

A Discursive Analysis of Reader Engagement in QAnon's Online Anti-immigration Rhetoric

Anti-immigration rhetoric has been one of the prevalent themes among QAnon's online crowdsourced conspiracies in light of the US border crisis and the so-called 'great replacement theory' (Cosentino, 2020). To better understand the contours of QAnon's immigration-related disinformation dissemination, it is critical to investigate its discursive characteristics and interactional macro functions aimed at directing the addressees toward making a particular judgment or interpretation. This paper looked into one of the active QAnon channels on Telegram from which 1330 posts and comments related to immigration were collected and analysed with the purpose of characterizing the communication between the author of the posts and the audience. Drawing on Hyland's (2005) model of interaction, we focused on engagement markers to explore how readers could potentially be persuaded into subscribing to anti-immigrant sentiments through various parameters namely, reader pronoun, directives, questions, shared knowledge, and personal aside. The results emphatically illustrated a complex rhetorical manipulation and nearly unanimous expression of hate and hostility toward immigrants involving various engagement markers. One very visible metadiscursive feature was the use of directives to prompt the audience to take extreme violent, mostly physical, actions. They were frequently saturated with light-hearted and rather uncivil humour to de-dramatize and trivialize the commentator's appeal for violence. Another noticeable marker was multi-functioned questions packaged to deliver criticisms, condemnation, disbelief or shock as well as to recapitulate conspiratorial rhetoric. Commentors were also engaged in forming collective identities and voicing the binary of danger and duty through using a repertoire of shared in-group vocabulary. Extradiscursive interjectional insertions were among other means to impose the authors' personal prejudices. This study intended to raise awareness not only of how the QAnon conspiracy discourse on Telegram encourages public to subscribe to its beliefs that may potentially result in violent extremism, but also of promoting digital media information literacy among the global publics to effectively and critically engage with online content and make informed decisions.

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