Alt-Right and its web of hate

_____

Introduction

Pictures speak a thousand words as they say, with the spread of the Internet we have seen "memes", becoming a particularly intrinsic part of web 2.0. The horizontality of the web has given memes a sort of transnational notion, something which might be dismissed as funny has been turned into a nefarious medium to propagate hate and launch something which digital activists have termed "memetic warfare". With the spread of the digital, the word meme has turned into an intertextual cultural medium that is designed to disseminate amongst the vast cyberspace.

The culture of speech has undergone rapid changes and new battles are being fought online. The Alt-Right is not a political party, it is a viral phenomenon with serious implications in the real world. This viral phenomenon can be seen as a kind of communication guerrilla from the right. The term "Alt-Right" gained media attention during the 2016 US Presidential elections. Alt-Right sees itself as an alternative to the conservative right and accuses its meek Christian adherents as the 'cuckservatives'. It equates the mainstream conservatives with effeminate values.

Platforms becoming a medium of hate

Message board platforms like 4Chan and 8Chan have been a focal point wherein far right-wing extremists would post about their deeds. A case in point is the shooting incident that took place on the 15th of March'19 that killed 51 people at a local mosque in the city of Christchurch,

New Zealand. Putting out warnings of such attacks has become a constant pattern across numerous hate crimes we have seen in recent times, where killings are trivialised to an extent that these anonymous leader-boards turn into platforms of competition. A potent medium through which eco-chambers of hate are created is through the use of memes, which seemingly is foolish to talk about but this has played a key role in constructing an array of neo-Nazi digital cultures, that are spreading like wildfire across cyberspace creating an exhaustive network. The platforms soon became linguistic battlefields, and a culture war was launched through memes, pranks, and hashtags that function as baits on the Internet. Pepe the frog became a popular internet meme with users on 4Chan, 8Chan and Reddit who turned the character into an anti-Semitic and racist one. The Anti-defamation League has called 'Pepe the frog' a racist hate symbol.

The term is problematic as it has been coined by the white supremacists and conceals central elements with its usage as a collective term for various right-wing to far-right extremist groups. The only common denominator is the belief that the white population is on a decline and is under threat from immigration, multi-culturalism, Islam, Judaism, feminism, cultural Marxism and political correctness.

The rise of masculinist narratives

The Alt-Right movement has been particularly active in Germany, where sympathisers of the fringe party Alternative for Deutschland (AFD) organised themselves under the project by the name of "Reconquista Germanica". This loose group served as a launchpad for creating visual remixes of memes that closely toe the lines of national identity, criminalization of refugees, pushing patriarchal narratives and denying the holocaust. In a world, being run on data and

attention economy, bombardment with particular images coerces a person towards that filter bubble, which seemingly one wants to steer clear of. Alt-Right memes seem to take a leaf out of Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony and seek to encash the significance of social media by employing memes as a terrain to refurnish the meta-political terrain.

Taking the case of one particular meme of Captain "Germanica" (written in the old Fraktur script) and the shield which has the logo of the group "Reconquista Germanica". The defender of the pure German people from the bullets of liberalism, communism and Islamism. This gets modified as needed and is brought into perspective surrounding current trends. In a day and age, where the pandemic has given rise to "authoritarianism" a growing "surveillance" network with the population is being pushed into the world of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon. The more docile a population, the easier it becomes to push one's diktat and keep a looming sense of fear over the populace.

It particularly becomes easy to use cultural mediums with the ever-increasing footprint of cyberspace to either support existing sovereigns or slowly create a caveat in the pre-existing democratic institutions. Fascism is right at our doorsteps, as one can see with the rise of fringe parties with strong nationalistic ideals starting from VOX in Spain to the Freedom Party in Austria. Throughout history, the rise of fascism has often been associated with the new aestheticization of the political space, and deliver their respective identities and distorting the truth to manufacture their factual bases. The use of words like 'fake news and 'alternative facts' have become common parlance, which shows the extent of the influence of the Alt-Right on the web. Right-wing trolls claimed to have shit-posted Donald Trump into office in 2016. The rise of the Alt-Right is not limited to the US. Germany is also home to several movements which have their roots in the Alt-Right.

A vicious circle

The lexicon of the Alt-Right has a complicated present and the symbiosis of words, and symbols surrounding the same makes it difficult to discern. The political compass is difficult to map and the involvement of billionaires like Peter Thiel who are backing the dark enlightenment or the neo-reactionary movement through investments makes the narrative even more complicated. As was evident through the Cambridge Analytica data scandal, the internet can be used as a powerful medium to manipulate elections. We also saw the emergence of Corona-Chan memes during the pandemic to convey the rhetoric of the "Chinese virus" and push hate against the population of Asian descent. It is indeed time, that this threat is looked at and internet cultures are closely examined to counter the existing expressions of hate.