TikTok, Instagram Introduce Antisemitic Ideas to Young Users, Report Warns

October 13, 2021

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Haaretz

<https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/.premium-tiktok-instagram-introduce-antisemitic-ideas-to-young-users-report-warns-1.10290315>

Social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram are introducing young users to antisemitic ideas and conspiracy theories they would not likely see elsewhere, a new report warned Wednesday.

Hope Not Hate, a London-based advocacy group, accused major tech platforms of creating “online spaces where [antisemitism](https://archive.vn/o/AujrW/https:/www.haaretz.com/misc/tags/TAG-anti-semitism-1.5598882) has been allowed to flourish with tragic and long-lasting effects, not least terrorism against Jewish communities.”

Seventy percent of Instagram’s approximately 1.1 billion users are between the ages of 13 and 34, and it is the most popular platform for 16- to 24-year-olds. Young people can be exposed to antisemitic content and are even being actively recruited by the extreme right, the report asserted.

“Hashtags that directly refer to antisemitic conspiracy jargon such as #JewWorldOrder, #TheGoyimKnow and #ProtocolsofZion lead to thousands of posts, many of which are either explicitly antisemitic in content or have been posted by accounts that commonly post on those lines,” it wrote.

Despite Instagram and its parent company, Facebook, having updated their Community Standards to ban allegations that Jews run the world or control major institutions, “it is still easy to find antisemitic conspiracy content on the platform, even when it is clearly labeled as such by accompanying hashtags,” the report found.

Hope Not Hate researcher Patrik Hermansson said his group found “two separate terror groups,” identified as the British Hand and the National Partisan Movement, “using Instagram as their primary means of propagandizing and recruitment, both of which were run by teenagers [who] used the platform to target young people with deeply antisemitic propaganda imagery and expressions of violent racial hatred.”

Earlier this month, [whistleblower Frances Haugen](https://archive.vn/o/AujrW/https:/www.theguardian.com/technology/2021/oct/04/facebook-tearing-our-societies-apart-key-excerpts-from-a-whistleblower-frances-haugen) accused Facebook of repeatedly prioritizing profit over clamping down on hate speech and misinformation.

“There were conflicts of interest between what was good for the public and what was good for Facebook,” she told news program “60 Minutes.” “And Facebook over and over again chose to optimize for its own interests like making more money.”

“It’s shocking that despite the work supposedly being done by tech firms to address hate speech, we found overt antisemitism on every social media platform we investigated,” Jemna Levene, Deputy Director at Hope not hate, told Haaretz.

“Social media users, including young people, are encountering antisemitic ideas they would be unlikely to see elsewhere. The reality is that  online spaces allow antisemitism to flourish, and this can have tragic real life consequences for Jewish communities; the lack of action from technology platforms is unforgivable. We now need to see a strong commitment to banning and moderating any and all forms of antisemitism and hate speech across the tech sector.”

As of last month, there were at least 100 million monthly users of the short video-sharing service TikTok in Europe. Nearly 70 percent of TikTok’s users are between the ages of 16 and 24, and could easily be exposed to hate due to the fact that “polarizing, strongly emotionally-charged content is rewarded by the algorithm, even in the case of political content,” the report stated.

And while far-right and neo-Nazi material in German has been removed, such accounts in English “are easy to find – and not in small numbers.”

“Classical antisemitism often appears on TikTok in casual form, as something which is ‘acceptable’ in everyday behavior,” the report said, citing a January 2021 clip posted in Germany in which a person placed a cake in an oven while declaring “Say hello to Anne Frank for me.”

Unless removed, antisemitic content on the platform can “find a new, playful expression on TikTok and thus reaches younger generations,” it stated.

The report, whose full title is “Antisemitism in the Digital Age: Online Antisemitic Hate, Holocaust Denial, Conspiracy Ideologies and Terrorism in Europe,” was produced in collaboration with the Amadeu Antonio Foundation in Germany and Sweden’s Expo Foundation.

While some companies have taken action that has “significantly” minimized antisemitism on their platforms, the report noted, their efforts thus far have proven insufficient, requiring legislative interventions.

Antisemitism has traditionally been promoted through conspiratorial thinking blaming Jews for societal problems. “Perhaps unsurprisingly, during the current global pandemic it is once again Jews that some conspiracy theorists are blaming,” the report declared.

This is in line with the findings of a report by the European Commission earlier this year, which found “considerable growth in the use of antisemitic keywords during the pandemic.” There was a “sevenfold increase in antisemitic posting” on French-language accounts and a thirteen-fold increase on German accounts since the beginning of the worldwide health crisis.

“Antisemitic narratives, hashtags, memes, videos and groups that emerged during the pandemic remain on some platforms,” the report found, stating that they are both “easily accessible” and “algorithmically amplified” and “aggressively made available to others through the logic of social networks.”

Noting that growing numbers of people have bought into conspiracy theories about COVID-19 across Europe and noting widespread comparisons of public health policies to the Holocaust, the report warned that “the risk of radicalization into Jew-hatred and Holocaust denial is particularly acute as conscious antisemites are actively making inroads into conspiratorial networks.

“This risk of radicalization has heightened after sweeping bans on mainstream platforms have encouraged many conspiratorial networks to migrate to alternatives,” it added.

The spread of such thinking is especially worrying because social media platforms have “taken on the function of conveying antisemitic stereotypes to younger user groups” on Instagram and TikTok, it wrote.