



## The Use of Social Networks by the Palestinian Public Facts and Assessments

March 2, 2023

### Overview

- ▶ iPoke, a company based in the Gaza Strip, issued its 2022 annual report about the "digital reality in the Palestinian territories." The report examined the Palestinian public's consumption habits according to population segments such as age, residence, gender, and the penetration of social networking sites.<sup>1</sup> The information relates mainly to Palestinians in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip, and sometimes also to Israeli Arabs. The report is in Arabic and has not been translated into English (iPoke report for 2022, January 1, 2023).
- ▶ According to the company, data analysis began in early 2022 and ended on December 25, 2022. The information in the reports reflects a combination of the quantitative information acquired from questionnaires distributed by the company to assess social behavior, and the qualitative information acquired by analyzing the data and by manual data collection from apps such as LinkedIn, Telegram and WhatsApp, which do not have their own analytical platforms. The report's authors admit to having faced several problems, among them the difficulty in collecting data. One of the most important findings was that **TikTok, Telegram and WhatsApp were the most popular apps, and were widely used by Palestinian society in general and by Palestinian youth in particular.** The report also noted that the apps were used almost equally by both genders, but certain ones were used more by women than by men.
- ▶ **The company does not reveal much about itself or who its target audience is, but recommends** using the report's findings for marketing the Palestinian narrative to the international arena.
- ▶ **According to the report, 42.2% of the respondents said the social networks had the greatest influence on internal Palestinian public support for the "national cause" and for improving the "national image" abroad. Only 12.7% said media outlets were the most influential.**

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[https://ipoke.co/report/SocialMediaOnPalestine2022.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1vWnouhYUWJfO\\_BYz3hibeKRrdqjVB6f7fXH3PjRXXPODJwqly0qbREs](https://ipoke.co/report/SocialMediaOnPalestine2022.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1vWnouhYUWJfO_BYz3hibeKRrdqjVB6f7fXH3PjRXXPODJwqly0qbREs)

► Given the findings, the most popular and influential apps and content for the Palestinian public, especially the younger generation, are the following:

**TikTok:** An extremely popular app for children and adolescents. The 13- and 14-year-old children who recently carried out terrorist attacks were apparently influenced by incitement to violence they found on the social networks.<sup>2</sup> The various networks in Judea and Samaria use TikTok during clashes with the IDF to send messages to operatives and report live from the ground.

**Telegram:** Used by older Palestinians. It is a platform for sending information and messages between the terrorist networks such as the Jenin Battalion and the Lion's Den, as well as sending messages to the general public, including calling for terrorist attacks and demonstrating how to carry them out.

**WhatsApp:** Used for continuous communication, sending visual and audio information, and messages, including "operational" messages.

## The Findings of the iPoke Report



The cover page of the annual iPoke report for 2022 (iPoke website, February 21, 2023).

### Overview

► The report, issued on January 1, 2023, claimed to have examined seven million Palestinians in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip, and some Israeli Arabs, 5.5 million of whom used the Internet on all their devices. According to the Palestinian Telecommunications Company, there

<sup>2</sup> For further information see the February 21, 2023, report, "Children in the Service of Palestinian Terrorism: Security tensions, incitement in the social networks and favorable public reactions may influence more children to carry out terrorist attacks."

are 4.4 million registered cell phones (3 million with the Jawwal network, 1.44 million with Ooredoo).

- The social networks are used by 65.7% of the population, 48.6% of whom are women and 51.4% men, according to the following distribution: 92% use Facebook, 90% WhatsApp, 81% YouTube, 67% Instagram, 38% TikTok, 37% Telegram, 26% Twitter, 17% LinkedIn, and 80.7% audio chat rooms.
- The use by men and women is similar for almost every age group, with a small majority of men in some age groups and of women in others. Use of the social media declines as the age of the users rises. The most popular hours are between five and seven p.m.



**The percentage of Palestinians who use the various social media**

- In answer to the question regarding the factors motivating the use of social networks, the two most frequent replies were (1) getting news updates and (2) the need to communicate with friends and family. Of the respondents, **42.2% said the social networks had the most influence in enlisting the public for the "national cause" within Palestinian society and improving the "national image" abroad, while only 12.7% said the media outlets were the most influential.**

## The social networks

### TikTok

- **The TikTok app is the favorite of most of Palestinian society in the post-corona era, and it is currently used by 38.2% of the population.** Most TikTokers are young, and those between the ages of 18 and 24 make up 48% of the total number of users; 47.5% are male and

52.5% female. The numbers are compatible with those of Google, according to which 40% of Gen Z<sup>3</sup> usually uses TikTok and Instagram.

► According to the Palestinian Central Statistics Office, Gen Z is composed of about a million and a half people between the ages of 15 and 29, about 897,000 in Judea, Samaria and east Jerusalem, and about 601,000 in the Gaza Strip. According to the iPoke report, TikTok is popular among the Palestinians and proved its ability to change opinions, as a result of which many supporters joined.

► The use of TikTok among Palestinians according to age is the following:

- ◆ 18 to 24: 77%
- ◆ 25 to 35: 21%
- ◆ 35 and older: 2%

► **The year 2022 was the first time in two decades that TikTok was used more than Google as a search engine, especially by the younger generation.** That is because it is easy to use, requires very little effort and is the fastest way to post something. There is no need to register and it is easily mastered by children. It can be used to make videos which can be seen by millions of viewers. According to the report, however, **TikTok has negative aspects which are liable to influence the younger generation, because the app is open to the entire world and sexual and violent content are readily available and easy to access.** The iPoke report notes that **the app is used extensively by various networks in Judea and Samaria, especially the Lion's Den network, because TikTok's content is neither monitored nor controlled by the United States**, which customarily monitors content. Lion's Den operatives exploit the app to transmit the "Palestinian narrative" to the younger generation to obtain supporters and sympathizers for the Palestinian cause.

► iPoke notes the importance of the social networks as vehicles to disseminate ideas. According to the company, without a doubt they can be used to spread the Palestinian cause and obtain support for it, and also to raise a younger generation which is aware of its rights.

► TikTok hashtags and the number of people who saw them in 2022:

- ◆ Palestine capital al-Quds – 97.5 billion.
- ◆ Palestine – 95.4 billion.

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<sup>3</sup> Generation Z, the zoomers, are people born between the mid-to-late 1990s and the early 2010s. It is the digital generation that did not know life before the Internet and the first generation for whom technology is accessible to very young children.

- ◆ Shireen Abu Akleh – 175.3 million.
- ◆ Lion's Den – 63.1 million.
- ◆ Resistance – 58.2 million.
- ◆ Jenin Battalion – 10.7 million.
- ◆ Jenin – 1 billion, of whom 77% were between the ages of 25 and 34, 21% between the ages 18 and 24, 2% over the age of 35.
- ◆ Nablus – 2.4 billion, of whom 76% were between the ages of 25 and 34, 22% between the ages 18 and 24, 2% over the age of 35.

### Examples of content containing incitement and to violence and fomenting unrest on TikTok



**The mother of Izz al-Din Salahat, a Lion's Den operative, killed by the IDF in January 2022, says to the mother of Palestinian terrorist Ibrahim al-Nabulsi, "Izz al-Din bought a gun with his own money and told me a bride had come to the house and he was really happy. I sang to him and his bride [the gun], for his sake I learned how to clean it and load it with bullets."**



A video of very young children shooting toy guns at an IDF vehicle.



A video of kindergarten children in Hebron playing at "burying a shaheed."

## Telegram

► There was recently a collective Palestinian shift in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip away from WhatsApp to Telegram, mainly because of the limitations placed on Palestinian content, technical issues and information security problems with WhatsApp's Beta version.

► **The number of Telegram users is about 37.3% of all Palestinian Internet surfers.** The app's security is unique and is very difficult to hack. It also does not place limitations on or censor content. Moreover, the sender can determine the length of time the message will be visible and instruct the app to destroy it when the time ends. More than 80% of Telegram users are convinced by its security and secrecy, which is why iPoke recommends using it to disseminate the Palestinian cause to the world.

► Popular Telegram apps include:

- ◆ Gaza Now – about 343,000 followers.
- ◆ Jenin al-Qasam – about 296,000 followers.
- ◆ Lion's Den – about 234,000 followers.
- ◆ QudsN (an online newspaper which opposes the Palestinian Authority) – about 215,000 followers.

► Given its advantages and popularity, the ITIC found a number of examples in which Telegram was used by terrorist organizations and networks in Judea and Samaria:

- ◆ In March 2023 the Hamas-affiliated media claimed the Aqabat Jabr Battalion of the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades [Hamas' military-terrorist wing], which operates in the Aqabat Jabr refugee camp near Jericho, clashed with IDF soldiers who entered the refugee camp. The Battalion posted a notice regarding the clash and launched a Telegram channel devoted to its activities (March 1, 2023).
- ◆ The Palestinian media reported that after information posted about the closing the Lion's Den network's TikTok and Instagram accounts following an official appeal from Israel to the app's administration, the Lion's Den's popularity on Telegram skyrocketed, and within 36 hours the number of its members rose from about 60,000 to 110,000.
- ◆ Telegram serves as an important communication channel for the various networks which clash with the Israeli security forces. Operatives who deploy at night in the streets and alleys of the Palestinian cities and refugee camps use it to contact one another with encrypted messages. According to a Jenin Battalion terrorist operative, **Telegram is relatively secure, and when problems develop and the advance of Israeli security**

**forces has to be transmitted, the announcement will be sent using Telegram.** The operatives also use Telegram to transmit information about unfamiliar vehicles in the area or if strangers enter the refugee camp (France24, April 13, 2022).

◆ The Hamas-affiliated online sites recently posted a video calling for "revenge attacks" against Jewish and Israeli civilians in public locations. The video shows "the next lone wolf" innocently walking along and then suddenly shooting or cutting the throats of Jewish and Israeli passersby (identified as Jews by "anti-Semitic" signs, such as their headwear or clothing). The video is accompanied by instructions to exact "revenge" and was originally posted to a Telegram channel opened specifically for show, although shortly thereafter it was reposted on Hamas media outlets with the claim it had been "disseminated on the Internet." A link was posted to many sites, including Hamas' al-Aqsa Telegram channel.

◆ [Hamas' online magazine Al-Risalah recently posted at least two videos to its Telegram channel. They explain and demonstrate how to carry out "successful" terrorist attacks. One refers to stabbing attacks and the other shooting attacks. The videos were extensively liked and reposted.



**How to carry out a terrorist attack, on Hamas' Telegram channel**

## WhatsApp

► WhatsApp is the Palestinians' favorite app for sending instant messages. It is used by about 91% of the Palestinians in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip, as well as Israeli Arabs. About 63% of the users are women and 36% men. It is most popular among Palestinians between the ages of 18 and 35, and is one of the most widely-known and easily-used apps for individual or group chats. It is free and can send pictures, audio messages, videos and locations, and is also a channel for the transmission of urgent messages.



## Facebook

► Despite the close oversight of its contents, Facebook is one of the leading Palestinian social network platforms. It is used by 92.9% of all Palestinian Internet surfers, as well as Israeli Arabs. About 51.4% of its users are men and 48.6% women; 70% have academic degrees, 26% are high school graduates, 72.9% use Facebook Messenger. Messenger is used by more women (53.2%) than men (46.8%). The oldest Facebook users are between 18 and 35. The most popular Facebook pages are radio and TV news pages.

## Twitter

► Twitter is used by 26.1% of all Internet surfers. The iPoke report indicated its use has risen among young Palestinians, especially in light of the campaign against Palestinian content on other platforms. Women make up 67% of its users and men 33%. The main age groups using it are Palestinians between the ages of 18 and 24, 53%, and between 25 and 34, 35%. News feeds are the most popular Twitter accounts.

## Instagram

► Instagram is a popular platform for electronic commerce. It is used by 67.5% of Internet surfers and is a Palestinian favorite. Women use it more often than men, 52.5%, as opposed to men, 47.5%. It is most popular with the 18 to 24 and 25 to 35 age groups.

## YouTube

► YouTube plays an important role in general searches and activities linked to teaching and learning. About 81.8% of all surfers use it, including Israeli Arabs. The most popular YouTube channels are its many children's channels.

## iPoke



**The iPoke logo (iPoke Arabic website)**

► According to its website, iPoke was founded in 2016 for Palestinian market research and over time expanded to the fields of consultation and project managing. It offers a variety of services for Internet marketing, product management, website development and design, business promotion, research and telemarketing (iPoke Arabic website).

► Its official website does not note its address beyond stating it is located in "Palestine." It can be contacted by a cell phone number belonging to the Palestinian Jawwal network, 0598478299, not a landline whose location can be verified. Its email address is [info@ipoke.co](mailto:info@ipoke.co) (iPoke website, February 21, 2023). Access to its IP is blocked, apparently for reasons of security. The website appears in Arabic only and the names of its management or employees are not given.