviours.

Information operations' aims are equal to the so-called information warfare, however, the latter indicates operations conducted in wartime, as opposed to its counterpart (Arif and Stewart, 2018)

Precisely, they embody actions aimed at affecting adversary information and information systems while defending one's own information and information systems. This concept encompasses two branches: Cyber Operations (consisting of Computer Network Attack and Defence), and Influence Attitudes, consisting of Psychological Operations and Deception (Taylor, 2002).

Nonetheless, as far as media is concerned, the aim of IO and IW is the same. Namely, the purpose of such processes is not necessarily convincing the target, but also preventing cooperation and enabling historical revisionism, misleading users about the state of affairs (Arif and Stewart, 2018).

Therefore, disinformation is a key component of information operations. Social media and announcements posted on them (as for instance Facebook and Twitter) are a global and accessible front for said operations. Additionally, their algorithms and self-reinforcing effects contribute to the effectiveness of information (and disinformation) operations (Arif and Stewart, 2018).

Thus, political communication concerning warfare (i.e., information operations) is paramount in shaping public support; in fact, the application of propaganda to war discourse polarises the public, dividing users only in "for" or "against" categories. This relates to both sides of conflict, the only difference being the inversion of roles.

The term war reporting indicates journalists' coverage of war-time events laid out "using language that conveys patterns of representation (discourse) on the war actors to either local or international audience(s)"(Amer, 2017).

Amer (2017) addresses the task as "multifunctional", due to its ambivalence in imparting unequivocal representation of actors and persuading the public to side with their perception.

The paradigm of war reporting is, however, largely debated, often in opposition to the new paradigm of "peace journalism", i.e. PJ (Shaw, Lynch and Hackett, 2011). Scholar Johan Galtung introduced said novel approach in 1965, then later proposed four points of contrast between the two aforementioned paradigms.

War journalism is founded on exaltation of violence and victory. Additionally, its content is based on propaganda and support to the elite. Antithetically, PJ focuses

on facts, victims, and civilians, valuing non-violent responses to conflict (Lynch & McGoldrick, Ottonsen in Shaw, Lynch and Hackett, 2011). In particular, peace journalism sheds light on cover-up attempts and lies committed by all parties, as well as transparently portraying conflict and their background. Namely, PJ claims that the influence of war is not limited to violence but impacts the social structure (Shaw, Lynch and Hackett, 2011). Nowadays, most PJ tasks focus on representation of war in mainstream media – including commercial journalism, tackling phenomena as decontextualization and omission of arguments and subtext (Shaw, Lynch and Hackett, 2011).

Finally, the two paradigms relate differently to human rights. PJ is utilised in the human rights journalism model (HRJ), characterised by proactive and diagnostic reporting. Contrarily, war reporting is related to the broader label of "human wrongs journalism model." The latter employs evocative reporting, manipulating communication in favour of the elite.

War Journalism	**Peace Journalism**
Violence oriented	Peace-oriented
Propaganda-oriented	Truth-oriented
Elite-oriented	People-oriented
Victory-oriented	Solution-oriented

Despite this distinction, HWJ/ War reporting is ubiquitous and, as already tackled, partisan.

CHAPTER II

2.1 War journalism and bias in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

In the last century, all types of media have shaped the warzone, with psyops and factual spread of information beyond borders.

The most underrepresented conflict in media is, following Ozohu-Suleiman and Ishak (2014)'s study, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, despite its consequences in "growing global terrorism". Precisely, their research underlines that it is not clearly defined how local media around the world presents the event, mainly due to precedents in which media mobilised support for war and violence. Concerning the matter, Wolfsfeld (2018) highlights that, likewise traditional media, new media (i.e. the internet) is primarily used to spread hatred, hostility, and brutality rather than peace. The resemblance between traditional media and social media can be located as well in the attraction to violence and tragedies (Wolfsfeld, 2018).

However, traditional media tends to be more biased and gatekeeping (favouring unequivocally one side instead of the other and informing citizens starting with that point of view), whereas mass media enable citizens to share information on the spot.

Namely, nowadays, citizens can use their mobile phones to document and share events on social media, as introduced in the first chapter, leading to an "event based" communication rather than a "institution based" communication (Wolfsfeld, 2018).

Platforms on which users can share videos and posts are a powerful tool to detect and ascertain human rights violations on a global scale, as for instance in the case of George Floyd, becoming therefore valuable in the case of war zones. As for conflicts-affected countries like the Gaza strip, this leads to spread images of everyday violence and broadcast events that would otherwise be unknown to the general public. Therefore, Wolsfeld (2018) confirms the role of new media as an enabler of Palestinians to compete "more equally" on the international landscape, allowing citizens to shed light on human rights violations and violence perpetrated in the area.

Nonetheless, academics do not fully believe in the utter pros of new media, highlighting its scarce aid in conflict resolution.

On this matter, applied to the Arab-Israeli conflict, a Knesset (i.e. Israel's unicameral legislature) member claimed that "digitalization has increased the power of Lahava groups to recruit and to indoctrinate, and to even instruct militarily building bombs", indoctrinating and reinforcing extremist views (Wolfsfeld, 2018).

However, before evaluating the consequences of media in radical groups, it is crucial to examine how they impact the national and international landscape and civilians who don't part-take in the conflict first-hand, therefore focusing solely on the power of manipulated and bias media.

This is the case for the majority of events that occurred in Israel and Palestine for the last decade, permanently changing journalism on the matter, as confirmed by both Israeli and Palestinian leaders (Wolfsfeld, 2018).

Precisely, as mentioned, the impact favoured the diffusion of the "Palestinian cause", affecting Israel on the other hand.

This is because, even when Palestinians were attacking Israeli soldiers and civilians, the international audiences, following Wolfsfeld's (2018) statement, deemed the assaults as justified.

For a long time, the Arab-Israeli conflict was underestimated and underdiscussed, due to the preference of the Israeli government to make the war remain "under international radar" (Wolfsfeld, 2018).

Nevertheless, the use of media and correlated public information and interest in the matter has recently increased and been progressively exploited and regulated for the past two decades by both sides, therefore becoming a key topic for academics.

2.2 Operation Cast Lead: Palestinian rise and Israel's downfall in public diplomacy.

Both Palestine and Israel employed technology in the early 2000, the former coincidentally with the Second Intifada, whereas the latter had a privileged spot as a start-up nation in cyber warfare (Singer, 2009 in Aouragh, 2016). Both sides claimed impartiality and favouring one side in Western media, which, based on the claims of Kressel (1987) implies balanced coverage on a general scale.

For Palestine, since the early 2000, social media served as a channel for anticolonialism and resistance, therefore being of more scattered and bottom-up nature (Aouragh, 2011; Tawil-Souri and Aouragh, 2014).

For what concerns Israel, their media policy should be labelled top-down: since 1970 the government has implemented plans to spread a positive image of the State and its army. This policy is known as “Hasbara”, i.e., “to explain” in Hebrew.

Objectively, this effort includes public diplomacy, involvement of international journalists in Israel, and presence of Israeli advocates on social networks.

More precisely, Aoragh (2016) highlights its confusing content and the sole objective of stigmatisation of Palestinians, namely defining Hasbara as “as the manufacturing of discontent with, or toward, Palestinian self-determination, while simultaneously constituting consent for Israel’s dominance.”, making public opinion define it as state propaganda and manipulation.

Such a definition is a reminder of the correlation between public diplomacy and propaganda, defined already in the First Chapter using (Derman, 2021)’s explanation. The author emphasises the use of “public diplomacy” as a synonym for propaganda but perceived as neutral dissimilarly to the former which for the US Information Agency has a negative connotation.

Nonetheless, Hasbara has undeniable fallacies that prevented the effectiveness of the plan, which started to crumble after the Second Intifada, with a stronger impact after 2009 and the Operation Cast Lead. During the latter, restrictions on

unapproved information flow and media use, as well as the implementation of Hasbara tightened to prevent leaks (Lead D.O.C, 2009).

As for the aforementioned Israeli regulations, Rapaport (Rapaport, 2010) summarised the interventions on media leaks introduced in the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) before the "Operation Cast Lead". Said campaign took place on 27 December 2008, involving 64 warplanes hitting around 50 Hamas-related security targets across the Gaza Strip (Lead D.O.C, 2009).

The changes in the military force introduced primarily the enforcement of a ban on the use of cellular phones during missions, with alleged heavy penalties for media leaks (Rapaport, 2010). While after the Second Lebanon War, dozens of officers were in contact with journalists, the number plummeted after the new protocol, leading to zero out of 550 officers in contact with the media without any mediation (Rapaport, 2010). This occurred since paratroopers were immediately deprived of their laptops and mobile phones by activists on the ship, along with the blockade of cellular and radio communication provided by Israel (Jayyusi and Roald, 2016).

This belongs to the constructed media practices that promote the Israeli narrative. For instance, the IDF campaign of 2009 focused solely on Israeli casualties of Hamas fire instead of Palestinian victims, endorsing the "legal war" storyline. Such an attempt was bolstered by the gatekeeping of information, carried out by a media ban on the entry of Israeli and foreign journalists in the Gaza strip (Kuntsman and Stein, 2015).

The tipping point of Hasbara appeared, in fact, 4 years later during Israel's Operation Protective Edge on the Gaza strip, when the regulations failed to suffice to gatekeep information and leaks. In fact, while lives were taken on the battle ground, citizen journalism and mainstream media flooded media platforms displaying current events of the Palestinian tragedy.

Precisely, journalists as Peter Beaumont, who described his shock both on private Twitter and The Guardian newspaper regarding an Israeli naval attack on four children playing football on a beach (Aouragh, 2016).

Due to the unplanned footages and witnesses, Operation Cast Lead and the following broadcasted attacks severely damaged Israel's reputation and increased solidarity for Palestinian movements (Aouragh, 2016).

Such feedback occurred because no media ban was imposed on civilians, therefore dead bodies from Palestinians filled media outlets and Hasbara's aim was not to gatekeeping information but to disprove the veracity of such deaths. The protocol often fell into racist bias, blaming all Arabs to always lie (Kuntsman and Stein, 2015). Such strategy granted the IDF social immunity and deresponsabilisation since the images could be fraudulent and leaving mystery surrounding any perpetrators.

This is a prime example of Israel's new form of public diplomacy, which Miriyam Aoragh defined as "Hasbara 2.0", implying a change both in tools and in perspective after the public opinion shift. In the Web context, 2.0 reminds of the capability of the net to sustain many-to-many interactions and self-published blogs (Tawil-Souri and Aouragh, 2014).

Whereas in mainstream traditional media the gaps in Israeli's storytelling were not filled by Palestinian revindication, with the implementation of non-centralized outlets (i.e., journalists having private social network accounts) the narrative is completed by online journalism that comes from different perspectives. Another key difference from traditional media is the presence of various international journalists with no independent or own sources to fact-check, making pre-internet approach preferable for Israeli public diplomacy (York, 2012).

Nonetheless, Hasbara's initiative of having on-site journalism doesn't guarantee sole advantages, since it allows journalists to share videos of bombings and violence, along with their reactions. Some causes were footage of civilians escaping attacks, as well as IDF self-portraits on the battlefield on major social networks (e.g. Facebook and YouTube) (Aouragh, 2016).

Hoping for the potential of social media, IDF launched its blog before the war in Lebanon in 2006 and its popularity peaked during Operation Cast Lead, underlining

the importance of visual mediation and microblogging through official IDF channels (Evans, 2016).

However, new media have a dichotomic effect: on one side, they aid the IDF in spreading its message, on the other, they allow cross-cutting exposure which diminishes the effect of pro-Israeli manipulated echo chambers in the mediatic campaign. In other words, Hasbara starts to falter with unplanned communication, i.e., leaks from both soldiers and journalists, sharing a non-tailored story to the public, which is magnified by social networks.

As for the functioning of media, a facilitator of Zionist and IDF media presence is "cyber imperialism", in which the bonds between the USA and the State of Israel influence the democratic landscape of media, excluding Arab voices. Namely, informative outlets from Hamas' wing (the Palestinian equivalent of IDF) al-Qassam isn't only not as followed on social networks but also a priori excluded because of American policy regulation to which most companies abide due to their legal head-office (Aouragh, 2011). Kessel (1987) already introduced the concept of structural constraints that "predispose the media toward certain types of coverage", which can be biased either in favour of Israel or the Arab faction.

Therefore, the support received by Israel is not strictly generated by a grassroot approach (in a bottom-up style, in other words), but it is what is defined as "astroturfing" in marketing. Precisely, astroturfing indicates an attempt to create an impression of widespread social and popular support for a cause, generated by an organisation or state like in this case (Bienkov, 2012). The reasons to state this are the artificiality of Hasbara and the conditions set on social networks to favour Israel.

However, as mentioned, the public diplomacy implemented by the State is not sufficient to gather undying support. After Operation Cast Lead, the expansion of Palestinian support was made apparent; the attempts of Hasbara to justify IDF attacks was disputed and diminished by the swarm of online activists (York, 2012).

Despite the efforts of the Israeli government, Barry Rubin (cited in Gilboa, 2006) states that Palestinians were winning the public relations battle against Hasbara, fighting on two levels, the television and the Internet.

Google and Internet presence were pivotal for Palestinian politicians, with a crucial step being the browser substituting “Palestinian territories” with “Palestine, an act deemed as a step towards liberation. (Tawil-Souri and Aouragh, 2014).

Precisely, the World-Wide Web aided Palestinians to compensate for restrictions on mobility, connecting local and diasporic communities, and educating the global public on the occupation (York, 2012).

On the matter of Internet in the Palestinian territories, (Aouragh, 2011) notes that the sprouting of websites and consequent political momentum online was 2004, to which followed an ever-increasing importance of online presence for Palestinian advocacy. Nonetheless, before such date, studies on Arab use of media focused on cyberterrorism and radicalization (therefore, deemed as already mentioned as a peril of Internet as a source of information); after the 2011 uprisings in the Middle East, online political activism became relevant worldwide (Jayyusi and Roald, 2016).

Naturally, this is partially a result of the increase in computer ownership and Internet access.

Statistically speaking, between 2004 and 2009 the Palestinian Bureau of Statistic (PCBS) identified a growth in computer ownership – from 26.4% to 42.9% - and internet access- from 9.2% to 28.5%, the latter reaching 57.7% in 2012 (Jayyusi and Roald, 2016). The growth of the internet, certainly linked to the inability to move and political resistance, led some to argue that Gaza has the largest number of Facebook users per capita (Tawil-Souri and Aouragh, 2014).

These percentages are even more impressive considering that the Internet was illegal in the OPT until the Oslo Accords of 1993 that permitted the construction of infrastructure for cellular and internet use. (Tawil-Souri and Aouragh, 2014). However, this is not ridden with complications related to the property of infrastructures, which will be deepened further in the dissertation.

Complications have risen even in matter of privacy; Palestinians civilian social media presence was monitored, leading to the gathering of sensitive information (e.g., sexual orientation) to blackmail them; the main responsible actor was Unit 8200 – an Intelligence Corp with Arab speaking agents (Bradshaw and Howard, no date).

However, such threats and the limited availability of infrastructure in the war-affected territories did not prevent Palestinians from counteracting Israeli's media presence. In opposition to Hasbara, Aouragh (2014) defines Palestinian resistance on media as "Intifada 3.0, hinting at a paradigm of opposition to Israel and cybercolonialism, therefore tackling the physical and less material (but technological, like cyber hacks and monopoly of communication) attacks suffered from their opponents. This is also addressed as a third Intifada, even if less evident than the previous two.

Intifadas generally indicate the popular uprisings of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip; the first one occurred before the signing of the Oslo Accords, whereas the second one (also referred to as the Al-Aqsa intifada) began in 2000 and ended approximately in 2005 (Britannica).

The grassroot pattern of the first two intifadas generated a paradigm of resistance to colonisation, encompassing both violent and non-violent practices (Tawil-Souri and Aouragh, 2014). These categories are also applied to internet practices during the Intifada 3.0, with actions like animated shorts from Hamas, and cyber-hacks of official Israeli websites and the Palestinian Advocacy president Abbas who roots for a federal state (Tawil-Souri and Aouragh, 2014). Citizens' deeds can also frequently be non-violent gatherings on media platforms that connect single users, for instance Facebook Groups.

An example is the March 15 campaign attracting attention in the media and inspiring initiatives as the "Third Intifada Facebook Group" – later closed by the platform due to a Zionist mobilisation – and similar groups whose demand was the reorganisation of the Palestinian political movements to face the common opposition (Tawil-Souri and Aouragh, 2014). Nonetheless, the presence of

variegated groups on social media (i.e., Facebook) arising during the war on Gaza in 2008 did not solve the issue or raise awareness. Hundreds of pages such as “Free Palestine” and “Electronic Republic of Palestine” contribute to a fragmented and distorted reality, generating a false sense of mass mobility and echo chambers that do not positively impact the Arab-Israeli situation (Tawil-Souri and Aouragh, 2014).

Practically speaking, the obstacle to Palestinian predominance in social networks is dictated by two additional factors: the lack of physical access to physical infrastructures of the internet (York, 2012) and the regulation and decisions of media and companies located abroad that censor Palestine-located media sources.

On the one hand, Israel prevents the occupied territories from managing their telecom resources, surveilling activity and its time of usage, therefore having the ability to cut access at all times (York, 2012). This is directly correlated to the Oslo accords, in which it was decreed that Israel would control allocation of frequencies, thus determining where their counterpart could build infrastructure, locating most exchanges through Israeli providers. Such a decision resulted in Paltel (ed. Palestinian telecommunication monopoly) being unable to import equipment to facilitate connections between the fragmented areas created by the Oslo accords (Tawil-Souri and Aouragh, 2014). This allows Israel to sever landline connections between southern and northern Gaza strip, as occurred in 2012, and further disrupting everyday life beyond the exceptional moments of violence (Tawil-Souri and Aouragh, 2014).

Additionally, Hadara (Paltel’s internet provider) cannot circumvent Israeli territories to avoid such issues and is directly impacted by the governmental policies, which provide limited bandwidth for Palestinian internet use, slowing down data in the territories (Tawil-Souri and Aouragh, 2014). The weakening of bandwidth controlled by Israel is worsened by the rise of Internet users, dooming the OPT (Jayyusi and Roald, 2016).

Furthermore, Israel did not cease to attack broadcasting stations, destroy hardware, and pillage IT firms – actions generally addressed as “cybericide” (Tawil-Souri and Aouragh, 2014).

Cybercide is a technique utilised by Israeli forces, conjoint with the evident offline operation of politicide (Jayyusi and Roald, 2016). Kimmerling (2006) defines politicide as "the process that has as its ultimate purpose the dissolution or weakening of the Palestinian people as a legitimate social, political, and economic entity", , therefore having cybercide as a new technological branch. It encompasses social, political, and military activities, such as localised massacres, physical destruction of infrastructure, social and political isolation (Kimmerling, 2006). Precisely, Evans (2016) reports that Palestinian youth turned to media for user-generated content to have a platform, escaping Israel's control over mainstream media used to impose nationwide blackouts in Palestine. In a mass-communicating world, isolation can be achieved only with the destruction of means of communication, as mentioned above.

Cybercide is inevitably included in military operations, since the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is part of the military-industrial-complex, as visible with the war on Lebanon and the discussed relevance of Operation Cast Lead in limiting mass media. Israeli refined high-tech industry guarantees the means for online surveillance and cyberwarfare ability (Jayyusi and Roald, 2016).

On the other hand, international companies intervened in content on social networks, as discussed above, as well as in denying access to materials or tools. One example is illustrated by Tawail-Souri and Aouragh (2014) highlighting that Palestinians are not allowed to increase their expertise to maintain functioning computers through open-source tools but have to rely on "monopolistic practices from foreign suppliers".

Those foreign suppliers encompass Israel, surfacing claims that material could be tampered with, either weakened or hacked for surveillance to eventually blackmail into collaboration (Tawil-Souri and Aouragh, 2014). Therefore, activists are limited in the use of media to avoid the State's radar.

Therefore, Palestinian activism is a blend of online and offline practices attempting to bypass these restraints.

One of these escapes is created by Palestinians in the diaspora who created websites in the United States with only a few of its staff living in the new country. These websites are a pillar for information about OPT, as for instance Electronic Intifada, launched during the Second Intifada to circulate news on the events in Middle East (Najjar, 2010)

Both sides exhibit cyber branches acting as political actors (be them in the military field or citizen journalists), however they are denoted by differences and inequalities, like power dynamics between Israel and Palestine in matters of ownership of infrastructures.

Nonetheless, since the early days of the conflict, Israel had an advantage in information reporting, due to the media strategy and infrastructure possessed by the country (Najjar, 2010).

In the country, spin doctors and public relations experts were mobilised to spread information on war's causes and aims to an English speaking audience, as in the case of the "Cast Lead" Operation – some of these including rockets launched by Hamas (Najjar, 2010).

Having introduced the public diplomacy instruments and implication from both sides, it is now crucial to first and foremost introduce the concept of fake news and bias applied to the conflict through examples, secondly international journalism will be introduced, comparing British and American journalism. Lastly, unbalanced coverage will be tackled then from a general point of view how bias is manifested and what are its roots, both in traditional and new media, as well as introducing its impact and main channel on social media.

2.3 Local media bias in Israel and Palestine – journalism and media

On a general level, as highlighted by Kressel (1987) media bias has been spotted both by pro-Arab and pro-Israeli critics. The common accusations outlined by the scholar apply to both sides of the conflict.

Kressel (1987) summarises the statements addressed both by pro-Israel and pro-Palestine perspectives. Accusations of anti-Arab media are founded on unbalanced

American coverage both in quantity and quality, displaying favourable reference to Israel counterbalanced by offences to Arab States and politicians. On the other hand, the mainstream pro-Israel commentary includes that American media has overplayed PLO moderation and portrayed both institutions and Palestinians closer to white western culture to make it palatable to USA audience. An additional remark was concerning the false facts and distorted view on peace when discussing Israel, allegedly spreading news under the fear of terrorist reprisals (Kressel, 1987).

The critiques of media coverage are founded on the fears of stereotypes, unfair political and organisational barriers to objective coverage, untrue media portrayal, and double standards (Kressel, 1987). Certainly, this is because partisans from different ideologies cannot agree on judgement of bias, unless it concerns trivial matters.

The study by Kressel can be applied to modern online journalism to identify bias.

The scholar classifies bias into two categories, the first one as the identification of partisan influence upon editors, and identification of racism imagery and stereotyping.

Furthermore, it is pivotal to take into consideration the violations of journalistic standards in news reports, as for instance the veracity of news.

Firstly, fake news dissipated by organs in Israeli and Palestinian administration and journalism will be discussed, analysing the common points and differences.

Secondly, the influence of international perspectives will be analysed, comparing headlines around the world and their relationship with the territories – tackling the first of the aforementioned Kressel categories. In such a context, the reason for bias will be briefly listed.

Lastly, the language used both by the involved countries and their international appendix will be investigated, focusing on racial and derogatory language – thus analysing the second class.

Having gone through a brief history of media in the conflict , to detect on a general scale the differences in coverage and untangle bias and disinformation on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is pivotal to analyse the perspective of both states on international representation, as well as the language used to indicate their opponent.

2.4 Fake news in the Arab Israeli conflict

The mediatic revolution increased the impact of fake news on the political landscape on a global scale, therefore affecting the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Social media, in fact, do not only play a key role in Westerners' lives, but also act as political catalysts for perilous situations as said conflict. In Palestine (including West Bank and Gaza), in 2011, the Internet reached more than 53% of diffusion, more than the remainder of the Middle East.

Consequently, with the constant rise of media use in Israel and Palestine, it increases the danger of new means of information – and disinformation. Based on Masqara (2020) studies, the spreading of fake news in the Middle East is closely linked to social media platforms (79% being Facebook posts and 42% being tweets on Twitter). The latter, guaranteeing microblogging and confrontation with user generated content, allows for communication under the special conditions of restricted news access applied to Palestinian territories (Siapera, 2014).

Additionally, high concentration of fake news is also present in advertisements, video, and pictures, as well as written news. Allegedly, such peril of modern media is related to the lack of ethics and fact checking in social networks; in fact, in traditional media, the editor is responsible for upholding regulation, but this is not applied to new media. (Masharqa, 2020)

Precisely, in the study conducted by Masharqa (2020) on which media dissipate fake news, participants stated popular social networks: the older citizens in the study named old networks like Facebook and Twitter (despite also hinting at newspapers), while younger part-takers mentioned Tiktok, Instagram, Whatsapp and Youtube. In the overall study, newspapers reached only 22%, while Facebook

soared at 89%; Tiktok and Twitter were close to 40% whereas videos and news websites almost reached 60%.

Temporally speaking, the spread of fake news worsened in times of increased violence and division among Palestinians.

With the pandemic crisis, fake news was criminalised in Palestine, not automatically making the environment safer, since it still has to take into account the ongoing "occupation", weak governance and laws, and political division.

In Palestine, the fear of fake news is widespread and affects not only future education, but also Palestinian political division, trust of citizens in the government and image of Palestine in the world – therefore influencing the outcome of the conflict itself.

Whereas the immediate solution to fake news is cross-cutting exposure and access to second sources, the situation is more complex in the case of Palestine; Masqara (2020) underlines that the information blockade and occupation by the Israeli government increases the scope of initiatives to confront fake news.

Following the study, Palestinian citizens assume more than 54% of fake news is spread by Israeli entities, while Palestinian entities only contribute for 29% (Masharqa, 2020).

Likewise, Israelis reported by Kunstman and Stein (2015) doubt the veracity of Palestinian news, stating with racist stereotypes that Arab are liars and therefore information propagated from a Palestinian perspective is fraudulent (Kuntsman and Stein, 2015). In support of this thesis, the term "Pallywood" – a portmanteau of Palestinian and Hollywood – has been coined to indicate media manipulation in Palestinian media; the noun originates from the controversy caused by the recording of Mohammad al Durah's death by the hand of the IDF, a crossfire whose consequences were thought to be staged (Group, 2009), nonetheless, this accusations of media manipulation share the characteristics with usual conspiracy theories. Precisely, it was employed hundreds of times by pro-Israeli social network users when sharing misleading information, as for instance a fake funeral in Gaza

used to escape COVID-19 regulations was shared also by the adviser to the Israeli Foreign Ministry claiming that it involved Palestinians faking a funeral to attract global sympathy after being hit by air strikes (*BBC News*, 2021)

To serve the purpose of cross-cutting fact checking, organisations (both pro-Israel and pro-Palestine) have been instituted. Their main purpose is media watching, defined by Gerstenfeld and Green (2004) as "critically examining one or more media on a regular or recurrent basis, thought to be biased against a cause that the monitoring body supports".

In the case of the Arab-Israeli conflict, they are both pro-Israel and pro-Palestine and act as public actors in the public relations war (Gerstenfeld and Green, 2004).

The two entities have various watchdogs that support their causes and corroborate articles and statements about events concerning them. As for Palestine, two alternative online media monitors are Electronic Intifada (already tackled above) and If Americans Knew. In addition, several pro-Arab media watchdogs have arisen in Western countries, as for instance Arab Media WATCH. As for Israel, some media watches were founded after the war in Lebanon, as for instance CAMERA (Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America), constituted in 1982. Additional pro-Israel organisations are FLAME (Facts and logic about the Middle East), Palestinian media watch and the Anti-Defamation League. The latter covers both traditional and new media, attacking religious and ethnic defamation irrespective of the victims (Gerstenfeld and Green, 2004).

The role of watchdogs is necessary to maintain the veracity and trustworthiness of information, due to its military and both local and international relevance.

As implied above, the accusations of misinformation and fraudulent information are present on both parts; while this could be a pathway to discrimination and silencing opposition, it is partially true due to the amount of news being spread by untrustworthy sources.

Two instances that attest such a statement are the false claims tweeted by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's spokesperson and the fake video of al-Aqsa Mosque on fire (*BBC News*, 2021).

The first one represents anti-Palestinian sentiment and lack of authentication at a governmental level, afterwards counteracted by Twitter. The spokesperson – Ofir Gendelman - shared a video on the network claiming that Hamas fired rockets at Israel from populated areas; nonetheless the footage reported a 2018 operation of the Syrian government against rebel groups in Deraa, therefore not involving the Gaza strip (*BBC News*, 2021).

On the other hand, another misleading video uploaded on twitter sparked anti-Israeli sentiment and accusations of "letting the al-Aqsa Mosque burn". In fact, the images allegedly showed fire in East Jerusalem's Old City, however, the fire came from a tree near to the mosque (*BBC News*, 2021).

Cross-cutting exposure and intervention from independent monitors and social media platforms (that counteract the circulation of disinformation when flagging it as such) are therefore fundamental when dealing with any news surrounding the conflict, both at a governmental and user-generated-content level.

While detecting fake news is more feasible thanks to the help of overseers, various biases cannot be spotted as easily, such as selective reporting or coverage bias.

As for bias, it is pivotal not only to focus on misinformation but also length of coverage, gatekeeping, and use of emotive language as part of the types of bias tackled in Chapter 1.

Precisely, beside the employment of misleading or decontextualised information, both sides focus on emotionally charged videos, underlining their loss with polarising and sensational content (Siapera, 2014).

2.5 International context

To properly evaluate news circulation concerning the conflict it is fundamental to take into account the bias introduced in Chapter 1, including emotive language,

selective reporting, and statement bias. Before dissecting these biases and their application, reasons, and consequences, it is necessary to discuss the international media landscape.

Precisely, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict transcends State and local media boundaries, as well as physical conflict, extending the battlefield both to international campuses and most importantly media (Neureiter, 2017).

The online media landscape is characterised by both newspapers and users spreading news on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook.

For instance, the use of sensational images is not only employed by the two factions, but also the international press reporting attacks and suffering, in an unbalanced manner, to gain support and views.

For instance, when reporting Israel's attack on the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Fox News displayed images of Palestinians praying, instead of the IDF entering religious grounds.

Therefore, not only information spread by local officials affects the perception of the Arab-Israeli narrative, but also media houses misleading and (partially or totally) incorrect information. This generates only a partial narrative, as the case of Fox News which does not display an attacker and downplays the event.

More broadly, it is vital to investigate the amount and condition of reporting, divided into nations. Italy is not covered as much as in Britain and the USA, therefore an analysis will be conducted first-hand, starting from users who consume said media, to estimate the amount of bias perceived by citizens, then comparing it with the factual findings included in this chapter.

British media

As for Britain, results are mixed. Its relevance in Arab-Israeli politics has been crucial since 1948, therefore giving it enough importance to take into consideration the news coming from the UK.

Philo and Barry conducted research in 2004, whose findings hint to a pro-Israel bias (Philo and Berry, 2011).

Namely, British media includes Israeli's motives allowing the reader to empathise and understand the actions carried out, however this is not applied to Palestinians, therefore leading to unfavourable opinion on the faction. Precisely, Israeli's voices advocating for their narrative outnumber Palestinians, as a result of alleged pro-Israel lobby. Practically, British media created a particular framework that disadvantaged Palestinians – the viewers didn't have context for Palestinian uprisings, therefore viewing them as disruptions of normal life.

Despite a more balanced coverage between 2001 and 2005, the bias already tackled remains unchanged as of now (Neureiter, 2017).

On the other hand, despite the public being favourable of Israel, Segev and Miesch (in Kaposi, 2019) denounce an anti-Israel bias in British media. Additionally, Simmons argues that the state received unfair treatment, since no background explaining the actions was included in the headlines, as well as downplaying the Palestinians attack in the guise of the "underdog narrative". For this story, Palestinians are justified, due to their innocence and strife fighting against a much larger force.

BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation, namely UK's most relevant media outlet) is founded on values as balanced and diverse coverage, implying the inclusion of both sides when tackling a conflict; nonetheless in the case of Israel and Palestine, a set of special discursive and social procedures is implemented (Barkho, 2008). These include internal "Middle East style" guidelines of words and expression used by reporters to select the correct discursive practices.

Malcolm Balen – Senior Editorial Adviser and top man on the Middle East for the BBC – is the author of the abovementioned writing, named "Balen Report". The author admits the channel's biased perspective on the conflict, blaming the lack of balance in the conflict itself. In other words, from Balen's perspective, "Israel has more power to do things […], more money, more support from America, more

weaponry […] than the 7-square miles of the Gaza strip" (Richardson and Barkho, 2009).

However, the scholars report that when narrating non-Israeli casualties, the language employed tends to de-emphasise the Israeli perpetrator; this will be tackled more extensively when discussing the emotive and biased language.

Furthermore, BBC's coverage is extensive on territorial issues and occupation since 1967, however the term occupation and its context is rarely included (Richardson and Barkho, 2009). Precisely, in the totality of headlines analysed by Barkho in an earlier study (2008), none of them included the term "occupation". Nonetheless, differently than in American media, the BBC glossary underlines the violation of international law of settlements in the West Bank.

This is one of what the two academics defined as the three "absences" of BBC coverage, namely Zionism, Colonialism or occupation, and Equality – i.e., fair and balanced coverage to either of the parts.

As for Zionism, the Corporation followers are confused on the reasons and dynamics of the conflict: since the root Israeli political ideology and movement is not mentioned, media users lack explanation for the events in the Gaza strip, without being able to acknowledge the Zionist strife for land (Richardson and Barkho, 2009). Nonetheless, this is harmful to Israeli reputation and self, since the global press blames Jews instead of the movement, despite the scarce connection between the two.

In sum, the Broadcasting Corporation applies gatekeeping and biased practices in media about the Arab-Israeli conflict. Therefore, British coverage in the BBC as a more prominent international media outlet isn't explicitly categorised as either pro-Israel or pro-Palestine. Despite a first reflection on giving more power to the Palestinians to counterbalance the disadvantages on the field, the language (which will be tackled further on) and lack thereof (no use of the word "occupation" for instance) result in a drawback for the OPT and misinformation to the public (indicating Zionism as Judaism).

In 2002, De Rooj argued for a pro-Israeli bias in the main British broadcast, as for the use of language and lack of historical context, eliminating both Israel and Britain responsibility – i.e., by not mentioning the infamous Balfour declaration.

Currently, the BBC is an atypical headline offering a third (however, still biased) path to reporting the Arab-Israeli conflict: it denounced Israeli occupation -visible since the word occupation is repeated but not explained – without excusing Palestinian actions, labelling it neither as resistance nor as terrorism.

Other daily broadsheets or quality newspapers from the UK were analysed through empirical investigation by Kaposi (2019), specifically when tackling the 2009 Operation Cast Lead discussed above. These media outlets include Daily Telegraph, Financial Times, Independent, The Times.

Such standpoints were taken into account to cover the whole spectrum of British politics, namely, firmly conservative (Daily telegraph), moderately conservative (The Times), liberal (Financial Times), and the left-liberal (Guardian, Independent). Generally, those belonging to right-wing views supported the State of Israel, whereas left-wing individuals were more critical of Israel and in support of Palestine (Philo & Berry, 2004, in Kaposi, 2019).

In the Daily Telegraph, Israel is justified and therefore not to blame for Operation Cast Lead, since Hamas triggered the war. The latter is depicted as "an agent of pure destruction", almost forcing – as a moral and political imperative – Israel to counterattack (Kaposi, 2019). Hence, Zionism is beyond critical deliberation for the newspaper, underlining the utter pro-Israel bias of the headline.

On the other hand, Liberal and left liberal press introduces the concept of negotiation, siding it with more character for the Palestinian counterpart. This is to say that the organisation is not discarded only as an enemy, but as a political movement, with "strategy no more and no less than resistance". In fact, the Guardian – a prominent left-liberal tabloid – received criticism about the coverage of the Arab-Israeli conflict accusing it of bias for both sides but with an

overwhelming number of complaints coming from the pro-Israeli side (Elliott, 2016).

Those media outlets however replaced the target on Hamas with one on the IDF, questioning the aim of the war, i.e., the purpose of killing "Palestinian rejectionists" (as defined by said journalists). Additionally, the press attaché at London's Israeli embassy criticised the Guardian for portraying Israeli soldiers as perpetrators despite them being the side who opened the fire, highlighting the numerous critiques on alleged bias (Elliott, 2014).

Therefore, despite the diametrically opposed stances, both the Guardian and the Daily Telegraph share the same amount of bias. On the other hand, the BBC appeared biased on both sides, in a confused manner. Bias, be it pro-Israeli or Pro Palestinian, is dichotomous, but it doesn't include a third party not mentioned. This is defined by Kaposi (2019) as the "invisible third", which does not focus on what side is favoured but what international and political relationships are seen as viable for peace, debating the actions keeping in mind the humanity of both parties.

On this line, The Times displayed a non-dichotomous critical perspective towards the war, deconstructing IDF's behaviour and discussing the ius in bello. More precisely, instead of aiming to sensationalist stories on violence and deaths, journalists at The Times enquired the use of white phosphorus-based weapons, shedding light on Israel's accountability (Kaposi, 2019). Nonetheless, this did not spare the prejudices and bias against Hamas.

Namely, the sole British newspaper that did not depict Hamas as an evil machine (as the Telegraph and Times) or trivialised it (Guardian) is the Financial Times. In reference to the Human Rights Journalism introduced in the First Chapter, the headline respected Hamas as a human agent in respect to human relations (Kaposi, 2019).

This leads to a critical evaluation and dissection of the conflict instead of decontextualized information and sensational headlines. The latter newswriting practices leave little space for peace journalism and for a narrative not built on

violent relationships between the parties involved. Apart from the exceptions, British journalism exhibits bias towards both Israel and Palestine (or more precisely IDF and Hamas), based on the political stance of the newspaper itself.

In sum, the British mediatic landscape is variegated and exhibits attempts at fair and balanced coverage, despite some proof of propaganda in more conservative newspapers. However, Philo and Barry (2004)'s findings of pro-Israel bias in British media, conjoint with the demonization of Hamas and justification of IDF in newspapers, are still verifiable today, despite the amount of sensationalist news that depict Palestinians as justified victims.

American media

A similar study has been conducted in the United States of America, with results being equally mixed.

Generally, American media are considered pro-Israeli, being influenced by the lobbies shaping U.S. foreign policy in that direction (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 112). On the matter, organisation like the aforementioned Anti-defamation League and CAMERA monitor news to ensure that coverage of the Middle East supports Israel (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2008 in Kaposi, 2019)

Neureiter (2017) underlines those numerous studies discovered a pro-Israel bias, mainly due to the primary focus on the New York Times. Namely, the newspaper ignored international laws and principles to distract from Israel's violation of said norms (Kaposi, 2019).

Bias is visible not only as for content, but also for length of coverage: numerous pages were dedicated to Israeli's deaths while killings of Palestinians and violations of human rights in Gaza were widely ignored.

Ratzkoff and Jhally (2004) criticised American television denoting how violence in the West Bank was shown only to prove Israeli self-defence.

On the other hand, scholars indicated other American mainstream media outlets of unfair treatment of Israel; some of them included CBS, NBC, ABC, CNN, and the

Washington Post. The archetype fits the underdog narrative, decontextualizing information pivotal to understand the conflict, therefore gaining the freedom to justify Palestinian attacks. (Kaposi, 2019)

Similar to the British case, such anti-Israel bias is more likely found in liberal headlines than conservative ones.

Broadly, the above-mentioned bias assumed by Kressel (1987) of American media to be characterised by "inequitable pro-Israel and anti-Arab bias" is verified by this analysis. Compared to Britain, scholars' findings appear more univocal and seem to confirm a widespread pro-Israeli voice. The reason for such bias lies in religious reasons and political affinity.

2.6 Type of bias

The categories of bias in mainstream media are all manifested in journalistic practices for the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Some have been already mentioned, as for instance decontextualization – which leads to lack of sufficient information to critically discuss the conflict – selective reporting and unbalanced coverage – favouring one side of the war (be it Israel or Palestine) by presenting their version and discussing for the major part casualties or attacks to the favoured side.

Emotive language, which is not as apparent as canonical misinformation, plays a fundamental role in war journalism.

Precisely, by using violent terms instead of more human-rights-centred nouns, journalists subtly hinder pacification (Shaw, Lynch and Hackett, 2011).

Type of language used in media.

The type of language used in media is measuring scale for the amount of bias present in it.

Precisely, Fowler (1991, cited in Barkho, 2008) states that the languages used to report news reveals implicit ideologies and perspectives, as well as power dynamics, when analysed properly.

For the case of Israel, as stated by (Divine, 2019), who tackles the language harming the State of Israel, students and scholars learn about the Arab-Israeli conflict with terms that indicate Israel as a force hostile to Palestine. However, such claims could be made by their counterpart too.

Compared to the limited effect of campus, much more ubiquitous consequences occur when biased language is used in media, both traditional and new. For this reason, it is crucial to make a distinction between HRJ and War Journalism, as introduced in the First Chapter.

Precisely war journalism is propaganda-oriented and promotes violence, instead of striving for peace and equal representation (Shaw, Lynch and Hackett, 2011).

Even in South-East Asian newspapers, conflict-focused language (e.g. “attacks,” “hostilities,” “hostages,” “clashes,” “escalation of violence,” “risks,” etc.) dominated the pages (Ozohu-Suleiman and Ishak, 2014). Additionally, extremist and sensational/emotive language was employed in the sample news; in fact terms such as “bully,” “goliath,” and “criminal” were frequently associated with Israel in journals as The Star of Malaysia, perpetrating the human-interest picture of the conflict through portrayal of Palestine as an underdog under Goliath’s siege (Ozohu-Suleiman and Ishak, 2014).

Additionally, language misuse could generate confusion at an international level, leading citizens to assume the conflict is caused by religious motives. Examples of this encompass using the term Jewish to indicate Israelis, despite the un-Jewish character of IDF and Zionist policies (Richardson and Barkho, 2009). Said confusion is due to reporters accusing all Jews to be inherently Zionists and causing religious discrimination.

From pro-Israel's scholars' perspective, in fact, language can swiftly become antisemitic, instead of anti-Zionist, and damage innocent citizens who might not associate with Zionism (Divine, 2019).

The issue with language can manifest not only a bias in itself, but also conjoint with decontextualization. For instance, BBC reporters have been accused of using unexplicated noun phrases such as "occupied territories" and "the refugee problem", which contribute to spreading misinformation and act as propaganda among BBC readers and listeners on the conflict (Richardson and Barkho, 2009).

The use of words can therefore underline an exclusionary bias, as for the case of Israel; the State adopted terms to describe the conflict and their counterpart that highlight double standards and hypocrisy (Gilboa, 2006).

As for American media, which was mentioned to be widely pro-Israel in their main media outlets, the term "terrorism" was predominantly used in the CNN (along with Palestinian and suicide), despite seldom appearing in European media. Similarly, Gaza territories are never addressed as "occupied" by USA based journalists. All these linguistic hints prove the alleged bias introduced in the previous paragraph.

The use of the term "terrorist" in media is, according to Perdue (1989, p.4) a "lable of defamation used to organise perceptions and reactions in the community against those to whom the noun is applied". In international media outlets (as for instance BBC, CNN, and Al Jazeera), terrorism (and subsequent declination and variations of the root) was used when referring to both Israel and Palestine. In reference to the former, Al Jazeera used it 6.6%, BBC 4.6%, and CNN 0.2%, As for Palestine, it occurred 3.6% in Al Jazeera, 3.2 in the BBC (displaying its alleged balance), and 6.3% in the CNN (Kandil, 2009)

In newspapers, language used to indicate the parts subtly implies the favoured component. To assure a balanced coverage, as already mentioned, the BBC redacted a glossary of terminology and facts to avoid biased language. Before such language policing, scholars highlighted British Broadcaster's words in favour of Israel. For instance, IDF's violence is classified as retaliation, whereas Palestinian attacks are

named terrorism; additionally, the word “killed” was used to refer to Israeli casualties, but Palestinian simply “died” (Kandil, 2009)

More subtly, along this line, syntactic structures are employed to eliminate responsibility for the killer. The example of American activist Rachel Corrie’s death is fitting. She died in Rafah as a member of the International Solidarity Movement, protesting in the Gaza strip during the Al-Aqsa Intifada.

BBC reported the information as “a peace protester killed by an Israeli bulldozer”, using a transitive verb constructed in the passive voice. Instead, to emphasise the actor, the sentence should have been “an Israeli soldier in a bulldozer killed a peace protestor” (Richardson and Barkho, 2009). This construction was used in both the similar events, however caused by a Palestinian instead of an Israeli.

It is important to denote that these latter examples are not always deliberate, nonetheless there are several occurrences in media reports.

The relevance of language does not solely pertain to media outlets, but also user-generated content and modern media. Specifically, networks such as Twitter use hashtags as an organising mechanism in online activism that connect users with shared interests, creating a community and allowing external individuals to recognise them (Alfano *et al.*, 2022).

The majority of hashtags concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict contain biased language to persuade public opinion. Hashtags are divided into pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli. The former more viral and interacted with hashtags are #Palestinianlivesmatter with a neutral undertone, but also #GazaUnderAttack – which creates the idea of only one side being the offender, and #BoycottIsrael, which indicates a negative and “violent” context. As for Israel, the country had a similar hashtag reciting #IsraeliLivesMatter, which received far less interactions, similarly to #IsraelUnderAttack compared to hashtags on Gaza. Therefore, Twitter generally displays favouritism towards Palestinians over Israel.

2.7 Reason of bias: religion, proximity, involvement, values

Precisely, bias is not always deliberate, therefore it is even more important to analyse its roots.

Nonetheless, its consequences are as perilous as intentional bias, despite the upholder not recognising them or being conscious about their bias. Implicit bias represents a form of prejudice and stereotype that affects decision making and thoughts.

Generally, bias is based on ethnicity, gender, and background; as for the Arab-Israeli conflict, it can be based on ideological, economic, and institutional factors.

Ideological theories on media bias affirm that political beliefs held historically by media outlets and political identities of journalists impact the cherry picking and language used in articles.

Namely, more liberal headlines support the occupied territories, sometimes denouncing imperialism and violence implemented by the Israeli government.

Conversely, conservative counterparts support pro-status quo views in Israel, denouncing Palestinian uprisings and comparing them to killing machines – as found in the Telegraph and Times.

In addition, it has been proven through critical discourse analysis that media houses frame events from the perspective that is politically beneficial for them and align with their nation's stance on the conflict (Zaher, 2009, p. 3).

In conservative media, and still pertaining to the ideological branch of theories on media bias, religious ideology holds an important role.

Religion is a reason for bias and links local media to global conflicts, making them directly involved, since the descriptions of Zionists as simple Jews targets reminiscences of hate speech. It is debated whether religion plays an important role in the spread of the Arab-Israeli conflict, since most stances cover political, legal, and economic instances; nonetheless, it is relevant in the framing of events.

In the West, it is under the conservative guise of "protecting Christianity" and rejecting the Arab world. In the American political landscape, the s-called "Armageddon Lobby" has become a pillar in the pro-Israel Christian-right. Precisely, the Christian Zionist Lobby has strict bonds with the Zionist movement, established on the ground of biblical premise of faith, such as the existence of a "Jewish State of Israel" being necessary for the return of the Messiah (Haija, 2006). The lobby, in 2007, counted for around 60 million, displaying the significant presence in the US and the threat of Islamophobia and ideological discourse against Palestinians (Fink, 2014).

In fact, despite the 7% of Palestinians being Christian, American conservative and Christian Zionists have used islamophobia and racism against Palestinians as a whole to support Israel, claiming that it is fighting against the exclusionary, intolerant and "violent Islam".

Often, states Fink (2014), such Zionist groups justify Israeli violence addressing the necessity and most importantly the lack of humanity of Palestinians, based on their Pastors' speeches and Genesis 12:3 (preventing the apocalypse by granting the Messiah's return via violence perpetrated in Gaza).

The lack of information about Islam, conjoint with the eschatological belief of Evangelical Zionist Christians, are tools used by the religious lobby to belittle and trivialise the Palestinian movement, granting Israel populistic and undoubted support.

More bluntly, however, religion is taken into account among the reasons for bias. Namely, religion plays a crucial role in political culture and weltanschauung of individuals, i.e., ideals, and how they behave within society. Therefore, the interiorisation of religious moral values and their belonging to a certain social group will directly influence citizens' political actions and redirect their support to groups of the same religion (Ceccarini, Diamanti, 2018, p. 107). For this reason, it is understandable that the USA – a country with a high Jewish population – expresses a pro-Israeli bias.

Outside of the Western world, Ozohu-Suleiman and Ishak (2014) conducted a study to examine how major newspapers in Southeast Asian countries were influenced by religious bias.

The reported the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during the year after the 2009 Gaza war, therefore still taking into consideration the timeframe discussed above in British and American news.

The selected headlines were *Star* (Malaysia), *The Philstar* (the Philippines), *The Jakarta Post* (Indonesia), and *The Nation* (Thailand).

In predominantly Muslim contexts, such as Malaysia and Indonesia, the headlines (respectively from the Star and the *Jakarta Post*) supported Palestine, expressing criticism against the Zionist nation. On the other hand, the Philstar, situated in a Christian environment, connected with Israel, with 55.1% of stories supporting the IDF and its government (Ozohu-Suleiman and Ishak, 2014).

However, political and ideological theories could explain the Philippines favouritism for Israel: based on the extensive relationships and favouring the American views and policies, the Philippines shares the American stance on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Compared to the above-mentioned “Armageddon Lobby”, bias in Southern Asian media appears to be less religion based and backed by sociological issues, such as support to individuals sharing personal features. Additionally, as suggested by the authors and deducted from the American influence on the Philippines, religious motives are less ideological and bigoted and more influenced by politics.

Generally, the bias stems from sources of information. As researched by Ozohu-Suleimani (2014), neutral stories produced by the Star of Malaysia were news agencies such as Reuters, whereas slanted stories came from civic bodies (for around 25%) and independent sources (for more than 70%). Nonetheless, there are still cases of news agencies being biased such as for Indonesia.

Conversely, Thailand gained around 90% of neutral stories from civic bodies, while more than half of biased or misinforming content derived from news agencies. This suggests that, despite the undeniable link with information sources, all informative content should be verified.

In all the cases, additionally, the language used by news agencies and other sources of information directly slanted the language of the articles themselves.

This addresses the issue of user generated content, in a landscape in which modern media such as TikTok are a principal source of information among younger people, who unquestioningly report the same information and language in their echo chambers.

Therefore, it is pivotal to analyse the social media platforms and their impact in information and misinformation.

2.8 Bias on social media – what are these media.

Currently, news industries and journalism have lost credibility in several countries, followed by the rise of Google and Facebook in the news media landscape (Saldaña and Vu, 2022). Precisely, Berenger (2013, in Siapera, Hunt and Lynn, 2015) observed the proliferation of information and communication sources and subsequent loss of control of war communication.

The spillover of traditional communication (i.e., journalism and governmental sources) into user-based social media contributes to increasing misinformation, due to echo chambers, lack of fact-checking, and quickness in the circulation of information (Saldaña and Vu, 2022).

Authors spreading biased and partial information are first and foremost the military and the State, using modernised media accounts. As implied in both the Hasbara and Palestinian Public Relations, governmental sources and policies impact international communication; nonetheless, power dynamics, reach and subsequent echo chambers differ in magnitude. Namely, military forces from Palestine (the Palestine Liberation Organization – Negotiations Affairs Department) and the

Israeli Defence Force count respectively 59.000 followers and more than 1.5 million on Twitter.

Traditional journalism provides a vital part of war communication, which as analysed before can be biased or partial. Journalistic headlines – similarly to government PR – have expanded to the social media landscape, enlarging their audience and the effects of bias towards Israel and Palestine. Namely, media outlets such as The Guardian and The New York Times have a massive social media presence. The British tabloid counts 5.5 million followers on Instagram, 10.8 million on Twitter, and 8.7 million on Facebook. Its American counterpart has 16.9 million followers on Instagram, 55 million on Twitter and more than 18.6 million on Facebook. Therefore, American views gain more relevance on social media, spreading what was analysed before to be biased or partial headlines.

Both traditional journalism and international citizen journalism (ed. journalism not tethered to legacy media structures) shape the current media landscape by spreading information, biased news, and misinformation.

Sources of information for the media public are, however, not limited to governmental channels and journalists.

Activists based in Israel and Palestine often share political views on the conflict and document violence in the territories (Siapera, 2014).

As for the networks on which those exchanges happen, some relevant information media for political participation are Twitter and Facebook; the latter promotes engagement for public protests and in groups with like-minded views, for instance, the private group called “Israelis & Palestinians for Peace שָׁלוֹם וְמַשָׁס “ with over 4,400 members that engage in respectful dialogue. Whereas some groups might propose a solution to the issues, some might become perilous echo chambers.

The former is found to be useful in “injecting novel information” relying on weaker and heterogeneous structures. In other words, updates and messages spread rapidly across different echo chambers. Additionally, in various studies conducted in English-speaking countries, the number of hashtags in favour of Palestine

outnumbered the ones defending Israel (Imtiaz et al., 2022), despite the major following of the IDF on the platform.

The abovementioned social networks are unified by their user-generated content, which is characterised by personal contribution and is created "outside the realm of professional routines", therefore becoming similar to citizen journalism and not a collaboration of press with individuals (Naab and Sehl, 2017). The number of users on this kind of network has grown steadily. As of 2014, 77% of adult internet users in the US used Facebook, 63% used YouTube, and 21% used Twitter (Anderson, 2015 (Evans, 2016).

However, new networks with political influence have recently tread the stage: Instagram and Tiktok.

A social media platform that gained momentum in recent years is Instagram, on which NGOs, politicians, news channels, and activists reach a wide audience with pictures and videos. Instagram proved to be the most successful platform to spread information among younger audiences (McLachlan, 2022).

Despite allowing for a broad audience, the obstacles of cybercolonialism and limitation of Palestinian freedom of speech spread quickly to the Meta platform. Precisely, pressure and censorship have strengthened since the 11 days of conflict in Gaza (Abushbak, Majeed and Sinha, no date). Additionally, similarly to Facebook, the platform removed, blocked and deleted Palestinian posts, comments and hashtags (Abushbak, Majeed and Sinha, no date). The enforcement of such censorship is particularly harsh on citizens in the occupied territories, therefore transferring their activism "duty" to Palestinians who emigrated.

Another recent and prominent platform – counting more than 730 million subscribers – is TikTok, where videos and hashtags generate ideological formation and polarised activism preventing cross-cutting exposure (Herrman, no date). Among the perils of such networks are partisanship and bias, the frequent lack of reliable sources, and the importance of an algorithm in creating echo chambers. Nonetheless, it is particularly convenient for Palestinians since it doesn't apply

equally strong censorship and regulations to access (Abushbak, Majeed and Sinha, no date).

This type of communication is found to perpetrate stereotypes and conflict, motivating people to assault other individuals and film it to go "viral", a phenomenon that has broadly occurred in Gaza recently (Ball, 2021).

The above-mentioned danger of echo-chambers (as defined in Chapter 1) is ubiquitous, due to the choice of audiences who turn to media that reinforce their views. This is partially because platforms like Facebook are used primarily to contact existing friend groups – who generally have similar political views and strong sociological ties. In addition, personalisation systems (i.e. algorithms that decide what the user will be exposed to) shape the information environment based on previous posts, granting the individual content that they will surely enjoy (Kozitsin and Chkhartishvili, 2020). Therefore, the media user will acquire content that does not contradict their preferences, eliminating cross cutting exposure and reinforcing confirmation bias (Kozitsin and Chkhartishvili, 2020).

Besides algorithm and bias influencing views both in the Middle East and the Western world, censorship plays a crucial role. As already debated in the context of digital apartheid, user-generated content in the Middle East and more precisely in the Gaza Strip is not accessible. Media such as Facebook, Google and Twitter accepted the vast majority of Israeli governmental complaints and subsided to the threats of Israel banning Meta if it did not delete accounts of Palestinian activists and journalists. Only after the user's reprimand, Facebook retrieved the content, despite repeating – along with TikTok - the same mass deletions and content removal of alleged "anti-Israeli content" (Alimardani and Elswah, no date).

Therefore, not only do echo chambers influence the spread and knowledge of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict globally, but algorithms also aggravate the erosion of rights and online censorship applied to Palestinian channels.

Overall, both the traditional media analysed above, and social media and their discriminatory policies display connivance with Israel of various degrees.

2.9 Percentage of bias on individuals – for which

Despite the effort of Israel's Hasbara to eliminate anti-Israel discourse from platforms and the constant bias manifested in American and British media, support of the Palestinian cause has undeniably grown over the past 10 years.

In EU countries – which never displayed undying support for the State - views on Israeli influence have hardened, for instance in Spain – with 74% negative rating - and in France with 65%, up 9 percentage points (Aouragh, 2016).

Nonetheless, negative perception in Britain remains high, hitting 68%. After the 2014 attack on Gaza, in the UK the YouGov and The Sunday Times' polls showed that 62% of the public believed that the Israeli government was committing war crimes, and 51% of those polled by The *Sunday Times* stated that Israel's actions were unjustified. The increase in sympathy for Palestinians is peculiar in the latter case, due to the polling being led in traditionally pro-Israeli media outlets, such as The Sunday Times (Aouragh, 2016) .

In other words, media outlets and the algorithm of media platforms has been proven to be anti-Palestinian, silencing them and oppressing them through defamatory language and partial coverage. Nonetheless, users in the UK haven't been influenced, displaying a pro-Palestinian sentiment.

As for other countries, unambiguous research on the impact of biased communication has not been led yet. For this reason, the Third Chapter of this dissertation will focus on the quantitative analysis of social media platforms used as sources of information on the conflict, as well as the perceived amount of bias and towards which part (i.e., Israel or Palestine) is this bias more frequent.

CHAPTER III

Having firstly discussed the technicalities and manners in which media - precisely social networks - manipulate factual information and secondly, their relevance in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is now pivotal to analyse the impact of media manipulation on both Israel and Palestine in Italy.

Before discussing the results - as standalone and in cross-tabulation - and their implication in the understanding of the media landscape and political communication, it is crucial to dissect the importance of the begged questions in the survey.

The survey was handed out through social media and personal connections, reaching a data pool of 145 individuals, therefore granting diversity (both opinions and backgrounds).

First and foremost, basic introductory questions have been posed to enquire about the demographics of the group. In relation to the age range, which social media they prefer will be investigated. Starting from such results (especially based on the outcome of the abovementioned investigation), the frequency of cross-cutting exposure and how and how frequently algorithms impact variegated exposure will be discussed.

In the First Chapter, echo chambers and their implications have been defined, highlighting a need for diverse sources and cross-cutting exposure to avoid radicalisation, and increasing misinformation; additionally, the variability of news sources was exemplified in the Second Chapter, while analysing British tabloids. Nonetheless, despite the continuous hateful coverage of the Sunday Times, their readers demonstrated opposite perspectives, with a majority of pro-Palestine readers who were not biased by the newspapers' articles.

Such an enquiry has not been led encompassing other recent mass media, e.g., Meta, Twitter, and TikTok.

Therefore, questions have been included in the survey to assess what degree of the echo chamber is witnessed by users, especially concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict, and in response what percentage engages in cross-cutting exposure and fact-checking.

Lastly, a set of 3 questions concerns users' perception of language (i.e. whether it may be biased and towards who) and their perception of the conflict.
Subsequently, the data will be interpreted, taking into account the personal bias admitted by the surveyed.
Ethically, bias is discussed starting from anonymous questions answered on Google Forms.

Moreover, a cross-cultural comparison will be led between Italy and Britain, having discussed outlets and partial impressions from the UK. Since an equal sample was not found, the analysis will be purely qualitative.

In sum, this last Chapter aims to find whether the Italian public is biased and towards which party. To answer this, demographic and behaviour will be discussed, before an in-depth analysis of media use and bias.

3.1 Methodology

Quantitative research consists of social research that uses empirical methods and statements – i.e. what occurs in reality, instead of what theoretically ought to be (Cohen, 1980 in Sukamolson, 2007). Additionally, Creswell defines it as a "type of research that explains phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed by mathematically based methods, in particular statistics" (Creswell, 1994, in Sukamolson, 2007), as opposed to qualitative research.

One type of quantitative research is survey research; it consists of scientific sampling and questionnaires to statistically measure characteristics, answering such questions as "How many people use a certain mass medium" (Sukamolson, 2007).

To guarantee a heterogeneous sample and therefore assure the outcome of the research, respondents need a variety of backgrounds and characteristics (e.g. age, academic background, and media used).

The diversity of the sample is guaranteed by handing out the questionnaire both to personal acquaintances (therefore both strong and weak ties) and publishing it on social media, therefore reaching members outside of my ties.

On a general level, sharing surveys on the Internet is increasingly frequent in social sciences, due to their potential to reach great numbers of participants (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007).

Therefore, the method employed (quantitative research) and its distribution were considered to be beneficial for the variety, velocity, and quality of the sample, since it gathers anonymous and heterogeneous participants.

This quantitative analysis will occur on two levels: descriptive and correlational.

In descriptive research, an overall summary of your study variables is sought (Apuke, 2017). This will be carried out in the first part, in which the results of each question will be discussed.

Correlational research determines whether and to what degree there is a relationship between variables of the sampled population (Apuke, 2017). This will be the method employed in the final part, by using contingency tables.

The undeniable perk of quantitative research is that the findings can be compared to other cultural contexts. For this reason, the outcomes and tested hypotheses will be contrasted with the results mentioned in Chapter 2. Finally, brief qualitative research will be led, to compare the Italian media landscape and the British one.

3.2 Survey structure

The survey was submitted in Italian since that is the target population.
The overall sample obtained was 145 individuals, whose ages ranged from 13 to 40.
The questions, after the introductory questions section (age, current study or highest achieved diploma, field of study where applicable) were divided into 2 additional sections.
The first section concerned the sources of information.
First and foremost, it enquired how users received information about the conflict – possible answers being: friend or family, school, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, television, newspapers/tabloids. In response, it was possible to select more than one answer. This is relevant to understand the plethora of sources

since the previous analysis (see Chapter 2) only mentioned quantitative research among newspaper readers, but only mentioned the amount of biased and fake information on the conflict.

Secondly, it was asked whether - if participants informed themselves through social media – they did it through popular posts, journalists' accounts, or politicians' accounts. Similarly, to the previous question, participants can tick more than one box. This enquiry aims to assess the percentage of part-takers who rely on verified information sources and those who only look out for popular posts. This is directly linked to the following question, which concerns the impact of echo chambers. The distinction between newspapers/politicians and popular posts is that for the former the veracity of the content is assumed from the profession, whereas for the latter it is deduced by its popularity. Popularity, as mentioned, is proven to be perilous for the spread of misinformation, since high levels of engagement (i.e. likes and comments) reduce the chances of users double-checking information, therefore leading to increasing disinformation (Avram et al., 2020).

As mentioned, the third question of the section invites the participant to reveal whether they look up the information themselves or the algorithm (for instance For You Page available on Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter) provides it. The available answers were:

- "I follow users who post about the conflict" – including influencers, and politicians
- "I find information because my friends share them on social media"
- "I don't look for information, but the algorithm shows me either way"
- "I don't look for information and I don't see it"

As before the participant could select more than one possible answer.

The questions aim to analyse respectively:

- Consistency of users who rely on channels that are specialized to a degree compared to the former question
- Number of users who rely on strong ties and echo chambers (since friends often belong in the same filter bubble)
- Number of users who rely on echo chambers

Due to the possibility of selecting more than one variable, the intensity of echo chambers and filter bubbles will be taken into account.

The fourth question of the section is "After reading a news item, do you look for more news with different points of view / from different sources?". The answer was binary compared to the previous ones, therefore allowing only to respond with "Yes" or "No".

This question, combined with the previous one, allows a thorough understanding of the degree of filtering that occurs in part-takers who rely on strong ties and algorithms. In other words, it will distinguish those who – despite not looking for professional information – adhere to cross-cutting exposure and those who do not.

Lastly, the conclusive question for this section assesses the relevance of cross-cutting exposure, questioning whether their opinion changes after being exposed to new information. Similarly to the former question, it is binary and allows only "Yes" or "No".

The first section is, in other words, used to comprehend the sources of information and behaviour of participants, which will be both analysed as a standalone (to assess whether bias is also influenced by misinformation and malpractices) and conjoint with their assumption on their bias (to deduce the bias contained in each social media platform).

The last section of the survey covers the relevant knowledge concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and it consists of 4 questions.

The opening question asks participants to self-evaluate their knowledge of the conflict, on a scale of 1 (very little) to 10 (very much). The spectrum guarantees more coverage of a binary question.

The remainder 3 questions, however, allow for no subjective interpretation, therefore being multiple choice with only one possible answer.

First and foremost, it enquires whether the user thinks the media is impartial towards one side (Israel or Palestine), one example of this phenomenon being that there is more coverage from one perspective. The answers were "Yes, I see more pro-Israel content", "Yes, I see more pro-Palestine content", and "No, I think it's

balanced". This question has a two-fold effect. Firstly, it allows the understanding of what content is currently more frequent. Secondly, combined with the analysis of what media platform is used, it displays the amount of biased coverage in each social network.

Moreover, the survey infers if, from the user's perspective, language is not objective (i.e. describing one side as terrorist or coloniser). The possible answers are:

- Yes, the language is more aggressive towards Israelis
- Yes, the language is more aggressive towards Palestinians
- Yes, the language is not objective in both cases
- No, the language is objective in both cases

Whereas the first two possible answers are a confirmation of the previous question's outcome, the latter two are the possible implication of balanced coverage. Precisely, the third answer to the former question not only implies that coverage is fair to both parties, but also could intend that both parties are discussed with a degree of bias.

The last question of the survey assesses the bias of the participant, to keep into account that quantitative methods that rely on personal preference, still have an unbalanced perspective.

The begged question is "Do you think you are unbiased on this topic", to which users can respond with "Yes I am impartial", "No, I am biased (pro-Israel)", and "No, I am biased (Pro-Palestine)".

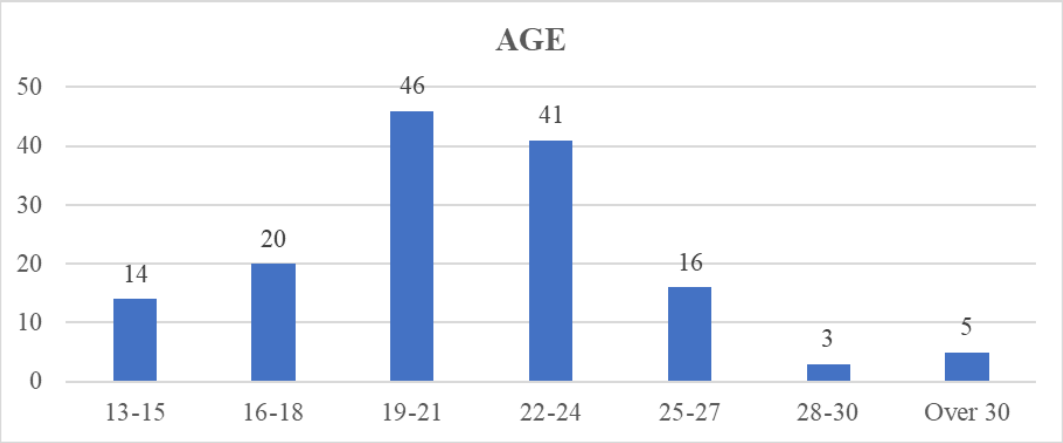
After having introduced the questions of the survey and briefly mentioning the reasons and aimed results, this paper will first focus on standalone results from each relevant question. Afterwards, it will proceed to cross-tabulation and correlation between variables such as bias and echo chambers.

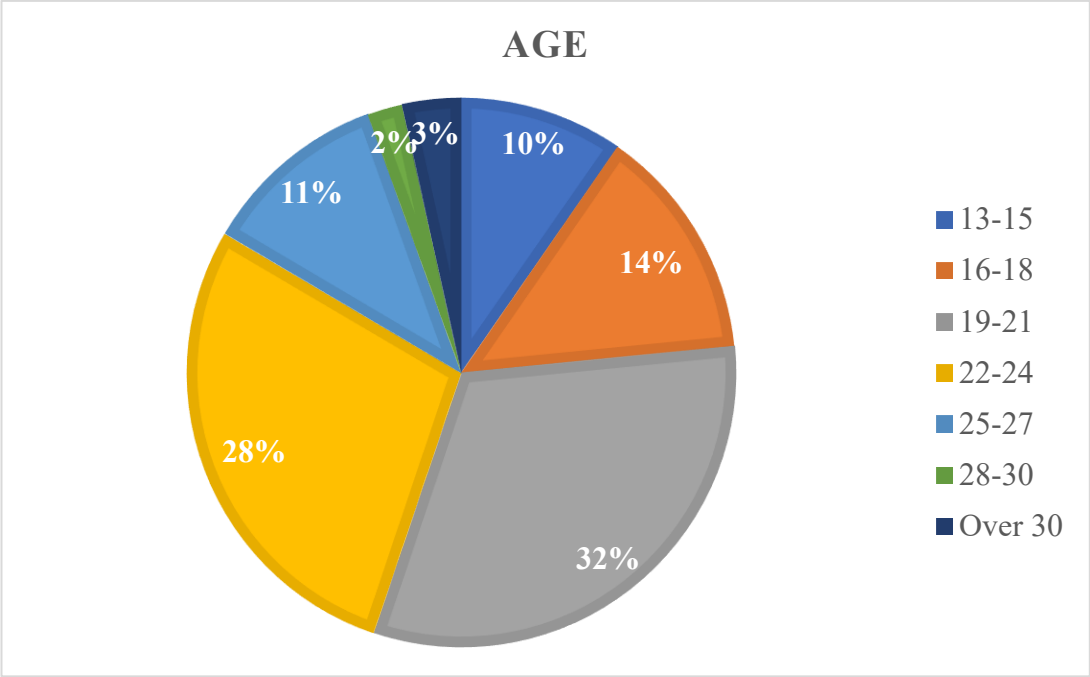
3.3 Descriptive research

Age and level of education

The age of responders ranged from 13 to over 30.

Age	*f*
13-15	14
16-18	20
19-21	46
22-24	41
25-27	16
28-30	3
Over 30	5

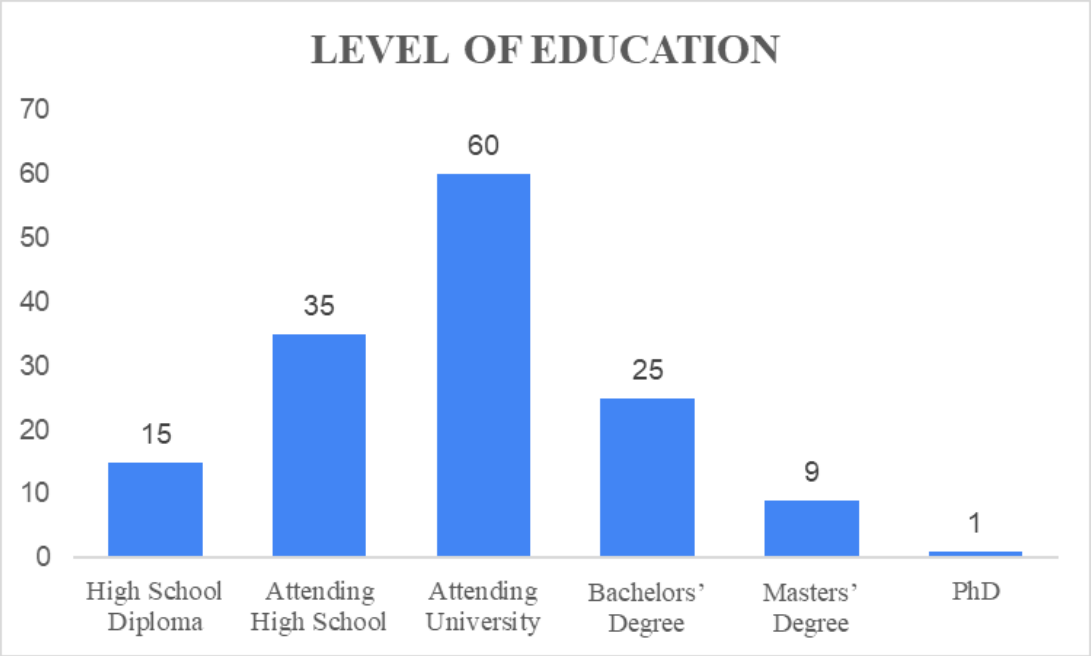


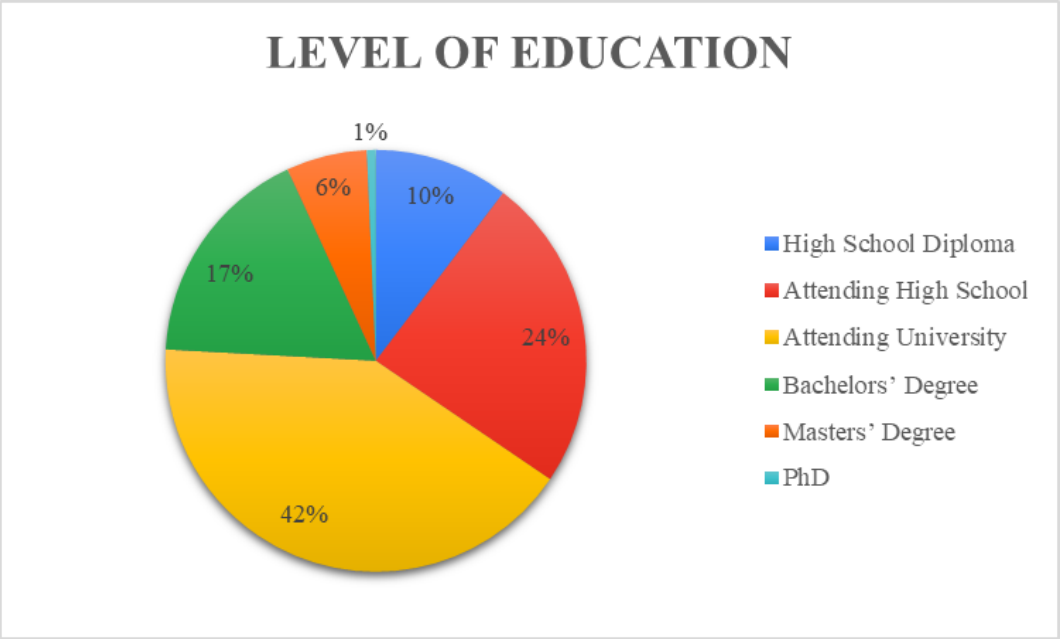


As seen both from the table and the graph, the majority of responders were aged between 19 and 24, with a total of 87 participants (60%). Participants over 28 were overall 8, whereas individuals under the age of 19 reached a total of 34 (therefore, 35%).

Due to the high number of participants aged between 21 and 24, the results concerning their academic level reflected the outcome of the previous question. The majority of responders (60 individuals, corresponding to 42%) stated to be attending university courses. Only 17% had already completed their Bachelor's Degree, 6% had already achieved their Master's degree or Graduate education, and only 0,7% has undertaken a PhD. As for younger individuals, 24% are completing high school and 10% have concluded their education with their High School diploma.

Level of education	*f*
High School Diploma	15
Attending High School	35
Attending University	60
Bachelors' Degree	25
Masters' Degree	9
PhD	1





After having briefly introduced the composition of the sample group, the analysis will focus on the two sections discussed above.

Sources of information

In the previous chapter Facebook and YouTube were discussed as main sources of information, both concerning the conflict and in general.

However, there has been a technological advancement, witnessing the substitution of Facebook by its Meta partner Instagram, Twitter, and more recently Tik Tok.

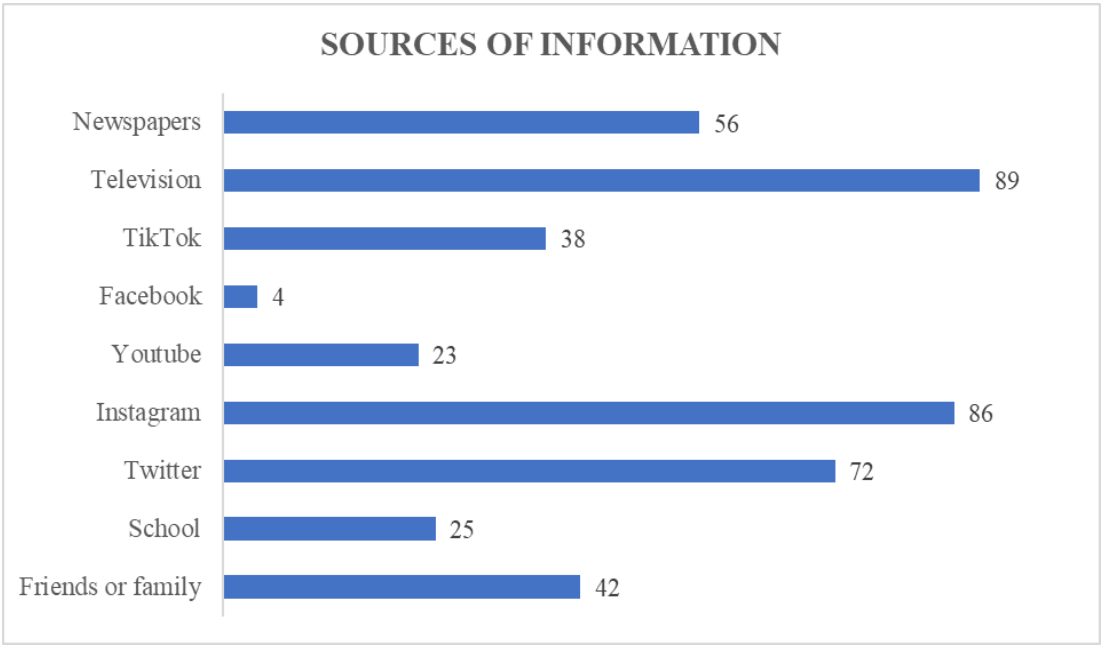
As visible in the graph, Facebook is an uncommon platform for newer generations, sitting at a mere 2.8% with 4 users overall. Similarly, YouTube has not reached the expected majority, with only 16% claiming to use the platform for informative purposes. Nonetheless, other more traditional sources, i.e. television and newspapers, reached 62% (82 participants) and 39% (56 individuals) respectively, demonstrating their ongoing relevance in the mediatic landscape.

The results are particularly interesting when compared to the American media landscape, where Facebook and YouTube were the most used social media reaching respectively 77% and 63% of the population. (see p.64)

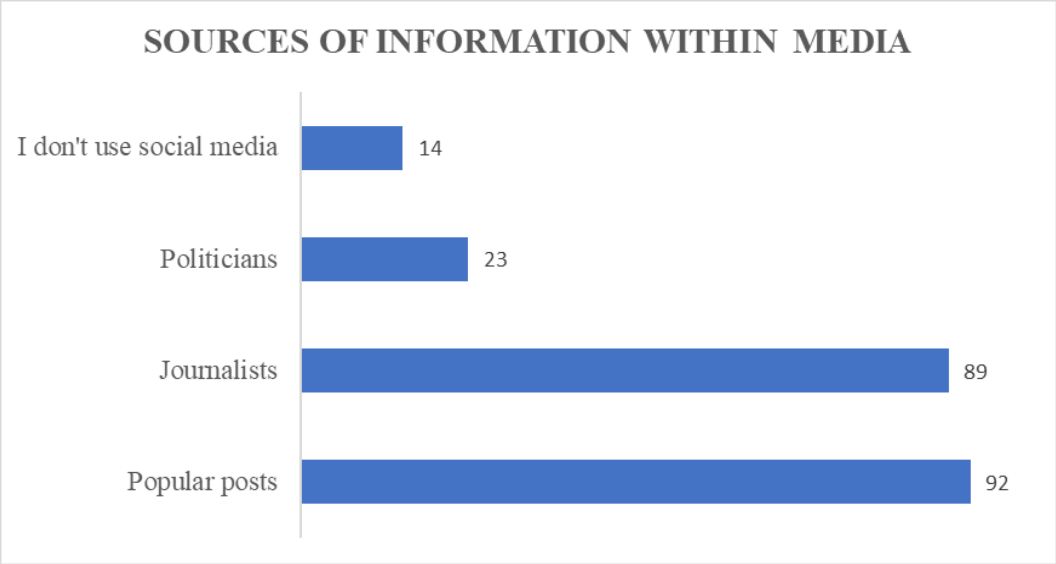
For what concerns information relying on stronger intrapersonal ties which do not depend on the Internet, only 25 participants (17.5%) gain knowledge on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through school. On the other hand, the option "friends and family" achieved around 30%, denoting the importance of stronger ties. This is particularly relevant since it should not be underestimated how friends' and family's opinions both are not necessarily fact-checked and can constitute an echo chamber. Precisely, Granovetter (1977 in Barberá, 2020) determined that individuals are exposed to different information and perspective through weak ties; therefore, stronger ties – such as family and friends – lead to repetition and radicalisation of pre-existing beliefs.

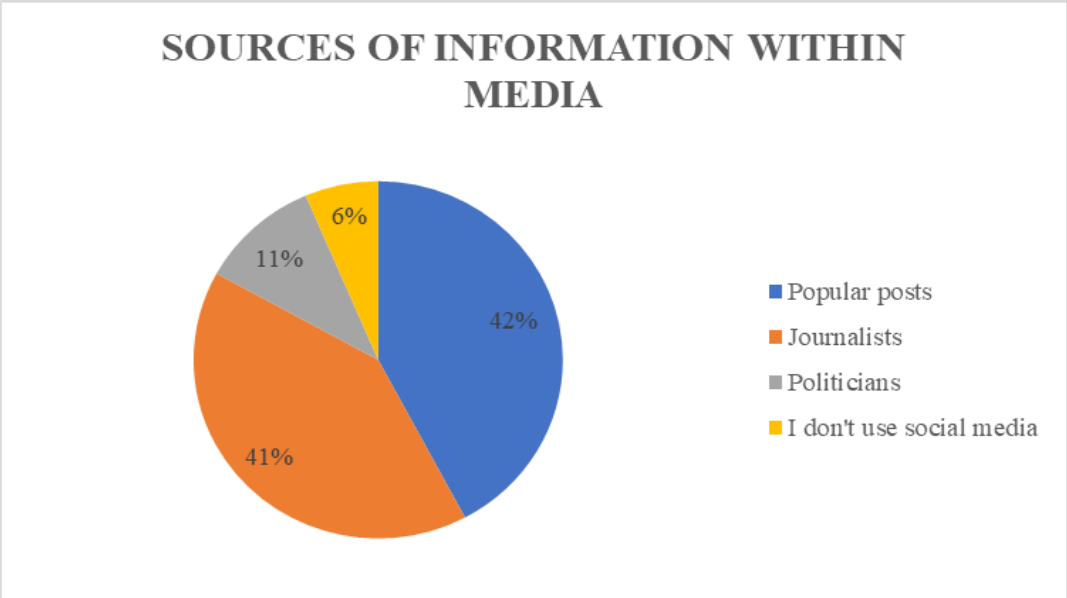
On the other hand, social media is considered to be beneficial for exposure to novel content since it is mainly shared by weak ties (Barberá, 2020), nonetheless, the presence of filter bubbles and algorithms must be taken into account. Such conditions will be further analysed in the upcoming questions, after discussing the most popular platform.

Undoubtedly, the most popular social networks (and among the most prominent sources of information) are Twitter and Instagram. The former hosts 50% of participants, while the latter a staggering 60%, surpassing other media platforms.



Having attested that 90% of participants gain information from at least one social network, it is important to dissect the main sources of information within them.





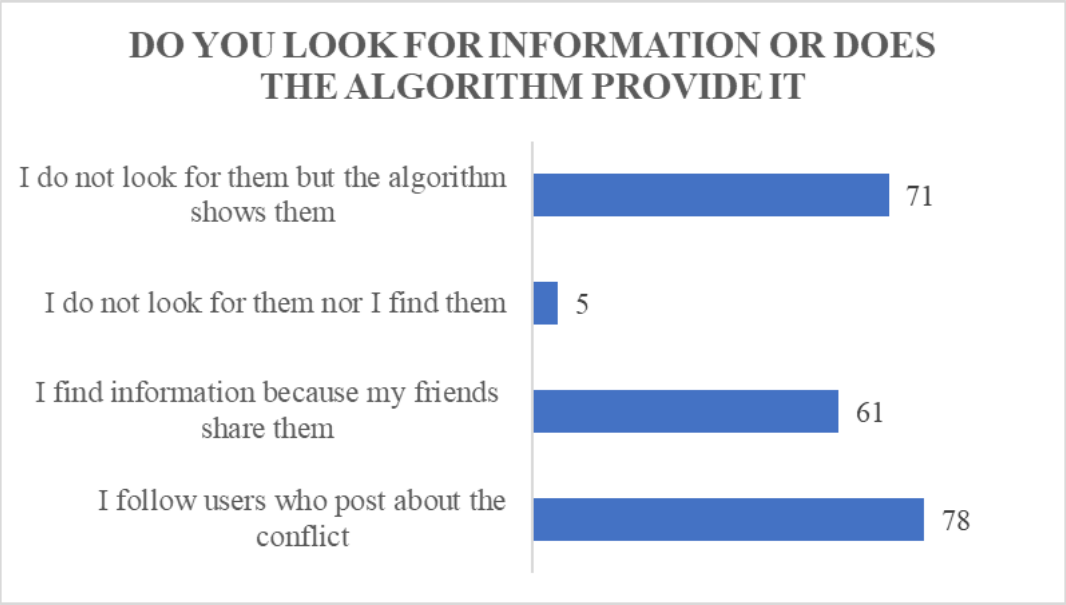
As stated above, 14 participants do not inform themselves through social media.

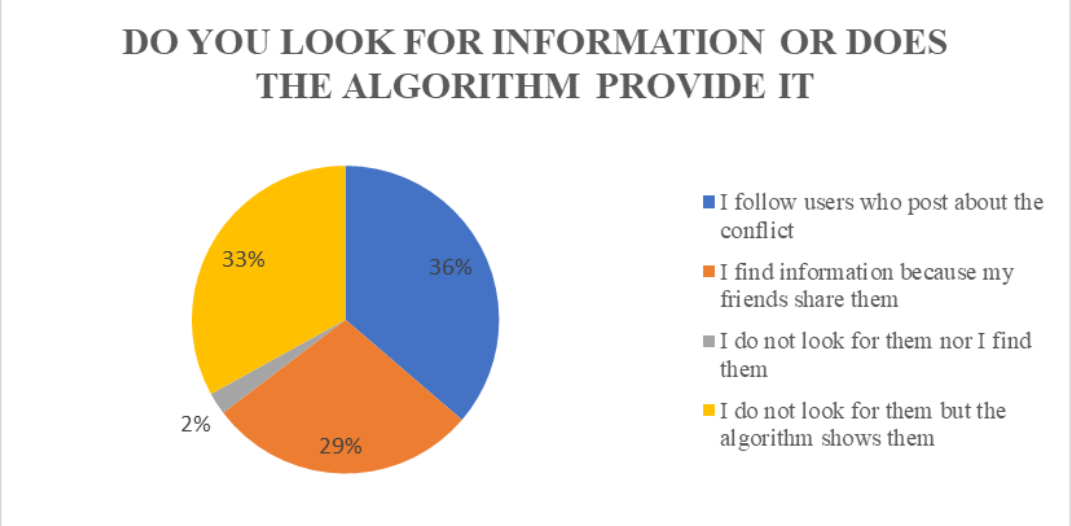
In addition, it is important to notice that the high figure of participants who inform themselves through newspapers is particularly due to online broadcasters. The theme of online newspapers and their trustworthiness will be resumed in the comparison between Italy and Britain.

The overall majority (42%) confirmed that popular posts are a prominent source. Similarly, 41% of individuals rely on journalists and online tabloids to keep tabs on the conflict. Notably, the answer "journalists" encompasses tabloids' websites, posts on social media, and personal posts from journalists.

On the other hand, a mere 11% (23 participants) gain information from politicians.

The incidence of popular posts can be confirmed by the high percentages of individuals that receive information through social networks' algorithms.





The most relevant figure is the response that confirms the relevance of popular posts. Precisely, this announces the effect that popularity has on information and hints at the functioning of social media and filter bubbles, enforcing echo chambers.

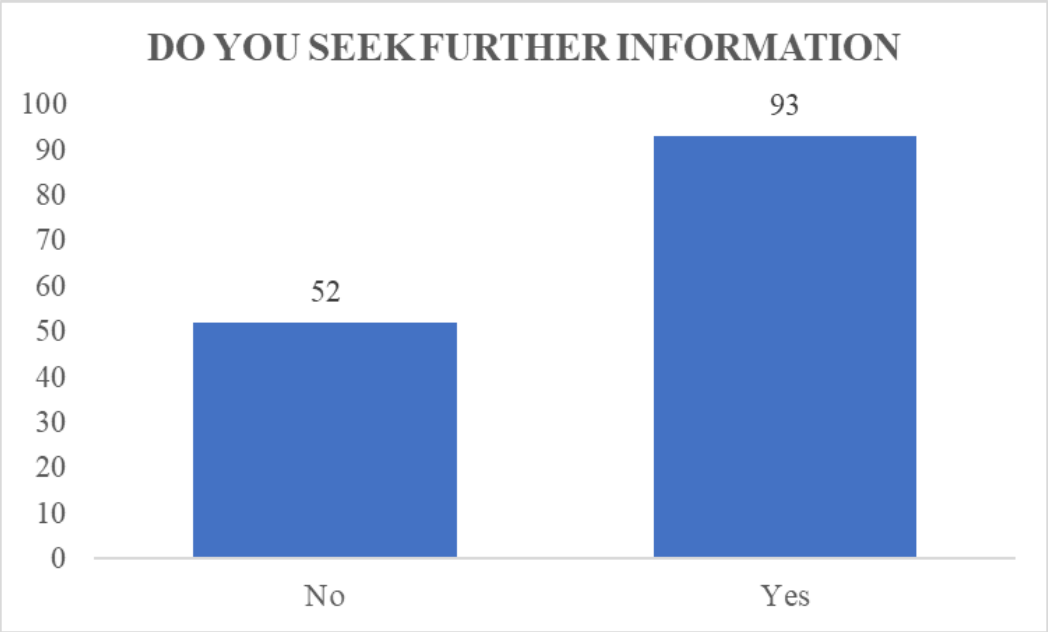
Precisely, the answers to the third question of the section confirm the importance of both algorithms and ties.

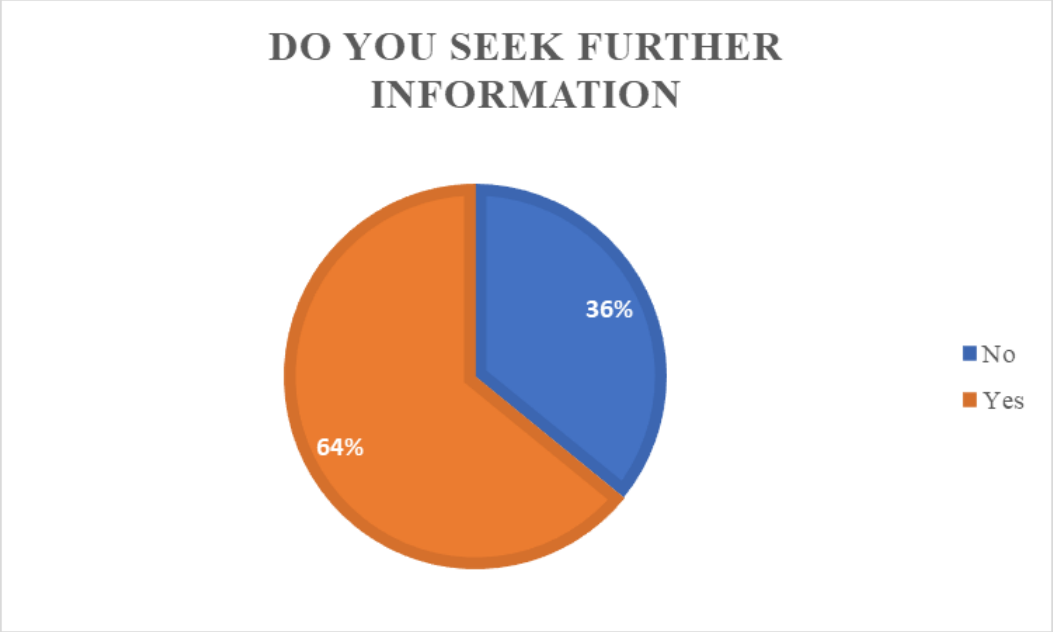
As for the former, more than 29% confirm that they don't deliberately seek information, but the algorithm provides them. The majority however (36%) states that they follow users who post about the conflict, therefore being linked by weak ties. As stated above, this is beneficial since it provides novel information; nonetheless, it is vital to remember that said information (both when coming from professionals and not) can be biased or partial.

Moreover, around 33% find information because it is shared by stronger ties, such as friends. However, it is still important to underline the conditions mentioned above.

Therefore, it is pivotal to assure that users who gain information from popular and algorithm-suggested posts voluntarily seek additional information to counteract eventual bias.

Do you seek further information	**f**
No	52
Yes	93

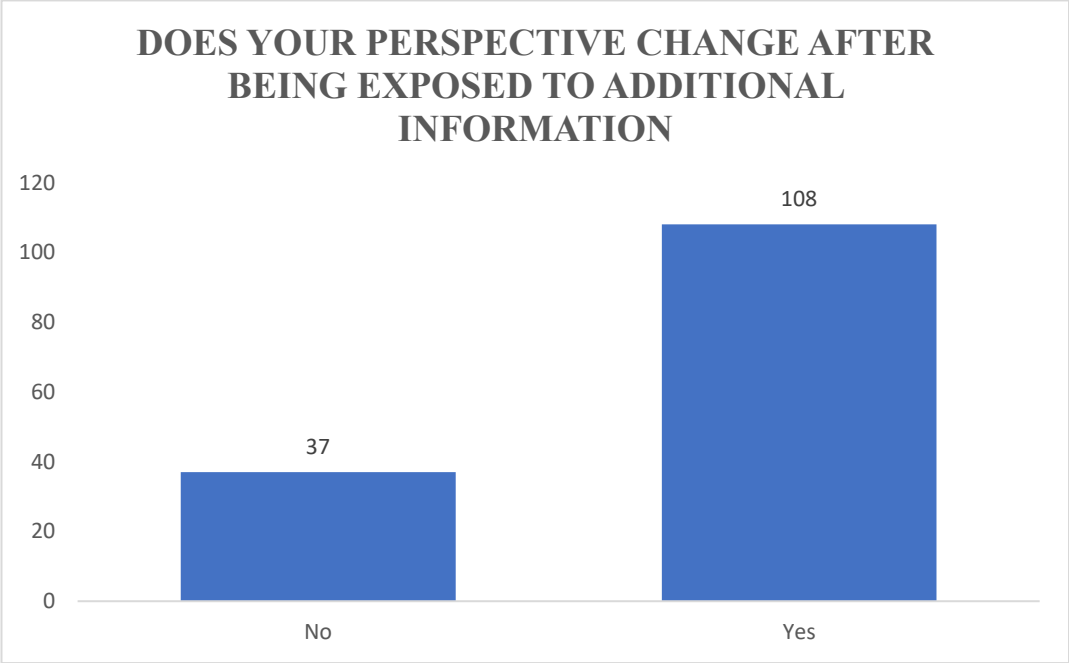


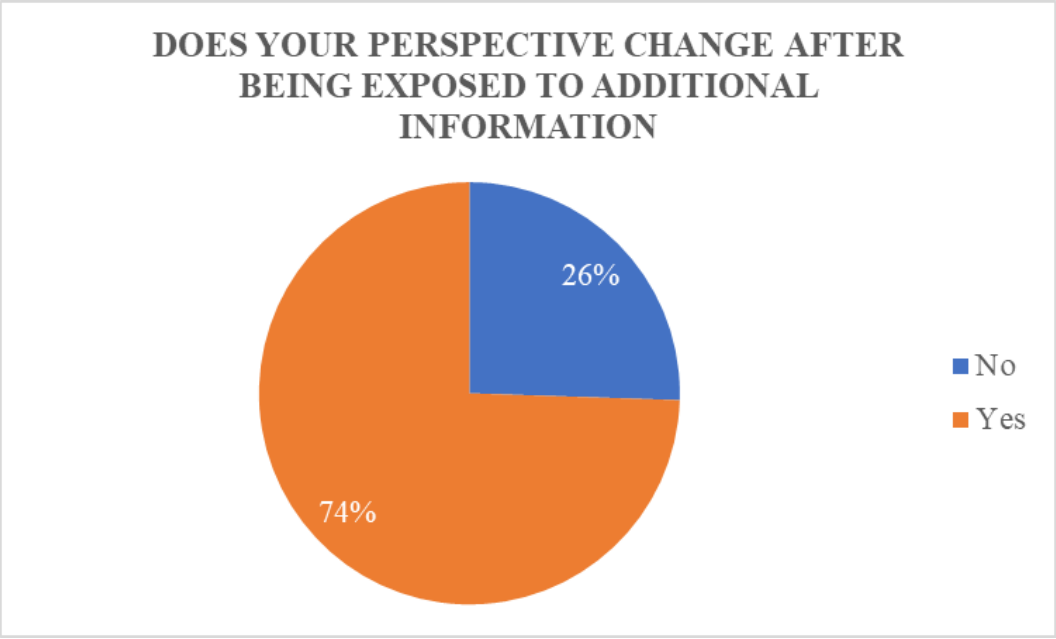


The staggering majority (64%) confirmed seeking further information after being exposed to news surrounding the conflict.

The effects are also attested by the conclusive question of the section. Precisely, the near absolute majority (75%, therefore 108 participants) confirmed the positive outcome of cross-cutting exposure which was discussed in Chapter 1 and previously reinforced.

Does your perspective change after being exposed to additional information	f
No	37
Yes	108





In sum, on a general level, the most employed sources are television, Twitter, and Instagram. On the latter two – and generally on social media – participants confirmed they tend to rely on journalists and popular posts. Therefore, the phenomenon of echo chambers and algorithms is crucial to understand the type of content that users interact with. To balance this, it is notable that more than 60% of the sample group successfully looks for disproving information.

Having confirmed that individuals seek novel information and that after being exposed to them they are prone to changing opinion, based on their self-assessed bias, the upcoming correlational research will focus on which algorithms propose biased news (and in favour of whom), and whether algorithms identify personal ideologies on the conflict and display information that resonates with the user.

Before this further enquiry, it is required to establish the group's knowledge and perceived bias in the merit of news on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Relevant knowledge on the conflict and bias

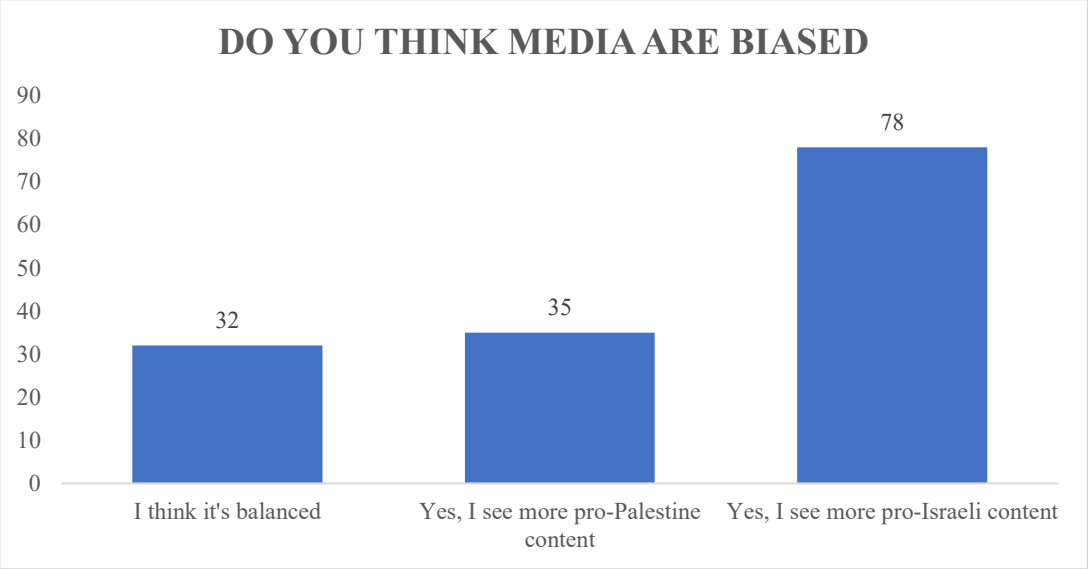
The majority of participants, when asked to self-assess their knowledge of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, mainly ranked themselves between 4 and 7, with more than 25 votes for each variable.

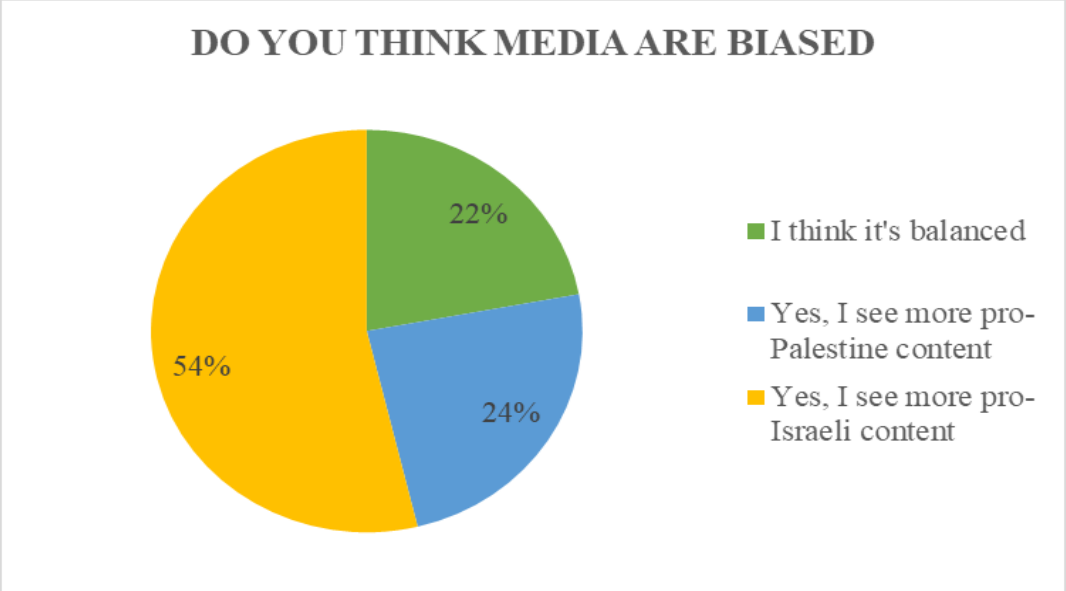
Overall, more votes were cast in the lower marks of the rank.

As introduced, the following questions focused on the perceived amount of bias in media concerning the conflict. To clarify, the noun “bias” is used to summarise all the types of bias mentioned in Chapter 1, e.g. political, economic, ...

The questionnaire confirmed the hypothesis advanced in Chapter 2, that the majority of content is biased in favour of Israel. The claim was proved both for the United States of America and the United Kingdom, for what concerns the press. On a broader scale, 54% of responders have identified a pro-Israel bias. Conversely,

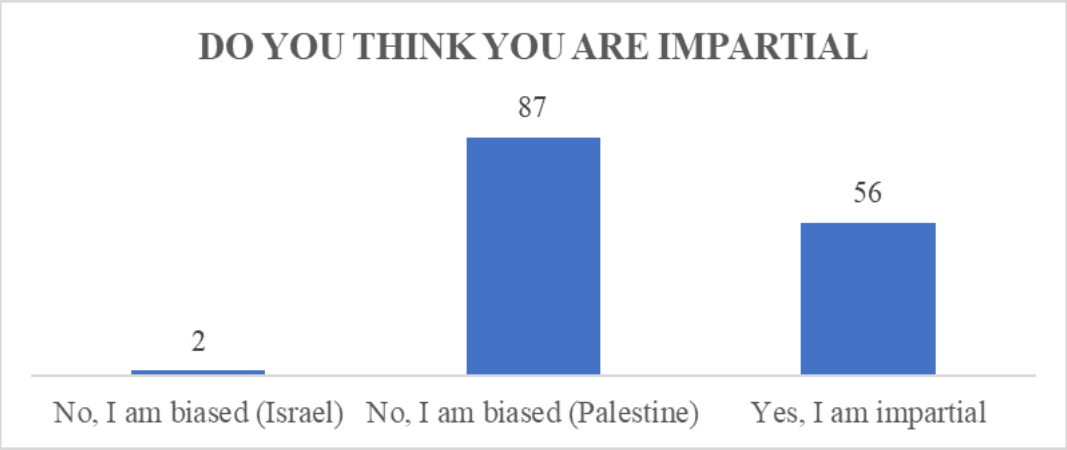
only 24% reckoned that the media was biased in favour of Palestinians, and the remainder 22% stated that the media are impartial on the matter.

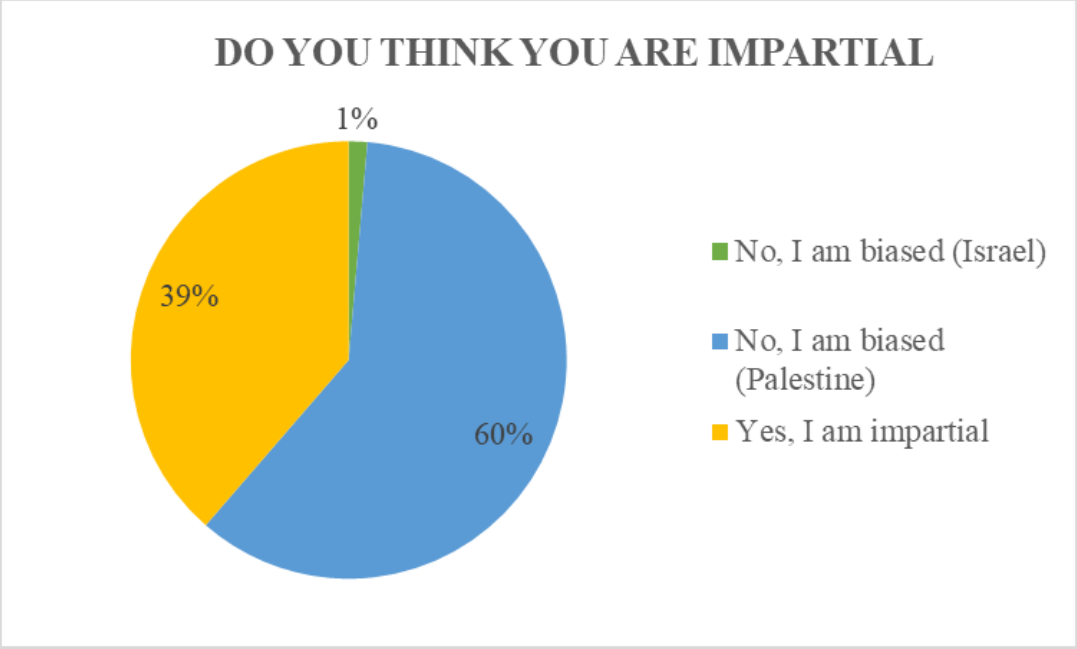




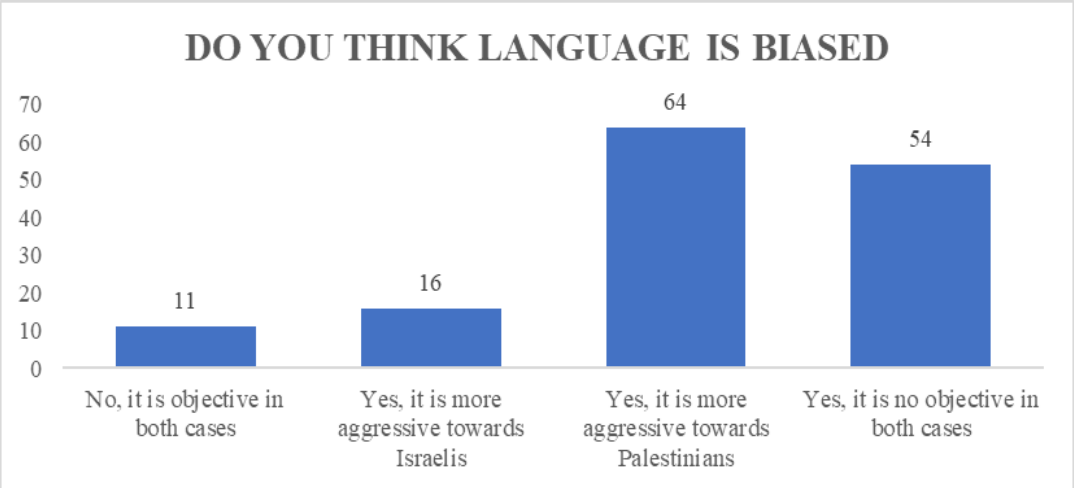
Nonetheless, it is vital to take into account the participants' bias in such responses. This will be deeply analysed in the following section (. Generally, 60% admitted to being biased towards Palestine, whereas only 1% sided with Israel; the reminder 39%presented themselves as impartial. Therefore, there is a high majority that witnessed pro-Palestinian bias and identified as impartial, since only 1% admitted to being pro-Israeli.

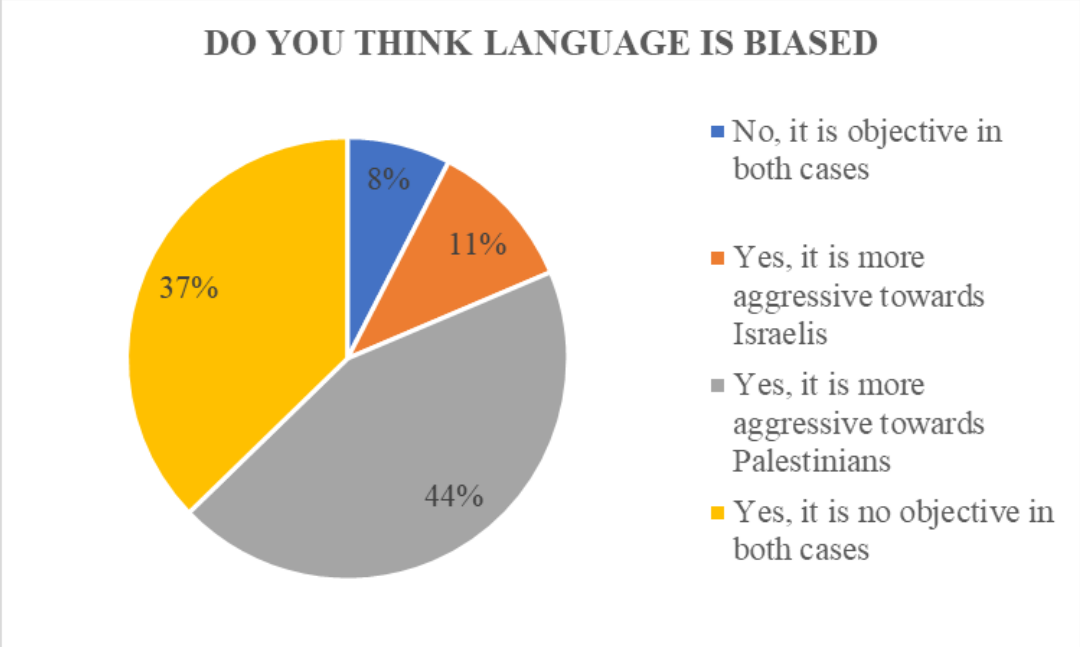
Do you think you are impartial	f
No, I am biased (Israel)	2
No, I am biased (Palestine)	87
Yes, I am impartial	56





To further enquire on the perceived bias in the mediatic landscape, it was asked whether the participants perceived the language used in posts and news as non-objective, i.e. describing one of the parts as terrorists...





The highest-ranking responses were "Yes, the language is more aggressive towards Palestinians" and "Yes, the language is impartial in both cases", respectively reaching 44% and 37% of responses. Therefore, the assumption that language is more anti-Palestinian confirms the above-mentioned imbalance in favour of Israel. On the other hand, only 11% of users detected anti-Israeli language, but the figure

was almost halved compared to the percentage of individuals that detected pro-Palestinian content.

Notably, a plummeted 8% assumed that language is objective in either case, outnumbered by the overall 92% of respondents that identified bias (be it pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian or mixed).

In sum, responders have identified a staggering majority of pro-Israeli content, as confirmed by the high percentage of witnesses of language more aggressive towards Palestinians. This confirms the theoretical analysis of language and syntax that was carried out in Chapter 2 concerning in particular British coverage. Therefore, both Italian and British coverage seems to have a pro-Israeli bias that translates into more aggressive language towards Palestinians.

Having analysed the collected data singularly, the following section of the study will focus on the confutation of the hypothesis through correlational quantitative analysis, based on the discussed outcomes and their interaction.

3.4 Correlational research

Hypotheses

In this section, 5 hypotheses will be advanced.

H1: The majority of social media are pro-Israel

H2: content on Twitter is more polarised than on algorithm-based platforms because of ties

H3: Participants who deliberately engage in cross-cutting exposure are prone to change their perspective

H4: Cross-cutting exposure is more frequent and efficient when it occurs involuntarily, due to confirmation bias.

H5: Interaction with pro-Israeli content does not prevent support for the Palestinian cause

3.5 Hypotheses 1 and 2

The first hypothesis this paper will disprove concerns the correlation between the social media users and the participants' opinions and self-assessed bias on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

H1: most social media are pro-Israel

H2: content on Twitter is more polarised than on algorithm-based platforms because of ties

Contingency table 1: Social media bias

	Pro-Israel	Pro-Palestine	Balanced
Facebook	3	X	1
Instagram	47	24	15
Newspapers	35	14	7
Television	45	22	22
Tik-Tok	17	14	8
Twitter	50	16	6
YouTube	17	4	2

Most users selected more than one since they use social networks and sources of information in a ubiquitous and variegated manner. Therefore, the results appear less straightforward, however, it is still possible to identify trends. Those trends are even more significant when analysing the bond between two or more platforms.

Overall, as suggested earlier, most social media display a pro-Israel bias and a lack of balance. The most partisan is Twitter, exhibiting peaks in pro-Israel content and low rates of balanced or pro-Palestine news, whereas Instagram and TV – despite a similar rate of pro-Israel content – have much more significant figures in unbiased or pro-Palestinian posts.

On the other hand, TikTok (similar to Instagram) are the most variegated, despite its undeniable predominance in pro-Israeli content.

Each media platform will be analysed, and the possible causes of such behaviour will be taken into account.

Newspapers

Overall, newspaper readers who interpreted news to have a Pro-Israel bias accounted for 35 users. On the other hand, only 14 witnessed a Pro-Palestinian bias, while 7 participants thought the content was balanced.

A major number of pro-Israeli content was present when, besides newspapers, Twitter was consulted.

Facebook

Participants who selected Facebook as a source of information were a minority (4 out of 145), of whom 3 considered content on the platform to be pro-Israel, and only 1 viewed it as balanced.

Instagram

Despite the staggering majority of pro-Israel bias detected by its users (47 overall), compared to newspapers, it has been found to be more balanced (15 balanced and 24 pro-Palestine) than the reminder platforms, both when consulted on its own and conjoint with other mass media (especially Twitter and television).

The hypothetical cause lies in the platform itself; a precisely substantial difference from the other media (except TikTok) is that the algorithm promotes posts based on previous views and connections (Shedding More Light on How Instagram Works, no date). The algorithm suggests posts based on previous interactions with similar content. For political purposes, this can consist of polarisation and lack of cross-cutting exposure.

Nonetheless, the variety of responses lies in the algorithm itself, which feeds different content to different users based on their search and interactions history.

Namely, this is further enabled by users commenting or interacting with the posts.

The diversity of these posts should however take into account the notions of polarisation caused by lack of cross-cutting exposure, as well as echo chambers.

Precisely, the functioning of algorithms diversifies the sample leading to more variegated answers, however, enforces polarised views, therefore being the most biased.

Additionally, it is the most prolific for disinformation because claims are imposed.

TikTok

As explained above, being TikTok based on a similar algorithm, posts are diverse based on the individual.

In the numerical results, TikTok stands out as the most balanced, counting 17 pro-Israel votes, 14 pro-Palestine, and 8 balanced.

However, the TikTok algorithm is the most effective and less transparent. Its functioning is similar to Meta's: the company considers data from user interaction, video information (such as sounds or hashtags) and profile setting (language, country), to provide videos akin to their interests (Bhandari and Bimo, 2022).

Additionally, it is suggested that the impact is increased from Instagram's algorithm, since the primary function of the latter is displaying posts and "stories" from followers, whereas TikTok's home page directly leads to the algorithm-curated For You page, with scarce relevance to followers.

In other words, compared to more traditional new media, TikTok fully relies on algorithms, while other platforms that have implemented that method still focus on the ability to shape one's homepage by following users (Bhandari and Bimo, 2022).

In the analysis conducted by Bhandari and Bimo (2022), participants stated that they were exposed to "different sides of TikTok" with different contents on a larger scale, but when focusing on the individual the content was repetitive and almost impossible to escape.

This reflects what has been previously mentioned regarding Instagram. In the current research, it reflects variegated data, based on "which side of TikTok" the respondents were in, respectively pro-Israeli, pro-Palestine, or objective.

Twitter

Twitter is overall the platform that displayed a majority of pro-Israel bias (50 users detected it), and scarce 16 pro-Palestine and 6 balanced contents.

Contrary to the previous two platforms, Twitter is a network-based social media that relies on followers' interactions (retweets that therefore end up on the user's homepage for instance).

Despite the visibility of different opinions when using hashtags or searching names, and the high levels of interactions from separate bubbles, Twitter appears to be highly polarised (Nguyen, 2018).

Similarly, to the former media platforms, it enforces political polarisation not through the lack of cross-cutting exposure but based on the behaviour of users who prefer to interact with homophiles.

Television

As demonstrated when cited on its own and not conjoint with other platforms, television reaches a majority of the content that hints at a pro-Israel bias (45 users detected it, compared to 22 notices both for balanced coverage and pro-Palestinian content). It is significant to underline that the most responses admitted to being reached by pro-Israeli content were those who counted only Twitter and Television as information sources. This reinforces the idea that those are the most biased and univocal.

YouTube

The video streaming platform accounts for 17 pro-Israel content detected, and sole 2 for balanced and 4 pro-Palestine.

The rare cases where the latter occurred were when Instagram was used conjointly with YouTube.

To conclude, it appears that most social media are dominated by pro-Israeli content whereas pro-Palestinian content is halved and the scarcest is undoubtedly balanced coverage.

The first hypothesis that social media are pro-Israeli is therefore confirmed.

As far as the second hypothesis is concerned, it can be asserted that Twitter is politically polarised, based on reviewed literature and the high results of pro-Israeli bias. At first glance, algorithm-driven platforms such as Instagram and TikTok (the latter being more relevant due to the importance of algorithm in its functioning) offer variegated content depending on the user, displaying less univocal content. However, referring to literature reviews, the algorithm enforces ideals on the individual counteracting the diversity offered on the platform, making it less influential.

An important factor to consider when comparing for instance Twitter and TikTok is the difference between their functioning methods. TikTok has the potential to be more variegated, but the algorithm enforces ideas based on suggestions and interactions, whereas Twitter presents pro-Israeli content voluntarily, based on the ties established within the app and sponsored posts, being, therefore, more easily avoidable than the former. As far as hashtags on Twitter are concerned, the news appears in an unbiased order, therefore hinting that biased posts exist even out of possible echo chambers, therefore being more pervasive.

To conclude, all the media considered contain a higher pro-Israeli content compared to pro-Palestinian and balanced coverage. This includes in different measures both Twitter and TikTok. The latter appears more balanced for the overall content, but the peril of the algorithm should not be underestimated. On the other hand, Twitter presents soaring rates of pro-Israeli content on the whole platform and not only generated echo chambers and filter bubbles.

3.6 Hypotheses 3, 4, and 5

From the analysis carried out in the previous hypothesis, it has been found that most users resort to different media to gain information and check for disinformation or fake news.

Having discussed theoretically the importance of cross-cutting exposure and perceived from the previous paragraphs how bias is spread on certain platforms, it is vital to analyse how users who engage with cross-cutting exposure react to disproving information, and whether cross-cutting exposure is (more effective)

when done involuntarily. In the latter case, it would prove the benefit of more unbiased content on media platforms, substituting what should be the best practice of fact-checking news, therefore leading most platforms to implement better regulations to prevent echo chambers.

H3: Participants who deliberately engage in cross-cutting exposure are prone to change their mind

H4: Cross-cutting exposure is more frequent and efficient when it occurs involuntarily, due to confirmation bias.

To assess the efficiency of cross-cutting exposure, their self-admitted bias will be taken into account.

Contingency Tables: cross-cutting exposure

	Does your perspective change after being exposed to additional information		
Do you look for additional information after reading a piece of information	No	Yes	Total
No	11	41	52
Yes	26	67	93
Total	37	108	145

To assess whether people who engage in cross-cutting exposure change their mind it is necessary to look at the second row of the contingency table. The row accounts

for the participants who voted "yes "to the question "Do you look for additional information after reading a piece of information".

Only 67 out of 93 participants who voluntarily sought cross-cutting exposure had a positive outcome. The remainder 26 individuals admitted that additional disproving information does not change their opinion on the matter, specifically the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Similar results are visible when analysing the previous row, in other words, the data collected from those who do not voluntarily seek information. In those instances cross-cutting exposure can occur by being exposed to "passive information", precisely stumbling on news from sources like television, and algorithm-driven platforms. The former, as discussed above, are more likely than the latter due to the dynamics of algorithms and filter bubbles.

Numerically, only 11 participants stated that they do not seek additional information and eventual additional knowledge does not change their stances (beliefs perseverance in confirmation bias), whereas 41 individuals affirmed that exposure to additional information has a positive influence on their opinions and beliefs.

Comparatively, the higher results in the second row, the first column (those who seek further information and do not change their minds afterwards) hint that participants -and more broadly individuals - who seek additional news may have confirmation bias. Since they voluntarily look for content, they can be prone to cherry-pick the results, and not change their belief as an outcome.

On the other hand, confirmation bias may still be present in the case of those who do not look for additional information, however, it is reduced by being exposed to content they did not deliberately pick and can therefore process more rationally.

To compare the two discussed rows it is important to transform the data to a percentage.

Contingency Tables : cross-cutting exposure (%)

Do you look for additional information after reading a piece of information		**Does your perspective change after being exposed to additional information**		
		No	**Yes**	**Total**
No	Count	11.000	41.000	52.000
	% within row	21.154 %	78.846 %	100.000 %
	% within column	29.730 %	37.963 %	35.862 %
Yes	Count	26.000	67.000	93.000
	% within row	27.957 %	72.043 %	100.000 %
	% within column	70.270 %	62.037 %	64.138 %
Total	Count	37.000	108.000	145.000
	% within row	25.517 %	74.483 %	100.000 %
	% within column	100.000 %	100.000 %	100.000 %

As stated in the first row and second column, 78% of those who don't seek additional information switch perspectives after being exposed to additional data.

Conversely, 72% of those who do seek additional content undergo changes in their point of view of the matter.

Therefore, as far as H3 is concerned, it can be confirmed that the majority of participants who deliberately sought cross-cutting exposure - 78% - had positive results (i,e. changing perspective).

Overall, however, as far as only the second column is concerned, most participants who admit a change in perspective do seek additional information, therefore accounting for 62% of the column.

In sum, additional information is beneficial, as it is shown that it has positive results in 75,5% of scenarios. Those cases encompass individuals who have both deliberately and involuntarily interacted with cross-cutting data.

When comparing the two latter categories, however, there is a nearly 25% difference between the witnessed percentages, respectively being 62% (deliberately) and 38% (involuntarily).

Therefore, in response to H4, it can be stated that there is a similar success rate in both cases (the 72% and 78% referenced earlier), despite the majority of the successful cases being those who voluntarily seek information.

Taking into account the positive outcomes of involuntary cross-cutting exposure compared to the deliberate one, it is still suggested that algorithms provide more variegated content, to the conclusions drawn in Chapter 1.

The similar success rate (differentiated by a mere 5% difference) displays that there is not much margin that discerns the two scenarios (voluntary and involuntary) discussed above.

To conclude the focus on the Italian situation, before comparing it to the United Kingdom, it is necessary to evaluate the relations between perceived bias and personal preference.

This is achieved by comparing the results from the enquiry on bias in the media (tackled above) and the results from the self-assessment of bias stemming from the last question of the survey.

After the conclusive data of Chapter 2, it is safe to assume that the majority of biased found in H1 is not enough to prevent most of the population from being pro-Palestine. Such a claim will be researched in the context of Italy.

H5: Interaction with pro-Israeli content does not prevent support for the Palestinian cause

Contingency Tables : bias

	Do you think you are biased			
Do you think media are biased	**impartial**	**pro-Israel**	**pro-Palestine**	**Total**
Balanced	24	1	7	32
pro-Israel bias	21	0	57	78
pro-Palestine bias	11	1	23	35
Total	56	2	87	145

As visible from the second row (pro-Israel bias) and the third column (pro-Palestine self-assessed position), 57 individuals who supported the Israeli cause deemed the media as pro-Israeli and interacted with said networks.

To approve the hypothesis made above, similarly to the British case, interaction with pro-Israeli media does not interfere with support for Palestinians.

While on one side, such a result underlines that despite the ubiquity of pro-Israeli news, individuals' opinion on the Arab-Israeli cause is adamant.

Conversely, one could state that this partially implies that pro-Palestine participants are more prone to view the media as pro-Israeli. However, it is important to

highlight that additional 23 users of the same stances affirmed the media to be biased towards their perspective, therefore hinting at self-awareness.

In the topic of self-awareness, the scarce pro-Israel participants lacked such value, as visible from the null slot in the second row and second column.

Beyond the confirmed hypothesis, there is an additional possible trend that requires explanation, concerning the first column.

Most individuals that presented themselves as impartial described the media as balanced. Similarly, however, 21 unbiased participants found media content to prevalently be pro-Israel. In other words, this confirms that the amount of content that favours Israel is not only perceived by pro-Palestine users but also by impartial ones. Therefore, the pro-Israeli tendency claimed above does not stem from biased perspectives but is proved by "fair" individuals.

3.7 Comparative analysis of British and Italian media

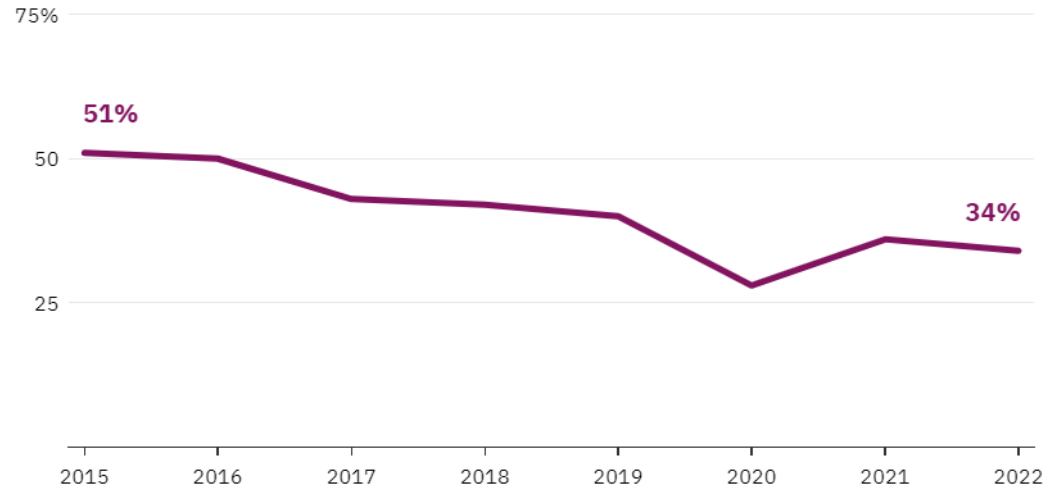
Before enquiring about the differences concerning the coverage of the Arab-Israeli conflict in general it is pivotal to understand the British and Italian media landscape separately.

The UK media landscape is well-funded and regulated (as exemplified by the Balen report on the Arab-Israeli conflict), however, the audience is increasingly fragmented, as well as discouraged by the current scene.

Namely, trust in British news has decreased by 16 percentage points since the Brexit referendum; precisely it has plummeted from 51% in 2015 to 34% in 2022 (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022b).

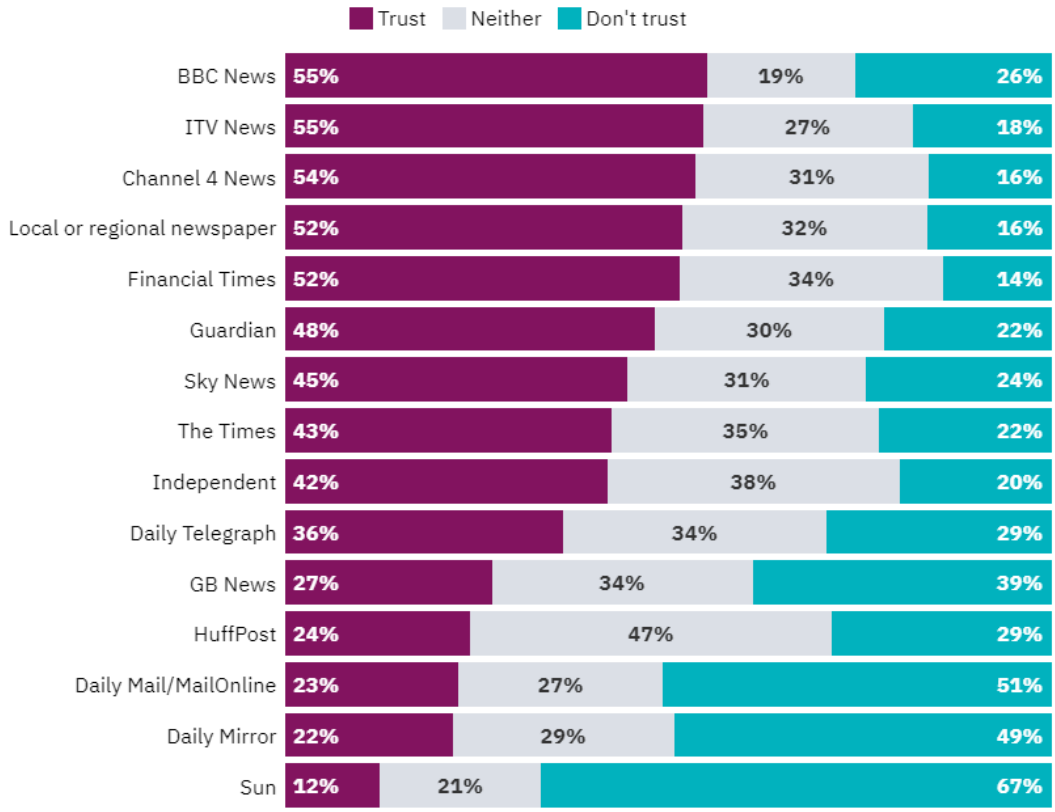
The lowest point – 28% - was reached in 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent worldwide loss of trust in the media (Reuters Institute for the Study of

Journalism, 2022).



Overall trust scores 2015-2022 for the UK, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

Most outlets have suffered from such a decrease in trust, such as the BBC, whose 26% of readers have little trust in its unbiased coverage. Nonetheless, most public broadcasters such as the abovementioned, the Financial Times, and national broadsheet titles are the most trusted, with around 50% of individuals trusting the outlet. Conversely, popular media outlets (e.g. the Sun, the Mail) are often distrusted – only trusted by 12-22% of the population, despite their big audience (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022).



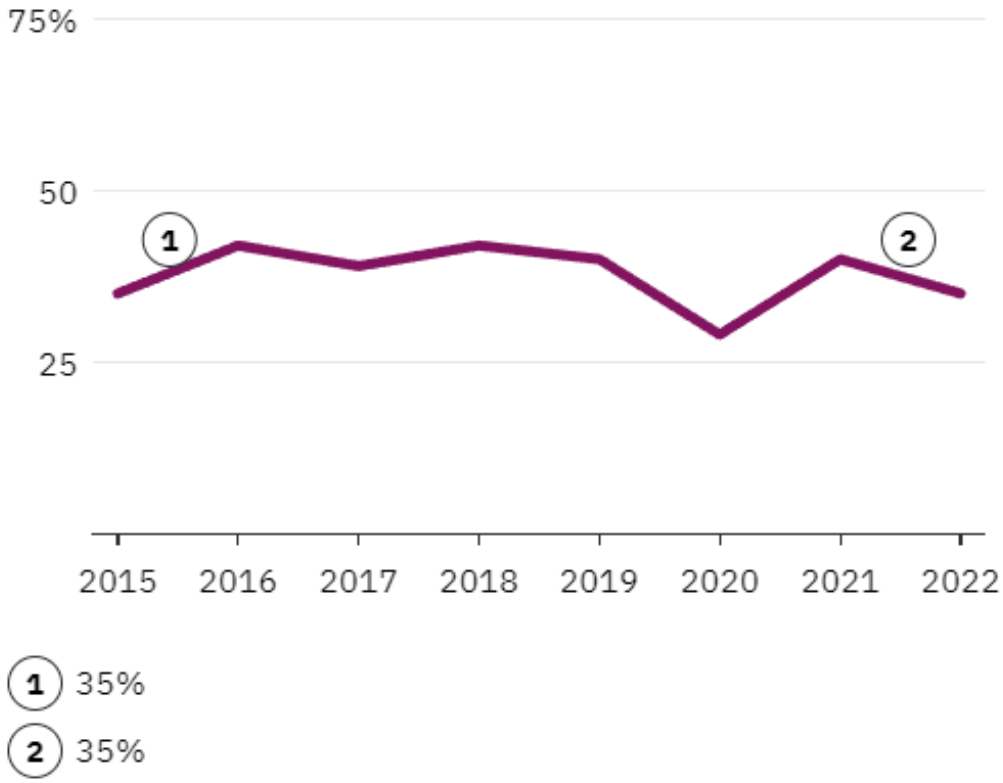
Trust = % scored 6–10 on 10-point scale, Don't trust = 0–4, Neither = 5. Those that haven't heard of each brand were excluded. Only the above brands were included in the survey so should not be treated as a list of the most trusted brands.

Band trust scores for the UK, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

Additionally, around 20% of the population sees the media as independent of political influence. This has dropped by 14 percentage points from 2017 (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022a)

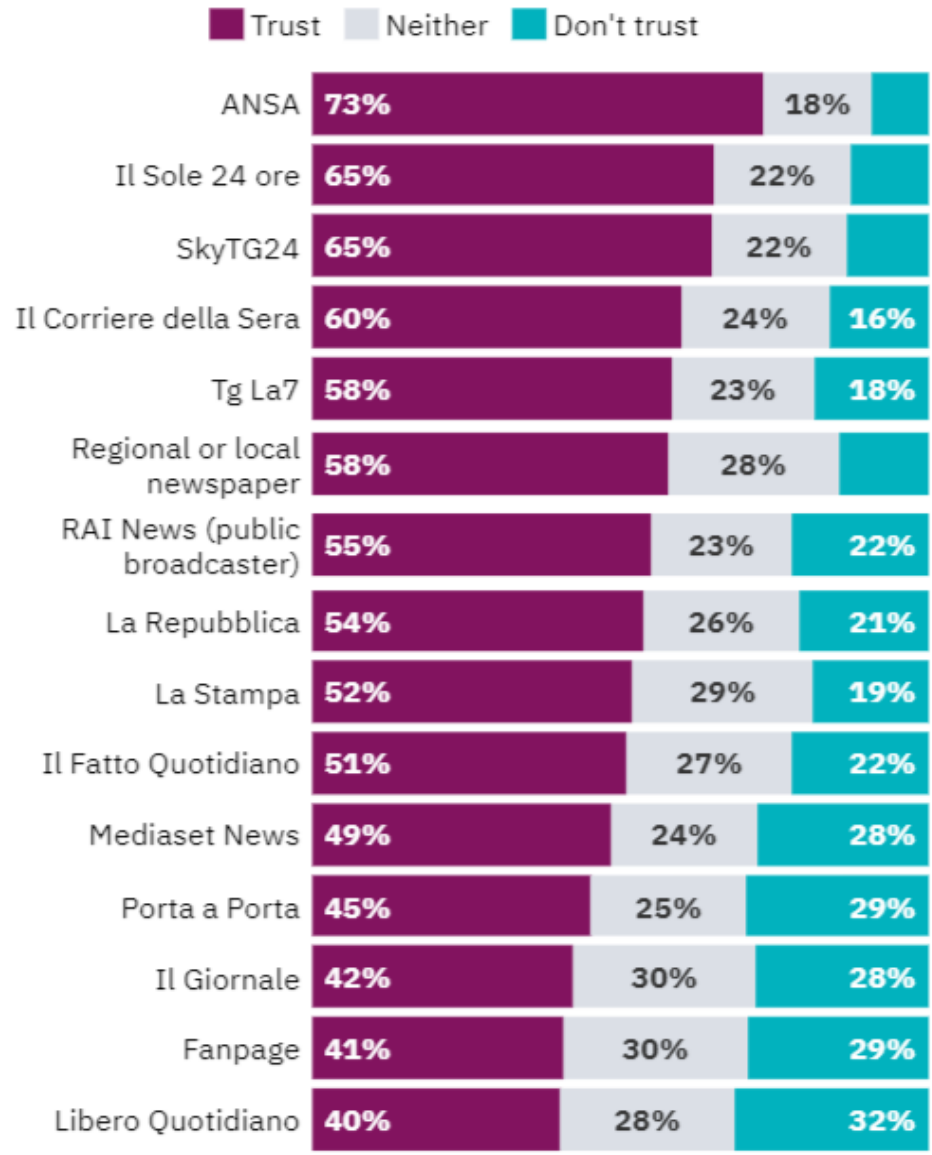
Italian digital media landscape transitioned more slowly compared to the remainder of the EU. In 2022, *Fanpage* (a digital-born outlet) surpassed established national broadcasts (e.g., ANSA and newspapers) receiving 21% of online reach. Comparatively, however, it relies on infotainment more than the traditional press. On the other hand, the offline landscape is still dominated by established newspapers such as *La Repubblica* and *Il Corriere della Sera*. Still, only 15% of sources of news are print, whereas social media and tv make up respectively for 75% and 70%. For this reason, it is important to state that, despite the increasing popularity of digital-born broadcasts, newspapers (combining both print and digital headlines) still occupy a prevalent source of information.

As for trust in news, Italy surpasses Britain, reaching 35%. Contrary to Britain, it remained in the same range over the analysed period but still registered a similar drop in 2020 (29%).



Overall trust score 2015-2022 for Italy, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism

National sources and traditional newspapers are still the most trusted, for instance, ANSA is trusted by around 73% of individuals, RAI news (public broadcaster) by around 55%, with most national press scoring around the same percentage or above. The aforementioned Fanpage is among the most distrusted, reaching a mere 41% (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022a).



Trust = % scored 6–10 on 10-point scale, Don't trust = 0–4, Neither = 5. Those that haven't heard of each brand were excluded. Only the above brands were included in the survey so should not be treated as a list of the most trusted brands.

Band trust scores for Italy, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

More precisely, however, only around 15% of individuals deem Italian media as independent from political and economic influence, losing only a slim 5% in 2017 (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022a).

Comparatively, the Italian media landscape seems to be more trusted but also less impartial and detached from political issues.

As for the first one, the most trusted British sources reach 20 percentage points less than the most trusted in Italy. British citizens seem less adamant about trusting public and private broadcasts.

Overall, the trends of distrust in Italy have remained unchanged in the past decade, whereas Britain has plummeted following the Brexit referendum of 2016, leading its media landscape to a similar or worse status than the Peninsula.

This has peculiar consequences when applied to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, around 60% of British individuals were vocally against Israel's war crimes despite their sources of information. Precisely, 51% of those polled by The Sunday Times (a conservative and pro-Israel outlet) stated that Israel's actions were unjustified. The increase in sympathy for Palestinians is peculiar in the latter case, due to the polling being led in traditionally pro-Israeli media outlets, such as The Sunday Times (Aouragh, 2016).

This leads to believe that, despite most British broadcasts leading to pro-Israeli views (varying however on their anti-Palestinian sentiment), citizens were not influenced by said news.

Based on statistical evidence, the same occurs in Italy, where most media are pro-Israeli but people who use them are pro-Palestine, as hinted by the answer to H5.

To conduct a more balanced analysis between the audience in Italy and the United Kingdom it is important to solely analyse the responses of those who used newspapers as sources of information, instead of considering the plethora of mass media as done above.

Contingency Table: Newspaper results

Do you think media are impartial	**Do you think you are biased**			
	impartial	**pro-Israel**	**pro-Palestine**	**Total**
Balanced	6	0	1	7
pro-Israel bias	11	0	24	35
pro-Palestine bias	5	1	8	14
Total	22	1	33	56

Similarly, to the British results, most individuals (24) deem newspapers as pro-Israeli but share a pro-Palestinian sentiment. However, the percentage is slightly lower than the British one (43% in Italy and 61% in Britain). The remaining participants in the study that identified a pro-Israeli bias were impartial, still therefore not fully trusting the biased news.

The high percentages of individuals that consume pro-Israeli content but do not align with its principles are derivates of the increasing distrust in media outlets discussed above.
In other words, the lack of trust and high perception of bias induces individuals to seek cross-cutting exposure (as confirmed by data), and therefore align with the Palestinian cause.

In sum, the different percentages of trust and the more fragmented media landscape reflect slightly higher anti-Israeli rates in Britain but still lead to similar conclusions.

CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to investigate whether media are biased, more precisely whether, in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict, there was a widespread pro-Israeli bias.

To lastly assess whether social networks are biased towards one of the sides it was fundamental to define the malpractices that occur in the mediatic landscape. Those include the spread of disinformation and biased information. In Chapter 1, the so-called "media problem" was trifold, concerning the message, the agent, and the receiver. Multiple issues were tackled on the latter level, including echo chambers, confirmation bias, and lack of fact-checking.

The theoretical knowledge acquired in Chapter 1 was employed in Chapter 3 to assess the scale of said problems at a national level, mainly concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In relation to such a topic, literature on the matter was reviewed in Chapter 2, investigating Israel and Palestine's "public diplomacy" and the measures enforced by Israel to silence Palestinians from the Occupied Territories. Having analysed the situation at a local level, the enquiry proceeded to dissect international media to confirm the suspected pro-Israeli bias. The situation was investigated from the American and British media perspectives, employing a detailed qualitative analysis of newspapers in both countries. In the first case, both for political and religious reasons, the pro-Israeli bias was confirmed. As for Britain, the mediatic landscape was less polarized but still favoured the Israeli side.

Finally, with the acquired knowledge, Chapter 3 consisted of quantitative and qualitative analysis of a survey, which aimed to confirm the aforementioned pro-Israeli bias and assess the need for cross-cutting exposure. Furthermore, its purpose was to confirm the trend suggested in Chapter 2 of an increasing pro-Palestinian sentiment despite most media platforms being pro-Israeli.

After discussing the theory and gaining data, it is possible to draw 3 conclusions.

All media, as shown both by theory and statistical evidence, are pro-Israeli, despite the majority of participants admitting to favouring the Palestinian cause; this is particularly the case of the United Kingdom and Italy. The two countries, despite

their slight difference in distrust rates, display the same result of pro-Israeli media and pro-Palestinian views in their readers. This comparison particularly applies to newspapers (both printed and online); however, as stated, the majority of media in the West display some grade of pro-Israeli bias.

As for social media in particular, in Chapter 1 the notion of echo chambers was discussed, as well as its danger to cross-cutting exposure and more broadly to democracy.

The data collected from the survey and literature review exposed Twitter as the most biased social media, therefore hinting at possible perilous echo chambers due to its functioning. On the platform, most Italian participants in the study have found a majority of pro-Israeli content. As discussed, the chance to receive cross-cutting exposure, allowing external individuals to recognise activists (Alfano et al., 2022) and thus escape said echo chambers is via hashtags. The research discussed in Chapter 2, however, concludes that the majority of hashtags concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict contain biased language to persuade public opinion, often siding with Palestine. Therefore, whereas Twitter might be a useful source of information and persuasion for the Palestinian cause, Italy shows a contrary trend, crowning it as the most pro-Israeli platform.

Moreover, when discussing the functioning of social networks, it was advised against misuse of algorithms. Precisely, their targeted action is proven to lead to radicalization and increased misinformation. In other words, algorithms are kindred to users' preferences and strain dissenting posts and partisan communities of like-minded individuals (Cinelli et al., 2021; Pariser (Tucker et al., 2018).

Data collected from the survey exhibit that algorithm-driven platforms (mainly TikTok) display more variegated content compared to other ties-based platforms (Twitter). Nonetheless, such variety does not subsist on an individual scale, in other words, individuals are shown biased content due to the functioning of the algorithm but on the whole platform, content is less partisan.

In such cases, voluntary cross-cutting exposure is essential, especially since it was proven effective by the survey results.

However, a significant percentage of participants confirmed not to deliberately seek additional information. Nonetheless, individuals who are passively exposed to additional news can still change their perspective on certain topics, with a slim difference compared to those who engage deliberately with further content.

For this reason, as already previously suggested, social media CEO and political entities (as the European Union is already implementing) should consider reforming their platforms; this would lead to less partisan and targeted content generated by algorithms on matters such as politics and public health.

In sum, the rise of TikTok and Instagram is proved by data to be less perilous than expected but the algorithm and functioning of all platforms should be improved to lead to more cross-cutting exposure and less radicalization, without the user directly seeking such content.

This is particularly pivotal for political content and, in this context, for the Israeli-Palestinian content to obtain a more balanced and critical perspective.

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