

# Jewish content creators say TikTok not doing enough to stop hate, antisemitism

*Screenshots of TikTok's internal employee platform show moderators purposely enable antisemitic and anti-Israel content to remain*

By [Ruth Marks Eglash](#) January 2, 2024



Jewish content creators on TikTok say they are facing a barrage of antisemitic hate since the Oct. 7 Hamas terror attacks on Israel and that the Chinese-owned video-sharing platform is not doing enough to protect them, with lax moderators and policies that are enabling and even amplifying extreme anti-Jewish and anti-Israel voices.

In some cases, Jewish creators who have tried to counter the hateful messages themselves by expressing support for Israel — or even just sharing Jewish religious, cultural or historical content — have had their accounts shut down or opted independently to pull back from the social media platform following relentless bullying and a limp official response from moderators and management.

Screenshots shared with *Jewish Insider* by Jewish employees of the internal messaging system used by TikTok staff appears to back up the claims that the

moderating of hateful content against Jewish users and the regulation of antisemitic or false accusations against Jews and Israel are being allowed to slip through the cracks.

One Jewish user who says he received insufficient support or action against constant antisemitic harassment is Gidon Lev, a Holocaust survivor who spent his childhood in the Nazi concentration camp Theresienstadt. Lev pulled his TikTok account with some 460,000 followers in November after the rising online hate became unbearable and inaction by moderators allowed it to continue unabated, Julie Gray, Lev's life partner, told JI.

"We were doing Holocaust education and fun things about Jewish life, it was a nice account and people really loved Gidon," said Gray, who lives with Lev in Israel.

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**"TikTok was just refusing to acknowledge that this was happening," said Julie Gray, the life partner of Holocaust survivor Gidon Lev. "They said that it is not real and does not happen, even when we confronted them with actual evidence they would just say 'we are working on it.'"**

She described how even prior to Oct.7, the two were forced to contend with neo-Nazi and Holocaust denial comments. But "then the war started," Gray said, "and we started to get anti-Israel comments too, with people calling Gidon a baby-killer who supports genocide, so we decided to leave the platform because of that."

Gray said the two now focus Lev's social media activities on Instagram, after complaints to TikTok moderators and management in Israel and Germany were brushed off, despite presenting evidence of the racist attacks.

"TikTok was just refusing to acknowledge that this was happening," explained Gray. "They said that it is not real and does not happen, even when we confronted them with actual evidence they would just say 'we are working on it.'"

Gray and other Jewish users of the site set up a support group on Facebook and shared with JI some of the problematic content and comments that, despite appearing to be in violation of TikTok's community guidelines and being flagged by Jewish users as racist and offensive, was marked as acceptable and allowed to remain on the site. In one video, which was "disguised" as a "skincare tutorial," a woman uses cue cards to accuse Israel of "banking Palestinian skin" – reminiscent of ancient blood libels against Jews. Despite complaints, it was marked as not a violation of TikTok guidelines.

"Something is happening with their moderators because this has become a pattern," said Gray, adding that Jewish content creators are being trolled so harshly that even those "who were making videos about Jewish food have had their accounts banned."

One such account, belonging to popular Jewish TikTok user Sarah Hester Ross, who boasts over 2.4 million followers, said that her account was shut down "for calling out antisemitic comments on my Chanukah videos."

**"We regularly report on our actions to counter hate, and of the content we removed for hate speech and hateful behavior, nine times out of ten we remove it before it's reported," the TikTok said in a statement to JI.**

"We oppose antisemitism in all forms," a spokesperson for TikTok told JI. "Antisemitism is on the rise globally, and we're committed to doing our part to fight it. Our Community Guidelines apply equally to all content on TikTok and we invest heavily in training our moderators to apply our policies consistently."

TikTok said it has in place strict policies against hate speech and hateful behavior, including antisemitism "which has no place on our platform." The company has said that between Oct.7 and Nov. 30, more than two million pieces of content that violated those rules were removed from the platform.

“We regularly report on our actions to counter hate, and of the content we removed for hate speech and hateful behavior, nine times out of ten we remove it before it’s reported,” the company said in a statement to JI, adding that TikTok does not “promote” one side of an issue over another and that the platform’s algorithm is generated by “our community and recommendations are based on the content people have previously engaged with.”

However, JI viewed screenshots shared by Jewish TikTok employees from the company’s internal interface system, Lark, showing that moderators from the Trust and Safety unit, including those based in the U.S., were celebrating that pro-Palestinian accounts, including some posting violent videos or that have made false claims against Jews and Israel, are allowed to remain on the platform.

In one example seen by JI, a trust and safety officer expressed gratitude that “TikTok has allowed me to have constant contact with our amazing heroes Motaz Azaiza & Saleh Jafarawi and helping them with protecting their content on the platform that is exposing the TRUTH, and get rid of those who are impersonating them!”

Both Azaiza and al-Jafarawi are Palestinian journalists based in Gaza. Al-Jafarawi has been accused of being closely aligned with Hamas, a designated terror group by the U.S. and Israel, and has posted violent content and false accusations against Israel to his millions of followers. In November, Instagram suspended al-Jafarawi’s account after complaints, though it was later reinstated.

In a blog post on TikTok’s website titled ‘Our continued actions to protect the TikTok community during the Israel-Hamas war,’ the company said it “continues to invest in training for the moderators, in partnership with experts, to address implicit bias and the unique aspects of hateful ideologies.” “We provide ongoing training for our content moderation teams to identify evolving hateful behavior, symbols, terms, and offensive stereotypes,” it said. “We also regularly engage with our community and experts to strengthen our approach against hate.”

TikTok said it was also working with outside organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League and others who “help us to more quickly detect and remove hate or violent extremist content that has already been identified off the platform.”

Jennifer Cohen, a best-selling author and podcaster, who has had an account on TikTok with more than 110,000 followers for the past two years, said that since Oct.7 she has refrained from posting any pro-Israel content because of “the hate-filled messages I receive based on me being Jewish.”

“I have also seen my numbers dropping and my content constantly pushed aside by pro-Palestinian content,” Cohen, who now only posts Jewish content on her Instagram account, added.

**“It’s essential to recognize that part of the motivation behind this surge is the pursuit of virality and trendiness,” Tom Divon, a platforms researcher at Hebrew University, said. “Not all users necessarily hold antisemitic or malicious intentions, but they recognize that this type of content is often algorithmically rewarded, leading some to jump on the bandwagon in search of exposure with their own take.”**

Tom Divon, a platforms researcher at Hebrew University who has been tracking TikTok and other social media apps for a while, told JI that while antisemitism and the proliferation of fake and inflammatory content have long existed on TikTok, “a noticeable shift occurred after October 7.”

“Prior to this date, you might have encountered sporadic instances of antisemitic content on the ‘For You’ page, which offers content based on previous viewing history, however, since then, the volume of videos espousing such ideologies has surged dramatically,” he said.

“It’s essential to recognize that part of the motivation behind this surge is the pursuit of virality and trendiness,” Divon added. “Not all users necessarily hold antisemitic or malicious intentions, but they recognize that this type of content is often algorithmically rewarded, leading some to jump on the

bandwagon in search of exposure with their own take.”

Divon said he did not believe that TikTok altered the algorithms to amplify content supportive of either Palestinians or Hamas.

“However, I do believe that TikTok isn’t doing enough to monitor relevant areas of the platform,” he said. “Pro-Palestinian creators are adept at using filters and emojis to encrypt symbols of Palestinian resistance and make their content more appealing.”

“This approach allows them to evade moderation as the algorithm doesn’t recognize emojis as offensive or violent,” Divon explained. “For many other creators and viewers, these symbols serve as clear indicators of content worth engaging with, thereby boosting its visibility in TikTok’s algorithm.”

“TikTok appears to prioritize hashtag-driven moderation, but more advanced methods are at play here,” he continued, adding, “In this context, Israeli creators may be outnumbered and less experienced and literate in content creation on TikTok.”

Divon said it was important to note that Jewish creators have not simply abandoned social media altogether, but “instead have opted to continue their remarkable ambassadorship on other platforms where they can prioritize their well-being and avoid the accumulated trauma.”