

حملة - المركز العربي
لتطوير الإعلام الاجتماعي
7amleh - The Arab Center For
the Advancement of Social Media



An Analysis of the Israeli Inciteful speech against the Village of "Huwara" on Twitter



Introduction

Since the beginning of the current year, 2023, Israeli attacks and raids on Palestinian cities have intensified, accompanied by a significant escalation in violence directed towards Palestinians on the ground, whether by the army or Israeli settlers in the West Bank. The preceding was accompanied by an extensive Israeli campaign on social media platforms, prompted and supported by Israeli ministers and officials, inciting against the village of Huwara and its residents, who have been heavily targeted, and demanding the village's demolition and subsequent erasure.

The incitement did not stop with ordinary settlers; it also included officials such as the Israeli Minister of Defense, the Israeli Minister of Finance, Bezalel Smotrich, as well as the Deputy Head of the Settlement Council in the Northern West Bank, David Ben-Zion, who called for the wiping out of Huwara, in addition to many right-wing news websites, pages and groups on social media platforms.

Indeed, the large scale of incitement via social media platforms contributed to the organization of an attack by hundreds of settlers on the village of Huwara on the evening of February 26, 2023. In spite of the presence of the Israeli soldiers, settlers rioted in the village, torching homes, crops, and vehicles and attacking residents and property with stones. Furthermore, settlers shot and killed a Palestinian and caused panic among Palestinians in an attack that drew widespread condemnation around the world. The attacks against the village of Huwara did not stop in the days that followed, although their frequency and volume lessened.

As a result, 7amleh published an analytical report outlining the volume, nature and patterns of inflammatory and violent speech in Hebrew directed at the village of Huwara on Twitter between the beginning of the year and the end of March.

Methodology

During the first three months, 7amleh monitored (15,250) Hebrew tweets with the hashtags Huwara (#חװארה) and Wipe out Huwara (#למחוק_את_חװארה). The aforementioned content, the accounts that posted it and the nature of the inciting language employed were analyzed in order to form a perception on Israeli incitement to violence against Palestinians in the digital sphere, as well as its relationship to violence on the ground.

In addition to the tweet texts, data on the time of publication, number of views, likes, retweets, quotes and replies were collected for each tweet. Furthermore, basic information about the accounts from which the tweets were collected was gathered, such as the account's name, number of followers, the time the account was first created and whether or not the account was verified by Twitter.

A "sentiment analysis» algorithm trained on millions of texts in the Hebrew language "HeBERT*¹" was used to analyze the tweets. This algorithm analyzes the emotional tone of texts as positive, negative, or neutral, classifying Tweets as negative if the language used in the text expresses an overall negative tone or attitude towards the subject of the text, which can include feelings of anger, frustration, sadness, sarcasm, disappointment or disgust. As a result, the negative content collected and analyzed in the report about the village of Huwara may include direct calls for violence, hate speech and incitement, but it is not limited to that and includes other forms of negative sentiments towards the village.

The HeBERT algorithm has been extensively tested and assessed, with remarkably accurate results. Notably, the model's accuracy at distinguishing positive from negative messages was found to be greater than 95%, indicating that it can reliably recognize positive and negative emotions. However, the possibility of error exists when using any automated algorithm and HeBERT's model is no exception. While it is a very effective tool for sentiment analysis in Hebrew, it is important to treat the results with caution and keep in mind the possibility of error, which can be as high as 5%.

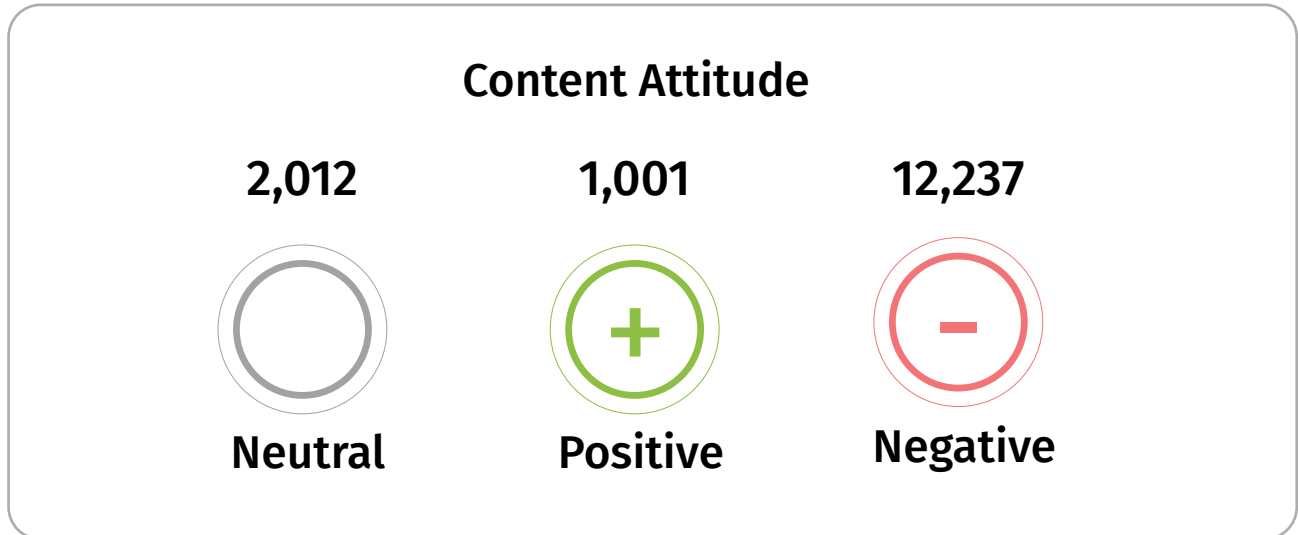
The following are the most prominent racist and incitement words and phrases that were monitored in the tweets and, accordingly, were analyzed in this report:

למחוק חװארה	Wipe out Huwara	תושבי חװארה	Residents of Huwara
לשרוף	Let's Burn	סמורטיץ	Smotrich
פוגרום חװארה	Annihilate Huwara	בן גביר	Ben-Gvir
טרור	Terrorism	אלימות	Violence
כפר חװארה	The Village of Huwara	פיגוע	Attack
רצח	Kill	פורעי חװארה	Huwara Troublemakers

¹ HeBERT :*It is a sophisticated language model that has been trained on tens of millions of texts to analyze the tone of Hebrew texts .This means that it has a thorough understanding of the intricacies and the complexity of the Hebrew language and can accurately discern emotion.

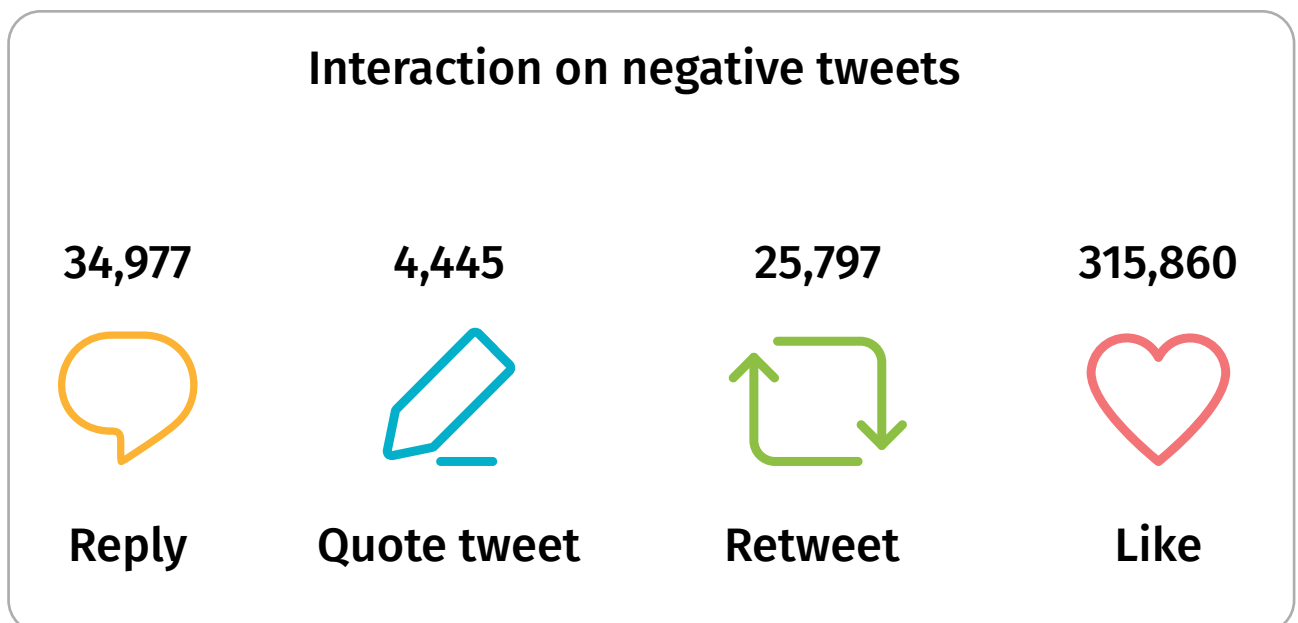
Content Analysis

The monitored content (tweets) were categorized into negative, positive and neutral content based on their attitude, and the results were as follows:

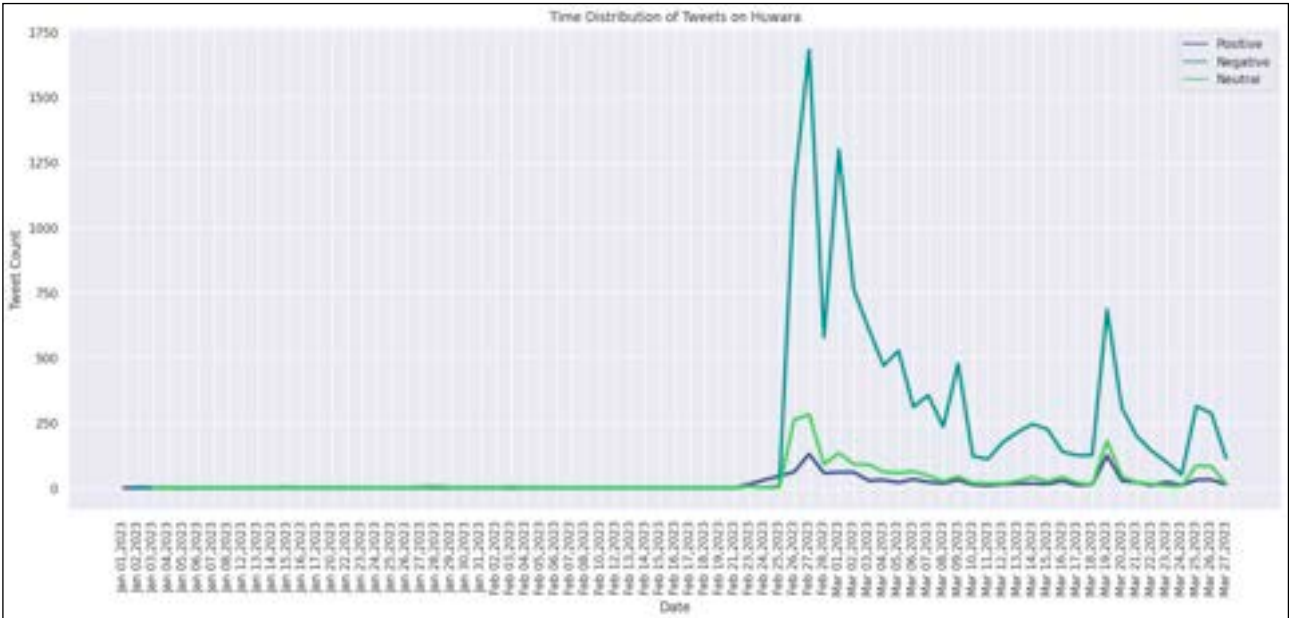


It turns out that in the Hebrew digital space, 80.2% of all tweets about Huwara (15,250 tweets) may include negative content against the village and its residents. The number of likes on negative tweets reached (315,860) interactions, which is a large number in relation to the number of tweets, with an average of (25.8) likes per tweet.

The following is the distribution of interaction on negative tweet:



On the eve of the settlers' attack on the village of Huwara on the evening of February 26, 2023, the intensity of incitement and hate speech increased over time. From the day of the attack until the end of March, approximately (158) Twitter accounts published an average of (188) negative tweets per day against the village of Huwara. The following graph depicts the frequency of inciteful speech against Huwara over time:



Many of the monitored terms were used more frequently than others, such as “Wipe out Huwara” which is the same hashtag that was widely used in the incitement campaign against the village of Huwara. Also used were words such as “terrorism,” “saboteurs,” and other expressions that incite murder. The following are the tweets' most prominent and violent vocabulary:

למחוק	Wipe out	מחבלים	Saboteurs
צריך למחוק	Must wipe out	באש	By fire
לשרוף	Let's burn	לפגוע	To harm
פוגרום חווארה	Annihilate Huwara	טרור	Terrorism
אלימות	Violence	רצח	Murder

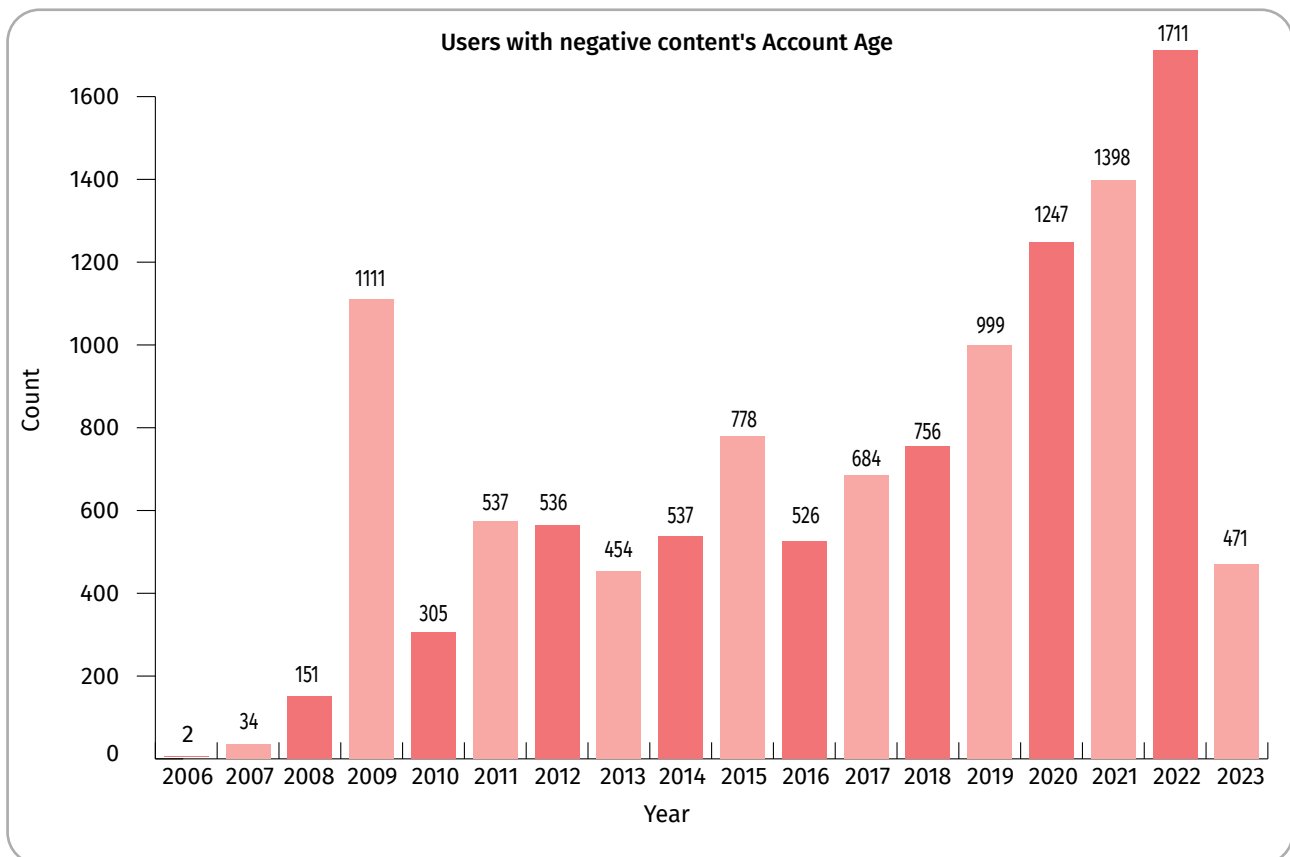
As a measure of analysis, the negative tweets were analyzed and classified based on the number of interactions they received, such as likes and retweets, and the results were as follows: The content included (826) tweets out of over 1000 tweets that received a negative and racist sentiment interaction, i.e. 82.6% of their content was negative toward Huwara. Only (22) tweets were positive concerning the village, while the remaining (152) were neutral. While out of over (1000) retweeted tweets (761) included racist and inciting content, (220) were neutral and only (19) were positive, i.e. only 1.9%.

Accounts 'Analysis

Over the course of three months, (6,241) users posted negative content about Huwara, with an average of two tweets per user. There were (188) verified accounts with an average of (61) thousand followers each, 68% of their content was negative against the village of Huwara, with a total potential viewership of (8,214,652) views, indicating their widespread impact. During the months of February and March, (70) new accounts were created, which published (89) tweets, all of which were inciting against Huwara, indicating the nature of the systematic and organized attack on the village.

The distribution of accounts that published negative content concerning the village of Huwara according to the year of creation is as follows. It appears that a large percentage of the accounts that published negative content were created during the Huwara attack in 2023 and were active in the racist campaign:

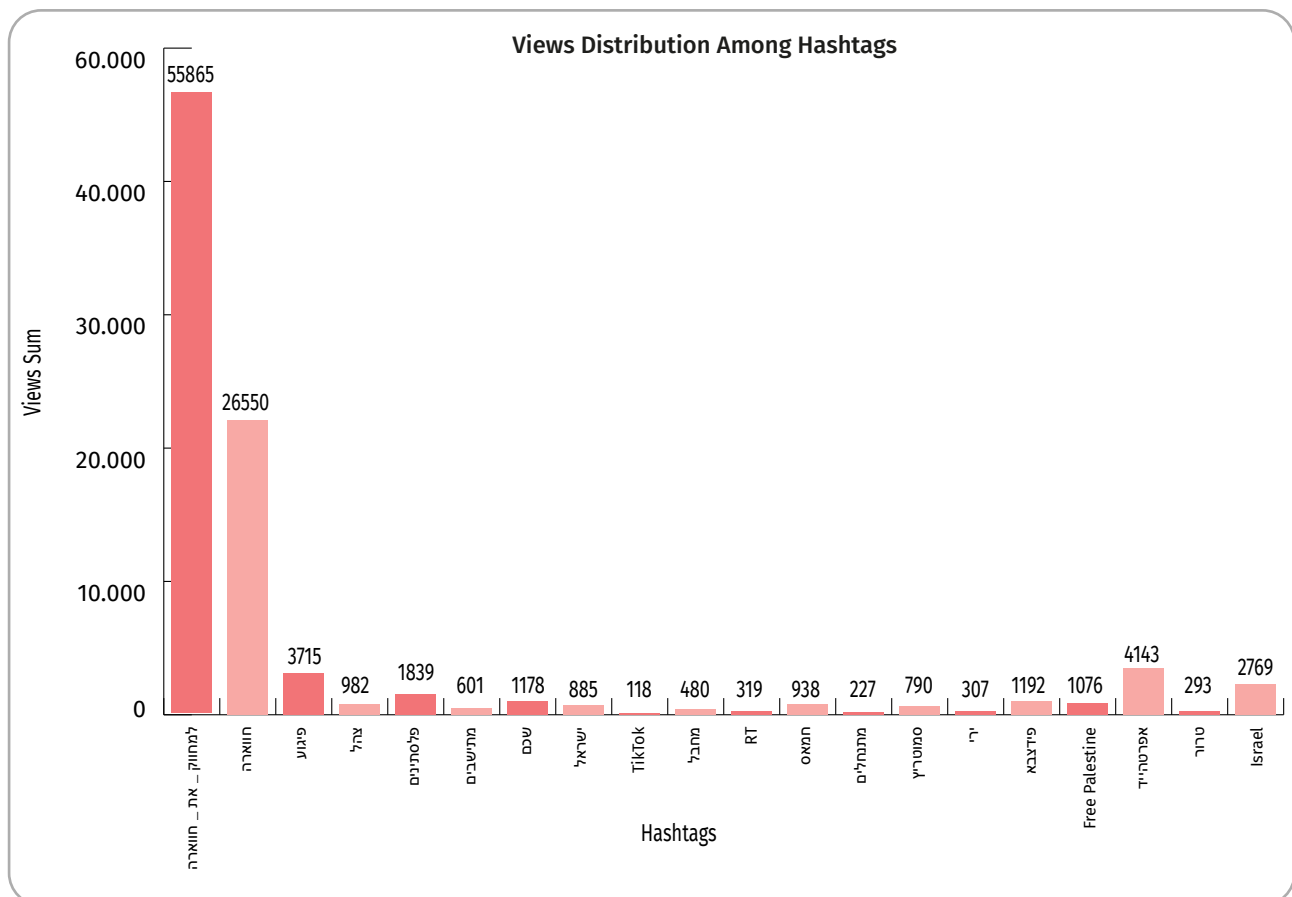
Year of creation of account	Number of accounts	Year of creation of account	Number of accounts
2006	2	2015	778
2007	34	2016	526
2008	151	2017	684
2009	1111	2018	756
2010	305	2019	999
2011	537	2020	1247
2012	536	2021	1398
2013	454	2022	1711
2014	537	2023	471



Hashtags Analysis

Israeli Twitter users who posted about the Huwara events used a variety of hashtags, the most popular of which was probably #Wipe out Huwara (למחוק_את_חווארה). Other hashtags were used frequently, but the #Wipe out Huwara hashtag was one of the most viewed by the public. Viewership varied by hashtag, and the following is a summary of the number of views attained by each of the hashtags used in the Hebrew digital space to incite or discuss the Huwara events:

Hashtags	No. of views	Hashtags	No. of views
טרור (terrorism)	293	חמאס (Hamas)	938
אפרטהייד (Apartheid)	4143	מחבל (Terrorist)	480
פיד צבא (Feeding the military)	1192	ישראל (Israel)	885
ירי (Shooting)	307	שכם (Nablus)	1178
סמוטריץ (Smotrich)	790	מתיישבים (Residents) Used to refer to settlers positively	601
מתנחלים (Settlers)	227	פלסטינים (Palestinians)	1839
צה ל (Israeli Army)	982	חווארה (Huwara)	26550
פיגוע (Operation)	3715	(Wipe out Huwara) למחוק את חווארה	55865
TikTok	118	RT	319
Israel	2769	Free Palestine	1076



According to the above analysis, the viewership of content published with the hashtag "Wipe out Huwara" is very high when compared to the use of other hashtags. As can be seen, the number of views of the content using this hashtag was approximately (56,000), whereas the total number of views of the content using the remaining hashtags was only approximately (48,400). The preceding demonstrates the direct impact and spread of inciting and violent rhetoric.

Examples of Inciteful Tweets



Translation:

We do not want to calm the situation, we want to burn Huwara.



Translation: Huwara must be wiped out from the ground, Unit 101* must be restored, and every village that produces a terrorist must be burned. If the army is incapable of doing so, let it turn a blind eye and assign this task to the settlers without disturbing or interrogating them.

* Unit (101): A former Israeli army unit was established in 1953 to conduct monitoring and tracking tours of Israel's border areas and beyond.²

² Terminology Encyclopedia. MADAR- the Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies. Last retrieved: 30 April 2023.

<https://www.madarcntr.org/%D985%D988%D8%B3%D988%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D984%D985%D8%B5%D8%B7%D984%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AA/1059-%D8%A7%D984%D988%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%A9101->



I support either wiping out Huwara or settling Jews there.



Account name: Let's Burn Huwara

Account Bio:

"A village of murderers, it's time for the army to demolish this village"



Comment:

“Why do you create contradictions when there is harmony??

We can do both, wiping out the village and populating the Jews in it, according to Ben-Gurion's plan for the kibbutzim: "Public buildings must be kept, and private homes must be blown up."

Conclusion

According to 7amleh's research and documentation on Palestinian digital rights, digital violence and incitement have effects and repercussions that extend beyond the political, social, and rights-related dimensions online, often causing material and even physical harm on the ground. It is no longer possible to control the overlap between real and digital events, and perhaps in the case study presented in this report, we find the most evidence that digital violence frequently translates into extremely serious physical and material violence.

In this context, it is not surprising to monitor thousands of Israeli tweets and racist and inciting content against Palestinians on social media platforms, particularly Twitter. 7amleh has monitored, annually, through the "Index of Racism and Incitement" hundreds of thousands of Israeli racist content against Palestinians on various Social media platforms, especially Twitter, which is widely used by Israelis to incite against Palestinians. 7amleh, for example, has monitored (685) thousand violent content against Palestinians in the last year, a 10% increase from the year prior³. As a result, the digital and physical attack on Huwara is not an exception, but rather the rule in Israeli digital behavior toward Palestinians in recent years. These digital attacks appear to be aimed not only at erasing the Palestinian presence and deterring the Palestinian digital narrative, but also at encouraging and organizing attacks on the ground.

The undermoderation of Hebrew content by social media platforms is to blame for the spread of this phenomenon. They do not penalize users who post inciting content in Hebrew, and they are unconcerned about the safety of Palestinian users who are victims of Israeli incitement. At a time when the same platforms are overburdening themselves with Palestinian and Arabic content in general. In the same context, the Israeli judiciary and police do not hold any acts of incitement against Palestinians and Arabs accountable, creating a fertile environment for the spread of such incitement and racist speech and attacks against Palestinians both online and in real life.

To summarize, it appears that Twitter and other social media platforms provide a fertile environment for the spread of hate speech, particularly against Palestinians in the Palestinian/Israeli context, with no intervention from the private sector to penalize the accounts that publish and promote these rhetoric. It appears that the contents of racism and incitement against the Palestinian people do not elicit responses from Twitter to control, remove, or reduce the distribution/viewership of this type of discourse. Especially after the platform's management deteriorated following the sale deal and its acquisition by American billionaire Elon Musk, as policy confusion that severely affected the company's commitment to respecting human rights and protecting users and their rights on the platform was evident.

3 "Index of Racism and Incitement 2022: 7amleh monitored 685 thousand racist and inciting speeches in the Hebrew language." 7amleh, 2022. <https://7amleh.org/202328/03//mushr-alansryh-walthrydh-mrkz-hmlh-yrsd-685-alf-khtab-ansry-wmhrdh-fy-allghh-alabryh-fy-alaam-2022>

Recommendations

Social media private sector:

- Taking decisive measures to prevent the spread of incitement, racism and violence speech against Arabs and Palestinians through various platforms.
- Developing a lexicon of hate speech in Hebrew and using it to monitor this type of content.
- Enforcing content moderation policies as required on Israeli content in Hebrew.
- Ending the policy of discriminatory double standards regarding Palestinian and Israeli content on social media platforms.

Third parties:

- Committing the Israeli government to halt the systematic incitement of Palestinians through social media platforms, and to hold officials and citizens accountable.
- Obligating the private sector of social media to develop transparent and just policies to combat hate speech and incitement.