

QAnon Unveiled: Exploring Esoteric Truth Construction in Online Conspiracy Discourse

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

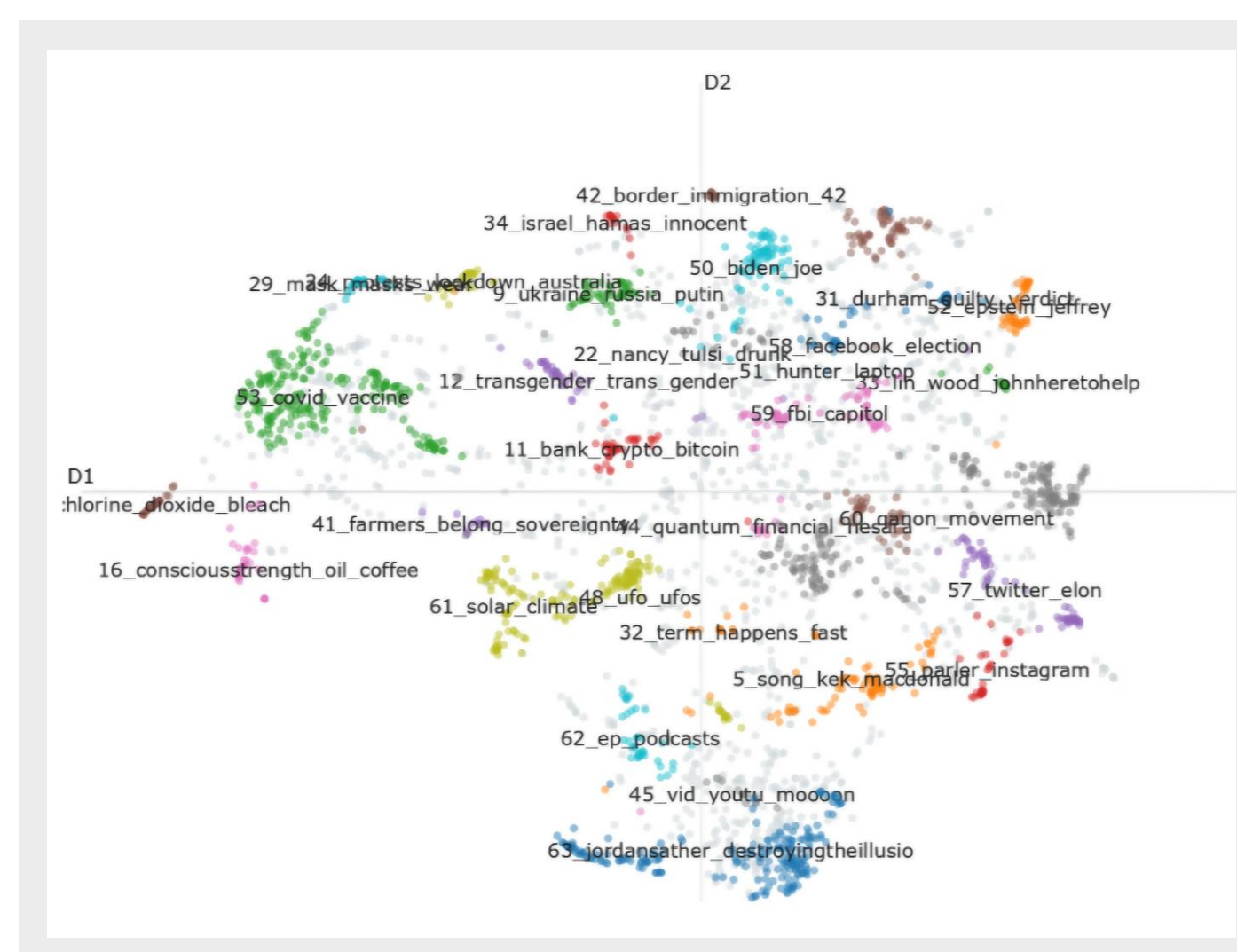
This dissertation investigates QAnon's practices of truth construction through the lens of esoteric concepts of truth. In an era of digital media transformation and increasingly fragmented public spheres, QAnon emerges as a distinctive phenomenon that constructs and propagates hidden knowledge purportedly accessible only to an initiated elite. This research examines the interplay between esoteric frameworks and conspiracy theories in the construction and dissemination of alternative truth claims.

Research Question: How do QAnon influencers build and spread their alternative truth systems online, and how do they use concepts similar to traditional esoteric movements?

Key Thesis: QAnon operates like an esoteric tradition: it presents truth as hidden, requires special techniques to decode, and creates a community of "awakened" believers who have privileged knowledge that others lack.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

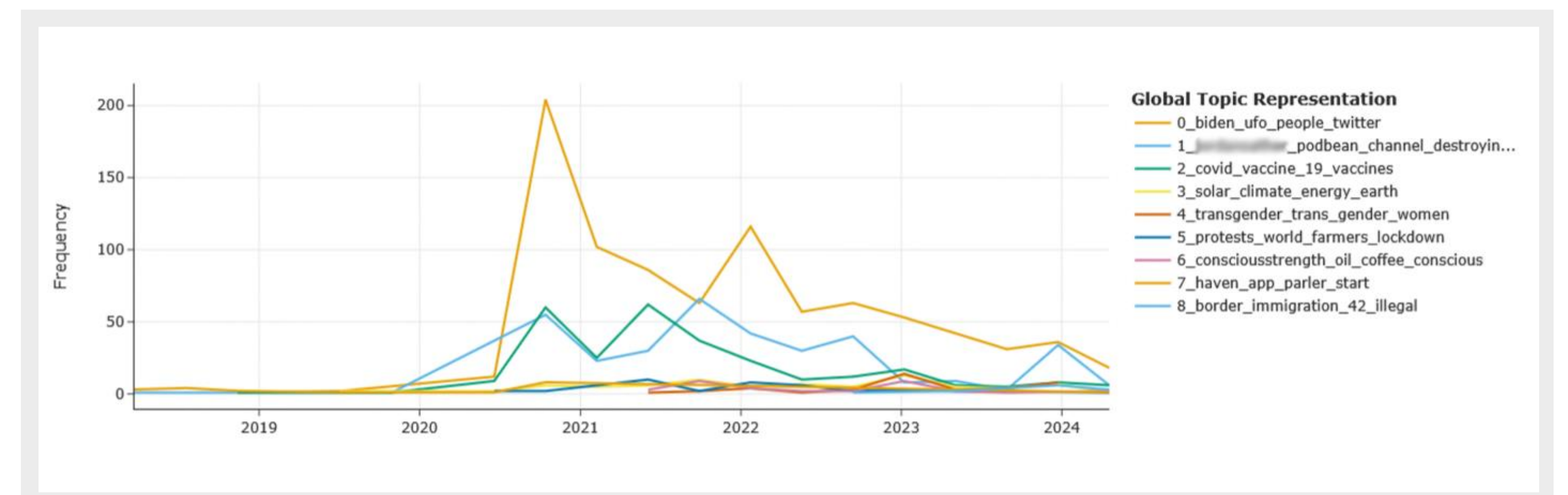
STEP 1: TOPIC MODELING	STEP 2: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employs BERTopic, a transformer-based topic modeling technique that leverages contextual embeddings Identifies thematic patterns and developments within extensive text collections Maps topic evolution across time and platforms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examines discourse patterns in content clusters identified through topic modeling (rhetorical strategies, narrative structures, and epistemic frameworks) Investigates how discursive elements are transformed across platform environments



TOPIC STRUCTURE

The BERTopic analysis of 3,065 posts from QInfluencer "J" on Gab revealed a complex interconnected topic landscape. This visualization shows how topics cluster into broader thematic areas, with major clusters forming around:

- COVID and vaccine narratives
- Political topics (Biden, Trump, elections)
- UFO/disclosure narratives
- Climate and energy conspiracies
- Financial/cryptocurrency systems
- Social issues (transgender, protests)
- Platform-specific content
- Sovereignty and freedom narratives



TOPIC EVOLUTION OVER TIME

This visualization tracks how key topics evolved between 2019-2024, revealing clear patterns of topic prevalence aligned with external events:

- Early 2020: Initial emergence of multiple conspiracy topics
- Late 2020-Early 2021: Major spike in political content (topic 0_biden_ufo_people_twitter) coinciding with the 2020 election and its aftermath

- Mid-2021: COVID/vaccine topics (2_covid_vaccine_19_vaccines) reach peak prominence
- 2021-2022: Platform content (1_'_podbean_channel) shows consistent presence, reflecting migration strategies
- 2022-2024: More diverse topic distribution with climate, energy and social issues gaining prominence

	B1 2019	B2 2020	B3 2020	B4 2021	B5 2021	B6 2021	B7 2021	B8 2021	B9 2022	B10 2022	B11 2022	B12 2022	B13 2023	B14 2023	B15 2024	B16 2024
Doubt of Truth Institutions	54.5%	67.0%	51.5%	66.5%	63.0%	66.0%	57.0%	49.0%	50.0%	48.0%	51.5%	58.0%	65.5%	47.0%	49.5%	47.7%
Do Your Own Research	7.5%	11.0%	7.0%	10.0%	10.0%	7.0%	11.0%	9.0%	9.0%	6.0%	10.5%	10.0%	7.5%	6.0%	9.0%	13.8%
Predicting & Prophesizing	18.5%	26.5%	22.5%	9.0%	18.0%	14.0%	11.0%	15.0%	15.5%	13.5%	13.5%	23.0%	16.5%	16.5%	21.0%	23.1%
Connecting Unrelated Events	12.5%	15.5%	12.0%	11.5%	16.0%	13.0%	12.0%	13.0%	14.0%	12.5%	10.5%	25.0%	15.5%	16.0%	18.0%	17.1%
Unveiled Hidden Knowledge	39.0%	45.5%	33.5%	34.0%	42.0%	37.5%	39.0%	37.0%	39.0%	34.0%	41.5%	52.5%	42.5%	37.5%	39.5%	43.1%

Legend: Low Frequency (0-10%) | Low-Medium (10-15%) | Medium (15-40%) | High (40-60%) | Very High (60%+)

Note: Data represents percentage of coded content within each batch of posts. Key events: B2 (2020 Election), B3 (Jan 6th), B5-6 (Vaccine Rollout), B9 (Ukraine War), B12 (Midterms), B13 (SVB Collapse).

DISCOURSE STRATEGIES

Undermining Traditional Authorities (47-67% of posts)

"The way the Media, Big Tech, FDA, and the DOJ have lied to the public about this substance should be a crime against humanity." (2021)

Adapting When Predictions Fail

When Biden took office despite predictions he wouldn't, narrative shifted to: "How else could we make meaningful change in our election systems unless the FRAUD was put on display for all to see?" (2020)

CONCLUSION

This research shows that QAnon isn't just about political beliefs but functions as a complete alternative way of determining what counts as "truth." In this manner I am investigating:

Connecting Seemingly Unrelated Events

"Interesting video showing how the blue and yellow color scheme has been pumped out incessantly... First with COVID, now with Ukraine. Color schemes have a big impact on a human's subconscious." (2022)

Building a Special Knowledge Community

"Patriots are finally seeing through the lies. We're the ones who understand what's really happening." (2020)

- Why contradictory evidence doesn't weaken belief but often strengthens it
- How conspiracy communities build resilient knowledge systems that adapt to changing events
- The complex relationship to "science"