

A New Demon after Collapse: Jewish Social Media Images in the Israeli Palestinian Conflict

—Short Videos' Analysis Based on TikTok

Xiangwu Lai^{1,a,*}, Tiange Zhang^{1,b}

¹*Institute of Journalism and Communication, Northwest University, Xuefu Street, Xi'an City, Shaanxi Province, China*

a. 1980864393@qq.com, b. 2549935915@qq.com

**corresponding author*

Abstract: From over two thousand years of exile history to post World War II Holocaust literature and film and television dramas, Jews have always appeared in various media as innocent victims with a mix of sadness and resilience, even making the "Jewish stance" somewhat politically correct. This article is based on the new round of Palestinian Israeli conflict that broke out on October 7, 2023. The research object is 729 short video data crawled on social media TikTok. Through analyzing the overall attitudes towards Jews presented in the videos, it is found that the ratio of positive and negative attitudes is about 1:12, and "genocide", "war criminals", and "terrorism" are the majority of accusations against Israeli Jews in the videos. The large number of negative evaluations on social media presented in the research conclusion strongly contrasts with the stereotypical impression of Jews in past media expressions. This finding is crucial for China's future diplomatic practice and how to enhance its ability to guide international public opinion.

Keywords: Media Image, Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, TikTok, Jew.

1. Introduction

For a long time, Jews have been presented as "Holocaust victims" in various media, even making the "Jewish position" a sense of "political correctness" for a time. On October 7, 2023, a new round of Israeli-Palestinian conflict broke out, and by the evening of October 9, 2023, the TikTok hashtags "# Palestine" and "# Israel" had been viewed more than 50 billion times.[1] While a wealth of first-hand accounts of the war and unfiltered commentary from all sides are widely disseminated, the media image of the Jewish people on TikTok seems to be moving toward the other end of the "victim" spectrum.

At present, studies on the media image of Jews in academic circles are mostly conducted from the perspectives of world history, international politics, drama, film and television, etc. In addition to some articles that expose the truth of control by Jewish interest groups, the image of Jews constructed through the media for a long time is always difficult to break away from the image of stigmatization from the religious standpoint, the weak party in anti-Semitism and anti-Semitism, and the tenacious resistance to racism. Therefore, in order to clarify the real image of Jews to guide diplomatic activities

under the current complex situation, this study selects the overseas version of TikTok as the research platform from the perspective of communication studies. By analyzing the attitudes towards Jews in the presentation of relevant short videos after the outbreak of the current round of Palestinian-Israeli conflict, it summarizes the real media images of Jews in the era of social media that are not subject to the control of Jewish capital.

2. Literature review

2.1. Jewish media images under the narrative of others

In the long history of the Middle Ages, many long-standing and deeply rooted Jewish images have emerged. Ai Rengui once conducted research on the origin and historical distribution of the Jewish image of "eternal wandering Jews" originating from the 13th century. "This image confirms the true and eternal fate of Jews --- constantly wandering and scattered everywhere." [2]; In medieval Christian painting, painters often depicted the "hooked nose," "long webbed feet," and "horns" as typical physiological features of Jewish images, and demonized them in visual representation. [3] In 1955, John Hyam's book "Strangers on the Land" discussed American localism and immigration issues, in which Jews appeared as typical immigrant figures with racist connotations [4]; In the traditional narrative of Irish Catholicism, Jews are often referred to as "exploitative and wealthy foreigners" and "friends who often betray non Jews". [5]

2.2. Jewish media images in self promotion

After the Third Middle East War, the political status and discourse power of American Jews increased significantly, and by virtue of their status as victims of the terrible human atrocities, they gained a unique narrative position in the American cultural landscape [6]. At that time, Jewish media images were mainly reflected in two types of Jewish films in Hollywood: one was based on trauma narrative, aiming to win international sympathy, guilt and compensation, such as the fate of Krakow Jews in the film "Sintler's List", and the boy Shimr living in a concentration camp in "The Boy in the Striped Pajamas"; The other is based on heroic hymns, focusing on the heroic Jewish people's unyielding resistance in the face of oppression and touching stories of making a living, such as Noah Ekman who struggled to make a living in postwar America in the film Lion Cub [7], and the tenacious Jewish hero who endured violence but had a rebirth in Exodus [6]. During this period, the construction of Jewish media image went through the whole process from carefully pursuing identity, to using character narration to show anti-Semitism on the screen, and then evolving it into ideology implanted in American society.

2.3. Media images of Jews in modern media reports

The image of Jews in the media in the 21st century is largely reflected in worldwide anti-Semitic sentiment and reports about Jews. A study by Anders Wiegerfurt and others at Marmo University found that reports of anti-Semitic crimes in the Swedish media increased significantly at the end of 2008, with 126 articles published in 31 Swedish dailies over a 15-year period [8]; According to the Online Hate Prevention Institute, there were 2,000 anti-Semitic tweets and videos posted on social media sites such as Twitter and YouTube in a 10-month period between 2015 and 2016 [9]. In the face of widely reported anti-Semitic sentiment, some scholars have pointed out that political groups have deliberately exploited the charge of "anti-Semitism", just as the Holocaust in American Life revealed that "Holocaust memory has been used as a tool by American Jews and American politicians" [10], Zhao Dingqi pointed out that in today's Western public opinion environment, the label "anti-Semitism" has been associated with a certain political identity. It became a kind of "everyone

passes" culture war[11].

3. Research design

In this study, Octopus collector version V8.6.7 was used. Logging in TikTok on April 2, 2024, videos under the hashtag "# Palestinian-Israeli conflict" in Chinese and translated into English and Arabic were respectively crawled for the specific fields shown in Table 1. By using TikTok's comprehensive sorting function [12], which ranks works from highest to lowest in terms of communication effect, 1,192 pieces of original data were initially obtained. In the data cleaning stage, the study takes "the official outbreak of the current round of conflict" (October 7, 2023) and "the UN Security Council passed a resolution explicitly calling for a ceasefire in Gaza for the first time" (March 25, 2024) as the key time node, and deletes videos that are outside the time range and not directly related to the current round of conflict. Finally, 245 Chinese, 255 English, 229 Arabic, a total of 729 valid data. After that, the sample data were coded in three levels in terms of attitudes toward Jews, and finally clustered into four categories: positive attitude toward Jews, negative attitude toward Jews, neutral attitude toward Jews, and no mention of attitudes toward Jews.

Table 1: TikTok data crawling keywords and specific fields.

Language	Standpoint	Videos' hashtag	keyword
Chinese	Within China	#巴以冲突	Video link Publisher ID Publish account link Release time Video title Likes Forwarding volume Volume of comments
English	Internation	#israelpalestineconflict	
Arabic	Arab world	الصراع_اللسطيني_الإسرائيلي#	
		قطاع_غزة#	

4. Research findings

4.1. Summary of Jewish media images

As shown in Figure 1, in this round of conflict, the image of Jews on social media is mainly negative, followed by neutral, and the least positive image. Among them, as shown in Figure 2, English hashtags had the highest number of videos with positive views of Jews, accounting for 89% of all positive videos, while Chinese and Arabic accounted for less, each less than 10%. Comparing these three languages, it can be seen that only videos under the Chinese tag show significantly more negative feelings toward Jews than "not mentioned". However, it is still worth considering whether this significant difference between negative emotions and positive emotions 135:1 is the result of independent thinking and judgment of the video publisher, or is it blindly following or echoing the mainstream public opinion of social media in the Chinese context.

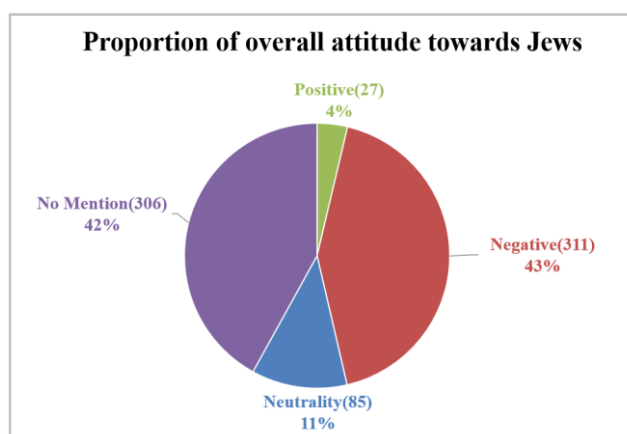


Figure 1: Overall attitudes toward Jews

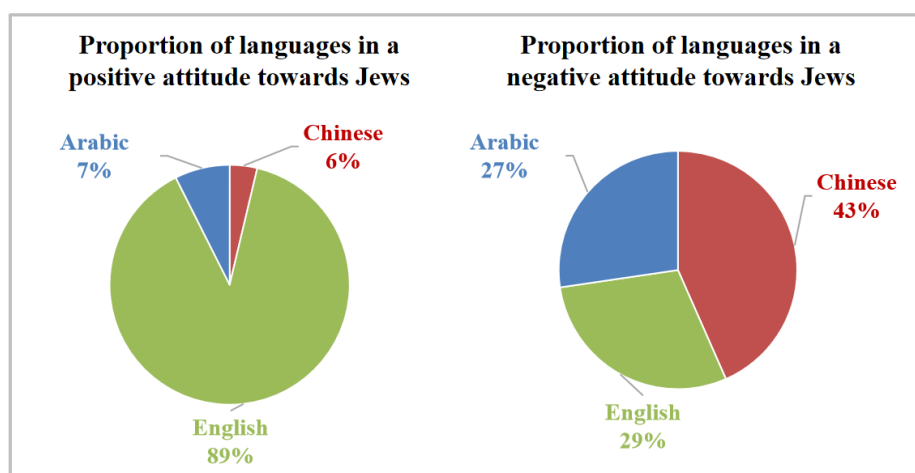


Figure 2: Positive & Negative attitudes toward Jews in three language

4.2. Jewish media image in the Chinese hashtag

Under Chinese tag, more than half of the videos explicitly expressed negative attitudes toward Jews or Israel. The images of Israeli Jews in these videos are mostly associated with negative words such as "aggression", "genocide" and "Holocaust", and are repeatedly described as "war criminals", "terrorism", "Nazification" and "aspirants". User @terrywang87 posted the only video with a positive attitude toward Jews under the Chinese hashtag. User @terrywang87 posted the only video with a positive attitude toward Jews under the Chinese hashtag. By introducing Israel's outstanding achievements and leading technologies in the military, agriculture and other fields, the publisher of the video constructs a "ruthless Middle East" image of a strong military and agricultural power.

Unlike the English and Arabic hashtags, all videos under the Chinese tag are posted by ordinary users (non-Blue V accounts) who are not officially verified by TikTok. Among the 66 publishers of negative videos, in addition to 1 non-certification authority account, 5 non-certification news media, and 5 foreign Chinese users, the other more than 50 video publishers are ordinary we-media users who use Chinese as their mother tongue. Thus, it can be seen that unverified Chinese "we media" dominated the construction of the negative Jewish media image under the Chinese narrative framework of the current round of Palestinian-Israeli conflict on TikTok, and official opinions representing media, organizations or institutions accounted for a small part, and the discourse expression of the Blue V verified account was missing in the Chinese context of the topic.

4.3. Jewish media image in the English hashtag

Under the English hashtag, videos with no mention of attitudes toward Jews and videos with negative attitudes toward Jews were far more than those with neutral and positive attitudes toward Jews. There were 22 references to "genocide" and "apartheid," and 11 to "violence" and "atrocities." This negative image mostly overlaps with that in the Chinese tag. In the 99 videos that did not mention attitudes toward Jews, except for 36 videos that were not clearly attitudinal oriented and 28 videos that were sympathetic, supportive or pro-Palestinian, there were some anti-Palestinian or anti-Hamas videos which had not been seen in the other two languages. Therefore, the attitude toward Jews in the framework of English narrative is complicated and diversified, but the video content showing the negative media image of Jews still accounts for a large proportion in this context. On the whole, among the publishers of videos with positive and negative attitudes in English tag, the ordinary self-media without verification are far more than the authentication users.

The video language symbols under "#israelpalestineconflict" have appeared in German, French, Thai, Indian and other languages in addition to English. Therefore, the overall attitude toward Jews presented under the English hashtag on TikTok can be used as a rough reference for the media image of Jews formed worldwide on social media during this round of Israeli-Palestinian war. In all negative video accounts, English users in Europe and the United States are still the majority, and there are also individual users in South Asia, Southeast Asia and Arab countries. More videos with positive anti-Semitic sentiments were posted from video accounts of Jewish users, and less than half were posted sporadically from a handful of European and American countries.

4.4. Jewish media image in the Arabic hashtag

Arabic is the official language of several Arab countries, such as Palestine, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Therefore, as the Arabs who took the opposite position of the Jewish nation in this round of conflict, a total of 85 videos in the 229 videos in the Arab context clearly showed negative emotions toward Jews; Article 92 does not mention specific attitudes toward Jews, but in its content symbols clearly convey sympathy or support for the opposite of its public opinion: Palestine or the militant group Hamas. There were also 19 neutral videos, while the smallest number of videos with a positive view of Israel was only 2. Among the 85 videos that negatively evaluated Jews, the keywords "occupation" and "invasion" were used 17 times, "massacre" and "killing" 11 times, and "genocide" and "injustice" seven times each. In addition, the repeated keywords of "terrorism", "Zionism", "Satan" and "ambition" in the Chinese and English videos are again displayed in the negative videos in the Arab context.

In the 35 TikTok users who posted 85 videos with negative views of Jews, 24 were posted by regular Arabic speakers and five by regular Arab news outlets; There are also six officially certified TikTok "Blue V" Arab media outlets, including five news outlets and one sports outlet. Thus, the negative anti-Semitic sentiment under the Arabic hashtag, without exception, comes from the Arab world. The Arabic video also featured two videos that were positive about Jews and one that made no mention of anti-Semitism but explicitly expressed opposition to the Palestine Liberation Organization Hamas. As for the identity of the publisher of these three videos, only @Capt. ella's authentication interface clearly shows his Israeli nationality. For the other two users, @aljazeera and @palestine_gaza.live, the former is an Arab news media officially certified by TikTok. The latter are ordinary Arabic speakers. In terms of content, all three videos are from the standpoint of the Israeli military or its soldiers, emphasizing the righteous actions of Israeli Jews in this war.

5. Conclusion and discussion

5.1. Risk: False information and information consumption

The Washington Post reported that a "flood" of false letters shaped the outside world's judgment of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict[13]. Under the Matthew effect, TikTok users' negative emotions toward Jews could easily become blind, extreme and even out of control in the frequent comparison between "colonial ambition" and "image construction of the weak". Research by Anthony Goldbloom has found that for every TikTok video viewed in the United States with a pro-Israel hashtag, 54 videos with a pro-Palestinian hashtag are viewed.[14] The underlying emotional logic of this is, of course, related to a series of extreme military actions by Israeli Jews, but whether it is entirely rational judgment and has no other purpose is not easily discerned. Therefore, in the face of more than half of the negative anti-Jewish sentiment under Chinese hashtags, we should remain sober and carefully analyze, to avoid being carried by the emotional wave of false information, and even be used by another wave of people with ulterior motives.

In addition, since the outbreak of this round of conflict, the "# Palestinian-Israeli conflict" has in many cases become the "traffic password" for video transmission. A large number of videos on TikTok that are not directly related to the current round of conflict have "deliberately" added the keyword "Israeli-Palestinian conflict" to the title in order to increase exposure and attract traffic. As stated in the article "Israeli-Palestinian Conflict 'Reveals' Fundamental Flaws in Social Media", "People around the world are consuming a lot of information about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through social media"[14]. These messages do not reflect the true picture of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but only fuel negative feelings such as incitement to violence and propaganda of hatred.

5.2. Change: Self-deconstruction of Western discourse hegemony

Behind the collapse and subversive change of the image of the Jewish national media is the self-deconstruction of the hegemonic system of Western discourse. Since the outbreak of the international financial crisis in 2008, the Western myth created by US imperialism has been collapsing. In 2023, when the new round of escalation between Palestine and Israel is spilling over, the double standards of Western politicians and media thoroughly expose the hypocrisy, deception and duplicity of the Western discourse system, which has been deliberately covered up for a long time, and the international public opinion dominated by Western values and rules is widely questioned[15]. The emergence of social media represented by TikTok has presented first-hand news of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and unfiltered comments from all sides to the public, which has failed the plan of Western forces to monopolize news discourse and control international public opinion. Compared with the blocking of Pro-Russian tweets on Twitter and other platforms during the Russia-Ukraine conflict, TikTok's disclosure of the real media image of Jews has changed and reshaped the original media ecology and communication pattern of the world. Some of the facts and truths revealed by TikTok have awakened the international public under digital equality, and TikTok has become a gravedigger for the hegemony of Western discourse.

In the current period, the old order of public opinion has just been broken, real news details and unfiltered voices have just been released, and the discourse expression on social media has temporarily presented a complicated development pattern. However, on the one hand is the imperialist regime trying to re-strengthen the control of public opinion in terms of policy sanctions, on the other hand is the camp country forces with different purposes under the surging public opinion - whether the world public can usher in the turning point of the complete subversion of the hegemony of Western discourse and whether China can enhance the influence of international public opinion again, this is both an opportunity and a challenge.

5.3. Communication: Politics and media, who shaped who?

Media narrative has become the cornerstone of international politics, and the combination of social media and digital manipulation strategies is a powerful weapon to win this battle[16]. The conflict, which broke out in October 2023, greatly reduced the media image of Jews through the spread of TikTok, and Israel lost its public opinion advantage in the social media battlefield of the current round of Palestinian-Israeli conflict; Similarly, widely distributed videos documenting the humanitarian disaster in Gaza have given momentum to the Palestinian side, creating more potential to demoralize its opponents and gain strategic advantage. In the discourse expression of the conflict on TikTok, the Chinese official media that supports the implementation of the "two-state solution" did not appear, which has its own national political standpoint considerations, but also reveals China: In the current international security context, paying attention to the field of social media public opinion, and timely use of media accounts or social media comments to release information in cyberspace, which is essential to ensure the security of China's geopolitical space, and be prepared to fight unconventional wars in the information age.

References

- [1] Wang, H. (2021, October 1). *As the Israeli-Palestinian conflict spills over into social media, TikTok is becoming the main battleground for information dissemination*. Beijing News. Retrieved June 6, 2024, from <https://m.bjnews.com.cn/detail/1697095344169691.html>
- [2] Ai, R. (2013). *The origin and circulation of the image of "eternal wandering Jew."* Journal of World Peoples Studies, (03), 86-94.
- [3] Guo, J. (2024). *Exploring the "othering" and "self-otherization" of visual images from the "slanted eyes" in Chinese and foreign visual arts*. Journal of Art Communication, (01), 128-134.
- [4] Higham, J. (1955). *Strangers in the land: Patterns of American nativism, 1860-1925*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- [5] Nadel, I. B. (1989). *Joyce and Jews: Culture and texts*. London: The Macmillan Press.
- [6] Cheng, S. (2021). *Jew, music fan and photographer (Doctoral dissertation, Nanjing University)*.
- [7] Yan, J. (2019). *The Jewish identity in the United States in 20th century from Hollywood movies (Doctoral dissertation, Xiamen University)*.
- [8] Wigerfelt, A., & Wigerfelt, B. (2016). *Media images and experience of being a Jew in the Swedish city of Malmö*. SAGE Open, 6(1), 1-11.
- [9] Brotherton, D. (2016, February 18). *Anti-Semitism more prevalent on social media than you think*. The American Genius. Retrieved June 6, 2024, from <https://theamericangenius.com/social-media/anti-semitism-social-media/>
- [10] Novick, P. (2004). *The Holocaust in American life*. Boston: Harvard University Press.
- [11] Zhao, D. (2023). *The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, neoliberalism and imperialist global hegemony*. World Socialism Studies, 8(12), 47-54.
- [12] Han, S. (2023). *Short video social media and the evolution of digital public diplomacy (Doctoral dissertation, China Foreign Affairs University)*.
- [13] Xinhuanet. (2023, October 24). *The second front of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: A fierce battle for public opinion*. Retrieved June 6, 2024, from https://www.news.cn/world/2023-10/24/c_1212292984.html
- [14] Sonnenfeld, J., & Tian, S. (2023, December 3). *The Israel-Hamas war reveals the fundamental flaws of social media*. Time. Retrieved June 6, 2024, from <https://time.com/6342140/israel-hamas-war-social-media-flaws>
- [15] Yang, Y., & Zhang, C. (2024). *The logic and realistic aspects of constructing the discourse system of China's external integration in the new era*. Shandong Social Sciences, (03), 145-155.
- [16] Rickli, J.-M., & Kaspersen, A. (2016, July 8). *The global war of narratives and the role of social media*. World Economic Forum. Retrieved June 6, 2024, from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/07/the-global-war-of-narratives-and-the-role-of-social-media/>