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Online Antisemitism: The Internet and the Campus

Andre Oboler

The Internet plays a significant role in the spread of information, and misinformation, on the campus and in student communities. Antisemitic conspiracy theories, stereotyping, imagery and motifs are shared and reused around the globe. Hateful lies not only spread, but grow. The hate is then expressed in bullying, intimidation, discriminatory policies and occasionally, violent outbursts. The campus, along with the school yard, stands on the front line between a developing culture of hate on the internet and the values of tolerance and multiculturalism that society wishes to instil in youth.

The Internet opens gateways between different communities and cultures. It is a vital source of information for a campus environment that prides itself on openness and rigorous debate. The campus, however, must remain a safe environment. Unlike the internet, the debate on campus must be conducted honestly and in good faith. Not everything on the internet is appropriate for the campus. Not every argument found online should be treated as valid and of equal weight. In an honest debate inappropriate and potentially dangerous propaganda should not be shared. When online hate is brought onto the campus, it must be exposed, rebutted and rejected.

My efforts to combat internet antisemitism began on a campus in the UK. I was in a meeting of the student government when otherwise reasonable representatives began spouting hate. They were not antisemites, they were dedicated student advocates. The hate was embedded in their arguments, in the analogies they used, and “factual information” they provided. These activists had done their own research. An internet search gave them the same

hateful content on multiple sites. The online repetition of an antisemitic lie adds neither truth nor credibility. Nor does a source-ranking in search engine results add veracity. Unfortunately, once someone has made the effort to discover and verify these lies, explaining the hateful nature of the content is an uphill battle.

Today there is a nexus between antisemitism on the campus and on the internet. Social media sites like Facebook publicly identify participants by their institution. Students create and join groups that promote antisemitism, which can bring their institution into disrepute. Friendship groups from school provide a network through which hateful content can readily spread. The internet, which operates in a fairly value-free environment, allows casual antisemitism to grow. It is the campus where this antisemitism is likely to manifest itself first, but it is also the campus which provides the best place to respond.

This essay examines the nature of internet-based antisemitism, the growth of Antisemitism 2.0, and the online antisemitism that is most likely to influence youth and the campus environment. It conducts two case studies of online antisemitism. It then considers how to manage and mitigate the influence of online antisemitism.

Campus use of the Internet

Students' use of the internet is fairly universal today. Data from late 2009 suggest that 93% of Americans aged 18 to 29 use the internet.¹ The same survey demonstrates that the figure must be higher for those in college as education is a significant indicator of internet usage.

Given the rapid rate of change, it is difficult to present a snapshot of the volume or the purposes of internet usage. Expressed broadly, however, the most-visited sites today are search engines or social media sites, as shown by the top eleven internet destinations (Figure 1). The social media sites are gaining increasing dominance and Twitter, in particular, continues to grow. In 2007, 20% of all web requests on the residential network at the

University of Bristol, servicing 4,700 students in dormitories, were for Facebook.² The next four most popular websites, which included YouTube, together accounted for the next 10% of requests. Since then, Facebook has grown from 20 million unique visitors a month to almost 120 million.³ In the United States Facebook's market penetration is even higher. As Mike Richwalsky explains, "College students today in the US live and breathe Facebook all day long."⁴

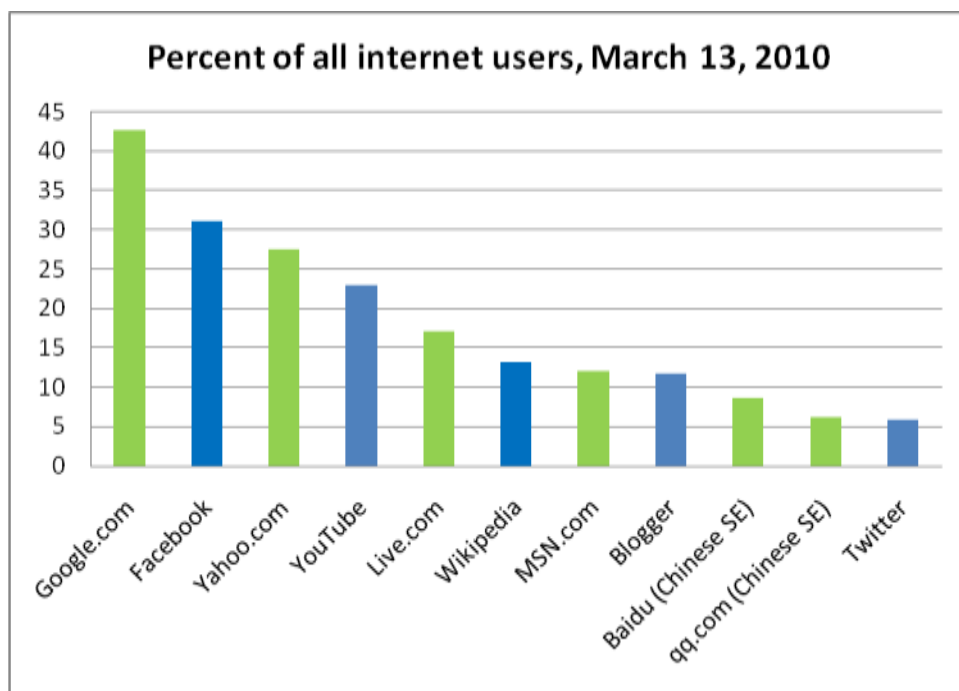


Figure 1 Top 11 Internet sites March 13, 2010. Graph is compiled based on data from Alexa.com

Students are clearly using the internet. Perhaps to a greater extent than others, they are using it to find information through search engines and sites like Wikipedia, and to interact with people they know and those they meet online with similar interests. Students use the internet to organise, share, protest and inform.

When it comes to academic work, students generally recognize that a glance at Wikipedia or the first few results offered by Google is not enough. However, for less formal, personal research, this is the common approach. It is this research that informs views expressed in campus debate, student meetings, and conversations with friends.

Informal research can also inform students' decisions online—to sign a petition, join an online protest group or share information with friends. In the online world links to the sources from which one obtained the information are often included in the communication. These links can be shared via private messages, as instant messengers like MSN, or publicly through forums or platforms such as Twitter or Facebook. Links are also included in comments to YouTube videos or responses to blog posts. Although this can be productive when the sources are credible, it also allows the spread of rumors, lies and deliberate propaganda.

Deep Antisemitism

Much of the antisemitic material that is regularly reproduced online contains “deep antisemitism,” that is, an underlying link to classical antisemitic motifs. On the internet “deep antisemitism” generally relies on at least some republishing of existing material.

Some of the regularly republished antisemitic material was uploaded or posted in an organised effort to spread hatred of the Jewish people. Other material uses antisemitism to promote a number of political or ideological agendas. The information is disseminated through search engines and links to related material. Students who fail to recognise the hateful nature of the material can inadvertently play a role in spreading it. Others, however, intentionally spread this material to bully other students, as was the case in “Punch a Jew in the Face Day” on Facebook, which involved a school in Australia.⁵ Still others have a political agenda they consider so important that it overrides all other concerns. Such student groups may deliberately spread antisemitic content and then express outrage at any complaints, as occurs in pro-Palestinian campaigns' abuse of Holocaust Memorial Day and Holocaust remembrance generally.

Not everyone recognizes the nature of this material . Although some sources of hate literature are well-known, much of it arrives with no indication of its source. Antisemitic

articles are often reposted online without reference to the original sources. Sometimes this material is also reproduced in hardcopy and distributed on campus or in student gatherings, again without indicating its source. In some cases it is not students but faculty who spread or accept the antisemitic tracts.⁶ A search on part of the text will often reveal its source, or its use and promotion by recognised antisemitic groups.

Ignorance is no excuse for the spread of antisemitism. When antisemitic material is encountered on the campus, one should first locate its original online source. When the intent is not to encourage antisemitism, a rational discussion may quickly resolve the problem. Similarly, when antisemitic material is encountered online, reporting the material or alerting online administrators may yield the fastest solution. In both cases, one should state the nature of the problem, the source of the material, and the justification for considering it racist, all preferably in confidence. When this fails, public exposure is the best response, informing the public about what is distributed, where it comes from, and which groups circulate it. Most groups on campus prefer not to have a reputation of spreading material known to be racist or from a well-known racist source.

The next section examines three websites that host antisemitic content: Stormfront, JewWatch, and MPACUK. These sites represent three different approaches to the website spread of online antisemitism.

Antisemitic websites

One of the earliest dedicated hate sites was stormfront.org, a U.S.-based white supremacist site established in 1995.^{7,8} At the beginning of February, 2010, stormfront.org had over 189,000 registered users (an 18% increase in eleven months) and over 6,807,000 posts (an increase of 23% over the same period).⁹

Stormfront is the central online meeting place for the white supremacist movement. It was established, and continues to act, as a broad church despite the rivalries of competing

movements. Lorraine Bowman-Grieve described Stormfront as a “community of like-minded individuals . . . [that] has developed a network of support for themselves and others that gives them legitimacy and allows them to further justify their ideological beliefs and actions both on an individual and group level.”¹⁰

Community discussions occur in different sections of the site. There are sections on cultural, theological and ideological issues, spaces for regional discussion, and places where current events and news are posted and discussed.¹¹ The site also plays a significant role in promoting literature that supports white supremacists’ views, defining the movement, and outlining “threats” to it. The content includes antisemitic libels, especially conspiracy theories.

Stormfront is self-censuring. Overt threats tend to be removed, helping the site stay on the right side of U.S. law. Despite this, the site breaches laws in countries such as Germany and France, which ban Nazism and Holocaust denial – a common feature on the site. Search results from the localised versions of Google, like Google.de and Google.fr, have omitted references to Stormfront.org since 2002.¹²

Another well-known antisemitic website is JewWatch.com.¹³ Unlike Stormfront, JewWatch focuses on providing published information rather than circulating information through an interactive community. JewWatch contains a large number of pages that are well-optimized and regularly appear in search results. The site specializes in conspiracy theories, promoting the idea that Jews control the media, banks and national governments. In 2005 Missouri Attorney General Jay Nixon described it as “nothing more than a racist hate site.”¹⁴ Between 1999 and October 2006 the site ran under the slogan “Keeping a Close Watch on Jewish Communities & Organizations Worldwide.”¹⁵ Now it identifies itself as providing a “Scholarly Library of Facts about Domestic & Worldwide Zionist Criminality.”¹⁶ These “facts” are organized into sections on “Zionist Occupied Governments,” “Jewish Mind

Control Mechanisms,” “Jewish Banking & Financial Manipulations” and other “scholarly” topics. The shift from making claims directly about Jews to hurling accusations against Zionists and Israel came after JewWatch changed ownership, but it also reflects a general increase in the “New Antisemitism” in online discussions.

Secondary slogans on JewWatch have attempted to establish the site’s credibility as an educational tool and research archive. An early strap line read, “Jew Watch is a Not-For-Profit Library for private study, scholarship, or research.”¹⁷ This was later expanded, adding, “This is NOT a hate site. This is a scholarly research archive of articles.”¹⁸ In 2006 another strap line was added: “Frank Weltner, M.A. English & Certified Librarian Presents His Famous Scholarly Library of Factual Links Known Around the World.”¹⁹ From October 4 the site began to claim: “The Jew Watch Project Is The Internet's Largest Scholarly Collection of Articles on Jewish History” and that it was a “Free Educational Library for Private Study, Scholarship, and Research.”²⁰ The original purpose of the claim to be an educational site was likely in order to follow “fair use” provisions of U.S. copyright law for the many articles from the press that JewWatch reproduces, and to which it adds commentary. Over time the claim shifted to make the site look more like a respectable authority. The contents, however, remain the same, leaving little doubt about its nature.

Awareness of JewWatch remains high due to the circulation of an e-mail claiming that Google will remove the site from its listings if 50,000 people sign the petition requesting this.²¹ The e-mail circulates every few months, and though originally legitimate, it has been out of date since 2004. Today the e-mail can best be described as spam and unintentional advertising for JewWatch, a good reason not to forward it as requested. An online version of the same petition now has over 625,000 signatures.²² In 2004 Google responded by noting that the high rank of JewWatch was due simply to the search engine algorithm and not to a deliberate decision at Google. Google also stated that it would not alter the results. Google

made one concession, however, placing a link at the top of the search results to a page explaining its position.²³ This statement only appears on Google.com; other Google sites, like Google.de and Google.fr, omitted JewWatch from the search results in the same manner as discussed above with regard to Stormfront.org.²⁴

There is also an increasing number of Islamist antisemitic sites and Muslim community sites that adopt an antisemitic narrative. This is not surprising, given that antisemitism is mainstream in many parts of the Arab world.²⁵ For example, MPACUK.org, website of the Muslim Public Affairs Committee in the UK, known for its extremist rhetoric and antisemitic content²⁶ and for its direct impact on campuses, is another example of the use of a forum. MPACUK promotes the idea of a worldwide Zionist conspiracy and reproduces articles originally published on neo-Nazi and Holocaust denial websites.²⁷ In 2004, however, MPACUK and its student branch IPAC were banned from campuses in the UK under the National Union of Students' (NUS) No Platform Policy.²⁸ Passed (and updated) by an NUS congress of delegates from student unions across the country, the NUS enforces the "no platform policy" for its national events and appearances by its officers. Most student unions have also adopted the policy locally. The ban is well-placed, since Asghar Bukhari, co-founder and spokesperson of MPAC, recently used Facebook to demonize Jews and call for violent jihad.²⁹

Sites like Stormfront.org and JewWatch.com allow antisemites to organize and share information. Given the wealth of information exposing these sites, their impact on campus is now negligible. Even websites such as MPAC regard JewWatch.com as a step too far and have closed forum threads that reference JewWatch.³⁰

Supportive sites

A second class of sites, run by Jews, provides selective support to conspiracy theories and antisemitic websites. By writing and speaking "as a Jew," these sites convey a certain

authority. Such sites are often used as references on campus, where they are considered a more reliable authority than Jewish classmates or staff.

Perhaps the most well-known of such sites are those of Neturei Karta, a sect within the Ultra Orthodox Jewish community, numbering a couple of thousand people, and the Satmar, numbering around 100,000.³¹ Both oppose the existence of the State of Israel, claiming the Torah teaches that “Jews shall not use human force to bring about the establishment of a Jewish state before the coming of the universally accepted Moshiach.”³² This view is rejected by the vast majority of Ultra Orthodox Jews as well as the Modern Orthodox, Conservative and Liberal streams of Judaism. Together, Neturei Karta and the Satmar account for less than 1% of the Jewish population.³³

The Satmar and Neturei Karta differ largely in their methods. Neturei Karta has a history of publicly lending “Jewish support” to antisemites in press conferences, conferences and through the media. In the 1970s it supported the PLO when its members were committing terrorist acts against Jews around the world, and more recently it has supported Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the president of Iran, who has called for the destruction of Israel, the Iranian Holocaust denial conference (2006), and Iran’s nuclear program.³⁴ Their actions and statements, supporting those who are trying to destroy the Jewish state, have been sharply condemned by Jewish communities worldwide, including the Satmar.³⁵

Both Neturei Karta and the Satmar run websites that claim that “real Jews” are opposed to Zionism and Israel, including Neturei Karta International (www.nkusa.org), True Torah Jews Against Zionism (www.jewsagainstzionism.com), and Jews not Zionists (www.jewsnotzionists.org). The latter site opens with the claim, “Contrary to common perception, Jewish anti-Zionism is not restricted exclusively to the well known Jewish anti-Zionist movements such as Satmar and Neturei Karta.” It mentions the Satmar and Neturei Karta to link to the above sites. By writing “We, the staff at www.jewsnotzionists.org” it

gives the impression that it is independent of the Satmar and Neturei Karta. The domain registration, however, indicates that it is registered to “Rabbi Yisroel Weiss” of “Neturei Karta International.”³⁶

Such websites provide support for antisemitic sites that claim only to be attacking “Zionists,” not “Jews.” One of the best examples of such an antisemitic site is www.serendipity.li/zionism.htm, which claims that “Zionists are experts at propaganda, disinformation, denying facts and outright lying,” and “Zionism seeks to dominate all of Palestine and the Middle East by means of violence and the threat of violence . . . to maximize its influence in world affairs . . . principally by means of control of the government of the USA.” Here are encapsulated conspiracy theories of Jewish control of world governments, accusations of colonial expansionism, the stereotype of the lying and conniving Jew, and the accusation that Jews are experts at “propaganda” and “disinformation”—perhaps a reference to media control or to the claim that the Holocaust is a myth.

Serendipity also offers articles on topics such as “Jewish power” and its understanding of the distinction between antisemitism and anti-Zionism. It reproduces articles by Ken Livingstone, Patrick J. Buchanan, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, and Gilad Atzmon. The site, which ranks high in a search on Zionism, states that “Zionism should not be equated with Judaism. . . .There are some Jews who are totally opposed to Zionism,” and then links to Jews Against Zionism and an article on the Neturei Karta International site. It encourages its readers to regard any accusation of antisemitism as an illegitimate effort to silence their views. This makes it harder to educate those who have undertaken their own research, as they have been instructed to dismiss any who challenge them.

Antisemitism 2.0

Antisemitism 2.0 is “the use of online social networking and content collaboration to share demonization [of Jews], conspiracy theories, Holocaust denial, and classical antisemitic

motifs with a view to creating social acceptability for such content.”³⁷ Antisemitism 2.0 works to weaken society’s immunity to the spread of hate, and often boldly asserts, counter to all evidence, that the group or its content is not racist. Antisemitism 2.0 is presented as one opinion among many, and argues explicitly or implicitly that there is a right to share “controversial” content.

Labeling Antisemitism 2.0 as nothing more than “controversial” speech serves to increase its social acceptability. People need not agree with the views expressed, but only recognize that they are legitimate views. To facilitate this, those posting the content often add disclaimers. The disclaimers suggest there is no intention to discriminate, that any problems that result are only part of the fallout to be expected from any contentious political discussion and, as such, should be excused. The distinction is one found in criminal law, which requires a *mens rea* (guilty mind) to accompany the *actus reus* (guilty act). In the case of Antisemitism 2.0, the disclaimer itself is an indication of the guilty mind. Such disclaimers seem to exist only in the presence of racist content.

Disclaimers also present a pre-emptive strike against those who would criticize a group, channel, or item. They serve, in particular, as a challenge to platform administrators. They say, “We don’t trust you. We know our rights. Are you one of those fascists who would take away our rights?” Holding freedom of expression sacrosanct, a platform administrator responds defensively, backing away. This appeal to moral values, in order to spread racism, is similar to that of fascist political parties who campaign under a banner of freedom of speech with the ultimate goal of removing such freedoms.

The danger of antisemitism 2.0: A shift in values

The danger of Antisemitism 2.0 derives above all from the way it threatens values. Sixty years of civil rights progress is being undone online. We risk being returned to a world where people do not stand up against hate. Opposition to antisemitism and racism generally is

seen not as an intrinsic societal value, but as the equivalent of a political or religious value. Some may share it, others may not. In such an environment hate can flourish.

Students today spend a significant part of their lives in an online world. With instant messaging and web browsing now available on cell phones, there are few times when students are not connected to the online world. Hence, the values of the online world are infiltrating the real world.

This can be seen, at the corporate policy level, in the social acceptability of Holocaust denial. In 2009 Facebook declared that Holocaust denial would not be banned under the provision against hateful content in its terms of service.³⁸ A statement by Facebook spokesperson Barry Schnitt demonstrates what can result from the spread of Antisemitism 2.0. He explained that the company abhors Nazi ideals and finds Holocaust denial “repulsive and ignorant,” but added, Facebook wants “to be a place where ideas, even controversial ideas, can be discussed.” Thus Antisemitism 2.0 can gain immunity even when the content is recognised as dangerous propaganda.³⁹ Though it has not publicly reversed its position, after a public outcry and media attention, Facebook seems to be removing Holocaust denial and pro-Nazi content from its platform. However, its silence indicates that Facebook is still uncomfortable with taking a moral stand, even with regard to content that countries (and the United Nations) have recognised as dangerous and outlawed.⁴⁰

The UK’s Report of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism drew a line between political expression and racism when it concluded, “whilst many have pointed out that criticism of Israel or Zionism is not necessarily antisemitic the converse is also true: it is never acceptable to mask hurtful racial generalisations by claiming the right to legitimate political discourse.”⁴¹ This is essentially Schnitt’s mistake. The argument is not about free speech, as Facebook had already taken a position prohibiting hateful content. The question was whether the claim that the speech was political should override the prohibition and allow

its hateful nature to be ignored. According to UK lawmakers, such an exception was never acceptable.

The online climate that is conducive to racism affects not only Jews but other minority groups. Conall McDevitt, a member of Ireland's Legislative Assembly, highlighted Facebook-based racism against the Roma community in Belfast. In early 2010 he wrote, "What is worrying about these online groups is that so many young people seem not to realise they are being racist. That it has become acceptable to treat members of minority communities in such a racist way is a terrible indictment of us all."⁴² McDevitt correctly identified the problem as one of values. The students involved see nothing wrong with their views or behavior. This is another example of Antisemitism 2.0—more generally, of Hate 2.0—where racist behavior is made socially acceptable.

I will now examine two cases in depth. The first is a YouTube clip, a song intended to expose how easy it is to get Americans to go along with antisemitism, but which has instead become a lightning rod for antisemitic comments. The second is a Holocaust denial group that Facebook recently shut down.

Case one: A YouTube lightning rod for antisemitism

The song "In my Country there is problem," more commonly known after its refrain as "throw the Jew down the well," was originally recorded by Jewish comedian Sacha Baron Cohen for Da Ali G show (season 2, episode 3). The song is featured in "Borat's Guide to the USA (Part 2)" and on the soundtrack to the 2006 film "Borat." Copies of the clip are available on YouTube as well as other music and video sites. The most popular copy on YouTube has received around 3.5 million views.

The clip features Baron Cohen, as the antisemitic character Borat, singing in an Arizona bar. The song starts with a lament about the transport in Kazakhstan that ends with "throw transport down the well." It then rapidly descends into antisemitic lyrics, and the bar's

patrons are shown clapping and singing along to the chorus “throw the Jew down the well.” The antisemitic nature of the lyrics is clear and draws on classical antisemitism. The second verse is “In my country there is problem / And that problem is the Jew / They take everybody money / And they never give it back.” The reference is to the stereotype of the “rich Jew” and perhaps to the classical stereotype of the Jewish money lender and banker. The chorus calls for throwing the Jew down the well, instructing: “You must grab him by his horns.” The third verse makes further use of demonization, warning, “be careful of his teeth,” and advises, “You must grab him by his money,” again drawing on the stereotype of the greedy Jew.

The song is clearly a satire. Baron Cohen has defended the use of his antisemitic character Borat. He explained to *Rolling Stone* that by being antisemitic, Borat “lets people lower their guard and expose their own prejudice, whether it’s anti-Semitism or an acceptance of anti-Semitism.”⁴³ In a press release the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) acknowledged that there was “no malevolence on the part of Sacha Baron Cohen, who is himself proudly Jewish” and sought “to use humor to unmask the absurd and irrational side of anti-Semitism and other phobias born of ignorance and fear.”⁴⁴ It did, however, express concern that “the audience may not always be sophisticated enough to get the joke, and that some may even find it reinforcing their bigotry.”⁴⁵ The ADL’s concern was well-grounded. The main YouTube video serves as a lightning rod attracting antisemitic comments.

Examining the Comments on YouTube

Consider the comments on the most popular copy of the video,⁴⁶ looking first at a sample of those posted in the six-hour period immediately before the page was examined. This exposes the content posted before there was a reasonable opportunity for review and moderation by YouTube. A random sample of the most recent posts made a month later shows similar problematic content.

The initial examination highlights seven users. Three post racist jokes.

Bobman717: “what's the difference between jews and boy scouts? Boy Scouts come back from there [sic] camps.” MADgAmER476: “how did copper wire get invented? 2 jews fighting over a penny.” Their listed age is 25, but in their description they state they are 15. Baxxynufc asks, “how do you get a jew on a bus? throw a penny on. how do you get a jew off the bus? tell them hitler is driving.” He gives his age as 20 and location as the UK. This is the “light-hearted” face of antisemitism.

The jokes are interspersed between the racist comments of four other users.

Constipatedclown writes, “Dear Jews, EAT SHIT AND DIE. yours truly, THE UNIVERSE.” Constipatedclown’s profile says she is a 20-year-old Canadian. On her channel comments she writes, “one jew is too many jews, and a good jew is a dead jew. 6 Million wasn't nearly enough.” Gr1Mf4nD4nG0 writes, “I had no problem with jews, i've never even seen one face to face, but when you find out they control all the media and banks you start to understand why hitler wanted to kill them. they are parasites.” Gr1Mf4nD4nG0 gives her/his age as 30 and location as the UK. Pebsykid puts the hate much more succinctly: “Kill all Jews.” Pebsykid is 23, from the USA.

SlavicFront88 is the only clear White Supremacist. He is from Russia, age 20. His channel is “14/88,” doubtless a reference to David Lane’s “Fourteen Words.” a slogan of the white supremacist movement,⁴⁷ and the neo-Nazi shorthand for Heil Hitler (88 [HH]).⁴⁸ He writes, “Fuck jews!!!! :D throw the jew down the well!” His profile is more alarming than his comment.

Table 1 YouTube Accounts

Account	Registered	Active one month later?
bobman717	February 2008	Yes
constipatedclown	August 2007	Yes

Gr1Mf4nD4nG0	December 2007	Yes
Pebsykid	July 2006	Yes
MADgAmER476	July 2008	Yes
Baxxynufc	August 2008	Yes
SlavicFront88	November 2009	Yes

This six-hour period is not unique. Going back another eighteen hours, FatsoJetson writes, “cause they are not ethnically jewish they have a hidden history. orthodox jews are the real jews. The rest are the remnant of a eastern European empire who adopted Judaism as its religion,” a reference to the Khazar myth.⁴⁹ FatsoJetson’s profile includes conspiracy-related pictures, aliens, a diagram of a suitcase bomb, and a Neturei Karta member holding a sign reading “End of Zionism = Peace.” He gives his country as Ireland and age as 27. More astonishing is leevi1234 who posts a poem, “From a Jew's face / The wicked Devil speaks to us, / The Devil who, in every country, /Is known as an evil plague. // Would we from the Jew be free, / Again be cheerful and happy,/ Then must youth / fight with us / To get rid of the Jewish Devil.” The poem is taken from an antisemitic children’s book *Der Giftpilz* by Julius Streicher, publisher of the Nazi newspaper *Der Stürmer*.⁵⁰

This examination shows the sort of hate that “throw the Jew down the well” by Sacha Baron Cohen attracts. The question then is, should a lightning rod for hate be allowed? If so, who should take responsibility for the resulting outpouring of hate?

Taking Responsibility: Responding to Online Video Incitement

As Sacha Baron Cohen explained, the problem is both those who are antisemitic and those who do not express antisemitic sentiments, but are willing to accept them. YouTube falls into the latter category when it allows and facilitates such comments. This very popular video clearly has a history of attracting such comments. YouTube could mitigate the damage

by indicating the satirical nature of the clip at the top of the page. Or it could monitor the comments on this and other “hate lighting rods” more vigilantly. However, an extreme solution may be in order. Perhaps the ADL is right, and despite his intentions, Baron Cohen’s work is doing more harm than good. In such circumstances perhaps it should be removed from YouTube, either by Google (which owns YouTube) on its own initiative, or at Baron Cohen’s request.

Recently the issue of corporate responsibility for hosting online videos ended up in court. Three executives of Google (YouTube’s parent company) were taken to court in Italy. They were found guilty of the violation of privacy after a video was posted in 2006 showing a group of students bullying a teenager with Down’s syndrome while other students looked on. The video remained on Google Video for two months.⁵¹ A statement from Google described the video as “totally reprehensible” and claimed that it “took it down within hours of being notified by the Italian police.”⁵² Companies must be allowed time to identify problematic content and respond, but the time should be measured as the two months since the video was posted (and became particularly popular), not the number of hours between the time the police contacted Google and it removed the video.

If Google enables anyone to become a publisher easily and quickly, it has a responsibility to make it equally easy for people to report abuses and have their complaint handled quickly. Google’s responsibility may begin only when the first complaint is made, and a couple of weeks might be a reasonable time to review a case with few complaints. When something becomes viral, however, as in this case, the response must be faster; there is no technological reason why Google cannot prioritise its response rate based on time since the first complaint, time from when the video was posted until the first complaint, popularity of the video, and volume of complaints.

There are also lessons for those producing or publishing YouTube clips on racism for

educational or journalistic purposes. These videos should contain subtitles with full explanations to ensure the educational message is not lost or separated from the content, which might otherwise make hate look acceptable. This also applies to satire and to translations of antisemitic television shows from the Arab world. The main problem on YouTube is hate that is posted intentionally. It is easy to find content on YouTube praising Hitler, denying the Holocaust, and attacking Jews. Getting YouTube to respond should not require a resort to law enforcement.

Case two: Facebook Holocaust “Revisionism”

Holocaust Revisionism, a Holocaust denial group on Facebook, had 881 members. Created around June 7, 2009, Facebook shut it down in late January 2010. Its removal seems to be part of a wider—unannounced—cleanup effort that Facebook has undertaken.⁵³ This was after much criticism had been directed at Facebook, which had, in effect, declared that Holocaust denial was not hateful.⁵⁴

Holocaust Revisionism follows the pattern of other Antisemitism 2.0 groups.⁵⁵ It includes an info box stating, “This is NOT an anti-Semite group, nor is it to be a group to hate JEWS. Our objective is to show you a [sic] aspect of History that is often misunderstood.” The description calls the Holocaust a “highly debatable aspect of history.” It declares that there are “many holes in the official story that mainstream historians cannot account for” and that there are “numerous reputable historians who have been persecuted and thrown in prison all for voicing their opinion on this aspect of history.” The call to action is: “This MUST stop, it is an abhorrent human rights violation to imprison someone for voicing an opinion on history.”

The UN General Assembly disagrees. It resolved in 2007 that it “Condemns without any reservation any denial of the Holocaust” and “Urges all Member States unreservedly to reject any denial of the Holocaust as a historical event, either in full or in part, or any

activities to this end.”⁵⁶ The UN, governments and academic experts take a hard line because Holocaust denial is both racist and potentially dangerous. Historian Deborah Lipstadt called it a “clear and future danger” and noted that “the time to rise to action is when it’s not yet a clear and present danger.”⁵⁷

Deborah Butler points out its racist nature: “Denial of the Holocaust is often accompanied by the allegation that the historical account of the Holocaust is a Jewish fabrication for financial gain,”⁵⁸ and even when this is absent, it is implied. Thus Holocaust denial is also a “considerable insult to the Jewish people.”

Frank Knopfelmacher explained the danger of Holocaust denial as a group-label “which exceeds in ferocity and depth of malice anything that has happened in the field of ethnic animadversion in this country at least since World War II.”⁵⁹ The deniers intend to imply “that the Jewish people are witting and, rarely, unwitting accomplices in a conspiracy to extort, to lie and to kill, in order to acquire a counterfeit crown of martyrdom to be used for personal and political gain.”⁶⁰ It is this implication that incites hatred and even violence against Jews and the Jewish community.

Examining the comments on Facebook

I examined all comments in the denial group until the week before the group was removed. Many of the comments echo the classic denier approaches. Cherissa Cutts asks why “In Canada you can go to jail for doubting the holocaust happened” but not for doubting the moon landing? “Welcome to zionist run Canada,” she concludes. Wotan Griffiths also writes of Jewish control of governments: “Wont be long before this group is closed due to the will of zog . . . death to zog [Zionist Occupation Government].” Ray Loy declares “The real Holocaust was in Dresden Germany,” referring to the allied bombing there. Andreas TerrorMachine leaves a one-word comment, “Holocash”. The comments often link to further antisemitic material on websites and in social media or help organise the deniers.

Elijah Wilson announces in this group that he has set up an official Toben fan club and has e-mailed Frederick-Toben for his thoughts on this. He provides the link and encourages others to join. Elsewhere Wilson links to a Google Video page with a clip by professional Holocaust denier Mark Weber⁶¹ discussing the situation of fellow denier Ernst Zundel. Another user, Charles Fink, links to “A letter from Ernst Zundel” posted at David Duke’s website. John Preben links to a dedicated website for Holocaust denial videos, advising, “Here you guys will find the most of Holocaust revisionism movies.” Natasha Volker, the group’s creator, links to Jewwatch, commenting, “A good one. Jew Watch - Jewish Holocaust - Media Lies - Frauds - Hoaxes.”

John Paul Cupp, addressing the online organising in Facebook, cheers, “This is a great upsurge in anti-Zionist and anti-hollowcause agitation. We just went from 42 when I joined a couple of days ago to 500.” He offers to direct people to unlisted Facebook groups that are being created by the Far Right to aid its efforts to organise: “If anyone wants to join the red-brown united front let me know and I will send you an invite since it is invite only for security reasons but even as a secure group reaching 300 within 3 weeks! Hail Vicotry [sic], smash Zionism!” The implication is that what we see is just the surface.

The group also contains other forms of blatant antisemitism. Christian Conn Lind links to a website called “Jews killed Jesus,” which features replacement theology. It declares, “The Jews have been milking the holocaust for every penny it's worth. They have no shame!” and justifies the Holocaust as the Jews’ rightful punishment for rejecting Christ. Lind comments, “Ha ha this is so good. The gentile world is still liveing [sic] the greatest hoax of all times, but these days more dramatically than ever perhaps?” Elsewhere he declares, “Too bad the ashkenazium southern whites did not end up in rockefellers eugenic programs at the turn of the century.”

The group is also used to share information. Sena Bowman writes, “All those who

haven't read it. . . . It will give you all the fuel needed to out debate any sympathizer. . . . Did Six Million Really Die? Don't recall the authors name though.” Another poster promptly supplied the author’s name. Another user declares, “Holocaust is just another jewish shield, which they can use against anyone who tries to oppose them. But the truth is different, Hitler believed that they could be changed if they work honestly, so he sent them to the work places. . . . Half of them died, the rest tried to corrupt the german soldiers by offering them money. . . .” This user’s name is a Russian phrase and the “about section” reads “14/88 Russian Roulette.” Perhaps a friend of the YouTube user SlavicFront88?

Ra'd Jundallah may be the most worrisome user, as he links to a Russian Islamic site and invites people to join the “World Antizionist Congress” (WAC). Here Islamism meets the Far Right and Holocaust denial. WAC is “opposed to Zionist-Imperialist expansion throughout the world in general and Zionist barbarism in Palestine in particular.” The user’s info box declares, “Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. Qur'an is our law. Jihad is our way. Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope.” Amazingly, he has 4,388 friends. It looks more like a well-organised (and perhaps, government-funded) project than that of an individual.

Systematic Response: A need for policy development

The Facebook group “Holocaust Revisionism” exposes the link between Holocaust denial and other forms of antisemitism. It serves as an example of why such groups are dangerous and of their role in rapidly organizing a community of hate.

When an entire group is dedicated to hate, Facebook must take the initial responsibility for handling complaints and determining if it should be shut down. Although Facebook seems to have begun doing this, there are no statistics on how many groups they have examined or the percentage of these that have been shut down. Such groups may return immediately, but by removing hate groups and accounts that spread hate, the cost of using

Facebook to organize for hate is increased. This reduces the antisemites' effectiveness and might ultimately force them off the platform altogether.

When confronting blatant hate in the comments, it may be more effective to close the accounts of those posting the hate before shutting down the group as a whole. Where an innocent group is collecting hate, initial reports of complaints should be redirected to the group's administrator. Facebook should step in only if there is no response within a given period. There will, of course, be administrators who shelter hate. If complaints persist, at some point Facebook should undertake an audit of the administrator, which could result in a loss of administrative privileges. Requiring an account to be registered for twelve months before it can administer a group would greatly increase the incentive to moderate a group responsibly. Giving administrators the ability to refer complaints about which they are uncertain to an elected group of reviewer-volunteers or to Facebook staff would also help manage the role. An administrator who refers everything could be dismissed as ineffective.

Conclusions

The internet, particularly Web 2.0, provides great opportunities to communicate, share, coordinate and organise, but also extends these advantages to those wishing to spread hate. Combined with an online culture where anything goes, the internet can provide a platform for the nurture and growth of antisemitism.

Antisemitism is often based on misinformation and propaganda, such as conspiracy theories. Well-known hate sites provide a ready source of such material. Knowing these sites and recognizing their contents when reproduced on other sites or on campus would help in quickly identifying propaganda.

Popular social media sites like Facebook and YouTube can encourage antisemitism. Efforts to expose such antisemitism must be conducted and presented carefully lest they themselves end up promoting hate. Hateful content in social media should be reported to the

platform providers, who should be encouraged to do more than they have done to date.

Countering antisemitism online does not stop with reporting those who spread hate. Educational campaigns are needed, both online and on campus, to encourage students not just to stand by when hate is displayed. In many countries antisemitism is illegal. Even in the U.S., the first amendment limits government censorship. It does not prevent companies like Google and Facebook from deciding that they want a hate-free platform. They are free to implement their own policies to ban or remove hate, but this will only happen across all platforms if internet users demand it. The public must take a stand against hate.

The problem exists online because laws, processes, community understanding and values have not kept up with technology. Recognition of the problem must start on the campus. The response must involve both experts and student activists. And recognition alone cannot solve the problem. Students must be trained, equipped and provided with strategies and expert help if they are to play a role in reducing online antisemitism. Monitoring, training and coordination need to improve.

Combating online antisemitism is one of the major challenges in the fight against all forms of antisemitism and hate. It is perhaps the fight we are least equipped to handle, as many experts on antisemitism are not technologically savvy. There is also a reluctance to recognise younger experts, including those on campus. Given the urgency of the problem, the community and NGOs focused on antisemitism must embrace change. Young people must also accept the challenge. It cannot be left to others.

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