

The use of social media during the Gaza war and its relationship with psychological security among upper elementary stage students in northern Hebron

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Abstract: Since October 7, 2023, all Palestinian cities have been enduring a brutal Zionist aggression that has affected all aspects of Palestinian society. This war has cast its shadow over the political, social, economic, and security dimensions, accompanied by numerous messages, news, and scenes of killing and destruction shared on social media. Naturally, these messages and events have had severe psychological impacts on their recipients, especially on those living in the war zones and directly affected by the violence, displacement, and destruction. Therefore, the current study aimed to assess the extent of social media usage among upper-grade students during the Gaza war of 2023 and its relationship to their level of psychological security. The researcher adopted a correlational descriptive approach and applied Maslow's Psychological Security Scale. The study sample consisted of 82 students who were randomly selected. The research findings revealed that the level of psychological security among the participants was moderate, with a mean score of 2.06 and a percentage of 68.67%. Regarding the daily use of social media, the majority (52.4%) used it for less than two hours a day, followed by (26.9%) using it for 2-3 hours, and (20.7%) using it for more than 3 hours. Additionally, the results indicated no statistically significant differences in the levels of psychological security among the participants based on the variable of social media usage hours.

Keywords: Social communication, Gaza War, Psychosocial security, Upper primary school students.

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1- Problem of the Study and Its Questions:

Many psychologists have been interested in studying the motives behind human behavior, one of which is the motive for security. Among the most famous of these scholars is Abraham Maslow, who categorized human behavior motives into five, organizing them into a hierarchical structure with basic physiological needs at the bottom, followed directly by the need for security, then the need for love, and lastly, the need for self-actualization. Erikson pointed out that the need for security is one of the most important psychological and social drives that motivate human behavior and guide it toward its goal. If a person fails to meet their need for security, this leads to an inability to move forward and strive toward self-actualization (Jabr, 1996).

The importance of the feeling of psychological security lies in its status as one of the fundamental human needs. Moreover, the feeling of psychological security is also a key component of mental health, as there is a strong correlation between anxiety, emotional balance, self-confidence, self-concept, and the feeling of psychological security. Psychological security refers to freedom from anxiety, self-acceptance, and harmony with others. All these concepts point to mental health, which is expressed through psychological security (Al-Slaibi, 2016).

(Samin, 1997) clarifies that the need for psychological security ranks first among psychological needs and is the most important in general. Once this need is met, an individual is prepared to address their other psychological and social needs. This need only arises after fulfilling physiological needs, even partially. Afterward, the secure person seeks to achieve higher needs within the hierarchical structure as defined by Maslow.

Based on the above, the researcher is interested in conducting this study due to the significant importance of psychological security in achieving the mental health of individuals, especially among upper elementary school students, who suffer from severe anxiety due to the current conditions and the news transmitted through social media.

Since October 7, 2023, all Palestinian cities have been subjected to brutal Israeli aggression, involving bombing, destruction, and murder in horrific and gruesome crimes, resulting in over 150,000 martyrs and injured individuals (as of the preparation of this study). Thousands of civilians have been detained, kidnapped, and tortured. Naturally, social media in Palestine, during the war, has been dominated by the transmission of disturbing news, images, and videos documenting these crimes, which may cause severe anxiety among news recipients, including upper elementary school students.

Thus, the researcher is interested in conducting this study, which aims to answer the following questions:

Study Questions:

The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the degree of social media usage among upper elementary school students in northern Hebron during the October 2023 war?
2. What is the level of psychological security among upper elementary school students in northern Hebron during the October 2023 war?

3. Are there statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the degree of psychological security among upper elementary school students in northern Hebron attributed to the variable of social media usage?

1.1 Study Objectives

The current study aimed to achieve the following:

- Measure the degree of social media usage among upper elementary school students in northern Hebron during the October 2023 war.
- Measure the level of psychological security among upper elementary school students in northern Hebron during the October 2023 war.
- Examine the correlational relationship between the level of psychological security and the degree of social media usage among upper elementary school students in northern Hebron during the 2023 war.

1.2 Importance of the Study

The following groups may benefit from this study:

- Counselors, specialists, and professionals working in the field of psychological counseling.
- Psychological support institutions in Palestine.
- Researchers and graduate students in the fields of psychology and education.

1.3 Study Boundaries

1. **Spatial and Human Boundaries:** The study was conducted on a sample of upper elementary school students in northern Hebron.
2. **Temporal Boundaries:** The study was conducted during the academic year 2024-2025.
3. **Conceptual Boundaries:** The concepts and terms used in this study include: social media, psychological security, upper elementary school students, and the October 2023 war.

1.4 Study Terminology:

Social Media:

Social media refers to electronic platforms that allow individuals to interact with one another and share content such as texts, images, videos, and news. These platforms enable the creation and exchange of information and opinions among users, enhancing social interaction and communication online. These media include websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and other applications that allow users to communicate and interact in real-time. Social media is a powerful tool for influencing public opinion, disseminating information, and exchanging experiences across various fields (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

The researcher defines it operationally as: a set of online applications on the internet designed for social communication between users, through which texts, audios, images, and videos are exchanged.

Psychological Security:

Psychological security is defined as an individual's sense of positivity toward their life, competence in managing their environment, achieving personal goals according to their abilities, and feeling meaning and purpose in life, with a positive attitude toward themselves and self-acceptance (Rubin, 2013).

The researcher defines it operationally as: the degree of psychological security an individual attains after applying the psychological security scale.

Upper Elementary Stage:

It is defined as "the educational stage that includes grades five, six, seven, eight, nine, and ten, according to the classifications adopted by the Palestinian Ministry of Education" (Al-Slaibi, 2016, p. 7).

The 2023 War:

The researcher defines it operationally as: a brutal Israeli aggression that began on October 7, 2023, against all Palestinian cities, with a focus on the Gaza Strip. It included continuous bombing, destruction of Palestinian homes and facilities, and resulted in the martyrdom and injury of more than 150,000 Palestinian citizens (as of the preparation of this study). The occupation used all forms of aggressive and terrorist tactics, including bombing, continuous gunfire, starvation, cutting off water and food supplies to citizens, and targeting individuals with death, injury, amputations, or arrest and enforced disappearance.

2- Method and Tools:**2.1 Research Methodology:**

To achieve the objectives of the current study, the researcher employed the descriptive correlational method, as it is appropriate for the nature of the research. This was done by administering the psychological security scale, followed by data collection, interpretation, and discussion.

2.2 Study Population:

The study population consists of upper elementary school students in the Directorate of Northern Hebron, totaling 20,647 students, according to data from the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

2.3 Study Sample:

Due to the large size of the study population and the difficulty of accessing all schools because of geographical constraints, the researcher selected a sample using the simple random sampling method from the overall population. The sample consisted of 82 students.

2.4 Study Instrument:

To achieve the study's objectives and answer its questions, and after reviewing previous studies, the researcher adopted Maslow's Psychological Security Scale, which was adapted into Arabic by Diwani and Dirani (1983). The final version of the questionnaire included a cover letter, an introduction to the instrument and its title, variables representing the use of social media, and the main scale items. The scale comprised 75 items, to be answered using the options: "Yes," "Not Sure," or "No." When analyzing responses, the weights assigned to positive items were (3, 2, 1), while the weights for negative items were (1, 2, 3).

2.5 Validity and Reliability of the Instrument:

To ensure the validity of the instrument, it was presented to a group of experts and specialists in psychological fields to benefit from their expertise and gather their feedback on the language, scientific accuracy, and relevance of the scale items to the study objectives.

Additionally, the construct validity of the instrument was verified by calculating Pearson's correlation coefficient for each item. The results indicated statistically significant correlations across all items, demonstrating internal consistency among the scale items. Table (1) presents these findings.

Table (1) : Pearson Correlation Coefficient Results for the Scale Items Matrix

No.	R Value	Significance	No.	R Value	Significance	No.	R Value	Significance
1	**0.523	0.001	26	**0.841	0.001	51	**0.413	0.001
2	**0.421	0.002	27	**0.522	0.002	52	**0.811	0.001
3	**0.487	0.001	28	**0.674	0.001	53	**0.718	0.001
4	**0.563	0.001	29	**0.386	0.001	54	**0.372	0.002
5	**0.573	0.002	30	**0.582	0.001	55	**0.382	0.002
6	**0.821	0.002	31	**0.476	0.002	56	**0.521	0.001
7	**0.353	0.002	32	**0.658	0.002	57	**0.564	0.002
8	**0.543	0.001	33	**0.611	0.001	58	**0.641	0.001
9	**0.813	0.001	34	**0.472	0.001	59	**0.714	0.001
10	**0.367	0.001	35	**0.365	0.001	60	**0.518	0.002
11	**0.561	0.001	36	**0.374	0.002	61	**0.528	0.002
12	**0.473	0.002	37	**0.412	0.002	62	**0.631	0.002
13	**0.567	0.002	38	**0.731	0.002	63	**0.419	0.001
14	**0.352	0.001	39	**0.488	0.001	64	**0.719	0.001
15	**0.441	0.002	40	**0.282	0.001	65	**0.522	0.002
16	**0.387	0.001	41	**0.548	0.002	66	**0.403	0.001
17	**0.652	0.002	42	**0.635	0.001	67	**0.614	0.001
18	**0.520	0.001	43	**0.274	0.001	68	**0.751	0.001
19	**0.829	0.001	44	**0.796	0.001	69	**0.378	0.002
20	**0.742	0.001	45	**0.622	0.002	70	**0.843	0.002
21	**0.568	0.001	46	**0.625	0.002	71	**0.283	0.002
22	**0.692	0.002	47	**0.544	0.002	72	**0.521	0.001
23	**0.458	0.002	48	**0.298	0.002	73	**0.623	0.001
24	**0.511	0.001	49	**0.725	0.002	74	**0.493	0.001
25	**0.718	0.001	50	**0.528	0.002	75	**0.613	0.002

Source: SPSS

It is evident from Table (1) that the correlation coefficient values range between 0.274 and 0.843, all of which are statistically significant. This indicates the validity of the scale items.

To verify the reliability of the scale, the internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) was calculated and found to be (0.84), indicating that the scale has a high level of reliability.

2.6 Statistical Processing

The questionnaires were collected and verified for their suitability for analysis, then coded and entered into a computer for appropriate statistical processing. Data were analyzed based on the study's questions and variables. The statistical procedures included calculating arithmetic means, standard deviations, and conducting the T-test to examine differences related to a binary variable. Additionally, Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess the reliability of the instrument, and Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated. All analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

3. Results and Discussion:

3.1 Results Related to the First Question:

What is the degree of social media usage among upper basic stage students in North Hebron during the October 2023 war?

To answer this question, arithmetic means and percentages were calculated for the daily average hours of social media usage. Table (2) presents the results:

Table (2): Arithmetic Means and Percentages of Daily Social Media Usage Hours

Daily Social Media Usage Average	Number of Students	Percentage
Less than 2 hours	43	52.4%
2-3 hours	22	26.9%
More than 3 hours	17	20.7%
Total	82	100%

Source: SPSS

It is evident from Table (2) that the "Less than 2 hours" daily usage category received the highest percentage (52.4%), followed by the "2-3 hours" category at 26.9%, and then the "More than 3 hours" category at 20.7%.

Some studies have indicated that the global average for daily social media usage is 2 hours and 38 minutes (Duggan et al., 2015). Therefore, the results of this study differ from the global average, with "Less than 2 hours" receiving the highest percentage.

The researcher attributes this result to the large volume of news and its dissemination via social media, including images, videos, and other content, especially during the war. Additionally, the constant anxiety and anticipation of ongoing events likely contributed to the higher daily usage of social media among Palestinian citizens, including upper basic stage students in North Hebron.

Previous studies have pointed out that individuals in conflict zones tend to follow ongoing events, which boosts their usage of social media (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Moreover, the psychological stress caused by wars and continuous threats may lead individuals to feel the need to follow daily updates on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, which may increase usage times (Barber, 2020).

Furthermore, Najeeb's (2019) study showed that Palestinians in conflict zones tend to use social media intensively to follow news of the war and political and security changes, reflecting the role of social media in individuals' lives in times of crises.

3.2 Results Related to the Second Question:

What is the level of psychological security among upper elementary school students in northern Hebron during the October 2023 war?

To answer the second research question, the arithmetic means and percentage rates for each item, as well as the overall score for the scale, were extracted. Table (3) illustrates this:

Table (3): Arithmetic Means and Percentages for the Items of the Psychological Security Scale

Serial No.	Questionnaire Item	Mean	Percentage (%)	Degree
1	Do you act naturally?	2.79	93.00	Very High
2	Can you be comfortable with yourself?	2.78	92.76	Very High
3	Are you able to work in harmony with others?	2.73	91.00	Very High
4	Was your childhood happy?	2.71	90.33	Very High
5	Do you feel respected by people in general?	2.67	89.00	Very High
6	Do you usually rejoice in the happiness and good fortune of others?	2.67	89.00	Very High
7	Are you usually confident in yourself?	2.66	88.67	Very High
8	Do you have enough faith in yourself?	2.66	88.67	Very High
9	Do you usually feel healthy and strong?	2.65	88.33	Very High
10	Do you feel that you are a valuable person in this world?	2.64	88.00	Very High
11	Do you usually feel satisfied?	2.62	87.33	Very High
12	Are you easily discouraged?	2.61	87.00	Very High
13	Do you usually do your work assuming things will turn out fine?	2.58	86.00	Very High
14	Are you generally aware of what you're doing?	2.53	84.33	Very High
15	Do you generally feel friendly toward most people?	2.52	84.00	Very High
16	Do you have many loyal friends?	2.52	84.00	Very High
17	Do you generally feel uplifted?	2.46	82.00	Very High
18	Do you sometimes feel that people mock you?	2.46	82.00	Very High
19	Are you generally a happy person?	2.46	82.00	Very High
20	Do you feel that you live as you wish, not as others want?	2.46	82.00	Very High
21	Do you make others feel comfortable around you?	2.40	81.33	Very High
22	Do you often think about yourself?	2.41	80.33	Very

				High
23	Is it your habit to accept your friends' criticism graciously?	2.37	79.00	High
24	Do you feel comfortable in social situations?	2.34	78.00	High
25	Do you tend to be a suspicious person?	2.31	77.00	High
26	Are you a good talker?	2.25	75.00	High
27	Do you usually get along with others?	2.25	75.00	High
28	Are you generally a relaxed person (not tense)?	2.23	74.33	High
29	Do you usually prefer to be with others rather than alone?	2.23	74.33	High
30	Do you get along with the opposite sex?	2.23	74.33	High
31	Do you feel sorry or pity for yourself when things go wrong?	2.13	71.00	High
32	Do you feel you get your due in life?	2.13	71.00	High
33	Are you generally optimistic?	2.12	70.67	High
34	Do you feel you receive enough praise?	2.10	70.00	High
35	Do you think that this world is a beautiful place to live?	2.01	67.00	Moderate
36	Do you think you're successful in life?	1.99	66.33	Moderate
37	Do you think people like you as much as they like others?	1.99	66.33	Moderate
38	Do you worry that bad luck may happen to you in the future?	1.99	66.33	Moderate
39	Have you ever been bothered by feeling that things are unreal?	1.98	66.00	Moderate
40	Do you feel comfortable in this world?	1.91	63.67	Moderate
41	Do you get angry and upset easily?	1.89	63.00	Moderate
42	Do you often feel upset about the world?	1.92	64.00	Moderate
43	Do you worry for a long time about the insults you experience?	1.91	63.67	Moderate
44	Do you generally feel that you can trust most people?	1.91	63.67	Moderate
45	Do you consider yourself a somewhat nervous person?	1.89	63.33	Moderate
46	Do you tend to avoid unpleasant things by running away from them?	1.88	62.67	Moderate
47	Do you feel hurt easily?	1.88	62.67	Moderate
48	Do you feel that the world around you treats you fairly?	1.88	62.67	Moderate
49	Does the feeling of inadequacy worry you?	1.83	61.00	Moderate
50	Do you feel uncomfortable most of the time?	1.81	60.33	Moderate
51	Do you have an irrational fear of the future?	1.79	59.67	Low
52	Have you repeatedly experienced insults?	1.79	59.67	Low
53	Do you often feel lonely even when you're around people?	1.79	59.67	Low
54	Do you spend a lot of time worrying about the future?	1.77	59.00	Low
55	Do you often get annoyed by people?	1.77	59.00	Low
56	Do you generally feel that you're a lucky person?	1.75	58.33	Low
57	Do you lack self-confidence?	1.73	57.67	Low
58	Do you often feel that life isn't worth living?	1.72	57.33	Low
59	Do you feel that life is a heavy burden?	1.71	57.00	Low
60	Do you worry about your intelligence?	1.71	57.00	Low
61	Do you feel happy where you live?	1.70	56.67	Low
62	Do you find it difficult to express your feelings?	1.69	56.33	Low
63	Do you feel that you're not coping with life in a satisfactory manner?	1.68	56.00	Low
64	When meeting others for the first time, do you usually feel they won't like you?	1.67	55.67	Low
65	Do you have mood swings?	1.62	54.00	Low
66	Are you afraid of competition?	1.59	53.00	Low
67	Have you ever felt that people on the street are watching you?	1.58	52.67	Low
68	Do you often feel neglected and not given enough attention?	1.52	50.67	Low
69	Do you feel that you can't control your emotions?	1.52	50.67	Low
70	Do you often feel low in spirits?	1.49	49.67	Very Low
71	Do you think others often see you as different from them?	1.47	49.00	Very Low
72	Is it your habit to let others see you for who you really are?	1.42	47.33	Very Low
73	Do you feel that you're a burden on others?	1.37	45.67	Very Low
74	Are you dissatisfied with yourself?	1.30	43.33	Very Low
75	Are you generally an unselfish person?	1.24	41.33	Very Low

Overall Score: 2.06

Average Percentage: 68.67%

Level: Moderate

It is clear from Table (3) that the overall score for the psychological security scale was moderate among the sample members, with an arithmetic mean of 2.06 and a percentage of 68.67%.

The researcher attributes this result to the nature of the conditions and circumstances experienced by the Palestinian people, particularly the upper elementary school students, who suffer from constant anticipation and anxiety due to the complex circumstances of the war.

The ongoing war, destruction, continuous shelling, mass displacement, the war of hunger, and economic siege have all directly contributed to lowering the level of psychological security among the sample members.

This result is consistent with many Arab and international studies. For instance, Hassan's study (2019) in the Arab region showed that wars and conflicts lead to increased levels of anxiety and depression among individuals due to the tense political conditions, thereby reducing their psychological security.

Al-Saeed (2017) also highlighted the impact of wars on children in Palestine, where continuous anticipation and anxiety enhance feelings of insecurity, which aligns with the current study's findings of reduced psychological security due to security conditions. Additionally, Al-Otaibi's study (2017) on the effects of wars on individuals in Palestinian society indicated that continuous exposure to crises increases anxiety levels, significantly affecting mental health and reducing psychological security.

Twenge et al. (2017) confirmed that political crises and wars lead to increased rates of anxiety and depression, especially among youth. The study showed that continuous exposure to violent scenes and conflicts raises stress levels and reduces individuals' sense of security, reflecting similar effects observed in Palestinian society.

Kirmayer et al. (2011) emphasized that conflicts and wars lead to the deterioration of individuals' mental health, particularly in terms of anxiety and depression in difficult conditions such as wars.

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the level of psychological security among the sample members is significantly affected by the complex security, political, and social conditions, which include the continuous occupation-related assaults such as killings, displacement, arrests, and brutal terror that have affected every aspect of Palestinian life, including the students who are part of the study sample.

3.3 Results related to the third question, which is:

"Are there statistically significant differences at the level of significance ($\alpha \geq 0.05$) in the level of psychological security among upper elementary school students in Northern Hebron during the October 2023 war, attributed to the variable of social media usage?"

To answer the third question of the study, one-way ANOVA analysis was used, and Table (4) illustrates this:

Table (4): Results of One-Way ANOVA Test for Psychological Security Scores Based on Social Media Usage Hours

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F Value (calculated)	Significance Level (p)
Between Groups	0.252	2	0.126	0.569	0.569
Within Groups	17.565	79	0.222		
Total	17.817	81			

From Table (4), it is clear that the calculated significance value (0.569) is greater than the statistical significance threshold ($\alpha = 0.05$), indicating that there are no statistically significant differences in the levels of psychological security among the sample members based on the variable of social media usage hours.

The researcher attributes this result to the intensity and similarity of the news coming through social media platforms, including reports, images, and videos that predominantly feature destruction, martyrdom, injuries, and imprisonments. Furthermore, multiple sources of information, such as conversations among people, TV channels, or social media platforms, all contain painful, continuous, and repetitive news, which means that the level of psychological security among upper elementary students in Northern Hebron is not affected by the number of hours spent on social media.

This result suggests that there is no statistically significant relationship between social media usage and psychological security among the sample members. This finding contradicts some studies that have shown a noticeable impact of social media on mental health, particularly due to exposure to negative news and disturbing content, such as news related to wars or crises.

For example, Pantic et al. (2012) indicated that excessive use of social media could be associated with higher rates of anxiety and depression among youth, particularly when users are exposed to negative content. Likewise, Twenge et al. (2017) showed that prolonged time on social media could lead to deterioration in mental health due to continuous exposure to negative and repetitive content.

The researcher attributes the current study's result to the fact that the sample members are exposed to similar content across various media platforms (whether social media, TV news, or oral conversations) that contain distressing and repetitive reports, images, and videos. As a result, they may have developed a form of adaptation or habituation to this negative content, which reduces its psychological impact. Gonzales & Hancock (2011) suggested that excessive exposure to negative content could lead to what is known as "psychological adaptation," where individuals become less affected by negative cues over time.

Moreover, it is certain that, like the rest of the Palestinian population, the sample members face daily violations by the occupation, which they experience personally, not just through social media. Therefore, the results of the current study may be explained by the presence of another factor that has a greater influence on psychological security than social media usage hours, such as security, cultural, or social factors. The local community may have developed coping mechanisms for negative news and repetitive distressing content, thus diminishing the impact of social media usage hours on their level of psychological security. Perhaps the role of social media has been integrated with other aspects of daily life that contribute to greater psychological stability, such as direct social relationships or family support.

4. Conclusion:

This study aimed to explore the extent of social media usage among upper elementary school students during the Gaza War of 2023, as well as the impact of social media usage on their psychological security. The study applied Maslow's Psychological Security Scale to a sample of 82 students. After collecting and statistically processing the data, the study concluded that the social media usage levels were as follows: an average of less than two hours per day had the highest percentage (52.4%), followed by an average of 2-3 hours with a percentage of 26.9%, and then more than 3 hours per day with a percentage of 20.07%. The results also showed that the psychological security of the sample members was moderate, with a mean score of 2.06 and a percentage of 66.67%. Additionally, no statistically significant differences were found in the psychological security levels of upper elementary students in Northern Hebron based on the daily hours of social media usage.

Based on these findings, the study recommends the following:

1. Raising awareness among upper elementary school students about the responsible use of social media.
2. Increasing awareness among parents about news sources on social media and distinguishing between rumors or false news.
3. Conducting further studies on the psychological aspects of upper elementary students, particularly in the context of the ongoing war.
4. Strengthening the role of community organizations in providing the necessary psychological support for all segments of the Palestinian society, particularly students and upper elementary school students.

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