Article

TikTok's Spiral of Antisemitism

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Abstract: The growing presence of antisemitism on social media platforms has become more prominent in recent years. Yet, while most of the scholarly attention has been focused on leading platforms like Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram, the extremist immigration to other platforms like TikTok went unnoticed. TikTok is the fastest-growing application today, attracting a huge audience of 1.2 billion active users, mostly children and teenagers. This report is based on two studies, conducted in 2020 and 2021, applying a systematic content analysis of TikTok videos, comments, and even usernames. Data were collected twice, in two four-month periods, February–May 2020 and February–May 2021, to allow for comparisons of changes and trends over time. Our findings highlighted the alarming presence of extreme antisemitic messages in video clips, songs, comments, texts, pictures, and symbols presented in TikTok's content. TikTok's algorithm is even more disconcerting since it leads to a spiral of hate: it pushes users who unintentionally view disturbing content to view more. Considering TikTok's young demographic, these findings are more than alarming; TikTok even fails to apply its own Terms of Service, which do not allow content "deliberately designed to provoke or antagonize people, or are intended to harass, harm, hurt, scare, distress, embarrass or upset people or include threats of physical violence".

Keywords: social media; hate speech; TikTok; antisemitism

1. Introduction

Seventy-six years after the liberation of Auschwitz, antisemitism is still being expressed both publicly and violently. In 2020, the Anti-Defamation League reported 2024 reported antisemitic incidents throughout the United States, making it the third-highest year on record since ADL began tracking antisemitism in 1979 (ADL 2020). More recently, during the uptake in violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in May 2021, they reported a 75% increase in antisemitism since the fighting began (ADL 2021a). Antisemitism as well as other forms of hate speech and disinformation thrive on social media, which connects users and creates a digital echo chamber. Whilst social media companies such as TikTok claim to roll out moderation tools to keep hate speech, misinformation, and incitements of violence off their platforms, users are perpetually publishing content despite it being prohibited. Social media algorithms, particularly TikTok's, are helping to spread hatred, shaping how billions of people read, watch, and think every day, and are creating polarization. The spread of hatred on TikTok, including antisemitism, is particularly shocking considering its young audience and the amount of influence it has on this vulnerable demographic.

2. TikTok: The Platform, Audiences and Content

In September 2016, the Chinese company ByteDance released a lip-synching video app called Doyin and later launched TikTok for markets outside of China. TikTok initially enabled its users to upload videos up to 60 s in length but in early 2021 this was increased to three minutes. TikTok enables its users to be creative with an array of features and interactive formats such as lip-synching and sharing memes.

In November 2017, ByteDance acquired Musical.ly and merged it with TikTok in 2018. As of July 2021, it is estimated that TikTok has been downloaded over three billion times globally on the App Store and Google Play (Sensor Tower 2021). TikTok has become the fifth non-game app to reach the three-million-install milestone; the only four other apps that have accumulated the same number of downloads are WhatsApp, Messenger, Facebook, and Instagram—all of which are owned by Facebook.

TikTok has become one of the most popular applications in the world, boasting a young audience despite its Terms of Service stating users must be over the age of 13. TikTok is rampant among children and teenagers seeking to expand their social networks, seek fame, or express themselves creatively (Montag et al. 2021). However, the application has a dark side, which puts its young users at risk. The app was shown to expose users to a range of extremist content, racist postings, and calls for attacking minorities, ethnic groups, people of color, Muslims, and Jews, as well as postings sharing neo-Nazi propaganda. TikTok's algorithm, which can increase video exposure, has made the platform attractive to many extremist, racist, and radical groups, including neo-Nazi and antisemitic individuals and groups. This study examined the rise in antisemitic postings on TikTok using a systematic content analysis of the videos, the comments, the texts, and the usernames.

It is estimated that TikTok currently has 37.3 million Gen Z users and by 2023 they will have more Gen Z users than Instagram (EMarketer 2021). TikTok's popularity amongst Gen Z can be explained by several factors. Firstly, TikTok enables anyone to produce content due to the simplicity of using the app. TikTok's mission, as declared by the company, is "to capture and present the world's creativity, knowledge, and precious life moments, directly from the mobile phone. TikTok enables everyone to be a creator and encourages users to share their passion and creative expression through their videos." In addition, by using short video formats, unlike other social media sites such as YouTube, TikTok can attract teenagers and young adults with shorter attention spans. This reflects the notion that the app designers decided to use youngsters as their preferred target audience from the very beginning, with its wide range of special effects and editing options. Another aspect of TikTok's appeal is that it is easier to go viral on TikTok compared with other social networking sites due to its algorithm, as Katie Elson Anderson argued: "a TikTok video from a user with absolutely no followers can quickly gain an audience as it appears in other user's feeds" (Anderson 2020).

Since TikTok's inception in 2016, TikTok has progressed from viral dances and lip-synching to dealing with political issues ranging from all sides. The best-performing videos on TikTok are under 15 s, which are challenging for fact-checkers, especially as the platform does not allow users to share URLs. This has given momentum to extremists, terrorist groups, and conspiracy theorists who use the app. As Jia Tollentino argued, "TikTok is a social network that has nothing to do with one's social network . . . in essence, the platform is an enormous meme factory, compressing the world into pellets of virality and dispensing those pellets until you get full or fall asleep" (2019). TikTok has also evolved into a meme-sharing platform due to its focus on viral culture and a young target audience.

3. TikTok's Algorithm

TikTok is unlike other social media accounts, as their newsfeed known as the "For You" page uses an algorithm to recommend videos to users as well as showing content from other, followed users. According to TikTok's listing in the iOS App Store, it is a "personalized video feed based on what you watch, like, and share" (TikTok 2020a). The "For You" page is the first page that opens when users open the app, with the videos playing on auto-play, making it hard for users not to watch them. Users can swipe down and watch unlimited videos based on the app's algorithm, showing posts based on the content users have been engaging with.

TikTok algorithm may seem complex and mysterious, but TikTok has revealed how it works (TikTok 2020b). According to TikTok, the algorithm recommends content by ranking videos based on a combination of factors including: (1) User interactions: such as the videos

the user likes or shares, accounts he/she follows, comments he/she posts, and content he/she creates; (2) Video information: this includes details like captions, sounds, and hashtags; and (3) Device and account settings, including the user's language preference, country setting, and device type. Each of these factors is individually weighted by TikTok's "For You" recommendation system, which means each "For You" page will be unique to a user and their level of interest. TikTok thereby provides users with a continuous stream of video content, fueling user interest and entertainment, and this can lead to the "anaesthetic effect" (Fang et al. 2019) whereby users consume content for long periods fed by curiosity without being fully aware they are doing so. TikTok's algorithm is therefore a disconcerting feature, as the algorithm can in effect push users who unintentionally view disturbing content to view more. This characterizes TikTok's dangerous spiral of hate and violence.

4. Literature Review

Scholarship on TikTok is still in its early days; however, most research focuses on the role of TikTok's algorithm. Research by Klug et al. (2021) found that TikTok users are highly aware of TikTok's algorithm and have developed assumptions about how the algorithm works to make their videos trend. A study by Omar and Dequan (2020) found that self-expression explains active involvement on TikTok with users wanting to express themselves and interact with others. In light of this, a study by Cervi (2021) explored the relationship between TikTok and generation Z and found that TikTok's algorithm provides everyone with the same popularity to go viral, which explains why TikTok is popular amongst minors. Further research by Schellewald (2021) studied the popularity of TikTok's short video content, with many videos portraying everyday situations and stereotypes and found that the popularity of videos is related to relatability. Zulli and Zulli (2020) looked at how TikTok's digital structure influences user behavior and found that TikTok encourages imitation and replication by using challenges combined with video editing features that can be easily accessed by users wanting to imitate the video. They also looked at the role of celebrities taking part in TikTok challenges which consolidates their significance on TikTok and in mainstream culture. Other studies have looked at TikTok's political potential; a study by Vijay and Gekker (2021) looked at how TikTok shapes expression, in particular political expression. Likewise, Henneman (2020) looked at the uses and concerns of TikTok's journalistic storytelling ability. Vázquez-Herrero et al. (2020) studied how TikTok is changing the consumption of news. Across these studies, there is consistent evidence that TikTok's algorithm, combined with its short video content, explains TikTok's widespread popularity by encouraging users to not only watch these videos, but also to be inspired and create their own videos by offering users the ability to use the same sounds or features that have already been used.

5. Old and New Antisemitism

Antisemitism has been referred to as history's oldest hatred, and it is extremely adaptable. Antisemitism is a set of negative attitudes, ideologies, and practices directed at Jews either individually or collectively based on hostile erroneous beliefs and assumptions that are perpetuated through age-old conspiracy theories and their modern variants.

In 1873, Wilhelm Marr, a German political agitator, coined the term "anti-Semitism", believing that Jews were conspiring to run the state and that they should be excluded from obtaining citizenship. Following the Holocaust, antisemitism became less accepted; whilst it did not vanish, the events of WWII drastically inhibited its expression. Theodor Adorno, a German philosopher, recognized the basic grounds of antisemitism in his definition from 1950, stating that "This ideology [of antisemitism] consists . . . of stereotyped negative opinions describing the Jews as threatening, immoral, and categorically different from non-Jews, and of hostile attitudes urging various forms of restriction, exclusion, and suppression as a means of solving 'the Jewish problem.'" (Adorno et al. 1950, p. 71).

Since Adorno's definition of antisemitism in 1950, the key ideas which he outlined have persisted, such as the fear of perceived Jewish power. Other forms of antisemitism

are directly linked to Israel—accusing Israel of antisemitic charges including blood libels and using evil power to control the world. Other forms are less direct, with criticism of Israel being blamed on Jews and Jewish institutions globally and launching attacks. Thus, when historians refer to the rise of "new anti-Semitism" in the 21st Century, it is evident that its core beliefs are formed of traditional notions of anti-Semitism. New anti-Semitism gained traction in the 1970s and 1980s, proposing that traditional anti-Semitism, typically associated with a biological race concept and prejudice against Jews, had been replaced with a new form of anti-Semitism which expressed itself as an "animus against Israel" and "insensitivity and indifference to Jewish concerns" (Romeyn 2020).

Oboler (2016) identified four categories of online anti-Semitism—traditional anti-semitism, Holocaust denial, promoting violence against Jews, and new antisemitism. Traditional antisemitism mirrors the rhetoric of the past, with statements on social media suggesting that Jews control the world. Holocaust denial and distortion have intensified; while it has often been limited to fringe groups, polarizing echo chambers online have enabled these ideas to spread. Holocaust denial on social media involves the denial that the Holocaust ever occurred or claiming that the number of Jews killed is exaggerated, and it can also mock the victims of the Holocaust. As Gerstenfeld (2007) argued, Holocaust distortion takes many forms and "the number of mutations of such distortions is also expanding". The promotion of violence against Jews is the most direct form of antisemitic hate expressed online according to Oboler (2016). Violence can also be expressed as being against "Israelis" or "Zionists". On social media today, antisemitic slogans expressing violent anti-Semitism have emerged, such as "gas the Jews", "death to Israel" and "race war now". New anti-Semitism is a manifestation of online antisemitism which targets the state of Israel rather than the Jews, arguing that both Zionism and the State of Israel are evil. Sacks (2016) pointed out that new antisemitism is different from old antisemitism as "once Jews were hated because of their religion. Then they were hated because of their race. Now they are hated because of their nation state". Furthermore, as Oboler (2016) pointed out, new antisemitism infers that anyone who to a greater or lesser degree supports or stands for the rights of Zionism and the State of Israel are evil.

New antisemitism, therefore, consists of the synthesis of antisemitism and anti-Zionism. An insidious form of antisemitism disguises itself as contempt for Israel, with Israel typically singled out for criticism by its enemies. In 2005, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) published a working definition of antisemitism which has been adopted by the U.S. State Department since 2010, amongst other government bodies worldwide. The definition states that "Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities" (IHRA 2005). Accompanying the IHRA definition are eleven examples that "may serve as illustrations (Ibid.) ranging from Holocaust denial to holding Jews collectively responsible for the actions of the state of Israel and historical tropes.

6. Antisemitism on TikTok

Extremists have found a home on TikTok, exploiting the platforms' young audience and lax security to prey on the vulnerable. The hate speech found on TikTok ranges from neo-Nazi to Boogaloo with a range of antisemitic and racist content. Until 2019, the hate speech on TikTok had gone virtually unnoticed until *Motherboard* reported that it had found examples of "blatant, violent white supremacy and Nazism", including direct calls to kill Jews and black people (Cox 2018). Some postings verbatim read "kill all n*****", "all Jews must die", and "killn******". (the words are uncensored on the app). One video, for example, contained a succession of young users performing Nazi salutes. Another TikTok video included the note, "I have a solution; a final solution," referring to the Holocaust. Some postings include 1488, a reference to two 14-word slogans "we must secure the

existence of our people and a future for white children", which originated with American white supremacist David Eden Lane, and the 88 standing for HH or Heil Hitler.

Since then, an increasing number of antisemitic TikTok trends have come to light. In 2020, a new trend emerged known as the "#holocaustchallenge" wherein people pretended to be Holocaust victims. Users shared clips of themselves with fake bruises and wearing items of clothing that Jews were ordered to wear by the Nazis. In 2021, another trend emerged, wherein users used the "Expressify" filter to exaggerate their facial features whilst singing "If I Were A Rich Man" from the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. This filter resembles the happy merchant, an antisemitic meme that has become popular among the alt-right, whilst users sang about money, wealth, and greed, which fit traditional antisemitic stereotypes.

An increasing number of videos featuring antisemitic agitation or Holocaust denial are being spread on TikTok. According to Wheatstone and O'Connor (2020), some posts "feature sickening antisemitic taunts—with cartoons depicting Jewish men with large noses and joking about the Holocaust receiving hundreds of likes and comments." In one video, racist sketches of characters labeled "A Sneaky Jew" and "Mega Jew" are followed by antisemitic statements that Jewish people control the media, the financial sector, and the government.

Amidst the conflict between Israel and Hamas in May 2021, there was an increase in antisemitism, in particular on TikTok as Jewish users found themselves flooded with messages of hate, including Lily Ebert, one of the oldest Jewish creators on TikTok who is also an Auschwitz survivor. After posting a video wishing her followers a restful Shabbat, she was flooded with messages with many blaming her for the violence; the messages included "Happy Holocaust", "Peace be upon Hitler", and "Ask her if she thinks the treatment of Palestinians reminds her [of] the treatment she got in the camps" (Kampeas 2021).

A study published by the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH 2021) in 2021 found that social media platforms including TikTok failed to act on most antisemitic posts. They collected 78 antisemitic comments sent directly to Jewish users and found that they failed to act against 76% of antisemitic abuse. When TikTok did act, it more frequently removed individual antisemitic comments instead of banning users, with TikTok removing 19.2% of posts and banning only 5% of accounts sending direct antisemitic abuse (CCDH 2021). These findings demonstrate the need for an empirical, systematic, and objective study of TikTok's use for antisemitic propaganda, incitement, and hate.

7. Research Questions

The present study set out to explore the various presentations of antisemitism on TikTok. More specifically, it addressed four research questions:

- RQ1: How is TikTok used to propagate antisemitism?
- RQ2: What are the different formats which are used for spreading hatred and antisemitism on TikTok such as posts, comments, hashtags, and usernames?
- RQ3: What are the various characteristics of antisemitism used on TikTok, focusing on whether the material shared on TikTok can be defined as "new antisemitism" or "old antisemitism"?
- RQ4: Are there changes over time, and new trends in antisemitism on TikTok?

8. Data Collection

Data were collected twice, in two four-month periods, February–May 2020 and February–May 2021, to allow for comparisons of changes and trends over time. To scan TikTok, we applied a systematic content analysis, which was conducted in Israel. The first stage involved searching for posts (video clips posted), comments (texts written by viewers, following the video clip), hashtags, and usernames relating to Judaism and antisemitic beliefs for around 20 to 60 min every day. All posts, comments, and usernames relating to the IHRA definition of antisemitism were noted, including screenshots and URLs. The keywords used for data collection were in English and included: Jew, Jewish, Jews, an-

tisemitic, antisemitism, holocaust, 109 countries (the number 109 is white supremacist numeric shorthand for an antisemitic claim that Jews have been expelled from 109 different countries), dancing Israeli, Rothschild, and 6 million. These keywords are a combination of generic terms, some of which are associated with antisemitic conspiracy theories. We selected these keywords as many relate to conspiracy theories which are popular amongst young people, who are TikTok's main audience.

These terms enabled us to find users who posted antisemitic hate content associated with these terms; however, memes and videos that did not contain captions were unsearchable. It should also be noted that TikTok contains limitations on what is searchable, for example, a search for "Adolf Hitler" will result in "no results found—this phrase may be associated with hateful behavior"; whilst users can use these hashtags when posting content, they cannot be searched for.

The IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism was selected for our study as it is intended to guide and educate. The Working Definition is in its essence a non-legally binding document, which makes it a useful tool in identifying antisemitism. Moreover, antisemitism today is primarily rooted in three different groups: the extreme right, the extreme left, and Islamic extremism. The IHRA Working Definition includes targeting the state of Israel which is important as antisemitism today is increasingly disguised as political stances against Israel and Zionism known as "new antisemitism". A recent study by the Kantor Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry (Jewish News Syndicate 2021) revealed that, over the past 5 years, over 450 leading organizations, including 28 countries, have adopted or endorsed the Working Definition of Antisemitism. As of June 2020, Switzerland adopted the Working Definition of Antisemitism, becoming the 36th country to do so.

The antisemitic postings on TikTok yielded numerous comments: we scanned 56,916 comments responding to the antisemitic postings. In addition to searching for posts and comments, we also searched for usernames with the same keywords. The methodology was developed, tested, and applied during our 2020 study (Weimann and Masri 2020), and the findings of the present study, a year later, allow for monitoring changes, especially after TikTok's declarations in 2020 that it will remove all antisemitic postings (Levine 2020).

9. Findings

9.1. RQ1: How Is TikTok Used to Propagate Antisemitism?

Despite multiple pledges by TikTok over the years to do more to tackle hateful content, it still fails. A recent report by The Centre for Countering Digital Hatred (CCDH) found that TikTok only removed 18.5% of reported antisemitic posts (CCDH 2021). Our scan of TikTok postings in 2021 revealed a total of 61 antisemitic postings (a rise of 41% when compared with our 2020 scan). More alarming was the growing frequency of antisemitic comments on TikTok, rising from 41 in 2020 to 415 in 2021 (an increase of 912%). We also found a sharp increase in usernames with antisemitic titles (e.g., "@holocaustwasgood" or "@eviljews"), rising from only four in 2020 to 59 in 2021 (an increase of 1375%).

By failing to remove these posts, they remain viewable to TikTok users, who can like, comment, and share the post, thus gaining it more viewers. TikTok's algorithm also means that antisemitic content is likely to be shared with users who the algorithm deems as being interested in similar posts. The algorithm learns users' hidden interests and emotions, which can drive users deep into a rabbit hole of dangerous content. This is particularly dangerous due to TikTok's young and captive audience, who are at risk of being radicalized and mobilized.

Let us present an illustrative example of antisemitism in TikTok's contents. On Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January 2021, TikTok populated the app with "educational videos about the Holocaust, the Jewish community and antisemitism today." (Kanter 2021). TikTok boasted that "when a UK TikTok user first opens the app, they will find at the top of their For You feed an educational video featuring Robert Rinder, as well as our top creators, to encourage our community to access the new educational resources and learn more about

Holocaust Memorial Day. The new resources include Lily Ebert BEM sharing her story of surviving Auschwitz-Birkenau." (Ibid). TikTok's attempts of promoting educational videos of the Holocaust were met with a barrage of antisemitic comments. The video from Lily Ebert received comments that included "it never happened", "Holocaust never happened". The video of Lily Ebert, a Holocaust and COVID-19 survivor, received similar comments: "yo I think we were in the same camp bro" and "burn." Other videos of Holocaust survivors received the following comments: "can not see 6 million," "holocaust is like 9/11 it was made to happen," "if the gas chambers at Auschwitz were real, how come the holes used to inject the gas were installed after the war," "most holocaust survivors are hoaxers", and "holocaust is the biggest lie in century." However, these videos also showed that many people did not know that six million Jewish people were killed in the Holocaust, such as "is this true" and "I only know 6 mill died cuz of TikTok." Whilst these videos demonstrate that TikTok has attempted to provide educational videos about the Holocaust and antisemitism today, their attempts were futile as they failed to monitor comments on these posts which they promoted.

9.2. RQ2: What Are the Different Formats Which Are Used for Spreading Hatred and Antisemitism on TikTok Such as Posts, Comments, Hashtags, and Usernames

TikTok was originally designed as a lip-synching app, similar to Vine, wherein users can create their own videos where they lip-sync along to popular songs and audio clips. Today, TikTok has evolved into a meme factory, with most forms of hatred taking this format. Many memes include antisemitic tropes including the "Happy Merchant", a meme illustrating a drawing of a Jewish man with a greatly stereotyped face who is greedily rubbing his hands together.

Another format used for spreading hatred on TikTok is via user handles and display names. TikTok users identify themselves in two ways, through a user handle (@johnsmith) and a display name that appears on their profile such as "John Smith"; 21 of the names found were categorized under the IHRA working definition of "Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as collective—such as, especially but not exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions". These names included "@antisemeticandproud", "@violentantisemite", "@eviljews", "@thejewsrunmedia", and "@jewdestroyer88". Several of these names included the far-right numerical code of "88" which is the white supremacist numerical code for "Heil Hitler". Another 18 names were categorized under "Denying the fact, scope, mechanisms (e.g., gas chambers) or intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of National Socialist Germany and its supporters and accomplices during World War II (the Holocaust)". These names included "@holocaust.was.a.pr.stunt", "@holocaustfake", and "@holocaust.is.fake". Additionally, we found 18 names that were categorized under "accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews". These names included "@jews_did_9_11", "@jewscaused911", and "@jewscausedvietnam". A further six names were characterized as "Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion". These included, "@jewgasser88", "@jewdestroyer1939" and "@holocaustwasgood". One account named "@holocaust_hype_house", a reference to houses where Gen-Z TikTok influencers live together and create TikTok videos, had a bio reading "let's gas the jews".

Another more recent format used for spreading hatred is TikTok challenges. TikTok challenges start with a viral video, and users quickly start putting their spin on it. While some of these challenges are innocent, such as the stair-step challenge, other challenges have been antisemitic in nature. In 2020, the "#holocaustchallenge" emerged where people pretended to be Holocaust victims, sharing clips of themselves with fake bruises and wearing items of clothing that Jews were ordered to wear by the Nazis. In 2021, another trend encouraged users to use the "Expressify" filter to exaggerate their facial features

whilst singing "If I Were A Rich Man" from the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, resembling the happy merchant.

The comment section on public posts is one of the main ways of spreading hatred on TikTok. TikTok's comment section was largely unfiltered until March 2021, when it gave post users the ability to filter their comments and users that are commenting now receive a pop-up intended to prompt the user to reconsider a comment that may be inappropriate or unkind. Within 4 months in 2021, we found 415 comments containing one or more of the antisemitic attributes of the IHRA working definition. The majority of these comments fit the IHRA definition of "*Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.*" These comments predominantly related to conspiracy theories such as the notion that Jews are conspiring to control the world, the media, banking industry, and government. Comments included "and yet they still control the banks and media, jews must be the master race", "agree 100% they [jews] control the media and all worldwide governments they are no good parasites", "the jews world bankers fabricated lies and wanted you to truly believe in it", "fake Holocaust that Jews can milk world out of pity and money", and "Jewish people are the most over-represented group in all circles of power. But keep pretending you're horribly prosecuted [sic] lmfao."

Another 125 comments related to "calling for, aiding or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a racial ideology or an extremist view of religion." These comments typically referred to the Holocaust such as "bring back the Holocaust", "the pogroms were justified", "we need another Holocaust", "we aren't sorry that we persecuted Jews in fact we'll do it again", "Jews are kind of people who should not exist". Fifty-four comments related to "Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel." Comments included; "aw poor wittle Jew is such a victim, its not like you literally have a ethnostate," "I remember the Palestinians in Gaza who were snipered cold blooded by Jews for being Palestinian teens", and "brother until you stop Jewish atrocities people will never accept and sympathise with the holocaust. It is hypocritical." Other comments related to "Denying the fact, scope, mechanisms (e.g., gas chambers) or intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of National Socialist Germany and its supporters and accomplices during World War II (the Holocaust)." These comments asserted that the Holocaust was invented, such as "can not see 6 million", "holocaust is like 9/11 it was made to happen", and "holocaust is the biggest lie in century". Other comments related to "Accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews." One comment argued that "Jews spread the virus" referring to the COVID-19 pandemic. Other comments suggested that Jews were responsible for the 9/11 attacks, such as "I am educated a lot and the only terrorists I mentioned are Jews the biggest terrorists in the world as well as the biggest war criminals in the world ... they also blew up the world trade centers, there the biggest terrorists in the world they kill and rape women and little girls in Palestine." More comments were found that "accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust." These comments included "Holocaust is like 9/11 it was made to happen" and "fun fact Holocaust never happened, they rebuilt the buildings, its fake with crisis actors." Other comments were found "Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour." These included "there was never a Jewish state and will never be one" and "Jews don't deserve a homeland".

9.3. RQ3: What Are the Various Characteristics of Antisemitism Used on TikTok, Focusing on Whether the Material Shared on TikTok Can Be Defined as "New Antisemitism" or "Old Antisemitism"

A substantial amount of antisemitism on TikTok was disguised as criticism of Israel or Holocaust denial. Holocaust denial and distortion is a form of antisemitism, claiming that the Holocaust was invented or exaggerated by the Jews to advance their interests. As Jack Fischel stated, "in continuing Hitler's racial war against the Jews, through its attack on Israel's legitimacy, anti-Semites in both the United States and Europe realized that to

be successful they must overcome the link the public made between the Holocaust and the subsequent creation of Israel" (Fischel 1995, p. 207). Over recent years, especially over the COVID-19 pandemic that led to the increased time spent at home on the internet, conspiracy theories including Holocaust denial have gained more traction. As a report from Hope Not Hate pointed out, "COVID-19 related conspiracy theories have provided a more worrying new route towards antisemitic politics . . . Holocaust denial and admiration for Hitler are in fact a progression through different conspiracy theories, which may contain antisemitic undertones but don't necessarily require them" (Hope Not Hate 2021). Holocaust denial usually comes in the form that not all Jews were killed, that the numbers are wrong/inflated, there are other equivalent tragedies, or that Israel has perpetuated its own Holocaust. Holocaust denial has become a fundamental aspect of new antisemitism, often used by the right and left-wing as well as anti-Israel critics to delegitimize the Jewish people and Israel.

Whilst not all criticism of Israel is antisemitic, comparisons to Nazi Germany such as claiming that what Israel is doing to the Palestinians now is the same as the systematic extermination of Jews by the Nazis in WWII are antisemitic and popular on TikTok. This type of demonization and unfair criticism against Israel fits the category of "new antisemitism" by singling out Israel. As Rabbi Sacks stated "Today, Jews are attacked because of the existence of their nation state, Israel. Denying Israel's right to exist is the new antisemitism. And just as antisemitism has mutated, so has its legitimization" (Sacks 2017).

The antisemitic contents on TikTok combine both "old" and "new" attributes of antisemitism. Thus, in addition to the "classical" attribute of Holocaust denial or stereotypical allegations about the power of Jews as a collective, we also found the newer attributes of blaming Israel for atrocities and comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis. These messages may be more powerful to young, gullible, naïve, and less-informed recipients, as most TikTok audiences are.

9.4. RQ4: Are There Changes over Time, New Trends in Antisemitism on TikTok?

In addition to the rising amounts of antisemitic postings, comments, and even usernames, we also found a rise in user awareness on the app surrounding antisemitism. Posts that were either antisemitic or received antisemitic comments also had comments including "Why am I on antisemitic TikTok", "holy s*** that is based", "nah just antisemitic", "how is this post not hateful towards Jews" and "please don't joke about the murder of 6 million innocent jews show some respect". Whilst only a small proportion of comments reflect user awareness of antisemitism on the app, it shows the prominent role that antisemitism plays on TikTok.

Another trend noticeable on the app was users trying to avoid detection by purposefully misspelling words. Users replace the word "Jews" with "juice" to avoid having accounts deleted, such as "f*** the juice, I'm dyslexic" and "juice have been expelled from 109 countries". One account posted a clip from the UN speech on Jewish Refugee Day in 2019 where Hillel Neuer asked Algeria, Egypt, Iraq and other countries "Where are your Jews?". This post received comments such as "where is the juice", "they're dead lol", "where are your juice? I put the juice in the oven", and "karma that's what they do to Palestinians, liars deceiver juice". This demonstrates that users are aware of algorithms and hate speech policies and are purposefully adapting their spelling of keywords to avoid detection. These terms were only noticed in our study as they were comments on antisemitic postings, otherwise, they would not have appeared when searching for them. This trend highlights a need for more stringent measures and content moderation on TikTok.

10. Conclusions

Since its inception in 2016, TikTok has repeatedly claimed that there it will not tolerate antisemitism on its platform. Elizabeth Kanter, director of TikTok's government relations in Israel said "Antisemitism is an abomination, and therefore anti-Semitic content that expresses hatred has no place on our platform. We have zero tolerance for organized hate

groups and those associated with them. Our community guidelines reflect our values and when they are violated, we take action, including removing content and closing accounts" (Knesset News 2020). However, TikTok remains a hotbed of antisemitism, failing to delete reported and non-reported posts and comments. TikTok's algorithm is a disconcerting feature, which sets TikTok apart from other social media applications as users do not know what type of content will appear on their homepage and can push users who unintentionally view disturbing content to view more.

Similar concerns exist on other social media platforms. In October 2020, Facebook and Twitter announced that they would remove tweets and posts that denied or diminished the Holocaust, insisting that antisemitism had no place on these platforms. However, they have failed to go far enough; in June 2021 The Campaign Against Antisemitism stated that "We do not have confidence in Twitter's capacity to address the rampant antisemitism on its platform" (Campaign Against Antisemitism 2021) citing Twitter's slow response in removing antisemitic posts. Likewise, in June 2021 the ADL criticized Facebook for their "inaction" in removing antisemitic postings, arguing that they were not upholding their community standards (ADL 2021b).

TikTok has unique features to make it more troublesome than other social media platforms. First, unlike other social media platforms, TikTok's users are predominantly young children and teenagers who are more naïve and gullible when it comes to malicious content. Second, TikTok is the youngest platform thus severely lagging behind its rivals, who have had more time to grapple with how to protect their users from disturbing and harmful content. Yet, TikTok should have learned from these other platforms' experiences and apply TikTok's own Terms of Service that does not allow postings that are deliberately designed to provoke or antagonize people, or are intended to harass, harm, hurt, scare, distress, embarrass, or upset people or include threats of physical violence.

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