# Digital Dog Whistles: The New Online Language of Extremism

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## Abstract

Terrorists and extremists groups are communicating sometimes openly but very often in concealed formats. Recently Far-right extremists including white supremacist, anti-Semite groups, racists and neo-Nazis started using a coded "New Language". Alarmed by police and security forces attempts to find them online and by the social platforms attempts to remove their contents, they try to apply the new language of codes and doublespeak. This study explores the emergence of a new language, the system of code words developed by Far-right extremists. What are the characteristics of this new language? How is it transmitted? How is it used? Our survey of online Far-right contents reveals the use of visual and textual codes for extremists. These hidden languages enable extremists to hide in plain sight and for others to easily identify like- minded individuals. There is no doubt that the "new language" used online by Far-right groups comprises all the known attributes of a language: It is very creative, productive and instinctive, uses exchanges of verbal or symbolic utterances shared by certain individuals and groups. These findings should serve both Law Enforcement and private sector bodies interested in preventing hate speech online.

## Introduction

Every human being acquires in childhood the ability to make use, as both sender and receiver, of a system of communication symbols or codes that comprises a circumscribed set of symbols (e.g., sounds, gestures, or written or typed characters). By means of these symbols, people are able to impart information, to express feelings and emotions, to influence the activities of others, and to comport themselves with varying degrees of friendliness or hostility toward persons who make use of substantially the same set of symbols.

Typically, people acquire a single language initially—their first language, or native tongue, the language used by those with whom, or by whom, they are brought up from infancy. Subsequent "second" languages are learned to different degrees of competence under various conditions. Language is transmitted culturally; that is, it is learned and taught, when parents or teachers deliberately encourage their children to talk and to respond to talk, correct their mistakes, and enlarge their vocabulary. But languages are acquired also by learning from the social environments including the mass media.

The whole object and purpose of language is to be meaningful. Languages have developed and are constituted in their present forms in order to meet the needs of communication in all its aspects. Yet, sometimes, as in the case of criminal jargons, part of the function of special languages is deliberately to mislead and obstruct the rest of society and the authorities in particular; they may even become wholly impenetrable to outsiders.

In this study we explore the emergence of a new language, the system of code words developed by Far-right extremists and terrorists. Being monitored online, these

users try to protect themselves, their audiences, their communication and information by adapting a new set of symbols. What are the characteristics of this new language? How is it transmitted? How is it used?

**Functional Theory of language**

Estimates of the number of human languages in the world vary between 5,000 and 7,000. The word language refers to a set of codes, ciphers, symbols and other kinds of artificially constructed communication systems. There are numerous definitions of the term, stemming from various disciplines. From the communicative perspective, language is a system of communication that enables humans to exchange verbal or symbolic utterances (Evans and Levinson 2009, Van Valin 2017). This definition stresses the social functions of language and the fact that humans use it to express themselves and to manipulate objects in their environment. Functionalist theories tend to study language as a dynamic phenomenon, the result of an adaptive process by which the signals and grammar are "tailored" to serve the communicative needs of its users. Language can have scores of characteristics but the following are the most important ones: language is arbitrary, productive, creative, systematic, social, non-instinctive and conventional (Bybee 2010, Crain 1987, Chomsky 2004, Curtiss et al. 2004, O'Grady,

2008).

*Language is Arbitrary*: Language is arbitrary since there is no inherent relation between the signs or symbols words of a language and their meanings or the ideas conveyed by them. The use of a sign or a symbol selected to mean a particular thing or idea is purely arbitrary but once it is selected for a particular meaning, it comes to stay as such.

*Language is Social:* Language is a set of common signals used for communication in a group or community. Language in this sense is an instrument of a social group, used by

its members to interact with each other, to co-operate with each other and to share information.

*Language is Symbolic*: Language consists of a set of symbols employed to represent a certain meaning. These symbols are arbitrarily chosen and commonly accepted and employed. The communicability of a language depends on a correct interpretation of these symbols.

*Language is Systematic*: Although language is symbolic, its symbols are arranged in a specific system. All languages have their system of arrangements.

*Language is Non-instinctive, Conventional*: No language was created in a day by a group of humans. Language is the outcome of development and convention. Like all social processes languages also change and die, grow and expand. Every language then is a convention in a community.

*Language is Productive and Creative*: Language change through creativity and productivity. Language changes according to the needs of the users, the community or the society.

In the 1960s, Noam Chomsky formulated the Generative Theory of Language. According to this theory, the most basic form of language is a set of syntactic rules that is universal for all humans and which underlies the grammars of all human languages. This set of rules is called Universal Grammar. Thus, he considered that the grammars of individual languages are only of importance insofar as they allow us to deduce the universal underlying rules. However, in opposition to the generative paradigm, functional theories of language propose that since language is fundamentally an instrument, its structures are best analyzed and understood by reference to their functions. Functional theories seek to define the functions performed by language and

then relate them to the linguistic elements that carry them out (Newmeyer 1998). In Nichols' (1984, p. 101) words,

> Functional grammar analyzes grammatical structure, as do formal and structural grammar; but it also analyzes the entire communicative situation: the purpose of the speech event, its participants, its discourse context. Functionalists maintain that the communicative situation motivates, constrains, explains, or otherwise determines grammatical structure, and that a structural or formal approach is not merely limited to an artificially restricted data base, but is inadequate even as a structural account. Functional grammar, then, differs from formal and structural grammar in that it purports not to model but to explain; and the explanation is grounded in the communicative situation.

**Coded Words and Doublespeak**

Sometimes people want to restrict the communicability and understanding of their messages. Confidential messages rely on the fact that they be known to and understood by only selected audiences or the few persons to whom they are addressed. Such are diplomatic exchanges, operational messages in wartime, and some transmissions of commercial information. The emergence and growth of the Internet, made protection against unauthorized reception more urgent. As Koskensalo (2015) reveals in her study "Secret Language Use of Criminals" - criminals, members of organized crime, and terroristic groups in order to avoid being monitored by legislative institutions and police organizations adopted and developed coded, secret languages.

Terrorists and extremists groups are communicating sometimes openly but very often in concealed formats. The RAF (Red Army Faction, Germany) used a mathematical code but have changed because of it has been cracked. Terrorists also used steganography to hide their messages and moved some to contents to the DarkNet (Weimann 2016a, 2016b), but these measures restricted their audiences due to the complexity of using such techniques. Bearing in mind that terrorists use online communication mainly for propaganda (including recruitment, radicalization, and incitement), the need to have a coded yet more accessible language was clear. This is where coded signals became useful.

Terrorists often use seemingly innocent conversations laced with coded messages and double-speak. Already in 2001, the 9/11 attacker Abu Abdul Rahman told his partner Ramzi Binalshibh in an Internet chat room: "The first semester commences in three weeks. Two high schools and two universities... This summer will surely be hot ... 19 certificates for private education and four exams. Regards to the professor. Goodbye".[1] Here, in three weeks refers to September 11, 2011, two high schools refers to World Trade Center, the professor refers to Bin Laden, 19 certificates means 19 hijackers and four exams means four planes, etc.. In addition, three targets had a code name: The US Capitol building was called The Faculty of Law; the Pentagon became The Faculty of Fine Arts; and the North Tower of the World Trade Center was code-named as The Faculty of Town Planning.

Based on reports from FBI and the International Center for Political Violence and Terrorism Research in Singapore, Ji and Knight (2018) presented a terrorist "dictionary" using innocuous terms which are terror code words and their meanings. Much of the trial of the "dirty bomber" Jose Padilla and of two co-defendants, has been taken up with transcripts of scores of secretly recorded phone calls. The defendants, charged with supporting violent Islamist groups overseas, knew their phones were monitored, used seemingly innocent conversations with coded messages and double- speak. "Tourism" was their euphemism for "jihad," the FBI's lead agent, John Kavanaugh, testified. "Smelling fresh air" also referred to waging jihad, Kavanaugh said. When defendant Adham Hassoun told an alleged recruit, "The warehouse will open up very soon and they will request workers," he was discussing "an opportunity to participate in some upcoming jihad," the agent said. He said Hassoun was also discussing jihad when he asked an acquaintance, "Is there a school over there to teach football?" and told another, "I need to confirm with you some final details before we go on the picnic."(Cited in Sutton 2007).

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[1] Cited in https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramzi_bin_al-Shibh

**Far-Right Groups and "Dog Whistle"**

The meaning of *dog whistle* is the obvious one: it is a whistle for dogs. Dog ears can detect much higher frequencies than our human ears can, so a dog whistle is nothing more than an exceedingly high-pitched whistle that canines can hear, but that we cannot. Yet, a new use of the term *dog whistle* has emerged lately: a coded message communicated through words or phrases commonly understood by a particular group of people, but not by others. In his book, *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism & Wrecked the Middle Class*, López (2015) explains that dog whistling "simply means speaking in code to a target audience."

Recently far-right extremists including white supremacist, anti-Semite groups, racists and neo-Nazis started using the "Dog Whistle". Alarmed by police and security forces attempts to find them online and by the social platforms attempts to remove their contents, they try to apply the new language of codes and doublespeak. A study conducted in 2019 revealed how white supremacists use coded language on social media networks to promote violence, terror and radicalism (Anti-Defamation League 2019a). Researchers analyzed millions of conversations on Gab, the site frequented by Pittsburgh synagogue shooter Bowers, and 8chan, the site favored by Christchurch mosque shooter Brenton Tarrant. The results showed disturbing patterns of increasingly hateful rhetoric after the shootings and also revealed linkages between hateful words and conspiratorial ideas about Jews, showing how these ideas spread and mutate across the platforms. They argued that "Bowers and Tarrant were deeply conversant in the conspiratorial language of these echo chambers and used coded racist and anti-Semitic language to spread fear and attempt to recruit others into violent acts". On these online platforms, users frequently rely on coded, ironic language so that only "insiders" can discern their rhetoric's profoundly hateful intent.

Far-right social media users are adopting a new form of hate-slang to refer to Jews, Muslims, Mexicans and other minority groups. Jews are being referred to as "Skypes", African-Americans are labelled "Googles", and Latinos are described as "Yahoos", while Muslims are called "Skittles". These phrases are believed to have been adopted to circumvent counter measures of anti-racism technology. To prevent violating the abuse policies of social media platforms and also to avoid detection by automatic systems like Google's Conversation AI, Far-right extremists have begun to use code words (a movement termed Operation Google) and thus a new type of hateful online language appears to be emerging: The systematic use of innocuous words to stand in for offensive racial slurs. A search of Twitter for "googles," "skypes," or "yahoos," will yield shocking results, like this tweet: "If welfare state is a given it must go towards our own who needs. No Skypes, googles, or yahoos." Or this one reading, "Chain the googles/Gas the yahoos." What does this mean? In this "dictionary", "googles" means the n-word; "skypes" means Jews; and "yahoos" means "spic." The word "skittles" has come to refer to Muslims, an obvious reference to Donald Trump's comparing of refugees with candy that "would kill you." Similarly, are violent acronyms such as "GTKRWN" ("gas the kikes, race war now"), and hashtags like #tgsnt or "the greatest story never told" (code for "Hitler was right"), "ZOG", "ZIO," or "turbokike" to use instead of "Jews."

The use of the new language involves substituting racist, anti-Semitic, neo-Nazi references by benign words that seem out of context in the postings. Researchers have recently discovered anyone can trick hate speech detectors with simple changes to their language -- removing spaces in sentences, changing "S" to "$," or changing vowels to numbers. Thus, for example, the numbers *14* and *88*, used in various combinations, are a code used by neo-Nazis and white supremacists to post online hate messages in a covert manner. The number *14* refers to David Lane, a notorious white supremacist leader and

murderer, who at one point issued the 14-word statement: "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children." Lane was imprisoned for various crimes including the assassination of a Jewish radio host. The number *88* refers to the fact that *H* is the eighth letter of the alphabet, so *88* is *HH*. This stands for "Heil Hitler," part of the historic Nazi salute. Essentially, *1488* is a callback to these two figures and their racist ideologies. The configuration or display of *1488* makes no difference: *8814* means the same thing as *1488*, as does *14/88* or *14-88*. Another secret symbol of white supremacist groups, based on the *1488* code, is a symbol depicting two dice. These dice are positioned in such a way that the two faces on the first dice show a one and a four (representing 14), and the second two dice show a five and a three (eight total).

The replacement of Far-right extremist terminology with codewords has been a practice that has existed for a comparatively long time. Doing so enables Far-right extremists to avoid algorithms on social media and also to avoid detection by human investigators online, as an investigator unfamiliar with certain code words may not even notice necessarily the hidden message. The Far-right practice of codes has begun to develop in recent years as well as social media platforms and algorithms have improved their identification and enforcement methods. These methods are by no means perfect, as recent events such as the "Boogaloo" have shown but are effective to the point of impacting Far-right online discourse. It should be noted that the efficacy of these methods has driven the formation of alternative social media sites such as Gab, Bitchute and imageboards such as 4Chan, 8Chan and Neinchan. However, mainstream social media remains crucial to many in the Far-right for recruiting, spreading propaganda and more.

**The Search for Hate Content**

Before discussing the brass tacks of how the Far-right bypasses algorithms and current enforcement methods to act openly on mainstream platforms on the open web, current

methods should be discussed. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter employ a number of machine-learning algorithms for myriad purposes. These algorithms have become more prominent on social media platforms such as Facebook due to the advent of the Coronavirus, minimizing human impact and relying almost entirely upon algorithms.[2]

These algorithms carry out a variety of purposes meant to replace or enhance human moderation. On Facebook, for example, these purposes range from approving account creation[3] to one's "Feed" content, to moderating uploaded post and image content.[4] The practice of moderating image content is by far the most difficult for Facebook compared to moderating text content, as images are harder to analyze via artificial intelligence. Harmful or illegal text content on platforms can be identified more easily via Natural Language Processing, as Facebook already does.[5] Facebook analyzes harmful imagery and "fingerprints" it to by "hashing" or assigning it an alphanumeric string based upon its qualities. This image is then saved in the Facebook Digital Fingerprinting Database to help identify identical or near-identical images to be taken down. Combining the two with Optical Character recognition for text content is often key to identifying hateful posts that combine text and image content.

Technology, while being key in the fight against hate content, cannot be the only tool employed, as many images and posts successfully circumvent the algorithm/ Company policy is key as well in moderating online content, and to that effect policy has a direct impact on Far-right communication patterns online. Twitter has recently taken a

[2] https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/03/23/facebook-moderators-coronavirus/

[3] https://blog.adcombo.com/fb-uses-fingerprint-detect/

[4] https://about.fb.com/news/2019/08/open-source-photo-video-matching/

[5] https://ai.facebook.com/blog/advances-in-content-understanding-self-supervision-to-protect- people/

harder line on banning extremist and conspiracy theory content as shown in the banning of thousands of "QAnon" related accounts.[6] Facebook and YouTube have been criticized in the past for a comparatively lax policy on enforcing their own discourse policies online to the benefit of Far-right extremists and in the case of YouTube even promoting controversial content.[7] Policy choices by these companies greatly impact enforcement and thus online behavior. A prime example of this is the Boogaloo movement.

## Method

The content used for this study focus primarily on content uploaded to Facebook on publicly available pages, groups and posts. These postings were searched, retrieved and investigated securely and anonymously via Cobwebs Technologies' Web Intelligence platform. The primary source for our search was Facebook due to its popularity and general appeal to a wide variety of sectors. Facebook is one of the few truly global and leading social media platforms with a wide variety of end-users and was chosen to investigate the widest possible range of hate content and target audiences beyond traditionally investigated sources such as pages affiliated with prominent hate groups.

The ideal post for the purposes of our analysis was one which included one or more "digital dog whistle". As noted, dog whistles of all sorts are more prominent on mainstream social media outlets as a tool to avoid detection and communicate with likeminded individuals. As such, posts on niche platforms such as Chan imageboards, Gab, Vkontakte, Voat or closed groups and pages don't require dog whistles or require them to a lesser degree.

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[6] https://www.wired.com/story/twitter-cracks-down-qanon-policy/

[7] https://www.technologyreview.com/2020/01/29/276000/a-study-of-youtube-comments- shows-how-its-turning-people-onto-the-alt-right/

Another research goal was to emphasize the wide variety of lesser-known or niche subgroups of Far-right extremism and their own peculiarities in dog-whistling. As such, many of the original pages chosen as "seed" pages belong to less prominent but more extreme and active (in comparison to less extreme and more mainstream pages) subgroups.

Posts used for our analysis were identified in a qualitative fashion after having scanned hundreds of relevant groups and pages, eventually reaching a smaller sample of tens of pages (with a minimum of 500 followers or likers) as an initial "seed" group. These pages were used as a "seed" to later explore other groups and pages that either interacted with said pages or were recommended as "recommended pages" by the Facebook algorithm to imitate a natural browsing process. This initial organic investigation flow led from one page or group to large numbers of other affiliated pages, and thousands of various posts affiliated with a variety of sub ideologies. Coded posts were investigated on a qualitative basis by the author to provide the highest quality and widest overview of codes. Many of these pages have since been taken down by Facebook after having been active and open to the public for months and occasionally years, and a significant number are still up and running.

**Boogaloo: Internet-Savvy Extremism**

The Boogaloo movement is a unique phenomenon in the Far-right movement which claims to act against police brutality and governmental overreach in hopes of an eventual "Boogaloo", or second civil war. Comprised of tens of thousands of members and sympathizers across the United States that have organized themselves primarily via Facebook groups and pages, the Boogaloo movement is by no means monolithic.[8]

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[8] https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/03/us/boogaloo-extremist-protests-invs/index.html

Members of the movement claim to be working within the limits of the law and to not be a Far-right or White Supremacist movement, but a number of affiliates have in the past committed terror attacks or been exposed as members of Far-right organizations. The rise of the Boogaloo movement – some Far-right and Neo-Nazi, some not – was fanned by the creation of hundreds of social media pages on Facebook, Vkontakte

Figure 1



and other platforms.[9] On May 1st, 2020, following an ad-boycott, Facebook adapted its policy regarding the term "Boogaloo" and the uploading of violent content alongside it.[10] This policy, decried by many as having come too late, lead to the eventual removal of hundreds of accounts, pages and groups on Facebook and Instagram.[11] Many Boogaloo pages continue to exist online however, primarily by utilizing code language.[12]

Much has been written about the Boogaloo movement and their use of textual and visual codes such as wearing Hawaiian shirts (inspired by the use of the term "Big Luau" as code for Boogaloo" and their penchant for meme-inspired patches and pages. The recent ban as mentioned above, however, has changed the discourse from commonly known variations of "Boogaloo," including but not limited to: Big Igloo, Big Luau, Big Lou and more, to pages that don't explicitly mention the term Boogaloo. These pages refer to other Boogaloo related content – play on words of government three letter agencies such as the ATF or the use of image frames (see figure 1). The image frame is interesting in that it

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[9] https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2020/05/27/the-boogaloo-movement-is-not-what-you- think/

[10] https://www.forbes.com/sites/sethcohen/2020/06/16/civil-war-20-the-boogaloo-movement- is-a-wake-up-call-for-america/#5ff6154d71ab

[11] https://www.cnbc.com/2020/06/30/facebook-removes-accounts-associated-with-boogaloo- movement.html

[12] https://www.cnbc.com/2020/06/30/facebook-removes-accounts-associated-with-boogaloo-movement.html

refers to the killing of Duncan Lemp by police, a figure who has become a rallying cry for Boogaloo bois in particular and the Far-right in general, while also utilizing the visual cue of the Boogaloo flag (a play on the American flag with an igloo in the upper left). This content enables Boogaloo bois to hide in the open by utilizing what appears to be an arguably innocuous image frame without any overtly extremist imagery while signaling to others that are "in the know" of their true affiliation.

The utilization of visual cues has become increasingly common as well in memes (see figure 2). Visual cues are far harder to monitor and remove automatically, or even manually, online as they require deep knowledge of the given field. Facebook's AI capabilities are capable of identifying harmful image content, and increasingly when innocuous image content and ambiguous text content are combined to form hate content.[13] This integration limits the capabilities of overt hate-posters, forcing them to find more subtle ways of expressing their allegiance to extremist organizations and uploading potentially threatening or hateful content online in a uniquely visual language. As shown in figure 2, the meme integrates both the

Figure 2



"chuckles in …" meme, the Hawaiian shirt pattern as well as the helmet and night vision goggles – all images that often appear in Boogaloo memes that even when combined wouldn't trigger algorithms.

**Coded Language: The Case of Eco-Fascism**

The Boogaloo movement isn't the only subgroup of Far-right extremists that have adapted their online discourse in the face of increasingly sophisticated algorithms and detection systems. Eco-Fascism, a small but increasingly popular subfield of Far- right
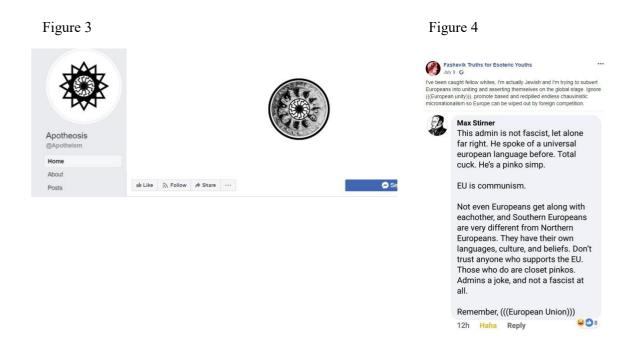
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[13] https://spectrum.ieee.org/computing/software/qa-facebooks-cto-is-at-war-with-bad-content- and-ai-is-his-best-weapon

extremism that promotes typical Fascist ideology in the wider context of a natural whole beyond solely the race. Elements of Eco-Fascism have been present in historical Far-right movements, such as the advent of the German Nazi party and its emphasis on "blood and soil".[14] Recent iterations include a fixation on Ted Kaczynski, called "Uncle Ted".[15] Eco-Fascist pages are increasingly prominent on imageboards such as 4 and 8chan, Telegram channels, and recently public Facebook pages. In order to be able to act publicly, many of these pages employ a variety of methods to avoid detection and thus stay hidden in plain sight.

Eco-Fascism is an under-researched and comparatively old sub stream of Far- right ideology that has begun to resurge recently. Its low profile allows its pages to flourish on mainstream social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and thus avoid both law enforcement monitoring and algorithm removal. Eco-Fascist pages do this by utilizing obscure words and terms, often with certain historical allusions, that only the "in" crowd understands. These terms can include visual cues and symbols as well, such as the use of Nordic runes (a common theme throughout the Far-right in general as well) and obscure fonts (Anti-Defamation League 2020). It is by no means uncommon for a Far-right extremist to hide in plain sight by utilizing runes (see figure 3, profile identified on a Far-right page). Numerous pages, often with thousands of followers, exist on Facebook that hide in the open by subtly utilizing runic imagery or more traditional Far-right symbols such as the Sonnenrad inside of less-suspicious runic imagery (see figure 4).

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[14] https://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2019/mar/20/eco-fascism-is- undergoing-a-revival-in-the-fetid-culture-of-the-extreme-right

[15] https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/vbw55j/understanding-the-alt-rights-growing- fascination-with-eco-fascism

Figure 3

Figure 4





## Visual Coded Language: Far-Right Aesthetics

Frequently the new meaning of this esoteric language is propagated to new and extant members by combining the new meaning with well-known memes or other online content. For example, a common structure used in modern meme pages on Facebook is

Figure 5



"XXXX" memes/posts for XXXX teens/youth". This structure has been modified by Far-right pages to include such variations as "Fashevik Truths for Esoteric Youths" or "Odinic Memes for Fashy Teens", pages with thousands of followers each (see figure 5). Many individuals are often exposed to these pages, thus beginning the radicalization process, and from there are recommended other imageboards or Telegram channels to visit to continue the process. These pages often utilize familiar meme and post structure to present niche extremist content in a context that makes it understandable to the average viewer. Our examination of these pages

uncovered numerous commenting accounts belonging to active-duty and reserves United States Armed Forces servicemen.

Far-right Facebook pages employ other cues as well to stay hidden in plain sight. These symbols and cues include more esoteric content such as certain visual aesthetics and niche symbols and terms as well. An excellent example of this is the case of "Honkler".[16] Honkler, an adaptation of the widely known "Pepe the Frog" symbol, is an even more expression of Far-right extremism and affiliated with the "Clownworld" and "blackpilled" evolution of Far-Right terminology. Originating in the "red pill" term, originally taken from the film "The Matrix" and referring to a Far- right individual who has taken the red pill and thus sees reality, "Blackpill" refers to the next stage of despair and apathy at realizing that society and the world cannot be changed (Anti-Defamation League 2019b). Clownworld, or "Clownpilled" takes this a step further, claiming generally that the lack of purpose and meaning in life means that one should kill and rape as many as possible (as there is no meaning to life).

Numerous Clownworld pages exist on Facebook, some with thousands and even tens of thousands of followers (see figure 6).

Figure 6



Clownworld is built upon mainstream memes and content, incorporating the "honk" as a Far-right element as well. "Honk Honk" is a common term used on these pages, generally as a pair. Shortened, this "Honk Honk" stands for "HH", or Heil Hitler. Utilizing generally acceptable visual cues such as Pepe, the rainbow clown wig (a jab at the LGBT movement) and terms such

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[16] https://forward.com/fast-forward/423812/white-nationalist-clowns-honk-honkler/

as Honk Honk enable even hardcore Far-right pages to exist and thrive freely in plain sight on mainstream social media.

Far-right visual language cues don't utilize iconography solely. Visual aesthetics as well are popularly used. These aesthetic styles are often taken from mainstream media but changed slightly so as to be understandable to the average Far- right extremist and not the average viewer. A prime example of this is the Vaporwave aesthetic.[17] Vaporwave, an aesthetic reminiscent of late 1980s and early 1990s "modern" styling and easily identifiable by its often grainy imagery, neon contrasting colorways and fonts, has become popular on the internet in general and in particular among people who experienced the 1980s or 1990s to some degree and remember it positively. This shared visual aesthetic, an unspoken language of style and design, has turned into "Terrorwave" aesthetic at the hands of the Far-right.

Terrorwave has grown popular among certain sections of the Far-right due to its utility in identifying fellow extremists without the use of words. Terrorwave also builds upon the Vaporwave aesthetic, an element of the cultural zeitgeist that many extremists of a certain age group (young to early-middle aged men) understand inherently by exposure. This aesthetic has become popular on a number of different platforms and for different reasons. There is a dedicated Terrorwave subreddit on Reddit (subreddit being a dedicated subforum on the popular website Reddit), dedicated Terrorwave Telegram channels and more, and often this content is mentioned in other contexts. The "National Socialist Network", an Australian Neo-Nazi organization, had adopted the aesthetic for their propaganda posters and cards (see Figure 8). This aesthetic is prominent among individuals as well for identification purposes and used in conjunction with other Far-right visual cues. In the below images taken from Facebook profiles that commented on Far-

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[17] https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/music/a47793/what-happened-to-vaporwave/

right pages we can see the adoption of Terrorwave aesthetics either alone or in the case of one of the images in conjunction with the "Red Eyes" meme of a "redpilled" Far-right extremist as the cover photo behind his profile picture.

## Conclusion

Visual and textual codes for extremists, as well as for specific interest groups in a more general sense, are crucial for a variety of reasons. These hidden languages enable extremists to hide in plain sight and for others to easily identify like-minded individuals. These codes often include terminology that inadvertently slips into usage in new contexts such as the term "Boogaloo" as well as purposeful variations of that term such as "Big Luau" to avoid identification. Far-right social media activity is also rife with visual codes and cues meant to carry out the same purpose: shared communication and identification in public without fear of law enforcement. Oftentimes these visual codes are esoteric and unclear such as "Terrorwave" while occasionally they are clearer – generally speaking the more extreme one's message the less clear the code is.

But is it indeed a language? As discussed earlier, language has several characteristics including being arbitrary, productive, creative, systematic, social, non-instinctive and conventional. There is no doubt that the "new language" used online by Far-right groups comprises all there attributes. It is certainly very creative, productive and instinctive (using code words, doublespeak, symbols), uses exchanges of verbal or symbolic utterances shared by certain individuals thus becoming an instrument of a social group, used by its members to interact with each other and share information. And clearly it is very functional for these specific communicators and the audiences. Yet, there is a need to teach this language to target audience. How can a language be secretive and coded and yet be shared and taught?

The above cases provide several examples of language and meaning propagation. These examples include the utility of mainstream platforms in combination with less well-known sources as well as organization similar to mainstream groups (Facebook pages, groups etc.). In addition, meaning is often propagated to new initiates by combining the new meaning with extant social media frameworks and example such as profile picture frames and common memes and structures to ensure that the shared basic understanding can be developed further by those interested by utilizing logic and hidden cues. In addition, new members that join the page are exposed to this content over time and slowly begin to understand the context themselves while also being aided by other members who explain the meaning of any given meme or post when requested. Far-right language and meaning transmission methods are integrative and often context-based with only occasional explicit explanations.

These findings should serve both Law Enforcement and private sector bodies interested in preventing hate speech online. Clearly extant AI processes meant to identify hateful content are not effective enough to prevent the spread or uploading of hateful content in a preventative fashion and still reliant on manual reporting for removing content already uploaded. Training AI processes by utilizing manual investigators to tag hateful content and provide a wider dataset against which all uploaded content could be compared. In addition, expanding awareness of hate content among end-users and encouraging or incentivizing their reporting of hate content could significantly aid extant removal mechanisms. In addition, finding nonintrusive and privacy and civil-rights oriented methods of cooperating with Law Enforcement should be of paramount importance to Facebook and other social media platforms to identify and monitor imminently dangerous online extremists.

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