BUSTLE

Donald Trump Jr. Ripped Off This Feminist M&M Meme From 2014

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It's not the candidate himself who dominated news headlines on Sept. 20, but rather Donald Trump's progeny. Donald Trump Jr.'s Skittles meme exploded all over the Internet, as people tried to wrap their heads around how it makes any sense. (Don't even try, because it doesn't.) Trump Jr.'s comparison of Syrian refugees to Skittles is instantly mind-boggling, enraging, and distressing. And it's also not new.

The Skittles meme message has been used before on multiple occasions, meaning you can only blame Trump Jr. for its distribution, not its inception. However, even with the benefit of hindsight, Trump Jr. and the campaign did little to improve upon the underlying statistical and rhetorical flaws in the argument, which remain both inaccurate and morally bankrupt.

The first of the meme's many deficiencies is that it seems to be essentially plagiarized (apparently it runs in the family). The tweet bears a striking resemblance to a 2014 graphic that was created for the social media campaign #YesAllWomen and used M&MS to talk about feminism. "You say not all men are monsters? Imagine a bowl of M&Ms, 10% are poisoned. Go ahead, eat a handful. Not all M&Ms are poison. #YesAllWomen."

The slightly more apt comparison (though there's no discussion of where the 10 percent statistic comes from) disappeared into the Internet ether along with the hashtag, until its new iteration in the form of Skittles and refugees appeared last month. Conservative talk radio host and former Illinois congressman Joe Walsh sassily called Trump Jr. out for allegedly stealing his tweet from August and using the exact same wording in the now infamous Skittles meme.

But even if the metaphor was allegedly stolen, that doesn't make it any clearer — it's still a sloppy and insulting rhetorical device that should have never made it into the campaign's message platform. A recent risk analysis published by the Cato Institute shows that the average American's chance of being murdered by a refugee is a sub-atomically minute 1 in 3.64 billion per year. Similarly, according to Mashable's math, the bowl in Trump Jr.'s picture contains approximately 162 Skittles, meaning Trump Jr. estimates a 1.85 percent chance of death by refugee, rather than the actual calculated risk of 0.000000027 percent. That means Trump Jr. exaggerated the risk by 685871 times the actual risk of Americans being murdered by a refugee. So much for statistical accuracy.

The meme also, as many have been quick to demonstrate online, completely ignores the human reality of the Syrian refugee crisis. Syria was once one of the most stable, prosperous, and progressive countries in the Middle East, but political instability instigated by a despotic, nondemocratic leader lead to a civil war that has completely ripped the country in two.

Within the span of only five years, Syrians have seen their peaceful way of life destroyed, their friends and family members killed, and the reputation of their country and their people brutally damaged on the international stage. Syrian refugees have suffered death, destruction, and degradation, and the very last thing they need is an ignorant, privileged American comparing them to poison (and reducing them to Skittles).

Trump's campaign is pushing an agenda of fear and anger armed with inaccuracy and weak rhetoric. Trump doesn't represent the values that the United States stands for, in ideology or practice, and to make up for that, he spreads disinformation and worry to get people to focus on the wrong things. Syrian refugees are not the danger here — it's Trump and the message of his entire campaign.