Gaza is Trending

There are roughly 27,600 Twitter accounts in Palestine—a number that is on the rise. Twitter has been more valuable than other social media services for Palestinians to spread news. The use of Twitter in Gaza—in terms of both the number of Twitter accounts and the number of Tweets—exceeds that of the West Bank despite Gaza's smaller population size in comparison. The long siege of Gaza has left its people isolated—both socially and emotionally—from other Palestinians and from the rest of the world. The 140-character Tweets have become the new voice of Gaza.

by Mohammad N. Khayyat

t's 10:00 p.m. here in Riyadh. I'm sitting in a crowded place full of football fans preparing for the World Cup semi-final match between Brazil and Germany. But my heart and mind are in a totally different place at the moment: Gaza.

I'm focused on Gaza, thanks to all the Palestinians who are actively showering us with Tweets from the burning land of our beloved home.

Twitter is my new trusted source for news coming out of occupied Palestine. Many people have developed a habit of turning off TV channels to listen instead to the voice of everyday people broadcasting their stories without the brutal censorship laws enforced by governments and media giants. In the social media world, Twitter is becoming a crowd-sourced news source where everyone can get the story from a first-person point of view instead of reading a reporter's edited script.

As a Twitter user, it is your responsibility to select your news sources for a certain event. Following trustworthy people and hashtags (which help you track specific topics) on this active platform is not easy. It could take you weeks of reviewing many tweets from one account to realise if that person is telling the truth, representing a certain point of view, or just playing around to get more followers (audience). There is no step-by-step guide to create your own list of citizen reporters for any event or cause; you will have to use your own best judgement and make these decisions for yourself.

In Gaza, new media activists are creating a live coverage stream using hashtags like #Gaza, #GazaUnderAttack, #PrayForGaza, #ZionismIsTerrorism, and many others. Pride, sarcasm, sorrow, and grief are pouring out from Gaza's new ambassadors, putting their homeland on the top of all trending topics in this virtual world. On other hand, opposing hashtags have been created by Israelis – mostly young teens – such as #ZionStandUp, #IsraelUnderFire, and #IStandWithIsrael.

The images below are from twazzup.com (an analytics website) for different hashtags. The first one represents #GazaUnderAttack showing top influencers, top photos, top links, and a live stream of tweets. The second one represents #ZionStandUp showing the same information.

The football match is starting now, but I'm not staying to watch it. I'm driving back home to follow the hashtags from Gaza and to spend the night with my beloved virtual friends. Kudos to you, Twitter heroes. You carry us to Gaza to know your reality and to feel the injustice of our universe.

Mohammad N. Khayyat has 14 years of experience in information technology, primarily in the areas of digital marketing, project management, and applications development. He's passionate about business development and new Arab start-ups.

STILL STANDING!
ALL WITH GAZA