

# The Rise (and Fall?) of Qanon – Part Two

Brant Houston  
Knight Chair in Investigative Reporting  
University of Illinois  
[brant.houston@gmail.com](mailto:brant.houston@gmail.com)

# QAnon in the news

DAILY BEAST | The Daily Beast

## Michael Flynn Is Now Selling QAnon Merch



Will Sommer

December 29, 2020 · 3 min read



Photo illustration by The Daily Beast/Getty/Screenshot/theshirtshowusa

# Profit from QAnon

- Flynn aligned himself even further with QAnon on Tuesday, endorsing a T-shirt website called “Shirt Show USA” that sells QAnon gear and other “official” Flynn-themed merchandise. The website’s offerings include camo trucker hats, T-shirts, and sweatshirts with the phrase “WWG1WGA,” a reference to the central QAnon motto, “Where we go one, we go all.”
- The ad copy describing the \$35 trucker hats makes clear that the site’s creators endorse QAnon, including a reference to another QAnon term, the “Great Awakening.”

# In the news - platform switching

HOME > CULTURE > CULTURE NEWS

JANUARY 22, 2021 1:05PM ET

## The QAnon Community Is in Crisis — But On Telegram, It's Also Growing

Extremists are actively recruiting disillusioned or despondent QAnon believers on encrypted messaging apps like Telegram, researchers say

By **EJ DICKSON**



<https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/qanon-telegram-channels-increase-1117869/>

# In the news – Coup in Myanmar

Q Send a Tip

# RollingStone

Menu Music TV Movies Politics Culture Charts Pro Newsle

HOME > CULTURE > CULTURE NEWS FEBRUARY 2, 2021 11:32AM ET

## QAnon Conspiracy Theorists Are Emboldened by the Coup in Myanmar

Proponents of the baseless QAnon conspiracy theory see the arrest of democratically elected officials as a sign that the same could happen to Democrats in the U.S.

By EJ DICKSON

f t r e +



<https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/qanon-myanmar-burma-coup-conspiracy-theory-1121849/>

# In the news - Greene under fire

**MEDIAMATTERS**  
FOR AMERICA

NEWS & ANALYSIS

RESEARCH & STUDIES

## **Marjorie Taylor Greene penned conspiracy theory that a laser beam from space started deadly 2018 California wildfire**

*House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) has done little to stop Greene's ascension in the Republican Party*

<https://www.mediamatters.org/facebook/marjorie-taylor-greene-penned-conspiracy-theory-laser-beam-space-started-deadly-2018>

# Greene and lasers



Marjorie Taylor Greene

November 17, 2018 · 🌐



As there are now over 70 people confirmed dead and over 1,000 missing, the fires in CA are a horrific tragedy. I'm praying for all involved!

I'm posting this in speculation because there are too many coincidences to ignore, and just putting it out there from some research I've done stemming from my curiosity over PG&E stocks, which tanked all week then rallied Thursday night after CA official announced they would not let PG&E fail. I find it very interesting that Roger Kimmel on the board of directors of PG&E is also Vice Chairman of Rothschild Inc, international investment banking firm. I also find interesting the long history of financial contributions

# Greene and lasers

Rep. Greene is a proponent of the Camp Fire laser beam conspiracy theory. She wrote a November 17, 2018, Facebook post -- which is no longer available online -- in which she said that she was speculating "because there are too many coincidences to ignore" regarding the fire, including that then-California Gov. Jerry Brown (D) wanted to build the high-speed rail project and "oddly there are all these people who have said they saw what looked like lasers or blue beams of light causing the fires."



# Greene and lasers

She also speculated that a vice chairman at "Rothschild Inc, international investment banking firm" was somehow involved, and suggested the fire was caused by a beam from "space solar generators."

# Greene and consultants

Greene, meanwhile, hired an advertising consultant who had once said the NAACP is “the Black KKK, only more violent and dangerous.” She spent \$211,000 to advertise on Parler, the social media site that attracted adherents to QAnon, according to Federal Election Commission records. The next highest amount spent on Parler by a congressional candidate last year was \$1,400. Parler declined to comment.

# Greene and supporters

Politics

## How Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, promoter of QAnon's baseless theories, rose with support from key Republicans



Washington Post, January 30, 2021

# The searchable database of QAnon

**We created a searchable database of the people behind QAnon, including its supporters and enablers**

Jessica Davies, Sawyer Click, and Madison Hall Dec 23, 2020, 8:42 AM



<https://www.businessinsider.com/qanon-searchable-database-people-2020-12>

# Greene

**QAnon's supporters and enablers**  
Click on a name to learn more

Activist × Criminal defendant × Individual ×  
Influencer × Personalities × Politician ×

Search.. Sort A:Z Sort by date

@6142Dave	@shadygrooove	Alex Jones	Alison Hayden
Aloise Life	Alpalus Slyman	Andrew Meehan	Andrew Torba
Angela Stanton-King	Ann Vandersteel	Anthony Comello	Antoine Tucker
Antonio Lamotta	Ari Friedman	Ashli Babbitt	Ben Gibson
Bill Mitchell	Billy Earley	Billy Prempeh	Blain McElrea
Bobby Jeffries	Brandon Cook	Brittany Sellner	Buzz Patterson
C. Wesley Morgan	Catherine Carr	Catherine Purcell	Cecilia Fulbright

<https://www.businessinsider.com/qanon-searchable-database-people-2020-12>

# Qanon author discussion – Fredrick Brennan and 8chan



# Q Authors – Jim Watkins



<https://mashable.com/article/qanon-study-two-people-wrote-q-posts-4chan-8kun/>

# Greene

## Krebs on Security

In-depth security news and investigation

### 07 All Aboard the Pequod!

JAN 21

Like countless others, I frittered away the better part of Jan. 6 doomscrolling and watching television coverage of the horrifying events unfolding in our nation's capital, where a mob of **President Trump** supporters and **QAnon** conspiracy theorists was incited to lay siege to the U.S. Capitol. For those trying to draw meaning from the experience, might I suggest consulting the literary classic *Moby Dick*, which simultaneously holds clues about QAnon's origins and offers an apt allegory about a modern-day **Captain Ahab** and his ill-fated obsessions.

Many have speculated that **Jim Watkins**, the administrator of the online message board **8chan** (a.k.a. 8kun), and/or his son **Ron** are in fact "Q," the anonymous persona behind the **QAnon conspiracy theory**, which holds that **President Trump** is secretly working to save the world from a satanic cult of pedophiles and cannibals.

Last year, as I was **scrutinizing the computer networks that kept QAnon online**, researcher **Ron Guilmette** pointed out a tantalizing utterance from Watkins the younger which adds tenuous credence to the notion that one or both of them is Q.

<https://krebsonsecurity.com/2021/01/all-aboard-the->



# Q Authors

In 2018, a report by NBC News tracked down three individuals who pushed the QAnon conspiracy in its earliest months, when Q was on 4chan. However, many who research, track, and report on QAnon believe that Jim Watkins, the current owner of 8kun (which known as 8chan until late 2019), is the man currently behind Q's posts.

<https://mashable.com/article/qanon-study-two-people-wrote-q-posts-4chan-8kun/>

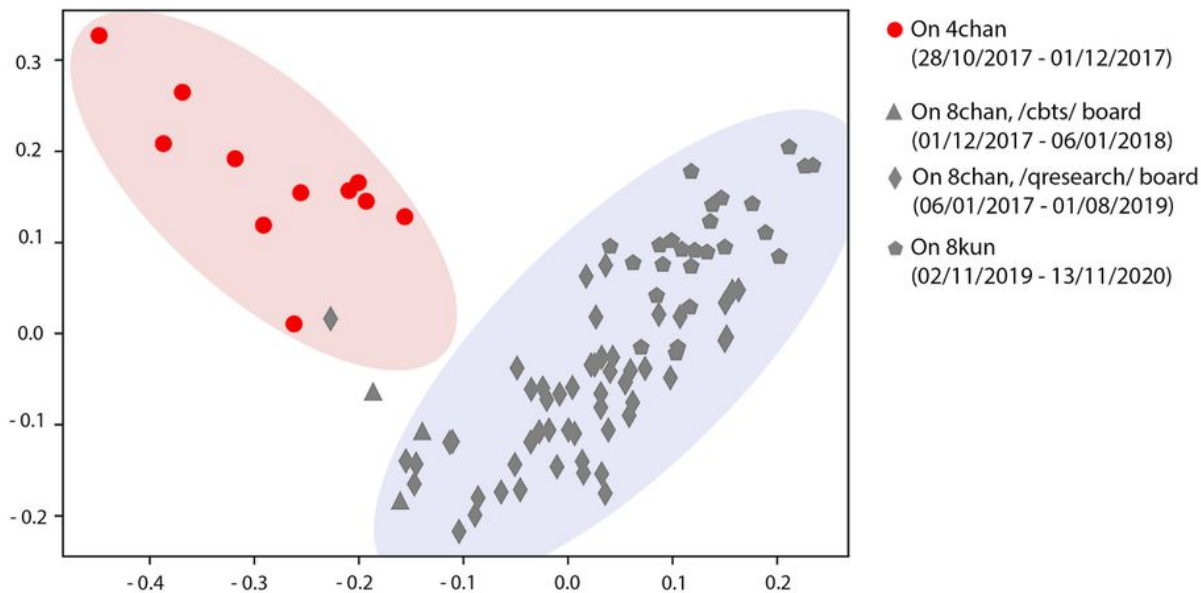
# Q Authors

Fredrick Brennan, who founded 8chan in 2013, has previously claimed that Jim Watkins is now Q and has been since the anonymous account moved from posting on 4chan to 8chan. Brennan believes the original "Q" is South African conspiracy theorist Paul Furber, an individual also named in the NBC News report. Brennan sold 8chan to Watkins in 2014 and worked with him until cutting ties with the site in 2016.

<https://mashable.com/article/qanon-study-two-people-wrote-q-posts-4chan-8kun/>

# Q Authors search

Machine learning stylometry identifies two authors behind Q drops (QAnon messages)



Multivariate statistical analysis (three-character pattern / conc. 7500 characters units) / by Orphanalytics 2020

<https://mashable.com/article/qanon-study-two-people-wrote-q-posts-4chan-8kun/>

# Think Tank Chronology

Center for Homeland Defense and Security    Naval Postgraduate School    DHS – FEMA    About the HSDL

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▶ ABSTRACT

## Genesis of a Conspiracy Theory: Key Trends in QAnon Activity Since 2017 [\[open pdf - OR\]](#)

From the Overview: "QAnon is a wide-ranging conspiracy theory that claims that an elite group of child-trafficking paedophiles have been ruling the world for a number of decades and that President Trump has a secret plan in place to bring this group to justice. This briefing paper provides an overview of the key trends in activity around the QAnon conspiracy theory from 2017 to 2020. Crucially it points to major spikes in QAnon activity in March 2020, suggesting both an increase in activity to promote the conspiracy theory and the spread of this conspiracy to new audiences."

Author:	<a href="#">Davey, Jacob</a> <a href="#">Gallagher, Aoife</a> <a href="#">Hart, Mackenzie</a>
Publisher:	<a href="#">Institute for Strategic Dialogue</a>
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Media Type:	application/pdf
URL:	<a href="https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-Genesis-of-a-Conspiracy-Theory.pdf">https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-Genesis-of-a-Conspiracy-Theory.pdf</a>

★ Listed on [September 9, 2020](#) [Critical Releases]

[Help with citations](#)

<https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=842110>

# Study

ISD | Powering solutions  
to extremism  
and polarisation

## The Genesis of a Conspiracy Theory



<https://www.isdglobal.org/isd-publications/the-genesis-of-a-conspiracy-theory/>

# Study

## Executive Summary

### Overview

QAnon is a wide-ranging conspiracy theory that claims that an elite group of child-trafficking paedophiles have been ruling the world for a number of decades and that President Trump has a secret plan in place to bring this group to justice. This briefing paper provides an overview of the key trends in activity around the QAnon conspiracy theory from 2017 to 2020. Crucially it points to major spikes in QAnon activity in March 2020, suggesting both an increase in activity to promote the conspiracy theory and the spread of this conspiracy to new audiences.

<https://www.businessinsider.com/qanon-searchable-database-people-2020-12>

# Study

Crucially it points to major spikes in QAnon activity in **March 2020**, suggesting both an increase in activity to promote the conspiracy theory and the spread of this conspiracy to new audiences.

# Study

On 28 October 2017, a user calling themselves Q who claimed to have high-level security clearance posted a series of cryptic messages on the “politically incorrect” section of the website 4chan. 4chan is an anonymous imageboard<sup>1</sup> with a “no rules” policy that has been associated with pranks, violence, and illegal and extremist content.



# Study

Over the next few years, users claiming to be Q have made over 4,000 posts, known in the community as “Qdrops”, fuelling the growth of a lurid meta-conspiracy connecting a range of harmful narratives. The QAnon theory now connects anti-vaccine, anti-5G conspiracies, antisemitic and anti-migrant tropes, and several bizarre theories that the world is in the thrall of a group of paedophile elites set on global domination in part aided by ritualistic child sacrifice.

# Study

In the 2020 US elections there are 14 congressional candidates on the ballot for November who express support for the theory.

# Study

In particular, this research highlights a significant uptick in the discussion of QAnon in 2020 and suggests that the theory is reaching a larger audience. The reasons behind this uptick need to be investigated further, but regardless of its genesis reflect a greater flow of traffic around this harmful conspiracy. An analysis of this recent surge in activity reveals how the theory and its adherents have been important in promoting disinformation around COVID-19 and the protests around the death of George Floyd.

# Study

The number of unique users engaging in discussion of QAnon have increased on both Facebook and Twitter in 2020. The most striking increase, in March 2020, saw the number of Facebook users increase from an average of 344 unique users per day between March 2 and 8, to 898 between March 22 and 29. Similarly, average Twitter users grew from 37,302 in the first week to 89,338 in the last.

# Study

Both Facebook group membership and engagement rates within those Facebook groups increased significantly in March 2020.

Membership of QAnon groups on Facebook increased by 120% in March and engagement rates increased by 91%.

# Study

The largest increase in Twitter conversation (249%) came just two months into the Q movement in January 2018 when the community latched onto the hashtag #ReleaseTheMemo.<sup>4</sup> The sudden proliferation of this trend drew media attention, with research suggesting Russian bot interference on Twitter. This increase is not seen in Facebook conversation at the same time.

# Study

Other events which caused notable spikes on Twitter, but also on Facebook include the first appearance of Q followers at Trump rallies in August 2018 and the death of Jeffrey Epstein in August 2019.

# Study

We found that the top four countries driving discussion of QAnon on Twitter were the US, the UK, Canada and Australia. On average the US accounted for 89.5% of mentions of Q-related hashtags from October 2017 to October 2019. However, in the last eight months this has dropped to 87%, suggesting that the conspiracy theory is spreading and taking hold internationally.



# Study

YouTube plays an important role in the sharing of QAnon-related content:

The analysis showed that 20.4% of all QAnon-related Facebook posts contained links to YouTube, while on Twitter 5% of QAnon-related posts contained YouTube links.

# Study

From 27 October 2017 to 17 June 2020, ISD recorded 69,475,451 million tweets, 487,310 Facebook posts and 281,554 Instagram posts mentioning QAnon-related hashtags and phrases. Across all three platforms, a clear trend exists showing a notable increase in conversation volumes coinciding with periods when lockdowns were issued in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020.

# Study

An examination of these figures shows that user numbers increased in line with spikes in conversation, and often coinciding with media attention given to the Q community.

Similar to trends seen in conversation volume, numbers of individuals discussing QAnon increased significantly between 31 July and 2 August 2018, when Q followers were first spotted at a Trump rally in Tampa, Florida.

# Study

In this instance, unique Twitter users rose above 100,000 for the first time. A similar trend was observed on Facebook, where user numbers more than doubled during those dates. Additionally, new users engaging in the conspiracy grew on both Twitter and Facebook throughout July 2019, with the arrest and subsequent death of Jeffrey Epstein.

# Study

The most-shared YouTube link over the entire timespan from Twitter was a link to the 1hr 17 min QAnon film

Out Of Shadows, which was released in April 2020 and has so far amassed more than 15.5 million views on YouTube, despite being demoted by the platform.<sup>7</sup>

We found that posts containing links to Out of Shadows on Facebook have received almost 2 million interactions since it was released.

# Study

On Facebook, it is worth noting that several of the top-shared YouTube videos have since been deleted from the platform. The third-highest shared link from Facebook to YouTube is a 40-min video released in March 2020 that details coronavirus conspiracies linked to QAnon.<sup>9</sup> It has so far amassed almost 300,000 views.

# Study

In January 2018, QAnon conversation on Twitter increased by 249%, fuelled by the movement's use of the hashtag #ReleasetheMemo.<sup>10</sup>



The conspiracy's first brush with the mainstream media came less than three months after the movement's origins, when the community latched onto the #ReleaseTheMemo hashtag, referring to the memo written by the staff of US rep Devin Nunes that would allegedly show that the FBI's investigation into Russia was politically biased.

# Study

At the time, research was released that suggested the hashtag was boosted by Russian bots on Twitter. Interestingly, our data shows that the #ReleaseTheMemo spike was not present in Facebook conversation at the time.<sup>11</sup>



# Study

The role of celebrities, as both targets and supporters of the conspiracy, plays a role in the movement's growth.



Celebrities who expressed their support for the QAnon movement early on, such as actress and presidential candidate Roseanne Barr, played a role in the movement's conversation growth, particularly when her association was highlighted in multiple media articles at the end of March 2018.

# Study

Not only does celebrity support boost the movement, but allegations of celebrities being involved in certain aspects of the conspiracy has also boosted conversation volumes. In April 2018, a feud between talk show host Sean Hannity and television host Jimmy Kimmel put Kimmel in the firing line of the QAnon community, where they attempted to link him<sup>13</sup> to Pizzagate, a debunked conspiracy theory that claimed that references to “pizza” made in the emails of John Podesta, Hillary Clinton’s campaign manager, were references to child trafficking.

# Study

At the end of July 2018, the Q community focused on Michael Avenatti, lawyer to adult film actress Stormy Daniels, after a Qdrop pointed them in his direction.<sup>16</sup> Daniels was involved in a scandal with President Trump and reportedly received 'hush' monies during the 2016 presidential election.

# Study

Alternatively, decreases in Q conversation also coincided with silences from Q, seen especially during 1 August and 2 November 2019 when three months of silence from Q made conversation on Twitter drop to under 50,000 mentions per day.

# Study

Following a lull in the conversation from April to July 2019, mentions of QAnon skyrocketed again, with conversation increasing by 136% between 8-9 July, when Epstein was charged with sex trafficking and conspiracy to traffic minors for sex.



Throughout July and August, Epstein was the second most-mentioned named individual behind Trump in QAnon discussion on Twitter.

# Study

Over a year later, the Q community were interested in the identity of the whistleblower involved in the impeachment trial. Amplified by tweets from the President himself, his name was revealed. This coincided with a 162% spike in Q conversation on 28 December 2019.

# Study

The almost uniform approach that most nations took in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the need for the public to listen to advice from several global institutions and the fact that people were confined to their homes, created an opportunity for QAnon conspiracy theorists to capitalise on.

# Study

These lockdowns caused increases in usage of both Facebook and Twitter which also corresponded with a sudden and drastic increase in both QAnon conversations and user numbers posting about the conspiracy. Throughout that week, coronavirus was the third-most featured word in QAnon tweets, behind the hashtags #QAnon, #wwg1wga and mentions of President Trump.



# Study

Within this period Tom Hanks was a particular focus and his diagnosis with COVID-19 on 12 March was deemed to signify a connection between Hollywood elites and the virus. Connected to this, adrenochrome became another hot topic issue, with mentions of the drug increasing by 834% compared to the week before. The drug itself is linked to specific conspiracy theories that it is manufactured through the ritualistic torture of children before being consumed by celebrities, and this was quickly linked to COVID-19, with suggestions that the adrenochrome supply had in some way been infected with the coronavirus.

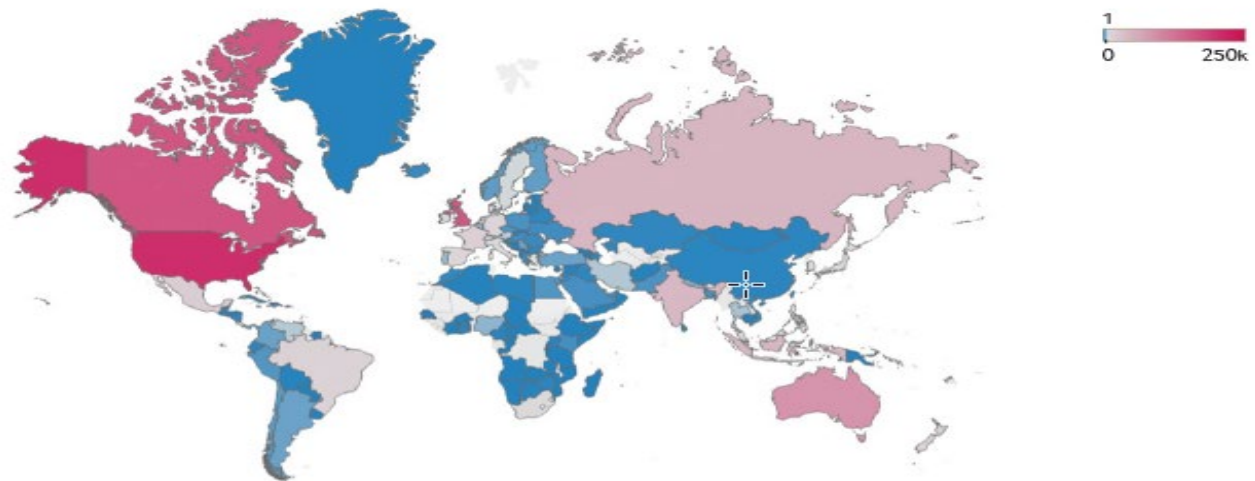
# Study

Within discussion linking QAnon and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests, we identified a number of important sub-narratives. This included discussion of the political movement Antifa, which was mentioned 194,000 in conjunction with QAnon keywords. In particular, discussion tried to paint Antifa as a terrorist organisation, and puppet of the elite. In addition to this, many conspiracy theories emerged about Floyd himself and his murder. Commonly, these suggest that the murder was staged to harm Trump's re-election campaign and that Floyd himself was complicit in this plot.

# Study

Figure 5 Heat map showing geographic distribution of QAnon conversation

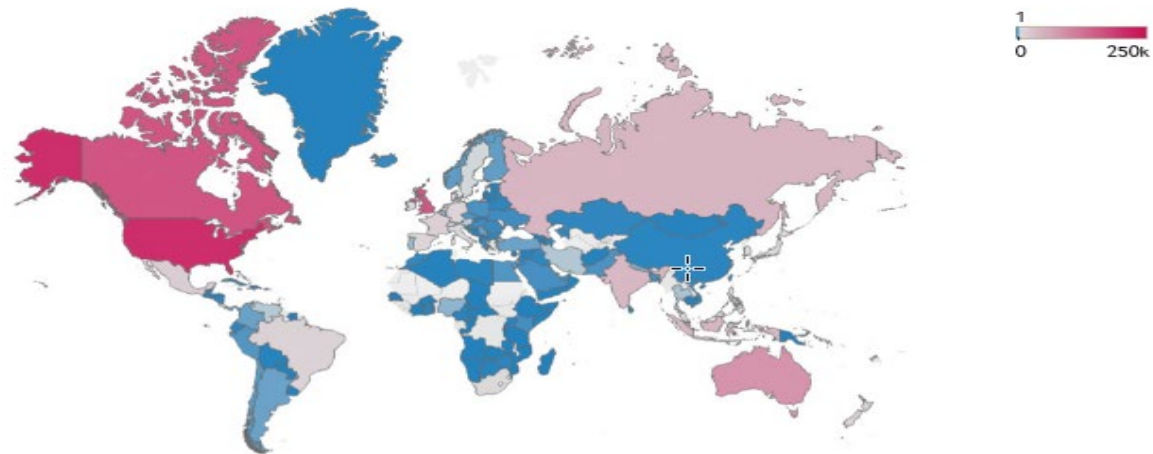
Oct '17–Jun '18



# Study

Figure 5 Heat map showing geographic distribution of QAnon conversation

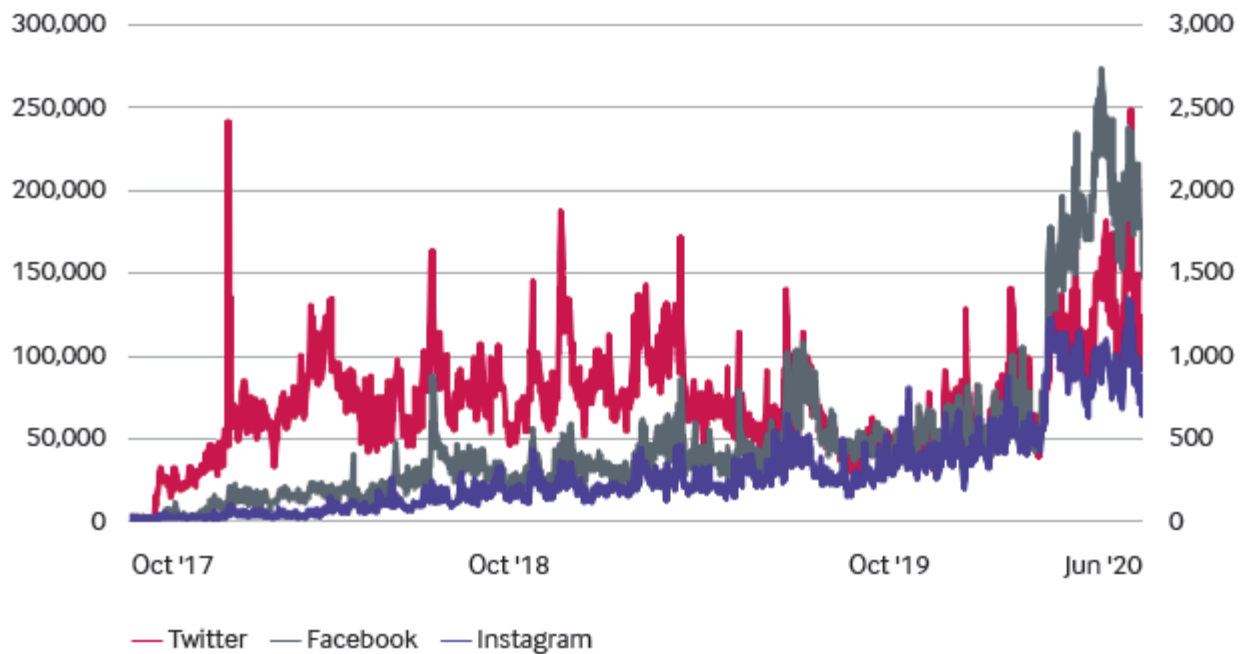
Oct '17–Jun '18



# Study

**Figure 1** The volume over time of QAnon posts 2017 – 2020. Left-hand side y-axis is the volume of Twitter posts; Right-hand side y-axis is the volume of Facebook and Instagram posts.

## Volume of QAnon discussion over time



# Qanon and Anti-Semitism



**QAnon is a Nazi Cult, Rebranded**

<https://www.justsecurity.org/72339/qanon-is-a-nazi-cult-rebranded/>

# Origins of QAnon

**THE CONVERSATION**  
Academic rigor, journalistic flair

COVID-19 Arts + Culture Economy + Business Education Environment + Energy **Ethics + Religion** Health Politics + Society Science + Technology



**Why the 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion' is still pushed by anti-Semites more than a century after hoax first circulated**

September 2, 2020 8:20am EDT

<https://theconversation.com/why-the-protocols-of-the-elders-of-zion-is-still-pushed-by-anti-semites-more-than-a-century-after-hoax-first-circulated-145220>

# Elders of Zion

The plot, described above, was the conspiracy “revealed” in the most influential anti-Jewish pamphlet of all time. It was called The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. It was written by Russian anti-Jewish propagandists around 1902. It collected myths about a Jewish plot to take over the world that had existed for hundreds of years. Central to its mythology was the Blood Libel, which claimed that Jews kidnapped and slaughtered Christian children and drained their blood to mix in the dough for matzos consumed on Jewish holidays.

<https://www.justsecurity.org/72339/qanon-is-a-nazi-cult-rebranded/>



# Anti-Semitic

From the Rothschilds to Soros

What sustains the influence of the Protocols among cranks and extremists is not the language of the text itself – which few of them are likely to have fully read in its various versions – but what this forgery purports to underscore, which is the astonishingly cunning influence of Jews in modern history.

The Protocols thus have no importance in themselves; they are spurious. But they do bestow precision upon apocalyptic fears, which could not survive without some ingredient of plausibility – however wildly far-fetched.

<https://theconversation.com/why-the-protocols-of-the-elders-of-zion-is-still-pushed-by-anti-semites-more-than-a-century-after-hoax-first-circulated-145220>

# Propaganda as a game

- QAnon was behaving precisely like an alternate-reality game, or ARG.
- ARGs are designed to be clue-cracking, multiplatform scavenger hunts. They're often used as a promotion, like for a movie. A studio plants a cryptic clue in the world around us.

<https://www.wired.com/story/qanon-most-dangerous-multiplatform-game/>

# From Wired Magazine

- If you notice it and Google it, it leads to hundreds more clues that the gamemaker has craftily embedded in various websites, online videos, maps, and even voice message boxes.
- The first big ARG—called The Beast—was created in 2001 to promote the Steven Spielberg movie A.I

<https://www.wired.com/story/qanon-most-dangerous-multiplatform-game/>

# An example from Wired Magazine



The screenshot shows a Medium article page. At the top left, there is a profile icon (three black circles) and the name 'curiouserinstitutione'. The main title of the article is 'A Game Designer's Analysis Of QAnon', with 'QAnon' in a larger, bold font. Below the title is the subtitle 'Playing with reality'. The author's name 'Rabbit Rabbit' is displayed next to a profile icon, with a 'Follow' button. Below the author's name is the date 'Sep 30, 2020' and the estimated reading time '26 min read'. To the right of the author information are social media sharing icons for Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, and a bookmark icon. At the bottom of the article preview, it says 'Written by Reed Berkowitz'.

curiouserinstitutione

## A Game Designer's Analysis Of QAnon

Playing with reality

Rabbit Rabbit [Follow](#)

Sep 30, 2020 · 26 min read

Twitter LinkedIn Facebook Bookmark

Written by Reed Berkowitz

<https://medium.com/curiouserinstitutione/a-game-designers-analysis-of-qanon-580972548be5>

# Game designer analysis

QAnon has often been compared to ARGs and LARPs and rightly so. It uses many of the same gaming mechanisms and rewards. It has a game-like feel to it that is evident to anyone who has ever played an ARG, online role-play (RP) or LARP before. The similarities are so striking that it has often been referred to *as* a LARP or ARG. However this beast is very very different from a game.

<https://medium.com/curiouserinstitutione/a-game-designers-analysis-of-qanon-580972548be5>

# Game designer analysis

Apophenia is : “the tendency to perceive a connection or meaningful pattern between unrelated or random things (such as objects or ideas)”

<https://medium.com/curiouserinstitutione/a-game-designers-analysis-of-qanon-580972548be5>

# Game designer analysis

Apophenia is : “the tendency to perceive a connection or meaningful pattern between unrelated or random things (such as objects or ideas)”

<https://medium.com/curiouserinstitutione/a-game-designers-analysis-of-qanon-580972548be5>

# Game designer analysis

QAnon grows on the wild misinterpretation of random data, presented in a suggestive fashion in a milieu designed to help the users come to the intended misunderstanding. Maybe “guided apophenia” is a better phrase. Guided because the puppet masters are directly involved in hinting about the desired conclusions. They have pre-seeded the conclusions. They are constantly getting the player lost by pointing out unrelated random events and creating a meaning for them that fits the propaganda message Q is delivering.

<https://medium.com/curiouserinstitutione/a-game-designers-analysis-of-qanon-580972548be5>



# Game designer analysis

Another major difference between QAnon and an actual game, is that Q is almost pure propaganda. That IS the sole purpose of this. It's not advertising a product, it's not for fun, and it's not an art project. There is no doubt about the political nature of the propaganda either. From ancient tropes about Jews and Democrats eating babies (blood-libel re-booted) to anti-science hysteria, this is all the solid reliable stuff of authoritarianism.

<https://medium.com/curiouserinstitutione/a-game-designers-analysis-of-qanon-580972548be5>

# Game designer analysis

This is the internet's re-purposing of hatred's oldest hits. The messaging is spot on. The "drops" implanted in an aspic of anti-Semitic, misogynist, and grotesque posts on posting boards that, indeed, have been implicated in many of the things the fake conspiracy is supposed to be guilty of!

<https://medium.com/curiouserinstitutione/a-game-designers-analysis-of-qanon-580972548be5>

# Vice documentary



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsN96zE8FuE>