

# After seeing the struggle of Palestinians in Gaza, TikTok users are learning about Islam

December 19 2023, by Nahid Widaatalla

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Credit: Timur Weber from Pexels

The ongoing conflict in Gaza between Hamas and Israel is playing out on screens like never before. [Through social media](#), millions are witnessing the violence that has killed [thousands since Oct. 7](#).

People have turned to [social media](#) to learn about the history and politics of the region. And increasingly, many are using it to learn about Islam after witnessing the plight of Palestinians in Gaza, giving rise to a movement around exploration of the religion.

In particular, TikTok has seen a spike in posts, livestreams and discussions about the Qur'an, with many citing the displays of Islamic [faith](#) they've seen in Gazans as their inspiration.

[TikTok analytics](#) show the hashtag #Islam has rapidly gained popularity since early October. In that time, videos using the hashtag have garnered more than 35 billion views globally, one billion views in the United States and 360 million in Canada, with the majority of viewers aged 18–24.

## **TikTok challenging narratives**

In November, I spoke with six North American TikTokers who have taken part in the online movement by posting content about their faith journey. They shared insights about what they've learned, reactions from their audiences and their thoughts on the crisis in Gaza.

"You see women running out of rubble buildings holding their lifeless child, and the first thing they do is thank Allah (God)," said TikToker [Hunter Graves \(@graves.hunter\)](#) when I had a conversation with him. Graves is a 21-year-old college senior in Nashville.

In the past two months, he has posted several videos discussing Islam. In some, he showcases books he's purchased; in [others](#), he lightheartedly muses about the religion and that he is "lowkey thinking bout becoming a Muslim."

One [video expressing his excitement](#) over terms like alhamdulillah

(praise be to Allah) gained almost two million views.

On Oct. 27, Graves [posted a video](#) taking his [shahada](#)—the formal declaration of faith whereby one becomes Muslim—at a mosque and officially "reverting," the term used by some converts to Islam. "With faith, suffering has meaning," he told me.

Muhammad Kolila, an imam at the [Downtown Denver Islamic Center](#), told me people are using social media to spread knowledge, challenge biases and express solidarity.

"You can do a lot with social media," he said, adding that some are linking the struggle of Palestinians to those of Indigenous people in North America and South African apartheid. Many TikTokers say the movement has deconstructed negative beliefs about Islam that they grew up with.

What's happening online contrasts with [the anti-Muslim sentiment that has been growing in the West](#) since the early 21st century. The Canadian Senate Committee on Human Rights recently released a report outlining the frequency and harms of [discrimination, violence and online hate against Canadian Muslims](#).

[Madison \(@6toedcats\)](#), a 24-year-old from Tampa, Fla., posted a [teary-eyed video](#) in mid-October, seeking local Muslim women to support her journey to becoming a Muslim. She had previously researched Islam online but said that Palestine was the tipping factor.

"It clicked in my head—I am thinking of myself as Muslim, why am I not Muslim already?" she expressed to me in an interview.

[Charlie Bowling \(@gingerbeard.prog\)](#), who considers himself agnostic, posts videos listening to and reading the Qur'an. "I see the Palestinian

faith that has kept them so willing and strong," he told me, "when I started reading the Qur'an, I wanted to document my journey."

## History repeats itself

Following the 9/11 attacks, a similar phenomenon of [people exploring Islam](#) occurred, [particularly among women](#). Current interest mirrors that, but it is now happening through social media and before a much wider audience.

[Camela Widad \(@camelawidad\)](#) began learning about Islam in the months prior to 9/11 and officially converted in 2003.

"We started to see people go 'What? Is it really a religion that promotes terrorism?' And that's when I saw it gain momentum," she told me. In her eyes, access to social media today has humanized Muslims.

Islam has kept individuals in Gaza [steadfast in the face of adversity](#), appealing to audiences on social media. Religion comforts individuals by providing answers to existential questions about life, death and suffering. The Qur'an encourages connection between lessons from its stories and the present day, contributing to its value in times of hardship.

The surge in online content is also inspiring some to re-explore their faith. [Fatima Abdi \(@bbyfatz\)](#), a fashion influencer with over 83,000 followers, became distanced from Islam as a teen, but has started to find her way back. Seeing others' videos inspired her to put more action into her belief—she's started sharing parts of her faith and modest fashion journey with her audience.

[Cornell Jones \(@consciouscorn\)](#) reverted to Islam three years ago. When I spoke to him in November, he said the current crisis in Gaza feels like a loss in humanity, but TikTok has allowed him to "make room for faith

in Allah." Jones said he's received many messages asking about his reversion experience.

## **The dangers of social media**

While social media can be great, Kolila warns against rushing into Islam or comparing one's journey to others online. "Walk to the faith, not the people," he said. Seeking reputable sources is key. "Just because we have a platform, it doesn't mean we have the authority," said Jones.

Abdi and Graves added that being open about faith online can come with harsh scrutiny.

Connection between Muslims and non-Muslims on TikTok has created a rare space for empathy to flourish. At its core, the movement has allowed people to come together, learn and unlearn. In a time of stark inhumanity and collective grief, doing this might just be what helps us cope.

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