

# Anti-Semitic Symbols and Holocaust Denial in Social Media Posts

January 2018



The study was produced by the World Jewish Congress  
in collaboration with Vigo Social Intelligence



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## Introduction

The World Jewish Congress commissioned the following study to examine the proliferation anti-Semitic symbols and Holocaust denial on social media over the course of January 2018, leading up to International Holocaust Remembrance Day. World Jewish Congress CEO and Executive Vice President Robert Singer presented the findings of the report to the International Conference Against Anti-Semitism of the OSCE in Rome on January 29, 2018.

In 2016, the World Jewish Congress (WJC) commissioned an initial comprehensive study on the scale and impact of anti-Semitism online, in which we recovered nearly [400,000 social media posts](#) containing anti-Semitic content in various forms. The WJC commissioned the subsequent study covering the period of January 1-24, 2018 on areas specifically related to Holocaust denial, to coincide with International Holocaust Remembrance Day (January 27) and the World Jewish Congress' 2018 We Remember campaign, the largest Holocaust commemoration initiative in the world.

The methodology adopted by Vigo Social Intelligence remains unchanged in both studies and follows closely the [definition](#) of anti-Semitism established by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance in May 2016. In the 2016 study, five categories of anti-Semitism were monitored: 1) expressions of hatred against Jews; 2) calls to harm Jews; 3) dehumanization of Jews; 4) Holocaust denial; 5) the use of symbols traditionally associated with anti-Semitism.

For the period of January 1-24, 2018, two categories of anti-Semitism were tracked:

- 1) The use of neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic symbols: Posts that included texts, logos, pictures, or symbols referring to the Holocaust. These were gratuitous in nature and not used for legitimate historical or documentary purposes.
- 2) Holocaust denial: Posts claiming the Holocaust or related events did not happen, or that they were exaggerated in scope or severity.

Vigo Social Intelligence monitored these posts via a manual analysis of related events and places (for example, ghettos, concentration camps, gas chambers).

Overall, from January 1-24, 2018, we saw a troubling increase in the number of anti-Semitic posts on social media: 30% more posts using anti-Semitic symbols were recorded compared to the same period in 2016; moreover, more than twice the number of conversations denying the Holocaust were recorded compared to the same period in 2016.

### **Key Findings**

Approximately 550 posts per day on average contained the use of neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic symbols over the course of January 1-24, 2018, at a rate of 23 posts per hour; in addition, 108 posts per day on average denied the Holocaust, for a total of 4.5 posts per hour. A total of 13,200 posts over the course of this period included symbols or signs relating to the Holocaust or Hitler's regime; 2,600 posts denied the existence of the Holocaust outright, or claimed that Jews were exaggerating its scope and the number of its victims.

Online platforms fared differently in the frequency of posted anti-Semitic content between 2016 and 2018. While there was an increase in anti-Semitic messages on Twitter and on non-social media platforms (websites and blogs), we found a decrease in anti-Semitic messages on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube compared to the same period in 2016. Although this finding is encouraging, it is alarming to note that dozens of explicit anti-Semitic messages continue to be posted to these platforms every day.

Platforms	Use of symbols	Holocaust denial
<b>Twitter</b>	10,600 <span style="color: red;">↑</span>	200 <span style="color: red;">↑</span>
<b>Blogs</b>	1,300 <span style="color: red;">↑</span>	2,100 <span style="color: red;">↑</span>
<b>Facebook</b>	400 <span style="color: green;">↓</span>	80 <span style="color: green;">↓</span>
<b>Instagram</b>	400 <span style="color: green;">↓</span>	- <span style="color: green;">↓</span>
<b>YouTube</b>	120 <span style="color: green;">↓</span>	60 <span style="color: green;">↓</span>
<b>Other</b>	380 <span style="color: red;">↑</span>	160 <span style="color: red;">↑</span>

\*The Arrow Indicates a rise or drop compared to the equivalent period in 2016



Figure 1: Twitter, January 9<sup>th</sup>



Figure 2: Twitter, January 9<sup>th</sup>

In the countries that were monitored, both the use of anti-Semitic symbols and posts denying the Holocaust increased from 2016 to 2018. It should be noted that while Poland, Switzerland, and Serbia were not among the list of countries leading in online anti-Semitism in 2016, they were propelled to the top of the list with regard to the variables analyzed in the 2018 study.

Use of Symbols – Top Countries:		Holocaust Denial – Top Countries:	
USA: <b>36%</b>	↑	USA: <b>68%</b>	↑
Germany: <b>16%</b>	↓	UK: <b>4%</b>	↑
Poland: <b>9%</b>	↑	Canada: <b>2%</b>	↑
Austria: <b>5%</b>	↑	Germany: <b>2%</b>	↑
UK: <b>3%</b>	↑	France: <b>1%</b>	↑
Switzerland: <b>3%</b>	↑	Spain: <b>1%</b>	↑
France: <b>2%</b>	↑	Poland: <b>1%</b>	↑
Spain: <b>2%</b>	↑	Austria: <b>1%</b>	↑
Serbia: <b>2%</b>	↑	Holland: <b>1%</b>	↑
Holland: <b>1%</b>	↑	Russia: <b>1%</b>	↑
Other: <b>21%</b>	↑	Other: <b>18%</b>	↑

\*The Arrow Indicates a rise or drop compared to the equivalent period in 2016

The WJC also found that an alarmingly larger portion of the anti-Semitic posts were intentionally hateful anti-Semitic messages. In 2016, 41% of posts using Holocaust symbols incorporated some element of humor, compared to only 20% of the posts written in 2018. The other 80% of posts using Holocaust symbols in January 2018 included serious, accusatory, and offensive uses of symbols against Jews.



Figure 3: Twitter, January 21<sup>st</sup>



Figure 4: Facebook, January 14<sup>th</sup>



Figure 5: Instagram, January 16<sup>th</sup>



Figure 6: Twitter, January 21<sup>st</sup>

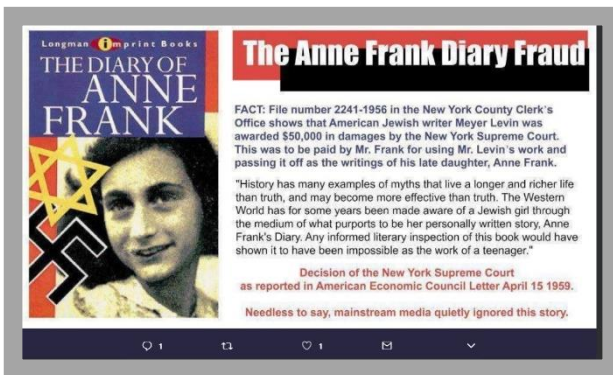


Figure 7: Blog, January 16<sup>th</sup>



Figure 8: Twitter, January 4<sup>th</sup>

## Conclusion

- Facebook, Instagram and YouTube appear to go to great lengths to delete posts with anti-Semitic or neo-Nazi content when notified of such by their users. Unfortunately, this contains but does not eliminate the problem. Twitter remains the leading social media platform regarding anti-Semitic content, with an increase both in Holocaust denial and the use of anti-Semitic symbols.
- The increasing number of anti-Semitic posts found on non-social media platforms (blogs and websites) leads us to believe that the discourse has not abated, but simply moved elsewhere. While blogs are comparatively more difficult to regulate than social media platforms, it is important to note they have a much lower reach.
- While we saw a significant decrease in the use of neo-Nazi symbols in Germany, we saw an increase in the use of these symbols in other European countries, such as Poland and Switzerland, which jumped from marginal reference in 2016 into the top 10 in the 2018 study.
- Additionally, in the United States, we have seen a substantial increase in apparently intentional, rather than humorous, anti-Semitic discourse in 2017.