Antisemitism on Social Media Platforms During 'Guardian of the Walls' Military Operation, May 2021

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Introduction

'Guardian of the Walls', was a military operation carried out by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) in May of 2021. The 12 days long operation included the indiscriminate firing of rockets from the Gaza strip at Israeli cities (perpetrated by Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad), and heavy IDF airstrikes on terrorist infrastructure in the strip. Amid the operation, a **sharp increase in manifestations of antisemitic sentiment** was apparent, both **online** and **offline**. While anti-Israel protesters **chanted about the massacre of Jews** in Vienna, **Israeli flags were burned** in front of synagogues in Germany. In anti-Israeli protests in several cities in Canada, alongside the burning of Israeli flags, demonstrators donned **swastikas** and **gave Nazi salutes**. **Jews were physically assaulted**, v**erbally abused, spat upon, and pelted with rocks**. In London, pro-Palestinian protesters **burned Israeli flags and liken Israel to Nazis**. In the US, an **increase** of over **100%** in the number of **antisemitic incidents** was registered in May 2021, with the most significant year-over-year increase in the category of **assault**.

Social media platforms have also constituted a **battlefield** during that time, albeit, a digital one. Activists took to social media, utilizing it to disseminate easy-to-consume information quickly and without limits. While a picture is said to be worth a thousand words, during the time of the Guardian of the Walls, misleading pictures, **disinformation** and '**fake news**' **spread** like wildfires on popular social media outlets.
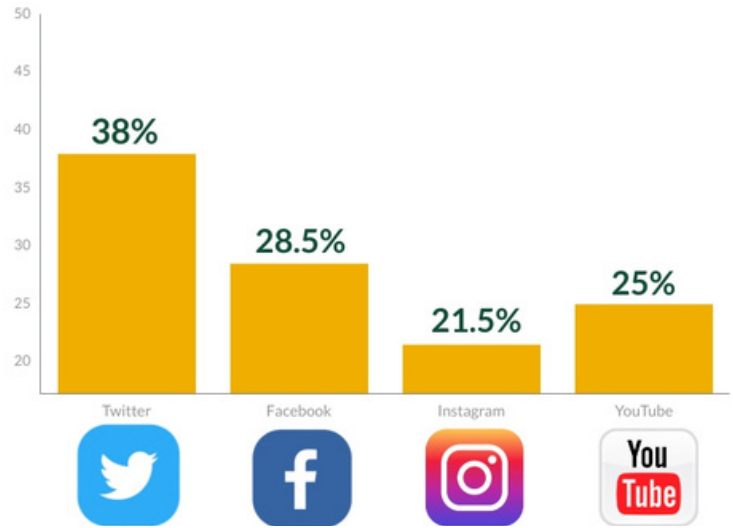
Alongside disinformation, a **wave of antisemitism swept through social media**. Hateful texts, photos, videos, and tweets **targeted Jews worldwide**. **Inflammatory antisemitic content**, not only expressed **support for Hamas** but also **incited violence against Jews and Israelis**, gained popularity on social media, and was widely shared. **Pro-Israeli accounts** were **harassed**, trolled, suspended, and **blocked**. **Social media-fueled attacks resulted in physical violence, incitement, and harassment both online and offline.**

Manual Monitoring of Antisemitism on Social Media

In response to the **sweeping rise of antisemitic content** on social media during the Guardian of the Walls military operation, **FOA's volunteers invested considerable time and effort in daily monitoring of antisemitic content across four leading social media platforms** (Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, & Facebook). Monitoring was conducted **manually**, following the **IHRA working definition of antisemitism**, and was assisted by specific **keywords** and **hashtags** (#Deathtoisrael, #zionfuck, #deathtoallkikes, #jewsareevil, #israelshouldbevanished, #ziocum, #ziofuck, #gasthejews, #Hitler_was_not_wrong, #ihatejews, #jewishmafia, #jewsAreTerrorist, #jewsarethiefs, and #killthejews).

During the month of May 2021, **FOA's volunteers monitored 692 antisemitic posts** (including texts, videos, pictures, etc.). As of June 16, **252** of these posts were **removed** by the social media outlets (about **36%**). **This is over three times the average annual removal rate in 2020** (about **12%**). The higher removal rate of reported content may be attributed to the type of content posted (more 'hardcore' antisemitism), but also to **increased monitoring efforts of FOA volunteers**. This points to the importance of **establishing a critical mass of volunteers,** enough to actively and continuously monitor antisemitic content on social media.

Removal Rate of Antisemitic Content Across Social Media Outlets

- Twitter: 38%
- Facebook: 28.5%
- Instagram: 21.5%
- YouTube: 25%

Digital Monitoring of Antisemitism on Social Media

Digital monitoring of online content can be carried out by **automated tools** (**AI**). Using specific, pre-defined terms, hashtags and keywords, such tools are able to track relevant content in real-time.

We utilized one such **automated tool** in order to **monitor antisemitic content on Twitter**. The content was monitored (number of mentions of each hashtag per day) between May 1 and June 1, 2021, based on the **hashtags** mentioned above. **Findings** are summarised in the table:

Monitoring Period	# Mentions / Day
May 1-9 => **Prior** to the operation	An average of **2,000**
May 10-21 => **During** the operation	Between **2,500** and **4,000**
May 22-31 => **After** the operation	**Increase**, with a **record** of **4,500** mentions on May 24

The findings demonstrate a **significant increase in the publication of antisemitic and anti-Israel content on Twitter** during, and immediately after the Guardian of the Walls military operation.

In addition, an examination of the **leading countries** in posting and mentioning the selected hashtags on Twitter revealed the **United States** to be the **leading source** of relevant tweets (with an average of **2,400** mentions of said hashtags per day). With an average of **800** mentions, **Pakistan** came second, followed by the **United Kingdom** (**600** mentions), **Yemen** (500 mentions), and **Iraq** (**200** mentions).

Takeaways

- Whereas antisemitic content appears on social media on a regular basis, data originated in an automated monitoring tool points to a **significant increase in the volume, popularity, and spread of antisemitic hashtags on Twitter during and after the Guardian of the Walls military operation**, compared to the beginning of May. **A similar trend is likely to exist across social media platforms**.

- **A higher volume of antisemitic content**, manually monitored and **reported by FOA's volunteers** during Guardian of the Walls, was associated with a **significantly higher removal rate** of such content, relative to the average annual removal rate of 2021 (**36% vs. 12%**).

- **Active** and **continuous monitoring is key to combating antisemitism on social media**. A critical mass of volunteers, manually reporting antisemitic content across social media is needed in order to effectively combat this phenomenon.

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