

# Platformized Conflict Visibility: A Conceptual Research Note on Digital War Coverage and the Lebanon-Israel Conflict

Mohsen El Ali

Independent Researcher

Working Paper / Conceptual Research Note

Version 1.0

28 April 2026

## Copyright and reuse notice

Copyright (c) 2026 Mohsen El Ali. All rights reserved. This manuscript is shared for academic citation, doctoral application support, and scholarly discussion. No part of this work may be reproduced, adapted, translated, distributed, republished, or used to prepare derivative works without written permission from the author, except for lawful quotation and citation. Suggested Zenodo license: Custom license - All Rights Reserved, or CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 if a standard Creative Commons license is required.

## Suggested citation

El Ali, M. (2026). Platformized Conflict Visibility: A Conceptual Research Note on Digital War Coverage and the Lebanon-Israel Conflict. Working paper, Version 1.0. DOI to be assigned by Zenodo at publication.

## Abstract

This working paper argues that contemporary conflict coverage should be studied not only as a question of bias, quantity, or editorial position, but as a hierarchy of visibility produced across institutional media routines, platform infrastructures, geopolitical attention, and emotional legibility. Using Lebanon-Israel conflict episodes since October 2023 as a motivating case, the paper defines platformized conflict visibility as the uneven process through which some wars, victims, geographies, and explanations become searchable, memorable, shareable, and politically intelligible, while others remain temporary, fragmented, or peripheral. The paper proposes six dimensions for analyzing conflict visibility: volume, duration, framing depth, humanization, attribution of responsibility, and platform afterlife. It also outlines methodological implications for future doctoral research without disclosing a complete empirical design. The contribution is conceptual: it offers a vocabulary for studying unequal visibility in digital conflict coverage and for moving beyond narrow debates about whether a conflict is merely covered or ignored.

**Keywords:** platformized visibility; conflict coverage; Lebanon-Israel conflict; political communication; social media; media sociology; war and media; digital platforms

**Author position:** This research note is based on the author's ongoing doctoral research development and public scholarly interests in media, conflict visibility, political communication, and Lebanon-Israel conflict coverage.

**Scope protection:** The paper intentionally presents a conceptual argument and selected methodological implications. It does not disclose the full doctoral research design, coding plan, sampling frame, interview strategy, or dissertation architecture.

**AI-assisted drafting disclosure:** AI-assisted drafting and editing tools were used to help structure and refine this manuscript. The author remains responsible for the argument, final text, citations, and any future submission or publication decisions.

## 1. Introduction: visibility as a form of power

In contemporary war coverage, the central question is no longer only whether a conflict is reported. The harder question is how a conflict becomes visible, for how long, through which images and explanations, and with what political meaning. A war may appear frequently in headlines and still remain poorly understood. Civilian suffering may circulate widely as an image while the political conditions that produced it are left thin, fragmented, or detached from responsibility. In this sense, visibility is not the opposite of invisibility. It is a hierarchy: some suffering is made legible, urgent, and historically meaningful, while other suffering is seen briefly and then absorbed into the background noise of the platform feed.

This distinction matters for the study of conflicts involving Lebanon and Israel after October 2023. The conflict has not existed outside public view. It has appeared in news reports, institutional statements, humanitarian updates, television segments, social media clips, and diplomatic commentary. Yet visibility has not been evenly distributed across actors, victims, territories, and narratives. The public does not encounter all forms of violence in the same way. Some events are named, contextualized, mapped, and repeatedly explained. Others appear as isolated incidents, regional spillover, secondary effects, or background instability. The result is not simple silence, but unequal visibility.

The purpose of this research note is to make that inequality analytically usable. Instead of treating visibility as a synonym for media attention, the paper develops the idea of platformized conflict visibility: the process through which institutional media and digital platforms jointly shape what becomes publicly seeable, searchable, emotionally recognizable, and politically significant. The word platformized is important. Conflicts are no longer mediated only by newspapers, broadcasters, and wire services. They are also sorted by recommendation systems, headline previews, search engines, hashtags, engagement metrics, moderation policies, influencer commentary, audience sharing, and the short memory of feed-based attention. Visibility is produced by this whole environment, not by a single editor or platform.

This is a conceptual working paper, not a finished empirical article. Its argument is deliberately focused: studying conflict coverage through visibility allows researchers to ask more precise questions than those offered by generic claims of bias, under-reporting, or double standards. Bias may be present, but it is not the whole story. The more useful question is how different conflicts are made visible in different forms, and how those forms affect public understanding.

## 2. From coverage to visibility

Media research has long provided tools for studying how public attention is shaped. Agenda-setting theory shows that media do not simply tell people what to think, but strongly influence what issues become thinkable as public priorities. Framing theory goes further by asking how issues are organized, what causal explanations are emphasized, and what moral evaluations are made available. These traditions remain essential, but platformed media environments require an additional layer of analysis. The issue is not just agenda position or frame selection. It is the uneven movement of conflict narratives through infrastructures that reward certain forms of expression: emotional immediacy, visual intensity, identity alignment, short captions, moral clarity, and repeatable symbolism.

Visibility therefore has at least two sides. The first is institutional. News organizations decide which conflicts deserve correspondents, explainers, live pages, expert interviews, and sustained follow-up. These decisions are shaped by professional routines, security access, geopolitical proximity, audience expectations, language availability, and the perceived relevance of a conflict to powerful states. The second side is platformic. Once a story enters digital circulation, it is reformatted by feeds, searchability, algorithmic recommendations, audience reactions, content moderation, and the affordances of each platform. A conflict can be prominent in one environment and marginal in another. It can be visually intense but analytically shallow. It can trend for hours and then vanish from public attention.

The concept of platformized conflict visibility connects these two sides. It treats visibility as a social and technical achievement rather than a natural result of events. This approach avoids two common mistakes. The first mistake is to count coverage as if all mentions carry the same meaning. The second is to assume that invisibility only means absence. In practice, a conflict may be visible as spectacle but invisible as history; visible as security threat but invisible as human loss; visible as regional disturbance but invisible as political consequence.

### **3. The Lebanon-Israel conflict as a motivating case**

Lebanon-Israel conflict episodes since October 2023 offer a strong case for this kind of analysis because they sit at the intersection of several visibility regimes. They are connected to the wider regional crisis after the Gaza war; they involve state and non-state actors; they unfold across a border already shaped by past wars, UN peacekeeping, displacement, and competing international narratives; and they are covered through both institutional news and social media fragments. This makes the case analytically rich but also risky. If studied only through event counts or headline volume, the deeper hierarchy of visibility may be missed.

Humanitarian and human rights reporting has documented that hostilities in Lebanon continued after the intensive phase that began in October 2023 and after the November 2024 ceasefire. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported in April 2026 that intermittent hostilities persisted despite the ceasefire, and that Israeli military operations continued almost daily thereafter. Such reports matter because they show that public visibility is not simply tied to whether violence exists. Violence can persist while public attention becomes intermittent, normalized, or displaced by larger narratives elsewhere.

For this reason, the Lebanon-Israel case should not be reduced to a question of whether Western media cover Lebanon enough. That question is too blunt. A stronger research question is: under what conditions does suffering in Lebanon become narratively visible, and under what conditions does it appear as secondary, temporary, or derivative of another conflict? This question does not require denying the visibility of other suffering. It asks how hierarchies of attention are made, justified, and reproduced across media systems.

The case also highlights a broader problem in digital conflict coverage: the mismatch between event visibility and explanatory visibility. An airstrike, displacement order, border incident, funeral, or destroyed village may become momentarily visible through images and headlines. But the explanatory frame - why it happened, how it connects to prior events, whose legal responsibility is alleged, how civilians narrate loss, and why international attention rises or falls - may remain weak. This gap between seeing and understanding is one of the central problems that the proposed concept is designed to capture.

### **4. Six dimensions of platformized conflict visibility**

A practical theory of visibility needs dimensions that can be observed. This paper proposes six: volume, duration, framing depth, humanization, attribution of responsibility, and platform afterlife. Together, they allow researchers to move beyond the yes-or-no question of whether a conflict is covered.

Volume refers to the amount of attention a conflict receives across outlets and platforms. It includes article counts, post counts, video segments, push notifications, social media posts, and homepage prominence. Volume is useful but insufficient. High volume can still produce shallow understanding if coverage is repetitive, episodic, or narrowly framed.

Duration refers to how long attention lasts after an event. Some conflicts receive sustained updates, background explainers, anniversary coverage, and follow-up investigations. Others appear briefly, often only when casualty numbers rise or when a major power is directly affected. Duration matters because public memory is built through repetition. If attention collapses quickly, the conflict remains visible only as a passing event, not as a political condition.

Framing depth refers to the amount of context attached to visibility. A deeply framed conflict is connected to history, institutions, law, civilian experience, diplomatic stakes, and patterns of violence. A thinly framed conflict is presented as an isolated escalation, clash, exchange, or security incident. Framing depth is especially important for conflicts involving non-Western or peripheralized geographies, where audiences may depend on media institutions to provide basic context.

Humanization refers to whose suffering is individualized and emotionally recognized. Humanization is not only the presence of victims; it is the narrative treatment of victims as people with names, families, homes, futures, memories, and losses. Unequal visibility often appears through unequal humanization: some deaths are narrated as biographies, while others appear only as numbers.

Attribution of responsibility refers to how agency is assigned. Conflict reporting often relies on passive constructions, balanced formulas, or generic language such as clashes, tensions, or escalation. Such language may be professionally cautious, but it can also obscure responsibility. Attribution does not mean propaganda or premature judgment. It means examining how reports handle claims, evidence, legal categories, and actor agency.

Platform afterlife refers to what happens after publication. A story may remain searchable, clipped, quoted, recirculated, discussed, and algorithmically recommended, or it may disappear rapidly. Platform afterlife is shaped by hashtags, influencer networks, search ranking, language communities, archiving, moderation, and engagement metrics. In a platformed media environment, publication is only the first stage of visibility. Circulation determines whether a story survives.

## **5. Mechanisms that produce unequal visibility**

The six dimensions above are shaped by several mechanisms. The first is geopolitical hierarchy. Conflicts are not equally close to the centers of global media power. States with strong diplomatic ties, military partnerships, diaspora influence, or strategic importance often receive more sustained interpretive attention. Other spaces are treated as complicated, chronically unstable, or secondary to a larger regional story. This does not mean journalists simply ignore them. It means that available narrative templates may already place them lower in the hierarchy of attention.

The second mechanism is narrative availability. Some conflicts fit familiar scripts: democracy versus authoritarianism, terrorism versus security, invasion versus defense, humanitarian disaster, regional spillover, or ancient hostility. The easier a conflict is to narrate, the more efficiently it travels across platforms. The harder it is to narrate, the more it risks being compressed into vague formulas. Lebanon-Israel conflict episodes often carry multiple overlapping scripts: border war, Hezbollah-Israel confrontation, Gaza spillover, Lebanese state fragility, regional proxy conflict, civilian displacement, and international law. That complexity can enrich analysis, but it can also weaken visibility if platforms reward simplified stories.

The third mechanism is affective legibility. Digital circulation favors content that can be quickly felt and judged. Images of children, destroyed homes, funerals, smoke, and emergency scenes may generate attention, but emotional intensity does not guarantee political understanding. Affective legibility can humanize suffering, but it can also transform suffering into consumable fragments. The question is not whether emotion belongs in conflict coverage. It clearly does. The question is whether emotion is attached to context or separated from it.

The fourth mechanism is platform design. Platforms are not neutral channels. They organize attention through ranking, notification systems, search tools, recommendation engines, trending lists, moderation decisions, and monetization structures. These systems privilege speed, reaction, identity signaling, and visual compression. They also create uneven visibility across languages. Arabic-language documentation of violence may circulate intensely in one network while remaining peripheral in English-language public debate. Polish, French, English, and Arabic media environments may each produce different maps of the same conflict.

The fifth mechanism is institutional risk. Newsrooms and public institutions often face legal, political, and reputational pressure when covering highly polarized conflicts. Cautious language may protect credibility, but it may also flatten asymmetry, legal responsibility, or civilian experience. The result can be a style of coverage that is technically visible but politically muted.

## **6. Methodological implications**

A full empirical study of platformized conflict visibility would need mixed methods, but the concept can already guide research design. First, researchers should compare not only how much coverage different events receive, but how coverage is distributed over time. A timeline of attention may reveal moments of spike and disappearance that a simple article count cannot capture.

Second, researchers should code for framing depth. Does a report explain the background of an event? Does it name legal or humanitarian categories? Does it connect the event to prior incidents? Does it include civilian voices? Does it rely mainly on official actors? Does it describe destruction as damage, strategy, punishment, deterrence, collateral effect, or alleged violation? Such questions turn visibility into a measurable object.

Third, researchers should compare institutional media with platform circulation. A story that appears on a major outlet may not have the same afterlife as a story circulating through activist networks, diaspora accounts, journalists on the ground, or short-form video. Platform afterlife can be tracked through engagement patterns, reposting, hashtag persistence, search results, and cross-platform movement.

Fourth, researchers should treat language as part of visibility. English-language coverage often shapes international perception, but Arabic-language coverage may provide denser local testimony and different moral vocabularies. Polish-language media may offer another layer, shaped by European security concerns, domestic politics, historical analogies, and news dependency on international wire services. A researcher based between Poland and Lebanon is well positioned to study how conflict visibility changes across linguistic and political contexts.

Finally, interviews can support the analysis, but they should not replace it. Interviews with journalists, editors, analysts, humanitarian communicators, or digital media professionals can clarify editorial and platform constraints. However, audience perception should not be claimed unless the project includes a robust audience method. For a doctoral project, the safest and strongest design would focus on visibility itself: the production, circulation, and framing of conflict narratives.

## **7. Contribution**

The contribution of this research note is to shift the discussion from coverage to visibility. This may seem like a small conceptual move, but it matters. Coverage asks whether something appears. Visibility asks what form that appearance takes, how long it lasts, who is made human, what explanation is attached, and whether the story survives beyond the initial moment of circulation.

This approach also avoids a weak version of media criticism. It does not begin with the conclusion that one region is ignored and another is over-covered. Instead, it asks how hierarchies of public attention are built. That is a stronger academic position because it can be tested. It can produce evidence rather than only moral frustration. It can also account for cases where a conflict is heavily covered but still poorly contextualized.

For political communication, the concept helps explain how platforms reshape war visibility. For sociology, it connects visibility to symbolic power, recognition, and public memory. For media studies, it extends framing and agenda-setting into platformed environments. For conflict studies, it shows why public perception of war is shaped not only by battlefield events, but by infrastructures of attention.

## 8. Conclusion

The visibility of war is never neutral. It is produced through institutional decisions, platform systems, geopolitical hierarchies, emotional scripts, and audience practices. Some conflicts become durable public objects. Others appear only as flashes of violence, detached from history and quickly replaced by the next event. The Lebanon-Israel conflict after October 2023 provides a powerful case for studying this process because it is visible enough to be documented but unequal enough to demand explanation.

The concept of platformized conflict visibility offers one way to make that explanation possible. It gives researchers a vocabulary for asking not simply whether a conflict was covered, but how it was made publicly meaningful. For future doctoral research, this conceptual move can support a stronger empirical design: one that studies visibility as a hierarchy of volume, duration, framing depth, humanization, attribution, and platform afterlife. That is where the real political significance of digital conflict coverage lies: not only in what is seen, but in what becomes understandable, memorable, and publicly consequential.

## References

- Brighenti, A. M. (2007). Visibility: A category for the social sciences. *Current Sociology*, 55(3), 323-342.
- Butler, J. (2009). *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* London: Verso.
- Chouliaraki, L. (2006). *The Spectatorship of Suffering*. London: Sage.
- Couldry, N., & Hepp, A. (2017). *The Mediated Construction of Reality*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51-58.
- Gillespie, T. (2018). *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions That Shape Social Media*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176-187.
- OHCHR. (2026). Update on the Human Rights Situation in Lebanon, 2-22 April 2026. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa.
- OCHA. (2024). Lebanon: Flash Update #41 - Escalation of Hostilities in Lebanon, as of 4 November 2024. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
- van Dijck, J., Poell, T., & de Waal, M. (2018). *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.