Organized Propaganda or Disorganized Chaos? A Case Study of the Canadian Energy Centre and its Online Communications

by

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Contents

Abstract

This research utilizes modern definitions of propaganda terms (e.g. misinformation, disinformation, white/grey/black propaganda) to create a tangible model for qualitative research. The book *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics* by Benkler, Faris & Roberts (2018) provides a substantial number of definitions, combined with literature from other notable researchers of related fields, such as Bernays' writings on Public Relations (1928, 1947). These definitions were the foundation of a coding matrix to assess the content of the Canadian Energy Centre, an organization which promotes Alberta's oil and gas sector. In total, 323 items tweeted by the CEC between December 2019 and March 2020 were collected for processing. This data was coded for signs of propaganda using an inductive qualitative content analysis, and further coding was done on discourse surrounding individual CEC Tweets. While it was found that the CEC's core items were largely normative (e.g. reasonable arguments, citing reputable sources, tonally level-headed), effects of propaganda were clearly present in the networked public sphere. Though proving the source(s) of propaganda in this larger network goes beyond the scope of this research, based on the theoretical framework employed for this study there was evidence of propaganda, as defined in the cited sources, within the CEC's Twitter network. This research provides a new qualitative coding scheme to research the presence and impacts of propaganda in a system, and also identifies the need to broaden strategies to allow the general public to recognize manipulative content beyond labour-intensive (and often confusing) fact checking. It encourages the inclusion of multiple tiers of relevant information when examining potentially manipulative content on social media, beyond that of the core items.

Introduction

At the very core of a functional democracy lies the ability for citizens to engage in productive and open discourse. It is important to study both the outcomes of public discussion in appropriate forums and the evolution of the social process itself. Social media platforms and computer access provide the potential for more members of society to take part in online discussion on a wide variety of topics, including politics. Not only is content more accessible for consumption than ever before, but members of the public are more active participants in discussions. Such discourse is at risk of being tainted by factors such as disinformation and misinformation[1], leading to distrust or confusion among those members of society seeking to participate in what is fundamentally their right. This issue is closely tied to the field of communication and technology. Zeitzoff (2017) wrote that social media significantly impacts the development of conflict due largely to faster information dissemination, which increases the overall susceptibility of misinformation during times of conflict (p. 1983). New forms of media have the potential to change how people communicate, and social media platforms are no different. This will be described in more detail in the literature review section.

Propaganda is a topic which has been studied in North America since the 1920s, beginning with "the emergence of a critical perspective on social influence known as propaganda analysis" (Sproule, 1987, p. 60). This has expanded to studying misinformation and other related topics. More recent studies related to propaganda and online communication include: an examination of online counter-propaganda created by Ukranian activists in *Stopping Fake News: The work practices of peer-to-peer counter propaganda* (Haigh, Haigh & Kozak, 2018); systematic research of where Public Relations ends and propaganda begins in a modern setting in

[1] Or other forms of propaganda, as defined in the Analysis and Definitions section of the Literature Review

Organizational propaganda on the Internet: A systematic review (Lock & Ludolph, 2019); and a memetic analysis of how misinformation, hostility and aggression spreads on Facebook within the context of a British extremist group in *Digital Propaganda: The Tyranny of Ignorance* (Sparkes-Vian, 2019).

To communicate properly, and to ensure that citizens can form fact-based opinions, information must be as clear and ethically presented as possible. This is true for the functionality of any democratic system, including in Canada. There exists research which establishes that propaganda has been present in Canada. In *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion: A Historical Encyclopedia, 1500 to the Present*, Cull, Culbert & Welch (2003) discussed propaganda utilized by the Canadian government leading up to and during World War II (p. 59). There has also been research linking the formation of the National Film Board to a government message delivery policy of World War II, since at one point the NFB fell under the control of the Film Board which was headed by the minister of National War Services (Evans, 1991, p. 3). Today, the ways Canadians consume information and communicate have changed significantly. According to the Canadian Internet Registration Authority (n.d.), as of 2019 60% of Canadians use social media (para. 46). This widespread use of social media has resulted in modern calls of concern around propaganda in Canada. In the lead-up to the 2019 Alberta provincial election, concerns about misinformation in the electoral process were legitimate enough for Elections Alberta to seek advice in preventing “online malfeasance” from the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (Parsons, 2019, para. 5). This indicates a need for researchers to take hard looks at Canadian political discourse in its many contemporary forms, with respect to propaganda and misinformation.

There is a gap in the literature concerning up-to-date examinations in Canadian political contexts. American politics are watched closely by academics where propaganda and misinformation are concerned (see above), but there are too few critical examinations of newer Canadian examples. These factors have led to the development of this research which focuses on a scenario specific to the Albertan political landscape.

In the summer of 2019 Alberta Premier Jason Kenney announced that the provincial government was developing plans to push back against what he called lies perpetrated by those who oppose the oil and gas sector (Heydari, 2019, para. 1). At that time, this endeavor was nicknamed Jason Kenney's "war room" (para. 3). By the time of its mobilization in December of 2019, the organization was formally called the Canadian Energy Centre (CEC), launching a website, Twitter account, and Facebook account under the same name. Its mandate is "to promote Canada as the supplier of choice for the world's growing demand for responsibly produced energy" (Canadian Energy Centre, n.d., About Us, para. 1). In describing the CEC's operations, CEO Tom Olsen said that it should be thought of as a media organization that also conducts research (Flexhaug, 2019, para. 13). From the outset, the CEC faced criticism and controversy. As early as January of 2020, Alberta NDP energy critic Irfan Sabir called for the CEC to be shut down, claiming that there was "a list of 10 apparent missteps in its first weeks" (French, 2020, para. 1). This organization creates a prime opportunity for researching propaganda and manipulation: the core of the organization's existence is based on a major topic of Albertan politics; the CEC has been involved in controversies (discussed in more detail below) and thus has gotten quite a bit of attention on social media and garnered many vocal opinions online; and because the organization aims to halt misinformation, it should theoretically be a shining example of truth and normativity and be perceived in kind.

In practice, however, one does not have to browse the CEC's Twitter account for long to see commenters decrying the CEC as a propaganda machine of Premier Jason Kenney's United Conservative Party government. Use of terms such as "propaganda" and "fake news" has largely lost all sense of meaning since the American election in 2016 where terms were rampant, according to Benkler, Faris & Roberts (2018, p. 23). Since these terms and others (described in detail in the Literature Review and Research Design and Methodology sections) are still common online and are found within the context of the CEC's Twitter network, it is worth examining whether or not there is legitimacy in these claims, or if the words are simply being misused. Normativity and clear communication are crucial for productive political discourse, so it is important to recognize and acknowledge whether or not distortion is tainting the discussion, particularly with regards to online conversations about such a hot topic in Alberta politics.

This report will feature an in-depth literature review, an outline of the research process and methodology, the findings from the research, and a discussion of the implications.

Purpose of Study

In this study I examined whether or not the content produced by the Canadian Energy Centre (CEC) would be considered propaganda under definitions found in academic literature, making the CEC an organized attempt at propaganda. I also examined the aggregate Twitter network around the CEC to determine if there are effects of propaganda evident in the system. This research was based on the following questions:

RQ1: Is the Canadian Energy Centre an organized effort for propaganda?

RQ2: Is there propaganda present in the aggregate Twitter communication network surrounding the Canadian Energy Centre?

The aim of this study was not only to look at this specific case, but also to contribute a new approach in examining propaganda for future research studies. To do this, I examined single units of analysis, and also compared this micro-level data with that of the bigger picture of the CEC's Twitter network to determine how much the greater context changes perspectives and outcomes.

This case is important in the Albertan and Canadian political landscape because of its subject matter. Not only is there a gap in Canadian-specific propaganda research, but more research must be done into topics important to Canadian politicians and voters. Finding a balance between protecting the environment and approving pipeline projects to strengthen the economy has been touted by some as "the defining challenge of Trudeau's nascent second term as prime minister" (Forrest, 2020, para. 1-3), therefore it is a topic which must be examined. The CEC provides a uniquely Albertan case within this contentious debate. It is an opportunity for a modern look at how online discourse is being conducted on a highly politicized topic for all of Canada.

The limitations of the study include: not having the time and other resources to be able to fact-check each individual item; being unable to determine motives of individual posters and of the CEC; being unable to pinpoint the source of any propaganda effects within the network; and not having a professional background in the oil and gas industry.

Literature Preview

This study fits amongst other modern contemporary studies, such as Haigh, Haigh & Kozak (2018), Al Zidjaly (2017) and Seo & Ebrahim (2016), and maintains grounding in historical literature on propaganda. The coding scheme is based entirely on literature which provides specific definitions of the many terms under the propaganda umbrella, advancing the

ability to recognize propaganda on social media. Many contemporary studies concentrate on specific semiotics, or contrasting messages between conflicting organizations' Facebook pages. This research takes an alternative approach in its contribution to the pool of modern case studies within this discipline.

In the greater context, much of the literature in the area of propaganda studies focuses on historical government propaganda. There is much research on different campaigns during World War II, including that of the Allies and of German propaganda. Many modern propaganda studies utilize content analysis to examine messaging and tone in content on social media including, but not limited to, Facebook posts and memes. Specific examples of contemporary studies will be discussed in-depth in the literature review section. Another prominent area of propaganda research which closely guided this research is historical literature. As mentioned, definitions within the realm of propaganda are contentious and continue to be revisited and updated by scholars. These studies continue the momentum of the field and identify issues for advancements in approach. A key piece of literature within this topic is *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics* by Benkler, Faris, and Roberts (2018). This in-depth resource was the cornerstone of developing my research. It provides crucial definitions and differences between similar and often-confusing terms within the study of propaganda.

Methodology Preview

To answer my research questions, I conducted an exploratory case study of the CEC's firsthand produced communicative items, and its adjacent Twitter network. I collected publicly available Tweets from the CEC's account, factored in comments, examined the CEC website's articles, and further researched its overall identity. Initially, I used the website Wakelet to gather

a broad pool of Tweets posted by the CEC, then transcribed basic metadata into a spreadsheet. The 323 Tweets were then subcategorized as a tweet, a retweet, or a comment, and whether or not it had a high or low rate of audience engagement. I then applied the coding scheme developed during the literature review to each individual item for micro-level coding. I coded the greater collection of comments on each individual item during the macro-level coding phase. For the purposes of conducting a qualitative content analysis, the central data was comprised of the CEC's individual tweets, linked articles, and the surrounding comments. This is described in more detail in the Research and Methodology and Findings chapters.

This design allowed for flexibility in dealing with different sources and types of data, to which a case study model lends itself well. It also allowed for a large-scale examination of Twitter data, while taking into account external information and context as necessary. Due to the complex nature of propaganda and manipulative content in new media, I decided on a qualitative content analysis of the data. This allowed me to stay grounded in historical literature, while also being reflexive in my coding based on what was present in such a large amount of data. I also had to develop a coding mechanism which did not rely on fact-checking due to limitations in resources. Had I stuck to a quantitative method, it would not have allowed me to apply as much contextual knowledge around the data in the discussion, and it would have been too restrictive in terms of examining content.

Summary

In this study, the aim is to determine if the Canadian Energy Centre's core content suggests that they are an organized propaganda agency, and whether there are any effects of propaganda evident in the CEC's Twitter network. There is currently widespread use of phrases such as "fake news", "alternative facts" and "misinformation age" in the context of the politics of

a major democracy, e.g. the United States (Szalai, 2019), but this phenomenon applies to more than a single country. As a result, there is a steady increase in calls for more "truth" in journalism, corporate social media policies, and other forms of mass communication. This is reflective of both an outcry concerning the truthfulness of mass media, and also the use of these terms to dismiss what are legitimately truthful facts and statements (Bell, 2018, para. 5-8). Added to the public concern is that of academic researchers, such as Benkler et al. (2018), who wrote that "The perceived threats to our very capacity to tell truth from convenient political fiction, if true, strike at the very foundations of democratic society" (p. 6). Concerns of this nature echo a longstanding history of literature regarding the phenomena of mass-scale propaganda. The delivery method is different, but the issues are the same. Propaganda has been widely studied historically, yet the definition of the term is somewhat contested. This case study utilizes a coding model to conduct a qualitative content analysis. The main goal is to define qualitative parameters to identify propagandic and normative types of messaging through examining a specific case.

Literature Review

For my topic, the term "propaganda" must be clearly defined and justified based in historical and contemporary research since the term "propaganda" and related sub-terms have evolved. Academic resources which clarify modern definitions of relevant terms and contemporary examples within the context of online political rhetoric form the foundation for my study. This section features an overview of findings discovered through an in-depth literature review of the history of propaganda and related modern topics.

I have used this literature review to lay the groundwork of topics relevant to my research question, and to conduct research into the evolving approaches to studies similar to mine. As

evident in the review of the literature below, there are many calls for further research into online political discourse and in the impacts of propaganda. This includes calls for developing subcategories of content analysis which are relevant to my topic. My research must also be rooted in interdisciplinary theories to contextualize and expand my ability to discuss my coded data.

In this chapter I list the steps I took to conduct a thorough literature review on my topic and describe the information found during this process. This includes databases I found to be the most useful, workflow developed to stay organized, and eligibility criteria and steps to decide what should and should not be include. I describe literature relating to my topic in the following categories: historical literature, contemporary studies, and discussions of modern definitions of propaganda terms.

Overview of the Field

Much of the literature in propaganda studies falls into three main categories: Historical Literature (which is made up of both older literature which describes and analyzes propaganda from its own time, and modern literature which documents historical propaganda); Contemporary Studies (which is subdivided into case studies, of which there are many, and broader studies); and Studies in Definitions (consisting of both exploratory accounts of definitions of propaganda terms, and literature review models). My study is of course a contemporary one and utilizes a very modern example, but will be informed by the over-arching literature on the history of propaganda. I use other contemporary case studies as guidelines for legitimacy and approach, and literature speaking to specific definitions of propaganda terms forms the basis of my coding. Before describing literature in depth, the following section provides a detailed account of how I conducted my literature review.

Search Process

To conduct my literature review search, I first developed the following list of relevant search terms:

- Propaganda
    - Misinformation/disinformation
    - Coercion
        - Public Relations
        - Marketing
    - Framing
    - Propaganda techniques
    - Persuasion
    - Information manipulation
    - Canadian propaganda
- Politics
    - Political discourse
        - Political discourse online
    - Political communication
    - Political sociology
    - Elections
    - Electoral discourse
- Social media
    - Twitter
    - Social media discourse

- Peer-to-peer propaganda

I began by utilizing a general search using the University of Alberta's journal article search function with my broadest key terms. Throughout this process, I also used the following search engines to take advantage of perceived strengths:

SAGE Journals: Many examples of peer-reviewed content analysis studies comparing propaganda to specific cases and/or scenarios

JSTOR: Historical sources of propaganda history and tactics, and sources on the debate between propaganda and public relations or marketing

Science Direct: Articles on history of propaganda in popular press, and psychology-specific research

From this, I refined my search by setting a date limit of the past 5 years and past 10 years to find more contemporary examples. I kept track of the resources I found in an Excel spreadsheet I developed, as seen in Figure 1.1.

	TITLE	AUTHOR	YEAR	FORMAT	JOURNAL	DB	R. TITLE? Wt 20		R. DISCUSS? Wt 20		PEER-REV? Wt 10		GOOD GREY? Wt 10		KNOWN AUTH? Wt 10		CITED? Wt 10		NEW? Wt 10		HISTORY Wt 5		3G THRY Wt 5		TOTAL Wt 100		CATEGORY FIT?
							Rt-10	Net	Rt-10	Net	Rt-10	Net	Rt-10	Net	Rt-10	Net	Rt-10	Net	Rt-10	Net	Rt-10	Net	Rt-10	Net		Net	
70	Political Photography, Journalism, and Framing in the Digital Age: The Management of Visual	MARLAND	2012	ARTICLE	The Internatior	SAGE	8	16		0	10	10		0		0		0	8	8		0		0	26.0	34.0	
71	Exploring the Networks of News Production: Frame Building and Source Use During the 2014 U.S.	CONWAY-SILVA	2018	ARTICLE	Journalism & M	SAGE	7	14	7	14	10	10		0		0		0	10	10		0		0	34.0	48.0	
72	Propaganda and Communication: A Study	FELLOWS	1957	ARTICLE	Journalism Qu	SAGE	7	14		0	10	10		0		0	5	5		0	10	5	32.0	34.0	
73	How Social Media Is Changing Conflict	ZEITZOFF	2017	ARTICLE	Journal of Cor	SAGE	7	14		0	10	10		0		0		0	10	10		0	7	3.5	34.0	37.5	
74	The Influence of Social Media in Vietnam's Elite	HAI BUI	2016	ARTICLE	Journal of Cur	SAGE	9	18		0	10	10		0		0		0	10	10		0		0	29.0	38.0	
75	Picturing Protest: The Visual Framing of Collective Action by First	CORRIGALL-BROWN, WILKES	2011	ARTICLE	American Beh	SAGE	8	16		0	10	10		0		0		0	8	8		0		0	26.0	34.0	
76	Network TV News' Affective Framing of the Presidential Candidates: Evidence For a Second-Level Agenda-Setting	COLEMAN AND BANNING	2006			SAGE	9	18		0		0		0		0		0	7	7		0		0	16.0	25.0	
77	Nonverbal Influence and the Expanding Boundaries of Political	BUCY AND DUMITRESCU	2016	ARTICLE	American Beh	SAGE	9	18		0	10	10		0		0		0	10	10	7	4		0	36.0	41.5	
78	Effectiveness of Cartoons as a Uniquely Visual Medium for	ABRAHAM	2009			SAGE	7	14		0		0		0		0		0	7	7	6	3		0	20.0	24.0	
79	Political acclamation, social media and the	DEAN	2016	ARTICLE	European Jour	SAGE	9	18		0	10	10		0		0		0	10	10		0		0	29.0	38.0	
80	The Clickwrap: A Political Economic Mechanism for Manufacturing Consent on Social Media	OBAR AND OELDORF-HIRSCH	2018	ARTICLE	Social Media +	SAGE	10	20		0	10	10		0		0		0	10	10		0	10	5	40.0	45.0	
	Organizational	LOCK AND	2019	ARTICLE	Public Relatior	SAGE																					

LIT EXAMPLES KEYWORDS

Count: 8

Figure 1.1: *Literature Review Spreadsheet*[2]

[2] More detailed information is available in Appendix A

Once I had a growing list of academic resources, I searched for other types of resources and grey material. I used the general University of Alberta resources search (which includes larger books and other resources) and general Google searches for alternative forms of useful data, such as news coverage. These resources justify the social context for my proposed research in the current social and political climate. I then graded each resource in my spreadsheet according to my eligibility criteria (more details below).

Eligibility Criteria

Basing my approach on recommendations made by Booth, Sutton and Papaioannou (2016), I developed categories and themes based on what I was finding in the literature (e.g. contemporary propaganda studies, propaganda in politics, etc.) and sorted each of the 160 resources to determine if any areas of interest were too thinly covered. Towards the end of this process, I was finding an excess of similar or redundant resources. Using the grading scheme and categorization quotas, I brought that amount down to something manageable. I ensured that peer-reviewed research was well represented, but found that many of the books which were based on literature review processes were vital to forming my methods. The literature I found to be the most meaningful is described below in the following categories: historical resources, contemporary resources, and resources specific to defining relevant propaganda and non-propaganda terms.

Review of Literature

Historical perspective. Because propaganda has had such influence and power in communication and political systems, there is a deep pool of literature about its history. In older nations, such as Korea, propaganda extended well before even the birth of nations such as

Canada. These propagandic communications can come from a variety of sources. Korea has long been subject to propaganda from powerful neighbors on the world stage, such as Japan and China, and since the Yi Dynasty of 1392-1910 their leaders have also deployed their own propaganda (Cull, Culbert & Welch, 2003, p. 211).

Much of the historical research of propaganda is based on the history of war. This is reasonable – during times of strife, governments must often spur on their people to different causes. It is difficult for modern scholars to fully understand the specific impacts various messaging had. For example, in the context of the first Great World War, it was written that "The scale and bloodiness of World War I led many historians and other intellectuals to conclude that propaganda was, unfortunately, extraordinarily effective" (Paddock, 2014, p. 1). Paddock also points out, however, that people are not merely "blind pawns" in a game when it comes to propaganda (p. 2). There are complex dynamics at work when it comes to propaganda campaigns and the decoding of messages by citizens, and it is therefore very difficult to predict definitive answers and outcomes to questions.

World War I propaganda as an overall theme is far beyond the scope of a single study. There are many broad topics and individual campaigns beyond pro-war posters and slogans produced by major governments. Areas which have also been of interest include, but are not limited to: propaganda use in negotiating with neutral nations, propaganda use in managing the opinions of citizens of occupied nations, or something more specific like wartime propaganda in nations which are not spoken of as often as Germany or France, such as Ireland (Paddock, 2014). *World War I and Propaganda* compiled by Paddock (2014) is an excellent resource for a broad overview of WWI propaganda.

Other established literature chronicles the evolution in strategies of Government Intelligence agencies (Briant, 2015), propaganda techniques of non-democratic government systems, such as the Communist movement of the early 1950s (Turner & Clews, 1965), and Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany (Taylor, 1998). There is also Canadian-specific literature which establishes that just prior to the start of the Second World War, the Canadian government "used propaganda on an ad hoc basis in accordance with imperial purposes and increasingly also to achieve sovereign national ends" (Cull et al., 2003, p. 59).

It is important to note that propaganda and associated terms are not universally considered negative, however. Eldersveld (1956) discusses two experiments conducted in 1953 and 1954 to test the impacts of personalized propaganda techniques (here, defined as interpersonal, face-to-face communication) on political participation. In *Experimental Propaganda and Voting Behavior,* Eldersveld (1956) found that personal contact greatly increased voter turnout among the participants. It is also an example of a study in which the term "propaganda" does not have negative connotations, used instead as a matter-of-fact term for political promotion. There is also historical literature regarding the usage and comparison of propaganda techniques with related areas, such as institutional advertising (Pearlin & Rosenberg, 1952) and in American public relations history between 1810 and 1918 (Myers, 2015). The differences and similarities between propaganda and disciplines such as marketing and PR will be discussed in depth in the analysis section of this literature review. Below are modern contemporary examinations of propaganda and adjacent topics.

Contemporary studies. At the core of my research question is the presence of propaganda on social media platforms. This presence is confirmed by many academics, as evident in works such as Seo and Ebrahim (2016), Fahmy, Bock and Wanta (2014), and Benkler

et al. (2018). Many studies in propaganda and social media discourse have been published in the past ten years. It is important for me to contextualize my research among modern propaganda case studies, but also to have a solid foundation of social media discourse and factors of usage. This section describes newer literature, subcategorized by these topics: modern disinformation and propaganda research, political discourse and dynamics on social media, and social media case studies.

Modern disinformation and propaganda research. Some authors, such as Schiffrin (2017), examine online disinformation from various sources, and attempt to describe the most common forms of disinformation impacting modern democracies. Schiffrin discusses the conflict and distrust between the general public and social media giants, compared to the hope in early years that social media would empower democracy and the general public. She also writes of how corporations such as Facebook have been challenged with academic data indicating the spread of disinformation during elections, including the 2016 American election and 2016 Brexit referendum in the UK.

There are government actors who still have the capacity to conduct propaganda, as covered in historical research. For example, Bradshaw and Howard (2018) compare the disinformation tactics of government actors across different types of regimes on social media, based on data from a 2017 investigation by the Computational Propaganda Project.

Other studies focus on propaganda interfacing with traditional media systems. Marland (2012) conducted interviews with members of the press and employees of politicians to explore framing with regards to photographic content prepackaged by politicians and political parties for use by the media, and how journalists are now more likely to use this delivered visual content. Findings suggest that major news outlets are more resistant to using this prepackaged visual

content, but smaller outlets with more limited resources are accepting of the items. This speaks to the power of images in politics, the importance of image management, and the relevancy of framing.

Some academics define specific aspects of propaganda in the political context. Seiffert-Brockmann, Diehl and Dobusch (2018) define memes in political discourse, and develop a theoretical framework for future research on the topics of how and why some memes are more successful than others online. In this writing, internet memes which are short, easy to share, and often humorous, are established as a tangible part of digital culture itself. Political memes are important because they are so easily shared and manipulated, impacting the minds of individuals and creating opportunities for further manipulation and evolution of memes. Similarly, Shirky (2011) wrote an exploratory article about social media as providing the coordinating tools for political movements and uprisings. He establishes that the internet is both liberating and problematic in the search for more political freedom. Along the lines of Seiffert-Brockmann et al.'s (2018) definition of memes, there has been much research of the involvement of the public in propaganda, and political discourse on social media.

Political discourse and dynamics on social media. These resources are not specific to propaganda, but provide a wider context of the general phenomenon of political discourse on social media. Garimella, De Francisci Morales, Gionis, and Mathioudakis (2018) quantified Twitter users' political leanings and compared them to each user's network position (e.g. influencer, outsider, etc.) to see if there were advantages to being partisan when aiming for more interaction and followers online. The findings support the existence of echo chambers in social media political discourse, and stated that it is much more difficult for bipartisan users to gain endorsements from other users compared to extremists.

Dean's (2017) article *Political acclamation, social media and the public mood* provides an exploratory look at political communication as "acclamation" – here defined as similar to a religious dedication and outcry. He draws comparisons between modern political affiliations and classical religious acclamation.

Scenarios of conflict are also inherent to political discourse. Zeitzoff (2017) provides an exploratory examination of existing literature which outlines a framework to understand how social media influences communications involving conflict, political or otherwise. Relevant factors include lower participation costs, and the increased speed of communication and dissemination of information online. In tandem, these variables allow for the sharing of information about conflicts, but also has the power to impact and influence the conflicts themselves.

Social media case studies. There are many contemporary research articles which concentrate on political spheres and discussions on social media. Much of the modern research is done in the context of case studies. These include: Facebook propaganda in Syrian conflicts of 2013 and 2014 (Seo & Ebrahim, 2016, p. 227); WhatsApp memes about politics in Oman (Al Zidjaly, 2017); newspaper article images of the 1990 Oka Crisis and the visual framing of relevant parties (Corrigall-Brown & Wilkes, 2012); and state-sponsored propaganda on social media in regard to the Ukraine Russia conflict of the late 2010s (Haigh, Haigh, & Kozak, 2018). Some of these studies do not work explicitly within the definitions of "propaganda", but do use terms which are described in the analysis section, and are therefore relevant to this research.

Bozkuş (2016) conducted a case study which examined the specific use of visual rhetoric in Turkish youth protest movements based in social media. The author set out to specifically analyze themes of populism in polyvocal discourse in internet memes of the Gezi Park protest

movement. This piece features data examples which show that memes can also be a way of remixing social culture and history into a modern political statement. Bozkuş frames this concept within a history in Turkey of anti-government graffiti and other forms of visual art, particularly in the 1990s. This article is a strong reminder that the idea of "memes" is not a new phenomenon specific to the internet, and also stresses how memes are online culture and are inherently linked to socialization – a critical piece of my research topic.

Modern studies have also been conducted on the growth of social media use in political movements. Bui's (2016) study *The Influence of Social Media in Vietnam's Elite Politics* applies a qualitative approach using participant observation and interviews to explore the rise and impacts of social media in Vietnamese politics. The study found that this increase in usage has enabled higher levels of political participation by members of the general public, and more open communication with elite members of society much more easily than was once possible. Bui also notes that social media allowed the users to push the boundaries of what is deemed "acceptable" in political spaces and have a hand in forming new political standards of approaches and policies. It is important to consider that online political discourse is not limited by national borders.

Researcher must also account for barriers to participation on social media. A study by Kushin, Yamamoto & Dalisay (2019) examined social media participation in the context of the Spiral of Silence theory (SOS), which states that people are more likely to ignore and ostracize someone who disagrees with their beliefs. The authors found that having specialized reference groups online (such as opinion-specific Facebook groups) makes people feel more empowered to share opinions which are not perceived to be that of the majority of society.

Heiskanen (2017) conducted an exploratory study based on the significant rise in members of the public posting online memes in the 2016 American Presidential election

campaign. This article features specific examples of tactics such as irony, humor, nicknames, and puns. Memes are examined as a kind of evolving discourse in and of themselves, and are also identified as a way for people who would previously not be able to promote their beliefs in a "traditional" media system to create content and commentary in a way that had not been seen at that level.

Another study was conducted specifically on the dichotomy of meme production of groups counter to each other's ideologies online. The article *Digital Propaganda: The Tyranny of* Ignorance by Sparkes-Vian (2019) features a qualitative memetical analysis of propaganda in images online, and discusses the impacts of satire and online critique as counter-propaganda. They found that the attempts to counteract the extremist narratives were less effective than the original messaging. Discussions of counter-propaganda are very helpful to my topic, as it illustrates two-way communication, which is reflective of meaning and significance in more than just a single image. This lends itself well to examining discourse surrounding (and ultimately driven by) audiovisual propaganda content.

To conduct this research, it is also essential to establish a framework of definitions of terms to code data and produce a meaningful discussion. The following literature are historical and modern resources which explore and differentiate terms relevant to this study.

Definition resources. Propaganda is not a term with a universally accepted definition. Well-known thinkers on this topic include Herman and Chomsky (1988), whose widely-cited book *Manufacturing Consent* features an in-depth guide to what is often considered a traditional definition and model of propaganda. Chomsky declares that propaganda causes inequality, is used by those in power to gain more wealth and power, and that it influences mass-media models and the very realities of those who consume its content.

Other early definitive works include *Propaganda and Communications: A Study in Definitions* by Fellows (1957), which explores a framework for approaches to education about propaganda. Even back in the 1950s it was a contentious topic which warranted academic exploration and is still a topic of concern. Some articles, such as Scheufele and Tewksbury (2006) define terms which fall under the propaganda umbrella, including: agenda-setting, framing, and priming. Other literature compares (and attempts to separate) the definitions of propaganda and marketing (Pearlin & Rosenberg, 1952, p. 5) and public relations (Myers, 2015, p. 551).

Much of the literature is conflicted on whether or not the term "propaganda" is inherently negative. The public attitude towards the concept is considered largely wary and skeptical, but some academics argue that in order to influence the behaviors and attitudes of members of society, largely considered to be rational beings, propaganda must also have the capacity to appeal to rational thinking and be ethically neutral (Cull et al., 2003, p. XVIII).

According to Lock and Ludolph (2019), propaganda research in social sciences largely peaked after World War II (p. 105). During that peak significant research was conducted, which generated many different definitions of propaganda. One significant source of research was the American-founded Institute for Propaganda Analysis (IPA), which operated from 1937 to 1942 (Sproule, 2001). The Institute provided the following definition: "propaganda is expression of opinion or action by individuals or groups deliberately designed to influence opinions or actions of other individuals or groups to predetermined ends" (Fellows, 1957, p. 433). This is very vague – that essentially anyone attempting to convince someone else of a certain opinion or to do a specific something is propaganda. Edward Bernays was arguably more definitive, by saying that

"Almost everything is propaganda" (p. 433). The IPA did provide more specific qualifications than Bernays did. The organization developed a list of seven devices of propaganda, which are;

- Name calling: Attaching stigmatized words or labels to the opposition
- Glittering generalities: Using virtuous words to promote the propagandist's cause, such as freedom, honor, public service, etc.
- Transfer: Projecting respect and other positive qualities from something revered onto whatever cause the propagandist wants to be accepted, such as using national symbolism
- Testimonial: Using the good image or reputation of an institution or person to boost the appeal of a propagandist's goal
- Plain folk: Propagandists creating a common identity with everyday people
- Card stacking: Using calculated omissions and distortions of information to emphasize the propagandist's preferred message and downplay any counter messages
- Band wagon: Playing to a group mentality, that if others in a group (e.g. region, nation, religion, etc.) agree, each individual should agree as well (Sproule, 2001, p. 136)

While these devices do not narrow down the propaganda definition enough to be applied in an academic study, it provided a strong basis for examining propaganda in terms of approaches and tactics. This framework proved to be very influential in post-World War II propaganda research, as it not only became "a standard component of inter-world-war propaganda analysis in the United States, but the rubric has been reprinted, cited, alluded to, critiqued, or reworked constantly during the last 65 years." (Sproule, 2001, p. 135). The IPA, however, was not the only research institution or individual to add and amend to the definition.

Fellows' (1957) article, *Propaganda and Communication: A Study in Definitions*, provides an excellent overview of evolutions and disagreements of the definition of propaganda.

Though quite dated, this writing provides many examples of research and academic discussion during very significant times for the field, including the aforementioned peak after World War II. Though many modern researchers would consider these associations with the term to be too vague or outdated, due to the longstanding history of propaganda research, it is important to ground modern examinations within the over-arching context and foundations of the term.

Within Fellows' work, alternative definitions include the eventual addition of "a method utilized for influencing the conduct of others, on behalf of predetermined ends " and "it appears that every articulate person with a purpose is a propagandist … ours is an age of competing propagandas … Propaganda is a method, a device for conditioning behavior. It represents nothing new in human affairs, except a refinement of techniques and the appropriation of new instruments for exerting the stimuli. Propaganda has no doubt always existed and will continue to exist so long as human beings contrive to formulate new goals and purposes" (Fellows, 1957, p. 433). It is at this point that different methods of manipulation, such as "refinement techniques", are being discussed in a more specific manner. Another thinker in the context of wartime propaganda, Lasswell sought to more specifically develop a quantitative way of measuring communications. He described propaganda in a vague sense, similar to previous examples, but also added that there is specific "manipulation of representations" (Fellows, 1957, p. 433) and that they can come in various formats, including "spoken, written, pictoral or musical form" (p. 433). Other researchers, such as Harwood and Childs had similar definitions around this era, but this definition is still too broad to provide foundation for an academic study (p. 433).

Scholars have also examined the specific elements which can determine whether or not an item falls into the realm of "propaganda" or not, including as a communicative event, subject matter, or as method (Fellows, 1957, p. 434). For example, Lasswell defines propaganda as a

communicative event which manipulated symbols “to control controversial attitudes”, and says that it is conducted in a manner which would be counter to “education” (p. 434). The theme of propaganda versus education is a recurring theme in some thinkers’ writings, and will be mentioned below in relation to Bernays and public relations. Other researchers have mapped propaganda as a method in and of itself, including framing its relevance within emotional manipulation. It is tempting to claim that “emotional” or “confusing” content is automatically unethical manipulation, but this does not necessarily tell the whole story. Appeals which are based entirely on emotion are not necessarily unethical – consider a coach rallying the morale of players at a halftime scrum, which would not require players to take pause and deeply deliberate on what is being said (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 30). Some researchers do use emotional appeal to define manipulative and propagandistic conduct, however. Kimberly Young wrote that: “the more or less deliberately planned and systematic use of symbols, chiefly through suggestion and related psychological techniques, with a view first to altering and controlling opinions, ideas, and values, and ultimately to changing overt actions along predetermined lines … The essential psychological element in propaganda is suggestion” (Fellows, 1957, p. 436). These suggestions can be done in ways which could be deemed “positive” or “negative”, as in the coach example mentioned above. Doob similarly linked propaganda to “suggestion”, and also provided the phrase “unintentional propaganda”, which he deems “is the control of the attitudes, and consequently, the actions of groups of individuals through the use of suggestion” (p. 436). The idea that propaganda could be unintentional is counter to many modern definitions, however, which will be discussed in detail below.

Propaganda compared to Public Relations and Marketing. The aforementioned vagueness of characterizations of propaganda in historical research has created challenges for

differentiating between “propaganda” and professional, ethical conduct of marketing and public relations (PR) professionals. This may have been a natural development, as at some periods in time marketing and propaganda were intrinsically linked in some senses. For example, after the First World War “psychological advertising” was promoted through the field of behavioral psychology, which “claimed that consumers were best reached through emotional appeals rather than reason” (Cull et al., 2003, p. 6). During World War II, this association was further solidified through professional advertisers in America working to assist in propaganda developed by the Office of War Information (p. 6-7). After World War II, at the peak of propaganda research, a shift was also occurring in the attitudes and assumptions about advertising and power dynamics, which became “informed by a new liberal critique of society” (p. 7).

Associations with propaganda have also occurred in the public relations field. For example, one of the founders of public relations, Edward Bernays declared that nearly everything could be considered propaganda (Fellows, 1957), even referring to PR professionals as propagandists as early as 1928 (Bernays, 1928). Bernays and propaganda include his early creation of slogans for the American campaign in World War I, and was so successful he was requested to work for Hitler’s German regime, which he refused (Foer, 2017, p. 215). This is a huge point towards the link between propaganda and PR – that the man considered to be the father of one was asked to operate as a propaganda agent for one of the most notorious regimes in history.

As part of writing from later in his career, Bernays (1947) wrote that *The Engineering of Consent* should be based on a thorough knowledge of the attempted audience in order to best make your message appealing, but also pointed out that “it is sometimes impossible to reach joint decisions based on an understanding of facts by all the people” (p. 3). Though these attempts to

convince can lead to emotional manipulation akin to classically-declared propaganda, Bernays did have reasonable outlines for the profession. Chief among these assertions is that "Under no circumstances should the engineering of consent supersede or displace the functions of the educational system, either formal or informal, in bringing about understanding by the people as a basis for their action" (p. 3). This is a point which would be in contrast to many thinkers' definitions of propaganda, including the aforementioned opinion of Lasswell, which claims that propaganda operates counter to education (Fellows, 1957, p. 434). Bernays also distinctly stated that public relations professionals have a professional responsibility to only promote the ideas that they can personally respect, and forbids practitioners from accepting work from clients which they would deem unethical (Bernays, 1947, p. 5). While propagandists working for an outlet which many might consider to be "unethical" may disagree, this first-step consideration to ethics is at least a promising distinguishing factor between the two activities.

Lock and Ludolph (2019) cite Hiebert's perspective that PR is also about reaching a "mutual understanding" between an organization and its audience, and is more of a two-way dialogue (p. 106). This is in contrast to an idea that propaganda aims not to have any mutual gain, but instead to generate "obedience" (p. 106). This can serve as one more way in which to differentiate between normative and manipulative content.

With this overview in mind, it is easy to see that the common thread between propaganda, marketing, and PR, no matter how specific or vague the definition, is that they all aim to convince an individual or group to a cause, action, or opinion. That said, there are modern definitions which serve to tangibly and more clearly separate each of them, particularly for academic purposes. Modern definitions of each of these professions, as well as adjacent relevant terms will be discussed in detail below.

Modern definitions. Fortunately, for the sake of researchers and those who yearn for a more functional definition for the word, the modern era of propaganda researchers (though light in breadth, compared to the "peak" era) have continued to shape and hone in on a definition of propaganda. It is important to note that many technological advances have taken place since much of the aforementioned foundational thinking was done, and Lock and Ludolph (2019) pointed out that "With technological advancement, the nature of propaganda has changed significantly from one-way communication through mass media channels directed at a passive audience to propaganda in a digital environment that allows for two-way communication without gatekeepers" (p. 104). With this in mind, it is clear that modern definitions of propaganda-related terms had to expand and evolve in order to meet the new online ecosystem.

There are no universally-accepted definitions of the terms within the realm of propaganda. While tempting, it is not significant enough to simply say that propaganda is anything that has "bad" or "negative" messaging, or, per Cass Sunstein, that manipulation "entails influencing people in a manner that 'does not sufficiently engage or appeal to their capacity for reflection and deliberation'" (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 30). Benkler et al. also point out that positive or negative emotional framing cannot be taken at face value, as "some of the worst abuses in human history were framed in terms that in the abstract sound positive and uplifting, be it love of country and patriotism or the universal solidarity of workers" (p. 31). That is not to say that all propaganda has negative impacts in and of itself, as well. Reilly (2018) wrote that "At its worst, propaganda serves to instill widespread compliance among citizens, workers, and consumers" and that "at its best, it is regarded as a tool to mobilize and guide a disparate citizenry toward a greater common good" (p. 142). It is important to note that Benkler et al. (2018) do not attempt to make a moral ruling between the two, or create a definitive coding

scheme of either. Instead, they "emphasize that some form of manipulation is a necessary part of justifying the normatively negative connotation of "propaganda" and that connotation must have a well-defined normative foundation other than "I don't agree with what they said'" (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 32).

These complications led to the development of an idea referred to as the "Empathetic observer" (which will be referred to frequently in the definitions found below). The essential issue is that there is no universality to what is or is not considered to be a "reasonable" communicative act. Because of this, Benkler et al. (2018) focus on the factor of autonomy, rather than self-interest, and use the following definition:

> The "empathetic observer" differs from the "reasonable person" in that she takes the first-person perspective of the target of the communication, and asks whether that person, knowing the entire situation, including the intentions and psychological techniques of the alleged manipulator, would welcome the allegedly manipulative communication (p. 31).

This definition does resurface the issue of individual conflict of what is or is not "appropriate" given personal beliefs, but the only solution to this would be to develop a systemic normative framework, (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 31) which is beyond the scope and limitations of this research. A perspective which Benkler et al. (2018) provides which will be used throughout this research to address this issue is in the comparison of a normative framework to "what democracy requires of citizens" (p. 31). With this in mind, the empathetic observer concept essentially allows for a framing piece to refer to normative reasonableness of a message. It must be acknowledged that some communications would seem, to some, entirely unreasonable – but Benkler et al. (2018) point to the possibility of, for example, a speech which would be offensive to some but not others, resulting in some message receivers which "are fully aware of the intent

and effect of the comm, and desire it no less than the nearly defeated athletes at halftime desire the rousing pep talk from the coach" (p. 31).

In building of these broad concepts, for the purposes of this research I use the definitions of Benkler et al. (2018) as a road map to create distinct definitions for the purposes of coding data. Data interpretation will also be informed by the aforementioned historical context, and by utilizing Benkler et al.'s ideas of the empathetic observer. Important definitions within this framework include: misinformation, propaganda (and its sub-types), disinformation, political advertising, public relations, marketing, bullshit, and fake news.

Analysis and Definitions

The above literature has been compiled into the following definitions to formulate a coding scheme. The terms which needed defining and pinpointing are: manipulation, propaganda (including white, grey, and black), disinformation, political advertising/communication, public relations, marketing, bullshit, and trolls. This section summarizes definitions of these terms, and a detailed table of definitions is available at Appendix B.

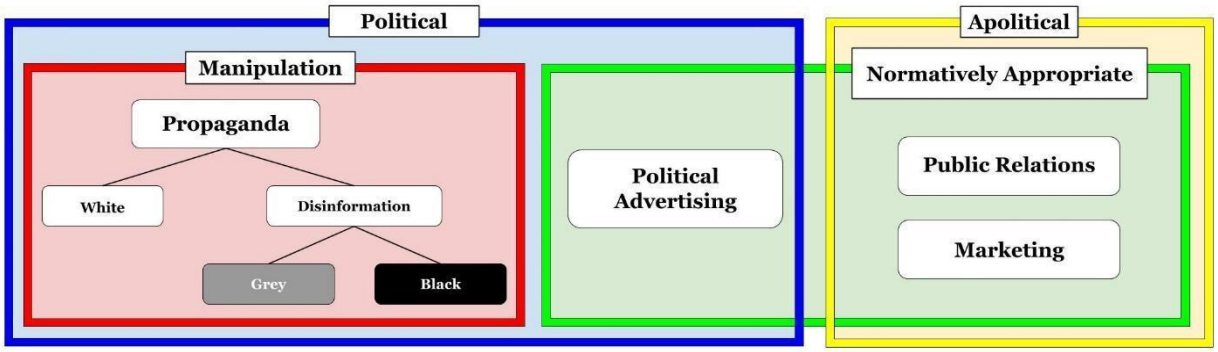


Figure. 1.2: *Propaganda Terms Visual Representation Graphic*[3]

[3] This chart was created by me based on Benkler et al.'s (2018) definitions

Manipulation. Though not a direct category of content, it is important to clarify my use of the term "manipulation". Manipulation is an element of propaganda, and is essentially a term for a communicative event which is produced with a goal of convincing an audience of an opinion (or into a specific action, etc.) which would not be deemed normatively appropriate for a given situation by an empathetic observer (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 30). It is important to note that manipulation can occur within multiple variables in message-sending, including in masking or misrepresenting the message or information source, misrepresenting or purposefully misinterpreting information or data, or untruthfully presenting an interpretation of data.

Propaganda. Benkler et al. (2018) broadly defines propaganda as "Communication designed to manipulate a target population by affecting its beliefs, attitudes, or preferences in order to obtain behavior compliant with political goals of the propagandist" (p. 29). Propaganda is also intentional, and would not otherwise be appropriate from the perspective of an empathetic observer (p. 30-31).

There are four effects on an audience which can occur as a result of the propaganda process:

- Induced misperceptions: Strong political beliefs unknowingly based on false information, misinterpretations of correct data, or which are counter to the best available evidence
- Distraction: Redirection of attention from a propagandist's undesired topic to weaken the ability to form decisions about it
- Disorientation: Weakening the ability to recognize truth from falsehoods and what sources are legitimate
- Misinformation: Unintentionally publishing false information (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 34-38)

Benkler et al. (2018). describe three types of propaganda (white, grey and black) which have been used in propaganda research as early as 1950 (Doob, 1950).

White propaganda. White propaganda is manipulative content which does not involve disinformation (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 29-30). This means that the message source is clear, and does not contain false data. To qualify as white propaganda the message must still not qualify as "reasonable", which can include information which is twisted or strategically-interpreted in such a way which attempts to the beliefs and/or actions of an audience (p. 29-30). For the purposes of this study, white propaganda will be content which manipulates the message involving an omission of facts, or which manipulates true facts.

Disinformation. A subcategory of propaganda which encompasses grey and black propaganda, "that includes dissemination of explicitly false or misleading information" (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 32). The misleading component may originate in the message source, the information, or the interpretation of the information (p. 32).

Grey propaganda. Political content which features some level of manipulation, misrepresentation, or masking of the source of a message, or of the legitimacy of information (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 32).

Black propaganda. Political, manipulative content which features blatant misrepresentation of the source of a message, or utilizes overtly false facts or interpretations of data (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 32).

Political advertising/communication: To differentiate political communication and advertising which is separate from propaganda, similar to Benkler et al. (2018)'s definitions of marketing, the communications must be normatively appropriate. Similarities to propaganda include agenda setting, priming, and framing (p. 101). Within the over-arching framework

Benkler et al. (2018) developed, political advertising/political communication is essentially comparable to marketing, except that it contains political content or messaging.

Public Relations. Due to Benkler et al.'s insistence of propaganda needing political content to qualify, public relations is for these purposes defined as normatively appropriate, apolitical communication conducted by corporations or noteworthy people in order to manage their image. Though Lock and Ludolph (2019) point to skepticism in the ethical practices and motives of organizational communications and many linking PR to propaganda (p. 107), this study will treat PR as ethically and reasonably conducted.

Marketing. Marketing, similar to public relations, is often seen as very similar to propaganda. Benkler et al. (2018) use the requirement for a political subject matter to differentiate between the two, as they deem marketing as potentially fitting all the other categories of definition, and sharing in many of the same practices (p. 29).

Bullshit/trolls. Bullshit and trolling involve messages and communications which are completely untrue, "with no regard to the truth or falsehood of the statements made" (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 32). Bullshit actors only want to gain traffic to their website (or delivery method of messages) through made-up stories without really caring about the impacts or ramifications (p. 32). This is separate from propaganda because it is not a targeted act with a specific political outcome or goal in mind.

Fake news. Though Benkler et al. (2018) deem fake news a term too vague to have a real academic usefulness (p. 9), it is relevant to the discussion of qualitative data. Reilly (2018) defines fake news as representing "information of various stripes that is presented as real but is patently false, fabricated, or exaggerated to the point where it no longer corresponds to reality" (p. 141). The main goal of fake news is to deceive or mislead a target audience (p. 141), which is

fundamentally similar to propaganda. Reilly (2018) goes so far as to equate fake news to propaganda (p. 141-142). Benkler et al. (2018) deems the term as very similar to bullshit, and that the true historical definitions (though is has been a short-lived term) are far too vague to be useful (p. 9).

Clear definitions of the preceding definitions are essential not only to the discussion of this project, but also for my coding scheme, in answering the following questions:

RQ1: Is the Canadian Energy Centre an organized effort for propaganda?

RQ2: Is there propaganda present in the aggregate Twitter communication network surrounding the Canadian Energy Centre?

Theoretical Context

At the core of this research is the idea that there is an online space in which legitimate political discourse should occur by the public. This idea is backed by the concept of a "public sphere". Jürgen Habermas (1991) devised the term, which he originally used to describe a space ultimately formed by journalists and the mass media, in which other members of the public can only watch what is occurring in a "virtual stage of mediated communication" (Bruns & Highfield, 2016, p. 56). While this early definition would not apply to modern social media platforms and new democratization of communications through evolving technologies, modern scholars such as Bruns and Highfield (2016) have since pushed for evolving ideologies related to this idea. This has included the concept of a "networked public sphere" (p. 60). An online sphere does not imply one singularity, but instead is a fragmented sphere which encompasses an over-arching system which inevitably experiences overlaps (p. 59). For example, not every Twitter user would discuss only politics at all times – quite likely, the user would also be interested in some form of pop culture or other more simplified social interactions (p. 61). It is interactions

among parts of the overall sphere which lead to interesting developments, all enabled by the ability for members of the public to participate more actively in online discussions. Through the movement between interpersonal and public topics on various social media sites (including Twitter), members of the public can act not only as individuals having a conversation with a friend of theirs in a private-public manner, but can also interact with larger industry bodies, corporations, and government members in serious forms of active political discussion.

Wherever democratic discussion takes place, ultimately the goal should be to earn mutual understanding. Johnson (2006) wrote that "an interest in building the shared grounds in terms of which the needs and points of view of strangers can become mutually intelligible is central to the goal of a public" (p. 2). This is indicative that no matter where these public spheres exist, they should be spaces which promote participation of members of the public in a forum which encourages healthy debate about relevant political topics (p. 12). If these are areas in which the public can form mutual understanding, it will allow formal publics (such as governments) to better inform their decision-making which impacts those participating stakeholders (p. 5). If a stakeholder participating in political discourse on a platform such as Twitter employs propagandic strategies, this would taint the ability of participants to co-create mutual understandings. Those who purposefully use forms of propaganda to skew arguments in their favor are guilty of poisoning the productivity of discussion, and stakeholders who then share propagandic content without proper research are guilty of conducting misinformation[4]

To ensure that political discourse is fair and productive, Habermas' critical theories of ideal speech must also be discussed. In line with many communication theories, Critical Theory prioritizes factors which would produce as "ideal" and "undistorted" speech as possible. This is a

[4] These terms are defined in-depth in the Analysis section of this Literature Review

basis which largely concentrates on distorted communication, particularly in a political context (Craig & Muller, 2007, p. 425). Critical theory also emphasizes issues in mass society of "inauthentic culture and the acceptance of deception" (p. 427). Habermas framed speech and messaging as having four underlying "claims to validity: intelligibility, truth, normative rightness, and sincerity" (Habermas, 2007, p. 447). If messaging does not meet these requirements, it is inauthentic speech and therefore no "true" consensus can be reached through discussion (p. 450). These factors will help to inform my ranking of reasonable normativity of content, and act as a framing device to discuss the greater implications of my data.

Summary

This chapter was written to summarize the theoretical foundations of my project, the background information for my discussion, and lays out the groundwork for forming the definitions of my coding scheme. This study is a qualitative content analysis, which is well in line with other contemporary studies in this area. From these resources, it is evident: propaganda is historically established as impactful and warranting research; propaganda has found effective delivery methods in audiovisual (e.g. film, posters) formats; social media platforms such as Twitter are potential ways users can post propaganda; misinformation is a concern in democratic elections; and that there are concerns regarding the tone and accuracy of discussions (online and otherwise) of current and future elections.

Many of these studies also concentrate on the content of messaging, framing strategies used, or the messages interpreted by audiences. Very little, if any, studies concentrate on the overall political socialization process. In a democracy, it is this very interaction between citizens which informs and inspires political action and participation, therefore it is incredibly important to have a better understanding of what is happening in the discourse to inform future studies. The

precedent has been set for those in power to use visual propaganda techniques, so research must investigate how this applies in modern contexts in the wake of aforementioned technical developments.

I must carefully define all the terms in my research question based on the data from my literature review. In particular, I must define my parameters of "propaganda" very clearly for the context of my research. I focus on what is happening to the online political socialization process when it occurs around an item which has utilized a form of propaganda. This literature review describes the process I developed to formulate the background research of my topic, and describes the findings and further implications for my project and future studies.

This literature review was conducted to provide the basis for answering the following questions:

RQ1: Is the Canadian Energy Centre an organized effort for propaganda?

RQ2: Is there propaganda present in the aggregate Twitter communication network surrounding the Canadian Energy Centre?

The following section describes the research and methodology designed and undertaken to answer these questions.

Research Design and Methodology

This chapter describes the research design and methodology undertaken to conduct this study. To reiterate, this was developed based on the following research questions:

RQ1: Is the Canadian Energy Centre an organized effort for propaganda?

RQ2: Is there propaganda present in the aggregate Twitter communication network surrounding the Canadian Energy Centre?

These questions were formed in response to the over-arching problem of the spread and effects of misinformation on online political discourse.

I conducted an exploratory case study which included an inductive qualitative content analysis of publicly available Twitter data which centers on the Canadian Energy Centre. I also took into account further details and data for context, including articles on the CEC's website, Twitter comments by the public on their Tweets, and other corporate details. I explored the context of the data as much as possible, and according to Denscombe (2010) the case study approach is a strong option for examining scenarios in which one looks at different layers of a scenario (p. 53).

I will also explain the thought process and academic facts which led to these choices. These are described in detail in the following sections: Design; Case Study Boundaries; Data Collection; Data Analysis; Coding Plan; and Data Collection Procedure.

Design

Due to the nature of my research questions, to conduct my study I used an exploratory qualitative Case Study. Baxter and Jack (2008) wrote that a case study approach is best suited for "How" or "Why" questions, when you cannot manipulate variables in a study, when context is very important to the phenomenon being observed, and when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are blurred (p. 545). In the case of the online discourse surrounding the Canadian Energy Centre, all of the above applies. The phenomenon of the outcomes of propaganda content paired with the context of political communication are very difficult to entirely separate, as evident in the foundations of propaganda research being so heavily intrinsically linked to politics (as evident in the Literature Review). It is also very difficult to predict what the impacts may be shown to be on the network, therefore this was an exploratory

case study, since it involved exploring a situation "in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear, single set of outcomes" (p. 548).

My study featured a single case with multiple embedded units (Yin, 2008, p. 140) – the case being the impacts of propaganda (whether pro- or anti-) content involved in networks around the Canadian Energy Centre and the embedded units being the levels of the network (defined in the Case Study Boundaries section below).

With this in mind, authors such as Yazan (2015) have pointed out that there are no clear-cut guidelines on how to approach a case study. Yazan wrote that "Research methodologists do not have a consensus on the design and implementation of case study, which makes it a contested terrain and hampers its full evolution" (p. 134). Case studies essentially do not have a one-size-fits-all manner of conducting research, which can not only make the initial design phase quite complex, but it also enables skepticism about the validity of the research method (p. 140).

This case study approach, however, made the most sense to answer my research questions. According to Denscombe (2010) case studies enable researchers to concentrate on very specific, holistic examples, and to take a specific, in-depth look at processes in a given scenario (p. 54). It is also possible to incorporate different types of data (p. 54). I therefore generated my approach while studying contemporary definitions of the relevant terms under the umbrella of the propaganda topic, while methodologically guided by Yin (2008).

Sources

My data consisted of Tweets posted by the CEC as well as the contextual information (e.g. articles each Tweet linked to), and comments on each Tweet. My study does not focus on the recurrence of individual words or phrases, or how the conversation itself is structured or organized. Instead, I sought to discover how perceived propaganda in the form of disinformation,

or accidentally perpetuated misinformation impacts the participants' experience, or whether this appeared to plant the seeds of disorientation or distraction among communication within the CEC network. This is reminiscent of seeking to learn more about the aforementioned "participants' meanings and experiences" rather than a more quantitative approach involving linguistical or other means of examinations. For gathering, I focused on collecting Tweets the CEC posted itself, comments the account posted on other Tweets, and posts in which the CEC retweeted another account's post, but also added a comment. I did not include posts where the CEC merely retweeted without adding any commentary, because that is more of a passive condoning of messaging rather than adding any message creation.

To explore this case study, I conducted an inductive qualitative content analysis. This was selected to best examine how the political discourse surrounding the CEC impacts participants and the aggregate network. The use of inductive analysis allowed me to use very specific units of data to build a greater pool, and in the process come to more generalized observations about outcomes (Denscombe, 2010, p. 273). Due to the qualitative nature of my data, the data gathering process was also iterative, thereby lower levels of coding (e.g. inputting metadata, gaining insight into what was generally there, etc.) occurred at the same time as data gathering (p. 272).

Case Study Boundaries

To ensure good coverage of my selected case study, I started by making a list of all the relevant communicative content which was produced, including but not limited to: Twitter, Facebook, and website posts by the Canadian Energy Centre; members of the public posting items about the CEC (or relevant adjacent topics) to various websites; news articles about the CEC; online communications by industry groups (such as CAPP); and press conferences. With a

very broad list in hand, I began to look for examples of each type of item which could feasibly be a part of my research and provide meaningful data. A detailed description of the data collection process is listed in the Data Collection section of this chapter.

Ultimately, I decided to concentrate firstly on communications posted directly by the Canadian Energy Centre on Twitter (including examining links to external website posts, videos, or other articles embedded in each post). I chose to begin on Twitter because the posts are inherently public in nature, hence would feature more public discourse attached to items (opposed to one-way communicative delivery items), and would also be easier for me to gather and code. Facebook was another option, but much of what was on their Facebook page was duplicates of Twitter posts, and it was more difficult to vet comments. Though it would have been theoretically possible to gather Twitter and Facebook data, as Yazan (2015) writes that case studies with embedded designs utilize multiple units of analysis (p. 140), I also had to keep my resource and time limitations in mind.

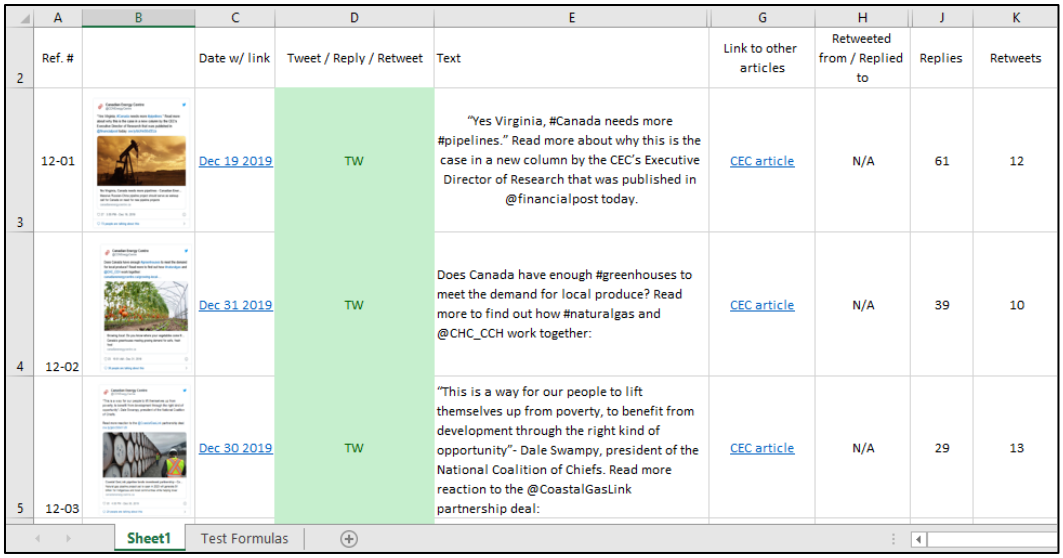
From this, I decided to define working parameter "levels" of the data I would be collecting. For the purposes of later discussion, the smallest embedded unit is at the "micro" level and consists of singular CEC Tweets and any articles or retweeted messages embedded within. The "macro" level expands beyond the micro level to include the comments of external users. Since I was examining impacts on a network, I framed these within "nodes" of the overall CEC Twitter network: The Central Node (The CEC itself), Peripheral Government Node (e.g. official UCP accounts, Jason Kenney), Peripheral Industry Node (e.g. the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers), Peripheral Media Node (e.g. CBC, Global News), and Peripheral Public node (members of the general public). These nodes are essentially subsections of the

online “public sphere”, which in their seeking out interaction with the CEC unite as an ad hoc public (Bruns & Highfield, 2016, p. 65).

Responses and feedback from the public are in the Peripheral Public node, which includes but is not limited to: Op eds, responses to Tweets of the Central CEC Node, Facebook responses, and public blogs and websites.

Data Collection

To gather my Twitter data, I used the website Wakelet. On this site it is possible to create collections of Tweets, including searching by Twitter handle. The site maintains a link to the original post at all times, rather than just capturing a screenshot, therefore collecting important contextual metadata. I input each of the CEC Tweets into an Excel spreadsheet. This involved transferring the original date posted and link to the original post, a screenshot of the post, the number of likes, the name of any account the CEC was referring to or responding to, etc. In gathering data it was crucial to stay as close to the original post as possible to maintain the integrity of the context throughout this process. This allowed me to better incorporate grounded theory, “a method that is premised on searching for possible explanations in the data rather than setting up hypotheses and testing them (an approach often ill-suited to Twitter-based research” (Sloan & Quan-Haase, 2016, p. 563) into my data analysis (See: Data Analysis section below).



	A	B	C	D	E	G	H	J	K
2	Ref. #		Date w/ link	Tweet / Reply / Retweet	Text	Link to other articles	Retweeted from / Replied to	Replies	Retweets
3	12-01		Dec 19 2019	TW	"Yes Virginia, #Canada needs more #pipelines." Read more about why this is the case in a new column by the CEC's Executive Director of Research that was published in @financialpost today.	CEC article	N/A	61	12
4	12-02		Dec 31 2019	TW	Does Canada have enough #greenhouses to meet the demand for local produce? Read more to find out how #naturalgas and @CHC_CCH work together:	CEC article	N/A	39	10
5	12-03		Dec 30 2019	TW	"This is a way for our people to lift themselves up from poverty, to benefit from development through the right kind of opportunity"- Dale Swampy, president of the National Coalition of Chiefs. Read more reaction to the @CoastalGasLink partnership deal:	CEC article	N/A	29	13

Sheet1 Test Formulas

Figure 2.1: *Data Collection spreadsheet sample*

Because the outlet was relatively new, I was able to do a primary collection and coding of all of their Twitter posts (up to March 31, 2020). As I collected the CEC Tweets, I included any embedded content from Peripheral Nodes (including CEC retweeting Industry bodies, or links to external websites) for further analysis in later steps. For example, many CEC Tweets included links to an article posted on their website. I not only saved the Tweet as an image and link to the original on Wakelet, I then also converted the Tweet to an Excel document which included a screenshot of the Tweet, any images, external links, the text, and the number of retweets and comments. This gave me sufficient raw data to conduct further analysis while still maintaining as much of the original context as possible.

Data Analysis

For this case study, I conducted an inductive qualitative content analysis to process my data. Since my data was all online text, images, and some video, content analysis allowed me to categorize my data, as well as analyze the relationship between different units of analysis (Denscombe, 2010, p. 281-282). An inductive approach allowed me to start with a wide pool of

data, and then work down to analyzing more specific scenarios and examples within the case study (p. 273).

To begin, I created a matrix of definitions of terms under the propaganda umbrella[5], which gave me a starting point for conducting my coding. I also closely followed the writings of Yin (2008) on conducting case study research. One of Yin's four theoretical propositions for data analysis within a case study approach is to rely on theoretical propositions (p. 130). Yin describes propositions as those ideas which originally formulate the research questions, and which therefore shape data collection and inform your development of your approach (p. 130). My propositions are based on the validity of Benkler et al.'s (2018) contemporary definitions of propaganda, I therefore took the approach that my "propositions" are the definitions of terms themselves.

Yin (2008) also writes of 5 analytic techniques which can be used in data analysis, one of which is pattern matching (p. 136). This technique encourages researchers to take a pattern that they know, and apply it to a case study in a model of independent and dependent variables, therefore allowing researchers to examine the outcomes of abstract and complex scenarios (p. 136-137). Keeping these techniques in mind, my study was based on the following frame: My propositions (term definitions) set the patterns which I looked for in the data set; the independent variables were the presence or absence of propaganda techniques in pieces of data; and the dependent variables were the presence or absence of propaganda effects within a system, as written of by Benkler et al. (2018) and converted into a coding chart.

This model, along with the backing literature of Habermas' critical theory acted as the theoretical framework off which to work. While this gave me a useful starting point for

[5] A summary of these terms is available in the Analysis and Definitions subsection, and for a full detailed chart see Appendix A

processing data, I did have to be careful with this strategy. Sloan and Quan-Haase (2016) wrote that systematic coding does not negate the risks of miscoding (p. 563). When speaking specifically of coding social media data, they write that "if coders are given coding rubrics that are leading, oriented around particular ontologies, or too narrowly defined, some content just gets missed" (p. 563). To combat this, I allowed for an evolving approach to my coding method to take surprising data into account and to ensure I was not dismissive of any outliers. That said, I had a very large pool of data to deal with on both the micro and macro levels, therefore I had to purposefully select representative examples from which to draw a broader sense of the overall phenomena.

There are other limitations to both case studies and qualitative data, however. Yin (2008) wrote that the "analysis of case study evidence is one of the least developed and most difficult aspects of doing case studies" (p. 127). Often, researchers are unsure of what their tangible data will be, or do not have ideas of how to begin their analysis process due to there being "few fixed formulas or cookbook recipes", particularly to guide a new researcher (p. 127). In regards to case studies, Denscombe, (2010) also writes that there is often skepticism and doubt around how generalizable findings will be from a single case (p. 60). This is defensible, however, since a case study is often not an entirely independent event, but instead is an example of wider pool of events, and it would be possible to find other similar case studies (p. 60).

To maintain validity and ensure my data is as precise and accurate as possible (Denscombe, 2010, p. 298) I based my findings in historical, peer-reviewed research rather than coding only from the units of analysis. Having that starting point enabled me to more effectively explore my core topics. To ensure neutrality and reliability of my findings, I conducted an inter-coder reliability test.

Coding Plan

To answer my first question, I utilized my propositions to build my coding scheme to prove or disprove the use of propaganda for Central Node CEC data. I used my coding scheme, as well as online fact-checking, to code items as either some form of propaganda (not normatively appropriate) or non-propagandic (normatively appropriate). This was the foundation for researching whether or not the CEC's posts had instances of propaganda. In this stage, an "item" of date is defined as a Tweet by the CEC, as well as any attached links to external material.

I then expanded my coding to Peripheral Node stakeholders interacting with CEC content. Posts by these members were coded similarly to determine if there were propaganda items in the greater network surrounding the CEC. In this stage, "items" of data included retweets of CEC items, and responses to CEC posts.

It is important to note that in both of these stages of coding, I had to conduct a level of fact-checking to determine if posts met any of the data falsification or manipulation criteria. To do this, I employed the fact-checking measures used by PolitiFacts (Holan, 2018). Within my resources, the most practical form of fact-checking I could employ was very thorough Googling of specific facts, and checking databases available to me through the University of Alberta library. I am not an expert in the field of oil and gas, but when it comes to examining the aggregate system for signs of propaganda and misinformation, even if I am unable to determine if singular items are untrue, I can compare comments and opposing views to indicate whether or not there is a sign of propaganda within the discussion surrounding the information itself (or if there is an indication of opposing data in news articles, if the information is backed up in industry literature, etc.). It is important to note, however, that it was not possible to entirely fact-

check every item, due to resource constraints. This was something identified during coding as much as possible, but was not significant in determining whether or not micro or macro items were normative.

After this, to determine if there were indications of the effects of propaganda on the aggregate communicative system, I applied the "Effects" framework[6] as a coding scheme to determine whether or not there was evidence of effects of propaganda within the broader CEC network. This framework was a starting point, but the process was still flexible enough to ensure I was not missing any impacts which were not found within the initial definitions.

Data Collection Procedure

The following provides an overall list of my procedures during this research:

1. Conducted research into contemporary definitions of propaganda terms (and the effects of propaganda), and created coding schemes to differentiate them in a clear manner
2. Created a running list of possible data sources within the case study, paring down as the initial development process went on (ultimately deciding on Twitter data)
3. Found the tools/established workflows to gather data
4. Gathered Twitter data using Wakelet by conducting a username search specific to my case study (@CDNEnergyCentre)
    - This was done over a period of time. I first gathered as many Twitter items as possible going back to the first day of the CEC's Twitter operations, and then sorted the items into sub-categories on Wakelet based on the month posted

[6] As seen in Figure 13.3

5. Transferred the collected data into my spreadsheet, with information such as: the date posted, a link to the original Tweet, the number of likes/retweets/comments (at time of processing), the text on the Tweet, and if it linked to any external articles
6. Categorized data into new working spreadsheets based on the type of micro item (Tweet, comment, or reply)
7. Coded micro-level units of analysis based on the coding scheme
8. Reorganized data into further spreadsheets (high-engagement normative, high-engagement manipulative, low-engagement normative and low-engagement manipulative)
9. Looked at extended peripheral conversations and took a look at the macro-level of the data to determine if there were signs of propaganda effects in the network (based on the Propaganda Effects chart developed during step 1)
10. Analyzed and created a discussion of my findings based in the context of Public Sphere theory

The preceding steps were chosen based on wanting to maintain as much context and original information from the micro items as possible. I had to ensure that not only could I figure out which micro unit of analysis I was dealing with at a glance in the spreadsheet itself, but I also had to be able to link back to the original Twitter item to ensure I could get deeper context when required. Initially I struggled to find a tool to use and felt bogged down by guides and software for collecting and coding qualitative data, so after consulting my supervisor and a former MACT student, I settled on keeping it simple with using Wakelet and organizing my data manually offline in Excel. It would have been possible to utilize web-based API (application programming interface) software to collect Tweets, but using one of these resources was far outside my realm

of expertise. It is still valid to manually gather data from social media, however. This does become labour-intensive, but Sloan and Quan-Haase (2016) write that it is appropriate for "narrowly focused, qualitative studies" (p. 166).

It was also very helpful to categorize and begin to sort the data in step 6, as this allowed me to look at more manageable portions at a time to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Categorization was conducted in two phases: on the surface-level of the data based on the type of item, as in step 6, then based on the micro-level coding scheme as in steps 7 and 8. These steps were conducted in an iterative fashion as the patterns in the data became more clear, to ensure consistency in coding as recommended by Denscombe (2010, p. 286).

Summary

In this exploratory single case study (with embedded units), I collected publicly available Twitter data using a website called Wakelet. This was done to ensure that context and extra information around the singular micro items (the Tweets) maintained integrity and linked to the original post, as well as gave me a link to coding on a macro level (e.g. comments on the Tweets). To analyze this data, I conducted an inductive qualitative content analysis, based on the following questions:

RQ1: Is the Canadian Energy Centre an organized effort for propaganda?

RQ2: Is there propaganda present in the aggregate Twitter communication network surrounding the Canadian Energy Centre?

After gathering data on the website Wakelet, I incorporated it into an Excel spreadsheet for categorization, organizing, and iterative coding. My approach was based in historical and contemporary literature which defined key propaganda terms (e.g. manipulation, misinformation,

disinformation) and allowed me to construct a coding scheme. I maintained close ties to the original data sources, as well as linking my coding to peer-reviewed literature to ensure validity.

For democracy to flourish, members of society must be able to partake in productive political fact-gathering and conversation. Much research has been conducted into the direct impacts of propaganda as a method to alter opinions, but there is a significant gap in studies which present how usage of propaganda impacts peer-to-peer discussions on social media platforms. It is legitimate to research whether or not messaging is "truthful", or whether or not audiences are receptive to said ideas. What is missing in academic literature is how the ability of members of the general public to create their own propaganda changes the social processes and environments in which they participate. To contribute to "solid methodological frameworks for analyzing social media-based visual propaganda and persuasive messages" (Seo & Ebrahim, 2016, p. 228) I will conduct comparative micro- and macro-level research with regards to this specific scenario in order to provide an alternative model and approach for future researchers in a topic which affects every facet of our ability to function as a society.

Findings

As evident in the literature review, there have historically been organizations in power who have utilized manipulative techniques of propaganda for their own gain. In political discourse it is essential for reasonable decision-making and the formations of valid opinions that messaging and conversing is as ideal and undistorted as possible, as per Habermas (2007, p. 447-448). That said, it is difficult to have a full handle on how much distorted, manipulative messaging is influencing political discourse online. It is also difficult to identify if any organizations or official bodies are operating in a way which essentially promotes manipulation on their behalf. Due to the potential lowering of participation costs in fact-checking information

online, it can still be difficult to know what messages to believe, and how trustworthy "information" is.

One of the four claims to validity Habermas (2007) wrote of is "normative rightness" (p. 448). He describes this as separate from the validity of truth, yet as acting in tandem with truth in that "both claims can be redeemed only discursively through argumentation and the attainment of rational consensus" (p. 450). To explore this element, I utilized Benkler et al.'s (2018) concept of an "empathetic observer", under which an examiner takes the approach of a member of the target audience of messaging to determine if it is normatively appropriate (p. 30). This process involved considering factors such as: Is there a reasonable counter-argument presented? Does the item acknowledge and/or provide the context around the opposing opinion it seeks to correct or respond to? Does the item redirect away from the issue at hand, without properly addressing it? This is part of the process undertaken to address the following research questions:

RQ1: Is the Canadian Energy Centre an organized effort for propaganda?

RQ2: Is there propaganda present in the aggregate Twitter communication network surrounding the Canadian Energy Centre?

To conduct this research, I utilized a single holistic case study research design with multiple levels of embedded units of analysis, per (Yin, 2008). To gather items which would have both core CEC messaging as well as public feedback and discourse as part of a wider network, I gathered publicly available Tweets as data. This gathered pool of data was then analyzed using an inductive discourse analysis to examine both micro-level deeper meaning, as well as macro-level larger cultural messaging and social implications. The DA approach also allowed me to involve readers of the messaging as active participants, rather than passive

receivers of messages, which is essential to research involving two- or multi-way communicative actions (Denscombe, 2010, p. 287-288).

In this chapter, I will present the findings from a sample of Twitter messages posted by or about the CEC posted between December 2019 and March 31, 2020. The chapter includes: a data presentation, a summary of findings and excerpts from the coded data; my data analysis process; and a discussion on the key findings and how they relate to the literature in the context of my research questions.

Data Presentation

By utilizing my developed coding scheme, I found that the CEC's core items are significantly normative under my interpretation of Benkler et al.'s definitions of propaganda terms[7]. Despite this, when analyzing on a macro-level and taking into account comments and retweets with written responses, every high-engagement item featured an indicator of an effect of propaganda: induced misperceptions, distraction, disorientation, and/or misinformation. Evidence of these effects do not give grounds to pinpoint blame of the source of propaganda within the network, however. The aim of this study is not to draw causation. Instead, the coding revealed that the effects are present within the network, as per RQ2.

Once comments around the core items were taken into account, the dynamic and tone changes quite drastically. It is important to note at this point that the aim of this research is not to pass judgment and determine if there are "sides" in these discourses which are normative or sides that are manipulative – the goal is to see if there are impacts present. There is also potential for misinformation in postings rather than purposeful disinformation, but I am unable to quantify or

[7] Such as: White/grey/black propaganda, public relations, marketing, and political advertising

determine motives, outcomes and findings have been interpreted in a more general sense, rather than being able to provide definitive answers of individual examples. In this approach I am only able to draw conclusions from the data and publicly available information, rather than personal interviews or surveys about motives.

It was not only the core messaging of the tweets and any linked retweets or linked external items (such as written pieces on the CEC's website, which they often referred to) which was commented on by peripheral members of the audience (e.g. members of the public), however. Throughout my coding I noticed three very prominent themes referred to by commenters: an incident involving the organization's logo; accusations of propaganda, corruption, or lying; and accusations of the CEC being funded by taxpayer dollars. As indicated in the introduction to this research, the Canadian Energy Centre faced some complicated situations from the very outset of their identity as an organization. Throughout the 7 weeks of Twitter messages gathered for this research, situations they were involved in include but are not limited to:

- Writers and other workers at the CEC referring to themselves as "journalists", to the objection of news journalists and even the president of the Canadian Association of Journalists (Global News, 2019)
- Within the first week of operation, the CEC faced criticism about their logo, which Twitter users pointed out looked very similar to that of an American software company (Franklin, 2019). Their response on Twitter to the situation was their highest rate of comments for any item on their account

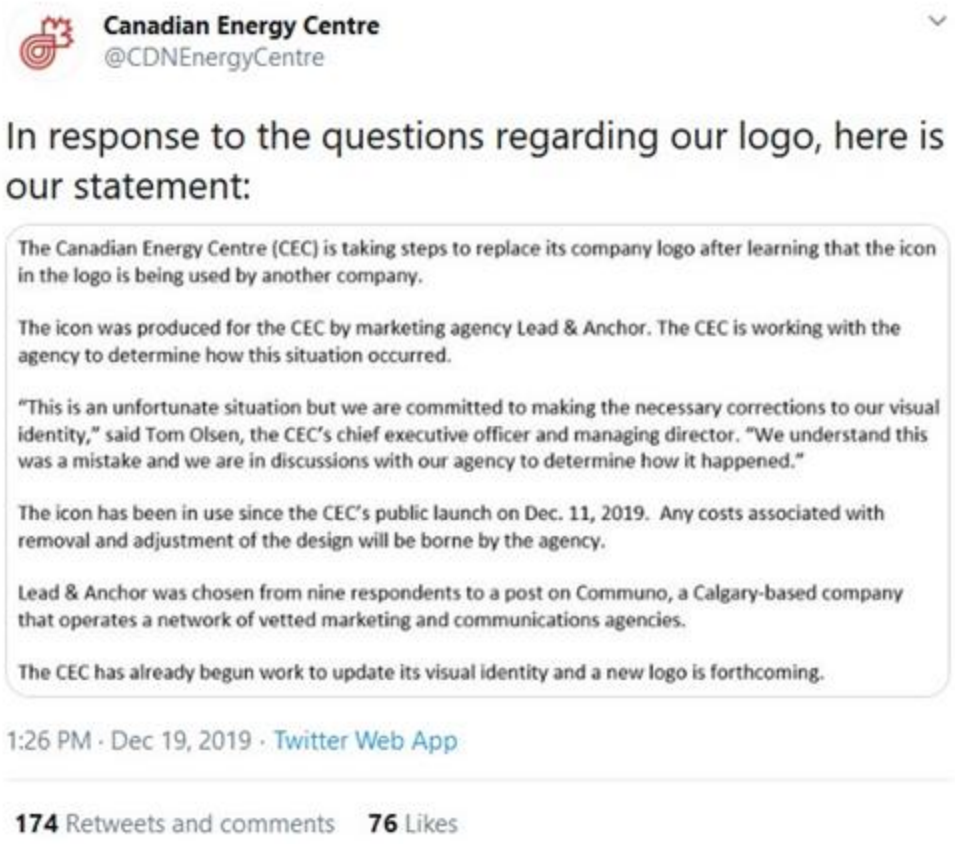


Figure 3.1: *The CEC's Twitter response to a logo gaffe*[8]

- A general ongoing confusion as to the status and affiliation of their organization, leading to be continuously referred to as a provincial organization affiliated with the government, with even the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers referring to them as an "Alberta government initiative" and that the provincial government itself "is spending $30 million to fund the campaign" (Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, n.d., para. 1-3). The CEC's identity will be discussed in more detail below
- In responding to a New York Times article, the CEC account became tonally inadequate enough to prompt a public Twitter apology from CEO Tom Olsen (Fig. 3.5), drawing

[8] Canadian Energy Centre. (December 19 2019). Retrieved from https://twitter.com/CDNEnergyCentre/status/1207759139906052096

further attention. Some Tweets in the thread were deleted[9] (Fig. 3.3), but 660 News took screen shots before they could be removed (Fig. 3.4). Fig. 3.2 provides context for the "Mad Max" reference in Fig. 3.3.

Figure 3.2: *The CEC makes a "Mad Max" movie reference*[10]

[9] Note: The deleted Tweets and subsequent were not coded, and are only included for further context
[10] Canadian Energy Centre. (February 11, 2020a). Retrieved from https://twitter.com/CDNEnergyCentre/status/1227363953925189632

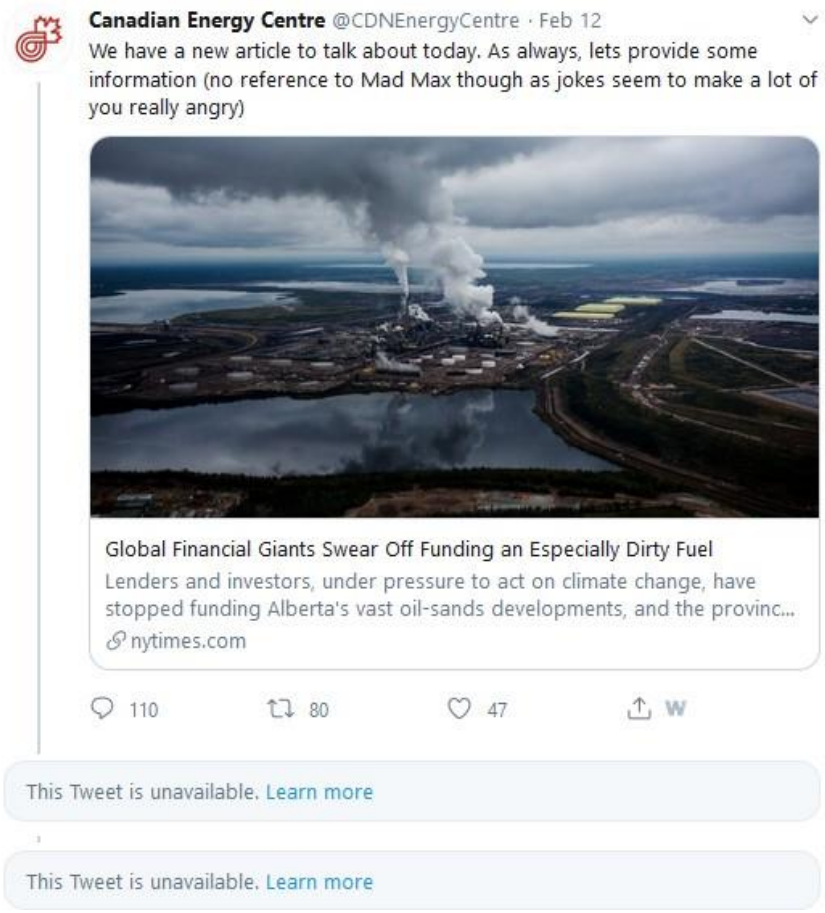


Figure 3.3: *Deleted Tweets in a CEC Twitter thread*[11]

[11] Canadian Energy Centre. (February 12, 2020). Retrieved from https://twitter.com/CDNEnergyCentre/status/1227671515031691265

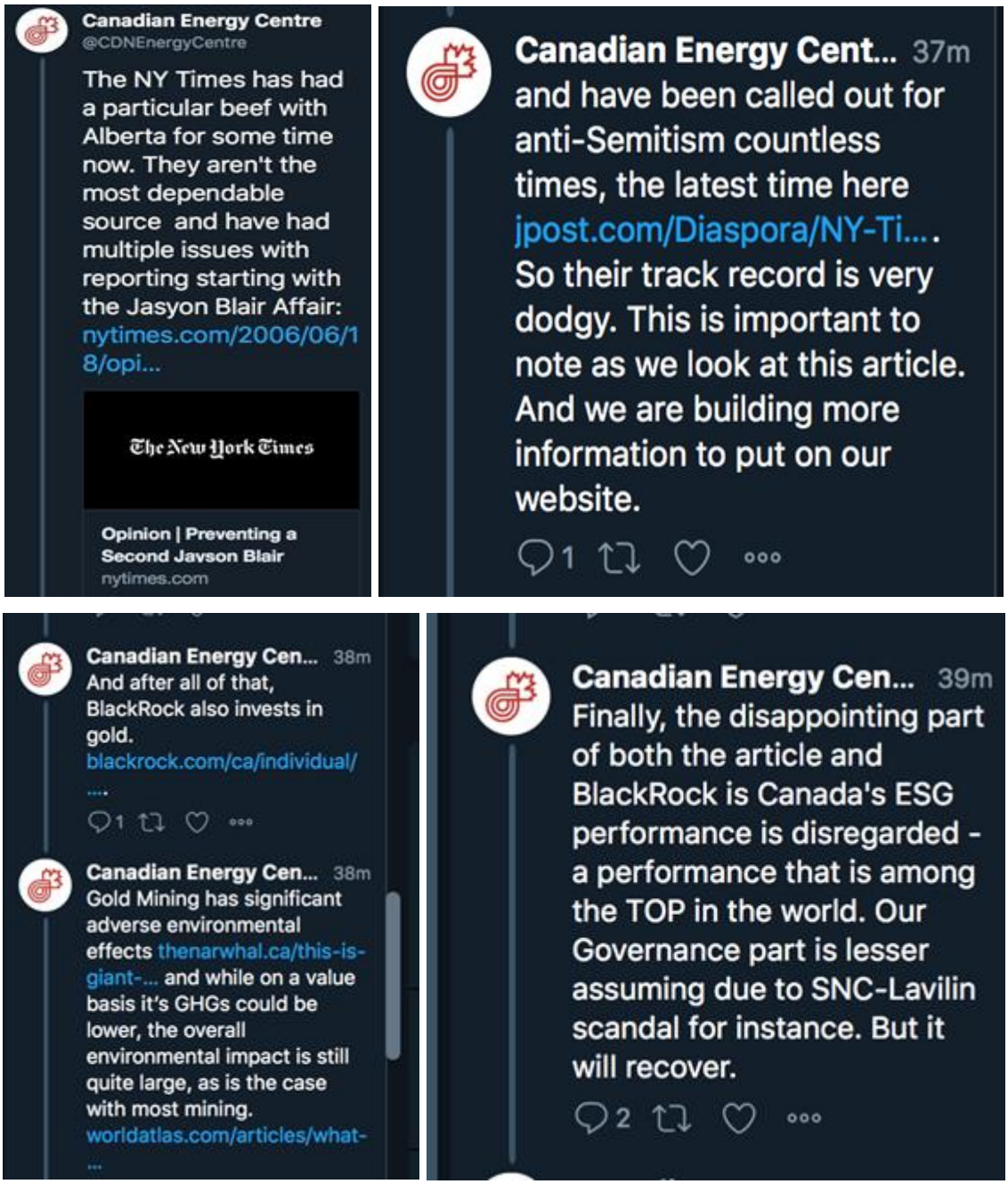


Figure 3.4: *Screenshots of deleted CEC Tweets captured by 660 News*[12]

[12] Slack, J. (February 14, 2020). Retrieved from https://www.660citynews.com/2020/02/14/premier-defending-energy-war-room-after-attacking-the-new-york-times/

Figure 3.5: *Tom Olsen apologizes for CEC's tone*[13]

These are just to name a few significant examples. Along these lines, comments in response to the CEC continuously referred to different variables concerning the organization itself, and its earlier operations and scandals. Through qualitative coding, it was found that the most predominant themes mentioned in comments are: the logo incident; calls of corruption/propaganda/lying; and the use of taxpayer dollars fueled by a lack of clarity around the CEC's identity and funding.

[13] Tom Olsen. (February 12, 2020). Retrieved from https://twitter.com/TomOlsenXIX/status/1227715416153346048

Figure 3.6: *Twitter users accuse the CEC of propaganda*[14]

[14] Canadian Energy Centre. (December 28, 2019). Retrieved from https://twitter.com/CDNEnergyCentre/status/1211027504955363329

Figure 3.7: *Twitter users responding negatively to a CEC tweet*[15]

These sorts of comments are reflective of different potential effects of propaganda within a system: induced misperceptions, distraction, disorientation, and misinformation (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 34-38). No matter what the situation is about the organization's status or funding, there is evidence that there is at least some genuine confusion about both of those items within the CEC's network. This can reasonably be interpreted as disorientation, and potentially misinformation. Even if some users who were commenting and making claims that the CEC is using taxpayer dollars, but if it turned out they technically were not (as is their claim on their

[15] Screenshot of twitter comments on: Canadian Energy Centre. (February 11, 2020b). Retrieved from https://twitter.com/CDNEnergyCentre/status/1227389075759325189

website (Olsen, 2019)) this could also be reflective of misinformation. Alternatively, if Twitter users posted about the use of taxpayer dollars without truly believing it to be an issue, and believing that the CEC genuinely gains funding from the TIER fund and does not attribute that to public funds, the act of still posting those claims would classify those comments as potentially distraction or attempting to sow induced misperceptions to other users. Alternatively, the repeated mention of the logo mishap early on in the CEC's existence could be simple trolling, or a claim that they are mistrustful or even inept. Either way, it would be reasonable to argue that it is being used to distract from whatever message is contained within the core CEC item the comment is attached to.

These are three of the themes continuously mentioned by users who disagree with their points, what they are believed to stand for, and simply for those looking to troll the account. After re-coding the high-engage Tweets on a macro level to examine the overall tone of comments on each item, it was found that the comments and discourse attached to all 68 high-engage items had plenty of propagandic messages and effects evident throughout regardless of the normativity of the core micro-coded item, as seen below.

	High-engage manipulative (9 total)	High-engage normative (59 total)
Logo	7	31
Propaganda/ corruption	9	57
Taxpayer dollars	9	55

Figure 3.8: *Frequency of macro-level coding themes per propaganda effects*

It is worth noting that none of the high-engage items were free of all three themes – some merely had only two out of three present. That said, over half of the total items had all three

themes present. This is indicative of the presence of effects of propaganda within the CEC network, despite finding a majority of core micro-items normative. That is not to say, however, that the items were entirely heckled or disagreed with, but those who did agree were less verbal and retweeted without posting further comment, which in this process I interpreted as a silent condoning of the core item's message. It is difficult to determine precisely the percentage of agreement or disagreement. Overall, however, the majority of posted comments were either trolling the CEC or condemning their organization or actions.

For example, on a Tweet posted January 2, 2010[16] there were 188 total comments. Of those:

- 7 were in normative agreement
- 2 normative questions were asked of the CEC, one was answered normatively by a member of the public, and another was met by a troll
- 34 comments featured normative disagreement
- 6 agreed, but featured manipulation
- And 139 of the comments were either in disagreement manipulatively, or trolling (but due to the inability to prove intent, distinguishing between the two is outside of the realm of this study)

During this phase, comments were held to the same standards as the core CEC content, and were coded within the same model developed from Benkler et al. Though just a sample, this example is representative of data found throughout the project.

Alternatively, though the low-engage items were not examined in-depth, there were some overall themes. Largely the low-engage core items were normative. At least 28 of the normative

[16] Canadian Energy Centre. (January 2, 2020). Retrieved from https://twitter.com/CDNEnergyCentre/status/1212786388174823424

low-engage core CEC items were profiles of individuals working in the oil and gas sector, and many others were concentrating largely on oil and gas companies investing in new technologies or reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The articles attached to these items largely read like news stories, and were quite straightforward in delivering messages or attributing quotes. As noted, these types of items do not often get much engagement.

That said, the low-engage manipulative items are mostly comments either in response to their own items (in a chain of comments, rather than a thread) or in response to peripheral members interacting with the CEC. It is in these situations, such as in in the example below, that the CEC account begins to lose the normative composure that would be ideal and most productive of a corporate account.

Figure 3.9: *The CEC responds to another user*[17]

[17] Canadian Energy Centre. (February 4, 2020b). Retrieved from https://twitter.com/CDNEnergyCentre/status/1224827462963482625

Tone along these lines is also found in high-engage items, though it is worth mentioning that largely the core, sculpted Tweets sent by the CEC's account maintains a level tone. It is mostly in comments and other forms of interacting with other accounts that this issue emerges. It is also worth noting that the account does not often respond to questions in the comments section by the public. This is not pointed out to condemn, however, as this may be due to resource or other limitations.

Data Analysis

Data organization. After the Tweets were gathered into my Wakelet account, I conducted an inductive content analysis. My first step was to transfer the data needed from this online database into Excel. I began by making a separate spreadsheet for each month involved (December 2019 to March 2020) to make for smaller, more manageable segments of initial data. In rows for each Tweet, I made note of the following:

- A screenshot of each item
- The date of posting with a hyperlink to the original item from the CEC's Twitter account
- What type of item it was: A primarily written Tweet (a standard Tweet sent from the CEC account), a comment on another primary Tweet, what I refer to as a "reply" (retweeting another Tweet and adding a comment), or a retweet (which does not add a comment)[18]
- The Text from the post
- A screenshot of any images
- Links to any articles, videos, etc.

[18] Note: Retweets which did not add comments were declared not adding primary content by the CEC and were therefore omitted from coding

- Which user it was posted in response to or retweet from (where applicable)
- The number of likes, replies, and retweets

I also, in line with Denscombe's (2010) recommendation, gave each item an individual number for reference (p. 274) in the form of MM-DD, where MM is the month and DD is the day of posting. This allowed me to refer back to items more easily during the iterative coding process.

To further organize my data, I took note of the number of comments and retweets each CEC item had. Due to the nature of the second research question, it was crucial that I ensured that I would be able to easily find items which had high levels of engagement, and therefore more instances of public discourse or interaction to work with. I tallied the number of comments and retweets each core item had to determine a good benchmark for separating items with high levels of engagement from those with low engagement. Through this process I determined that items with more than 20 comments were ideal, as they presented a good amount of data to code in my second macro-level phase, as well as creating a more manageable portion to work with.[19] This left me with 68 high-engagement items and 255 low-engagement items. These items were re-organized into new spreadsheets: a master high-engage and a master low-engage. I did save the originally gathered spreadsheets, however, as like Dencsombe (2010) points out, original data must be protected (p. 274). While my data is publicly gathered, it was still necessary for me to ensure the data I collected was intact in case of future corruption or other future needs for reference. Since there are no privacy concerns with publicly collected data, copies of my spreadsheets have been uploaded to my Google Drive account, and I will maintain my Wakelet account.

[19] Note: The main number listed as "retweets" does not differentiate between those RTs with and without comments, therefore the "comments" column was taken to be the most meaningful

Micro-level coding. For my initial question, I had to code the individual CEC items to determine whether or not any of them could be classified as manipulative propaganda. I first had to break the data set down into a workable fashion. As Denscombe (2010) wrote, qualitative data analysis is not linear and neat, but instead is a creative, ambiguous, and messy process to bring order and structure to the data (p. 295). Fortunately, I had some semblance of organization to pull from in the form of my coding scheme previously developed through the literature review process.

		Main Terms					
		White Prop.	**Grey Prop.**	**Black Prop.**	**PR**	**Marketing**	**Political Ad.**
Elements (Number in brackets used for Excel grading in Fig. 3.11)	**Purposeful (1)**	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	False Info (10)	N	Y	Y	N	N	N
	Political? (100)	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y
	Behavior/ opinion goal? (1000)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Target audience? (10000)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Normatively appropriate? (100000)	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
	Disinformation? (1000000)	N	Y	Y	N	N	N

Figure 3.10: *Propaganda terms coding framework*

I then applied this as binary columns (1 for yes, 0 for no) in Excel for each category, using the values in the table above. The sum of calculated columns then added up to specific propaganda terms:

Term	**Resulting number in Excel**
White propaganda	11101
Grey or black propaganda	1011111
PR or marketing	111001
Political ad	111101
BS or fake news	11
Misinformation	1010

Figure 3.11: *Binary number allocations from coding framework*

These columns were used to conduct the first phase of coding individual items. My declaration of whether or not an item was "normative" was determined by taking on the role as the empathetic observer. My approach was based on assuming that they are in fact a private provincial corporation, as listed on their website (Canadian Energy Centre, n.d.). There has been confusion around their status as a corporation or as a government-affiliated entity (described below). Items also needed to have enough self-contained evidence to ensure legitimacy and normativity. Other questions I asked myself to determine if an item was normative include:

- Are there citations or meaningful links to the origins of data claims? In particular, links to reputable sources (e.g. industry groups, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, etc.)?
- Does it present a reasonable counter-argument?
- Does it acknowledge and/or provide the context around the opposing opinion it seeks to correct or respond to?

- Does it redirect away from the issue at hand, without properly addressing it?

These questions were developed through an interpretation of the seven devices of propaganda[20] developed by the Institute for Propaganda Analysis (IPA) (Sproule, 2001, p. 136).

Throughout this process I also kept notes of which Tweets linked to specific CEC articles. This was very useful for iteratively comparing items which linked to the same source material, but may have different Tweeted messages associated with them. On some occasions, despite being normative, one article on the CEC's website could be Tweeted in one way which was normative, and another which met the threshold for white propaganda.

After finishing grading the content of each core item, I came to the following results:

	Manipulative	Normative
High-engage	9	59
Low-engage	17	238

Figure 3.12: *Overview of micro-coding results for RQ1*

This initial quadrant presents an idealistic interpretation of the CEC's messaging. In the coding process, it was assumed that the CEC is in reality a private marketing agency for the Albertan oil and gas centre (as on their website (Canadian Energy Centre, n.d.)). These items were then copied to new spreadsheets for each quadrant.

Macro-level coding. After the initial round of item coding, further context was taken into account for a deeper discourse analysis. This phase was intended to examine high-engage items to determine if it was possible to find indicators of the effects of propaganda. I began by utilizing the same listed codes as above and applying them to the peripheral interactions around the high-engage items, as well as the core information (e.g. the information contained in the core tweet as

[20] Listed in the Definition resources section of the Review of Literature

well as the posted comments) to get a general idea of how much normativity or manipulation was happening. I also made notes of recurring themes and topics of comments. This was then applied to the potential for viewing propaganda effects within the network. Similar to the coding scheme above, the effects to watch for were written based on Benkler, Faris and Roberts' (2018) writings:

		Main Terms					
		White Prop.	**Grey Prop.**	**Black Prop.**	**PR**	**Marketing**	**Political Ad.**
Propaganda Effects	**Induced Misperceptions**	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N
	Distraction	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Disorientation	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N
	Misinformation	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N

Figure 3.13: *Potential effects of propaganda, based on Benkler et al. (2018)*

The recurring themes were then compared to the propaganda effects chart to see if there was an inference to be drawn. The three main themes in the comments were: the logo incident; overt accusations of propaganda, corruption, or lying; and the use of taxpayer money for CEC operations. Major and consistent posting of any of these themes were interpreted to reasonably be representative of the presence of propaganda effects – either the indication of impacts of manipulation on the audience, or indications of the commenters using manipulative tactics on the core items. Any attempt to pinpoint the source of any manipulation goes beyond the scope of this research.

With the over-arching themes in hand, and acknowledging the potential for propaganda effects in the system of the CEC, I then purposefully selected some of the items with the highest

levels of engagement to see how the comments broke down individually, to act as a guideline and avoid over-generalization of the data. It is important to note that the CEC item with the highest engagement was not selected for processing in this way, as it was a statement in response to the logo plagiarism incident (Fig. 3.1). This item was therefore not reflective of the audience's response to CEC content, but instead was in response to a specific incident which becomes relevant throughout the ongoing process. Instead, other high-engage items which posted CEC website content which made a statement or produced an argument was selected for further examination, though the logo statement was not discounted as part of the discussion. In examining the peripheral comments around a core CEC item I was able to examine how the label of "normative" or "manipulative" items shifted when examining the entire context, including surrounding discourse.

To ensure I was not over-simplifying my interpretation of the data, I also purposefully selected items with the highest number of comments to get a sense of how many of the comments were:

- Normative, and agreeing with the CEC's messaging
- Normative, and disagreeing with the CEC's messaging
- Non-normative, and agreeing with the CEC
- Non-normative disagreeing, or trolling

This extra information allowed me to have a quantitative basis for my qualitative interpretations and discussion.

Quality Control

In order to operate with high levels of quality control, I occasionally re-visited four principles guiding my research: validity, reliability, generalizability, and objectivity

(Denscombe, 2010, p. 298). To ensure the quality of coding, I based my approach closely on my literature review. In particular, I developed my parameters and categories off of Benkler et al.'s research. I also built my coding scheme in a way which allowed for the inclusion of very similar categories (e.g. between marketing and political ads) but which still clearly differentiated between normative and manipulative data to act as the backbone of the research. To ensure validity, I also stayed as close to my data as possible while coding (Denscombe, 2010, p. 288). I continuously re-visited and reviewed coding thus far to ensure that I was not adapting or evolving how I was coding (therefore getting a widely different result in items coded later in the process) and to avoid over-generalizations in observations.

Denscombe (2010) writes that to ensure reliability, the research instrument used must produce the same results so long as there are no changes to whatever is being measured (p. 326). There must be no variations in outcome as a result of volatility of the research instrument (p. 326). To ensure reliability in this way, I conducted an inter-coder reliability test, and found the same results when my research instrument was used by another person. This made sure that not only were my categories productive and meaningful, but also that my interpretations were not being too harsh on the CEC, as I acknowledge my outset hesitance in their normativity. Generalizability was kept in mind by the overall map of my model. I specifically built that based on Benkler et al.'s research to be applicable for a number of situations, and I wanted to make sure it was not specific to just this topic and case.

I dealt with validity considerations not only through my inter-coder reliability test, but also by incorporating quantitative values within the data so as to not make over-generalizations in my observations. A study is valid when the findings reflect the data and do not omit valid factors (Denscombe, 2010, p. 328), which is crucial to the usefulness and accuracy of the study.

To ensure honesty in this process, and due to my qualitative approach, it was crucial that I acknowledged potential biases and tried to create my research instrument to be as impartial as possible. I acknowledge that as someone within the target demographic of the CEC's approach (as an Albertan who is on the fence about pipeline development) I am an ideal candidate to play the empathetic observer. My parents have both worked lifelong careers in oil and gas, yet I am very Liberal and do not generally agree with Conservative economics. That said, basing my findings and discussion in some quantitative data allowed me to make sure I was not simply finding what I wanted to see. I also made sure to include examples of less common comments to properly represent the variety of opinions in the CEC network.

Discussion

The overarching summary of my research is this: The CEC's core content is vastly normative, when taken as self-contained items, but as soon as the CEC's Twitter network is examined it reads like a true exercise in misery for all parties involved. In the micro-examination, only 26 of the 323 Tweets were manipulative. Those that were not normative were often flagged due to semantics, or due to a lack of self-contained data to back up their claims. Ergo, the CEC appears not to be a centre for propaganda, but rather a normative marketing firm. As mentioned above, there are many examples which imply that the effects of propaganda are present in the network of the CEC. This is not to make claims that the CEC is necessarily the cause of the effects, or that the peripheral members of the network are entirely to blame. Proving causation from specific entities goes beyond the scope of this research. There were many observations which fall under this scope of discussion, however.

What this does demonstrate is that the CEC's operations as a hypothetical, one-way communication delivery organization have very different impacts than its interactions in a

networked public sphere. Habermas originally intended the term "public sphere" to encompass the space in which journalists and other operators who can gain mass attention operated, which was then transmitted to the public (Bruns & Highfield, 2016, p. 56). This older model is closer to the treatment of this issue in RQ1, where the CEC is seen as occupying that space. Alternatively, the networked public sphere concept introduces the capacity for further complications in two-way dynamics. In this scenario, there is a lack of universal understanding about prime variables. Were the CEC to be operating in a vacuum, they would not be a problem. It is when peripheral networks interact that complications arise.

Commenters often brought up claims that the CEC is taxpayer funded. This was a consistent point of contention throughout the course of this project. Ultimately, it comes down to this: On December 16th 2019 the CEC Tweeted that their $30 million budget is two-thirds provided by "funding collected from Alberta's energy industry" and the remaining third is "repurposed advertising $ earmarked by the previous provincial government" (Fig. 3.14[21]). Alternatively, the article Fig. 3.14 links to does not mention the money from the previous government, and instead says only that they "will largely be funded by Alberta's energy industry, through the new Technology Innovation and Emissions Reduction (TIER) fund" (Olsen, 2019, para. 14).

[21] Canadian Energy Centre. (December 16, 2019). Retrieved from https://twitter.com/CDNEnergyCentre/status/1206670645704232960

Figure 3.14: *CEC Tweet explaining their budget*[22]

TIER, the Technology Innovation and Emissions Reduction Fund is an official regulation active as of January 1, 2020 (Province of Alberta, 2020) which "requires regulated facilities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions" (Alberta Queen's Printer, 2019). It is worth noting that through researching the background of TIER, the official document makes no mention of the Canadian Energy Centre, or its initial nickname, the "War Room". The only mention of the CEC in relation to TIER that I could find was in an online summary of an engagement session done prior to TIER's enactment, which says:

[22] Canadian Energy Centre. (December 16, 2019). Retrieved from https://twitter.com/CDNEnergyCentre/status/1206670645704232960

> The TIER Fund would be used for new and cleaner Alberta-based technologies that reduce emissions, like improved oil sands extraction methods and research and investment in carbon capture, utilization and storage. It would also be used to reduce Alberta's deficit and support the province's energy war room – which is now incorporated as the Canadian Energy Centre. (Government of Alberta, 2019).

With these in mind, it could be argued that the entire $30 million budget of the CEC goes through the Government of Alberta at some point – the first third was from the previous government, and the remaining two thirds is industry money which is collected by the government and then selectively distributed per the TIER Fund outline. I believe this is a reasonable cause for confusion concerning whether or not the entire $30 million is taxpayer funds. In at least one instance, an oil and gas corporation was drawn into the fray around this, and attempted to distance themselves:

Figure 3.15: *Shell Canada's official Twitter account responds to a comment on a CEC tweet*[23]

[23] Screenshot of twitter comments on: Canadian Energy Centre. (December 19, 2020). Retrieved from https://twitter.com/CDNEnergyCentre/status/1207435422277787648

It seems that those who work for the CEC themselves are somewhat confused as well, as in the article their budget-explainer Tweet links to there is the following correction:

> *CORRECTION: An earlier version of this column identified the Canadian Energy Centre as a Crown corporation. In fact, it is a provincial government corporation.* (Olsen, 2019, para. 19)

Between two different, officially released communications by the CEC, they identify themselves as: an independent provincial corporation (Canadian Energy Centre, n.d.), and are not a crown corporation, but are a "provincial government corporation under the Financial Administration Act" (Olsen, 2019, para. 14). Again, it is not a huge surprise that the public is confused about their identity. It is also crucial to note that the identity claim which is the easiest to find is the claim as an independent provincial corporation (Canadian Energy Centre, n.d.), which is why I took the approach of assuming that to be true. That is what is written on their main website's "About Us" page, and the Tweet and article cited above are one-offs which a member of the public would have to know to look for.

Other commenters were making claims that the CEC was costing taxpayers $120 million, but that number has not come up in official messaging. Within the scope of this project, ultimately it does not matter if the CEC is not mostly funded by taxpayers, or if they technically entirely are. The prominence of comments accusing the CEC of using taxpayer money is either reflective of a confused public and therefore a demonstration of misinformation within the system, or it could be a normative argument and thus claims to the contrary could be purposeful disinformation perpetrated by the CEC. Regardless, it is a huge crux in the CEC's Twitter operations.

And along the same lines, as an empathetic observer, I had to make a judgment call at the outset of coding to determine how to classify the CEC as an organization. I chose to assume they truly are an independent provincial organization as outlined on their website (Canadian Energy Centre, n.d.) and place trust in the fact that if they truly weren't, they would be liable for false advertising. Even at the time of writing, however, it is unclear to me exactly what they are. They seem to want to distance themselves from the provincial government and seem impartial, but there is no denying that at a minimum one third of their funding comes from taxpayer dollars. I was not the only one confused about this:

Figure 3.16: *The CEC Tweeting a response about if they "give a crap" about solar or wind energy*[24]

[24] Canadian Energy Centre. (February 4, 2020a). Retrieved from https://twitter.com/CDNEnergyCentre/status/1224823316105424896

Figure 3.17: *Selected Twitter comments in response to Figure 3.16*[25]

When an official industry body from the oil and gas sector, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, refers to the CEC as affiliated with the provincial government (Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, n.d.), it is no wonder that members of the public fall under the same impression. In my confusion, I even emailed the CEC for clarification but, perhaps unsurprisingly, I never heard back. There was one Tweet which linked to an article on the CEC's website about their funding model (Fig. 3.14), but judging from the responses many either have not read it, or do not believe their messaging.

[25] Screenshot of twitter comments on: Canadian Energy Centre. (February 4, 2020a). Retrieved from https://twitter.com/CDNEnergyCentre/status/1224823316105424896

This overarching confusion about this and other factors and controversies has essentially negated much of the attempt of the CEC being normative, and essentially causes the CEC's Twitter outreach to become an exercise in futility. It is crucial for the sake of the CEC's potential normativity, if they so desire it, to clarify their status as an organization, how their funding works, and work on their transparency. Different types of organizations are held to different standards. It is one thing if the CEC is legitimately a marketing or public relations group. It is often acceptable for marketers to make claims which are bold, but which do not necessarily encompass the entire picture. There still must be normativity and ethics present, however. In *The Engineering of Consent,* Bernays (1947) wrote that public relations professionals should never attempt to persuade in such a way that would be in violation of one's education, ergo the arguments should remain within the realm of truth (p. 3). For example, in Figure 3.18 the CEC claims that Canada should be the provider of oil and gas for the world because if not, the market gap will be filled by countries that don't have Canada's high standards "on the environment, labour rights, human rights, and Indigenous rights". The organization makes similar claims when discussing the potential lowering of greenhouse gas emissions if Canadian liquid natural gas were to replace coal in countries like China. The issue with this statement is that it is an all-or-nothing claim: that we are the one nation which is ethical, therefore if we do not fill the gap, a much less ethical country will benefit. It does make me wonder what countries such as the United States or the United Kingdom would think of that opinion. But that said, if they are essentially marketers or PR professionals, it may be a more reasonable statement. This messaging could be interpreted very differently if it were to come from an official government entity on which expectations of bureaucratic competency are enforced.

Figure 3.18: *CEC tweet about Canada's modern industrial economy*[26]

With either status, this item does not have a tone befitting an organization welcoming productive, ideal discourse in the networking public sphere. It also certainly is not apt from an organization which touts that they "will be informative, positive and educational" (Olsen, 2019, para. 16).

According to Johnson (2006) the entire goal of a public should be to share differing points of view intelligibly (p. 2) so in that sense the discourse is not being productive, either. Even worse would be if the organization did turn out to be very closely affiliated with the government. It is not exactly bureaucratic to declare that any option other than Canada would not be close to our standards. Countries like Norway, the US, the UK, and other allies of Canada's may not be thrilled at the statement, if that were the case.

In terms of transparency and imaging, there is also the question of the Terms of Use on the CEC's website.

[26] Canadian Energy Centre. (December 28, 2019). Retrieved from https://twitter.com/CDNEnergyCentre/status/1211027504955363329

Because of these overarching factors, it forces me to come to conclude that per my model, the CEC is not an organized propaganda outlet. But they are steeped in so much confusion and seem to actively wield a lack of transparency, even denying FOIP eligibility (Bellefontaine, 2019) despite them having government affiliations in the minds of so many, even CAPP. What I propose is this: The core content of the CEC is normative and not manipulative based on Benkler et al.'s definitions. As for the normativity and legitimacy around the CEC's identity as a whole, based on this study, I cannot ethically claim that to be normative. Benkler et al. (2018) define grey propaganda as "[Propaganda] whose source and content is more subtly masked and manipulated to appear other than what it is" (p. 32). Due to the confusion surrounding their status and funding, it is not entirely unreasonable for people to question whether or not they are conducting propaganda within this definition.

The difficulty in examining propaganda within a two-way system is that so often, multiple sides of an argument can be considered technically correct. Pinpointing objective universal "truth" in discourse is very difficult, and is so subjective to any given person's perspectives. I ultimately began this project by asking if the CEC is an organized propaganda machine, but even that phrase is steeped in imagery and bias. In the data it is evident that the organization's very status of being is seen to be contentious and could easily sow mistrust in some observers who seek to interact, and therein lies the problem. That said, this is not a universal impact. There was still evidence of some CEC supporters who were present, particularly those who were retweeting without comment. I was surprised, however, by how few supporters were speaking out in the comments compared to those who hounded the CEC's account at every post. Within the topic of propaganda, scenarios of echo chambers are often attributed, such as in Morales, Gionis, and Mathioudakis (2018). In their research, they found

evidence which would support the idea of echo chambers in social media political discourse. Interestingly, in my research it appeared to be less of a scenario of an CEC-affiliated echo chamber attached to items, but instead an anti-CEC echo chamber in the comments. This could be explained by the Spiral of Silence theory (SOS), which posits that in public forums people who have what they believe to be the majority opinion are often much more vocal and willing to express their opinions, and some people are more likely to be silent if they feel their views are in that of the minority (Kushin, Yamamoto & Dalisay, 2019, p. 2). Traditionally in propaganda systems and discussions of power, as is reflected in the historical literature, large corporations and governments are spoken of as the powerful conductors of manipulation. But it could be argued with the SOS theory that in this example, taking power into account specifically in the network public sphere, perhaps the CEC and its supporters are actually the powerless agents due to having an opinion which appears to be the minority. Or further, perhaps power dynamics are less realistic to measure online due to such fast-paced, two-way communications. Zeitzoff (2017) wrote of how the lowering costs of participation on social media have made it easier than ever for people to conduct "slacktivism" in times of political conflict through liking and sharing posts (p. 1978-1979) or in this case, in trolling or hounding the comments section. These are perspectives worthy of philosophical discussion, but the bottom line in this case is that while the CEC's core items are normative based on this coding scheme, it does not mean that they have been successfully meeting their mandate and goals.

Limitations

Limitations within this research include that, like in all qualitative research, it is not possible to present the entire pool of my data (Denscombe, 2010, p. 295). Similarly, I eventually had to consider my data gathering "done" within the scope of meaningful coding, and within my

time and resource constraints. This came organically, as in the spring of 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic began impacting Alberta more and I therefore started to see much of the content and comments start to shift that way, changing the data pool dramatically. Luckily, there was enough workable content between December 2019 and the end of March 2020.

I am not an oil and gas expert by any means, so I had to develop an approach which did not rely too heavily on fact-checking. This would have been much too cumbersome and unrealistic within the constraints of my project. From the perspective of a normative observer, the articles on the CEC's website read as quite reasonable and good attempts at informing the public – but it is again worth noting that this opinion is not from an industry expert. I am ultimately as qualified at fact-checking as any other member of the public, but that act becomes a confusing rabbit-hole in and of itself. I also am brand new to research, so this project was certainly a learning experience, rather than a project undertaken by an experienced scholar.

Summary

Within the model of this research, I found that individual communicative items produced by the Canadian Energy Centre are normative, as long as they are considered an independent marketing organization. Despite this normativity, there is evidence of the effects of propaganda within the CEC network. The clearest observation from this research is that the CEC's messaging on Twitter is met with distrust, trolling, and confusion. If the organization's goal is to educate and inform, it does not appear to be effective, at least where their Twitter account is concerned. Much of the criticism they face stems from operational errors which happened during their inception and outset, including not considering the ethical implications of staff referring to themselves as "journalists", or in the confusing rollout of their imaging campaign. No matter who they are as an organization, it is unclear whether or not their image can be clarified and

future operations can be conducted in such a way that the members of their network may be more receptive and supportive of their messaging, or whether it is a futile effort caused by a tainted image.

Conclusion

Benkler et al. (2018) declares that "Echo chambers ringing with false news make democracies ungovernable" (p. 5). Given the requirement for transparency and truthfulness in order for democracies to function, everyday political discourse should be examined to determine how effective democracy itself is functioning as a process of the evolution of communication technologies and strategies. Many studies on politics focus impacts on the outcome and process of elections. To build models and theories which are applicable to future technologies and are more helpful in interim political life, the everyday social processes of politics must be examined through the social media sphere. To explore a scenario that has garnered much notoriety, I chose to examine the online political discourse surrounding the Government of Alberta's Canadian Energy Centre. In December of 2019, the CEC begun operations to promote the oil and gas industry through conducting research and promotions (Flexhaug, 2019, para. 11-13). Though the organization was pitched as a part of the United Conservative Party's electoral platform in the provincial election (para. 5), it is unclear whether or not the organization is a fully independent lobbying group, or is directly affiliated with the provincial government. The CEC is a valid scenario to examine, due to the newness of the issue (therefore no research of this kind exists at time of writing), the relevant Canadian context (which is underrepresented in established literature), and due to having a clear start-point. To do this, I used the following research questions:

RQ1: Is the Canadian Energy Centre an organized effort for propaganda?

RQ2: Is there propaganda present in the aggregate Twitter communication network surrounding the Canadian Energy Centre?

To explore the impacts of propaganda within the CEC's Twitter network, I conducted an exploratory case study utilizing a content analysis methodology. I used established definitions to create a coding scheme which was applied in a multi-layered network examination to determine if there were signs of what have been considered to be the "effects" of propaganda: induced misperceptions, distraction, disorientation, and misinformation (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 34-38). The discussion of data was informed and shaped by various teachings of Habermas, including Critical Theory and a contemporary take on public sphere theory. These theories stated that not only must political discourse take place in a public setting where many may participate, but it must also be conducted in a fair way which is free of distortion of facts.

This chapter will conclude this research project by providing an overview of methods, a summary of findings, a recommendation for the future direction of this area of research, and an overall conclusion.

Summary of Findings

Through this research I found that the Canadian Energy Centre's Tweets were largely normative. In this study, normative messaging is defined as transparent messaging and presentation of accurate (and accurately interpreted) data, which maintains a reasonably professional tone and stays on-topic without attempting to redirect the attention of the audience. When examining the networked public sphere, however, it became evident that context changed the outcomes and indicated that the effects of propaganda are present within the system. It is one thing to attempt to determine whether or not singular items are normative in content, but it would be impossible to determine whether or not propaganda impacts are occurring without taking a

broader approach. This wider look also encompasses learning more about the organization which is delivering the core messages and content. Much of the confusion within the network responses was the result of the muddled identity of the CEC. Their messages, therefore, were not well received by the audience. In the CEC's Twitter network, discourse was not conducted through ideal speech, as per Habermas. To Habermas, if speech is not intelligible, truthful, normative, and sincere, it will be impossible for a true consensus to be reached (Habermas, 2007, p. 447-450). It was impossible to determine, however, if it would be the same story if the organization was more forthcoming and transparent about their organizational status and affiliations. As mentioned in the Discussion section, were it to be true that the CEC is ultimately a provincial organization, yet trying to mask it, it would fundamentally make all of their content fall into the grey propaganda category by promoting disinformation of their identity. This demonstrates the critical nature of incorporating data within an aggregate network public sphere in order to assess the normativity of discourse.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in March of 2020 the Alberta government announced that the CEC's budget would be cut (Jeffrey, 2020). This is of interest for two reasons: one, it reestablishes the apparent government affiliations with the organization, and two: it may provide an opportunity to quietly let the Twittersphere settle and reassess operations and imaging. This is not necessarily the case, however, as the CEC launched a new marketing campaign on July 23 (EnergyNow Media, 2020).

Findings in Context

For this project, the biggest objective is to contribute a new way to seek out and contextualize propaganda content. It is clearly an imperfect art, and one which has evolved over decades. As communication technologies and the dynamics between organizations and audiences

evolve, researchers must continue to think creatively to add alternative means of exploring relevant topics within not only individual items, but within a network as a whole. It is essential to continue to develop and debate definitions of propaganda terms to meet public discourse research needs in politics, particularly in times of stark division. If it is possible to take this model and further develop a coding scheme which could more clearly differentiate between manipulative and normative content, it may provide a tool to more effectively assess social media content. Not every member of an audience is a specialist capable of fact-checking at will, therefore other means of being aware of manipulative content must be developed.

It should be noted that there are also potential counterpoints to this research. Some researchers, such as Cull, Culbert and Welch (2003) claim that declaring propaganda as inherently "evil" should be challenged (p. XV). Other academics similarly argue that it is more difficult to appeal to the masses than by simply lying to or manipulating them, and that if "propaganda" convinces members of society, then it must have some level of rationality to it (from the need to appeal to the rationality of individuals) and therefore would be ethically neutral (p. XVIII). Though these are valid points which could be argued, in order to conduct this research I had to establish my working definitions in order to have a manageable model from which to work.

Future Recommendations

This study does feature limitations, however. In this model I was unable to determine motives of any party, or to pinpoint the source of propaganda. It was also limiting to be forced to decide whether or not to take the CEC at their word on their "About Us" page, where they claim to be an "independent provincial corporation" (Canadian Energy Centre, n.d., para. 1). This has been discussed and taken into account as much as possible throughout the study. I also was

unable to fact-check each item due to time and resource constraints. I am not an expert in the field of oil and gas, therefore some false information by any party would be more difficult for me to identify compared to someone with more knowledge. This did allow me to adopt the empathetic observer role, however, and represent the general populace who also are for the most part not privy to insider knowledge.

These limitations do provide the opportunity for further research, however. This model can be adapted and applied by an expert in a given field, who would then be able to add a fact-checking layer much more effectively and efficiently than I would have been able. The model described would provide the framework to have not only a specific, narrow examination, but also to apply to a broader network.

Any development in strategies to grow awareness of online propaganda can be useful to the expansion of journalism and media literacy education in schools. This model can be incorporated into curriculums as one more tool for students to use to be aware of and combat manipulative content. Much of the discussion concerning propaganda focuses on the threat of falsified information, or specific symbolism. From a practical standpoint, it is incredibly labour-intensive to fact-check or conduct a semiotic analysis of every item one comes across online. Having the added perspective of even a brief micro/macro normativity approach, paired with some knowledge of (or lack thereof) the message source can contribute to further awareness of attempted manipulation. Education on the risks inherent in online political discourse which features evidence of the effects of propaganda is a first step in mitigating its effects on the political process.

Conclusion

Though propaganda and manipulation are nothing new, advances in communication technologies continue expanding the challenges and legitimizing the importance of research. If citizens are unable to determine what is true and false, or what information is being presented in a manipulative fashion, how could they be expected to properly form political opinion? And if that is the case, is democracy truly sustainable within a system marred by manipulative content? There are many contentious topics in politics, one of which in Alberta concerns the oil and gas industry. This led me to develop the following research questions to conduct a case study of the Canadian Energy Centre:

RQ1: Is the Canadian Energy Centre an organized effort for propaganda?

RQ2: Is there propaganda present in the aggregate Twitter communication network surrounding the Canadian Energy Centre?

My qualitative content analysis led me to the conclusion that, when examined as standalone items, the CEC's Twitter and website content was normative. Alternatively, in examining the bigger context it became apparent that: there are effects of propaganda present in the networked public sphere of the CEC, and; that when taking into account the greater context of the CEC's identity (and conflicting information regarding that), it had the potential to change the declaration of normativity of content in the micro-coding of RQ1.

It is my hope that this study provides a contribution to studies examining propaganda, no matter what discipline the researcher specializes in. It is a topic which could fall within the realm of communications studies, political science, sociology, and psychology, just to name a few. This study also attempted to determine the most clearly signified components of manipulation in discourse, and then "measure" them to determine what was present. This model is one which can

be modified and built on for further research. While it is one thing to study whether an intended message is accurately conveyed and interpreted by an audience, discerning the impacts on discourse in the online public sphere in which message transmission and adjacent two-way communication is taking place is a layer which must be added for academic research.

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Canadian Energy Centre. [CDNEnergyCentre]. (December 18, 2020). Growing up in Calgary, Gillian Hynes always had energy on her mind. Continue reading to learn how she secured her dream job as an HR expert for @Shell_Canada:. [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/CDNEnergyCentre/status/1207435422277787648

Canadian Energy Centre. [CDNEnergyCentre]. (December 19, 2019). In response to the questions regarding our logo, here is our statement. [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/CDNEnergyCentre/status/1207759139906052096

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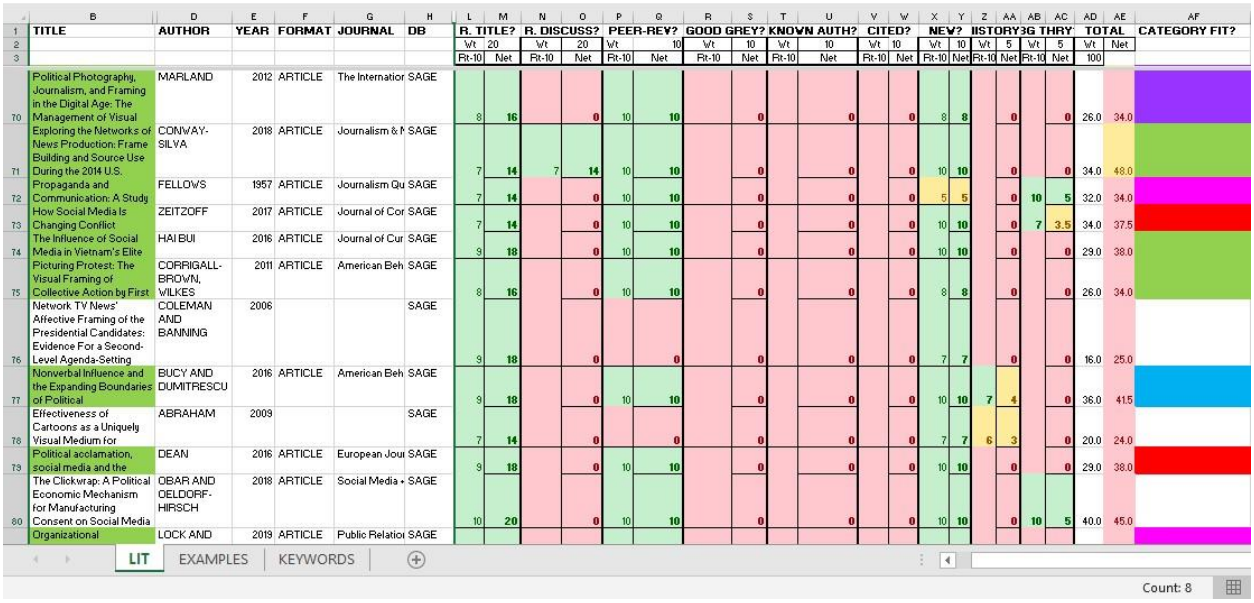
Appendices

Appendix A

Literature Review Spreadsheet



	B	D	E	F	G	H	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	AA	AB	AC	AD	AE	AF
1	TITLE	AUTHOR	YEAR	FORMAT	JOURNAL	DB	R. TITLE?		R. DISCUSS?		PEER-REV?		GOOD GREY?		KNOWN AUTH?		CITED?		NEW?		ISTORY		3G THRY		TOTAL		CATEGORY FIT?
2							Wt	20	Wt	20	Wt	10	Wt	10	Wt	10	Wt	10	Wt	10	Wt	5	Wt	5	Wt	Net	
3							Rt-10	Net	Rt-10	Net	Rt-10	Net	Rt-10	Net	Rt-10	Net	Rt-10	Net	Rt-10	Net	Rt-10	Net	Rt-10	Net	100		
70	Political Photography, Journalism, and Framing in the Digital Age: The Management of Visual	MARLAND	2012	ARTICLE	The Internatior	SAGE	8	16		0	10	10		0		0		0	8	8		0		0	26.0	34.0	
71	Exploring the Networks of News Production: Frame Building and Source Use During the 2014 U.S.	CONWAY-SILVA	2018	ARTICLE	Journalism & M	SAGE	7	14	7	14	10	10		0		0		0	10	10		0		0	34.0	48.0	
72	Propaganda and Communication: A Study	FELLOWS	1957	ARTICLE	Journalism Qu	SAGE	7	14		0	10	10		0		0		0	5	5		0	10	5	32.0	34.0	
73	How Social Media Is Changing Conflict	ZEITZOFF	2017	ARTICLE	Journal of Cor	SAGE	7	14		0	10	10		0		0		0	10	10		0	7	3.5	34.0	37.5	
74	The Influence of Social Media in Vietnam's Elite	HAI BUI	2016	ARTICLE	Journal of Cur	SAGE	9	18		0	10	10		0		0		0	10	10		0		0	29.0	38.0	
75	Picturing Protest: The Visual Framing of Collective Action by First	CORRIGALL-BROWN, WILKES	2011	ARTICLE	American Beh	SAGE	8	16		0	10	10		0		0		0	8	8		0		0	26.0	34.0	
76	Network TV News' Affective Framing of the Presidential Candidates: Evidence For a Second-Level Agenda-Setting	COLEMAN AND BANNING	2006			SAGE	9	18		0		0		0		0		0	7	7		0		0	16.0	25.0	
77	Nonverbal Influence and the Expanding Boundaries of Political	BUCY AND DUMITRESCU	2016	ARTICLE	American Beh	SAGE	9	18		0	10	10		0		0		0	10	10	7	4		0	36.0	41.5	
78	Effectiveness of Cartoons as a Uniquely Visual Medium for	ABRAHAM	2009			SAGE	7	14		0		0		0		0		0	7	7	6	3		0	20.0	24.0	
79	Political acclamation, social media and the	DEAN	2016	ARTICLE	European Jour	SAGE	9	18		0	10	10		0		0		0	10	10		0		0	29.0	38.0	
80	The Clickwrap: A Political Economic Mechanism for Manufacturing Consent on Social Media	OBAR AND OELDORF-HIRSCH	2018	ARTICLE	Social Media +	SAGE	10	20		0	10	10		0		0		0	10	10		0	10	5	40.0	45.0	
	Organizational	LOCK AND	2019	ARTICLE	Public Relatior	SAGE																					

LIT | EXAMPLES | KEYWORDS

Count: 8

Above is a broad overview of the first section of columns of my spreadsheet. Columns L-AC are subcategories based on my eligibility criteria which have been designated assigned weighting. The *RT-10* sub-columns are a grade I assign from 1-10, which is then calculated (using cell-based algorithms) into a weighted percentage of the total in the *Net* sub-column. The grades are then calculated into row-specific total in columns AD and AE. It is important to note that some of the columns are ultimately either-or (such as whether it is peer-reviewed or grey literature), therefore a score of 100% was impossible. With that in mind, I determined what reasonable benchmarks would be and coded each cell to change color based on what I deemed a strong score (highlighted green), a reasonable score (highlighted yellow), or a low or N/A score (highlighted red).

The *CATEGORY FIT?* column was created to allow me to visualize which categories of my literature review discussion had a sufficient number of sources. It was much easier for me to get a sense of how much useful literature at a glance using this color-coded scheme.

Appendix B

In-depth Definitions Processing Chart

CONCEPTS	DEFINITIONS	CRITERIA
Propaganda	Propaganda: "Communication designed to manipulate a target population by affecting its beliefs, attitudes, or preferences in order to obtain behavior compliant with political goals of the propagandist" (Benkler, Faris & Roberts, 2018, p. 29)	● Aims to **manipulate**/ involves **manipulation**, (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 29) ● **Intentional** communications, designed to try and gain **desired outcomes** (p. 29) ● Has a significant-scale **target population**, beyond interpersonal or small-group communications (p. 29) ● Aims for **political outcomes** (p. 29) ● Would **not** otherwise be **appropriate** for the situation (p. 30) ● Can be framed in **positive or negative** ways/messages (p. 31)

		• Could create outcomes of: Induced misperceptions, distraction, disorientation, and/or fuel misinformation (p. 34-38)
White Propaganda	Propaganda which does not fall under the "disinformation" category. It is clear where the messaging is coming from (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 29-30).	• **Clear source** of messaging/information (p. 29-30) • But information or messages presented in a way that an **empathetic observer** would find **inappropriate** (p. 29-30) • **True information**, or **lack of information** (p. 29-30) • Relies on **emotional appeal**, with **little-to-no information** to back it up (p. 29-30) • Does **not** feature **fully false** information (p. 29-30) • Message can be based on a **logical fallacy** in the context of information given (p. 29-30) • Can involve **data** taken **out of context** (p. 29-30)

		● Could create outcomes of: Induced misperceptions, distraction, disorientation, and/or fuel misinformation (p. 34-38)
Disinformation	A subset of propaganda, per Benkler, which involves "includes dissemination of explicitly false or misleading information. The falsehood may be the origin of the information, as when Russian-controlled Facebook or Twitter accounts masquerade as American, or it may be in relation to specific facts, as when Alex Jones of Infowars ran a Pizzagate story that he was later forced to retract" (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 32).	● Utilizes **misleading information**, or **false information** (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 32) ● This includes using purposefully **misleading interpretation of information** (p. 32) ● Tactics and level of manipulation varies depending on what type of disinformation (grey or black propaganda) (p. 32)
Grey Propaganda	"[Propaganda] whose source and content is more subtly masked and manipulated to appear other than what it is" (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 32).	● Falls under the **disinformation** category of propaganda (p. 32) ● Message source is **not transparent**, but is not entirely falsified, and/or messages present

		misleading or manipulated information (p. 32) ● Could involve: **Misleading** about a source's credentials, location, experience, authority, etc. (p. 32) ● Manipulated information could include: data sets which are **half-true but partially false**, a true set of data which has been **manipulated** to create a different outcome/set of findings, data taken entirely **out of context** (p. 32) ● Could create outcomes of: Induced misperceptions, distraction, disorientation, and/or fuel misinformation (p. 34-38)
Black Propaganda	"[Propaganda] whose source or content is purely false" (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 32).	● Falls under the **disinformation** category of propaganda (p. 32) ● The **source** is a **complete fabrication** and/or misrepresentation (p. 32)

		• **Information** is **entirely false** and misleading (p. 32) • Per Doob, a source may be faked to look like the propaganda message is coming from the person/source it's meant to discredit (Doob, 1950, p. 433) • Could create outcomes of: Induced misperceptions, distraction, disorientation, and/or fuel misinformation (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 34-38)
Political Advertising/ Political Communication	Though political advertising/communications usually focus on three areas which are often spoken of in the context of propaganda (agenda-setting, priming, and framing) (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 101), similar to marketing and PR the differentiating factor between political advertising/communications and	• Should be **normatively appropriate** (to avoid a manipulation classification) • Is **political** • Does not cause: Induced misperceptions (politically-specific (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 34), disorientation, or misinformation (if done ethically) • Could act as distraction

	propaganda is whether or not content is normatively appropriate, and whether or not there is disinformation present.	• Very similar to marketing and PR for these purposes, but features political content
Public Relations	Public relations is often deemed similar to propaganda in the same way that marketing is, with even Edward Bernays referring to PR professionals as propagandists (Lock & Ludolph, 2019, p. 106). Bernays did, however, also write that "Under no circumstances should the engineering of consent supersede or displace the functions of the educational system, either formal or informal, in bringing about understanding by the people as a basis for their action" (Bernays, 1947, p. 3). The unwillingness to come into conflict with education and "truth" is indicative of being normatively appropriate, when	• Should be **normatively appropriate** to be different from a propaganda classification • Held to some level of professional ethics/accountability standards • Often conducted by professionals trained in the field of work • Does not create: Induced misperceptions (politically-specific (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 34)), disorientation, or misinformation (if done ethically) • Could act as a distraction • Very similar to marketing for these purposes • Some level of dialogue (Lock & Ludolph, 2019, p. 106) • Aims to form a mutual understanding (p. 106)

	done ethically. Some theorists have also claimed that PR is more to do with a two-way, relationship-building dialogue rather than one-way information delivery (Lock & Ludolph, 2019, p. 106).	
Marketing	Benkler et al. (2018) state that marketing meets all elements of their definition of propaganda, except for a desired political outcome of the target population (p. 29). Marketing also pushes an agenda, but for the sake of differentiation this agenda is apolitical, and is conducted in a more normative and appropriate manner than propaganda (p. 29).	● Does not always use manipulation by this definition, since it is **often normatively appropriate** by the perspective of an empathetic observer ● Per Benkler et al.'s (2018) definitions, the content of marketing messaging is **non-political** (though he acknowledges a level of subjectivity) (p. 29) ● Has a **transparent source** ● Should not cause: Induced misperceptions (politically-specific (p. 34)), disorientation, or misinformation (if conducted thoroughly and responsibly)

		● Could act as a distraction ● Can be difficult to differentiate between political and apolitical content (can be subjective, to a point) ● Held to some level of professional ethics/accountability standards ● Often conducted by professionals trained in the field of work ● Very similar to PR for these purposes
Bullshit/trolls	Bullshit content and trolls operating online may contain manipulation and/or disinformation, and may mask the source of the message. The difference between bullshit and propaganda is that bullshit artists don't have a goal in their content other than garnering clicks and traffic to gain money (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 24). According to Harry Frankfurt, a bullshit artist	● **Not necessarily manipulation** because it doesn't have an end-goal influence in mind in terms of behavior or changing someone's mind ● Just wants "clicks" or online traffic for personal financial gain, or for a laugh ● May or may not be political ● Intentionally misleading, but not out of a long-term plan, instead out of wanting to make financial gain

	"does not care whether the things he says describe reality correctly. He just picks them out, or makes them up, to suit his purpose" (p. 32). I am grouping trolls in with bullshit artists because though trolls may not be seeking money, they similarly do not care if what they say is completely untrue, and only want to sensationalize content to get a rise out of people.	and not caring about ethical implications (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 24) ● Could lead to: Induced misperceptions, distraction, disorientation or misinformation (but not as the main goal)
Fake News	Fake news is essentially any content which purposefully contains disinformation, and has an end goal of generating clicks and attention. Due to the vague definition and significant similarities to "bullshit", Benkler et al. (2018) deem the term as not academically useful (p. 9).	● Benkler et al. (2018) does not use the term fake news, as they deem it "too vague as a category of analysis and its meaning quickly eroded soon after it was first introduced" (p. 9) ● Will not be a full category of coding, just another term to define in the discussion of the data in the context of content which looks like

		traditional news media content and features significant disinformation ● Aims specifically to mislead audiences (Reilly, 2018, p. 141) ● Does not always implicitly feature misleading information or data, sometimes leaves much open to misleading interpretations of the public (p. 141) ● Could cause: Induced misperceptions, distraction, disorientation, and misinformation
Misinformation	Misinformation is "publishing wrong information without meaning to be wrong or having a political purpose in communicating false information" (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 24).	● Can be as simple as an honest mistake, not doing any fact-checking before spreading false information ● Can also exist as part of a system ● For the purposes of this examination, this will include retweeting/sharing a post with wrong information on social media, with good intentions

		● Includes the spread/sharing of blatant “fake news” ● Can also include the spread of false data through traditional media (aka news) sources, potentially caused by overworked journalists, editors being untrained in a relevant profession, etc.