



SAMHÄLLS- VETENSKAPLIGA FAKULTETEN

The Visual Transformation of Security Narratives: Visual Culture of the German Querdenker Movement on Instagram

Meriel Olga Ott

SIMZ – 2022: Master Thesis

11th August 2022

Lund University: Department of Political Science

Master of Science in Global Studies

Major – Political Science

Supervisor: Anders Uhlin

Word Count: 20,203

Keywords: Querdenker, visual culture, Covid-19, ontological security, identity, Instagram

Abstract:

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic the post-truth and increasingly radicalized anti-vaccine movement has gained worldwide attention as a major opponent of Covid-restricting efforts. In Germany, the anti-vax movement *Querdenker* have staged several large-scale protests opposing the 'undemocratic' government. With increasing online identity expression through fast-paced visual platforms, the *Querdenker* utilize the global, visual environment of Instagram to facilitate and sustain an ontological security narrative while affected by Instagram's content moderation efforts. An explanatory sequential design is used, combining a quantitative content analysis of the three movement-connected hashtags with a qualitative semiotic and text analysis of selected profiles' meme content. Applying mixed methodology allows the thesis to draw reflections on the embeddedness of content while also providing insights into commonly used visual signs and narrative tools to construct security. The findings indicate that *Querdenker* security narratives rely on defining the Other as a threat to continuity of the Self. The 'Radicalized Other' is here interpreted in line with populist anti-elitism while non-movement members of society are seen as similar to the 'Orientalized Other' that needs to be guided and taught. As society changes, the movement displays tendencies of holding on to traditional worldviews and value systems to establish a securitized context in which protest and resistance become necessary to sustain their identity. On the other hand, censorship affects textual elements within Instagram content. Users have also reported several strategies of countering censorship, thus raising the question if algorithmic filtering approaches are ineffective in detecting and sustaining content moderation according to misinformation guidelines. Comedic visual content, however, proved to make memes more resilient to censorship and potentially more effective in sustaining ontological security narratives.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	3
TABLE OF FIGURES.....	4
1. BACKGROUND	5
1.1. Querdenker.....	7
1.2. The Meaning of Free Speech	8
1.3. Research Questions.....	9
2. THEORY	10
2.1. Ontological Security	11
2.1.1. Collective Memory and Emotions	14
2.2. Resilience and Risk.....	17
2.2.1. Digital Communication Resilience and Strategic Censorship	17
2.2.2. Identity Resilience: Countering rising Anxiety	18
2.3. Instagram And Visual Social Media	19
2.3.1. Identity Construction Online	19
2.3.1.1. Authenticity and Context	19
2.3.1.2. Group Identity and Hashtag Communities.....	20
2.3.2. Memes and Visual Culture	21
2.4. Theoretical Framework.....	23
3. METHODOLOGY, SAMPLING, AND EMPIRICAL MATERIAL	24
3.1. Explanatory Sequential Design.....	25
3.2. Quantitative Content Analysis and First Stage Sampling.....	26
3.2.1. Activity, and Engagement.....	28
3.2.2. Profiles: Types and Activity	29
3.3. Qualitative Analysis and Secondary Sampling.....	30
3.3.1. Instagram's Flagging System of COVID-19 related Content.....	33
3.3.2. Semiotic Visual Analysis.....	37
3.3.3. Qualitative Text Analysis	38
3.4. Instagram: Platform Boundaries and Ethical Considerations	40
3.4.1. Anonymity	41
4. SECURITY NARRATIVES AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION	42

4.1. Timeline of COVID-19 in Germany	42
4.2. Profile Analysis.....	45
4.3. Semiotic and Text Analysis of Content	46
4.3.1. Signs.....	48
4.3.2. Textual Content.....	60
4.4. Pop-Culture References	62
4.5. Offline Context	64
5. PLATFORM MODERATION: STRATEGIC APPROACHES TO COUNTER CENSORSHIP	65
6. CONCLUSION.....	70
References.....	74
Appendix.....	83

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: A link to national Public Health Agencies is provided when trying to open or share COVID-19 related content	24
Figure 2: Instagram is referring users to national Public Health Agencies based on search terms	24
Figure 3: Flag Distribution across sampled Posts.....	34
Figure 4: Topic Areas of sampled Posts	46
Figure 5: Reference Groups in sampled Posts	47
Figure 6: Identified Themes across sampled Memes.....	47
Figure 7: @thewolfbyyourside	49
Figure 8: @thewolfbyyourside	49
Figure 9: @georgeorwellnow	49
Figure 10: @georgeorwellnow	50
Figure 11: @thewolfbyyourside	50
Figure 12: @georgeorwellnow , @thewolfbyyourside.....	51
Figure 13: @thewolfbyyourside	51
Figure 14: @georgeorwellnow	52
Figure 15: @thewolfbyyourside	52
Figure 16: @thewolfbyyourside	52
Figure 17: @thewolfbyyourside	54
Figure 18: @thewolfbyyourside	54
Figure 19: @thewolfbyyourside	55
Figure 20: @thewolfbyyourside	55
Figure 21: @georgeorwellnow	57

Figure 22: @georgeorwellnow	57
Figure 23: @thewolfbyyourside	57
Figure 24: A screenshot of a video was posted to avoid censorship	65
Figure 25 Self-censoring to counter platform censorship.....	66
Figure 26 'Your Story was deleted - only you can see this information'. A user received this notification about deleted content.	68
Figure 27: Profiles with high activity by hashtag	83
Figure 28: Occurrence of Types of Content by User.....	84
Figure 29: Content Type Distribution for georgeorwellnow	85
Figure 30: Content Type Distribution for thewolfbyyourside	85

Table 1: Distribution of Posts by Type (Data from georgeorwellnow and thewolfbyyourside)	36
Table 2: Table of Covid Events (regulatory data is collected from WHO, 2022).44	
Table 3: Georgeorwellnow Hashtag Coding Chart (a)	86
Table 4: Georgeorwellnow Hashtag Coding Chart (b)	87
Table 5: Georgeorwellnow Hashtag Coding Chart (c)	88
Table 6: Thewolfbyyourside Hashtag Coding Chart (a).....	89
Table 7: Thewolfbyyourside Hashtag Coding Chart (b)	90
Table 8: Thewolfbyyourside Hashtag Coding Chart (c).....	91
Table 9: Georgeorwellnow Caption Coding Chart	92
Table 10: Thewolfbyyourside Caption Coding Chart.....	93

1. BACKGROUND

Amidst rising election talks in 2020, one of the biggest protests in Germany, regarding recently introduced contact restrictions and regulations to public life, took place. Approximately 40.000 people protested in Berlin against COVID rules decided upon by the government (Strick, 2021, p. 389) – one protest among many that recently erupted in cities across the globe. Alongside COVID-deniers in the United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK) and mass protests against regulations in India, the German ‘Querdenker’ movement can be considered one of the most prominent strands of anti-vax movements globally.

Today many people utilize digital and social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and others as a source of information (Malik et al., 2021). Particularly younger age groups (18-44) project a high consumption of social media

content (Newman et al., 2017). While the move towards digital media as a main resource for information consumption today has provided wider and faster access to news, through a decentralized dissemination of content, it also comes with a significant increase in circulation of false information (Malik et al., 2021). The focus on visual, fast-paced, and emotional content poses a particularly challenging environment for identifying the degree of truthfulness within posted content (Jaramillo-Dent & Pérez-Rodríguez, 2021), especially considering that the average user of social media does not take extra time to verify information online (Khan & Idris, 2019).

On the other hand, social media are platforms of self-expression. Through constructing an image of the self, especially through visual platforms like Instagram, individuals connect to a community, while also establishing and re-arranging their identity within a larger context. Creating content, but also reacting and consuming other users' content, thus, serves as an outlet of identity development and expression (Perera et al., 2021). While identity narration is a central part of social media usage, so is the sensation of anxiety. The constant flow of information inherent to the social media environment of endless news feeds confronts users with worldwide conflict, global changes and risks to personal health and life stability, thus causing a rise in anxiety, fear, and insecurities (Burrows, 2017).

Previously research has investigated how rising usage of social media is connected to identity narration (Jaramillo-Dent & Pérez-Rodríguez, 2021; Perera et al., 2021), and how social movements express their views within a larger context of media discourse (Jaramillo-Dent & Pérez-Rodríguez, 2021). While many prior studies have investigated security narration and ontological security, in particular on mainly textual platforms like Facebook and Twitter, this paper will attempt to dive deeper into the visual transformation of security narratives, by looking at content generated on the social network platform Instagram.

While the narration of oneself, combined with the securitization of context and narratives, builds one half of this thesis, the other comes from platform

interventions. People take to social media to construct an image and a narrative about themselves, their surroundings and their intentions. On the other hand, the platforms influence the discourse present online through implementing distinct platform specific communication norms through content management, restrictions, and censorship. This can be observed in the case of the COVID-19 debate specifically. While many companies online were praised for cracking down on the spread of misinformation online, this also caused users to implement countermeasures to circumvent hashtag-blocks, content restrictions, etc. (Steinberg, 2021).

To investigate how social identity is constructed virtually, influenced by platform providers, and securitized in a crisis context such as the COVID-19 pandemic the case of the German Querdenker movement was chosen.

1.1. Querdenker

The origins of the movement lead back to a group in Stuttgart that was founded in April 2020 in response to a nationwide lockdown including the closing of schools, shops, and places of public gathering. What started as a group of a few dozen soon became a national movement that attracted multiple thousands of protesters opposing the national ‘infection protection act’ (Infektionsschutzgesetz) based on the grounds of freedom of movement, decision making, and personhood – German fundamental constitutional rights (Teune, 2021). A defining characteristic of the Querdenker movement’s narrative is the use of false information to argue against restrictions and vaccine promotion. Their narrative strategies of posing as the victim of political correctness are paired with arguments of Social-Darwinism and appropriation of Jewish Holocaust history thus positioning them close to far-right extremist groups that show increasing presence at anti-vax protests.

While the ideological profile of the movement is very diverse as followers joined the movement from various political and cultural backgrounds, they still project a strong group identity that has significant implications on individual

identity practices (Chen, 2021; Chotiner, 2020; Hornsey, 2021; Teune, 2021). Here an understanding of ontological security and effects of anxiety can add an understanding of what unites and binds people to a movement that provides a distinct understanding and contextualization of current events, effectively simplifying an increasingly complex globalized world.

1.2. The Meaning of Free Speech

Free speech is an essential part of democracies. But the fundamental right has not just been discussed in relation to political systems but also when it comes to ethical guidelines online. As many social media platforms exist to encourage discussions and exchange, they are also faced with the difficulties that come with digital anonymity. Anonymity is much easier to achieve in a digital context as people no longer engage face-to-face. While reducing the cost of communication, it also builds barriers prohibiting previous means of communicating and enclosing a new set of communication norms (Rösner & Krämer, 2016).

Recently social media platforms have been the center of attention when it comes to addressing problems of hate speech, racism, and sexism (Griffin, 2022). The focus in the debates often refers back to the right of free speech. What are its boundaries? Is it more important than physical and psychological security and who is responsible for assuring proper conduct? Germany is considered one of the countries with the strictest regulations on what can be considered under freedom of speech. This is in part due to historically tight restrictions on hate speech and verbal offense originating in the 1950s, after the country was facing increasing difficulties with Nazi-mentality in its society (Delcker, 2020). These laws regulating freedom of speech were recently translated into new legal contexts trying to tackle hate speech and illegal activity on social networks. While this effort was mainly directed towards managing the increasing transference of online hate incitement into offline far-right extremist terrorism it also targets dangerous levels of mis- and disinformation circulating on those platforms. The new Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG) was written into law in 2017 and further tightened in 2019 in response to the murder of a pro-refugee politician. It puts the responsibility of monitoring and

censoring illegal content on social media platforms with more than two million German users. Non-compliance with the law will lead to fines leading up to five million Euros forcing private tech companies to administer diligent and widespread censorship to avoid the punishment (Bundesministerium der Justiz, 2017). A common criticism and an important factor to this thesis' analysis is that this censorship is enforced by the platforms, however it is done on behalf of government regulations, thus linking political oversight to the process of online censorship¹. Another fact to consider is the original motivation behind NetzDG being right-wing extremism and hate speech, especially regarding the increasing involvement of far-right groups within the Querdenker movement.

1.3. Research Questions

As such this thesis will investigate the identity construction of the Querdenker movement as the representation of a populist anti-government movement with members from diverse motivations and backgrounds. A special attention will be given to how platform moderation influences published content by changing and implementing communication norms. Here a closer look will be taken at security narratives and their degree of radicalization over time. With regards to Instagram, the question will be how this is achieved through visualization rather than textualization.

RQ1: How does the Querdenker movement construct their identity through visualization strategies on Instagram?

➔ How do these strategies motivate ontological security?

RQ2: How does platform moderation influence visual security narratives online?

Within the following section the main foundations of the theoretical framework of this thesis will be discussed. The theories of ontological security, (visual) online

¹ It is noteworthy that censorship varies in countries and based on language as reviews focus on major western languages (Faddoul, 2020) with national legal constraints on platform moderation efforts motivating censorship and content guidance further.

culture and censorship build this frame which will be filled with contextual concepts and definitions originating from research in digital and social media, visual culture, security studies, and globalization.

2. THEORY

To situate this research, one must consider the global context in which both the online sphere and political movements such as the anti-vax movement today operate. Here it becomes evident that global interconnectedness progresses, just like the interrelation of political narratives and reasoning. While many nationalist and populist movements and political actors are increasingly arguing against globalization, they rely on the transnational character of the movement they are part of. Steger and James (2019) argue that while populist movements often are ‘economically anti-globalist’ their ‘practice is culturally globalizing’ (ibid., p. 188). Proof of this can be found in several collaborations between populist leaders worldwide regarding campaign slogans, joined symbolism and rhetoric, and movement belonging and identification. The transferability has become especially visible recently when – due to the COVID-19 pandemic – people united via the means of digital resources, forming global movements that are bound, not by locality or national belonging, but rather shared interests that led to the formation of non-territorial identities – identities existing outside of geographical limitations (Scholte, 2005, pp. 239–240).

While globalization advances the disconnect of activities and everyday life from the local context, this social disembedding influences trust in increasingly abstract systems (financial system, economy, etc.). Stretching space and time limitations across further distances the process of globalization is perceived as ‘liberating’ but also causes changes in routines, thus, straining perceptions of normalcy (Giddens, 1991a; Steger & James, 2019, p. 193). This increasing complexity can motivate a strong opposition to further globalization, as people strive towards reinstating simplicity as a sensemaking mechanism to incomprehensible global interconnectedness (Sharp, 1985).

2.1. Ontological Security

Within this increasingly globalized world questions of identity and familiarity have gained precedence in public discourse on- and offline. At the same time a multitude of ideological movements driven by the rise of uncertainty and insecurity in modern day society are emerging and exert pressure on current political and economic decision-making processes. Here, the concept of ontological security becomes a central element to assess trends in insecurity, as it seeks to explain these phenomena and the coping mechanisms that are being applied to counteract heightened uncertainty. Ontological security describes the security of being. By reassuring stability of one's self-narrative and societal embeddedness, ontological security can be established. As a response to heightened insecurity, global issues are interpreted in line with pre-existing narratives to ground identities, thus reassuring individuals in their being and strengthening societal position, 'order', and ontological security (Subotic, 2016).

Ontological security theory (OST) draws on three distinct concepts: Identity, anxiety, and security. While identity formation and awareness are both reflexive and internal processes, especially the continuity of the Self and the prospect of a somewhat predictable future are essential to the conceptualization of identity in OST. In Mitzen's (2006) words:

Ontological security refers to the need to experience oneself as a whole, continuous person in time — as being rather than constantly changing — in order to realize a sense of agency (Giddens, 1991b; Laing, 1969; in Mitzen, 2006, p. 342)

Anxiety in OST is a diversely used concept. Previous research both interprets anxiety as disabling and enabling regarding motivating agency and changes in behavioral patterns (Krickel-Choi, 2021). To sharpen the definition and especially develop a distinction between the often-synonymous use of anxiety and ontological insecurity, Krickel-Choi (2021) returns to an existentialist reading of the concept of anxiety. In line with the interpretation by Laing (1990) who split anxiety into normal and neurotic, Krickel-Choi distinguishes between anxiety and

ontological insecurity. The former describes the enabling stages in line with a normal, every-day sensation of anxiousness, whereas the latter defines severe stages of instability in personal continuity that incapacitates an individual's ability to modify behavioral patterns and adjust to alternating circumstances threatening future stability of the Self (Krickel-Choi, 2021).

Two concepts strongly connected to those of anxiety and ontological insecurity are risk and uncertainty. The modern globalized world comes with many changes to the fabric of society. Processes are increasingly disconnected from the local context, while on a global level being highly interrelated which causes different risk perceptions in individuals. The main driver for this development is uncertainty. A world as interrelated as it is now provides a stage that is highly “complex, ambiguous and dynamic” (Becker, 2014, p. 123). In the context of addressing identified future high-risk scenarios the individual often struggles to identify causal action and response links, thus causing emotions of frustration and anxiety. On the other hand, many global issues today require global cooperative solutions. However, when faced with diversity in opinions and viewpoints regarding how to address complex issues many disagree on the necessary measures, thus transforming decision making processes into long-lasting, unproductive arguments with no definitive outcome (Slovic, 2001). This has the potential to undermine established trust structures within societies (ibid.), heightening polarization in politics, while also positioning political opinions as a central factor to judging the trustworthiness of a person.

Trust is another essential element within OST. Giddens describes societal trust as essential to an ontologically secure self thus defining the essence of the conceptualization of security. The trust in others and the ability to anticipate events and interactions through routines provides an individual with a sense of continuity that counteracts the complexity of a changing and uncertain world (Giddens, 1991b, pp. 38–47; Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2014, p. 69). Distrust is a common phenomenon in members within the anti-vax movement, particularly the feeling of being out of touch with the rest of society and being disregarded by a political

context can have a powerful effect on an individual's experience of ontological security (Cossarini, 2017; Krolikowski, 2008). The theorization of basic trust by Giddens can be used in this context to illustrate why Querdenker are so susceptible to disinformation and conspiracy theories building the foundation to their ideology. This dimension of trust describes the confidence placed in individuals in a person's immediate, daily environment. Through basic trust interactions an individual bridges the possibility for unexpected events or surprises, by feeling confident in the upholding of patterned behavior. This conceptualization of trust by Giddens (1991b) builds the foundation of most of modern-day communication. Here, the expectation of behavior is essential to avoid misunderstandings caused by subjectivity in perceptions, thus stabilizing interactions against disappointment (Luhmann, 1972, pp. 31–32). The developments caused by globalization towards increased global interdependency and de-linkages of space and identity coincide with the rise of ideological structures such as populism within political contexts. Together they function as a strong destabilizing force to basic trust structures as differences in worldviews, behavioral patterns and biases are highlighted amongst members of society often causing dissonance for the Self (Giddens, 1991b, pp. 187–188). Resulting from this, basic trust is reassigned by the individual to new and potentially smaller groups of people as more global societal trust structures retreat, making reconceptualizations of trust and protective measures of identity necessary.

Argumentative contradictions or opposing worldviews inherent to a democratic political environment can lead to an individual questioning the continuity of his or her understanding of the world and, thus, pose a possibility for insecurities arising. A 'protective cocoon', according to Giddens, can then be necessary strengthening the continuation of self against obscuring ideas and risks (Giddens, 1991b, pp. 126–133), which in the case of the anti-vax movement becomes evident in the form of disinformation and conspiracies. While trust in governmental functions, then, is dwindling amongst anti-vax community members, the belief in the community and the shared narrative rises (Germani & Biller-Andorno, 2021; Wang, 2021). Provided is a narrative that reassures followers of simplified explanations to increasingly complex issues of an interconnected,

globalized world amidst a pandemic. Strengthened through phenomena like echo chambers and filter bubbles this contributes to a rising polarization between factual and counterfactual motivated arguments while both experience rising levels of resilience (Colomina et al., 2021, p. 13).

2.1.1. Collective Memory and Emotions

Collective Memory is a driving force in creating collective narratives. While collectivity unites multiple variations of past recollections within one sense-making-model, often it also highlights divisions based on power relations within society. While some groups' interpretation of history functions as a guiding principle to make sense of global societal events, others' memory is silenced or disregarded in everyday contexts. Nicole Doerr (2017) writes about how in this regard collective memory can become a source of conflict or be disrupting to democratic decision-making processes as majority and minority memories clash in public settings. Providing space for excluded narratives is an enabling technique. When disregarding diverse recollections of history for long, however, it also comes with the risk of narrative reproduction of trauma and encouraging defensive storytelling of both victims and perpetrators, thus fostering an increasingly toxic environment for democratic processes and decision-making. Particularly interesting in her analysis is the mentioning of so called 'crypts', a narrative form implicitly portraying memories of violence and suppression carried through generations (Doerr, 2017).

Regarding the anti-vax movement, memory and narrative recollections of minorities versus majorities are a central factor. In Germany, but also globally, the anti-vax movement has been criticized for utilizing political systems' attentiveness to diverse interests and inclusiveness to successfully influence political agendas despite being a small minority of the population. While inclusivity and attentiveness to diverse recollections of past and present events can be an asset in countering political alienation and defensiveness, as Nicole Doerr (2017) describes, it can also come with the risk of reversing power relations into the opposite extreme, where

minority opinions are not disregarded but rather given more attention and weight than are present in society.

The political environment, especially in recent times with the rise in globally spread populist and nationalist movements, is one strongly interwoven with emotions. Emotions, embedded and reproduced in and through fantasies, historical accounts and not the least felt in everyday interactions with the immediate environment, can function as strong influences on the conceptualization of ontological security (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2018) while also guiding securitization practices (Kinnvall, 2017).

Traumatic experiences are easily engrained in individual memory over extended periods of time, as they are tied to strong emotional responses and heightened insecurities about the present and future state of being. Due to this trauma and feelings of fear and anxiousness are used in political contexts to steer public opinions, but also to create a sense of unity and belonging through shared hardship (Kinnvall, 2017.). While these experiences often tie to insecurities of ontological nature, insofar as they challenge an individual's notion of continuity and stability in the wake of unsettling changes in the societal fabric – they can also bind a physical element of security. This is especially the case when considering challenges to health and physical safety on a wide-range societal scale. Kinnvall (2017) describes, in this context, how the securitization of women's bodies in the context of repeated rape cases in India functions not just to establish a grounded societal order and re-narrate complex identity structures of the Indian society against the threat of physical violence. It also aligns with a physical dimension of securitization and insecurity as it coincides with restrictions to bodily autonomy and physical well-being for women by introducing a conceptualization of gendered identity that poses challenges to physical security (ibid.).

The Querdenker movement operates on the margins of physical and ontological security as well. To start with, contextualized in an ongoing global pandemic, concerns about physical security are governing many political and personal decisions of individuals. However, movements and societies alike also

create elements of identity out of their experiences during these trying times. As restrictions, vaccines, and severity of the virus are debated daily on a public stage, many people experienced the past few years as a most unprecedented time of limitations and threat. Especially in a Western European context many young people have not experienced any event with similar restrictiveness and threatening their life to the same degree. As the pandemic is still ongoing it is hard to tell whether it will become an established trauma, shaping identity structures in a powerful way. However, as the societal divisiveness of the Querdenker movement has shown already, arguments for “freedom of bodily choice” and “freedom of movement” are combined with powerful emotional undertones. This hints towards current events that are experienced as extreme by all of society are, within the movement, also re-narrated in line with collective trauma language.

Here, it is noteworthy that trauma and emotions originating in a physical context become re-narrated to an ontological context, by politicizing the subject through a focus of political decision-making – a strategy that utilizes embedding practices thus linking the corona crisis to many previous governmental ‘failures’. This creates a backdrop to the crisis, simulating a historical context and routine in society that can be criticized, thus providing not just a basis for in-group identity through shared hardship (via the means of restrictions and forced vaccinations), but also a distinct opponent – the political decision makers, which are compared to past extremists posing a threat to the well-being of the people, thus linking ontological perceptions of identity and physical security in narrative.

In addition to the linkages between physical and ontological securities, emotions and trauma also motivate a securitized narrative of the ‘Other’. Self-identity is also constructed reflexively through defining what it is not. By assigning characteristics and a role to the other in-group members externalize and distance themselves from unwanted characteristics and in the process create an ‘abject’ (Kinnvall, 2006, pp. 47/53). This imagination of the Other then undergoes constant alienation through processes of dehumanization or the establishment of deep prejudice, thus creating a societal divide (ibid., p. 78). The creation of the abject

then opens a possibility to both vilify the Other or create a narrative in which the Other needs to be guided and taught the correct ways (Croft, 2012, p. 198). Croft (2012) differentiates the othered status of post-London-bombings Muslims in England into these two states of either ‘Radical Other’ – the villain – or ‘Orientalized Other’ – the naïve subject.

2.2. Resilience and Risk

2.2.1. Digital Communication Resilience and Strategic Censorship

Considering the context of the COVID-19 pandemic – a crisis and emergency context – effective communication strategies were necessary to raise awareness and gain support for regulations and rapid response plans to counteract the threat to physical well-being. The digital environment, while providing many paths to increased effectiveness in crisis communication (such as faster and decentralized dissemination of information), is also accompanied by the greatest challenge of wide-ranging disinformation (Malik et al., 2021). Research has illustrated that institutional public outreach campaigns utilizing celebrity support, clarification posts, or infographics can be utilized to increase factual awareness while also directing social media users towards credible sources (ibid.). However, these strategies, as they increase the resilience of information against conspiracies and misinformation, fall short of addressing the issue of echo chambers and filter bubbles in directing content consumption. To counteract the usual functionality of the algorithm, Instagram has introduced pop-up warnings linking users to credible government and non-governmental organization’s websites or profiles, thus furthering the distribution of accurate information (Instagram, 2020).

While this might aid in countering the unintentional distribution of misinformation many users’ consumption of content is strongly aligned with their social context. With the rise of populism, the ideological links between political opinion and societal behavior have become more prominent. This cognitive bias is making it difficult to breach established information seeking patterns and introducing new sources to an individual’s selection pool of news-providers (Bloomfield & Tillery, 2019; Regehr, 2022).

2.2.2. Identity Resilience: Countering rising Anxiety

Central to the anti-vax argument is also a different kind of resilience understanding, more directly related to the theory of ontological security – a conceptualization used to counter anxieties about the unknown. Implemented mainly through highlighting physical resistance to influenza, resilience becomes an essential part of countering anxiety amongst group members. The concept, then, can be understood as a coping tool in a time defined by particularly high uncertainty and incomprehensible risks (Guittet & Brion, 2017, pp. 80–81).

To understand the significance of resilience in coping it is necessary to conceptualize the pandemic first and foremost as a politically narrated crisis (Bergman-Rosamond et al., 2020). This overlap with securitization theory introduces a lens to the narrative that binds it within a political context, thus, all arguments become politicized. Resilience then does not just function as a coping mechanism to anticipated bodily harm but also to lifespan of ideology and worldviews which in a harsher political climate become faced with stronger opposition due to polarization. In this context resilience is facilitated within groups through narration of continuity and membership, reminding one another of community and belonging while also creating a bubble shielding against threats not just in the physical sense but also in an ideological way. Instagram here can be understood as the facilitator of such resilience by providing a platform of exchange that creates the shielding bubble while also becoming a main element in organizational infrastructure, which has previously been identified within social media such as Facebook (Rodineliussen, 2019).

While crises describe times of heightened senses of fear, insecurity and uncertainty this is particularly true for its representation on social media. Through high information exposure and repeatedly dramatized versions, individuals find themselves faced with heightened risk perceptions that are not the least encouraged through securitizing features online (Burrows, 2017). While anxiety appears to be a general reaction to heightened risk, there are a multitude of coping mechanisms to manage these emotions. Basic trust in the continuity of normalcy stands at the

center of them all (Giddens, 1991b, pp. 126-129). While trust is put in different people and institutions it is the focal point of understanding the significance of resilience building in society during the COVID-19 pandemic and must thus be included in the analysis.

2.3. Instagram And Visual Social Media

2.3.1. Identity Construction Online

Social media and digital networks have opened the gate to a new conceptualization of identity and community. While previous offline expressions of community were bound within the limitations of time and space, digitalization of social interaction has deemed them nearly insignificant. Online content and, thus, (content-based) community can exist spanning large distances and express opinion or engage in dialogue within seconds (Seargeant & Tagg, 2014, p. 11). This can function as a great networking opportunity. However, it also poses a challenge to identity authenticity to the individual.

Identity traditionally is performed in many ways. Expressions range from narrative-driven to everyday actions. Most commonly, identity conceptualizations originate from the individual themselves; at most they are constructed through groups or in a dialectic approach. The reflexive element of identity construction that originates in modes of communication, however, highlights one of the essential challenges inherent to the specific functions of an online environment. Identities online are narrated reflexively to an audience but also contextualized within an artificial digital environment. Other than in the offline context users construct their identity through re-narrating elements of their offline persona but with anticipation to a more global potentially unknown audience (ibid., p. 8). This originates from communities now being built on ideological expressions and common interests rather than geographical proximity, which causes individuals to cater their self-expression online towards a potentially infinite audience that originates from diverse contexts and thus interprets messages differently.

2.3.1.1. Authenticity and Context

Another element of online self-representation is the notion of authenticity. While offline presentations of the self are authenticated through the physical presence of a person, online a bigger weight is put on coherent depictions of the self and identity elements. In general, the digital sphere today is an environment associated with a lot of distrust. Individuals are engaging in reflexive narrations of themselves in an environment associated with identity fraud, fake news, and suggestive framing through photoshop or bought reviews. This leads to a lot of users relying on various modes of verification. However, offline and online interactions in the case of social media are interwoven as connections oftentimes transcend one environment into the other. While the translation of offline relationships into the online context are intuitive, especially identity elements founded in community-building also translate from the online context into an offline reality (ibid., pp. 46-49).

As previously described due to the disappearance of space and time as social limitations online environments experience a ‘context collapse’, which results in a transformation of expression where most users online utilize a targeted communication strategy that singles out a specific audience by the means of utilizing group-specific language or visual cues (ibid., pp. 8, 11). Language and visuals are chosen against the backdrop of sustaining a sense of consistency to create an authentic image of oneself and one’s respective identity. While this consistency is in most parts intrinsic it is also institutionalized in rules of conduct provided by the respective platform insofar as every user must agree to make no false claims and give accurate information on themselves (ibid., pp. 49-50). Consistency and authenticity, thus, pose central motivators to the choice of shared or created content for a social media user and must be included in an analysis of identity construction online.

2.3.1.2. Group Identity and Hashtag Communities

Group identity development is inherent to diverse global networking platforms such as social media. As previously mentioned, trends like context collapse and globality cause a necessity for targeted communication, utilizing

diverse methods to capture attention. One such strategy is the use of contextual hashtags to establish hashtag communities. On Instagram, just like on other social networks, many viewers filter the content they consume via hashtags. They function as ‘indexing systems’ (Kidd, 2017, p. 161) situating the post within a larger context or discussion, thus, linking it to other posts and creating a ‘backdoor network’ (ibid.) – a hashtag community (Seargeant & Tagg, 2014, p. 12).

Hashtag communities and backdoor networks do not only create links between content but also function as strengthening factors in the establishment of group identities. They create a forum of exchange that enhances a certain opinion or worldview, thus, strengthening ties to a specific group of other like-minded users. When this created community is also enforced further through side-effects of content-catering algorithm, hashtag filtering can lead to establishing strong echo chambers, limiting access to any type of constructive engagement with opposing opinions. This motivates the choice of investigating prominent hashtags among the Querdenker movement rather than selecting a few individual accounts of outstanding members.

2.3.2. Memes and Visual Culture

Memes, a term coined by Dawkins (1976) as replicable cultural minimum units, are a form of expression of public opinion in online environments. Multimodal in nature, memes reproduce cultural values and expressions through a visual lens (Wiggins, 2019). These forms of communication have long been seen to influence discourse and public agenda (Tufekci, 2013) with their increasing dispersion in society due to rising relevance of online content. An important factor in the appeal of memes and other humorous online content is the community that establishes their reach through imitating, reusing, and sharing them (Roslyng & Larsen, 2021). Open to interpretation and change, meme templates can often be found to refer to diverse contexts and include varying messages, while maintaining a focus on participation and humor (Brady et al., 2022). Within the anti-vax community online visual culture does not just focus on humor and participation, it also reflects key attitudes within the movement. Previous comparative research of

vaccine opponents' and supporters' media presence, however, has revealed that meme culture on both sides displays similar antagonistic tendencies. Content structure, tone, and material mirror each other in the way they construct arguments and voice opposition while also utilizing 'scientific' facts to validate their statements (ibid.; Roslyng & Larsen, 2021). While this highlights shortcomings in the general communication of science it also shines a light on the politicization of science and how this is translated into and through humor online (Roslyng & Larsen, 2021).

According to previous research memes mainly cover constructions of subjectivity, spanning the realms of science, spirituality, politics, and emotions. Individual perceptions of truths and facts are re-narrated and performed, thus expressing ideology, identity, and political opinion. Inherent to this process of utilizing scientific knowledge is the politicization of science (ibid.) which consequently disconnects it from objectivity. Two distinct themes identified within vaccine discourse online are linked to this trend, namely the sensation of powerlessness (ibid.) and distrust towards authorities (Brady et al., 2022). While these are narrated through a variety of meme templates three designs have received prominence. Roslyng and Larsen (2021) have established a distinction between memes capturing pop-culture references, containing factual elements or (pseudo-) logical reasoning, and those countering arguments from their opposition. Pop-culture provides an especially strong medium for carrying messages with regards to ideology, values, and emotions.

At last, memes can be understood as expressions of identity. By emphasizing narratives within visual online culture relating to expressions of self-awareness, societal awareness of the Self, and distinction from the Other, identities are constructed and replicated both reflexively and internal. Pavlovic concludes:

“[...] this form of viral content [memes] can be also viewed as a space of resistance and criticism in which identities are decentralized and ready for change” (Pavlovic, 2016, p. 100).

Combining this with the understanding of identity in ontological security studies, memes can be interpreted as expressions of both group and individual identity, strengthening its continuity through establishing agency and binding it to shared (political) projects (ibid., p. 102). The sense of group belonging is especially strengthened through similar experiences and contextual interpretations linked to the establishment of collective memory and emotions. This is captured in Pavlovic's work as memes also function to make sense of the world in a way that is expressive of cultural, political, or ethnic identities (ibid.).

2.4. Theoretical Framework

Concluding this review of theory, three main themes will be building the foundation to investigating discursive Querdenker security strategies on Instagram. The movement is classed as a populist anti-government movement that is transnationally embedded due to digital connectedness. Their narrative will be understood in the context of a crisis and as an effort to alleviate insecurity resulting from heightened risk and uncertainty perceptions (Beck, 1986; Bergman Rosamond et al., 2020). As such, a community driven narrative can be theorized to restore trust in the continuity of self and ideology while also assuring a discursive construction of protected values and livelihood. This may be achieved by policing the trusted in-group-membership by the means of othering and referrals to collective memory (Kinnvall, 2017). By creating stories of trauma and glory, powerful fantasies and emotions can construct and bind communities which can be identified and expressed in illustrative tools and communication techniques online. Here memes, as participatory practices of identity are considered the online outlet for ideology reproduction (Pavlovic, 2016) and thus establish the ontological security of the movement via restoring stability to the continuity of the movement and the Self. At last, this thesis will draw upon the concepts of resilience and online communication theory to identify effects of narrative and chosen rhetoric originating from heightened anxiety and uncertainty inherent to times of crisis (Giddens, 1991a, p.27; Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2014, p. 68). Prior research has pointed to the areas of community building, exposure strategies, and emotionalization or

politicization of content and tone, looking at the meaning of authenticity and language to the appeal of content and engagement with it. This will be contextualized with environmental influences inherent to the digital social media space of Instagram.

3. METHODOLOGY, SAMPLING, AND EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

Working with data from Instagram poses two distinct challenges. Instagram used to be a major source of information exchange for the Querdenken movement. However, considering the increasing circulation of COVID-19 misinformation, the platform has recently decided to filter information and put in place restrictions which lead to many of the more prominent users of the anti-vax scene being suspended and the most popular content being taken down (Instagram, 2019, 2020, 2021; Deutsche Welle, 2021a).

Due to a variety of hashtags being frequented there is still a large sum of content being circulated, effectively circumventing the platform's algorithmic filtering and hashtag bans (Leaver et al., 2020, p. 22). The platform has also introduced a warning when sharing COVID related content, informing about the likelihood of

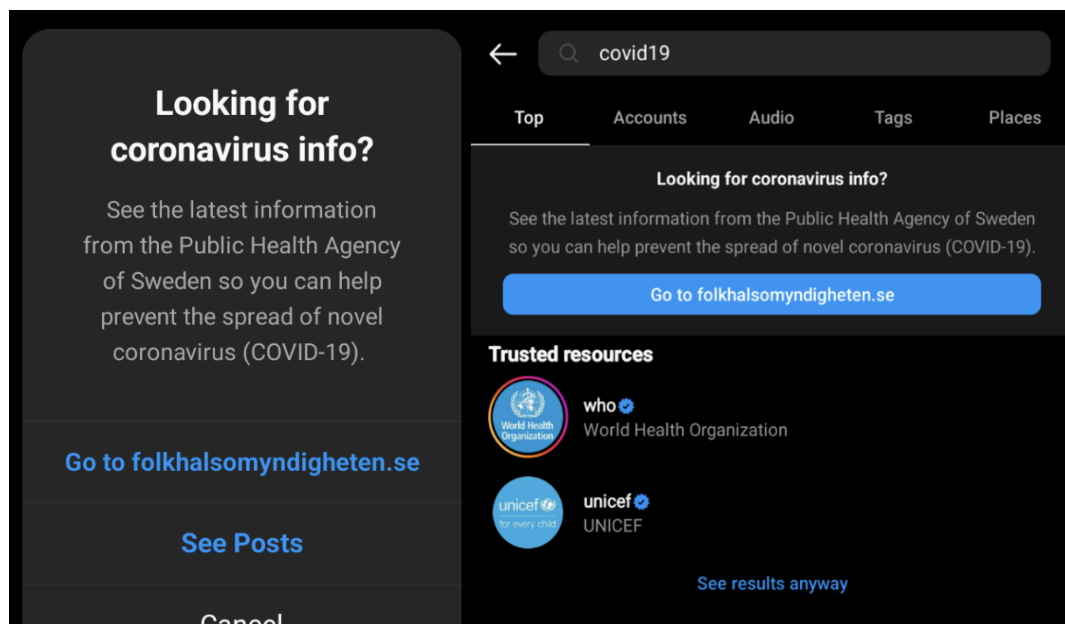


Figure 2: A link to national Public Health Agencies is provided when trying to open or share COVID-19 related content

Figure 1: Instagram is referring users to national Public Health Agencies based on search terms

misinformation and encouraging the user to fact check before distributing the content further (Instagram, 2020).

While all these efforts are targeted towards limiting the exposure that Querdenker (anti-vaxxers) and COVID-deniers get through social networks, the movement still utilizes Instagram to spread vaccine opposition and anti-government mentality. This is in part due to the more popular alternative for community building and activism – namely Facebook – experiencing much stricter censorship by Meta as the company has focused its main attention on large-scale tackling of disinformation circulation and, thus, content moderation there. Instagram comes with the secondary characteristics of experiencing a higher adoption rate amongst youth and its main outlet (visual content), being more difficult to censor through Meta's preferred means: algorithms (Faddoul, 2020). However, due to the removal of prominent accounts and content the movement's representation has been decentralized, spread across several smaller accounts and the traction of posts reduced from multiple thousands to few hundreds, even on Instagram (Deutsche Welle, 2021a).

3.1. Explanatory Sequential Design

The methodological approach will consist of the implementation of an explanatory sequential design. The mixed method approach rests on a first stage of quantitative data collection and analysis that can be further investigated and explained through qualitative in depth analysis without relinquishing statistical significance and the representative nature provided through quantitative results (Creswell, 2015, pp. 37–39). Important to the successful execution of this method are focused research questions for both quantitative and qualitative strands of the analysis to motivate the different strands in research (ibid., pp. 69-71) and a rigorous, and well-reasoned sampling strategy (ibid., p. 79).

The guiding research questions for the two stages of data collection and analysis are centered around the main research intent of identifying construction of ontological security amongst Querdenker on Instagram and platform influences

through content moderation censorship. The quantitative strand will focus on identifying general trends in engagement, publishing behavior and rhetorical means by implementing an exploratory content analysis. Here the focus lies on identifying how the Querdenker movement utilizes Instagram as a tool to support their ideological narrative. Additionally, this section will take a closer look at influences that platform censorship through content guidelines and moderation has on the chosen content and tone.

The qualitative strand will then aim towards connecting these trends with moderated trends in radicalization and social pressure towards community via the means of hermeneutics and semiotics focusing on captions and signs in visual content of public and deleted posts, respectively. Regarding the aim of explanatory sequential designs to have the qualitative strand explain first stage quantitative results (ibid., p. 71), this part of the research will be guided by the question of how the created narrative contributes to ontological security perceptions within the movement.

3.2. Quantitative Content Analysis and First Stage Sampling

Some very prominent hashtags among the anti-vax community in Germany are #ichmachdanichtmit² (33.569 posts) (Instagram, 2022b), #coronalüge³ (12.581 posts) (Instagram, 2022a), #ungeimpft⁴ (13.209 posts) (Instagram, 2022c) (Strick, 2021, p. 389). While the first hashtag arose from the movement itself as an answer to imposed restrictions, the latter two give indications to political viewpoints (Corona lie) and identifying characteristics of members (unvaccinated). To analyze the movement's visual security narrative these three hashtags will provide the sample for a mixed method analysis. Basing the sampling strategy on hashtag selections can further be justified through Instagram's function to follow hashtags, thus enabling higher content exposure originating from a diverse selection of users (Jaramillo-Dent & Pérez-Rodríguez, 2021).

² "I will not participate in this" (translated from German by author)

³ „Corona lie“ (translated from German by author)

⁴ „unvaccinated“ (translated from German by author)

A quantitative sample is ideally randomized and large in size to represent societal trends while also allowing ‘room for error’ (Creswell, 2015, p. 76). However, while large sample sizes are achievable, randomized sampling can be difficult. As for the case of social media data collection the sample is limited via the means of hashtags. While this provides a full sample of posts in each hashtag it does fall in line with non-probability sampling techniques regarding the representation of the movement. What speaks for this sampling method, however, is that at least one of the three selected hashtags is very likely to appear on a Querdenker post, thus qualifying as an identifier of the movement’s social media activity.

The quantitative analysis determines average engagement via likes and comments and movement representation. Descriptive statistics give insight into average likes and comments, caption keywords and word counts, audience exposure and the use of further hashtags – situating posts within the movement’s representation on the platform. The aim of this quantitative stage is a brief content analysis of the chosen environment and hashtags to identify the sample for the next qualitative stage of analysis. Special attention in this stage is given to the frequency with and amount to which creators post content to identify individuals that are especially involved in the Querdenker discourse. Content analysis was chosen as a methodological approach as it is commonly paired with qualitative methodologies in media and communication research (Hansen & Machin, 2019, p. 88).

The data collection is enabled through the analytics software Analisa (Analisa, 2022). Analisa was chosen to gain access to data on Instagram that is otherwise hard to access, as Meta is specifically protective of analytical data on Instagram, thus making engagement analytics a difficult endeavor. Analisa in this case enables their customers with large scale data collected on profiles and hashtags contributing to statistical analysis of engagement and content on the otherwise locked social media platform. This software will also be utilized to investigate and map out content on the selected profiles that will be given further insight to, by means of a profile content analysis. The software originating from Singapore and Jakarta is

commonly used by different sized businesses and enterprises for market mapping and analytics on audience demographics, engagement, and content analysis (amongst others) (Analisa, 2022). While not being as frequently adopted in academic studies it is able to provide in-depth information on user profiles and content and thus appears valuable to the quantitative stage of this research.

3.2.1. Activity, and Engagement

A data overview highlights the distribution of posts across the past few months. Software limitations will cap the quantitative sample to 5000 posts per hashtag, which, however, poses only few restrictions of the sample as the content availability of all three hashtags ranges from September of 2021 to the end of March 2022. This limitation might also prove to be an asset for this analysis, as it centers the focus on current narratives in the COVID-19 debate including all the developments that have taken place within the last two years and with full availability of the vaccine to the German public.

As can be identified, the activity across all hashtags is especially high in January 2022. On the other hand, it is also particularly noteworthy that data on #ungeimpft appears particularly scarce in the time from late September 2021 to early December 2021. It can be assumed that this is due to Instagram's newly introduced restrictions on content, as the hashtag 'unvaccinated' is possibly most intuitively linked to accounts opposing COVID-19 restrictions or sharing misinformation. This could have led to the dip in available content not just through content moderation but also through adjustments in usage by the community to evade censorship by filtering algorithms (see chapter 5). Two more spikes in posts can be observed on the 29th of November 2021 for the #ichmachdanichtmit and #coronalüge. Yet two more appear on the 21st of December 2021 and in between the red days of Christmas and New Year's Eve most likely responding to the introduction of the Novavax vaccine (20th) and the implementation of limitations on freedom of assembly over the holidays (WHO, 2022; see also chapter 5.1.-5.4.3). Additionally noticeable is the peak in total engagement towards the days of the weekend. All hashtags have particularly high engagement on either Friday, Saturday, or Sunday, thus indicating individuals'

consumption-patterns of social media content. In line with regular activity hours online posting activity is highest in the evening hours, namely 4pm to 11pm and on the weekends.

Regarding the first stage of content assessment, it is also noteworthy that two of the hashtags have significant overlap. #ichmachdanichtmit and #ungeimpft appear together on up to half of the respective hashtags posts. In addition, the content analysis shows that all the hashtags display a frequented use of the word “Mensch⁵” and its plural “Menschen”. #ichmachdanichtmit and #coronalüge also display mentions of the messaging software Telegram as one of the most common words. For the third hashtag #ungeimpft references to Telegram or Telegram channels were common only when looking at the data of the latter half of 2021. The references to Telegram are consistent with the German government’s announcement in mid-December 2021 to crack down on Querdenker group-chats on the platform to regulate the spread of misinformation and radicalization. This was decided in response to several protests especially in the state of Saxony harboring right-wing extremists and anti-constitutionalists (Pfeifer, 2021).⁶

3.2.2. Profiles: Types and Activity

Further user profiles connected to the posts were identified and most of the posts within the sample can be connected to very few users. Upon investigating user profiles 4 groups could be identified: private individuals, project-based activist profiles representing values of the movement, news media representation, and political government or party profiles. The characteristics of each of these profile groups can be summarized as follows: The widest reach, highest follower counts, and generally high engagement can be found amongst news agency and government profiles. While they tend to be particularly active, they only utilize the hashtag #ungeimpft. This is most likely due to the hashtag not being as strongly associated

⁵ Human (translated from German by author)

⁶ Due to an update in the API Instagram is using to monitor access to its content the quantitative data could in the later stages of the analysis no longer be accessed to create distribution graphs.

with the Querdenker-movement while also being most likely to be used in newscasts. While news and government channels appear to be the origin of the majority of outreach within the sample, the contribution of posts is much higher from individuals' accounts. With uses of the hashtag reaching up to over 600 posts per account within the sample, private individuals and project based activist profiles contribute the main load of content to public discourse on Instagram. While this holds true for all hashtags on the movement specific hashtag #ichmachdanichtmit even the outreach parameters are dominated by individual and project-based movement accounts.⁶

3.3. Qualitative Analysis and Secondary Sampling

This thesis will take a closer look at how Instagram influences narrative construction and reproduction and previously identified processes of radicalization and securitization over time (Chen, 2021; Denney, 2022; Deutsche Welle, 2021a). To achieve this the hashtag sample will motivate a qualitative sample of few very active users having posted more than 100 posts within the confines of one hashtag. To further investigate their discursive behavior on the platform, their posted content will be supplemented with experiences users made with Instagram flagging, restricting access, or deleting posts due to guideline violations. To be able to include this information, users with more than 100 posts will be contacted privately through the platform and are asked to share their experiences through a private chat function on the platform.

The main goal of qualitative sampling is saturation – to get as much information as possible regarding the research question while also avoiding data that does not add valuable new knowledge (ibid., p. 77). Important in explanatory sequential designs is that the qualitative sample is a subset of the quantitative one (ibid., p. 79), while it is also advised to consider a sample of at least 4-5 participants in case studies such as this one (ibid., p. 77). Three limitations regarding the sample size must be addressed. First, the sample will be limited to images and video material published as posts, including photos, 'Instagram Reels' (shorter videos), videos, and 'IGTV' (extended videos with no time limitation), This excludes 'Stories' and

‘Highlights’ as they are moderated differently and are non-permanent content. Additionally, the sample will be narrowed down to only look at memes and artistic or humorous content. As previously discussed, memes, with their dissemination across the internet, especially regarding their potential of reproduction and evolution, as well as the performative element in sight of identity, group belonging and continuity, place them in the center of the analysis of security narratives (Roslyng & Larsen, 2021; Tufekci, 2013; Wiggins, 2019). This is done to capture the visual element of security narratives rather than their translation through newspaper articles and headlines. While the anti-vax scene on Instagram does post a large amount of visual material in video and photographic form ranging from art, through humorous content, to documentation of protests and activism, their profiles also contain an overwhelming number of newspaper screenshots. This content is in its essence textual rather than visual. Consequently, this thesis chooses to exclude them. A further limitation of the sampled contents stems from the actions Meta has taken against misinformation. In September of 2021 several accounts connected to the Querdenker movement were discontinued on the platform thus limiting content provision (Deutsche Welle, 2021a). To incorporate this change in content moderation into the research only posts that were published under the new guidelines and monitoring are taken into account, thus, limiting the sample to posts published after September 2021.

Based on the quantitative hashtag overview users, that surpassed a threshold of activity equal to 100 posts using at least one of the three hashtags, were selected and sorted according to the frequency of hashtag usage. As some of the hashtags are more popular amongst users than others while also displaying very different activity profiles the sample size for each of the three hashtags will be varying. To counteract the imbalance accounts that underscore the 100-posts minimum were contacted to match the quantity of the most frequented hashtag #coronalüge. Here it is also noteworthy that these profiles had to adhere to the characteristic of being individual or movement-based profiles to accurately represent the Querdenker rather than other user profiles such as news agencies, governmental institutions, or counter actors. This criterion becomes particularly relevant as the selected hashtags

do not solely find use among the supporters of the Querdenker movement but also among opponents of the movement possibly trying to hijack a hashtag (Kidd, 2017, p. 161). However, none of the undesired types could be identified within the sample. The sample of accounts resulted in 12 accounts for each hashtag that were contacted for information. Within this sample one account appeared in all three groups and another was overlapping two groups. Thus, the final sample resulted in 33 accounts that were contacted through Instagram's direct messaging service (see appendix, Figure 27).

Of these contacted users 6 were open to contribute material to the research. While two users ended up sending visual material that was in some way censored by Instagram, one forwarded video material that was without any restriction accessible on their profile, another person gave extensive descriptions of attempted censorship and taken countermeasures via voice messages, one person responded only in writing about their experiences, while the last did not give any accounts after voicing their initial interest in contributing. Based on this turnout the three profiles reporting extensive information in written and/or visual form were selected into the qualitative sample (marked with green in Figure 27). The other three profiles' information, if present, will be taken into account in later efforts to contextualize meaning and analyze censorship countermeasures (profiles are marked in yellow in Figure 27).

The contents of each post will be analyzed utilizing a mixture of semiotic methodology (Hansen & Machin, 2019; Rose, 2016), to determine the visual materials meaning and effect on the viewer, and a qualitative text analysis according to Kuckartz (2014, pp. 37–64) of the caption of the post to further determine the intent and meaning. The goal is to identify signs and themes whose repeated use generates ontological security. Certain indications about the type of identity expression the author engages in throughout their profile will be included at this stage. Kidd identifies two distinct social media identities in this context: personality-based profiles, that can be understood as a reflection of one's offline self (individual, as previously referred to), and project-based profiles, which center around a specific movement or interest in an effort for increasing civic engagement

or achieving social change (movement-based, as previously referred to) (Kidd, 2017, pp. 195–197).

3.3.1. Instagram's Flagging System of COVID-19 related Content

Essential to the secondary research interest, censorship is the understanding and categorizing of content in accordance with Instagram's communication regulations. As such, profiles are not just assessed on a global level. Rather posts are analyzed, categorized, and contextualized individually with regards to the profile to understand how content regulations are implemented and enforced, while also assessing strategies of avoiding censorship within these accounts. To achieve this, before the first stage of qualitative analysis, all posts within the timeframe of the 30th of September 2021 to the 31st of March 2022 published via the selected accounts were classed into three respective categories based on the warning flag they received from Instagram. Instagram differentiates two categories here: 1. Informative flags in white, that link to websites containing further knowledge on the pandemic and vaccines, often added by automated algorithmic filtering strategies; 2. mis- and disinformation flags in red, that are added by fact checking groups and companies who identified issues within the post or caption hinting towards missing context or false information. The posts are thus classed as either 1 (white flags), 2 (red flags), or 0 (no flags). As each profile will contain a large number of posts and a deeply engaging analysis will be very time consuming the sample will be limited through purposeful sampling methodology applied to each flag category within each selected profile.

During this coding stage white flags could be identified as used by Instagram commonly regarding mentions of pandemic-related subject matters, thus appearing with the highest frequency overall, as many posts mentioned or displayed keywords, -symbols, or -individuals that were then likely picked up by algorithmic filters. White flags appeared with links to information resources of the World Health Organization (WHO), government institutions, or Instagram's own COVID information page. Red flags were the rarest. Spanning from false information to missing context and partially false information, red flags generally indicated a

degree of misinformation. As such they are in accordance with community guidelines on Instagram (Instagram, 2022d; Instagram, 2022e) likely to be either censored through limited accessibility, blurred out content, or deleted which might have affected their frequency in the sample. Finally, the last group of posts received no flags by Instagram. Through documentation and reports by users (one in particular gave very detailed accounts on this subject see chapter 5) it becomes transparent that this might not only be due to the algorithm's labeling mechanism but due to a user's agency in opposing the previously assigned flag, thus setting off a review-cycle. An overview of the content on each profile concluded in the following frequencies: Red flags carrying the richest information on platform censorship and radical content were fewest in numbers (only 7 posts in total), spread across the profiles with an uneven distribution of 6/1/0 respectively. White flags appeared with a frequency of 696 (spread across the profiles with 344/336/16 posts respectively), while 238 posts (spread across the profiles with 42/50/146 posts respectively) received no flag.

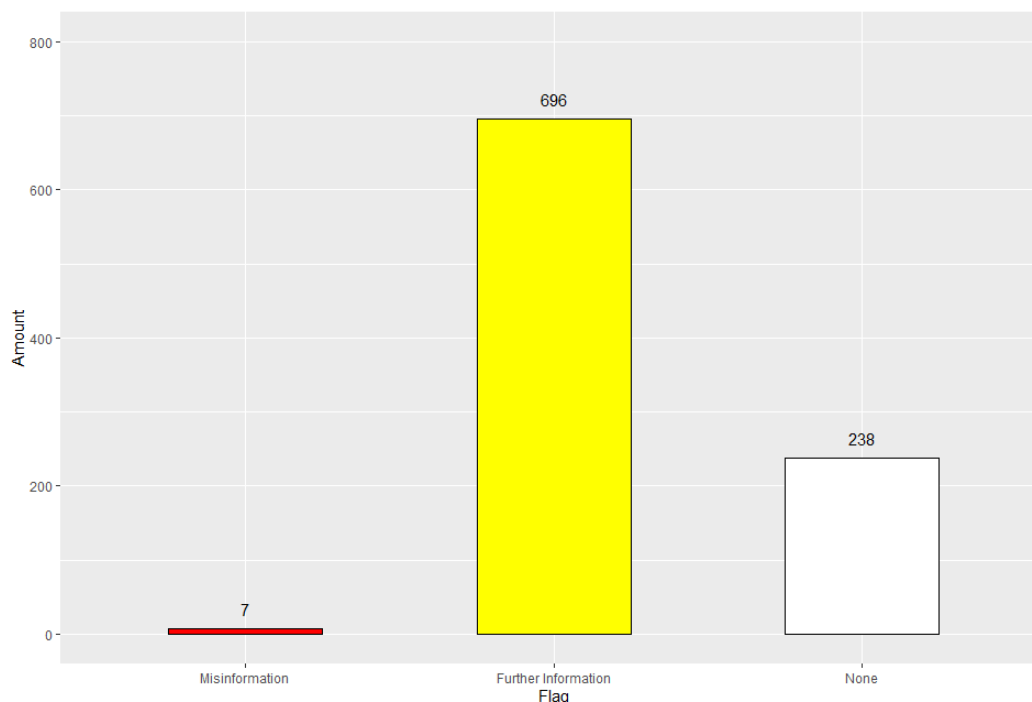


Figure 3: Flag Distribution across sampled Posts

In the further analysis this sample has been narrowed down to allow for a deeper qualitative engagement with each post. For the semiotic analysis a purposeful sampling methodology has been applied to each profile. To include posts from each flagging category an equal amount of qualifying content will be collected from every profile. As previously mentioned, material that contained mainly textual elements such as newspaper articles and videos that viewed mainly headlines and written documents were excluded in this step. This results in a full removal of the misinformation as none of the posts in this category fit the image criteria. While not relevant to the assessment of visualizing security narratives, the selection of misinformation posts still adds meaning regarding Instagram's censorship approach, which exerts indirect influence on how security narratives develop online. As such, the posts of this section will be assessed separately in comparison to the other two categories as part of the profile summaries. Additionally, the pool for the sampling of the other two flagging categories was significantly reduced in size to a total of 57 posts flagged with further information and 90 posts without any tag. A balanced selection according to total amount has been chosen as the aim of this study is not to accurately depict frequency of appearance but rather analyze the contents and implications for censorship and identity security inherent to the posts and their labeling.

Another reduction of the sample occurred at this stage. One of the individual activist accounts ([danimee.de](#)) displays a different approach to content as she primarily posts news content or textual material in combination with a large amount of video material of news conferences and specifically cut material of private media agencies (see appendix, Figure 28). She does not engage with the meme content the other two accounts present. For this reason and the purpose of feasibility of this thesis her video material will only be touched upon as supplemental material to the meme content of the other two accounts. While [danimee.de](#)'s material will not contribute to the in-depth analysis of security narratives in individual posts, her content will still contribute to the analysis of content management, censorship and overall profile representation within the movement.

This initial stage of coding was accompanied by a classification of all content into 10 different categories (memes or cartoons, news, statistical graphs and tables, press conferences and interviews, social media posts, quotes, documentaries, stitched video material, documentations of protests, and other). Initial deductive coding identified 6 categories (memes, news, statistics, reposted social media content, text, and other). Throughout the coding several categories were inductively added as previous classifications became too broad to give meaningful insights. Additional material on the classification of posts can be found in the appendix (Figure 29, 30). The goal of this step in the coding process was to identify which posts are targeted by Instagram's reviews based on style, subjects, themes, and type.

Type	Flag			Ratio
	No Flag	Information Flag	Misinformation Flag	No flag/flag
Meme / Cartoon	36	30	0	1.2
News article / Video	64	114	0	0.56
Statistics	3	22	2	0.125
Press conference / Interview	14	58	3	0.23
Social Media Content	22	24	0	0.92
Quote	1	20	1	0.048
Documentary	2	9	0	0.222
Stitched video material	5	13	0	0.385
Documentation of protest	11	14	0	0.786
Other	14	77	0	0.182

Table 1: Distribution of Posts by Type (Data from georgeorwellnow and thewolfbyyourside)

The findings highlight two distinct developments. On one side, humorous content could be identified to be the only category with a higher likelihood of receiving no flag. Meanwhile, both statistical content and quotes presented the highest ratios of flagged posts while also both presenting misinformation flags. These findings lead to a conclusion, that while humor appeared to be harder to censor, factual knowledge was most moderated. This theory was also supported by three more misinformation flags appearing among press conference and interview material which in all three cases was labeled as false or taken out of context.

While the theory would suggest flags significantly outweighing no-flag posts also regarding news and press conferences or interviews this could not be observed with the same pronounced numbers. The explanation for this could however lie in the diversity of ideologies within the represented sources. While statistics are factually-based they are more easily checked for falsehood than often opinion-focused news, speeches or interviews. Also, statistics, even though they might be used in different ideological contexts, are often interpreted and contextualized to gain meaning, which makes their knowledge a tool but doesn't necessarily alter the contents of the statistic itself. If the content is altered, it would alert fact-checking. The same logic applies to quotes.

3.3.2. Semiotic Visual Analysis

To start with, selected posts of each profile underwent a semiotic analysis. Semiotics describes the study of signs. As such it functions as a measure to interpret and situate visual data (Hansen & Machin, 2019, p. 168; Jensen, 2012, p. 31). To achieve this, semiotics utilizes the concepts of denotation and connotation, in other words: what a picture depicts and what meaning, ideas and values this carries (Hansen & Machin, 2019, pp. 169–170). Carriers of connotation are for example poses, gaze, depicted objects, or the setting in an image or video (ibid., pp. 171–178). Of specific interest to this thesis are objects and settings as they can convey cultural, ideological and, thus, identity relating significance and meaning. Where the author of the post has placed particular importance can be identified through strategies like foregrounding, overlapping, size, color and tone, or focus (ibid., pp.

178-180). Through the assessment of these indicators the semiotic analysis determines visual security narratives and links to specific movement ideology, culture, and tone. This is possible as signs are considered to be means in the communication and portrayal of culture, ideology and myths (Jensen, 2012, p. 34).

A connection to the previously discussed concept of authenticity online is discussed as an influential factor on the choice of image that a user posts regarding their expected audience (ibid., p. 180-186; Seargeant & Tagg, 2014, pp. 46–49). The analysis paid a special attention to authenticity regarding the assessment of identity signs within the image, as previous research suggests that social media content is expressed discursively and in the context of a user's established online network (ibid., pp. 5-8). In addition, the semiotic analysis paid attention to processes of resemiotization – expressions and developing changes in meaning production and interpretation via the means of images (Fuchs, 2017, p.116). This took place in the contrastation phase of posts that still remain online and are thus adhering to Instagram's content guidelines and posts that have been censored or taken down based on content violations. The essential part in this stage of analysis was to investigate potential links in adjustments the user made to published content when confronted with content blocks.

3.3.3. Qualitative Text Analysis

A qualitative text analysis of the posts caption follows the semiotic analysis. Qualitative text analysis is based within the theoretical approach of Hermeneutics. Hermeneutics implies that a text must be understood and interpreted in a continuous circle ('Hermeneutic Circle') in which meaning can both be derived from looking at parts of the text and the whole with regards to context environment and author (Jensen, 2012, p. 29; Kuckartz, 2014, pp. 17–19). When implementing a hermeneutic framework written words must be understood as a dialogue between interpretation, understanding, and text-predating opinions and ideology, while also accounting for prejudice, stereotypes, and values that might influence either the authors' wording or the researchers'/audience's interpretation of it (Jensen, 2012, pp. 29–30; Kuckartz, 2014, pp. 18–21).

A post's caption, thus, had to be contextualized not just with the visual elements depicted in the post but also within a spatial and timely environment that might exert an effect on meaning construction and content selection. The aim of the analysis here is, thus, to not just identify a security narrative within the post but also to put it in perspective with a grander discourse surrounding the subject of the post. As is the case in discourse schemas, the research will focus on identifying the practical implications of security discourses and narratives on Instagram. This is achieved through identifying connotations in wording and visual thus tying visual and textual analysis together with the context found in the prior quantitative results (Hansen & Machin, 2019, p. 155).

Text will be contextualized over time by considering both previous and following content, thus allowing for the establishment of a timeline in discursive development enabling inferences about ideological radicalization and security patterns. During the analysis narrative contributions will be investigated, while also taking a closer look at how users situate themselves within the movement. Establishing a timeline of a user's posted content will be of particular interest considering the ongoing performance, articulation, and rearticulation of identity, meaning, and values online. This entextualization will be achieved through capturing de- and recontextualization processes in the text within applying heuristic qualitative text analysis on the captions (Fuchs, 2017, p. 115). The timeline is contextualized with events that took place in the German and global context with regards to the pandemic, thus allowing links between narrative and offline conditions.

To start the analysis process, a case summary is written about each text. Thus, one post contains two textual summaries: one for the caption or content itself and another for the contextual element considering surrounding profile content. This part also includes potential posts that have been deleted by the platform and were provided through establishing private contact with the user. The summaries are written to highlight differences across different texts and to aid in constructing categories by linking the text with selected theories (Kuckartz, 2014, pp. 52–54). In

the next step posts that received flags or require further contextualization receive additional explanations or summaries in a note section. Here, fact-checking reasoning or background on authorship of video or photo material will be explained to pave the way towards contextual understanding of meaning.

The coding of text will rely on a combination of deductive and inductive construction of categories throughout the given text. Starting with a deductive approach, categories that are likely to be found in the text based on the selected theories of ontological security and resilience building will be determined. The inductive approach to constructing categories will become relevant, once too much deviation from previously defined classifications can be found within the text, thus, hinting towards the requirement of different or additional categories (ibid., pp. 54-59). Deductive categories will be selected to identify factual and thematic elements of the texts, while the inductive approach will center around identifying further analytical categories (ibid., pp. 39-42).

3.4. Instagram: Platform Boundaries and Ethical Considerations

Instagram uses algorithms to filter its content in line with fact-checking reviews. Especially in the context of the pandemic Instagram has introduced several methods of flagging and filtering COVID-19-related content in an attempt to “prioritize safety, connecting people with accurate information, and encouraging support” (Instagram, 2020). Within the first few months of the pandemic the platform introduced account recommendations for promoting credible sources while also removing accounts publishing content that contained misinformation or conspiracies regarding the virus (ibid.). Instagram further started collaborating more intensely with third party fact-checkers to identify misinformation and consequently remove flagged posts from recommendation and explore functions on the platform (Instagram, 2019). While the company relied on these increasingly during the COVID-19 pandemic (Instagram, 2021), shortcomings of Instagram's content moderation have been identified. Specifically the use of algorithms to detect content violations and remove posts and accounts in response to it can on one hand fail to identify posts due to circumventing of tags by the means of intentional

misspelling, lower resolution or utilizing of increased privacy with functions like direct messaging or self-deleting stories (Leaver et al., 2020, pp. 20–25). Due to this, misinformation and controversial content are still being circulated on the platform. This provides ground for an ethical discussion of Instagram's potential involvement in strengthening the anti-vax movement. On the other hand, a certain danger lies in having the defining of appropriate digital content lie in the hands of few private companies, as the ability to define rules about communication standards illustrates immense power structures in public speech moderation online, while also prioritizing certain populations' experiences and views over others (ibid.; Coppola, 2020, p. 402). This will have to be considered when assessing and contextualizing the results on a platform scale.

In correspondence with Instagram's and Meta's involvement in the production and steering of knowledge the researchers own affiliation in it has to also be discussed. My choice as the author of this thesis and a native speaker of German has been to translate content myself. As I am no professional translator, and an individual with a subjective understanding of the world and the meaning construction within it I must reflect on the subjectivity inherent to the meaning construction within my analysis. Following strict rules of coding and methodology thus becomes incremental to the process of interpreting the findings.

3.4.1. Anonymity

As the analysis dives deep into the construction of security and the narration of ideological standpoints that are contested within society it is important to reflect on anonymity. Instagram is a publicly available platform that provides the opportunity to privatize the access to account content. However, through utilizing the software Analisa.io accounts that are included in the analysis are already filtered according to their accessibility. Only public profiles have been selected for the first quantitative stage of analysis due to accessibility limitations. Consequently, only those types of profiles are in the following qualitative sample. As content on these profiles is openly accessible, including certain user demographics that arise from the profile biography, anonymity concerns can be brought up but have limited

validity in this case. To match the platform's level of anonymity that the user consciously chose, profiles in the continuing analysis will only be referred to by their user-tag and not by the user's full name (Instagram, 2022d).

4. SECURITY NARRATIVES AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

4.1. Timeline of COVID-19 in Germany

Date	Category	Event
2020-03-22 – 2020-05-04	Lockdown	Nation-wide partial lockdown is issued. Public life is widely restricted, limiting free movement.
2020-03-28	Regulations	Amendments to the Infektionsschutzgesetz empowering federal decision-makers in epidemic scenarios to overrule certain fundamental rights. ⁷
2020-04	Querdenker	Querdenker are founded over first measure opposing protests.
2020-04	Regulations	First mask requirements are introduced for supermarkets.
2020-06-16	Tracking	Corona-Warn-App is being put on the market tracking movement and interactions with COVID-positive individuals.
2020-08	Querdenker	During a Querdenker protest in Berlin members of the far-right evaded police barriers and “stormed the steps of the German Bundestag” (Denney, 2022).
2020-11-02	Lockdown	The second Lockdown (“Lockdown Light”) starts with several newly imposed measures.

⁷ Continuous changes are made to the law throughout the pandemic.

2021-01	Vaccine	First vaccinations with BioNTech-Pfizer vaccine start for selected 'high risk groups'.
2021-01-06	Lockdown	Former 'light' restrictions are not enough, thus, new 'hard' Lockdown is issued.
2021-04	Querdenker	German domestic intelligence "Verfassungsschutz" ('protection of the constitution', translated by author) starts monitoring the movement as anti-constitutional on a national level.
2021-05	Lockdown	Lockdown measures are slowly lifted with falling infection numbers.
2021-06	Vaccine	Vaccinations open to the whole public. Vaccines are highly encouraged despite lacking and strained infrastructure.
2021-06-08	Vaccine	Health minister Jens Spahn announces rollout of digital COVID passport by end of June.
Mid-2021 – early 2022	COVID-19	Professional athletes are affected by COVID-19 and are kept from competing. A study in 2021 assesses COVID-19 patterns and recovery paths in athletes (Hull et al., 2022).
2021-08-06	Regulations	New restrictions require individuals entering Germany from 'high risk countries' to present a vaccination/recovery/negative test certificate in addition to registering online. A quarantine can be avoided through vaccination or recovery proof. Unvaccinated individuals can end the quarantine early through a second test after 5 days.
2021-08-18	Vaccine/Church	Pope Francis encourages vaccinations by calling them an "Act of Love" (Watkins, 2021).

2021-10	Regulations	Restrictions are lifted with new implementation of 2G and 3G rules.
2021-11-24	Regulations	Passengers on public transportation have to wear masks and comply with the 3G rule.
2021-12-18	Querdenker	Major coordinated Querdenker protests happen in several German cities.
2021-12-20	Vaccine	The Novavax vaccine gets approved for the European market by EMA.
2021-12-23	Regulations	Travel restrictions are changed responding to major increases in infection numbers due to the Omicron variant. Individuals traveling to Germany from a high risk or variant country now are required to present negative PCR tests or proof of vaccination. This regulation is relevant for all individuals of 6 years and older.
2022-01-24	Regulations	Many regulations limiting public life for unvaccinated individuals are continued.
2022-01 – 2022-02	Vaccine	Parliament and Government discuss a potential vaccine mandate.
2022-02-03	Vaccine	Germany approves Novavax use.
2022-02-08	Church	Former Pope Benedict denies any involvement or knowledge of the child abuse in the German Catholic church.
2022-03-20	Regulations	Freedom Day: almost all previous regulations restricting public life are lifted on a national level.

Table 2: Table of COVID Events (regulatory data is collected from WHO, 2022)

4.2. Profile Analysis

To evaluate each of the selected posts, first a general assessment of the profiles was done. While both *danimee.de* and *thewolfbyyourside* present the characteristics of individual profiles, *georgeorwellnow* appears as a project-based activist profile. Especially in the two individual accounts the re-narration of offline character traits to establish a sense of authenticity can be noticed. While *danimee.de* posts frequently about her surroundings, cooking, and walks, *thewolfbyyourside*'s account shows images of himself, references to his podcast and his art and mascot – a wolf. While *danimee.de*'s account displays a noticeably consistent link to her personal life and offline persona, *thewolfbyyourside*'s account went through a transition period. During the first year of the pandemic (2020) the account consisted of personal content such as selfies, photos from the workplace, photos of leisure activities, etc. with no reference to COVID-19. The transition period starts towards the end of 2020 with several selfies containing captions referring to the vaccine, the pandemic, and implemented measures by the German government. The posts get more explicit and start featuring several hashtags in conjunction with the narrative of the post. It is noteworthy that this development is in line with the introduction and increasing distribution of several vaccines towards the beginning of 2021. During that time a lot of misinformation circulated online causing confusion amongst both politicians and population as to which vaccine was safest and whether vaccination was encouraged or discouraged. Towards the end of 2021 *thewolfbyyourside*'s profile is starting to visually appear more as a project-based profile rather than an individual one despite displaying links to off-site accounts and personal messages from the author. This establishes authenticity by contextualizing opinions, posts and individual efforts with previous content while also highlighting the offline persona behind the account, thus, accrediting further legitimacy and authenticity.

Georgeorwellnow consistently and largely relies on meme content utilizing the modus of images. *Thewolfbyyourside*'s profile in the later stages displays similar content. *Danimee.de*'s profile on the other hand portrays Querdenker

narratives mainly through the outlets of videos that are often edited to stress certain arguments through the blocking out of sound or combining of multiple clips. In all three profiles a consistent content modus are news articles that rely on written narratives rather than visual elements and are thus considered only as a complementary frame to the subject of this thesis. Additional information on the specific content distributions for thewolfbyyourside and georgeorwellnow can be found in the appendix (Figure 29, 30).

4.3. Semiotic and Text Analysis of Content

Several narratives appear within the sampled memes. The topics within the content focus mainly on four distinct areas: freedom and rights, safety, credibility, and authority and power.

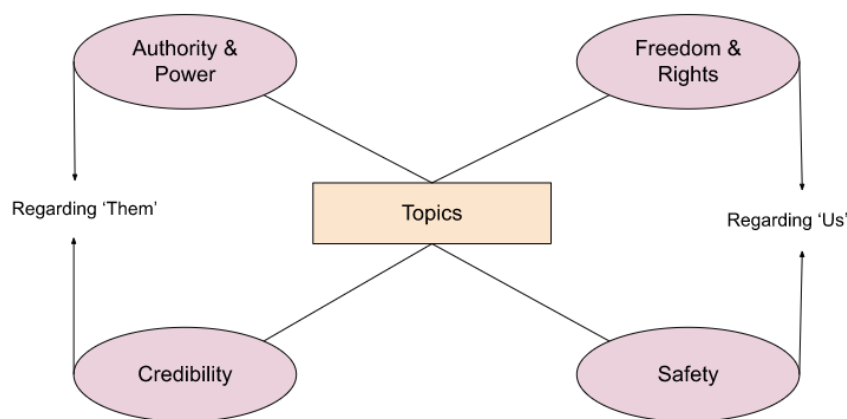


Figure 4: Topic Areas of sampled Posts

Within these categories four groups are distinguished: elites, pro-vaccine citizens ('believers'), movement members ('critical thinkers'), and children. Across these dimensions each account argues via the means of cynicism, sarcasm, and otherwise voiced humoristic approaches to the distinctions between 'Us' and 'Them'. Arguments are drawn to both argue a perception of reality but also strengthen this binary between in- and out-group. Thus, most posts relate to a dominant umbrella narrative of discrediting out-group members while strengthening and sustaining Querdenker credibility.

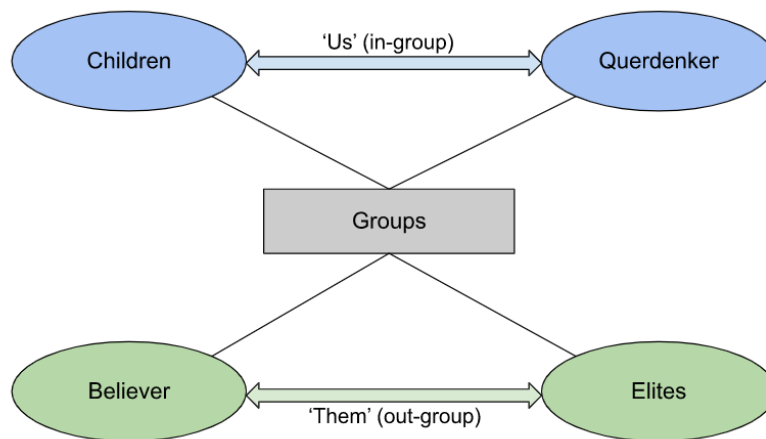


Figure 5: Reference Groups in sampled Posts

Within these distinctions, sources of ontological insecurity are originating from four subject areas: Children, political skepticism, health concerns, and basic rights. Some of these, like children and rights, overlap with the topics of the memes. Insecurities and anxieties regarding the mentioned subjects can be found mainly in the metatext of each meme.

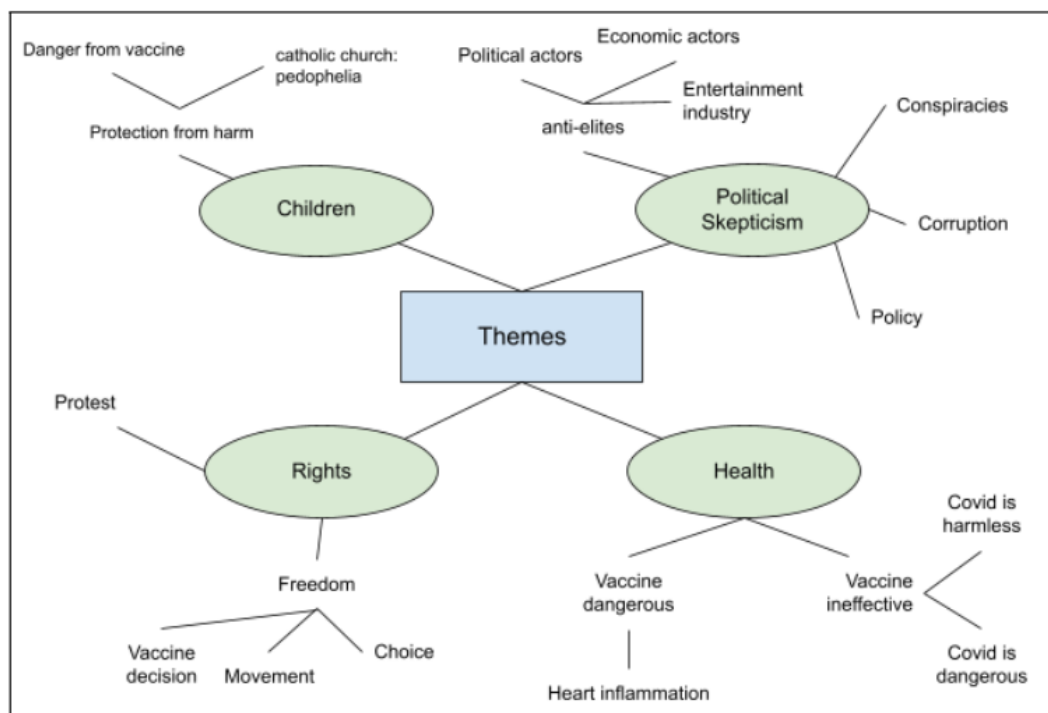


Figure 6: Identified Themes across sampled Memes

Guiding the mentioned themes are emotions of distrust, uncertainty, and anxiety. Distrust is closely paired with anti-elitist sentiment, which is common amongst members of the populist movement. As such memes expressing distrust are situated mostly along the lines of political skepticism and often express support for conspiracy theories such as ‘The Great Reset’ or ‘New World Order’. Uncertainty is presented across several posts on the sampled accounts and appears to connect to the circumstances of a quickly changing and adjusting world. Values that posts highlight as core societal values are slowly being replaced and disregarded as old by German society and the political context. Mentioned in posts are for example normative conceptions of femininity, gatekeeping the status of being a woman.

The Querdenker make up a small minority of the German population (Denney, 2022). While they are an ideologically diverse group, they still build a strong opposition to the rest of society and specifically decision-makers. As such their online representation pushes a narrative of being misunderstood and discriminated against. Here, a reappearing theme is the mentioning of rights and freedoms that are not granted to them based on distinct movement characteristics such as being unvaccinated. This highlights the ties between feelings of distrust and anxiousness regarding their status in society. Finally, the material shows the overlap of ontological and physical security by introducing the ideological incorporation of health concerns. The link that combines all themes is vaccine opposition and disbelief in severe physical harm originating from the virus. This is reflected on the theme of protecting children from the vaccine and in their own health decisions. By tying this physical security theme to political and ideological identity the subject is lifted into the realm of the ontological. What is a threat to physical security also becomes a risk to ontological security and continuity of identity and normative conceptualization.

4.3.1. Signs

Several signs could be identified in the content across the profiles as representing certain core values out of which security narratives could be derived.

In the following segment each of these signs will be explained and linked to the respective anxiety that is tackled. It will also be addressed how the visual contextualization of the sign contributes to the restoration of ontological security amongst movement members.

a. Barcode/QR-code



Figure 9: @georgeorwellnow

Figure 7: @thewolfbyyourside

Figure 8: @thewolfbyyourside

One of the Querdenker's main narratives concerns the opposition to the COVID-pass. This opinion is argued from many different angles resulting in many purchasing faked passports (MDR exactly, 2021). One, however, is presented in the sampled material several times. The barcode or QR-code is used as a sign to represent not just the COVID-pass but also the reduction of an individual to a digital code. The argument accompanying this visualization is that human beings no longer are seen as multifaceted people or human beings but rather are assessed on whether they are able to present a vaccine pass. This argument is often contextualized with historic cases of severe segregation or discrimination of individuals based on a distinct characteristic such as Jews in the Holocaust (Denney, 2022). While this set of memes illustrates an existential fear within the movement, thus the source of an ontological insecurity, it also serves as the provision of agency. Especially, the first few images restore a sense of ontological security by assigning the viewer a task. While the first image shows that society is not (yet) completely lost – the figure is not yet fully fused into the barcode – the second image states explicitly: "It is our decision". A sense of security and continuity is, thus, provided by reminding the viewer that the status quo is changeable thus giving incentive to act while also

providing a group where the individual may experience a feeling of belonging based on corresponding values.

The second barcode meme also shows a reference to another set of memes. Recently the enlightenment meme has stood as a reference to intelligent behavior. By cross-referencing these two the barcode meme gains another layer of meaning. Individuals are asserted intelligence because they oppose the digitalization of health data and thus the COVID-pass. The overlapping of meme templates is used in this context to generate new meaning. By using similar templates linking to the same subjects, other accounts practice a discursive resemiotization online. This also illustrates the complex linkages between the development pathways of a pop-culture meme.

b. Sheep



Figure 11: @thewolfbyyourside



Figure 10: @georgeorwellnow

A second set of posts utilizes the sheep as a representation of the German citizens. This narrative is constructed as part of the criticism voiced against regulations and vaccine mandates. The movement criticizes that citizens no longer question decisions made by politicians but just accept regulations without consideration to their implications on health, freedom, and autonomy. The sheep in this visualization signifies a citizen that follows the ‘herd’, asks no questions, and poses no threat to the ‘herder’ who in this metaphor would be the decision-

makers in governments and health-institutions, often represented by health minister Karl Lauterbach or lead-epidemiologist Christian Drosten.



Figure 13: @thewolfbyyourside

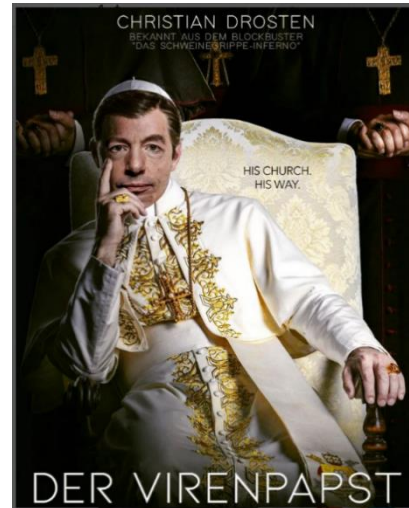


Figure 12: @georgeorwellnow , @thewolfbyyourside

This narrative securitizes the fear of remaining unheard and unrepresented. The society is moving on without members of the movement. As their fears and concerns are disregarded, they still follow the democratic principle of striving to be represented, while they experience increasing segregation from a society that slowly develops into an autocracy – a system governed by political and medical elites without opposition from the people. This fear becomes an ontological security risk as it threatens the bases of existence – namely democratic freedom of decision-making – forcing individuals to let go of what they perceive part of what they are.

To counteract this existential fear the memes utilize humor and satirical illustrations of both politicians and specifically ‘believers’ in the vaccine as sheep to delegitimize them. Citizens become the Other that needs to be guided and taught, comparable to Croft’s ‘Orientalized Other’ (2012, p.198). The illustrations of elites as Gollum and the Pope representing the vilified ‘Radical Other’ carry additional meaning (ibid.). Gollum as a character is associated with the characteristics of being greedy and longs for power. The illustration of Lauterbach as Gollum, thus, carries the connotation of him longing for “subjugation of the German citizens” making him into an opponent of democracy in which the people are supposed to be represented. On the other hand, Drosten being visualized as the Pope becomes an

individual of immense authority and power, which does not fit his position as an advisor. Additionally, the Pope, during the time of publishing this post, was associated with a pedophilia scandal within the German division of the catholic church. Within this context he becomes not just a risk to representative democracy but also to children's safety, which was commonly discussed regarding the use of the vaccine on minors.

Ultimately these memes restore a sense of ontological security, as legitimacy is asserted to the in-group's efforts in countering the status quo. It hereby also becomes an indirect call for action to restore the 'rightful way' and counter the efforts of politicians and health advisors in subjugating the public into 'mindless sheep'.

c. Children



Figure 15: @georgeorwellnow



Figure 16: @thewolfbyyourside



Figure 14: @thewolfbyyourside

As previously mentioned, children are one of the major themes within the online narrative of the Querdenker. But the sample also shows them being used as a sign frequently. Children signify innocence, health, freedom, and light-heartedness. In this context these values are securitized. They are narrated as essential to the human experience and severely threatened by the current changes to the fabric of politics and society. Thus, values and characteristics signified by the child need to be protected from the dangers of the vaccine and strict regulations. With 185, 125, and 86 likes these three posts gain relatively high approval rates from the audience. This hints towards the relatability of the content, which might be due to the use of a child as the personification of these values. Causing harm to children in many societies across the world carries highly negative connotations. It is a societal norm that children are to be free from harm and protected at all costs. Thus, the implications of the vaccine or decision-makers being the source of harm for them causes an immediate securitization in narrative while also triggering emotional responses in the audience, due to norm-violation. Children, in this scenario also represent helplessness and victimhood. The posts illustrate this in several ways. The first post displays children as victims of rape through vaccinations, the second shows a child equipped with a shield protecting from the vaccine, while the last image displays a carefree child on a swing with the caption that free humans cannot be tamed. The child in these images thus becomes a personification of the many statuses of the movement, the violated and defensive, the fighters defending against the vaccine, and the free at risk of subjugation. This binds the child as a sign further to the individual movement member, making the meme relatable.

While these memes express fears and values they also display encouragements. A shield is not only a defensive item but also carries an active connotation. Individuals need to pick up a shield and defend. Somebody has to carry a shield adding an engaging narrative to the protest image. Considering the context in which this picture was taken – a protest – the image re-narrates the anxious threat narrative into one that strengthens the establishment of new routines. By

highlighting the necessity of protests and the frequency in which they happen, they gain a new routinized status.

d. Mask



Figure 18: @thewolfbyyourside



Figure 17: @thewolfbyyourside

The mask is a symbol of oppression to the Querdenker. While individuals wearing it are viewed as conformists unable to critically assess the oppressive measures implemented by the local and national governments, people that defy the mask mandate are portrayed as freedom fighters and idealized. The mask thus symbolizes what Doerr (2017) called crypts – a story of violence and oppression that is retold using signs. What becomes clear in the second meme is the connection Querdenker establish between masks and violence. A gun is deemed necessary to defend against the ‘oppressive measure’ of being forced to wear a mask.

The sympathies the girl portrayed in the image receives from the author in the caption of the image and from the audience within the comment section of the post illustrate the emotional backdrop of this narrative. At the same time the memes also further highlight how political and ideological divides influence the trust structures and routines in the societal fabric. People wearing masks and advocating for them are othered by the movement. Meanwhile the masks are politicized through contextualizing the act of wearing one with mandates, the risk of rising autocracy,

and conspiracies such as the *plandemic*⁸. This trend of politicized humoristic material online, however, contributes to the increasing reliance on ideological closeness, interests, and identities as an indicator of trust. (Roslyng & Larsen, 2021; Hornsey, 2021)

These memes thus show the alienation of outgroup-members in a similar matter as the sheep, while assigning in-group glory to members of the Querdenker using as much as depictions of violence to express dominance and stabilize their narrative against the majority. The sensation of being disregarded in policy decisions, thus leads to increasing emotions of alienation and enables a gateway to violent signs in narrative building. This in turn creates ontological security which is bound to aggressively defensive storytelling in an effort to increase predictability in actions and interactions for in-group members. Linking back to the theory, Luhmann's (Luhmann, 1972) predictability in communication and Cossarini's (2017) and Krolikowski's (2008) described impact of feeling left behind by political and societal contexts in these images are illustrated to have severe impacts on the defensiveness of constructing collective narratives.

e. Death/Tombstone



Figure 20: @thewolfbyyourside

Figure 19: @thewolfbyyourside



⁸ The plandemic was a misinformation documentary stating COVID to be a planned effort by worldwide elites to exert control over the population. The movie also argued that masks and vaccines are damaging the body (Nazar & Pieters, 2021, p.1).

Death is associated with side-effects from the vaccine rather than with the virus. As such efforts to push for increased vaccination rates are valued as a threat. The sign of death either through personification as the grim reaper or in the form of the tombstone thus functions as a form of doom protests, a vision into the future, or an eye-opener to 'believers'. The insecurity that this category of memes deals with could be defined as physical as it ties to the belief in a threat to the body. However, these memes also touch upon other elements. The grim reaper for example does not just bring death to the doorstep or represents the risk of vaccination, but he is contextualized as an ally of the political decision-makers. He arrives because somebody did what they were told. As such death is constructed as a characteristic associated with the Other.

Through this association death also becomes an element bound to the in-group identity insofar as it is an antonym to what the movement sees itself as – a representation of freedom and life. The first image visualizes this by portraying the harsh contrast between the locked-in 'believer' facing death on the doorstep versus the escaping, free conspiracy theorist. On the other hand, the second image chooses a different approach. The post comes across as sarcastic, illustrating its opinion through stating opposites. By claiming reversed facts in an overstated and overt manner the image paints a black and white contrast illustrating the Other and the Self (implicitly). The Other is ridiculed for their values in an attempt to evoke emotions of shame while highlighting the in-group's values superiority, restoring security in members that are faced with uncertainties and anxious emotions (Brasset et al., 2021). The portrayals of the Other in both posts utilizing the sign of death are aligned with Kinnvall's 'abject'. Characteristics that the movement want to discard as they are unfavorable are assigned to the Other: such as being naive, undemocratic, or against traditional social norms. Even though these might still occur amongst members of the movement they are projected on to the Other. Through processes of ridicule and establishing prejudice about the Other (political elites or non-movement citizens in this case) in-group members distance themselves from these characteristics while also alienating the Other further (Kinnvall, 2006, pp.

47/53/78). These approaches highlight the strategic value in humor for identity and ontological security purposes.

Death is an important visualization as it carries a harsh normative value in society. By associating death, a physical consequence, with a group, they can easily be securitized and labeled as not just the Other but a threat to in-group members. While this illustrates physical security fears and needs, it also ties to ontological security. As Kinnvall (2017) has described regarding Indian society, the physical nature of security threats can become ontological when physical needs and performative elements of identity overlap.

f. Needle/Vaccine



Figure 22: @georgeorwellnow



Figure 23: @georgeorwellnow



Figure 21: @thewolfbyyourside

Finally, the needle is a sign that frequently appears across the profiles. In most of the posts the needle is distinctly portrayed as the enemy that needs to be escaped or defended against. The visualizations generally associate needles with an enemy figure. In the sampled posts these are Bill Gates, the evil witch, and Karl Lauterbach. The Other is then visualized against the Self via the means of selected public heroes that oppose the vaccine in a harsh way. The portrayed ‘heroes’ are Daenerys Targaryen (*Game of Thrones*), Snow White, and Joshua Kimmich (FC Bayern München soccer player). Each of these individuals is known to have overcome a great hurdle and gained a prestigious position. Daenerys Targaryen rose to be a powerful queen with dragons while also associated with a mother figure. Snow White was poisoned by the evil queen but ended up being queen herself and defeated the evil powers opposing her. Joshua Kimmich is a successful soccer player who has recently publicly voiced concerns and opposition against the vaccine and has since then been celebrated by the anti-vax movement.

Especially, considering the embedding of the COVID context into stories of popular culture the posts create a narrative that strongly highlights the binary of good and evil with the vaccine or needle being the weapon of choice for their enemy. By using similar signs and positioning of good and evil these posts portray the expression of political identity while binding trust structures to it. The content constitutes a populist anti-elitist sentiment. Heroes are representative of in-group values such as power, purity, freedom, opposition and thus function as a visual glorification of the movement (Duncombe & Bleiker, 2015). Villains, on the contrary, are highly stereotyped with negative connotations building the counterpart to the movements chosen characteristics. This visualization and narrative sustain an identity narrative while strengthening an experience of unity through identifying in-group characteristics and values. However, pop-culture content also utilizes emotional components (*ibid.*). Such is illustrated in the act of opposition through the act of showing the middle finger, a sign of anger and hostility, or ridiculing the Other.

What these posts also illustrate is the rising dependency structures in society which can function as destabilizing forces to established trust structures. Health care for example is no longer a solely local, regional, or even national effort. It is a complex system of global and local actors. International pharmaceutical companies produce medical products that are distributed worldwide to health care providers that operate regionally and locally. During times of crisis this already complex network is becoming even more elaborate. Economic and medical actors are then faced with political and further scientific involvement making it harder to determine the source of error in case of consequences arising.

The ambivalence in what is deemed to be the Other is specifically transparent in this set of posts: economic actors, politicians, or evil witches. All use the needle as a weapon against the heroes in this security narrative. The diversity displays a distinct struggle in the modern globalized world to identify the source of anxiety which in turn easily transforms it into paralyzing insecurity. While a pandemic and health hazards from illnesses are hard to comprehend or counter for a non-medically skilled individual it easily causes uncertainty. Individuals are prone to assert blame to the Other for consequences they themselves deem threatening. However, by assigning these uncertainties as intentional outcomes of actions executed by the Other, they can also be assessed as preventable. This in turn redirects insecurities of destabilizing and groundbreaking nature back to anxieties and risks that can be addressed, if only responsible individuals and groups would act correctly. Consequently, in-group members are reassured that a positive outcome is possible if they act and protest. This process, thus, illustrates not just the changes from insecurities to anxieties (Krickle-Choi, 2021) but also highlights how these images contribute to the strengthening of ontological security.

g. Summary

Two security narratives appear throughout the posts. The first is a visualization of the idealized Self. As a fantasy of intelligence, persistence, and overcoming the daily struggles the movement utilizes the means of visual content in often humoristic tones and contexts to illustrate their values and reproduce and strengthen

their identity (Brasset et al., 2021). On the contrary, antagonistic humor is used to assign to the Other the values and characteristics that the movement deems undesirable or opposing their own (Kinnvall, 2006, p. 47). This strategy also paints the Other as a threat to performing Queerdenker identity and living out daily routines, thus transforming it into a potential source of ontological insecurity.

4.3.2. Textual Content

(For illustrations and data discussed in this section see tables 3-10 in appendix)

As recommended in qualitative text analysis the content needs to be understood as both parts and the whole. Considering that, in the analysis the text was first coded separately from the images and was then embedded within the visual categories to get a complete picture on meaning production. During the first stages of coding, it was noticeable that content in text and visual showed significant overlap. Themes reappeared in the text and in the hashtags similar to the visual. However, in the textual components opinions and values gained more depth. Several categories needed to be further distinguished which was not only due to thematic reasoning but also on the level of Self-defining vs. alienating the Other, situating opinions within cultural contexts, and modes of expression. Both for hashtags and for captions themes needed to be added to the visual sets. In-group sympathies and distinct identity expressions no longer fit in the pre-existing categories.

Both accounts use a set selection of hashtags under all their posts that refer to general movement attitudes and link to contexts. Georgeorwellnow's posts display great variations in the additional hashtags that are linked depending on altering content. Meanwhile thewolfbyyourside implements a static set that barely displays minor variations of few additional hashtags on the earlier posts. The most recent of his posts do not display any alterations in hashtags anymore. This allows for the conclusion that the author has significantly stabilized in his mindset. Considering the more extensive caption texts accompanying recent posts it also leads to the conclusion that efforts now are focused on the more engaging personalized components of the posts rather than the static hashtags. This supports the theory of

visual elements becoming more essential to the narrative as captions can be tailored more closely to images and also give reference or utilize visual elements themselves.

When analyzing the textual components in the posts it also becomes clearer how deeply embedded visual elements are even in text. Especially thewolfbyyourside's captions utilize several emojis. Every post has a reference to the author by ending with one or multiple wolf emojis. This pattern also establishes authenticity as it functions like a signature. Meanwhile both accounts visualize emotions through the use of expressive emojis. This commonly used aid in communication illustrates how visualizations in text can ease conveying intrinsic emotions and values that are tied but not explicitly mentioned in text (Alshenqeeti, 2016). It further highlights the relevance of visualizations for narratives.

Noticeable from the captions (combined with the posts and the linked hashtags) is the very different tone in content in the two analyzed accounts. While both accounts express clear disagreement with societal and political trends, they do it in very different approaches. Both accounts draw on two emotions with their posts: humor and anger. However, while humor is generally antagonistic when applied, anger must be distinguished between complaint and threat. While georgeorwellnow's content displays a tone tapping into either humor or complaint, 5 of 11 of thewolfbyyourside's posts display a threatening narrative or tone. This, however, also coincides with a more active engaging language, encouraging his audience to take action and "start a revolution". Concluding from this, georgeorwellnow's profile appears as a passive commentary compared to the activist but also more radical overall. Regarding the process it is noteworthy that georgeorwellnow transitioned from more emotionally diverse content spanning all categories to a more recently passive commentary tone. Meanwhile thewolfbyyourside transitioned to more radical and more engagement encouraging content in the latest two months.

4.4. Pop-Culture References

Pop-culture references are commonly used as narrative tools to increase meaning accessibility and situate scenarios in a familiar context. They provide a source of knowledge, a compass indicating meaning and visualizing common values and norms (Clapton & Shepherd, 2017). As such it is not surprising that several links to popular culture can be identified within the material. Memes are a type of modern online pop-culture as they are a form of cultural expression taking place via forums and social media. They, however, often utilize references to offline pop-culture in the form of e.g. cinematic material, stories, art, or religion.

Amongst the sampled material references to two famous dystopian stories can be found: The Matrix and 1984. The hashtag section of thewolfbyyourside's posts frequently mentions the matrix movies. The two hashtags are #allIhaveleftisred and #breakthematrix. The first appears to be a reference to the element in the movie trilogy where the main actor gets the choice between taking the red pill and lifting the curtain to a life-altering truth that explains the otherwise opaque workings of an entire system whereas taking the blue pill would restore previous ignorance (the simulation) and make the individual forget any events that would challenge the established worldview. By using these hashtags with references to becoming the Neo (main character in the Matrix trilogy who decides to take the red pill) within a system, the user paints a picture of a system where the people in power created a lie that the majority of the people believe without question. Members of the Querdenker movement, however, are challenged by him to protest this system of exploitation and lies by 'taking the red pill', peeking behind the simulated reality, and 'break the matrix' carefully constructed by political and scientific elites to reinstate a system in favor of the 'common people'.

The Matrix reference carries another layer to it when considering the often populist and anti-systemic undertones in the posts. A common reference amongst several of the analyzed material across all accounts is to the conspiracy theory of a plandemic and the harsh autocratic rule of the elite over the people. A concept that can be found in the Matrix story but might be even more prominent to the dystopian

police state in 1984. Georgeorwellnow choses an account name giving direct reference to the author of the dystopian novel. Across his accounts content he gives reference to the dystopia several times, and often in combination with mentions of the conspiracy theory of the plandemic or a corona dictatorship. The George Orwell reference can be found in one specific IGTV post by georgeorwellnow showing an interview with Aldous Huxley, author of the dystopian novel Brave New World. In the video segment he talks about the modern transformation of autocracies and autocratic leadership. However, the author of the post contextualizes the video not just within corona politics but also links to the dystopian novel by George Orwell suggesting that the current corona politics within Germany equate to a modern police state comparable to the situation in the novel 1984. The contextualization offered both through his visual material and the textual components display a view of the current world as autocratic with unfair power relations and elitist control over the people. While individuals familiar with the pop-culture content get an in-depth view of the narrative georgeorwellnow is offering, the visual components in combination with entextualizations make the narrative accessible even to people that have had limited or no previous exposure to the utopian story.

Other links established to values and meaning arise for example from the peanuts template or the catholic church references. Former pope Benedict and high-ranking officials of the catholic church in Germany were in the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022 legally prosecuted for several child abuse cases they were involved in or tried to hide from authorities. As one of the movement's core values relates to protecting children from harm the association within these sets of memes carries a distinct connotation. Starting in December 2021 with the peanuts-meme equating rape and vaccinations as recommendations from the pope a certain tone was set. Following the development of the investigation into 2022 in February in response to a statement from Benedict denouncing all blame suddenly memes surfaced displaying health advisor Drosten as the pope – a threat to children and immune to criminal prosecution. This example illustrates how closely some of the more specific content is linked to not just pop-culture but also current events.

4.5. Offline Context

Online content is created and generated in conjunction with offline events taking place in the author's environment. Offline events are then re-narrated and contextualized to a global online audience. As previously described this online construction of ideology and reality builds an online persona that gains authenticity through coherence and persistence (Sergeant & Tagg, 2014). The process can be observed in the content sampled for this research.

Content corresponds to real world events. However, in many cases a significant lag time can be identified between the event occurring and memes appearing on the sampled profiles. An example are the references to the Catholic church's child abuse case. Several memes loosely reference the investigation into former Pope Benedict's involvement in the case. Two memes, in particular, appeared one or two days after a public statement rather than on the same day. Another set of memes are the QR-/barcode memes. They span a time of 3 months (December – February). While individual events kept happening throughout this time it is hard to tell which exact individual event triggered each of these posts. Most likely they are linked to adjustments to the travel requirements and proof of vaccinations for activities or avoiding quarantine.

The sampled content, while it corresponds to offline events and is motivated by regulations and political decision-making often has a long lifespan in which it is shared, reused and newly contextualized, thus, making it hard to determine exact triggers. Another reason is the use of international content that loosely translates to different national contexts (as it discusses general values and fears) and is thus used transnationally. This also highlights the global character of the anti-vax movement. While many arguments and visualizations originate in a specific regional context, they still have globally linking values reinforcing a global identity-based community of anti-vaxxers (Scholte, 2005, pp. 239-240; Steger & James, 2019, p. 188).

5. PLATFORM MODERATION: STRATEGIC APPROACHES TO COUNTER CENSORSHIP

Several users have reported or displayed in their online presence a variety of approaches to counter censorship or make guideline violating content less visible to algorithmic filtering strategies. While some utilize adjustments to visualization and content provision others use community-based strategies to deal with platform algorithms.

Regarding adjustments to content one user chose to share screenshots of videos with hyperlinks attached to the caption rather than sharing the video itself. The user also implemented a less visual approach containing the exemption of sound in videos and instead giving clues to the content through caption and hashtag references. This was particularly utilized in videos of press conferences and speeches by prominent political figures who already had a certain reputation amongst movement members to which the user could refer.

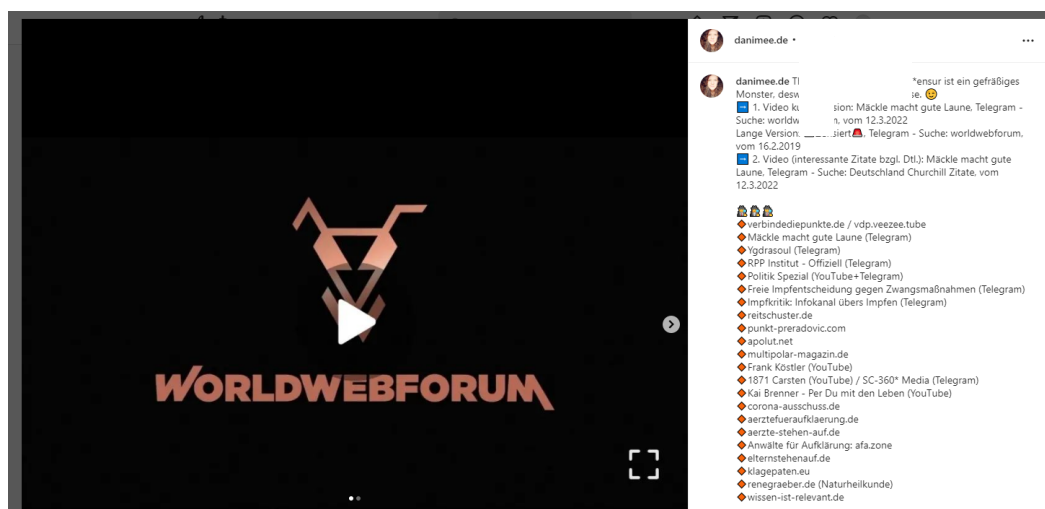


Figure 24: A screenshot of a video was posted to avoid censorship

Another common strategy used by several users was to replace certain words with emojis to decrease detectability through algorithmic filtering. This was also attempted through editing images with text components where indicating words like ‘Corona’, ‘vaccine’, ‘Biontech’ and others were covered or blocked out. As one user puts it:

“We must also always censor ourselves, so that the system does not censor us. Otherwise it [the post] will be deleted”

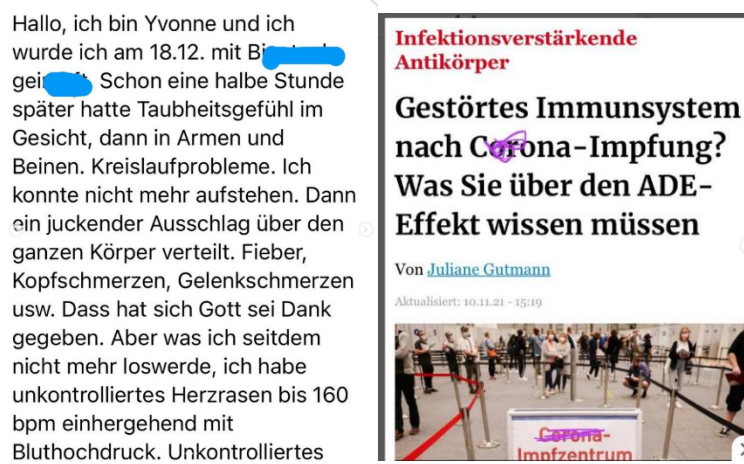


Figure 25 Self-censoring to counter platform censorship

This narrative binary between ‘we’ and ‘the system’ reflects the movements general attitude towards authorities. This othering technique does not just highlight the criticism towards elites (in this case Instagram as a platform oversight institution) but also emphasizes the community through a bonding expression of ‘we’. What is commonly utilized to secure identity notions amongst ingroup members are reminders of shared experiences, shared hardships, or shared successes. Kinnvall calls the narratives built surrounding these frames on collective memory, chosen traumas and chosen glories (Kinnvall, 2017). In this case the user expresses a burden that the community must carry together by implementing their own censorship rules to circumvent broader and more thorough censorship by the elitist Other. Through relating to community strength, he establishes not just critique towards the Other but also an ontologically secure self and movement.

In relation to the second post the user elaborates:

“With the ADE I had to paint over the picture because otherwise it was immediately deleted. The hashtag was also no longer possible. The vaccine must have really had this opposing [hint towards negative side effect described by the term ADE] effect.”

This quote highlights on one hand Instagram's rigorous content filters, as posts referencing common misinformation were almost immediately reported as deleted by several users. On the other hand, it also shows that communication guidelines and restrictions do not just steer normative conceptions regarding communication online but also have a strengthening effect on conspiracy theories. The user argues about the theory of side effects of vaccines, that by deleting content Instagram (as a representative of global elites) is trying to cover up the truth.

A common online trend has always been to share and repost popular content, thus establishing a sense of community amongst users. This is a characteristic of the online space that one user utilizes to their advantage in their censorship strategy.

"[...] I sometimes shared with the community, that I was supposed to be blocked soon. Or which posts were taken down."

By being transparent about censorship, the community (in this case their followers) are also given agency in countering the platform's approach in content management. They become part of distributing content through sharing and reposting, which in turn develops a stronger sense of togetherness.

Censorship ultimately guides the way in which information and narratives are communicated. This holds particularly true when taking a closer look at communication style and modus, such as the use of hashtags, emojis, audio and text. While this affects communication norms and outlets, it does not seem to have any effect on themes within the narratives provided in the content. What is noteworthy and referenced within several exchanges with users, is the supplemental use of the stories function on the platform. While some mention having "hidden" content in their story highlights that was otherwise deleted as a post, others describe the experience of increasing censorship even amongst their posted stories.

Deine Story wurde entfernt

Nur du kannst diese Informationen sehen.



Figure 26 'Your Story was deleted - only you can see this information'. A user received this notification about deleted content.

Based on this assessment the effect censorship exerts on visual content might seem benign. It is a mostly indirect effect influencing representations of the self and trust relationships between user and audience and between user and platform. Censorship or any external moderation of content always poses a challenge to the authenticity and continuity of presenting the Self. Changes in content and narrative, due to adjusting to hostile filtering algorithms, can affect the believability of the online persona as an audience in a virtual environment that needs to be convinced and continuously captured by the authenticity of content. Especially, when images depicting third party content such as memes and screenshots build the main part of the account's material, this moderation can have a significant effect. The analysis of this research showed that filtering algorithms mainly target textual content, filtering for keywords appearing both in the visual and textual material. Two approaches have been implemented by users to remain authentic without being censored. First, images have been edited to no longer display certain keywords. This strategy has given users the opportunity to still share the same (although edited) visual content. One user in particular has displayed how the authenticity issue is avoided by giving specific reference to the intent of editing in the caption: "After deletion, once again [...]" and "Censorship at Instagram, democracy comes

from demonstrations, just so you know [...]”. The other strategy was to counter censorship through opposition forms. As one user demonstrated this can limit censorship to a minimum and establishes additional trust between audience and user, as barely any posts are labeled or tagged as either insufficient or false information.

The discussion of censorship is also relevant regarding building resilience narratives as a coping mechanism in times of heightened risk perception. Krahmann (2018) describes how ontological security is achieved and managed via the involvement of private economic actors. Risk identification, profiling and management are the main contributions of Private Security Companies to the building and maintaining of ontological security. What Krahmann problematizes in her article, is the strong reliance on experts in the private sector which contributes to driving trust away from public institutions and into privatized economic dependency structures. The underlying argument here can also be identified in the narratives on Instagram. Social media in recent years has contributed, especially in areas of effective communication, to managing crises and emergencies (eg. Meta, formerly Facebook, established several crisis response tools in recent years, that were distributed across several of their platforms (Burrows, 2017). Paired with the general availability of social media and the frequency in which platforms like Facebook are used as informative tools during crises and in matters of security (Tarman & Yigit, 2012), they pose a particular challenge to the position of traditional security providers such as regional and national authorities. Whether intentional or not, Instagram as a platform facilitates a discussion that actively questions the role of national authorities as security providers while providing a far-reaching stage for the voices of few individuals, calling themselves experts. Thus, the platform’s actions fall in line with what Krahmann describes as a risk originating in the reliance on private firms in security matters. While only focusing on crisis communication, Instagram still has the potential to generate ontological security through the narrative-driven community building. Based on Krahmann’s categories, Instagram can be both identified as a private economic security actor focused on risk profiling through the use of filter algorithms centered around

consumer content and location, while also providing a level of risk management through the provision of easily accessible and vast communication channels (Instagram, 2020, 2021; Krahmann, 2018). From the perspectives of the Querdenker, however, Instagram also causes resilience building amongst the movement. Especially their communications are adjusting to increasing censoring efforts by the platform, thus making it harder to detect their narratives and interactions through automated algorithmic filtering. While this provides additional resilience to communication efforts, this resilience also strengthens in-group trust and information access security which in turn motivates ontological security.

Finally, censorship both threatens and increases ontological insecurity. While facing silencing can be the source of insecurity due to limitations in identity expression and the experience of being othered through exclusion (Croft, 2012, pp. 73/198) the Querdenker appear to implement measures online to rather build resilience and strengthen in-group trust and out-group alienation. These efforts redirect censorship as an argument for activism and out-group hatred strengthening the movement's identity rather than inducing paralyzing insecurities. This is not the least influenced by the general humoristic and lighthearted tone that visual content on Instagram facilitates. While platforms aim to limit the stream of misinformation on social media, many users take pride in countering them or even achieve status by being taken down and establishing 'back-up accounts' (Steinberg, 2021).

6. CONCLUSION

The pandemic provided an environment of repeated trauma due to limitations in fundamental rights and physical threats. Vaccines and politically decided regulations provided a coping tool and lifeline of hope to most. The virus as the source of trauma and the health care and political system as institutions of trust were able to ground an ontological security narrative founded in the establishment of new routines during the pandemic. While this worked for large portions of society it also had a polarizing effect on the rest. The Querdenker opposed the constructed

narrative. Rather than accepting new routines their narrative became protective of previous ones. Their identity became performative through protesting the changing system and referencing the lack of established constitutional rights that were temporarily discarded during the pandemic (Teune, 2021). Routines are strongly tied to identity and thus are difficult to change over short time periods. This however became necessary during the early stages of COVID-19 which established both trust in a crisis-responsive system but also systemic distrust and doubt towards politicians and those in power, as people felt stripped of their rights and ripped out of their daily routines. An environment like this harbors ontological insecurity (Giddens, 1991a, p.27 in Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2014, p. 68) and provides grounds for strong political and societal polarization.

This thesis focused on identifying the visual translation of security narratives amongst the German anti-vax community. Amongst the sampled material two strategies could be identified. On the one side most content focused on constructing an image of the Other. Defined through associations with pop-culture villains and derision, especially supporters of the vaccine and members of the societal and political elite were alienated and provided a threat narrative to both the physical and ontological security of the Querdenker. On the other hand, another narrative constructed an idealized image of the Self. Acts of protest, often tied to violence and evasion, were glorified and applauded, strengthening values and ideals of the movement in a comical, at times lighthearted way. A method that eases consumption of frustrating news but also increases the motivation to fight for fundamental values in an increasingly polarized environment.

Both narratives construct identities of Self and Other in a binary way of right and wrong but also highlight a distinct call for action that ultimately counters the paralyzing ontological insecurity that originates out of uncertainties in a changing complex system such as the modern world (Giddens, 1991b, pp. 38–47; Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2014, p. 69). While humor proved to be a medium frequently used to stabilize both self-identity and the Other, it also was the facilitator of introducing new routines through visual depictions of behavioral norms and

knowledge. Through depictions of pop-culture heroes opposing vaccines or the regulations associated, individuals created glorified fantasies contributing to a shared narrative of successes while other depictions illustrated shared struggles. These narratives ultimately build an identity-constructing and -stabilizing story that shows potential to unite an ideologically diverse movement even across countries.

Considering the second research question, content on social media is most affected by platform moderation when tied to factual knowledge. As a content analysis of the sampled profiles has shown, flagging and censorship was very likely to appear on posts that displayed either statistics or quoted content. Additionally, several posts containing video footage of prominent political figures were targeted by fact-checking. Considering the scope of information provided by users, it can be concluded that while textual material is often affected by algorithmic filtering and countermeasures implemented by users, purely visual material tends to operate largely outside these limitations and is, thus, mostly unaffected by platform moderation. Additionally, a user's efforts of countering censorship had proven successful, thus suggesting the translations of security narratives into visual media (especially humorous content) can be more resilient against platform moderation.

While this research can contribute an insight into visual constructions of ontological security online it also relies on a comparatively small sample size. A significant number of posts have been viewed, however, only originating from two authors. Because identity online is constructed with close regards to authenticity and continuity it is important that the sample discussed in this thesis viewed content across time. Due to this and accessibility limitations the research could only focus on two individual users. This research is able to provide a first insight into the movements use of humorous material to construct, reconstruct, and share ideology, values, and consequently ontological security online. However, it is important to further investigate these first insights in following research that engages a larger sample of multiple users and further develops the content analysis that build the brief introduction to this thesis methodological approach.

To conclude this thesis with some words of warning: The Querdenker have formed a movement and an identity around limitations during a global pandemic. Despite regulations being lifted in Germany and the world turning to a (new) normal post-pandemic world, the movement continues to exist. This is in part due to the ontological security narrative they created. An ideology that counters the essence of what political institutions and societal functions in current Germany stand for. A movement that contains members opposing even established institutions like the constitution, faces an identity crisis when confronted with the possibility of conformity with the group they had previously othered to severe degrees. Current narratives within the movement are surfacing displaying a shift to new subjects such as the war in Ukraine and inflation. These subjects highlight the continuity of the movement and an issue of on-going political polarization and skepticism that has yet to be addressed both nationally and globally (Denney, 2022).

References

- Alshenqeeti, H. (2016). Are Emojis Creating a New or Old Visual Language for New Generations? A Socio-semiotic Study. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 7(6), pp. 56-69.
- Analisa (2022). *Instagram AI Analytics*. <https://analisa.io/about-us> [retrieved: 25.02.2022]
- Beck, U. (1986). *Risikogesellschaft: Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne*. Suhrkamp.
- Becker, P. (2014). *Sustainability science: Managing risk and resilience for sustainable development*. Elsevier.
- Bergman-Rosamond, A.; Gammeltoft-Hansen, T.; Hamza, M.; Hearn, J.; Ramasar, V.; Rydstrom, H. (2020). The case for Interdisciplinary Crisis Studies. *Global Discourse*. (published online ahead of print 2020). <https://bristoluniversitypressdigital.com/view/journals/gd/aop/article-10.1332-204378920X15802967811683/article-10.1332-204378920X15802967811683.xml> [retrieved: 01.08.2022]
- Bloomfield, E. F.; Tillery, D. (2019). The Circulation of Climate Change Denial Online: Rhetorical and Networking Strategies on Facebook. *Environmental Communication*, 13(1), pp. 23–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2018.1527378>
- Bosen, R.; Thureau, J. (2021). COVID: How Germany battles the pandemic - a chronology. *DW*. <https://www.dw.com/en/covid-how-germany-battles-the-pandemic-a-chronology/a-58026877> [retrieved: 18.07.2022]
- Brasset, J.; Browning, C.; O'Dwyer, M. (2021). EU've Got to Be Kidding: Anxiety, Humour and Ontological Security. *Global Society*, 35(1), pp. 8-26.
- Bundesministerium der Justiz (2017). Act to Improve Enforcement of the Law in Social Networks (Network Enforcement Act). https://www.bmj.de/SharedDocs/Gesetzgebungsverfahren/Dokumente/NetzDG_engl.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2 [retrieved: 18.07.2022]

- Burrows, T. (2017). Safety Check: is Facebook becoming fear's administrator-in-chief? *The Guardian*.
- Chen, S. (2021). The anti-vax movement is being radicalized by far-right political extremism. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/the-anti-vax-movement-is-being-radicalized-by-far-right-political-extremism-166396> [retrieved: 01.07.2022]
- Chotiner, I. (2020). The Influence of the Anti-Vaccine Movement. *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/the-influence-of-the-anti-vaccine-movement> [retrieved: 01.07.2022]
- Clapton, W.; Shepherd, L.J. (2017). Lessons from Westeros: Gender and power in Game of Thrones. *Politics*, 37(1). pp. 5-18.
- Colomina, C.; Sánchez Margalef, H.; Youngs, R. (2021). The impact of disinformation on democratic processes and human rights in the world. *European Union*. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/653635/EXP_O_STU\(2021\)6536_35_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/653635/EXP_O_STU(2021)6536_35_EN.pdf) [retrieved: 09.10.2021]
- Coppola, D. P. (2020). *Introduction to international disaster management* (Fourth edition). Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Cossarini, P. (2017). Indignation as Resistance: Beyond the Anxiety of No Future Alternatives. In Eklundh, E.; Zevnik, A.; Guittet, E. (Eds.), *Politics of Anxiety* (pp. 141–164). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Creswell, J. W. (2015). *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research*. Sage.
- Croft, S. (2012). *Securitizing Islam: Identity and the Search for Security*. Cambridge University Press.
- Davis, N. (2022). Heart inflammation after Covid vaccine 'no more common than after other jabs'. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/apr/11/heart-inflammation-after-covid-vaccine-no-more-common-than-after-other-jabs> [retrieved: 15.07.2022]

- Delcker, J. (2020). Germany's balancing act: Fighting online hate while protecting free speech. *Politico*. <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-hate-speech-internet-netzdg-controversial-legislation/> [retrieved: 02.06.2022]
- Denney, S. (2022). Trouble Is Brewing in Germany. *Lawfare*. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/trouble-brewing-germany> [retrieved: 18.07.2022]
- Deutsche Bundesregierung (2022). Änderungen an Infektionsschutzgesetz (IfSG). *buzer.de*. <https://www.buzer.de/gesetz/2148/l.htm> [retrieved: 19.07.2022]
- Deutsche Welle (2021a). Facebook deletes accounts of German anti-lockdown group. *DW*. <https://www.dw.com/en/facebook-deletes-accounts-of-german-anti-lockdown-group/a-59206831> [retrieved: 11.04.2022]
- Deutsche Welle (2021b). Germany's Joshua Kimmich to get COVID vaccine after initial 'concerns'. *DW*. <https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-joshua-kimmich-to-get-covid-vaccine-after-initial-concerns/a-60096560> [retrieved: 19.07.2022]
- Doerr, N. (2017). The Power of Conflicting Memories in European Transnational Social Movements. In Freeman, L. A.; Nienass, B.; Daniell, R. (Eds.), *Silence, Screen and Spectacle: Rethinking Social Memory in the Age of Information* (pp. 163–182). Berghahn Books.
- Duncombe, C.; Bleiker, R. (2015). Popular Culture and Political Identity. In: Caso, F.; Hamilton, C. (Eds.). *Popular Culture and World Politics: Theories, Methods, Pedagogies*. (pp. 35-44). E-International Relations.
- Eder, T.; Firsova, E. (2021). Out of the Box: Surveillance of Querdenker movement in Germany reflects a new political reality. *Wilson Center*. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/out-box-surveillance-querdenker-movement-germany-reflects-new-political-reality> [retrieved: 19.07.2022]
- European Medicines Agency (2021). EMA recommends Nuvaxovid for authorisation in the EU. *European Medicines Agency*. <https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/news/ema-recommends-nuvaxovid-authorisation-eu> [retrieved: 18.07.2022]

- Faddoul, M. (2020). COVID-19 is triggering a massive experiment in algorithmic content moderation. *Tech Stream*.
<https://www.brookings.edu/techstream/covid-19-is-triggering-a-massive-experiment-in-algorithmic-content-moderation/> [retrieved: 22.07.2022]
- Fuchs, C. (2017). *Social Media: a critical introduction*. SAGE.
- Germani, F.; Biller-Andorno, N. (2021). The anti-vaccination infodemic on social media: A behavioral analysis. *PloS One*, 16(3), e0247642, pp. 1-14.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0247642>
- Giddens, A. (1991a). *The Consequences of Modernity*. Polity Press.
- Giddens, A. (1991b). *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Polity.
- Griffin, R. (2022). New school speech regulation as a regulatory strategy against hate speech on social media: The case of Germany's NetzDG. *Telecommunications Policy*, 46(9), pp. 1-21.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.telpol.2022.102411>
- Guittet, E.; Brion, F. (2017). The New Age of Suspicion. In E. Eklundh, A. Zevnik, & E. Guittet (Eds.), *Politics of Anxiety* (pp. 79–99). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Hansen, A.; Machin, D. (2019). *Media and communication research methods* (2nd edition). *Macmillan international higher education*. Red Globe Press.
- Hornsey, M. (2021). The psychology of the anti-vaccine movement. *The Biochemist*, 43(4), pp. 52–54. https://doi.org/10.1042/bio_2021_162
- Hull, JH.; Wootten, M.; Moghal, M.; Heron, N.; Martin, R.; Walsted, ES.; Biswas, A.; Loosemore, M.; Elliot, N.; Ranson, C. (2022). Clinical patterns, recovery time and prolonged impact of COVID-19 illness in international athletes: the UK experience. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 56(4), pp. 4-11.
- Instagram (2019). *Combatting Misinformation on Instagram*.
<https://about.instagram.com/blog/announcements/combating-misinformation-on-instagram/> [retrieved: 03.04.2022]

- Instagram (2020). *Keeping People Informed, Safe, and Supported on Instagram*.
<https://about.instagram.com/blog/announcements/coronavirus-keeping-people-safe-informed-and-supported-on-instagram> [retrieved: 03.04.2022]
- Instagram (2021). *Helping People Stay Safe and Informed about COVID-19 Vaccines*. <https://about.instagram.com/blog/announcements/continuing-to-keep-people-safe-and-informed-about-covid-19> [retrieved: 03.04.2022]
- Instagram (2022a). *#coronalüge*.
<https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/coronal%C3%BCge/>
[retrieved:01.03.2022]
- Instagram (2022b). *#ichmachdanichtmit*.
<https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/ichmachdanichtmit/>
[retrieved:01.03.2022]
- Instagram (2022c). *#ungeimpft*.
<https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/ungeimpft/>
[retrieved:01.03.2022]
- Instagram (2022d). *Gemeinschaftsrichtlinien*.
https://help.instagram.com/477434105621119/?helpref=uf_share
[retrieved: 26.07.2022]
- Instagram (2022e). *Richtlinie zu COVID-19 und Impfstoffen - Aktualisierungen und Schutzmaßnahmen*.
https://help.instagram.com/697825587576762/?helpref=uf_share
[retrieved: 26.07.2022]
- Jaramillo-Dent, D.; Pérez-Rodríguez, M. A. (2021). #MigrantCaravan: The border wall and the establishment of otherness on Instagram. *New Media & Society*, 23(1), pp. 121–141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819894241>
- Jensen, K. B. (2012). *A handbook of media and communication research: Qualitative and quantitative methodologies* (2nd ed. [1st published]. Routledge.
- Khan, M. L.; Idris, I. K. (2019). Recognise misinformation and verify before sharing: a reasoned action and information literacy perspective. *Behaviour*

- & *Information Technology*, 38(12), pp. 1194–1212.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929X.2019.1578828>
- Kidd, D. (2017). *Social Media Freaks: Digital Identity in the Network Society*. Westview Press.
- Kinkartz, S. (2021). Germany introduces digital COVID-19 pass. DW.
<https://www.dw.com/en/germany-introduces-digital-covid-19-pass/a-57840431> [retrieved: 19.07.2022]
- Kinnvall, C. (2006). *Globalization and Religious Nationalism in India: The Search for Ontological Security*. Routledge.
- Kinnvall, C. (2017). Feeling ontologically (in)secure: States, traumas and the governing of gendered space. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 52(1), pp. 90–108.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836716641137>
- Kinnvall, C.; Mitzen, J. (2018). Ontological security and conflict: the dynamics of crisis and the constitution of community. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 21(4), pp. 825–835. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-018-0161-1>
- Krahmann, E. (2018). The market for ontological security. *European Security*, 27(3), pp. 356–373. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2018.1497983>
- Krickel-Choi, N. C. (2021). Rethinking Ontological Security Theory: Conceptual Investigations into ‘Self’ and ‘Anxiety’. Doctoral Dissertation, *Department of Economic History and International Relations*, Stockholm University.
- Krolikowski, A. (2008). State Personhood in Ontological Security Theories of International Relations and Chinese Nationalism: A Sceptical View. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 2(1), pp. 109–133.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/pon003>
- Kuckartz, U. (2014). *Qualitative Text Analysis*. Sage.
- Laing, R.D. (1969). *The Divided Self*. Penguin.
- Leaver, T.; Highfield, T.; Abidin, C. (2020). *Instagram: Visual Social Media Cultures*. Polity.
- Luhmann, N. (1972). *Rechtssoziologie*. Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH.

- Malik, A.; Khan, M. L.; Quan-Haase, A. (2021). Public health agencies outreach through Instagram during the COVID-19 pandemic: Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication perspective. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 61(12), 102346, pp. 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2021.102346>
- MDR exactly (2021). Gefälschte Impfpässe: Wer steckt hinter solchen Geschäften?. *Mittel Deutscher Rundfunk*. <https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/deutschland/gesellschaft/corona-impfung-impfpass-faelschung-100.html> [retrieved: 28.07.2022]
- Mitzen, J. (2006). Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma. *European Journal of International Relations*, 12(3), pp. 341-370. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066106067346>
- Nazar, S.; Pieters, T. (2021). Plandemic Revisited: A Product of Planned Disinformation Amplifying the COVID-19 "infodemic". *Frontiers in Public Health*, 9(649930). pp. 1-15.
- Newman, N.; Fletcher, R.; Kalogeropoulos, A.; Levy, D. A. L.; Nielsen, R. K. (2017). *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017*. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Digital%20News%20Report%202017%20web_0.pdf [retrieved: 18.04.2022]
- NPR (2022). Retired Pope Benedict doesn't admit wrongdoing for the way he handled sex abuse cases. *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/08/1079149031/pope-benedict-wrongdoing-pardon-sex-abuse> [retrieved: 18.07.2022]
- Peoples, C.; Vaughan-Williams, N. (2014). *Critical Security Studies*. Routledge.
- Perera, B. Y.; Chaudhury, S. R.; Albinsson, P. A.; Nafees, L. (2021). This Is Who I Am: Instagram as Counterspace for Shared Gendered Ethnic Identity Expressions. *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 6(2), pp. 274–285. <https://doi.org/10.1086/713288>
- Pfeifer, H. (2021). Protests escalate in Germany. *DW*. <https://www.dw.com/en/covid-protests-escalate-in-germany/a-60118647> [retrieved: 19.07.2022]

- Regehr, K. (2022). In(cel)doctrination: How technologically facilitated misogyny moves violence off screens and on to streets. *New Media & Society*, 24(1), pp. 138–155. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820959019>
- Rodineliussen, R. (2019). Organising the Syrian revolution — student activism through Facebook. *Visual Studies*, 34(3), pp. 239–251. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2019.1653790>
- Rose, G. (2016). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Rösner, L.; Krämer, NC. (2016). Verbal Venting in the Social Web: Effects of Anonymity and Group Norms on Aggressive Language Use in Online Comments. *Social Media + Society*, 2(3), pp. 1-13.
- Scholte, J. (2005). *Globalisation: A critical Introduction*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Seargeant, P.; Tagg, C. (Eds.). (2014). *The Language of Social Media: Identity and Community on the Internet*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sharp, G. (1985). Constitutive Abstraction and Social Practice. *Arena*, 70, pp. 48–82.
- Slovic, P. (2001). The risk game. *Journal of Hazardous Materials*, (86), pp. 17–24.
- Steger, M. B.; James, P. (2019). *Globalization Matters: Enabling the Global in Unsettled Times*. Cambridge University Press.
- Steinberg, K. (2021). People are using coded language to avoid social media moderation. Is it working?. *Politifact*. <https://www.politifact.com/article/2021/nov/04/people-are-using-coded-language-avoid-social-media/> [retrieved: 23.07.2022]
- Strick, S. (2021). *Rechte Gefühle*. transcript Verlag. <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839454954>
- Subotic, J. (2016). Narrative, Ontological Security, and Foreign Policy Change. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 12(4), pp. 610–627.
- Tarman, B.; Yigit, M. F. (2012). The Impact of Social Media on Globalization, Democratization and Participative Citizenship. Advance online publication. *Journal of Social Science Education*, 12(1), pp. 75-80.

- Teune, S. (2021). *Protest in Stuttgart 2010 und 2020. Zwei Herausforderungen der Demokratie*. bpb. <https://www.bpb.de/apuz/stuttgart-2021/326245/protest-in-stuttgart-2010-und-2020-zwei-herausforderungen-der-demokratie> [retrieved: 23.07.2022]
- Watkins, D. (2021). Pope Francis urges people to get vaccinated against Covid-19. *Vatican News*. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-08/pope-francis-appeal-covid-19-vaccines-act-of-love.html> [retrieved: 18.07.2022]
- Wang, L. (2021). Restaging COVID-19: Material Culture, Ontological Security, and Liminality in a Time of Pandemic. *FrameWorks*, (2), pp. 9–23.
- World Health Organization (2022). Public Health and Social Measures in Response to COVID-19. <https://phsm.euro.who.int/measuresDatabase> [retrieved: 18.07.2022]

Appendix

#ungeimpft		#coronalüge		#ichmachdanichtmit	
Usetag	total posts	Usetag	total posts	Usetag	total posts
wie_esmirgefaellt	563	wolfgang_wodarg	692	smilley67	329
na_di_ne_1990	544	bodohhauser	527	wie_esmirgefaellt	228
masken_freiheit	300	unbekannter_nr1	374	widerstand.ist.pflicht	197
antiimpf	203	impfkontrolle	330	harlekinshop	180
widerstand.ist.pflicht	190	widerstand.ist.pflicht	264	freiheitsfreundin	149
diana24mehr	138	oevpmussweg	132	thewolfbyyourside	139
bittebildedich	122	melanie_ana_kolic	125	janimee.de	112
georgeorwellnow	117	selberdenken.ist.sexy	117	ailenroc_78	84
impfpflicht2022	102	wir_halten_durch	117	ein_freier_mensch	83
unidentifiedplayer	98	joshimine	114	mitchelmischtmit	82
covidlandthemovie	87	der_selbstdenker	95	chipsimwiderstand	69
demos2022austria	85	wie_esmirgefaellt	88	flo_heichel	68
freie_meinung_2021	76	hart.aber.ehrlich	87	elternstehenauf	67

Figure 27: Profiles with high activity by hashtag

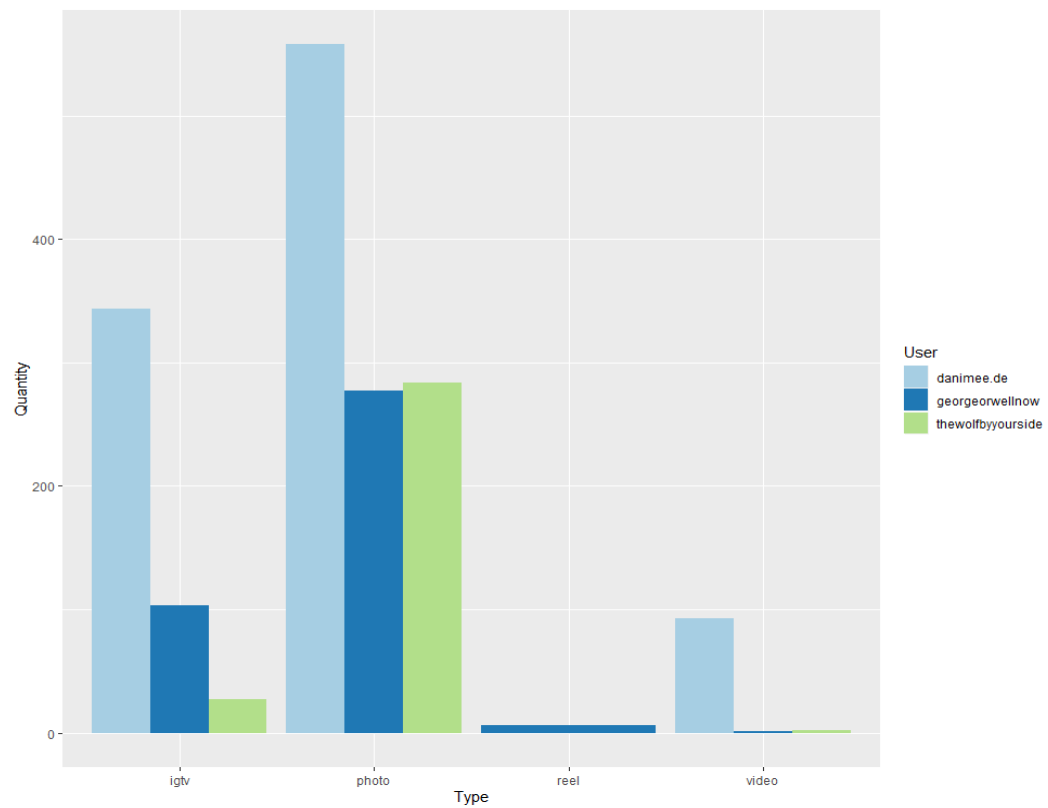


Figure 28: Occurrence of Types of Content by User

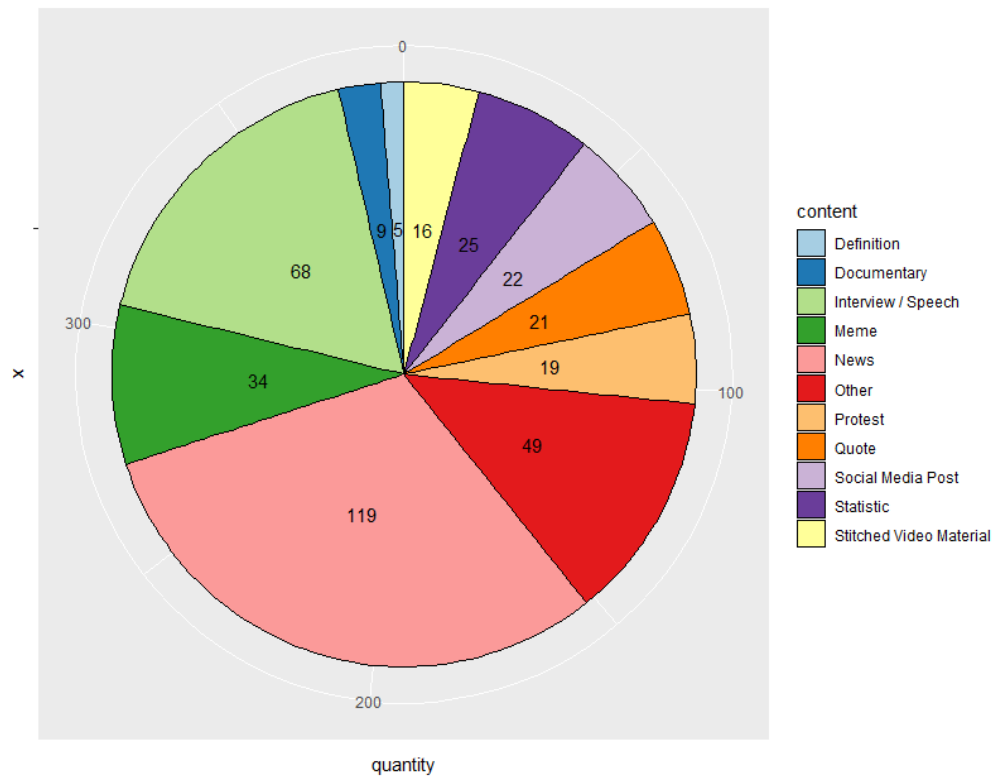


Figure 29: Content Type Distribution for georgeorwellnow

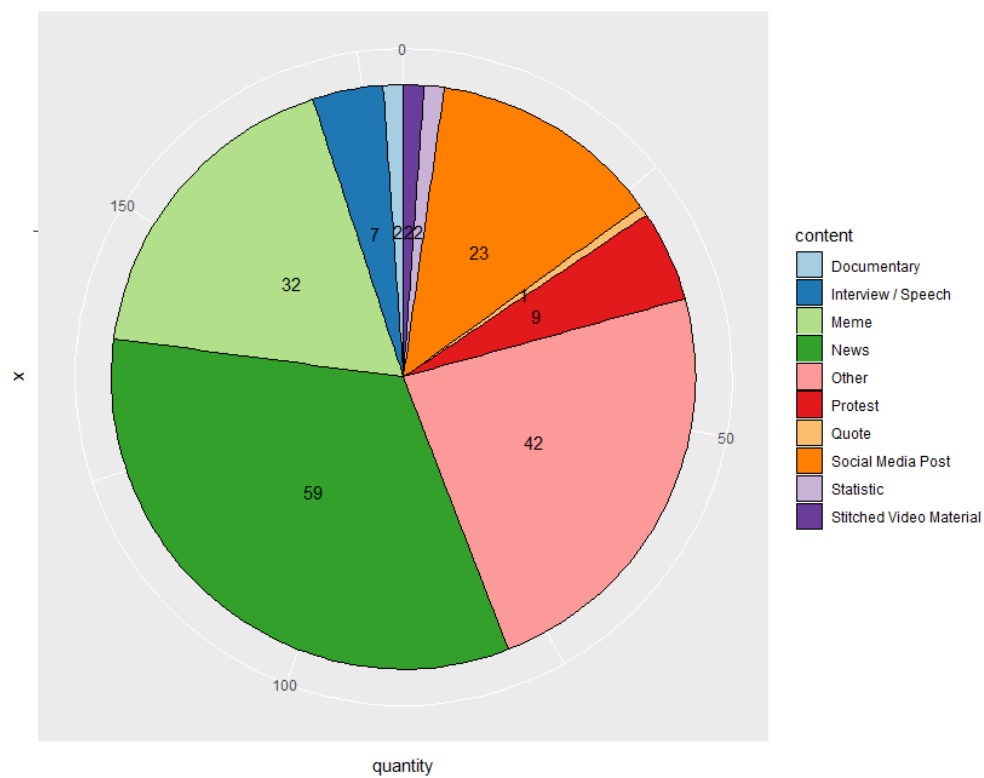


Figure 30: Content Type Distribution for thewolfbyyourside

Categories	Sub-Categories	Textual Category		Author	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6	G7	G8	G9	
				Date	10/02/2022	27/01/2022	22/1/2022	24/12/2021	23/12/2021	21/12/2021	20/12/2021	15/12/2021	10/12/2021	
				Post short	Virus Pope	Mask Walk	Football	Bill Gates & Daenerys	Evolution Barcode	Snow White Needle	QR-Code Family	Sheep Vaccine Center	Peanuts Rape	
	Qualifying tags		#ichmachedankhmit #ungeimpft											
	Freedom		#freiheit											
			#impffreiheit											
			#impffreundglücklich											
			#diegedankensindfrei											
		#keinemenschillegal												
		#neinzumimpfzwang												
	Constitutional References		#unversehrtheit											
		Unvaccinated and unharmed	#unversehrtheitskörpers											
	Rights			#jointheresistance										
			#Widerstandjetzt											
			#getoffyourknees											
			#dontfallort											
			#nevergiveup											
			#HoldTheFrequency											
			Activism / Enabling	#nutzdeineherzunddeinenverstand										
				#ärztestehenauf										
				#spaziergang										
			Protest	#widerstandskämpfer										
			#coronawiderstand											
			#lassienlichtgewinnen											
			I won't be pushed	#ichlassenmichnichteropressen										
				#ichlassemichnichtimpfen										
				#impfteuchsknie										
		Aggression	#fuckcovid19											
			Pop-culture reference	#endgame										
In-Group Sympathy			Unvaccinated and unharmed	#ungeimpfte willkommen										
		Community Building	Account references	#TheWolfByYourSide										
			Post Themes	#gutenacht										
			Unvaccinated and unharmed											
				#gesundundglücklich										
		Emotions	Kindness	#behuman #bekind #love										

Table 3: Georgeorwellnow Hashtag Coding Chart (a)

Categories	Sub-Categories	Textual Category Account references	#TheWolffMakesYouStille	Author	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6	G7	G8	G9
Health	Children		#fingerwegvonunserekindern	[REDACTED]									
			#SaveTheChildren										
			#SaveOurChildren										
			#ungeimpftekindersindgesund										
	Vaccine Danger		#herzmuskelenzündung										
			#plötzlichundunerwartet										
			#impfschädensindreal										
			#impfschaden										
			#nebenwirkungen										
	Post Themes Unvaccinated and unharmed		#totimpfstoff										
			#allesnurzufall										
			#impftote										
			#impflosigkeit										
			#derimpfstoffistnegentherapie										
	Vaccine Inefficient		#sportler										
			#ungeimpftesundunglücklich										
			#impfenskeinelösung										
			#impfungschütztnicht										
	Other Vaccine Opposition		#neinzurimpfung										
			#impfnein Danke										
			#neinheisstnein										
			#neinzurpharmaindustrie										
			#impfpflicht										
	Feeling Forced		#impfabo	[REDACTED]									
			#zahlenundfakten										
			#impfen										
			#coronaimpfung										
	Descriptives		#impfdurchbrüche										
	No												
	Anti-Elite (Populists)												
	Anti-health-elites			[REDACTED]									
	I won't be pushed												
	anti-gov												
	Anti-health-elites												

Table 4: Georgeorwellnow Hashtag Coding Chart (b)

Categories	Sub-Categories	Textual Category		Author	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6	G7	G8	G9
				Date	10/02/2022	27/01/2022	22/1/2022	24/12/2021	23/12/2021	21/12/2021	20/12/2021	15/12/2021	10/12/2021
Political Skepticism	Conspiracy	Conspiracies	#TheGreatWeSet										
			#altheydostletoyou										
			#nothingbutlies										
			#withabendundblick										
			#plandemie										
	Pop-culture reference	#laborthese	#laborthese										
			#allhaveleftrsd										
			#breakthematix										
	Post Themes	#coronapocalypse											
	COVID-Policy	Anti-regulations	#2ggehigamicht										
			#impflichtneindanke										
			#heinzumimflabo										
			#heinzuspaltung										
			#heinzurimpflicht										
	COVID-Policy	Descriptives	#coronapolik										
			#ichmachedanchitrit										
			I wont be pushed										
			Feeling Forced										
			Post Themes										
	Autocracy	Feeling Forced	#evolution										
			#coronawahnsinn										
			#CoronaFaschismus										
			#impfiktatur										
Other	Autocracy	Feeling Forced	#gesundheitsdiktatur										
			#deutschlandtotalitar										
			#coronadiktatur										
			#vergewaltigung										
			#dlb										
	Post Themes	I wont be pushed											
			#ichbinraus										
			#markusgeiau										
			#nichtlustig										
			#einfachnurkrank										
	Post Themes	Post Themes	#coronames										

Table 5: Georgeorwellnow Hashtag Coding Chart (c)

[illegible]

Table 6: Thewolfbyyourside Hashtag Coding Chart (a)

Categories	Sub-Categories	Textual Category	Author	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	T10	T11
			Date	20/03/2022	13/03/2022	19/02/2022	16/02/2022	14/02/2022	13/02/2022	09/02/2022	03/02/2022	03/02/2022	27/01/2022	25/01/2022
Health	Children													
	Vaccine Danger	Sideeffects												
	Post Themes Unvaccinated and unharmed													
	Vaccine Inefficient													
	Other Vaccine Opposition	No												
	Feeling Forced													
	Descriptives													
	Anti-Elite (Populist)	No												
	Anti-health-ellies	I won't be pushed												
	#TheGreatWeSet	#ichbinstaatsfeind												

Table 7: Thewolfbyyourside Hashtag Coding Chart (b)

Categories	Sub-Categories	Textual Category		Author	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	T10	T11
Political Skepticism	Conspiracy	Conspiracies	#nothingbutlies	[REDACTED]											
			#withabendundurchblick												
			#pandemie												
			#abortthese												
		Pop-culture reference	#allthaveleftistred												
	COVID-Policy	Post Themes	#breakthematix												
			#coronapocalypse												
		Anti-regulations	#2ggehtgarnicht												
			#impflichtneindanke												
		No	#neinzurimpfabo												
	Autocracy		#neinzurispaltung												
			#neinzurimpfpflicht												
		Descriptives	#coronpolitik												
		I won't be pushed	#sichmachedarnichtmit												
		Feeling Forced	#impfzwang												
Other		Post Themes	#evolution												
			#coronawahnsinn												
			#CoronaFaschismus												
		Feeling Forced	#impfdiktatur												
			#gesundheitsdiktatur												
			#deutschlandtotalitar												
			#coronadiktatur												
		Post Themes	#wegewaligung												
			#dtb												
		I won't be pushed	#chbintraus												
			#maskengeisau												
		Post Themes	#nichtlustig												
			#einfachnukrank												
			#coronamemes												

Table 8: Thewolfbyyourside Hashtag Coding Chart (c)

Codes				Author	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6	G7	G8	G9
				Date	10/02/2022	27/01/2022	22/1/2022	24/12/2021	23/12/2021	21/12/2021	20/12/2021	15/12/2021	10/12/2021
				Post short	Virus Pope Drostien	Mask Walk	Football	Bill Gates & Daenerys	Evolution Barcode	Snow White and the Needle	QR-Code Family	Sheep Vaccine Center	Peanuts Rape
				Code			Warum kippen alle sportler nach und nach um warum schweigen die großen Verbände wie ddb dazu? Obwohl die Quote der herzmuskelerzündung en immens ist plötzlich und unerwartet es wird zeit, dass das aufhörit!	Novavax? totimpfstoff? Nein genauso ein Gen Medikament.	Es gibt einen anderen Weg: stay true zu deinen Werten. Überzeugungen und keep it up - am Ende siegt innerer Gerechtigkeit!	imptf euch ins kne guenacht bild für alle	-	Lauf, lauf meine Schächten „hr werdet dort sicherlich nicht geschächet werden.....	impflicht ist nichts als vergewaltun g!
Emotions	Humor	Antagonistic	Caption										
	Anger	Complaint											
	Encouragement	Threat											
			Vaccine mandate										
			Heart-muscle inflammation										
			Side-effects										
			Gene-manipulation										
			Death from vaccine										
			Justice										
			Encouraging activism										
			Submissive society										
			People are blind to the truth										
			Vaccination is rape										
			Politics is responsible										
			Revolution										
			Dataprotection										
			Microsoft										
			Laughter										
			Identity / identifying										
			anti-elitist										
			sarcasm										
			approval										

Table 9: Georgeorwellnow Caption Coding Chart

			Author	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	T10	T11
	Codes	Date	20/03/2022	13/03/2022	19/02/2022	16/02/2022	14/02/2022	13/02/2022	09/02/2022	09/02/2022	03/02/2022	27/01/2022	25/01/2022	
	Post short	Value Comic	Masked Sheep	Barcode Evolution	Zeigst tieren wie diese. Es gibt da eine Firma, die 2020 ein Patent mit der Nummer 060606 angemeldet hat. Dieses Patent beinhaltet das Konzept der "Gewinnung von Kryptowährung über Körperaktivität" mithilfe eines Endgeräts und einer "Schmitzle". Der Frühling kommt. Du bist die Quale. Den Smartphone ist die Tux. Graphen ist der Schlüssel. Und der Patenthaber Microsoft. Think.	Death on Doorstep	Girl with Gun	Kid on Swing	Virus Pope	Hide the Pain Herod	Kinnich vs. Laubach	Girl with Shield	Golum Laubach	
Category	Subcategory	Specification	Code											
			Your new really...thanks to Schneiblaus, Parbenderken, Dierem Fernseher und... Die beiden Memes sind ich recht hüftig, und irgendwie ergötzen sie sich sogar. In'r wiss was zu un ist. Woheres and Wohermas. Der Frühling kommt. Er wird wie ein roter Teppich für eine Revolution sein. Go, go, go! ONE	Horohoho. My kind of girl. •	Damit das mal richtig klar ist. Ladies & Gentlemen von 'da oben'. No fucking way. Assassinen, ja genau.	Ich mag den Alter das ist mein Name der Woche. Wenn nicht sogar des Monats.	Scheesele	Symbolbild des Monats. •						
Emotions	Humor	Antagonistic	Caption											
	Anger	Complaint												
	Encouragement	Threat												
			Vaccine mandate											
			Heart-muscle inflammation											
			Side-effects											
			Gene-manipulation											
			Death from vaccine											
			Justice											
			Encouraging activism											
		Subversive society												
		People are blind to the truth												
		Vaccination is rape												
		Politics is responsible												
		Revolution												
		Disproportion												
		Microsoft												
		Laughter												
		Identify / identifying												
		anti-elites												
		sarcasm												
		approval												

Table 10: Thewolbyyourside Caption Coding Chart