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Digital Solidarity and Crisis Mediation: How Malaysian TikTok Influencers Framed the Global Sumud Flotilla 2025

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ABSTRACT

The digital landscape has fundamentally changed how global audiences experience humanitarian crises, shifting attention from traditional news to interactive, short-form video platforms like TikTok. While social media increasingly drives geopolitical discourse, we still know very little about how Southeast Asian content creators frame complex transnational conflicts to build digital solidarity. This study addresses this gap by analysing social media engagement in response to the Palestine-Israel conflict, focusing on the high-stakes Global Sumud Flotilla 2025 (GSF 2025) humanitarian mission. Grounded in Robert Entman's four framing functions, this research uses a qualitative content analysis to evaluate the TikTok posts of three prominent Malaysian influencers who participated directly in the voyage: Ardell Aryana, Zainal Rashid Ahmad (ZRA), and Haroqs. A corpus of 49 TikTok posts was analysed across three chronological phases: pre-mission, during-mission, and post-mission. To understand audience reception, a thematic analysis was also conducted on the five most-liked comments from each selected post (N = 245). The findings reveal that framing strategies shifted fluidly alongside the journey's timeline, moving from early calls for action to immersive, real-time moral and causal evaluations while at sea. The findings further demonstrate that localised social media narratives can serve as pathways for transnational solidarity, constructing a shared faith-based humanitarian identity, collective moral agency, and interactive spaces for global support of the Palestinian cause.

Keywords: *Digital solidarity, media framing, TikTok influencers, Global Sumud Flotilla 2025, audience engagement.*

INTRODUCTION

The structural architecture of global crisis communication has undergone a profound transformation due to the rapid growth of algorithmic, short-form video communication ecosystems (Abbas et al., 2022). Historically, public understanding of international geopolitical conflicts was heavily mediated by legacy news institutions, which often reinforced institutional foreign policies or dominant Western geopolitical agendas. However, contemporary transnational solidarity movements increasingly bypass traditional gatekeepers, utilising decentralised digital platforms to build alternative frameworks of public awareness and mobilisation (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2023). Within this landscape, TikTok has emerged as an influential political and humanitarian tool, operating as an affective public sphere where content creators translate remote suffering into highly visible, immediate, and emotionally resonant calls for action (Cervi & Divon, 2023). On many social media platforms, a creator's reach is strongly influenced by the size of their existing follower network. TikTok's For You Page (FYP) differs from follower-centred distribution models by enabling content to circulate beyond a creator's existing follower network. Engagement signals such as viewing behaviour and sharing can contribute to wider content visibility, allowing humanitarian narratives to reach audiences beyond established networks (Cervi & Divon, 2023).

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Although remainmedia has increasingly reshaped communication and stakeholder engagement in Malaysia, research examining its implications within developing-nation contexts remains comparatively limited (Zeti Azreen, 2019). More specifically, less attention has been given to how social media influencers communicate transnational humanitarian crises within Muslim-majority societies such as Malaysia. This context is particularly relevant to the Palestinian issue, where solidarity has long involved institutional and civil society engagement and has increasingly expanded into digital forms of participation. Recent studies show that Malaysian engagement with Palestine is expressed through humanitarian advocacy, social media activism, content sharing, online discussion, and consumer-based actions such as boycott participation (Nazri & Ridzuan, 2025; Ali et al., 2025). Yet, limited research has examined how Malaysian influencers themselves frame an unfolding humanitarian mission through TikTok and how audiences respond to these narratives.

Understanding this dynamic requires addressing a clear theoretical and empirical gap. While current literature highlights the role of generic digital activism, few studies dissect how the specific structural features of TikTok are leveraged to sustain engagement across different stages of a high-stakes, dangerous international deployment (Divon & Eriksson Krutrök, 2025). This study addresses this gap by analysing how Malaysian TikTok influencers operationalised media frames across the pre-, during-, and post-mission phases of the GSF 2025 voyage and how their audiences co-created digital solidarity within the resulting digital spaces. By applying Robert Entman's (1993) structural framing functions to the selected case study, this paper aims to provide clear insights into the mechanics of decentralised digital solidarity, shedding light on how localised, faith-based, and humanitarian narratives challenge dominant global media representations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Global Sumud Flotilla 2025 as a Communication Catalyst

Humanitarian access to Gaza has been severely constrained by continuing violence, restrictions on aid delivery, and Israeli control over access routes, placing both civilians and humanitarian actors at risk (Abdullahi & Tahir, 2025). These conditions have prompted international civil society groups to organise non-violent maritime missions aimed at delivering humanitarian assistance while challenging the blockade (de Jong, 2012; Al Jazeera, 2025). The Global Sumud Flotilla 2025 (GSF 2025) continued this tradition on a larger international scale, bringing together more than 50 vessels and participants from over 40 countries in an effort to deliver aid and demonstrate solidarity with Palestinians (Sumud Nusantara, 2025; Saleem et al., 2025).

Beyond its humanitarian purpose, the flotilla also functioned as a highly visible communication event. The concept of *sumud*, meaning steadfastness, resilience, and rooted resistance, provided a symbolic foundation for the mission, while the voyage itself transformed humanitarian action into a public narrative of resistance and solidarity. Earlier flotillas similarly combined material intervention with symbolic communication by drawing international attention to the blockade (Aran & Yishayahu, 2022). What distinguishes GSF 2025 is its operation within a highly networked media environment. Rather than relying primarily on conventional news coverage, participants could communicate their experiences directly through social media, allowing first-hand narratives, images, and updates to circulate across national boundaries (Izzal Asnira, 2025; McAllister & Uras, 2025). The mission can therefore be understood not only as a humanitarian intervention but also as a communication

event through which alternative narratives of the conflict were produced and circulated in real time.

The Development of Digital Solidarity

The communicative role of GSF 2025 reflects a broader shift in activism towards networked forms of solidarity. Social media has expanded opportunities for individuals and communities to share alternative perspectives, build collective identities, and mobilise support beyond conventional political and media structures (Lim, 2013; Tufekci, 2017). Digital solidarity consequently extends beyond expressions of sympathy: it involves affective support, shared moral or political identification, and forms of civic participation that connect geographically dispersed individuals around common concerns (Achmad, 2022; Stjernswärd & Glasdam, 2021; Ali et al., 2025).

This shift has also made activism increasingly personalised and decentralised. Individuals can participate through sharing content, hashtags, videos, discussions, and other forms of interactive communication without necessarily belonging to formal activist organisations (Abbas et al., 2022). Importantly, such participation is not confined to online spaces. Digital engagement can contribute to demonstrations, donations, humanitarian initiatives, and other forms of collective action, illustrating the increasingly hybrid relationship between online and offline activism (Achmad, 2022; Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2023). Therefore, digital solidarity can be recognised as both communicative and participatory: it makes support visible while creating opportunities for individuals to identify with and act upon distant causes.

In Malaysia, this process is further shaped by local religious, cultural, and moral values. Support for Palestine has been expressed through online campaigns, public discussions, demonstrations, and humanitarian initiatives (Nazri & Ridzuan, 2025; Nurathirah, 2025). Recent research also points to the intersection of humanitarian concerns with faith-based and moral expressions of solidarity (Izanee & Mohamad Khairi, 2025). Thus, the Malaysian context illustrates how a distant geopolitical conflict can be interpreted through locally meaningful moral and religious frameworks, transforming digital engagement into a form of transnational solidarity.

TikTok and the circulation of conflict narratives and digital activism

TikTok has become an important space for such communication, particularly among younger audiences. Its short-form audio-visual format, editing tools, algorithmic distribution, and participatory features encourage accessible and highly personalised forms of content creation and circulation (Arfan et al., 2023; Cervi & Divon, 2023). TikTok also has a substantial audience reach in Malaysia (Kemp, 2025); thus, it provides a significant space for public communication and engagement. Compared with more conventional media formats, TikTok communication is often informal, visually driven, and embedded in everyday experiences, characteristics that make it particularly attractive to younger audiences (Barta et al., 2023; Jing, 2024).

These communicative features are especially significant during conflicts, where short videos, images, captions, sounds, and hashtags can combine to make distant events immediate and emotionally accessible. Research on Palestine-related social media communication shows that digital platforms can amplify Palestinian experiences, circulate alternative accounts of events, and challenge dominant media narratives (Huda et al., 2022; Nurathirah, 2025). Visual and textual elements work together in this process, as emotionally

charged images and videos may evoke empathy, sadness, or anger, while concise captions provide interpretive cues through which audiences make sense of what they see (Nurathirah, 2025). TikTok does more than distribute information, as its multimodal and participatory features shape how conflict narratives are presented, experienced, and circulated.

However, TikTok's short-form format creates a tension between depth and engagement. Complex geopolitical issues may be simplified, yet the platform's accessibility and emotional immediacy can make these issues more relatable and encourage wider participation (Cervi & Divon, 2023). This tension is particularly relevant to digital activism, as the same platform that compresses complex events can also make humanitarian narratives easier to circulate and engage with. In Malaysia, pro-Palestinian solidarity increasingly connects such digital participation with everyday activism. Malaysian youth use social media to share information, discuss Palestine, and support boycott campaigns (Ali et al., 2025), while consumer activism surrounding Palestine has also become visible through Malaysian boycott responses towards global brands (Ahmad Tajudin et al., 2025). Together, these studies suggest that TikTok should be understood not simply as a channel for conflict information, but as a participatory space where narratives, emotions, identities, and solidarity can intersect.

Entman's Framing Framework and TikTok Communication

Entman's (1993) framework was selected because it explains how communicators construct meaning through four functions: defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral evaluations, and suggesting remedies. Unlike generic framing approaches that classify content into predetermined categories, this functional approach allows the study to trace how influencer framing shifted across the pre-mission, during-mission, and post-mission phases of GSF 2025. It also accommodates the multimodal nature of social media communication, where frames may be constructed through textual, visual, and auditory elements (Entman, 1993; Geise & Xu, 2025).

This approach is particularly relevant to TikTok, where platform features facilitate affective, multimodal, and participatory forms of communication and activism (Hautea et al., 2021; Cervi & Divon, 2023). Rather than treating these features as frames themselves, this study considers them as the communicative environment through which influencers use strategies such as first-hand updates, personal storytelling, emotional appeals, and faith- or moral-based discourse. These strategies are examined through Entman's framing functions to understand how particular interpretations of the GSF 2025 mission were made salient. Audience responses are then examined as expressions of digital solidarity. The framework therefore connects TikTok's communicative features, influencer strategies, framing functions, and audience engagement, as illustrated in Figure 1.

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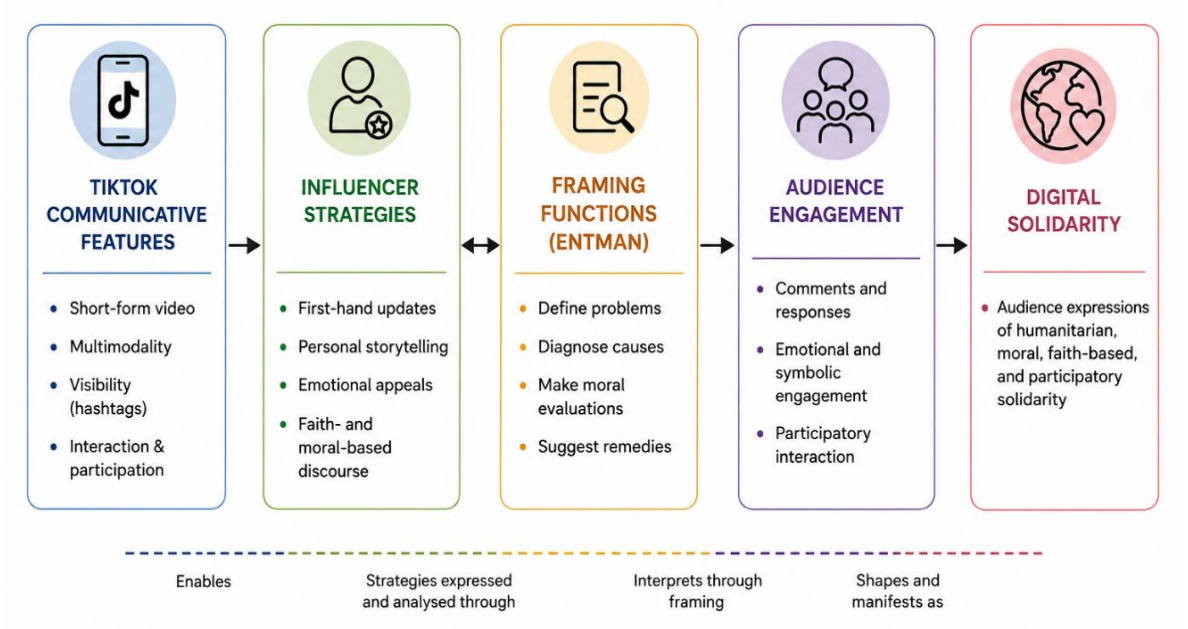


Figure 1: Integrated framework of TikTok framing and digital solidarity

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design to examine how Malaysian TikTok influencers framed the Palestine–Israel conflict during the Global Sumud Flotilla 2025 (GSF 2025) and how audiences engaged with these narratives as expressions of digital solidarity. Existing scholarship suggests that digital solidarity is shaped through the interaction of platform affordances, affective communication, collective identity, and participatory engagement rather than through a single communicative mechanism. Studies of social media activism have shown that digital platforms enable users to circulate alternative narratives, mobilise support, and form affective publics around political and humanitarian issues (Abbas et al., 2022; Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2023). Similarly, research on TikTok highlights the importance of short-form video, multimodality, algorithmic visibility, and emotionally resonant storytelling in shaping audience engagement (Cervi & Divon, 2023; Divon & Eriksson Krutrök, 2025). These studies suggest that examining digital solidarity requires attention to both how messages are framed by content creators and how audiences interpret and participate in those narratives. Therefore, the present study combined descriptive analysis, framing analysis guided by Entman's (1993) four framing functions, and thematic analysis of audience comments.

Framing analysis was conducted to examine how the selected influencers portrayed the conflict through their posts. Framing analysis, initially applied to traditional news media, has increasingly been extended to social media platforms such as TikTok, where communication relies heavily on visual and audio-visual content (Güran & Özarslan, 2022). As framing shapes how issues are interpreted and evaluated, it provides an appropriate analytical approach for examining communication within media, political, and social contexts (Entman, 1993). To strengthen methodological consistency and transparency, a systematic sampling strategy was developed. This multi-layered framework ensured that both parts, the media production (influencers and their posts) and the audience reception side (viewer interactions), were systematically linked and contextualised.

Data Collection and Coding Procedure

Purposive sampling was employed because the study required information-rich cases that were directly relevant to the GSF 2025 and the communication of the Palestine–Israel conflict on TikTok. Purposive selection is particularly appropriate in qualitative inquiry when cases are chosen according to their relevance to the research questions and clearly specified inclusion criteria (Robinson, 2014). The sampling process involved three levels: influencers, TikTok posts, and audience comments.

Three Malaysian TikTok influencers—Ardell Aryana, Zainal Rashid Ahmad (ZRA), and Haroqs—were selected from among the Malaysian participants in the GSF 2025. Selection was based on four operational criteria: (1) direct participation in the GSF 2025 mission; (2) a substantial TikTok following of at least 800,000 followers at the time of sampling; (3) active posting about the Palestine–Israel conflict or GSF 2025 surrounding the mission period; and (4) a sufficiently distinctive content and narrative style to permit comparative analysis. These criteria prioritised participants who combined first-hand involvement in the mission with substantial digital visibility and sustained communication about the issue. The ≥800,000-follower threshold was therefore used as an operational sampling criterion for this study rather than as a universal definition of a macro-influencer.

TikTok posts were purposely selected from the three influencers' public accounts. Posts were included when they directly addressed the Palestine–Israel conflict or the GSF 2025 and were published during the period surrounding the mission, from late August to early October 2025. The sampling period was organised into three operational phases: pre-mission, during-mission, and post-mission to enable comparison of framing patterns as the mission developed. A total of 49 TikTok posts met the study criteria and were included in the final dataset.

Data was manually collected from the selected influencers' publicly accessible TikTok accounts. Each selected post was viewed repeatedly to capture both its primary message and the multimodal features through which that message was communicated. A structured coding sheet was developed in Google Sheets to maintain a systematic record of the dataset. For each post, the coding sheet recorded the upload date, mission phase, engagement metrics (views, likes, and comments), URL, content type, content details, caption, hashtags, symbols, and sounds. This coding structure enabled a systematic analysis of how verbal, visual, and audio elements contributed to the mission's framing.

Clearly defined selection criteria guided the sampling process to ensure the relevance and consistency of the materials analysed. These criteria were developed in accordance with the research objectives and the characteristics of TikTok as a platform for participatory engagement. A summary of the sampling strategy and selection criteria is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of data sampling and selection criteria

Category	Details and Selection Criteria
Sampling units	TikTok posts from selected influencers and audience comments
Influencer criteria	Direct participation in GSF 2025; ≥800,000 TikTok followers at the time of sampling; active posting related to Palestine–Israel/GSF 2025; distinctive content and narrative presentation
Post criteria	Posts directly related to the Palestine-Israel conflict or GSF 2025 within the study period
Comment criteria	Five most-liked relevant comments from each selected post
Comment exclusions	Duplicate, spam, irrelevant, or ethically unsuitable comments
Timeframe	27 August–8 October 2025

Mission phases	Pre-mission; during-mission; post-mission
Final dataset	49 TikTok posts; 245 comments
Recorded post features	Upload date, mission phase, views, likes, comments, URL, content type/details, captions, hashtags, symbols, and sounds

Thematic Analysis of Audience Engagement

For audience engagement, the five most-liked comments from each selected post were manually extracted and entered into the coding sheet together with their respective like counts. The selection prioritised highly visible audience responses that received comparatively greater endorsement within each comment space, thereby providing a consistent criterion for identifying prominent patterns of audience engagement. This resulted in a dataset of 245 comments, which were read repeatedly before coding to familiarise the researcher with recurring expressions and patterns. Comments written in Malay were retained in their original form during the analysis, while literal English translations were provided for illustrative comments presented in the findings.

Previous research on digital activism suggests that online solidarity may be expressed through multiple forms of participation, including emotional identification, collective identity, symbolic support, and calls for action (Abbas et al., 2022; Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2023). Within Palestine-related digital communication, these forms of engagement may also intersect with humanitarian and faith-based expressions. Drawing on this broader scholarly context, faith-based humanitarian values and collective moral identity were used as initial sensitising concepts to guide the analysis, while allowing additional patterns to emerge from the data.

The audience comments were therefore analysed using a hybrid deductive-inductive thematic approach. The deductive component provided an initial conceptual direction through the two sensitising concepts, while the inductive component allowed additional patterns to emerge from the audience responses. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach, the researcher first became familiar with the dataset by repeatedly reading the comments. Meaningful expressions were then coded and compared for similarities and differences. Related codes were grouped into potential themes and subthemes, which were subsequently reviewed against the dataset, refined, defined, and named before the final interpretation was developed.

Trustworthiness and Analytical Rigour

Trustworthiness was addressed through systematic and transparent analytical procedures. Credibility was strengthened through repeated engagement with the dataset, whereby the TikTok posts were viewed multiple times and audience comments were read repeatedly throughout the coding and interpretive process. Dependability was supported through a structured coding sheet that documented the data and coding decisions, thereby providing an audit trail of the analytical process. Peer debriefing and expert review of the coding sheet and coding decisions were also undertaken to assess the clarity, consistency, and appropriateness of the analytical categories. These procedures reflect qualitative approaches that emphasise transparency, systematic documentation, and clear connections between data, coding, and interpretation as important elements of analytical rigour (Nowell et al., 2017). As a formal statistical intercoder reliability coefficient was not calculated, the study does not claim statistical intercoder agreement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The empirical analysis shows that the framing strategies used by Malaysian TikTok influencers were not static but shifted across the operational phases of the Global Sumud Flotilla 2025 (GSF 2025) mission. Across the 49 selected posts, influencers adapted their communicative emphasis as the mission progressed from preparation to the voyage's risks and confrontations, and finally to post-mission reflection. The findings are presented in three connected parts: phase-based framing structures, multimodal framing and platform-specific communication, and audience co-creation of digital solidarity.

a. Phase-based Framing Structures

During the pre-mission phase, the primary focus was on defining problems and suggesting remedies. Influencers presented the planned voyage as an urgent humanitarian and moral response to the continuing blockade. At this stage, proposed remedies centred on collective mobilisation, including public donations, awareness-building, and requests for community prayers (*doa*) to support the mission and its participants.

As the mission moved into the during-mission phase, framing shifted more clearly towards diagnosing causes and making moral evaluations. When the vessels encountered operational difficulties, heightened risks, and military intervention, influencer content increasingly documented events as they unfolded. Causal interpretations were linked to the restrictions and confrontations the flotilla encountered, while visual and verbal narratives emphasised the vulnerability, resilience, and conviction of participants on board.

In the post-mission phase, moral evaluation became more prominent. Rather than concentrating on real-time developments, the posts reflected on the meaning, spiritual significance, and continuing implications of the voyage. The physical limitations of the mission were consequently reframed through narratives of moral endurance, public awareness, and continued solidarity with Palestine. Figure 2 illustrates this phase-based movement, and Table 2 summarises the distribution of the dominant framing functions.

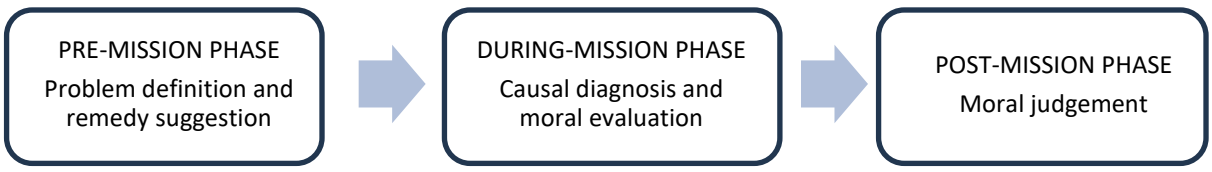


Figure 2: Phase-based framing structures

As shown in Table 2, the distribution of posts indicates that the prominence of Entman's framing functions shifted across the mission's three phases. Problem definition and proposed remedies were more prominent during the pre-mission phase, as influencers prepared audiences for the mission and encouraged support. During the mission, causal interpretation and moral evaluation became more prominent as risks and confrontations intensified, while post-mission framing shifted towards reflective moral evaluation. This pattern highlights how TikTok's framing dynamically adapted to changing mission circumstances. Rather than challenging Entman's (1993) four functions, the findings demonstrate their temporal adaptability within real-time social media communication. Framing can therefore be understood as an evolving interpretive process that responds to unfolding events.

Table 2: Distribution of influencer framing functions across mission phases

Mission Phase	Total Posts	Dominant Entman Function	Key Narrative Motifs
Pre-mission	11	Problem definition and proposed remedies	Kinship *(saudara)*, collective prayer, blockade realities
During mission	36	Causal interpretation and moral evaluation	Mission updates, journey obstacles, military confrontation, faith over fear, aggressive blockade
Post-mission	2	Moral evaluation	Spiritual victory, enduring advocacy, persistent solidarity

b. Multimodal Framing and Platform-Specific Communication

The analysis further shows that Entman's framing functions were not solely communicated through verbal statements. Influencers combined first-hand video, captions, hashtags, visual symbols, emojis, and sounds to reinforce particular interpretations of the mission. For example, religious hashtags such as *#allahuakbar* and *#hasbunallahwanikmalwakil* placed the mission's challenges within a shared spiritual and moral context. Recurring symbols, including the watermelon, the Palestinian flag, and the boat, connected individual posts to wider Palestinian solidarity efforts. These communicative elements worked together rather than independently, enabling brief TikTok posts to convey informational, emotional, symbolic, and moral meanings simultaneously. First-hand narration could define an immediate problem, while captions or hashtags reinforced moral evaluation and visual symbols situated the update within a wider solidarity narrative. Therefore, the creator became part of the framed story, combining personal experience with interpretation of the unfolding event.

This multimodal pattern is theoretically important, revealing how creators leverage platform-specific resources to execute Entman's framing functions. The four functions continue to explain what framing does: defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral evaluations, and suggesting remedies, but TikTok influences how these functions are realised. Short-form video, personalised narration, captions, symbols, hashtags, and sounds allow informational framing to coexist with emotional and moral storytelling within the same post. This refines the application of framing analysis to short-form social media by highlighting the multimodal performance of established framing functions (Cervi & Divon, 2023; Geise & Xu, 2025).

c. Audience Co-Creation of Digital Solidarity within Comment Spaces

The audience comments were analysed using a hybrid deductive-inductive thematic approach. The 245 selected comments indicate that audience members were not merely passive recipients of influencer narratives. Through the interactive spaces beneath the videos, viewers responded to, reinforced, and sometimes extended the meanings communicated in the posts. Three themes captured these expressions of digital solidarity: faith-based humanitarian values and communal devotion, collective moral identity and transnational kinship, and participatory involvement and narrative amplification.

Table 3: Influencer posting activity and audience engagement

Influencer	Mission phase	No. of posts	Dominant content type	Total views	Total likes	Total comments
Ardell	Pre	6	Video/still images: solidarity, awareness, symbolic representation	12.3M	1.19M	11.2K
Ardell	During	5	Real-time updates, spiritual reflections, participant experiences	40.5M	3.42M	56.8K
Ardell	Post	–	–	–	–	–
ZRA	Pre	1	Video: crowds in Italy rally for Palestine	1M	91K	2,123
ZRA	During	7	Mission updates, challenges, safety reports	12.2M	1.06M	31.3K
ZRA	Post	1	Return and safety confirmation	1.4M	143.4K	4K
Haroqs	Pre	2	International solidarity	2.3M	236.8K	2.5K
Haroqs	During	26	Journey updates, faith narratives, challenges, collective experiences	95.4M	10.6M	81.7K
Haroqs	Post	1	Safe return update	3.3M	499.6K	3.6K

Table 3 summarises the posting activity and audience engagement associated with the selected content across the three mission phases. Building on this engagement dataset, thematic analysis of the five most-liked comments from each selected post identified three recurring expressions of digital solidarity.

Theme One: Faith-based Humanitarian Values and Communal Devotion

The most prominent theme within the audience comment corpus was the expression of shared faith-based humanitarian values and communal devotion. Audiences frequently used religious language, collective prayers (*doa*), expressions of gratitude, and invocations for divine protection. These responses suggest that viewers interpreted the flotilla as both a geopolitical event and a moral and spiritual humanitarian endeavour in which they could symbolically participate. Prayer and spiritual encouragement became visible forms of audience involvement, particularly during periods of heightened tension at sea.

> *"tuan terus update.. kami mahu berita terus dari akaun tuan.. ya allah kau selamatkanlah semua dan permudahkanlah urusan"*
> (Translation: Sir, keep updating... we want news directly from your account... O Allah, save everyone and make their journey easy.)

> *"Alhamdullilah Haroqs update, hari2 tunggu. Semoga dipermudah pelayarannya. Selamat sampai"*
> (Translation: Alhamdulillah Haroqs updated, I waited every single day. May the voyage be made easy. Arrive safely.)

> *"bila sampai yellow atau red zon nti laungkankan lah Azan walaupun sekecil2 alunan suaramu anak muda..mudah2an tentera2 Allah swt Dari segenap sudut bumi melindungi perjuangan kalian"*

(Translation: Dear young man, when you reach the yellow or red zone later, please recite the azan even if only softly. May Allah's protection surround your struggle.)

Ya Allah. Aku memang pendosa Ya Allah. Tapi terimalah satu doaku ini. Jagalah Sumud Flotilla dan penduduk Gaza. Jadikan pergerakan ini asbab hidayah bertebaran seluruh alam
(Translation: O Allah, I am a sinner, but please accept this prayer. Protect the Sumud Flotilla and the people of Gaza, and make this movement a means through which guidance spreads.)

These responses reinforced the moral interpretation already present in influencer narratives. In Entman's terms, the comments strengthened both moral evaluation and proposed remedies: while the mission was framed through compassion, sacrifice, and collective responsibility, prayer, hope, and spiritual support were articulated as actionable responses to injustice and uncertainty. This pattern supports the broader argument that solidarity can transcend physical boundaries in digital environments (Ali et al., 2025). Here, however, solidarity was culturally localised through faith-based language, showing how audiences translated a transnational humanitarian issue into familiar forms of moral and spiritual participation.

Theme Two: Collective Moral Identity and Transnational Kinship
The second theme reflects a strong sense of shared moral identity and kinship with mission participants and those affected by the conflict. Audiences frequently used familial terms such as *saudara* (brother/sister), *ibu* (mother), *aya*h (father), and *anak* (child). Such language reduced the symbolic distance between viewers and participants, repositioning the humanitarian struggle as a personal and collective ethical concern rather than a remote geopolitical event.

"demi Allah..ibu sygkan ardell dunia akhirat..ibu sgt cemburu dgn ardell, allah pilih ardell"
(Translation: For Allah... this mother loves Ardell in this world and the Hereafter... I am so envious of Ardell, Allah chose her)

"Anak muda yg mcm ni yg ayah sayang. Moga Allah melindungi mu ya nak 🤲"
(Translation: This is the kind of young person that a father loves. May Allah protect you, my child)

"Welcome home brother, teruskan jadi inspirasi anak muda dan teruskan berjuang untuk Palestine ❤"
(Translation: Welcome home, brother. Keep being an inspiration to the youth and continue fighting for Palestine ❤)

The repeated use of familial language demonstrates how moral solidarity was expressed through relational identities. Rather than relying on formal political language, audiences positioned participants as members of an imagined moral community whose safety and

mission carried personal significance. This finding is consistent with a study showing that online communication can make participation in activism more accessible and can strengthen collective identification across geographical boundaries (Gul & Jabeen, 2024). In the Malaysian context, such kinship language also reveals how global humanitarian concerns are interpreted through culturally familiar expressions of care, obligation, and shared responsibility.

Theme Three: Participatory Involvement and Narrative Amplification

The third theme focuses on sustaining the visibility and continuity of the mission narrative. Viewers did not restrict their engagement to emotional support but rather utilised likes, comments, sharing practices, and documentation requests as active modes of participation. These activities indicate an awareness that engagement can contribute to the circulation of content within platform environments. At the same time, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence that all online engagement necessarily produces offline political action. Rather, they show how audiences used the communicative opportunities available within TikTok to amplify and preserve the mission narrative.

> *"Tuan, kami tunggu Tuan bukukan kisah ni setelah kembali ke tanahair nnti..janji tau Tuan 🥹"*
> (Translation: Sir, we are waiting for you to turn this story into a book once you return to the homeland... promise us, Sir)

> *"Haroq, lps pelayaran ini…tulislah buku cerita kan pengalaman agar ianya menjadi aspirasi kpd anak muda yg ingin menyertai ekspedisi ini pd masa akan datang."*
> (Translation: Haroq, after this mission, please write a book to share your experiences so that it can inspire young people who want to participate in this expedition in the future)

These requests are significant because they extend participation beyond immediate reactions to individual posts. Audience members encouraged the transformation of temporary social media updates into a more enduring record that could inform and inspire future participants. This supports research on connective and digital action showing that social media users participate in the circulation, interpretation, and amplification of social and political narratives through personalised and participatory communication (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Jackson, Bailey, & Welles, 2020). In this study, participation involved not only keeping content visible but also encouraging the longer-term preservation of the mission's narrative.

Theoretical Implications: Refining Entman's Framework for TikTok Communication

Across the three sets of findings, the study refines the application of Entman's (1993) framing framework in three related ways. First, the phase-based analysis demonstrates the temporal adaptability of framing functions. Their relative prominence shifted as GSF 2025 progressed from preparation to confrontation and post-mission reflection. This does not invalidate Entman's four functions but rather demonstrates that their configuration can evolve dynamically as an event unfolds.

Second, the analysis demonstrates the multimodal performance of framing on TikTok. Problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations, and proposed remedies were communicated through combinations of first-hand video, captions, hashtags, symbols, sounds, and personalised storytelling. Therefore, TikTok does not require a new framing function; rather, its communicative features provide distinctive resources to perform established functions in concise, affective, and creator-centred ways (Cervi & Divon, 2023; Geise & Xu, 2025).

Third, the audience findings reveal a participatory dimension that is less explicit in Entman's original communicator-centred formulation. Viewers did not simply receive influencer frames. Through prayers, moral evaluations, kinship language, requests for continued updates, and participatory amplification, they reinforced and elaborated the meanings circulating the mission. As a result, framing within TikTok can operate across interconnected levels of content production and audience interaction. In this sense, the findings point towards framing that is temporally adaptive, multimodally performed, and participatively reinforced.

These insights are relevant beyond the Palestinian case. Similar processes may occur when humanitarian crises, protests, disasters, social movements, or other rapidly developing events are communicated through creator-led short-form platforms. In such settings, communicators can simultaneously document events, interpret their meaning, personalise distant issues, and interact with audiences in real time. The theoretical contribution of this study therefore lies not in proposing additional framing functions but in showing how Entman's established functions operate within a platform environment characterised by temporal change, multimodal communication, and participatory meaning-making.

Integrated Discussion: From Influencer Framing to Digital Solidarity

The audience findings further show that digital solidarity was co-created through the interaction between influencer framing and audience response. Comment spaces became sites where viewers expressed shared moral identities, offered spiritual support, and participated in the circulation and preservation of humanitarian narratives (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2023). In the Malaysian context, these responses were frequently articulated through culturally and religiously familiar ideas of faith, kinship, compassion, and collective obligation (Achmad, 2022).

The relationship between influencer framing and audience solidarity should nevertheless be interpreted analytically rather than causally. The study does not establish that influencer frames directly caused specific audience responses. Instead, the correspondence between the framing patterns in the posts and recurring meanings in the comments indicates a communicative environment in which influencer narratives and audience interpretations mutually reinforced particular understandings of the mission. This helps explain why TikTok can function not simply as a channel for disseminating crisis updates but as a participatory space in which humanitarian meanings are circulated, localised, and sustained.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that short-form video platforms such as TikTok have become important spaces for mediating humanitarian communication during international crises. By examining the communication practices of Malaysian influencers throughout the Global

Sumud Flotilla 2025 mission, the study shows that media framing is not static but evolves in response to different phases of an unfolding humanitarian mission. The findings further illustrate how social media functions as a networked communication environment in which meanings surrounding political and humanitarian events are continuously shaped through interactions between content creators, audiences, and broader digital publics (Papacharissi, 2015; Poell et al., 2022). Guided by Entman's four framing functions, Malaysian influencers translated distant geopolitical events into culturally meaningful, emotionally engaging, and faith-informed narratives that resonated with local audiences. Audience responses further reinforced these meanings through expressions of moral commitment, spiritual support, and participatory advocacy. Therefore, the study refines the application of Entman's framework by showing that framing within short-form social media can be temporally adaptive, multimodally performed, and participatively reinforced. Beyond the Palestinian case, these findings contribute to understanding how creator-led communication can mediate humanitarian crises and facilitate transnational digital solidarity within contemporary platform environments.

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