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The Internet Meme as a Tool for Promoting Nationalism in the Network Society: The Case of "American Youth for Nationalism" Facebook Page

Introduction

Recent years have seen the escalation of nationalism in local communities all over Europe (Austria, Germany, Ukraine, etc.) and the United States. It should be stressed that modern nationalist movements have specific local features, which means that nationalist rhetoric varies from one country to another. This article focuses on American nationalism connected with the political victory of Donald Trump, who promotes a highly nationalist policy (Bazian, 2018, p. 10).

It should be stressed that in this article nationalism is viewed as a radical nationalistic ideology and not as a process of the formation of a nation. It should also be noted that modern nationalism is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon which involves a number of ideologies. Modern nationalists typically support anti-immigration and anti-globalization policies which are aimed at protecting the interests of native people and preserving the authentic culture of local communities. In addition, today's nationalists often promote ethnic nationalism, which presupposes that ethnicity, including common religion, language and ancestry, is the key factor of a nation (Yun, 1990, p. 529). Ethnic nationalists often promote anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic and anti-black views. In many cases radical nationalists belong to far-right movements (Veugelers, 1999, p. 80).

Another common nationalist movement is the alt-right, which relies on white suprem-acism (Atkinson, 2018, p. 309): alt-right followers believe that white people are superior to representatives of other races. The alt-right movement was activated during Donald Trump's election campaign as he used rhetoric which was close to alt-right principles (Hawley, 2017, p. 3; Hermansson et al., 2020, pp. 5–8). The distinctive feature of the alt-right is that it is mainly online in nature, which presupposes anonymous troll culture (Hawley, 2017, p. 4). Alt-right supporters often resort to humour and irony online to promote their ideology (Hawley, 2017, pp. 18–20). Another important aspect of the alt-right is its anti-feminism: the movement is based on the idea of masculinity politics (Kelly, 2017, p. 68), favours patriarchal society and fixed gender roles, and misogyny is one of the central points of its ideology (Hermansson et al., 2020, pp. 9–11). The concept of "manosphere" has been introduced to describe Internet resources promoting white masculinity and anti-feminist principles (Nagle, 2017, p. 75). It has been recorded that alt-right supporters sometimes aggressively express anti-feminist sentiment using hate speech and threats (Nagle, 2015, p. 8). It also should be noted that although the alt-right ideology is young, the number of its supporters is growing (Hawley, 2017, p. 3).

Since nationalism is a complex system of ideas, there is a great number of factors that contribute to its proliferation, including social, economic, political, as well as technological conditions. The intensive development of the Internet has also stimulated the spread of nationalism: it made communication faster, more efficient and targeted, which means that nationalistically-minded people can easily consolidate and promote their ideas online. Today many researchers agree that the Internet is one of the key factors leading to the active development of nationalism in modern society (Banaji, 2013, p. 69; Eriksen, 2007, p. 1; Linke, 2004, p. 205; Paasi, 1999, p. 4). However, there are also scholars who claim that media, including the Internet, not only promote nationalism but can also fragment a nation (Soffer, 2014, p. 1; Szulc, 2017, p. 53).

The interconnection of nationalism and the Internet has encouraged researchers to examine this phenomenon more closely. Some of them focused on the role of technology in promoting nationalism in general (Adria, 2010, p. 3), while others paid special attention to the role of Internet in strengthening nationalism (Eriksen, 2007, p. 1). Many scholars agree that technology boosts nationalism (Adria, 2010, p. 3; Eriksen, 2007, p. 1; Paasi, 1999, p. 4). Some researchers examined different aspects of nationalist rhetoric in social media. For example, Gwen Bouvier from Zhejiang University analysed how Facebook users select identity categories for self-presentation online, which often results in favouring nationalist identity categories

(Bouvier, 2012, p. 37). The Dutch scholar Giulia Evolvi concludes that Twitter is a platform for such an extreme form of nationalism as Islamophobia (Evolvi, 2018, p. 1). The English researcher Christian Fuchs examined radical nationalism on Twitter and concluded that fascism thrives online (Fuchs, 2017, p. 228). A number of studies investigated nationalism in local contexts (Garner, 2015, p. 445; Linke, 2004, p. 205) and mentioned in passing that media play an important role in intensifying nationalism (Linke, 2004, p. 205).

Although the theory of nationalism has been elaborately developed, some important aspects have not as yet been examined, namely the role of Internet memes, popular Internet phenomena in promoting nationalism online. It should be noted that Internet memes have already attracted public attention in connection with their nationalist orientation (a definition of Internet meme will be presented later on in this article). The well-known meme Pepe the Frog (which will also be explained in more detail further on) initially was not associated with nationalism but became a universally recognized symbol of the alt-right movement (Heikkilä, 2017, p. 9). Nationalism in memes is actively articulated in online communities which unite like-minded people with a nationalist outlook. Internet users who promote or advocate nationalism use memes as a tool for disseminating and expressing their views.

Considering the literature on the issue of nationalism in memes, it should be said that this aspect has not been covered in detail as yet due to the novelty and the unstable nature of Internet memes as an online phenomenon. There are only a few studies on this topic, among them those conducted by American scholars Injeong Yoon (Yoon, 2016, pp. 92–123) and Gabriel Tucker (Tucker, 2018, pp. 1–38). The two researchers claim that Internet memes are a powerful instrument to convey nationalism online (Tucker, 2018, pp. 1–38; Yoon, 2016, pp. 92–123). However, this paper goes beyond the existing studies on the issue and provides an insight into the functions of Internet memes in promoting nationalism.

Internet memes have a large impact on modern culture and on shaping the mindset of modern people. Owing to the anonymity of memes and their rebellious nature, different ideas, including nationalism, can be freely expressed. These considerations make the analysis of Internet memes in terms of their nationalist content highly relevant and topical. The aim of this study is to investigate their role in the process of promoting nationalism online with regard to the functions the meme fulfils. Specifically, the following hypothesis is tested: the Internet meme is a modern, powerful and widely spread mass media tool for promoting nationalism online, as can be seen in the case of "American Youth for Nationalism" Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/AmericanNationalistMemeTeam/photos).

This paper consists of four sections. The first one presents the theoretical background of the concept "Internet meme". The second section outlines the materials and methods of the study. It is followed by a discussion of the results, which provides a general characteristic of the Internet meme as a tool for spreading nationalism and the functions it plays in the process of disseminating nationalism online. The final section considers some important theoretical implications of the study and the perspective for future research.

The concept of Internet meme

The advent of Internet technology led to the development of viral Internet phenomena which came to be called Internet memes. The Internet meme is broadly defined as a unit of Internet communication which is transmitted from one Internet user to another (Segev et al., 2015, p. 417; Shifman, 2013, p. 362; Silvestri, 2016, pp. 27–28). The concept of Internet meme draws on the concept of meme proposed by the English biologist Richard Dawkins in his 1976 study *The Selfish Gene*, where he defined it as a new kind of replicator which passes from brain to brain through imitation (Dawkins, 2006, pp. 189–202). The examples of memes include tunes, ideas, catch phrases, clothes, fashions, etc. Dawkins put forward an idea that memes act like genes: they can mutate, replicate and evolve. Internet memes may have different forms of expression, ranging from viral Internet videos (Shifman, 2012, pp. 188–189) to pictures shared by Internet users. Internet memes are usually multimodal units, which means that they can combine two channels of transmitting information – visual and verbal (a caption attached to the picture).

Despite their relatively short history, Internet memes have become a ubiquitous cultural phenomenon, and some of them are even universally recognized. Since they are created by ordinary Internet users with the help of accessible Internet resources, they represent a form of participatory culture.

Considering research on memes in general, we should mention studies on memes as a cultural phenomenon (Cannizzaro, 2016, pp. 562–586; J. Wang & Wang, 2015, pp. 261–274). Since the emergence of the concept of meme researchers have been trying to provide a comprehensive definition of this complex notion. Limor Shifman from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Mike Thelwall from the University of Wolverhampton point out that memes are units of culture similar to genes, which are spread by copying or imitation (Shifman & Thelwall, 2009, p. 2567). Bradley E. Wiggins from Webster Vienna Private University and Smith G. Bret Bowers from the University of Arkansas-Fort argue that memes are messages which are transmitted

by members of participatory culture for the purpose of continuing a conversation (Wiggins & Bowers, 2015, p. 1886). The American researcher Grant Kien points out that Internet memes are unique media phenomena spreading in the network society (Kien, 2013, p. 554). Chinese scholars Junhua Wang and Hua Wang state that memes are cultural units that are similar to genes as they can be replicated and pass from mind to mind (J. Wang & Wang, 2015, p. 263). Michael Benaim notes that Internet memes have deeply rooted symbolic values and can be regarded as an innovation phenomenon (Benaim, 2018, p. 901). Apart from the study of their tendency to replicate and express cultural meaning, some researchers focus on the multimodal form of memes and stress the combination of language and visuality they involve (Brideau & Berret, 2014, p. 307; W. Y. Wang & Wen, 2015, p. 355). Another important aspect of memes is their common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance (Gal et al., 2016, pp. 1698–1703), which presupposes that Internet memes are similar – they are units of Internet communication of the same type, created according to conventional patterns.

The semiotic aspect of memes is also important since they are sign systems of unique semiotic nature (Cannizzaro, 2016, p. 562). Researchers also highlight the participatory aspect of memes (Rentschler & Thrift, 2015, pp. 329–332), which means that they are an embodiment of modern participatory culture. Another perspective in analysing memes is their social aspect since memes convey social values of a community (Procházka, 2018, p. 78). To sum up, the research on memes is multi-faceted and versatile, which testifies to the fact that researchers pay special attention to different aspects of this complex phenomenon.

Materials and methods

This analysis relies on case study methodology as the investigation is focused on one particular Facebook public group: American Youth for Nationalism (https://www.facebook.com/AmericanNationalistMemeTeam/photos). This group was selected as a meme source for several reasons. First of all, it has an explicit nationalist bias, which is spelled out in its name. Secondly, it had 1,908 followers at the time this article was written, which means that it is a popular Internet venue for nationalistically-minded people. Besides, the group is part of the Facebook platform, the largest social network in the world: at the time this article was written Facebook had 2.32 billion active monthly users.

The methodology applied in the study involved several steps. In the first one 150 nationalist-themed memes were retrieved from the Facebook public group called American

Youth for Nationalism (https://www.facebook.com/AmericanNationalistMemeTeam/photos). The selection of the examples relied on purposive sampling, a method according to which only samples with particular characteristics are selected. In this study, only memes with more than 10 likes were retrieved from the analysed Facebook public group, because the aims of the study required a collection of the most noticeable Internet memes. This ensured the objectivity of the study: the selected memes were appreciated and elicited a response from the community of like-minded people.

It should be noted that size limitations of this paper make it impossible to present all the 150 selected memes: only six most conspicuous examples which illustrate the overall findings are discussed. They were selected according to several criteria. First of all, they are the most illustrative examples of the 150 retrieved memes owing to their explicit nationalist underpinning. Secondly, they seem to have a clear semantics and thus they are presumably understandable for the reader. Finally, they exemplify vividly and clearly the interaction of verbal and visual components, which is important for the multimodal analysis.

This paper applies the so-called multi-layered analysis of Internet memes. First, it provides an overview of all selected examples in order to make general conclusions on how nationalism is articulated in memes. Some important observations have been made during this stage concerning the frequency, efficiency and rhetoric of nationalist-themed memes. These observations lay out the ground for further analysis. The second step involved an in-depth multimodal analysis of the selected memes, conducted within the framework of the multimodal discourse theory (Bateman & Wildfeuer, 2014, p. 180), and performed using multimodal discourse analysis tools. The analysis consisted in examining the semantics of the memes with regard to their multimodal nature, and making generalizations concerning the nature and characteristics of nationalist-themed memes. It was conducted with the focus on examination of the meaning embedded in verbal and visual components of the selected examples, specifically the interconnection of both inputs. The analysis also included interpreting the semantics of the memes in the context of their computer mediated communicative environment: they are individual and subjective representations of the author's opinion on the one hand, and part of a larger Internet discourse addressed to the public on the other. The advantage of this approach is that it enables a complex evaluation of verbal and visual components of memes, and makes it possible to examine their interaction within one meme.

The next stage of the analysis aimed to determine the functions of nationalist-themed memes, which involved examining the selected examples from the perspective of communicative

acts. The Internet meme creators were treated as social actors who used memes as a communication tool to express their ideas. Having analysed the communicative intentions of the creators, it was possible to define the functions of the nationalist-themed memes. These functions were analysed with a view to decoding a possible communicative intention of the user who used memes as a manipulative or convincing tool. This stage was required in order to understand the role of memes in the complex process of expression or articulation of nationalism in social media. The analysis of functions of nationalist-themed memes is important because it sheds light on their communicative potential, namely their influence on Internet users. Their functions were determined using multimodal discourse analysis, which made it possible to explore the communicative aspect of nationalist-themed memes in the Internet narrative.

This multi-layered procedure is justified by the ultimate aim – to understand the inner mechanism of nationalism articulation in memes, getting beyond the boundaries of explicit manifestation of nationalist rhetoric. The applied methodology may be regarded as a sound and scientifically justified approach to examining the nationalist rhetoric in memes, because it allows taking into consideration the complex nature of memes, which incorporate visual and verbal information, and which are semantically and semiotically different from traditional monomodal verbal texts. Despite the consistency of the methodology and the abundance of material, the study may have certain limitations stemming from the fact that the communicative nature of memes is hard to analyse: memes are contradictory, erratic, elusive and unconventional units of communication.

Results

The analysis of 150 nationalist-themed memes which were retrieved from the Facebook group American Youth for Nationalism (https://www.facebook.com/AmericanNationalistMemeTeam /photos) revealed the following findings.

First of all, the study confirmed that nationalism is widely articulated in Internet memes. This claim may be supported by the fact that the Facebook group in question holds a collection of more than 300 nationalist-themed memes, which is just a small part of the social media segment promoting nationalism using Internet memes. There are plenty of nationalistically-minded groups on Facebook, Pinterest, Reddit and Tumblr. For example, the Reddit group called Nationalism (https://www.reddit.com/r/Nationalism/), which fosters nationalistic rhetoric, has more than 3,000 subscribers; the Tumblr blog

called alt-right-alright (https://www.tumblr.com/dashboard/blog/alt-right-alright-blog) also expresses nationalist ideas. Such groups use memes as a powerful tool for conveying nationalist ideas in an assertive and concise form (Figure 1).

Figure 1: https://www.facebook.com/AmericanNationalistMemeTeam/photos

Figure 1 is a good example of an Internet meme with the multimodal interaction of verbal and visual components. The meme alludes to the 1969 manned lunar mission, when two Americans, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, landed on the Moon for the first time in history. The important attribute is the American flag, which symbolizes national pride and power. Thus, the visual component by itself evokes the idea of American supremacy, reinforced by the verbal component: "Not all men are created equal", which clearly communicates a message that some people are presumably more gifted, more powerful and have more opportunities. Evidently, the communicative intention of the author was to show the supremacy of the American nation by referring to the glorious event.

Secondly, the study showed that the nationalist message in memes requires background knowledge in order to be decoded: all the 150 selected examples rely on the Internet user's background knowledge. This knowledge, then, is the key factor at play: if the recipient

does not recognize a historical allusion, symbolism, a reference to a particular event or phenomenon, he or she will not understand the meme and will be confused.

Figure 2: https://www.facebook.com/AmericanNationalistMemeTeam/photos

The meme presented in Figure 2, which is also based on the multimodal interaction of verbal and visual components, is a good example of how memes rely on background knowledge. It features two students in a classroom, one of them marked "United States", and the other – "Great Britain". The "US" student is giving the other one, "Great Britain", a piece of paper which turns out to be the "Declaration of Independence". The meme refers to 4 July 1776, when the Second Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence, stating that the Thirteen Colonies would consider themselves independent states which are no longer under the British rule. Background knowledge, then, is crucial to understand the message, since the nationalistic rhetoric is stated in a symbolic way. The communicative intention of the author is to stress American sovereignty and independence.

Another important finding is that nationalism is often expressed in memes in a humorous way: 38 out of the 150 analysed memes were meant to be funny. Although humour and nationalism do not seem to go hand in hand at all, it is revealing to observe that Internet memes may provide a humorous representation of nationalist ideas, involving the use of bitter satire,

mocking attitude, parody, etc. It is important, however, to note that in these memes humour actually intensifies the nationalist rhetoric, though at first glance it may appear to downplay it. Humour gives a tinge of playfulness and joviality, which is why their authors often use it as a disguise for nationalist rhetoric. This makes it easier for them to claim that their nationalist-themed memes are just a harmless joke – humour usually evokes positive emotions. In nationalist-themed memes, humour also serves as a hooking technique: it arrests the reader's attention, gives a positive colour to a meme and thus increases its popularity.
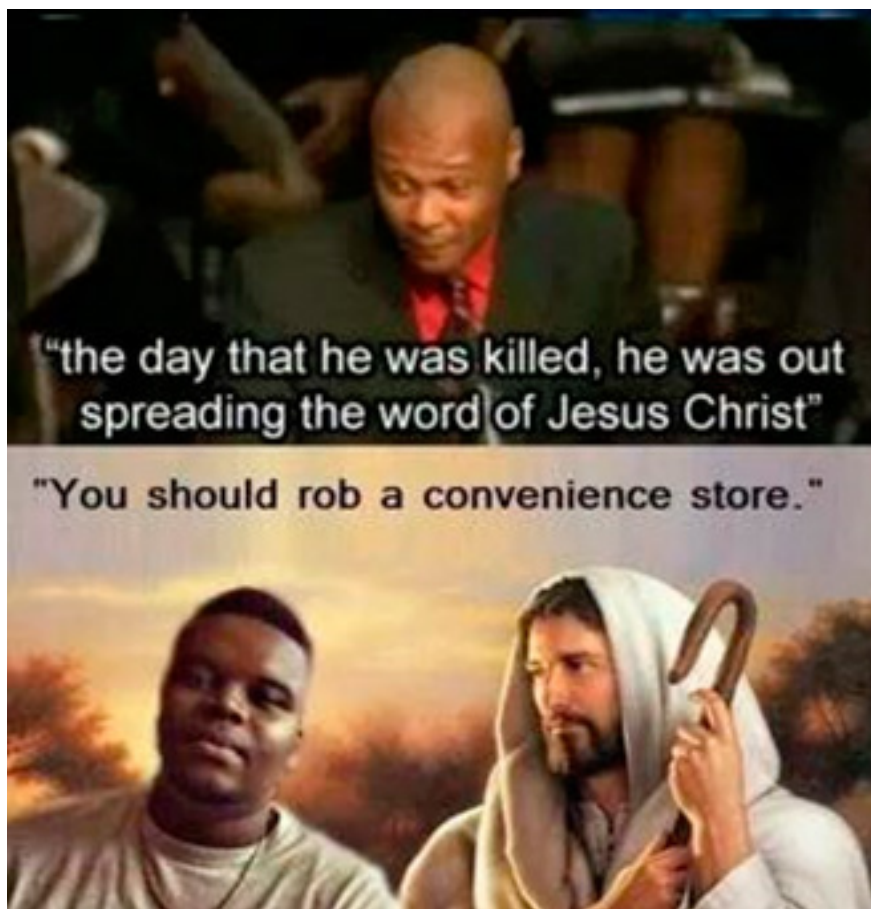

Figure 3: https://www.facebook.com/AmericanNationalistMemeTeam/photos

Figure 3 presents a meme with a bitter satirical effect. The meme refers to the shooting of the African-American Michael Brown by a white police officer (9 August 2014), who chased him because he had allegedly stolen some goods from a shop. The incident sparked social outrage and Brown was portrayed as a victim of the police abuse aggravated by anti-black discrimination. On the day of his funeral the pastor said that Brown had been spreading the word of Jesus Christ. The meme also features an interesting multimodal interplay of verbal and visual components. The image of Jesus standing next to Michael Brown saying "You should rob a convenience

store" creates a mocking satirical message. The communicative intention of the author was to contradict the commonly held view that Brown was a victim of anti-black discrimination. By giving the scornful opinion on the incident, the author manifests his anti-black ideas.

Internet memes as a consolidating force for nationalistically-minded people

The study also identified the functions of the Internet meme in the process of disseminating nationalist ideas. Internet memes are a powerful tool for consolidating nationalistically-minded people in social media, which may be corroborated by the fact that the most impressive memes which go viral can become symbols of nationalist movements online. Nationalistically-minded people tend to use memes as a metonymic sign for their nationalist outlook. Likewise, social media featuring nationalist-themed memes attract nationalistically-inclined people and become a hotbed of nationalist rhetoric.

Figure 4: https://www.facebook.com/AmericanNationalistMemeTeam/photos

One of the most conspicuous nationalist-themed memes is Pepe the Frog. The meme originated from a comic created by Matt Furie and soon went viral. Initially it was not associated with nationalism, but as of 2015 it began to be used in nationalist contexts. In October 2015 Donald

Trump tweeted Pepe the Frog and thus associated the character with himself and his alt-right pronouncements. In 2016 Donald Trump Jr posted a funny meme called The Deplorables, featuring Pepe the Frog (Figure 4). The meme presented in Figure 4 has a political context: in one of her speeches during the 2016 presidential campaign Hillary Clinton described "half of Trump's supporters" as a "basket of deplorables". As a result, the phrase "basket of deplorables" was reappropriated by alt-right followers. Since then Pepe the Frog has been the symbol of the alt-right movement.

The claim about the consolidating role of memes corresponds with the findings of the Norwegian anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen, who speculates on the role of the Internet in supporting nationalism in a broad perspective (Eriksen, 2007, p. 1), and states that the Internet is becoming a medium for consolidating and strengthening collective identities.

Internet memes as a token of national identity

Memes also function as a token of national identity online. This idea is illustrated by the fact that in anonymized Internet discourse national identity may well be hidden, but posting a meme with a nationalist appeal may testify to the person's national identity (Figure 5). Internet users may resort to nationalist-themed memes in order to identify themselves with a certain nation and to distance themselves from some other nations. Expressing national identity via memes is very important for establishing rapport online and for being accepted into nationalistically-inclined social media communities. It is also significant because it helps to conceptualize nationalist ideology, which is based on the "we vs they" opposition (Petersoo, 2007, p. 419).

Figure 5: https://www.facebook.com /AmericanNationalistMemeTeam /photos

Figure 5 presents a meme which serves as a national identity token since it shows that the person who created it belongs to the American nation. The meme features a schoolboy in a classroom next to a map; he answers geographical questions. When asked "Where is American empire?", he replies "here" and points to his heart, meaning

that American empire is dear to him. The word "empire" also implies the idea of American greatness and power. The communicative message is to stress the greatness of the American state. At the same time, the author manifests his or her belonging to the American nation.

The idea that Internet memes can function as a token of national identity resonates with the findings of Gwen Bouvier, who examined the display of identity on Facebook and came to the conclusion that nationalist identity categories are widely used on the platform to profile users' national identity (Bouvier, 2012, p. 37). Despite the anonymity of Facebook discourse, the users demonstrate their national identity by posting memes with nationalist rhetoric. Facebook, then, is a platform which provides instruments for national identity representation.

Internet memes as a platform of free speech

Owing to their anonymity and unruly nature, Internet memes are a means of free, unrestricted articulation of nationalist discourse (Figure 6). Nationalistically-minded people increasingly use them to give vent to their nationalistic opinions. As nationalist discourse is generally prohibited, condemned and frowned upon, it is becoming increasingly difficult to voice nationalist ideas in public (Banaji, 2013, p. 69). Under the circumstances of the perceived oppression of nationalist discourse, memes provide an opportunity to communicate nationalism in social media and become a tool for "freedom of speech". One of the peculiarities of memes is that they reject taboo in speech, which means that they can touch on all traditionally sensitive topics without observing political correctness. Freedom of expression in memes may seem an embodiment of democracy, but the downside is that they tend to foster politically incorrect speech.

The meme in Figure 6 is an example of radical nationalist free speech. The image features immigrants arriving in America. The caption refers to European Christians, who played an important role in building the American nation. However, the author goes on to say that "they didn't come to bitch, collect welfare, wage jihad, and replace the American constitution with Sharia law", which evidently refers to Muslim immigrants since jihad and Sharia law are Islamic concepts. This means that the author rudely and radically attacks Muslim immigrants. Apart from presenting inflammatory, provocative nationalist discourse, this meme also uses taboo language: the word "bitch".

THEY CAME TO TAKE PART IN THE AMERICAN DREAM

EUROPEAN CHRISTIANS BUILT THIS NATION

THEY DIDN'T COME TO BITCH, COLLECT WELFARE, WAGE JIHAD, AND REPLACE THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION WITH SHARIA LAW

Figure 6: https://www.facebook.com/AmericanNationalistMemeTeam/photos

The role of Internet memes as a platform for free speech corresponds with the findings of the English scholar Shakuntala Banaji, who comes to the conclusion that imposed political correctness makes people hide their radical sentiment in public discourse but Internet communication gives them an opportunity to voice it (Banaji, 2013, p. 69).

Discussion

The principal aim of this study was to examine the role of Internet memes in the process of articulation of nationalistic ideology on the Internet, with due regard to the functions they perform in the process of spreading nationalism. The analysis revealed that Internet memes are a powerful tool to promote nationalism in the network society.

The multimodal discourse analysis of 150 nationalist-themed memes retrieved from social media confirmed the hypothesis. In general, the study indicated that the Internet

meme is an uncensored, efficient and widely used instrument for promoting nationalism online. It also revealed that nationalist-themed Internet memes may fulfil several functions: they can function as a consolidating force for nationalistically-minded people, as a token of national identity and as a platform of free speech.

These results resonate with ideas present in existing studies on Internet media. For instance, in his *Technology and Nationalism* the Canadian researcher Marco Adria proposes that in a broad sense technology fosters nationalist rhetoric (Adria, 2010, p. 9). The findings of the present study confirm this idea: the Internet meme, a product of modern Internet technology, gives online users new innovative ways to render nationalism online. The English scholar Robert Topinka also claims that nationalism and politically incorrect rhetoric flourish in participatory Internet media (Topinka, 2018, p. 2050). The findings presented above also correspond to the idea proposed by some researchers that the Internet generally gives opportunities to emphasize a sense of national belonging instead of erasing it (Ershov, 2015, p. 206; Mitra, 1996, p. 44; Parker & Song, 2006, p. 575). The results of the study are also in line with the findings suggesting that the Internet is a platform for radical views related to one's national belonging (Bliuc et al., 2018, p. 75; Fuchs, 2017, p. 228). However, the study goes further than the existing literature on related topics and puts forward some ideas concerning the powerful role of Internet memes in spreading toxic nationalistic ideas, which is possible due to the viral replication of memes, their popularity among Internet users and the characteristics of the genre.

All the above mentioned findings may be regarded as a contribution to the modern theory of nationalism. They provide a fresh look at an old problem and show that nationalism has adjusted to modern Internet technology and has capitalized on the benefits of a new vehicle of Internet communication – Internet memes. The results are also important for the modern theory of Internet memes since they warn against their new harmful function. Thus, the study contributes to the knowledge about the functioning of memes in computer mediated communication and helps to understand their contradictory communicative nature. The study also has some practical implications. A new understanding of nationalism which takes into consideration nationalist-themed memes may be helpful in working out a strategy to counteract nationalism. Such a strategy may take the form of a special code of ethics for Internet users in order to avoid hate speech, taboo language and offensive rhetoric online, in Internet memes in particular.

It should be noted that this study has been primarily concerned with a general overview of the Internet meme as an instrument for promoting nationalism online. The article cannot provide

an exhaustive analysis of Internet memes from the perspective of their nationalist underpinning because this task would require much broader research on various aspects of nationalism in memes, including psychological, cultural, political and other aspects. Considering the perspective for future studies in this area, it would be interesting to analyse nationalist-themed memes in more detail. It might also be promising to conduct a study based on a psychological experiment which would involve interpreting nationalist-themed memes by representatives of different national communities in order to understand the pragmatic nature of memes.

Conclusion

The findings of the study have several important implications. The first one is that nationalism has adopted a fully-fledged digital form. As it is today, it is articulated by means of modern Internet resources, including memes, which enables users to make nationalist rhetoric more targeted, more efficient and subtler. In general, the articulation of nationalism in memes reflects the expansion of nationalism in the network society.

Another important implication of the study is the idea that modern nationalism has become more versatile, sophisticated and elaborate. Nationalist-themed memes show that nationalism can be expressed originally and creatively, rather than coarsely and roughly. In general, memes provide new opportunities for the eye-catchy and inviting presentation of nationalism.

One more theoretical implication is that nationalism on the Internet is becoming more multimodal rather than purely verbal or visual. Internet memes give an opportunity to communicate nationalism in a multimodal form involving the use textual and visual information, which makes nationalist rhetoric more expressive and compelling.

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Memy internetowe jako narzędzie promowania nacjonalizmu w społeczeństwie sieciowym – strona „American Youth for Nationalism" na Facebooku

Wobec postępującego gwałtownie w ostatnich latach rozwoju „nacjonalizmu online" artykuł przedstawia udział memów w promowaniu treści nacjonalistycznych w Internecie. W celu ukazania mechanizmów kierujących tym multimodalnym zjawiskiem analizie dyskursu poddano 150 memów o tematyce nacjonalistycznej zebranych na Facebooku. W rezultacie przedstawiony został charakter obecnej w memach internetowych retoryki nacjonalistycznej. Wyniki badania ukazują memy jako skuteczną platformę otwartego propagowania radykalnych treści narodowych online. Analiza ujawniła ponadto konkretne role, jakie mogą one odgrywać w rozpowszechnianiu nacjonalizmu. Memy stanowią zatem narzędzie

pomagające jednoczyć osoby o podobnych przekonaniach, służą również jako znacznik tożsamości i platforma nieskrępowanej wolności wypowiedzi. Artykuł wyraźnie wskazuje, że nacjonalizm aktywnie korzysta z przestrzeni oferowanej przez nowy gatunek komunikacji internetowej, jaki stanowią memy. W zakończeniu zawarte zostały wnioski praktyczne oraz możliwe kierunki przyszłych badań.

The Internet Meme as a Tool for Promoting Nationalism in the Network Society: The Case of "American Youth for Nationalism" Facebook Page

In view of the rapid growth of "online nationalism" in recent years, this study explores the contribution of Internet memes to promoting nationalism on the Internet. The presented discourse analysis of 150 nationalist-themed memes retrieved from Facebook was conducted with the aim of examining the mechanisms of this multimodal phenomenon. As such, then, the study investigated the nature of nationalist rhetoric in Internet memes. The findings indicate that they are an efficient platform for open and radical proliferation of nationalism online. The study also revealed the functions of memes in the process of disseminating nationalism: they function as a consolidating force for nationalistically-minded people, as a token of national identity, and as a platform of free speech. The article concludes that nationalism actively exploits the space of a new genre of Internet discourse – the Internet meme. Finally, it also notes some practical implications of the study and the perspective for future research in the field.