GREEN RIBBON
GROUP

The Impact of Gaza-related Social Media Content on Mental Health in Malaysia

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Executive Summary

- This Working Paper aims to assess **the impacts of consuming social media coverage of Israel's war on Gaza on mental health in Malaysia**, using data collected through an online survey and interviews along **three dimensions**: 1) general perceptions on the Gaza conflict; 2) implications of exposure to Gaza-related content on one's mental health, and; 3) coping mechanisms.

- The ongoing war is different from previous conflicts in the sense that it has been unfolding live, online, owing to **cultural shifts** in the way people consume social media and various **technological innovations** adopted by social media platforms.

- As social media has become an alternative to traditional news outlets, a large number of survey respondents **obtain their updates on the war via social media platforms**.

- **Instagram**, **TikTok** and **X** are the most popular platforms that respondents utilise for Gaza-related updates.

- Three-quarters of respondents face **pressures to repost/reshare Gaza-related content** on social media, but even a larger number reported that **they expect others to engage in the same activities** online.

- More than three-quarters claimed that consuming Gaza-related content **affects their mood and/or daily activities**. While more than half feel **traumatised** by what they see online, four-fifths reported they feel **a sense of guilt** for "not doing enough" about the Gaza situation.

- Respondents reported that they have experienced **sleep deprivation**, **anxiety**, **depression** and **negative changes in mood** after consuming Gaza-related content on social media. Conversely, others claimed to have become **more grateful** for their own living conditions or **strengthened their faith and/or mental wellbeing**.

- Respondents are almost evenly divided when asked if they have experienced **social media fatigue** as a consequence of overconsuming Gaza-related content.

Preamble

On the heels of its inaugural research series, "Building a Community Approach to a Workplace Mental Health" conducted in 2023, the Green Ribbon Group (GRG) is kickstarting 2024 with a topic that has been heavily debated in the mental health realm.

As a tool that has become part and parcel of our daily routine, the impacts of social media on mental health – both good and bad – are widely known. For the former, social media has provided an additional avenue for social interaction that encompasses education, peer support and humour, to name a few examples. Conversely, social media - in terms of the quality and quantity of its usage - has been linked to low moods due to cyberbullying, the fear of missing out (FOMO), loneliness, as well as mental health problems like depression and anxiety.

GRG has decided to zoom into a specific research topic vis-a-vis social media and mental health in the ongoing coverage of Israel's war on Gaza. This research, "The Impact of Gaza-related Social Media Content on Mental Health in Malaysia," is a Working Paper that offers preliminary analysis on data collected via an online survey and interviews, with the research and analysis processes continuing beyond the initial phase of data collection.

Introduction

Malaysia's stance on the issue has always been crystal clear, owing to its long history of supporting Palestinians and not recognising Israel.

Israel's ongoing war on Gaza broke out when Palestinian armed group Hamas launched a barrage of rockets into Israel and entered the latter's territory on 7 October 2023. Since then, the conflict has claimed more than 28,176 lives and injured over 67,784 individuals, at the time of writing. The conflict, attempts of resolution, and aid delivery progress, have been widely covered by both traditional news outlets as well as social media accounts.

Malaysia's stance on the issue has always been crystal clear, owing to its long history of supporting Palestinians and not recognising Israel. The war on Gaza today, however, is unique to the Malaysian populace compared to previous clashes between Israel and Palestine. Those in Malaysia, like the rest of the world, have been witnessing the conflict unfolding live on their gadgets via social media platforms, at a speed that potentially rivals or even outperforms live satellite broadcasts (the latter of which gave birth to "the CNN Effect" and "the Al-Jazeera Effect"). Several factors account for this:

- Cultural shifts – technological leaps have facilitated greater access to gadgets and the Internet, with people more likely to spend their time online than before. Millennials, Gen Zs and Gen Alpha, known for their tech-savviness, are especially exposed to Gaza-related content on social media.

- The increased popularity of visual-based social media, such as Instagram, TikTok and YouTube, compared to before.

- Social media accounts have emerged as an alternative source of news to traditional news outlets, despite the potential absence of journalistic processes in its reporting.

Initial discussions with our own circles of family and friends reveal a number of mental health implications from exposure to social media content on the conflict in Gaza. These include feelings of helplessness, trauma, depression and anger, among others. We then asked ourselves a few questions:

- To what extent is this true for the population in general, both Malaysians and residents of the country?

- What are the implications of exposure to social media content on the conflict in Gaza to the overall mood and productivity of those affected?

Methodology

The Gaza conflict is a modern example of how social media can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it raises awareness on the conflict and provides updates in real time, sucking users into the debate even further. This is not new to Gaza-content, as social media does this in general regardless of topic. But on the other hand, what was previously frowned-upon or banned – such as images of children injured, traumatised, or killed – is now "encouraged" to educate and pressure governments and organisations to take action. We hypothesise two main streams of thought, on the opposite ends of the axis:

- Gaza-related content on social media has become a tool for self-reflection whereby users are now careful about what they post on social media. Some users may have also changed their posting etiquette entirely, perhaps limiting everyday posts on regular topics like the food they eat and their daily activities. Given the self-reflection element, we also hypothesise a deeper sense of appreciation and gratitude amongst users.

- On the flip side, the violent imagery and ongoing humanitarian calls for aid and a ceasefire could have left some users mentally fatigued and burnt out due to overconsumption and traumatising thoughts.

We also hypothesise that some users would have quit their social media platforms entirely as a result.

The Gaza conflict is a modern example of how social media can be a double-edged sword.

Our hypothesis warrants a deeper analysis into how users may be affected by Gaza-related content and engagement on social media. In broader terms, this Working Paper aims to investigate the following subjects:

- General thoughts on social media and its coverage on Gaza on one's mental health, in terms of consumption and engagement.

- The potential implications of such exposure on one's mood, relationships and productivity.

- The coping mechanisms opted by Malaysians in dealing with potentially distressing news and visuals coming out of Gaza.

The methodology adopted comprises an online survey, online interviews as well as validation exercises with mental health professionals. Consisting of 15 questions (both demographic and substantial sections), the online survey ran from 10 to 18 January 2024 in English and Bahasa Malaysia and resulted in 283 respondents.

For qualitative research, the online interviews commenced on 12 January 2024 and will continue into the second part of this Working Paper. Questions were asked along the three lines stated above: (i) social media coverage; (ii) mental health implications and (iii) coping mechanisms. Thus far, GRG has conducted 17 interviews and a mini focus group discussion (FGD) of three participants.

Demographically, a snapshot of our data pool is as follows:

	Survey Respondents	Interviewees (including FGD)
Total	283	20
Age	26 and below – 50 (17.7%) 27-42 – 198 (70.0%) 43-58 – 26 (9.2%) 59-68 – 8 (2.8%) Other – 1 (0.3%) at 16 years	26 and below – 3 (15.0%) 27-42 – 8 (40.0%) 43-58 – 7 (35.0%) 59-68 – 2 (10.0%) Other – 0 (0.0%)
Gender	Female – 217 (76.7%) Male – 66 (23.3%)	Female – 13 (65.0%) Male – 7 (35.0%%)
Ethnicity	Chinese – 16 (5.6%) Indian – 6 (2.1%) Malay – 241 (85.2%) Others – 20 (7.1%)	Chinese – 3 (15.0%) Indian – 2 (10.0%) Malay – 13 (65.0%) Others – 2 (10.0%)

At the outset, the limitations of our research thus far, as a result of the demographic pool above, are as follows:

- There is an element of gender bias as the majority of survey respondents and interviewees are female. Consistent with our previous research series, the lack of male participation in this survey serves as another indication that mental health amongst men is still stigmatised in Malaysia.

- The ethnicity make-up of our survey respondents does not reflect the population of Malaysia, with one ethnicity being overrepresented while others underrepresented. This could owe to the perception that the Israel-Palestinian conflict is religiously motivated.

- A respectable number of participants (seven) reported a more moderate usage of social media, or claim to be passive social media users. Only a few declare themselves as spending much time on these platforms. As such, the interview process might have not sufficiently captured the population segment that is "chronically online" or more actively engaged with Gaza-related content.

Literature and Social Media Reviews

General Data

Data compiled by Kepios reveals that as of October 2023, there were 4.95 billion social media users worldwide, which translates into 61.4% of the global population. An analysis by GWI determines social media users in general use or visit 6.7 different social media platforms every month, while spending between two and 24 minutes daily on these platforms.
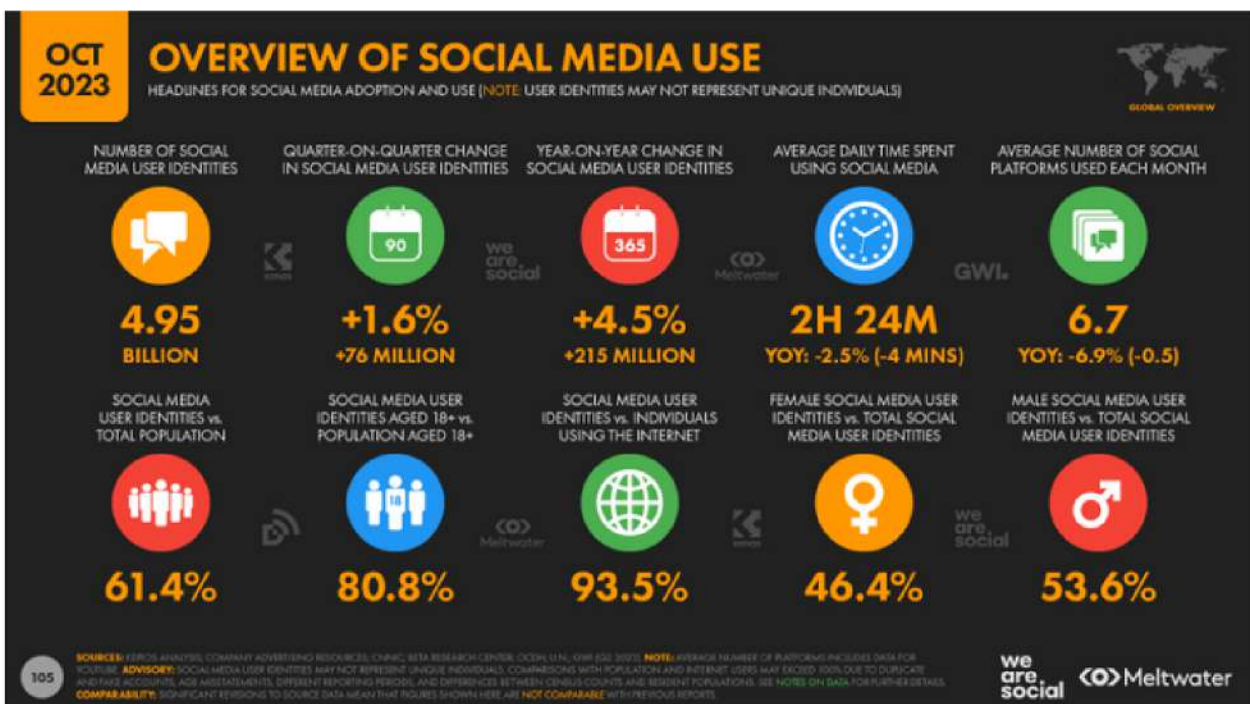

Figure 1: Summary of social media usage worldwide, as of October 2023. Source: DataReportal.

Furthermore, DataReportal lists down 15 social media platforms with more than 400 million active users in July 2023. These are Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, WeChat, TikTok, Facebook Messenger, Telegram, Snapchat, Douyin, Kuaishou, X (formerly Twitter), Sina Weibo, QQ and Pinterest.

...Malaysia ranked sixth in the world in terms of highest internet usage daily, at nine hours and four minutes.

In Malaysia specifically, the internet penetration rate stood at 96.8% of total population in the beginning of 2023. In the same time frame, Malaysia was also host to 33.03 million internet users, 26.8 million of which were also social media users. This last figure is equivalent to 78.5% of Malaysia's total population, which means more than three quarters of the population were social media users in early 2023.

The most popular social media platforms in Malaysia are as follows: YouTube (23.9 million users), Facebook (20.25 million), TikTok (19.3 million), Instagram (13.90 million), Facebook Messenger (11.2 million), LinkedIn (7.00 million), Snapchat (1.45 million) and X (5.50 million). It has been reported that Malaysia ranked sixth in the world in terms of highest internet usage daily, at nine hours and four minutes. Most of this time was spent on messaging and social media.

What this means is that potentially, a large number of Malaysia's populace is likely to have been exposed to circulating coverage of Israel's war on Gaza on social media platforms. As they read, listen and watch the conflict unfold on their gadgets, they are likely to have formed their own opinion of the conflict and/or experienced potential consequences from exposure to such coverage, whether they realise it or not.

Social Media and Mental Health

Although the Internet and social media are hailed as essential

components in our daily lives, there have been wide-ranging <u>research</u> on both the positive and negative impacts of social media on mental health. The positive impacts include:

- <u>Overcoming</u> loneliness and fostering a sense of belonging.

- <u>Positive relationships</u> and building social capital.

- Enriching self-concept, which leads to self-acceptance, body positivity and self-esteem.

- An avenue to destress, express emotions and experiences.

Conversely, the negative implications are as follows:

- Social media <u>addiction</u>, which leads to neglecting other aspects of life.

- Social isolation and disconnection.

- Unhealthy comparisons to other people's lives.

- Feelings of jealousy and envy.

- Forecasting error, which is the mistaken belief that using social media will improve our mood.

- Perception gap, in which virtual friends do not provide all the benefits of having friends in real life.

- <u>Aggravating</u> feelings of worthlessness or dissatisfaction in life.

- <u>Greater risk </u>of depression, anxiety and stress.

It should be noted that the emphasis is on <u>excessive or unregulated use</u> of social media as a primary factor of the increased risk of mental health

problems. Users who practise mindfulness may not be at similar risk as those who lack control in accessing and using social media.

Social Media Coverage on Israel's War on Gaza

Social media also plays a major role in spreading news and raising awareness about Gaza at a time when Western mass media cannot be expected to be objective.

In terms of Israel's war on Gaza, social media coverage of the conflict features prominently in the way that Malaysians converse about the subject, and also in terms of how they respond.

This is evident in the highest level of government. Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has taken to X to communicate Malaysia's support towards Hamas and demands for Israel to cease its aggression. The Malaysian government also seems bent that the online discourse on the subject could go on uninterrupted, as indicated by its warning against TikTok and Meta for their alleged attempt at taking down pro-Palestinian content on their platforms.

Social media also plays a major role in spreading news and raising awareness about Gaza at a time when Western mass media cannot be expected to be objective. Influencer Tyra Kamaruzzaman claims to be using her Instagram account to combat false information and educate others about various aspects of the conflict. Figures such as former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad have also leveraged their social media presence to influence the ongoing debate about the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Linked to the above is how social media today has become a conduit for individuals to plan, organise and execute protests and rallies. In Malaysia, pro-Palestine rallies have popped up from time and time and their coverage is widely distributed on social media platforms to raise

awareness amongst those who are previously uninformed about the subject.

Other than this, other forms of political activism are also noticeable among Malaysian netizens. Calls for boycotting against companies or products perceived to be associated with Israel circulate on social media platforms. Some Malaysians have also engaged in online trolling of accounts associated with the Israel Defence Forces (IDF), spamming their accounts with calls, comments and messages. Such actions can be interpreted as netizens' effort to take part in the Palestinians' struggle against Israel, as opposed to merely being bystanders or onlookers on the conflict.

وَمَكَرُوا وَمَكَرَ ٱللَّهُ وَٱللَّهُ خَيْرُ ٱلْمَٰكِرِينَ

PENGUMUMAN TEKNIS OPERASI
#JULIDFISABILILLAH
Brigade Hassan bin Tsabit

Demi tercapainya kesuksesan operasi #JulidFiSabilillah, berikut disampaikan 7 teknis penting yang perlu diingat setiap pejuang #JulidFiSabilillah.

1. Operasi Julid fi Sabilillah ditujukan untuk melemahkan moril Israel, memerangi propaganda Zionis, dan memperkuat narasi pro-Palestina di jagat maya (Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, FB, dan kanal maya lainnya).

Figure 2: A screenshot of the directive for an online alliance between Indonesian and Malaysian netizens to troll Israel-related social media accounts. Source: @Greschinov on X.
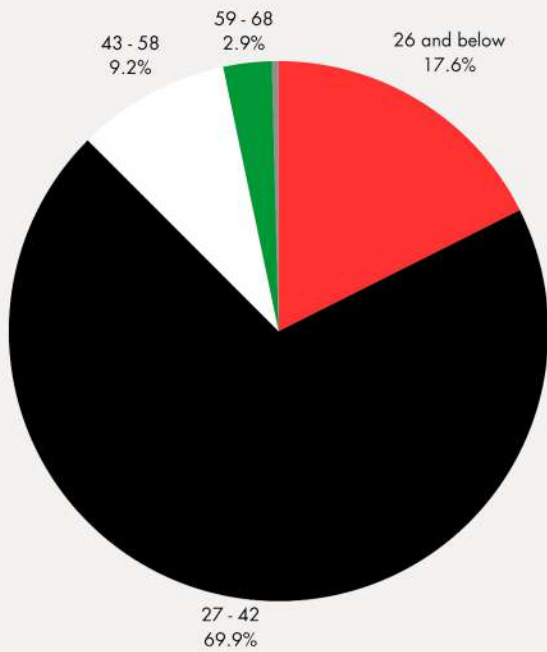
Data Presentation

In this section, findings from our online survey will be presented and discussed through four different sections, namely "Demographics", "Social Media Coverage", "Implications on Mental Health" as well as "Coping Mechanisms". Some qualitative data from open-ended questions in the survey, are inserted to enhance the points of discussion.
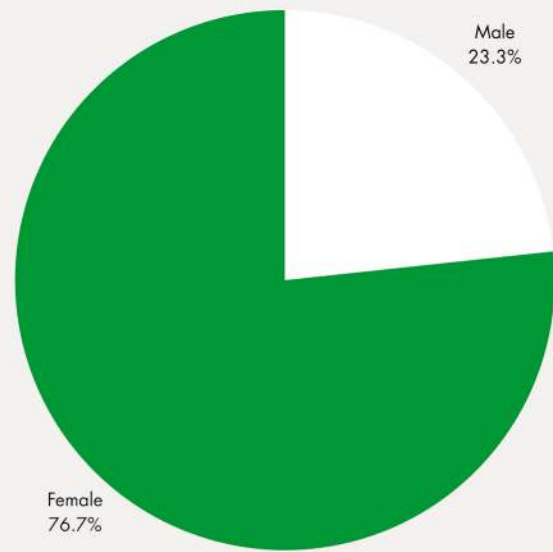
Demographics

To reiterate, the online survey ran from 10 to 18 January 2024 and managed to garner 283 responses in total, all completed. The demographics of our respondents are as follows:
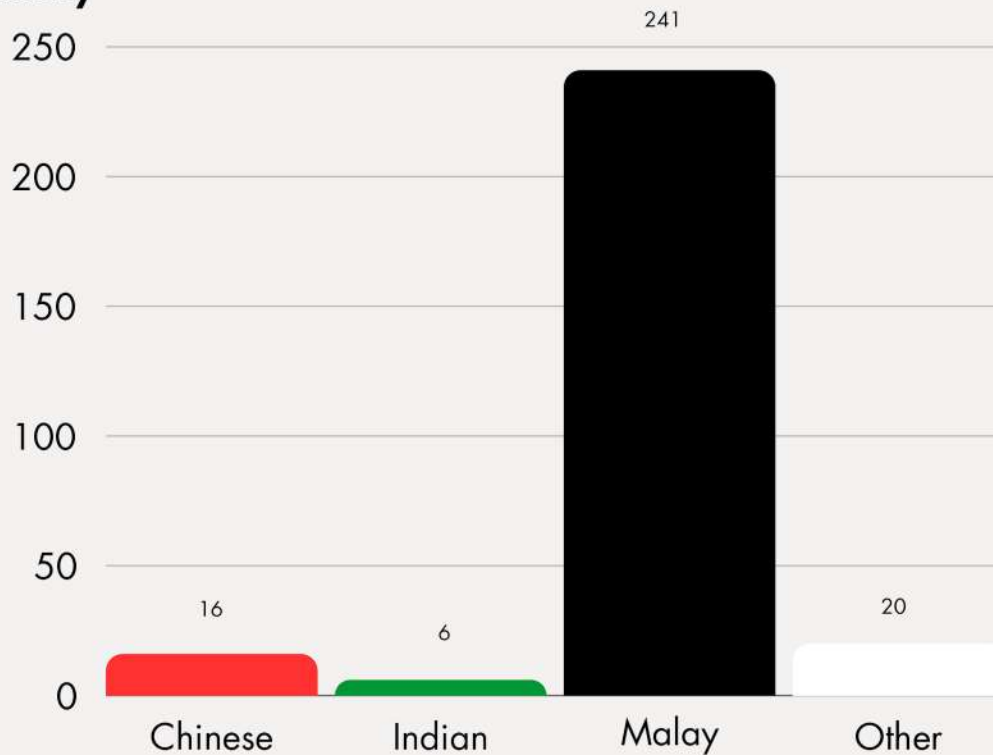
Age

- 59 - 68: 2.9%
- 43 - 58: 9.2%
- 26 and below: 17.6%
- 27 - 42: 69.9%

Gender

- Male: 23.3%
- Female: 76.7%

Ethnicity

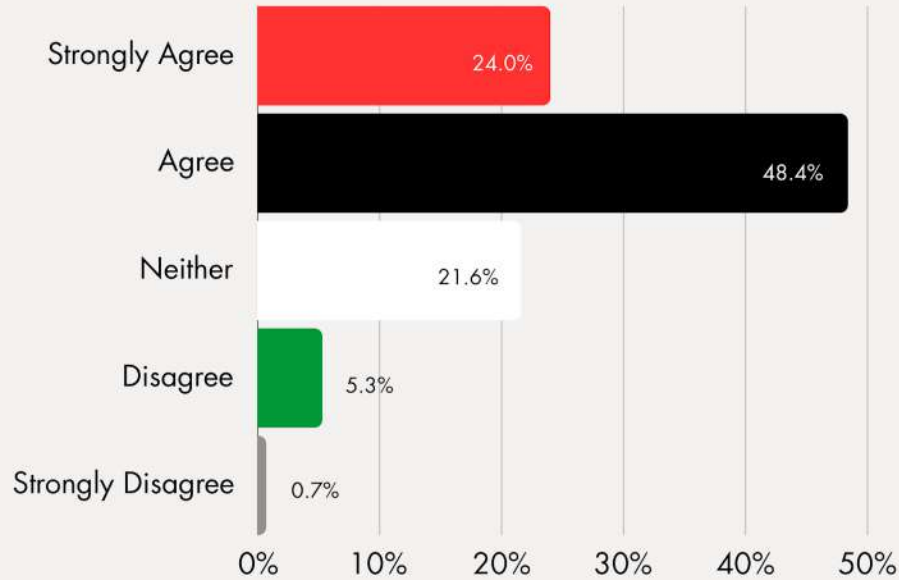| Chinese	Indian	Malay	Other
16	6	241	20

The only respondent whose age does not fall into any of the age brackets provided is 16 years old. Meanwhile, other ethnicities include Iban, Kadazan, Dusun, Bugis, mixed ethnicity as well as Indonesians.
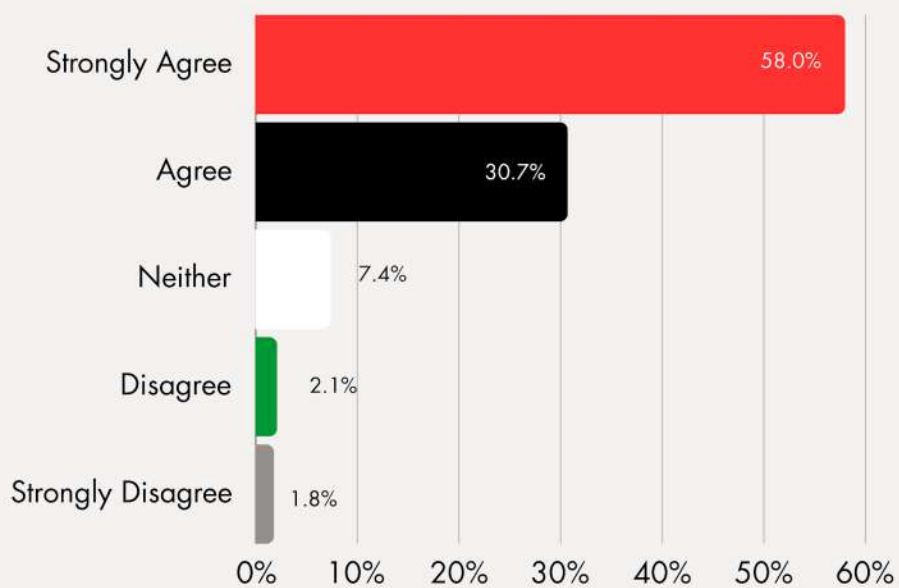
Social Media and Gaza-related Content

"I have a healthy relationship with social media"

Strongly Agree	24.0%
Agree	48.4%
Neither	21.6%
Disagree	5.3%
Strongly Disagree	0.7%

(chart x-axis: 0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50%)

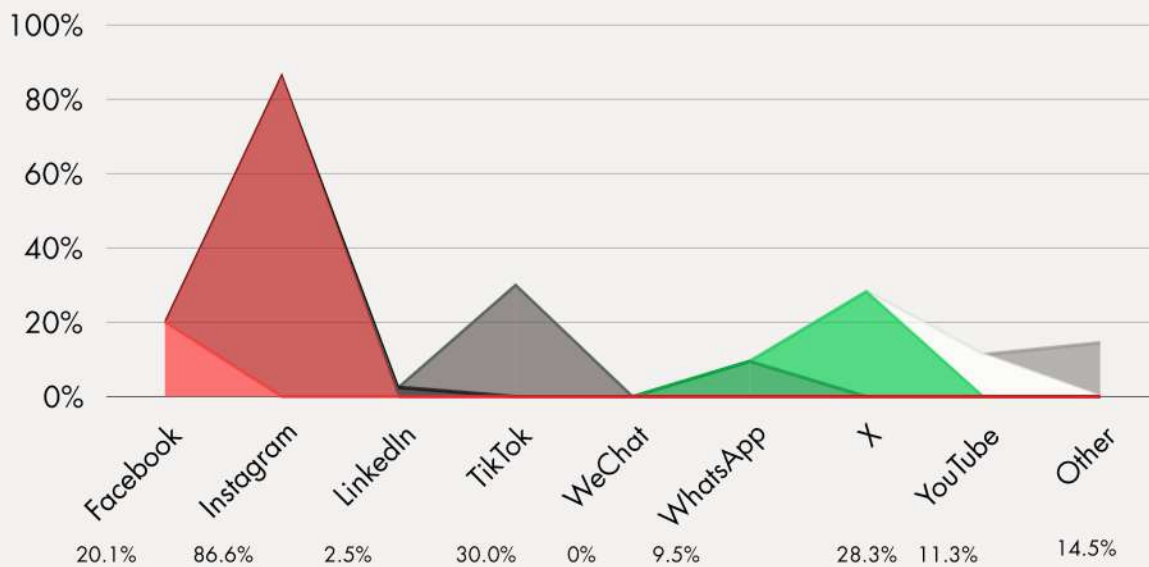Although the parameters are not identified in the survey, almost three quarters of total respondents (72.4%) report that they have a healthy relationship with social media.

"I use social media to get my latest updates on the conflict in Gaza"

Strongly Agree	58.0%
Agree	30.7%
Neither	7.4%
Disagree	2.1%
Strongly Disagree	1.8%

(chart x-axis: 0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60%)

An overwhelming majority of respondents (88.7%) use social media for their latest updates on Israel's war on Gaza. Respondents were not asked what types of updates they are looking for – whether it be details about the armed conflict, the casualties, any attempt for peace process and delivery of humanitarian aid, to name a few. Different types of updates or news regarding the subject could impact users differently.
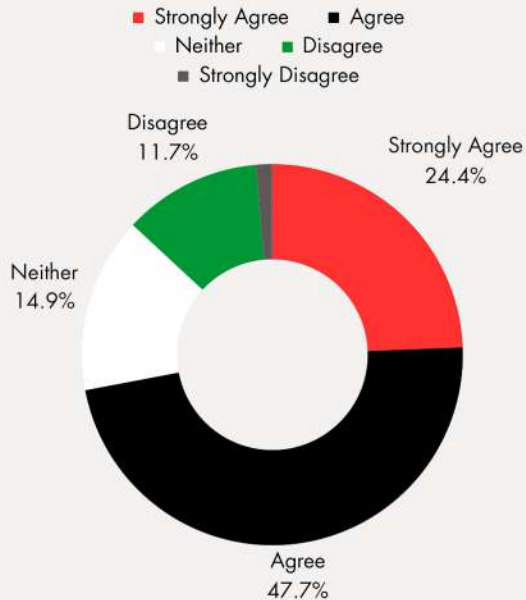
"Which social media platform do you visit to get the latest news on Gaza?"

Facebook	Instagram	LinkedIn	TikTok	WeChat	WhatsApp	X	YouTube	Other
20.1%	86.6%	2.5%	30.0%	0%	9.5%	28.3%	11.3%	14.5%

Respondents were allowed to choose more than one option. The top three social media platforms used by our respondents for updates on the Gaza situation are Instagram (86.6%), TikTok (30.0%) and X (28.3%). Other platforms that are used but not specified in the survey include Telegram and Threads. Still, some mentioned that they obtain their updates from traditional news outlets.
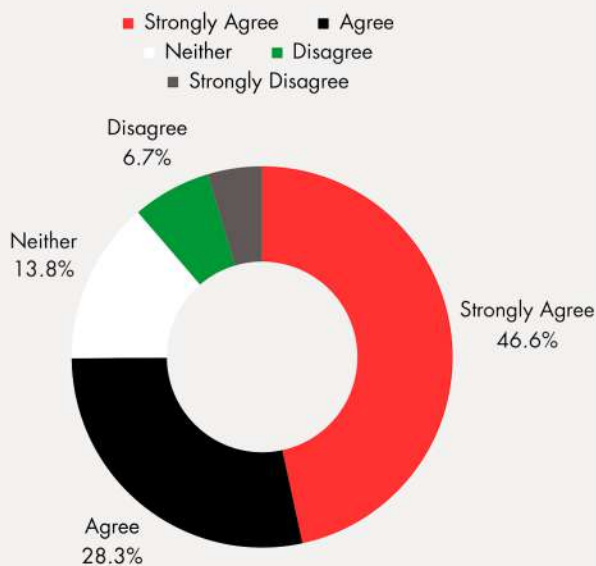
Implications on Mental Health

"Gaza-related topics feature a lot in my daily conversations with others, both online and offline."

Legend:
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Disagree 11.7%
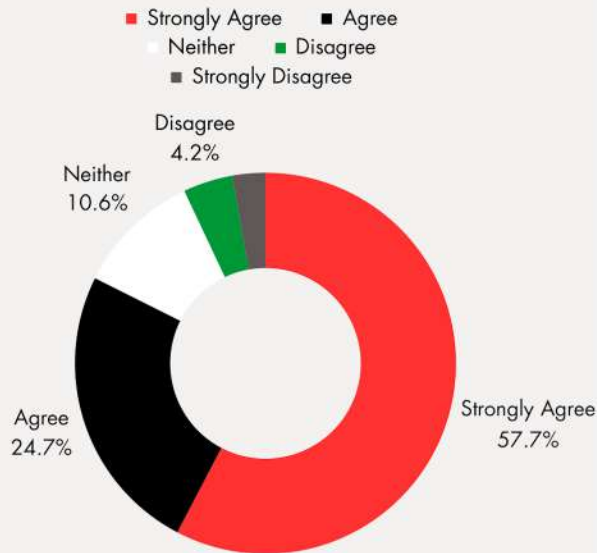Strongly Agree 24.4%
Neither 14.9%
Agree 47.7%

Almost three quarters of survey respondents (72.1%) claimed that Gaza-related topics are a feature in their daily interaction with others, both online and offline. This indicates that for a majority of respondents, Gaza is a hot topic for them and has become a part of public consciousness.

"I feel compelled to repost/reshare Gaza-related content."

Legend:
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Disagree 6.7%
Neither 13.8%
Strongly Agree 46.6%
Agree 28.3%

As many as 74.9% of respondents have already experienced some forms of pressure, whether from society or otherwise, regarding their online behaviour vis-a-vis the situation in Gaza.

"I feel people must repost/reshare Gaza-related content to continue raising awareness on the conflict."

Legend:
- ■ Strongly Agree
- ■ Agree
- □ Neither
- ■ Disagree
- ■ Strongly Disagree

Disagree 4.2%

Neither 10.6%

Agree 24.7%

Strongly Agree 57.7%

Conversely, an overwhelming majority (82.3%) feel that others must also repost/reshare Gaza-related content to continue raising awareness on the conflict. This indicates that while respondents do feel pressured to repost/reshare, they also expect others to do the same online.

"What are your thoughts on those who do not repost/reshare Gaza-related content?"

When asked what their thoughts are on those who do not repost/reshare (open-ended question), the respondents' answers can be categorised into the following groups:

Viewing the inaction in a negative light	Judgement
	Religious obligations
Holding a neutral position on the matter	Personal choice
Keeping a positive thought	Benefit of the doubt
	Mental health concerns

Viewing the inaction in a negative light

Judgement

" *"Jika mereka boleh post hal/isu/gambar yg berkaitan dengan duniawi, tapi tidak mahu post hal Gaza, saya berpendapat mereka ini terpenyakit al-wahn."* (If they can post about worldly things but do not want to post about Gaza, I feel they are afflicted with *al-wahn* – love of the world and dislike of death.) "

" "Ignorance. Thinking more about their own mental health but not even thinking about Palestinians' mental health whose the one that facing the genocide, losing families, friends, homes and many facilities." "

" *"Mungkin mereka tak ada hati dan perasaan."* (Maybe they have no hearts and feelings). "

Religious obligation

" *"Tapi seeloknya kita sebagai orang Islam wajib ambik tahu."* (It is better for us Muslims to pay attention.) "

" "As Muslim, feels like it is compulsory for us to repost. Those is no reposting are not helping the cause." "

Holding a neutral position on the matter

Personal choice

" *"Masing-masing ada sebab tersendiri. Tidak boleh judge mereka kerana tidak ikut saranan majoriti."* (Each has their own reason. We cannot judge them for not complying with the majority.) "

> *"Hak/pilihan masing-masing. However, as a Muslim, itu adalah tanggungjawab kita untuk saling sokong, jaga, dan pertahankan agama dan saudara seagama kita dengan pelbagai cara/jalan. Mungkin tidak lakukan di media sosial tapi realiti kehidupan seharian mereka kita tidak tahu, melalui sesama ahli keluarga, jiran, kawan, sedekah, malah sujud berdoa kepada Nya, pada waktu tahajud. Husnozon. Kita ada cara kita tersendiri, secara terangan atau di belakang tabir."* (It's a matter of personal choice. However, as a Muslim, it is a responsibility to take care and protect each other, as well as defend the religion and our fellow Muslims in every way. Maybe they do not do that on social media but we never know what they do in real life, along with their family members, neighbours, friends, giving alms, – [they may] even prostrate and pray [for the Palestinians] during tahajud prayer. *Husnozon* [positive thought]. Each has their own method, overtly or covertly.)

Keeping a positive thought

Benefit of the doubt

> *"Setiap orang ada pandangan dan cara masing-masing dalam isu berkaitan gaza. Mungkin mereka berdoa secara diam-diam, bersedekah dengan banyak."* (Each and everyone of us has their own perspcetives and ways to approach the Gaza situation. Maybe they pray quietly and give a lot of alms).

> *"Mereka takut Instagram disekat utk berkongsi maklumat dan mungkin mereka berjihad dengan cara lain iaitu melalui doa atau solat hajat."* (They are concerned about Instagram's censoring and maybe they struggle through other means, through prayers or the Hajat prayer.)

> 66 I think that they are either not interested in world affairs/politics or that they are more thoughtful and measured in their response to issues". 99
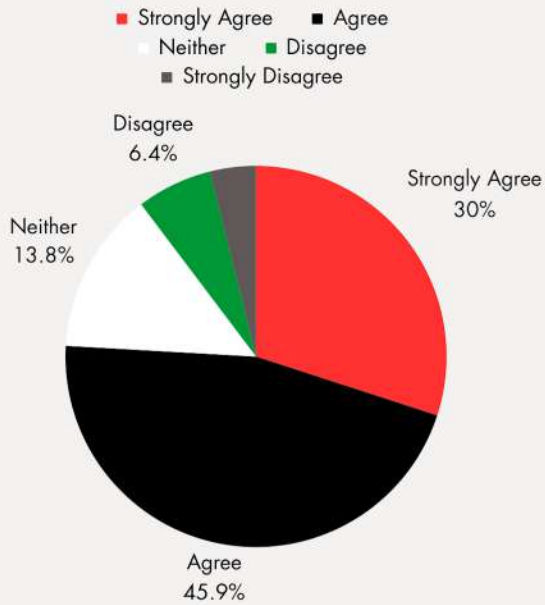
Mental health concerns

> 66 *"Terpulang pada niat. Ada setengah yang tak kongsi mungkin nak jaga mental diri sendiri. Contoh saya ibu baru bersalin dan menyusu – saya lebih kepada jaga emosi diri sendiri. Sedih sangat takut saya tak boleh kawal diri. Hanya amik tahu dan berdoa untuk rakyat Palestin ketika saya boleh kawal emosi diri dan keliling saya."* (It depends on one's intention. Some do not repost/reshare to look after their own mental health. For example, as someone who just gave birth and is still nursing my child, I need to look after my emotion. I'm scared I would not be able to control myself. I simply keep myself updated and pray for the Palestinians when I can keep my emotion in check). 99

> 66 "I think it depends on the person, some people may find it too upsetting to repost but that does not mean they do not find the content relevant and concerning." 99
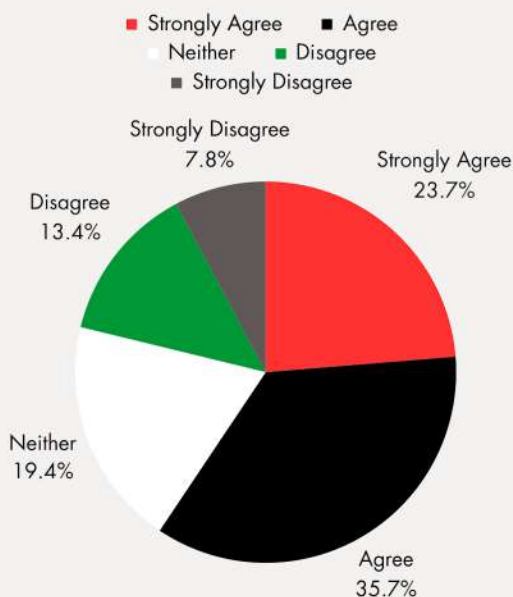
While the majority of answers have a negative tone (only a select few are shown here due to limited space), it is interesting to note that some answers have religious undertones or are linked to mental health considerations. These are some of the themes to be explored in the second phase of the Working Paper.

"Consuming Gaza-related content affects my mood and/or daily activities."

Strongly Agree · Agree
Neither · Disagree
Strongly Disagree

Disagree
6.4%

Neither
13.8%

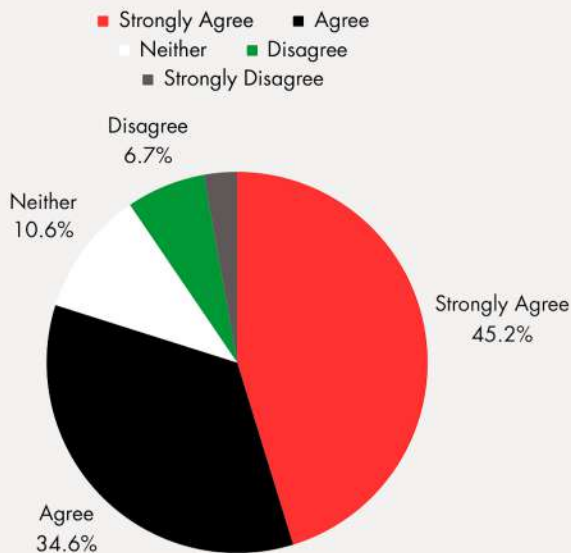Strongly Agree
30%

Agree
45.9%

More than three quarters of respondents (75.9%) stated that their mood and/or overall daily activities have been affected after consuming Gaza-related content. This is an indication that consumption of Gaza-related content has borne some implications to our respondents, though not specified if it is positive or negative.

"The violence depicted in Gaza-related content that I consume has traumatised me."

Strongly Agree · Agree
Neither · Disagree
Strongly Disagree

Strongly Disagree
7.8%

Disagree
13.4%
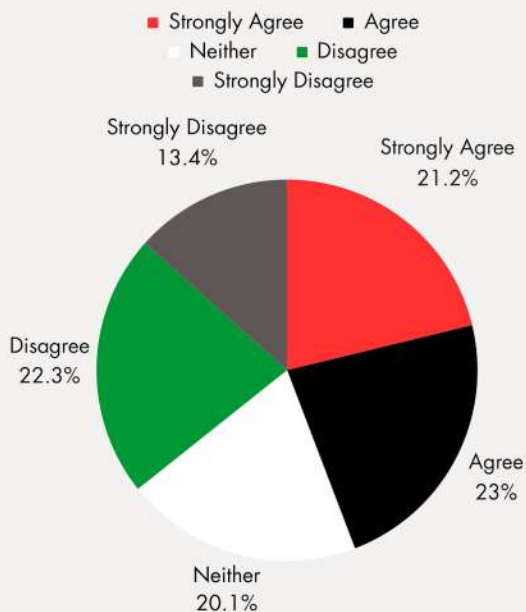
Strongly Agree
23.7%

Neither
19.4%

Agree
35.7%

More than half of respondents (59.4%) claimed to have been traumatised by Gaza-related content on social media. This is the first indication that exposure to such content bears negative implications on respondents' mental health. However, more than a fifth of respondents (21.2%) stated that they do not experience trauma. The fact that another fifth of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed suggests that such an effect might not be as clear to them.

"I feel a sense of guilt for not doing enough whenever I come across Gaza-related content on social media."

Legend: ■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree □ Neither ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree

- Strongly Agree 45.2%
- Agree 34.6%
- Neither 10.6%
- Disagree 6.7%

Four-fifths of respondents (79.8%) declared that they feel guilty for not doing enough after seeing Gaza-related content. This is yet another indication that the content has impacted our respondents emotionally, consistent with an earlier question on its impacts to respondents' mood. Whether this guilt has prompted respondents to take action or resort to coping mechanisms remains to be seen, and will be explored further in the second phase of this Working Paper.

"I have experienced social media fatigue as a result of overconsumption of Gaza-related content."

Legend: ■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree □ Neither ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree

- Strongly Agree 21.2%
- Agree 23%
- Neither 20.1%
- Disagree 22.3%
- Strongly Disagree 13.4%

Respondents are almost evenly divided on the question of social media fatigue. Granted, most of the content from the Gaza conflict can be distressing and off-putting to certain segments of society. However, the survey reveals that this is not a foregone conclusion. The combined number of those who disagree and strongly disagree (35.7%) almost rivals those who agree or strongly agree (44.2%), whilst the number of fence-sitters is significant as well (20.1%). This could suggest that respondents have the capability to manage usage and prevent overconsumption.

"How would you describe the effect of the Gaza conflict that you see on social media on your mental wellbeing? "

The last question aims to discover how respondents' mental health has been impacted by Gaza-related content that they have seen on social media platforms (open-ended question). Similar as before, the answers can be categorised into several groups.

Sleep deprivation and nightmares	
1	"I had quite a number of nightmares, as if I was there seeing my family being killed right in front of my eyes. But "lucky" for me, it's just dreams. But for Palestinians, it's not. 😔 Also, as others may feel, I feel super helpless and that kinda drain my energy and motivation to continue doing my daily task."
2	"Sometimes I don't wanna go on Internet since it makes me sad and can't go on normally with my life. I also can't have a proper sleep since im thinking about the privileges Im having while Palestinians were suffering."
3	"I lost sleep. Even dreamt of being in Gaza and surrounded by dead bodies. I had to limit myself from scrolling social media too often."
Anxiety and depression	
1	"*Saya xboleh dgr mercun saya anxiety . Sebb terbayang di gaza. Time deepavali and last christmas make me very sick.*" (I cannot listen to fireworks. They remind me of Gaza. During Deepavali and Christmas last year – fireworks made me very sick.)
2	"Sometimes I feel empty and exhausted."
3	"I feel anxious, because the images and news are traumatising. But also because I feel that there is societal pressure for me to speak out, which I wish not to."
Negative emotions and/or mood changes	
1	"Sedih teramat, tremendously. Efek selera makan, yet lebih berdoa & kuat bermuhasabah. Kadang2 akan menangis memikir keadaan di sana yg bertubi2 dgn ujian."
2	"*Saya menangis hampir setiap hari dan tiada semangat untuk melakukan kerja.*" (I cry almost everyday and I have no spirit to do work.)

3	"My experience of losing close friends due to differing perspectives on the conflict is undoubtedly painful, especially when these were cherished relationships. The loss of these friendships have left me with a sense of grief and confusion as I grapple with these conflicting emotions. The constant exposure to graphic images, intense discussions, and divergent viewpoints has also contributed to feelings of helplessness, sadness, and anger in me that has had a lasting impact on me."
One-word responses	
1	"Disturbing."
2	"Frustrated."
3	"Overwhelming."
Positive attitude	
1	"It doesnt impact my mental health at all. Further from what is happening in Gaza has drawn me to learn more about Islamic history, tafseer Al Qur'an & always reminds me to put Allah first in all situation."
2	"Ia sebenarnya menguatkan lagi mental saya tentang kebenaran yang disampaikan oleh Nabi Muhammad SAW dan hadis yang ditulis dalam Al Quran mengenai akhir zaman. Saya kadang kala terfikir bagaimana jika ia terjadi di Malaysia, how about me, my family and my pets. But ia menguatkan mental saya bahawa semua ini Allah tetapkan dan dunia hanya satu pentas untuk kita kumpul pahala dosa." (It has instead strengthened my faith in the truth revealed by Prophet Muhammad SAW and hadiths as well as what is written in Al-Qur'an regarding the end of time. I sometimes wondered if it were to happen in Malaysia, what would become of myself, my family and my pets? But it strengthened my faith that everything has been ordained by Allah and this world is simply a stage for us to accumulate either reward or sin.)
3	"More to positive effect. Remind me to be more thankful, always have them in my daily prayers, thoughts, activities. Boycotting become easier."

Coping Mechanisms

While a specific question relating to people's coping mechanisms vis-a-vis the Gaza conflict is not part of the online survey, this topic is a major feature in our interviews. The interviews highlighted some of the issues relating to this subject, such as feelings of helplessness, the variety of coping mechanisms utilised, discipline in social media usage, and being accepting of one's inability to help Palestinians, among others.

The subject will be explored in more detail in the second phase of this Working Paper. However, some responses to open-ended questions provide a glimpse into people's methods in dealing with the Gaza-related content that they consume.

1	*"Banyak memberi kesan terhadap kesihatan mental. Cara untuk reduce it adalah dengan saya elakkan melihat kandungan-kandungan tersebut dan kurangkan menghadap fon dan media sosial serta lebihkan aktiviti luar dengan melihat alam semulajadi pokok-pokok."* (It is impacting [my] mental health. The ways to reduce it are by stopping to consume these contents, reduce my phone and social media usages and increase my outdoor activity, by exploring nature and [seeing] trees.)
2	"The first month of genocide, I am always sad, depressed and felt helpless. Then I started to share news and donate."
3	"It impacted me adversely at the beginning of the war for at least one month. Cried almost everyday, could not properly function nor sleep. After realising it was taking a heavy toll on my own mental and physical health, I took steps to limit my exposure time to the news and contents. I also attended talks both online and offline. Now I can better manage and got hold back of my mental and physical health. It is no longer consuming my life even when I follow updates and news online on daily basis."

Conclusion

Given Malaysia's historical support of Palestine, it is of no surprise that Israel's war on Gaza continues to be a hot topic or a main feature of everyday conversation for the majority of respondents in the online survey, interviews and mini FGD. The pressure to repost or reshare content on Gaza is apparent, as well as the lingering feelings of guilt, frustration and helplessness.

Therefore, with regards to our first hypothesis on Gaza-related content becoming a tool for self-reflection, the majority of users are indeed careful about what they post on social media with some limiting their posts on non-Gaza related content altogether. Some have also shared about the net positive impact that the coverage on Gaza has had on their mental health, with a deeper sense of gratitude for the mundane things in life that are easy for us to take for granted.

In terms of our second hypothesis – on the extent to which users are mentally fatigued and burnt out due to overconsumption of Gaza-related content – the percentages were not as high in comparison, with only a small portion quitting their social media platforms altogether (responses to open-ended questions). However, respondents did report disturbances to their sleep with Gaza-related content negatively impacting their mood

and activities on a daily basis.

The upcoming paper will be used to benchmark or validate these findings with psychiatrists and psychologists in order to further ascertain the short-term and long-term effects of Gaza-related content on our mental health. For instance, is it possible for one to be affected by such content without being aware that one is indeed affected? What is the effect of prolonged visibility of Gaza-related content on social media? Our second paper will also (tentatively) look at policies to help address mental health challenges as a result of watching the ongoing war on Gaza unfold online.

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