TIKTOK’S SPIRAL OF ANTESEMITISM: A STUDY CASE IN INDONESIA

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Abstract. With its disruptive development as the biggest social media worldwide, TikTok poses numerous threats to the society. With 99 million users in Indonesia, TikTok has potential to propagate hate speech on its platform. Having rich history of antisemitism in Indonesia, researcher seek to identify whether TikTok propagate antisemitism in Indonesia. In order to conduct the research, quantitative methods are utilized. This research focused on antisemitism on TikTok in Indonesia, which can be perceived as cyberbullying and online hate speech, and aimed to explain how TikTok used in Indonesia, forms of antisemitism on TikTok in Indonesia (if any), and how antisemitism proliferate through TikTok. Hence, the research would attempt to verify whether TikTok propagate antisemitism in Indonesia. In order to analyze and get a better view of the theme, researcher will discuss the rise of TikTok and the phenomena of Antisemitism in Indonesia in the next sections. With 400 samples, it is found that TikTok is having a great screen time (more than 60 minutes per day) and enjoyed by most of their users in Indonesia and it is indicated that TikTok able to convey political messages/social campaign efficiently in Indonesia. This research concludes that TikTok does propagate antisemitism in Indonesia, despite its sprawling are limited.

Keywords: TikTok, Indonesia, Antisemitism
INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communications technology, social media in particular, enabled people around the world to share their thoughts, ideas, and opinions in a totally different manner than before. With the disruptive development of the information and communications technology, opinion can be shared in seconds, despite having far distance between audiences. This, of course, has brought benefits for people to gain a better well-being and prosperity. However, there is also another side effects that proliferate with the development of information and communications technology. These rather negative effects are numerous such as gadget addiction, spread of misinformation, lifestyle disruption, cyberbullying, etc.

Meanwhile researcher choose TikTok since the Chinese – origin social media has grown rapidly in the last decade, with 755 million users in 2022. (Ceci, 2022) Launched as the international version of the Chinese social media named Douyin, TikTok also successfully popularize the trend of short video format, a format that later followed by other social medias such as YouTube and Instagram. With its enormous amount of users, and its features that allow users to share their thoughts and opinions through short video and comment, researcher believe that TikTok will be the most suitable social media to be analyzed for this research.

In addition, the research limits the location of the research only in Indonesia, thus the researcher will only include TikTok content, comment and questionnaire that originate from Indonesia or using Bahasa Indonesia. Indonesia also selected since the nation sits on the second place in the lists of countries with the largest TikTok users, with approximately 99 million users, following United States with 136 million users and followed by Brazil with 74 million users (Ceci, 2022).

This research focused on antisemitism on TikTok in Indonesia, which can be perceived as cyberbullying and online hate speech, and aimed to explain how TikTok used in Indonesia, forms of antisemitism on TikTok in Indonesia (if any), and how antisemitism proliferate through TikTok. Hence, the research would attempt to verify whether TikTok propagate antisemitism in Indonesia. In order to analyze and get a better view of the theme, researcher will discuss the rise of TikTok and the phenomena of Antisemitism in Indonesia in the next sections.

Antisemitism is argued as one of the oldest hatreds in the history of humankind. It is argued that the existence of Antisemitism reached back as far to the Biblical times, in which after the Hebrews settled in the Canaan, they experienced hatred and persecution, arguably caused by their refusal to adopt the local religion and customs of the kingdoms of the Middle East. (Anti-Defamation League, 2013) There are numerous attempts to define the term Antisemitism. In 2016, through International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Plenary, it is stated that “Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”, an attempt to define the term which agreed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Plenary representatives from 31 countries. (European Commission, 2021) Despite reportedly having adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance member states and 865 legal entities, the definition proposed by the organization is not without backlash and rejection. (Klein, 2022) Numerous countries, international organizations, and epistemic communities, including international academics and Israeli scholars, decided not to adopt nor endorse the definition of Antisemitism by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. The rejection and critics of the definition came from University College London’s governing body and University of Aberdeen, among other academic institutions that refuse the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance statement. (Gilholy, 2022; Hall, 2021) Furthermore, it is also reported that 128 scholars, which among of them are Jewish, urged the United Nations not to adopt the definition of Antisemitism by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. (Al Jazeera, 2022) Rejections came since the definition is perceived “divisive and polarizing” in nature, and jeopardize the freedom of speech. Others also argued that the definition potentially help Israeli government to avoid critics from international community. In consequence of the rejection, other definitions are proposed by numerous institutions. One of the definitions stated by the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem and other eight coordinators, named the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, define antisemitism as follow: “Antisemitism is discrimination, prejudice, hostility or
violence against Jews as Jews (or Jewish institutions as Jewish)” (Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, 2021).

Meanwhile, despite having a small population of Jews and Jewish descendants, various forms of antisemitism often take place in Indonesia. It is argued that the Jewish population in Indonesia can be traced as early as 17th century. During the colonial era, Jews were prohibited from being employees of the Dutch East Indies Company, Java Bank, and Nederlandsch-Indische Handelsbank. The situation worsened during the Japanese occupation era, in which Jews were arrested and sent to the concentration camp. (Sumandoyo, 2017) In the political context, Indonesia has never established a diplomatic relation with Israel since the independences of the two countries. The first president of Indonesia, Sukarno, even stated that “As long as the freedom of Palestine is yet to be returned to the Palestinians, Indonesia will forever stand in defiance against the occupation by Israel.”, clearly showing and the stance of the nation in the international community and set the nation’s foreign policy toward the issue of Israel. (Zon, 2020) This political stance and the statement by the first president of Indonesia shaped Indonesian sentiments and assumption toward Israel and its people, particularly Jews. These perceptions of Indonesian toward Israel and its people can lead into Antisemitism in various forms. Past research found that the term “Jews” has a negative connotation in Indonesia, which means a threat. (Rachman, 2022) In addition, it is rather difficult for Indonesian to differentiate “Israel” as a state and “Jews” as a race. As explained by Verbrugge and Wiriaatmadja, negative perceptions of Judaism and the Jewish community among Indonesians have led to the concealment of their Jewish identity in order to avoid the conflict and insecurity encountered by the Jewish community. (Rachman, 2022)

Furthermore, Rabbi Yaakov Baruch stated that Indonesians perceive Jews and Israel as the enemy of their religion and state. (Brieger & Buol, 2019) With these negative perceptions, Antisemitism-themed conspiracies propagate among Indonesians, fueled by the disruptive development of information and communication technology. Conspiracies regarding Jews or Judaism in Indonesia mostly revolve around hypothesizing an evil Jewish agenda to conquer and control the world through economics and technology. Not only shared through personal blog or social media posts, but these conspiracies also proliferate through books, sometimes even categorized as non-fiction literature. Some of these books include 'Synagogue of Satan: The Secret History of Jews Dominating the World and Long-Prepared Total Destruction,' a 386-page book published in 2011 categorized as a political book by the Jakarta Public Library; 'Jews the Destroyer of the World,' a 352-page book published in 2008; and 'The Jewish Alarming Report Throughout History,' a 286-page book that unjustly attempts to portray Jews as corrupt, cunning, unjust, and responsible for all crimes. A rather recent phenomenon involving hatred towards Jews also seen in 2022 in which a Holocaust Museum was protested by a number of Indonesian Muslim leaders, merely days after its inauguration. (Strangio, 2022)

Originated from China, TikTok is one of the biggest social media with fast and rapid growth rate. With 755 million accounts registered in 2022 worldwide, TikTok successfully popularize the trend of short video format, a format that later followed by other social medias such as YouTube and Instagram. (Ceci, 2022) With its enormous amount of users, and its features that allow users to share their thoughts and opinions through short video and comment, TikTok transformed into social space and some kind of public sphere. However, this means that TikTok also pose threats for cyberbullying and hate speech. Cyberbullying can be defined as an aggressive intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself. (Smith, et al., 2008) With the disruptive and industrial growth of electronic social media, cyberbullying proliferates in an unprecedented level. Meanwhile, Merriam Webster defines hate speech as "speech expressing hatred of a particular group of people. “However, besides cyberbullying and hate speech, social media also could affect the lifestyle of its users. A study conducted in Indonesia conclude that exposure to TikTok can affect the lifestyle of teenagers and young adult. (Khansa & Putri, 2022) With its close relationship with the government of China and Chinese Communist Party (CCP), TikTok has been receiving adverse reaction from lawmakers and academics around the world. Mike Gallagher, American lawmaker, alleged that TikTok is highly addictive and destructive, while also claiming
that CCP is spreading propaganda through TikTok. (Agence France-Presse, 2023) Allegation and consideration to ban TikTok is not only coming from the USA, India even censored the application since mid of 2020. The cautious actions toward TikTok were also taken from countries around the world since CCP allegedly use medias to frame and spreading its propaganda. (Nathanael, 2022) (Nathanael, Sutowo, & Astuti, 2022).

In Indonesia, based on survey conducted by researcher, 216 samples or around 54% respondents answer that they spend more than 60 minutes per day on TikTok, and 255 samples or around 64% respondents believe that they were enjoying their time to be spent on TikTok. However, regarding whether TikTok is better than other social medias, 41% of the respondents or 163 samples are disagreeing and 45 strongly disagreed. Regarding how the respondents express themselves on TikTok, the majority of them agreed that they can express themselves and leave their impression on the platform, with 139 agreed and 32 strongly agreed or around 43% of them combined. Based on these four questions, it is suggested that around 45% of the respondents are spending and enjoying their time on TikTok, believe that TikTok is the best social media, and express themselves and leave impression on TikTok.

Furthermore, content in Bahasa Indonesia on TikTok that unfairly portrays Jews, Jewish culture, or Judaism, researchers have identified numerous instances on TikTok and other social media. First, at https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSLE4V7WV/, there is a video featuring a religious figure discussing Jews as an evil power that seek to control the world. Another content on TikTok, at https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSLE4m5FR/, also featuring a renown religious figure in Indonesia that discussing a conspiracy about Saudi, Israel, and United States as “global trio” in which they cooperate together to put Jews into power that control Mecca and Medina, two Holy Cities of Islam. Beside videos about evil Jewish political conspiration, there are also contents that claimed the appearance of Dajjal in Israel, a figure that often described as false prophet which will emerge in the approaching Day of Judgment in Islamic tradition, as shown at https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSLE4H7dD/ and https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSLE4yyqg/. Another popular topic on TikTok that unjustly depicts Jews revolves around economic conspiracies, as seen in the video at https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSLE4bJmf/, which claims that the Rothschild family has the power to control most central banks around the world. Similar antisemitic content can also be found on other social media platforms, such as Facebook, as shown in this video at https://fb.watch/nat_pj8etG/?mibextid=Nif5oz, which argues that Jews have an evil strategy to control the world's economy.

METHODE

This research is conducted quantitatively, with a descriptive approach. Quantitative research relies on the collection and analysis of numerical data to describe, explain, predict, or control variables and phenomena of interest. (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012) In this research, the collection and analysis of the data is utilized to describe whether TikTok propagate antisemitism in Indonesia. Hence, the hypotheses of the research are as follow:

H0: TikTok does not propagate antisemitism in Indonesia.
H1: TikTok propagate antisemitism in Indonesia.

With these hypotheses, the research questions are:
1. Are there any forms of antisemitism on TikTok in Indonesia?
2. How strong is the effect of TikTok towards the proliferation of antisemitism?

To collect the data, a survey method, particularly a questionnaire, was conducted by the researcher. Survey method is conducted since the method able to answer questions that have been raised, to solve problems that have been posed or observed, to assess needs and set goals, to determine whether or not specific objectives have been met, to establish baselines against which future comparisons can be made, to analyze trends across time, and generally, to describe what exists, in what amount, and in what context. (Isaac, Stephen; Michael, William B, 1997) Moreover, researcher utilized Statistical Package for Social Sciences in order to test the reliability and validity coefficients of the questionnaire. Reliability coefficients is analyzed by Pearson’s equation below:
In this equation, $r$ represents the Pearson’s correlation coefficient, $n$ is the number of valid responses, $x$ represents the score of an item, and $y$ represents the total score of each respondent with valid responses. Meanwhile, the reliability of the questionnaire can be analyzed using Cronbach’s equation as follow:

$$\alpha = \left[\frac{n}{n-1}\right] \left[1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} \sigma_i^2}{\sigma_X^2}\right]$$

To determine the amount of sample required for the questionnaire, researcher use Slovin’s formula as follow:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + (N 	imes e^2)}$$

In this equation, $n$ is the amount of sample needed, $N$ is the total population, and $e$ is margin of error. Hence, the sample required for this research are:

$$n = \frac{99,100,000}{1 + (99,100,000 	imes 0.0025)} = 400 \text{ sample}$$

The sampling method conducted in this research is simple random sampling. Simple random sampling is the process of selecting a sample in such a way that all individuals in the defined population have an equal and independent chance of selection for the sample. (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012) The result of the methods will be delivered and explained in the next section.

In order to examine if the samples are normally distributed, the researcher will conduct the Kolmogorov – Smirnov Test. The Kolmogorov – Smirnov Test is a mathematical tool that measures the difference between two types of distributions. The first is the empirical distribution function (EDF) of a given sample, and the second is the cumulative distribution function (CDF) of a reference distribution. Alternatively, the Kolmogorov – Smirnov Test can compare the EDFs of two different samples. To determine the validity of this comparison, the Kolmogorov – Smirnov Test's null distribution is calculated. The null hypothesis states that the sample(s) being compared are drawn from the reference distribution (in the one-sample case) or from the same distribution (in the two-sample case).

In the one-sample case, the reference distribution can be continuous, purely discrete, or a mix of both. On the other hand, in the two-sample case, the reference distribution is a continuous distribution without any further restrictions. This null distribution is used to determine whether the difference between the EDF and CDF is significant or can be attributed to random chance. (Conover, 1999)

In this particular research, researcher conducted the one – sample case. In the one-sample case, the Kolmogorov – Smirnov Test equation is:

$$D_n = \max|F_{n}(x) - F(x)|$$

$F_n(x)$ is the empirical distribution function of the sample, which is defined as the proportion of observations in the sample that are less than or equal to $x$. $F(x)$ is the cumulative distribution function of the reference distribution that the sample is being compared to.

$D_n$ is the Kolmogorov – Smirnov Test, which measures the maximum distance between the empirical distribution function of the sample and the cumulative distribution function of the reference distribution.

The null hypothesis of the one-sample Kolmogorov – Smirnov Test is that the sample is drawn from the reference distribution. The $p$-value is then calculated from the null distribution of the Kolmogorov – Smirnov Test, which depends on the sample size and the reference distribution. If the $p$-value is less than the chosen significance level, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that the sample is unlikely to have come from the reference distribution. In this particular research, based on Slovin’s formula, the sample size is 400 samples.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To answer the research question regarding forms of antisemitism on TikTok, 40% agree and 20% strongly agree that hate speech and cyberbullying is often found on TikTok. More than 30% samples also agree that Jews/Jewish/Judaism are perceived negatively on TikTok, while 24% other disagree and another 44% chose neutral. Moreover, 37% of samples agree that they often found hate speech or cyberbullying towards Jews/Jewish/Judaism on TikTok. However, only 23% of the samples agree that they found “truth” about Jews/Jewish/Judaism on TikTok, while 48% chose neutral and 29% of the samples disagree. Overall, regarding whether there is any form of antisemitism on TikTok, 7% of the samples answer strongly disagree, 16% disagree, 38% neutral, 30% agree, and 9% strongly agree that there are forms of antisemitism on TikTok. Onto the next research question regarding how strong the effect of TikTok towards the proliferation of antisemitism in Indonesia, around 79% samples agree that beside entertainment TikTok also sources of news, knowledge, and information. In addition, 63% of the samples agree that TikTok is able to convey political messages and social campaigns efficiently. However, only 13% of samples agree and more than 70% of the samples disagree that they do not need to verify the information they received on TikTok. Regarding whether TikTok can affect the perception towards Jews/Jewish/Judaism, 10% strongly disagree, 24% answer disagree, 43% chose neutral, 19% agree, and 4% strongly agree. Furthermore, whether there are a lot of misinformation regarding Jews/Jewish/Judaism on TikTok, 8% answer strongly disagree, 13% disagree, 62% chose neutral, 14% agree, and 4% strongly agree. Thus, it can be concluded that TikTok potentially has strong effect towards the proliferation of antisemitism in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This research seeks whether TikTok propagate antisemitism in Indonesia. Antisemitism defined as discrimination, prejudice, hostility, or violence against Jews as Jews (or Jewish institutions as Jewish). (Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, 2021) In order to get the findings, researcher utilize descriptive quantitative methods. With 400 samples, it is known that more than 50% of the population enjoy more than an hour of their time on TikTok. Moreover, more than 65% of the samples agree that hate speech and cyberbullying are often found on TikTok. However, only 33% samples agree that Jews/Jewish/Israel/Judaism are perceived negatively on TikTok and only 37% samples agree there are many cyberbullying and hate speech toward Jews/Jewish/Israel/Judaism on TikTok. In addition, 79% of the samples agree that TikTok is not only source for the entertainment, but also source for news, knowledge, and information and 63% agree that TikTok is able to convey political messages/social campaign efficiently. Despite that, 75% of the samples disagree that they do not double check the information that they received on TikTok. Regarding whether TikTok can affect the perception towards Jews/Jewish/Judaism, 10% strongly disagree, 24% answer disagree, 43% chose neutral, 19% agree, and 4% strongly agree. Furthermore, TikTok is having a great screen time and enjoyed by most of their users in Indonesia. It is also indicated that there are a lot of hate speech and cyberbullying on TikTok in Indonesia, however these hate speech and cyberbullying are mainly not toward Jews/Jewish/Israel/Judaism. While it is indicated that TikTok able to convey political messages/social campaign efficiently in Indonesia, it is also found that TikTok have limited power to affect the perception of Jews/Jewish/Israel/Judaism in Indonesia. Hence, this research concludes that TikTok does propagate antisemitism in Indonesia, despite its sprawling are limited.

REFERENCE


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