

In what ways has the antisemitic discourse on X manifested in the aftermath of the Hamas attacks, and what are the predominant themes, formats, and dynamics of these tweets?

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ABSTRACT

Antisemitism and hate speech have been common practices on X, with surges during political events such as elections, acquisitions, and global affairs. Since the Hamas terrorist attack on the 7th of October 2023, this study monitors tweets to track the levels, characteristics, and behaviours of antisemitic tweets. Over two-thirds of the tweets analysed during this period were antisemitic and contained hate speech, with nearly half of them using images as a format. Moreover, this research found a spike in tweets on the 29th of November 2023, possibly due to the anniversary of the United Nations partition vote for Palestine at the end of the British Mandate, suggesting antisemitic behaviour could be tracked based on historical dates; however further research is needed for this hypothesis. The findings illustrate how X can promote the structure of the public sphere providing a place for deliberation and everyday political talk, yet most of the tweets were original posts and few were replies. This research confirmed previous scholars' work on types of antisemitism, such as the Post-Holocaust Phase and anti-Israel-centred antisemitism (Schwarz-Friesel, 2019). The research contributes to the knowledge gap of online visual expressions of antisemitic behaviour (Hubscher and von Mering, 2022). This study investigates antisemitic tweets during this period monitoring dates, themes, subjects of the tweets, intentions, and atmosphere. The research adopts an inductive, quantitative content analysis approach to manually code nearly 700 tweets using code words and hashtags discovered in the literature review.

OBJECTIVES

The six-week research project was framed by the guiding research questions:

- What is meant by antisemitism?
- When studying social media platforms, which was found to be more prevalent for users to post anti-semitic information on?
- How does X influence citizen media?
- What format (image, text, video, reply) do X users choose to use for antisemitism-related posts on the identified platform?
- How does hate speech prevail on social media during international conflicts? What triggers this behaviour, or does it increase on specific dates?

METHODOLOGY

This study uses an inductive, quantitative, content analysis approach to conduct secondary data analysis on the occurrences of antisemitic themes or keywords occurring on X. During the literature review stage, several specific terms and hashtags which were used in previous studies on antisemitic behaviour were identified as relevant to this study, forming the basis of the literature review and the formation of a dataset for the analysis (Riedl et al., 2022). This approach broadened the data set during the literature review which aligns with an inductive approach (Clark et al., 2021).

Following previous antisemitic X studies linked to American presidential elections and Elon Musk's X takeover, this research used convenience purposive non-probability sampling. After compiling a list of search terms from studies found in the literature review to form a dataset, they were then categorised into six themes, shown in Table 1. Mirroring a social research study by McHugh et al (2018), using a recursive approach the coding categories were constructed for different data outcomes at the end of the study. As seen in Table 1, the theme category is the purpose of the tweet and which theme it fits into, whilst the subject is the focus of the tweet, showing reoccurring subthemes.

Theme	Term or Hashtag
World War 2	'#HitlerWasRight', 'Holocaust', 'Nazi', 'Hitler'
Zionism	'#ZionistsAreEvil', '#ZionistsAreNazis', 'Zionist', 'Zionazi'
Antisemitism and Jewish	'Jews', 'Jewish', 'Judaism', 'Antisemitism', 'antisemitic', 'Semitic', 'Shylock', 'Goy', 'Jewess', 'Jew' AND 'Cancer', 'Jew' AND 'Filth',
Code Names	'Soros', 'Rothschild', 'Austrian painter' (17), 'read siege'
Israel and Palestine	'Israel', 'Hamas', '#IsraelNazis',
Other*	'Apartheid', 'Globalist', 'Illuminati', 'Shill',

*The category 'other' was terms discovered on the data was collected, but after linking the Israel and Palestine category, it was clear the data was saturated with over 200 tweets, so this category was not used.

METHODOLOGY CONTINUED

Previous studies have identified a research gap in visual expressions of antisemitism, including imagery (Hubscher and von Mering, 2022). Another study found manual annotation to be more reliable in content classification compared to computerised coding, as some tweets can be read sarcastically, which is difficult to detect by computer software (Jikeli and Soemer, 2023). Furthermore, research found antisemitic posts use code words, such as Austrian painter as code for Hitler, which meant memes were not flagged as hate speech when they were coded using software (Brandeis University, 2022). Therefore, by manually coding the tweets the data and images would be more accurately categorised.

RESULTS

Figure 1 presents the percentage of antisemitic tweets during the selected timeframe, showing a prominent finding which was just over a third of posts were revealed to be antisemitic.

Percentage of Antisemitic Tweets on X between 7th October to 30 November 2023

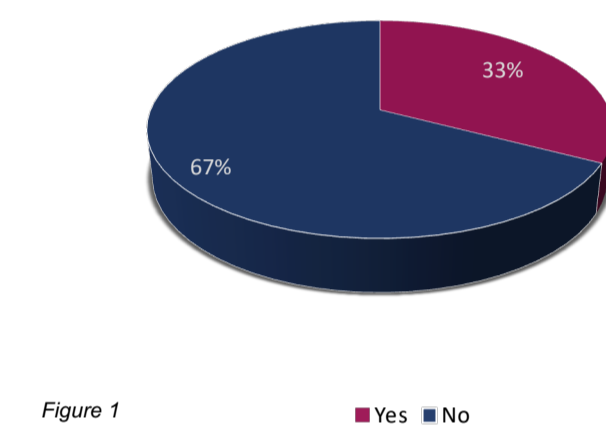


Figure 1

Moreover, over half of the tweets had helpful intentions, whilst 42% intended to harm. This is surprising when looking at this in collaboration with Figure 2, showing that 77% of tweets had negative connotations, and 7% had a positive atmosphere. So, although half of the tweets were used to help, less than 10% had a positive impact on the user.

Atmosphere of tweets relating to study topic posted between 7th October and 30th November 2023

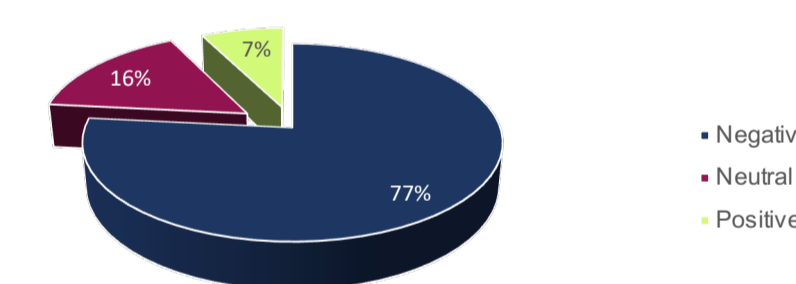


Figure 2

This topic is important to research as it will help future studies monitor and remove hate speech by understanding the forms it presents itself in. These findings can suggest evolving forms of antisemitism, especially how it surfaces on social media. Further research could include the personal reasons why individuals use antisemitic hashtags even when they are in support of Israel and Jewish people. It is worth noting there were also large differences in the formats used for distributing antisemitic content. Figure 3 shows images equate to almost half (45%) of formats used in the tweets coded, with video second (34%) and text after (18%), potentially indicating the original purpose of sharing information via tweets using text is no longer the preferred format to use, particularly when sharing hate speech.

Format of antisemitic tweets used between 7th October and 30th November 2023

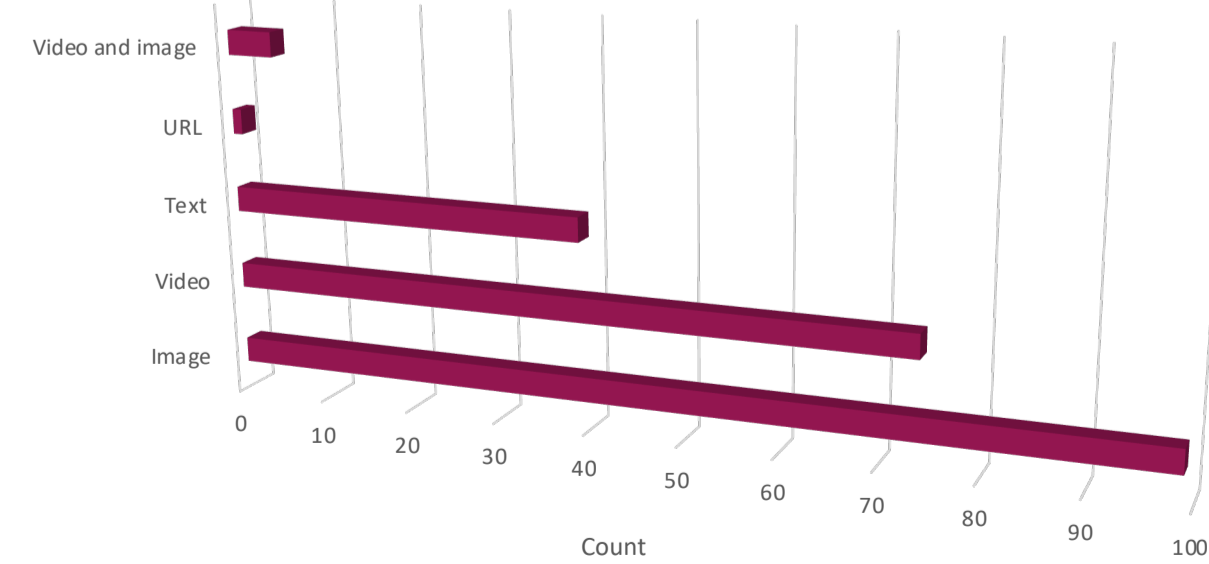


Figure 3

Results Continued

The subject of the tweets shows reoccurring subthemes that wouldn't have been discovered in my literature review and aren't the overall theme of the tweet. For example, the themes used in the coding manual in Table 1 help categorise them; the subtheme coding allowed for a deeper analysis of the topics. For example, '#HitlerWasRight' tweets were subcoded as World War 2 or Religion, depending on the content of the Tweet. Figure 4 shows the top three most popular categories, with different subthemes overlapping at times.

Subject of tweets posted in relation to identified hashtags between 7th October and 30th November 2023

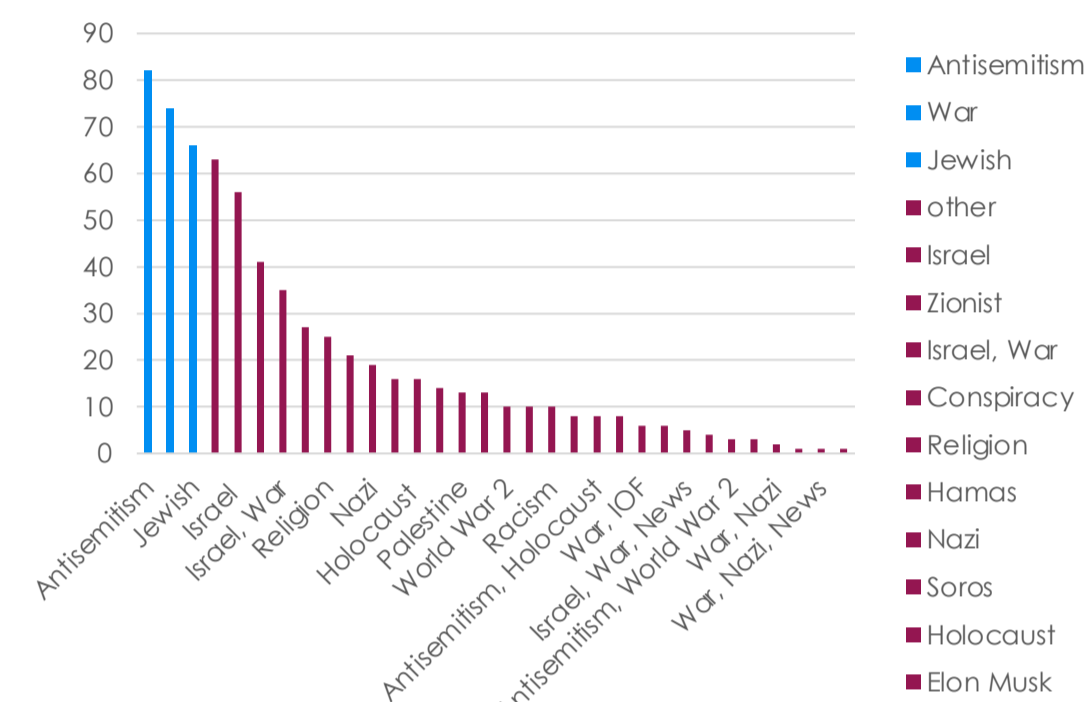


Figure 4

One interesting finding is a significant amount of content within the tweets was not antisemitic, yet the text included offensive hashtags, which could then potentially cause a Jewish person to deem the tweet offensive, as seen in Figure 5. A possible explanation for this finding could be people using multiple trending hashtags during these events to increase the reach of their posts, as some tweets had it alongside other non-offensive hashtags. Another form of antisemitism has been employed by right-wing groups which negatively charge Jewish people, such as Soros or Rothschild, about the Jewish conspiracy of world power (Schwarz-Friesel, 2019; Riedl et al., 2022). As Soros and Rothschild were both search terms used, this study followed the same criteria where the terms individually are not antisemitic nor are harsh political criticism, but if they raised antisemitic tropes or stereotypes, then they were categorised as antisemitic. This is seen in Figure 6.



Figure 5



Figure 6

Some scholars argue antisemitism is condemned less, especially when it is rebranded as anti-Israelism or anti-Zionism with the same rooted hatred for Jews (Schwarz-Friesel, 2019). On the one hand, some tweets justified Hitler's actions and excused him for not completing the annihilation of Jews so people could understand his actions. Some tweets featured the same pattern of neutral text yet used offensive hashtags. For example, one tweet published a video of a young girl in Gaza asking Israel why she and the children of Palestine are in this state of aggressive oppression, yet ended the post with '#ZionistsAreNazis'. Whilst the post is emotionally moving, intending to help people understand what is happening, using hashtags normalises the antisemitism discussed by these scholars. Other posts under this hashtag were more explicitly obvious about their hatred of Zionists using unnecessary language.

Lastly, prior studies have found a strong increase in hate speech following global events (Bosssetta, 2022). This research found an extreme spike in antisemitic tweets on the 29th of November 2023. A possible explanation for this might be the anniversary of the United Nations partition vote for Palestine at the end of the British Mandate (United Nations, 1947). This event has been known to increase antisemitic behaviour in the past and therefore could promote this behaviour on X (The Israel Forever Foundation, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study has identified the prevalent formats antisemitic tweets use which has contributed to a research gap in how antisemitic visual materials are used online. This study confirmed previous scholar's work on types of antisemitism whilst contributing to the knowledge of how it is becoming standardised through trending hashtags on posts which are not inherently antisemitic. The results of this study indicate most tweets have a negative atmosphere showing users do not rely on positive functions of this platform. Despite this, 56% of tweets helped and informed whilst 42% intended to harm. The emergence of the volume of tweets on the 29th of November 2023 suggests antisemitic behaviour could be tracked based on historical dates, however further research is needed for this hypothesis. This work contributes to existing knowledge of antisemitism on X and provides insight into how they tweet by mostly using original posts (419) or replying (149), suggesting users want to share their opinions compared to deliberation and discussion. This questions the evolving model of Habermas' public sphere on X despite its design offering the citizens the typical functions of the public sphere for online deliberation (Blumler and Coleman, 2015). The small sample size may not accurately reflect a large population or can lead to generalised. Notwithstanding these limitations, the study does suggest behaviours and characteristics of citizens producing antisemitic tweets and builds on the evolving ideas of antisemitism as it is surfacing in new ways. Future studies could focus on real-time analysis and monitoring X as events continue to happen in Israel and Palestine, allowing for insight into posts that may be flagged quicker by X. Further work needs to be done to establish how X can counteract hate speech and create an efficient system for flagging explicitly offensive tweets.

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