

Taking Back Control: Memes, Trump, 4chan, Gamergate, and the Rise of the Alt-Right

Background

My thesis's impetus is the rise of reactionary discourse on the internet, collectively known as the *alt-right*. As with the traditional right, the alt-right is anti-feminist, anti-immigration, and anti-political-correctness, but unlike its predecessor, is also anti-establishment, anti-religion, pro-Donald Trump, and thoroughly engaged with and immersed in the meme-based political discourse of digital media.

Hypothesis

I argue against the cyber-utopianism proposed by Douglass Rushkoff and other early internet theorists; I argue that, while the internet has made memes central to political discourse, the rise of *laissez-faire* social media platforms has not made the digital generation more enlightened, or tolerant, or multicultural; it has instead fostered tribalism, anti-intellectualism, and reactionary politics, manifesting in right-wing populist movements across the Western world.

Methods

Drawing on contemporary meme-theorists such as Ryan Milner and Whitney Philips, and citing news articles, memes, and social-media posts extensively, I argue that the internet meme-scene is a war between *ideas*, guided in the 2010s by far-right online meme-centers such as 4chan and Reddit. Their ideas spread via *resonance* through the alt-right and its various splinters, such as Gamergate, which defends “gamer identity” from the encroachment of feminism and multiculturalism.

Results

The mainstream media cannot understand the rise of Trump or the alt-right because they are ignorant of who produces memes, and where (i.e, 4chan and Reddit); furthermore, the media have erased their role in creating the Trump media cult of the 1980s and 90s.

Conclusion

The fight against the alt-right is to fight against the ignorance and misinformation encouraged by mindless repetition of memes.