



### Introduction

- In 1998, Andrew Wakefield proposed a link between autism and the MMR vaccine. While this study has since been retracted for falsifying data, it has spawned a persistent movement of individuals who continue to distrust the safety and efficacy of vaccines.
- This has led to a heated and public debate over the past decade and a half, with both pro and anti vaccine sides criticizing the decisions of the other. One endangers children by exposing them to preventable diseases like the measles, while the other endangers children by exposing them to toxic chemicals in the vaccines. In this sense, they are diametrically opposed, much like two countries at war.
- For that reason, this paper explores this debate by looking at how politicians in the past have framed their enemies in war times, and compares it to the rhetorical strategies used now by the anti-vaccination movement.

# Use of Decivilizing Vehicles in Pro-war Rhetoric

Decivilizing vehicles are metaphors that describe the enemy as savage and barbaric.

Reduces enemy to brutish caricature that is easy to vility.

Metaphor becomes they are portrayed.



For example, depicting Native Americans as wild and untamed allowed European settlers to consider them a threat to their Western way of life. This threat then required action to defend against a menacing enemy.

Results in the interpretation of the enemy's actions as proof of the enemy's characterization.

Enemy's characterization further taints any outside **sources of information**, discrediting all evidence that supports the enemy.

Positions ally as only source of trustworthy information.

# **Establishing Credibility through Conflict: A Comparison of Anti-Vaccination and Pro-war Rhetoric**

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### Methods

- literalized, allowing for enemy to be treated as

- In 2015, an outbreak of measles at Disneyland led to a renewed discussion about the dangers of vaccine resistance. Several public health officials blamed unvaccinated individuals for weakening herd immunity. These accusations clearly questioned the implications of the anti-vaccination movement for the wider community. Being attacked, anti-vaccination advocates took to their websites to defend their right to refuse.
- Using a sample from seven anti-vaccination websites, this paper qualitatively analyzes the online posts for their use of pro-war rhetoric and decivilizing vehicles.
- Sample: Age of Autism, Green Med Info, Health Impact News, Mercola, National Vaccine Information Center, Natural News, Vaccination Council

### Use of Decivilizing Vehicles to Characterize Big Pharma

Anti-vaccination movement assumed big pharma is greedy and untrustworthy.

- Vaccines require booster shots because it "makes Merck's stockholders really happy" (NVIC).
- Pharma supposedly hid test results that "reveal and expose on a regular basis that vaccines are neither safe nor effective, and never have been" (Age of Autism). Thus, big pharma acted as savage by placing profits over lives.

Based on this characterization, the anti-vaccination movement questioned motives behind vaccine industry.

- "Why have parents been denied choice with regards to... the trivalent vaccine?" (Age of Autism), suggesting they are deliberately withholding a safer alternative.
- "Why America's mainstream media have refused to report on these whistleblowers (can test results.
- "Why is a big deal being made over 51 cases of measles?... [Because it had] more to do with covering up vaccine failures and propping up the dissolving myth of vaccine acquired herd immunity" (NVIC), suggesting they used the Disneyland outbreak as a calculated distraction from vaccine issues.

Thus, big pharma's actions were interpreted as further proof that they could not be trusted.

you say cha-ching from those non-stop pharma ads on TV and in the propaganda papers)" (Age of Autism), suggesting they used money to cover up the stories about hidden vaccine

## Simultaneous Elimination and Establishment of Credibility

Because big pharma was thought to lie and use money, the anti-vaccination movement assumed any source advocating for vaccines had been corrupted. As a result, they extended the characterization of untrustworthiness to all pro-vaccine sources.

- Autism).

# Questions? Email mrs0054@auburn.edu

Any pro-vaccine source is compromised and therefore eliminated as a credible source. • Scientists: Studies "might be [by] scientists who work at or for Merck" (Age of Autism).

• Health organizations: CDC's encouragement was "vaccination agenda" (Green Med Info) and an effort to "propagate vaccination practices" (Age of

• Physicians: Thought to get a payout per vaccine, and doctor visits were described as being "led like a lamb to slaughter... with a fistful of syringes in your nurse's hand" (Age of Autism).

• Government: Because of lobbyists, "getting anything done in Congress that the drug industry doesn't want done is next to impossible" (Mercola). • Media: Due to drug ads, they are the "marketing and cheerleading arm of the vaccine industry and the medical-industrial complex" (Green Med Info).

By grouping all pro-vaccine as untrustworthy, the anti-vaccination movement simultaneously labelled themselves as the credible source precisely because they were not pro-vaccine.

- "Jenny McCarthy and Andrew Wakefield are actually heroic beacons of truth" (Age of Autism).
- "Those who haven't guzzled down the vaccine Kool Aid can see right through the hype" (Green Med Info).

### Implications

• This paper offers a new avenue for examining how credibility is established through dissenting rhetoric in science and health. Naming the enemy in a particular way can provide a path to establishing credibility when none exists.

• This also presents a new challenge for the health community to try and combat misinformation because if, like in this case, scientific evidence is being ignored, then providing more science is not an effective strategy.