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Hashtag Hate: #JewGoal and the Normalization of Antisemitism Online

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Abstract

Originating amongst the FIFA video game community, where it is a recognised tactic employed while playing the game, the term, ‘Jew goal’, describes a type of football goal, where, in a two-on-one situation with the goalkeeper, a player passes the ball across the goal instead of taking a direct shot. It implies a level of opportunism or ‘unfairness’, which, without breaking any official rules, perceives the player who scores such a goal as capitalizing on the preceding play, or the efforts of the passing player, thus resulting in the accusation that the scoring player has achieved a ‘cheap’ or ‘easy’ goal. In doing so, the term draws from the racist antisemitic stereotype of the lecherous ‘Jew’ living off the hard-work and effort of others. What remains unique to the term, however, is how it has migrated from video game communities to online discussions of real football games. This phenomenon reflects a significant development in the manifestation of antisemitism within online spaces, particularly where the fictional world of video games intersects with real-world sports discourse. This was made apparent in tweets that specifically adopted the ‘Jew goal’ hashtag (#JewGoal), illustrating how antisemitic coding infiltrates public online discussions. In this paper I will explore the spread of the antisemitic hashtag—#JewGoal—from the FIFA video game community into to online football discourse, emphasizing the way in which antisemitic language can normalize and move seamlessly between these domains. By exploring this migration, it is argued that such phrases exemplify the ease with which online hate can manifest in everyday, offline contexts. Notably, I’ll highlight how the trivialization and perpetuation of antisemitism—whereby humour and irony are employed to mask the offensive nature of language—can create a sense of belonging among those who participate in this form of expression, while also downplaying its harmful effects. To help make sense of this, I’ll conclude with a reference to Lacanian psychoanalysis, and, specifically, Lacan’s concept of *jouissance*. I’ll argue that this concept can allow us to examine what I refer to as the often excessive enjoyment that fuels examples of online hate. Through introducing Lacan’s *llanguage*, I’ll highlight how language becomes a tool for expressing the senseless repetition and enjoyment of a racist gesture that retains its significance despite its absurdity. The dataset used in this study comprised 1,364 public tweets posted between 2010 and 2020 containing the phrase ‘Jew goal’ or the hashtag #jewgoal.

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