Media Observatory

UNESCO CHAIR DCMÉT

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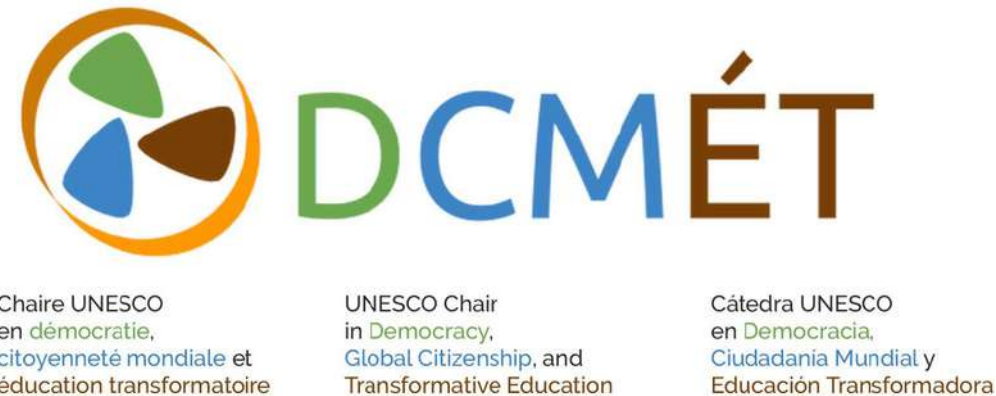
What is the Media Observatory?

The DCMÉT Media Observatory is a part of the *Social Media, Citizen Participation and Education* research project, funded by SSHRC (#435-2017-0745), for which Paul R. Carr is the Principal Investigator and Gina Thésée and Michael Hoechsmann are the Co-Investigators. Michael Hoechsmann led the work on the Observatory. This project has involved several research assistants, who were indispensable in developing, cultivating and analyzing the research. This project has also helped inform, advance and cultivate other parts of the Media, Citizen Participation and Education research, including through publications, organizing symposia, developing civil society activities and undertaking mixed methods research with a range of contexts and samples in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. Please consult the UNESCO Chair DCMÉT website for further information.

What is the UNESCO Chair DCMÉT?

Paul R. Carr and Gina Thésée established the UNESCO Chair DCMÉT with the aim to develop and support research, dialogue, and participatory activities which engage with the intersecting topics of democracy, global citizenship and transformative education.

What is a UNESCO Chair?

A UNESCO Chair involves research, civil society participation, linking up with partners in the Global South, and a direct connection to UNESCO objectives and goals, especially, pertaining to the UNESCO Chair DCMÉT, in relation to human rights, global citizenship, education for sustainable development, peace education and education for all within a critical, engaging and inclusive lens. Working with UNESCO and other UNESCO Chairs is also a unique feature of the work undertaken by a UNESCO Chair.

Chaire UNESCO en démocratie, citoyenneté mondiale et éducation transformatoire

UNESCO Chair in Democracy, Global Citizenship, and Transformative Education

Cátedra UNESCO en Democracia, Ciudadanía Mundial y Educación Transformadora

Dr. Paul R. Carr
Titulaire / Chair / Titular

Dr. Gina Thésée
Cotitulaire / Co-Chair / Cotitular

Why a UNESCO Chair?

The Co-Chair, Gina Thésée, became involved with UNESCO's Teachers Task Force for Education for All in 2012, attending the annual Policy Dialogue Forums, respectively, in Buea, Windhoek, Kinshasa, Rabat, Mexico City and Siem Reap, for the next several years. She served as a Rapporteur as well as a presenter in several of the meetings, and Paul R. Carr served as the Rapporteur general for the Rabat meeting in 2014, during which time we both spent several months in Paris working on UNESCO projects. The work continued in Canada with the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, attending meetings, cultivating relations, and developing a network with the other roughly 25 UNESCO Chairs in Canada, culminating in the proposal for the UNESCO Chair in Democracy, Global Citizenship and Transformative Education.

Our collaboration together (Carr and Thésée) over the past almost twenty years has led us to a number of countries around the world, and we are hopeful that the engaging, dynamic and transformative work that we have seen and experienced in a variety of contexts will spill over to the work of our UNESCO Chair.

Learn more:

Website: www.education4democracy.net

Facebook: @UNESCO.CHAIR.DCMET

YouTube: UNESCO-DCMÉT

Twitter: @PaulRCarr1

MEDIA OBSERVATORY
UNESCO CHAIR DCMÉT

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MEDIA OBSERVATORY

Environmental Scan/Twitter/Hybrid Studies

Capturing an accurate picture of the online democratic discourse of a moment is no small task. In attempting to capture a broad overall picture, for each subject we looked at a selection of popular search results as well linked or hyperlinked sources to investigate a larger interlinked discourse.

Investigations were carried out within popular social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, and YouTube. Certain platforms such as Reddit continually appeared to represent fewer extremist positions and articles than platforms like Facebook and Youtube. Twitter appeared to produce a consistently polarizing tone, perhaps due to a greater incidence of mixing which is not found on either Reddit or Facebook. This may be somewhat the result of structural design, mainly due to the existence of groups, pages, and subreddits which tend to collect people around shared views and thus require less conflicts during flashpoints. Yet, Twitter also seems to be a site where the sharing of breaking information flows via non-traditional channels during these same flashpoint events. All in all, news comments sections (both on their websites and on Facebook) were found to be the most toxic and contested spaces with greater incidences of agitators or "trolls" being readily apparent. This may explain the amount of news outlets who have turned off their comments sections, even on platforms like Youtube.

Yet, given the infamy of News comments sections, we would have expected them to be worse than we found them as there was definite evidence of productive and connecting discourse taking place even in these contested spaces. There incidents in response to "trolls" inciting anger often indicated the longest and most involved conversations but, during such times, a number of counter-agents would be drawn to take part in the conversation. This suggests an attempt to maintain positive and productive conversation in the encounter of hostility and anti-social discourses.

Youtube comments, by and large, contained the least serious comments out of all platforms studied. This could differ based on the importance of the video in question. Comments on this site often take the shape of jokes or pop-culture references. There also seemed to be fewer discussions taking place in separate threads. This might be due to the medium being primarily visual and perhaps those who engage in comments sections, could represent a niche subset.

One thing we did notice when tracking a story across time, was how trends in the discourse could take both surprising and predictable courses as they travelled and were filtered by different informational mediums. For example, news stories reporting on the "Defund the Police" movement led to a general sense of confusion around the purposes of the movement. In response to this, the Canadian mainstream news discourse, made attempts to clarify the purpose (suggesting modes of defunding and restructuring social services rather than police). In educative media spaces there was represented less extreme polarization around the issue. Due to a lack of educative media content in the United States, where mainstream media tended to obfuscate and share distorted information, there were more distinct divisions between "sides". Comments in the data relating to confusion around the term "defund" and its larger implications seemed to correlate with larger counter reactions found in the United States discourse.

"SOCIAL MEDIA SITES, DUE TO THE STRUCTURAL NATURE AS WELL AS THE QUALITY OF THEIR MODERATION CREATE A SORT OF RHETORICAL STYLE THAT IS LARGELY OBSERVABLE ON EACH SITE."
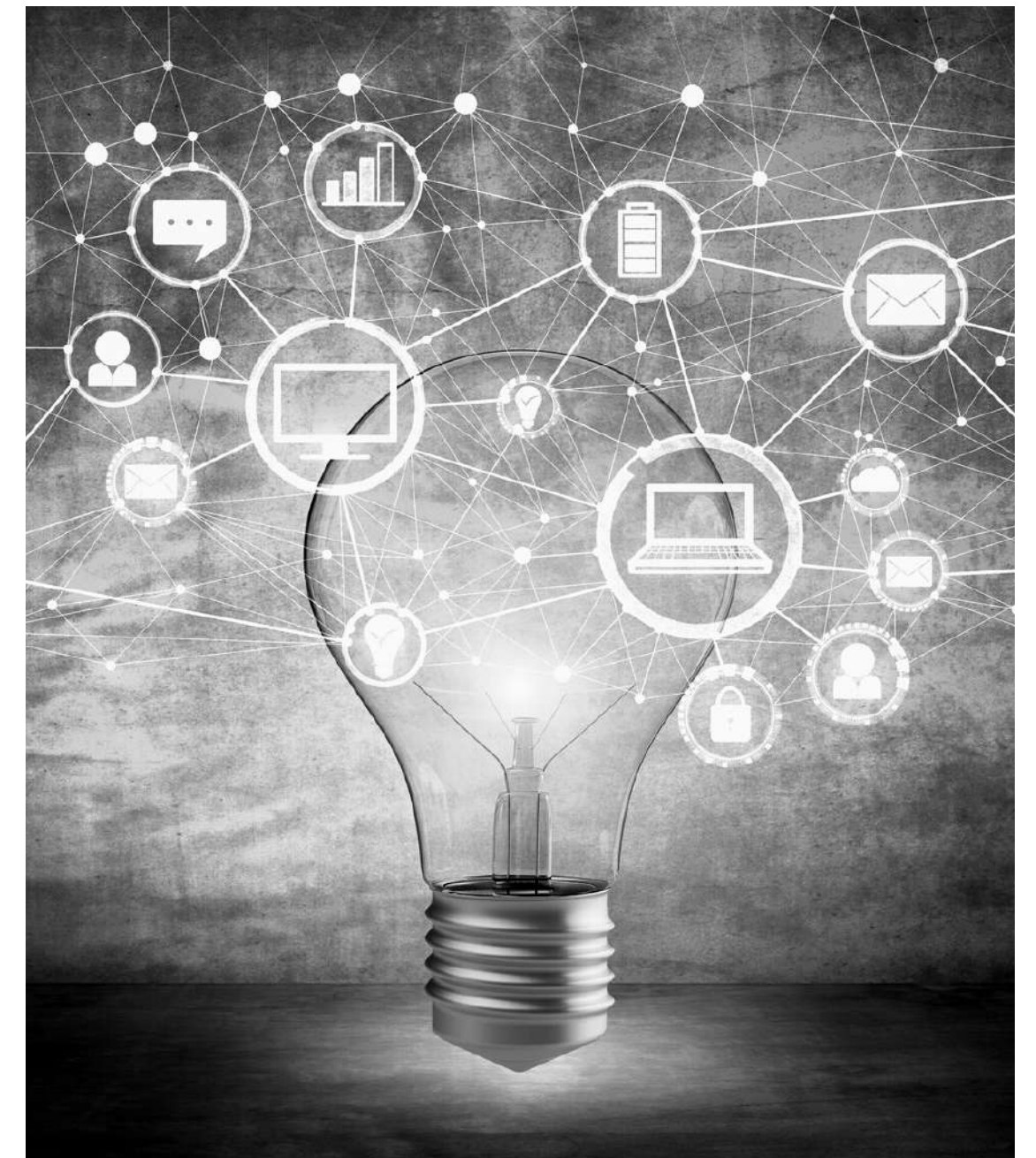
INTRODUCTION

Once we began tracking issues such as the spread of conspiracy theory rhetoric, it became increasingly clear that misinformation relied on cascades of networked information sharing. One specific incidence of a conspiracy theory-that the online furniture retailer Wayfair was involved in child sex trafficking via cabinetry-linked back to a Canadian conspiracy theory YouTube content creator, who was also found to be involved in spreading anti-mask and lockdown content, which appeared prominently in materials surrounding the mobilization of anti-mask, anti-mandate protests in Canada.

There is a bleed-over effect between American and Canadian conspiratorial information sharing channels, which are involved in building upon a network which can then be used to share theories with one another. These networked cluster regard each other as "trusted" sources and recommend new nodes as thus, acclaim begins to be spread, creating new potent sources for the generation and spread of misinformation. Any node along the chain may "discover" new information which comes from "research" via the internet and is thus accessible to any lay person (an is the case with the Wayfair conspiracy which generated attention for a small YouTube channel creator). In many of these cases, there are threads of truth embedded within more extreme and untethered theories. Uprooting theories requires sorting good from ill along networked connections of sharing.

Social media sites, due to the structural nature as well as the quality of their moderation result in a sort of rhetorical style. Sites may have reputations for certain kinds of discourse (i.e. Tumblr in its prime was largely regarded as an enclave for young liberal discourse, 8-chan for edgy trolls and memelords, etc.). Thus, media located via different channels will have an influence on Democratic conversation and participation in different ways.

Reddit seems to be a place where people can engage in long-form (for the internet) conversations in the comments sections, but tends to skew towards the centrist-left (with a few examples of closed extreme right enclaves) and is often criticized on the site itself as having an orthodoxy in opinions and reactions. In democratic discourse, Twitter seems to be a space where there is a speaking to power, a sharing of immediate information on flashpoint events and a potentially potent site for reactions based on incomplete or false information. Facebook seems more stratified and difficult to study due to the structure of privacy on the medium, which is in stark contrast to more open usage on Twitter and Reddit (the latter of which is still largely anonymous). This may mean that on Facebook, conversations are limited to one's particular networks and thus discourse would vary widely depending on your online community.

As the case studies moved forward, it became clear that there were stratifications within information sharing channels encapsulated within a "culture war" trope. This was more largely representative of US based discourse but was also reflected in Canadian channels, which take up much of the same lines, even potentially showing patriotism for US candidates, thus showing a blurring of lines between national identities.

METHODOLOGY

Due to the mercurial nature of online discourse, we used this methodology as a general guideline but would break with the structure in order to try to balance a consistent methodology with the needs of the moment. Some news sources would are more prevalent than others dependent on the issue. For each issue, the sites that best represented a conversation became the focus of study.

A series of mini case studies were performed involving 1-2 week scans of traditional and social media based in a local, national, or international context around a particular new event/happening. Each mini case study collects data from:

1. Two or more mainstream digital news sources, (potentially one tabloid-style and one broadsheet but in the case of ongoing news happenings, at times media was better represented by less traditional, yet still mainstream, online sources and thus would involve traditional vs. non- traditional mainstream news sources);

2. The comments sections of news sources and popular social media posts;

3. Social media streams that follow the given media story (for example, Twitter hashtags); and

4. NGO or third sector Web sources (non-mainstream: blogs, Web sites, social media feeds, etc.) that focus on the given story.

These mini case studies around the world will provide us with a comparative data-set to better map how social media is impacting citizen participation and democracy in different linguistic, cultural and political contexts. We will consider several factors, including the scope and breadth of interaction, participation and engagement, the types of media produced, shared and discussed, and the quantity of media being circulated, commented on and affecting other users.

For Twitter exclusive studies, data was collected over a period of 1 – 3 weeks in which there were three searches performed each time 1) tweets from an account 2) tweets @ing an account 3) tweets #ing an account. A word frequency search was then performed and in some cases a text search was performed that generated a word tree.
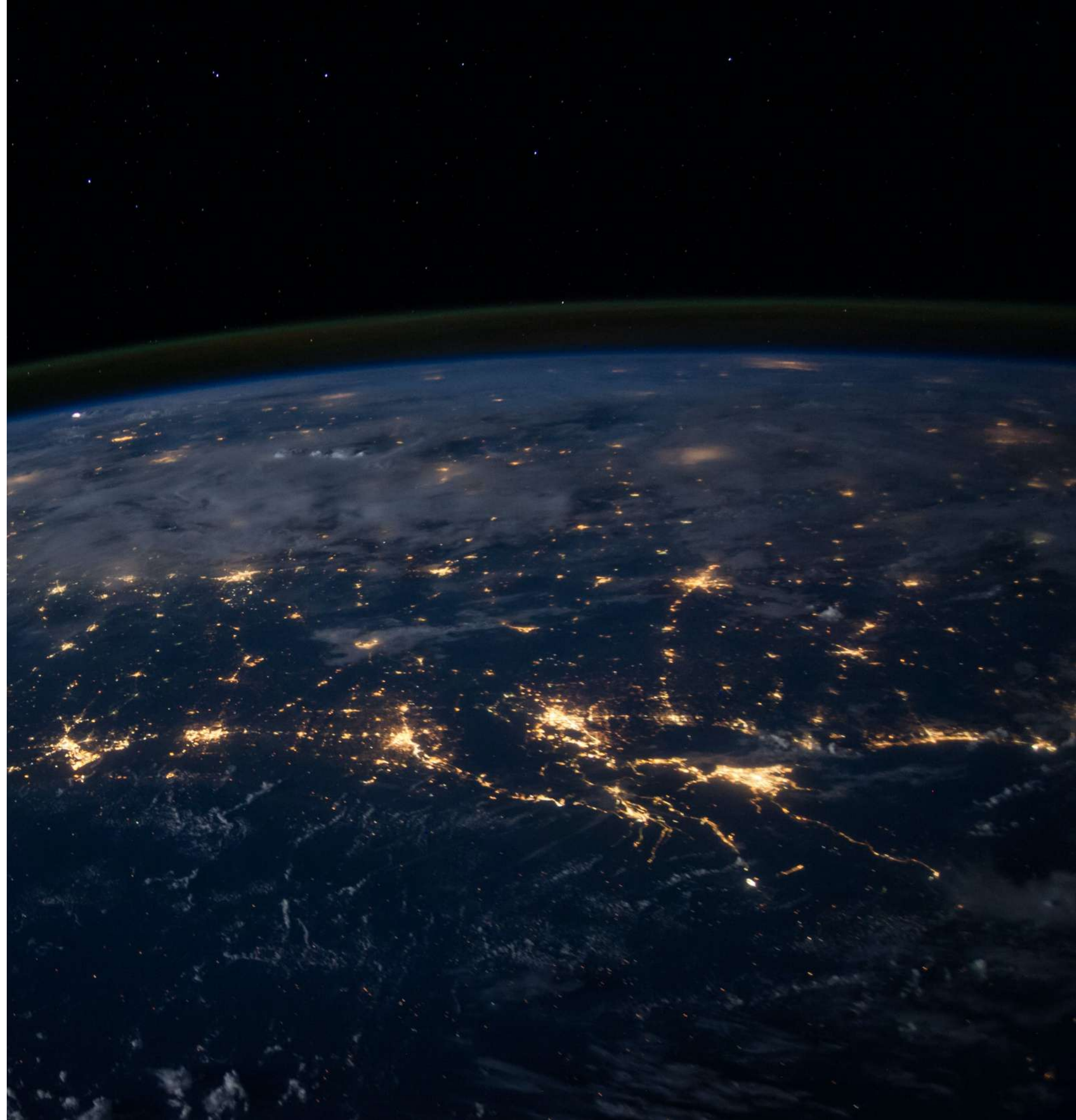
DEMOCRATIC DISCOURSE
ON SOCIAL MEDIA

FACEBOOK

More extreme positions expressed
More stratified due to structure of privacy
Communicate via enclosed groups &
Curated friends lists

THE TWITTERVERSE SEEMS TO FOCUS ON THE SHARING OF PHONE-BASED FOOTAGE, WHILE FACEBOOK AND REDDIT FOCUS ON THE SHARING OF ARTICLES WHICH ARE THEN COMMENTED ON.

TWITTER

Speaking to power
Sharing info on breaking events
Quick nature breeds misinformation
Curated friends/groups + trending posts

ON TWITTER, THE QUICK SHARING OF NEW DETAILS CAN SPREAD WITHIN NETWORKS.

Less mixing

[The] existence of groups, pages, and subreddits... tend to collect people around shared views" p. 1

REDDIT

Skews left
Criticized for having orthodoxy
Long-form conversation & posts
Extremist positions captured in closed groups
User base verbally critical of censorship

PLATFORMS SUCH AS REDDIT CONTINUALLY REPRESENT FEWER EXTREMIST POSITIONS ON THE FEED.

YOUTUBE

Contained least serious comment battles
More jokes, pop culture references
Visual heavy, less comments

IN COMMENTARY, AGENTS INCITING ANGER WERE ENGAGED VIA COUNTER-AGENTS TAKING PART IN THE CONVERSATION.

NEWSPAPER COMMENTS SECTION

Often most toxic and contested
Trolls and agitators engage here

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Internet Censorship

ENVIRONMENTAL CLUSTER SCAN

Methodology

The methodology for this case study involved a cluster scan (a number of related issues each consisting of a mini-study) of relevant cases under an umbrella of internet censorship. All cases chosen were current or had happened in the recent past at the time of the scan. Those investigated as part of the recent past were often mentioned in relation to current cases and were thus highly relevant and provided the criteria for investigation-i(.e. the case of David Icke is often cited).

Also relevant at this time were incidents where a person had been removed from social media, igniting tensions around censorship. These incidents were painted by the mainstream media as spreading false information around the Covid-19 pandemic (i.e. the White Coat Summit). In each instance, a spider-web or networked analysis was performed, looking into articles and cases mentioned in one instance, which created links to another instance and began to compile an image of networked ideologies and cases.

Findings

In the case of internet censorship, many if not most of the subjects studied had been censored due to spreading misinformation over the Covid-19 pandemic. Actions taken by social media companies exacerbated tensions and perhaps even paranoia over the malicious intent of governments and capital to suppress free thought and to perhaps take advantage of citizens for economic reasons or reasons of political corruption. People removed from mainstream platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, subject to some moderation, continue on in other areas of the internet where moderation is enforced less, or in some cases, not at all (i.e. 4chan, personal websites, Gaia, etc.). In these less moderated spaces, theories coalesce without oversight, mixing with more virulent and niche sentiments such as overtly racist or anti-Semitic rhetoric.

A challenge is being raised for social media platforms and also web hosting companies, to be held accountable for media that they publish. This, in turn, has sprouted potential issues around the clandestine decisions of media companies as to how they police speech on their platforms. There is a question of whether or not moderation on these platforms actually counts as censorship due to the nature of social media sites as private entities. This also begs the question of whether social media sites are public forums for democratic discourse and if there should be rules governing the moderation of speech on these platforms. In the discourse, there was encountered discussion of algorithmic moderation specifically targeting the resistance of those in Palestine, for example, or of women of colour having their portraits censored more than those of white women.

Issues of accountability and the spread of disinformation are being balanced between the harm of extremism and the protections of free speech. There is a sense of trying to resist adding fodder to conspiratorially minded individuals sense of persecution at the hands of the powers-that-be, which seems to add legitimacy to their narratives. Yet, the spread of certain conspiracy theories of late also seems to suggest that doing nothing to counter them is also not the answer due to the mainstreaming of fringe conspiracies (e.g. The Plandemic documentary going recently viral and abounding with misconceptions about the virus).

"A CHALLENGE IS BEING RAISED FOR SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AND ALSO WEB HOSTING COMPANIES, TO BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR MEDIA THAT THEY PUBLISH."

CASE STUDIES OVERVIEW

	CANADIAN	AMERICAN	INTERNATIONAL

Twitter (17 case studies)

CANADIAN

PUBLIC FIGURES
JUSTIN TRUDEAU
ANDREW SCHEER
JAHMEET SINGH
ELIZABETH MAY
DOUG FORD/FORD NATION

POLICE
RCMP
TORONTO POLICE

GROUPS
CANADA PROUD

AMERICAN

PUBLIC FIGURES
GEORGE FLOYD
KYLE RITTENHOUSE
MICHAEL REINOEHL
GRETCHEN WHITMER

POLICE
NYPD

POLITICAL ISSUE
QANON
ANTIFA

INTERNATIONAL

NGO
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
BILL AND MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

Environmental Scan (13 case studies)

CANADIAN

PUBLIC FIGURES

LETITIA MONTANA
AMAZING POLLY
CHRIS SKY

AMERICAN

POLITICAL ISSUES

REOPENING SCHOOLS
COVID/LOCKDOWN PROTESTS
WHITE COAT SUMMIT
DENVER SHOOTING
ELECTION/VOTER FRAUD
PROJECT BIG PICTURE

INTERNATIONAL

POLITICAL ISSUE
DEFUND THE POLICE
INTERNET CENSORSHIP
QANON INFLUENCER PIPELINE
THE GREAT RESET

Hybrid (16 case studies)

CANADIAN

POLITICAL ISSUES
REOPENING SCHOOLS
WHITE SHIRT MOVEMENT
HYDROXYCHLOROQUINE
LOBSTER WAR
QANON INTSAGRAM INFLUENCERS
ONTARIO LOCKDOWN
ADAMSON BBQ

GROUPS
HUGS NOT MASKS
MOTHERS AGAINST DISTANCING WHITE SHIRT MOVEMENT
THE LINE CANADA

AMERICAN

PUBLIC FIGURES
DR. SHERRI TENPENNY
DEL BIGTREE
JACOB BLAKE
ANTIFA
BREONNA TAYLOR

The coming of the COVID-19 pandemic during a particular connected time in the age of Web 2.0, brought about the creation of a new media ecosystem. This new ecosystem, with greater democratic access to the tools to produce media meant that the consequent control and centralization of media messaging became exceedingly diffuse. This has led to what some have labelled an "infodemic" which refers to the mass proliferation of misinformation during a time when public consensus is exceedingly necessary in order to prevent a catastrophic global health event. Despite attempts to limit the dissemination of information, to provide fact-checking documents and other moves, "alternative facts" continue to thrive in an atmosphere where public trust in authority is low and where so-called authorities stoke this distrust for their own ends. Valid commentary on the effects of governmental measures thus become lost in a wash of bad science and suspect public commentary.

THE COMING OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC DURING A PARTICULAR CONNECTED TIME IN THE AGE OF WEB 2.0, BROUGHT ABOUT THE CREATION OF A NEW MEDIA ECOSYSTEM.

April 2020 - January 2021: What happened
• In January, 2020 reports of the Corona-virus emerge, quickly developing into a global pandemic
• Emerging conditions such as lockdowns and other restrictions create a new environment for media consumption due to increased use (Wold, 2020) and dissemination of information via social media creates a new worldwide media ecosystem (Tsao, Chen, Tisseverasinghe, Yang, Li, & Butt, 2021).
• Large scale astroturfing campaigns behind the "Re-Open" protests is waged across US, with links to far-right political parties (Stanley-Becker, & Romm, 2020; Graves, 2020; Vogel, Rutenberg, & Kerer, 2020) as well as opportunistic business interests (Binder, 2020).
• "American Patriot Rally" Protesters with rifles storm the statehouse in April (Conley, 2020)
• Impact on school closures on parents complicates issues between protecting children & teachers and enabling parents to attend to their work (Anderson, 2020).
• Ontario faces waves of lockdowns and attempts to impacting

on individuals and businesses, right-leaning media complain about divides between white-collar workers able to work from home and blue-collar work that puts workers in harm's way (Lilley, 2020).
• In November, Adamson BBQ protest in Toronto, ON creates a media frenzy, staying open for indoor dining in opposition to provincial shutdown orders, garnishing support in the form of a GoFundMe Campaign with over $300,000 in funds (McNamar, 2020).

Disinformation methods
• Astroturfing efforts take the form of buying and supplying infrastructure via websites (Re-Open Domains, 2020), legal support (Graves, 2020), and media/informational support (Vogel, Rutenberg, & Kerer, 2020).
• Right-Wing media & pundits balk against social-media crackdown on misinformation (Hamilton, 2020), claim left-wing bias in Silicon Valley (Harrington, 2020).
• Misinformation campaigns use widely recognizable formats (e.g. Plandemic's expose documentary style), taking advantage of small community and family networks (Frenkel, Decker, & Alba, 2020; Naughton, 2020)
• Media channels heavily use perceptions of authority to buttress claims (e.g. Dr. Zev Zelenko and Hydroxychloroquine furor; White Coat Summit, Judy Mikovits, etc.)
• Peddlers of "alternative" perspectives navigate around bans (Baram, 2020), coopting popular hashtags (Roose, 2020) and methods such as the use of images vs. text in order to avoid algorithm detection (Grey Ellis, 2020)

Response
• Organizations seek to provide "fact-checking" documents against the spread of popular misinformation pieces like Plandemic (Varshavki, 2020; Einserink & Cohen, 2020; Cook, Van Der Linden, Lewandowsky, & Ecker, 2020)
• Social Media sites crack down on conspiracy spreading accounts (Cohen, 2020; Dickson, 2020)
• Local governments impose fines and penalties against those openly flouting lockdown rules (Rocca, 2020)
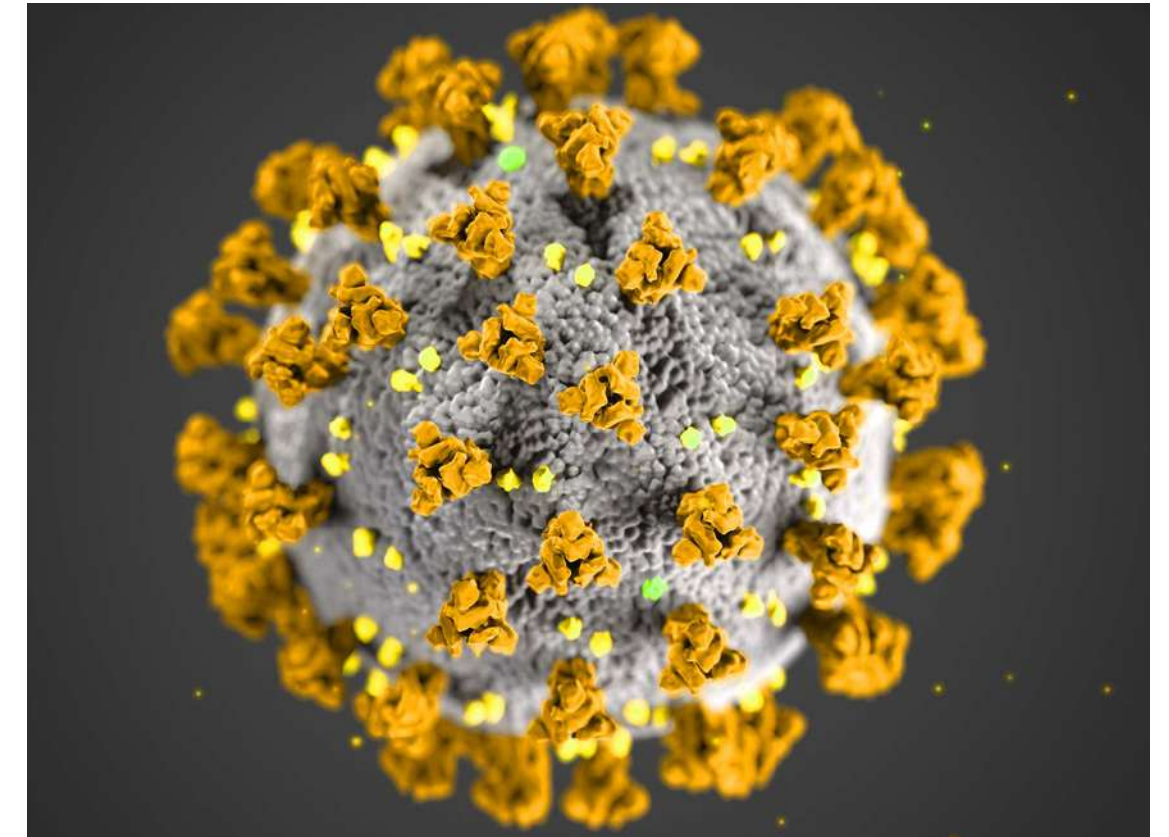
#COVID-19

Who Benefits
• Bad faith actors acting on the behalf of corrupt political parties or according to selfish self-interests are able to manipulate the public through the use of disinformation
• Foreign governments who might wish to destabilize Western democracies (Foer, 2020; Romano, 2018)
• Individuals wishing to raise their personal profile through their ability to disseminate "special" information that discredits establishment lines

Case Study Summary

Adamson BBQ Protest (3 months: November 2020 – January 2021):
• Individuals/Groups: Adam Skelly, Chris Sky, Henry Hildebrandt/Church of God.
• Events/Issues: COVID Disinformation, Small Business vs. Big Box Stores.

Astroturfing Cluster Study (1 month: April, 2020):
• Individuals/Groups: Sara Walton Brady, The Dorr Brothers, Michael Murphy, Rosanne Ponkowski/Marian Sheridan, Amon Bundy, Michigan United for Liberty, Mark Mekler & Noah Wall/The Tea Party, William P. Barr, The Koch Brothers, Robert Mercer/Convention of States, Michael & Friedrich Best/Reopen NC, Free North Patriots, Proud Boys, QAnon.
• Events/Issues: Boogaloo/Extremist Groups taking advantage of chaos

Media Censorship Cluster Study (2 Weeks: August 2020)
• Individuals/Groups: Del Bigtree, David Icke, Alex Jones, Judy Mikovits/Plandemic, QANON, Dr.Zev Zelenko /Hydroxychloroquine
• Events/Issues: The White Coat Summit, Racism in Algorythms, Right-Wing Censorship, Open Letter on Cancel Culture.
School Closure Study (2 weeks: July 2020):
• Individuals/Groups: Ontario Ministry of Education, Doug Ford, Sick Kids Hospital
• Events/Issues: Parents as Caregivers & Employees, Community Care vs. Parental Needs

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"School reopening" Canadian Discourse

Methodology

An environmental scan was conducted over the course of three dates, namely, July 16, 22, and 29. During this scan, we focused on a linear scan of a particular media: Google Search, Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, and Youtube. We performed the search "school reopening Ontario". we then surveyed top hits in terms of 1) news stories and 2) public comments. We captured and analysed comments if there were any. At the end of each day's scan, we would record my observations in a media journal, which would make my impressions more concrete and accessible at a later date.

Findings

Overall, the conversation about schools reopening in Ontario has several streams. There is a great deal of concern about the logistics, especially as related to parents juggling responsibilities with the requirement to return to work as well as a great deal of critiques relating to the Ford Government's plans for reopening schools. Commenters were able to point out and mirror issues with the government plan for bubbles. They easily drew lines of contact between children and daycare, extended family, etc.

There is a great deal of concern for obvious drawbacks of the governmental plan, namely exposure of teachers, bus-drivers, and the families of students. On one side of the political divide, the issue seems to bring up personal criticisms of both the Premiere and the education minister. On the other side of the divide, teachers themselves, the liberal establishment and school boards become targets for criticism.

All in all, there was an overarching tone of frustration for all sides attempting to come to a resolution of the issue that was being put on hold until more information was available. Most commenters seemed to agree on the importance of schools, with some outliers. Many were less favourable to teaching as a profession and often when issues were brought up around teacher safety, there were comments related to their salaries and other non-related issues.

"School reopening" American Discourse

Methodology

An environmental scan was conducted over the course of three dates, namely, July 20, 21, and 29. During this scan, we focused on a linear scan of a particular media, i.e. Facebook, Twitter, etc. in which we would do a search relating to the issue of schools reopening. We would survey top hits in terms of news stories and public comments and would also capture and analyse comments if there were any. Overall, we surveyed a Google Search, Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, and Youtube. At the end of each day's scan, we would record my observations in a media journal document, which would make my impressions more concrete and accessible at a later date.

Findings

Overall, discourse in the United States appeared much more likely than in Canada to discuss the issues of school reopening as a political issue alone without referencing mitigating circumstances. As in Canadian discourse, there were moments where parents would share their frustration over their situation as well as frustration at the actions of the government as a whole.

Rhetoric tended to diverge more severely in the US depending on the outlet. In some, there would be only negative, violent rhetoric about Democratic officials and in others, there would be intense sentiment against Republicans. There were fewer environments with only negativity towards Republicans present, though there were many instances of frustration with the President as an individual.

The focus on issues brought up US-centric topics such as the incidence of poverty and reliance on school lunches being suspended during school closures. There was also greater frustration around parents needing to return to work with few solutions to childcare without schools. Unlike in Canada, there were fewer instances of imagining other solutions to the topic than the reopening of schools, perhaps due to an understanding that such solutions would not be politically viable.

In one instance when a public official was a woman, there was a great deal of violent misogyny represented in the comments section towards her, which was not a factor in the Canadian scan, though this might have been due to a lack of a proper flashpoint for this issue.

NGOs

WHO/GATES FOUNDATION

      Organizations engaged at the international level, especially in relation to the pandemic, were much more likely to show a stark bifurcation between discourse relating with and about each organization. There was a much higher prevalence of conspiracy theory discourse in each case and especially within the # dataset. Examination of data in these cases was used to suggest modes of inquiry in relation to environmental scans that related to specific forms of conspiracy theorization (i.e. QAnon & Bill Gates).

      In both cases, the fundamental values expressed by each NGO were related to human rights, international collaboration, and science/government-based interventions. Those who agreed with and engaged in discourse with each group, tended to express similar sentiments which perhaps reflect a correlation in values. The very values that were espoused also served to foment suspicion around group due to the sheer scope and power wielded by each. Though there were very valid critiques leveled against them, general discourse seemed to revolve around the object of critique but attributed very different reasons as justification for disagreement, which suggests a general breakdown in communication between critics of international organizations and those who also notice areas to critique but perhaps either 1) do not trust any "mainstream" sources 2) do not have the resources to research critical discourse.

"IN BOTH CASES, THE FUNDAMENTAL VALUES EXPRESSED BY EACH NGO WERE RELATED TO HUMAN RIGHTS, INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION, AND SCIENCE/GOVERNMENT-BASED INTERVENTIONS."

Project Big Picture

Searches were performed for the terms Project Big Picture and several major news articles were chosen across a spectrum of British and International media as well as popular Reddit, Twitter, and Youtube posts. Comments sections were then captured where available and commentary summarized.

Findings

Project Big Picture is a proposal that would have been one of the most radical changes to English football since the creation of the Premier League (from the First Division) in 1992. Although there have been financial issues for years, the pandemic has hastened the need to discuss ways to better distribute wealth throughout English football to ensure the survival of clubs throughout all of the leagues. This proposal was a supposed idea that the owners of Manchester United and Liverpool, two of the biggest clubs in English football history, had been discussing for an extended period of time in private. It only came to light when the proposal was leaked to the press and the Telegraph made this information public through exposure in the media.

Although there are many aspects of Project Big Picture that may benefit lower league clubs, the main aspect of this proposal that is creating conflict is the new voting rights and power that would be placed in the hands of the big 6 clubs in England. The majority of the public response to Project Big Picture has been negative. Although some people can see the benefits in some aspects of the proposal, there seems to be near-unanimous agreement that this would further imbalance English football and provide too much power in the hands of the super-rich clubs who are more focused on business than football.

With football having its origins as a working-class game, to becoming one of the most lucrative sports in terms of revenue potential, there seems to be a disconnect between club ownership and the supporters. Some of the words used to describe this proposal in the comments section of each medium include: greed, power, money, cartel, capitalism, corporation, American businessmen, foreigners, disgrace, authoritarianism, crisis, outrage. The manner in which people have been commenting shows that there is a feeling of a potential hegemonic struggle permeating football and supporters have gone as far as suggesting boycotting their own football clubs or the TV stations in order to support lower league football directly. One article even discusses how large actors within football and society are trying to create an independent body to "save" football.

It is clear that Project Big Picture has started a public conversation and it remains to be seen whether the new transparency of this idea will help English football or will make it easier for the richest clubs to eventually cement their ideas and change football permanently.

During a time of extreme social and political instability, outrage over police brutality in the case of George Floyd boils over, leading to protests across the US and eventually, the world. Concomitant with the COVID-19 pandemic and right-wing protest movements against lockdown measures, masks, and more, the BLM movement still managed to capture the public imagination, creating real social change and raising awareness of the plight that People of Colour face in the US and elsewhere. Disinformation and discrediting campaigns are waged against the cause in popular news media, namely, linking BLM and Antifa to left-wing plots to destabilize governments and to create property damage through rioting. Scaremongering around the goals of BLM attempt to turn public sentiment against the movement, politicising it as a left/right issue, rather than an issue affecting all human beings, across the spectrum.

Key Moments
• BLM protests erupt in America and around the world, precipitated by the killing of George Floyd by law enforcement. During ongoing protests, Jacob Blake is shot by police seven times in the back, this combined with ongoing proceedings in the death of Breonna Taylor stoke tensions.
• Louisiana protesters are subjected to curfews/arrests, resulting in violence after protesters shelter at a local church after curfew (Lovan, 2020).
• Federal police sent into places like Portland (Koin 6 News Staff, 2020)
• The National Guard is called in to control protests in Kenosha after Blake shooting (Peiser, Berman, Guardino, Firozi, Paulina, & Witte, 2020)
• Protesters report being pulled into unmarked vans by Federal Officers (Levinson, Wilson, Doubek, & Nuyen, 2020)
 Kyle Rittenhouse, a 17-year-old with a semi-automatic rifle shoots two protesters while patrolling with militia members (Noor, 2020)
• Officer charged with "wanton endangerment" in the Breonna Taylor case, due only to shooting into neighbouring apartments and not for Breonna's death (Oppel Jr., Taylor, & Bogel-Burroughs, 2020).
Patriot caravan's drive through city centres, near to BLM protests, Aaron J. Danielson from Patriot Prayer shot during one of these incidents (Holocombe, 2020).
• Michael Reinoehl is investigated for the shooting of Danielson, in Portland and dies in a shootout with FBI officials within the week, claims to have been offering security for BLM protesters (Golden, Blaker, & Goldman).
• Toronto council votes against defunding the police (Power, 2020) while cities like Seattle and Minneapolis vote to cut funding (Talcott, 2020; Bernstein, 2020)
• Armed Militias begin to roam the streets in cities such as Minneapolis (Bernstein, 2020)
• Counter rallies, such as the "Patriot Rally" are organized near BLM events, leading to tensions and violence such as the shooting of Lee Keltner (Schmelzer, 2020)
• Violence during BLM protests is found most often to be perpetrated against BLM protesters, rather than counter-protesters or "patriots" (Owen, 2020)
• Officers in George Floyd case charged, racist monuments taken down, and social pressure leads to greater support in the movement (Somvichian-Clausen, 2020)

The Conflict
• BLM participates in larger moves to remake the world into a more equitable and sustainable place (Akbar, 2020), demanding acknowledgement and justice for victims of police brutality (e.g. George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Jacob Blake, and countless others)
• Jon Mattingly, the officer responsible for the death of Breonna Taylor in an interview, blames race tensions on "trouble makers" claims that police do not racially profile. He says he has "feelings" about who is a criminal and who is not. His message to the mother of Breonna Taylor "police reform is not going to bring her back" (Good Morning America, 2020).

#BlackLivesMatter

Disinformation Methods
• Persistent attempts to unearth backgrounds of the victims of police shootings as "criminal" (Stickings, 2020; MacGuill, 2020), promotes an implicit meaning that they were deserving of what happened to them
• Consistent comparisons of rioting and property damage with the loss of human life levelled against protesters in attempts to discredit movement.
• Spreading paranoia about "Antifa Caravans" (Howell, 2020) covers actual incidence of Patriot caravans driving through BLM protests and stoke incidents of racist violence (Associated Press, 2020).
• BLM and Antifa are linked in a conspiratorial fashion by right-wing actors, to point to BLM protests and acts of violence as part of a coordinated plot to cause chaos (Suerth, 2020).
• Andy Ngo, a right-wing journalist is attacked at a protest, his publicizing of the incident spurs discourse over who is the "real" threat, right of left wing protests (Beauchamp, 2019).
• Threats of violence from Antifa justify and underline resistance to BLM by those who believe in the smear campaign.
• Incidents of violence and rioting at protests become woven into a narrative to discredit progressive motivations.
• Identity Evropa accounts spread violent rhetoric on behalf of Antifa (Jones, 2020).
• Opposition twists Defund the Police messaging to scaremonger (Parker, 2020), for example, stating that police might not respond to 911 calls.
• Right-wing media elevate incidents such as the shooting perpetrated by Kyle Rittenhouse as a defence of so-called "freedom," idolizing Rittenhouse (Fitz-Gibbon, 2020; Ormiston, 2020)

RESPONSE
• Media attempts to educate public about the "Defund the Police" Movement, giving broader context and background of aims (Boynton, 2020; Dawson, 2020)
• Attempts are made to make a fuller picture by quantifying all incidents of violence in order to tell a more accurate story (Dettmer, 2020)

• Reuters poll finds 39% for and 56% against defund movement, while 76% support redistribution: mental heath, homelessness, community service, training (Boynton, 2020).
• Center for Strategic and International Studies finds that the majority of domestic terrorism is perpetrated by right-wing terrorists (57% - white supremacists, anti-government extremists, and involuntary celibates). Left-wing extremists perpetrate 25%, religious extremists 15%, ethno nationalists 3%, misc 0.7%. To date Right wing extremists have caused 335 fatalities, left-wing 22, and ethno-nationalists 5 (Jones, 2020).

Who Benefits from BLM
• Long beleaguered People of Colour stand to benefit from moves away from police enforcement, towards more community rooted responses to social issues, perhaps being able to take solace when the state finally holds those responsible who are perpetrating racist violence (Somvichian-Clausen, 2020).

Who Benefits from Suppressing BLM
• Establishment lines, including those in support of "Blue Lives Matter," pro-policing arguments, pro-gun advocates, right-wing politicians, and white supremacists (which may overlap any of

the other categories) seem to be the primary and most obvious sources of disinformation about BLM and are also, incidentally those who stand to benefit from downplaying their pleas.
• Politicians and groups may take advantage of those suffering from confusion and anxiety around the social disruption to funnel them into membership in their causes whether it be pro-social causes such as BLM or those of white supremacist groups and other right-wing and/or extremist political groups (i.e. guns rights advocates, pro-police groups, etc.).

Case Study Summary

George Floyd Case Study (1 month: May – June, 2020):
• Individuals/Groups: Tom Cotton, Antifa "violence"
• Events/Issues: White Supremacy/Telegram

Defund the Police Case Study (3 weeks: July, 2020):
• Individuals/Groups: Toronto City Council, Seattle City Council, Minneapolis City Council, Donald Trump Jr., Spike Lee, Black Lives Matter Canada, Joe Biden,
• Events/Issues: Canadian Protests, Portland Protests

Jacob Blake Case Study: 2 weeks, August, 2020):
• Individuals/Groups: Kyle Rittenhouse
• Events/Issues: Smearing of victims of police violence

ANTIFA (1 Month – September (ber 2020):
• Individuals/Groups: Richard Spencer, Joe Biden/Antifa, Aaron J. Danelson/Patriot Prayer, Michael Reinoehl (Portland Shooting),
• Events/Issues: Charlottesville Protest, State Monopoly on Violence, Families targeted on camping trips (Montana & (Forks Washington), Antifa as terrorists, Antifa Caravan.

Breonna Taylor Case Study (1 month: September – October, 2020):
• Individuals/Groups: Officer Jon Mattingly
• Events/Issues: Vancouver Protests, Louisiana Protest/ Violence

Denver Shooting Case Study (2 weeks: October, 2020):
• Individuals/Groups: Mathew Robert Dolloff, Lee Keltner, Tig Tiegan/United American Defence Force

#BlackLivesMatter

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"Defund the Police"

Methodology

A series of searches were performed over the course of two weeks: July 13, 14, 15, and 29. The search was performed on Google, Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, and Youtube. The subsequent comments sections were captured and analyzed for sentiment. After each day's survey, impressions were captured via a Media Journal in order to more easily access overall impressions at a later date.

"Evidence of guilt of a crime, even a minor crime, seems to take the steam out of an argument and commenters begin to dismiss the validity of protesting the taking of a life under these circumstances."

Findings

The conversation about the abolition or "defund the police" movement seems to be a fight for education amidst misunderstanding and flaring emotional breakouts. Incidents of police violence can lead to interpersonal violence, anger, and rhetoric against the police. This may then incite further suspicion from those who fail to understand the tensions that are at play and can result in counter movements to support police and perhaps to start such initiatives as armed Neighbour Watch groups.

Certain right-wing actors who position themselves against the movement use videos of black violence, which seem to incite feelings of dismay, distress, cynicism, and calls for greater police presence. BLM allies are quick to post videos and first-hand witness statements of violence but there doesn't seem to be an environment where these same posters may discuss the nuance in the issues and there is a push from commenters to call into question the validity of video evidence as well as a failure to understand that even if guilty of crimes, black people should not be executed by police. Evidence of guilt of a crime, even a minor crime, seems to take the steam out of an argument and commenters begin to dismiss the validity of protesting the taking of a life under these circumstances.

Many of the bi-partisan discussions of the issue seem to express incredulity at the possibility of a society without police while protesters are attempting to stretch the imaginary to encompass the possibility. There is at least one article addressing this directly. Many mainstream sources initially take the place as educators, attempting to understand the underlying message of the movement and tend to focus on moderate voices, calling for the reallocation of resources rather than delving into more inflammatory or radical calls to actually abolish police. While the BLM Canada page explicitly states that their approach would be to move towards abolition of police and more over time and there are commenters on Twitter who are expressing dismay at the watering down of the movement to become mere symbolic cuts in funding rather than in outright abolition.

The Twitterverse seems to focus on the sharing of phone-based footage, while facebook and reddit focus on the sharing of articles which are then commented on. Most conversations on both Facebook and Reddit occur in value bubbles in which commenters mostly agree with one another, although there are exceptions to this in the comments sections of mainstream news channels which may attract a wider range of readers.

POLICE

RCMP/NYPD

Discourse was highly affected by the particular incidents that the force was dealing with in the moments where the data was collected. One could detect a much higher level of distress and tension in communications dealing with the NYPD due to incidents of localized violence occurring at the time of the study, whereas, with the RCMP, there were local incidents of protests but nothing on the scale of what was happening in New York City.

Overall, the tone of police discourse about themselves was fairly consistent. There was an honorific tone and no mention of police brutality or other issues being raised by protests, at least in the data examined. Police seemed focused on highlighting the good being done by the force and pointing towards those in the community who were in support of police, which may appeal to those who are already feeling positive towards the police but may do little to win the hearts and minds of those engaged in police brutality protests.

Conversations about police were divided along the two camps as for or against police with some shades of grey in the middle which consisted of those concerned about safety in general or who did not fully grasp the scope of the issues being addressed by protests. There was an indication of a bifurcation around the @/# lines which suggests that people using the @ are more likely to be engaging in a conversation with police rather than the # which indicates that there may be a view that police cannot be reached. In the case of police related discourse, the @ symbol seemed more likely to be wielded by those discussing the NYPD, perhaps due to the locality of the force and their ability to be reached by a regular person. More case studies on this topic would potentially help to clarify differences.

"There was an indication of a bifurcation around the @/# lines which suggests that people using the @ are more likely to be engaging in a conversation with police rather than the # which indicates that there may be a view that police cannot be reached."

Jacob Blake

POLICE BRUTALITY/BLM/KYLE RITTENHOUSE

Methodology

Twitter data was collected around the hashtag #JacobBlake. In addition to large-scale data collection, a visual scan of the hashtag was performed with some popular posts being closely scrutinized and comments and replies read and collected. In addition to this, major news sources were scrutinized and recorded after performing a search via Google with the terms Jacob Blake. Facebook posts (via search term Wisconsin) and Reddit comments sections in r/Wisconsin were also scanned. Upon reading major news sources and social media posts, the scan evolved to include linked articles in comments sections, hyperlinked sources, and other networked media.

A linked scan was performed of a less thorough nature of a Google and Twitter search of Kyle Rittenhouse and #KyleRittenhouse. Major stories and posts were examined and comments were read and captured.

Findings

The Jacob Blake case, much as was found with the George Floyd case, becomes a flashpoint for a larger democratic conversation about the tactics which activists use in order to influence the government as well as the overarching issues of police brutality and racism as a whole. In Reddit discourse, there were (frankly fascinating) conversations happening around the nature of protest and the use or incidence of violence and its place within the larger conversation. Comments sections explored the issue in some depth and insights were shared around the collective motivations towards violence as well as violence as a tactic vs. a symptom of oppression. Twitter conversations, as in other cases, involved the sharing of information as it developed around the case.

> **CODIFIED IN THE LANGUAGE IS THE IMPRESSION THAT THERE IS A THREAT TO "WHITE" SOCIETY VIA THE UNREST OF PEOPLE OF COLOUR AND THERE IS A DIRECTIVE TO REINSTATE LAW AND ORDER, WHICH WOULD OSTENSIBLY BE THE STATUS QUO WHEREIN PEOPLE OF COLOUR ARE BEING OPPRESSED.**

As the case of Kyle Rittenhouse came to the fore, videos were shared of police handing out water bottles to vigilante groups and these videos later became talking points in the larger conversation. Twitter seems to be a site wherein the quick sharing of new details in ongoing cases can spread within networks. Conversations on Facebook discussing the issue seemed to represent a much deeper partisan divide, perhaps because comments sections of major newspaper outlets aggregate a much more diverse user base. Commentary was found to be largely supportive or antagonistic with many extensive arguments happening as responses to top level comments.

In the case of Rittenhouse, there were also key instances of high-level glorification of the murder by US officials and pundits which was reflected in the commentary. The issue becomes one in which protesters are painted as "criminals" who wish to destroy the property of innocent victims and therefore threaten the safety of all people and must be dealt with via a show of force. Blake is also painted via his criminal history, which becomes a justification for the shooting. Those of the far-right who are patrolling with guns are merely protecting their way of life from a greater threat and are justified in shooting and killing protesters because of this threat (a.k.a. self-defence). Codified in the language is the impression that there is a threat to "white" society via the unrest of people of colour and there is a directive to reinstate law and order, which would ostensibly be the status quo wherein people of colour are being oppressed.

Antifa

KYLE RITTENHOUSE/MICHAEL REINOEHL/ANDY NGO

Methodology

The Antifa environmental scan is a three-pronged study involving the general discourse surrounding Antifa as well as two separate incidents that occurred during the course of the study, one the murder of two protesters by Kyle Rittenhouse as well as the shooting of a Trump supporter by Michael Reinoehl. The first aspect of the scan involved an overall networked scan of major and independent news sources covering the major incidents in this story. The second part of the study is an attempt to capture online discourse via Reddit, Twitter, and Facebook.

A separate twitter analysis was performed under a search of Antifa & #antifa over the course of several weeks: September 1, 2, 4, 11, 14, & 21. A word frequency search was performed and major categories were investigated in order to validate meaning.

Findings

Given that there has been a concerted effort on behalf of certain conservative media channels to establish an equivalency between Antifa and violence relating to the BLM protests, this concern seems reflected in public discourse around the group. In a Twitter analysis, major indicators were a vast proportion of keyword frequency revolving around arrests, violence, rioters, fire, death, as well as links with the democratic party, which have been promoted during campaign activities in the United States. Although many media outlets attempt to disambiguate the issues, this is complicated by the nature of Antifa groups and their use of direct action tactics which do include some forms of violent interaction with apparent provocateurs.

Most arguments against the current characterization of Antifa action is to point towards the prevalence of real right-wing violence which has resulted in the actual death of protesters and others in recent years. The main consideration seems to be the moral panic surrounding Antifa that is amplified by the United States Presidential election, BLM unrest, and the COVID pandemic as combined factors. It is especially concerning when one sees mainstream lionization of figures such as Kyle Rittenhouse and right-wing militia members, who are known to patrol the streets with rifles during protests and which resulted in at least two deaths. There is a broad characterization of Rittenhouse as a community-minded person and a well-meaning youth who was drawn to attempt to establish order in a disorderly situation. The equivalency being drawn between Antifa and other far-right extremists seems to be attempting to paint a conflict between two sides, minimizing the alarming rise of right-wing extremism and (arguably) driving left-wing interest in Antifa tactics.

THE EQUIVALENCY BEING DRAWN BETWEEN ANTIFA AND OTHER FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISTS SEEMS TO BE ATTEMPTING TO PAINT A CONFLICT BETWEEN TWO SIDES, MINIMIZING THE ALARMING RISE OF RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM AND (ARGUABLY) DRIVING LEFT-WING INTEREST IN ANTIFA TACTICS.
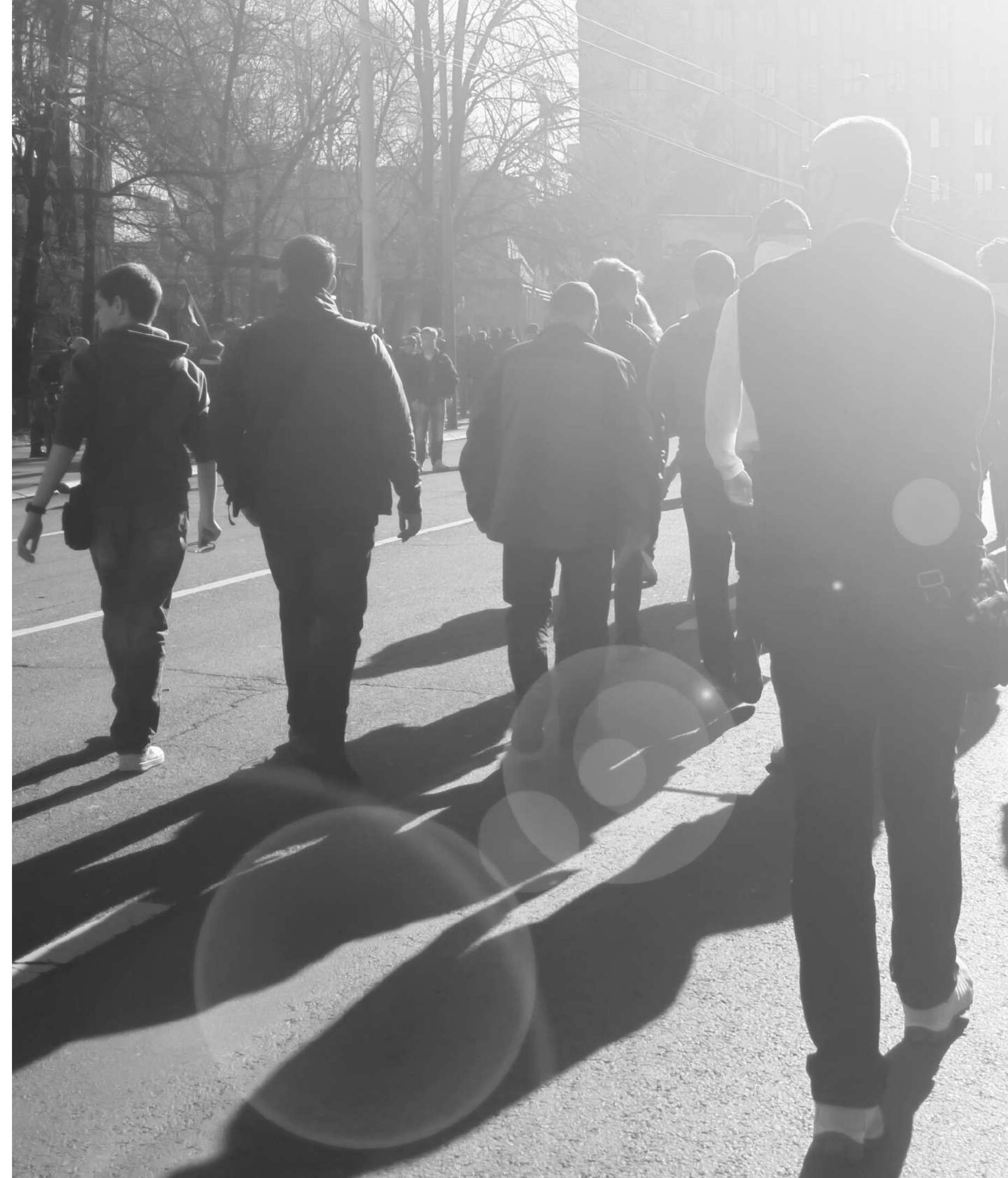
Breonna Taylor

Methodology

For the Breonna Taylor scan, searches were performed via Google, Reddit, Twitter, and Youtube to find the highest-ranking stories that also capture the imagination of the public, inciting commentary in comments sections. In terms of news commentary, top stories of the day were surveyed in an attempt to cover a spectrum of different sources. As a story that had been developing over a longer time, a longer-term was chosen for the case study, covering material over the course of a month.

Findings

Over the course of the month, there were a number of incidents that affected and shaped the overall coverage of the story. As details of the case came out, overall media coverage by news outlets seemed to swing towards the support of Taylor and her partner Walker, whereas during the initial scans, there was a greater tone of neutrality. Also, particular campaigns to release incriminating information about Taylor and Walker by the police department in Louisiana is reflected in citizen commentary which seems to further theories pushed by the department that the two victims were involved in selling drugs, as this seems to be a particularly damning detail in the public eyes. In other cases where people of colour have been shot and/or killed by police, previous involvement in criminal behaviours has pushed public discourse towards condemning victims and supporting police narratives.

IN OTHER CASES WHERE PEOPLE OF COLOUR HAVE BEEN SHOT AND/OR KILLED BY POLICE, PREVIOUS INVOLVEMENT IN CRIMINAL BEHAVIOURS HAS PUSHED PUBLIC DISCOURSE TOWARDS CONDEMNING VICTIMS AND SUPPORTING POLICE NARRATIVES.

Denver Shooting

Methodology

Searches were performed for the terms Denver Shooting on Google, Reddit, and Twitter, paying key attention to posts that captured the public imagination through greater commentary. The scan was performed over the course of a week as the story was developing, checking in on previously searched channels to see if developments in coverage were occurring.

Findings

This particular story plays into the narrative of American patriots vs. Antifascists. Of particular note in this incident is a group named the United American Defense Force, or FEC United whose figurehead, Mark Geist had purported organized the protest in which the shooting occurred. One of the stated aims of FEC United is to arm citizens for conflicts with groups such as Antifa. Of particular concern in the commentary, is the political affiliation of the bodyguard with particular notice to the moments directly preceding the shooting as captured on amateur cell phone cameras. Each second of the clip is analysed as a means of providing "proof" of guilt as to whether the action was carried out in self-defence, which is what the majority of the incidents hinge upon. If it was indeed self-defence, the victim would no longer be considered a victim and so proving negative intent in the case of the shooter seemed to be of utmost importance in furthering the narrative of the left and particularly leftist groups such as Antifa as the antagonists in the struggle. However, data found during the course of the search seemed to indicate that despite culpability in this particular incident, VICE recorded overall violence as having been committed by right-affiliated actors with 33 recorded shootings of BLM protesters and 12 counter-protestors. However, incidents involving intentional vehicular violence against protesters are on the rise and were not recorded as part of this survey (over 100 incidents, 50% of which were deemed intentional).

HOWEVER, DATA FOUND DURING THE COURSE OF THE SEARCH SEEMED TO INDICATE THAT DESPITE CULPABILITY IN THIS PARTICULAR INCIDENT, VICE RECORDED OVERALL VIOLENCE AS HAVING BEEN COMMITTED BY RIGHT-AFFILIATED ACTORS WITH 33 RECORDED SHOOTINGS OF BLM PROTESTERS AND 12 OF COUNTER-PROTESTORS.

QAnon represents a corner of the triangle of media-misrepresentation, gamification. Adherents are invited to an Alternative Reality Game (ARG) where citizens wake up from the nightmare that is global climate change, political instability, and corporate corruption. QAnon offers a solution to the suffering, anxiety, and psychological strain coming from seismic changes within human and ecological realities. It is sparked by a vision of a fictitious harmonious past that preserves an idealized version of homeostasis, longing for a return to a metaphorical Garden of Eden. One can choose to "awaken" from the nightmare, to realize that none of it was ever real and that the solutions to any apparent problems have simple and straightforward solutions. In the phrase "do your own research" participants in the ARG may take real-world information and interpret it via a new framework. In the crux of a fragmentation of the media ecosystem during a time of exceptional uncertainty, anxiety, and precarity, if religion were the opiate of the masses, QAnon would be the Fentanyl.

What is Happening
• Sides are drawn that constitute the other/the normative, both existing in a state of alarm, one against mythical signs of the conspiracy and another against the theorists themselves. The sense of threat is defined by where one points the finger.
• "I feel like there's a profound sense of unreality because of the fragmentation of media. People feel disoriented. People don't know what's real anymore. People feel let down by institutions and so they resort to these wild fantasies in order to explain that sense of unreality." (View quoted in Heffner, 2020)
• There is a co-option of the language and narratives of oppression (Bogdan, 2020).
The message of awakening brings a person into a new matrix, organizing reality along a new set of rules and guidelines that dictate specific forms of media consumption, presenting a potential MIL framework for "alternative facts."

What is the Message
• Anti-mask sentiment seems to cluster around other popular
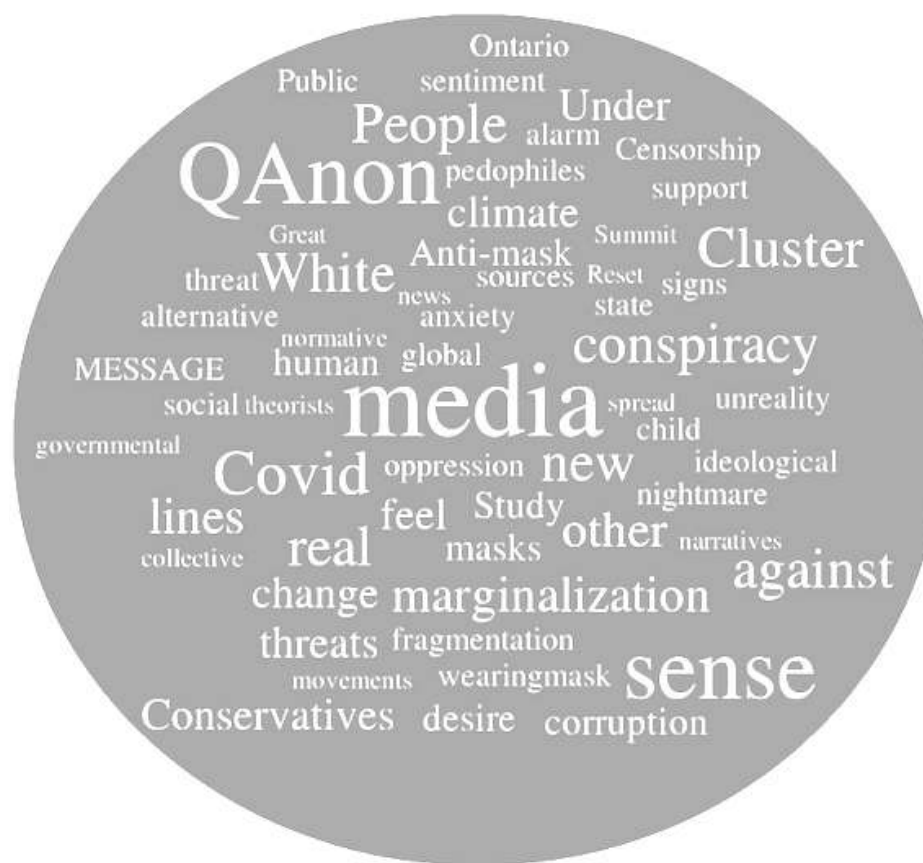
conspiracy flashpoints such as vaccines, pedophiles, QAnon, climate change denial, the communist threat, and state distrust. Each point could arguably cluster around the greatest threats to human civilization: plague, governmental corruption, absorption by the collective, and climate catastrophe.
• There is also a naming and othering of their targets along lines of recognizable villains (particularly Hitler, but other fascists as well). There are convenient labels for the enemy that associate them with a narrative of evil (pedophiles, cannibals).
• One protester against Ontario Covid-19 lockdowns says to put Doug Ford in prison for "child abuse" and "torture," to which the crowd began to chant, "lock him up" (O'Neil, 2020).
• Despite claims to desire massive upheaval, most actions seemed motivated to maintain the status quo (not wearing masks, denying global threats, denying covid existence, white

supremacy, tradition/religion, etc.) and are against movements who are seeking dramatic change (i.e. Black Lives Matter).
• Under the COVID-19 Pandemic, there is a fine balancing of individual, social, and economic factors in trying to figure out what the "right" thing to do might be. Under each lens, the actions of the public/state appear different.
• Real movements, such as The Great Reset and Shareholder Capitalism (Wherry, 2020; Pecknold, 2020; Corocoran, 2020) and real people such as George Soros and Bill Gates become signs indicating much larger anxieties around globalism and the billionaire class.
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WHO IS AT RISK
• Anyone can potentially fall victim to misinformation, tends to be triggered by a sense of alarm, attached to areas where there is already suspicion + a desire to discredit.
• Those who are already within a traditional marginalized groups, but also otherwise othered, or contrary/oppositional statuses are also vulnerable (Church of God, White Supremacists, New Age, Conservatives). Class/financial status does not seem to be the only metric for marginalization. It can occur along ideological lines and one's own personal feelings of marginalization could be more important to consider than actual social marginalization, such as the case with far-right conservatives.

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• Those who lack a specific conscientization around their own oppression, who also lack media literacy skills, and who crave a sense of belonging (Winiecki, 2020).
• The summer marks a turning point for anti-mask sentiment, falling firmly along ideological lines, 94% of left-wing Canadians wearing masks and only 68% of right-wing, with the gap widening (Linden, 2020). Conservatives have also been less likely to support public works to prevent the spread of Covid, such as through mass vaccination programs (Grenier, 2020)
• Co-opting of pro-child slogans (#savethechildren) makes those concerned with child welfare particularly prone (Humanity Rising, 2020; Ramirez, 2020; Macbeth, 2020).

Conspiracy Methods
• Affective tone of alternative news sources leads to a sense of urgency, overloading the audience with rehearsed facts that can lend a sense of credibility. The fearful, frenzied, and erratic tone leads to snap decision making.
• Media sources/events can mimic valid information sources, such as the Plandemic documentary (Enserink & Cohen, 2020), White coat summit (Dapcevich, 2020), Informed Consent Network (Coleman, 2019) Hydroxychloroquine Medical Support (Roose & Rosenberg, 2020), Ontario Civil Liberties Association (OCLA, 2012), Rosemary Frei (Frei, 2020) creating new networks that may be collected and shared as so-called "trusted" sources (Polly, n.d.; TenPenny, 2020).
• Staged incidents can manufacture a sense of outrage, victimization, such as the Letitia Montana and Sara Bundy cases, as well as others (Yuen, 2020; Gillis, 2020).
• Those concerned by governmental corruption and the capture of news media by corporate forces may be caught up in alternative "news" channels such as the Corbett Report that share a mixture of true and false information, making it difficult to sort reality from fiction(Corbett, 2020).
• Public figures who fall into the web become Superpreaders (Silverman, 2020; Hollowood, Serrato, & Newell, 2020).
• Theorists are appropriating critical voices, essays, studies, etc. and staging their own more extreme narratives upon their established ground, such as the Amazing Polly's use of Vakin's essay (Polly, 2020), the growth of "organic intellectuals."

• Gamification around Q-drops leads converts into a Live-Action-Role-Play (LARP) scenario, where they become detectives, revolutionaries, and other characters (Duffield, 2020; O'Brien, 2020). Discourse around those who charge the Whitehouse as individuals "LARPING" as heroes and revolutionaries.
• Leaders of "The Line Canada" discuss reality/death as though resetting in a video game and say that the destruction of the human race is "inevitable," potentially suggesting a level of depersonalization/derealisation in their approach to politics (thatchannel, n.d.).

RESPONSE
• Any response along the lines of a previously scripted narrative further embeds tensions and demarcations between, unless the conspiracy believer is absorbed into the normative collective through threats of exclusion. For those already excluded, these threats serve no purpose.
• Public officials are torn between ignoring them as a means of negating their desire for notoriety, and addressing their dangerous spread of untruths (Hanes, 2020).
• Perception of conservative/conspiracy marginalization supported by media censorship (Zakrzewski, 2020; Creitz, 2020).

Who Benefits
• Opportunistic agents can take advantage of fractures to either promote dissent or to support grassroots movements with parallel motivations (Zadrozny, 2020; Kingery, 2020; Morrison, 2020; Vogel, Rutenberg & Lerer, 2020).
• Extremist groups are better able to access those who may be open to radicalization, as may be supported through observation of noted radical leaders at lockdown/anti-mask protests (Anti-Racist Canada, 2020).
• Marginal media sources can take on refugees from media censorship (Hagerty, 2020) [i.e. gab/parler].

Case Study Summary

Canadian Conspiracy Cluster Study (5 months: July – November 2020):
• Individuals/Groups: Kerry-Lynne Findlay, Maxine Bernier, Henry Hildebrandt/Church of God, Lamont Daigle/The Line Canada, Letitia Montana, Vladislaw Sobilev/Hugs Over Masks, Centre for Constitutional Freedoms, Kelly Anne Wolfe, Sherry Tenpenny, Rosemary Frei, Chris Sky/Back to Work Initiative, Adam Skelly/Adamson's BBQ, The Corbett Report, The Amazing Polly, Call to Freedom (Quebec), Canadian/Ontario Civil Liberties Association, Canadian Freedom Fighters, National Citizens Alliance, Yellow Vests Ontario.
• Events: Aylmer/St. Thomas/Cornwall/Toronto Anti-Mask Rallies, Adamson's BBQ.

QAnon Lifestyle Marketing Cluster Study (5 months: May – September 2020):
• Individuals: @Krystaltini, @Luvbec, @sovereign.ivy.rose, @madluv21, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Shannon Algeo & Sean Corn/Confronting Radicalization, @roseuncharted, @ivycarnegie
• Events/Issues: New Age/QAnon surge/New Fascism, Pedophilia/Conspiracy Theories, Superspreaders, 5g Summit, Instagram Radicalization, "Redpilling"

QAnon and Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty
Mini Case Studies (1 – 2 weeks: April, 2020 – January, 2021): Proud Boys, Covid Vaccine, The Great Reset, White House Insurrection, White House Shaman

QANON Radicalization Pathway

Followers of "Q" or "QANON" on social media display all the classic markers of online radicalization leading towards extremism, as exhibited by such groups as ISIS

Pre-Radicalization	→	Exposure, Repetition, & Conversation	→	Identification, Indoctrination & Group Bonding	→	Moralization Justifying Violence	→	Violent Extremist Acts
"Normies"		**"Redpilled"**		**"#IAMQ"**		**"These people are sick"**		**"BOOM"**
Targeting of vulnerable social groups with perceived victim status for political end		Algorithmic reinforcement of emotional viral payloads through network propaganda		Shifting norms & referents to follow perceived peers, reinforcing in-group status		Ratcheting up of rhetoric, imagery, aggression & dehumanisation of out-group		Actual commission of violent extremist acts to reflect & reinforce in-group worldview

(Replicated based on flow chart from Archive.com, 2020 citing removed post from Medium.com, 2018)

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Lockdown Protests

US AND CANADIAN DISCOURSE

Methodology

Conceived as an earlier formulation of the environmental scan, the methodology for this case study differs somewhat significantly from others performed during a later state. The methodology for this case study operated in a networked form, following linkages from news sources in order to find other networked sources along a scattered framework in order to assemble an overall image of the discourse. Less focus was given on gathering internet commentary. A number of different searches were performed in order to investigate an overall impression of the event, which involved an investigation of sub-sections of the scan (i.e. QAnon and Astroturfing).

Findings

Overall, there was a breadth of discourse relating to the uncovering of the networks of support that were serving as the foundation for an overall movement. The findings were of a kind in that researchers and journalists were attempting to uncover bad-faith actors participating in a process of astroturfing in order to provide a conduit for unrest during the lockdown for those who might create political unrest around the lockdown in seeming support for reopening the economy. In addition to the overall conversation around astroturfing, forays into Twitter data gathering brought up results linking protests to conspiracy theory movements such as QAnon that were then investigated.

Conversations involving QAnon seemed to support a generalized suspicion of governments and government actions which serve as a fertile ground for political actors to foment anti-government sentiment around political decisions made during the pandemic. A mixture of both apt political critique was mixed with otherworldly narratives having to do with a grand awakening brought about by what seemed to be mystical forces that center around the figure of Trump.

White Shirt Movement

Methodology

During a daily review of trending hashtags, #whiteshirtmovement was found to be trending in Canada, which led to a hybrid study. Data was collected via Twitter and users, mentions, and other incidents in the data led to an environmental scan in order to ascertain the source and foundation of the hashtag.

Findings

This case study is partial and is being recorded in the case that the movement gains momentum and in addition to a larger information gathering around conspiratorial mobilization in Canada. There was one small Facebook group titled "The Line" that was organizing a protest in Ottawa and was instructing protesters to wear white t-shirts with a black circle and a red line through it. The symbolism of the shirt was meant to stand against oppression as a broader concept. It is interesting to note that protests against masks and the lockdown seem to be organized by a revolving number of emergent groups with different names and no main group has emerged to the fore in any prominence. Discourse under the hashtag was largely similar to that occurring in another case study of anti-mask mobilization in Canada, yet seemed to involve a different group of actors, which could perhaps be due to the previous study being comprised of Toronto regional actors and "The Line" being regional to Ottawa.
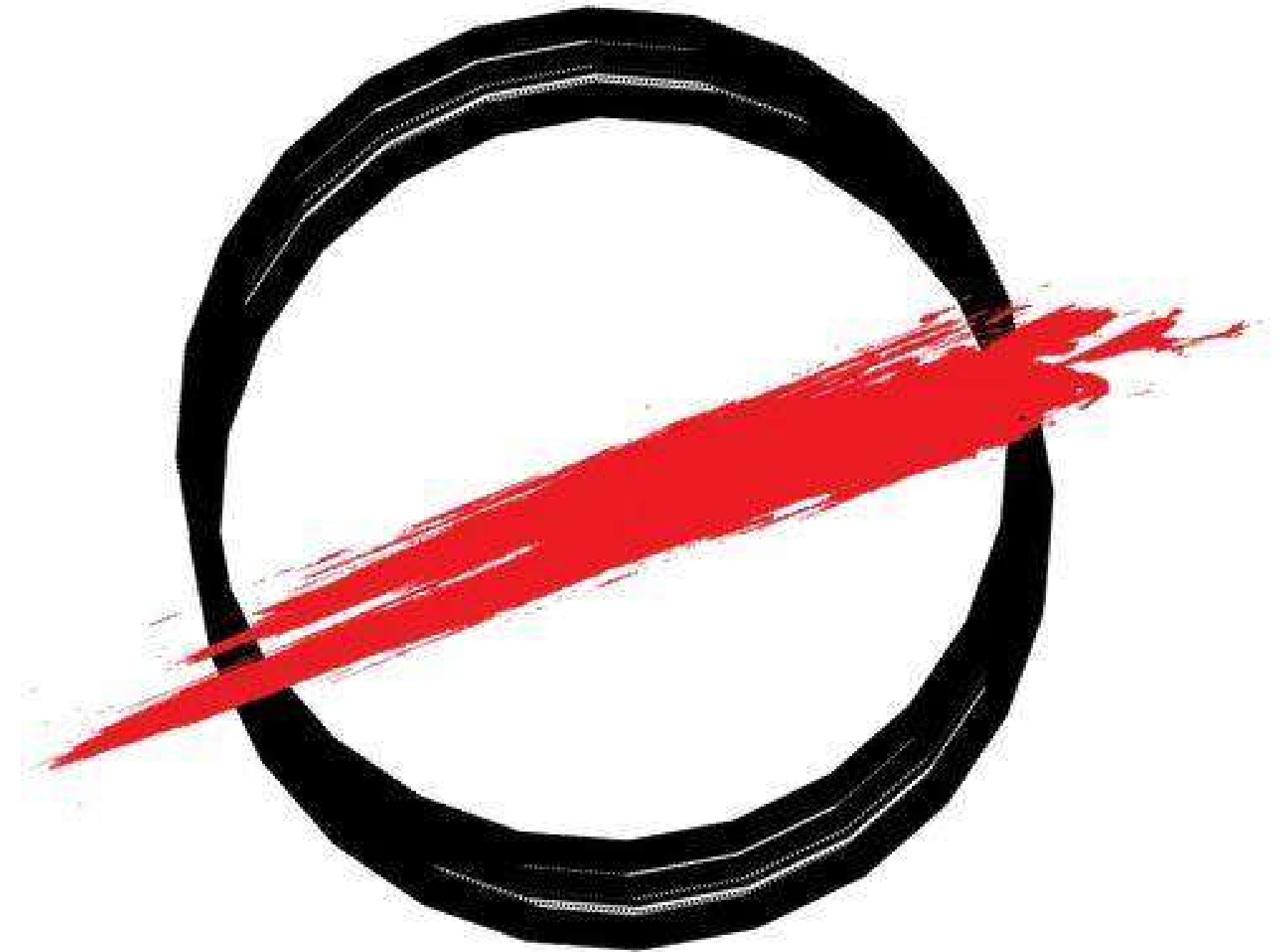
"IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT PROTESTS AGAINST MASKS AND THE LOCKDOWN SEEM TO BE ORGANIZED BY A REVOLVING NUMBER OF EMERGENT GROUPS WITH DIFFERENT NAMES AND NO MAIN GROUP HAS EMERGED TO THE FORE IN ANY PROMINENCE."

Letitia Montana Scandal

CANADIAN ANTI-MASK MOBILIZATION

Methodology

In this hybrid study, twitter data was inputted into NVivo and the analysis of frequently mentioned accounts, specific references, and other instances in the data were used as the basis of an environmental scan into anti-mask mobilization in Canada, including influential thinkers and pundits specifically influencing the Canadian movement (i.e. Dr. Sherri TenPenny). As such, this also became a cluster analysis under the heading of Anti-Mask mobilization and included a look into major figures of the movement.

THEMES THAT CAME UP A GREAT DEAL IN THE TEXT ANALYZED WERE GOVERNMENTAL CORRUPTION, HEALTH (HEALTHY EATING, HEALTHY LIFESTYLE, ETC.), FASCISM/TOTALITARIANISM, AND FREE-SPEECH.

Findings

It became immediately apparent that a small network of social media users was coalescing to appear in events organized by others in the network, speaking at functions, inciting incidents for media attention (allegedly), and sharing information and opinions within the network. Amidst this community, it became apparent that there was a sharing of a particular kind of media literacy among constituents in a kind of informal training of how to read information in order to arrive at the "truth." Many of the methods shared would potentially provide a foundation for critical thinking about the media and yet the implicit perspective that underlies this messaging obviously has the potential to skew any findings as more obvious conclusions are discarded in order to arrive at deeper and deeper modes of truth, connecting the dots between different actors and actions that may or may not have any relevance to one another other than in speculation. Yet, when there is purportedly a movement of people who would potentially suppress information, naïve investigation would not be able to access clandestine sources and would largely need to rely on intuition, speculation, and pattern analysis in order to come to conclusions.

The themes that came up often in the text analyzed were governmental corruption, health (healthy eating, healthy lifestyle, etc.), fascism/totalitarianism, and free speech. It often seemed that different forms of conspiracies could coalesce within the community, so for example, there would be an

implication that the Trudeau government was involved in a conspiracy to "muzzle" protests through the institution of mask policy as well as covid tracking, and on top of this might be other implications of his involvement in pedophilia or child trafficking (which suggests connections to conspiracies such as QAnon and others). While some protesters might focus on the constitutional right to refuse to wear masks, others might call into question the validity of covid's existence as a whole. There could be a range of discourse from questioning reported numbers of cases and reasonable debate around the justice of policies revolving around long-term care and then speculation about international plots to cull the population.

The protesters also have an interesting relationship with science. In some cases, they call into question scientific consensus on issues such as the efficacy of masks, while in other moments, they defer to scientific authority in relation to studies they have found that support their positions. They seem to suggest that the scientific institution has become corrupt, but their reliance on studies to buttress their argument suggests that they have not abandoned trust in science altogether. They also seem to question authority in the case of the government but rely on the authority of those who question the given narrative, such as a doctor being specially qualified to offer an opinion on mask science or lockdown measures. Yet, the main issue seems to be with the coalescing of consensus being something to be suspicious of, regardless of the narrative.

CANADIAN PUBLIC FIGURES

**Canadian Prime Minister
Justin Trudeau**

**Canadian NDP Leader
Jagmeet Singh**

**Ontario Premier
Doug Ford**

**Ontario Premier
Elizabeth May**

**Regina—Qu'Appelle MP
Andrew Scheer**

Overall findings supported a conclusion that the use of an @ symbol before invoking a political figure had a tendency for a comment to support the focus and values of the invoked account. However, it may be that tweets using the @ symbol feel comfortable engaging in conversation with a particular entity. In the case of Andrew Scheer, who is currently experiencing a great deal of negative sentiment, there was a much higher incidence of negative rhetoric contained in the @ data. Co-entities that were invoked using the @ symbol often seemed to suggest a coding of credibility, assumed resonance, and perceived power in relation to an issue. Often, news outlets would be co-invoked in order to elevate tweets to another level of importance in the discourse. Some invocations may be used to lend credibility to a tweet as well.

The use of @ is often followed by a comment of support.

The use of # often indicates a discussion about, not with.

Use of the # often represented discussions wielding the entity as an object of discussion, rather than engaging in a discussion with, it became a discussion about. Incidences of discussion using the # symbol were much more likely to engage in negative rhetoric about the subject in question. It seemed as though the # symbol could give the symbolic power to wield an entity through conversation, potentially reordering its signification. Overall, there was a tendency for instances of conspiracy theory, racism, and sexism to be wielded in a process of critique.

Justin Trudeau

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

Data was collected on June 30, July 7, and 21, 2020.

There were three (3) independent twitter searches:

1) Tweets put out from the account @JustinTrudeau
3) The hashtag #JustinTrudeau
4) Those tweeting @JustinTrudeau

Analysis: @JustinTrudeau Account Tweets

We manually reviewed @JustinTrudeau sourced tweets gathered over the course of two weeks from June 30 – July 21, coding 150 tweets for sentiment. We dropped in on the remainder of the dataset, analysing a random subset of tweets to confirm my findings.

Twitter Sentiment Codes

COVID Preparedness:
relating to the COVID pandemic

Scientific Inquiry:
relating to investment in scientific inquiry

Social Funding:
detailing funding to social services and individuals

Community Involvement:
detailing community outreach

Solidarity:
relating to solidarity to individuals and groups

Social Justice:
focusing on social justice issues

Nationalist Rhetoric:
honouring Canada as a nation

Crime Awareness:
relating to crime

Environmentalism:
centering the environment

LGBTQ:
celebrating LGBTQ diversity

Indigeneity:
celebrating Indigeneity

There was a much higher incidence of focus on specific social justice issues than in other case-studies, specifically dealing with more structural issues or at least drawing attention to them.

Sentiment Analysis Results:
The majority of sentiments shared related to the sentiments Social Funding with COVID Preparedness, and Solidarity following as the top three sentiments expressed in the data. Following, in order, were Nationalist Rhetoric, Social Justice, and Scientific Inquiry. Other sentiments were at a low level, which included Community Outreach, Crime Awareness, Environmentalism, LGBTQ, and Indigeneity. Tweet focus was affected as in other studies performed at this time by such events as Pride Month, Indigenous Awareness Day, etc.

Discussion:
There was a much higher incidence of focus on specific social justice issues than in other case-studies, specifically dealing with more structural issues or at least drawing attention to them. All in all, the bulk of tweets were detailing governmental plans for social funding and support during the pandemic, which is the major project being dealt with at the federal level at this time. It might be important to note the tweets celebrating the nation of Canada were still represented at a greater proportion than those dealing with issues of social justice specifically, however solidarity was offered to a number of individuals and groups, which requires a less critical focus and offers support.

Justin Trudeau

@JustinTrudeau Mentions

Word cloud frequency analysis

46,000 tweets

Findings:

   Interesting correlations were noted where public figures were linked such as @JustinTrudeau, @RealDonaldTrump and @BorisJohnson. In this case, there seemed to be a high frequency of conspiratorial calls to do with the WHO, Gates Foundation, and others involved in a global conspiracy as well as concerns over the CCP in relation to COVID, global threats, and the treatment of the Muslim population in China. While links between @JustinTrudea and @UN were calls to do with climate change policies and links with @JoeBiden were discussing their relative merits as statesmen. One issue largely dominating the data was a call to look at the issue of spousal sponsorship under the hashtag #prioritizefamilysponsorship.

Discussion:

   It is interesting to note that in the case of public figures, there seems to be something akin to a recipe that one may invoke in an address to certain issues. Those who may be seen to have power over such issues, which in the case of a global cabal, is potential enlightening, as well as in checking the power of the CCP (which seems to fall upon a mixture of US, Canadian, and British – current and former – commonwealth leadership). The data seems to support the notion that @-ing a public figure serves as a means of signalling to power in order to address an issue.

@JustinTrudeau Mentions

#JustinTrudeau hashtag mentions

#JustinTrudeau hashtag mentions

Word cloud frequency analysis

7,000 tweets

Findings:

   The #JustinTrudeau hashtag seemed to pull together a great deal more criticism in terms of issues such as the We Charity scandal, which correlated with hashtags such as #crimesagainsthumanity and #worstpmever. Yet, there were also represented tweets that indicated pride at Trudeau having refused an invitation to the Whitehouse. Not all of the conversations were negative, but there is definitely a tendency towards negative bias in the # call-out. Calls to news sources such as including @CTVnews along with the expression of political opinions seemed to be motivated towards publicizing and boosting their expression of dissent.

Discussion:

   In certain tweets, the notion of the invocation also seems to be present, especially in the invocation of news outlets without any specific news items included other than political opinions. Perhaps the news outlets are seen as something one might appeal to in order to have one's opinion on the matter registered and therefore expressed en masse.

Jagmeet Singh

Canadian NDP Leader
Jagmeet Singh

Data was collected on June 30, July 7, and 27, 2020.

There were three (3) independent twitter searches:
1) Tweets put out from the account @theJagmeetSingh
2) Those tweeting @JagmeetSingh
3) The hashtag #JagmeetSingh

Analysis: @theJagmeetSingh Account Tweets

We manually reviewed @theJagmeetSignh sourced tweets gathered over the course of two weeks from June 30 – July 27, coding 100 tweets for sentiment. We dropped in on the remainder of the dataset, analysing a random subset of tweets to confirm my findings.

Twitter Sentiment Codes

Community Engagement:
engaging in community events, etc.

Community Infrastructure:
Investments in Community infrastructure

COVID Preparedness:
relating to the COVID pandemic specifically

Critique of Business:
Critiques of businesses and business practices

Critique of Conservatives:
Critiques leveled at the Conservative Party and their policies

Critique of Police:
Critiques levelled at police and RCMP over police brutality

Critique of Trudeau:
Critique of Trudeau government and policies

Diversity:
related to diversity issues

Hopeful Futurity:
expressing hopeful sentiments about the future

Public Health:
dealing with public health issues (mental health, addiction, etc.)

Special Events:
dealing with special events and holidays

Sports:
related to sports, sports figures, and sporting events

Spotlight on Jagmeet:
relating to the doings of Jagmeet Singh

Overall the sentiment seemed to be directed towards the support of vulnerable populations.

Sentiment Analysis Results:
Overall, the largest category of Tweets were critiques levelled at the Trudeau Government. The second most represented category would be critiques of the police. After this is a Critique of Business, followed by COVID Preparedness, Public Health, Community Engagement, and Special Events. After this followed, Hopeful Futurity Critiques of Conservatives, Community Infrastructure, and Diversity. In the last category with only 1 tweet representative there was Sports and a Spotlight on Jagmeet.

Discussion:
Unlike those of the Scheer government, tweets were levelled at a number of programs and issues and often offered concrete suggestions for what should happen instead. This account tweeted on a wide variety and topics and was more difficult to fit into neat categories. Often tweets would be responding to a number of different sentiments within each tweet as well. Overall the sentiment seemed to be directed towards the support of vulnerable populations.

Jagmeet Singh

@JagmeetSingh mentions

Word cloud frequency analysis

25,000 tweets

Findings:

Tweets in this dataset seemed to reflect similar sentiments to those coded in the @theJagmeetSingh account, such as issues of housing, healthcare, and police brutality. There were special appeals to the account in relation to an issue of family sponsorship in relation to immigration. There were also attempts to call-out a number of politicians about an incident in which a gunman broke into the Prime Minister's residence, calling for it to be called a terrorist attack.

Discussion:

Singh's account was implicated in topics covered under other accounts within this study, as one of the party leaders of Canada. In all, sentiments relating to conversations with Singh were largely cordial and/or synchronous with the sentiments he largely supports within his own account. Tweets that were less friendly were often engaging in conversations involving other accounts and were looping Singh into the conversation. There was at least one incident wherein an activist @'ed Singh to pass on information about protests happening in the United States in order to crowd source information on police actions, which could perhaps speak to Singh's overall appeal as a person who supports vulnerable populations due to his vocal tweets, speeches, etc.

@JagmeetSingh mentions

#JagmeetSingh Hashtag Mentions

#JagmeetSingh Hashtag Mentions

Word cloud frequency analysis

500 tweets

Findings:

There were very few tweets in this dataset, which correlates with other minority leaders thus far. Tweets seemed to highlight an issue asking Singh to denounce a purported Sikh extremist and an issue about his relationship with Quebec. There was some support of an incident in which he called out racism in parliament, pointing to incidents wherein other politicians had used offensive words and were not ejected. There was also a viral tweet linking politicians to the "Muslim Brotherhood" when they attended an event for Eid.

Discussion:

Issues of race and religion seemed much more prevalent in this dataset, as there were a number of instances where Singh was linked with the Sihk community at large or else the Muslim community, in each instance there seemed to be a critical sentiment to tweets. Other sentiments about racism could potentially be explained by Singh's focus on issues of police brutality and systemic racism.

Doug Ford

Ontario Premier Doug Ford

Data was collected on June 30, July 7, and 21, 2020.

There were three (3) independent twitter searches:

1) Tweets put out from the account @FordNation
3) The hashtag #FordNation
4) Those tweeting @FordNation

Analysis: @FordNations Account Tweets

We manually reviewed @FordNation sourced tweets gathered over the course of two weeks from June 30 – July 21, coding 100 tweets for sentiment. We dropped in on the remainder of the dataset, analysing a random subset of tweets to confirm my findings.

Twitter Sentiment Codes

COVID Preparedness:
relating to the COVID pandemic

Diversity:
celebrating diversity

Economic Restart:
Tweets relating to restarting the economy

Government Tour:
relating to a government tour

Humanitarianism:
celebrating humanitarianism

Infrastructure:
relating to investment in infrastructure

Jobs:
relating to jobs, training, etc.

Solidarity:
encouraging solidarity

Sports:
relating to professional sports

Spotlight on Business:
highlighting local business

Spotlight on Doug:
relating to Doug Ford

Stimulus Spending:
detailing stimulus spending

Sentiment Analysis Results:

The vast majority of tweets were related to shouting out local businesses. This seemed to coincide with announcements related to a local governmental tour happening at the time of data recovery. Tweets related to the tour followed closely behind sentiments relating to COVID preparedness and an Economic Restart. Following this were tweets relating to Infrastructure, and Stimulus Spending. All other tweets fell between 1-2 tweets including, Sports, Diversity, Humanitarianism, Solidarity, and a Spotlight on Doug Ford.

Dropping in on the remainder of approximately 3,000 tweets seemed to reflect a similar sentiment throughout, which would naturally diverge depending on the events and focus of specific government initiatives. However, the main perspective of the tweets seemed consistently focused on business and economic concerns.

Discussion:

The overall sentiment expressed by the @Fordnation account seemed very concerned with the economic well-being of Ontario which was expressed through a focus on the doings of local businesses. A consistent concern with re-opening safely was the main thrust of discussion around COVID and nearly all tweets reviewed that related to COVID preparedness also had a view to specific businesses that were helping to deal with material supplies, etc. There was only a single tweet within the dataset that seemed to appeal to any sort of emotional nature to do with the pandemic, nor giving guidance to how people should operate rather than directing them to resources like masks and giving thanks to local manufacturers.

There was an especially thorough series of tweets regarding the Premier's haircut, which could be understood to have political or ideological significance considering access to haircuts became a talking point in several of the COVID lockdown protests and had become a talking point with people who were defying restrictions.

Doug Ford

@FordNation Mentions

Word cloud frequency analysis

46,000 tweets

Findings:
Correlations between @FordNation and @JustinTrudeau seemed to highlight issues with border reopening and concerns about a spike in Corona-Virus infections, while correlations between @FordNation and @JohnTory seemed to center around the legalities of mandatory facemasks. In these cases, entities such as @TorontoStar and @CP24. Issues largely revolve around the reopening of schools, bars, and the economy, support for those suffering under economic restrictions, as well as concerns about COVID.

Discussion:
Tweets do not seem to support the government's concern with the reopening of business, and instead focus on individual safety and support. There is a lot of concern over governmental priorities when it comes to reopening bars before schools as well as issues of the border reopening and the safety of reopening businesses. There is vocal opposition to bills being quietly passed during the pandemic, especially at the time of data collection, bill 125 which tweets seem to equate to opening up the privatization of healthcare. All in all, tweets are most often relating to issues that need to be addressed and changed with users imploring the government to take notice and/or action.

@FordNation Mentions

#FordNation hashtag mentions

#FordNation hashtag mentions

Word cloud frequency analysis

1,000 tweets

Findings:
Toronto specific issues seemed to surface with an @JohnTory and specifically #FordNation, which seemed intended to exclude the Premiere's opinion for the issue and appeal directly to the city government to address issues such as police and the COVID reopening scheme. Appeals related to ODSP payments were made directly to @theJagmeetSingh and @CdnHeritage (Government of Canada Account), these also refer to #JustinTrudeau. Critique of Bill 159, which is purported to be a serving financial ties with developers.

Discussion:
#FordNation tweets were, by far, more critical than @FordNation tweets. There was a much higher prevalence of overt criticism and this criticism did not seem to have a sense that they would be able to change the government's position. Often an #FordNation hashtag would serve simply as a condemnation and would instead appeal to other instances of authority that might be more open to responding to appeals for change.

Elizabeth May

Ontario Premier Elizabeth May

Data was collected on July 8, 22, 27, and 28 2020.

There were three (3) independent twitter searches:
1) Tweets put out from the account @ElizabethMay
2) Those tweeting @ElizabethMay
3) The hashtag #ElizabethMay

Analysis: @ElizabethMay Account Tweets

We manually reviewed @ElizabethMay sourced tweets gathered over the course of two weeks from July 8 – 28, coding 100 tweets for sentiment. We dropped in on the remainder of the dataset, analysing a random subset of tweets to confirm my findings.

Twitter Sentiment Codes

COVID Preparedness:
related to COVID precautions, etc.

Critical of Government:
Critical tweets relating to government and government policies

Democratic Issues:
Issues of democratic discourse and structure

Environmentalism:
relating to environmental issues

Gender Issues:
relating to gendered issues

Green Party Business:
relating to Green Party operations

Health Care:
relating to health care issues

Immigration:
relating to immigration issues

Indigenous/Race Issues:
relating to race and indigenous issues

Infrastructure:
relating to infrastructure

Personal Posts:
relating to personal thoughts, feelings, issues

Poverty:
relating to poverty-based issues

Special Events:
relating to special events and holidays

Tweets were overall less critical of government and geared more towards the promotion of specific values.

Sentiment Analysis Results:

The highest incidence of posts were relating to Environmentalism, followed by Green Party Business, Indigenous and Race Issues, COVID Preparedness, and Personal Posts. Following this were Critical of Government, Gender Issues, Poverty, Democracy and Special Events. In the last category with a single tweet for each were Health Care and Immigration.

Discussion:

Posts were understandably slanted towards environmental issues due to Green Party affiliation. Tweets may have been affected by May recently standing down from a leadership position to run provincially within BC, although at the time of this study, the Green Party leadership was undecided. Tweets were overall less critical of government and geared more towards the promotion of specific values. The account was, in all, the only political account to post personal content. One may wonder whether this may be a gendered approach to social media but without access to other female political leaders in Canada, there is no data to compare this to.
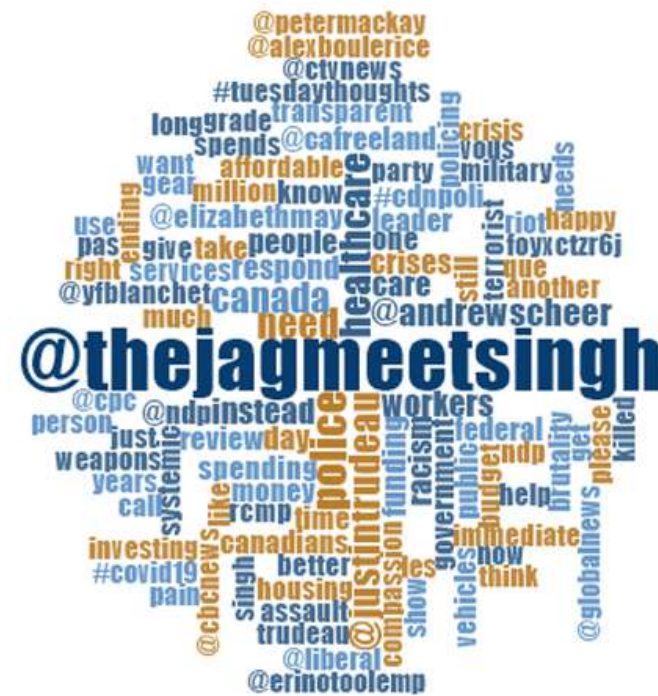
Elizabeth May

@ElizabethMay Mentions

Word cloud frequency analysis
18,000 tweets

Findings:

    May's account was invoked in relation to the WE Charity scandal along with other party leaders, regardless of the fact that she is stepping down from party leadership. She was also invoked with @JustinTrudeau in relation to opening borders for international students. However, her account was more closely associated with @theJagmeetSingh references than any other. Issues seemed to reflect those tweeted by her account including, the pipeline, and racial and indigenous issues. There was a representation of vocal criticism of the Green Party as well as climate change, socialist policies, and immigration that used the word idiot. There was also a viral tweet that questioned whether the Green Party and NDP parties also had links to the We Charity.

Discussion:

    Overall, tweets mentioning @ElizabethMay seemed to approach discourse on the level of addressing pressing social issues. Most who discussed the same issues that May tweeted on her own account seemed to share similar values, while those who addressed her account in relation to the WE Charity scandal seemed to align with the Green Party for instrumental reasons in order to take down the Liberal government. There seemed to be some solidarity towards her place as a woman in a field dominated by men, as there were mentions of committee meetings populated by "old white men." Yet, tweets were also keen to use "Lizzy" as a moniker to critique statements made about Scheer not wearing a mask.

@ElizabethMay Mentions

#ElizabethMay Hashtag Mentions

#ElizabethMay Hashtag Mentions

Word cloud frequency analysis
21 tweets

Findings:

    There were a very slim amount of tweets to do with Elizabeth May that were also utilizing a hashtag. Most of the tweets seemed to revolve around a single tweet that May had posted on her account that had to do with the death of a woman at a BLM protest. Tweets were highly critical.

Discussion:

    Due to the fact that May has been largely out of the public eye, while remaining a public figure of note, it is perhaps safe to say that she has not done enough publicly to warrant a large conversation about her as a person or a public official. It seems that most reactions were to her online presence.

Andrew Scheer

Regina—Qu'Appelle MP
Andrew Scheer

Data was collected on July 8, 22, and 23, 2020.

There were three (3) independent twitter searches:
1) Tweets put out from the account @AndrewScheer
3) The hashtag #AndrewScheer
4) Those tweeting @AndrewScheer

Analysis: @AndrewScheer Account Tweets

We manually reviewed @AndrewScheer sourced tweets gathered over the course of two weeks from July 8 – July 23, coding 100 tweets for sentiment. We dropped in on the remainder of the dataset, analysing a random subset of tweets to confirm findings.

Twitter Sentiment Codes

Anti-Communism:
condemning communism

Condemning Anti-Semitism:
condemning anti-Semitism

Critique of Trudeau Government:
Critiques of Trudeau Government

Special Day:
honouring special days

Historical Architecture:
related to historical architecture

Honouring Veterans & War Dead:
honouring veterans and victims of war

Spotlight on Conservative Policies:
detailing conservative policies

Spotlight on Oil Sands:
relating to oil sands issues

It seems clear that the Scheer Twitter account may be properly utilized to maintain pressure through advertising a political scandal against the opposing party.

Sentiment Analysis Results:

The lion's share of tweets were criticisms of the Trudeau government, so much so that all other categories only contain 1 – 2 tweets. The second most common tweets were for Honouring Veterans and War Dead. All other categories were represented by only a single tweet, out of 100 tweets. In dropping in on other tweets in the nearly 3,000, it became clear that the fury of focus on Liberals is part of a current scandal and that tweets during other periods had a much higher incidence of tweets relating to the Conservative Party platform, specific holidays, environmental policy, and infrastructure projects.

Discussion:

It seems clear that the Scheer Twitter account may be properly utilized to maintain pressure through advertising a political scandal against the opposing party. In dropping in on the remaining tweets in the dataset, it seems as though there may be an attempt to present the conservative platform as one that maintains concern for both the Oil Sands and environmental sustainability, but through the lens of business and economic prosperity.

Andrew Scheer

@AndewScheer Mentions

Word cloud frequency analysis

37,000 tweets

Findings:

Conversations largely centered on the We Charity scandal, which may be related to the Conservative party focus. In it, there seemed to be a divide in the conversation between calling out Liberal corruption and pointing out the hypocrisy due to a claim that Scheer took $700,000 taken from the conservative party coffers without paying it back, this particular conversation looped in @PeterMackay and the hashtag #lifestylesoftherichandinfamous.

Discussion:

People largely seemed comfortable making call-outs using @AndrewScheer and there was a large contingent of people on both sides of the spectrum engaging in conversation with the account. Scheer was looped into tweets where all other leaders were represented on issues. The larger proportion of tweets between the three datasets was in this category and it calls into question when someone feels comfortable addressing a public figure directly. As an opposition candidate, who seems to be experiencing less popularity, perhaps there is less motivation to use indirect references when levelling critiques. One could theorize that depending on the perceived strength of the individual, one might make different choices about how they are addressed.

@AndewScheer Mentions

#AndrewScheer hashtag mentions

#AndrewScheer hashtag mentions

Word cloud frequency analysis

1,400 tweets

Findings:

This dataset was much smaller and largely seemed to focus on the We Charity scandal, but particularly Conservative Party officials' wrongdoing and hypocrisy, perhaps in response to the large flurry of tweets focusing on Liberal wrongdoing. There were a great deal of tweets focusing on an incident in which Scheer took his mask off during a public function.

Discussion:

#AndrewScheer hashtag tweets were largely quite negative and/or mocking in tone. Words used to describe the politician were largely unflattering and/or overtly disrespectful. One must consider the numbers representing under this tone, however. Although there was a largely cohesive sentiment across the dataset, it was much less utilized.

TO BE CONTINUED

Due to the emergent nature of this research,
our work remains ongoing.

Follow us below for updates and new findings:

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