The Role of Social Media and Participatory E-Democracy Practices in Palestine during COVID- 19 Pandemic in Good Governance

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Abstract

This article is an academic analysis contribution, that aims at focusing on the optimistic roles of social media in society, starting from the understanding of the sociality of social media from the point of view of the social theory, and applying the case of the study "The Participatory E-Democracy Practices in Palestine by the Government, the Citizens, and the Journalists on Social Media during COVID- 19 Pandemic Crisis Management, and the Fundamentals of Good Governance" to the theories of e-democracy and participatory democracy as a socio-political framework, also to examine the online communicational practices and interactions of both the governmental body and the citizens through social media platforms, in addition, to check to which extent they follow and take in consideration the participatory e-democracy and good governance fundamentals in the context of raising the values of the democratic culture in Palestine. On the other hand, the article highlights the pessimism side of social media from the point of view of the critical and digital surveillance media theories, as sub-topics in the contexts of online capitalism and the authoritarian logic of digital communication.

Some of the major findings of the article were: (a) the active participation of the citizens on social media to express their opinions and practice their freedom of speech as e-democracy participatory tools; they influenced the decision-making processes many times and the government was responsible for their suggestions, one of the most effective participation was when they were able to co-operated and push to cancel the presidential decision number (12\2020) during COVID-19 state of emergency, which aimed to give financial advantages for the ministers and some other officials from the first level in Palestine. (b) The second major achievement of their e-participation was when they advocated stopping the violations against two of the journalists in the official media agency (WAFA). (c) They could participate and enrich the structure of the daily press conferences of the government, by asking the government to delegate a professional senior doctor to be the

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second main speaker in the press conferences. (d) Also through their online participation, the citizens encouraged the government to take the decision of the participation of the ministers in the press conferences. That established environment for good governance, and enhanced the roles of the citizens in the public life issues in the society. (e) The Social media platforms usage in Palestine were like the e-parliament hall, where the e-citizens virtually meet and practice the participatory e-democracy, this gave them power, sometimes to criticize the government, and others to support its strategies or to suggest solutions for some problems, it worked as a simulation for the direct democracy.

Introduction:

In contemporary society, internet and social media are essential needs for human's communication and social relations, it works as means, spaces, and spheres where individuals, groups, institutions, governmental systems, and political regimes communicate, publish information, share knowledge and thoughts, co-operate, and interact.

The upgrades of the technological systems changed the essence of communication's culture; it reshaped its traditional structures, values, feasibility, and functionality to the online communication, in conjunction with transforming the audience gradually from the lazy to the active position.

Over the time, internet and social media became basic universal human rights. Its efficacy and influence depend on the level of people's participations and interactions, in addition to the type of the rules and flexibility level of the political regime in each country, and also to the gatekeepers of the digital systems which operates the social media.

The usage percentages of social media platforms, and the violations against that are considered nowadays as indicators for the freedoms and rights practices in the society, in addition to use them as measurement tools and evidences for the performances of the political regimes and governmental bodies towards good governance, for example the participatory e-democracy.

In Palestine, some ministries and governmental institutions realized early the importance of social media as public relations and media windows to accelerate its communication and interaction with the audience, since 2000, these main governmental organizations started to employ journalists and other professionals in the media and public relation units for this duty, such as the positions of: graphic designers, photographers, editors, and content developers, etc…

The governmental organizations are active on social media, especially on Facebook, and some pages have hundreds of thousands of followers, for example the official page of the health ministry has around 400,000 followers.

These pages and other social media platforms helped the government of Palestine and the citizens to manage the crises of COVID-19 pandemic, especially in 2020, and accelerated the

communication processes and the interaction between them. It served as bridges to connect both citizens and government, and as windows to transform the information from the government to the citizens, to keep them updated with COVID-19 news; the government is the major and official source of information for them in their self home quarantine and curfew periods.

The question of the paper will focus on how the government and the citizen in Palestine invested the social media to enhance the transparency of information, participatory e-democracy, and the fundamentals of the good governance in the pandemic period of COVID-19?

1. **Background: COVID-19, rumors, and the journalistic scoop**

During the early stages of COVID-19 spread in China in December 2019, and then in other countries, there was no infected cases in Palestine until the 4th of March 2020, and was the Ministry of Health was the official responsible organization and the main source of information about COVID-19 in Palestine.

The problem that faced the Ministry, the media institutions, and the police was the spread of rumors and fake news on social media about infected cases, the ministry refuted that many times, and dispelled a lot of it. The police also warned from publishing false news and rumors, and arrested some people because of such posts, and declared in news reports the reasons of each arrestment case.

The media institutions and the journalists worked a lot to chick wither the citizens posts about COVID-19 infected cases are true or not, and they criticized the performance of the Ministry in this side, they started to comment on Facebook and asked the Ministry to delegate a spokesman on behalf of it to be in touch with the media, and makes declarations and speaks directly any time.

The media and public relations unit of the Health Ministry started to produce a daily report about COVID-19 virus all over the world and the situations in Palestine,

On the 11th of January 2020 the minister delegated and authorized a spokesman- who holds a PhD in Media- on behalf of the ministry, in addition to the daily work of the media and public relations unit on press releases and news reports, and on social media.

The biggest shock for the ministry, the media, and the citizens was when a famous Palestinian journalist announced on the 5th of March 2020 exclusive information on his accounts on Twitter and Facebook about the first four corona virus infected cases in Palestine (see figure 01) in a hotel in Bethlehem City, this post caused a revolutionary interactions on social media, and many posts accused the Ministry of Health of lack of information transparency.

Thousands of comments on social media asked the ministry to declare the information and to tell the truth; also the media started to talk about the silence of the ministry, and emphasized the right of media and the citizens to access to the information. It denounced the competition between

the media institutions to reach to the information, and asked the Ministry for transparency and popularization of information, besides the equality and justice in distributing it to the media.

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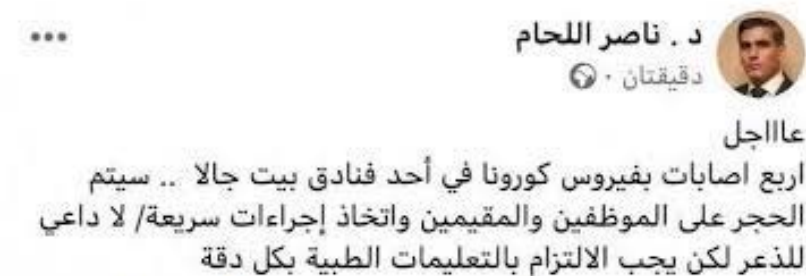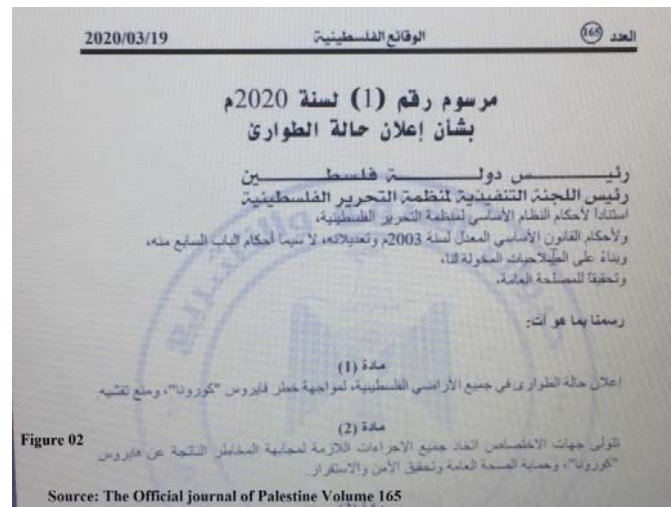للذعر لكن يجب الالتزام بالتعليمات الطبية بكل دقة

Figure 01: The first post about COVID-19 infected cases in Palestine

Later on at the same day, the ministry confirmed the information about the infected cases, and mentioned that the reason of its delay was because that the government organized urgent meeting to discuss the procedures and actions to keep the safety and security in the city.

Urgently, the government decided to isolate the city of Bethlehem, by closing the hotels, mosques, churches, educational organizations, public places, and restricted the movement inside the city; spread the security in the streets, and police checkpoints under the logo "Love checkpoints". The prime minister also recommended for the president to announce the state of emergency in the country.

Few hours later, at the evening of that day, the president of Palestine announced officially ***the state of emergency in the Palestine*** (See figure 02), and authorized the prime minister and the ministers' cabinet to take the useful procedures to manage the crises to stop the spread of the virus, protect the public health, keeping the security, safety, and stability. This decision was welcomed by the World Health Organization (WHO), and described as early response.

Figure 02

Source: The Official journal of Palestine Volume 165

Immediately, the cabinet responded and delegated responsibilities for main and sub emergency committees in all the governorates, cities, villages, camps, and areas. In addition the prime minister decided to stop the officials from giving speeches without authorization from him.

The cabinet also delegated one central integrated media committee, which consists of ministries' and society professionals representatives, and it works under the supervision of the prime minister in his office in Ramallah city, the head of the committee is the spokesman of the government, who is an expert in media, and has a wild experience in social media, besides that he has a book on media under the title ***"Media from the plate to the tablet"***.

The government also decided to restrict the movement between cities, blocked the roads between population centers, lockdown the public life, spread the security forces and checkpoints to limit the spread of COVID-19, and to keep security and safety, moreover it took practical steps for protection by social distance, physical distance between people, and self-isolation. It published a huge number of awareness messages on stream-media, social media, and SMS, designed by different ministries and institutions, and later on it imposed the partially curfew and then the completely curfew everywhere.

Social media platforms were main sources of information for the citizens in their home quarantine, and the media committee employed it to communicate and interact directly with them, also the government used it through its committees and systems as main tools of communication in the management processes of the crises. Social media platforms played the role of keeping social and organizational relations within the social distance situations.

This paper will focus on this optimistic role of social media and matches it to e-democracy, participatory democracy, and good governance practices in Palestine at the pandemic period of COVID-19.

2. **Literature Review**

3.1 Participatory e-democracy, good governance, and the optimism of social media

Talking about the relationship between the participatory electronic democracy, good governance, the free society, the democratic approach, and the influence of social media, means that we are focusing on the optimistic side of social media platforms and its positive effects in the society, and developing the democratic approach, through enhancing the roles of the citizens and the governments in developing the good governance fundamentals.

Citizens' participation level in e-democracy indicates on their practices levels for their rights and freedoms, especially the right of participation in the decision-making processes and public life, directly and indirectly, and the freedom of speech.

The essence of sociality of social media platforms is oriented in its ability, as a compound dynamic technological sociological systems "techno-socio-systems" to connect the people in an online society (Fuchs, 2016, Pg. 41), and to produce a new shape for the citizenship through e-citizens, and to enhance the practices and values of the participatory electronic democracy as main human right in the temporary democratic culture sphere (Gachau, 2018. Pg.3), which increased through developing the means of human communication and interaction from distance. This kind of communication enhanced the citizens' participation in the public issues, and in their roles in the decision making processes by several ways, also it created supportive environment to help them to practice their responsibilities in accountability in the society, in addition it empowered their cooperation and collaboration as stockholders and as the source of authority and legendary of the political regimes and governments (Kreiss, 2015, Pg.3).

On the other side, the development of computer network systems, the internet, and web operating systems, besides the revolution in the industry of the computerized communication technologies created the infrastructure, conditions, and the suitable environments to transform the traditional society to the stage of the social network society, and through upgrading the interactivity of these networks the world became a small village, and the globalization of information achieved (Castells, 1996, Pg. 6).

The upgrading of the Web operating systems (Web 01, Web 02, Web 03..etc) accelerated the interactivity of social media platforms, and that increased the opportunities of the citizens participation publishing, exchanging, sharing several types of information on the internet, and also gave the opportunity for the governmental and nongovernmental organizations to enriched the contents on the internet and raise the level of information transparency, and the shape of the relationship between the citizens and the governments has changed and reflected positively on practices of the cisterns rights and the performances of the governmental administration (García-sánchez and others, 2013, Pg. 338).

Thus, social media accelerated the processes of human communication and reactions on the online information society space, and enhanced the democratic approaches and its culture through raising the practicing level of citizens' rights and freedoms in online society and raised the level of e-democracy values (Lidén, 2015, Pg.699). The information society also reshaped the traditional structures of knowledge, social relations, culture, and communication, which are core elements for the free society in the vision of the main thinkers of the social theory, but the core problem is that the techno- social-system exploited by the domination of the capitalism, but it is still valid for social practices and interactions within the sphere of capitalist online society (Fuchs, 2008, Pg. 9).

Social Media platforms are spaces where the individuals can share their opinions, discuss public issues, meet and co-operate with other people, practice to some levels their freedom and right of speech, participate indirectly and influence the decision making processes. It's now essential need elements for the electronic democracy, and participatory democracy as important values for the democracy approach in the dynamic contemporary society (Gil de zúñiga, 2018, Pgs. 1773,1774), which looks for making use of the optimistic social media to create democratic culture and raise the value of e-citizenship, and to reach the state of good governance through the citizens participation in the decision- making processes, accountability, and by changing the situations for more democracy level in the society, and for better life.

3.2 Capitalism and Social Media Pessimism and Surveillance Digital Society

3.2.1 Capitalism and Social Media Pessimism

Looking deeply at the communication technologies industry, internet, and social media from the point of view of the critical theory, gives us a holistic image for the domination and exploitation of the capitalism for these industries and spaces. In other words social media and technology industries grown up in the context of Capitalism, it works within the notions of: surplus-value. free labor, individual-collective work not the collaborative work, competition, profit, investment, commodity, class-control, exploiting workers efforts and times, low salaries, violations of human rights, e-wastes problems for the environment. That means the capitalism values are in contradiction with the free society values, it manipulates people for more domination, and employing the social values in terms its fundamental accumulation, to keep its culture, sustainability and survival (Fuchs, 2017, Pgs. 10-11).

Social media is exploited by the capitalism throughout the advertisements, by encouraging the people to have accounts and provide their information and data for the social platforms companies, and then the companies use it in many ways to make more profit.

Critical theorists argue that the capitalism promises people with happiness, better life, freedoms, participation, human rights, and democracy, but in reality it is exploiting them for the interests of few numbers of people who control the economic and making use of these contradictions.

The techno- social system of internet and social media created as self-restructuring of the dynamic society, but it was invested more by the capitalism, and exploited by the capitalist class. Social media platforms work in the notions of social facts and the values of the free society, but at the same time these digital systems manipulate people and operate as catalysts to make the social media familiar with the capitalism elements, and work in a contradictory structure sphere (Fuchs, 2016, Pg. 81).

3.2.2 Surveillance Social Media and the Freedom of Speech

For most of the users, social media platforms are interfaces for open spaces where they can keep in touch and connect with the others all over the world, and they just accept the do privacy statement of each platform without reading or skimming it, they need to communicate and interact, to share their activities, to archive their photos and videos without being aware about how social media companies exploit them, and employ them and their data in different ways.

But, gatekeepers look for these platforms as digital systems, algorithms, repots, and computer software and programs, to control and monitor the users in the digital society, by collecting their data and make use of it for many purposes (Napoli, 2015, Pg. 753).

Gatekeepers could be individuals, the owners of the platforms, the technical administrators, the police, the governments, political regimes, the enemies, companies which pay money to have our data, or the digital system itself (Fuchs, 2016, Pg. 204).

The digital society is repressed; it works according to authoritarian logic, in which the e-democracy is constrained, and the freedom of speech and participatory democracy are limited, also citizens' activities and responses levels are under social media gatekeepers monitor and control all the time.

Thus, social media platforms work in the notion of subject and object, where invisible subject controls visible objects, and the digital citizens do not interact freely because of the non secure sphere.

3. **COVID-19 in Palestine: information transparency, citizens' participation, and responsibility and accountability**
   4.1 COVID-19 Information transparency

The government stressed in many occasions the protection of the freedom of speech, citizens' rights, media freedoms and journalist's rights. The journalists' representative praised the performance of the government and its protection for the rights of journalists, and emphasized that no violations for the journalists rights in the previous period.

The official central media committee of COVID-19 crisis decided to organize tow live press conferences every day, one in the morning and the other one in the evening, and considered the media institutions as partners in the duties of transferring the true information to the citizens.

All media institutions and agencies informed to participate and make live coverage for the conferences, and the government gave instructions to the security to make the movement of the media useful everywhere, in addition to that the syndicate provided them with protective clothing and essential protection tools.

The main objectives of the live conferences are to update the citizens and the media at the same time with the information, data, and news of COVID-19 in Palestine, and the new decisions and procedures of the government.

In addition, the committee employed a full media team to work on the updates 24 hours per day, especially on social media. to provide the citizens and media with any new information, press releases, news reports, urgent appeals, awareness posts and messages, and to prepare for the coming conferences.

The conferences broadcasted live on the main social media pages of the government, in addition to all the pages of the TVs, Radio stations, and media agencies in Palestine (See figure 03), such as the pages of: The spokesman of the government, the prime minister, ministry of health, ministry of education, governorates, municipalities, and the active social media pages in the cities and villages, Palestine TV-live, Maan TV and news agency, Palestine Radio, Ajyyal Radio Network, Bethlehem2000 Radio, Alfajer TV…etc

Figure 03: samples for the daily live press conferences on social media

The live broadcasting on social media gave the opportunity for the citizens to receive the information directly and from the official source, and they can host the video and share the watching with their followers and friends on their social media accounts, this helped the government to reach to the citizens and talk to them directly, through using conversational speeches with the individuals and families, by using simple and understood language for all the ages, which built trust relations between them and the government, this strategy made them feel that their health, safety, protection, security, and rights are the most important things for the government, and that was clear when the spokesman used and repeated his well known sentence in the beginnings of all the conferences and press speeches ***"Stay at home, the God will spread his mercy, and will make the future better"***, and many people make funny videos on that and shared it on social media, and the spokesman reacted positively with it and mentioned it in his speeches as positive energy making in the society, and he phoned one of the video actors and thanked him for his funny video, and he employed the conferences to send positive direct messages to the grandparents, to the parents, to the youth, and also to the kids.

The spokesman decided to add some words to his speeches to make it more simple, when he received a response from a grandmother on his speech to the grandparents asking him to use the simple worlds "not infected cases" instead of using the medical concept "negative cases", because she feels confused of that and think of the non-positive meaning of "negative" medical concept.

Also to encourage the creative ideas of the citizens, the government welcomed and adopted tow innovative electronic projects which were designed and developed by a young journalist, one of them is a website and application of corona virus, https://corona.ps/ (see figure 04), which was considered by the government as official sources for covid-19 data and news in Palestine, also to be as archive, and supporting tool for the planning teams, decision-makers, and researchers. The second project is a mobile application (See figure 05) designed to help the security to adjust the movement of the citizens on the roads during the curfew times, the application includes data base of the citizens who are in home quarantine, and also electronic application form the movement permissions requests.

Figure 04: coronavirus.ps	Figure 05: The movement adjustment mobile application

All the governmental organizations and the providers of the basic services invested the social media to contact and interact with their audiences, by publishing the procedures of their work and services during the crisis online, in addition to urgent information and awareness posts (Texts, photos, graphic designs, and videos) related to their scope of work, and it also used social media to publish contents show the transparency in providing their services, and their achievements as contributions in the crises management of the pandemic COVID-19.

Some of these organizations used online voting system and open questions to measure the level of the citizens' satisfaction about their services in the crises, Some others such as the governorates and municipalities published news, photos, and information about the donations from the people as social responsibility to encourage others to do so, and to give impression about their transparency and responsibility (See figure 06).

Figure 06: Ramallah and Albireh governor welcomes and thanks a business man donator.
Source: The official page of the governorate on Facebook

4.2 COVID-19: Media and citizens' participation

4.2.1 The role of media in the press conferences of the government

The spokesman of the government described the journalists on the air by saying "***You are the citizens' media; and their representatives; you have the responsibility to evaluate our work and account us***".

In each live press conference, the spokesman answers the questions of the journalists, and also gives direct explanations for unclear issues; in addition to answering some of the citizens' questions and comments on social media, or those questions come from the journalists' follower and friends on social media. Moreover he showed live participations from some citizens' in the conference (see figure 07), also he mentioned in many times the names of the citizens and thanked them for their participations, and he declared that the media crew in his office is following up the comments on social media and answers it; also he told some funny stories of these comments, which increased the trust in the government and the provided information.
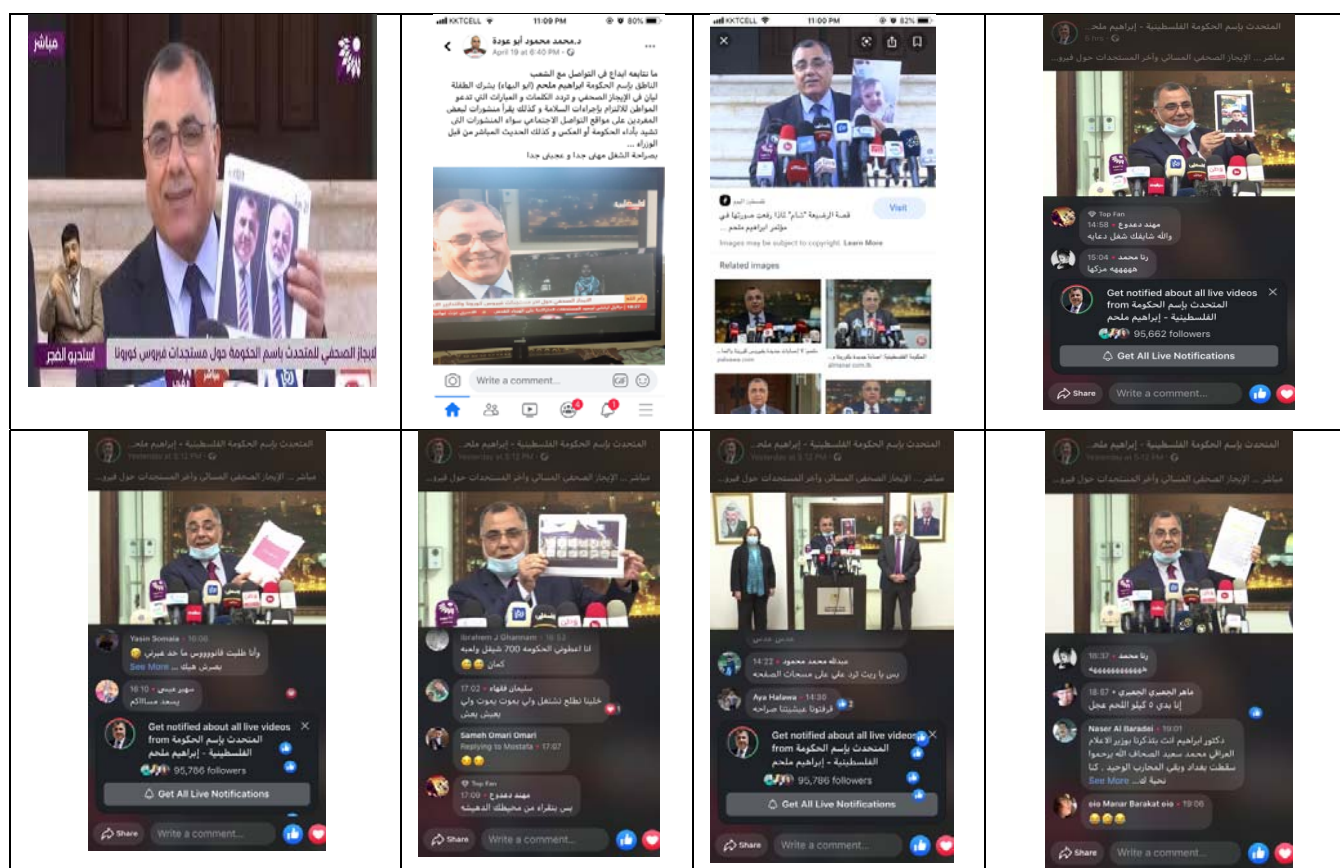
Figure 07: sharing samples for citizens' participations on social media through the live press conferences

4.2.2 Doctors and citizens claims on social media and medical information

Some comments from doctors and other citizens, besides journal articles on social media claimed the government to delegate a doctor to participate in the conferences, to give professional answers for the medical questions of the citizens', also to give advices for protection, in addition to make public awareness.

Immediately, the ministry of health realized the importance of that claim, and responded by delegating a senior doctor to take place in the conferences as main speaker daily, in addition to the daily participation of the minister of health (see figure 08), and that step made the citizens more satisfied, and also enhanced the trust between them and the government.
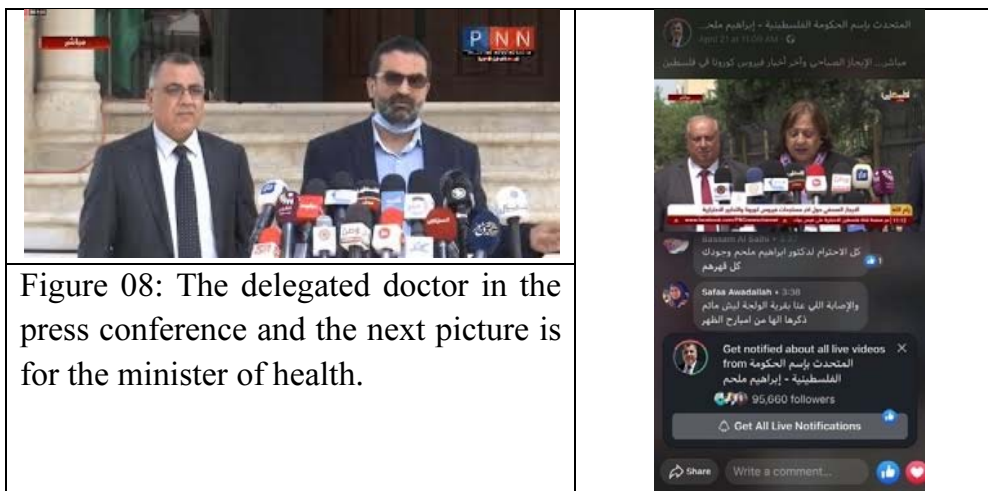
Figure 08: The delegated doctor in the press conference and the next picture is for the minister of health.

4.2.3 Individual participations for awareness and some for criticizing the government performance on social media

A Palestinian young girl published a video for herself on Facebook account while she is singing awareness song and advising the girls to protect themselves from the dangerous corona virus, by using masks, disinfected hygiene, don't shake hands, don't hug, and to stay at home. Thousands of citizens and media institutions interacted with the video and shared it shared

Fathers and mothers started to make and publish such videos with different ideas for their children, to give advices for the people to protect themselves from the virus.

Some people recorded and published funny and videos with innovated ideas to send quick messages to the government about their needs, or to criticize its performance, they succeeded and their needs were provided, and these videos achieved high interaction (see figure 09).

Figure 09: Samples from the citizens' individual participations on social media for different aims

4.2.4 The curfew idea started as an appeal from the citizens on social media

The government at the beginning depended on the citizens' commitment and awareness to stop the spread of corona virus, in addition to its procedures, such as the restriction of movement, but many people did not adhere to the instructions in some places, and the curve of the infected case indicated its increase

On the other hand, the Palestinian Authority doesn't have full control on the Palestinian territories, because some of it are controlled by the Israeli occupation, this increased the fear of the citizens, and lead them to publish posts on social media asking the government to impose the full curfew to stop the spread of the virus (see figure 10).

Later on the government announced partially curfew, and after few days it imposed the full curfew with some exceptions for urgent and emergency cases.

Figure 10: Samples of the Citizens' appeals for imposing the curfew in Palestine

4.2.5 Solidarity campaign through comments and tags by the citizens on social media against violations of tow journalists rights in the official news agency (WAFA)

In many speeches, the prime minister stressed on the protection of the journalists and citizens rights and freedoms, also the spokesman of the government mentioned that many times in the press conferences.

The shock was in the 22nd of April 2020 when the administration of the official Palestinian news agency (WAFA) informed orally tow of its journalist that their salaries were stopped, and it will refer them for investigation after the end of the state of emergency in the country, because of some posts and comments on their accounts on social media.

A wide interaction by citizens, journalists, and human rights defenders took place on social media through critical comments for the government to stop the violations against the tow journalists (see figure 11).

Two days later, the spokesman of the government answered a question by one of the journalists in the press conference about this crisis and the opinion of the government. The answer was "***the problem was solved through a meeting included the representative of the journalists, the top management of WAFA agency, and the tow journalists, and everything is OK now".***

Figure 11: Samples from the solidarity comments campaign against tow journalists

4. **Response and Accountability**

    5.1 The ministers face to face with the citizens and journalists

The citizens started to ask more on social media about the services, plans, projects, activities, and the roles of the different ministries in the crises, the work of the ministries of health and interior were clear for the citizens, but they started to ask on social media about the work and services of the other ministries, they wanted to know more and hear from the ministers not from the media.

The spokesman said in one of the conferences that the president and the prime minister took the decision of the minister participations in the press conferences to talk about their ministers services and achievements.

The prime minister also declared in one of the conferences that ***"In the absence of the legislative council\ Parliament, as the case in Palestine, the citizens and the media as representatives for the citizens have the right to ask the government and account it, so the government decided the participation of its ministers in the press conferences* to talk to the citizens and media about their achievements, decisions, plans, and projects".**

The appearance of the ministers was organized to be two of them in the morning conference, and tow in the evening conference, and also the participation of the prime minister participated as his responsibility as minister for both interior and "awqaf" ministries (see figure 12).

The spokesman introduced the first minister by saying ***"This new tradition, we are a government of transparency; I would like to introduce the ministers for you, to talk about their achievements and failures".***

The citizens used the social media platforms to comment and ask questions, and to criticize the performance of the ministers, they supported some decisions, plans and projects, and also asked to modify some others. Many critical notes were discussed and explained.

The journalists also asked deep questions, and many times ask them in behalf of some of their friends and followers on social media. For example for the ministers of tourism, because the transmission of COVID-19 infection to Palestine was because of tourist delegation and the ministry did not make early decision to stop the tourism in the country. The commentators through social media on the minister's answer divided to supporters and opponents, because country, and nobody were ready for the crises, and the ministry of truism did not receive any report or recommendation from the Ministry of Health to stop the tourism.

Through social media the citizens practiced their rights of accountability and freedoms of speech, and by this step the relationship between them and the government enhanced, also this experience shown the importance and positivism of the social media.

The government show high response for the citizens' requests and questions, in addition to developing the conferences upon their needs. The spokesman of the government also said in one of his speeches that *"No-body was ready for this pandemic, even the great countries, all the world was surprised and shocked by the pandemic of COVID-19, We also were not ready for this crises, we did not have a specific media plan to deal with it, so we are developing our strategies, and we welcome any idea that can help in making our work better, and increases our transparency and shows our credibility in transforming the information to the citizens".*
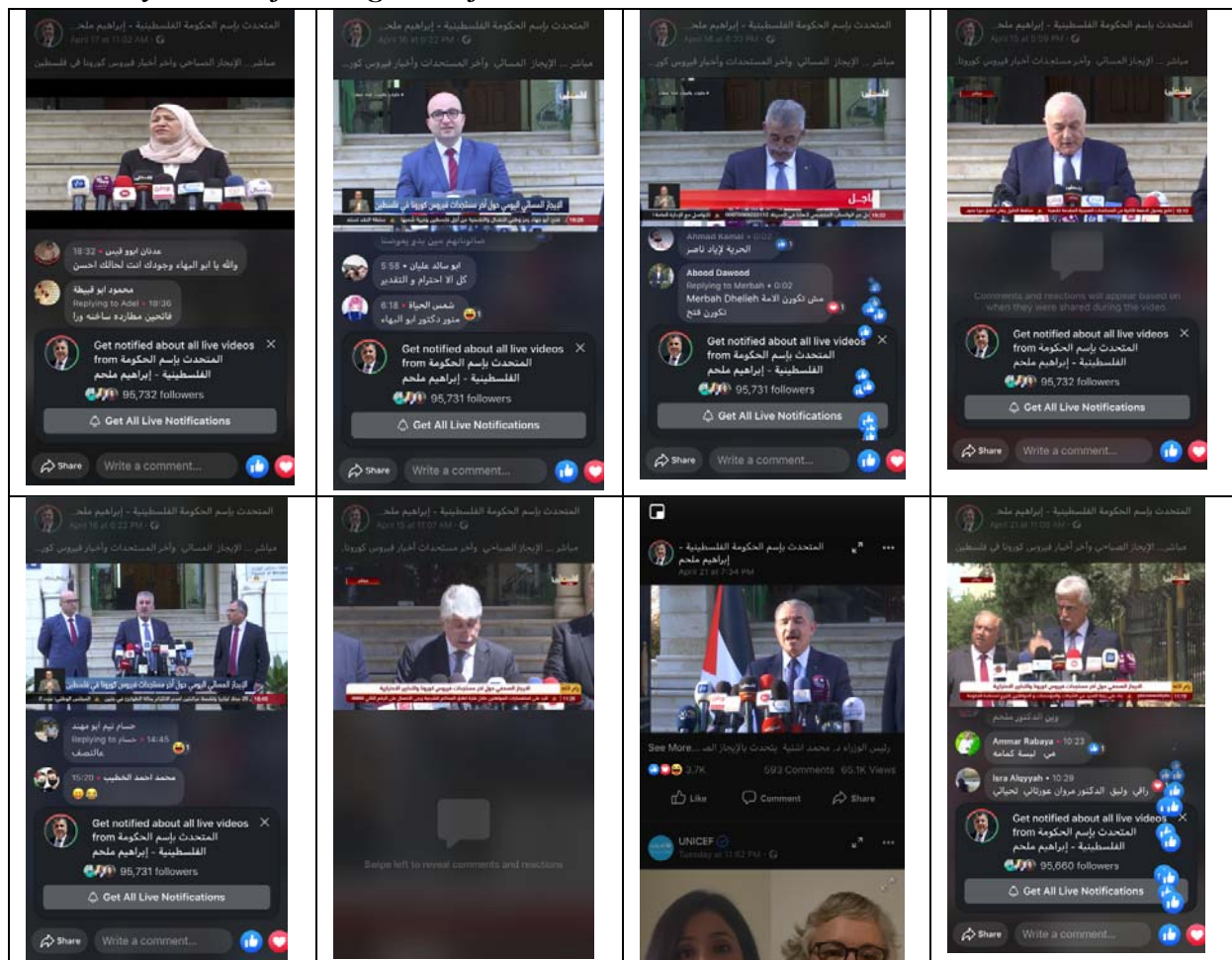

Figure 12: Samples of ministers participation in the daily press conference

5.2 Citizens' campaign on social media against financial advantages for the ministers

On the 28ᵗʰ of April 2020 one of the media institutions published on social media a news report about tow presidential decisions published in the official newspaper of Palestine in its volume number (165) during the state of emergency, aimed to edit and add some articles for previous rules; especially the updates of low number 7\2005 of retirement, and the new updates give *high financial benefits for the ministers and some other officials from the first level in Palestine.*

This news disturbed the citizens because the government is still talking about financial crises in the state of emergency period, and asking them and the privet sector for donations. The citizens and the journalists started to react on social media; thousands of posts and comments criticized that, and asked the president and the government to cancel the new decisions. (See figure 13).

Figure 13: samples of the citizens' posts against the presidential decision

The prime minister *announced in his speech that the government does not know how this happened, and no recommendations were taken by them, also he said "we recommended to the president to cancel the decisions".*

At the midnight of the same day, the prime minister announced on his official Facebook page that the president responded and decided to cancel the decisions and he comment again on his page in the afternoon of the next day that he received copies of the cancelation decisions from the president (see figure 14).

Figure 14 : The president responded and decided to cancel the decisions
Source: The official page of the prime minister

5. **The rule of law and the surveillance on social media**

During the state of emergency two types of surveillance on social media were mentioned either in the press conferences of the government or the news reports of the police:

The first type was following up the comments and posts of the citizens as daily work of the media team in the spokesman office to answer it and to take the appropriate responses depending on the type of the issues, many of these issues were mentioned in the conferences, some of it were critical comments for the performance of the government and the media committee. The government through this way showed its protection and respect for the freedom of speech and enhanced its relationship with the citizens, they believed in its positive surveillance on social media.

The second type of surveillance by the police for security needs to stop the rumors, which started to appear on social media before COVID-19 infection spread in Palestine, many police news reports announced the arrestment of cotises because of publishing rumors and spreading the fear in the society.

6. **Conclusion**

Change and transformation processes to democracy require accumulative work and collective efforts from the citizens, because they have the power and authority for change, as they are the source of the legitimacy of the political regime. The level of their participation in the public life issues and also the response of the government indicate on the level of democracy and human rights practices in the society, also it reflects the image of the political regime type, in addition to the efficiency of the procedures and fundamentals of the good governance.

The Palestinians were able and free to implement social media platforms to increase their e-participation in the several issues of COVID-19 pandemic, and they achieved many benefits as results of the participatory e-democracy; they succeeded to make use of the social media to a wild extent.

E-democracy in the case of Palestine during COVID-19 crisis is considered as an added value for processes of developing the democratic culture and the governance elements, and it is still in need for improvement and supportive legislations, in addition to universal declarations to adopt it locally and internationally, besides revealing any obstacle impedes its progress and removing it.

The experience of participatory e-democracy on social media in Palestine during COVID-19 pandemic crises management has achieved many benefits; it enhanced the roles of citizens in the decision- making process, and reinforced to some levels the trust relationship between the citizens and the government as a basic need for the real partnership to achieve and enhance the elements of good governance: transparency, accountability, participation, responsiveness, efficiency, the rule of low, consensus oriented, and equitability and inclusiveness.

Social Media platforms were the main spaces in which the connection was direct between the citizens: individuals, families, interest parties, the media institutions, the public organizations, and the government. This environment established base for the collaborative work and efforts of the active actors, in which all of them had be responsible, transparent, and believe in e-democracy and participatory democracy.

The citizens were the source of real authority on social media, especially because of the absence of the parliament since more than 13 years, and then it's officially dissolution in December 2008.

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