

The Darwinian Nature of Alt-Right Discourse on the Meme App “iFunny”

Media Study of Alt-Right Content



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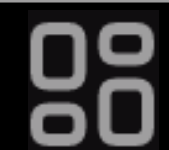
Argument



Media and communication scholars have attributed the success of the Alt-Right to democratic, meme-based communication of the movement (Woods, 2020).

I argue that through observation of Alt-Right meme app “iFunny”, memes function less democratically and more by a Darwinian logic of competition and this perspective on Alt-Right meme discourse explains the group’s ability to remain resilient against outside influence.

Definitions



Democratic:

When referring to a meme as “democratic”, it is in reference to the belief that memes arise from a “co-constitutive” space with “online communities functioning as collectives.” (Woods, 2020, pp. 49)

Darwinian:

Darwinian refers to the exclusive and highly selective nature of alt-right communities. Unlike democracies which thrive on inclusivity, alt-right communities only exist by forcing conformity through threat and harassment, or having such densely coded discourse it is inaccessible unless one participates.

Exclusion & Harassment



farod when deep ifunny finds where he lives



the last thing Farod's sister sees



Above are a series of memes made in response to TikTok user “Farod” joining iFunny in January 2022. After several posts taunting users, his home address was discovered, images of his house and family posted, and he was harassed off the app.

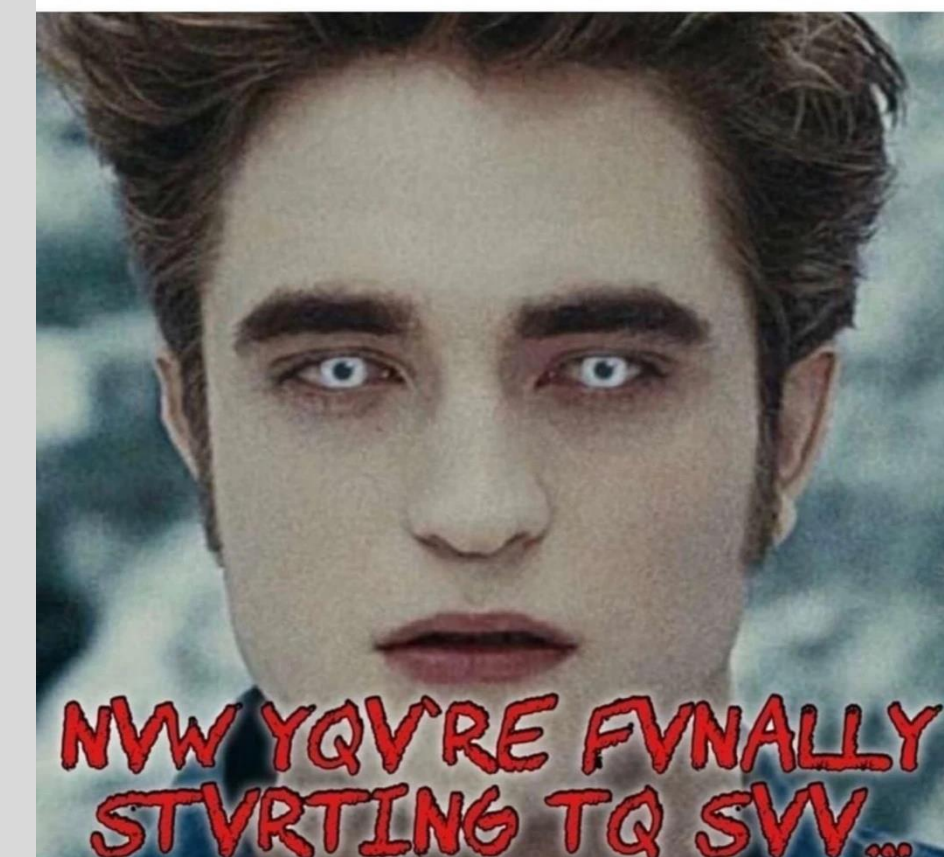
This incident exemplifies how alt-right communities create spaces of “constitutive exclusion”, in which they actively alienate those who do not meet their standards. By vehemently excluding outsiders, the community defines itself by the very act of what it excludes. (Elsby, 2019)

Exclusivity & Language



From KND to TND

Tfw a tradcath wignat jelqs off his latinx swarthy italiophobic ganglogoyim femcel but xe is schizomaxxing & girlobosses xeir way into agartha but H-mans bussy was dilating & flopping so you larp as a garf pagang femboy who's vrillginitny sneeds & glarps into a hyperborean incel with a morbing fetish



On the left is a meme parodying the abbreviation “Total Ni***r Death”, a repeatable comment and post trend which can be done to dodge automatic banning of the word and echo racist ideas.

On the right is an even stronger example of coded language. While exaggerated for comedic affect, the post is essentially a list of phrases which are otherwise incomprehensible unless you are familiar with the app.

Both images pictured are memes that could be referred to as “dog whistles”. In memes and political rhetoric, the term dog whistle refers to statements otherwise “inaudible” to those who do not recognize it. (Haney-Lopez, 2015) Together, they exemplify how exclusive and inaccessible the community and memes can be.

What is iFunny?



Released in 2011 by Russian company “FunCorp”, iFunny is a less known alt-right social media platform.

Users share images that can be “republished” to profiles, liked, and commented on. Popular posts get “featured” in a unique section that first appears upon opening the app.

Arrests associated with app:

- Samuel Woodward: a neo-Nazi who murdered his Jewish friend Blaze Bernstein
- Justin Olsen: arrested for making memes implying plans to shoot a local Planned Parenthood
- Alexander Treisman: investigated after posting “should I kill Joe Biden?” and arrested for carrying concealed weapons, bomb making, and possession of child pornography.

What makes it unique?

Unlike the much more well-known Alt-Right site 4chan and others, iFunny has stricter moderation and will automatically block and censor certain words. These include:

Ni***r = Noon	Fa***t = Noon
Black = Noon	Nazi = Noon
Bomb = Noon	Hitler = Noon
Pedophile/pedo = Emu	Rape = Noon

Nonetheless, users can dodge automatic moderation by slightly cropping words, replacing letters, or using emojis. (i.e, Black by replacing L with I)

References



Elsby, C. (2019, January 22). *Sina Kramer, excluded within*. CSCP SCPC. Retrieved April 9, 2023, from <https://cscp.org/2019/01/22/sina-kramer-excluded-within>

Haney-Lopez, I. (2015). In *Dog whistle politics: How coded racial appeals have reinvented racism and wrecked the middle class*. preface, Oxford University Press.

Woods, H. S., & Hahner, L. A. (2020). *Make America Meme Again: the rhetoric of the alt-right*. Peter Lang Publishing Inc. New York.