

The Dominant Messages and Patterns in Far-Right Extremist Memes on Instagram: A Qualitative Analysis

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Introduction

- Extremist far-right movements have long since made their way into online spaces, having recognized and seized opportunities to further promote their messages effectively, such as by using memes.
- Instagram's algorithm aids the reach of these propaganda memes as interacting with Instagram posts exposes the users to more of the same type of content.
- This study aims to provide a foundational understanding of the type of far-right extremist content that people, especially youths, are being exposed to and manipulated by on Instagram.

- The research question contains two components: (1) What are the types of recurring/dominant far-right messages being conveyed through the memes on Instagram and (2) how is the content and/or features of the meme being utilized to help convey the message?

Results

Categories:

1. Anti-Semitism
2. Anti-feminist/anti-liberal/anti-LGBTQ
3. Anti-government
4. Anti-BIPOOC and xenophobic

Figure 1. Portrayals of Powerful and Good vs. Powerless

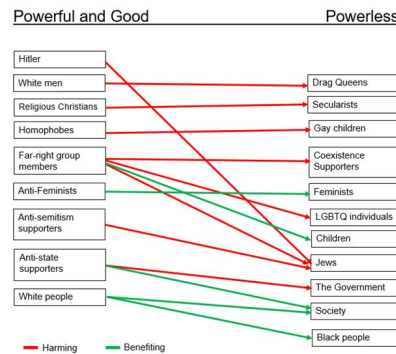
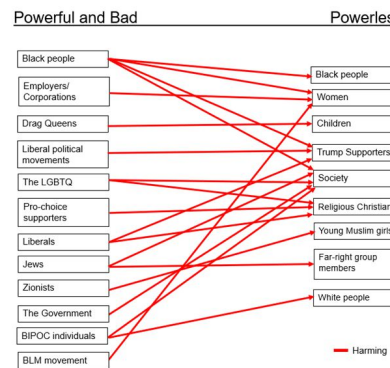


Figure 2. Portrayals of Powerful and Bad vs. Powerless



Features and Symbols

- Wojak variations: NPC Wojak, crying Wojak, and Troon Wojak are used to ridicule and dehumanize.
- The skull face mask is a transnational symbol for violent Neo-Nazi movements.
- 1950s vintage illustrations of a nuclear white families are used to represent the ideal family and racial purity.
- "It wasn't 6 million" is a recurring phrase stated without any context or explanation in holocaust denial propaganda.
- Representations of white women as positive or negative vary depending on the race of the children they are depicted with, with white being positive and black being negative.



Methods

- This study proceeds in two parts. First, a literature review was conducted to establish major categories of far-right extremist memes.
- Second, a sample of far-right memes (n = 69) that fit into any of the major categories were collected to conduct a qualitative analysis. The meme collection period ranged from June 5th, 2023 to June 19th, 2023.
- A manual visual content analysis was conducted using 66 annotation questions. The goal was to extract trends and patterns in each meme that are significant or systematically reoccur.

Limitation

- Due to a small sample size, this study does not provide a comprehensive understanding and insight on the symbols and reoccurring features in far-right memes. As a future direction, an analysis software tool and a larger sample size can address this limitation.



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