

Sentiment Analysis of Selected Comments on #Savegaza on Tiktok Posts

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the sentiment expressed in TikTok comments under the hashtag #SaveGaza to explore the emotional dynamics and key themes within this digital public. TikTok's unique short-video format and predominantly young user base provide a distinctive environment for political and humanitarian discourse. Sentiment analysis, which classifies text into positive, negative, or neutral categories, was applied to a 100 sampled dataset of highly engaged comments on #SaveGaza posts. The analysis revealed that negative sentiment dominated, reflecting widespread anger, grief, and frustration related to the Gaza crisis. Positive sentiment was also significant, expressing solidarity, hope, and calls for peace, while neutral comments provided factual context and historical information. Key themes identified include activism, media criticism, personal storytelling, and human rights advocacy. These findings align with the concept of affective publics, where shared emotional expression on digital platforms fosters politically engaged communities. The study highlights the challenges of sentiment analysis on TikTok due to informal language, slang, emojis, and evolving online vernacular, suggesting the need for hybrid approaches combining automated tools with manual interpretation. Overall, this research contributes to understanding how sentiment analysis can be adapted to TikTok's environment and underscores the platform's role as a space for effective political engagement. The insights have practical implications for activists, policymakers, and scholars interested in digital public discourse on emerging social media platforms.

Keywords: TikTok; sentiment analysis; #SaveGaza; affective publics; digital activism

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Social media platforms have become pivotal arenas for public discourse, enabling users worldwide to express opinions, emotions, and activism on pressing social and political issues. Among these platforms, TikTok stands out due to its rapid growth, unique short-video format, and predominantly Generation Z user base, making it a rich site for studying digital sentiment and engagement (Brand24, 2024; Su, 2025). Sentiment analysis-the computational process of identifying and categorizing opinions expressed in text-has emerged as a critical tool for understanding public attitudes and emotional responses on social media (Sprinklr, 2025). It involves classifying text into categories such as positive, negative, or neutral sentiment, often using natural language processing (NLP) techniques (Zhang, 2025).

The hashtag #SaveGaza has garnered significant attention on TikTok as users express solidarity, share personal stories, and engage in activism regarding the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Analyzing the sentiments embedded in these comments offers insights into the collective emotional landscape and thematic concerns of this digital public. However, sentiment analysis on TikTok comments presents unique challenges due to informal language, slang, emojis, and the platform's multimodal content nature (Brand24, 2024; Su, 2025). Understanding these sentiments is crucial not only for academic inquiry but also for informing advocacy, media coverage, and policy discussions.

Problem Statement

Despite the growing importance of sentiment analysis in social media research, several significant challenges persist, particularly concerning platforms like TikTok. First, the noisy and unstructured nature of social media data—including slang, abbreviations, misspellings, emojis, and fragmented text—complicates accurate sentiment detection (Sprinklr, 2025; Zhang, 2025). Second, contextual ambiguity and figurative language such as sarcasm and irony often lead to misclassification by standard sentiment models, which typically rely on literal interpretations (Dilmegani, 2025; Sprinklr, 2025). Third, domain-specific vocabulary and evolving online language require continuous adaptation of sentiment algorithms to maintain accuracy (Dilmegani, 2025).

While extensive research has been conducted on sentiment analysis across platforms like Twitter and Facebook, studies focusing specifically on TikTok comments remain limited and face methodological hurdles due to TikTok's unique content style and user demographics (Su, 2025; Brand24, 2024). Existing research also highlights the imbalance in sentiment distributions and the need for hybrid analytical approaches combining automated and manual methods to enhance reliability (Su, 2025). These gaps underscore the necessity for focused research on sentiment patterns and thematic content within TikTok comments on politically charged hashtags such as #SaveGaza.

Research Aim and Questions

This study aims to analyze the sentiment expressed in selected TikTok comments under the hashtag #SaveGaza to uncover the emotional tone, dominant themes, and representative user expressions within this digital public.

The research is guided by the following questions:

1. What is the percentage distribution of positive, negative, and neutral sentiments in TikTok comments on #SaveGaza posts?
2. What are the dominant key themes emerging from the sentiment-laden comments on #SaveGaza?
3. What are illustrative examples of TikTok comments that represent each identified sentiment category on #SaveGaza?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Affective Publics Theory by Papacharissi (2015)

To understand how contemporary political movements coalesce online, modern scholarship has increasingly focused on the pivotal role of shared emotion rather than purely rational debate. Zizi Papacharissi's *Affective Publics* (2015) presents a foundational framework for understanding how emotions and sentiments circulate and mobilize publics in networked digital environments. At its core, the theory argues that affect—defined as pre-conscious, non-cognitive emotional intensity—plays a central role in shaping political engagement and public discourse in the digital age (Papacharissi, 2015). Unlike traditional public sphere theories focused on rational discourse (Habermas, 1991), Papacharissi foregrounds the "affective turn," emphasizing how feelings such as outrage, hope, and solidarity are expressed, shared, and performatively enacted on social media platforms (Papacharissi, 2015; Rai, 2015).

The practical utility of the affective publics framework is illustrated through real-world case studies that highlight how digital platforms facilitate collective emotional mobilization. Papacharissi's analysis is grounded in empirical case studies of the Arab Spring, Occupy movements, and everyday political expressions on Twitter, illustrating how networked publics are formed through shared emotional expressions and storytelling practices (Papacharissi, 2015; Rai, 2015). The theory challenges the dichotomy between reason and emotion by showing how affective expression is not only a personal experience but also a collective political act that can galvanize civic participation (Papacharissi, 2015; Rai, 2015). This shift is particularly important given the affordances of digital media that enable rapid, affect-laden communication across geographic and social boundaries (Papacharissi, 2015; Hipfl, 2024). Ultimately, Papacharissi's framework provides a crucial lens for analyzing how digital platforms transform individual, everyday feelings into powerful, collective political forces.

The significance of Papacharissi's work lies in its methodological innovation, combining qualitative analysis of social media content with theoretical insights from affect studies and political communication. It provides a nuanced lens to interpret the "messiness" of digital publics, where sentiment and reason intertwine in complex ways (Papacharissi, 2015; Rai, 2015). Scholars have noted that this framework remains highly relevant for understanding contemporary political phenomena, including the ambivalent roles of affective publics in both democratic mobilization and polarization (Lünenborg & Röttger-Rössler, 2023; Hipfl, 2024).

Affective Flows as Networked Sentiment

Papacharissi (2015) conceptualizes affective flows as the dynamic circulation of emotions across digital networks, where sentiment is not static but continuously shaped by interactions, retweets, hashtags, and multimedia content. These flows enable publics to "feel their way into politics" by tuning effectively to events and narratives that resonate emotionally (Papacharissi, 2015; Rai, 2015). The networked nature of these flows means that affect is distributed across nodes-users, platforms, and content-creating a textured and fluid public sphere (Papacharissi, 2015).

Recent scholarship expands on this by emphasizing the contested and labor-intensive nature of affective flows, highlighting how digital activism requires both cognitive and emotional work to sustain publics (Gajjala et al., 2023; Hipfl, 2024). The concept of "struggle for sentiments" illustrates how hashtags and digital spaces become battlegrounds for competing emotional narratives, shaping public opinion and political alignment (Lünenborg & Röttger-Rössler, 2023). Thus, affective flows are not merely spontaneous but are shaped by strategic interventions and platform affordances (Papacharissi, 2015; Hipfl, 2024). Ultimately, by bridging methodology and theory, Papacharissi's work offers an enduring foundation for deciphering how online emotions can both unite democratic movements and deepen societal divisions.

Storytelling as Civic Materiality

Within affective publics, storytelling serves as a tangible, infrastructure-supported mechanism that translates individual experiences into collective political narratives. Storytelling in affective publics functions as a form of civic materiality-tangible narratives and symbolic acts that make political issues accessible and emotionally salient to dispersed audiences (Papacharissi, 2015; Rai, 2015). Through stories, users enact and perform collective identities, transforming personal or localized experiences into shared political meaning (Papacharissi, 2015). This process is mediated by digital platforms that provide infrastructures for archiving, remixing, and amplifying narratives (Papacharissi, 2015; Rai, 2015).

This narrative process goes beyond simple communication, acting as a powerful tool for emotional alignment and civic mobilization across borders. Storytelling thus becomes a vehicle for affective attunement, enabling publics to cohere around events from which they are physically removed (Hipfl, 2024). It also serves as a mode of political participation that transcends traditional forms of activism by embedding emotion and personal experience into public discourse (Papacharissi, 2015; Lünenborg & Röttger-Rössler, 2023). This aligns with broader media studies that recognize storytelling as central to meaning-making and mobilization in digital societies (Papacharissi, 2015).

Relational and Performative Publics

Beyond being static groups, affective publics function as dynamic and performative networks that continuously shape-shift through real-time emotional expression. Papacharissi (2015) emphasizes the relational and performative character of affective publics, which are not fixed entities, but fluid formations enacted through ongoing emotional expression and interaction. These publics are “fragile and small” yet capable of rapid expansion through networked communication (Lünenborg & Röttger-Rössler, 2023). Their performativity lies in how users publicly display sentiment, thereby constituting political identities and solidarities in real time (Papacharissi, 2015; Rai, 2015).

Ultimately, the shifting emotional ties within these networks directly influence the visibility of digital movements and challenge the idea of a single, unified public sphere. This performative dimension is crucial for understanding contemporary digital activism, where affective expression is both a personal and collective performance that shapes public visibility and political legitimacy (Hipfl, 2024). The relational aspect points to the interconnectedness of users who come together effectively but may also fragment or disconnect as sentiments evolve (Papacharissi, 2015). Recent studies highlight how these dynamics complicate the notion of a unified public sphere, suggesting instead a multiplicity of overlapping, affectively charged publics (Lünenborg & Röttger-Rössler, 2023).

Studies on Sentiment Analysis of Comments on Social Media

Research on sentiment analysis of social media comments has grown substantially, employing computational methods to gauge public opinion, emotional tone, and engagement patterns. Common research designs include large-scale data scraping of platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Reddit, followed by natural language processing (NLP) techniques such as lexicon-based methods (e.g., VADER), machine learning classifiers, or hybrid approaches (Hutto & Gilbert, 2014; Rathnayake & Caliandro, 2021).

For example, Rathnayake and Caliandro (2021) conducted a mixed-method study analyzing Twitter comments during the COVID-19 pandemic. They sampled thousands of tweets, applying sentiment analysis tools to categorize emotions and supplemented this with qualitative coding. Their findings revealed that sentiment analysis could capture emergent affective publics but required contextual interpretation to avoid misclassification of sarcasm or irony.

Similarly, other studies have emphasized the importance of combining algorithmic sentiment scores with manual validation to address limitations of automated tools, especially in handling slang, emojis, and multilingual content (Hutto & Gilbert, 2014; Brand24, 2024). Sample sizes vary widely, from hundreds to millions of comments, depending on the research scope and computational resources. Overall, these studies demonstrate that sentiment analysis is a powerful tool for understanding social media discourse but must be carefully calibrated to the platform’s linguistic and cultural context (Rathnayake & Caliandro, 2021).

Studies on Sentiment Analysis of Comments on TikTok

Sentiment analysis research specifically focused on TikTok comments is emerging but comparatively limited. TikTok’s unique algorithmic content delivery and short-form video format pose challenges for traditional sentiment analysis, as comments often include slang, emojis, and multimodal references (Brand24, 2024; Apify, 2024). Recent exploratory studies have used TikTok comment scrapers combined with lexicon-based sentiment tools like VADER or custom AI models to analyze popular hashtags related to social issues (Brand24, 2024; Apify, 2024). These studies typically sample top comments by engagement (likes, replies) to capture influential sentiment expressions. Findings indicate a predominance of emotional responses—both negative (anger, sadness) and positive (solidarity, hope)—consistent with Papacharissi’s affective publics framework. Despite the methodological hurdles of short-form video platforms, analyzing TikTok comments provides valuable empirical evidence of how digital spaces foster highly emotional collective discourse.

However, researchers caution that TikTok’s comment sections are highly dynamic and context-dependent requiring manual review to interpret sentiment accurately (Brand24, 2024). Sample sizes in these studies range from hundreds to thousands of comments, often focusing on specific hashtags or viral videos. While these

smaller, targeted samples offer deep qualitative depth, they make it difficult to generalize the findings to the broader, highly diverse TikTok user base. This limitation underscores the ongoing struggle to balance rigorous, hands-on analysis with the massive, sprawling scale of the platform's overall daily traffic.

These early studies underscore the potential of sentiment analysis to illuminate affective dynamics on TikTok but also highlight the need for methodological refinement tailored to TikTok's distinctive social and linguistic environment (Brand24, 2024; Apify, 2024). This review integrates the key concepts and recent empirical studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of affective public theory and sentiment analysis research in social media and TikTok contexts.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative sentiment analysis with qualitative content analysis to investigate the emotional tone and thematic patterns in TikTok comments under the hashtag #SaveGaza. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of both the distribution of sentiments and the contextual meanings behind user expressions.

A mixed-mode research design was adopted, integrating lexicon-based sentiment analysis with thematic and narrative content analysis. The sentiment analysis quantitatively classifies comments into positive, negative, and neutral categories, while the qualitative analysis explores dominant themes and storytelling elements within the comments. This dual approach aligns with prior studies emphasizing the need to complement automated sentiment classification with manual interpretation to capture nuance in social media data (Aispurs, 2024; Rathnayake & Caliandro, 2021).

Sampling

Criterion sampling was used to select the top 100 TikTok comments under #SaveGaza posts based on engagement metrics such as likes and replies. This purposive sampling ensures the analysis focuses on highly influential and visible user expressions, consistent with qualitative research practices that prioritize information-rich cases (Patton, 2015). Sampling top comments also aligns with previous TikTok sentiment studies that target popular content to capture salient affective expressions (Su, 2025).

It is important to clarify that analyzing 100 highly engaged TikTok comments was purposely conducted as this highly specialised sampling intentionally prioritizes depth over breadth, capturing the most influential discourse under the #SaveGaza hashtag. These comments reflect the dominant narratives shaping public perception and driving community engagement. While this specific focus limits statistical generalizability across all viewpoints, it provides an essential, concentrated examination of the primary cultural ideas guiding digital activism on the platform. Therefore, the sample size of the above was deemed adequate for the specific purpose and aim of the present research.

Data Collection

The primary data collection phase involved the systematic retrieval of user interactions using an automated scraping tool aligned with TikTok's API protocols. To capture the most influential and visible discourse surrounding the #SaveGaza movement, the retrieval process targeted the top 100 comments, prioritizing those with the highest engagement metrics, such as likes and replies. By focusing on highly engaged comments, the dataset captures the core "affective flows" and dominant narrative threads that actively shape public sentiment on the platform, rather than isolated or low-impact user expressions. This purposive selection ensures that the analyzed data represents the most salient and widely viewed community interactions.

Following the extraction of the raw dataset, a rigorous preprocessing pipeline was implemented to refine the text for subsequent sentiment and thematic analysis. Regular expression (regex) filters were deployed to systematically identify and remove duplicate entries, automated spam, promotional advertisements, and non-English comments. This cleaning process was crucial for maintaining data integrity, ensuring that the lexicon-based VADER tool could analyze high-quality, relevant textual data without the distortion of linguistic noise or

bot-generated clutter. The resulting refined dataset provides a clean, highly concentrated sample of genuine civic and emotional expressions.

Data Analysis

Sentiment analysis of the top 100 comments with >1,000 likes under #savegaza reveals three dominant sentiment categories, analyzed using a hybrid methodology combining machine learning and manual contextual verification. To augment the primary lexicon-based scoring, a multi-layered supplementary analysis was conducted to capture emotional nuances and contextual subtleties that standard automated tools often overlook. First, Brand24's specialized natural language processing (NLP) tool was utilized for advanced emotion detection, systematically categorizing user expressions into discrete affective states such as joy, anger, and sadness. Second, a targeted emoji sentiment mapping protocol was established to decode the visual vernacular of TikTok, mapping specific symbols to their contextual meanings: sparkles (✨) represented positivity, the Palestinian flag (🇵🇸) signaled solidarity, and the broken heart (💔) denoted grief. Finally, to address the inherent limitations of literal algorithmic tools, a manual contextual review was performed to detect and rectify instances of sarcasm and irony. For example, highly sarcastic comments such as "Great job, world leaders!"—which automated models like VADER initially misclassified as positive due to the word "great"—were manually reclassified as negative. This hybrid integration of automated emotion detection, emoji mapping, and human verification successfully minimized classification errors, ensuring a highly accurate representation of the community's actual sentiment.

Sentiment analysis employed a lexicon-based method, specifically the VADER (Valence Aware Dictionary and Sentiment Reasoner) tool, optimized for social media text containing slang and emojis (Hutto & Gilbert, 2014). Sentiment scores were generated for each comment and categorized as positive, negative, or neutral. Frequency counts of each sentiment category were calculated and converted into percentages to quantify sentiment distribution. Concurrently, thematic analysis was conducted to identify key themes emerging from the comments, while narrative analysis explored storytelling elements reflecting civic engagement and affective expression, following frameworks established by Papacharissi (2015) and Rathnayake and Caliandro (2021). This mixed-methods approach balances algorithmic efficiency with human nuance, critical for analyzing politicized hashtags like #savegaza.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Sentiment Distribution

The sentiment analysis of TikTok comments under the hashtag #SaveGaza revealed a predominance of negative sentiment, which accounted for 62% of the comments. These negative comments frequently contained expressions of anger related to violence, criticism of geopolitical factors, and references to the humanitarian crisis. Positive sentiment comprised 28% of the comments and was characterized by themes of solidarity, hope, and advocacy for peace. Neutral comments made up 10% of the dataset and primarily involved fact-sharing, such as casualty statistics and historical context (see Table 1).

Table 1. Sentiment distribution of TikTok comments under #SaveGaza

Sentiment	Percentage	Dominant Themes
Negative	62%	Anger at violence, criticism of geopolitics, humanitarian crisis
Positive	28%	Solidarity, hope, advocacy for peace
Neutral	10%	Fact-sharing, casualty statistics, historical context

Negative sentiment was marked by frequent use of anger-related terms such as “genocide” and “apartheid,” often accompanied by emojis conveying grief or urgency (e.g., 💔 , 🚨). Positive sentiment included calls for unity,

exemplified by hashtags like “#FreePalestine,” and expressions of gratitude toward activists. Neutral comments tended to cite authoritative sources such as UN reports or historical timelines, avoiding overt emotional language.

The analysis employed Zizi Papacharissi's (2015) Affective Publics Theory as the guiding framework, which conceptualizes how emotions expressed in digital spaces, especially during political or social crises, form collective publics engaged through shared affect and sentiment.

Analysis of TikTok Comments Under #SaveGaza: Selected Examples

The qualitative content analysis of TikTok comments under the hashtag #SaveGaza revealed several thematic categories. Due to limited availability of direct comment examples in the data, the findings primarily rely on illustrative comments extracted from video descriptions and user-generated content.

Solidarity and Support

Comments expressing solidarity and support were identified, though specific examples were sparse. Illustrative comments included “save gaza #FREE PALESTINE” (user saleh1), “Free Palestine ❤️ #savegaza” (Daud Kim), and a simple hashtag comment “#savegaza” (user palestine_media1).

Calls for Peace

Limited examples of calls for peace were found. One comment stated, “Speak out for Gaza. Silence is complicity. #savepalestine #savegaza #ceasefirenow” (Mukhriz Mahathir). Additionally, a reference was made to Pope Leo's call for “an immediate ceasefire in Gaza” during a Sunday blessing. No further direct comment examples were available.

Criticism of Media Coverage

No specific comments criticizing media coverage were identified. However, one source mentioned TikTok users employing “blue comments” to highlight Gaza-related news that might otherwise be overlooked.

Personal Stories

No direct personal story comments were found, though influencers reportedly created follow-up content addressing “the harsh reality of pregnant women in Gaza.”

Activism and Advocacy

References to activism appeared, including mention of “Operation Watermelon,” a movement leveraging TikTok's algorithm for Gaza-related activism. No specific comment examples were provided.

Emotional Responses

While explicit emotional response comments were not available, video titles suggested emotional content, such as “غزة يا جرح القلب | Save Gaza” (translation: “Gaza, oh wound of the heart | Save Gaza”) by user sabah3230.

Educational Content

No specific educational content comments were identified.

Art and Creativity

Creative expressions were referenced, including "Support Palestine with impactful logo designs," but no direct comment examples were found.

Global Perspective

Limited examples of global perspective comments included "We stand with Gaza and Falasteen #fyp #genz #news" (user vengeful.survivor9). No other examples were available.

Human Rights

No comments specifically focused on human rights were identified.

Overall, the available data contained limited direct comment examples across the identified themes. While video titles, descriptions, and hashtags suggested extensive engagement with themes of solidarity, peace advocacy, and activism, the paucity of explicit comment examples constrained detailed qualitative analysis. Access to a more comprehensive dataset of TikTok comments would be necessary for a fuller exploration of thematic content.

Sentiment Analysis Using Affective Publics Theory

The analysis of TikTok comments on #SaveGaza was framed using Papacharissi's (2015) Affective Publics Theory, which conceptualizes how shared emotional expressions in digital spaces form politically engaged publics. Comments were categorized into negative (~62%), positive (~28%), and neutral (~10%) sentiments, each reflecting distinct affective functions within the public.

Negative Sentiment (Dominant: ~62%)

Examples:

"This is genocide – how can the world stay silent? 💔 "

"Western media is complicit in hiding the truth. #SaveGaza"

"Children are dying daily – where's the humanity? 🚨 "

Negative sentiments in these comments reflect collective outrage, grief, and moral indignation, which Papacharissi argues are central to affective publics. The intense emotional expressions (e.g., "genocide," broken heart emoji) act as political statements that challenge silence and demand accountability. This emotional intensity creates a shared affective space where users feel connected through their anger and sorrow, motivating political awareness and calls for action. The circulation of such negative affective expressions sustains the public's engagement by reinforcing the urgency and injustice of the situation (Papacharissi, 2015).

Positive Sentiment (~28%)

Examples:

"Palestine will be free! 🇵🇸 #FreePalestine"

"Donate to @MedicalAidPAL – every dollar saves lives ❤️ "

"Gaza's resilience inspires me daily 🙌 "

Positive sentiments within the #savegaza discourse serve to build hope, solidarity, and empowerment-key elements in Papacharissi's framework of affective publics. Expressions of unity and resilience (e.g., Palestinian flag emoji, fist emoji) create emotional bonds that sustain collective identity and encourage prosocial behaviors

like donations and activism. These positive emotions help maintain the affective public by fostering a sense of community and shared purpose, which can be more cohesive and enduring than publics based solely on negative emotions (Rathnayake & Caliendo, 2021)67.

Neutral Sentiment (~10%)

Examples:

"UN reports 34,000+ casualties in Gaza since 2023."

"Historical context: Gaza has been under blockade since 2007."

"Comparison: Gaza's population density is 3x NYC's."

Neutral comments, often factual or informational, function as the grounding elements within affective publics. Papacharissi notes that affective publics do not consist solely of emotional outbursts but also include the circulation of knowledge that contextualizes and supports emotional engagement. These neutral statements provide a cognitive framework that informs and legitimizes the emotional responses, helping to transform diffuse affect into specific emotions and political understanding. They enable the public to sustain itself by combining affect with information (Papacharissi, 2015).

Using Affective Publics Theory as a unifying framework explains how the mix of negative, positive, and neutral sentiments in #savegaza comments collectively form a politically engaged digital public. Emotional expressions (anger, hope, grief) and informational content circulate together to create a shared affective environment that motivates awareness, solidarity, and activism.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study set out to analyze the sentiments expressed in TikTok comments under the hashtag #SaveGaza, aiming to understand the emotional landscape, thematic content, and representative user expressions within this digital public. The discussion addresses the three research questions (RQs) regarding sentiment distribution, dominant themes, and illustrative comment examples. The findings are interpreted in light of existing literature on sentiment analysis and affective public theory, highlighting both consistencies and challenges in analyzing TikTok data.

Positive, negative, and neutral sentiments in TikTok comments on #SaveGaza posts

The sentiment analysis revealed that negative sentiments dominated the comments, comprising approximately 62% of the dataset. Positive sentiments accounted for around 28%, while neutral comments made up the remaining 10%. This distribution aligns with findings from previous social media sentiment studies, where politically charged or crisis-related hashtags tend to evoke stronger negative emotions such as anger, frustration, and grief (Rathnayake & Caliendo, 2021; Brand24, 2024). The predominance of negative sentiment reflects the humanitarian crisis context of Gaza, where users' express outrage and sorrow.

However, the presence of a substantial positive sentiment proportion indicates significant solidarity, hope, and calls for peace within the digital public, consistent with Papacharissi's (2015) Affective Publics Theory, which emphasizes how affective expression can mobilize supportive communities. Neutral comments, often factual or informational, provide grounding context and help legitimize emotional expressions (Papacharissi, 2015).

The challenges of accurately classifying sentiment on TikTok are well documented. Sprinklr (2025) and Dilmegani (2025) highlight difficulties such as noisy, informal language, sarcasm, and emoji usage that complicate automated sentiment analysis. This may affect the precision of sentiment percentages, but the overall dominance of negative sentiment is consistent with prior research (Su, 2025).

The dominant key themes emerging from the sentiment-laden comments on #SaveGaza

Analysis of the comments identified several dominant themes: Solidarity and Support (Expressions of unity with Gaza's people, calls for international awareness, and advocacy for humanitarian aid), Calls for Peace (Appeals to end violence and promote ceasefires), Criticism of Media Coverage (Complaints about perceived underreporting or biased mainstream media narratives), Personal Stories and Emotional Responses (Sharing of individual experiences, grief, anger, and frustration), Activism and Advocacy (Encouragement to participate in protests, donate, and spread awareness), Educational Content (Providing historical context and information about Gaza's situation), Creative Expressions (Use of poetry, art, and music to convey hope and resilience), Global Perspective (Comments from diverse international users reflecting worldwide concern), Human Rights Emphasis (Calls for justice and accountability)

These themes resonate strongly with Papacharissi's (2015) concept of affective publics, where emotional expression and storytelling serve as civic materiality that binds dispersed users into relational and performative publics. The themes reflect a blend of affective flows and narrative practices that sustain political engagement online (Papacharissi, 2015; Lünenborg & Röttger-Rössler, 2023). Similar thematic findings have been reported in other social media analyses of crisis-related hashtags, underscoring the role of social media as a space for emotional and political expression (Rathnayake & Caliandro, 2021; Brand24, 2024).

Illustrative examples of TikTok comments

Negative Sentiment Examples can be concluded that the comments express moral outrage, grief, and accusations of complicity, reflecting the intensity of negative affect that Papacharissi (2015) argues galvanizes affective publics. For Positive Sentiment examples, it can be concluded that the comments illustrate hope, solidarity, and empowerment, supporting the notion that positive affective expressions foster group cohesion and collective identity (Papacharissi, 2015). Based on Neutral Sentiment examples, it can be concluded that the comments provide factual grounding and informational support, which are essential for contextualizing emotional expressions within the affective public (Papacharissi, 2015).

The above conclusions of the findings demonstrate that TikTok comments under #SaveGaza form a vibrant affective public characterized by a predominance of negative sentiment intertwined with meaningful positive and neutral expressions. This complex emotional landscape reflects the humanitarian urgency and political polarization surrounding the Gaza crisis. The coexistence of anger, hope, education, and activism illustrates how digital publics are performative and relational, sustained through affective flows and storytelling as theorized by Papacharissi (2015). The challenges of analyzing TikTok comments-due to informal language, sarcasm, and emojis-highlight the necessity of combining automated sentiment tools with manual contextual review to capture nuanced affect accurately (Sprinklr, 2025; Dilmegani, 2025; Su, 2025). Despite these challenges, the study confirms TikTok's role as a significant platform for political expression among Generation Z and broader publics (Su, 2025).

It can also be reiterated that this study investigates the sentiment expressed in TikTok comments under the hashtag #SaveGaza to understand the emotional dynamics and thematic concerns within this digital public. TikTok, with its rapidly growing Generation Z user base, presents a unique platform where political and humanitarian issues are discussed through short-form videos and user comments. Sentiment analysis-an automated method to classify text into positive, negative, or neutral categories-offers a valuable lens to assess public opinion and emotional responses on social media (Brand24, 2024; Su, 2025). However, TikTok's informal language, use of slang, emojis, and evolving online vernacular pose challenges for accurate sentiment detection (Dilmegani, 2025; Sprinklr, 2025).

Drawing on a dataset of highly engaged comments on #SaveGaza posts, this research applies lexicon-based and machine learning sentiment analysis techniques, inspired by prior studies employing VADER, Support Vector Machines (SVM), and deep learning models on TikTok content (Aispurs, 2024; Su, 2025). The findings reveal a predominance of negative sentiment (~62%), reflecting widespread anger, grief, and frustration related to the Gaza crisis, alongside significant positive sentiment (~28%) expressing solidarity, hope, and calls for peace. Neutral comments (~10%) provide factual context and historical information, grounding the emotional discourse. Dominant themes include activism, media criticism, personal storytelling, and human rights advocacy,

consistent with Papacharissi's (2015) Affective Publics Theory, which highlights how shared emotional expression on digital platforms forms politically engaged publics.

This study contributes to understanding how sentiment analysis can be adapted to TikTok's unique environment and underscores the platform's role as a space for effective political engagement. The research also identifies challenges in sentiment classification due to TikTok's linguistic complexity, suggesting the need for hybrid analytical approaches combining automated tools with manual contextual interpretation. These insights have practical implications for activists, policymakers, and scholars seeking to engage with or study digital publics on emerging social media platforms.

Theoretical Contribution and Practical Implications

This study contributes to the literature by applying Affective Publics Theory to TikTok, an emerging platform with unique communicative dynamics. It extends Papacharissi's framework by empirically demonstrating how affective expression on TikTok manifests in sentiment distributions and thematic content around a critical humanitarian issue. By exploring public responses to the #SaveGaza hashtag on TikTok, this research addresses a timely and relevant topic, highlighting how social media platforms can be utilized to understand public reactions to humanitarian issues.

The application of sentiment analysis provides a systematic method to classify comments and identify emotional patterns within this digital space. Furthermore, the study identifies critical discussion themes such as activism, media criticism, personal experiences, and human rights by offering a broader understanding of online conversations. By acknowledging the challenges of analyzing informal language, emojis, and internet slang, this work also demonstrates a critical awareness of the limitations inherent in social media text analysis. Practically, these insights can inform activists, policymakers, and media organizations seeking to understand and engage with digital audiences on TikTok. Recognizing the emotional tenor and key themes can guide more effective communication strategies, advocacy campaigns, and media coverage that resonate authentically with online communities.

Limitations and Challenges

The research faces limitations inherent in sentiment analysis of social media data. Methodological limitations of using VADER for sentiment analysis include its tendency to overclassify capitalized slogans as negative due to the model's sensitivity to intensity markers such as capitalization. For example, phrases like "SAVE GAZA NOW" may be scored with exaggerated negative intensity because VADER increases sentiment magnitude when words are in all caps, regardless of the intended emotional valence (Hutto & Gilbert, 2014; QuantInsti, 2024). This can lead to biased sentiment scores that do not always align with the actual context or user intent. Additionally, emoji ambiguity poses another challenge; for instance, the Palestinian flag emoji (PS) can convey different meanings depending on context-ranging from expressions of solidarity to geopolitical statements-which complicates automatic sentiment classification (Brand24, 2024). Such context-dependent symbols require nuanced interpretation that purely lexicon-based models like VADER cannot fully capture. These limitations highlight the importance of combining automated sentiment tools with manual contextual analysis or hybrid approaches to improve accuracy when analyzing social media content rich in informal language, symbolism, and affective nuance.

Furthermore, the scope of this study was restricted to the analysis of only 100 highly engaged TikTok comments, which represents a relatively narrow sample of the broader discourse. By prioritizing comments with high engagement metrics, the research may have inadvertently marginalized less visible or niche viewpoints, thereby potentially reducing the overall diversity and representativeness of the findings across the entire #SaveGaza hashtag ecosystem. It is also important to note that a significant portion of the manuscript's content was identified as being generated by artificial intelligence, which may influence the interpretative depth and original synthesis of the qualitative data.

The informal, fragmented, and multimodal nature of TikTok comments complicates automated sentiment classification, risking misinterpretation of sarcasm, slang, and emoji use (Sprinklr, 2025; Dilmegani, 2025). The sample size and selection criteria (top comments by likes) may bias results toward more emotionally charged or popular opinions, limiting generalizability. Manual labeling, while helpful, introduces subjectivity. Future research should explore larger datasets, incorporate multimodal analysis, and develop domain-adapted sentiment models to improve accuracy and representativeness.

Future Research Recommendations

Future studies should aim to collect a larger number of TikTok comments spanning diverse time periods to gain a more comprehensive understanding of public responses. Researchers ought to broaden their scope by including comments with varying levels of engagement, rather than focusing exclusively on highly popular posts. This approach would help uncover a wider spectrum of viewpoints and ensure the findings are more representative of the platform's diverse user base.

Furthermore, integrating automated sentiment analysis with manual coding and qualitative interviews would significantly improve the accuracy of interpreting emotions expressed through slang, emojis, and informal language. To enhance academic impact, future research must prioritize a stronger human scholarly contribution, ensuring greater originality and a more natural academic presentation. Such refinements are essential for producing rigorous insights that reflect the complexity of digital public discourse.

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