

Social Media Rhetoric of the Transnational Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement

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Abstract

This article uses rhetorical analysis to determine the effectiveness and characteristics of social media usage by the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement targeting Israel. Hundreds of local student, community, and religious groups in the United States use social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to promote BDS discourse and organize local BDS-related events. Even though social media platforms are important for an international movement composed of a very dispersed population, with millions of Palestinians also living under military occupation, the history of traditional media use during the First Intifada also suggests that social media are not necessary for mobilizing Palestinians at the local level. A preliminary rhetorical analysis of several BDS-related Facebook pages and Twitter accounts reveals that the BDS movement's social media usage functions similarly in some ways to other contemporary mass movements by facilitating on-the-ground actions and delivering useful information to supporters. BDS movement social media discourse, however, does not establish the same level of emotional connection or interactivity with audiences as some other recent movements have, but these limitations can be partly explained by the unique political, material, and rhetorical constraints of the situation.

Keywords

social media, Boycott, rhetoric, social movement, activism, Palestinian

Introduction

The Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign targeting Israel is now one of the fastest growing activist movements on college campuses in the West, after beginning 10 years ago in the occupied Palestinian territories (Harvey, 2012; Nussbaum Cohen, 2014). In July 2005, more than 170 organizations in Palestinian civil society—including trade unions, women's groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), political parties, and other grassroots organizations of all kinds—officially issued the call for BDS targeting Israel until it meets its obligations under international law (Barghouti, 2011). The BDS call includes academic, cultural, and consumer boycotts of the Israeli government, institutions, and corporations, and it also asks international organizations and governments to sanction and divest from Israel in the same way that was widely applied to South Africa's Apartheid regime ("Palestinian Civil Society Call for BDS," 2005).

The BDS call and the rhetoric of the campaign is explicitly rooted in international law, universal principles of human rights, and United Nations (UN) resolutions, and it

demands that Israel end three major forms of injustice against Palestinians: "ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands occupied in 1967 and dismantling the Wall, recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality," and "respecting, protecting, and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties, as stipulated in UN Resolution 194" ("Introducing the BDS Movement," n.d.). Inspired by the BDS campaign against Apartheid South Africa, Palestinians and their international supporters see BDS as the only reasonable option left to help Palestinians gain human rights and achieve a just peace. In order to pressure Israel to respect Palestinian rights and international law, the BDS movement seeks to gain

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members, sustain activism, and achieve tangible successes through various rhetorical strategies, often using social media platforms to spread their message.

I posit that accurately understanding the role and impact of social media use in contemporary political activist movements, including that of the BDS movement, requires an examination of the particular historical, political, cultural, and social—as well as rhetorical—contexts for that use (Gerbaudo, 2012; Tawil-Souri & Aouragh, 2014). My analysis attempts to examine and describe the BDS movement's social media usage and rhetoric when compared with earlier pre-Internet forms of Palestinian activism. While I will touch on other contextual elements, in this article, I focus primarily on analyzing the rhetorical characteristics and effectiveness of the BDS movement's social media use. The results of my analysis suggest that the BDS movement's social media usage functions similarly in some ways to other contemporary mass movements by facilitating on-the-ground actions and delivering useful information to supporters. BDS movement social media discourse, however, does not establish the same level of emotional connection or interactivity with audiences as some other recent movements have, but these limitations can be partly explained by the unique political, material, and rhetorical constraints of the situation.

Since the 2005 BDS call was initiated, this transnational movement has sought to raise awareness of Israel's violations of Palestinian human rights in the West Bank and Gaza and to pressure Israel to comply with international law. Hundreds of local student, community, and religious groups in the United States use social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to promote BDS discourse and organize local BDS-related events. Even though social media platforms are useful for an international movement composed of a very dispersed population, with millions of Palestinians also living under Israel's military occupation, the history of traditional media use during the First Intifada suggests that social media are not necessary for mobilizing Palestinians at the local level.

In addition to focusing on international law and UN resolutions, the rhetoric of the BDS movement is framed in terms of a nonviolent anti-colonial struggle to end Palestinian oppression and achieve full civil rights and equality. Even though Israel does not fit the mold of most traditional colonial powers, having been established as a safe haven for a persecuted diasporic people, the way Israel has displaced and continues to oppress the indigenous Palestinians is a form of settler colonialism. To emphasize the settler-colonial character of the Zionist project, BDS activists often make rhetorical analogies to other anti-colonial liberation movements and struggles for civil rights and equality, including those in Algeria, Northern Ireland, South Africa, and the Civil Rights movement in the United States, among others (Abunimah, 2012a, 2012b; Bakan & Abu-Laban, 2009; Barghouti, 2011; Weiss, 2014). Other elements of BDS rhetoric echo characteristics common to nonviolent rhetoric generally, as

discussed by Gorsevski (2004) in *Peaceful Persuasion: The Geopolitics of Nonviolent Rhetoric*, and include a focus on stubborn noncooperation (including BDS, and resistance to “normalization”), the *ethos* of being an underdog, and universal human rights and equality (Gorsevski, 2004, p. 164).

Some elements of the immediate historical context for the BDS call include the ending of the violent and ineffective Second Intifada (or “al-Aqsa Intifada”) and the construction of Israel's separation barrier in the West Bank, which has confiscated Palestinian lands, separated many Palestinians from their farms and livelihoods, and made travel between West Bank cities much more difficult for Palestinians (Bakan & Abu-Laban, 2009, p. 39). Among the rest of Israel's ongoing occupation policies, Israel's separation barrier was a significant impetus for the BDS call, which was issued on the 1-year anniversary of the International Court of Justice ruling declaring the wall illegal (Bakan & Abu-Laban, 2009, p. 39). Since the initial BDS call in 2005, Israeli incursions into Gaza in both 2008–2009 and 2014, Netanyahu's divisive 2015 campaign for prime minister, and other political events in the region, have all led to significant increases in the numbers of people and organizations supporting BDS internationally (Munayyer, 2015; Nussbaum Cohen, 2014).

Background on Social Media and Social Movements

Research about contemporary protest movements in the Internet era has often focused on how activists use social media tools to attract and mobilize supporters. Some social theory and scholarship leans toward positive technological determinism or “techno-optimism,” which views Internet communication technologies (ICTs) as almost purely positive promoters and instigators of democratic revolutions (Abdulla, 2011; Byerly, 2005; Castells, 2012; Fuchs, 2014; Nabulsi, 2014; Shirky, 2011). Other deterministic social theorists, termed “techno-pessimists,” promote a more negative view, focusing instead on the Internet and social media as counterproductive to effective social movements and activism (Fuchs, 2014; Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2009). And in opposition to these two camps of technological determinists are those scholars who see the relationship between ICTs and contemporary protest movements as more complex and necessarily embedded in particular local historical, political, cultural, and social contexts, which Warnick and Heineman (2012) describe as a “relativist” view (Aouragh, 2012; Christensen, 2011; Fuchs, 2014; Gerbaudo, 2012; Warnick & Heineman, 2012). These researchers believe that social media play an important role in helping to organize and publicize protests, but they do not cause revolutions and are rather ancillary factors to other forms of more traditional communication, activism, and on-the-ground organizing.

Social theory scholarship about ICT use by contemporary protest movements is substantial, interdisciplinary, and influenced by the fields of sociology, philosophy, Internet studies,

anthropology, political science, cognitive science, psychology, cultural studies, communications, critical theory, and Manuel Castells' (2009, 2012, etc.) social theory work, among others, but little research from the field of rhetoric and discourse studies has been applied to the way protest movements use social media (Castells, 2009; Fuchs, 2014; Warnick & Heineman, 2012). To offer another perspective on the role of social media in contemporary protest movements, it would be useful to apply a rhetoric and discourse studies lens to investigate the ways that contemporary activists use social media discourse to recruit and mobilize supporters. In the hands of savvy rhetorician-activists, rather than simply being a tool with a pre-determined positive or negative outcome, social media are platforms for linguistic, visual, and discursive expressions and arguments meant to persuade users/audiences to become active participants in social movements that exist both online and offline.

The Importance of Emotions and Interactivity for Social Movement Rhetoric

Two issues that have been discussed as important aspects of contemporary social movement activism on social media—emotional connections and interactivity—are also relevant to an examination of BDS movement social media use (Castells, 2009, 2012; Gay, 2010; Gerbaudo, 2012; Gorsevski, 2004; Jasper, 1997, 2011; Melucci, 1996; Warnick & Heineman, 2012). Gerbaudo's (2012) discussion of how social media work to facilitate a "choreography of assembly" is perhaps most relevant to the BDS movement's use of social media—to direct people to specific events and also provide them with "suggestions and instructions about how to act, and in the construction of an emotional narration to sustain their coming together in public space" (p. 12). In addition to Gerbaudo, scholars from a variety of disciplines have argued for the importance of emotional appeals and connections between leaders and members to the success of social movements (Castells, 2009, 2012; Gay, 2010; Gorsevski, 2004; Jasper, 1997, 2011; Melucci, 1996). Manuel Castells (2009, 2012) argues that emotions can affect people's decision-making processes, add force to arguments, redirect attention, motivate action, and transform "emotion into action", and he further argues that fear and enthusiasm are the two most important emotions for political behavior (Castells, 2009, pp. 144-152; Castells, 2012, p. 13). Jasper (1997, 2011) and Melucci (1996) both also discuss how emotional connections with supporters can motivate collective action.

Emotions and emotional appeals or *pathos* have also been considered one of the three primary rhetorical appeals for public discourse since the time of Ancient Greece and were discussed at length by Aristotle (2007, Chap. 2-11, pp. 39, 116-147). Subsequent rhetoricians and scholars of rhetoric have repeatedly reaffirmed the role of *pathos* in persuasive discourse, including that of social movements (Gay, 2010, p. 33;

Gorsevski, 2004, p. 187; Simons, 1970, p. 5). One aspect of my analysis of BDS social media discourse will attempt to discern how effectively pro-BDS discourse appeals to audiences' emotions and creates an emotional narrative to motivate supporters to act—both online and offline.

The importance of interactivity in social media activism has also been emphasized by several scholars and thus is worthy of attention in my rhetorical analysis of BDS movement social media use as well (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 88; Warnick & Heineman, 2012, pp. 51-55). Warnick and Heineman (2012) point out that even though the definition of interactivity is highly contested among scholars, "interactivity is nevertheless a significant linchpin in the rhetorical appeal of online messages" (p. 52). They argue that, in accordance with Kenneth Burke's views on identification and division, interactivity online

can play a key role in enabling proponents and opponents on an issue to refine their thinking on major political topics, identify major features at play in deliberation, and engage the interests of people who either share their views or oppose them. (p. 52)

Social Media Use by Palestinian and BDS Activists

Palestinians have been using ICTs and social media for activism and communication within the diaspora since Internet access became more widespread in the Occupied Territories during the Second Intifada (Aouragh, 2011, pp. 93-94, 117; Bunt, 2009, p. 263; Nabulsi, 2014, pp. 105-106; Siapera, 2014, p. 543; Tawil-Souri & Aouragh, 2014, p. 121). Events such as the 2008–2009 War in Gaza and the subsequent Goldstone Report, as well as the "Flotillas for Gaza" movement all played a role not only in increasing support for BDS internationally, but also increasing Palestinian use of the Internet and social media for activism and organizing (Nabulsi, 2014, p. 106). As a result of living under an Israeli occupation that restricts their free movement, Palestinian Internet use has been higher than for most other Arab countries (Najjar, 2007, pp. 191-197). Inspired by the Arab Spring uprisings, Palestinian activists launched the 15 May movement through social media, including with a "Third Palestinian Intifada" Facebook page, which gathered nearly 200,000 fans in only 1 week (Nabulsi, 2014, p. 107; Tawil-Souri & Aouragh, 2014, p. 122). This movement succeeded in mobilizing thousands of Palestinians to march to the borders of Israel and neighboring countries on 15 May (also "Nakba Day") *despite* the fact that pro-Israel pressure led Facebook to shut down the "Third Palestinian Intifada" page on 29 March when it had over 350,000 fans (Nabulsi, 2014, p. 107; Tawil-Souri & Aouragh, 2014, p. 122). This case highlights the uniquely controversial nature of Palestinian activism because, as Nabulsi points out, "in contrast to the Palestinian case, youth movements in Egypt and Tunisia received the support of Facebook during their

uprisings” (p. 107). Another successful Palestinian social media campaign occurred when Palestinian Khader Adnan, known in British media as the “Palestinian Bobby Sands,” undertook a hunger strike while in Israeli detention, a story that was finally covered by mainstream media outlets toward the end of his second month of fasting after activists publicized his strike on Twitter (Nabulsi, 2014, p. 111).

Much scholarship on Palestinian ICT and social media use, including for activist purposes, supports a view of this usage as situated and embedded in local and material conditions. In *Palestine Online*, Aouragh (2011) discusses the influence of the Internet and social media on Palestinian activism and transnational community. Like Gerbaudo (2012), she avoids technologically deterministic arguments when she argues that the Internet, at least in the Palestinian context, sometimes functions “as space for building solidarity and as a tool for empowerment” (p. 40). Aouragh argues that the Internet serves a particularly important function for Palestinians as a dispersed diasporic people who lack freedom of movement as a result of the Israeli occupation: “Online mobility became part of the alternatives to overcome that lack of mobility” (p. 75). “With the wall and the checkpoints paralyzing movement between the West Bank and Gaza,” as well as within the West Bank, the Internet helps reconnect Palestinian society (Aouragh, 2011, p. 85). In “Social Media, Mediation and the Arab Revolutions,” Aouragh (2012) also emphasizes that the Internet is not essentially positive or negative but is rather “tactically embedded in a broader political strategy” in which the Internet acts as both “a *tool* for activists (survival, operational continuity) and a *space* for activism (expanding networks)” (pp. 529-530). But she and Tawil-Souri (Tawil-Souri & Aouragh, 2014) also stress the importance of a contextualized, historical view of how the Internet functions in the case of Palestinian activism: “Besides overlooking power relations and on-the-ground dynamics, a technological determinist view is inherently ahistorical. It neither contextualizes technological change itself nor the rhetoric around it” (p. 103).

Surveillance and the Risks of Online Activism

One important political and rhetorical constraint faced by BDS movement activists using social media, as well as pro-Palestinian transnational activists operating in online spaces, is surveillance of activism by Israel and its supporters. Viewing the transnational Palestinian-led BDS movement as a strategic threat that delegitimizes Israel’s existence as a Jewish state, the Israeli government has initiated surveillance of foreign pro-Palestinian organizations and activists supporting BDS; while the Shin Bet monitors local Israeli and Palestinian groups and activists that support BDS, the Israeli Defense Forces monitor foreign groups (Bunt, 2009, pp. 263-265; Cohen, 2015; Coren, 2015). And in 2015,

Israel’s High Court upheld the widely criticized anti-democratic “Anti-Boycott Law” passed by the Israeli Knesset that allows companies and organizations to sue any Israeli citizen for advocating BDS (Hovel, 2015). Even the US government and state legislatures have begun surveilling and punishing BDS activism. In addition to anti-BDS provisions included in the federal Trade Promotions Authority (TPA) law, Illinois has enacted the first state anti-BDS law, and the New York state assembly has even proposed creating a list of persons or organizations engaged in a boycott of Israel to deny them access state funds and business partnerships (“Anti-BDS legislation,” 2015; Barrows-Friedman, 2016; New York State Assembly, 2015).

Israel’s advocates in both Israel and the United States have also been implicated in monitoring and pressuring activists (Blumenthal & Carmel, 2015; Holpuch, 2015). Blumenthal and Carmel describe a secretive website called Canary Mission that provides a “blacklist” of US students involved in pro-Palestinian and pro-BDS activism, often including their personal Twitter and Facebook accounts, in order to try to tarnish their reputations, paint them as anti-Semites, and prevent them from obtaining future employment (Blumenthal & Carmel, 2015; Canary Mission, n.d.). According to Blumenthal and Carmel (2015), Canary Mission seems to cultivate “an atmosphere of intimidation in which activists, academics and journalists are fair game for threats” (n.p.). In several cases, faculty have been targeted for their activism and social media use, including Palestinian-American scholar Steven Salaita (2015) who was unhired from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign after tweeting harsh criticism of Israel during the 2014 Gaza assault. Examples like these and others may serve to limit the BDS-related discourse of activists who may fear for their future employment prospects (Abraham, 2014; Salaita, 2015). In other cases, Israel has denied entry into the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel proper to foreigners whose online presence and social media use indicates their participation in or support for Palestinian solidarity activism or BDS (Alsaafin, 2013). This problem of surveillance and punitive actions by Israel and its supporters are some of the political and material conditions serving as obstacles and constraints on BDS discourse and thus must be considered as relevant context for any analysis of pro-BDS discourse.

Palestinian Use of Traditional Print Media During First Intifada

While social media platforms are currently important components of organizing and communication for the BDS movement and other Palestinian solidarity activists, the most sustained, effective, and primarily nonviolent revolutionary protest movement and mobilization that has occurred in the Palestinian territories was the pre-Internet-era First Intifada (or “uprising”) from 1987 to 1993 (Abu-Nimer, 2003, p. 134;

Mishal & Aharoni, 1994, pp. 39-43; Sharp, 1989, p. 3). Palestinian organizations used leaflets and communiqués during the First Intifada to direct Palestinian actions and establish an emotional connection with Palestinians in the territories, which helped sustain the Intifada for years. Printed paper leaflets and communiqués were distributed to the local population by young activists and members of established Palestinian political organizations. During this time, the Palestinian Unified National Command (UNC) and the newly formed Hamas issued frequent leaflets and communiqués to persuade and instruct the masses of Palestinians on how to participate in the uprising (Abu-Nimer, 2003, p. 134; Mishal & Aharoni, 1994, pp. 26-30).

In *Speaking Stones: Communiqués from the Intifada Underground*, Mishal and Aharoni (1994) translate the bulk of communiqués from the Intifada, which demonstrate how homemade printed leaflets were able to serve the same functions to incite and maintain primarily nonviolent actions as later activists' use of social media. *Leaflet No. 1*, for example, opens with a reminder of the need to promote "the spirit of struggle and solidarity with our people everywhere," reminds readers of Israel's repressive policies, and calls for all Palestinians to observe a 3-day general strike (Mishal & Aharoni, 1994, p. 53). Not only do these communiqués from the First Intifada relay useful information that helped to facilitate a "choreography of assembly," but they also often included emotional language and *pathos* appeals, both of which are described by Gerbaudo (2012) as important components of social media activism in successful contemporary social movements (p. 162). For example, *Leaflet no. 30* opens with the nationalistic, populist appeal, "O our masses in our precious homeland" and goes on to directly address the people and describe the Intifada as "*your* magnificent and hallowed uprising" (emphasis added) that has achieved "victory after victory on the road of liberation and independence" (Mishal & Aharoni, 1994, p. 151). This leaflet also includes the following emotional affirmation of the struggle:

Our masses who have embarked on the road of liberty, glory, and honor will continue on the path to realize their legitimate right and sovereignty over the soil of our independent state, Palestine . . . we send greetings of esteem and honor in memory of our valiant martyrs who fell during the magnificent uprising. (p. 151)

Many other communiqués include similarly emotional appeals to Palestinians to praise their resistance efforts and encourage them to remain committed to continuing the struggle despite the sacrifice and risk involved.

The printed leaflets of the First Intifada clearly promoted an emotional connection that helped mobilize Palestinians and sustain protest actions, but the local material and political conditions and rhetorical constraints during the First Intifada were also very different than the context and rhetorical situation for the transnational BDS movement's social

media use. For example, while the Palestinian leadership during the First Intifada sought to gain sympathy from the international community at that time, the activist writers of the leaflets were targeting a local Palestinian audience rather than an international one. The social media discourse of the Palestinian leadership of the BDS movement and affiliated transnational Palestinian solidarity organizations both target international and non-Palestinian audiences, mainly in the West. Because Western, and especially American, audiences have traditionally been more sympathetic to Israel and the Zionist project than occupied Palestinians have, the rhetorical situation and relevant audience beliefs for the discourse of the First Intifada versus the contemporary BDS movement are very different.

Rhetorical Analysis of BDS Movement's Social Media Usage

I have analyzed selected social media texts from the BDS movement to compare BDS social media usage with earlier forms of Palestinian protest communication during the First Intifada, investigate if and how this usage appears to foster interactivity and emotional connections with supporters, and determine the rhetorical characteristics and overall effectiveness of pro-BDS social media discourse. I have performed a preliminary rhetorical and content analysis of some BDS-related Facebook pages and Twitter accounts using a mixed-methods approach with both qualitative analysis and coding, as well as some basic quantitative analysis. I studied both the official international Palestinian-led BDS organization's Facebook page and Twitter account (@BDSmovement, 2015). I also chose two smaller, local BDS-affiliated organizations—"Students for Justice in Palestine at UH" (Students for Justice in Palestine at University of Houston [SJP at UH]) and "Jewish Voice for Peace—DC Metro Chapter" (JVP—DC Metro). These two local pro-BDS organizations were the first local chapters suggested by predictive text when I searched Facebook for two of the most well-known BDS-affiliated organizations with many chapters around the United States: "Students for Justice in Palestine" and "Jewish Voice for Peace."

In addition to browsing posts on these accounts to get an overall, initial sense of their content, I also chose a limited period of time during which I closely examined each post from the organization to determine not only how many comments, likes, retweets, shares, replies, and so on each post had garnered, but I also analyzed the content of each post, coding for common themes and arguments, interactivity between admins and users, and rhetorical appeals—with a focus on emotional appeals and tone as revealed through word choice. In this study, I analyzed a 2-week selection of posts from the Palestinian-led BDS movement's official Facebook page (14 March 2015 to 27 March 2015), along with 10 days of posts from their official Twitter account

(@BDSmovement) (17 March to 26 March). I also analyzed 2 weeks worth of posts (24 March 2015–6 April 2015) from the Facebook pages and Twitter accounts of JVP—DC Metro and SJP at UH.

The posts on the Facebook page and Twitter account for the Palestinian-led BDS movement attempt to generate enthusiasm by publicizing successful BDS actions internationally, but they also displayed a focus on information and evidence (*logos*) rather than emotional appeal (*pathos*) in the textual content and images for the vast majority of posts. For the Facebook page of the BDS movement, page administrators posted less than 1 message per day (0.64 per day), with a mean of 363 likes and 10.33 shares for each post. There was also a mean of 17 comments per post. Most posts on the BDS movement's official page serve to publicize BDS-related actions that have recently happened, especially successful actions and divestment initiatives around the world. These posts appear to address an audience of activists who already support the movement and have liked the page. The page has over 90,000 likes, and posts are then broadcast out to users who have liked the page. There are also a few posts that publicize opportunities for action in the near future, such as signing petitions ahead of a divestment vote in a certain country or organization. And the administrators also sometimes link to articles from news sources or blogs discussing BDS and Israeli policy more generally. While most posts have at least a few comments, I noticed that the majority of comments are not available for viewing (only a mean of 25.1% of comments are available for viewing, ranging from 0 comments available to 74% available), suggesting that admins are hiding some comments for unknown reasons.

The content of post descriptions are typically written in an informative tone and do not appeal to audience emotions in a significant way. One typical example of the tone of most Facebook posts is one from 25 March that discusses a recent decision by two French firms to withdraw from a Jerusalem cable car project:

Palestinian activists today welcomed the news that two French firms, Safege and Puma, have canceled their participation in a Jerusalem cable car project that aims to connect illegal settlements to Israel after being warned about the legal risks involved by the French finance and foreign ministries.

Posts like this one focus more on the rhetorical appeal of *logos* by presenting straightforward facts about BDS-related events, but they lack emotional appeal or *pathos* that can help create the emotional narrative or connection—the “emotional sense of togetherness”—that can motivate people to take to the streets or engage in other protest actions (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 162).

There were a few exceptions to this general lack of emotionality, though, including one Facebook post on 19 March in which Mahmoud Nawajaa, a Palestinian youth activist and BDS National Committee (BNC) coordinator, draws a

parallel between BDS and the Occupy movement: “Our oppressors are united so we must too be united. We too are part of the 99%, and we too know that another world is possible, and that ordinary people can create it.” Not only does Nawajaa add a level of emotional narration that is not present in most other posts, but he also directly connects Palestinian solidarity activism and BDS to Occupy and the larger movement for global justice, which may be a strategy to gain more supporters for BDS who are already sympathetic to the goals of Occupy and other social justice movements.

These same patterns of a focus on *logos* with little use of *pathos* also held for the official BDS movement's Twitter account. This Twitter account (@BDSmovement) had 41k followers as of 28 March 2015, and 2,628 tweets. In this 10-day period, account administrators posted 12 total tweets (mean of 1.2 per day). Only one of the tweets from this period was a retweet, and for these 12 tweets, there were 515 total retweets (mean of 42.92 retweets per tweet) and 244 total favorites (mean of 20.33 favorites per tweet). Again, the vast majority of tweets straightforwardly refer to recent BDS-related actions around the world with links to relevant articles, including links to news of Thurston Moore's cancellation of a performance in Israel (26 March), a statement about the same French firm pulling out of the cable car project (25 March), and a letter from a Danish BDS group calling on Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) to expel the Israeli football association (26 March). Most of the tweets have an informational, *logos* focused tone, and only a couple of them include language choices that could be considered more emotionally loaded. For example, 1 tweet from 25 March asks musician Robert Cray to “stay on the right side of history and say no to Israeli apartheid.” A couple of tweets during this time period also reference the Israeli parliamentary election that took place on 17 March, including the following one: “Israel votes for permanent occupation and apartheid—it must face international isolation,” with an added link to a statement on the BDS movement's official website. The two most common news and information sources linked in these selected tweets are the BDSmovement.net website (5 tweets) and links to Alternativenews.org (Alternative Information Center [AIC]) (3 tweets). Overall, the language use in the text of the tweets tends to lack emotional narration or interaction with users. Regarding attempts by account administrators to facilitate offline actions, only 3 tweets reference events that have not occurred yet in an apparent effort to get supporters to take action online: a tweet calling on Sussex University students to vote for BDS (23 March), one asking Robert Cray to cancel a performance in Israel (25 March), and a tweet that invites followers to “Crash Ahava's Twitter party” (26 March).

While the official Facebook page and Twitter account for the international Palestinian-led BDS movement generally lacked emotion, interactivity, and attempts to choreograph actions, the social media accounts for local BDS

organizations showed more of these characteristics. The Students for Justice in Palestine at UH (University of Houston) (SJP at UH, 2015) Facebook posts tend to use language to express more enthusiasm than posts and tweets from the international BDS movement accounts. As of 6 April 2015, the page had 1,147 likes, and there were 7 total posts during this 2-week period (mean of 0.5 posts per day), and a mean of 11.7 likes per post. The commenting was very minimal: only two comments on 1 post and one share on 1 post. Because this 2-week period occurred during the “Israeli Apartheid Week” (IAW) events, which began on 30 March at the UH, 1 post on 29 March requests volunteers for IAW events and includes a link to a sign-up page. The text, as in several other posts, includes a degree of enthusiasm not found in posts from the official BDS movement: “We kick off IAW 2015 tomorrow! Sign up to volunteer!” In this case, the use of multiple exclamation points expresses enthusiasm without accompanying emotional or enthusiastic language, and the post also seeks to mobilize students for on-the-ground actions. Another post on 29 March thanks participants in an earlier event and includes photos from the event. This post includes more likes than usual (15), along with one share and two comments. And on 3 April, another post thanks all participants in IAW and includes hyperlinks to presenters’ pages and two Twitter hashtags, including one to the official SJP at UH Twitter hashtag: #Coogs4Palestine:

We thank everyone for participating in Israeli Apartheid Week-2015. Especially to our speakers Remi Kanazi, Alison Weir (If Americans Knew), & Mariam Barghouti for coming and enlightening us with their struggles. Shout out to all volunteers, organizations, and restaurants who helped us, we couldn’t have accomplished this successful week without you! #IAW2015 #Coogs4Palestine

The above post and the following one highlight the increased level of interactivity, enthusiasm and attempted emotional narration present in SJP at UH’s Facebook posts when compared with those of the international BDS movement. This one is also on 3 April from a student, Mohammad Abdel-Aziz, who saw some of the groups’ IAW displays on campus and included an image of one particular mock wall section from their display representing the Israeli separation barrier:

Walking through campus I came across this and many other beautifully done pieces illustrating the inhumane acts being carried out in Palestine by the Israeli government. None of the pieces quite stood out to me as this one did. Overjoyed to see an organization on campus who’s [sic] specific goals are to raise awareness and combat these injustices. Ecstatic to join them next semester. #coogs4palestine

These examples and others demonstrate not only that page administrators express increased levels of enthusiasm for BDS actions, but also include higher levels of

interactivity and attempts to encourage actions—both online and offline. Even with this added linguistic enthusiasm, however, the posts include few comments and shares, suggesting that perhaps the pool of users from the local campus is somewhat small—or that most members do not visibly interact with the page and may remain “lurkers” instead.

Like their Facebook page, the SJP at UH Twitter account (@SJPHouston, 2015 and associated with #coogs4Palestine) also shows significant levels of interaction and enthusiasm. The account includes 99 tweets, 211 following, 151 followers, and 24 favorites. For this 2-week period, there were 19 total tweets, and 16 are retweets (84.2% retweets). A few of the retweets are from someone who appears to also be a member of the campus Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) chapter (@WeTeachLifeSir_) and who has over 3,800 followers and 13.6k tweets. His tweets that are retweeted by SJP at UH include the following: “A look at #IsraeliApartheidWeek at my campus. Proud to say the Palestinian cause now has hundreds of new supporters,” which also includes photos from IAW on UH campus (77 retweets, 47 favorites), and “Today was the 1st day of Israeli Apartheid Week at my campus. I can proudly say we made a big statement,” with photos (139 retweets, 117 favorites).

Like the SJP at UH social media accounts, the Facebook page and Twitter account for Jewish Voice for Peace—DC Metro Chapter (JVP—DC Metro) include many posts that are directly relevant to the BDS movement, though some relate to Palestine solidarity or Israeli policy more generally. While the SJP at UH chapter’s accounts included more posts and tweets that attempt to choreograph local actions and events, the JVP—DC Metro accounts did not include these types of posts as much and were mostly informational, including links to articles about BDS or Palestinian solidarity work. JVP—DC Metro’s Facebook posts often relate to BDS but also include links to articles about Palestinian solidarity activism and Israeli policy. The most frequently linked source on the Facebook page is the leftist Israeli activist blog, +972 Magazine. Most posts have very few likes (mean of 3.9 likes per post) and also very few shares or comments (only 4 total comments and 4 shares [mean of 0.29 per post]). These numbers suggest that most members of the DC chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) do not engage with the Facebook page through liking or commenting. One example that supports this conclusion is that on 30 March, a post about JVP—DC Metro’s 2015 Passover Seder at the restaurant Busboys & Poets in D.C., which was sold out, includes several pictures of the event that shows a significant crowd—many more people than publicly use the Facebook page. The Facebook page also seems to avoid emotional language choices and sticks to a heavily informational *logos*-centric tone. For example, a post on 25 March straightforwardly states, “JVP DC Metro Seder is SOLD OUT. Unfortunately if you did not make reservations we don’t expect to have space. Our apologies for any inconvenience” (4 likes).

And with such few likes, comments, and shares, the page does not appear to include much interaction between administrators and users.

JVP—DC Metro’s Twitter account (@JVPDCMetro, 2015) seems to be administered by a different person or persons than the Facebook page. While the JVP—DC Metro Facebook page includes several links to *+972 Magazine*, the Twitter account never links to this blog and instead links frequently to other activist blogs not included much on the Facebook page, such as the *Electronic Intifada* and *Mondoweiss*. Like the social media accounts for the international BDS movement and SJP at UH, many posts by JVP—DC Metro on both Facebook and Twitter relate to recent or ongoing BDS actions. For example, on 31 March, 2 retweets reference recent divestment initiatives at Northeastern and the University of Michigan. On 24 March, several retweets follow the progress of a divestment vote at Loyola University, including this retweet from SJP Loyola (@SJPLoyola1): “‘This time, I want to use my privilege to stand in solidarity’. #LoyolaDivest” (19 retweets, 13 favorites). Another retweet following the Loyola vote references the South Africa analogy: retweet of SJP Loyola (@SJPLoyola1): “‘Nelson Mandela stated divestment was one of the main tools in fighting apartheid in South Africa’. #LoyolaDivest” (13 retweets, 8 favorites).

While the JVP—DC Metro Facebook page includes minimal emotional narration or *pathos* appeals, the Twitter feed includes a few more attempts at emotional appeals, including this retweet from 25 March: (retweet of JewishVoiceForPeace [@jvplive]): “The time has now come for . . . Jews the world over to open their hearts and mouths, to speak out, and to act,” followed by a link to an article from the *Huffington Post*. Another retweet from @jvplive on 25 March states, “The time to choose is now—we can continue to delay justice by offering only words of criticism, or we can stand on the side of freedom and equality, and embrace all forms of nonviolent pressure on Israel.”

Results and Discussion

Based on these preliminary results of my analysis, it seems that pro-BDS social media posts from the organizations studied were usually informative and *logos*-based in tone and content and did not heavily rely on emotional appeals or interactivity to connect with audiences. In contrast, the printed communiqués from the First Intifada included significantly more emotional language and *pathos* appeals that inspired Palestinians to maintain protest actions even in the face of Israeli repression. The Palestinian communiqué writers during the First Intifada addressed only Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories, but the audience included people from all walks of life. On the other hand, BDS-related social media posts seem to target a transnational audience of users who are already social justice activists and BDS supporters.

While the SJP at UH Facebook and Twitter accounts seemed to facilitate offline actions and local events, the Facebook page and Twitter account for the international Palestinian-led BDS movement and the JVP—DC Metro Chapter instead seem rather to build a general enthusiasm for the movement by focusing on recent successful international BDS actions. All sites also frequently linked to articles from various news sources and activist blogs, including *Electronic Intifada*, *Mondoweiss*, and *+972 Magazine*, among others. Perhaps page administrators hope that these articles taken together will create an overarching emotional narrative that is not present in administrator posts.

The reason that most comments were hidden by Facebook admins for the BDS movement page is unclear. Perhaps these hidden comments express attitudes that could be perceived as too negative or hateful toward Israel, and the administrators have hidden them to avoid such views being associated with the movement as a whole—a strategy to strengthen the credibility or *ethos* of the movement as a peaceful, nonviolent human-rights movement and thus combat frequent charges of anti-Semitism from supporters of Israel. Or, maybe the comments were hidden because they were negative comments made by Israel supporters or pro-Israel “trolls” who are overly critical of the movement and its supporters. Either way, without a record of the content of these hidden comments, and absent any posted guidelines for commenting, we can only speculate about their content and the motivations of the admins in censoring them.

These results also reveal that there is no apparent interaction between page administrators and commenters, especially for the BDS movement accounts, which is unlike the interactivity and frequent admin responses to comments found on the “We Are Khaled Said” page from the Egyptian revolution and the Democracia Real Ya (DRY) page in Spain leading up to the mass mobilizations in those countries in 2011 (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 88). I did not find a similar level of interaction or personal responses on the part of the BDS movement’s Facebook or Twitter administrators, though a higher level of interaction was present in the posts from local groups, especially SJP at UH. Without a specific mobilization event or date to build support for, however, it is hard to compare these movements to ongoing BDS activism online.

The lack of interactivity could also limit the emotional connection with commenters who may thus also be less likely to participate in on-the-ground events. This lack of emotionality, however, is similar to Gerbaudo’s description of the early social media posts from the Occupy Wall Street movement, which he argues were devoid of emotion and *not* “designed to create an emotional connection with the public” (p. 115). While the majority of posts on the official Palestinian-led BDS campaign’s Facebook page and Twitter account use an informational tone and lack a strong emotional narration or significant interactivity between admins and users, perhaps publicizing successful actions, even without an accompanying emotional narration, can help provide

emotional sustenance by the mere fact of demonstrating the growth of the BDS movement. These social media administrators may believe that with new divestment initiatives appearing frequently at colleges throughout North America and Europe, they need not do more than publicize such actions to give hope and emotional encouragement to social media supporters.

While on one hand, a low number of likes and comments could suggest poor audience reception or a small audience for these BDS-related social media posts, the material and rhetorical context for pro-BDS social media discourse includes online monitoring of activists who could suffer negative consequences in future employment or denial of entry when attempting to visit Israel or the Occupied Palestinian Territories. These conditions may consciously constrain BDS activists' use of emotional appeals and interactivity—both for their own sake and for the sake of supporters, neither of whom would desire to be targeted by Israel or its advocates nor be painted as anti-Semitic. Such conditions would perhaps also make other activists, social media followers, and potential supporters wary of publicly liking or commenting for the same reasons.

Conclusion

Even though social media platforms have been useful to many Palestinian and international supporters of BDS, they have not yet helped to orchestrate a protest movement with as much coherence and success as was found in the First Intifada—which was organized with printed leaflets before the Internet. The Intifada, however, took place within the Occupied Territories among Palestinians themselves, while the BDS movement is a transnational activist-led movement that may be headquartered in the Occupied Palestinian Territories but which has supporters throughout the world. This newer transnational character of the BDS movement necessitates the use of social media and the Internet in a way that the First Intifada—and even most recent nationally based movements—did not.

To further this line of inquiry, ethnographic interviews with BDS activists could be added to a more robust and extensive mixed-methods analysis of larger corpora of BDS-related social media posts. Also, because the social media discourse of only three organizations was studied for a short period of time, adding more organizations and analyzing posts from a longer period of time may reveal additional patterns and rhetorical characteristics that could not be seen in this limited study. Another point worth considering in relation to the role of social media in the success of the BDS movement is how the recent growth in popularity of BDS in the West and the United States is strongly correlated with political events and conflict in Israel and the Palestinian territories rather than with particular social media campaigns and discursive strategies. For example, membership in BDS-supporting organizations spiked during and after the two

most recent Israeli attacks on Hamas in Gaza in 2008–2009 and in the summer of 2014 (Beinart, 2015; Munayyer, 2015; Nabulsi, 2014, p. 106; Nussbaum Cohen, 2014). An in-depth discussion of this connection is beyond the scope of this article but warrants further study. If pro-BDS discourse can build a stronger emotional narration and connection with wider audiences during and immediately after relevant political or military events in the region, then faster growth in membership and support may result.

Rather than supporting a techno-deterministic view of social media use in social movements, this analysis of the BDS case indicates that the movement uses social media in particular ways that are influenced by the social, cultural, and geographic context of the specific BDS-supporting groups and organizations studied. International and local BDS organizations use social media in different ways, and each local group and social media page administrator have their own style of writing and favorite sources for linking and retweeting. While some local groups regularly post messages that initiate physical mobilizations and thus may facilitate a choreography of assembly for local actions and events, as discussed by Gerbaudo, the international organization focuses more on building enthusiasm for BDS by publicizing successful actions. This difference in strategies echoes Hallward's (2013) description of the BDS movement as "a loosely organized network" of grassroots activists who devise campaigns that are sensitive to the context of local values and needs (pp. 33-34). Official Palestinian BDS movement discourse targets a larger international audience, while local BDS groups focus on smaller audiences of local activists and supporters. Both local and international BDS organizations appear to use social media primarily to address audiences who already support BDS rather than trying to gain converts or persuade those who are opposed. BDS groups' use of social media is also paired with on-the-ground organizing and activism that cannot be replaced by online activism alone. The successful history of print media use during the First Intifada shows that social media, while especially useful for a transnational population of diaspora Palestinians and their supporters, are not a prerequisite for Palestinian mobilization.

These findings also suggest that pro-BDS social media discourse could build a stronger emotional connection with a wider international audience. Without a stronger emotional connection to spur them to join on-the-ground actions, a significant percentage of users who are reading and/or liking these posts may tend more toward "slacktivism" (Gerbaudo, 2012, pp. 30-35, 147; Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2009; Tawil-Souri & Aouragh, 2014, p. 117). The movement also faces unique rhetorical obstacles and constraints that make connecting with wider audiences more difficult, especially given the controversy and polarization surrounding criticism of Israeli policy and the obligation to frequently address charges of anti-Semitism against a boycott movement that targets the Jewish State. This is one reason why BDS

activists may often avoid using emotional appeals. They must be careful *how* they create an emotional narration and use emotional appeals so as to avoid stoking too much anger at Israel, which could then be perceived as crossing the line into promoting anti-Semitism and thus provoke a backlash from Israel advocates. Jasper (2011) describes how expressions of anger are often “a means for challenging injustices, a normal part of most protest movements,” but in the case of Palestinians solidarity activism and the BDS movement, anger can also backfire (p. 296). Edward Said (1979) acknowledges the rhetorical difficulty long faced by pro-Palestinian activists: “no other movement in history has had so difficult an opponent: a people recognized as the classical victim of history” (p. xxii).

It can be argued that the controversial nature of BDS, especially in the United States, likely serves as an obstacle to making the BDS movement more inclusive and appealing to a wider audience. Although BDS supporters have in recent years made an effort to connect the struggle with racial and economic justice issues in the United States, including through Black–Palestinian solidarity initiatives and connections with the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States, BDS and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict continue to be perceived by many as a risky subject to discuss (Abraham, 2014; Bailey, 2015; Black-Palestinian Solidarity, 2015; Kane, 2015). Because BDS-related activism and social media use is also monitored by Israel and pro-Israel advocacy organizations, the risks to activists also include potential negative consequences for future employment and denial of entry to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (Alsaafin, 2013; Barrows-Friedman, 2016; Blumenthal & Carmel, 2015; Cohen, 2015; Coren, 2015; Hovel, 2015; Kane, 2015).

While the BDS movement’s social media usage functions similarly in some ways to other contemporary mass movements by delivering practical information to supporters and facilitating on-the-ground actions, the BDS movement’s social media discourse does not establish the same level of emotional connection or interactivity with audiences as some other recent movements have. These limitations, however, must also be contextualized by considering the unique constraints of the rhetorical situation confronted by the BDS movement and the possible repercussions faced by activists engaging in Palestinian solidarity activism. And while social media platforms will likely continue to play an indispensable role in the growth of the BDS movement and the circulation of BDS and Palestinian solidarity discourse, the growth and success of this movement also requires many dedicated activists, organizers, and effective rhetorical strategies.

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