Jewishness and the Rise of Antisemitism on Social Media

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COM 9505: Media Analysis for Corporate Communications

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May 15, 2023

Introduction

Jewishness is commonly defined as someone having characteristics typically regarded as Jewish. According to the 2020 United States Census, approximately 2.4% of U.S. Adults, or about 5.8 million people, are Jewish, breaking down into religiously and non-religiously Jewish. The global population is estimated to be over 16 million Jewish people, constituting about 0.2% of the 8 billion people on Earth. Antisemitic crimes in the United States rose 36% from 2021 to 2022, “the highest number on record since ADL began tracking antisemitic incidents in 1979.” (Anti-Defamation League, 2023). As antisemitism sees its highest reports in decades, social media plays a proportional role in the spread of antisemitism and the rise of crimes. One of the main problems with social media is spreading Jewish stereotypes, which are inherently antisemitic in nature. Some examples include Jews owning the media, Jews running the music industry or Hollywood, and Jews controlling the banks. each of these stereotypical ideas promotes an implicit bias against the Jewish community. This paper aims to analyze the correlation between antisemitic rhetoric on Twitter and TikTok to the rise of hate crimes, how to understand subliminal messages and Jewish stereotypes, and how to combat antisemitic stereotypes on social media platforms that have seen a surge in these behaviors since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Preliminary Analysis

My principal methodologies revolve around secondary literature and previously released statistics. The methods don’t involve surveys, as people view antisemitism through different lenses; Jewish and non-Jewish. As a Jewish-Italian American who has learned of relatives that died in concentration camps during the Holocaust, the perspective of antisemitism from this lens

differs from someone that isn't Jewish nor has experience pointing out antisemitism. "It has been argued that social media has opened up new opportunities for antisemites to disseminate material and organize. It is, therefore, necessary to get a picture of the scope and nature of antisemitism on social media." (Jikeli et al., 2022, p. 1). Social media lacks a sense of moderation and the inability of its users to correctly identify hate speech on their platforms. Subsequently, it is essential for corporations to acknowledge that although free speech exists, it doesn't exist at the expense of marginalized groups. Having a quantifiable dataset to distinguish between antisemitic and non-antisemitic rhetoric on Twitter and TikTok is important because the authors of this article set precedence about what they constituted to be antisemitic behavior on Twitter alone; these precedents can be translated into TikTok, though not so much traditional media.

Using an interpretive approach with secondary literature, survey data, and published statistics allows a different perspective to consider other possible conclusions to the subsequent research. The first step in analyzing and interpreting the survey data, secondary literature, and statistics is to set a precedent on what antisemitism is. Having a clear definition of what is and isn't antisemitic allows researchers to interpret and analyze data through a specific lens. "Antisemitism has long been related to or expressed in the form of statements about Israel or 'Zionist,' permitting anti-Jewish attitudes to circulate under cover of political critique." (Allington, 2018, p. 129). People often disguise their antisemitic rhetoric under the guise of anti-Zionist thoughts, and the line between antisemitism and anti-Zionism shrinks.

This research aims to acknowledge a standard definition of antisemitism, anti-Zionism, Zionism, Jewishness, Collective Identity, and the Jewish Diaspora. Developing critical thoughts around the literature analysis and methodological approaches is essential. "Antisemitism has returned as a major issue across the Western world. But while concern about antisemitism is

growing, agreement on what constitutes antisemitism is shrinking." (Waxman et al., 2021, p. 1803). When there is consensus over definitions, there will be a definitive way to point out antisemitism.

Literature Review

Judaism is an ethnoreligious group of participants whose religion correlates with the Jewish ethnicity. Ashkenazi Jews, Mizrahi Jews, and Sephardi Jews are the most prominent Jewish ethnic groups globally. It is often widely understood that one's Jewishness can be identified through physical traits, such as nose, hair texture, and other general facial structures. Laitman, a researcher of Jewish descent, published a paper on his experience with his Jewish identity and how his upbringing is integral to his Jewish identity. "I am Jewish. While I never consider myself either religious or even culturally involved, the fact of my birth and upbringing has played, and continues to play, a seemingly integral part in my path." (Laitman, 2022, p. 849). Jewishness often plays an integral part in someone's perception of life and with whom they associate. Asa Kasher, a Tel Aviv University professor, calls it the "Jewish Collective Identity."

> Two pleas seem warranted at this stage. One is a plea for restraint in interpreting remarks about the Jews as straightforward truths or falsehoods. More often than not, such remarks are related to features of the Jewish collective rather than to every single Jew or group of Jews (Kasher, 2015, p. 26).

Kasher conducted a study on Group Identification regarding Jewish people and the impact of stereotypical assumptions on a collectivist mindset. A lot of the stereotypes are innocent in nature. However, the line between harmless and antisemitic rhetoric blurs commonly. "The combination of antisemitism, the rejection of cultural-historical difference by assimilated Jews in

favour of universal rationality, and the principle of self-negation, was toxic." (Ashcroft, 2015, p. 430). Assimilation, about the Jewish collective, are a set of rules that allow the Jewish identity to be masked behind an American assimilative identity. It provides camouflaging within the means of the "American Dream." When Jewishness becomes the forefront of one's identity, whether physical traits or cultural identity, antisemitism is the opposing force that encapsulates the hate for Jewishness.

Antisemitism is a belief or behavior that shows hostility towards Jews because they are Jewish (Anti-Defamation League). It often refers to prejudicial behaviors and attitudes that involve oppression, isolation, and harm to Jewish people. The prefix Anti is against something, and Semitic is an identity referring to Semitic languages, though it has commonly been referenced towards Jewish people. "We are Semites after all, not really anti myself" is frequently used by non-Jewish Semitic people when called out for antisemitism. That statement might be accurate. However, antisemitism is commonly associated with Jewish hatred. Gunther Jikeli et al. quantified the data involving antisemitic tweets on Twitter between January 2019 and August 2020. This was before Elon Musk purchased Twitter in 2022 when antisemitism and other hateful conduct rose.

> Between January 2019 and August 2020, 11.2% of all conversations on Twitter that included the word "Jews" were antisemitic. This can be extrapolated from our sample to nearly 2 million (1,973,709) antisemitic tweets during this period. The majority of them were classic forms of antisemitic stereotypes and conspiracy theories that can be described as "making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such. (Jikeli et al., 2022, p. 31).

Statista estimates that 353.9 million people have been active on Twitter monthly as recently as March 2023. That is about 0.5 percent of antisemitic tweets per tweet posted on a daily occurrence. There is about a 1 in 194,645 chance of encountering an antisemitic tweet on your timeline, and those odds increase when you actively search for antisemitism on Twitter. Those are inherently antisemitic tweets, which don't include the stereotypical subliminal tropes that often encompass the Jewish identity. There is a distinction between the rampant antisemitism on Twitter and TikTok respectively, however, it is essential to recognize the parallels between the two social media platforms.

TikTok remained relatively unmoderated until March 2021 with the implementation of filtering from creators and the algorithm that filters through content and comments. TikTok is typically known for its dancing content and trends involving specific scenarios and popular songs. There were moments when antisemitic trends did occur, whether directly antisemitic or subverted.

> 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. (Weimann et al., 2021, pp. 703-704).

The Jewish communities on TikTok and Twitter have found solace with one another and have communal spaces that allow like-minded individuals to share their thoughts, frustrations, and concerns. Whilst having this safe space is vital to the protectivity and thriving nature that

continues to foster within the Jewish collective, Hollywood representation surges as more celebrities praise and celebrate their Jewishness to combat the ever so growing antisemitism in Hollywood and the media respectively.

Jewish representation within Hollywood is often a hot topic as one of the most common antisemitic tropes is “Jews Control the Media” and “Jews Control Hollywood.” Paul Rudd, Harrison Ford, Sarah Jessica Parker, Joaquin Phoenix, and Seth Rogen. What do these names have in common? These Hollywood icons all identify as Jewish, whether religiously or ethnically. They are proud of their Jewish heritage and aren’t worried about passing as non-Jewish in Hollywood, which has often been antisemitic, even though Jewish people were a part of the foundational aspects of Hollywood. “Passing is often chosen to avoid any potential (or actual) negative social or economic fallout associated with being Jewish.” (Schrank, 2007, p. 19). In the era of the idolization of celebrities and influencers, people being proud of their identity makes non-idolized people happy in such a way that they aren’t being portrayed negatively. The “Jewish nose” is a staple stereotype encompassing the Jewish identity. However, the Jewish nose has been timelessly proven as an antisemitic trope and not an indicator of someone’s Jewishness.

> Given the sparseness and unreliability of other markers of identity in North American society, discriminating gatekeepers need to invest heavily in their ability to discern ethnicity based on looks. This is how the “Jewish nose” becomes useful. Noses are not infallible markers either. All too often these days, the Jewish nose is the centerpiece of a generic ethnic look which may include, but is not limited to, the Jewish look. (Schrank, 2007, pp. 20-21).

The nose nor the family names are determining factors in someone's identity. Schrank points out that Whoopi Goldberg isn't Jewish, yet Goldberg is seen typically as a Jewish last name. Adam Driver, who has been seen as someone with a Jewish nose, isn't ethnically Jewish. Barbra Streisand is proud of her Jewish identity and her refusal to get a nose job to conform to the Anglo-Saxon views of the United States. However, it isn't inherently a bad thing to have an identifier. "Jews with Jewish noses who are treated as if having a "Jewish nose" is a matter of supreme indifference: (Schrank, 2007, pp. 22-23). Jewish anatomy was often propagated by Nazi Germany to identify someone that is Jewish to face persecution. However, as research develops about the anatomical features of a skeleton, there is no evidence of a "Judea skeleton". What constitutes the ability for the public to scrutinize some celebrities based on their physical features and no other celebrities with the same qualities? Is the standard that establishes the Jewishness of Hollywood applied applicably and based on celebrity social pariah?

Methodology

This paper will use an interpretive approach employing a qualitative method in secondary literature, a quantitative method in the form of past statistics, and a researcher-conducted survey on antisemitic rhetoric in the United States. The justification for the interpretive approach for this paper will be to understand the ontological, epistemological, and axiological assertions that propagate the rise of antisemitism in the United States. This paper aims to analyze the media's impact in correlation with the increase in antisemitism through televised and social media.

Self-Reflexivity

As a Jewish-American person living in the United States, there is an implicit bias that I expose myself to antisemitism as I want to spread awareness of stereotypical tropes and rhetoric

that is seen across different media spaces. It is vital to note that my experiences with antisemitism may contrast or contribute to the paper's analysis of the media's impact and antisemitic rhetoric.

Participants

This research will investigate perceptions of antisemitism rhetoric from participants in the United States. That is the only prerequisite for the survey, as the goal is to get different perspectives from prospective participants.

Sampling Method

The sampling approach will utilize convenience, theoretical-construct, and snowball sampling methods for this research. In convenience sampling, participants who meet the study's requirements and are willing to participate will be recruited. Theoretical-construct sampling will involve selecting participants who meet specific theoretical characteristics or conceptual frameworks. According to Tracy (2020), "theoretical-construct samples" refer to a type of sampling method that recruits particular types of participants or data based on specific theoretical characteristics or conceptual frameworks (p. 84). Lastly, snowball sampling will involve participants referring to colleagues, family, or friends who may meet the criteria for participation in the research.

Data Collection

For this research, participants will conduct a survey that will last approximately 10 minutes. Surveys allow for anonymity and transparency that prompts participants to be as open as they want. There will be demographic questions, multiple choice questions about

antisemitism, and open-ended questions to prompt participants to expand upon their thoughts and perceptions of antisemitism in televised and social media.

Researchers will have the list of complete responses after participants take the survey through Qualtrics. Qualtrics organizes the data for researchers clearly and concisely to propagate mutual understanding.

Data Analysis

As most of the questions will be open-ended, researchers will utilize intercoder reliability to determine the similarities between respondents' answers. Researchers will conclusively decide on the categories to sort the responses into and then analyze the perceptions of antisemitism through different lenses.

Intercoder reliability is "a practice in which multiple researchers code the data, engage in techniques to encourage consistency, and determine the degree to which they are coding data similarly" (Tracy, 2020, p. 276).

Conclusion

The paper highlights the urgent need for immediate action to address the rampant spread of antisemitic content on social media platforms and to challenge the damaging stereotypes and biases associated with Jewishness. It proposes various essential strategies, including raising awareness, establishing a clear and comprehensive definition of antisemitism, and implementing proactive measures to combat online hate speech effectively.

By increasing awareness of the harmful impacts of antisemitic rhetoric, societies can cultivate a shared understanding of the seriousness of the issue. This heightened awareness can

inspire individuals, communities, and organizations to stand against antisemitism and actively strive for its elimination. Education and public campaigns play crucial roles in this effort, as they can help dispel stereotypes, foster empathy, and promote a culture of respect and inclusivity.

The paper also emphasizes the importance of a standardized and universally accepted definition of antisemitism. A precise definition provides a framework for accurately identifying and addressing instances of antisemitism. It enables policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and social media platforms to establish practical guidelines, protocols, and regulations that combat antisemitic content while safeguarding freedom of speech.

Proactive measures must be implemented to tackle hate speech targeting the Jewish community on social media platforms. This involves developing robust reporting mechanisms, strengthening moderation efforts, and imposing appropriate consequences on individuals or groups propagating antisemitic rhetoric. Collaborative efforts between social media platforms, government entities, and civil society organizations are crucial to ensuring a comprehensive and coordinated response to online antisemitism.

By gaining a comprehensive understanding of the root causes and various forms of antisemitism, society can work together to create an inclusive and tolerant environment. This requires a commitment to combat explicit expressions of hatred and the subtle biases and stereotypes perpetuating discrimination. Ultimately, the goal is to establish a society that embraces diversity, rejects prejudice, and upholds the rights and dignity of all individuals, regardless of their religious or ethnic backgrounds.

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