

# Memetic warfare: dangerous memes & fallacies

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2020-10-04

*Let's start with a personal story (or two)...*

## 2012: Smuggler & Frank Braun wear a mask



## 2020: Everybody wears a mask



*...and this is how memes work!*

On a more serious note, when I wrote...



**Frank Braun**

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In 2020 the Cyberpunk Age will start.

1:24 AM · Jun 23, 2019 · Twitter Web App

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# ...I had something else in mind for 2020

During the year I had

- times when I was reading all COVID-19 news first thing in the morning
- times when I was totally unable to work due to illness and was consuming basically no news and social media for about a month

It had a severe impact on my mental state.

The whole experience got me thinking on memetic warfare.

# What is memetic warfare?

*“Memetic warfare is a modern type of information warfare and psychological warfare involving the propagation of memes on social media through ‘platform weaponization’.” — Wikipedia*

## Memes:

*“Replicating information patterns: ways to do things, learned elements of culture, beliefs or ideas.” – Keith Henson, In Evolutionary Psychology, Memes and the Origin of War (2006)*

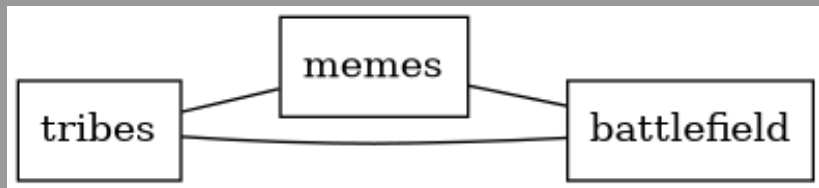


# What is memetic warfare? (cont.)

*“Competition over narrative, ideas, and social control in a social-media battlefield. One might think of it as a subset of ‘information operations’ tailored to social media. Information operations involve the collection and dissemination of information to establish a competitive advantage over an opponent”.*

*— Jeff Giese, It’s time to embrace memetic warfare, NATO’s Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence*

# Memetic warfare



- tribes: state and non-state actors, different interest groups
- battlefield: social media platforms (not neutral!)

# Memetic warfare (cont.)

Ultimately, the goal of memetic warfare is about:

- getting people to do something
- getting people not to do something

they would otherwise do / not do.

Memetic warfare uses viral (dis-)information to reach its goals, trying to cloud rational judgement.

# Why does almost everybody seem to be engaged in it?

if:

- the game is rigged (the battlefield isn't neutral)
- you competing with pros (e.g., Russian's troll army)
- it clouds judgment (reducing likelihood of correct conclusions)

why are so many people engaged in memetic warfare?

# Memes feel good

*Memes are the information equivalent of fast food.  
They make you feel good but lack substance.*

# Tribes feel good

*Some good ol' "us vs. them" goes a long way.*

# Social media feelz

*All of social media is optimized to maximize engagement by evoking emotions (good and bad).*

# Why do memes feels good?

memes often give the impression:

- I don't have to change (yay!)
  - There is a simple solution (or it solves itself automatically)
  - If everybody does  $x$  then  $y$  is solved (universalism)
- the others have to change!



It's always good if I don't have to change and things will resolve itself or by the others changing.

Memetic warfare: Making the world a better place one Tweet at a time.

*The Internet will route around censorship.*

*Just use Tor!*

*“Given enough eyeballs, all bugs are shallow.”*  
— *Linus's law*

# Some common fallacies in memetic warfare

- There is only one solution (we have to take over the world)
- There is an ideal solution
- The opponent is static

# Driving factors for memetic warfare

- authority bias

- popularity bias

⇒ authorities are crowned by popularity vote

- social media

- information overload (future shock)

- tribalization (cause and effect)

- complexity reduction

- virtue signalling

*Everything has to be decentralized.*

*It just has to be transparent.*



*Bitcoin fixes this.*

*Smart contracts will solve this.*

*With a decentralized autonomous organization (DAO) we don't have the problem.*

## *Loophole fallacy*

*Technology will fix it fallacy*

*The market will fix it fallacy*

# Libertarian COVID-19 “reasoning”

- state interventions are bad
  - the state enacts COVID-19 measures
- ⇒ there is no virus

# What does it mean for society and ones personal life?

*“too much change in too short a period of time”*  
— Alvin Tofler, *Future Shock*, 1970



# How to stay sane in an insane world?

- de-tribalize: search for real diversity of opinion
- disconnect: information & social media fasting
- memes put your brain in a box, perspective gets it out
- embrace uncertainty
- intellectual humility (“I know that I know nothing”)
- your actions matter

# Ask these questions

- 1 Who does it serve if I do/don't do this?
- 2 How might the opponent react if this approach is successful?
- 3 Who might have opposing views and why? (don't think they are stupid)
- 4 What if nobody knows? (embrace uncertainty)
- 5 How can I test this myself? (preferably in meat space)

“Point of view is worth eighty IQ points.” – Alan Kay

acknowledgments: Jonathan "Smuggler" Logan

→ Cypherpunk Bitstream Podcast

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thank you very much for your attention! questions?