

Original Article

THE ROLE OF TWITTER IN SETTING THE AGENDA AND SHAPING PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT THE PALESTINIAN NATIONAL STRUGGLE: AN EXPLANATORY STUDY IN LIGHT OF AGENDA-SETTING THEORY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Twitter's role in setting the agenda about the Palestinian national struggle (PNS) to create public opinion by applying the agenda-setting theory. The study uses a quantitative approach, utilizing an online survey published on Twitter, which garnered 424 participants. The study concluded that Twitter shapes an alternative cognitive and political agenda, and it constantly reinforces the PNS in the public consciousness through repetition and constant exposure. Furthermore, Twitter has become a space for constructing alternative narratives and breaking the hegemony of the Western narrative. The study also indicated that users are no longer passive recipients, but rather active participants in shaping public opinion. The study reveals a mechanism of reverse agenda setting, where priorities shift from digital platforms like Twitter to traditional media instead of the usual classic direction. Finally, Twitter represents a living application of the three levels of agenda setting.

Keywords: Agenda-Setting Theory, Agenda-Setting, Palestine, Public Opinion, Twitter, X

INTRODUCTION

Our world is witnessing fundamental transformations in the nature of political and media communication due to the emergence of social media as alternative spaces for the production, dissemination, and widespread circulation of information [Hermida \(2010b\)](#). Traditional media is no longer monopolizing the process of shaping public opinion and determining public priorities. In this context, Twitter stands out as one of the most important digital platforms, playing a complex role in shaping public debates. It is characterized by its ability to spread rapidly, enable immediate interaction, and enable users to become producers and distributors of content, rather than mere passive recipients [Rogstad \(2016\)](#).

The Palestinian National Struggle (PNS) represents a crucial model for studying these transformations, especially in light of its marginalization or bias in traditional media coverage, in contrast to its growing and active presence on social media platforms. The ongoing Israeli genocide in Gaza demonstrated that Twitter has become a key arena for amplifying the Palestinian voice and reframing it as both a humanitarian and political issue [Rabin \(2024\)](#), reshaping international discussions about justice and rights.

This research is based on the Agenda-Setting Theory (AST) developed by [McCombs and Shaw \(1972\)](#), which posits that the media tell people not what to think, but what they should think, as the theory has evolved across its three levels. The digital environment, particularly Twitter, represents an ideal arena for empirically testing these levels. Traditional media is no longer the

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Received: 06 November 2025; **Accepted:** 23 December 2025; **Published** 20 January 2026

DOI: [10.29121/ShodhVichar.v2.i1.2026.78](https://doi.org/10.29121/ShodhVichar.v2.i1.2026.78)

Page Number: 1-21

Journal Title: ShodhVichar: Journal of Media and Mass Communication

Journal Abbreviation: ShodhVichar J. Media & Mass Commun.

Online ISSN: 3107-6408

Publisher: Granthaalayah Publications and Printers, India

Conflict of Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Authors' Contributions: **Abunahel, M.** was responsible for the conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis and investigation, original draft preparation, and provision of resources. **Prof. Sapna** contributed to the review and editing of the manuscript, supervision of the whole research process, and provided critical guidance to enhance the analytical framework and statistical interpretation.

Transparency: The authors affirm that this manuscript presents an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study. All essential aspects have been included, and any deviations from the original study plan have been clearly explained. The writing process strictly adhered to established ethical standards.

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sole actor in agenda-setting; users, activists, and digital influencers have become active partners in this process, and sometimes even leaders.

AST is fundamental in analyzing the relationship between media and public opinion [Cohen \(1963\)](#). This theoretical framework posits that the media's focus on a particular issue makes it more prominent in the public's mind, even if it does not directly influence their opinions. Instead, it determines their priorities and attitudes.

In a participatory environment such as social media platforms, media institutions no longer have a monopoly on setting the agenda. Instead, users and influencers have become active partners in creating alternative agendas that reshape the order of public issues. According to [Guo and McCombs \(2016\)](#), news networks have the ability to affect public opinion by selecting and presenting news on social media platforms such as Twitter. Through this selective presentation, digital media promote topics that should receive attention, transforming their editorial agenda into the audience's cognitive agenda, according to the hypotheses of agenda-setting theory.

Hence, this research seeks to analyze Twitter's role in setting the agenda about the PNS to create public opinion by examining patterns of exposure to content, forms of interaction (liking, retweeting, commenting), and the impact of digital campaigns and visual content in reshaping collective consciousness. The research also aims to monitor the shift from centralized media to interactive networked media and to clarify how digital platforms contribute to breaking the monopoly of traditional media institutions over shaping priorities.

This research differs from previous research in several key aspects. Most previous studies have examined Twitter's role in political campaigns or social movements. However, this study focuses on the PNS as a case study to analyze Twitter's role in setting the agenda about the PNS to create public opinion. Furthermore, this study integrates the application of the three levels of AST. A large-scale survey provided quantitative data for this study, providing it with an empirical dimension that other tweet analysis studies lack. Finally, this study emphasizes the relevance of visual content and structured digital campaigns in reframing the Palestinian cause, which prior studies have neglected in favor of tweets. Thus, the research uniquely combines a theoretical framework with empirical evidence to show how Twitter has reshaped Palestine's media and political agenda.

LITERATURE REVIEW

AST has been applied and studied in different fields, including political discourse on Twitter [Volders and Milan \(2013\)](#), election campaign [McGregor and Vargo \(2017\)](#), [Pedro-Carañana et al. \(2020\)](#), Twitter in the political campaign [Ceron \(2014\)](#), [Conway et al. \(2015\)](#), comparing the agenda setter between Twitter and newspapers [Su and Borah \(2019\)](#), comparing disaster news on Twitter and television [Valenzuela et al. \(2017\)](#), comparing Trump's and Clinton's AST on Twitter [Lee and Xu \(2018\)](#), and comparing newspapers, Facebook and Twitter [Almistadi \(2014\)](#), [Skogerbø and Krumsvik \(2015\)](#).

Social media platforms have the potential to influence the agendas of traditional news media and other social actors for the purpose of deliberating policy issues. According to [Brunns et al. \(2016\)](#), political actors have the ability to circumvent the conventional media gatekeeping function by utilising social media platforms. This enables them to directly interact with various actors, thereby exerting influence on political transformation. For example, scholars have demonstrated that politicians and political parties have the ability to establish direct connections with voters, bypassing the need for mass media. This approach has been found to enhance direct communication with voters [Golbeck et al. \(2010\)](#), [Maarek \(2014\)](#), [Straus et al. \(2013\)](#).

Similarly, individuals and political advocates have the ability to obtain information directly from politicians through two means: by following their social media accounts or by selecting accounts that offer content that is pertinent to their interests, as demonstrated by [Fraia and Missaglia \(2014\)](#). According to [Conway et al. \(2015\)](#), social media users and conventional media rely on each other for legitimacy. In [Parmelee \(2014\)](#) study on the agenda-building function of political tweets during the 2012 US elections, it was observed that tweets authored by political leaders played a significant role in generating news coverage pertaining to various subjects and candidates. Specifically, these tweets served as catalysts for journalists to generate story ideas.

Meanwhile, [D'heer and Verdegem \(2014\)](#) conducted an analysis on the influence of Twitter on agenda-setting processes during the 2012 local elections in Belgium. They found that the use of #hashtags by broadcast media, particularly during televised political debates, fostered a shared viewer experience by enabling real-time and collective comments and discussions. Additionally, it was observed that numerous tweets including the hashtag #vk2012 were associated with various media platforms, encompassing both conventional and social media channels. This finding suggests that the platform is susceptible to and can be impacted by other media channels. "Intermedia agenda setting" is the phrase used to describe the process in which one media exerts influence over the agenda of another media. In his 2005 evaluation of agenda shaping studies, McCombs emphasised the importance of comprehending the impact of both traditional news media and the new online media. In a study conducted by [Lim \(2011\)](#), it was observed that prominent news websites in South Korea exerted impact on the content of online newspapers and also had a certain degree of mutual influence.

[Vargo \(2011\)](#) research on Twitter data indicates that traditional newscasts and newspaper stories have the ability to forecast the overall number of Twitter tweets related to a certain problem. [Parmelee and Bichard \(2012\)](#) conducted an interview with Twitter users to confirm this finding by triangulation. Subsequently, [Vargo et al. \(2014\)](#) utilized a substantial Twitter dataset to analyse the

vertical (top-down) and horizontal media agendas that emerged during the 2012 US presidential election. This study examined the interconnections between different problems related to the election from a network analysis standpoint. It also explored how these issues influenced the priorities and opinions of Obama supporters and Romney supporters.

Although previous studies have applied AST to a number of fields, they have mostly focused on Western contexts or elections rather than on international issues of a broader humanitarian and political nature, such as the PNS. These studies have not given sufficient attention to the role of digital campaigns and hashtags in reshaping marginalized or counter-mainstream narratives. In addition, much research has focused on the first level of AST (issue salience) and perhaps the second level (attribution salience). At the same time, little has been examined about the third level (agenda network) in conflict settings and protracted disputes. In the PNS context, there remains a dearth of quantitative studies that integrate tools such as large-scale surveys with the theoretical framework of AST to explore how users interact with Twitter content and how this influences their priorities, perceptions, and networks of symbolic associations. Hence, this research seeks to fill this gap by applying the three levels of AST to the case of the PNS. Drawing on quantitative data from an internationally diverse survey, this study analyzes the role Twitter plays in reshaping the media and political agenda, breaking the monopoly of traditional narratives, and highlighting Palestine as both a humanitarian and political issue.

Despite the significant development of agenda-setting theory since its first introduction and its application to various fields such as election campaigns and political discourse, its application to studying international issues of a humanitarian nature, such as the Palestinian cause, remains limited. The literature indicates that traditional media often marginalize or bias coverage of the PNS, while social media platforms, most notably Twitter, have emerged as alternative spaces for highlighting the Palestinian narrative and reshaping public debates. However, previous research has focused primarily on Western contexts or elections and has not examined in-depth how issues, features, and network connections related to Palestine are transmitted via Twitter, or the extent to which this platform influences public priorities and reshapes awareness. Hence, the problem of this study stems from the need to understand Twitter's role in setting the media and political agenda related to the Palestinian cause by applying the three levels of the theory (first, second, and third) to digital interactions, visual content, and digital campaigns.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of AST revolves around how the media influences the public's priorities; it is about the role of mass media in shaping the public's perception of the significance of particular issues through selective emphasis and presentation [McCombs and Shaw \(1972\)](#). AST claims that the news media do not have the ability to tell people what to think; however, by highlighting some issues at the cost of other issues, they can tell people what to think about. In this way, the media makes the issues more salient and essential to the recipient [McCombs and Valenzuela \(2020\)](#).

[Lippmann \(1922\)](#) laid the foundation of the AST, which was then expanded by [Lasswell \(1948\)](#) and [Cohen \(1963\)](#). Their work ultimately led to the formulation of AST by [McCombs and Shaw \(1972\)](#), who demonstrated issue salience shifts from the news agenda to the public agenda.

The theory is based on the principle that the media can transfer salience from its agenda to the public agenda. By emphasizing a specific topic, the public tends to have analogous perceptions and priorities. The concentrated coverage of the media influences individuals' understanding of the significance of these issues, even if it does not alter their opinions. This is referred to as "the first level of agenda setting," which establishes what topics to consider, while "the second level" pertains to shaping perceptions of the topic through the employed language, imagery, and media framing. This approach highlights the media's influence in determining the significance of issues and the perception of these issues [Ghanem \(1997\)](#).

The first level of the theory concerns about the issue agenda. It focuses on the shift in issue salience from the media to the public agenda. This occurs when the media repeatedly cover a particular issue and give it more space. Therefore, public awareness increases, and it is perceived as a priority deserving of discourse. The magnitude of this effect fluctuates based on various aspects, including the intensity of coverage, the angles of its presentation, and the degree of the issue's relevance to the public's everyday life. Issues distant from their personal experiences or immediate lives are frequently more shaped by the media, whereas issues they experience themselves are less dependent on the media [McCombs \(2005\)](#).

The notion of AST extended beyond only recognizing which issues garner attention to encompass how those issues and the people associated with them are presented [McCombs et al. \(2014\)](#), this level is known as the second level. The media emphasizes specific attributes—such as competence, integrity, or leadership—and reiterates them until they become the criteria by which the audience evaluates topics or individuals [McCombs et al. \(1997\)](#). [Balmas and Sheaffer \(2010\)](#) noted that the first level emphasizes the media's role in telling us "what to think about," while the second level shifted to the media's function of telling us "how to think about." This level is similar to the concept of framing, but it remains focused on the salience of traits rather than the interpretation of meaning. Thus, it can be said that the media determines not only what the audience thinks about, but also how they think about it by repeatedly highlighting certain traits or characteristics [Ghanem \(1997\)](#).

As the theory evolved, a third, more complex level emerged, known as the Network Agenda Setting Model [Guo et al. \(2012\)](#). This level goes beyond individual issues or attributes, demonstrating that the media constructs a network of links between issues,

attributes, and actors, forming a complete cognitive map in the public's mind. For example, a political candidate can be linked to a set of issues (such as the economy, health, or security) and to specific attributes (such as integrity or power), creating a complete network image of him. Studies have shown that these links, as constructed in the media, are directly transmitted to the public's perception, helping to explain phenomena such as "issue ownership" and the association of specific actors with an entire agenda rather than just a single issue [Guo and McCombs \(2016\)](#)

AGENDA-SETTING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Traditionally, newspapers and television served as "gatekeepers," selecting and prioritizing issues. In the digital age, particularly on Twitter, the landscape has changed radically. Audiences are no longer passive recipients, but rather key actors in agenda-setting through tweets, retweets, comments, and hashtags. These interactions generate new patterns of prioritization, where trending topics are formed in real-time and may precede or even adversely affect traditional media coverage. The emergence of digital media and social media platforms, such as Twitter, has led to an evolution in the theory, incorporating direct public interaction in agenda-setting processes. Traditional media is no longer the exclusive source of information; the public, along with activists and influencers, now plays a significant role in shaping the agenda through tweets, hashtags, and engagement in digital campaigns [Conway et al. \(2022\)](#).

Twitter accommodates a range of perspectives, including those of the organizations, journalists, and the general public. It enables users to disseminate and enhance content quickly, thereby influencing public discourse and shaping narratives on diverse topics [Vargo et al. \(2018\)](#). Twitter trends and algorithms are recognized for their capacity to amplify specific issues on the platform, thereby reinforcing its function as an agenda-setting tool [Conway et al. \(2022\)](#). Hence, the concept of "reverse agenda-setting" [Chong \(2019\)](#), [Sanusi et al. \(2025\)](#) emerged, where digital audiences can impose new priorities on traditional media. Recent models, such as "Network Agenda Setting" [Guo \(2013\)](#), have also emerged, examining how agendas are shaped through social media.

However, Twitter's ability to create new agendas faces significant challenges, most notably fragmentation, where prominent issues differ from one follower network to another, creating divergent priorities within the same community [Webster and Ksiazek \(2012\)](#). Algorithms further exacerbate this phenomenon by selecting content based on individual interests or social credibility [Messing and Westwood \(2014\)](#), creating information bubbles that limit the diversity of exposure to ideas. Furthermore, the proliferation of misinformation on digital platforms is also evident, with a major study showing that fake news spreads faster and more widely on Twitter than real news [Vosoughi et al. \(2018\)](#). Thus, Twitter does not eliminate the logic of agenda-setting, but rather reshapes it in a hybrid environment where priorities are managed through a complex interaction between platforms, traditional media, and active audiences.

AST is relevant for analysing Twitter's influence on public opinion regarding the PNS. The platform offers significant opportunities for interaction and engagement on issues about the PNS, such as the Israeli genocidal war in Gaza and displacement. The greater the public's exposure to these topics through Twitter, the greater their importance in individuals' awareness, resulting in the formation of a more informed and engaged public opinion on the issue. The frequency and prominence of posts, indicating their visibility and level of engagement, reveal significant issues and underscore imbalances that affect agenda-setting [Tuchman \(1978\)](#). Furthermore, audience engagement with news illustrates the mechanisms of information dissemination and underscores communication deficiencies, thereby influencing public discourse [Wojcieszak and Mutz \(2009\)](#)

This study tests the following hypothesis, which states that Twitter not only transmits information, but also contributes to setting the priorities for Twitter users.

- **H0:** There is no statistically significant relationship between the public's perception of Twitter's role in setting the media agenda and shaping public opinion on the PNS.
- **H1:** There is a statistically significant relationship between the public's perception of Twitter's role in setting the media agenda and shaping public opinion on the PNS.

AST serves as a suitable theoretical framework for examining the relationship between exposure to digital content regarding the Palestinian struggle on Twitter and its influence on shaping public opinion, particularly in terms of recognizing the significance of the issue and altering attitudes toward it.

RESEARCH METHOD

This explanatory study adopted an online questionnaire distributed on Twitter by using an 'Ads' campaign to reach the maximum number of users from 7 May until 6 June 2024. This data collection method is convenient for respondents to complete the survey in multiple sessions, to answer at a convenient time, and to take as much time as they need [Regmi et al. \(2016\)](#).

This study targets all Twitter users who tweet, talk, or follow news related to Palestine. 'Tweet object features' were used to determine the target audience [Cavazos-Rehg et al. \(2016\)](#), [O'Hallarn and Shapiro \(2014\)](#). This feature was adopted because the study ran Ads utilizes algorithms on Twitter to target users who tweet about Palestine. Therefore, any user who tweets or follows Palestine news will have the opportunity to see the Ads and complete the questionnaire. Even those who are silent have a chance to fill it out.

The study did not utilize a planned list of people; instead, it relied on the organic reach and interaction produced by the Twitter Ads campaign.

In the lack of a pre-existing sample frame, randomization was unfeasible, prompting the researchers to employ non-random sampling methods [Vicente \(2023\)](#). Furthermore, to broaden the outreach, the authors partnered with select Twitter users to repost the questionnaire URL to their followers, thus incorporating a snowball sampling element [Chen \(2011\)](#), [Pentina et al. \(2013\)](#). This was conducted with participants who had given their consent to cooperate.

The data collection utilized a self-report methodology [Visser et al. \(2014\)](#). This method was characterized by [Vicente \(2023\)](#) as a data collection approach wherein a sample of Twitter users engages in inquiry modes, such as online surveys and in-depth interviews. A total of 483 participants completed the questionnaire, and 424 respondents were included in the final analysis after excluding incomplete responses and other related issues.

The questionnaire design ensured study objectives were met. Participants gave electronic informed consent by voluntarily deciding to participate before doing the online questionnaire. Two sections make up the questionnaire. The first section covers participant demographics, and the second covers study objectives.

Specialized professors reviewed the questionnaire before distribution and suggested improvements. After improving the questions, a group of 30 people tested it to find any other issues and found it clear and well-organized. Cronbach's alpha of the 18 questions was .833, which is satisfactory for the study.

To test the hypothesis, quantitative methods were used. The collected data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation (SD), frequency, and percentage, using SPSS. This study used Spearman's correlation, a non-parametric test, to determine the two variables' relationship for inferential statistics.

RESULTS

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

This section illustrates the demographic profile of the participants to understand their background and characteristics, and to provide a precise analysis for the study. This section comprises four questions of the survey. The first question aimed to understand where the participants came from. The answer was comprehensive, containing 79 different countries. Most notably, Palestine (7.3%), the United States (7.1%), Jordan (6.4%), India (3.8%), Yemen (3.5%), Canada, Finland and Syria (3.1%). Secondly, we asked about their age demographic. The predominant age group is 25 to 34 years, comprising 44.1%, followed by the 35 to 49 years age group, which is 39.9%. Individuals aged 18 to 24 years and those aged 50 years and over constitute 8.3% and 7.5% of the total participation, respectively. Third, we asked about their gender. The sample predominantly comprises girls and males, accounting for 49.8% and 47.2%, respectively, while 1.7% identify as 'other.' An extra 1.4% of persons chose not to disclose their gender. The final demographic question refers to their educational background. Of the respondents, 34.7% own a master's degree or above, and 29.5% possess a bachelor's degree. Furthermore, 21.7% have completed high school or its equivalent, while 12.5% holding college degrees.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Q1. How effective is Twitter in setting the agenda for public discussions related to the PNS?

Table 1

Table 1 Exposure to the PNS Content on Twitter								
1. How often do you encounter discussions or content related to the PNS on Twitter?								
	Multiple times a day	Once a day	A few times a week	Rarely	Never	Total	Mean	Std. Deviation
F.	327	84	8	4	1	424	1.27	0.568
%	77.10%	19.80%	1.90%	0.90%	0.20%	100%		

[Table 1](#) provides valuable insights into the frequency of specific topics related to the PNS on Twitter. The majority of respondents (77.1%) come across discussions or debates about Palestine multiple times a day. Followed by 19.8% daily. Only 1.9% encountered content weekly. While a small proportion of respondents, specifically 0.9% and 0.2% respectively, experience such content rarely or never. The mean is situated between the first two options, leaning towards the first option, which suggests that, on average, participants encounter such content multiple times a day, often daily. The lower SD indicates that the majority of participants are closely grouped around the mean value, suggesting that most participants frequently encounter tweets about the PNS, with minimal fluctuation.

Table 2

Table 2 Frequency of Exposure to Campaigns Related to PNS								
2. How often do you see advocacy or awareness campaigns related to the PNS on Twitter?								
	Multiple times a day	Daily	Weekly	Rarely	Never	Total	Mean	SD
F.	284	128	6	4	2	424	1.38	0.614
%	67%	30.20%	1.40%	0.90%	0.50%	100%		

Table 2 shows that almost 97% of participants encounter advocacy or awareness campaigns related to the PNS multiple times a day or daily combined. On the other hand, some participants encounter such campaigns weekly, rarely, and never, with 1.4%, 0.9% and 0.5%, respectively. The mean of 1.38 is situated between multiple times a day and daily. This means that respondents see these campaigns more than once every day but less frequently than multiple times a day. The SD indicates a reasonably narrow range of values around the average. Hence, participants have comparable experiences in terms of the frequency.

Table 3

Table 3 Reliance on Twitter for Updates about the PNS								
3. How often do you rely on Twitter for updates and information about the PNS?								
	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total	Mean	SD
F.	154	118	61	73	18	424	2.25	1.232
%	36.30%	27.80%	14.40%	17.20%	4.20%	100%		

Table 3 illustrates that a total of 64% of participants frequently rely on Twitter, with 36.3% relying on it very often and 27.8% relying on it often, for updates and information about the PNS. Other participants indicated that they sometimes, rarely, and never rely on Twitter, with 14.4%, 17.2%, and 4.2%, respectively. The mean value lies between often and sometimes, with a tendency towards often. The SD value suggests considerable variation in how often respondents utilize Twitter for updates about the PNS.

Table 4

Table 4 Influence of Twitter in Setting the Agenda for the PNS								
4. How influential do you believe Twitter is in setting the agenda for current discussions about the PNS?								
	Extremely influential	Very influential	Moderately influential	Slightly influential	Not influential at all	Total	Mean	SD
F.	248	102	50	17	7	242	1.66	0.949
%	58.50%	24.10%	11.80%	4%	1.70%	100%		

Table 4 shows that most respondents (82.6%) think that Twitter is extremely influential (58.5%) or very influential (24.1%). Thus, the platform is seen as a powerful platform. Some respondents (11.8%) rated Twitter's influence as moderately influential, while 4% and 1.7% rated it as slightly influential and not influential at all, respectively. The mean value is closer to extremely influential, while the SD suggests that even though there is quite a strong agreement, some divergence in opinion exists.

Table 5

Table 5 Twitter's Primacy in Setting the Agenda About the PNS								
5. Do you think Twitter precedes traditional media in setting the agenda about the PNS?								
	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	It depends on the event	Never	Total	Mean	SD
F.	101	101	81	92	49	242	2.73	1.343
%	23.80%	23.80%	19.10%	21.70%	11.60%	100%		

Table 5 shows that the majority of participants (23.8%) believe that Twitter always and sometimes precedes the traditional media in setting the agenda about the PNS. At the same time, 21.7% of participants indicated that Twitter's influence depends on the

nature of the event or trending topic. The mean suggests that the value falls between the always and sometimes options, while the SD indicates a relative variance in opinions among participants.

Table 6

Table 6 Twitter's Primacy Over Traditional Media in Setting the News Agenda Related to Palestine								
1. To what extent do you agree with the statement: "Twitter determines the topics covered by traditional media?"								
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total	Mean	SD
F.	103	101	90	67	63	242	2.73	1.376
%	%24.30	%23.80	%21.20	%15.80	%14.90	100%		

Table 6 indicates that the participant strongly agrees with the statement (24.3%), indicating that they do believe Twitter determines the topics for traditional media. At the same time, 23.8% agree. On the other hand, 21.2% maintain a neutral stance. Approximately 15.8% and 14.9% disagree and strongly disagree with the statement. The mean value of 2.73 (SD = 1.376), indicating that the majority of participants strongly agreed with the statement idea, with very little dispersion of opinions.

Q2. How does Twitter content (tweets, visual media, campaigns) influence awareness and knowledge about the Palestinian cause?

Table 7

Table 7 Participants' Engagement with Tweets About the PNS								
7. How often do you engage (like, retweet, comment) with tweets about the PNS?								
	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total	Mean	SD
F.	298	113	8	3	2	424	1.34	0.603
%	70.30%	26.70%	1.90%	0.70%	0.50%	100%		

Table 7 provides insight into how participants interact and engage with tweets about Palestine. Approximately 70.3% indicate that they interact with tweets very often, while 26.3% do so often. At the same time, 96.7%. Only 1.9% do it sometimes, 0.7% rarely, and 0.5% never. The mean value falls between very often and often, closer to very often, suggesting that respondents engage with such tweets more than often but less than very often. The SD indicates a moderate spread of responses, suggesting some variability in engagement levels.

Table 8

Table 8 Twitter's Role in Enhancing the Understanding of the Political Situation About the PNS							
8. How do you feel Twitter has affected your understanding of the political situation about the PNS?							
	It has greatly improved my understanding	It has somewhat improved my understanding	It has had no effect on my understanding	It has confused me more	Total	Mean	SD
F.	301	118	7	2	424	1.31	0.506
%	71.7%	27.8%	0.7%	0.5%	100%		

Table 8 shows that a significant majority of participants (71.7%) perceive Twitter as having significantly enhanced their comprehension of the political landscape regarding the PNS. A substantial proportion of participants (27.8%) believe that Twitter has moderately enhanced their understanding. A minute fraction of participants (0.7%) indicate that Twitter has had no discernible impact on their comprehension. A minor percentage (0.5%) of individuals perceive that Twitter has confused them. The mean value falls within the range of the first two options, leaning towards the first option. On average, Twitter has greatly enhanced its understanding, while the SD suggests a relatively low spread of responses, implying that the majority of respondents share a similar perspective.

Table 9

Table 9 Twitter's Role in Changing Perception About the PNS
9. Has Your Perception About the PNS Changed Since You Started Using Twitter?

	Yes, significantly	Yes, somewhat	No, it has remained the same	Total	Mean	Std. Deviation
F.	236	149	39	424	1.54	0.659
%	55.70%	35.10%	9.20%	100%		

Table 9 illustrates that the majority of respondents (55.7%) reported a substantial shift in their perspective. Furthermore, approximately 35.1% of respondents reported a moderate change in their perception. On the other hand, a minority of respondents (9.2%) indicated that their perception of Palestine had not changed after using Twitter. The mean value of change is 1.54, and it is positioned between the first two options, leaning towards the first option. On average, a substantial change in their perspective about the PNS. The SD reflects the variability of responses around the mean, implying that there is some variation in the extent to which respondents' perceptions have altered.

Table 10

Table 10 Twitter's Role in Amplifying Palestinian Voices and Narratives.								
10. To what extent do you agree with the statement: "Twitter has a role in amplifying Palestinian voices and narratives."								
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total	Mean	SD
F.	226	183	10	3	2	242	1.52	0.63
%	53.3	43.2	2.4	0.70%	0.50%	100%		

Table 10 shows that over half of the respondents (53.3%) strongly agree with the statement, demonstrating a substantial acknowledgement of Twitter's role in amplifying the voices of Palestinians. An additional 43.2% of respondents agree with the statement. A minority of respondents (2.4%) expressed neutrality. The proportion of respondents who disagree (0.7%) or strongly disagree (0.5%) is low, indicating a lack of disagreement with the assumption that Twitter plays a substantial role in this context. The mean value indicates that the majority of participants agree that Twitter has a significant impact in magnifying the voices and narratives of Palestinians. The SD suggests a relatively small degree of variability among the responses.

Table 11

Table 11 The Impact of Palestine-Related Visual Content on Agenda-Setting								
11. How Do Visual Contents (Images, Videos) Related to Palestine Shared on Twitter Affect the Agenda-Setting Process?								
	Strongly enhance	Somewhat enhance	Neutral effect	Somewhat diminish	Strongly diminish	Total	Mean	SD
F.	285	82	43	9	5	242	1.51	0.851
%	67.20%	19.30%	10.10%	2.10%	1.20%	100%		

Table 11 shows that 67.2% of participants believe visual content on Twitter significantly enhances the agenda-setting process, while 19.3% believe that the visual content is somewhat enhancing the agenda-setting process. On the other hand, 2.1% and 1.2% believe visual content somewhat diminishes and strongly diminishes the agenda-setting process. The mean values indicate that most responses lean toward categories with a significant positive impact on the agenda-setting process. The SD is relatively low, indicating a high degree of consistency in participants' responses.

Table 12

Table 12 The Effectiveness of Twitter Campaigns in Shaping Opinions About the PNS.								
12. How effective do you think Twitter campaigns (e.g., hashtags, trending topics) are in raising awareness and shaping opinions about Palestine?								
	Very effective	Effective	Neutral	Ineffective	Very ineffective	Total	Mean	SD
F.	226	185	7	4	2	424	1.52	0.63
%	53.30%	43.60%	1.70%	0.90%	0.50%	100%		

Table 12 indicates that a high majority of participants perceive Twitter campaigns as either highly effective (53.3%) or effective (43.6%) in increasing awareness and influencing opinions toward the PNS. On the other hand, a small proportion of respondents

(1.7%) maintain a neutral position. A tiny proportion, at 0.9% and 0.5%, respectively, perceive the campaigns as ineffective or very ineffective. The mean value falls within the range of the first two options, leaning slightly towards the first option. The SD indicates a considerable level of dispersion in the responses, implying that although there is a consensus on the efficacy, there is some degree of variation in the judgments.

Q3. How much do audiences trust Palestine-related content on Twitter compared to traditional media, and what impact does this have on personal attitudes?

Table 13

Table 13 Participants' Trust in News Twitter About the PNS								
13. How likely are you to trust information about the PNS that you read on Twitter compared to traditional news sources?								
	Much more likely	More likely	About the same	Less likely	Much less likely	Total	Mean	SD
F.	118	114	148	10	4	424	2.15	0.887
%	27.80%	34%	34.90%	2.40%	0.90%	100%		

Table 13 illustrates that 27.8% are much more likely to trust information about the PNS compared to traditional media, followed by 34% of participants who are more likely to trust information about the PNS. At the same time, 34.9% of the respondents consider the reliability of news and information on Twitter to be similar to that of traditional news sources. Only a minority of respondents, comprising 2.4% who are less likely and 0.9% who are significantly less likely, express distrust in information and news regarding Palestine on Twitter compared to traditional news sources. The mean value represents that the respondents have a somewhat higher level of trust in information from Twitter compared to established news sources. The SD suggests a moderate level of dispersion, indicating that there is some degree of fluctuation in the extent to which respondents trust information from Twitter compared to established news sources

Table 14

Table 14 The Credibility of Information on Twitter About the PNS.								
14. How credible do you find the information about the PNS shared on Twitter?								
	Very credible	Credible	Neutral	Not very credible	Not credible at all	Total	Mean	SD
F.	237	141	34	9	3	424	1.58	0.785
%	55.90%	33.30%	8%	2.10%	0.70%	100%		

Table 14 shows that a significant proportion of the respondents (55.9%) perceive the information on Palestine shared on Twitter as highly credible. Approximately 33% of participants find the information to be credible. Only 8% of the respondents have a neutral stance toward the trustworthiness of the information. A minority of 2.1% and 0.7% of participants perceive the information on Twitter as lacking credibility and as not credible at all, respectively. The mean value is situated between the first two options, leaning towards the first option. The SD signifies a moderate spread of responses, indicating that although the majority of respondents consider the material reliable, there is some variation in their perspectives.

Table 15

Table 15 Twitter's Role in Changing Participants' Stance on Issues Related to the PNS.						
15. Have you ever changed your stance on issues related to the PNS after engaging with content?						
	Yes, completely	Yes, partially	No, never	Total	Mean	SD
F.	198	194	32	424	1.61	0.625
%	46.70%	45.80%	7.50%	100%		

Table 15 shows that a substantial proportion of participants (46.7%) have changed their positions on issues concerning Palestine following their interaction with Twitter content. An additional considerable portion (45.8%) has changed their position partially. At the same time, a small minority of respondents (7.5%) have maintained a consistent view on issues related to Palestine without any changes, even after engaging with content. The mean value suggests, on average, participants have undergone substantial shifts in their position on these matters. In contrast, the SD suggests considerable variability in responses, indicating that although there is some variation in how respondents have altered their position, the majority have undergone at least some degree of change.

Table 16

Table 16 The Effectiveness of Retweeting Content Regarding the PNS.								
16. To what extent do you agree with the statement: "Retweeting content about the PNS is an effective way to raise awareness and create public opinion."								
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total	Mean	SD
F.	264	142	14	2	2	264	1.43	0.630
%	62.3%	33.5%	3.3%	0.5%	0.5%	100%		

Table 16 indicates a significant level of agreement among participants. The majority of respondents (62.3%) strongly agree, and 33.5% of respondents agree with the statement. A small proportion of respondents (3.3%) have a neutral stance. The low percentage of respondents who disagree (0.5%) or strongly disagree (0.5%) suggests that there is very little pushback to the assumption that retweeting is successful. The mean value indicates that most respondents strongly think that retweeting news regarding the PNS is an effective method for increasing awareness and shaping public opinion. The SD remains reasonably low, demonstrating a close grouping of answers around the average. This indicates a robust agreement among the participants.

Table 17

Table 17 To What Extent Have Discussions on Twitter Influenced Your Personal Views About the PNS?							
17. To what extent have discussions on Twitter influenced your personal views about the PNS?							
	Greatly influenced	Moderately influenced	Slightly influenced	Not influential at all	Total	Mean	SD
F.	303	82	32	7	242	1.39	0.7
%	71.50%	19.30%	7.50%	1.70%	100%		

Table 17 illustrates that the discussions about the PNS on Twitter significantly influence 71.5% of participants. Followed by 19.3% of participants who consider Twitter's influence to be moderate. Regarding the slight influence, 7.5% of participants believed that Twitter had only a slight influence on their opinions. Only 1.7% of participants reported that Twitter did not influence their personal opinions. The mean value indicates that the majority of responses skewed toward the high-influence categories, reinforcing the notion that Twitter has a strong influence on its users. The SD is relatively low, indicating a high degree of homogeneity among participants.

Table 18

Table 18 The Importance of Twitter Compared to other Media Platforms in Shaping Understanding About the PNS								
18. Compared to other media platforms, how significant is Twitter in shaping your understanding of the PNS?								
	Much more significant	Somewhat more significant	About the same	Somewhat less significant	Much less significant	Total	Mean	SD
F.	253	78	70	5	18	242	1.72	1.056
%	59.70%	18.40%	16.50%	1.20%	4.20%	100%		

Table 18 indicates that 59.7% of participants consider Twitter to be much more important in this context, while 18.4% consider Twitter somewhat more important. On the other hand, 16.5% consider Twitter is equally important compared to other platforms. The somewhat less significant category accounted for only 1.2% of the responses, while the "much less significant" category accounted for 4.2%. The mean value is 1.72, indicating that most participants see Twitter as a major influence on their PNS understanding, with most responses skewing toward the most significant influence categories.

INFERENCE STATISTICS

This study's hypothesis posits a relationship between agenda-setting on Twitter (as the independent variable) and shaping public opinion on the PNS (as the dependent variable). To test this hypothesis, the Spearman's correlation test was used to make inferences about the population (Twitter users) from the sample data.

Table 19

Table 19 Spearman's Correlation.			
Spearman's rho		Shaping Public Opinion about the PNS	Agenda-Setting on Twitter
Shaping Public Opinion about the PNS	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.854**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	424	424
Agenda-Setting on Twitter	Correlation Coefficient	.854**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	424	424

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 19 shows the results of a Spearman's rho test. The result of the correlation coefficient between the two variables is .854, which is a very high result, indicating a very strong positive correlation between the two variables. This suggests that the content that is promoted and repeatedly posted by influencers and activists on Twitter becomes more prominent in the audience's consciousness. Thus, the media agenda shifts to become the public agenda. Therefore, Twitter users begin to consider them "priority" and form their opinion based on what they are exposed to. This is known as salience transfer, the essence of agenda-setting theory.

The 2-tailed Sig. value of 0.000 indicates that the significance level is significantly less than 0.01, meaning the relationship between the two variables is highly statistically significant. The statistical significance of this supports the hypothesis that Twitter has a significant influence on public opinion regarding the PNS through the agenda-setting process, which justifies rejecting the null hypothesis and accepting the alternative.

DISCUSSION

The results of the demographic profile demonstrate a high degree of geographical and cultural diversity in the sample, reflecting the comprehensiveness of the study and its ability to capture diverse perspectives. This indicates greater engagement from countries linked to the PNS or with a strong social media presence. The sample of the study consists of diverse age groups, most notably the young adults. This reflects that the study relies heavily on groups often seen as the most active online and most engaged in public debates. This enhances the validity of the findings when discussing digital media issues. Furthermore, the study supports equal gender representation and reduces gender bias. Regarding educational background, the high percentage of those holding a master's degree or higher indicates that the sample has a relatively high level of education. Overall, these results confirm that the sample is rich and diverse. However, it is more skewed toward younger and more educated groups, which must be taken into account when interpreting the results and relating them to broader contexts.

The results of descriptive statistics indicate that Twitter users are more likely to encounter discussions, advocacy, and awareness campaigns related to the PNS on Twitter. This reflects a constant and pervasive presence of the PNS in the daily consciousness of users and, therefore, becomes an integral part of the content they consume. These results lead to the conclusion that Twitter has evolved from a social media platform into a central space for shaping public priorities around public issues, most notably the PNS. This is consistent with prior research demonstrating that social media can draw attention to issues at the national and international level, which may be impossible through reliance on traditional media [Eltantawy and Wiest \(2011\)](#). In light of the AST, the repetition of a particular problem in the media contributes to raising its cognitive importance to the public. At the same time, the frequency of messages and repeated exposure contribute to raising collective awareness of the importance of these issues. Therefore, Twitter is not only a space for discussions but also actively participates in setting the public's cognitive agenda, especially when the issues presented are of a pressing political or humanitarian nature. This confirms that organized campaigns on Twitter serve as tools for shaping the media agenda from the bottom up. This result reinforces the concept of the AST, especially in light of [Wallace \(2018\)](#), who pointed out the role of "digital gatekeepers" in creating alternative channels for setting the agenda outside the traditional scope of corporate media. In light of the PNS, which is often neglected, marginalized, distorted, or sometimes biased by the Western media [Kareem and Najm \(2024\)](#), digital campaigns emerge as a mechanism to rebalance media representation by directing public attention to specific issues related to identity, justice, and rights. Furthermore, this finding points to a shift in the agenda-setting centres. Through their interaction with Twitter content, users can shape priorities, meaning traditional media no longer sets the agenda, at least at the Twitter level. These findings also reveal a dimension of the second level of AST, which focuses not only on what people think, but also on how they think about it. Research indicates that the utilization of hashtags and ongoing interactions significantly influences the evolution of political discourse [Gerbaudo \(2012\)](#). This approach enables activists and supporters to disseminate

valuable information and engage broader audiences efficiently. On the other hand, the high encounter of the PNS contents might be due to algorithmic curation, which leads to amplification bias; echo chambers, resulting in a narrow and repetitive spectrum of content, while “opposing” content is excluded; and bot accounts, which lead to the automatic publishing of the same content.

Twitter serves as a significant source of information regarding the PNS, and respondents rely on it extensively. This pattern of reliance implies increased trust in the platform and a functional shift from entertainment and social spaces to alternative information sources that complement—or surpass—traditional media sources. This increased reliance suggests that agenda-setting authority has shifted from traditional media to interactive digital media, and more especially, to users. Twitter's persistent use as a primary source helps it establish an alternative agenda based on user, activist, and civil society interactions. This shift is in line with [Brunson \(2005\)](#) theory of "Gatewatching," in which he explains that users in new media not only produce news, but also select and redirect it in ways that influence the flow of information and audience prioritization. This result is also supported by the study by [Hermida Fletcher et al. \(2012\)](#), which confirmed that the digital audience is no longer a passive recipient of content, but instead actively participates in producing and evaluating the news agenda, by sharing and republishing content that is consistent with its interests and values. From another perspective, this reliance on Twitter is interpreted within the context of the first-level agenda setting, as the result shows that repeated reliance translates into an increase in the awareness of the importance of the PNS among users, which proves the effect of content frequency in raising the audience's cognitive priority, which was indicated by [McCombs and Shaw \(1972\)](#) in the origin of the theory. Therefore, Twitter is a primary source of news related to the PNS. The high reliance on Twitter reflects a notable change in the consumption patterns of news and political information. This aligns with previous research indicating that Twitter serves as the primary platform for users engaged in political and social issues [Ausserhofer and Maireder \(2013\)](#), offering an uninterrupted flow of immediate news [Hermida \(2010a\)](#) that operates independently of traditional media constraints.

Twitter strongly influences PNS agendas. This shows that Twitter is becoming a tool for shaping the public agenda, promoting the transition of "media influence power" from centralised institutions to more decentralised and representative venues. This changes the media landscape, where legitimacy and impact come from networked contacts and mobilization rather than institutional status. This proposes a more nuanced, interactive model than the classic agenda-setting theory, which focuses on media influence on audiences. Twitter does more than set audience priorities under this strategy. The audience's interactions decide and reinforce Twitter's priorities, creating a powerful feedback loop that raises awareness of the issue. These dynamics fit [Guo \(2013\)](#) "Networked Agenda Setting" paradigm. Social media transmits agendas and delineates confrontations between activists, audiences, and journalists. This illustrates how Twitter PNS content is a media battleground where the narrative is driven by involvement rather than institutional origin. This supports Russell [Neuman et al. \(2014\)](#), who found that Twitter drove public interest during emergencies before traditional media coverage. This is why respondents think Twitter is "highly influential": it's often the first source of Palestine news and discussion, setting the stage for other media.

The participants' opinions regarding whether Twitter precedes traditional media in setting the news agenda related to the PNS show a relative agreement towards Twitter. This indicates that Twitter has broken the agenda-setting monopoly and become a major player. This dynamic strongly corresponds with the "intermedia agenda-setting" theory posited by [Lopez-Escobar et al. \(1998\)](#), which investigates the influence of media outlets on one another in determining issue prioritization. The results indicate that this relationship is not unidirectional. Twitter frequently launches the news cycle by distributing testimonies and unedited video (user-generated content) [Jang et al. \(2017\)](#), which are subsequently adopted by established media sites, validated, and included in their corporate reporting (traditional media content). Twitter users subsequently promote and critique these reports. Furthermore, the findings indicate that the participants' view of Twitter's dominance is not an inherent characteristic of the platform, but rather it depends on the event. [Brunson and Burgess \(2011\)](#) noted that "events and themes are filtered through the community's own established interests and news frames, resulting in a distribution of attention that is different from that of the mainstream media or of general public debate" (p.45). Twitter may not be the primary agenda-setter for everyone. Still, for those within its "filter bubble," its influence appears absolutely dominant and prevalent. This does not negate Twitter's powerful role, but it does put it in perspective: its perceived power is a product of the interaction between the characteristics of the platform and the characteristics of its audience.

The extent to which participants believed Twitter could influence the traditional media agenda was explored, and the result reveals a clear tendency to agree with this idea, indicating a perception of Twitter as a setter of the agenda for traditional media. [Moon and Hadley \(2014\)](#) noted that "TV used Twitter more heavily as a sole or primary source than newspapers." The study conducted by [Rogstad \(2016\)](#) found that mainstream media and Twitter cover the same issues, but Twitter gives attention to issues that are overlooked by mainstream media. The findings suggest that Twitter users believe that topics trending on Twitter subsequently emerge in traditional media. This indicates a pattern of "reverse agenda setting," wherein digital platforms such as Twitter are beginning to impose their priorities on traditional media outlets. This aligns with what [Parmelee \(2014\)](#) found in his study, which indicates that tweets from political leaders lead to agenda building. On the other hand, [Groshek and Groshek \(2013\)](#) indicated that traditional media sets the agenda for social media, while this finding contradicts [Meraz \(2011\)](#) and [Sayre et al. \(2010\)](#). In the PNS context, this dynamic is particularly significant, as Twitter constitutes a key platform for activists and alternative media to disseminate their narratives, particularly in light of censorship or bias in the traditional international media. This reinforces the concept of networked agenda-setting [Vargo and Guo \(2016\)](#).

Based on the above discussion, it is clear that Twitter is an effective platform for setting the agenda for public discussions about the PNS. The analysis reveals high levels of exposure, reliance, and perception of influence. The results also indicate that the public views Twitter as influential, sometimes even ahead of traditional media, in prioritizing discussions, supporting the hypotheses of the first and second levels of agenda-setting theory.

The study reveals that participants highly engage with content related to the PNS through activities such as liking, retweeting, and commenting on Twitter. This engagement reflects a fundamental shift in audience behaviour from passive consumption to active, interactive engagement. According to the first-level agenda-setting theory, this intense engagement demonstrates that Palestine has become a high-priority issue of perception, not only through media institutions, but also through the ongoing digital activity of individuals themselves. This illustrates [McCombs and Shaw \(1972\)](#), [McCombs and Shaw \(1972\)](#) assertion that the media informs individuals not what to think, but what they should think—an observation pertinent to a digital audience that has re-centred the Palestinian cause in its daily focus through likes, retweets, and comments. At the second-level agenda-setting and network agenda-setting levels, this interaction demonstrates that users are not only highlighting the issue, but are also reshaping its perception. Some researchers argue that contemporary political solidarity manifests as clicktivism [Halupka \(2018\)](#), or digital activism, where the simple acts of retweeting and commenting by digital users can influence political opinion. On the other hand, [Morozov \(2012\)](#) contends that despite the virality of tweets and the interaction of digital users via comments and retweets, this does not inherently imply that they affect political opinion or effectuate tangible change in reality.

Twitter contributes positively to shaping the users' political awareness, as indicated by the participants who stated that Twitter has greatly improved their understanding about the PNS. This result reflects a shift in the platform's function from a mere social media platform or news channel [Moon and Hadley \(2014\)](#) to a knowledge medium that influences individuals' perceptions and political landscape. According to agenda-setting theory, in this case, Twitter not only determines which issues are important (first-level agenda setting) but also contributes to shaping how individuals think about them (second-level agenda setting), as asserted by [McCombs and Shaw \(1972\)](#) and later developed by [Guo \(2013\)](#). This shaping occurs through repeated interaction with visual and narrative content (such as videos and field reports), which fosters the construction of new mental representations of Palestine related to justice, violations, and international inequality. The heavy use of Twitter during Palestinian crises, such as the #GazaUnderAttack campaign, appears to have contributed to what [Siapera et al. \(2015\)](#) call a “diffused war,” where social media is used not only to transmit news, but also to reshape global political awareness around the issue.

The result indicates that the participants' perceptions of the PNS changed after using Twitter, reflecting the platform's influential role in reshaping political perceptions. This result is directly linked to the impact of digital platforms in reshaping public awareness and supports a precise application of the levels of agenda-setting theory. At the first level, the frequent repetition of tweets about the PNS keeps it constantly present in the public's mind, raising its cognitive status. At the second level, the circulating content not only highlights the issue but also re-presents it within new symbolic frameworks: resistance, injustice, violation, and morality. In this way, not only is the order of priorities altered, but the way the issue itself is understood is also reshaped. At the third level of the theory, Twitter does not present the PNS in isolation, but rather links it to other discourses: justice, identity, religion, and anti-colonialism. This shift may be related to several factors, such as exposure to new narratives. Users often have an initial understanding based on what is presented by traditional media, but with the use of Twitter, they have the opportunity to explore alternative sources, which may lead to a reassessment of their positions on political issues [Bane \(2019\)](#). Another factor is the interaction with the digital community. Open discussions and interaction with various actors on Twitter allow users to challenge their previous views and test the credibility of information they previously believed. Another factor is the emotional impact of digital content: studies suggest that visual content, such as images and videos, plays a pivotal role in reshaping public opinion, as emotional engagement with events increases the likelihood of users adopting new positions [Zelizer \(2010\)](#). These shifts in political perception are consistent with theories of the “network effect,” which suggest that individuals, when exposed to frequent and diverse information via digital networks, become more likely to reevaluate their beliefs [Belleflamme and Peitz \(2018\)](#).

Participants also acknowledged that Twitter contributes to amplifying Palestinian voices and delivering them to a more diverse global audience, indicating the platform's role in promoting international solidarity with the PNS and moving their narrative away from traditional media hegemony [Hayes \(2023\)](#). This result highlights the platform's effectiveness in presenting an alternative discourse to the prevailing discourse in international media. Within the framework of agenda-setting theory, this reflects not only the ability to make the PNS more present in the public consciousness (first-level agenda setting) but also to reframe its meanings and symbolic references (second-level). User-generated content is not limited to news coverage; it forms a narrative that encompasses moral, cultural, and political meanings, providing viewers with alternative tools for interpreting events. These findings demonstrate that Twitter plays a crucial role in shaping public debates, promoting Palestinian narratives, and fostering international engagement with the PNS. In this context, the findings suggest that Twitter serves as a digital space that empowers users to actively participate in shaping public discourse, thereby enhancing the dynamism of digital struggle and its impact in the international media and political spheres [Fikriyah and Pramiyanti \(2025\)](#).

The results show that visual content (images and videos) related to the PNS on Twitter plays a significant role in promoting agenda-setting. Most participants believe that this content significantly enhances the dissemination of issues related to the PNS, demonstrating the importance of visual media in guiding public debates and setting media priorities. These visuals have the ability

to frame the news [Dahmen \(2009\)](#), influence how viewers interpret news stories [Coleman and Banning \(2006\)](#), and exert a visual agenda-setting effect, which can have an impact on the public agenda [Miller and Roberts \(2010\)](#). According to [Ewbank et al. \(2009\)](#), their potency lies in their capacity to elicit a powerful emotional response from the viewer, thereby leaving a memory that will hold on for a long time. These findings suggest that images and videos posted on Twitter serve not only as a means of disseminating news but also as powerful tools that shape the public's perception of the PNS. This reflects the power of visual media in shaping public awareness. This finding directly supports agenda-setting theory, particularly at its three levels. At the first level, images and videos with a humanistic demonstrate a greater ability to attract attention and focus the public on the PNS than traditional texts. Visual content not only highlights what needs to be discussed but also compels the recipient to engage emotionally in the moment, creating a "cognitive priority" for the issue in the public consciousness. The second level of the theory concerns how the issue is framed—that is, how it is visually represented. Here, we find that images circulating on Twitter typically depict scenes of destruction, injured children, demolished mosques, and forms of resistance, reframing Palestine not only as a political issue, but as a humanitarian and moral symbol. [Oguejiofor \(2024\)](#) supports this argument, demonstrating that images and videos related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict disseminate rapidly on Twitter and contribute to shaping public discourse and enhancing international awareness of the PNS. On the other hand, [Alsaba \(2023\)](#) suggests that the visual impact of these contents depends on how they are framed and presented by users, whether they are activists, media professionals, or government agencies. Images and videos presented in a frame that highlights human suffering are more widely disseminated and contribute more to setting the agenda. Furthermore, [Hayes \(2023\)](#) confirmed that human rights organizations utilize images and videos on Twitter as an effective means to promote their messages and garner public support. The use of visual content is considered one of the most effective methods for steering public opinion toward specific issues and generating global sympathy for the PNS.

Digital campaigns serve as a mechanism for shaping public opinion. The findings suggest that digital campaigns, including the use of hashtags and trending topics on Twitter, have a significant impact on public opinion and increase awareness of the PNS. This is a highly significant finding within the framework of agenda-setting theory. At the first level of the theory, hashtags serve as indicators of collective interest, bringing issues to the forefront of public debate. When hashtags top trending lists, they not only indicate the extent of engagement but also force traditional media and the general public to treat them as a central issue. At the second-level agenda setting, these campaigns play a role in framing the issue within specific symbols and meanings. Palestine is not only presented as a political issue, but is also framed through the campaigns in humanitarian, rights-based, and colonialist terms. Previous studies demonstrate that hashtags serve as significant tools in digital campaigns, facilitating the expression of political dialogue, mobilizing public support, and influencing media discourse [Gerbaudo \(2012\)](#). These campaigns generate significant public engagement, thereby exerting political and diplomatic pressure on decision-makers. Besides its function in raising awareness, Twitter exerted pressure on governments and international organizations to adopt stances regarding Israeli violations in Palestine. Digital campaigns and the commitment of journalists in Gaza to convey the reality of the Israeli human rights violations through news reports and social media posts has led South Africa to take legal action against Israel at the International Court of Justice on 29 December 2023, accusing Israel of committing genocide in Gaza [Rabin \(2024\)](#). Additionally, traditional media expanded their coverage of events in Palestine as a result of Twitter campaigns following the widespread circulation of related hashtags. This demonstrates how digital actions alter media discourse and compel major media institutions to address issues of public interest.

Based on the above discussion, the second research question was thoroughly addressed by demonstrating how Twitter content has a tangible impact on shaping users' awareness and knowledge of the PNS through engagement with tweets, thereby improving political understanding and changing perceptions. Moreover, Twitter is not only used as a platform for disseminating information, but has also become a participatory tool in reshaping political and emotional understanding of the issue. Additionally, visual content and digital campaigns contribute significantly to setting the media agenda and amplifying the Palestinian narrative globally. These results, taken together, confirm that Twitter influences not only the extent of awareness but also its quality and cognitive frameworks, making the platform a key player in reshaping public discourse on Palestine.

The study indicates that Twitter serves as an effective tool for shaping public opinion, and its users trust the content related to the PNS more than traditional media. And has become, for many, a "popular" alternative source of knowledge and information, in contrast to what is perceived as "bias" or "ignorance" in traditional media towards the PNS. This is due to several reasons. First, breaking the monopoly of Western media narratives. It is frequently observed that traditional media, mainly Western media coverage, is biased in its coverage of the PNS [Kareem and Najm \(2024\)](#). In contrast to traditional media, Twitter facilitates real-time reporting of events [Sakaki et al. \(2012\)](#) from local Palestinian sources, and Palestinian journalists, providing a more diverse and uncensored perspective [Fahmy et al. \(2024\)](#). Second, Public engagement and speed of information transfer. Twitter facilitates immediate tweeting and interaction, allowing users to verify news through multiple sources simultaneously, thereby enhancing trust in information compared to traditional media, which is often subject to political or economic censorship [Corduneanu Huci and Hamilton \(2018\)](#). Third, the challenge of media disinformation. In conflict situations, such as the Israeli wars, genocide, and violence in Gaza, Twitter is a platform for exposing the falsity of some official media narratives, which contributed to increasing public awareness of the need to seek alternative sources of information. These findings are associated with significant transformations in the global media environment, in which Twitter has emerged as a platform used by activists and politicians to articulate their viewpoints beyond conventional media outlets. Numerous international MPs, activists, and Palestinian officials [Abunahel \(2025\)](#),

including Hamas [Margolin \(2022\)](#), have utilised Twitter to articulate a direct narrative of Israeli violations, thus shifting global media discourse toward a more equitable representation of the PNS. From the perspective of agenda-setting theory, this shift illustrates how audiences can adjust their priorities and media references in response to digital interactions, rather than relying on institutional directives. High trust in Twitter as an alternative source enhances users' ability to perform bottom-up agenda setting, which is in line with what [Meraz and Papacharissi \(2013\)](#) noted in their study on the role of audiences as "network gatekeepers." With increasing reliance on social media, trust in digital content becomes not only a reflection of trustworthiness but also a catalyst for shaping personal attitudes and adopting alternative narratives about the Palestinian cause—narratives that extend beyond the confines of official media to grassroots narratives originating from within Palestine itself.

The results of the study reveal that the news and the information about the PNS on Twitter receive credibility from the users. This clear trend reflects a qualitative shift in public trust in alternative media sources, which have come to play a pivotal role in shaping public opinion on the PNS. From the perspective of agenda-setting theory, Twitter's role extends beyond highlighting issues (first-level agenda setting) to influencing how they are framed and presented (second-level). The high credibility that the public has granted Twitter indicates that the platform has succeeded in displacing traditional media as the sole source of information and has become a key tool in shaping public perception, particularly on issues perceived as marginalized or biased by the media. Thus, a high trust index contributes to strengthening public attitudes toward the Palestinian cause and leads to greater cognitive and perceptual engagement, making Twitter not only a tool for disseminating news, but also a space for position-building and political opinion-formation—the core objective of AST in the age of networked media. On the other hand, users might encounter or be exposed to misleading or biased information. This is due to media disinformation and electronic misinformation, often facilitated by Twitter as a tool for counter-propaganda. There is evidence that accounts affiliated with political or government groups use Twitter to spread misinformation aimed at influencing public opinion [Bennett and Livingston \(2020\)](#). Furthermore, the spread of fake accounts (bots) in political conflicts. Previous research suggests that some states are using artificial intelligence and programmed accounts to influence discussions related to the PNS, which may affect how users perceive reality [Loewenstein \(2024\)](#), [Ünver \(2024\)](#). These challenges highlight the need to develop "digital media literacy" skills, enabling users to become more aware of how to verify news and distinguish between reliable and misleading information. It also requires the intervention of platforms such as Twitter to develop stricter policies to combat fake news that can affect public awareness of the PNS.

One of the most notable findings is that a high number of participants changed their attitudes towards PNS after interacting with content on Twitter, confirming that digital interaction is not just a cognitive experience, but leads to actual shifts in individuals' attitudes and political views. It reflects the power of Twitter not only as a reliable source of information but also as an effective tool in reshaping political and personal attitudes towards the PNS, a crucial aspect in assessing the impact of new media on public awareness. From the perspective of agenda-setting theory, this effect clearly demonstrates the intersection of the second and third levels of the theory; existing content determines not only what we think about, but also how we think about it and with whom we associate it—a phenomenon known as network agenda setting. Platforms like Twitter allow Palestine to be associated with issues such as social justice, racism, and anti-colonialism, making it possible to reevaluate one's own positions upon repeated exposure to the content. Users change their attitudes due to some of the following reasons: First, exposure to new sources that were previously unavailable: Twitter allows users to access firsthand accounts from Palestinians living under occupation, which may not be available in traditional media [Wulf et al. \(2013\)](#). Second, social pressure and belonging to digital communities: When users observe a broad digital consensus on a particular issue, it may prompt them to reconsider their opinions and align with the prevailing discourse [Damásio et al. \(2012\)](#). Third, the power of personal narratives: Studies show that personal narratives and human experiences have a greater ability to change political convictions than abstract information or academic data [Mayer \(2014\)](#).

Furthermore, the results showed that the participants believe that retweeting is an effective means of raising public awareness about the PNS, which is in line with the findings of [Majmundar et al. \(2018\)](#), who explained that retweeting works as a digital amplification tool, contributing to the dissemination of the Palestinian narrative globally. From the perspective of agenda-setting theory, retweets are a crucial mechanism for reinforcing the power of repetition, which is one of the most important factors in bringing an issue higher on the agenda of both the public and media organizations. The more a message is repeated across multiple accounts, the greater the chance of it appearing in trending hashtags and becoming a public issue that takes precedence in public debate—the essence of the first level of the theory. But more importantly, retweets demonstrate a shift in the dynamics of agenda production and distribution. Ordinary users, through simple engagement, have become "partial agenda makers," participating in determining which issues are raised and how they are raised. This form of "networked amplification" reflects a decentralized media structure, controlled by audiences through small but repetitive actions.

The results show that most participants believe that discussions on Twitter have significantly influenced their personal opinions about the PNS. This pattern clearly demonstrates the transformative role Twitter plays as a platform for political dialogue that reshapes individual positions, not just as a means of conveying news or symbolic solidarity. In light of agenda-setting theory, these findings represent a direct application of an advanced level of influence known as "third-level agenda setting," which is not limited to what we think or how we think, but rather to the cognitive and networked connections between issues, concepts, and symbols that are formed in the recipient's mind as a result of collective interaction. Discussions on Twitter, particularly those circulating in Palestinian circles or in solidarity with them, reproduce alternative narratives that challenge the dominant narrative in traditional

media. Dalipaj et al. (2024) demonstrated that Twitter is widely utilized to shape public attitudes on specific issues, such as the PNS, as the platform effectively directs public discourse and conveys messages of solidarity.

The results indicate that Twitter is considered more influential than other media platforms in shaping public understanding of the PNS. This is evidenced by the high level of agreement among participants that Twitter plays a more important role than other platforms in transmitting and directing discussions related to the PNS. These results confirm that the public does not view Twitter as just one of many tools, but rather as a pivotal and effective platform for building knowledge and political understanding about Palestine. From the perspective of agenda-setting theory, Twitter's cognitive superiority over traditional media signals a shift in the center of influence from institutional media to participatory media based on instant content and interactive discussion. This shift not only signifies a change in platforms but also in the way audiences shape political and cognitive priorities. While traditional media often operates according to editorial agendas, Twitter's agenda is produced collectively and instantly via tweets, retweets, and emotional shares. Nasereddin (2024) illustrates how social platforms, including Twitter, significantly influence international public opinion on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It was found that Twitter directly contributes to promoting discussions related to humanitarian issues, and users engage extensively with topics related to violence and violations, leading to their prominence in public discourse. In addition, Siapera (2014) indicates that Twitter provides a unique platform for informal and independent voices to convey their views on Palestinian issues directly to a global audience. This reinforces the importance of Twitter as an effective means of setting the media agenda related to the PNS, as content related to current events is circulated frequently and rapidly. Celik et al. (2024) also support this idea, showing that Twitter is widely used to disseminate information about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict through the official accounts of non-governmental organizations and independent activists. The study also demonstrated that tweets addressing the most sensitive issues, such as Israeli crimes, are widely shared and have a significant influence on public opinion.

The discussion above shows that the users have a higher degree of trust in the PNS content on Twitter compared to traditional media outlets and view it as credible—additionally, tweets about the PNS changing their attitudes after interacting with such content. Retweets and discussions are effective in shaping public opinion, and Twitter is more influential than other platforms in shaping their understanding of the PNS. These results answered the third research question and support the application of agenda-setting theory, as it becomes clear that Twitter is no longer merely a means of communication but rather a participatory platform that reorders public priorities and reshapes attitudes through interaction, repetition, and collective framing.

CONCLUSION

This explanatory study is an important step in paving the way for future studies. However, it faces some limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting its results. The most prominent of these limitations relates to the issue of generalizability. The results may not apply to different demographic groups or to other social media platforms that differ in nature from Twitter. Twitter users have specific characteristics related to the platform's operating mechanisms and algorithms, which may make them different from users of platforms such as Facebook or Instagram. Furthermore, Twitter allows users to express their opinions anonymously, unlike direct interactions, which are often more transparent. This may limit the ability to compare the results to real-life behaviors. Furthermore, there are other limitations related to the demographic composition of the sample. The high proportion of young and educated people in the sample may make the results more representative of these groups, and less representative of older or less educated groups. Relying on self-reported data may also open the door to biases such as exaggeration or selectivity in responses. Furthermore, this study focused on a specific time period, meaning that the results may be influenced by circumstances or events specific to that period, and therefore may vary depending on the temporal or political context. An important methodological limitation is that the descriptive study design does not allow for the extraction of causal relationships, but rather is limited to revealing general correlations and patterns. This calls for future experimental or longitudinal studies to more precisely verify causal relationships. Finally, the rapid change in the digital platform environment cannot be overlooked. Continuous updates to Twitter's policies or changes in ownership may reshape interaction patterns. This makes the results valid in their temporal context, but requires periodic review in the future.

The findings of this study theoretically endorse the concept that digital platforms can execute an agenda-setting function, but within a new media framework that contrasts with the conventional centralized approach. This necessitates the expansion of the theoretical paradigm to incorporate interactive agenda-setting, wherein the media is not the sole player. Still, the audience also plays a role in determining significance. This gives this study a field-specific focus, highlighting how issues are prioritized and prioritized through unconventional means.

The broader implications of these results indicate that Twitter is no longer just a social media platform, but has become an influential space in shaping public priorities and political awareness regarding the PNS. The results reveal that frequent exposure to tweets, hashtags, and visual content enhances the presence of the Palestinian cause in collective consciousness, clearly reflecting the application of the three levels of agenda-setting theory (first, second, and third). Twitter serves not only as a source of news but also as an interactive arena where users, activists, and digital communities participate in constructing narratives, formulating issues, and promoting solidarity.

The results also demonstrate that Twitter broke the traditional media's monopoly on the agenda, providing direct, uncensored, and fast-moving alternatives to events, which participants considered more reliable compared to mainstream sources, which are often accused of bias or marginalization. Visual content, such as photos and videos, played a pivotal role in enhancing emotional engagement and reframing Palestine not only as a political issue, but also as a humanitarian and moral one. Digital campaigns and hashtags also contributed to amplifying the Palestinian voice globally, pressuring traditional media and even political institutions to respond.

In general, Twitter emerges as a key player in setting the media and political agenda related to the Palestinian issue. The public is no longer a passive recipient, but rather an active partner in shaping public debate and shaping positions through repetition, interaction, and collective engagement.

The importance of this research lies in its revelation of the radical transformations in the structure of political and media communication in the digital age, highlighting the central role of Twitter in reshaping the public agenda related to the Palestinian national struggle. The research demonstrates that the platform is no longer merely a social media tool, but has transformed into an alternative space that enables marginalized groups to convey their narratives and challenge the prevailing discourse in traditional media. The analysis also demonstrates that digital campaigns and hashtags are capable of generating political and media pressure that extends beyond the virtual sphere to influence global public opinion and decision-makers. Conversely, the research also indicates that heavy reliance on Twitter is not without problems, such as algorithmic bias and the spread of misinformation. This demonstrates that digital platforms possess a dual nature: on the one hand, they expand the circle of participation and representation, while on the other, they may produce new forms of marginalization or manipulation. Hence, the importance of this research emerges as a reference for understanding new media power dynamics and for guiding activists and policymakers towards strategies that are more aware of the capabilities and limitations of digital activism.

ETHICAL APPROVAL AND INFORMED CONSENT

This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Human Ethical Committee (IHEC) of the University of Mysore, Mysuru, India (Approval No. UOM-IHEC/PhD_01/2025-26). Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their inclusion in the study.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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