

## **\*\*Online antisemitism in Dutch football fandom\*\***

**Article.** Seijbel, J..A, Van Sterkenburg, J. & Oonk, G. (2022) Expressing rivalry online: antisemitic rhetoric among Dutch football supporters on Twitter. *Soccer and Society*, 23, 8, 834-848

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**Aim.** This research investigated the presence of antisemitism within online discussions among fans of Dutch football clubs. Specifically, it focused on the intense rivalry between Dutch football clubs Ajax and Feyenoord, and how this rivalry plays out on Twitter, where Ajax is often associated with Jewish identity. The goal was to understand how antisemitic ideas are expressed and spread in this context.

**Methods.** 111 tweets were analyzed which were posted around a single match weekend in January 2021 and that referenced Ajax. The researchers used Critical Discourse Analysis to carefully examine the language used in these tweets, looking for patterns and hidden meanings. They weren't just looking for obvious insults, but also for more subtle expressions of prejudice.

**Key findings.** The study revealed that antisemitism is present in online discussions about Dutch football. It manifests in several ways. Some tweets contained direct, offensive language targeting Jewish people or linking them to Ajax. Others used coded language – like references to stereotypes or nicknames – to subtly express antisemitic views. Notably, the researchers found that antisemitic chants traditionally sung in stadiums were also shared and repeated online. Interestingly, some Ajax fans appeared to embrace the association with being 'Jewish', but the study points out that even this can contribute to normalizing the link between a football club and a religious group. This research is important because it shows how online platforms can amplify existing prejudices and how seemingly harmless 'banter' can contribute to a hostile environment. It highlights how sports, a space often seen as unifying, can unfortunately become a platform for harmful prejudice.

**Limitations.** It's important to note that this study focused on a limited snapshot of online activity – tweets from a single match weekend between two teams. This means the findings may not fully represent the extent of antisemitism in Dutch football online overall. The research also concentrated on the Ajax-Feyenoord rivalry, so it's unclear whether the same patterns would be observed among fans of other clubs. Additionally, the researchers acknowledged the difficulty in definitively determining intent; it can be challenging to know whether someone is deliberately expressing antisemitic views or simply participating in existing fan culture.