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INSTAGRAM:

Bad Influence

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Antisemitism Policy Trust is a registered charity focused on educating and empowering decision makers in the UK and across the world to effectively address antisemitism. The organisation has provided the secretariat to the All-Party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism for over a decade.

Community Security Trust (CST) is a UK charity that advises and represents the Jewish community on matters of antisemitism, terrorism, extremism and security. CST received charitable status in 1994 and is recognised by the Government and the Police as a best practice model of a minority-community security organisation.

The Woolf Institute The Woolf Institute is a charitable organisation based in Cambridge. With strong ties to the University of Cambridge, the Woolf Institute is dedicated to research, teaching, policy and public education work with a focus on Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities.”

MAIN FINDINGS

- **Antisemitism on Instagram is significantly associated with a trolling phenomenon on the platform. Trolling of this type is chaotic in nature and often characterised by an incoherent mix of images and phrases. Some content is explicitly and coherently antisemitic, some links to related themes (such as conspiracy theories) and some uses antisemitic phrases alongside other offensive but seemingly random images and phrases. It is antisemitic chaos.**
- **People exposed to antisemitism on Instagram are not necessarily searching for it. This is a case of antisemitic supply rather than demand. Antisemitic Instagram hashtags, alongside hashtags with demonstrable links to antisemitism, were viewed tens of thousands of times during our seven-week research period. Worryingly, the hashtags also generated thousands of likes.**
- **Similarly, antisemitism on Instagram has a strong association with anti-Israel attitudes. This builds on previous research that has provided evidence of a strong link between anti-Jewish and anti-Israel attitudes in real-world settings.**

BACKGROUND

Many people around the world will know Instagram as a photo- and video-sharing social media application. Launched in 2010, it has remarkable reach. Research compiled in 2019 for web platform Hootsuite¹ and other online data² suggest that:

- **One billion people use Instagram every month**
- **500 million people use Instagram Stories every day**
- **There were 27 million Instagram users in the UK as of June 2020.³**
- **63% of users log in at least once a day⁴**

- **Instagram users spend an average of 28 minutes per day on the platform**
- **The gender breakdown of users is fairly even: 52% female, 48% male⁵**

Given the size, reach and influence of Instagram, we wanted to better understand how antisemitism manifests and spreads across the platform. In order to do this, we used Pulsar Platform, a commercially available social media research tool. Though Instagram is a picture-based platform, the technology to analyse images remains in its infancy. Our focus was therefore on the hashtags that typically accompany images posted by users.

1. Christina Newberry (<https://blog.hootsuite.com/how-to-use-instagram-stories/>).

2. According to statista.com and sproutsocial.com.

3. Ibid.

4. pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/social-media/.

5. hootsuite.com/resources/the-state-of-digital-in-q3-2019 and www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/social-media/#who-uses-social-media.

EXPLORING ANTISEMITISM ON INSTAGRAM

Over the course of seven weeks between July and September 2020, we ran a search using 27 different hashtags. These included some that were unambiguously antisemitic (e.g. **#gasJews**); and other search terms that are not antisemitic per se but are strongly anti-Israel or anti-Zionist and may be found alongside antisemitic content (e.g. **#israhell**). Through this, we hoped to understand more about content which represents the very outer limit of strong but legitimate criticism of Israel. For example, how often criticism of Israel is observed in close proximity to unambiguously antisemitic content. The terms were drawn from expert input from the Community Security Trust (CST), Antisemitism Policy Trust (APT) and Pulsar Platform which conducted a preliminary search on our behalf.

Restrictions placed on researchers by Instagram meant that our data collection used our chosen search terms (i.e. our 27 hashtags) individually rather than in combination (as is permitted by other social media platforms).

It should also be noted that Pulsar (the market research company which offers use of Pulsar Platform) deleted duplicated posts to avoid double counting. This means that the examples we gathered for analysis were single posts that, in some cases, were shared multiple times, despite only being analysed once by our team.

In total, nearly 4,000 Instagram posts were collected which, according to Pulsar Platform (our research tool), gained 132,000 views in Instagram users' feeds during the seven-week research period.⁶

We do not suggest users were necessarily searching for this content, although some might have been. Similarly, we do not have the information from Instagram to determine the extent to which people's personal algorithms influence their search. However, our analysis suggests that such content is provided by the platform regardless of the users' intentions and chosen search terms. For antisemitic content, this would appear to represent supply rather than demand.⁷

6. The exact number was 3,768 Instagram posts.

7. Using the "actual impressions" component of Pulsar's "mentions by impressions" tool.

WHAT'S ON TREND IN ANTISEMITISM?

The 27 hashtags used in our search were chosen on the basis that they contain words or phrases that are known by APT, CST and other experts either to be antisemitic, or that may be associated frequently with antisemitism.

Table 1. Our 27 search terms

#fakejews	#jewishbanks	#jewishbitch
#filthyjew	#jewishcontrol	#jewworldorder
#gasjews	#jewfilth	#rothschildcontrol
#ihatejewstho	#jewjokes	#sorosfundedriots
#israelapartheid	#jewishmedia	#synagogueofsatan
#israhell	#jewishmoney	#zionazi
#israelhell	#jewmedia	#zionistagenda
#khazarianmafia	#jewsdid711	#zionistscum

As stated, we used these hashtags to build a dataset of nearly 4,000 Instagram posts.

We included hashtags in the list of 10, whether or not they related to antisemitism.

From these 4,000 posts, we identified the 10 hashtags that appeared most frequently. These were not necessarily in our original group of 27 hashtags used as our initial search terms, but were the 10 hashtags that actually appeared most frequently in the dataset generated by the search.

This top 10 hashtags list contained some antisemitic terms that were not anticipated in our original group of 27 hashtags (e.g. **#thegoyimknow**⁸) and some that are more indirectly, although frequently, associated with antisemitism (e.g. **#illuminati**⁹).

The top 10 hashtags appearing in our dataset were (in order of frequency):

#chemtrails	#thegoyimknow
#zionistagenda	#mkultra
#illuminati	#israhell
#5g	#pedogate
#deepstate	#humanrights

8. "Goyim" can be used as an offensive description of a non-Jewish person, 'reclaimed' here to suggest non-Jewish people know what Jewish people, stereotyped as a conspiratorial group, are supposedly plotting or planning.

9. A conspiracist term sometimes used by antisemites to point to a supposed Jewish conspiracy.

Only two of the 10 most common hashtags found within our dataset were from the initial group of 27 hashtags used to collect the data, namely **#israhell** and **#zionistagenda**. The other most common hashtags were almost all connected with conspiracy theories.¹⁰

To reiterate, 27 searches using 27 individual hashtags selected on the basis of being antisemitic or commonly associated with antisemitism resulted in a return of nearly 4,000 posts. Among these, hashtags associated with conspiracy theories were prevalent throughout. Of these, **#chemtrails** was observed more than any other single hashtag. The term “chemtrails” relates to the conspiracy theory that the white condensation trails left by high-flying aircraft in the sky are in fact chemical or biological agents used for nefarious purposes undisclosed to the general public.

This leads us to the key finding, that hashtags that are either antisemitic or commonly associated with antisemitism are often used alongside hashtags related to conspiracy theories. In the cases we observed, this included conspiracy theories concerning chemtrails, 5G and pedophilia.

We attempted to probe Instagram in order to understand whether sentiment analyses might yield interesting or useful findings.

Unfortunately, the technology is still in its infancy and requires further integration with Instagram’s platform before it can be used robustly. Instead, we dug deeper into the apparent overlap between hashtags related to antisemitism and conspiracy theories.

To summarise and clarify, because Instagram is so vast, the process of collecting data must begin with a set of search terms. These terms may be considered similar to bait used for fishing. Accordingly, we went ‘fishing’ for Instagram content with our 27 hashtags as ‘bait’. The ‘haul’ of Instagram data we gathered all included content in which our original 27 hashtags featured but were not necessarily the most frequently occurring. This was to be expected: it is akin to going looking for discussion of the 27 most popular British footballers and observing that the Argentinian footballer Lionel Messi is mentioned more than any of the 27 British names within the resulting dataset.

The next question for us was how to describe the “haul” of content. We decided that focusing on the use of hashtags by Instagram users would give us insight into the nature and extent of antisemitism across the platform.

10. We looked at a longer list of the 40 most commonly occurring hashtags and found a similar pattern.

11. An undisclosed calculation of visibility reported by Pulsar and presumed by the research team to be a proxy measure for distribution.

THE ANTISEMITISM CONSPIRACY NEXUS

When it comes to conspiracy theories, the most common Instagram posts in our dataset relate to chemtrails, the Illuminati, coronavirus, 5G and aliens. Some posts include references to religion and associated themes, sometimes with extracts from the Bible, sometimes with references to Satan.

Many of the posts are incoherent and defy easy explanation. Some of the more coherent contributions include news items, either written or shared, to promote pro-Palestinian or anti-Israel sentiment.

As stated, conspiracy theories and antisemitism appear to overlap on Instagram. One common feature of antisemitism identified on the platform is that it often appears in hashtags attached to a post that have no direct, or even indirect, relationship to that post's content.

In this way, antisemitic terms and tropes appear to be, in some cases, deployed almost randomly by users alongside other forms of discriminatory, hateful or conspiratorial hashtags. These posts can, of course, also act as a resource or gateway to further racist content.

As an example of content relating to conspiracy theory and antisemitism, we used one of the tools provided by Pulsar Platform¹¹ to find the most 'visible' post which contained both. It reads:

I love you so much guys!!! 🥰🙏❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️ Happy rising inmates. wishing you a fabulous day in the coronavirus infected satanic slave matrix soul harvesting farm... they are dividing and conquering Don't be deceived, unite people 🖐️ New world order loading...Protect yourself and your family #pedogate #illuminati #thegoyimknow #zionistagenda #theyarekillingus #bilderberggroup #nasalies #pray #chemtrails #vaccines #psyops #projectbluebeam #mkultra #deepstate #falofthecabal #newworldorderagenda #rockefeller #rothschild #epsteindidntkillhimself #stopbillgates #controledopposition #depopulation #endtimes #georgesoros #5g #humanrights #greatawakening #devilworshippers #satanicgovernments #falseflagoperations

TO HATE OR NOT TO HATE – DIGGING DEEPER INTO THE ANTISEMITIC CONSPIRACY OVERLAP

PART A

We sought to determine the extent of conspiracy theory-related content on Instagram by looking at the prevalence of the three most popular hashtags in our top ten (based on the results of our initial search) alongside antisemitic hashtags.

Over seven weeks, we collected 1,550 posts containing **#chemtrails** and one or more of our chosen antisemitic hashtags (one of the 27 hashtags used as the initial search terms for our data collection).

Given that Pulsar collects Instagram data in real time and offers a rolling total (material posted in the last 24 hours, over a period of seven weeks), it is safe to assume that over a year there would be approximately 11,500 visible posts containing **#chemtrails** and one of our search terms¹².

Similarly, based on this approach (the number of posts multiplied by 52/7), we estimate that over the course of a year there would have been nearly 9,000 posts containing **#zionistagenda** (8,877 posts) and one or more of our search terms, and nearly 9,000 (8,992 posts) with **#illuminati** and one or more of our search terms.

Pulsar offer an “impressions” score for posts. Impressions are the number of times a post has been displayed in a user’s timeline (regardless of whether or not the post is clicked and accessed). In essence, an impressions score reports the number of times the post is available to be seen, or likely to have been seen, by users. The exact methods of calculation remain unknown because Pulsar does not share them, although we believe it to be based on “likes” (reported after 12 hours) multiplied by an undisclosed multiplier.¹³ Due

to the fact that posts may be seen multiple times by the same user, we took an average of impressions scores for the three most frequently found hashtags (**#chemtrails**, **#zionistagenda** and **#illuminati**), plus two further hashtags that are or are likely to be antisemitic (**#thegoyimknow** and **#israhell**), to determine the nature and scale of content related commonly to antisemitism across Instagram.

#chemtrails had an average impressions score of 63, which means that 11,544 posts (our estimate for the year) were each made available for an average of 63 users. According to Pulsar estimates, there were 98,593 impressions for the hashtag during our seven-week research period. So, one conspiracy hashtag with proven links to antisemitism was potentially made available and likely to have been viewed nearly 100,000 times during this seven-week time period alone.

Although we describe antisemitism on Instagram as more often a matter of supply than demand, it is worth noting that posts containing **#chemtrails** generated 43,008 likes. While we cannot know the extent to which these likes represent support for antisemitism, the total number of likes offers a clue to the extent to which content commonly associated with antisemitic hashtags is flagged and circulated among Instagram users.

12. Based on the calculation $52/7 \times 1,550$

13. Roughly, the calculation is as follows: first, “potential estimated impressions” are based on likes (reported after 12 hours) times a multiplier. One thousand followers on average gives 37 likes. So, for every 37 likes there could be 1,000 followers; second, “actual estimated impressions” are calculated by multiplying “potential estimated impressions” by a “channel factor” of approximately 5% for Instagram.

Similarly, **#zionistagenda** generated an estimated 8,877 posts per year, each of which was made available for an average of 82 Instagram users. During our seven-week research period, the hashtag - and any content alongside it - is likely to have been viewed 97,876 times. Posts containing **#zionistagenda** generated 42,612 likes.

#illuminati generated an estimated 8,922 posts per year, was made available for an average of 81 users per post and is likely to have been seen 97,270 times during our seven-week research period. **#illuminati** generated 42,346 likes.

#thegoyimknow (a hashtag that is explicitly antisemitic) appeared 796 times within our dataset. From this, we estimated that nearly

6,000 posts per year contain the hashtag (5,913 posts) and that each post containing it is likely to be viewed by an average of 120 users. During our seven-week research period, content featuring this explicitly antisemitic hashtag was made available and likely to have been seen over 95,000 times (95,615 impressions). **#thegoyimknow** generated 42,346 likes.

#israhell (an example of an anti-Israel hashtag which is likely to be antisemitic, subject to context) appeared 786 times within our dataset. We estimate that 5,839 posts per year contain this hashtag. During our seven-week research period, content featuring **#israhell** was likely to have been viewed over 10,000 times (10,558 impressions), resulting in 4,790 likes.

PART B

To further examine the links between conspiracy theories and antisemitism, we examined our search results – nearly 4,000 posts - for associations between the 10 most common conspiracy and antisemitic hashtags.

We used Mozdeh (an open-source social media analysis tool developed at the University of Wolverhampton) and undertook an automated analysis of word association using posts that included one of the 10 most popular conspiracy theory hashtags.

Next, we examined the results of the word association analysis, noting any terms associated with conspiracy theories that were either antisemitic or that may be commonly associated with antisemitism. We found that a majority – 6 out of 10 conspiracy theory hashtags – had associations with hashtags used in relation to antisemitism. Our findings are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Associations between conspiracy theories and antisemitism

Instagram search terms		
#fakejews	#jewishbanks	#jewishbitch
#filthyjew	#jewishcontrol	#jewworldorder
#gasjews	#jewfilth	#rothschildcontrol
#ihatejewstho	#jewjokes	#sorosfundedriots
#israelapartheid	#jewishmedia	#synagogueofsatan
#israhell	#jewishmoney	#zionazi
#israelhell	#jewmedia	#zionistagenda
#khazarianmafia	#jewsdid711	#zionistscum
#jewbitch	#jewsdidtheholocaust	#zog ¹⁴

14. ZOG is an acronym used online as shorthand for the antisemitic conspiracy, "Zionist Occupied Government".

Table 2. Associations between conspiracy theories and antisemitism (cont.)

10 most common hashtags in dataset	Typical nature of hashtag use	No. of matches	Hashtags found with most common hashtags in dataset and related to antisemitism*
#chemtrails	conspiracy theory	1553	n/a
#zionistagenda	antisemitism conspiracy theory anti- Israel	1137	#thegoyimknow, #new-worldagenda
#illuminati	conspiracy theory	1121	#newworldagenda
#5g	conspiracy theory	1015	n/a
#deepstate	conspiracy theory	793	#newworldagenda
#thegoyimknow	conspiracy theory antisemitism	759	#epsteindidntkillhimself
#mkultra	conspiracy theory	743	#georgesoros
#israhell	anti-Israel antisemitism	740	n/a
#pedogate	conspiracy theory	725	#epsteindidntkillhimself
#humanrights	political discourse conspiracy theory	715	n/a

* Hashtags in the right-hand column are among the 10 hashtags most commonly found with those in the left-hand column.

EXPLORING THE LINKS BETWEEN ANTI-ISRAEL ATTITUDES AND ANTISEMITISM

From our original 27 search terms, we selected six that conveyed strong anti-Israel attitudes:

#israhell
#israelhell
#israelapartheid
#zionazi
#zionistagenda
#zionistscum

What should be obvious from the list is that some of the hashtags, while provocative, are implicitly (but not necessarily) antisemitic (such as **#israhell**), whereas others are explicitly antisemitic (such as **#zionazi**). One of the hashtags, **#israelapartheid**, is not itself antisemitic but is strongly anti-Israel, and we wanted to test whether it was commonly found in association with antisemitism.

We used Mozdeh to run a series of word associations and noted the words and other hashtags with strong associations to our six chosen hashtags.¹⁵

#israhell was found in 786 posts during our seven-week research period, is found in an estimated 5,839 posts per year and generated 4,790 likes.

We found **#israhell** to be strongly associated with hashtags such as **#governmentslavery**, **#vaticanpedomafia**, **#saturndeathcultkiller** (Jews as worshippers of Saturn is an historic antisemitic trope), **#zetass**¹⁶, **#agenda203050**¹⁷, **#draco**¹⁸, **#archon**¹⁹, **#anunnaki**²⁰, **#elite** and **#coronahoax**. This is further evidence of the links between anti-Israel attitudes and conspiracy theories.

We found no matches for **#israelhell** in our dataset.

We found only 13 posts containing **#israelapartheid** in our Instagram dataset and

found the hashtag to be strongly associated with non-antisemitic expressions of anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian sentiment including: **#endapartheid**, **#palestine** and **#freegaza**.

We found five posts containing the antisemitic hashtag **#zionazi** and found it to be strongly associated with hashtags such as: **#paedophilesinhighplaces**, **#saveourchildren** (ostensibly non-antisemitic but used here to convey the antisemitic trope of Jews as child-murderers), **#zionismisnazism** and **#zionismisnotjudaism**.

As stated, we found over 1,000 posts containing **#zionistagenda** and found it to be strongly associated with a long list of hashtags, many of which were explicitly antisemitic or with common links to common antisemitic tropes. These include: **#thegoyimknow**, **#newworldorderagenda**, **#devilworshipper**, **#falloffthecabal** and **#satanicgovernment**.

We found only 18 posts containing the hashtags **#zionistscum**. Despite its relative scarcity within the dataset, the hashtag was found to be strongly associated with explicit antisemitism including: **#satanicworldorder**, **#deathtoisrael** and **#fuckzionsim**.

Our analysis found common hashtags operating as expressions of strong anti-Israel sentiment (e.g. **#zionistagenda**) that were linked to explicit antisemitism. Again, we consider this as a matter of supply rather than demand. Instagram users searching for or being offered hashtags and content related to anti-Israel sentiment are frequently exposed to strong, overt antisemitism and the murky world of conspiracy theories which, as our analysis has demonstrated, are often intertwined with antisemitic motifs and tropes.

15. In this case, strong associations' were deemed to be those that were statistically significant at the .01% level. A full list of findings is available upon request.

16. The term "zeta" is sometimes used to describe extraterrestrial aliens guiding or controlling humans.

17. The term, also expressed as "2030/50", is a reference to the UN's 2015 initiative "Agenda 2030" (a set of global goals around issues around poverty, energy and equality), the secret objective of which, it is claimed, is to enslave humanity (especially be taking advantage of the public health challenges related to the coronavirus pandemic).

18. The term "draco" is sometimes used in reference to the home planet of reptilian aliens who, it is believed by some, live among humans on Earth. Reptilian conspiracy theories have associations with the classic antisemitic tropes of foreignness, secret power and a desire for takeover.

19. "Archon" refers to rulers, in this case alien rulers, and is another conspiracy about secret power.

20. "The Anunnaki" are ancient deities referred to by conspiracy theorists in relation to ancient extraterrestrial lifeforms inhabiting Earth and enslaving humanity to secretly control it.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Instagram still has a significant amount of work to do to make its platform safer. As long as the platform supplies antisemitic posts to its users or acts as a gateway or resource for further harms, the company should be regarded as actively promoting antisemitism.

- 1. Instagram should instigate a detailed review of the harmful conspiracy theories that pervade the platform, with particular reference to antisemitism, and improve its community standards to ensure action against this hateful content.**
- 2. Instagram requires better algorithmic filtering of antisemitic keywords linked to conspiracies, and should work to improve its internal technology in this regard.**
- 3. Instagram should develop the capability and resources to identify when anti-Israel or anti-Zionist language is associated with antisemitism or used as a way of expressing antisemitic sentiment.**

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