



From Ceasefire To Shadowban: Gaza, Algorithms, And The Politics Of Visibility

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Abstract

The 2023–2025 Gaza crisis has been a watershed moment for the politics of representation of genocide. Where states and institutions wobbled, social media has emerged as the primary site of global witnessing, resistance, and contestation of narratives. This short communication charts the contours of how algorithmically shaped visibility, user-led content creation, and digital activism have reshaped the discourse on genocide in Gaza. It contends that the traditional forms of accountability have been replaced with what we refer to here as 'algorithmic witnessing'; a politically and morally decentralized phenomenon wherein visibility outpaces legal legitimacy. Via a combination of relevant digital data, platform policy analysis and dissent diffusion, the paper offers a general account of the limited but transformative power of social media in countering the violence of the state.

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1. Introduction: Gaza as the Digital Battlefield

Since October 2023, Gaza has become the most observed conflict in the history of social media. For instance, previous wars were typically filtered through mainstream media. The Gaza crisis, however, unfolded across TikTok, Instagram, and X (previously Twitter), in real time. Palestinians uploaded unedited disaster footage of airstrikes, family members' cries, and crumpled houses, while audiences interacted and reshared that content. The hashtag #GazaGenocide and #AllEyesOnRafah circulated for several weeks. And while more mundane selfies, gifs, and TikTok reels populated some online spaces, they became layered with visual motifs in the digital imaginary, like keffiyehs, domed mosques, and bomb craters.

Even so, visibility is not complete through these new terrains; with the weight of obscurity created by the algorithms, regimes of content moderation, and platform interests. In the meanwhile, states continue to master diplomacy channels to further suppress dissent and manipulate narratives. What emerges, then, is a bifurcated world wherein genocide is both hyper-visible and politically paralyzed.

2. Platform Power: Visibility, Suppression, and Censorship

Social media platforms have influenced not only what is visible but whether it is visible at all. Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok were universally accused of shadow banning and content takedowns. In Meta's 2024 transparency report, more than 1.4 million items of Palestine-related content were removed or downgraded. Meanwhile, leaked content moderation guidelines indicated that images considered too "graphic" or "inciting" were systematically down prioritized—even when contextually correct.

Platform	Suppression incidents reported	Alleged tactics	Public response
Instagram	750,000+	Shadow banning and post removal	#StopSilencingPalestine
TikTok	450,000+	Hashtag demotion and Filters	Creator boycotts
X(Twitter)	220,000+	Throttling and content labels	Policy appeals

Table 1. Reported Suppression Tactics and Public Response Across Major Social Media Platforms during Gaza Conflict (Sources: Meta Transparency Report 2024; internal moderation guidelines leaked via The Intercept, 2024)

Despite these challenges, activists responded with counter-tactics: using code words ("Ghaza" rather than "Gaza"), applying Arabic script overlays, or incorporating key messages in visual memes. The Gaza war was, in this way, also an algorithmic visibility war.

3. Hashtags as Mobilization Tools

Hashtags like #AllEyesOnRafah, #CeasefireNow, and #GazaGenocide have served as political expression and mobilization infrastructure. After the May 2025 Rafah airstrike occurred, a stylized image of tent camps that said "All Eyes on Rafah" became viral, and in the first 48 hours had 47 million reposts. Although it was AI-generated and aesthetically clean, the image ended up being more effective than traditional journalism because the simplicity and emotional appeal of the image worked better.

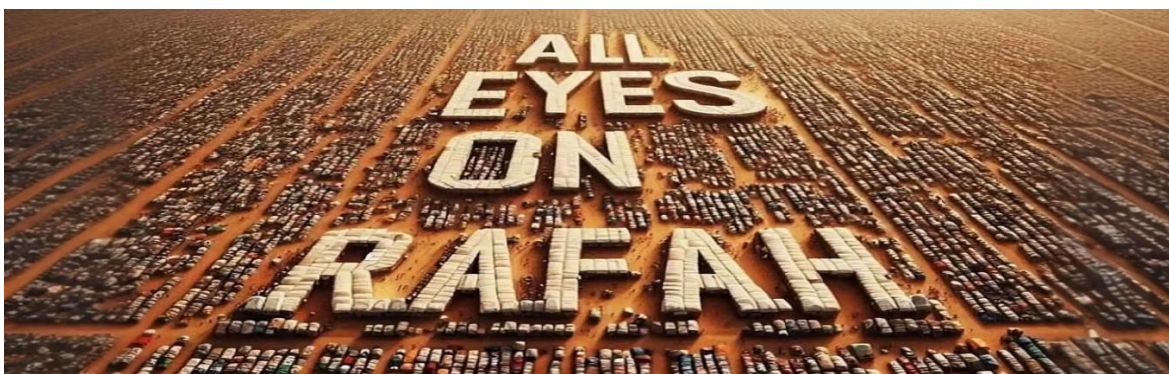


Figure 1 Digital Solidarity as Spectacle: The viral “All Eyes on Rafah” image circulated globally in May–June 2025

Hashtags weren't just trending; they had real life organizational outcomes. Demonstrations from Chicago to Johannesburg simultaneous times, billboards, and catchphrases through Telegram, Instagram stories, and TikTok explainers. Under these circumstances, hashtags served as containers for mourning as well as drivers for world-wide outrage.

4. From Feed to Street: The Offline Impact of Digital Narratives

The digital to physical space diffusion was unmatched. University camps throughout the United States, mass demonstrations in The Hague, and humanitarian flotillas leaving from Cyprus all emerged on social media and viral videos and stories. The biggest protest in Brussels (June 2025) was coordinated entirely via TikTok handles followed by fewer than 10,000 users. These events underscore that while states delay, publics mobilize. Social media, far from being essentially expressive, became logistically significant in resistance.

Event	Date	Estimated turnout	Originating hashtag
Columbia University Camp	Apr 2024	2,000+	#FreePalestine
Brussels Protest	Jun 2025	100,000+	#AllEyesOnRafah
UK Aid Convoy Launch	May 2025	300+ volunteers	#CeasefireNow

Table 2. Digitally Coordinated Physical Mobilizations Related to the Gaza Conflict (Source: Compiled from protest records, social media archives, and press releases, 2024–2025)

These incidents highlight the fact that as states procrastinate, publics organize. Social media, rather than being essentially expressive, became logistically practical for resisting.

5. Competing Victimhood's: The Visual Politics of Empathy

The Gaza conflict also became a contested site over whose victimhood gets to be viewed.

Israeli campaigns portraying the October 7 Hamas attack and hostage posters vied with pictures of Gazan children beneath the rubble. Both sides used emotionally charged imagery, but global publics and platforms translated them asymmetrically.

Image Type	Average likes	Average shares	Dominant audience region
Palestinian Casualties	210,000	85,000	MENA, South Asia
Israeli Hostage posters	90,000	15,000	U.S.A, EU

Table 3. Image Type Engagement Patterns by Region and Interaction Volume (Source: Aggregated social media platform analytics, 2024–2025)

This competition over empathy revealed algorithmic biases and geopolitical divides. Sympathy became a resource—allocated, restricted, and weaponized.

6. Algorithmic Witnessing and the Limits of Visibility

This essay suggests the phenomenon of algorithmic witnessing: a method through which atrocity is documented and disseminated not in courts or media but in user feeds, emotional virality, and algorithmic push. It is strong in terms of shaping view but weak in inculcating action. Even with overwhelming visibility, Gaza continues to be besieged, and legal solutions remain intact. This paradox—of being visible yet not rescued—characterizes a hallmark of the digital era of genocide politics.

7. Conclusion

The conclusion of this discussion points toward a fresh perspective on digital atrocity politics. The ongoing Gaza conflict highlights how a decentralized, user-driven approach to witnessing genocide is taking shape. Social media platforms have transformed into both amplifiers and filters, fostering an unprecedented level of global solidarity while also controlling and influencing what narratives are visible. Legal institutions like the ICJ and ICC are becoming more responsive to the conversations happening online, yet they still move at a sluggish pace. As the events in Gaza unfold in real-time across billions of screens, the widening chasm between public outrage and institutional action becomes increasingly apparent—and frankly, unbearable. Future research in political science needs to recognize these platforms not just as neutral tools, but as active participants in the dynamics of violence, memory, and justice.

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