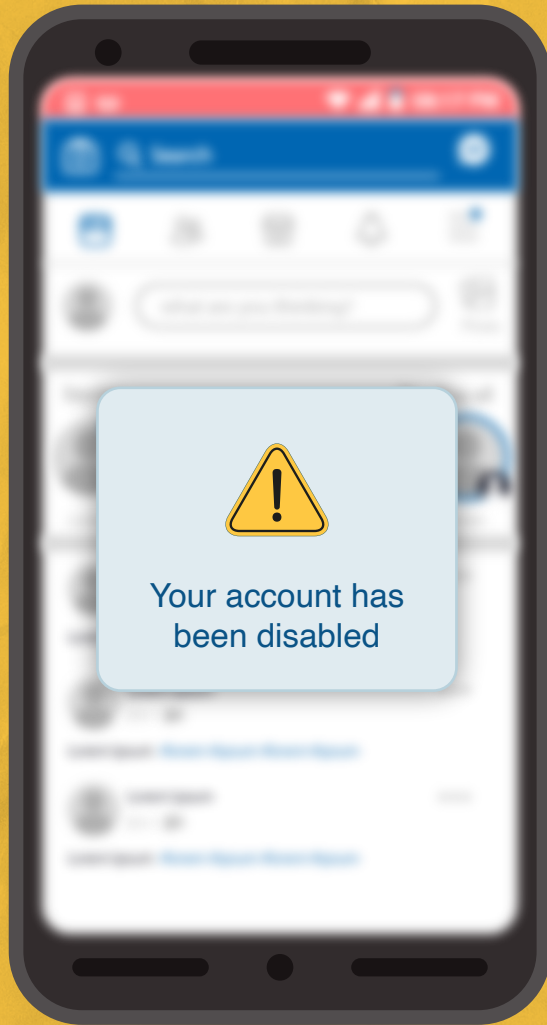




Quarterly Report



Q₃

July-September 2023

Introduction

The occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) remains embroiled in a persistent cycle of unrest and tension, which has persisted over the last two years, with ongoing developments continually reshaping the area. As we transition into the fourth quarter of this year, we are confronted with a disquieting pattern of sustained violence and actions by Israeli forces and settlers that loom over the population and the land. These unfolding events continue to undermine the fundamental human rights and freedoms of Palestinians, particularly within the digital realm. This digital dimension amplifies the challenges systematically faced by Palestinians, adding another layer of complexity to their struggle for justice and equality.

In this complex digital environment, social media companies have increasingly turned to artificial intelligence techniques and algorithms as essential tools for adopting and implementing content moderation decisions. Regrettably, these very tools have frequently been utilized to censor legal and legitimate content and enforce limitations on Palestinian voices, as shown in this report. What's concerning is the obvious disparity between the strict measures taken against hate speech and incitement in many cases worldwide and the significant inaction against the same type of hate speech and incitement is used against pro-Palestinian activists and the Palestinian community within Israeli digital space.

Social media companies persisted in implementing punitive policies and measures that unfairly and disproportionately impact accounts and pages dedicated to advocating for Palestinian rights. In its Annual Human Rights report, Meta recently claimed of dedication to fostering transparency regarding human rights due diligence, particularly in the realm of fairer content moderation in the Israel/Palestine context¹. However, there remains a continuous tolerance for hate speech and inflammatory content against Palestinians, while Palestinian voices and narratives are still discriminated against.²

In the following analysis, we aim to shed light on the most significant digital violations meticulously documented by 7amleh through the Palestinian Observatory of Digital Rights Violations - «7or.» Our focus spans the from July to September of this year, offering insights into the evolving landscape of digital rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territory.

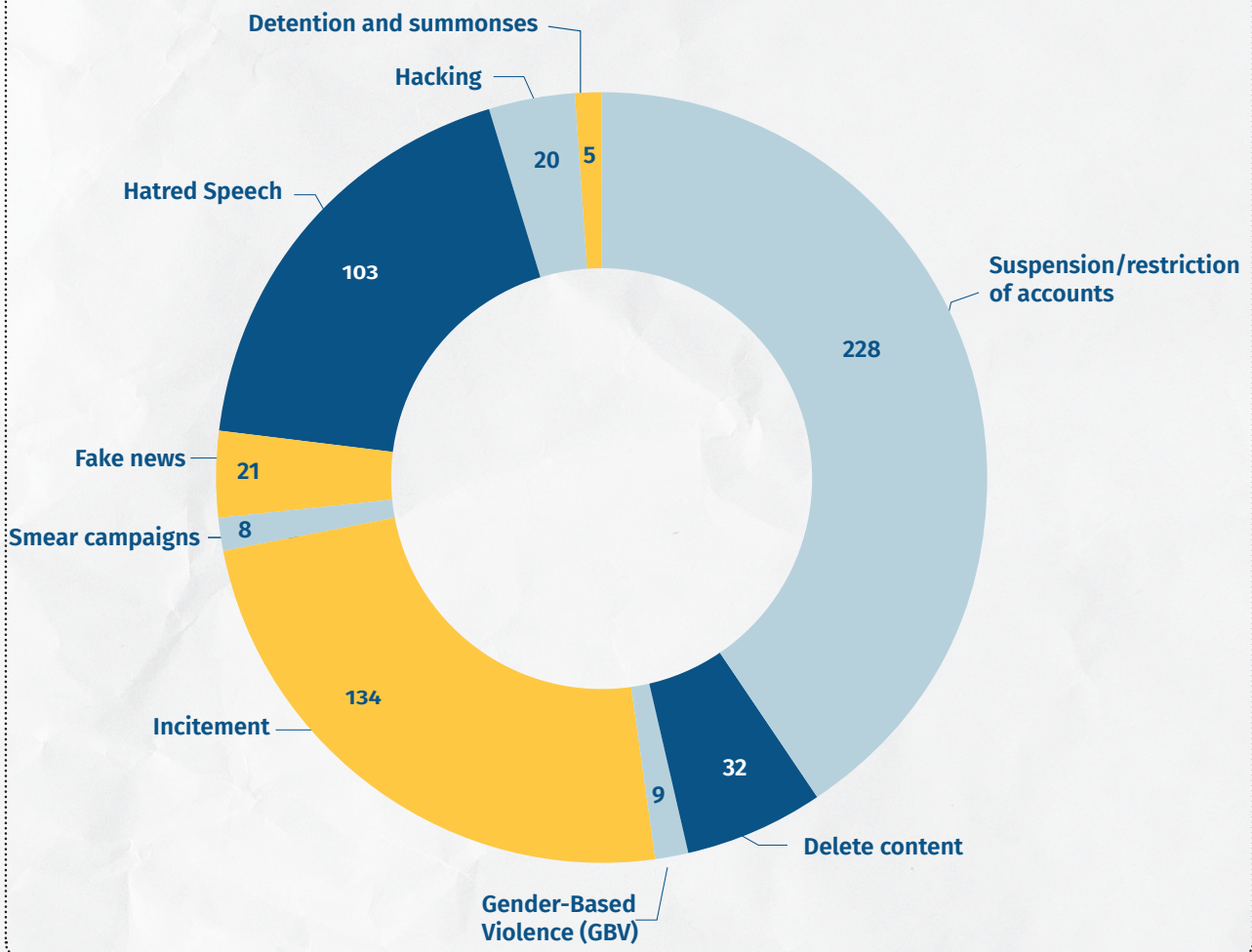
1 "Human Rights Report Insights and Actions 2022." Meta. URL: <https://humanrights.fb.com/wp-content/uploads/-2022/09/2023-Meta-Human-Rights-Report.pdf>; "Meta Update: Israel Palestine Due Diligence Update". URL: <https://humanrights.fb.com/wp-content/uploads/09/2023/September-2023-Israel-and-Palestine-HRDD-Meta-Update.pdf>

2 "7amleh Calls on Meta to Fully Implement BSR Report Recommendations." 7amleh. URL: <https://7amleh.org/7/27/09/2023amleh-calls-on-meta-to-fully-implement-bsr-report-recommendations>

Violations

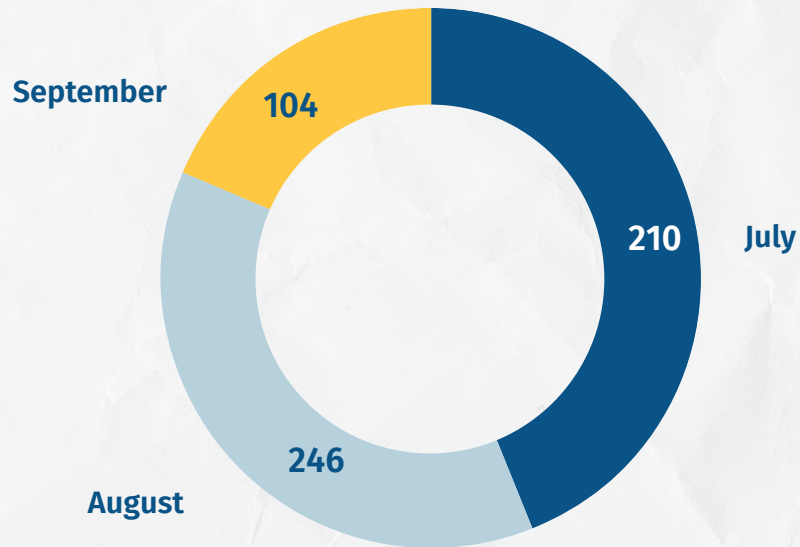
Throughout the third quarter of the year, social media companies persistently censored the Palestinian narrative, stifling voices and employing disproportionate content moderation measures. During this timeframe, we observed a staggering 560 documented violations:

Disaggregation of violations according to their form



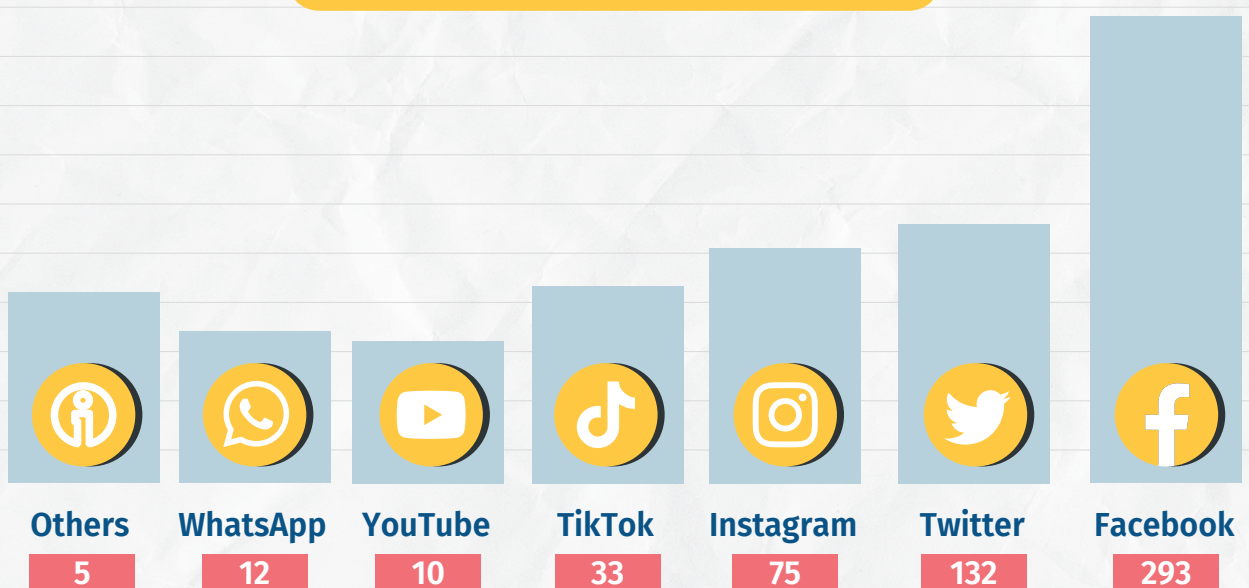
Social media platforms predominantly employed punitive measures against Palestinian pages and accounts dedicated to promoting Palestinian rights or reporting news, all within the context of expressing opinions and critiquing the actions of the Israeli forces. As the indicators above vividly illustrate, these restrictive actions, including content takedowns and account suspensions, accounted for a staggering 46.5% of the total violations documented by 7amleh over the past three months.

Disaggregation of violations by month



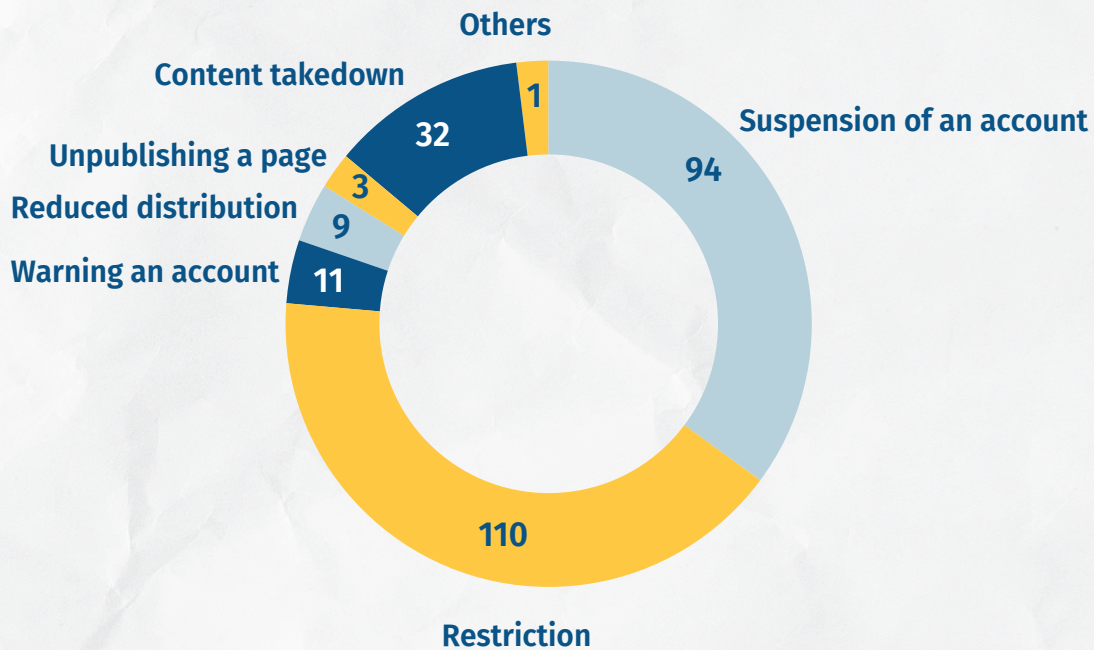
From July through September, the oPt experienced a significant surge in violent events on the ground. As anticipated, these events directly impacted the digital sphere, resulting in increased restrictions on fundamental freedoms, while Israeli accounts and pages simultaneously proliferated hate speech and incitement against Palestinians online. The rise in the frequency of digital violations against Palestinians and advocates of Palestinian rights worldwide within the first two months of the third quarter underscores the extent of repression and the daunting challenges they encounter in the digital realm.

Disaggregation of violations by platform



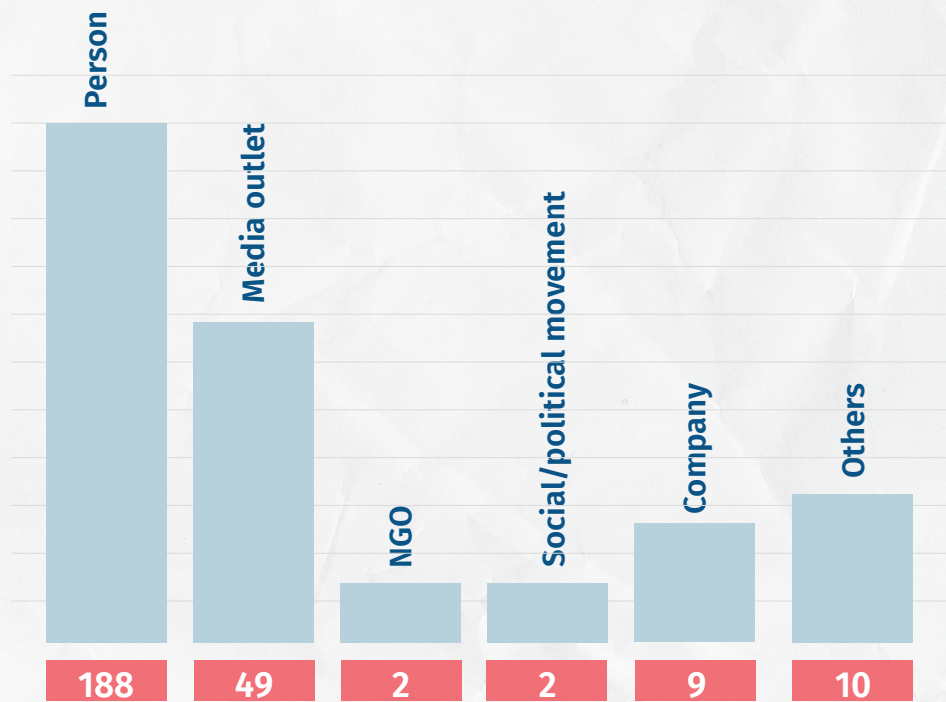
Meta platforms remain the predominant source of violations against Palestinian digital rights, constituting a substantial 68% of all documented infractions by 7amleh. These violations primarily manifest as access restrictions, suspensions, and content takedowns across Meta’s platforms. Concurrently, the persistent prevalence of hate speech and incitement against the Palestinian community and its advocates in the digital realm remains a pressing concern.

Distribution of violations by type of blocking/restriction

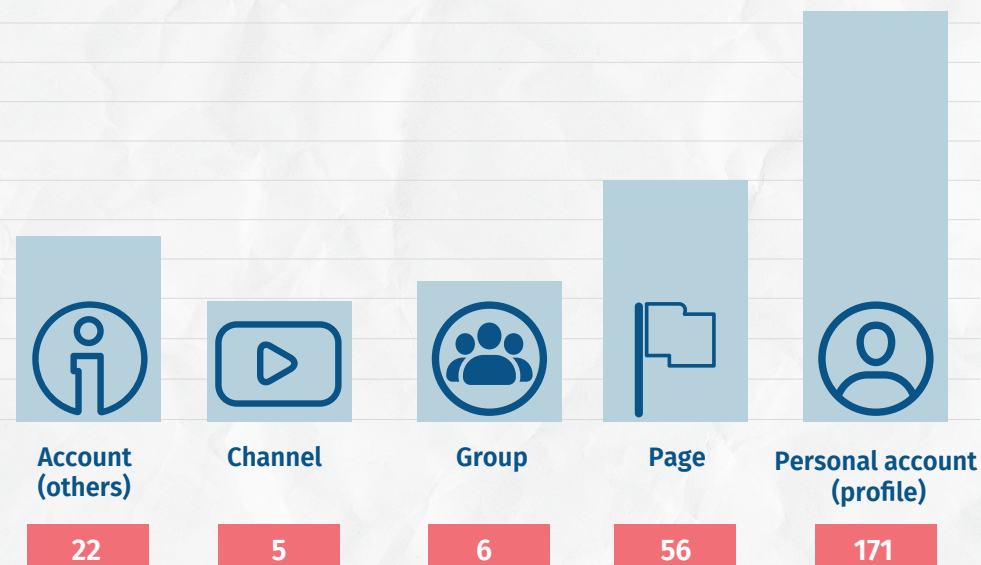


The findings underscore that one of the most prominent punitive actions (the “Strike” system) taken by companies against Palestinian content involves a progression from initial warnings to complete restrictions and suspensions of accounts. Importantly, in numerous instances, these measures are implemented without prior warning.

Disaggregation of violations by affected body

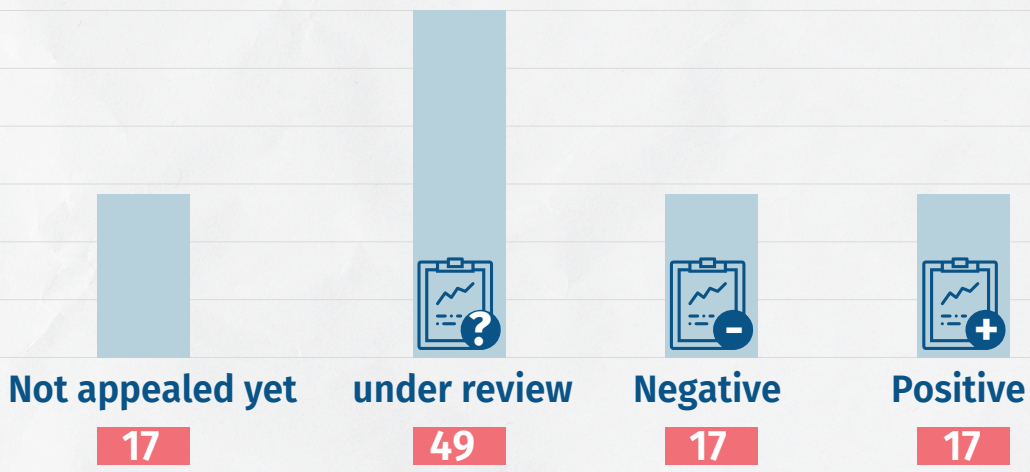


Classification of victims according to the type of account on the social media platforms



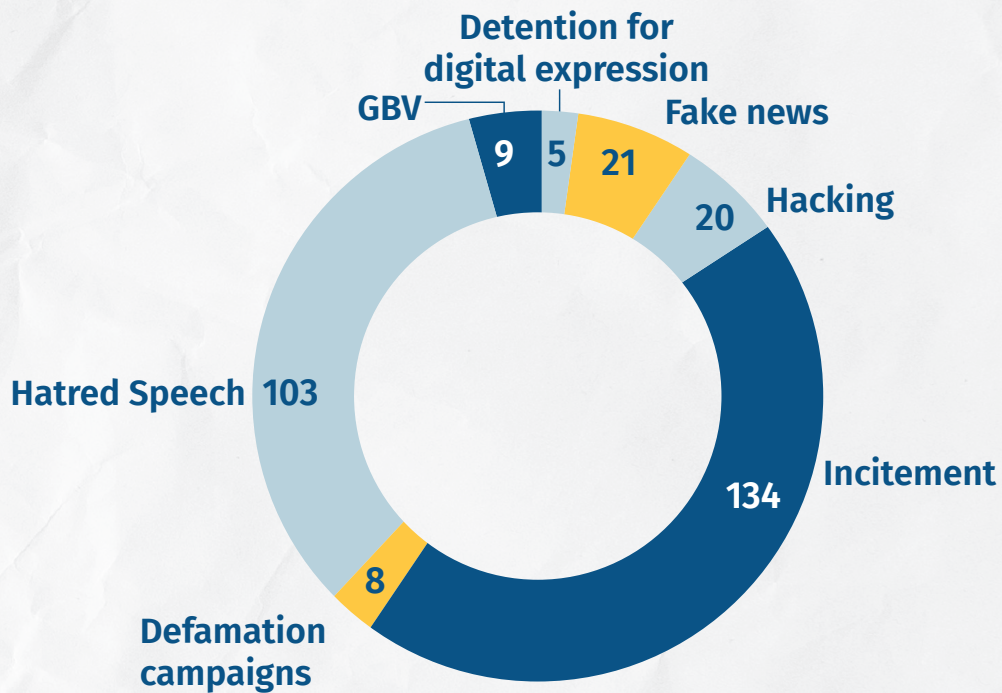
Evidently, individuals in specific professions, particularly regarding the Palestinian context, where documentation of human rights violations is critical, such as journalists, activists, or human rights defenders, emerge as the most susceptible targets for various digital violations. Simultaneously, media pages have also encountered a substantial share of restrictions and violations, hampering their ability to effectively carry out their strategic work across social media platforms.

Disaggregation of the companies' responses to the reports that the 7amleh Center has followed up to date



Companies' response to requests for content and account reinstatement, as well as lifting restrictions, yielded a success rate of approximately 23%. A significant portion of these requests remains under review by companies as of this report's release, which is concerning because rapid responses are critical in the context of a crisis.

Harmful content and practices



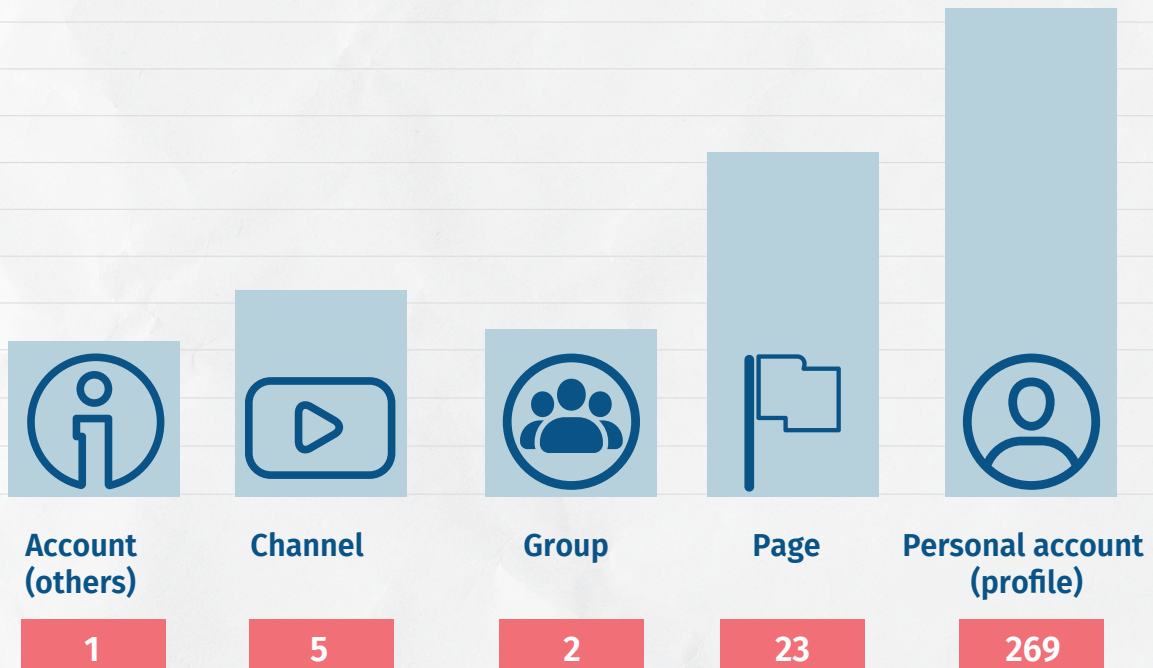
The documented violations underscore a disconcerting reality: incitement and hate speech have permeated social media platforms to an alarming extent. These findings emphasize the urgent need for comprehensive, meaningful and effective measures to address this pervasive issue and ensure the maintenance of safe and respectful digital spaces.

On which platform did the violation take place?



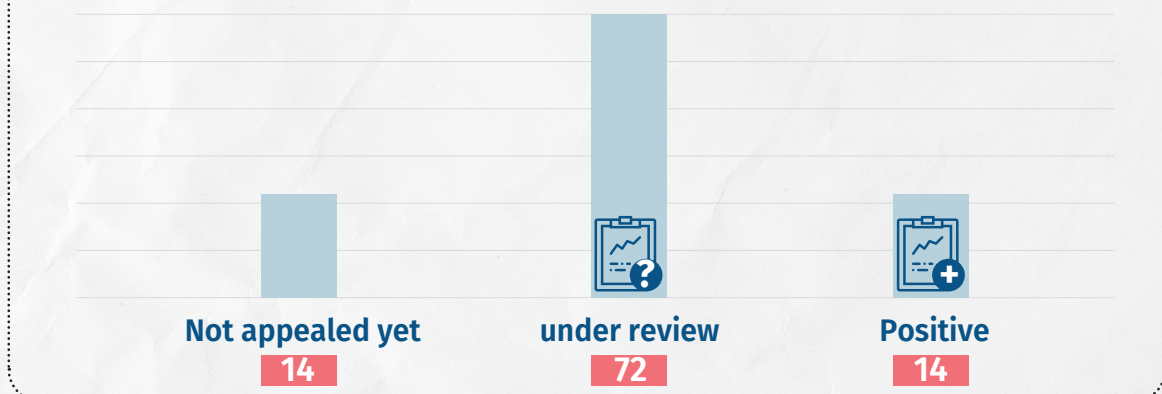
The findings presented here clearly indicate that Twitter (now called X) continues to serve as a fertile ground for the proliferation of hate speech, incitement, and violent content. This is a concerning observation as it highlights the persistent challenges faced by human rights organizations and activists in curtailing harmful discourse on this particular platform. Moreover, the prevalence of such content on Twitter is closely followed by Facebook, indicating that this issue is not confined to a single platform, but rather spans across multiple social media platforms. This underscores the need for a responsible effort by social media companies to address these challenges comprehensively, as the spread of hate speech and incitement has real-world consequences.

Action taken



The prevalence of inflammatory content being posted by individual profiles, especially those belonging to actual persons (and not ‘trolls’, as in other instances), is a concerning revelation. This pattern underscores a disquieting trend that suggests a disproportionate degree of impunity for Israeli perpetrators of hate speech and incitement. When real and identifiable individuals openly propagate such content without facing significant consequences, it sends a troubling message that raises questions about the effectiveness of measures put in place by social media platforms to curb hate speech and promote accountability. Furthermore, it underscores the need for stronger and more comprehensive efforts to address these issues both online and offline, ensuring that there are repercussions for those who engage in harmful and divisive discourse.

What type of account posted these speeches?



Companies are showing a regrettable delay in addressing violent and inflammatory content in Hebrew targeting Palestinians. There appears to be a lack of urgency in addressing violent content, despite the already mentioned potential harm to safety and the profoundly chilling effects in both the digital realm and the real world. It is disheartening to note that these virulent discourses frequently translate into actual acts of violence and destruction against innocent civilians. This glaring disparity between the urgency required to combat hate speech and the measured responses of these companies highlights the need for a more proactive approach to curbing such dangerous rhetoric. The consequences of inaction are not only confined to the digital sphere but have palpable, devastating impacts on the lives of individuals and communities on the ground. It is imperative that companies recognize the gravity of this situation and take swift and decisive action to mitigate the spread of violent content that fuels real-world violence and harm.

Conclusion

The aforementioned evidence paints a concerning picture wherein social media companies are actively involved in limiting and erasing content and accounts that voice the Palestinian perspective and criticize Israeli policies and actions. This translates into a direct infringement upon the fundamental freedoms of expression and association. The motivations behind such removals and restrictions are multifaceted, stemming from the automated workings of algorithms, requests from Israeli official entities, and pressure exerted by right-wing Israeli or Western pro-Israel groups orchestrating mass reporting campaigns against content advocating for Palestinian rights. Meta, with its diverse range of platforms, remains at the forefront of companies primarily accountable for limiting Palestinian digital rights.

Conversely, the prevalence of hate speech and incitement against Palestinians remains alarmingly high on social media platforms, with Twitter notably standing out. This toxic digital environment has, in some instances, resulted in real-world attacks against Palestinian communities. It's glaringly apparent that social media companies have displayed a level of tolerance towards such harmful discourse, and their responsiveness to requests for the removal of hateful content falls short of the urgency required to neutralize these attacks against Palestinian rights and their global supporters.

This report underscores the harsh reality that a multitude of individuals, particularly journalists, activists, human rights defenders, media outlets, and civil society organizations, find themselves disproportionately subjected to digital violations. These violations are an unfortunate consequence of their active involvement in public discourse and their unwavering dedication to advocating Palestinian rights. This stark reality emphasizes that the endeavor to safeguard digital rights is still in its infancy, necessitating a concerted and sustained effort to protect the digital space that serves as a vital platform for the Palestinian narrative.

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