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Hacking the Mind: Internet Memes as Tools of Propaganda

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Hacking the Mind: Internet Memes as Tools of Propaganda



ABSTRACT: Internet memes are one of the latest evolutions of "leaflet" propaganda and an effective tool in the arsenal of digital persuasion. In the past such items were dropped from planes, now they find their way into social media across multiple platforms and their territory lacks spacial boundaries. Internet memes can be used to target specific groups to help build and solidify tribal bonds. Due to the ease of creation, and their ability to constantly reaffirm axiomatic tribal ideas, they have become an adroit tool allowing for mass influence across international borders. This poster seeks to display some of the common links between internet memes and leaflet propaganda. This poster particularly focuses on the tools used to "hack" the attention of anyone connected to internet using dense modality, cognitive biases, and traditional PSYOP tactics that are rooted in earlier leaflet propaganda techniques.

Methodology: The utilization of media archeology and the applied use of macroscopic comparison and microscopic analysis revealed a trend of parallel persuasion techniques and tactics between analog leaflet propaganda and internet memes.

Full text: frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fcomm.2020.547065/full

Key Findings: Internet memes have become the digital successor of leaflet propaganda and look to be the first fully digital version in the evolutionary sequence of things to come. Their ability to harness viral modality, prey upon heuristics and cognitive biases, and be exploited by corporations, nations, political parties, and individuals alike changes the historical power dynamic. In some ways internet memes level the playing field and in others they open the door for an era of mass digital manipulation.

So What? Internet memes are generally conceived as a fun or cathartic expression. Harmless bits of culture sent out in the hopes of garnering a laugh or to share a common sentiment. The reality is that they are being used as tools to disperse propaganda-ridden narratives disrupting the flow of information across large networks of people. Rhetoric that may prove to be nothing to laugh about in the future.