

Witnessing the Unseen: Hybrid Moral Testimonies in the Digital Narratives of the Palestinian Occupation (2023–2024)

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Abstract

This study examines moral witnessing in digital narratives of the Israel-Palestine conflict from October 2023 to March 2024, analyzing 372,000 tweets to understand how moral credibility is constructed across asymmetric power dynamics. The research addresses the digital representation of human suffering during violent conflict, where narrative visibility impacts global recognition and response. We document how ordinary citizens become moral witnesses through social media, transforming digital platforms into sites of ethical testimony. The complexity arises from competing narratives, geopolitical constraints, and algorithmic mediation that shape whose suffering is deemed credible. Pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli discourses employ different strategies: distributed grassroots witnessing versus institutional authority. This asymmetry is compounded by content moderation practices that often marginalize Palestinian voices while amplifying state-affiliated narratives. Our mixed-methods approach combines quantitative analysis of engagement metrics and sentiment with qualitative thematic coding. Quantitative findings show pro-Palestinian narratives achieve higher moral credibility scores (0.74 versus 0.59) through emotional intensity and distributed visibility, while qualitative analysis uncovers themes of suffering as testimony and witnessing as ethical memory. This integration demonstrates that empathy functions as moral currency, transmitted through visual testimony. Analytic credibility was ensured through methodological triangulation, intercoder reliability ($\kappa = 0.84$), and temporal consistency checks. The synthesis reveals that epistemic injustice persists despite—and sometimes because of—digital platform architectures.

1 Introduction – Encountering the Subject

This study examines digital moral witnessing during the Israel-Palestine conflict from October 2023 to March 2024, focusing on how social media platforms serve as spaces for testimony and documentation of human experience. The research addresses how moral credibility is constructed and distributed across asymmetric power dynamics in digital

narratives. Digital platforms have become primary sites for real-time documentation of conflict, where narrative visibility affects global recognition of human suffering.

The complexity of digital witnessing in this context arises from historical, social, and international dimensions. The conflict involves competing claims to land and national identity that span decades. Social systems feature asymmetric power relations and displacement. International frameworks provide contested grounds for interpreting rights and responsibilities. Digital testimony operates within these multiple interpretive frames, with algorithmic systems and content moderation practices influencing narrative visibility and credibility.

A mixed-methods approach enables interpretation of lived experiences, communication patterns, and institutional narratives. This methodology captures how individuals and groups articulate suffering, resistance, and moral claims in digital spaces. It examines how testimonies are framed and received across different audiences, and how institutional narratives interact with grassroots testimony. The integration of qualitative analysis with quantitative metrics provides a comprehensive view of moral authority in digital environments.

The study makes several contributions: it develops a mixed-methods framework for analyzing moral witnessing in digital conflict narratives; provides empirical analysis of 372,000 tweets; introduces the Moral Credibility Index for evaluating digital testimony; documents asymmetric patterns in narrative visibility; and theoretically integrates epistemic justice [4] with moral witnessing [6] in digital communication studies.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides context on digital communication in conflict settings. Section 3 reviews scholarship on digital witnessing. Section 4 presents the theoretical framework. Section 5 details the methodology. Section 6 reports findings. Section 7 discusses results. Section 8 concludes with implications.

The implications extend to education, humanitarian policy, and cross-cultural understanding. Findings inform media literacy curricula for evaluating digital testimony in conflict zones. For humanitarian policy, the research shows how digital platforms influence visibility of suffering and resource allocation. For cross-cultural understanding, the study demonstrates how digital spaces can bridge or reinforce divides in interpreting human experience across political contexts.

2 Context of Communication or Practice

Twitter/X serves as a networked stage of testimony, where moral appeals, visual evidence, and solidarity gestures circulate in compressed form [5]. The immediacy of the platform amplifies affective reactions—shock, outrage, empathy—often preceding deliberation. Hashtags such as #GazaUnderAttack, #FreePalestine, and #StandWithIsrael crystallize collective identity and shape moral belonging.

Social media moderation practices reflect political bias and influence moral perception. Palestinian voices report shadow banning, limited reach, or account suspensions, reducing testimonial visibility. Pro-Israeli voices benefit from higher verification rates and institutional network effects. This structural asymmetry transforms digital testimony into an ethical site: moral truth competes with algorithmic privilege.

Key challenges identified include epistemic marginalization—when testimony is

discounted due to geopolitical status; affective oversaturation—compassion fatigue triggered by repetitive violence imagery; authenticity disputes—user-generated footage questioned for veracity; and platform governance—the moderation of moral expression under vague “violence” policies.

For Palestinians, digital witnessing becomes an act of survival—preserving narrative existence amid material destruction. For Israeli supporters, moral witnessing centers around existential fear and security legitimacy. The conflict over whose humanity is visible constitutes the moral epicenter of the digital war.

3 State of the Art – Empirical Foundations

Studies of digital witnessing emphasize networked publics [8], affective journalism [7], and conflict communication ethics [2], with foundational work establishing digital platforms as sites for testimony and human rights documentation [5]. Research on Palestine–Israel digital narratives shows persistent asymmetry in media framing and algorithmic bias [3, 1]. Previous works focused on sentiment or misinformation, but few examined moral witnessing as a cross-regional phenomenon.

Social network analysis, topic modeling, and sentiment analysis have mapped discourse polarity and engagement patterns. Yet these methods often neglect ethical valence—the moral meanings attached to digital emotion. Ethnographies of online activism reveal testimonial ethics as central to solidarity movements. Digital ethnographers note the symbolic role of martyrs, children, and mothers in sustaining empathy and political commitment.

Despite extensive sentiment analytics, the interplay between trust, emotion, and credibility in asymmetric digital testimony remains underexplored. This study bridges that gap by combining quantitative engagement metrics with qualitative thematic interpretation. It offers an empirically grounded framework for analyzing hybrid moral witnessing, integrating statistical modeling and ethical interpretation. It positions digital testimony as both a communicative and moral act—where recognition equals resistance.

4 Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Fricker’s [4] concept of epistemic injustice, which examines how individuals are wronged as knowers due to identity prejudice. The framework is extended through Margalit’s [6] notion of the moral witness, defined as one who testifies to preserve human dignity in the face of atrocity. These theoretical foundations provide a lens for understanding how digital testimony functions within asymmetric power dynamics, particularly in contexts where certain narratives are systematically marginalized.

The research is situated within Palestinian studies through oral history and narrative inquiry traditions. Oral history methodologies prioritize first-person accounts as valid sources of historical knowledge, countering dominant institutional narratives. Narrative inquiry examines how personal stories construct meaning and preserve collective memory in contexts of displacement and conflict. These approaches are relevant for

understanding Palestinian digital testimony, where social media platforms become sites for documenting lived experience.

Decolonial theory informs the interpretive orientation by examining how knowledge production is shaped by colonial power structures. This perspective highlights the impact of settler colonialism on epistemic hierarchies and narrative authority. In the Palestinian context, decolonial frameworks reveal how digital spaces can either reproduce or challenge colonial patterns of representation. The analysis considers how algorithmic systems and platform governance may reinforce or subvert these colonial dynamics.

The societal setting involves Palestinian communities navigating prolonged occupation, displacement, and fragmented sovereignty. Institutional frameworks include international human rights law, United Nations agencies, and non-governmental organizations that document and respond to the conflict. Digital platforms introduce social media companies whose content moderation policies and algorithmic systems influence narrative visibility and credibility. This institutional landscape shapes the conditions under which Palestinian testimony is produced and received.

The integration of these frameworks with digital communication studies [8, 7] examines how technological affordances transform traditional testimonial practices. Networked publics enable new forms of collective witnessing, where distributed visibility can challenge institutional gatekeeping. However, these platforms may also reproduce existing power asymmetries through algorithmic bias and content moderation practices. This tension defines the contemporary landscape of digital moral witnessing.

Core constructs include authenticity as perceived truthfulness derived from proximity to suffering, empathy as emotional connection enabling moral recognition, authority as credibility constructed through validation, silencing as processes that marginalize testimonies, and epistemic justice as the restoration of credibility to disbelieved narratives. These constructs bridge theoretical frameworks with empirical analysis, enabling examination of how moral credibility is constructed in digital spaces documenting the Palestinian experience.

5 Methodology – Mixed-Methods Approach

5.1 Research Design

This study employs a concurrent mixed-methods design integrating quantitative analysis of social media data with qualitative narrative inquiry. The research design is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of epistemic justice [4] and moral witnessing [6]. Narrative inquiry was selected as the primary qualitative approach because it centers personal and collective stories as sites of meaning-making in contexts of conflict. The concurrent design allows for triangulation between quantitative patterns of engagement and qualitative themes of moral credibility.

5.2 Participants and Sampling

The study analyzes 372,000 tweets from the Israel–Palestine Conflict Tweets Dataset spanning October 2023 to March 2024. The dataset was sourced from Kaggle and represents publicly available digital testimony. Sampling followed a multi-stage process beginning with the removal of duplicate entries, automated bot accounts, and inactive users. The final sample preserves tweets that met minimum engagement thresholds of ten interactions.

The sample composition reflects diverse linguistic and geographic origins. English language tweets constitute 60 percent of the dataset, Arabic 25 percent, and Hebrew 10 percent. Geographic distribution shows 48 percent of tweets originate from the Middle East region, 22 percent from North America, 15 percent from Europe, and 10 percent from Asia-Pacific. User classification indicates 65 percent individual accounts, 20 percent media organizations, 8 percent non-governmental organizations, and 7 percent government or official accounts.

5.3 Data Collection

Data collection utilized the complete Israel–Palestine Conflict Tweets Dataset. The dataset includes tweet content, metadata, engagement metrics, and user information. Collection parameters focused on tweets containing conflict-related hashtags such as #GazaUnderAttack, #StandWithIsrael, #FreePalestine, and #IsraelUnderFire. The temporal scope captures six months of digital discourse following the escalation of violence in October 2023.

For qualitative analysis, a stratified random sample of 2,000 tweets was selected, with 1,000 tweets from pro-Palestinian narratives and 1,000 from pro-Israeli narratives. This sampling strategy ensured proportional representation of different narrative positions. The qualitative sample included tweets in all three primary languages, with professional translation services employed for Arabic and Hebrew content.

5.4 Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis employed Python computational libraries including pandas for data manipulation, nltk for natural language processing, scikit-learn for machine learning applications, and matplotlib for visualization. Sentiment analysis utilized the VADER model adapted for social media context, with scores normalized to a range from negative one to positive one. Topic modeling implemented Latent Dirichlet Allocation with a ten-topic solution optimized through coherence score evaluation.

Engagement metrics were calculated including retweet ratio defined as retweets divided by total interactions, and empathy ratio operationalized as positive mentions of civilians divided by total tweets. Correlation analysis used Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient to examine relationships between sentiment scores, engagement metrics, and geographic variables.

5.5 Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis followed a narrative inquiry approach aligned with the theoretical framework of moral witnessing. The analytic process began with iterative development of a coding framework based on preliminary examination of tweet samples. Primary thematic categories included suffering, legitimacy, resistance, humanity, silence, defense, and security. These categories emerged from both theoretical sensitization through epistemic justice literature and empirical observation of recurring discourse patterns.

The coding process employed constant comparison techniques where each new tweet was compared to existing codes and categories. Two trained coders independently analyzed the qualitative sample, achieving intercoder reliability of $\kappa = 0.84$ through rigorous training and calibration. Discrepancies were resolved through consensus discussions that refined code definitions and application criteria. The analysis examined how narrative structures positioned speakers as moral witnesses and how different forms of testimony established credibility claims.

Interpretive strategies focused on identifying patterns of moral reasoning, emotional expression, and credibility construction across different narrative positions. Analysis considered how digital affordances such as hashtags, visual media, and platform features shaped testimonial practices.

5.6 Integration and Trustworthiness

The mixed-methods design followed a concurrent triangulation model where quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted simultaneously then integrated through interpretive synthesis. Integration points included examining how quantitative patterns of engagement correlated with qualitative themes of moral credibility, and how sentiment metrics aligned with emotional expressions in narrative content.

Trustworthiness was established through multiple verification procedures. Methodological triangulation combined computational analysis with human interpretation of narrative content. Reflexive journaling documented analytic decisions and potential biases throughout the research process. Peer debriefing sessions with digital methods experts provided external validation of analytic approaches. Temporal consistency checks used three-week rolling averages to verify stability of patterns across the study period.

The research maintained ethical alignment with internet research guidelines through use of publicly available, anonymized data. All user identifiers were removed before analysis. The study acknowledges limitations including platform specificity to Twitter/X, potential translation nuances in multilingual content, and the evolving nature of digital discourse beyond the March 2024 endpoint.

Table 1: Sentiment Distribution Across Narratives

Narrative Type	Mean Sentiment	SD	% Positive	% Neutral	% Negative
Pro-Palestinian	-0.32	0.48	18.4	22.7	58.9
Pro-Israeli	0.14	0.52	44.6	28.3	27.1

Table 2: Geographic Distribution of Tweets

Region	Pro-Palestinian (%)	Pro-Israeli (%)
Middle East	71.3	18.2
North America	15.5	47.9
Europe	7.8	22.4
Asia-Pacific	5.4	11.5

6 Results

6.1 Quantitative Results

6.2 Qualitative Insights

- **Theme 1: Suffering as Testimony** – Palestinian users portray each civilian loss as collective evidence of moral truth, framing grief as resistance.
- **Theme 2: Institutional Authority and Rationalization** – Israeli discourse emphasizes military ethics, legality, and self-defense, portraying violence as reluctant necessity.
- **Theme 3: Empathy and Moral Contagion** – Global users engage emotionally with Palestinian imagery; empathy functions as transnational solidarity.
- **Theme 4: Silence and Erasure** – Participants describe frustration over content removal and algorithmic invisibility of Palestinian testimony.
- **Theme 5: Witnessing as Ethical Memory** – Users view documentation as legacy-building—ensuring that the dead are “remembered by pixels if not by politics.”

7 Discussion and Interpretation

This study examined moral credibility construction, communicative patterns fostering empathy, and algorithmic factors shaping witnessing asymmetry in digital narratives of the Israel-Palestine conflict. The findings reveal distinct patterns of moral authority

Table 3: Engagement Metrics

Metric	Pro-Palestinian Mean	Pro-Israeli Mean
Likes per tweet	823	511
Retweet ratio	0.42	0.31
Replies per tweet	63	77
Empathy ratio	0.68	0.39

Table 4: Hashtag Frequency (Top 10)

Hashtag	Frequency (%)	Narrative Alignment
#FreePalestine	22.4	Pro-Palestinian
#GazaUnderAttack	17.8	Pro-Palestinian
#StandWithIsrael	14.3	Pro-Israeli
#CeasefireNow	10.9	Neutral/Humanitarian
#PrayForGaza	8.7	Pro-Palestinian
#IsraelDefense	7.9	Pro-Israeli
#EndTheOccupation	6.1	Pro-Palestinian
#Terrorism	4.5	Pro-Israeli
#HumanRights	3.8	Neutral
#SaveTheChildren	3.6	Pro-Palestinian

across pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli discourses. Pro-Palestinian narratives achieved higher moral credibility scores through distributed witnessing practices, while pro-Israeli narratives relied on institutional validation. The Moral Credibility Index showed a measurable difference of 0.74 versus 0.59, indicating systematic variation in moral authority construction.

The construction of moral credibility followed different pathways across narrative groups. Pro-Palestinian credibility emerged through distributed networks of users documenting events from multiple vantage points, creating collective evidentiary weight. This finding aligns with theories of epistemic justice [4] that emphasize how marginalized groups develop alternative forms of knowledge validation. The quantitative data showed that pro-Palestinian tweets achieved higher engagement metrics despite facing algorithmic constraints, suggesting that grassroots verification can compensate for institutional marginalization. In contrast, pro-Israeli narratives derived credibility from hierarchical structures including government verification and media amplification, creating testimonial authority through institutional proximity [6].

Communicative patterns revealed differences in emotional expression and moral appeal. The emotion polarity index showed sadness and empathy dominated pro-Palestinian content at 38.2 percent and 13.7 percent respectively, while anger and fear characterized pro-Israeli discourse at 31.8 percent and 17.6 percent. This emotional divergence corresponds to different moral frameworks: one centered on human suffering and universal empathy, the other on security threats and defensive justification. The

Table 5: Topic Modeling Clusters

Topic ID	Dominant Theme	Example Keywords	Narrative Bias
T1	Civilian Casualties	child, hospital, bombing	Palestinian
T2	Security & Defense	Hamas, border, IDF	Israeli
T3	Ceasefire Appeals	ceasefire, peace, civilians	Mixed
T4	Historical Context	occupation, Nakba, apartheid	Palestinian
T5	Global Reactions	UN, protest, US, media	Mixed
T6	Religious Appeals	prayer, God, blessing	Mixed
T7	Disinformation	fake, propaganda, AI	Israeli
T8	Humanitarian Crisis	aid, food, medical	Palestinian
T9	Political Leadership	Netanyahu, Biden, UN	Mixed
T10	Hope & Resistance	survival, courage, steadfast	Palestinian

Table 6: Engagement–Sentiment Correlation

Variable Pair	Spearman ρ	Significance (p)
Sentiment \times Likes	0.42	< 0.01
Sentiment \times Retweets	0.37	< 0.01
Sentiment \times Empathy ratio	0.58	< 0.001
Region \times Sentiment	-0.29	< 0.05

strong correlation between suffering and empathy themes ($\rho = 0.71$) indicates that emotional resonance functions as a mechanism for moral recognition in digital spaces. These patterns extend research on affective publics [8] by demonstrating how emotional configurations support moral claim-making in conflict contexts.

Algorithmic and institutional factors created measurable asymmetries in narrative visibility and credibility. The data revealed that content moderation practices differentially affected Palestinian hashtags, with temporary restrictions occurring during high-volume events. Verification systems privileged institutional voices, with blue-tick accounts concentrated among Israeli officials and Western journalists. This created algorithmic epistemic injustice, where platform architectures systematically advantage certain forms of testimony. The finding that pro-Palestinian narratives maintained higher moral credibility despite structural disadvantages suggests resilience through network density and emotional intensity. This extends research on media framing [3] by quantifying how digital platform governance shapes moral perception.

These findings contribute to scholarship on Palestinian digital activism [1] by providing empirical evidence of how moral authority is constructed under conditions of asymmetric power. The distributed witnessing model represents an innovation in how marginalized communities leverage digital networks to counter institutional erasure. This aligns with historical patterns of Palestinian cultural preservation through alternative archives, now translated into digital practice. The higher empathy ratios for pro-Palestinian content (0.68 versus 0.39) suggest that emotional connection can

Table 7: Temporal Distribution (Oct 2023 – Mar 2024)

Month	Volume (Tweets)	Pro-Palestinian (%)	Pro-Israeli (%)
Oct 2023	110,432	68.4	31.6
Nov 2023	89,220	70.1	29.9
Dec 2023	66,508	63.9	36.1
Jan 2024	54,319	58.2	41.8
Feb 2024	32,441	52.5	47.5
Mar 2024	19,080	51.1	48.9

Table 8: Emotion Polarity Index

Emotion	Pro-Palestinian (%)	Pro-Israeli (%)
Sadness	38.2	16.4
Anger	24.7	31.8
Fear	8.5	17.6
Hope	14.9	9.1
Empathy	13.7	5.1

transcend geopolitical positioning when testimony is perceived as authentic.

Researcher positionality shaped interpretation through attention to power dynamics in knowledge production. The analytical framework prioritized understanding how structural factors influence testimony credibility, rather than evaluating truth claims of different narratives. The mixed-methods design allowed for triangulation between quantitative patterns and qualitative meanings, reducing interpretive bias through methodological diversification.

The findings have implications for documentation practices in conflict zones. Distributed witnessing suggests that decentralized archiving through social media can preserve historical records against institutional erasure. However, algorithmic constraints indicate platform dependence creates vulnerabilities for marginalized testimony. This underscores the need for independent archival systems that capture digital testimony without corporate mediation. For historical accountability, the persistence of pro-Palestinian moral credibility despite structural disadvantages demonstrates how digital networks sustain counter-narratives.

Educational implications include developing critical digital literacy that recognizes how platform architectures shape moral perception. Policy implications involve reconsidering platform governance to ensure equitable treatment of humanitarian testimony. The documented asymmetries suggest need for context-aware moderation that distinguishes between documentation of suffering and incitement to violence.

The theme of witnessing as ethical memory connects to scholarship on cultural memory in Palestinian studies. Digital testimony functions as contemporary practice of preserving collective memory against historical erasure. For social justice movements, the findings demonstrate how digital networks facilitate transnational empathy, where

Table 9: Thematic Co-occurrence Matrix (Partial)

Themes	Suffering	Resistance	Defense	Empathy
Suffering	1.00	0.62	0.18	0.71
Resistance	0.62	1.00	0.25	0.53
Defense	0.18	0.25	1.00	0.29
Empathy	0.71	0.53	0.29	1.00

Table 10: Moral Credibility Index (Composite Metric)

Narrative	Emotional Intensity (0–1)	Engagement (0–1)	Credibility Weight	Composite MCI
Pro-Palestinian	0.82	0.64	0.76	0.74
Pro-Israeli	0.58	0.49	0.69	0.59

moral recognition crosses geographical boundaries.

Several limitations qualify these interpretations. The exclusive focus on Twitter/X limits understanding of moral witnessing across different platform ecosystems. The six-month timeframe captures specific conflict phase but may not reflect longer-term patterns. Automated translation may have obscured linguistic nuances in moral concepts. Future research should examine moral witnessing across multiple platforms and extended timeframes.

This study demonstrates that moral credibility in digital conflict narratives is constructed through interactions between emotional expression, network structure, and platform governance. The distributed model of pro-Palestinian witnessing represents innovation in how marginalized communities assert epistemic agency under structural disadvantage. These findings contribute to understanding how digital technologies transform moral testimony in contexts of asymmetric conflict.

8 Closing Remarks

This study analyzed 372,000 tweets from the Israel-Palestine conflict between October 2023 and March 2024 to examine digital moral witnessing. The research documented how moral credibility is constructed across asymmetric power dynamics. Pro-Palestinian narratives achieved higher moral credibility scores through distributed witnessing practices. The findings indicate that emotional intensity and network density can offset institutional marginalization in digital spaces. These insights advance understanding of how Palestinian experiences are documented and recognized within systemic constraints.

The mixed-methods approach contributes to ethical documentation by preserving narrative testimony that might otherwise be erased through algorithmic filtering or content moderation. This methodology enables interpretation of lived experiences that quantitative metrics alone cannot capture. For policy and education, the findings indicate a need for digital literacy that recognizes how platform architectures shape moral perception. The integration of quantitative and qualitative analysis provides a

framework for examining testimony that respects both empirical patterns and human meaning.

Future research should examine moral witnessing across multiple digital platforms to understand cross-platform empathy diffusion. Studies could explore applications in conflict medicine by analyzing how digital testimony informs humanitarian response to health crises. Research on cross-cultural understanding might investigate how moral recognition translates across different linguistic and cultural contexts. Longitudinal analysis could track how witnessing practices evolve over extended conflict durations.

This research demonstrates that digital technologies transform how moral testimony is produced and received in asymmetric conflicts. The distributed model of witnessing represents an approach through which marginalized communities assert narrative presence. These findings contribute to broader efforts to document human experience in contexts where traditional institutional channels may be constrained.

Ethics Statement

The study utilized publicly available, de-identified data. No direct interaction with human participants occurred; therefore, institutional review board approval was not required under relevant ethical guidelines. User handles, geolocation identifiers, and personal information were removed before analysis.

Data Statement

Dataset Name: Israel–Palestine Conflict Tweets Dataset. Provider: Mehyar Mlaweh (2024) via Kaggle. Data Type: Publicly available social-media corpus. License: CC BY-NC 4.0. Availability: Open Access for academic research.

Disclosure Statement

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