



QAnon Conspiracy Theorists Target Wayfair In Disinformation Campaign *Published by The Alethea Group*

This report analyzes the amplification of a conspiracy theory about [Wayfair](#), the U.S.-based furniture and home décor company, that went viral after surfacing on the popular sub-Reddit r/Conspiracy in early July 2020. An anonymous QAnon conspiracy theorist falsely claimed that the company operated a vast child trafficking operation in which it shipped and sold children in its industrial cabinets. Disinformation operations are often thought of solely as an issue targeting election season, but the problem is much larger than that. Companies are regular targets of online information campaigns that can have an enormous impact on brand reputation, employee safety, and financial bottom lines.

Key Findings:

- As typical when QAnon theories go viral, the bizarre “evidence” to support the claim on Reddit mounted as the conspiracy spread across social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and 4chan. The theory even made its way to iFunny, a joke image site that attracts QAnon believers and white nationalists. On the site, an anonymous user posted a meme claiming to be from a Wayfair employee, who planned to quit after learning that a so-called platinum customer service team managed orders for children.
- Other social media users claimed the conspiracy was true because typing the SKU product numbers for the cabinets and other Wayfair items into the Russian search engine Yandex would show pictures of children.
- Users on places like 4chan and Twitter attempted to coordinate a campaign to short Wayfair’s stock.
- On Twitter, users posted Google Map images and the address of Wayfair’s office building in Boston. Others posted the LinkedIn profiles of Wayfair employees.
- QAnon supporters targeted the company’s CEO, Niraj Shah, drawing false conclusions from his philanthropic work with nonprofit organizations supporting children. Between July 1 and July 15, Shah was mentioned on Twitter almost 12,000 times, compared to just 126 mentions the entire month of June.
- QAnon pages, groups, forums, and accounts are already expanding their list of commercial sector suspects they believe are involved and have targeted the likes of Amazon, Walmart, Etsy, and Target, among others.

About Alethea Group: *Founded in 2019 to help organizations navigate the digital reality, Alethea Group is a firm that detects and mitigates instances of disinformation to protect each organization's ability to communicate the truth to its stakeholders. Alethea Group's proactive approach provides organizations with actionable information that protects brands, bottom lines, corporate strategy, and democratic institutions from disinformation that could target their ability to make smart decisions. Alethea Group conducts its public interest work with the goal of informing citizens about threats targeting them.*



Timeline: Wayfair Disinformation Campaign Timeline

Links to mentioned tweets are not included as to limit the further spread of false information.

June 2020:

- June 14, 2020: QAnon supporter falsely claims in a tweet that Wayfair is part of a global child trafficking conspiracy
- Tweet is still live today and has 1.5K Retweets and 2.2K likes

July 2020

- Reddit thread surfaces about Wayfair operating a child trafficking operation, citing the original tweet.
- Conspiracy goes viral and spreads widely across social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube, and 4chan.
- The theory even made its way to iFunny, a joke image site that attracts QAnon believers and white nationalists. On the site, an anonymous user posted a meme claiming to be from a Wayfair employee verifying the conspiracy.
 - The post is still live on iFunny
- Other social media users claimed the conspiracy was true because typing the SKU product numbers for the cabinets and other Wayfair items into the Russian search engine Yandex would show pictures of children.
- Between July 9-11, four dedicated threads promoting the Wayfair conspiracy went live on 4chan.
 - These threads have since been removed from 4chan
 - Most popular board was created on July 10 and has 328 replies
- Saturday, July 11 - about 2 days before the conspiracy hit peak virality - users attempted to coordinate a campaign to short company's stock, primarily on Twitter.
 - Conversations also took place on Twitter
- During the week of July 13 (peak of the campaign) users on social media targeted employees and Wayfair's HQ on social media by posting screenshots of their LinkedIn bios.
- QAnon supporters also targeted the company's CEO, Niraj Shah, drawing negative implications from his philanthropic work with nonprofit organizations supporting children and falsely claiming it was evidence of his involvement.
 - Between July 1 and July 15, Shah was mentioned on Twitter almost 12,000 times, compared to just 126 mentions the entire month of June.
- QAnon supporters also began claiming other US-based companies were part of the network, such as Walmart, Amazon, Target, and Etsy.

August 2020



- QAnon supporters are still sharing/posting about Wayfair. These posts still receive significant engagement on social platforms.