

Delighting and detesting engagement: emotional politics of junk news

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How do audiences make sense of and interact with political junk news on Facebook? How does the platform's "emotional architecture" (Wahl- Jorgensen 2019) intervene in these sense-making, interactive processes? What kinds of mediated publics emerge on and through Facebook as a result? We study these questions through topic modeling 40,500 junk news articles, quantitatively analyzing their engagement metrics, and a qualitative comment analysis. This exploratory research design allows us to move between levels of public discourse, zooming in from cross-outlet talking points to microsociological processes of meaning-making, interaction and emotional entrainment taking place within the comment boxes themselves. We propose the concepts of delighting and detesting engagement to illustrate how the interplay between audiences, platform architecture and political junk news generates a bivalent emotional dynamic that routinely divides posts into highly "loved" and highly "angering". We argue that highperforming (or in everyday parlance, viral) junk news bring otherwise disparate audience members together and orient their dramatic focus towards objects of collective joy, anger or concern. In this context, the nature of political junk news is performative as they become resources for emotional signaling and the construction of group identity and shared feeling on social media. The emotions that animate junk news audiences typically refer back to a transpiring social relationship between two political sides. This affectively loaded "us" versus "them" dynamic is both enforced by Facebook's emotional architecture and made use of by junk news publishers.