Selected Papers of #AoIR2017:
The 18th Annual Conference of the
Association of Internet Researchers
Tartu, Estonia / 18-21 October 2017

DISRUPTING ONLINE RACISM AGAINST MĀORI IN AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND

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This visual presentation illustrated a pilot study that developed anti-racist graphics in an attempt to disrupt dominant anti-Māori discourses on news Facebook pages in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Despite the acknowledgement of Māori sovereignty in the 1840 Tiriti o Waitangi, colonisation of Aotearoa/New Zealand resulted in the wholesale theft of Māori land and the dominance of Pākehā (non-Māori of European descent) people, structures and discourses. Persistent campaigns for Te Tiriti to be honoured resulted in a settlement process which returns less than three percent of what was taken.

Theoretical framework

This research draws on an emerging theory of affective-discursive practice (Wetherell, 2012), which recognises the intricate binding of affect in discourse (Hepburn & Jackson, 2000) and online social networking sites (Papacharissi, 2014; Vie, 2014), and the role of emotions in Pākehā decolonisation. Huygens (2011, p. 75) points to a Pākehā need for "quite some emotional assistance" to come to terms with the "emotional shock" of their group's maintenance of structural racism. This research also draws on the concept of discursive repertoires (Wetherell & Potter, 1992) from social psychology.

Methodology

Reviews of anti-racist interventions (Challenging Racism Project, 2014; Pedersen, Walker, Paradies, & Guerin, 2011) indicate that they should 1) Be respectful; 2) Highlight inconsistencies in racist beliefs (Image 8, below); 3) Evoke feelings such as empathy or outrage (Image 3); 4) Undermine the hegemony of the dominant culture (Image 4); 5) Aim to change social norms about racism (Image 5) (MNet, 2012); and 6) Counter persistent misinformation (Image 6). Conversely, some studies have shown that attempts to reverse stereotypes (eg, Image 1) could make racism *worse* (Donovan & Vlais, 2006; Murji, 2006).

Rankine, J. (2017, October 18-21). *Disrupting online racism against Māori in Aotearoa/New Zealand.* Paper presented at AoIR 2017: The 18th Annual Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers. Tartu, Estonia: AoIR. Retrieved from http://spir.aoir.org.

A sample of online commentary on Māori and Treaty of Waitangi issues from 2015 found that news Facebook (FB) pages hosted antagonistic discussion between different viewpoints, many of which used common anti-Māori discursive repertoires (Moewaka Barnes et al., 2012). Twitter carried news media updates about Māori news stories but very few comments, while blog sites were silos for similar viewpoints. As a result I chose to intervene on news and private FB pages.

In an iterative cycle of co-intentional praxis (Huygens, 2006) with non-Māori Treaty educators and in consultation with Māori, I developed 80 graphics that aimed to disrupt some of the anti-Māori discourses in the 2015 sample. Difficulties obtaining historical images restricted some representations (eg, 7, 11). While humour is the main factor contributing to online artefacts becoming widely-shared memes (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007), it was difficult to make anti-racist responses funny; irony predominated and humorous graphics (8-11) were a minority.

Implementation

I posted 49 images on news FB page comment threads about nine news stories; they stimulated a low level of engagement with average or fewer Likes, shares or responses. However, the thread on which I posted the most graphics was dominated by pro-Māori comments and featured a more respectful and agonistic discussion (Mouffe, 2000) than the baseline sample.

Twenty-four participants posted 36 graphics on personal FB pages, usually unaccompanied by participant's comments; most also received few Likes, comments or shares. However, 305 people shared Image 2, stimulating sometimes long comment threads on half the visible pages - privacy settings hid the majority of sharers' pages. Image 12 was shared by 260 people, with comments on 28 percent of visible pages, and in response to requests from some of the commenters has since been made into a poster. On visible pages, the two graphics reached almost completely separate networks; discussion was overwhelmingly friendly and agonistic.

Treaty education groups and FB participants all valued having images with which to respond to racist FB comments. Treaty groups also valued highly the thinking involved in developing the graphics, and two planned to continue the process; the only stumbling block was access to design skills and programmes.

Conclusions

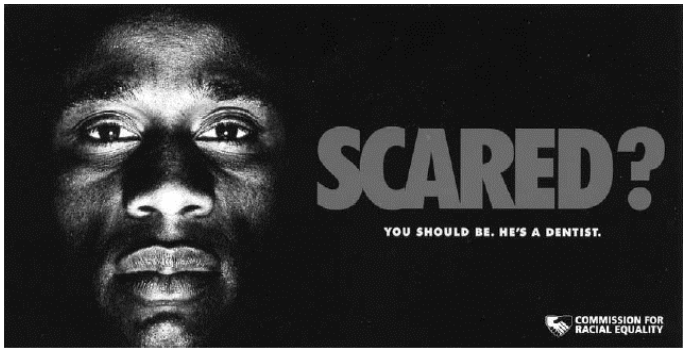
From an activist's viewpoint, this attempt to disrupt online racism against Māori seemed to be unsuccessful, although FB metrics are proxies rather than reliable measures of impact. Several factors may have contributed to less than average engagement on news FB pages. They include timing (graphics were posted an average of one hour after news stories), lack of humour, image format, the short intervention time-frame, and the resistance of dominant discourses to disruption. From a researcher's viewpoint, this result suggests several tentative conclusions. Firstly, the wide dissemination of two

graphics on personal FB pages suggests that personal networks of existing and potential allies may have more potential than public FB pages to extend counter-hegemonic discourses into new digital networks. Secondly, it suggests that the emotional shock of Pākehā confronted by their "ignorance and complicity" (Huygens, 2011, p. 75) in colonial racism, which motivates them to change their worldview, may be more likely from face-to-face interactions than the fleeting glimpse of an image when surfing online news sites. Thirdly, it suggests that the prominence of counter-hegemonic graphics in newsfeeds may influence the quality of discussion, and encourage more lurkers with counter-hegemonic views to comment. Fourthly, it indicates the need to create a wide range of alternative graphics in the competition for online attention (Weng, Flammini, Vespignani, & Menczer, 2012). And fifthly, it indicates the difficulty of predicting which of those graphics will be widely disseminated; Image 12, for example, is didactic rather than funny, and one I used in the study only at the request of a participant.

Applying discourse analysis to develop anti-racist graphics also resulted in a methodological finding - a transferable five-step process for developing counter-hegemonic visual and textual alternatives to dominant online discourses that undermine social justice. This process includes: 1) Measuring baseline discussion of the issue; 2) Identifying dominant discourses; 3) Analysing contradictions and paradoxes; 4) Developing humorous visual and text alternatives; and 5) Evaluating their online impact. This process has been adopted by Treaty workers, feminist (Kennedy, 2017) and anti-poverty activists (Rankine, 2017, March), and is similar to one advocated by the European No Hate Speech Movement (de Latour, Perger, Salaj, Tocchi, & Otero, 2017).

Graphics

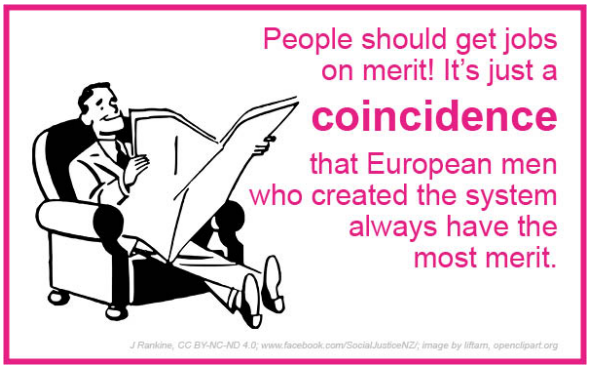
1



3

1860 Maori land
Maori land 1960
A thief steals a car, admits he stole it, then decides when, how much and what part of the car he will give back.
How fair is that?
J Rankine, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0, www.facebook.com/Social-Justice-NZ-1237007476340632/; text adapted from Josie Anderson, Annette Sykes and others at government fiscal envelope hui, 1995;

4


People should get jobs on merit! It's just a
coincidence
that European men who created the system always have the most merit.
J Rankine, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0; www.facebook.com/SocialJusticeNZ/; image by liftarn, openclipart.org

5

Te Urewera: Protected as the first natural area with its own legal identity -
Treaty settlements work for all of us
J Rankine, CC BY-SA 4.0; www.facebook.com/Social-Justice-NZ-1237007476340632/; Photo of Waikaremoana, Department of Conservation, www.flickr.com/photos/docnz/6835355898

6

What the Treaty really costs NZ
The money laundered in one year through NZ companies
$1.5 billion
laundered
$1.5 billion
All settlements to 2014
J Rankine, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0; SocialJusticeNZ on Facebook;
Info: Ministry of Justice, 2016, Consultation for new anti-money laundering laws;
Parliamentary Library, 2014, Historical Treaty settlements

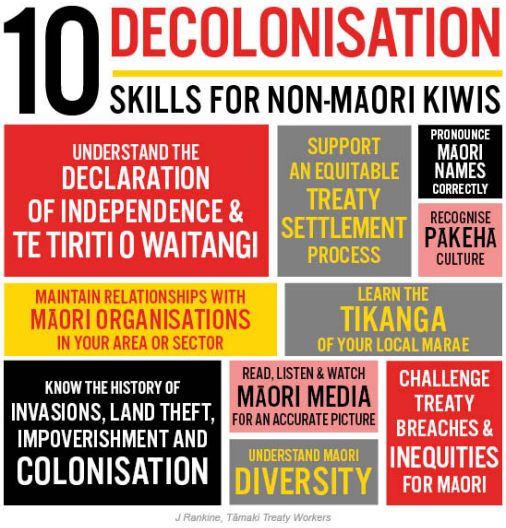
7

1860
Land wars in Taranaki
1881
Invasion of Parihaka
And they say Maori are violent
1916
Invasion of Maungapohatu
2007
Invasion of Ruatoki

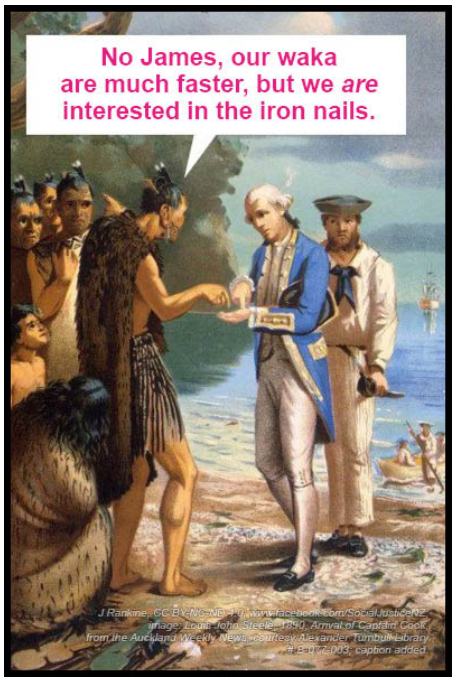
"I would hate to see New Zealanders as tenants in their own country"
"Oh, really?"
J Rankine, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0, www.facebook.com/Social-Justice-NZ-1237007476340632/; photo on right by Denis Friar

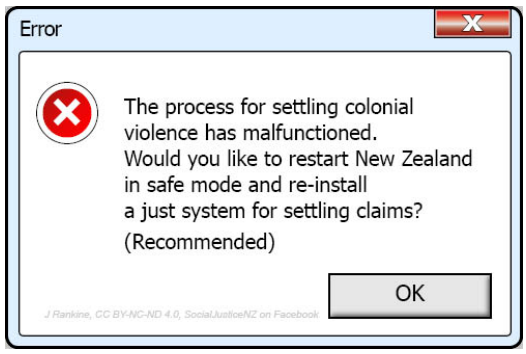
9

10



11





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