Antisemitism on mainstream social media after Hamas terror attack: A case study of online discourse and its impact on Jewish youth in Sweden

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ABSTRACT

Social media have created new opportunities for Jewish community-building and education but are also used to disseminate antisemitic content. Individuals and political actors from various ideological backgrounds exploit these platforms, while algorithms amplify such hate speech. The Hamas terrorist attack in Israel on 7 October 2023 intensified this issue, leading to a surge in Israel-related antisemitism online. With this case study, we examine antisemitic discourse on the social media accounts of a Swedish Jewish youth organisation and its impact on the youths' engagement with these platforms following the attack and ensuing conflict. We draw on data from interviews, a focus group, and posts (n = 115) and comments (n = 2,964) from X and Instagram. The findings reveal how rising antisemitism, particularly the "Israelisation of antisemitism", affected young Jews, prompting self-censorship and withdrawal from unsafe online spaces. This study provides insights into the evolving nature of antisemitism in the digital age. It highlights the need for societal and technological responses to address the challenges posed by online hate speech.

KEYWORDS: antisemitism, extremism on social media, Hamas terror attack, Israeli–Palestinian conflict, Israelisation of antisemitism

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Introduction

The Internet and social media have helped create new communities for Jews and are widely used for learning about Jewish issues and conveying knowledge about Jews and Judaism to a broader society. However, research highlights how individuals and political actors across right-wing, left-wing, and extremist Islamist environments are using these platforms to disseminate antisemitic content (Cohen et al., 2021). Algorithms that curate platform content contribute to spreading and reinforcing antisemitic messages (Hübscher & von Mering, 2022). The Hamas terrorist attack in Israel on 7 October 2023 further exacerbated this issue. Hate speech targeting Jews has surged on social media, with a sharp rise in Israel-related antisemitism. A recent study by Rose and colleagues (2024) found that antisemitic content increased significantly on platforms like YouTube and alternative social media outlets in the week following the attack. This surge in online hostility not only promotes antisemitism but also has real-world consequences for those targeted. In Sweden, antisemitic hate crimes reported to the police have significantly increased since the 7 October attack (Brå, 2024). Additionally, a survey commissioned by the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities (Infostat, 2023) and a recent report by the Segerstedt Institute (Katzin & Rudberg, 2024) show that personal experiences of antisemitic incidents and fears surrounding antisemitism have risen, resulting in a partial withdrawal from non-Jewish acquaintances due to perceived misunderstanding or indifference and increased Jewish communal engagement and identity reaffirmation. Another study shows very similar responses among Jews in Germany (Shani et al., 2024). Several reports indicate rising levels of antisemitism worldwide, including in Scandinavia, in the context of the ongoing war in Gaza (Due Enstad, 2024).

In a recent article, Yael Silverstein and Caryn Block (2025) applied a microaggression framework to contemporary antisemitism on North American campuses, developing a taxonomy that highlights both overt and subtle forms of hostility. They distinguished four categories: overt assault (physical or verbal attacks), micro-assaults (explicit slurs or threats), micro-insults (demeaning comments based on stereotypes or conspiracy tropes), and micro-invalidations (denial of antisemitism, dual-loyalty accusations, exclusion from diversity initiatives, or delegitimisation of Israel). Silverstein and Block have demonstrated that subtle manifestations are pervasive and closely linked to psychological distress, often as strongly as overt aggression.

Researchers have noted that antidemocratic extremist landscapes have emerged in Sweden and internationally in recent years, as alliances between different extremist actors have strengthened and new constellations have emerged. Extremist actors systematically interpret conflicts and social conditions using conspiratorial models of interpretation. Others have shown how social media – by providing a space for the dissemination of hate symbols, memes, and conspiracy theories – has contributed to the mainstreaming of fringe extremist ideologies and discourses (Törnberg & Törnberg, 2024). Meanwhile, Monika Schwarz-Friesel (2020: 314–315) has emphasised the societal mainstream's role in disseminating

antisemitism and criticised what she labels a "marginalisation of mainstream antisemitism" and that empirical research on mainstream antisemitism is being ignored. While acknowledging the antisemitism of the fringes, she stressed that "the main multipliers and propagators of present-day antisemitism are the mainstream websites" (Schwarz-Friesel, 2019: 329). Together with Jehuda Reinharz, Schwarz-Friesel has noted,

> in both the past and the present, negative attitudes toward Jews and images of them as the enemy are by no means found only on the margins of society; they occur frequently among mainstream individuals who are educated, comfortably situated economically, and not politically radical. (Schwarz-Friesel & Reinharz 2017: 1)

This does not necessarily contradict Törnberg and Törnberg's (2024) conclusion that social media have contributed to channelling antisemitic views held by radical fringe groups to the mainstream. However, while social media certainly works to popularise and normalise radical views, Schwarz-Friesel (2020: 333) has claimed that antisemitism, rather than expressing a protest against modernity associated with radical anti-establishment sentiments, is a "cultural category that has been communicated for many centuries and is deeply embedded in the societal mindset and behavior and has become an integral element of Western culture". This does not, of course, mean that antisemitism cannot – and indeed to a large extent has – been exploited as a means of mobilising against modernity or, for that matter, the establishment; one of its defining features is precisely its function as a vehicle for political mobilisation, a function that would not operate were it not already grounded in a widespread and entrenched social recognisability. Another recent study (Miehling, 2024) has analysed and compared antisemitic hate speech on X and fringe communities on Telegram and has identified recurring patterns of antisemitism and examined the roles of key actors, including right-wing extremists, Islamist groups, and influential "superspreaders". The study demonstrates how antisemitism adapts to different platform logics: While expressions on X tend to be more coded and subtle, Telegram provides a relatively unregulated space for explicit and organised antisemitic discourse. It also highlights the multimodal character of such communication, showing how text, images, and memes reinforce dissemination (Miehling, 2024).

The Internet and social media are now the main arena for the dissemination of antisemitic messages. Schwarz-Friesel's (2020) study examining antisemitism on social media highlights how Israel, perceived as the "collective Jew", serves as the primary target for antisemitism online. Therefore, a prevalent form of antisemitism today centres around Israel, which is seen as a representation of Judaism, Jewish identity, and existence. This "Israelisation of antisemitism" is marked, among other things, by the projection of traditional anti-Jewish stereotypes onto the state of Israel (Schwarz-Friesel, 2020; Weimann & Masri, 2022). An example of this is when Israel, Israelis, or Zionists are portrayed as greedy, vengeful child murderers, or accused of colluding with the devil or plotting to dominate the world. Another is different forms of Holocaust denial

and distortion. One study demonstrates that Holocaust denial and distortion were prevalent across five online platforms in the wake of Hamas's attack, with an even higher concentration and more extreme manifestations found on platforms such as Gab and 4chan; nonetheless, the report also indicates that such content is present in the comment sections of mainstream platforms such as YouTube (Jikeli, 2023). Another study (Becker, 2018) has examined anti-Israel projections in online reader comments on the German weekly *Die Zeit* and the British daily *The Guardian* during the Israeli military operations of 2012 and 2014. Drawing on a corpus of more than 6,000 comments, the author focused on forms of Israel-related antisemitism that deploy analogies between Israeli policies and historical crimes associated with the commentators' national pasts – National Socialism in Germany and colonialism or apartheid in the British context. Becker found that such analogies function not only as instruments of demonisation but also as strategies of self-exculpation, allowing commentators to relativise their own society's historical guilt and to reaffirm a positive sense of national identity. The study further points to a gradual de-tabooing of antisemitic discourse in ostensibly liberal mainstream public spheres (Becker, 2018).

According to Fladmoe and Nadim (2017), exposure to hate speech may cause people to withdraw from digital discussions, thereby restricting freedom of expression. As Haanshuus (2023) has pointed out, experiences of hate speech can lead to negative consequences such as fear, emotional pain, and feelings of vulnerability and exclusion from society. However, research also indicates that, despite these negative impacts, exposure to hate speech can sometimes result in increased engagement and participation in public debate (Awan & Zempi, 2016; Gelber & McNamara, 2016; Haanshuus, 2024). Nevertheless, research on antisemitism on mainstream social media is still in its early stages, and there is a significant lack of understanding of how it affects Jews and their use of these platforms.

This study aims to increase knowledge about antisemitic discourse on mainstream social media after Hamas's attack, focusing on the experiences of Swedish Jews during the aftermath of the attack and the subsequent war. This research uses a case study of a Jewish youth organisation to explore antisemitic discourse on the organisation's social media accounts and how it affected the youths' engagement with social media after the terrorist attack on 7 October and the ensuing conflict. The study draws on data from interviews, a focus group, and posts (n = 115) and comments (n = 2,964) from the organisation's Instagram and X accounts.

Theory: Antisemitic beliefs, stereotypes, and conspiracy theories

This study departs from sociologist Helen Fein's widely accepted definition which characterises antisemitism as a structure of hostile beliefs towards Jews which can be expressed both on a discursive level as attitudes and on a practical level as actions (Fein, 1987: 67).

Antisemitism has always been characterised by a paradoxical combination of deeply irrational beliefs and recurring, predictable prejudices. Jews have been accused of the most improbable crimes: the murder of Christ, the desecration of the Eucharist, the ritual murder of Christian children, the poisoning of wells, practising witchcraft, making secret pacts with the Devil, and conspiring to undermine Christianity itself (Trachtenberg, 1984; Wistrich, 1999).

Although the racist theories that were used to justify colonial oppression, slavery, and economic exploitation did indeed lay the ground for race antisemitism, it was only one component of modern antisemitism according to which "the Jew" was not merely an inferior race but an existential anomaly, standing outside the supposed natural order of humanity. In the Nazi worldview, the destruction of the Jews was not only necessary for securing the purity of the German race; it was also framed as an act of salvation for humanity. This went far beyond conventional prejudices or hatred of the "other".

The Nazis drew on centuries-old religious and cultural narratives – myths that had been embedded in European folklore for over two thousand years. These ideas did not disappear with modernity; they were secularised, adapted, and disseminated in new forms. They exploited existing fears and fuelled new hatreds. Long before the Nazis, Jews had been cast as theological opponents of Christianity. In sermons, theatre, literature, and art, they were depicted across Europe as malevolent figures – portrayals unparalleled in their scale and intensity when compared to other groups. Judeophobia was deeply embedded in European culture.

As several scholars have demonstrated, modern antisemitism builds on these foundations, adding new layers of demonisation. The Jew became a corrupter, a seducer, a violator – one who contaminates, defiles, and destroys. Several scholars have emphasised how these antisemitic myths and stereotypes, such as Jews being disloyal, greedy, or conspiratorial, have not only persisted across different societies but have also been reshaped to fit prevailing cultural anxieties and how they serve specific political and social functions, from justifying discrimination to rationalising mass violence (Andersson, 2000; Fein, 1987; Laqueur, 2006; Wistrich, 1999).

Case, material, and method

The study was conducted using a case study design (Flyvbjerg, 2003), combining analyses of three types of material: in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and comment fields from the social media platforms X and Instagram. The case examined is a Jewish youth organisation in Sweden that uses social media platforms. The youth organisation and its members have been treated anonymously on the grounds that we judged that the interview responses collected would contain information that could be considered sensitive, namely relating to religion, ethnic affiliation, and political opinion. As neither the name of the organisation nor those of the individual respondents would add anything substantive to the study, we therefore decided to anonymise the investigation.

As far as we can ascertain, this has not entailed any consequences for the study. The youth organisation, dedicated to empowering Jewish children and youth in Sweden, uses social media to foster a sense of Jewish community and learning, share knowledge about Judaism, and raise awareness of and combat antisemitism. The selection of the specific Jewish youth organisation as the focus of the case study is justified by the fact that it is a well-known Jewish organisation in Sweden for using social media to promote Jewish community and learning and to spread knowledge about Judaism and counter antisemitism. It thus constitutes a so-called "critical case" (Flyvbjerg, 2003).

The organisation has approximately 2,000 members and several local associations throughout Sweden. The study focuses on the social media team, consisting of nine young participants who were also members or deputy members of the governing board during the examined period. Within the organisation, the work group is divided into two teams, one for each social media platform, that communicate through a chat group. The case study design of the organisation's activity on social media enabled an exploration of both antisemitic discourses on the organisation's social media accounts *and* how it affected the youths' engagement with social media after the terrorist attack on 7 October and the ensuing conflict.

Material

A focus group interview was conducted with the social media team ($n = 9$). The aim of the interview was to allow participants to engage on their own terms, fostering dialogue and interaction within the focus group, enabling spontaneous thoughts and reflections to emerge through their collective dynamics (Kreuger & Casey, 2000). The focus group interview lasted one and a half hours and was exploratory in nature, aimed at providing both a broad and deep understanding of how the organisation has engaged with social media before and after the Hamas terrorist attack, as well as the participants' perceptions and experiences of this work.

We also carried out individual in-depth interviews with seven of the nine members of the social media team. The interviews were conducted inspired by a narrative interview technique, the purpose of which is to make it easy for participants to share their experiences and emotions related to specific events (Riessman, 2004). This meant that the interviews focused on concrete events and the participants' experiences of the events, for example: "Could you tell me about how the time after the Hamas terror attack affected your work on social media?" Each interview lasted between one and two hours and was audio recorded. All interviews were conducted in Swedish and transcribed verbatim. All quotations from interviews cited in this article are translations from Swedish into English by the authors.

Material from the organisation's social media platforms, X and Instagram, was collected manually, with posts (tweets) and subsequent comments (replies) copied and compiled into a new document. All posts and comments were collected from one month before the terrorist attack until one month after (7 September–6

October & 7 October–7 November 2023). This sampling strategy was chosen specifically to be able to make comparisons between before and after the terrorist attack. A total of 115 posts and 2,964 comments were collected and analysed.

Analysis

The material was analysed using the MAXQDA software, which facilitates both qualitative and quantitative analysis. The analysis was guided by the following questions:

- What types of posts and comments appear on the organisation's social media channels, and how have they evolved since the terrorist attack and the subsequent war?
- What factors are considered before and after the organisation publishes social media posts, and how have these considerations changed since the terrorist attack and the subsequent war?
- How did young people experience their use of social media after 7 October, and in what ways have the events affected them and their activities?

The analysis of the focus group interview and the individual interviews was carried out in three main steps, guided by Tavory and Timmerman's (2014) abductive approach, which emphasises the interaction between empirical data and the researcher's theoretical perspectives, specifically regarding antisemitism in this case (primarily referencing Andersson, 2000; Fein, 1987; Schwarz-Friesel, 2020; and Wistrich, 1999). In the initial step, the material was read in its entirety, with preliminary insights being noted. In the second step, we coded the material and merged similar codes to identify patterns. By coding, we mean tagging significant units of meaning in the raw data and organising it into meaningful groups. Once all significant units of meaning had been initially coded and collated, we refocused the analysis at the broader level of themes. This involved organising the different codes into analytical themes. Through the themes, we aimed to capture more general patterns in the data in relation to the research questions. In practice, this was achieved by developing a thematic map, tagging statements with preliminary codes and initial themes. During this phase, we paid attention to contradictions, tensions, and inconsistencies within the material.

The last step involved revisiting the whole dataset again to change, modify, and regroup initial codes, patterns, and interpretations (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014).

For the social media material, we began with an initial coding of a portion of the content to gain an overview and understanding of its characteristics. From this initial coding, a code structure was developed that drew on the content of the material as well as previous research on antisemitic beliefs, stereotypes, and conspiracy theories (Andersson, 2000; Fein, 1987; Wistrich, 1999). The code structure further incorporated codes that did not directly reflect antisemitic expressions, such as "anti-Israeli content", "social discussions", and "criticism

of the organisation". For instance, a comment might combine various types of antisemitic expressions with criticism of Israel or political critiques. In such instances, the comment was classified under each relevant content category. In instances where well-known antisemitic expressions were not clearly discernible in comments criticising or condemning Israel, these were coded solely as anti-Israel content.

For this analysis, we have opted to focus exclusively on comments from X, as the organisation's Instagram account was moderated to remove threats and hateful comments. In the final step, we revisited the material, refined and reorganised our initial interpretations, and connected these insights to existing research and theoretical frameworks.

At first, we conducted separate analyses of the interviews and the social media material. To assess how the events of 7 October influenced the youth organisation's social media usage, we divided the social media material into two segments: one covering the period before the attack and the other following it. In the second step, we conducted a cross-analysis of the results to derive broader conclusions. Every step of the analysis was sensitised by previous research and theories outlined in the introductory section.

Ethical considerations

The design of the study has been tested and approved by the Ethical Review Authority (2024-01118-01). Throughout the process of conducting and reporting the study, we have prioritised the careful collection and handling of sensitive personal data to ensure that research subjects are not adversely affected.

Findings: The activity on social media

The following section outlines the findings from our social media comment analysis, starting with a general summary of post and comment activity and then moving into a detailed examination of the comment content itself. Following this, we present the findings from the interviews.

Social media engagement and interactions in social media comments

What types of comments do the posts from the youth organisation typically generate? The comment sections on X and Instagram feature text comments, so-called memes (images, video clips, or other content shared and circulated online), GIFs (simple animated images), and links to news articles, videos, and other online resources.

There is a notable disparity between the organisation's usage of different social media platforms and the responses generated by the posts. The organisation's account on X primarily serves as a communication channel to engage with the surrounding community, media, and other stakeholders, aiming to inform and influence discussions about Jewish youth and Jewish life in Sweden. Additionally, the X account serves to spark discussions and articulate the organisation's

stances on a range of topics, especially those aimed at promoting Jewish life and countering antisemitism in Sweden.

The organisation primarily uses its Instagram account to connect with its members (Jewish youth in Sweden), occasionally allowing individual members to participate. Comments on Instagram primarily come from individuals affiliated with Jewish communities. This is often evident in their shared experiences, such as expressing what it means to be Jewish following the Hamas attack or leaving supportive comments for the organisation and showing appreciation for its posts. On the organisation's X account, the debate tends to be quite heated, often featuring aggressive and hateful rhetoric in the comments, whereas the tone on Instagram is generally calmer and more respectful.

Antisemitism and hate speech on X and Instagram before and after the terror attack

Even prior to the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023, the difference in content and tone between the two platforms was already apparent. In other aspects, the difference between the period before and after the attack was substantial. Prior to the attack, comments on X often centred around discussions on factual issues relevant to the organisation's posts. Comments containing antisemitic and hateful rhetoric were also prevalent, particularly those reflecting traditional right-wing views, such as conspiracy theories portraying Jews as orchestrating global political and economic control, alongside depictions of Jews as an alien, unassimilable group undermining national purity and cohesion (Mudde, 2000; Wodak, 2015). However, the prevalence of such comments was significantly lower compared to the surge seen after the terrorist attack.

Activity in the comment sections of both platforms saw a notable increase following the attack. In the month leading up to the attack, the organisation's 17 posts on Instagram generated a total of 113 comments, whereas its 26 posts on X accumulated 285 comments. In the month following the attack, the organisation's 18 posts on Instagram attracted a remarkable 1,052 comments, while its 54 posts on X generated 1,514 comments. This reflects a staggering increase of 431 per cent in comments on X and 831 per cent on Instagram. Although the organisation's activity on Instagram remained relatively stable, the increase on X can likely be explained by the organisation nearly doubling its number of posts.

In the month leading up to 7 October 2023, comments on the organisation's X account primarily focused on social matters and other relevant issues that generally did not receive antisemitic or hateful responses. Out of the 285 comments coded across all the organisation's threads on X during this period, various antisemitic expressions were identified in 39 instances (14%). The antisemitic content identified primarily consisted of conspiracy theories, particularly the age-old belief that Jews are colluding with the Devil (Wistrich, 1999). Additionally, the "Great Replacement" theory, a conspiracy often circulated in far-right circles, asserts that Jews are orchestrating immigration to Europe with the intention of undermining or destroying European or Western peoples, or the white race (see, e.g., Askanius, 2021; Davey & Ebner, 2019; Haanshuus & Ihlebæk,

2021). Among the stereotypes encountered, the portrayal of Jews as deceitful or dishonest was the most prevalent. This notion has medieval origins and has a long-standing tradition in Sweden as well (Andersson, 2000; Fein, 1987). The organisation faced criticism for distancing itself from the Sweden Democrats.

Beginning on 7 October, the character of the organisation's comment section on X underwent a significant change. The previously mentioned conspiracy theories persisted and saw an increase from 11 to 71 comments. A significant difference was that many of the comments after 7 October included a clear element of hatred towards Israel, which was absent in the month leading up to the war. This trend also characterised other forms of antisemitism observed after 7 October.

Another notable shift is the increased prevalence of comments that can be classified as anti-Israeli. In the month prior to 7 October, there was only one comment of this nature, whereas in the month following, it became the most prevalent type of comment (n = 314). The qualitative analysis of the study reveals that these comments often, but not always, contained clear antisemitic messages. Some comments expressed what could be considered legitimate criticism of Israel. However, the overall tone was often heated and filled with threats and hatred towards Israel.

In the month following the attack, overt antisemitic messages appeared 190 times in the comments section, a stark increase from the 39 occurrences recorded before the attack. This reflects a 387 per cent increase in overt antisemitic expressions. These comments often featured the projection of long-standing antisemitic beliefs onto Israel.

Old beliefs in new contexts

This section presents a selection of the most prominent content categories on X after the terrorist attack. The analysis focuses primarily on antisemitic content but also includes content related to Israel. The analysis was based on the 1,514 comments on X following the terrorist attack. Table 1 lists the categories presented in this section and the number of times comments in each category occurred on X before and after the attack.

Table 1 Content categories on X illustrated in the results

Content categories	Before the attack (7 Sept.–6 Oct.)	After the attack (7 Oct.–7 Nov.)
Hatred of Israel and Israel-related antisemitism	1	314
Conspiracy theories and myths about Jews	11	71
Medieval beliefs about Jews	5	23
Stereotypical representations of Jews	7	45
Relativisation and distortion of the Holocaust	7	26

Hatred of Israel and Israel-related antisemitism

Hatred of Israel and Israel-related antisemitism constitute the largest category of comments in the organisation's comments section on X. This is exemplified by attributing responsibility for Israeli policies to the Jewish youth organisation or to Jews in general. An example of this occurred on 11 October 2023, when the organisation published a post about a minute of silence for the victims of a terrorist attack and received the comment: "Minute of silence for child murderers". The comment implies that the victims of the terrorist attack were child murderers, a slogan frequently used in remarks regarding Israel's actions in Gaza. Victims are blamed for civilian casualties resulting from Israel's military actions, whether as Israelis or as Jews. Several other comments questioned the trauma experienced by Jews (n = 34), often by relativising the terrorist attack and projecting blame onto Israel. Comments expressing hatred towards Israel for alleged war crimes, genocide, and ethnic cleansing (n = 34), or branding it as a terrorist state (n = 14), were also frequently observed. Several comments (n = 21) drew parallels between Jews or Israelis and Nazis. Some comments (n = 14) characterised the terrorist attack as legitimate resistance against Israeli oppression and included anti-Zionist slogans like "Zionism equals terror". This category also contained hateful anti-Zionist remarks targeting Zionism beyond the context of Israel. A common phenomenon is depicting Jews who criticise Israel as "good" or "real" Jews, contrasting them with Zionists or Israelis (n = 25). This includes statements and memes likening Israel's behaviour to that of Hamas and claiming that Israel functions as an apartheid regime. Slogans like "Go home to Israel", when directed at Jews in Sweden, stem from the belief that Jews do not belong in Sweden because they are considered "foreign" for various reasons. The belief that Jews are un-Swedish and foreign is an antisemitic notion with deep historical roots (Andersson, 2000; Bachner, 1999). However, one commentator argued that Jews do not belong in Israel either and should be relocated to ghettos in Poland.

Relativisation and distortion of the Holocaust

Several comments contain a relativisation and distortion of the Holocaust (n = 26). By comparing Israel's actions against Palestinians to Nazi Germany's treatment of Jews, the Holocaust is relativised, and Israel is demonised. Figure 1 illustrates an example of a common meme posted in the comment fields.

Figure 1 A meme that exemplifies the relativisation and distortion of the Holocaust

Comments: The meme was featured in a comment on 14 October and seeks to equate the fate of Jews during the Holocaust with the current situation of Palestinians in Gaza.

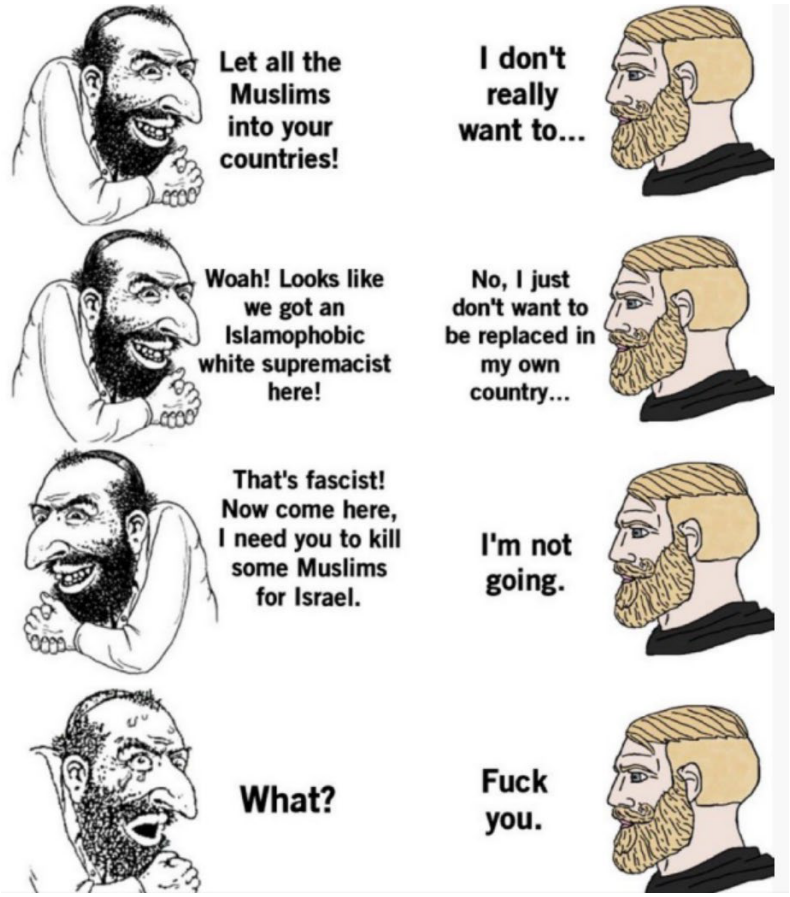
Conspiracy theories and myths about Jews

Conspiracy theories and myths about Jews are also present in the comment section (n = 71). The most prevalent variations are different iterations of the "Great Replacement" (n = 26). The image in Figure 2 is a common representation that illustrates both the conspiracy theory and stereotypes about Jewish appearance and traits, including a distinct nose, a demonic gaze, and greed. There are also conspiracy theories suggesting that Jewish conspiracies, led by financier George Soros, the Rothschild banking family, or the Bonnier family, control the world's finances and media or are behind major phenomena like the Covid-19 pandemic and the LGBTQI+ movement. The example below illustrates various similar notions:

> 16.1 million jews are dictation 10 000 000 000 people's life with garbage as lgbtq, trangender, vegan, atheist, blm, settlements asholes, Bonnier, Goldman shack bank sitting USA government, AFA, ANTIFA, killed Jesus, george Soros, Roshild, illuminati, the freemasons + evil [SIC!]

In this type of commentary, George Soros and other named Jews serve as symbols of Jewish power, purportedly controlling the liberal forces in Europe and the US and influencing them to act according to their desires.

Figure 2 A meme that illustrates the "Great Replacement" conspiracy theory



Comments: The meme in the image exemplifies the far-right conspiracy theory of the "Great Replacement" and was referenced in a comment on 11 October.

Stereotypical representations of Jewish characteristics

Stereotypical representations of Jewish characteristics were present in 45 of the comments made following the attack. As noted above, these comments were frequently intertwined with conspiracy theories as well as anti-Israeli sentiments. The predominant stereotype was that Jews are deceitful and cunning. It was frequently asserted that Jews were "knitting their sacrificial cardigan" in reference to the terrorist attack and the ensuing war.

Medieval beliefs about Jews

While conspiracy theories, such as those related to the Great Replacement, primarily circulate among right-wing extremists, various medieval beliefs

about Jews are also propagated from other sources (n = 23). These include variations of medieval myths about Jewish collusion with the Devil, along with the "blood libel" or blood myth in the context of criticising Israel's actions in Gaza. According to the blood myth, Jews engage in ritualistic murders of non-Jews (especially children) to use their blood. This myth exists in various forms and is spread through both right-wing and Islamist propaganda (Teter, 2020). For instance, a user commented on the organisation's post with a text meme on 19 December 2023:

> The baby who was burned alive is now part of depraved Israeli marriage rituals, they take photos and stab it as a symbol for all Palestinian babies they want to kill. Ben Gvir, a top member of Netanyahu's government, has joined in this genocide ritual.

Alongside new iterations of conspiracy theories, myths, and ideas about Jewish deceit, power, and alienation, there are also comments that reflect old notions, such as Jews being dirty, despising non-Jews and being indifferent to their suffering. These long-standing ideas are often framed within a context that is critical of Israel. Previous research indicates that this type of Israel-related antisemitism is becoming more prevalent (Schwarz-Friesel, 2020). As we will explore, this type of antisemitism was especially challenging for the young members of the Jewish organisation, as they struggled to differentiate between legitimate criticism of Israel and antisemitism disguised as such.

Before and after 7 October: Experiences of being on social media

How did the social media team members feel about using social media after 7 October, and in what ways have the reactions on social media impacted them and their activities? In this section, we present the findings from the interviews organised around four themes. The members perceived a significant change on social media before and after 7 October, recognising that after the attack, they had to learn how to manage evolving hate storms of antisemitism. The Israelisation of antisemitism they experienced on social media left them feeling unsafe and insecure and was described as the most challenging form of hatred. The elevated tone and hostile atmosphere on social media left no margin for error in the public sphere, resulting in significant pressure and an overwhelming workload. The hatred that the members experienced led them to avoid public spaces where they felt unsafe, both online and offline, while simultaneously feeling an increased responsibility to engage in the debates. As a result, they experienced both heightened exclusion and increased engagement.

A surge of antisemitism after 7 October

During the interviews, the members spoke about the aftermath of the terrorist attack as a difficult time to cope with. They were confronted with a surge of antisemitism, often manifesting itself in new forms. Several of the members

noted that the antisemitism they had previously encountered in their work with the organisation's social media seemed primarily to originate from what they perceived as right-wing extremist sources. They had learnt to manage this type of antisemitism from their "regulars", as they jokingly referred to them. In contrast, after the attack, antisemitism emerged from multiple directions simultaneously, and the members discovered that the comment sections were filled with hatred directed at Israel and Zionists, often manifesting in antisemitic forms.

While the members of the social media team grappled with their own feelings regarding the terrorist attack, they also faced antisemitic hate storms in comments and instant messages, which not only increased their workload but also took an emotional toll on them. Many of the members described how it negatively impacted their private lives as well. Some have lost friends because of the polarised conflict and often encountered silence and a lack of understanding from those around them following the terrorist attack. Several members expressed that "everything was turned upside down" after the attack, and they quickly realised that nothing would ever be the same.

The Israelisation of antisemitism and its consequences

Our examination of social media revealed that Israel acts as a projection surface for antisemitic concepts, a conclusion that aligns with Schwarz-Friesel's (2020) findings. In the analysis of the members' experiences on social media, it was the pervasive expressions of hatred towards Israel and Israel-related antisemitism that they found most challenging to navigate. Many of the members felt that they understood where the line was drawn, yet they struggled to address antisemitism without the impression of taking sides in the conflict. Others expressed difficulty in distinguishing between criticism of Israel, hatred towards Israel, and antisemitism, which affected their ability to address Israel-related accusations directed at them.

When criticism of Israel, frequently accompanied by antisemitic undertones, was directed at the members, they felt as if they were being accused of Israel's actions and drawn into political discussions, despite the organisation's stance of political neutrality. Many of the members described the intensified tone, hatred towards Israel, and collective blaming of Jews as a new phenomenon that they needed to learn to navigate. One of the members illustrated what it felt like to come across comments about Israel:

> While it doesn't necessarily mean they wish me harm, that's how I feel. That's how my mind perceives it. I perceive it as a threat. It's quite challenging. It's been mentally taxing. There's a lot of shaming directed at Jews and Israel, which is really tough. (Interview informant H, 13-08-2024)

The members reported that the pervasive hate and aggressive atmosphere on social media intensified their feelings of insecurity and the sense of being threatened, leading them to remain vigilant. They felt scrutinised and labelled as alarmists whenever they acknowledged the antisemitism, and when this happened repeatedly, they started to doubt their own perceptions.

No margin for mistake in the public sphere: Pressure and an unreasonable workload

For the focus group, the terrorist attack and the ensuing war established a new context that required them to adapt their social media management strategies. The group began to systematically record and report threats and hateful comments. All posts had to be meticulously reviewed before publication. Adaptations were necessary to reflect current developments, and each formulation underwent careful consideration. The team became more cautious with each publication, as some of the members noted that there was no longer any "margin for error". On Instagram, the social media team felt compelled to moderate and remove antisemitic and hateful comments to uphold their responsibility to both the account's visitors and their members, whereas they opted to retain the comments on X as a sort of evidence. The different approaches were due to the differing functions of the two platforms. They sought to establish an antisemitism-free environment on Instagram for their members and those interested in Jewish life. Conversely, the comment sections on X became a direct reflection of antisemitic sentiments. On X, the hate was viewed as more pervasive and intense than on Instagram, prompting the team managing the X account to shift from a structured division of tasks to an approach described by one member as "whoever can make it through the day gets involved" (Interview informant C, 13-05-2024). They also tried to reduce the amount of time each individual spent on the platform. Despite the team's changes in working methods and practices, their commitment remained strong. "We are still fighting against antisemitism", one of the members stated in an interview, "but we are questioning whether it's actually worth it" (Interview informant E, 28-08-2024).

Increased exclusion and engagement

Research indicates that exposure to online hate can result in fear, feelings of vulnerability, and social exclusion, but it may also foster greater engagement in public debate (Awan & Zempi, 2016; Gelber & McNamara, 2016; Haanshuus, 2024). Similar patterns also emerged from the interviews conducted with the young participants in this study. In the interviews, the participants expressed that navigating social media was both challenging and stressful for them. Many of them experienced mental health issues, and some even took sick leave as a result. Feeling a loss of control on social media is a common response to online hate storms (Czymmek, 2022). Consequently, many of the members found themselves increasingly drawn to Jewish communities that, unlike social media, provided a sense of self-control, allowing them to avoid the constant threat of unexpected attacks. As a result, several of the team members felt as if they wanted to withdraw from public spaces.

Although the members spoke about withdrawing from specific social environments, they also expressed a sense of responsibility towards their peers in the Jewish community to engage in public debates by remaining active on social media, highlighting and responding to antisemitism. Many of the members

experienced this duality and conflicting emotions simultaneously. The members also felt that there was a constant interaction between events on social media and those occurring in the offline world. For many of the members, their engagement with the organisation's social media accounts heightened feelings of insecurity in other environments. For instance, one of the members shared that his friends had posted comments on social media supporting Palestine on the day of the terrorist attack, without mentioning the terror attack. Another member that she felt pressured by her classmates to express support for Palestine on social media, which negatively affected her motivation to study and engage in student activities. This illustrates how posts, comments, and stances taken in the context of the war on social media threatened personal friendships.

Discussion and conclusions

The purpose of this study is to contribute knowledge about antisemitic discourse on mainstream social media after Hamas's attack, and how it affects young Jews. We have examined how these events have affected the social media activity of a Jewish youth organisation and the subsequent impact on the daily lives of its members. The findings build upon research on the spread and impact of antisemitism on social media. Prior studies have highlighted how mainstream social media platforms serve as arenas for the dissemination and amplification of antisemitic discourse, with content shaped by ideological actors and mechanisms that reinforce hate speech (Miehling, 2024; Törnberg & Törnberg, 2024; Webman & Naamat, 2020). Researchers have also argued that negative attitudes toward Jews are not confined to politically radical groups at the margins of society but are frequently found within mainstream society (Schwarz-Friesel & Reinharz, 2017). In particular, researchers have noted how antisemitism in online spaces often manifests through the Israelisation of antisemitism, in which traditional antisemitic tropes are projected onto the state of Israel, blurring the boundaries between political critique and Jew hatred (Jikeli, 2023; Schwarz-Friesel, 2020). The surge in antisemitism following Hamas's attack on 7 October 2023, as demonstrated in this study, reflects a broader pattern identified in previous research, where geopolitical events serve as catalysts for intensified online hostility toward Jews (Rose et al., 2024).

Moreover, this study confirms that social media not only function as a site for antisemitic discourse but also directly affect the individuals and communities targeted. Previous research suggests that exposure to hate speech can lead to self-censorship, withdrawal from online spaces, and broader implications for civic engagement and social belonging (Fladmoe & Nadim, 2017; Haanshuus, 2023; Katzin & Rudberg, 2024). These insights provide a foundation for further discussion on how antisemitic discourse evolves in digital environments and how it impacts the everyday lives of young Jews in Sweden.

Israelisation of antisemitism

The case study reveals that following the terrorist attack on 7 October, there has been both an increase and a shift in the nature of antisemitic comments on the youth organisation's accounts on the social media platforms X and Instagram compared to the period before the attack. The rise in Israel-related antisemitic hate speech aimed at the youth organisation aligns with general trends identified by several researchers, indicating that Jew-hatred often targets Israel as a symbol of Judaism (see, e.g., Rose et al., 2024; Schwarz-Friesel, 2020; Weimann & Masri, 2022). Antisemitism is continually evolving, and one of its defining features is the transformation of historical tropes into new manifestations (Weimann & Masri, 2022). The analysis of the comments on the organisation's X account reveals that much of the antisemitism present can be considered a mutation, described as an "Israelisation of antisemitism", where antisemitism is intertwined with discussions related to Israel.

Initially, the comments on social media were marked by Israel-related antisemitism, where criticism of Israel included distinct antisemitic assertions. Additionally, there were several hateful comments in which the level of antisemitism was challenging to assess, including allegations of genocide, claims that "Israel murders children", and statements like "Zionism is terrorism". While these comments might be considered offensive because of their hateful tone, they do not automatically qualify as antisemitic. Although the hatred aimed at Israel and Israelis may not always be antisemitic, the comments section of the organisation's social media account does include threats and hostility that would likely be deemed unacceptable if directed at other groups. It is also evident that many of the comments criticising Israel align with antisemitic thought patterns. Considering the historical context of antisemitism and the results of the study, it is important to closely examine the hatred towards Israel that is currently prevalent on social media. Schwarz-Friesel and Reinharz (2017) argued that antisemitism is not solely propagated by extremist movements but also functions as an embedded cultural category, where mainstream individuals – without radical political affiliations – contribute to the spread of antisemitic ideas through expressions of hostility towards Israel. While this study has not examined which specific users are responsible for antisemitic comments on X, and therefore cannot draw definitive conclusions on this matter, the findings nonetheless indicate a shift in how hatred is expressed. Both the analysis of comments on the youth organisation's X account and the testimonies of its members suggest that antisemitic remarks and hostility toward Israel were increasingly coming from actors beyond their "regulars", namely right-wing extremist groups. This highlights the need for further empirical research to better understand contemporary antisemitism on mainstream social media, particularly with a focus on the individuals behind it.

The impact of hatred on social media on everyday life

Another key finding of the study is the insight it offers into the impact of this hatred on Jewish youth. The hatred towards Israel and Israel-related antisemitism caused Jewish youth to feel insecure and unsafe, as they were not only identified as Jews but also linked to Israel, regardless of their personal views. The members struggled to address this hybrid form of antisemitism, which changed the organisation's use of social media and led to increased caution and self-censorship. It also impacted the way in which the members used social media in their private lives, often leading them to self-exclude from environments and contexts they perceived as unsafe.

Prior research indicates that many Jews perceive social media as the platform where they feel most vulnerable to antisemitism (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2019; Haanshuus, 2023). In the wake of the attack and during the ongoing war, social media has become a hostile and unsafe environment for Jewish youth. Additionally, participants noted a distinct correlation between social media events and real-world occurrences. Events on social media impact young people in various contexts, contributing to a heightened sense of insecurity in their daily lives. While the young participants in our case study were somewhat accustomed to handling antisemitism due to their role in the social media team in the Jewish youth organisation, the events following 7 October created an overwhelming and frightening new reality. More research is needed to understand how the situation impacts young Jews who are not part of such a Jewish community.

In conclusion, this study has provided insight into the evolving nature of antisemitism in the digital age and its effects on Jewish youth. While social media offer valuable platforms for education and community building, they have also become spaces where hate speech proliferates. This case study offers a novel understanding of how antisemitism has shifted in the wake of the Hamas terrorist attack and the subsequent war and how these shifts affect young Jews in their daily lives. Addressing the challenges posed by online antisemitism requires not only technological solutions but also a deeper societal understanding of how this age-old prejudice manifests in contemporary discourse. In a Nordic context, where traditional antisemitic expressions explicitly directed at Jews have, since World War II, been socially unacceptable, it is particularly important that we learn to recognise when antisemitism mutates and assumes new disguises.

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