

ONLINE ANTISEMITISM IN THE COVID-19 CONTEXT

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OBJECTIVE

- ❖ This report examines how extremist voices are leveraging the COVID-19 pandemic to spread hate, xenophobia and racism, across different social media platforms, with a focus on antisemitism.
- ❖ The report seeks to inform foreign policy with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic, including protecting and promoting human rights, inclusive governance and democracy as well as an open, free and secure Internet.


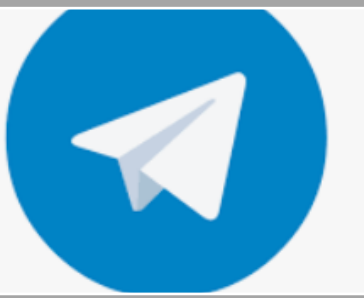


CONTEXT

- ❖ As noted by Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, the COVID-19 pandemic has galvanized the dissemination of antisemitic content on the Internet, encouraging the dangerous formation of receptive online audiences.
- ❖ Ahmed Shaheed, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, has specifically emphasized the danger of antisemitism, recognizing its toxic effects on democracy and its corrosive effects on society and inclusion.



METHODOLOGY

Multi-Platform Analysis

-  **4chan:** anonymous imageboard website
-  **Telegram:** cloud-based online messaging app
-  **Reddit:** social news aggregator, web content rating, and discussion website
-  **Twitter:** microblogging and social networking website

Mixed-Methods Approach: we used a lexicon of hateful terms related to Jewish people and Israel for our English language data analysis to map out and analyze antisemitic discourse across four different social media platforms.

KEY FINDINGS

- ❖ Extremist voices have been using both mainstream social media and smaller fringe social media to spread antisemitic views, using the COVID-19 context and hateful visual imagery online to strategically reach wider audiences.
- ❖ Antisemitic conspiracy theories are being leveraged by extremists to foster scapegoating by blaming billionaire George Soros and the Zionist Occupation Government for creating the virus.
- ❖ Social media platforms are open hubs for both Holocaust-denial content and coded-language specific to white supremacy, covertly reinforcing old racist tropes against Jewish people in conversation.
- ❖ Extremist voices are leveraging COVID-19 to criticize Israel and Israelis regarding the plight of the Palestinians and the Occupied Territories.
- ❖ Extremists have instrumentalized the Black Lives Matter movement with the aim to build a white supremacist, antisemitic and anti-black narrative around the COVID-19 crisis.

ANTISEMITIC COVID-19 NARRATIVES

TWITTER ANTISEMITIC DISCOURSE



1. Anti-Israel and anti-Zionist threads of antisemitism were often linked to the #COVID48 hashtag that was propagated around Holocaust Remembrance Day on 21 April, which also saw organized counter-responses speaking against antisemitism on Twitter.
2. Extremists regularly propagated classical antisemitic narratives, employing slurs as part of conversations. Traditional slurs ("shylock" references to WWII) were employed alongside contemporary slurs ("goyim" statements that mockingly caricature Hebrew words) and gendered slurs ("jewess"), demonstrating the adaptability and tenacity of antisemitic discourse in online contexts.
3. As Black Lives Matter protests gained prominence in early June, news stories, live videos, and anti-black racist content were leveraged by extremist voices to advance antisemitic conspiracies and target and scapegoat Jewish people.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DIGITAL INCLUSION

- ❖ Exclusionary terms, conspiracy theories, and the creation of in-group and outgroup dynamics are often inexplicit but rouse reaction and replenish the "online hate ecosystem" through the simple sharing of information.
- ❖ As governments and tech companies fail to protect individuals from online harms, both in democratic and non-democratic states alike, communities lose trust and disengage, especially if they have been historically marginalized offline and continue to experience the marginalization and discrimination online. A key factor of digital inclusion is then impeded – civic participation, as individuals cannot access, nor meaningfully use, information, including life-saving or political information.