
Title: Live, and Let Last: The Power of Ephemerality in the #FreePalestine Digital Movement.

Name: Tisha Maria Banerjee [tishbanerjee1@gmail.com]

Supervisor: Dr. Anne Helmond [a.helmond@uu.nl]

Second Reader: Dr. P. (Maxigas) Dunajcsik [p.dunajcsik@uu.nl]

Programme: New Media and Digital Culture Master's

Date of Submission: 18th April 2025

Acknowledgements

First, a big thank you to Dr. Anne Helmond, for being the kind of supervisor who challenges you in all the right ways. Your guidance sharpened both my thinking and my writing, and I'm incredibly grateful. My appreciation also goes to Dr. P. (Maxigas) Dunajcsik, my second reader; we only met once, but that one meeting delivered more clarity than most people do in ten.

To my parents: thank you for always supporting me, even when I was explaining things that probably made no sense to you at the time. And to Joey, thank you for being endlessly patient and for reminding me that taking breaks is not a crime.

I stand with the hope for a Free Palestine, and my gratitude extends to Motaz Azaiza, not just for his work, but for his heart. He inspires more than just this thesis.

I'm only 21, but I feel like I've lived several lives through the conversations, readings, and people who shaped this work. Thank you all.

Abstract:

This research examines the impact of Instagram's ephemeral features, specifically Instagram Live, on creating urgency, engagement, and visibility within the #FreePalestine movement. By focusing on the digital activism of Motaz Azaiza, a prominent Palestinian photojournalist, the study explores how temporary content enables collective momentum, challenging the conventional view that digital activism relies on permanence to create lasting political impact. Instagram's unique combination of real-time interaction and selective permanence, such as Archived Live videos, creates a space for immediate action while retaining traces of content for future visibility. The study uses a mixed-methods qualitative approach, incorporating case study analysis, affordance analysis, and interface analysis to examine how Instagram's platform design shapes the practices and content of digital activists and the endurance of ephemeral content. It looks at how the affordances of Instagram, such as the transitory nature of Live content and the selective preservation of archived videos, contribute to the dynamic nature of online activism. This research also addresses the implications of ephemerality for digital memory, exploring how the fleeting nature of certain content disrupts traditional notions of social media versus digital archives. By considering these tensions between immediacy and long-term visibility, the research offers fresh insights into the evolving nature of digital activism. It explores the ways in which social media platforms, through their features and governance, mediate political participation and influence the strategies employed by activists. Ultimately, this study sheds light on how ephemeral content can both challenge and reinforce the broader socio-political landscape of digital activism, with implications for the governance of activism in the digital age.

Keywords: Instagram, Archived Lives, Ephemerality, Palestine, Temporality, Digital Activism

Table of Contents

I. Introduction.....	5
<i>Research Relevance.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Research Context.....</i>	<i>6</i>
II. Theoretical Framework.....	9
<i>Understanding Digital Activism.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Distributed Framing and Platform-Specific Real-Timeness.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Archiving Practices within Instagram Lives.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>The Urgency Imperative.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Ephemerality as a Strategy.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Disciplinary Power.....</i>	<i>16</i>
III. Methodology.....	18
<i>Interface and Affordance Analysis.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Case Selection and Sampling Strategy.....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Ethical Considerations.....</i>	<i>23</i>
IV. Analysis and Discussion.....	24
<i>Part I: Affordances, Interfaces, and Platform Design.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>The Politics of Labelling and Timestamping.....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Epistemic Constraints and Temporal Regulation in Archived Lives.....</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Part II: Motaz Azaiza and the #FreePalestine Movement.....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Rethinking the “Archived” in “Archived Lives”.....</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Compression or Comprehension?.....</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Platform Control and the Disciplining of Visibility.....</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Distributed Authorship.....</i>	<i>37</i>
V. Conclusion.....	38
VI. Bibliography.....	40
VII. Appendix.....	46

I. Introduction

Erase the past, silence the present, and control the future—these are the mechanisms through which power enforces “historical amnesia” (Howard-Hassmann, 2014). Nowhere is this more evident than in the struggle for Palestinian visibility, where systemic erasure operates not only through physical displacement but also within the digital sphere. “For more than a century, Zionist groups and Western colonial powers have sought to erase Palestine’s Arab roots, erase Palestinian ties to the land, and even erase Palestinians as a people” (Nassar, 2024). This long-standing erasure is not only political and historical but also extends into the digital sphere, where Palestinian activists frequently experience fights against algorithmic suppression, content takedowns, and the fleeting nature of social media visibility (Arkenbout, 2024). While some movements seek lasting institutional change, Palestinian activism has always been a battle against forced disappearance; both offline and online.

Research Relevance

In the current digital space, social media platforms have become central arenas for activism, where movements mobilise, gain visibility, and challenge dominant narratives. Instagram, a platform primarily known for its visual content, has also emerged as a site of political engagement (Olof Larsson, 2021), particularly through its ephemeral features such as Stories and Lives. An Instagram Live can disappear immediately after broadcast, following the platform’s default settings. However, at times the content does not vanish entirely. Almost immediately, the video can be saved, reposted, and shared across various Instagram feeds.¹ The

¹Only the original broadcaster can archive or repost an Instagram Live through the platform’s native tools. However, once the Live is made publicly accessible, either as a post, Reel, or story, other users can redistribute it within Instagram’s sharing features, depending on the account’s privacy settings. Additionally, even if a Live is not reposted, viewers can still preserve it through external means such as screen recording or third-party tools, highlighting the porous boundaries of ephemerality on social media.

act of saving and repurposing temporary content highlights an interesting paradox: what was meant to be temporary became permanent. This shift—from ephemeral to enduring—reveals an important tension in digital activism: while some social media platforms create tools for temporary content, they also provide mechanisms for *selective permanence*. In this research, I define *selective permanence* as the persistence of digital content originally designed to be transient, sustained through user intervention, algorithmic amplification, or cross-platform migration. This concept captures the interplay between platform-imposed ephemerality and activist strategies that extend the life of digital content. *Selective permanence* is neither entirely dictated by platform affordances nor solely controlled by activists; rather, as this thesis will show, it emerges from the interaction between social media infrastructures, user practices, and the broader socio-political context of digital activism.

Research Context

Discussions on ephemerality have often framed it as a characteristic of activism itself—suggesting that movements, rather than just content, are inherently transient (Crane, 2015; Phillips & Montes, 2017; Lazzara, 2018). However, ephemerality, as a platform-driven feature that structures engagement through *selective permanence*, remains underexplored in this context.

The distinction between ephemerality and impermanence is crucial for understanding how activism functions on digital platforms. At an ontological level, impermanence speaks to a fundamental condition of reality: “reality is never static but dynamic throughout,” a state that “modern scientists are realising to be the basic nature of the world without any exception” (Thera, 2008, p. 10). In the context of digital media, impermanence hence refers to the broader lifespan of content—how it moves between disappearance and persistence over time.

Ephemerality, by contrast, specifically describes “communication artifacts, including text, pictures, and videos, that will be erased after being displaying for a limited period of time” (Chen & Cheung, 2019, p. 67). Unlike impermanence, which reflects a more gradual fading or preservation of content, ephemerality highlights the platform’s role in structuring what is made to disappear and how activists respond to this temporality.

By focusing on the #FreePalestine movement on Instagram, this research examines how activists strategically engage with ephemerality to shape visibility, urgency, and engagement. While ephemeral features are designed for immediacy, some Palestinian activists frequently repurpose them to document on-the-ground realities, counter mainstream media narratives, and mobilise international audiences, whether through resharing, archiving, or platform affordances that extend the life of ephemeral content. This study challenges the assumption that ephemerality weakens activism—a critique often found in discussions of “clicktivism,” (Özkula, 2021) where online activism is dismissed as “futile, trivial, inconsequential, ephemeral, low-risk, loose-/weak-tie, low-commitment/ uncommitted/ apathetic,” implying that transient digital actions lack meaningful impact (p. 74). Instead, this research positions ephemerality as a deliberate and flexible tool for mobilisation, narrative construction, and digital resistance.

The nature of the live, which, as Karin Van Es (2017) states “has always been a construction and never not been social,” (p. 1248) highlights how ephemeral moments are inherently shaped by their social context and engagement. This ultimately leads to the central question of this research: How do Instagram’s ephemeral features, like Lives, facilitate urgency, engagement, and visibility in the #FreePalestine movement?

To address this overarching question, the research examines several more specific lines of inquiry that collectively unpack how ephemerality shapes activist practice on the platform. One

such line of inquiry focuses on the urgency embedded within ephemeral features. The very temporality of Instagram Live, for instance, compels audiences to engage in the moment, creating a heightened sense of immediacy and crisis. Unlike traditional activism, which often relies on sustained campaigning, ephemeral activism forces immediate interaction, compelling users to participate before content disappears. It is therefore important to ask: how does the urgency created by Instagram's ephemeral features afford rapid participation and collective momentum in the #FreePalestine movement? And to what extent do these affordances enable sustained engagement or contribute to cycles of short-lived digital activism?

Another line of investigation considers the socio-political implications of ephemeral activism. While social media platforms offer new avenues for mobilisation, they also exert control over activism through algorithmic suppression, de-platforming, and content moderation. Palestinian activists, in particular, have reported widespread content takedowns and shadow banning on Instagram (Arkenbout, 2024), raising questions about how platform governance influences the visibility of activism. Building on this broader inquiry, a key supporting question arises: how does using temporary content challenge traditional academic theories and public perceptions regarding digital activism's reach and effectiveness? These tensions between visibility, suppression, and ephemerality are crucial to understanding the broader impact of digital activism in constrained political environments.

My thesis expands on key studies in digital activism and the role of social media platforms in political engagement, using a theoretical framework centered on ephemerality, urgency, and platform affordances. Using an interface analysis, the methodology section examines how these dynamics, used as analytical tools for understanding platform behaviour, are enabled or constrained by design and affordances. This is followed by a case study of a

Palestinian digital activist, providing further insight into ephemeral activism and platform governance within the #FreePalestine movement. The findings contribute to the broader field of digital activism research.

II. Theoretical Framework

In this section, I will discuss the relevant literature and theoretical concepts that underpin this research. I will begin by defining digital activism, after which I will delve into the concept of temporality in digital media, focusing on how platforms like Instagram shape the dynamics of digital activism through their ephemeral features. I will then examine the intersection of ephemerality, urgency, and engagement, and how these elements influence the visibility and impact of social movements. This discussion will be informed by key theories, including Hartmut Rosa's theory of social acceleration and Michel Foucault's disciplinary power. Additionally, I will consider the role of platform-specific temporalities, real-timeness, and archival practices in shaping user engagement and the persistence of activist messages. By integrating these concepts, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how digital activism operates within the temporal constraints and affordances of digital platforms.

Understanding Digital Activism

Digital activism involves “citizen-spurred forms of contentious collective action that use either digital tools to organize or digital environments to confront their political targets” (Balan & Dumitrica, 2022, pp. 5467-5468). This form of activism allows for decentralised, spontaneous actions that can rapidly spread across digital platforms. Özkula (2021) expands on this by highlighting that digital activism includes both online versions of traditional activism, such as

petitions and protests, and the use of digital technologies to support offline actions, like organising events through social media (p. 61). This conceptualisation highlights the interplay between digital and offline activism, where digital tools not only build immediate online actions but also serve as a starter of real-world events.

While digital activism enables rapid action, some scholars note that this immediacy often leads to short-lived impacts. Kamilla Pietrzyk's (2010) critique in *Activism in the Fast Lane: Social Movements and the Neglect of Time*, aids in understanding the less contested views of ephemerality in digital activism. She argues that the focus on immediate responses within digital activism often results in "short-term, unreflexive, and ahistorical" modes of social consciousness, where the urgency of the moment often overshadows the importance of long-term reflection and sustained action (p. 9). Her view suggests that digital activism's temporality undermines the long-term capacity of movements to evolve. This study will revisit Pietrzyk's assessment through the lens of the ephemeral nature of Instagram's features.

Distributed Framing and Platform-Specific Real-Timeness

Ince, Rojas, and Davis's (2017) study on the social activist movement and hashtag #BlackLivesMatter sparks ongoing discourse and challenges the assumption that ephemeral visibility equates to a lack of long-term impact. They demonstrate that while the hashtag's visibility may be short-lived, the conversations it initiated on platforms like Twitter continue to resonate over time. As they explain, "many actors can appropriate the movement's phraseology and deploy it for their own goals," which demonstrates how the public not only embraces the original message of the movement but also reinterprets and extends its meaning to include broader issues such as racial inequality, police violence, and healthcare disparities (Ince, Rojas,

& Davis, 2017, p. 1815). This process of “distributed framing” ensures that the movement’s core message is continually adapted and re-engaged by different audiences across time and space, creating an evolving discourse around social justice. The temporality and ephemerality of digital activism do not negate its long-term influence. In fact, the transient nature of online content can serve as a catalyst, fueling processes that sustain and transform a movement’s message over time. While “distributed framing” ensures that a movement’s message can evolve over time, it is essential to recognise how the urgency and real-timeness of digital platforms shape the trajectory of digital activism.

Real-timeness refers to the immediacy of engagement on platforms, an aspect that compels rapid action and participation. However, it is important to note that this quality is not uniform across all platforms. Weltevrede, Helmond, and Gerlitz (2014) further extend this analysis by emphasising how platform-specific temporalities shape the ways in which users interact with content. Their concept of “real-timeness” (p. 127) critiques the assumption that all digital interactions are equally immediate and transient. Rather, the temporality of digital platforms is shaped by the unique rhythms, features, and affordances each platform offers. In the case of Instagram, for example, the combination of ephemeral features like Stories and Lives with the option for archiving creates a tension between immediacy and the potential for sustained engagement. This tension, rather than detracting from the long-term relevance of digital activism, fuels its continual transformation and widespread impact. Similarly, Thomas Poell (2019) in *Social Media, Temporality, and the Legitimacy of Protest*, labels this very concept of “real-time social media reporting” as “the dominant mode of protest communication, further accelerating the mainstream news cycle” (p. 610). It is hence clear that real-timeness drives

immediate engagement but, when paired with the mechanisms of distributed framing, allows movements to extend their influence well beyond the fleeting moment of interaction.

The notion of digital media's fleeting nature, though often seen as a limitation, is in fact part of what makes it so potent for sustained engagement. This is furthered by Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (2008), in her essay *The Enduring Ephemeral, or The Future is a Memory*, where she discusses how digital media's constant regeneration and interaction create sustained user interest. "Digital media is truly a time-based medium" and "turns images, sounds, and text into discrete moments in time" (Chun, 2008, pp. 166-167) and this research draws on this very characteristic to argue that Instagram Lives similarly drives continued engagement. Rather than viewing ephemerality as antithetical to longevity, Chun (2008) argues that "we must analyze, as we try to grasp a present that is always degenerating, the ways in which ephemerality is made to endure" (p. 171). This insight is crucial for understanding how Instagram Lives operate, not just as momentary events, but as nodes within a broader layering of chronologies, where repeated sharing and archiving allow ephemeral content to gain political weight over time. As Chun (2008) furthers, "this enduring ephemeral—a battle of diligence between the passing and the repetitive—also characterizes content" (p. 167). In this sense, the affordance of archiving Lives does not negate their temporality, but rather extends it into new cycles of circulation, creating continuity through repetition. The ongoing relevance of movements like #BlackLivesMatter (Chatterjee, 2024)—despite their initially ephemeral visibility—helps understand how ephemeral features like Instagram Lives used for the #FreePalestine movement can aid in adapting to new contexts and sustaining public discourse over time.

Archiving Practices within Instagram Lives

Instagram Lives, by broadcasting events as they happen, not only compel viewers to engage immediately, creating a shared sense of urgency and action, but also allow activists “to document their motivations and conduct, and blunt less flattering narratives in legacy media” (Agur & Frisch, 2019, p. 1). This practice mirrors how protesters utilised digital platforms during ‘Hong Kong’s 2014 Umbrella Movement’, as noted by Colin Agur and Nicholas Frisch (2019). The temporary nature of Instagram Lives means they are prioritised in users’ feeds, ensuring that content related to the #FreePalestine movement reaches a broader audience quickly. This visibility is crucial for maintaining the movement’s momentum and keeping it in the public eye.

Bainotti et al. (2020) highlight the tension between Instagram’s ephemeral features and archival practices. They state that Instagram Stories are designed to disappear, users often save these moments as Highlights or repurpose them for use on other platforms like YouTube, thus extending the life of the content (pp. 3657-3673). This interaction between the ephemeral and the archival allows this research to study how activists ensure their messages persist beyond the 24-hour window, creating a feedback loop that maintains the movement’s visibility and relevance. As Rob Kitchin (2023) argues in his book *Digital Timescapes*, digital platforms do not just archive time; they manipulate it, creating elastic, recursive temporalities where the past is never quite past (pp. 3-25). This resonates with the concept of “archive fever”, first introduced by Jacques Derrida (1998) as a paradoxical desire to both preserve and conceal the past. Ariella Azoulay (2011) reworks this idea, reframing “archive fever” as a political condition rooted in the “public’s right to access, contribute to, and reshape the archive. She argues that this right can be seen “as not external to the archive, but rather as an essential part of it, of its character, of its raison d’être.” This rethinking positions the archive as a contested, participatory space; one

shaped not only by institutions but by ordinary citizens, ensuring that moments of mobilisation are re-shared and re-contextualised in a manner that reinforces the ongoing relevance of the movement. In this light, Instagram's archiving of ephemeral features like Lives becomes a form of counter-archival practice.

The Urgency Imperative

The world of digital activism operates within a paradoxical temporal regime where urgency and ephemerality coexist as defining characteristics. Hartmut Rosa's *Theory of Social Acceleration* (2013) explains how the increasing speed of technological and social processes conditions activism to adapt to compressed temporalities. In an era where political discourse unfolds in real time, movements must synchronise with the faster rhythms of digital platforms to capture attention and sustain relevance. Ephemerality, rather than being a limitation, becomes an operational necessity aligning activist strategies with the fleeting but intensified engagement patterns that define digital publics. "Social acceleration is defined by an increase in the decay-rates of the reliability of experiences and expectations and by the contraction of the time-spans definable as the 'present'." (Rosa, 2003, p. 7). An Instagram Live documenting hardships in Palestine loses relevance almost as soon as the broadcast ends, necessitating the need for the aforementioned *selective permanence*.

Instagram Lives are engineered to create what I call a *compressed present*, a phenomenon that echoes Rosa's (2003) views on how, in late modernity, time no longer simply unfolds but accelerates to the point of "compressing or even annihilating space" (p. 6). This shift is crucial in understanding the role of ephemerality in digital activism: rather than content being anchored to a stable, locatable history, it exists in a state of *selective permanence*, where visibility is

contingent on strategic preservation and platform affordances. The *compressed present* amplifies this effect, as activists must move through a temporality in which the immediacy of engagement is paramount, yet the longevity of impact is uncertain. This aligns with Rosa's (2003) observation that “people feel pressed to keep up with the speed of change they experience in their social and technological world in order to avoid the loss of potentially valuable options and connections” (p. 11), forcing activists to treat content as perishable goods in a hyper-competitive attention economy. Paradoxically, ephemerality becomes a tool for synchronisation with platform temporality; a way to be at pace with accelerated user expectations. This study applies Rosa’s framework to investigate how ephemerality structures the temporality of digital activism, shaping not only how movements mobilise but also how they remain perceptible within an ecosystem of accelerated visibility.

Ephemerality as a Strategy

The significance of digital platforms in creating both temporal urgency and long-term continuity are furthered by Vázquez-Herrero et al. (2019). Their findings of how media outlets are “producing ephemeral stories for Instagram with the main purpose of adapting their news contents to the functionalities of this platform and the users’ preferences” (p. 2) directly ties into this research’s investigation of how digital activists of the #FreePalestine movement also adapt to platform temporalities. This adaptation is critical for this research, as it demonstrates that ephemeral content is not merely an obstacle to long-term activism but a tool for increasing engagement and responsiveness, much like news media strategies. Bayer et al. (2015) also explore the dynamics between persistent and ephemeral communication on social media. While persistent content allows for long-term documentation and engagement, ephemeral media brings

about a sense of urgency and spontaneity. Bayer et al.'s (2015) discussion on the persistence of social media as an affordance that extends the accessibility of content (p. 956) directly aligns with Weltevrede et al.'s (2014) arguments on platform temporalities, where platform affordances like those on Instagram influence the perceived longevity of content, which could affect how activism is experienced and organised.

We see that persistent social media can “make self-presentational concerns more salient” (Bayer et al., 2015, p. 957), as it shows how users might tailor their content based on its potential to endure in public memory. This distinction aligns with this research, highlighting how Instagram's ephemeral features, though short-lived, can create a heightened sense of immediacy that spurs ongoing action. Bayer et al.'s (2015) analysis of how platforms support both persistent self-presentation and ephemeral interactions provides a valuable lens through which to understand the balance between short-term visibility and long-term social change in digital activism. This tension between dynamic urgency and archival persistence allows movements to thrive in digital spaces, making use of the platform's temporal affordances to effect lasting social change.

Disciplinary Power

As Sarah Sharma (2014) argues in *In the Meantime*, “temporality is an invisible and unremarked relation of power” (p. 13)— a force that determines who has the ability to participate in political discourse and on what terms. Complementing this, Michel Foucault's (1975) analysis from his work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, highlights how power operates through the governance of discipline. Digital platforms, as socio-technical infrastructures, do not merely host activism; they actively mediate its temporal conditions. Algorithmic curation,

ephemeral content cycles, and engagement-driven visibility mechanisms dictate the duration and reach of activist interventions, creating a temporality that is neither entirely activist-driven nor wholly imposed. Foucault (1975) argues that “disciplinary power” does not function as a centralised force coming from an authority figure like a sovereign or judge; rather, it moves through individuals as they interact and build relationships across various settings (p. 146). In the case of this study, by limiting content lifespans, Instagram enforces a regime of urgency that mirrors the idea of “disciplinary power”, regulating activist bodies (users) via features that demand continuous productivity. As Taina Bucher (2012) notes in her work *Want to be on the top? Algorithmic power and the threat of invisibility on Facebook*, “many of the characteristics associated with disciplinary power described by Foucault, such as the function of enclosure, the creation of self-control and the training of human multiplicity, are apt characterizations of the kind of enclosed architecture of Facebook,” (p. 1177) and by extension, platforms like Instagram. However, she also highlights how these architectures differ: visibility is “not permanent but temporary, not equally imposed on everyone and oscillating between appearing and disappearing” (p. 1177). The #FreePalestine movement's reliance on real-time updates, documenting bombardments, displacement, and protests as they unfold, reflects an internalisation of this disciplinary logic. This research uses these insights to interrogate the structural conditions that produce ephemerality as a strategic necessity rather than a voluntary choice.

By integrating these key concepts and theories, this synthesis moves beyond viewing ephemerality as either a constraint or an enabler, instead positioning it as a condition that emerges from the interplay between activist strategies and platform-imposed temporalities. In

doing so, this research aims to reveal how urgency in digital activism is both a response to and a product of the infrastructures that mediate its visibility and impact.

III. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods qualitative approach to examine how Instagram Live functions as an ephemeral yet enduring infrastructure for digital activism. The research combines case study analysis, affordance analysis, and interface analysis to create a comprehensive methodological framework. I aim to divide the analysis into two interrelated parts. The first part focuses on Instagram’s interface and affordances through a comparative analysis of archived Lives and regular video posts. In the second part, the case study of Motaz Azaiza demonstrates how activists harness these ephemeral affordances. This section, therefore, outlines the methodological framework for exploring the complex interplay between design, user behaviour, and the broader socio-political implications of ephemeral digital activism.

Interface and Affordance Analysis

This study employs interface analysis to examine how Instagram signals *liveness* and how audiences are presented with real-time content. As Suler (1996) notes, individuals “often feel—consciously or subconsciously—that they are entering a ‘place’ or ‘space’ that is filled with a wide array of meanings and purposes” (p. 105). This perspective underscores the importance of analysing how Instagram’s interface creates a sense of presence during Live broadcasts, shaping both the spatial and affective dimensions of digital activism.

Social media interfaces are not neutral spaces, instead, they play a crucial role in shaping how activist narratives are both created and consumed. Instagram, with its ephemeral design, offers a rich space to explore how these temporary features alter public discourse. Yet, the analysis is not simply concerned with technological features; it is a critical inquiry into how digital interfaces mediate the practice of activism. As Mel Stanfill (2012) reminds us in their work *The interface as discourse: The production of norms through web design*, “a site’s design makes a normative claim about its purpose and appropriate use” (p. 1060), revealing how affordances are always entangled with power. This study therefore interrogates the dual function of Lives as both a site of empowerment and a mechanism of regulation, and examines what this tension reveals about the politics of immediacy.

A key aspect of this analysis is identifying the visual, textual, and interactive cues that distinguish Live videos from standard posts. This study compares the general affordances of Live videos with regular posts, exploring how interface elements shape user perception, engagement, and interaction. The concept of affordances is useful in understanding this process, with Gibson (1979) defining them as “what the environment offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill” (p. 127). This perspective emphasises the inherent action possibilities enabled by a system rather than just user perception, making it particularly valuable for analysing Instagram Lives.

Bucher and Helmond (2018) extend Gibson’s work into digital environments by suggesting that affordances are not only a matter of physical environments but also “capture[s] the relationship between the materiality of media and human agency” (p. 11). Rather than simply focusing on the environment-body relationship, this approach examines the dynamics of communicative practices and social interactions that various platform features enable (Bucher &

Helmond, 2018, p. 11). They therefore introduce the distinction between high-level and low-level affordances, where low-level affordances are “typically located in the materiality of the medium, in specific features, buttons, screens, and platforms” (Bucher & Helmond, 2018, p. 12).

While low-level affordances shape micro-level user interaction, they do not exist in isolation but instead operate within a broader socio-technical framework. As danah boyd (2010) argues, social network sites “are essentially shaped by four central affordances: persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability” (p. 46). These high-level affordances, as Bucher and Helmond (2018) describe them, represent “the kinds of dynamics and conditions enabled by technical devices, platforms and media” (p. 12) rather than just specific features. Building on this framework, this study identifies the following key affordances of Instagram Live:

1. Liveness: The ability to broadcast in real time, bringing direct audience interaction and immediacy.
2. Ephemerality: The temporariness of Live content, which can disappear after 24 hours unless archived.
3. Archivability: The capacity for platform or user-driven preservation through highlights, reposts, or third-party recordings.
4. Visibility Modulation: The platform's role in amplifying or limiting the reach of Live content through algorithmic recommendation and interface cues.

By systematically analysing these high-level affordances, this research assesses how Instagram Live's ephemeral infrastructure both enables and constrains activist engagement.

Case Selection and Sampling Strategy

Instagram was chosen as the primary platform due to its built-in affordances that allow Lives to either disappear after 24 hours or be preserved as posts. It has become a dominant platform for activism, by using its visual nature, such as hashtags, infographics, and viral posts, to amplify social movements and elevate marginalised voices (Mao, 2021; Raffio, 2022). The platform's accessibility and popularity among youth make it particularly effective for engaging peripheral participants, who collectively expand the reach of activist messages (Mao, 2021; Heuer & Macomber, 2022;). Unlike platforms such as TikTok, where live videos are often removed unless actively saved by users, Instagram's design offers activists strategic choices regarding content permanence.

This study selects Motaz Azaiza (@motaz_azaiza), a prominent Palestinian photojournalist and digital activist, as its primary case study². Amassing over 16.9 million followers as of March 2025, his account features more than 2,500 posts documenting the people of Gaza and daily life under siege, offering unfiltered coverage that has resonated globally (Mraffko, 2024). Initially focused on artistic photography, his work shifted to “daily chronicle of Israeli strikes” after early October of 2023, making him one of the most prominent voices from Gaza (Abbruzzese et al., 2023). Motaz frequently uses Instagram Live to document events in real time, engage audiences, and shape digital narratives around the #FreePalestine movement. His Live broadcasts have garnered widespread attention and have often been reshared beyond

² A second activist, Bisan Owda (@wizard_bisan1), was initially considered but has increasingly shifted her live broadcasts to TikTok since starting the research. While TikTok's affordances differ significantly from Instagram's, the focus of this study remains on Instagram's ephemeral infrastructure rather than cross-platform activism. Notably, Bisan's videos are often archived and reshared by other users, shifting the focus from ephemerality as an activist strategy toward audience-driven preservation. This highlights the broader role of platform ecosystems in shaping activist content's lifespan and reach, though TikTok will not be included in the primary analysis.

Instagram, extending their reach beyond their initial ephemeral format. In recognition of his impact both online and offline, he was also named *GQ Magazine Middle East's* 'Man of the Year' back in 2023 (Sinha, 2023).



Image 1: Motaz Azaiza's Instagram profile as of March, 2025.

A case study approach is used to provide an in-depth, context-sensitive examination of activist practices on Instagram Live. This study employs purposive sampling, which is “used to select respondents that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information” (Kelly, 2010, p. 317), deliberately selecting Motaz Azaiza’s account due to its prominence and relevance to the research focus on digital activism and ephemerality.

Three archived Instagram Lives and three regular video posts are purposefully selected based on their temporal proximity, with the selection being limited to content available as of 20 March 2025. The archived Lives I will be analysing were posted on 20 March 2025, 15 January 2024, and 16 November 2024. Initially, three of Motaz Azaiza’s most recent video posts as of 20 March 2025 were selected: two from 20 March 2025 and one from 18 March 2025. However,

this selection was revised upon realising that comparing Lives and posts too spaced out in time would limit interpretive depth. Instead, the final video posts selected are from 20 March 2025, 15 January 2025, and 18 November 2024; each corresponding immediately after the dates of the archived Lives to enable more coherent comparative analysis (see Appendix for links to the selected videos). A comparative framework is important since it isolates how different platform formats (despite similar content) shape the activist's communicative strategies and the temporal dynamics of participation.

Only six pieces of content will be analysed in total (three Lives and three video posts) as “purposive sampling is best used when you want to focus in depth on relatively small samples” (Nikolopoulou, 2022). Rather than aiming for broad generalisation based on content alone, the analysis focuses on the affordances and temporal dynamics that shape how content is experienced and engaged with on Instagram. This makes a smaller, carefully selected sample suitable for illustrating the mechanisms through which ephemerality and persistence operate. Additionally, video posts were specifically selected because their format closely matches that of the Lives, allowing for a more direct comparison of audiovisual storytelling and emotional tone. The paired content will be compared on the basis of the representation of the #FreePalestine movement, with platform affordances considered only where relevant to understanding how content circulates and persists. Lastly, the analysis itself prioritises the activist’s message, meaning that audience responses, such as comment sections, will be acknowledged minimally.

Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to ethical guidelines for digital research, ensuring that all data collection and analysis respect user privacy and platform policies. Since the research focuses on

publicly available Instagram content, no private or restricted data is accessed (LEL Ethics, 2018). However, ethical considerations arise regarding the visibility and potential risks associated with analysing activist content, particularly in politically sensitive contexts. To mitigate harm, this study avoids unnecessary exposure of vulnerable individuals and prioritises contextual integrity when interpreting findings. Additionally, user-generated interactions (such as comments) are anonymised where applicable to protect participant privacy. The research follows institutional ethical guidelines and complies with GDPR regulations on data handling and storage, balancing "the rights of subjects (as authors, as research participants, as people) with the social benefits of research" (Markham & Buchanan, 2012, p. 4).

IV. Analysis and Discussion

Part I: Affordances, Interfaces, and Platform Design

When I look at an Instagram profile, I am struck by how temporality is not immediately perceptible. Archived Lives, Reels, and other posts are collapsed into the same grid layout, their original context obscured by the platform's spatial organisation. One cannot instantly tell what was a Live and what was not; there is no immediate visual cue. To discern this, one must manually inspect individual posts within the Reels section, looking for interface-specific markers like the ones I analyse in this section. This flattening of time into space shows how asynchronous elements are made to appear simultaneous, and liveness becomes just another tile in a user's feed. Inevitably, "considering one without the other is problematic since temporal and spatial relations are often interdependent" (Kitchin, 2023, p. ix) and while spatial arrangements may obscure temporal markers, this study focuses mainly on how temporality is still embedded in the

platform's design, influencing how urgency and ephemerality are felt, even when hidden beneath layers of spatial organisation.

The Politics of Labelling and Timestamping

A critical design feature of an archived Live is the “was live” label that appears immediately after a broadcast concludes (see Image 2). While this label might appear to be a simple archival marker, it serves a dual purpose. First, it creates an immediate reminder of the broadcast's transience; second, it invokes a sense of urgency that may compel viewers to engage with the broadcast retrospectively. This is activism not just in the now, but in the almost-now, the just-missed, the nearly-present—a liminal state where urgency lingers long after the moment has supposedly passed. In this way, the "was live" label transforms ephemerality into a paradox: a marker of disappearance that ensures continued presence, proving that even in its absence, the live moment still exerts its pull. As Rob Kitchin (2023) furthers “the past is inserted into the present, producing an affective response that might shape how the future unfolds” (p. 54).

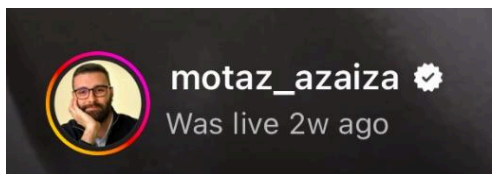


Image 2: The 'Was live' label and relative timestamping ('2 weeks ago')

In contrast, regular posts, with their static, label-less presence, offer an opportunity for asynchronous, reflective interaction. Unlike the temporality of archived Lives, which demand real-time participation and evoke the fear of having just missed something important, regular posts settle into the fabric of the platform's memory, awaiting interaction at the viewer's

convenience. Their longevity brings about a different mode of engagement; one less dictated by urgency and more by contemplation. This difference is further reinforced by the interface itself, where posts are placed beneath even more ephemeral content like Stories, subtly signalling their reduced temporal urgency and encouraging slower consumption. While Lives lean into the mechanics of disappearance to amplify their impact, regular posts rely on accumulation (see Image 3). They become part of a persistent archive, accruing layers of meaning through sustained visibility, ongoing commentary, and algorithmic resurfacing. This structural difference highlights two temporal modes of activism: one that thrives on momentum and disappearance, pulling viewers into action through a fleeting presence, and one that depends on persistence and retrievability, allowing messages to be revisited, recontextualised, and continuously reactivated. If the "was live" label weaponises the fear of missing out, regular posts instead cultivate a slower, more deliberate politics of engagement; one that unfolds across time rather than racing against it.

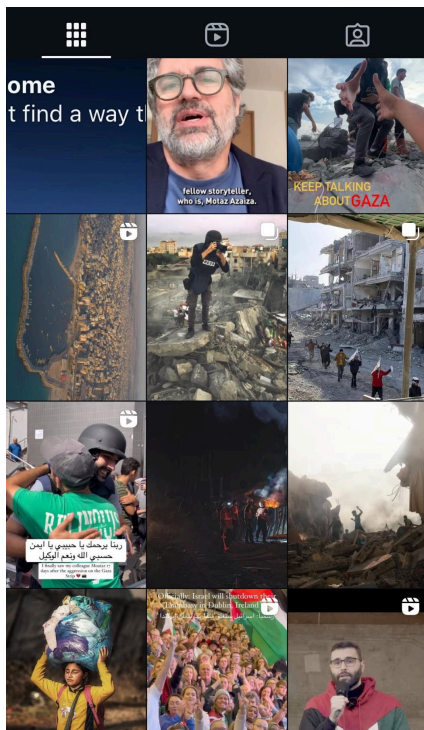


Image 3: Motaz Azaiza's posts accumulated on his Instagram feed.

Another unique aspect of archived Lives is that they are displayed by both the exact date of the broadcast, but also in relative terms (e.g., “2w ago”) (see Image 2). This relative temporal indicator encourages a more fluid perception of time, blurring the exact chronology of events. Moreover, this may diminish the ability of viewers to place events within a clear historical context, reinforcing the ephemeral nature of the moment and emphasising the immediacy over long-term accountability. The tension between immediacy and historical anchoring reflects a broader issue in platform-driven archival practices. As Kitchin (2023) notes, the abundance of digital storage does not automatically translate into a more coherent or reliable historical record (pp. 51-67). Instead, platforms like Instagram curate history according to engagement metrics, not “archival integrity”, which is defined in the *Dictionary of Archival Terminology* (Walne, 1988) as the need for an archive to be “preserved in its entirety without division, mutilation, alienation, unauthorised destruction or addition”(p. 18). In other words, Instagram does not passively preserve content for historical purposes; instead, content that gains fewer interactions is algorithmically buried and high-performing posts are surfaced more often, effectively allowing engagement to dictate what is remembered. This engagement-driven logic is mirrored in the temporal design of archived Lives; where preserving both an absolute and relative timestamp might suggest a nod to historical continuity, but in practice, it does the opposite: by constantly updating the “weeks ago” label, it keeps content hovering between the ephemeral and the archival.

Regular posts, on the other hand, do not get this treatment. Their timestamps remain locked in their relative framing; whether a photo was posted a year ago or five, it is all about how long it has been since its upload. They are timestamped with a simple, relative marker like “2 days ago,” and once a certain threshold is passed, they become fixed to a date, anchoring them in

a linear temporality that reflects their age rather than their urgency. This distinction subtly reinforces the different expectations Instagram sets for its content. Regular posts accumulate likes, comments, and longevity; they age into the platform's ecosystem. Archived Lives, however, are preserved in a way that acknowledges their fleeting origins. Their week-based labeling constantly reminds users of their past immediacy, paradoxically keeping them tied to a sense of freshness even as they persist. This plays into a larger platform logic where the past is always slipping just out of reach. It is clear that Instagram's archival mechanisms here function within the tension of what Azoulay (2011), building on Derrida's idea of "archival fever," describes as preserving content while keeping it in a state of temporal instability, denying it full historical authority. By preserving only traces of past immediacy rather than fully integrating ephemeral content into the platform's enduring memory, Instagram creates an archival condition that keeps the past accessible, but only on its own terms. The effect is what I call a *precarious archive*, naturally operating within the logic of *selective permanence*, where platforms present an illusion of preservation while strategically privileging impermanence.

Epistemic Constraints and Temporal Regulation in Archived Lives

Unlike posts, which allow for captions, hashtags, and metadata that help frame meaning, archived Lives typically lack textual guidance, leaving interpretation entirely dependent on immediate visual and emotional perception. This absence of captions (see Image 4) is not just a design limitation, but an epistemic constraint that reflects the platform's emphasis on continuous, real-time engagement over reflective, contextualised discourse. In the context of Weltevrede et al. (2014) referring to real-timeness as a structuring condition of digital platforms (p. 127), the absence of captions in archived Lives reinforces the primacy of immediacy, ensuring that activist documentation remains fluid, reactive, and tied to the rhythm of platform logics rather than

external historiographical frameworks. Foucault's (1975) notion of disciplinary power is also useful in looking at this phenomenon: Instagram does not overtly coerce activism but conditions it through affordances that regulate behaviour.

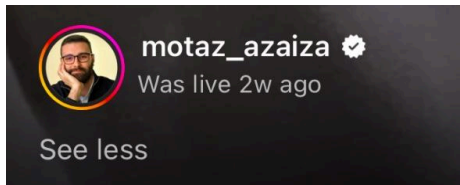


Image 4: Screenshot from an archived Live indicating a lack of captions.

Instagram's archived Lives also introduce a strange kind of visibility: while they extend the lifespan of real-time broadcasts, they strip away the original texture of interaction. Unlike regular posts that can only be up to 3 minutes long as of 2025 and also collect thoughtful comment threads over time, archived Lives (with a maximum length of 4 hours) are cut off from the audience's real-time responses. As Instagram's official website itself confirms, archived Lives "won't include any likes or comments from your original live video" (Instagram, 2022a). This is not just a technical quirk, it is a design choice that severs the moment from its social context, flattening what was once a lively, participatory event into a silent replay. The result is a haunting kind of engagement: *You see the Live, but not the life it had.*

This design move reflects what Hartmut Rosa (2003) calls the pressure to keep pace with accelerated social and technological change. As I noted earlier, in a hyper-competitive attention economy, activists are forced to treat content as urgent. Ephemerality, through the help of "distributed framing", becomes less about disappearance and more about staying in sync with the quick rhythms of the platform. Moreover, the removal of comments and likes does not just erase past engagement; it demands new engagement, every time. In this way, Instagram does not

merely archive activism; it reconditions its temporality to be one that privileges the affective intensity of the now over the longevity of deliberative discourse. The absence of previous comment threads in archived Lives reinforces a mode of participation that is immersive yet fleeting, reactive yet non-accumulative.


From a Foucauldian lens (1975), the affordance of missing comment threads, just like the lack of textual guidance, operates as a disciplinary mechanism, regulating activist engagement by tethering visibility to continuous labour. Unlike regular posts, which allow for prolonged, asynchronous discussion, Lives demand that activists and audiences remain constantly present, producing, reacting, and consuming in real time. The moment that engagement slows, visibility declines, thus disciplining activist bodies into perpetual productivity. Sharma's (2014) insight that "the slow intersubjective time of a contemplative and deliberative public sphere is the assumed form of a properly civic and politicized public" (p. 12) is particularly relevant here. The *selective impermanence* of archived Lives in this case, does not allow for slow, reflective engagement, instead engineering a temporality in which urgency becomes the primary mode of political participation.

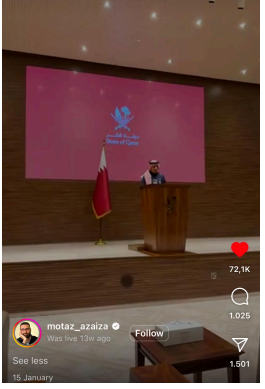
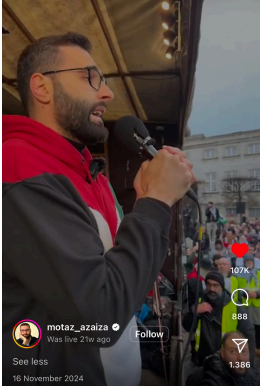
Drawing these strands together, it becomes evident that Instagram Lives function as a potent yet paradoxical tool for digital activism. On one hand, the extended duration of archived Lives offers a more comprehensive visual record of events, suggesting a potential for sustained engagement. On the other hand, the absence of captions and precise temporal markers means that this longer record may be interpreted solely through immediate emotional cues, potentially compromising its depth and historical accuracy. This trade-off between immediate mobilisation and enduring understanding is central to the paradox of digital activism on Instagram. Moreover, the interplay between algorithmic visibility and interactive affordances introduces a complex

disciplinary layer. Instagram’s algorithms working alongside the affordances of the archived Lives are designed to boost content that achieves rapid engagement, yet this mechanism may inadvertently marginalise activist voices that need time and reflection to make their impact. In this digital context, the algorithmic filtering inherent in Lives not only amplifies high-intensity engagement but also reinforces a narrow, emotionally driven mode of public discourse. This analysis of Instagram’s interface and affordances hence lays a solid foundation for the subsequent case study on Motaz Azaiza, who situates himself within these dynamics in his innovative use of Lives for Palestinian activism.

Part II: Motaz Azaiza and the #FreePalestine Movement

In the second part of this analysis, I focus on comparing and contrasting archived Instagram Lives with regular video posts by Motaz Azaiza in the context of the #FreePalestine movement. This comparison explores the different content structures and temporal dynamics each format offers for activism. For ease of analysis, I have labelled each piece of selected content accordingly, distinguishing between archived Instagram Lives and regular video posts:

Content Type	Given Label	Date Posted	Content Duration	Caption	Description	Still Image
Archived Live	Archived Live #1	19 March 2025	~ 25 minutes	N/A	Motaz Azaiza speaks alone, directly addressing a live audience.	

Archived Live	Archived Live #2	15 January 2025	~ 7 minutes	N/A	Captures the moment the Prime Minister of Qatar announces a ceasefire.	
Archived Live	Archived Live #3	16 November 2024	~ 3 minutes	N/A	Someone on stage films Motaz Azaiza delivering a speech in Copenhagen	
Post	Post #1	20 March 2025	26 seconds	“Again and again and again People have no idea where to go or what to do..”	Short video depicting the body of a deceased Palestinian child.	

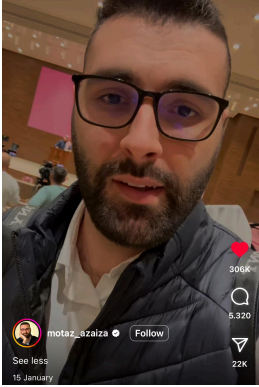
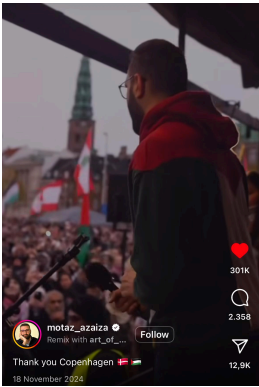
Post	Post #2	15 January 2025	58 seconds	N/A	Motaz Azaiza, after the Qatari ceasefire conference, relays the news in English and Arabic.	
Post	Post #3	15 November 2024	54 seconds	“Thank you Copenhagen 🇩🇰🇪🇬”	Cinematic-style edit with music, documenting Motaz Azaiza’s Copenhagen visit in a stylised and evocative manner.	

Table 1: Overview of Selected Archived Lives and Posts.

Rethinking the “Archived” in “Archived Lives”

In Archived Live #1, Motaz Azaiza appears alone, responding to live comments in real time, and as I clarified in the previous section, the comments that are no longer visible in the archived version. This absence fractures the dialogical nature of the original broadcast. What was once a shared, co-present encounter becomes a monologue without clear referents. Viewers can hear him respond to questions they can no longer see, producing a temporal dissonance: we are watching a conversation with ghosts. The result is what I have previously termed a *precarious archive*. It is not archival in the sense of stability or completeness, but archival by necessity, an

infrastructural artefact of something more complex that has been stripped down for preservation.

Archived Live #1 is also the longest piece of content in the dataset (about 25 minutes) making it stand out from the rest. That length does something important: it gives space for slower, more reflective engagement, and offers a kind of temporal breathing room that is rare on Instagram, where content is often optimised to fit within a *compressed present*. Compared to the other Lives and especially the Posts (all under a minute), this Live feels deliberately slower, like a refusal to condense something too big and painful into bite-sized updates. But at the same time, the extended duration does not necessarily mean it gives us more. As Weltevrede et al. (2014) suggest, real-timeness is not just about equal immediacy; it is a socio-technical condition. Instagram's archived version of what was once a 'Live Broadcast of Motaz Azaiza replying to Live Comments' leaves us with fragments of real-time presence that cannot be reassembled into full meaning. I note that the loss of comments is not merely an erasure of interactivity but an erasure of collective witnessing. Therefore, the archive becomes a record of individual visibility and platform compliance, not social context.

Compression or Comprehension?

Comparing Archived Live #2 and Post #2 (both from January 15, 2025) further shows the temporal politics of Instagram. In the archived Live, the audience watches (or re-watches) the Qatari Prime Minister's ceasefire speech, aired in full and unmediated in Arabic. At the start of Archived Live #2, there is also a noticeable waiting period as the audience members wait for the Qatari Prime Minister and his entourage to walk in. This delay pulls the audience into the event, making them active participants in the moment. Rather than providing instant access to the speech, the wait stretches time, creating anticipation and forcing viewers to engage in a slower,

more attentive way. Additionally, comments from viewers under this video are filled with those asking for a translation of the speech. This not only shows a distributed form of participation, where the audience shapes how the event is experienced, but also points to the “disciplinary power” at play: the platform’s design and the language barrier limit access to the content. The need for translation highlights the gap between the live experience and the accessibility of the event, and once the live is archived, that moment of negotiation and interactivity is lost, once again leaving an incomplete archive of the original event.

In Post #2, Motaz Azaiza delivers a 58-second bilingual summary of the event. Both pieces are about the same moment, but they operate in entirely different temporal registers. This divergence maps directly onto Rosa’s (2013) notion of social acceleration. The Archived Live #2 represents a slower temporality, one of presence and attentiveness, while Post #2 offers a compressed, affectively potent version designed for rapid uptake and comprehension. Clearly, there is a certain optimisation that takes place but this inevitably comes at a cost. The Post offers clarity, but not complexity, where it makes the event accessible for global audiences, but compresses the political process into a moment of affective relay. It is a form of witnessing shaped by the platform’s demand for speed, not the temporal rhythm of diplomacy or deliberation. The result is a disjunctive temporality, where the Archived Live and the Post tell different versions of the same event; one durational, the other viral.

Platform Control and the Disciplining of Visibility

I briefly mentioned earlier that Instagram does not simply host Motaz Azaiza’s activism, instead it disciplines it. It dictates what can be posted and under what conditions it will remain visible. This disciplinary infrastructure is especially visible in Post #1, which features a short

video of a deceased Palestinian child. The video is painful and extremely human but also precariously platformed. The video risks algorithmic suppression or even removal. Discipline, in this context, operates through control over visibility: who can appear, how they can appear, and what can be said about them. Motaz Azaiza walks a fine line, between Instagram's community guidelines and his own political imperatives. According to Instagram's (2018) official policy, "*Graphic violence is not allowed and we may remove videos or images of intense, graphic violence.*" However, the platform makes a conditional exception: "*If shared in relation to important and newsworthy events, and this imagery is shared to condemn or raise awareness and educate, it may be allowed.*" The use of "may" is especially important as it signals ambiguity and discretionary enforcement rather than guaranteed protection. This vagueness creates an atmosphere of uncertainty for activists like Motaz Azaiza, who must constantly anticipate the platform's thresholds for acceptability while documenting state violence and human suffering. Moreover, disciplinary power functions in the way Instagram dismembers the content temporally and spatially. In Lives, the audience is disempowered in the archive. In Posts, the narrative is shaped through strategic ambiguity. This is not censorship per se, but a mode of constrained expressivity: visibility under conditions of platform governance. As Bucher (2012) suggests, platforms today operate less through the notions of constant surveillance and more through what she terms the "*threat of invisibility,*" a disciplining force where failure to meet algorithmic expectations results in being sidelined or unseen (pp. 1171-1172). Visibility is hence not guaranteed; it must be earned according to opaque metrics. Thus, Motaz Azaiza's presence is continuously negotiated, not just in what he chooses to show, but in how he ensures it can be seen at all.

Unlike the archived Lives or Post #2, Post #1 includes a caption that reads: "Again and

again and again. People have no idea where to go or what to do..." This caption, though also following a strategically ambiguous narrative, powerfully conveys the cyclical nature of crisis and structural violence. At the same time, it speaks to the ephemeral nature of digital activism by illustrating how such ongoing suffering is continually documented, yet repeatedly submerged by the platform's fast-moving content stream. The repetition of "again and again" not only marks the endlessness of displacement and violence, but also reflects the temporal instability of digital witnessing: each post risks being rapidly consumed and forgotten, caught in a cycle of temporary visibility. In this way, the caption functions as a form of ephemeral meta-commentary as it is fleeting, like the story it describes, and disappears quickly in the stream of constant content that Instagram produces. The temporality of the platform, as I established earlier, is driven by recency and novelty, rendering even repetition as a kind of disappearance: what is posted "again and again" is also forgotten again and again. Here, Motaz Azaiza's caption unintentionally reflects the core contradiction of ephemeral activism; how the need to continually repost atrocities becomes both a form of resistance and a symptom of digital forgetting.

Distributed Authorship

Archived Live #3 presents a more fragmented authorship. Filmed by someone else in the audience, the Live captures Motaz Azaiza delivering a speech in Copenhagen, but without full control over the framing, sound, or quality. This opens the door to what Ince, Rojas, and Davis (2017) call "distributed framing", where multiple agents co-construct meaning. This logic is pushed further in Post #3, a polished, music-backed remix of Motaz Azaiza's Copenhagen appearance. The post was likely not created by Motaz Azaiza himself, but produced via Instagram's "Remix" feature, which the official website defines as enabling "anyone [to] create a reel that includes someone else's video or photo" (Instagram, 2022b). Here, the activist shifts

from the messenger to the message; someone who speaks, but also someone whose appearance is repurposed.

This shift is accentuated by the fact that no direct credit is given by Motaz Azaiza to the original creator of the video in Post #3, aside from a small watermark of the original creator at the bottom of the video and the "Remix with..." indicator. These minimal attributions highlight how ephemerality and authorial control intersect in digital spaces. While remixing can amplify reach, it can also blur intent. The remix aestheticises the activist moment, turning it into cinematic spectacle, signalling a shift from discursive to affective circulation. It is activism that must now operate through platform-native storytelling, sometimes at the cost of discursive precision.

V. Conclusion

This research has explored how Instagram's ephemeral features shape digital activism, particularly through archived Lives. Unlike static posts, which allow activists to craft narratives and anchor meaning, archived Lives demand constant re-engagement to stay relevant. To maintain visibility, users must produce new content, reflecting Instagram's broader governance of attention, where engagement depends on ongoing participation within an accelerated temporal framework. Rather than viewing the urgency generated by Instagram's ephemerality as a limitation, as Pietrzyk (2010) suggests, this study argues that it is a productive force. Ephemerality compels activists to continuously assert their presence, transforming visibility into a form of labour conditioned by platform temporality. By withholding permanence and textual framing, Instagram ensures that activism remains provisional, affective, and grounded in

real-time engagement, rather than building into a stable historical record. Archived Lives exist in a temporal limbo; neither fully past nor fully present. This raises a crucial question for digital activism: How can movements function in this in-between space, where urgency competes with the need for stability in historical documentation? These questions remain only partially answered in this paper, and future research could expand on them by investigating the strategies activists employ to push back against these constraints.

Across the six pieces of content analysed, Motaz Azaiza's strategy of combining Lives and Posts shows a deliberate effort to balance these temporal modes. However, Instagram fragments and recontextualises these forms, resulting in a temporal mismatch: Lives seem long-form but lack engagement, while Posts are dense with affect but short on process. Both modes reveal the limits of platformed time, highlighting the instability of memory and presence in digital activism. I believe that further examining whether and how these temporary moments contribute to or undermine the longevity of digital movements could provide valuable insights into the sustainability of platformed activism. Additionally, exploring audience interactions even further could provide insight into how user engagement influences the temporality of digital activism. The tension between Archived Lives and Posts ultimately reflects the struggle between presence and afterlife. It aids me in defining Instagram's activism as always ephemeral, always archived, but never whole. Instagram offers tools for documentation and visibility, but only under the conditions of temporal fragmentation, aesthetic optimisation, and infrastructural discipline. Simply put, Archived Lives simulate duration but lose collectivity and Posts circulate widely but compress complexity.

It is clear by now that ephemerality is a strategy and not a limitation. Activists work with and against the platform's affordances to create meaning, but the archive remains precarious. In

the absence of comments, context, or clear authorship, meanings are vulnerable to being wiped away. Instagram's ephemeral features, then, does not merely erase but redefines activism. However, this brings us back to the point I raised in the introduction: does this incomplete and fragmented record of resistance challenge historical amnesia, or does it, in fact, contribute to it?

VI. Bibliography

- Abbruzzese, J., Ingram, D., & Salam, Y. (2023, November 3). *On Instagram, Palestinian journalists and digital creators documenting Gaza strikes see surge in followers*. NBC News.
<https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/instagram-palestinian-journalists-digital-creators-document-gaza-strike-rcna123067>
- Agur, C., & Frisch, N. (2019). Digital Disobedience and the Limits of Persuasion: Social Media Activism in Hong Kong's 2014 Umbrella Movement. *Social Media + Society*, 5(1), 205630511982700. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119827002>
- Arkenbout, C. (2024, March 29). *Tactical Media Room | Theory Fragments of the Shadowban: Navigating Censorship of Palestinian Content*. Networkcultures.org.
<https://networkcultures.org/tactical-media-room/2024/03/29/theory-fragments-of-the-shadowban-navigating-censorship-of-palestinian-content/>
- Azoulay, A. (2011). *Archive. Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon*. Politicalconcepts.org.
<http://www.politicalconcepts.org/archive-ariella-azoulay/>

- Bainotti, L., Caliandro, A., & Gandini, A. (2020). From archive cultures to ephemeral content, and back: Studying Instagram Stories with digital methods. *New Media & Society*, 23(12), 146144482096007. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820960071>
- Balan, V., & Dumitrica, D. (2022). Technologies of last resort: The discursive construction of digital activism in *Wired* and *Timemagazine*, 2010–2021. *New Media & Society*, 26(9), 146144482211358. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221135886>
- Bayer, J. B., Ellison, N. B., Schoenebeck, S. Y., & Falk, E. B. (2015). Sharing the small moments: ephemeral social interaction on Snapchat. *Information, Communication & Society*, 19(7), 956–977.
- BOYD, D. (2010). Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications. *Taylor & Francis*, 47–66. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203876527-8>
- Bucher, T. (2012). Want to Be on the top? Algorithmic Power and the Threat of Invisibility on Facebook. *New Media & Society*, 14(7), 1164–1180.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444812440159>
- Bucher, T., & Helmond, A. (2018). *The Affordances of Social Media Platforms* (pp. 233–253).
https://pure.uva.nl/ws/files/9115828/BucherHelmond_SocialMediaAffordances_preprint.pdf
- Chatterjee, S. (2024). *Why #BlackLivesMatter still matters | For Researchers | Springer Nature*.
Springernature.com.
<https://www.springernature.com/gp/researchers/the-source/blog/blogposts-life-in-research/why-black-lives-matter-still-matters/27696320>

- Chen, K.-J., & Cheung, H. L. (2019). Unlocking the power of ephemeral content: The roles of motivations, gratification, need for closure, and engagement. *Computers in Human Behavior, 97*, 67–74. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.03.007>
- Chun, W. (2008). The Enduring Ephemeral, or the Future Is a Memory. *Critical Inquiry, 35*(1), 148–171. <https://doi.org/10.1086/595632>
- Crane, S. (2015). Rewriting the Battles of Algiers. *Space and Culture, 18*(4), 387–410. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331215616084>
- Derrida, J. (1998). *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Univ. Of Chicago Press.
- Foucault, M. (1975). *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*. Vintage Books.
- Heuer, G., & Macomber, M. (2022). Gender and Instagram Activism in Teenagers: Social Discourse in a Digital Age. *Journal of Student Research, 11*(3). <https://doi.org/10.47611/jsrhs.v11i3.2918>
- Howard-Hassmann, R. E. (2014). 13. Historical Amnesia, Genocide, and the Rejection of Universal Human Rights. In M. Goodale (Ed.), *Human Rights at the Crossroads* (pp. 172–182). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780199376414.003.0013>
- Ince, J., Rojas, F., & Davis, C. A. (2017). The Social Media Response to Black Lives Matter: How Twitter Users Interact with Black Lives Matter through Hashtag Use. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 40*(11), 1814–1830. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1334931>
- Instagram. (2018, April 19). *Instagram Community Guidelines FAQs*. About.instagram.com. <https://about.instagram.com/blog/announcements/instagram-community-guidelines-faqs>

Instagram. (2022a). *Help Center - Live*. Instagram.com.

https://help.instagram.com/3276175655832615/?helpref=platform_switcher&cms_platform=android-app&cms_id=3276175655832615

Instagram. (2022b). *Help Centre - Remix a video on Instagram*. Instagram.com.

https://help.instagram.com/139004934231412/?cms_platform=iphone-app&helpref=platform_switcher

Kelly, S. E. (2010). Qualitative Interviewing Techniques and Styles. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Methods in Health Research*, 19, 307–326.

<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446268247.n17>

Kitchin, R. (2023). *Digital Timescapes*. John Wiley & Sons.

Lazzara, M. (2018). *Ephemeral Histories: Public Art, Politics, and the Struggle for the Streets in Chile by Camilo D. Trumper*. *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos*; Project MUSE.

https://www.academia.edu/123419706/Ephemeral_Histories_Public_Art_Politics_and_the_Struggle_for_the_Streets_in_Chile_by_Camilo_D_Trumper

LEL Ethics. (2018). *Social media data – LEL Ethics*. Ed.ac.uk.

<https://resource.ppls.ed.ac.uk/lelethics/index.php/frequently-asked-questions/research-with-social-media-data/>

Mao, A. (2021, September 22). *Instagram Infographic Activism: One Step Forward or Two Steps Back?* Stanfordrewired.com.

<https://stanfordrewired.com/post/instagram-infographic-activism>

Markham, A., & Buchanan, E. (2012). *Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research:*

Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee (Version 2.0) AUTHORS.

<https://aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf>

- Mraffko, C. (2024, January 26). Motaz Azaiza: Palestinian reporter who became Instagram celebrity leaves Gaza. *Le Monde.fr*.
https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/01/26/motaz-azaiza-palestinian-reporter-who-became-instagram-celebrity-leaves-gaza_6467624_4.html
- Nassar, M. (2024, January 30). “From the River to the Sea”: Palestinians Resist Erasure. In *These Times*.
<https://inthesetimes.com/article/from-the-river-to-the-sea-palestinians-resist-erasure-gaza>
- Nikolopoulou, K. (2022). *What is purposive sampling? | definition & examples*. Scribbr.
<https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/purposive-sampling/>
- Olof Larsson, A. (2021). The rise of Instagram as a tool for political communication: A longitudinal study of European political parties and their followers. *New Media & Society*, 25(10), 146144482110341. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211034158>
- Özkula, S. M. (2021). What is digital activism anyway? *Journal of Digital Social Research*, 3(3), 60–84. <https://doi.org/10.33621/jdsr.v3i3.44>
- Phillips, L. G., & Montes, C. (2017). Walking Borders: Explorations of Aesthetics in Ephemeral Arts Activism for Asylum Seeker Rights. *Space and Culture*, 21(2), 92–107.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331217729509>
- Pietrzyk, K. (2010). Activism in the Fast Lane: Social Movements and the Neglect of Time. *Fast Capitalism*, 7(1), 9–24. <https://doi.org/10.32855/fcapital.201001.002>
- Poell, T. (2019). Social media, Temporality, and the Legitimacy of Protest. *Social Movement Studies*, 19(5-6), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2019.1605287>

- Raffio, N. (2022, December 9). *What makes a movement go viral? How Instagram facilitated the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests*. Phys.org.
<https://phys.org/news/2022-12-movement-viral-instagram-black-protests.html>
- Rosa, H. (2003). Social Acceleration: Ethical and Political Consequences of a Desynchronized High-Speed Society. *Constellations*, 10(1), 3–33.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.00309>
- Rosa, H. (2013). *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*. Columbia University Press.
- Sharma, S. (2014). *In the meantime : temporality and cultural politics*. Duke University Press.
- Sinha, S. (2023, November 24). *Palestinian photojournalist Motaz Azaiza crowned GQ's "Man of the Year" 2023 for pioneering digital activism*. Mashable ME.
<https://me.mashable.com/culture/35215/palestinian-photojournalist-motaz-azaiza-crowne-d-gqs-man-of-the-year-2023-for-pioneering-digital-act>
- Stanfill, M. (2014). The interface as discourse: The production of norms through web design. *New Media & Society*, 17(7), 1059–1074. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814520873>
- Suler, J. (1996). *The Psychology of Cyberspace*. ResearchGate.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/37366481_The_Psychology_of_Cyberspace
- Thera, N. (2008). *The Three Basic Facts of Existence I: Impermanence (Anicca) Collected essays with a preface by The Wheel Publication No. 186/187*. Buddhist Publication Society.
https://www.bps.lk/olib/wh/wh186_Nyanaponika-et-al_Three-Basic-Facts-of-Existence--I-Anicca.pdf
- van Es, K. (2017). Liveness redux: on media and their claim to be live. *Media, Culture & Society*, 39(8), 1245–1256. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443717717633>

Vázquez-Herrero, J., Direito-Rebollal, S., & López-García, X. (2019). Ephemeral Journalism: News Distribution Through Instagram Stories. *Social Media + Society*, 5(4),

205630511988865. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119888657>

Walne, P. (1988). *Dictionary of Archival Terminology*. De Gruyter Saur.

Weltevrede, E., Helmond, A., & Gerlitz, C. (2014). The Politics of Real-time: A Device

Perspective on Social Media Platforms and Search Engines. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 31(6), 125–150. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276414537318>

VII. Appendix

1. Archived Live #1:

https://www.instagram.com/reel/DHY_am4NTfq/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWF1ZA==

2. Archived Live #2:

https://www.instagram.com/reel/DE22Z4LtNo2/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWF1ZA==

3. Archived Live #3:

https://www.instagram.com/reel/DCb1iPNgZE2/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWF1ZA==

4. Post #1:

https://www.instagram.com/reel/DHa5kyJtr_O/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWF1ZA==

5. Post #2:

[https://www.instagram.com/reel/DE24YrIN7f3/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=](https://www.instagram.com/reel/DE24YrIN7f3/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWF1ZA==)

[MzRIODBiNWF1ZA==](https://www.instagram.com/reel/DE24YrIN7f3/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWF1ZA==)

6. Post #3:

[https://www.instagram.com/reel/DChTU5tupl_/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=](https://www.instagram.com/reel/DChTU5tupl_/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWF1ZA==)

[MzRIODBiNWF1ZA==](https://www.instagram.com/reel/DChTU5tupl_/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWF1ZA==)