

Presenters: Paul Iganski, Lancaster University, and Abe Sweiry, “Prejudice Bytes”

Title: “**Antisemitism on social media**”

Panel: Internet and Anti-Semitism

Insults, abuse, and other derogatory comments against Jews are frequently hurled on the streets and other public places. But the sentiments expressed by offenders have not usually been accessible to researchers because of the fleeting nature of their occurrence. Insults slung on social media, by contrast, are preserved for scrutiny—unless they are deleted by the perpetrator. Social media, therefore provide a reservoir of unsolicited everyday public opinion which will include a range of discriminatory discourses. Social media also provide a more naturalistic, and hence more reliable, source of public attitudes about Jews than attitude surveys which traditionally have been used to identify prejudicial sentiments on a large scale: as attitude surveys inevitably presuppose the discourses thought to be contemporarily relevant and encourage respondents to articulate views that they might harbour in the abstract, but might never articulate to another individual in-person. By contrast, social media users often vent their views without inhibition due to the cloak of impersonality that computer mediated communication provides. Such expressions of hostility or prejudice on social media, as well as being preserved in text, are also retained in their original setting. The prompts and wider contexts of discussion, whether international or local events, interpersonal disputes or discussions of seemingly unrelated matters, provide the possibility of exploring and understanding the social contexts within which discriminatory discourses, such as antisemitic discourses emerge and develop. The precise influence of wider events on the emergence, variation and nature of discriminatory discourses can be illuminated. However, despite the potential provided by social media for accessing antisemitic discourse there has to-date been little systematic analysis of such discourse prevalent on social media. Consequently, in this paper using Twitter data we present a typology and a categorisation of the different themes of antisemitic discourse manifest on Twitter and offer suggestions for the conceptual and applied value of such systematic analysis in terms of informing counter responses to antisemitic hate speech.