

CASE STUDY 3

"The problem of refugees" - which M&M are you going to eat?

On the April 22nd of 2020, the Portuguese extreme right-wing party Facebook page "Ergue-te" (Rise-up) published the following content:



The post translates to: "an Air Force spokesman said today that a migrant was injured Tuesday night in a disagreement between refugees who are quarantined due to COVID-19 at the Ota base in the municipality of Alenquer".

And the image points out "the problem of refugees". It is said that "there are thousands of M&M's here. Only 10 are poisoned". And finishes asking "which one will you take?".



IMPORTANT POINTS



This is an example of **genuine information** (the news about the disagreement between refugees are true and come from a registered news online service) that is **shared to cause harm to a group of individuals**.



In analytical terms, this is **misleading content**, which is genuine content that has been taken out of context and used in a misleading way to frame an issue. The message is intended to induce negatively the perceptions of the readers against the refugees.

This post starts by giving true information, legitimized by the link to the original piece of news from an online registered news service, which lends some seriousness to the message. The aforementioned news report tells of clashes between refugees who are in quarantine due to COVID-19 in facilities of the Portuguese Air Force. The text is illustrated by an image containing xenophobic statements. In it, it is possible to see several M&M's, which are compared to or depict refugees. In the first statement, M&M's are said to represent a problem. Then, the reader is presented with another statement referring that among thousands of M&Ms/refugees, only 10 are poisoned. Given this, the reader is then confronted with the question: which one will you take?

Regarding the features of the post itself, we can observe several important aspects concerning the **agent** (1), the **message** (2) and the **interpreter** (3).



(1) AGENT



The Portuguese Extreme right-wing party “Ergue-te” (Rise Up Party) whose motto is “Pela Pátria, pela Família, pelos teus” (for the Country, for the Family, for your own People). Its Facebook Page has 47,000 likes, 51,000 followers. This particular Post had 49 likes, 8 comments, 31 shares.



(2) MESSAGE

Focused on an image containing xenophobic text, accompanied by the link and part of the text from the original source.



(3) INTERPRETER

Hate speech against immigrants is present in the comment section (e.g. “I’M GOING TO FLUSH THEM ALL DOWN THE DRAIN.”), but also against the government for being complicit (e.g. “[..]Thank you socialist government for spreading COVID-19. We will pay you back in due course.”).

COMMENTS SECTION



In response to this post, several users published negative comments about migrants and refugees:

1. I'M GOING TO FLUSH THEM ALL DOWN THE DRAIN.
2. People who will never integrate
3. It was mentioned on the TV news that 80% of these people have had their asylum claim rejected (but they are still here, because they have issued an appeal !!!!!). So they shouldn't even be here. Thank you socialist government for spreading COVID-19. We will pay you back in due course.
4. I see a lot of strange people in my country, sometimes I see these people more often than Portuguese people, it's depressing !!!
5. The Migrant Roulette.
6. Now imagine what should be happening in that pension! We already have many criminals here, these need to be expelled.

SUMMARY

As extreme right-wing movements gain popularity among the society, posts on Facebook such as the above become more common. The Portuguese extreme right-wing party “Ergue-te” (Rise Up Party), based on an image containing xenophobic text, brings out misleading content, trying to induce negatively the perceptions of the readers against refugees.