



Fakultet for lærerutdanning og pedagogikk

Øyvind Johnsen Liberg

Master thesis

Digital propaganda: Analyzing modern influencing operations

Master of digital communication and culture

2023

Acknowledgments

After far too many hours spent reading, writing, and quite frankly losing track of my own thoughts it is a delight to finally be forced to hand this in. I'd like to thank my family members for bearing with my rambling rants and inability to stop talking.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Ida Jahr, who has been exceptionally patient and helpful. Her assistance provided me with some much-needed explanations on the creation of an academic work, as well as pointing out that which I'd forgotten to explain, that which I had not explained, and that which I was just plain wrong about.

Content

Acknowledgments	2
Abstract English	6
Abstrakt	7
1.0 Introduction	8
1.1 Thesis	8
2.0 Intro to propaganda	11
2.1 Modern communication.....	13
3.0 Scholars on propaganda	17
3.1 1928 – Bernays	17
3.2 1935-1948 - Leonard Doob	20
3.3 1948-Lazarsfeld and Merton	21
3.4 1951 - Adorno.....	23
3.5 1988 – Herman and Chomsky’s propaganda model.....	24
3.6 The legitimacy of influence	26
4.0 Introducing Ellul	27
4.1 Technique	27
4.2 Propaganda as technique	29
4.3 Orthopraxy, creating action	29
4.4 The importance of factuality.....	32
4.5 Factuality in a digital age.....	36
4.6 Knowledge of the Psychological Terrain	37
4.7 The individual and the masses.....	41
4.8 Total propaganda	45
4.9 Types of Propaganda	47
4.10 Continual propaganda.....	48

4.11 Self-replicating online	52
4.12 The propagandee’s participation	52
4.13 Doomscrolling	57
4.14 Radicalization or propagandization? New words old clothes.....	58
4.15 Vertical and horizontal propaganda.....	62
4.16 Modern vertical and horizontal propaganda	64
4.17 Conclusion for chapter 4.....	69
5.0 The reports.....	72
5.1 Why these reports?	72
5.2 The difficulty of measuring impact of hostile operations.....	73
5.3 Joint Analysis Report GRIZZLY STEPPE – Russian Malicious Cyber Activity	74
5.4 Intelligence Community Assessment 2017 - Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections	75
5.5 Hacking democracies - Cataloguing cyber-enabled attacks on elections.....	76
5.6 Unwanted foreign influence? - mapping and analysis of the 2021 general election	76
6.0 Existing vulnerabilities.....	77
6.1 Goals	79
6.2 Information gathering	83
6.3 Laying foundation for influence	86
6.4 Method of distribution	90
6.5 Delegitimization of the opposition	101
7.0 Conclusions - Becoming actionable	103
7.1 Conclusions - Mass media vs post mass media	104
List of terminology used in the text.	108
Reference list.....	109

Abstract English

The study of propaganda has been an ongoing topic well over a century, and in a modern context much of propaganda has moved online and with that some dynamics of how it functions have changed. This thesis studies the existing literature on propaganda, primarily the propaganda concept as developed by Jacques Ellul, and to use that to as a framework while modernizing it to the realities of the digital space.

After which I go through 5 reports on hostile influence operations, particularly targeting elections within the United States, and to use a document analysis method to extract the relevant information and explain how Russian intelligence services structure their influencing operations and why they are structured as they are.

While studying the theoretical framework of Ellul I found that it still provides a solid base for understanding influence operations, however some modernization was required. Particularly in the nature of group behavior online, which is different from more traditional familial group behavior. Ellul's focus on the academic had to be abandoned as, within the digital space, all participants have the same vulnerability that was previously mainly present within academics. The main change however was about the individual's participation in their own propagandization, notably caused by the discovery that many individuals will be naturally drawn towards propaganda through a psychological need to hear negative information.

Through the document analysis of the reports I found that Russian intelligence services largely follow the propaganda structure as explained by Ellul, with the expected changes according to the modernized concept of propaganda. The focus on modern influence operations appears to be focused on actionability, causing specific behavior and creating people who, with the right impetus, will react in specific predictable ways.

The theoretical findings provide some concerning implications about people and group's potential for self-radicalization, even without dedicated efforts by a hostile entity.

Abstrakt

Propagandastudier har vært et pågående tema i over et århundre. I en moderne kontekst har mye av propaganda blitt flyttet på nettet og med det har propagandaens metodikk gjennomgått endringer. Denne oppgaven studerer den eksisterende litteraturen om propaganda, først og fremst propagandakonseptet som utviklet av Jacques Ellul, for så å bruke det som et rammeverk for et modernisert propagandakonsept tilpasset realitetene i det digitale rommet.

Deretter går jeg igjennom 5 rapporter om fiendtlige påvirkningsoperasjoner, spesielt rettet mot valg i USA, for så å bruke en dokumentanalysemetode til å trekke ut relevant informasjon og forklare hvordan russiske etterretningstjenester strukturerer sine påvirkningsoperasjoner og forklarer hvorfor de er strukturert som de er.

Jeg fant at det teoretiske rammeverket til Ellul gir fortsatt et solid grunnlag for å forstå påvirkningsoperasjoner, men noe modernisering var nødvendig. Spesielt rundt gruppeatferd på net, som er forskjellig fra mer tradisjonell familiær gruppeatferd. Elluls påstand om at akademikeren er særlig utsatt måtte forlates ettersom alle brukere innenfor det digitale rommet har den samme sårbarheten for propaganda som tidligere var til stede hovedsakelig hos akademikere. Den største endringen var angående individets deltakelse i sin egen propagandisering, mye på grunn av en nyere oppdagelse angående individers naturlige tiltrekning mot negativ informasjon, som jeg argumenterer medfører en naturlig tiltrekning mot propaganda.

Dokumentanalysens funn viser at de russiske etterretningstjenester i stor grad følger propagandastrukturen slik den var forklart av Ellul, med forventede endringer i henhold til det moderniserte propagandabegrepet. Fokuset på moderne påvirkningsoperasjoner ser ut til å være fokusert på å skape handling. Den er dedikert mot fremstilling av spesifikk atferd og forsøk på å skape mennesker som, med riktig påvirkning, vil reagere på spesifikke forutsigbare måter.

De teoretiske funnene gir også noen urovekkende implikasjoner om mennesker og gruppers potensiale for selvradikalisering, selv uten dedikert innsats fra en fiendtlig enhet.

1.0 Introduction

During and in the aftermath of the 2016 US presidential election the idea of foreign states manipulating the US public reached the public consciousness, particularly regarding accusations of election interference and questioning the legitimacy of US elections.

While the idea of mass media being responsible for forming public opinion is not new and has been a keystone of propaganda scholarship since Bernays developed his conceptions of modern propaganda leading through to more modern interpretations like Herman and Chomsky's book *Manufacturing Consent* accusing public broadcasting of being sources of public manipulation. However, post-2016 election the discussion has moved from the smaller circle of those particularly interested in the topic to the general public. Today most people have some thoughts on the matter of public opinion being controlled by either media corporations, foreign interference, or both. With this newfound public interest in the matter, so comes government interest. However with all these accusations of interference and propaganda, the question of the definition of propaganda less discussed. Most members of the public seem to use Potter Stewart's definition of obscenity, "I know it when I see it".¹ Which is not a particularly helpful definition, nor does it provide any sort of guideline to work with for those who want to seriously study foreign interference into elections. There are older models of understanding propaganda, the most complete of which is Ellul's work on the subject, yet his work is from 1962, because of this I have an interest in finding a definition of propaganda in a modern sense that can be applied for effectively for the modern context. I am curious about how the digital space affects our understanding of what propaganda is and what it is used for.

1.1 Thesis

Conspiracy theories are not new, and to a point they have become sufficiently ubiquitous that a modern person can be reasonably familiar with several even if they themselves do not believe in them. They are sufficiently common that normal people may encounter them by happenstance, and with modern technology find out more about them with little effort.

In 2016 John Podesta, a member of Hillary Clinton's circle for the 2016 election, was supposedly exposed as a participant in a spirit dinner. His critics claimed, this was an occult event consisting of satanic rituals. For him however it was a simple reference to an art

¹ Ward 2009

installation and a humorous name for a simple dinner invitation. Yet this invitation ended up in a leaked set of emails and sparked a conspiracy. Podesta, and Clinton herself by association, was a devil worshipper. Or so the conspiracy theorists claimed. The leaked email of a funny dinner sparked a conspiracy so large it caused problems. To the point that former presidential candidate Ben Carson claimed Clinton to be a follower of Lucifer.² This is obviously not the first time Clinton has had mud slung at her, nor even the first time she was accused of being a devil worshiper, however this particular instance was part of a larger trend of online conspiracy theories and election interference. In the report *Trends in Online Influence Efforts* it is claimed that that major interference operations have happened in 30 countries, with 76 different operations having been found in a 6-year time period. Here quoted from *Uønsket utenlandsk påvirkning? – kartlegging og analyse av stortingsvalget 2021*:

“A more recent report from 2020, *Trends in Online Influence Efforts*, argues that at least 30 countries were exposed to 76 foreign influence operations in the period 2013-2019. Many of the operations lasted over several years and Russia was behind 64% of them“³

With how many of these operations there are, and the possibly devastating consequences they could have, having a clear understanding of the methodology of these operations is of exceptional importance. I intend to analyze several reports, primarily by US intelligence agencies but also those by Australian and Norwegian research institutions, to study the methodology of the efforts made by Russian intelligence in influencing the population of the United States through influencing operations utilizing propaganda. By looking at the methodology of Russian influence operations and analyzing at them using the concept of propaganda as developed by Jacques Ellul. I intend to show how Russian intelligence has adapted the methodology of propaganda to the possibilities of modern technology, the rise of social media, and a digital media landscape. By doing this I will seek to explain how they have adapted the concept of propaganda to the realities of modern mass media and adapt Ellul’s theory to the situation created by the public not only having immediate and constant access to mass media and social media.

I will need a solid theoretical base to understand why Russian intelligence networks act in the manner that they do. I have chosen the 1962 work by Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The*

² Phillips & Milner 2021: Page 28

³ Sivertsen et al. 2022: Page 16 (my translation)

formation of men's attitudes. In this book, Ellul attempted to study propaganda from a psychological and sociological perspective. He wanted to explain what it is, how it functions, and how it attempts to inspire people into action. Fundamentally he was trying to explain propaganda as a sociological phenomenon. I will also use the works of other scholars as supplementary support for his work.

While looking at the reports from intelligence networks and government research institutions I intend to analyze the methodology of modern propaganda, which tools the digital propagandist uses, and why. To do this I will be looking at them through the lens afforded to me by the sociology of propaganda described by Ellul. I will adapt Ellul's work by utilizing some more modern theory on usage of mass communication and the role of mass media in propaganda.

2.0 Intro to propaganda

The history of propaganda is both long and complicated. This topic has been the work of many great scholars, and even more propagandists large and small. While the terminology is relatively new, only a few centuries old, the general concept of influencing others through the media of the day is not. The possibility of rhetorical abuse to convince rather than obtain truth was a matter of concern even for the philosophers of ancient Greece, as communications scholar Marshall Soules points out in his book *Media, Persuasion and Propaganda*:

“As orality and literacy were vying for the stage in Athenian democracy, Plato and Aristotle took differing positions on rhetoric’s role. Plato was suspicious that rhetoric, with its origins in oratory, was more concerned with persuasion than with truth, especially as practiced by the Sophists, who considered rhetoric an end in itself. Plato describes Socrates as troubled by the possible abuse of rhetoric. When he challenges the rhetorician Gorgias on the matter, Gorgias replies with a classic rhetorical defence: Socrates: . . . [T]he rhetorician need not know the truth about things; he has only to discover some way of persuading the ignorant that he has more knowledge than those who know?

Gorgias: Yes, Socrates, and is not this a great comfort? Not to have learned the other arts, but the art of rhetoric only, and yet to be in no way inferior to the professors of them?”⁴

The issue Socrates is pointing out is that simply stating the truth is not guaranteed to win a debate to control public opinion, something that several scholars on propaganda have also stated in their works. Socrates here explains that the public can be moved by persuasion, and an ignorant public can just as easily be moved by rhetoric as it can be done by facts. Socrates here points towards the issue of the ignorant public which cannot tell the difference between someone who holds knowledge and someone who is simply pretending to do so. The public does not have the knowledge to distinguish fact from fiction on their own, and as such they are vulnerable to the predations of rhetoric. This is a fact not unknown to those who have engaged in propaganda in modern times who must be keenly aware not only of which lies they can get away with, but which lies their audience will want to hear, and which ones they will reject outright. This will be covered in greater detail later on.

⁴ Soules 2015: Page 22

To further entrench this point Soules quotes Boler brings up the testimony of Hermann Göring during the Nuremberg trials, where he in clear-cut terms explained the simple psychological phenomenon utilized by the Nazi propaganda machine in order to convince the German public to support war and accept the personal risk and horrible casualties that war entails:

“Naturally, the common people don’t want war, but after all, it is the leaders of a country who determine the policy, and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along whether it is a democracy, or a fascistic dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to do the bidding of the leaders. This is easy: All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in every country.”⁵

Göring’s simple explanation of the cynical manipulation of the public to create support for the already decided actions desired by a nation’s leaders may give the reader the idea that this is an exclusively fascist concept, but it assuredly is not. Government-sanctioned propaganda is a staple of society, though democratic ones often prefer to hide such actions behind euphemisms. In his work *Propaganda and the Ethics of Persuasion* Randal explains:

“Typically, an enemy is said to engage in propaganda, whereas “our side” may use the same tactics, but it is characterized as providing information rather than engaging in propaganda. Whereas the Nazi propaganda minister, Josef Goebbels, did not mind calling his ministry one of “Propaganda and People’s Enlightenment,” suggesting that “propaganda” was being treated as a neutral term, English-speaking countries prefer to use the word “information” for a ministry doing essentially the same work.”⁶

To put it in the crudest terms the enemy uses propaganda to control the public while we provide information to the public to create desirable behavior. Arguably the degree to which these are truly different concepts is debatable at best.

⁵ Soules 2015: Page 119

⁶ Marlin 2014: Page 192

2.1 Modern communication

As we get further into the 21st century our lives are becoming increasingly digital. The German statistics and survey company Statista, which specializes in marketing and consumer data, claims that the average person now spends 147 minutes a day on social media⁷. While other sources have found that the average person spends at least 2 hours a day online.

If we account for sleep, food, work, and other necessities eating up our daily schedules we can safely assume that most people spend a considerable amount of their free time in a digital space, to the point that phrases like “terminally online” have been coined to describe people who live their lives largely on the internet in general and particularly on social media.

Technology has become a more significant part of our society as people’s lives keep moving toward the digital sphere. This also means we are completely and constantly bombarded with information. The digital world is one of information. Those of us who participate in it are constantly consuming information, through text, pictures, video, and audio. Close to every second in the digital space is one spent absorbing and interpreting information that is provided to us. Those who make their living on their do so by providing a constant stream of content, content simply being information readily available and consumable. There is no end to information online, simply because information is essentially what it consists of. Be it true or false, important or farcical. Some of it is harmless and cute, like pictures of cats sitting in boxes. Some of it is the daily things of little consequence that we share with our friends, the birthday celebrations, or photographs of tonight’s dinner. However, not all of it is quite so benign. Our social media feeds are always looking for something to add as we scroll down, simply to keep us on the platform. We subscribe to news organizations, political commentators, bloggers, vloggers, Instagram celebrities, and anyone else with the dedication and desire to create content online for the consumption of the masses. And most of it with their own dedicated comment section where every man, woman, and child share their opinion on the matter being discussed. The issue of propaganda may then be more relevant today than it ever was before as now propaganda has functionally become a daily encounter in everyone’s life, particularly online with the digital spaces taking over people’s lives and attention. The digital world offers up an endless amount of entertainment and information,

⁷ Statista 2022

and therefore also functions as a vector for persuasion, offering up relational content for consumption ready to reinforce existing views and possibly create new ones.⁸

This flood of information is consumed through the digital channels used by the public. This is information which exists in spaces with what can graciously be said to have dubious records on the matter of fact-checking is available for the consumption of all. The information is often shared through social media channels between friends or through non-digital groups or online forums where it is managed by algorithms that are an integral part of the social media platforms themselves, and to be clear when speaking about a platform's algorithm what is actually being talked about is a system of many algorithms working in concert.⁹ The exact way an algorithm works varies significantly between different platforms, and each platform will tweak their algorithm over time to improve it towards whatever effect they have decided is preferable. Speaking broadly these algorithms are designed to calculate what content its consumers will want to engage with based on what else they have previously interacted with. This is not necessarily positive engagement, as many find it impossible not to engage with information that upsets them, which will be covered further in 3.3. These algorithms are not interested in catering to bias specifically, they are created with the intent of causing engagement, to keep people clicking on the next one.¹⁰ The algorithm is attempting to keep the consumer present, so the stronger the emotional response, the better. That doesn't mean it records the emotional response directly, but rather it measures how engaged people are by measuring how much they interact with the medium. The algorithms of digital media are designed to keep people online first and secondly on the platform in question. To keep them consuming the content the platform has available by providing what the algorithm judges to be most interesting, or at least most engaging, to the user.¹¹ As a result of these algorithms this digital age has created an entirely new way for the average person to interact with the world around them, most notably in how much information they can consume, and with that comes a new age of propaganda.

With this change in information consumption anyone could be excused for thinking that this new digital age has made old theories on the subject meaningless. We have access to more

⁸ Hobbs et al. 2019: Page 2

⁹ Bucher 2021: 118

¹⁰ Thorson 2019: page 1

¹¹ Bucher 2021: 120

information in our hands than generations before us would ever see in their entire lives. The entire knowledge of all of humanity gathered and made available to us on devices we carry in our pocket. Some would argue this should make us immune to misinformation as we all have the means to look up the truth. Actual reality is quite the opposite. With the digitalization of the lives of the ordinary citizen propaganda has arguably become a staple of the life of the ordinary citizen to the point that functionally speaking almost all people are consuming it in one way or another. The fundamentals of how propaganda works have not changed, it is a system of influencing people and while how the people interact with the world has changed their fundamental psychology has not. The sociological phenomenon is no different today than it was yesterday or how it was a century ago. What has changed is the flow of information, the way it travels and reaches the people, and how people interact with it. A simple example of this is social grooming, which is not a new concept. People participate in social grooming on a daily basis, asking how people are, taking care of each other, and broadcasting friendships to those around you. A similar concept happens online where people comment on each other's pictures and shared life events, have public conversations and demonstrate fondness for each other through online displays.¹²

While the means of communication may have changed the people are no different, and so the needs of propaganda to create the intended effect remain the same. What the digital age has done is usher in new delivery systems more capable of delivering information into the hands of the user and with that comes the ability of propaganda to increase its target base as it becomes easier than ever to completely envelop an individual in propaganda. Further, the modern propaganda is self-replicating in a way that historical propaganda could not be, as the nature of social media makes the target for propaganda an active part of its spread as they share it, and their engagement with it makes the algorithms of online media pick it up and recommend it to others who share the target's engagement habits. This will be covered further in chapter (to be decided). The individual is consuming information to a greater extent than was previously possible and as such is more vulnerable to being influenced through that information, and a hostile state can use this to attack another state through manipulating sections of their population. This creates new challenges for society as the population becomes more vulnerable to influence operations from hostile actors. As we all now live in a permanent river of propaganda constantly streaming through our lives at any given moment a

¹² Aalen 2015: 47-48

thorough understanding of its functions may be more relevant than ever before as states work to figure out how to counter propaganda operations within their own territory, even as such operations across national borders and function on a global scale through the previously unheard of amount of media that we all consume on a daily basis. A modern government interested in countering such operations needs to understand the methodology of such operations, what is being done and how, in order to create effective counterintelligence operations to prevent or undo the influence operations that have targeted their population. Even as they themselves likely have operations intended to create desirable opinions within the general public.

3.0 Scholars on propaganda

There has been considerable work done on the matter of propaganda over the years, adapting the terminology and making arguments for what is and is not propaganda. I'll be going through some of the more important ones here, selected for their works completeness and ability to provide further perspectives. They are being covered chronologically for reasons of practicality, with the exception of Ellul whose work appears in the middle of the time frame. I view his work as a more complete understanding of propaganda and for this reason he has been chosen as the primary source of the theoretical framework used for this thesis. Some propaganda scholars have argued that by using propaganda more knowledgeable and educated leaders can ensure the public makes the correct decisions, and in fact that doing so is necessary for a well-maintained society. The most well-known such scholar may be Edward Bernays.

3.1 1928 – Bernays

In 1928 Edward Bernays published his book *Propaganda*, which built upon his earlier works *Crystallizing Public Opinion* and *A Public Relations Counsel*. In this book, Bernays expanded upon the concepts of the manipulation of the public, how it is to be done, and why.

We will start with the why, as this is what separates Bernays from most others. Bernays openly advocated for the government's use of propaganda toward the public. As far as he was concerned the public needed to be guided even if only as a matter of practical necessity. He also argues that this was already the state of affairs, and that the existing political situation in the United States already allowed the political parties to efficiently funnel down the list of candidates for election to a number manageable for elections and that without the hand of guidance from unelected leaders hiding in the background a democratic society wouldn't function. Bernays believed in this being a necessity, that without the parties preselecting what they considered acceptable candidates the voting process turns into a confusing mess. Therefore, for reasons of practicality, political parties' function to narrow down the list of candidates to a more manageable amount for the voters to choose from.¹³

Further, Bernays argues that the hidden hand of guidance is not limited to the practicalities of elections. As he explains, in theory, each man makes his own decision, but if all men were to be sufficiently informed in all matters to make a decision on much of anything. As a result all

¹³ Bernays 2005: Page 26

matters of life are infused in propaganda, attempting to guide people towards a more limited number of options. Few enough that they can be educated on what those differences are. After this, Bernays argues, a trusted manager can provide them with an acceptable choice, and people allow it. They take their opinions from politicians and ministers, from celebrities or simply the crowd through whatever is the accepted opinion of the day.¹⁴ He further explains that this is a simple necessity of a capitalistic structure of at least nominal free choice. On this, he differs from scholars like Adorno, who studied propaganda as it had been used by fascists in before and during WW2. This will be covered further later in section 3.4. Bernays's view on propaganda was that it is necessary for the capitalistic and democratic structure to function. He saw the issue as one of maintaining a functional society in the face of endless choices where a person would otherwise become paralyzed by indecision. The conclusion he arrived at was that, in order for society's chosen method of open competition to function, the pool of candidates had to be whittled down through party mechanisms and organizations to present a more manageable field of options for the voters to choose between.¹⁵

Bernays's view of propaganda is thus one of absolute necessity. This may have been somewhat a result of his work for the US military during WW1, where he worked with the public affairs and was tasked with building support for the war with the general public. To put it quite simply, his job was to make the nation's public support the decision already made by its leaders. Arguably a natural result of this would be his opinion that propaganda is something done by those who lead society to guide the public to the correct conclusion, and those who lead society do so by virtue of their status. The elite of the society is working towards the good of all. Not in the form of conspiracy, but simply as a result of those in power who, according to Bernays, are in power because of their natural leadership qualities who are forced into attempting to make the democratic system function by manipulating the masses into the correct opinions and desired behavior.¹⁶

With this understanding of Bernays opinion on why propaganda is important, I move on to Bernays opinion on how it is to be done. Bernays was the nephew of Sigmund Freud, and his work is similarly based on the hidden desires that human beings refuse to express but which inevitably guide their actions in ways they may themselves not really understand. The

¹⁴ Bernays 2005: Page 27

¹⁵ Bernays 2005: Page 27

¹⁶ Soules 2015: Page 62

propagandist however must know the true workings behind the workings of mankind as without it they will be unable to sufficiently motivate them to act as the propagandist desires. Bernays argues that human beings function mostly on motivations they themselves do not understand and do not provide accurate descriptions of why they do what they do. This is why Bernays argues the propagandist must study the psychology of the individual and the mass and must look beyond the reasoning provided by people, as people are unreliable narrators for their own choices, they must be studied to be truly understood.¹⁷ Bernays himself applied this not simply to matters of politics, but also to what we now consider matters of marketing and public relations. A field Bernays arguably founded, at least in its modern context. By utilizing the psychology of Freud to investigate the hidden motivations of the public and manipulate their desires in order to create sales. Bernays works was used as the basis for a century of marketing pitches targeting the desires of the masses and built the marketing machines of the 20th century.. His work selling the guilty pleasures and targeting the hidden desires for social acceptance present in all people.¹⁸ The foundational concept is of course quite simple. Selling someone something they do not need is difficult. Selling someone something they want is less so. Bernays himself uses the example of selling the piano. First, the salesman must create a desire for pianos. This can be done through leaders and persons of influence. Convincing those creating places of note to make room and space for pianos. People see their leaders, people of note, participate. The example Bernays uses is that of the music room. All these people have a music room. These people lead by example, and this makes having such a room a matter of prestige. Once having such a room becomes prestigious, this manifests a desire for such rooms among those following. People desire to copy their chosen source of influence. This creates a waterfall effect, where those further down copy those further up. The result is that many people have music rooms, because having one is the thing to do, and once someone has a music room the natural thing is to fill it with music. This creates a desire to own a piano and the individual will begin seeking one all on their own. The goal is thus for the creation of new foundations of the human experience that creates a desire within the individual to, on their own, seek out and buy a piano.¹⁹

¹⁷ Bernays 2005: Page 52

¹⁸ Soules 2015: Page 62-63

¹⁹ Bernays 2005: Page 54

Bernays work is useful for its focus on the hidden desires of human beings, its considerations of the hidden psychology of the social behavior of the masses. As such I will be using it to occasionally inform or supplement the work of Ellul as it provides further bases for the arguments on human behavior that influences the use of mass psychology. Bernays use within the world of marketing also demonstrates the insight it provides on the manipulation of the masses into making choices through indirectly providing them with ideas of what provides social status. Bernays' work is therefore particularly useful when attempting to understand the methodology of manipulating the opinion of the masses.

3.2 1935-1948 - Leonard Doob

Leonard Doob was a psychologist at Yale university who pioneered in the field of cognitive and social psychology. He served as director of overseas intelligence for the United States' office of war information during WW2. His work *Public policy and Propaganda* was a valuable pioneering work in the field. Doob defined propaganda as "*the attempt to affect the personalities and to control the behavior of individuals towards ends considered unscientific or of doubtful value in a society at a particular time.*"²⁰ For this reason Doob's work on propaganda beings with the matter of public opinion, which is ruled through collective attitudes. Doob's propaganda more so than others rely on public perception and the value, this is something he adds in order to avoid calling education itself propaganda, as education provides skills and some provable scientific value. he himself readily admits that education is not easily separated from propaganda, and when matters of history and non-scientific methods are concerned it may be propaganda.²¹ His concept of propaganda relies on the fundamental aspects of personality, as it exists in the individual once properly settled through socialization and education. Doob's propaganda works by utilizing that which is present. Doob further opined that propagandization could be done unintentionally, for example by teachers educating the youth. The teacher is not a propagandist, but they teach according to their bias and their understanding of the world. His view was that education was filled with value judgements, and through education a person becomes indoctrinated within certain opinion and filled with bias towards certain perceptions.²² In this he is stricter than other scholars, particularly compared to Ellul who deal with this problem specifically in his works. Namely,

²⁰ Doob 1948: Page 240

²¹ Doob 1948: Page 242

²² Doob 1948: Page 236

if the term propaganda becomes so open that it may apply to education provided by the state, as Doob does, then functionally all things that are thought that are not skills are propaganda. This works for Doob's propaganda which works by way of suggestion, personalized to the individual's basic attitudes and built around repetition. His definition is similar to that of Ellul, which will be covered in more detail later, with that propaganda is that which intends to create action. Propaganda does not intend to change attitudes, it aims to change behavior. Propaganda attempts to change attitudes, not because a specific attitude is desirable, but for its connection to how an individual acts.

While Doob's work is interesting from a purely academic purpose I find Doob's concept of propaganda to be too loosely defined for analytical purposes. Doob's propaganda may result in the actions of the teacher in socializing the children under their care to be considered propaganda, and arguably it can be, however when looking at modern operations influencing people it becomes too broad. Doob also argues that the act of marketing a product can be considered propaganda, something with which he agrees with Bernays, and they are naturally right in that marketing much like propaganda is designed to install a willingness to perform an action. While Doob's work overlaps with Ellul's in some crucial ways in its interpretation of how propaganda functions on the individual and what the goals of propaganda are, Doob's propaganda is too open ended to be used as a basis for this analysis, and the lack of a clear-cut definition was unworkable as a basis of analysis. Doob's work is relevant when discussing propaganda in more abstract forms and important to inform further on other works, but he leaves the term too open to effectively wield in an analysis of specific influence operations.

3.3 1948-Lazarsfeld and Merton

Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton's collaboration on media studies cover notable sections on the issues of how propaganda is effectively implemented through mass communication. Particularly relevant is their work on the issues of media control and manipulation of public attitudes through media communications.

There are 2 critical elements of Lazarsfeld and Merton's work that are of particular value for how it intersects with the scholarship of other academics. The first one is the necessity of utilizing what is already present in the individual. The propagandist, according to Lazarsfeld and Merton, must rely on the basic building blocks of personality, morality, and desires of the individual. The propagandist cannot change basic values, they must use these pre-existing building blocks and channel through them to create the desired effect. The marketer who

attempts to influence a person into buying fashionable clothes is not trying to create a need for fashionable clothes, they are using an existing desire for fashionable clothes that already exists through ties to social status.²³ In this regard, the work of Lazarsfeld and Merton is similar to that of other works, notably that of Ellul. The difficulty and probable impossibility of the propagandist overcoming foundational attitudes is a thread that goes through all work on propaganda. From Bernays's writings in 1928 all the way to Chomsky in 1988. The question then becomes, how are these preexisting attitudes effectively channeled by the propagandist? Lazarsfeld and Merton answer this with a short list of conditions required for effective propagandization of the individual: Monopolization of influence through the absence of counterpropaganda, behavior is canalized through existing values, and face-to-face contact is used to supplement the propaganda stream.²⁴

Lazarsfeld and Merton's work on propaganda through mass communication is valuable for those wanting to analyze propaganda issued through mass media, which most mass propaganda is. It provides a simple explanation for how effective propaganda is effectively disseminated to the public. They borrow from Bernays and his argument for propaganda as a consensus builder. It is also similar to the work of Ellul in its key points. The foundation of Lazarsfeld and Merton's propaganda, which is a point it shares with Ellul's work, is that propagandization through media communication must happen through monopolization. The propagandist must effectively create a wall of propaganda that the propagandee cannot escape from, with a complete absence of counterpropaganda. Lazarsfeld and Merton's work also share Ellul's focus on the importance of supplementation by way of personal contact in order to manifest the effect of propaganda more clearly. Another point that they also share with other propagandists like Bernays.

Despite this overlap with other propagandists it is not as well suited as the work of Ellul for an analysis of propaganda in the digital age, simply because of their overreliance on the concept of monopolization. While modern social media is monopolized in many ways, particularly in the view of the major Social Media companies like Meta which effectively function as a controlled public square. However hostile efforts of propaganda are not locked to specific forms of social media; neither the propagandist nor the propagandee is restricted in their movement in the way that monopolization would really require. The individual may

²³ Peters & Simonson 2004: Page

²⁴ Jeřábek 2011: Page 1204

have preferred social media channels, but they will generally have multiple as well as the possibility of consumption of mass media as well as a social life in the non-digital space. While monopolization certainly happens, and in section 4.12 I argue that people self-isolate online into what is essentially monopolized sections, however the technique described by Lazarsfeld and Merton has fundamentally changed in the digital age as monopolization is less of a technical reality in the form of other options simply not existing. Modern monopolization comes through having the widest reach through having the largest number of users.

While Ellul's work is both more complete and more malleable for adaption into the realities of the digital age and was chosen as the basis for this reason, the work of Lazarsfeld and Merton is excellent as a supporting element that further confirms the significance of Ellul's Propaganda where it relies on filling the space around the propagandee to avoid escape, the importance of face-to-face interactions, and particularly the importance of the propagandee's participation in the digital age.

3.4 1951 - Adorno

Adorno's work was less on the matter of propaganda itself as it was on the issue of the mass psychology of the public which allows for the creation and existence of fascist states. His essay *The Authoritarian Personality*, which by its name alone most can guess the topic of interest, aimed to explain the fundamental psychological reality of the fascist.

Much like other scholars of propaganda Adorno agrees here that the propagandist, in this case the fascist uses what is already present. Fascism finds an area within the psyche of the public that is ripe for exploitation by a skilled manipulator seeking to promote it for their own self-interest.²⁵ The fascist exploits the sections of the individual's psychology that can be coopted by an authoritarian with malevolent intentions, and by doing this the authoritarian can make the individual accept a release of their individuality for participation in the group ideals. To make the individual surrender their personality to the fascistic ideal, to take their place as a cog in the machine essentially worshipping a paternalistic idealized leader figure. In direct contradiction to their own best interest.²⁶

Adorno's work is interesting as a psychological review of the way fascist propaganda specifically functions. As an explanation of the function of propaganda I would argue that it is

²⁵ Hammer 2006: Page 57

²⁶ Adorno 1950: Page 124-127

too specialized to be useful for a larger review of influencing efforts, however it can be useful to understand the specific effects on a particular group. Adorno's work was heavily based on the issue of fascism specifically, which becomes a weakness when analyzing a general overview of influencing operations working on varied groups of different psychological makeups. For this reason it would be insufficient for an analysis of modern influence operations as a whole, however it is useful when looking at specific groups whose behavior has similarities to those of fascist organizations, particularly those groups who form as an organized effort at combating a vaguely specified 'enemy'. His understanding of fascist propaganda is therefore primarily useful for understanding operations where, for example, the Russian state operations supported an individual, a group, or an ideology with authoritarian traits in addition to an ethnonationalist element. As a result of this Adorno's work will be informing my understanding of events and views, but it is too limited to base the entire analysis on. Adorno's work will be used to buffer up the works of Ellul and provide further understanding of how propaganda functions in the specific field for which his work is best suited.

3.5 1988 – Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model

In 1988 Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky released their book *Manufacturing Consent: The political economy of the mass media*. This work explained what they termed as the propaganda model, a concept they developed which sought to explain the role of mass media in the creation and distribution of propaganda. Herman and Chomsky have covered the topic of propaganda as a means of controlling the general public in other works, however the propaganda model was intended to explain how, as they saw it, mass media functions as propaganda as well as deconstructing the idea of mass media as a source of pure information.²⁷

The propaganda model argues that the role of media inherently turns towards the interests of those the media organization is financially interested in catering to, which puts it at odds with matters of public interest. They explain media as fundamentally a capitalist enterprise seeking profit, for media organizations to achieve this profit they require access to what might be called the halls of power and they are therefore incentivized to maintain their access to the powers that be. Media functions as a communication system acting on the general population,

²⁷ Mullen & Klaehn 2010: Page 217-218

entertaining, educating, and informing the population according to the desires of the institutions of society. When this is happening in a world that is fundamentally class based the media naturally develops into propaganda institutions as they select information and develop bias according to their reader's and shareholder's preferences.²⁸

The propaganda model is similar to Bernays's theories as it too acknowledges the free trade of ideas as less free and more controlled by market forces. Where they separate is that, while Bernays argued that the media helps direct the public towards manageable choices, the propaganda model argues that mass media becomes controlled by market forces which directs them towards becoming creators and distributors of propaganda. The structural elements of the society, the political and economic interests that guide mass media is not conspiracy, this is important to note because the propaganda model does not claim that the media is directly controlled by the elite powers. It is a function of a free press in a capitalistic society that media will seek out patrons, sources of information, and others who function as sources for what is ultimately their product.²⁹ This means that according to Herman and Chomsky, functionally speaking, all media is propaganda.

In the Ellul section this will also be covered from the buyer's perspective. The individual seeks out sources of information that they know they will agree with. Simply put, those with a politically right-wing mindset will seek out right-wing media. Similarly, those with a politically left-wing mindset will seek out politically left-wing media. Effectively creating a feedback loop where the media is incentivized to produce material its customers will want to hear. The free market of ideas, even without structural guides, naturally seek to cover that which fits the bias of its market demographic, which results in a market led path to propaganda.

The propaganda model is useful for illustrating how media change into propagandists naturally as a result of market forces and with very little if any necessary input from anyone maliciously attempting to push it in that direction. This is useful to understand its supporting role in societal structures and when explaining the autonomous nature of media propagandists who may be utilized by a state attempting to influence a foreign nation's public without the media source itself necessarily being directly involved in a conspiracy. Particularly when looking at the wild and largely uncontrolled space of social media where, as I will argue in the

²⁸ Herman & Chomsky 2008: Page 94

²⁹ Mullen & Klaehn, 2010: Page 217-218

modernization section on Ellul's propaganda, personalities and users naturally form self-radicalizing groups as content producers cater to those consuming their content.

3.6 The legitimacy of influence

The scholars looked at in this section all have valuable additions and viewpoints on propaganda, what it is and how it functions. They can all be used as supportive works for a better understanding of the functions of how propaganda functions. The first fundamental problem that we see with the lack of consistent definition is the lack of a conclusive concept of what propaganda is, and with that a lack of a clear-cut definition on what forms of influence are legitimate and what forms of influence are illegitimate.

The democratic concept requires the function of convincing others to see your point of view, as all political work and public debate is based around convincing others of your point of view to build consensus for a decision, and by necessity this includes exchanging information that those participating in the discussion deem to be meaningful. This means that the right of the members of the public to influence each other is a necessary function of a democratic society, and any honest attempt to honestly influence others in according to the democratic concept should be clear from accusations of illegitimacy.

To resolve this issue I argue that in order to be illegitimate the attempt to influence should be hostile to the natural function of a democratic society, a simple attempt to convince others into agreeing with your position remains a legitimate attempt to influence others. In addition to that I argue that, for an attempt to influence to be illegitimate, it should be organized by an entity that is knowingly and dishonestly engaging with the group with the specific intention to manipulate it into behaving against their natural inclinations.

4.0 Introducing Ellul

The scholar whose work I will primarily rely on is French philosopher, sociologist, and theologian Jacques Ellul. His work was heavily based around the impact of technology on society, theoretical work on propaganda, as well as religion and politics. Notably he was both a Christian and an anarchist, both of which influenced his view on the world, also in concert. Deeply believing as a Christian, yet he also criticized the church as being too concerned with dogma over scripture and the teachings of Christ.

The primary focus will be his work *propaganda: The formation of men's attitudes* which I have chosen as the primary theoretical framework. I have chosen Ellul's work as it is more complete and acknowledges the differences between various intentions for influence, while also setting aside matters of influence that are not relevant such as marketing, education, and similar ways to adjust people's behavior. Ellul's Propaganda is preferred as it is open enough to include the various methods add intentions of propaganda while also setting aside these other forms of influencing people. His propaganda is also more modifiable, on account of it being based around his concept of technique, which more readily allows for modernization of the concepts to account for the differences created by new technology and a changing media landscape.

4.1 Technique

To discuss Ellul's propaganda we must first understand his work on technique, a concept he discussed in his book "the technological society".³⁰ Similar to the Greek concept of *Techne*, which as described by Aristoteles is the productive attitude towards a true concept, using practical knowledge to create a desired result. Built around the concept of true practical knowledge and often translated as art, the concept can be quickly described as knowing what you want to achieve, knowing how to achieve it, and importantly knowing why the actions necessary to achieve it are in fact necessary. Philosopher Einar Bøhn uses the example of the carpenter, an apprentice carpenter does not understand *Techne* because they simply do as they are told, they may understand the intent to produce, but not the knowledge of how outside of a very general understanding of how things fit together. As the apprentice learns they gain understanding not just of how things fit together, but of why they fit together in a specific way. Through practice the apprentice carpenter gain knowledge of not just how things are

³⁰ Marlin 2014: Page 190-191

done, but why they are done in such a way and how this contributes to a successful result.³¹ Ellul's Technique is a form of continuation from the old concept of *Techne* and similarly to *Techne* a loose term built around a general concept of understanding. According to Ellul all forms of technology consists of a set of principles, these foundational principles of technique are efficiency, optimization, and control. Ellul's concept of Technique operates in an autonomous fashion devoid of any moral or ethical considerations, it reconstructs itself continually in an attempt to create greater efficiency. Technique is not limited to the technology itself because it includes the way people think and act. Notably to Ellul's technique is that people drive the process of optimization and continually work towards predictability through more control. Technique is not simply a specific technology, human beings and how they function are part of technique. Ellul's opinion was that technique was everywhere as the most efficient way to reach an end, and that techniques of various kinds existed all over society in every field as a continuous drive towards increased effectiveness at whatever was being accomplished regardless of matters of morality or societal benefit. Further he argues that not only does technique adapt itself, but that human beings also adapt to technology as much if not more so than technology adapts to human beings, reducing the human experience to the most effective form of behavior and utilization of the technology that surrounds us.³² This aspect of technique is one of the main reasons why I consider Ellul particularly useful, because he argues that people adapt to technology as much as technology adapts to people. I would go so far as to claim that, in a modern context, we are all walking around with a computer in our pockets that always provides us with constant communication with the entire world around us. We are all, in a way, a cyborg, a combination of human and technology. Human beings and our lives are being adapted to technology as much as the other way around.

This is important as Technique is not knowledge nor is it science, rather it is a way of adapting technology to goals and people to technology. A form of mutual *Techne* where the carpenter gains understanding of their art, but the art also adapts the carpenter to it. Technique does not influence what we do, it also influences how we think and what we value. This means that the technique has a profound impact on our social, political, and cultural institutions, and it can have both positive and negative consequences for society. Ellul's work

³¹ Bøhn 2022: Page 18

³² Marlin 2014: Page 190-191

on technique is not a condemnation, but a warning that highlights the importance of examining how technology shapes our world and our worldviews and encourages us to reexamine our perceptions as they have been influenced by the technology and mindset of technique.³³

4.2 Propaganda as technique

The word propaganda itself is a word with many connotations, most of which are negative in the western sphere of thought. To call someone a propagandist has long been considered insulting in the Anglo-Saxon world.³⁴ Propaganda is technique. To be more specific, it is the technique of using scientific knowledge, such as psychology and sociology, as well as the technology of media and its distribution in a deliberate and organized way intended to influence actions of a target audience. It involves deception and the use of misleading language and imagery, often through simplification and repetition. Propaganda is not a science itself, it is the methods used by propagandists that are based around scientific knowledge which is utilized to effectively analyze and manipulate their target audience. A propagandist will study their successes and their failures to find out where they went wrong, a simple form of scientific methodology may be used, though obviously freed from the ethical and moral quandaries faced by the sciences themselves. Yet still the propagandist researches their own work to see what went wrong and what went right in a method way, and for this reason propaganda cannot be impulsive. It must be planned with the intention to create not simply a belief but an action, or at the very least, an inaction. It must be deployed in a methodical, observable, and above all repeatable manner. In this way, the propagandist uses the scientific method, and while propaganda itself is not a science it is a systematic application of the sciences in pursuit of the most effective way to create the desired effect.³⁵ This is why propaganda is technique.

4.3 Orthopraxy, creating action

According to Ellul Propaganda is not about changing someone's mind or making them adhere to a specific doctrine. The aim of modern propaganda is to provoke action, rather than modify ideas. It seeks to make individuals cling irrationally to a process of action, rather than lead

³³ Marlin 2014: Page 203

³⁴ Doob 1948: Page 231

³⁵ Ellul 1973: Page 20

them to a choice. Propaganda wants to arouse an active and mythical belief, rather than transform an opinion. This is because modern propaganda is concerned with action, not just opinion, and this is another reason why I believe Ellul's propaganda to be a particularly useful representation for what propaganda is. Rather than involving itself in debates on which forms of influence should count as propaganda it simply states that the goal of propaganda to make people actionable and condition them into participating in actions or inactions based on their beliefs. This level of indoctrination is called orthopraxy, where individuals act in accordance with their adopted belief system without thinking, even if it goes against their own interests or opinions.³⁶ This is important because this is the mentality that influences action. A person who thinks a specific thing does not necessarily intend to follow the logical conclusion and may not feel any obligation to act in a specific manner simply because they hold that opinion. People can have beliefs on socialism and be theoretically against overconsumption yet participate in fast fashion trends. They can be religious yet break the commands of morality stated by their religion. Oftentimes people do not have an opinion on a matter at all, but when faced with a decision to act they will make one and declare it the obviously moral decision after the fact. This is why modern propaganda is not simply concerned with opinion, it is concerned with action. The goal is to make a person actionable, someone who with the right trigger will follow through with the intended actions even without necessarily considering the ramifications of doing so. It attempts to condition them into someone who can be encouraged into committing actions or inactions based on their beliefs, or at the very least to become passive participants to the actions of others. The goal is to make the indoctrinated participate, even if not physically it should make them participate spiritually. They should not simply watch but offer support. This, Ellul argues, is the difference between opinion and belief, because opinion allows for the individual to not commit to the path whereas participation is the key that locks them to the effort. This is why action is the goal of Propaganda. By participating in the crowd, even as a small part, they become committed within their own mind. The examples Ellul provides are that of the communal prayer or supporters chants at sports events, where the individual makes their presence and their support known and declares it and becomes a passive participant.³⁷ I argue that this element of propaganda has changed notably because of the move to digital space and participatory cultures. Participatory cultures function around people not only consuming content but also producing and contributing to

³⁶ Ellul 1973: Page 38

³⁷ Ellul 1973: Page 39

other productions of content. Often characterized by their low barriers to entry and a significant amount of connection between users. These cultures are part of the democratization of media, giving individuals the ability to produce and distribute their own content through digital platforms. All social media are based around these participatory cultures, and with that comes an existential change for the participation aspect of propaganda. People do not simply consume the content that is produced, they provide it with likes, share it with others, commentate on it and participate in the distribution of the media itself. These can be relatively harmless, like people speaking about their favorite piece of media and creating related content for other fans. For propaganda however this means that propaganda sent through these channels use the same feelings and triggers the same participating feelings that, as Ellul brings up, the crowd at the football game that is participating through chants. Though in the case of social media they participate through comment fields and discussion fora. I argue that the participatory effect of social media provides a shorter pathway for participation that would be far more difficult to achieve in a non-digital space. People are not being informed by the propaganda they are actively engaged with it.

Someone fully propagandized has reached a level of indoctrination at which the individual is no longer thinking about their actions, their participation is instinctual and habitual. There is no conscious decision involved, it is an unconscious decision of adherence to belief. The describing word for this is orthopraxy, here defined as the right behavior as decided by the propagandist. The intention of the propagandist is to cause the Propagandee to act in a manner that leads directly to their goal, of which the Propagandee is entirely unaware. The Propagandee simply behaves in the manner of the belief system they have adopted, without thinking and possibly even against their own interest. They could even be acting against their personal thoughts and opinions that can even be the opposite of the belief system they have adopted. Someone sufficiently propagandized can will act in the way their group deems correct regardless of the action's incompatibility with the group's stated ideology, the propagandized person simply accepting the new as a necessity for the cause.³⁸ This is the final step of propaganda. Once properly saturated in pre-propaganda the target may become actionable, encouraged into action, and separated from routes of escape. But all people are not actionable at all times. They must be prepared appropriately through the careful and continuous use of propaganda. Only when molded into an appropriate level of belief can the

³⁸ Ellul 1973: Page 40

immediate and direct propaganda be used to lead them into action. And it is only through action that they commit fully to the belief they have been indoctrinated into.

The propagandist uses the tools available to them to create an environment in which the Propagandee is conditioned into the necessary state of mind to be activated by direct propaganda, possibly simulating a crisis that must be acted on immediately. By answering the call the Propagandee becomes irretrievably connected to the cause they now have no other option than to commit to fully. However, to reach that point the propagandist must skillfully maneuver the propagandee into the correct position over time by using the tools at their disposal to carefully guide the propagandee to the desired conclusions through curating their social experiences, careful selection of information, and taking over the propagandee's frames through which they view the world.

4.4 The importance of factuality

The issue of facts, or truth, or the accuracy of information tends to become a focal point in debates on propaganda, Ellul considered the issue of truth as something of a non-starter, though he acknowledged the necessity of information appearing factual. As previously mentioned, all propaganda is spread by the propagandist. In Ellulian propaganda they are a technician, responsible for application of their technique in order to achieve their chosen goal. To do this the propagandist cannot be a true believer in the facts they claim, they must be emotionally and intellectually separated from the propaganda, or risk being taken in by it. The propagandist does not believe what they say because they might, at any moment, be asked to say the complete opposite, to take whichever stance is the most effective option to achieve their goals and to do so with conviction. Propaganda is a means to an end, it is a tool to achieve a goal, the propagandist is aware of this, and to lose sight of this would turn them from propagandist into Propagandee. This contrasts the propagandist from the successfully propagandized and the useful tool, who may further the spread propaganda that they themselves believe but is not its source. The distinction is important as the successfully propagandized will participate in spreading information, and an intelligent propagandist will seek out those who already exist with the right opinions to be useful in furthering their aims. These people may be wrong from a factual point of view, but they are not themselves propagandists. They are simply participating in public life the way all people that are part of a society can freely do.

This does not mean the propagandist cannot believe in the cause they serve. It is the individual information they spread as facts that they must treat not as dearly held beliefs but

as tools, the way a carpenter views a hammer. This is a necessary implementation to be technique, the most effective way to achieve the ends, the means are a tool but an emotional or intellectual connection with the Propagandee is necessary to overcome the defenses of the Propagandee who must believe that what they are being told is genuine. They must believe that the information given comes from a place of conviction. The propagandist however cannot hold any such conviction, they know it to be a device of propaganda intended to reach a goal. The propagandist knows what the goals are, they know what they are attempting to accomplish, and they are specifically choosing methods in order to accomplish their goals. The Propagandee is the only one who believes the propaganda itself. This is what separates the propagandist from the propagandee, and the propagandist from the useful tools they may choose to employ either directly or indirectly as means of distribution. This runs contrary to the propagandee who absolutely must believe the information to be factual. The propagandee holds a repository of local facts, items of truth that the propagandee possesses, going contrary to these would make any effort of propaganda immediately obvious. Going against local facts is only possible once the propaganda is so firmly settled in the population that the propagandist no longer has any limits on what they can do and be believed, but this is exceptionally difficult to do and requires the propagandist to have gained complete control over the propagandee.³⁹

Propaganda has a poor reputation, the word is received and perceived as manipulation, at least within Anglo-Saxon societies, and manipulation is somewhat intrinsically linked to a perception of untruth. Despite this Propaganda may not be a lie at all, deception is just as easily achieved through selectively applying true information, by withholding context, or by selectively portraying causes without ever telling an outright lie but simply omitting the inconvenient matters. Propaganda can be just as easily transferred through music, emotional appeals, and images taken at just the right moment to give the impression desired.⁴⁰ This does not make it less manipulative, nor does it change the intent behind the effort made. The propagandist is always attempting to create an effect and is working to manipulate their target through dishonesty. I would argue that a fact presented dishonestly in order to create a false impression of reality is still a form of lying. Propaganda may be misleading, however, that does not mean propaganda is a lie. The best propaganda is not only not a lie at all. The

³⁹ Ellul 1973: Page 59

⁴⁰ Marlin 2014: Page 192

truth is the best form of propaganda, and a good propagandist will avoid telling lies for the simple reason that lies can be fact checked. A careful application of true statements presented in a way to mislead is propaganda just the same, far more difficult to disprove, and so it is far more effective. In the normal state of affairs propaganda must deal with facts, and those facts must be maintained. The propaganda should not be based on lies, especially not easily fact checked ones, rather a good propagandist will build on truth which they can then twist into the interpretation with the right presentation. The propaganda is not in the statement of facts but in how the receiver will interpret it, given the right presentation in a way that the propagandist knows will appeal to them. The lies are limited to the values, the ideas, and the concepts, or in the interpretation of statistics and numbers, propaganda thrives particularly with that which is debatable or a matter of perception.⁴¹

Ellul's claim then is that a modern propagandist doing his job has abandoned the lie and that influence operations must be built on a foundation of factuality, there must be an element of reality in the propaganda that grounds it. Within digital propaganda that is a truth with some modifications, as a skilled propagandist may choose to create false sites designed to look like media that they do not control or that is not part of their apparatus, and so they do not care if that media's credibility is damaged. However, for media that functions as their own propaganda channels this remains true and this is why the propagandist may not provide the propagandee with any facts at all if none exists, but rather vague concepts and symbols around which they can form opinions and beliefs. The ideas of a group once formed are difficult to uproot, and a group's opinion is most effectively handled by being avoided.⁴² Particularly if the propagandist is also the government and the media is favorable to the current ruler, in which case true but misleading statements will simply not be challenged where a lie could be, and so the lie creates a risk of being caught. A straight up lie is to be avoided as they can be called out, at least when they come in the form of direct lies. A lie of omission is more acceptable for the propagandist if they can assume the distributors of information won't call them on them, and so are lies of selective representation and lies of statistics.⁴³ The danger for the propagandist is in being caught in an outright lie. To be caught lying would not only be a severe hindrance to the propagandist's current operation, but it

⁴¹ Marlin 2014: Page 202

⁴² Ellul 1973: Page 109

⁴³ Marlin 2014: Page 202

would also devalue the propagandist's standing in the eyes of the propagandee which would make further operations more difficult. If the propagandee catches the propagandist in a lie they may now become wary of information coming from the propagandist. As a result of this, any information stated as facts spread through propaganda must be true and verifiable insofar as doing so is at all possible. The propagandist tries to avoid lying to someone about something that can be easily disproven, particularly those issues they are personally familiar with, these are what Ellul calls local facts.

The simplest form of these are regional local facts, for example the goings on in a specific area. If you live in a small town then you likely know what happens there and what is not, so any story told about your area must match what you know. Similarly, if you are a nuclear tech in a nuclear energy plant, any story about nuclear energy plants that targets you must fit with what you know about how such a plant functions. This is true for all information and all topics. Anyone intimately familiar with a subject will be able to identify the faults in propaganda which are blatant lies or misinformation. To avoid this the propagandist uses truth to create a belief of verifiability and a general sense of trustworthiness, to avoid this the propagandist seeks out information that the propagandee will accept. Such information would have the opposite effect, it allows the propagandist to look truthful and trustworthy while also making it more difficult for other groups to counter the propagandist's efforts to the point that anyone attempting to counter the propagandist's efforts run the risk of appearing untrustworthy. Any attempt to counter the propagandist's influence on an individual, particularly those already introduced who have accepted facts, has to be wary of this. The propagandized may not fact check what the propagandist says, but they will certainly look for information countering contrary influences. Influencing someone away from the hold of a manipulator is already going to be an uphill battle, being caught lying to someone you are trying to influence out of a radicalization process is surefire way of pushing them in the opposite direction. This gathering of facts, I argue, therefore has a dual purpose. The truthfulness of information used in later propaganda operations is strengthened, which increases their perceived veracity at the same time as it lowers the perceived validity of any claims to the contrary and lowers the perceived trustworthiness of anyone attempting to counter the propagandist's efforts.

4.5 Factuality in a digital age

The digitalization of our lives has expanded our communities across land borders and across vast distances. With that, the idea of local facts has grown as people's general knowledge broaden and they have access to people across the world. They see videos and pictures from social media accounts dedicated to traveling the world or educating people on other cultures. They read articles and are more globally exposed. But primarily the use of social media has allowed them to always maintain constant contact with people even if those people live across the world. If you want to know the goings-on in Washington today you may be able to simply message a friend or an acquaintance who lives there, maybe someone you've met in offline but also ones you have met through online communities. These social media platforms encourage people to share their lives and/or engage with one another and create connections with people across vast distances. This means the existence of local facts is spread further, and people engage with others around the world in a manner not seen before. The vertical spread of information has grown exponentially through the use of online communication platforms. Not necessarily in the manner of propaganda, but as an expansion of an individual's experiences and therefore of their local facts. In the section on the propagandee's participation I go into detail on the propagandee self-selecting for environments that suit their preconceived notions, for Ellul's work that focused on their selection of news media, particularly newspapers and such. There is no reason to believe this does not also apply to the digital space and people's participation in digital communities. The issue then is people's propensity for bubbles and to isolate themselves into communities and information sources that provide them with their desired form of information and protects them from anything they may deem uncomfortable.

This then results in a dual situation. A propagandist that fails to account for this digital expansion of local facts will likely have issues with breaking through walls, or at least their efforts may have a diminished effect as fewer members of the target group will be vulnerable to manipulation initially. They will see straight through it, either through direct knowledge, local contacts they trust more than the propagandist or their tools, or the propagandist could be caught simply by their target's ability to fact check. For example, a military organization attempting to hide its casualty rate from the public will fail to do so if messaging apps available to and used by the public are filled with videos and pictures of the casualties they are attempting to hide. A statement given could be scrutinized by people in the geographic vicinity or whose personal knowledge includes dissenting information and depending on the

platform they may be taken as more valid of a source than the propagandist. The development of large international social media platforms means that a group's resistance to propaganda should increase with their shared knowledge as they, as a group, are more likely to have a member whose local facts contradict any false information, yet that does not seem to be the case. In theory the digital space should make lies more difficult to get through, yet the individual's selection seems to favor their preferred prefabricated opinions. They have the option of fact checking, they just don't.

Then comes the issue of shared myths. The idea of the shared myth has changed somewhat during the rise of digital communication. Specifically, it has changed as people's social lives move online and they participate in digital fora. Online collectives that have gathered around a shared interest in some form of media like video games, books, or tv-shows, politically aligned groupings, and other shared interests. These collectives will over time, as the members communicate with each other, develop a shared group identity and with that create their own myths. These myths function much the same as local facts in that they cannot be disagreed with, they are indisputable, therefore the propagandist must know and understand the shared myths of his target group. The propagandist that goes against the shared myth will fail and so they must work with it. They can do this, for example, by creating media that confirms the shared myth or takes a place within the relevant mythology. A committed capitalist will not be receptive to propaganda espousing the grandness of communism and vice versa.

4.6 Knowledge of the Psychological Terrain

It may appear obvious that, before a propagandist can influence a person, they must first understand the psychological terrain of the person or group in question. This is part of the pre-propaganda process in which the propagandist seeks to understand this psychological framework of the target they want to influence. They can then, in the propaganda phase, use this knowledge of the targets psychology to condition the individual into reacting in the desired way when triggered with the right stimuli, in what is very much a Pavlovian way.⁴⁴ The propagandist must understand this because the propagandist may not go against the fundamental mythology of a person's understanding of the world around them. As Ellul explains it: "We can conclude from a large body of experience that the propagandist cannot

⁴⁴ Marlin 2014: Page 198-199

go contrary to what is in an individual; he cannot create just any new psychological mechanism or obtain just any decision or action”.⁴⁵ This is another key reason why I believe Ellul to be an excellent grounding for any work on propaganda, as this key element of propagandization is based on a part of the human experience that is unlikely to ever change.

This aspect of humanity means that before a propagandist can begin their work of influencing a group they must first do their research on the group in question. The group’s values must be analyzed at every level. The group’s basic beliefs. Their pattern of thought must be understood as it exists in the form of the stereotypes they believe in, their habits, and their myths. All this must be well known to the propagandist. They must be studied sociologically so that the propagandist can tailor their campaign towards the propagandee, a necessity for it to have the desired effect. The propagandist cannot simply create something out of nothing, they must attach themselves to pre-existing feelings or ideas that exists within the myths that the propagandee has already accepted.⁴⁶ To create something from scratch the propagandist would have to first overcome the beliefs of the propagandee, a committed belief sits deep in a person’s psychology and to overturn it requires considerable effort or significant control over a person’s social connections, something which is difficult to achieve. These are the fundamental structures of the target group. Their local facts, their myths. This is necessary because an attack on any of these structural systems a person is attached to will be defended en masse, therefore any attack on a structure still standing will fail as it breaks on the wall of existing structures.⁴⁷ The exception to this is in matters where the group’s ideas run contrary to those of society, in which case the group’s ideas take precedence.⁴⁸ This does not mean the propagandist can’t create anything new, but that they cannot create something that goes contrary to the person’s existing notions. Anything new must be built either in an empty space or in concert with their existing beliefs. This does not mean the propagandist is unable to move all the group’s facts and myths, a careful propagandist can do this. A functioning person will have many ideas, many of these can be contradictory especially on the surface. The propagandist must adapt and skillfully navigate the group’s functions and determine which of the beliefs they hold are permanent and immovable, and which are more fluid. The immovable sections cannot be contradicted directly, they must first be undermined until such

⁴⁵ Ellul 1973: Page 43

⁴⁶ Ellul 1973: Page 45

⁴⁷ Ellul 1973: Page 49

⁴⁸ Ellul 1973: Page 50

a time that the propagandist has successfully loosened its grounding to the point that the idea has become fluid enough to be moved, once this has been done the propagandist can introduce more contradictory beliefs.

Cognitive dissonance, a concept from psychology, appears when a person must simultaneously hold contradictory beliefs or values. This can happen, for example, when someone you trust ends up breaking it, putting you up in the uncomfortable position of wanting to trust someone who is not trustworthy. When someone experiences cognitive dissonance they will, contrary to reason, seek to minimize it, oftentimes by simple ignoring the contradiction. This appears to be related to the backfire effect that was found by American political scientists Nyhan and Reifler who found that when people, particularly political supporters, were presented with corrected facts they rarely changed their minds and often became more entrenched in their beliefs. This seemed to be a result of a psychological defense mechanism against cognitive dissonance, rather than admit they were wrong when faced with conflicting evidence people often choose to ignore that which doesn't match their chosen opinion, possibly even actively refute it and further entrench within their position.⁴⁹ This was already somewhat known, particularly religious myths have been documented as resistant to conflicting evidence and quite likely this form of selection process for which facts to accept and which to reject is contributing to this, In addition to that people also have a natural desire to conform to the social norms, which often include religious beliefs.⁵⁰ From this we can assume that religious adjacent beliefs, like political beliefs or fundamental shared myths, are particularly resistant to change and thus also particularly valuable tools for a propagandist who wants to code specific behaviors into the group. This fits with the conceptualization of local facts and group mythology and is further evidence on why the propagandist must work with the existing structures within the individual's psychological profile.

Further on this matter, the propagandist cannot simply use anything to build propaganda. The propaganda, particularly the initial one, must apply to a particular need within a group. This can be a specific physiological need like food or security, or it can be a psychological need.⁵¹ Psychological needs being the many psychological desires created by human beings and their

⁴⁹ Nyhan & Reifler 2010

⁵⁰ Soules 2015: Page 33

⁵¹ Ellul 1973: Page 45

status as social creatures. People like to be perceived in ways that function as high status within the social sphere. They enjoy being viewed as competent and skilled, or as autonomous, or as related to others through shared group affiliation. A propagandist could employ these needs to funnel a person's interest in believing what they are being told. People are more likely to react to information related to their needs. The physical needs like security are simple, people must feel safe and if they do not they are naturally drawn towards information posing as information about possible threats to their security.

The psychological needs are no less important, and I would argue easier to use when manipulating individuals and encouraging them to further the propagandist's goals. A person's desire for relatedness with their fellow group members increases their willingness to accept the correct information for status within the group, and their desire for being viewed as competent, skilled, or knowledgeable by other members of the group makes them into willing tools for furthering the spread of the propagandist's information. Anything the propagandist does must be done with this in mind. The group is being manipulated and the propagandist will seek to reduce the propagandees to servants and distributors working on their behalf. To achieve this the propagandist will ideally work with the more basic needs and desires of a human being. The basic needs and desires are what motivates people most effectively, and so hunger, hate, pride, and desire are the most effective motivators.⁵² These are not only timeless but also cultureless. A modern propagandist may have to deal with multiple cultural backgrounds, religious backgrounds, multiple languages and wide-ranging communication nets crossing any regional boundaries. The base needs of humans however are permanent and present in all societies. This is why propaganda aimed at these basic emotions is more effective than that which targets less powerful emotions, and as previously described effectiveness is paramount to the entire concept of technique. The technique of propaganda fundamentally wants to achieve action, or possibly inaction, the latter of which is functionally identical to action. The action worked towards is the goals of the propagandist, and to achieve this they must use the emotions most likely to draw the propagandee into active participation. The base needs that unite humanity are easier to reach, and thus more likely to have an effect.

⁵² Ellul 1973: Page 47

4.7 The individual and the masses

The problem of how to reach the individual is covered in the extended works of several propaganda scholars. Bernays work, which covers both the political and that of marketing, overlaps with Ellul's work on this subject.

In Ellulian theory the propagandist faces a unique issue when designing their operation to influence the masses. The operations themselves cannot be aimed at a single person because a single person is not by themselves influenceable, nor would convincing individuals one by one be particularly cost effective, which breaks with the concept of technique, I would argue that there is no effective way of targeted impacts on individual persons at a large scale. Comparatively easily the actions of a group can be impacted by influencing its leaders, who may not even be aware that they are being used. Bernays speaks on how mass psychology affects individuals even when they are not physically together in a group setting, such as in a public meeting or riot. Humans are naturally social creatures and tend to identify with a group even when they are alone. The group's ideologies and beliefs continue to shape the individuals' thoughts and behavior even when outside of the group itself.⁵³

Ellul also speaks on this issue, though he calls it mass psychology, explaining it quite simply as the fact that people tend to follow the precepts of their group identity.⁵⁴ The group can then be lead through controlling those leading the group or inserting people into the group to provide support to specific lines of thought. Both Bernays and Ellul then argues that to convince the individual the propagandist must also convince the group. This futility of addressing the individual directly is a problem for the propagandist. The individual is resistant. When an individual is addressed directly they engage in dialogue, during which they ask questions and the conversation becomes more complex. The individual is harder to convince because the individual is more intelligent than the mass. When they are engaged in a dialogue the individual sees more clearly and utilizes their intellect to a greater extent and their emotions to a lesser one. They become more concerned with details, which is something that propaganda cannot concern itself with.⁵⁵ For this reason the propagandist must aim at the masses. Yet the masses are not receptive to efforts of propaganda. An influencing operation targeting the masses would be unsuccessful simply for lacking specificity, it will be too broad

⁵³ Bernays 2005: Page 50

⁵⁴ Ellul 1973: Page 122

⁵⁵ Ellul 1973: Page 21

and lacking in the detail necessary to reach people on a personal level. The argument here is that the crowd is not one group with one mind, the crowd is a collection of individuals each of which have their own thoughts and their own minds. For this reason, an effort of propaganda must be targeted at the masses to reach its target, but it must also be aimed at the individual in the crowd. A contradiction of concepts, how to be both individual and group. This is why propaganda is most effective in a society that is both a mass society and an individualist society. On the surface, this sounds contradictory, but arguably most modern societies are both mass societies and individualist societies.

To clarify further, when we speak about a mass society we are speaking of strongly organized societies.⁵⁶ These are societies in which the public are so strongly organized in a mass that they are effectively controlled by the those who control the mass as they lack the means to counter the influences put on them by those in power.⁵⁷ This sounds contrary to the idea of an individualist society, yet Ellul argues that being a mass society is a fundamental part of being an individualist society. They all begin as mass societies and are then broken up into individualist experiences. The mass society simply differs in that the individual is removed from their natural groupings of family and hometown and are turned upon society at large. A mass society can only exist as a collection of individuals, each placed equal to each other, and each acted upon as part of the mass.⁵⁸

This is also how digital societies work, the fundamental trait of a social media platform is that all are equal and can distribute and participate in the same ways. Ellul notes that the mass society makes the individuals form new associations that are socially formed through other means than those of family or home. In this way these more natural familial bonds are weakened and the propagandee is not as protected as they otherwise would be. The idea being that the familial bonds, that of a tribe or a family, includes a variety of knowledge and perspectives, and people who care about you. People who see when you change and can correct you as you go. Ellul uses the example of communist party in China and its destruction of familial relationships. Moving people away from familial bonds and entering them into political groups where they could participate in guided debates where they eventually would arrive at the politically mandated correct position, believing they arrived at it on their own.

⁵⁶ Ellul 1973: Page 124

⁵⁷ Mills 1963: Page 303

⁵⁸ Ellul 1973: Page 100

The familial relationships function as a vanguard that prevents propaganda from being continuous, which is necessary for it to have an effect. By breaking these bonds mass society puts the individual in a place that makes them more malleable, without the access to a road out. Psychologically this also makes fitting in an even bigger necessity, the individual is even more reliant on the acceptance of the group, which as covered in the previous section they already have a natural inclination of focusing on.

This makes the propagandee isolated from the natural protection they have through stable familial connections and turns them into members of a group where the bonds are more tenuous and relying on acceptance or status. The fundamental argument here is, somewhat dramatically, that being viewed as socially acceptable, competent, and valuable to the group is important for self-selected social connections, but a person's family will keep them around even if they're incompetent and socially awkward. As previously covered, in order to accomplish their goal the propagandist must consider the individual not as a simple person but as a complex and unique one that shares a commonality with the group. The group is analyzed for its shared characteristics, the group's feelings, motivations, and myths. For this purpose the propagandist is concerned with the issue of frames. The frames of the individual, of the group, of their life. A collection of experiences, knowledge, opinions, and beliefs that construct their worldview.⁵⁹ These frames are built on emotional understandings of the world, not detail, and so they are the ones that can be most effectively utilized, and they build the worldview through which the propagandee will view the information they are provided. It is then that the group's feelings become the emotions of the individual targeted. The individual's defenses are lowered and they become affected by their group identity which they fervently adopt to avoid social ostracization they.⁶⁰

As mentioned, at the same time, as the efforts are made towards the masses they must simultaneously address the individual. Each person must feel like the propaganda speaks to them specifically. Ellul explains this as the need to combine the mass and the individual. That while people in groups are more receptive towards groupthink, of accepting things stated and following the crowd, they also have a need to pretend otherwise. Ellul says it quite coldly with:

⁵⁹ Phillips & Milner 2021: Page 30

⁶⁰ Ellul 1973: Page 22

“The mass man is clearly subhuman, but pretends to be superman. He is more suggestible, but insists he is more forceful; he is more unstable, but thinks he is firm in his convictions. If one openly treats the mass as a mass, the individuals who form it will feel themselves belittled and will refuse to participate. If one treats these individuals as children (and they are children because they are in a group), they will not accept their leader’s projections or identify with him. They will withdraw and we will not be able to get anything out of them. On the contrary, each one must feel individualized, each must have the impression that he is being looked at, that he is being addressed personally. Only then will he respond and cease to be anonymous (although in reality remaining anonymous).⁶¹

The foundational element here is the individual. The individual is in the center, but only as an individual who is part of the group. The group identity must take control over the individual. Through the group they become more vulnerable as they become focused on their presentation and their social mask as members of the collective. They seek to be acknowledged as members of the group, recognized as important. It is because they feel recognized as an individual that they listen, and because they are part of the group they accept what they are told.

Ellul clarifies that we are here speaking of a psychological mass, not a biological one. The group does not need to be gathered in a crowd. They must simply be engaged in a shared psychological event. The example provided is one of the readers of a particular newspaper. Each one engages the newspaper alone and are engaging with it alone, yet all who buy it are consuming the same material. I argue that this is similar to how we consume information in the digital space, lonely in a crowd, participating in forums and watching content provided to us by our algorithms and favored content producers. This is an adaption, historically information distribution has been relegated to particular people, journalists, organizations, authorities, and experts instead of the common man.⁶² In the digital space however there’s been an increase in amount of citizen journalism, and regular people simply producing content for their followers. Professional influencers and people whose YouTube channels or managing fora dedicated to their subject of interest. Arguably this is a side effect of people’s preference for personal information and self-selecting for groups. We prefer sideways

⁶¹ Ellul 1973: Page 24

⁶² Soules 2015: Page 227

communication and people speaking directly to us, personal relationships. With the rise of social media there has also been a rise of so called parasocial relationships, where one side feels emotionally connected to another person as if they have a close emotional connection while the other is not aware that the other person even exists. Something previously reserved primarily for celebrities, which is now more widespread and includes bloggers, streamers, and every other form of online content creator personality.⁶³ These people, I argue, fulfill a similar preference for information as a friend or a personal connection of some kind, and create a similar vulnerability.

Historically the benefit of mass media, for the propagandist, was its ability to project propaganda. Ellul describes it as: “The most favorable moment to seize a man and influence him is when he is alone in the mass: it is at this point that propaganda can be most effective”.⁶⁴ The consumer of mass media is the most vulnerable, the most receptive, and the one most easily reached. Propaganda cannot function without the element of mass media, as without it the mass cannot be fragmented, nor can it be effectively reached. I argue that when we move into a digital space as an extension of mass media that becomes even more pronounced. People are more isolated at the same time as they are more connected. They follow specific people or channels where they get their information, information sources that they have likely selected at according to their own interest, and they have more emotionally connected relationships with the people they get their information from. Ellul’s work on this matter is therefore very easily transferable to the online social experience and the way in which information consumption happens digital space.

4.8 Total propaganda

As covered previously the propagandist cannot immediately use direct propaganda to engage the Propagandee directly. The groundwork must be laid down before action can be created. The propagandist’s first efforts must be towards creating a social climate receptive to their efforts. This is what Ellul calls pre-propaganda. This layer of the propagandist’s influence efforts is aimed toward the target mass's social groundwork. These are efforts to make the actions the propaganda will later seek to cause the target to engage in more palatable. If we use the example of Nazi Germany then the idea here is that they cannot simply tell a man to attack a Jewish person, and if they had done so from the beginning that would likely

⁶³ Bennett et al.

⁶⁴ Ellul 1973: Page 24

have failed. The individual had to first be conditioned to believe that doing so is justified. To accomplish this the propagandist began by subtly increasing the acceptable level of hostility towards Jewish people within the group targeted by propaganda. They then slowly escalated the acceptance of violence within the group while also working towards increasing the group's prejudice over time. In the finished stages they engage in direct propaganda declaring the evilness of Jews and encourage violence towards them. But this cannot be the first step, if attempted it would have faced resistance by a group that had neither has the required hostility nor the social justification for violence. Without first laying the sociological groundwork to make the mass ready to accept such ideas you would run across the group's foundational morals. Even as late as 1938 Josef Goebbels attempted to have the antisemitic newspaper *Der Stürmer* closed down for being too brazen, too aggressive, to publicly ugly.⁶⁵ In more recent times neo-Nazi movements often follow the same principles, with dress codes and encouraging their followers to be well groomed when representing their group. Jihadist groups, well known for publishing execution videos, do dry runs and fool their victims into a false sense of security in order to make it all look clean and well presented, in so far as brutally murdering a human being can be considered well presented.⁶⁶

This is done because ugliness is anathema to the propagandist, not because they are against it but because it causes people to pull back. To successfully lay its groundwork propaganda must be total, all-encompassing. The propagandist must utilize every tool to surround the propagandee, and to do this the propagandee must, to a degree, allow themselves to be surrounded. If the propaganda is displeasing to the propagandee, then the propagandee will retract from it if doing so is feasible. If the propagandist is to have success they cannot allow their influence to be sporadic or random, this would allow too much time for reflection, doubt, or competing ideas. To avoid this the propagandist will attempt to use multiple mediums as access points towards the propagandee. Each of these mediums attacks the target in different ways and at different times, with the effectiveness of various mediums varies greatly between individuals. This separates one avenue information efforts from propaganda, which is more detailed. Someone using a singular method to attack a Propagandee is not performing an act of propaganda, simply putting up some posters or giving an interview on TV is not sufficient. A TV interview, a news article, a forum post, a Twitter post, or a personal conversation all

⁶⁵ Zelnhefer 2008

⁶⁶ Taylor & Kaplan 2015

produce different emotions and reactions. The use of multiple mediums is vital to successfully penetrate the individual's defenses. To engage the target fully, the influencing operation must use every connection to the target and make the Propagandee engage with the material in new ways and in their daily life.⁶⁷ The effort is to completely surround the propagandee. They are not given rest from the propaganda where they can recharge their battery and fight against its influence. The propaganda is designed to surround them and furnish them with a new understanding of the world around them. As Ellul describes it: "It furnishes him with a complete system for explaining the world, and provides immediate incentives to action"⁶⁸ This psychological situation is certainly still in effect and the prevalent desire for propagandists around the world, and is another reason why Ellul's work is an excellent fundament to build an understanding of propaganda from. This element of providing a complete understand of the world allows the propaganda to influence the individual's every thought and action. It is not simply their view of a particular issue that is affected, it is their view on all things and how they view the world around them. To accomplish this they must consume the efforts of the propagandist on an almost constant basis. Ellul argues that even if the matter first seems trivial or incorrect, by being swarmed by it and engaging with it repeatedly over time the Propagandee will absorb its perspective and replicate it within themselves. This complete change of personal view is one of the ultimate goals of effective propaganda and is necessary in order to make an individual actionable in the way that the propagandist desires.

4.9 Types of Propaganda

We must also consider the matter of black, grey, and white propaganda. All of which the effective propagandist will use in order to create completely coverage. These 3 types of propaganda are relatively easily separated. The white propaganda is the official line, that which openly presents itself as biased and openly states its source. Black propaganda is the exact opposite to white propaganda, this is propaganda that actively conceals its nature and presents itself as neutral or belonging to those it seeks to discredit. This could be in the shape of false news stories attributing statements to a person who never said anything of the kind. Grey propaganda is, as the name suggests, a middle point that seeks to influence by hiding its source but does not openly pretend to be something that it is not. What they're saying will

⁶⁷ Ellul 1973: Page 26

⁶⁸ Ellul 1973: Page 26

usually be broadly true but slanted by the propagandist who selectively applies facts according to their bias.

The propagandist cannot rely on a single form of propaganda. They must combine them, use them in concert, and an effectively propagandist will use the overt forms of propaganda as cover for their covert methods. The propagandist may clearly admit they participate in propaganda, their white propaganda, while running grey and black propaganda operations in the back. The idea of which is to make people resist the white propaganda, and by giving them the impression that they are resisting the operation to influence them, have them let down their guard giving grey and black propaganda operations space to maneuver in a different direction. By allowing the target to see their white propaganda and possibly allowing them to catch the propagandist in the act of grey propaganda they can become susceptible to the propagandist's black propaganda efforts. The target lowers their defenses, feeling secure in their knowledge of having seen the propaganda of their suspected enemy.⁶⁹

4.10 Continual propaganda

According to Ellul all efforts of propaganda must be continual and constant, and under no circumstance can the Propagandee be left to their own devices. The Propagandist must prevent the Propagandee from gaining an outside perspective, from getting a moment of retrospection. The individual target must be held in a continual loop of information that occupies every moment of their life and dominates their interactions with the world around them. The Propagandee cannot be given time to recover or be untouched by further efforts for any prolonged amount of time. In the words of Ellul himself. "For propaganda is not the touch of the magic wand. It is based on slow, constant impregnation."⁷⁰ To ensure the target's compliance the propagandist attempts to create a wholly dominated environment where the effort to influence is repeated continually. Ideally without disagreeing viewpoints that could harm the foundation laid by sustained efforts of pre-propaganda. The effort to be continuous is essential to overwhelm the target successfully. The propagandist must go beyond the target's ability to pay attention to overpower their resistance to outside influence. Once this is accomplished, once a target is caught in the web of propaganda, they will follow it regardless of its authenticity or even if it breaks with its own previously established narratives. Obviously they do notice that there's been a change, and they may try to resist, but to do so

⁶⁹ Ellul 1973: Page 30

⁷⁰ Ellul 1973: Page 31

will require a sustained effort over time. It may mean to break with their favored sources of information or social circles. To do so is difficult and painful, especially in comparison to the more comfortable option of simply ignoring the change and accepting the new line. This way the individual may retain their habits, with little actual change.⁷¹ At that point the new direction must simply be restated repeatedly and the Propagandee will then accept it as the truth regardless of its inauthenticity or its contradictory nature with any previously established truth. A simple example being the 2016 US election, which in the Trump supporting camp changed from being rigged before Trump won to being a just result after he did so. This will also be covered in greater detail in chapter 6.

The individual will not engage with the change, certainly not to protect the truth of yesterday to which they hold no allegiance. They will simply follow the new reality and as it becomes restated repeatedly, it becomes an undisputed fact. Resistance to propaganda is at best sporadic. A propagandist that fails to be continuous allows the target to catch their breath, to find their feet, and allows them to resist. The Propagandee will resist more heavy-handed touches if allowed to breathe, as in such cases their sporadic attention span is allowed to fight back effectively towards propaganda that itself is sporadic. The cycle must be continual to create the intended effect. By doing this the propagandist can effectively create a constant flow of emotion. The propagandee is continually blasted with information and new thoughts and never given time to resist.⁷² This is also important for the psychological issues of dealing with inconsistencies. The propagandee is caught in the flow, unable to stop and think and consider their reaction. The propaganda at this point does not have to be true, it has gone past the need of truth because it is no longer being questioned and any individual piece of propaganda will be gone from the propagandee's mind soon enough. The propagandee is caught and now simply follows the flow of the river. The foundational point is that in order to achieve its goal propaganda must overwhelm, it must overpower the target's defenses and lead them into a wave they cannot then simply step out of or push aside.

In Ellul's work he argues that it is the educated and socially aware who are most likely to be victims of propaganda. Ellul's example is that of the man who lives alone in the forest with no access to media who cannot be reached by propaganda, he is immune. Ellul also mention the

⁷¹ Ellul 1973: Page 32

⁷² Ellul 1973: Page 53

difficulty of reaching the poor and those who do not own a TV set.⁷³ Ellul's argument here is based on who, during his time, consumed media and participated in public life. From a modern digital perspective this argument appears outdated, as the public has gained constant access to the digital space and its information through their phones. Ellul's side argument, that the academically minded may have a psychological vulnerability towards thinking themselves too intelligent to fall for manipulation may still ring somewhat true, but the primary argument of access and informational content consumption is certainly no longer valid. As established earlier most people spend significant amounts of time on their phones every day, in addition to time spent online or watching more traditional mass media. A regular person now almost certainly consumes more content than even most academics would have in Ellul's time, and so the vulnerability needs some updating. My standpoint on this is that in the modern context Ellul's idea of the academic, the educated socially aware person most vulnerable, now arguably consists of the general population. These people may not be academics in the traditional sense of having schooling and membership in the upper social classes, but rather they are academics in the sense that they consume information and are active in various online fora. They are not isolated, sitting in a hunting cabin in the woods looking for deer. They are participating in the public sphere.

The issue is further enhanced by the need for the propagandee to engage with the propaganda on their own. A propagandee that does not participate will simply step out and be free of the issue, they must engage with it and consume it for it to effectively do its job. As a result of this it is the academic, the socially aware, and other people more engaged with information who are the most likely to be targets of propaganda. They consume more information than anyone else and consider themselves qualified to distinguish simple facts from matters of propaganda.⁷⁴ When the propagandee has become thoroughly surrounded by propaganda the psychological process of developing individual fanaticism begins. The propagandee begins to believe, and then to rely on the ideas they are provided through propaganda. The process that Ellul describes as Psychological Crystallization. The propagandee not only starts to believe in the ideas they have been provided and internalize them fully, but they begin to believe in the rightness of their cause. They do not simply believe this. They are convinced that they are

⁷³ Ellul 1973: Page 113

⁷⁴ Ellul 1973: Page 120

right to believe this.⁷⁵ A process of intense rationalization has begun, and with it the individual is completely lost into the fanatical base of their ideology. This not only because the propagandee truly believes this to be true, but they have now internalized it to the point that any attack on the ideology is treated as a personal assault. This is natural because in a way it is a personal attack. The propagandee is fully encapsulated and certain of all that they have been propagandized to believe, the propaganda has become a matter of the propagandee's conceptualization of self. Any change will bother them fundamentally as a human being because it threatens their fundamental truths. This development then continues as they begin to hate anything opposed to their propaganda. That turns into a repeating circle as the propagandee only wants to consume even more propaganda. The propaganda delivers certainly, comfort, stability, and personal satisfaction, while also completely closing their mind to new ideas. The successfully propagandized is no longer capable of processing any information that runs contrary to their accepted propaganda, ironically an attempt to course correct will simply be perceived as propaganda and tossed aside.⁷⁶ Someone successfully propagandized has completely lost their ability to exercise individual thought as they adopt everything uncritically and in its totality. There is no longer any concept of asking questions or utilizing their personal judgment.⁷⁷

At this stage the propagandee is not simply choosing to indulge in their chosen propaganda, they are now addicted. They need it. They have reconstructed their worldview, their framing, through the lens provided to them by propaganda. The propaganda is their new framework, how they view and understand the world around them. Without it their worldview falls apart. As the Nyhan and Reifler research pointed out, when faced with conflicting facts people double down. The successfully propagandized do not simply have facts wrong, they have had their framework reconstructed, or added to. The successfully propagandized is reliant on the propaganda to such a degree that continued participation is necessary for them to continue to understand the world around them. This is why those successfully propagandized can be turned into action. As stated in section 4.3 the goal of any propaganda is to make a person actionable. The propagandist wants to create a propagandee so completely turned that they act

⁷⁵ Ellul 1973: Page 167

⁷⁶ Ellul 1973: Page 168-169

⁷⁷ Ellul 1973: Page 172

without thinking, they blindly accept what they are told, and they can therefore be instructed to act in any way the propagandist desires by simply pushing the right buttons.⁷⁸

4.11 Self-replicating online

The foundational aspect of community-based propagandization is that it is self-reaffirming. Once a group is sufficiently directed that the individuals automatically steer towards the ideas held by the group every member is a propagandist for all the others. When this aspect has been sufficiently applied that the group's ideas have been solidified the group becomes self-replicating. They maintain their ideological basis over time as each group member holds all the others ideologically responsible. When this is applied digitally the community can be much larger, but the foundational element still applies. The group is still vulnerable to the same manipulations, particularly through leaders both official and unofficial who can control the narratives in some regard. However, as a whole, the group's ideology is now self-reaffirming. Through shared social media the groups encounter other groups who are ideologically compatible but whose ideology is not already set in stone. I would argue it is at this point their ideas become self-replicating. Through a horizontal spread and wide engagement, the ideas of already solidified communities spread sideways into groups not already convinced but ideologically fitting. Further, these groups will encounter each other in digital settings in which the already effectively propagandized group will act as one, rather than as many. As such they have a more dominant effect on what is perceived as truth within the wider community.

4.12 The propagandee's participation

Ellul also does something that many other works on the subject do not, which is that he acknowledges the complicity of the propagandee in the spread and realization of propaganda. This does not mean the propagandist will not seek to isolate the propagandee anyway. The skilled propagandist will seek to alienate the person from their natural groups and bonds, those of family and the community they live in. To put it simply, the people that an individual has to regularly deal with in a civil manner, regardless of personal disagreements. These are the people who would normally keep them in check. Placed on their own so they can only exist in their own bubble, and with that they become defenseless as the individual is put into the position of standing up for themselves against the entire world. "The individual is placed

⁷⁸ Ellul 1973: Page 180

in a minority position and burdened at the same time with a total, crushing responsibility”⁷⁹ This way the individual is made vulnerable to propaganda, they are alone and can be caught in a net of propaganda. However Ellul also acknowledges that the propagandee is an active participant in the process of propaganda.⁸⁰ That was already true when Ellul’s work was initially written, and this is why I believe Ellul’s propaganda is particularly useful when looking at modern propaganda, and I will argue that this concept only become more relevant in the context of modern technology. Soules made the claim that: “Behavioural sciences are teaching us that we deceive ourselves as much as we are deceived by others.”⁸¹ Ellul uses the example of the man who buys the newspaper that caters to his prejudices. He consumes the media that speaks to his pleasure. In the modern context we must look at the many new forms of media the public engages with. What is sometimes referred to as alternative news media feeding into various subcultures, the many online personalities who speak to their online communities, and the various online fora with which any single participant chooses, entirely on their own, to engage with the other members of the community.

Even small preferences can lead to major differences and functional segregation of opinions. To the point that a slight preference eventually lead to people to live lives fully segregated from opposing thought. The active participation of the propagandee has become even more important for the consideration of the propagandist, as with the move towards online fora and social media the power of horizontal spread has increased, and people are in more constant direct contact with each other. With mass amounts of information being spread horizontally through social media the complicity of the propagandee is crucial for the propagandist to achieve their goal. The propagandist must dominate the propagandee’s consumption of social media. They may use algorithms to influence what online content is most easily visible to the propagandee. Still, ultimately it is the propagandee that chooses to participate. Most social media algorithms are designed to increase content consumption, not necessarily particular political viewpoints. They show what creates engagement and keeps people coming back for more. This is similar to the functions of what Herman and Chomsky described in their work *Manufacturing consent* which I covered in section 3.5. Algorithms can be managed by the propagandee, curated to create a specific experience, although this requires some technical

⁷⁹ Ellul 1973: Page 102

⁸⁰ Marlin 2014: Page 204

⁸¹ Soules 2015: Page 222

insight and awareness of how algorithms function, which is something most people do not possess. The algorithm itself is simply doing the job of the editor in old school media, feeding the user with content that they will want to engage with. The user is the one who interacts with the content and who keeps coming back to the platform to further engage with similar content. That said, the algorithm does have a weakness when it comes to the possibility of abuse as, unlike traditional media, it lacks an editor who selects what will make it through. A dedicated group with knowledge of how an algorithm functions could flood it with desired content, at least until the platform tweaks the algorithm or creates safeguards to prevent this type of domination. From the view of the potential for abuse or domination of content by an outside force the platforms reliance on algorithm provide a new avenue for inserting specific narratives into a population, however from the perspective of self-inflicted propagandization the algorithm is simply feeding people with their desired narratives, an action that previously had to be done manually by an editor, but which as Herman and Chomsky explains, is a natural and unavoidable part of any mass media structure.

Online polarization happens quickly, people skip across communities with ease and small differences create segregated communities of particular interest. This is described as Balkanization of online blogs dedicated to political thought.⁸² With as little as 10 percent interaction, and that mostly being insults.⁸³ This segregation then increases ideological differences as people only discuss issues with those they already agree with, causing them to solidify their thoughts and creates a path towards extremism. This is not exclusive to social media, it also applies to traditional news media, where biased reporting responds to ideological audiences with a particular preference. As Soules sums it up: “Circular reasoning is involved: people like this source of news and opinion because they agree with it. It is familiar.”⁸⁴ Similarly they will happily disagree or dismiss information coming from the wrong source. As one can often see with people dismissing information or points of view by simply handwaving them away as “far-left” or “far-right”, ignoring the actual source of the information or its validity by focusing on who they perceive as the distributor and therefore also the holder of the information.⁸⁵ The end result of this is fully segregated opinion holders that, if successfully isolated, may have an entire ecosystem of news dedicated to their

⁸² Soules 2015: Page 106

⁸³ Soules 2015: Page 106

⁸⁴ Soules, 2015: Page 106

⁸⁵ Marlin 2014: Page 205

isolation, that may include television news media, newspapers both offline and online, social media, YouTube channels, blogs and eclectic online fora.⁸⁶ This way they perceive themselves as receiving varied news, but in reality they are receiving a complete isolation of opinion at every front.

The propagandee is the only one who can move their consciousness into the digital space, and it does not matter how much effort is made to influence someone through Instagram if they are not present on Instagram. Someone choosing to stay in the real world is not available for the digital propagandist to influence. They will not be submerged in the efforts of the propagandist in the manner that is necessary for the operation to be successful. The propagandee must, at some level, choose to participate as without their presence propaganda cannot take hold. The only one who can decide to engage with the propaganda is the propagandee. People use multiple forms of social media and so they must more actively choose to participate, at least insofar as their decision to consume content created by other users is concerned, when it comes to commercial activity like advertisements they are at the mercy of the platforms. This is noteworthy for the selection of new social groups which happens as people choose which fora they want to engage with. People choose which groups to socialize with, and through this organic groups are formed. Small local communities formed online. These are created by association and people join them by choosing communities that match their own prejudices and convictions. For the individual, it is as simple as selecting which of the various social media they have available to them and how they want to use it. They click on links and create their own feeds, supported by algorithms designed to feed more information of the kind that creates engagement. This development is not new, the algorithmic interface is simply a new form. Ellul describes it quite well already in 1973:

“At present we are witnessing the emergence of organic groups in which individuals tend to be integrated. These groups have certain traits of the old organic groups, but their collective life, their intellectual, emotional, and spiritual life is determined by propaganda, and they can no longer maintain themselves without it. They become organic groups in the mass society only if they subject themselves to, and serve as agents of, propaganda”.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Phillips & Milner 2021: Page 140

⁸⁷ Ellul 1973: Page 107

This is why I argue that groups formed on social media are not innovative as a general concept, but rather are primarily unique in how they form. The ability of the digital space is not in creating new things, but rather in how it increases the propagandist's ability to spread information and increases the ease with which like-minded social groups can form and enforce the horizontal spread of propaganda to each other. Which brings us back to the issue of journalism and the consumption of news. As previously covered, the individual consumes news that they agree with, that they know full well is of dubious factual quality, and which is chosen for its emotional appeal. The propagandee has selected the news which will provide them with the news they desire.

In this regard Ellul recognizes the fundamental issue, which is that the reader is not interested in information that does not fit their preselected narratives. As covered in section 4.7, the individual must be reached through their group identity, which is their primary source and reason for wanting information. Anything more than simplified portrayals of problems and solutions is unnecessary because the idea is not for the reader to make real choices, but rather for the reader to have their bias confirmed and to be provided information they can use to socialize. People do not like having their beliefs challenged, they do not like having to truly think about issues. What people want is status within their group, to get approval and validation from their social sphere. Professor of philosophy Randal Marlin argues that what they are after is not actually news, but a running update of current events that they may repeat socially to appear intelligent, informed, and accepted.⁸⁸ The propagandee's participation is based on the same primary motivation as their group status, which brings us back to the issue of the group. The propagandee desires social recognition, they will themselves participate in consuming the propagandist's material if doing so is the key to social status. This is why, as much as we may want to blame all these problems on propaganda, the issue is based on human psychology. A propagandist cannot make anyone click on anything. They may want to create articles intended to entice their target's attention and curate it towards a group's interests, but much like leading horses to water they can only make something that will create curiosity, they cannot force anyone to consume their propaganda.⁸⁹ The propagandee must participate at some level or the propagandist will fail to reach them. I argue that the digital space gathers all communication and interaction in one space. The propagandee can choose to

⁸⁸ Marlin 2014: Page 204-205

⁸⁹ Phillips & Milner 2021: Page 146

involve themselves more deeply with the propaganda of their chose, and they have become easier to surround as all the necessary communication comes directly through their chosen devices and all their networks share frameworks. The status of being permanently online creates an environment in which every interaction, which happen daily and for multiple hours, are within the propagandee's selected bubbles and the propagandee has minimal need for any information coming from outside the digital space.

4.13 Doomscrolling

The introduction of social media has created a new issue. The concept of doomscrolling, a form of addiction to bad news. To explain what doomscrolling actually is I will borrow from a 2022 research project by Sharma, Lee, and Johnson on the subject published in the journal *Technology, Mind, and Behavior*: "Doomscrolling refers to a state of media use typically characterized as individuals persistently scrolling through their social media newsfeeds with an obsessive focus on distressing, depressing, or otherwise negative information"⁹⁰ Social media users become obsessed with keeping up to date with information, particularly that information they deem to be of personal interest. It is not ideologically motivated, rather it is a personal behavior based around originally motivated behavior like wanting to keep up to date on information on a particular topic which then devolves into compulsive behavior. It is strongly correlated with social media addiction. These people become fixated on depressing content that makes them upset and are unable to stop themselves from looking at it.

This is a new concept that must be integrated into the overall theoretical framework. Ellul does mention the complicity of the propagandee. However, in his work on the subject he focuses on the way in which the propagandee chooses to consume news and information that they already agree with. The concept of doomscrolling is therefore a new adaption to the theoretical framework as the propagandee not only chooses to consume media that they already agree with, but they also consume media designed to make them angry. This is not a total abandonment of Ellul's concept, we're not talking about them consuming media that is designed to promote the opposite opinion of the doomscroller. This media may not necessarily be against them, as in they are not consuming media that they are fundamentally in disagreement with. Rather they are consuming media designed to show them a terrible thing that they will fundamentally dislike, with one respondent directly stating they felt

⁹⁰ Sharma 2022: Page 3

addicted to seeing negative news.⁹¹ Doomscrolling, while not the end all be all, needs to be included in the analysis for a way the propagandist can engage the reader. In previous chapters I covered how the propagandist will focus on utilizing the propagandee's basic needs and emotions. That which they will react most to. Some of those needs, like security, is essentially what those prone to doomscrolling are reacting to. They notably tended to follow matters that felt close to home, which affected them either directly or indirectly.⁹² Is similar to Ellul's work on people's priorities. Social media campaigns and news campaigns could therefore, theoretically, study a group's fears and overload them with negative news that they will react to, which a subsection of that population will have a very difficult time to resist looking at. Weaponizing their need for security to engage them in a self-propagandizing behavior that they will then obsessively seek out.

4.14 Radicalization or propagandization? New words old clothes

Radicalization, which we can define by its use in common nomenclature is the process to which an individual increasingly accepts the use of violence to achieve political goals.⁹³ It is not limited to any political orientation or ideological belonging, rather it is an extremization process in which a person goes from being a regular and more rational person to blindly accepting violence as a tool of creating desired political goals.

The radicalization process described by modern researchers on the subject has many similarities with the propagandization process described by Ellul. Tom Olsen, who has a master's degree in social work is an expert on radicalization who works in crime prevention in Time municipality in Norway, he is also a former neo-Nazi who details his own radicalization process in the book *Radicalization: phenomenon and prevention*. The path Olsen describes begins with meeting members of the neo-Nazi group through a shared enemy who they both felt required resistance. After a successful fight in which the radical leftist group was excised from the local community, a victory party led to sustained contact with the group whose ideals did not immediately appeal but rather it created questions he wanted answers to. The matter of allied war crimes against German civilians during WW2 became a contact point and during a classroom discussion a harsh rebuke from a teacher for questioning the bombing of Dresden created an impression of that the neo-Nazis were on to something. Quite simply

⁹¹ Sharma 2022: Page 4

⁹² Sharma 2022: Page 3

⁹³ Noor 2018: Page 50

because they acknowledged a wrong that society, or rather the representative for society, declared right or justified.⁹⁴

From an Ellulian standpoint this goes under the importance of accuracy and verifiable fact. The teacher was obviously not incorrect in rebuking neo-Nazi rhetoric particularly within what falls under holocaust denialism. It is the importance of fact and its perception. The bombing of Dresden is a historically controversial fact, and I'd argue it's only controversial because of who was bombed and who was doing the bombing, the inhumanity of bombing a civilian city filled to the brim with refugees is difficult to deny. The act of refusing to acknowledge the existence of a horrific war crime committed by allies then destroys the credibility of the educational system. The representative of the system lies straight to his face and punishes him for questioning the narrative. By doing this public narrative pushed by the school system, functioning as a representative for the state, becomes questionable in the mind of the young man early in his radicalization process. His association with the neo-Nazis makes his old friends abandon him, further surrounding him by only one story.⁹⁵

Tom Olsen is in this case a good example of the conspiratorial mindset that the radicalized person adopts. Conspiracy theories are notoriously difficult to disprove as they are, by their very nature, supposed to be either led by hidden forces or the overarching hand of the state. Lack of evidence becomes its own evidence, and arguments against their theory tend to simply be perceived as the theory's accuracy.⁹⁶ Setting those with particular vulnerabilities like mental illness aside, conspiracy theories are often a defensive mechanism part of an individual's need to regulate feelings like fear and uncertainty. Where normal functioning people focus on family and personal connections, the conspiracy theorist may be socially maladjusted or simply be an outsider. They lack the personal connections to ground them and so they can become vulnerable to very closed worldviews and extremist thought processes.⁹⁷ This is practically Ellulian theory, the propagandized isolated from their natural protections against radical thought and indoctrination becomes vulnerable to the predations of a skilled manipulator.

⁹⁴ Olsen 2018: Page 15-17

⁹⁵ Olsen 2018: Page 16

⁹⁶ Basit 2018: Page 105

⁹⁷ Basit 2018: Page 109

The most interesting section of Olsen's story however is the part where he finally gets fully committed to the group. Olsen ends up going to prison where he ends up in isolation for three months. During this time in prison he had nothing to do but read and the only thing he had to read was copious amounts of neo-Nazi and other far right works delivered to him by his new neo-Nazi friends. The prison sentence that was supposed to take him away from the world instead put him into a space where he had nothing to do other than spend all his time self-radicalizing. The radicalization of Tom Olsen here I argue has similarities with the solo radicalization that can happen online, where an individual sit alone at home simply consuming mass amounts of content directing their attention in a specific direction, directed by algorithms or even their own compulsion to consume bad news as covered in section 4.13 on Doomscrolling.

Radical groups of all types have long been early adopters of technology, fully aware of its potential to spread their message to new people. Far right radical groups established the well-known neo-Nazi website Stormfront as early as 1996.⁹⁸ Abu Musab al-Suri is arguably the world's most skilled radicalization strategist, and somewhere around late 2004 and early 2005 he released his 1600 pages long manifesto "Call to Global Islamic Resistance" online, setting up the manual for how to create smaller terrorist groups and lone-wolves. Al-Qaida launched their English language magazine Inspire in 2010, with several articles written by Al-Suri. The jihadist group Daesh, also known as the Islamic State, brought the matter into more public attention when they ran a blistering social media campaign, even having their own app called The Dawn of Glad Tidings dedicated to spreading their message on twitter.⁹⁹ Similarly the prophet's Ummah within Norway had been frequent figures in social media spaces, actively using it to get into contact with young Muslims. They are not alone in this, in a modern right wing Nordic context the Nordic resistance movement, a Swedish neo-Nazi organization, has its own podcast and are commonly seen across social media.¹⁰⁰ It's worth noting that attention by traditional media seems to function as a recruitment post. When the leader of the prophets Ummah Ubaydullah Hussain was interviewed in long form by VGTV, the live video section

⁹⁸ Strømme 2018: Page 39

⁹⁹ Powell 2014

¹⁰⁰ Strømme 2018: Page 39

of one of Norway's larger newspapers, the group used this interview to legitimize their view and their place as a voice for those they claimed to represent.¹⁰¹

The extremist groups, somewhat predictably from an Ellulian standpoint, focus on the baser emotions. Fear and anger most commonly, as images and videos that engages the extreme emotions are a significant part of early radicalization process. With Islamic fundamentalists the process can start with images of Muslims being victimized in some manner or incidents creating feelings of injustice, which leaders within extreme communities can use to grab hold of people in vulnerable stages.¹⁰² A methodology the primary recruiting group in Norway, called the prophet's Ummah, used substantially. Often by creating protests around various grievances faithful Muslims felt they had which put them in contact with people in a vulnerable state who could be recruited. Though the methods of that particular group have seized as a result of most of its leadership and upper members being killed fighting for Daesh in Syria, functionally making the group defunct.¹⁰³

What we're seeing then in modern radicalization is very similar to what Ellul describes in his theory on propaganda. The social factors in a radicalization process being so valuable, with group dynamics, changes in the circle of friends, withdrawal from society, or charismatic leaders being of critical importance. The process is characterized by the development of a one-sided worldview with no room for alternative perspectives, where drastic actions, such as supporting or inciting violence, are considered necessary, and the thought that the end justifies the means. This means that radicalization is not simply having one sided view, it is part of a greater process in which people lose their loyalty or belonging to society and is driven into groups of extremist thought, where they can be utilized as tools. Effectively being turned into people who, with the right impulse, will commit violent actions on behalf of their ideology to achieve their ideological goals. That is what Ellul calls becoming actionable.

¹⁰¹ Noor 2018: Page 45

¹⁰² Noor 2018: Page 45

¹⁰³ Noor 2018: Page 46

4.15 Vertical and horizontal propaganda

With the understanding gained I move on to the matter of how propaganda is actually spread. For this I will look on another set of concepts first developed by Ellul that are useful when trying to understand how propaganda spreads. Ellul finds that there are two separate ways propaganda spreads, namely vertically and horizontally. Ellul's concept of vertical propaganda is the typical form that propaganda takes as people tend to imagine it when they hear the word. This means propaganda that comes from a leader or a leading figure of some kind who uses their authority to influence a group. This is a form of propaganda where the propagandist and the propagandee is experiencing one-way communication. The crowd is not participating nor is the propagandee adding anything, even if they are being influenced totally they are simply responding to the inputs of the propagandist. The propagandist speaks and the propagandee listens.¹⁰⁴ A simple example is the numerous propaganda newspapers run by various propaganda personnel of Nazi-Germany. Famous examples like Julius Streicher's *Der Stürmer* or Josef Goebbels' *Der Angriff* and *Das Reich*. The reader does not contribute, to these they only consume the content that is given to them by the propagandist.

Ellul's concept of horizontal propaganda is opposite in function. With horizontal propaganda the propagandist is trying to influence the group, but their goal in doing so is to create propaganda that is self-replicating. This form of propaganda does not rely on a leader, it is shared between members of the group. The individual is actively participating of their own free will. The information is spread not from the top down to the propagandee but rather between members of equal status. Ellul claims that:

“Each individual helps to form the opinion of the group, but the group helps each individual to discover the correct line. For, miraculously, it is always the correct line, the anticipated solution, the “proper” convictions, which are eventually discovered.”¹⁰⁵

Through careful manipulation of the facts the propagandist makes sure the propagandees are reaching the desired conclusions. The debate is monitored and intervened with only to lead dialogue in the desired direction. Ellul's example is that of the political club society, in which people socialize in groups and discuss matters of politics. The propagandist has control over the discussion and so they can create the terms of the discussion, dictate who is allowed to

¹⁰⁴ Ellul 1973: Page 120

¹⁰⁵ Ellul 1973: Page 83

speak, and what they can talk about. In this way they control the result of any discussion. Horizontal propaganda is exceptionally efficient as not only is the propagandee actively participating and being manipulated into reaching the desired conclusions on what they experience on their own, but it further encapsulates the propagandee into the sphere of propaganda and prevents them from escaping its hold. Their social spheres are infiltrated, the participants are locked in. After carefully managing the social fabric of the group each propagandee is turned into a propagandist for the others. They each socially enforce the thoughts of the group on each other. And while there must be some messenger authority between the group as a whole and the actual propagandist these are direction influencers. They will be somewhat respected within the group, they are people considered knowledgeable or connected with an organization or the desired political direction. A trusted source.

As covered earlier, all people are part of groups of various kinds, and on this topic the work of Bernays must be mentioned. Bernays claimed that people are members of many groups. They are members of political parties, of charities and clubs and all other forms of group associations. Through these societies they gain opinions, which they then distribute into the other groups they associate with.¹⁰⁶ This is a secondary benefit of horizontal propaganda. People are part of multiple groups that are likely to be similarly minded as the individual, and that thus are likely to be vulnerable to similar ideas. Horizontal propaganda can then spread through these groups from a common source point. As individuals are convinced they spread the effect to other likeminded individuals. These then act in the same way, allowing the propagandists ideas to spread wide through the shared members of different groups.

Both types of propaganda rely to some extent on social proof. Social interaction is the basis of society, where liking what other people like and being liked by others is critical for individual survival. As a result of this humans continually make decisions while they try to figure out who belongs to their community and who does not, which creates repetition and favors shared opinions that are liked by the entire group.¹⁰⁷ The basis of this shared opinion is social proof. The idea behind social proof is that we decide what the correct behavior is by observing those around us. The issue is of course that public opinion is not a source for true information, but of popular information. As Soules uses as an example, canned laughter on television shows function to improve the laughter of the audience, who tend to think the shows are funnier if

¹⁰⁶ Bernays 2005: Page 31

¹⁰⁷ Soules 2015: Page 105

triggered by the sound of others laughing.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, people experiencing a medical emergency in a crowd are more likely to be helped if there are fewer bystanders, as individuals can be paralyzed by the inaction of others. People who are uncertain about what action to take will default to the actions of the people around them, and when the situation is generally unfamiliar and nobody is doing anything, that may result in nobody reacting, even though if alone they would have acted differently. People who are uncertain will, quite simply, default to the actions of the crowd. The first person to make a decision then becomes the guide for the actions of the crowd, as everyone seek to copy the person who appears to know what they're doing.¹⁰⁹ This is the same idea of validation and acceptance from the section on the propagandee's participation. People will want to adopt the information and standpoints that are popular within their group. That which has been socially proven to be popular. When they participate in the group and see what is popular within it they adopt the opinions that are popular.

4.16 Modern vertical and horizontal propaganda

The section of horizontal propaganda needs some adjustment as the new forms of media has empowered the ability to maintain groups. In their book *You Are Here*, professors in communication Whitney Phillips and Ryan Milner argue that the force of the spread of misinformation is empowered by what they call network climate change. The idea of which is that the creation of new networks of communications and media distribution overwhelm any previously existing measures intended to maintain information purity, the old methods of controlling information simply do not work within the new system. This failure then creates pathways for false information, or propaganda in our case, to flow through and reach the public consuming information.¹¹⁰ This then combines with the presence of collective intelligence, which function in the digital space. Collective intelligence is not new and to a degree has always existed in the form of the local community. with the move to the digital space however collective intelligence can draw from more people and reach across borders into global communities where people can engage in persuasion without being physically close to each other and create communities based around opinions and interests entirely

¹⁰⁸ Soules 2015: Page 104

¹⁰⁹ Soules 2015: Page 104-105

¹¹⁰ Phillips & Milner 2021: Page 54

unrelated to their physical closeness. Simultaneously leaving them more vulnerable to isolation of thought.¹¹¹

The result of all this is that the scale at which horizontal propaganda can be utilized has magnified exponentially. One of the more well-known and effective at doing this was the Islamic State. Journalist Rose Powell explained the propaganda style of the terrorist organization ISIS by using the following 4-step model, explaining their use of propaganda which starts vertically then moves into horizontal spread as it moves further down into the model.¹¹²

The first step is the Islamic state itself. Using official and direct channels of communication it spreads its official news stories and information. These are the more traditional methods of spreading information. Newsletters, news organizations, official statements. This section of creating and distributing propaganda more closely follows the ideas of vertical propaganda.

The second step is the local accounts that spread stories on local events. These are closer to the 'action' so to speak. They are focused on more local news sources and the smaller subsections of the organization's official channels.

The third step is where the nature of social media comes into play, and where the spread takes a more sideways turn. Individual fighters provide information on what they have done and experienced through social media. An example of this would be the personal Twitter account of a jihadist fighter who might share his personal day-to-day experiences.

The fourth step is where the organization itself loses significant control over the message. This fourth level is where sympathizers and supporters, people who are not directly connected to the goings-on of the group take control over the spreading of information. They use their ability to acquire the material through the previously mentioned access points in order to then spread the information further or modify it for their audience. These are ordinary people who engage with the material directly and spread it between each other, they engage with it horizontally through chatrooms, fora, and various messaging platforms.¹¹³

Propaganda begins initially as vertical propaganda, in order to guide the general direction. It is then later released into the groups where they lose control over the message to a degree,

¹¹¹ Soules 2015: Page 229; Bernays 2005: Page 28

¹¹² Nissen 2015: Page 61

¹¹³ Nissen 2015: Page 61

while individuals are employed at the later stages to guide the general conversation in the correct direction, the loss of control is expected. Step 4 allows for specific modification to fit into otherwise difficult to reach audiences that may have group specific modes of communication. What Phillips and Milner calls memetic frames.¹¹⁴ Communication channels that exists partly or entirely outside of reach as they consist of language and modes of communication that differs from the standard and where an outsider will quickly be exposed by failing to utilize the language of the group in the correct manner. The last step is also where the potential to face to face meetings and local spread begins. Philips and Milner noted this about the difference between the mainstream right and the far-right wing no longer being easy to separate ideologically, because the insidious nature of horizontal spread includes the spread through local communities. Which remains the most effective method of persuasion.¹¹⁵ With the deep horizontal spread that unrestricted online communication allows disconnected local entities find themselves similarly compromised and effectively being part of the same larger network of communication.¹¹⁶

Ellul describes the formation of smaller communities, these replace the traditional small communities people experience like the family or the village. For Ellul these were political groups meeting physically. The digital space has created a method for people to form small communities online. People can form groups built around identity, ideology, and various interests and opinions across borders. International groups of like-minded people who are vulnerable to similar rhetoric, assuming that the sociological functioning of these groups is similar to those created in the real world. Which may or may not be the case, but as covered in section 4.14 the online communications of committed extremists certainly appear to attempt to mimic non-digital face-to-face communication. The focus on personal stories are clearly intended to create this effect, and the lack of cross political dialogue referenced in section 4.12 certainly seems to indicate that online spaces are just as if not more closed than non-digital interest groups, as such it seems clear that closed groups online have the possibility of functioning as propaganda chambers much the same as ideologically restricted groups in non-digital spaces.

¹¹⁴ Phillips & Milner 2021: Page 31

¹¹⁵ Soules 2015: Page 229

¹¹⁶ Phillips & Milner 2021: Page 56

When Ellul describes such groups he speaks of a leader who functions as a contact point between the group and the propagandist. In the digital space, this leader could be a person of standing within the group, or if the community is formed around an online personality, the online personality would likely default to using them as their de facto leader and narrative controller. Ellul describes how such groups allow each person, individually, to get to the right conclusion. The right conclusion here being defined as what the propagandist wants the propagandee to believe, and they always make sure that the group will reach the right conclusion. They achieve this by managing the group's dialogue, traditionally this was done by the official or unofficial community leader, who also acts as a contact point with the propagandist. In online fora this can be even more effectively managed through moderators with the power to directly control who gets to speak and the ability to remove voices spreading ideas contrary to the narrative the moderator has deemed acceptable.¹¹⁷ This is one way in which the digital space has allowed the propagandist the ability to manipulate narratives through falsifying agreement. The community groups function by letting each person get to the desired conclusion themselves, increasing their belief in the conclusion as they believe they reached it independently, yet their conclusion was decided by those controlling the flow of information. Ellul explains that the groups are designed to cause this feeling, the individual propagandee does not actually have control over their own conclusions, they have been manipulated through the group's interactions, in order to create a more stalwart belief. I argue that these online communities' function in much the same manner and that by manipulating algorithms, making arguments in comment sections, and providing a mass amount of likes and other signs of approval on content, they can effectively convince the propagandee that there is a false consensus. That this opinion or belief is already held by the group at large, and that therefore it is the correct opinion. Any opinion already held by the group will often lead the individual to begin convincing themselves that this is the case, or even simply readily accepting it without question. The individual wants to believe the truth as defined by the propagandist because the propagandist has created an environment in which that is already the socially acceptable answer. At least that's what the propagandee believes. The propagandee then engages with the content themselves, further boosting this element. As Ellul covers, in the small groups that replace the natural communities of people, the people in them still feel the need to fit in and participate in the group. They engage with the material to show their agreement, further boosting it in the algorithm and further boosting its perception

¹¹⁷ Dijck & Poell, 2013: Page 5

of accepted truth within the group. As Ellul says, each propagandee becomes a propagandist for all the other propagandees within the group.

The loose confederations that are online communities translates into significant contact between various groups with similarly minded people. They engage on open social media, and therefore each can see the other. I argue that this means they have an increased likelihood of horizontally spreading information across community groups at an equal level in the information pyramid. They spread horizontally from similar community to similar community through contact with each other's members. Relatively small amounts of leaders can be responsible for wide amounts of dissemination of selected information. For example, the Center for Countering Digital Hate found that 65% of anti-vaccine information originated from as few as 12 people, indicating substantial overlap between similar interest groups whose information largely comes from the same set of sources.¹¹⁸ These main links function as mass spreaders, causing each individual community to react and act as propagandists for their own group further spreading the information to others who do the same for the groups they themselves are members of which are likely to have similar psychological vulnerabilities.

The existence of these online communities in a public space I also argue makes it easier for the propagandist to effectively study the group, the way it functions, its ideological values, and how its members interact. They can therefore, with much more ease, select for desired group traits when disseminating information. By selecting which information goes where the propagandist makes sure each group is being manipulated in the desired direction by feeding them the correct information at the right time. This way the propagandist can move their dialogue and its conclusions, selectively editing which information goes where at which time. The propagandist must study their target to effectively propagandize them, this was key when Ellul described it and it is only more so now. Catering to the prejudices and beliefs of the propagandee is no less important, though doing so is likely easier when the propagandee participates and shares their thoughts and beliefs in an online forum. I would also argue that this might have become even easier to do with the prospect of anonymity. The propagandee active on social media may believe themselves to be anonymous. With that, they may be more willing to expose their foundational beliefs which they might normally be more hesitant to share during face-to-face interactions.

¹¹⁸ CCDH: Page 6

The digital space is then, as noted above, not changing the foundational method of operation, though it does allow for the propagandist to gain more control over locked groups, and this has increased their ability to spread information through interconnected networks of people with similar bias and frameworks. Rather than having many small physical groups that must be actively managed even in a minor way through unofficial contacts, an effective propagandist can instead simply feed information to these self-formed.

4.17 Conclusion for chapter 4

The first claim Ellul makes is that technique does not simply adapt technology to people, but it adapts people to technology. The democratization of media has provided people with the ability to produce and distribute their own media content through open platforms in the digital space, and all social media are based around the idea that the user base not only consumes but also takes over production and distribution. In Ellul's work it is the academic that is most vulnerable simply because they consume more information than anyone else and propaganda is information. More consumption simply creates more room for propaganda to enter through. With the move to the digital space it is clear that what Ellul called the academic is now, functionally speaking, everyone. The digital space is only information and in the modern world most people spend up to several hours every day consuming the information available from their preferred sources.

However, social media is not just media, it is also social. This is significant as the social aspects of group dynamics and social relationships, previously limited to offline interactions, have become integrated with media consumption. Ellul's work already included people's preference for consuming media they fundamentally agree with which leads people into only consuming media that suits their personal preferences. The evidence suggest that this also happens during the formation of online social media groups, which have highly isolated information preferences and almost no meaningful contact with the informational channels of other groups. People form into highly exclusive social spheres, form parasocial relationships with large creators whose content is consumed by many users, and form communities based around shared information preferences. This is a change in information consumption where the group dynamic becomes intrinsically added to the social space, which is reinforced through the group dynamic which states that people tend to follow the media that is the preference of their social groups. Part of social proof, people already implicitly trust that which they are told by people they trust, and they are likely to consume media that provides them with status within their social group. What this means is that online communication

within a social space is far less likely to be criticized as much by the individual compared to traditional media, and within a space the user feels is their social space they likely do not fact check at all.

This issue is magnified online not just because of the social nature imitating the concept of social proof, but unlike normal offline human bonds, like familial or relational bonds, these groups are built on much less of a connection and are far easier to sever should someone step out of line. Within a non-digital space relationships have more solid fundamentals and being out of line on an opinion is usually non-catastrophic, for this reason familial relationships often function as vanguards that prevents propaganda from taking hold as the local offline connections provide stable relationships where disagreements can be challenged. This is why Ellul argued that propaganda aimed at the masses should try to sever people from these normal social groups and put them into more tenuous social groupings. He argued that with weaker social ties people become less likely to challenge ideas because conformity becomes more crucial to maintaining status within the groups, and I argue that online this has reached a far greater height. People's online social groups are exceptionally fragile and even the slightest step out of the group's line can lead to being exiled. As a result of this these groups develop towards a form of competition, trying to be the most in line at all times, which makes the groups exceptionally vulnerable to being led to pre-decided conclusions. The inherent instability of online group associations makes the individual vulnerable to influence, and where being wrong is unthinkable. The idea of Ellul's propaganda is to influence a person when they are alone in a mass, which he identified as when they are the most vulnerable. It is difficult to imagine any area where someone is more alone in a mass than on social media, existing in a digital space where they alone are forced to manage their own feeds, are responsible for fact checking their own claims and those claims others make as well as having to navigate a social sphere in which they are vulnerable to exile should they step out of line, making the prospect of going against the group decision highly undesirable for the individual.

In addition to this the information becomes self-replicating as each individual is part of multiple social groups, most if not all of which are chosen by each individual according to that individual's preferences. This means that each group likely has considerable overlap on what information they consider acceptable. This creates a horizontal spreading pattern where social proof leads to a horizontal spread through each individual participants social groups, because they all have similar psychological preferences and vulnerabilities, which they have because each user selected themselves into the group because of its informational bias which

will be the case for each group that user self-selects in to. In this respect the self-selection process that Ellul speaks on has become a key section of not just the individual's participation in their own propagandization, but in how they distribute it to others. The people within the social media space's habitual self-segregation into ideological echo chambers, many of whom are in at least a few different groups yet every group have similar ideological blind spots, which lead them not just into informational bias but the social nature means that propaganda that works on one group will also work on the others.

Within Ellul's theoretical framework it is emotions that are used to cause an individual to engage with and respond to propaganda, and it is the more basic emotions experienced by humans that function best. Fear, anger, feelings of bitterness or being aggrieved. Within the digital space we're seen this develop further, and I argue that the phenomenon of doomscrolling is this taken to its online conclusion. People will, independently, seek out information that upsets them and consume it with regularity. This form of social media obsession can easily step over into addiction, where an individual finds themselves completely unable to not view bad news. This addiction to information that upsets them, that trigger these negative emotions, is highly likely to be another vulnerability towards propaganda online. Propaganda will, by default, seek to be upsetting. People whose addiction towards online media includes doomscrolling with naturally be drawn not just to information they agree with, but towards information that makes them angry, making them naturally drawn to propaganda.

I argue that when it comes to the issue of self-radicalization this is primarily driven by a combination of people's natural inclination towards finding information that upsets them combined with their natural preference for self-selecting into social groups that function as information blocks, where only information that fits the narrative preferences of the group can find a place. In addition to this a notable subsection of people having a notable preference for negatively loaded information, which they will seek almost if not entirely without prompting, but also spread into their own personal social networks spanning multiple platforms. Herman and Chomsky argued that there is, functionally, no media that is not propaganda, simply because of the inherent bias that exists within their structure. I argue that this is also true within online spaces. The digital world is all information and the self-selection process towards a person's existing personal bias, as well as the bias of any platform moderator or platform owner, transforms the digital space into a natural path for perpetual reinforcement of an individual's bias.

5.0 The reports

For this section I will present the 5 reports that I intend to analyze for information on the influence operations of Russian intelligence services. To do this I have chosen to use a document analysis method. This methodology was chosen as it allows me to extract the relevant information for my thesis from these reports as well as providing the option of rearranging the information into a structure more suitable for analysis. This allows me to explain how Russian intelligence services structure their influencing operations more easily and lets me apply the theoretical framework I have explained and developed in chapter 4 to the information provided by these reports in a more orderly way.

Before I can do that I will explain why these reports were chosen, do a short explanation on the difficulties of measuring the impact on such operations, and do a short rundown on what each report is, why it was made, and what it contains.

5.1 Why these reports?

A total of 5 reports have been selected, these reports were chosen intentionally to cover for each other's potential weaknesses and strengths. The 3 American reports are direct intelligence reports provided to the US government in order to combat hostile intrusions and influence operations. Summed together they provide a good overview of the efforts targeting the United States by Russian intelligence services, as perceived by US intelligence services. The primary reason for this selection is that they are the closest to a primary source on the subject can be found without access to classified material. The choice of these 3 reports does leave me open for source bias, though the nature of the reports should minimize this as they are not targeted towards the general public but towards government personnel in need factual information which should help minimize error or the reports themselves being part of propaganda or as part of a political ploy. The inclusion of the Australian and Norwegian reports also helps to alleviate this concern. Although both nations are allied with the United States and as such are likely to have similar bias structures and shared source networks they help provide a broader consensus than what can be achieved using a singular nation as a source. These sources are broader and study the concept of foreign interference in general, and so they provide helpful side perspectives and help provide academic backing to conclusions in regards to the intent of actions and provides a broader view on the methodology of influence operations. The issue of shared bias with the US sources remain,

but a truly neutral source would be impossible to find, and information from the hostile part would be similarly impossible to find as neither the Russian or the Chinese government publicize their influence operations. I have concluded that this type of broad-spectrum method of analyzing reports while utilizing specific intelligence assessments for detail will have to suffice to avoid bias as much as is possible while maintaining the necessary clarity and sufficiently reliable source material on how exactly Russian influence operations are structured.

5.2 The difficulty of measuring impact of hostile operations

The major issue is finding and measuring the existence and impact of influence operations is the problem of separating it from internal dissent, native grown opposition, and people simply protesting injustice. The reports, being intelligence reports or reports capturing the effects of intelligence operations, have an inherent flaw in their ability to clearly capture events. What they are trying to capture is, by definition, hidden, and could be missed or could even not even be present at all.¹¹⁹ Even when captured these operations may be using intermediaries who could not even be aware that they are being used for propaganda purposes by a hostile state. The effects could also be difficult to measure. Groups who share links spread by Russian operations also overlap with groups that previous work has categorized as nationalists or generally critical of government systems.¹²⁰ These groups, as well as opposition groups in general, have a vested interest in utilizing similar techniques as Russian intelligence services. The difference between a Russian hostile operation and a local activist dissatisfied with government institutions can be marginal and so they can be functionally indistinguishable from each other and not readily apparent.¹²¹ Especially as previously covered the major operations also function be exacerbating existing divisions, picking up on a long-term trend of lessening trust in public institutions as well as lessening trust in media, often exacerbated by any immediate effort to shape public opinion through disinformation.¹²² Even if we assume the intent is to create discord and hostility between groups in the targeted populations, to what degree is that hostility coming from other sources? A difficult question to answer, and one that the reports largely cannot accurately measure. The reports can find specific activities

¹¹⁹ Sivertsen et al. 2022: Page 22

¹²⁰ Sivertsen et al. 2022: Page 45

¹²¹ Hanson et al. 2019: Page 12-13: Page 16

¹²² Hanson et al. 2019: Page 14: Page 15

happening, but often they cannot tell to what degree that action had an effect, if at all.¹²³

Reports can find evidence of foreign intelligence involvement or support to radical groups that are political in nature or attempting to influence their national politics¹²⁴, but they cannot provide anything conclusive about the degree of which these radical groups would exist without this support or to what degree the group's effectiveness is affected by this support.

In addition to the already existing problem of separating hostile action from the locally produced conspiracy theorist is the issue of commercial interest. The Hacking Democracies report specifically brings up the issue of a Balkan group that ran popular Facebook pages like 'Australians against Sharia' and 'Aussie infidels', intended to gather ad revenue by targeting the Australian public, particularly those more likely to consistently consume such content which I argue is a commercialization of the doomscrolling phenomenon, essentially making people angry in order to generate profit through advertisement.¹²⁵

5.3 Joint Analysis Report GRIZZLY STEPPE – Russian Malicious Cyber Activity

This report was created by the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Bureau of Investigation that provides an overview over the tools used by the Russian military intelligence. This report is the shortest and most limited of the reports covered as it does not contain information on the motivations behind the Russian efforts, nor does it go into the methodology of their manipulation efforts themselves. This report's focus is on direct malicious activity attempting to gather information and commit cyber-attacks intended to do direct harm towards specific individuals and organizations. The report focuses on the methodology of these direct cyber operations, with the intent of creating a source of threats and provide threat awareness. The report has been included for its usefulness in cataloguing early efforts in the pre-propaganda phase of Russian influence operations.

¹²³ Sivertsen et al. 2022: Page 19: Hanson et al., 2019: Page 11

¹²⁴ Sivertsen et al. 2022: Page 16

¹²⁵ Hanson et al. 2019: Page 15

5.4 Intelligence Community Assessment 2017 - Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections

This report was created as a community effort by The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and The National Security Agency (NSA). The report provides an assessment of the activities of Russian intelligence services and their attempts to influence the 2016 US election. The report makes some essential claims, the most important of which is the claim that there was an organized effort to influence the US election by Russian intelligence. That this effort was ordered from the top down. That this effort included a multi-faceted approach to spreading propaganda. This effort was intended to assist Donald Trump in winning the presidential election, and finally that the fundamental goal of the operation was to undermine the position of the United States of America as a world leader.¹²⁶ The report is included for its coverage of the 2016 election, and to demonstrate how these operations function over longer time periods.

5.4 Intelligence Community Assessment Foreign Threats to the 2020 US Federal Election

This report was created as a community effort by The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), The Department of Homeland Security, The Bureau of Intelligence and Research, and The National Security Agency (NSA). The report provides an assessment of the activities of Russian intelligence services and their attempts to influence the 2016 US election.

The report makes some essential claims that are not present in the previous reports. Notably, it includes the likely short and long-term goals of the Russian interference effort, as well as providing further insight into the methodology of spreading information. It is not a report on the degree to which these operations succeeded, and this will not be covered. The report is also limited to actions designed to influence people, not direct interference in the form of attacking the technical aspects of voting, like machines and or attempting to interfere with ballot counting.¹²⁷ It has been included to provide a complimentary picture of Russian activities to the information provided in the previous reports.

¹²⁶ ICA 2017: Page 1

¹²⁷ ICA 2021: Page 3

5.5 Hacking democracies - Cataloguing cyber-enabled attacks on elections

An Australian report originating from the Australian strategic policy institute. Which looks at online originating and enabled foreign interference in election and attempts to provide as catalogue of targets while providing solutions to these problems. The report was chosen for its cataloguing of the various efforts made by Chinese and Russian intelligence towards various European and Anglosphere states and is particularly useful as a structured source on information on influence operations that can be used in comparison with the American reports on the influence efforts of what they perceive to be hostile states.

5.6 Unwanted foreign influence? - mapping and analysis of the 2021 general election¹²⁸

A Norwegian report originating from the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment.¹²⁹ The study attempts to determine if the 2021 Norwegian election was impacted by foreign influence through the spread of disinformation or manipulation of the public through websites or social media. The study catalogues existing information on methodology sourced from previous work and goes through signs of similar manipulation on social media platforms commonly used by the Norwegian public. This report functions as another summary of other reports which are useful as comparison information to the descriptions of Russian intent and methodology provided by the 3 American reports.

¹²⁸ Uønsket utenlandsk påvirkning? – kartlegging og analyse av stortingsvalget 2021 (my translation)

¹²⁹ Forsvarets Forskningsinstitutt

6.0 Existing vulnerabilities

To study the method of the Russian efforts to influence the US public there are some concerns specific to the United States and its vulnerabilities towards influence efforts that should be covered, notably in regards to its recent history of media regulation which has led to an increase in partisanship and a penchant towards conspiratorial thinking.

In their book *You are here* communication professors Phillips and Milner document how the media landscape in the United States underwent significant changes during the middle to late 1900s. One key factor in this evolution was the rise of fundamentalist broadcast media, which was facilitated by a combination of factors including the availability of infrastructure and interested audiences, as well as deregulation. Prior to the 1980s, the Federal Communications Commission's Fairness Doctrine required broadcast stations to devote airtime to matters of public interest and to present diverse perspectives on these issues. This had the function of limiting extremist voices likely to run counter to the established narratives. However, in the 1980s the growing popularity of cable television which were not held by the same standard led to the decline of the Fairness Doctrine, which allowed for more hyper partisan and targeted programming as networks sought to attract and retain audiences through more specialized content. In addition to the FCC simply dismissing most complaints anyway.¹³⁰

With the release of the fairness doctrine to the efforts of market self-regulation, mainstream media channels dedicated their content towards demographic specialization, self-regulation effectively chaining the media channels to search for the content that most engaged its viewers and thus created profit.¹³¹ Further, the emergence of read/write media, like cassettes, later CDs, hard drives and more, which provided people with the ability to record, mix, and share content they produced or that produced by others but recorded, copied, and/or distributed by them. This development further contributed to this change in the media landscape, allowing for more people to be heard who otherwise would have been prevented access through the traditional methods of controlling the media as people could make their own tapes, record their own messages, and create their own informational content that they could distribute as they desired.¹³²

¹³⁰ Phillips & Milner 2021: Page 50

¹³¹ Phillips & Milner 2021: Page 50

¹³² Phillips & Milner 2021: Page 25

Secondary from this is the issue of the United States public and their affinity towards conspiracy theories. From the 1960s forward suspicion towards the government has been on the increase, not the least of which because it was valid. Anti-governmental attitudes and suspicion towards the federal government became commonplace after the 1960s. A growing surveillance system spied on the public and interfered in people's lives. Particularly the exposure of actual conspiracies must have increased the power of conspiracy theories. From slandering activists they wanted to shut down to hiding information deemed damaging to the government. To Nixon's Watergate scandal of having wiretapped the democratic party's headquarters to Reagan's Iran-Contra affair, having broken an arms embargo to Iran to fund the Contra militia attempting to overthrow the government of Honduras. A general suspicion, suspicion arising for good reason, grew within the United States public towards their government and the journalists pushing government information.¹³³ We have now reached the point where multiple generations have lived within this narrative structure, not an undeserved one, and as such there is a deep-rooted suspicion towards the government that is ever present within the general public.

The last point for this is the issue of organizations and loose confederations of similarly minded personalities created their own communication channels, something which again has been ongoing within the United States now for several decades. The example for which Phillips and Milner uses is the evangelical Christian radio networks which started showing up in the 1950s and kept growing. With some, like the Christian Broadcasting Network at one point being the third-largest cable network in the United States. With a serious distrust of mainstream news networks, often considered too willing to simply restate the claims of the federal government with a complete lack of critical thinking.¹³⁴ The issue being pointed out here is of course that the United States has a rich history of conspiratorial thinking, partly deserved, and a history of large alternative media channels sought out particularly for their willingness to be contrary to the government. From a perspective that includes an understanding of the Russian goals for their influencing operations, specifically as their previously established primary goal being to undermine social cohesion, these existing fractures makes for fertile ground for their operations targeting social cohesion.

¹³³ Phillips & Milner 2021: Page 122

¹³⁴ Phillips & Milner 2021: Page 49

6.1 Goals

The intent of Ellulian propaganda is not to convince, but to inspire into action. Measures used should then be seen not only through what they are, but what they are trying to achieve.

Focusing on the bigger picture. Two of these reports give us a clear picture of the goals of this type of influence operation, with the *Hacking democracies* report notably covering both Russian and Chinese operations towards elections in a more general sense while the ICA 2021 report providing an overview of Russian intentions for their influence operations aimed specifically at the 2020 US presidential election. The *Hacking democracies* report notes a difference in Russian and Chinese operations and speculates on the motives for this. Russian interference, it states, is directly aimed toward the democratic system itself and focused on the simpler goal of eroding public trust and increase division within the nations Russia is hostile towards. The report also provides some speculation on the cause of this possibly being Putin's personal hostility towards the west and a desire for revenge for the fall of the USSR. A destruction of the democratic system serving as said revenge, but also with the intent of dissuading the Russian public from wanting to adopt such a system. Putin's personal revenge desires aside, the *Hacking democracies* report also points out a desire to assist those members of opposition parties they see as sympathetic to Russia or whose goals are aligned with theirs as part of a strategy of short-term gains.¹³⁵

The ICA 2021 report covers the Russian efforts towards the 2020 presidential election. According to this report the primary goal of this particular influence effort was the reelection of Donald Trump who Russian leadership considered a preferable alternative to the Biden administration, which they viewed as hostile, while the Trump administration seemed less assertive in its geopolitical goals while also more willing to make deals with Russia.¹³⁶ The overarching objective presented in the ICA 2021 report then is the weakening of the United States as a geopolitical power. Either through the election of what Russia considered a president they considered more manageable, or if that was unsuccessful through weakening the ability of the sitting administration to pursue geopolitical goals at odds with Russian interests.

¹³⁵ Hanson et al. 2019: Page 9

¹³⁶ ICA 2021: Page 5

The ICA2021 report and the Hacking Democracies report agree that the primary target was to cause sociopolitical division and undermine the people's confidence in the democratic process. The ICA 2021 report, as well as the Hacking democracies report found that Russian intelligence networks were boosting the profiles of candidates on both sides of the political spectrum and attempting to increase the social divides within the public, particularly with the boosting of what it defined as non-establishment candidates as the goal of the influence operations during this period. While trying to amplify existing mistrust in the democratic process by highlighting accusations of voting fraud.¹³⁷ There were also attempts to cause damage by not only by questioning the democratic model itself but also using disinformation to exploit legitimate criticism of the justice system to question the entire system of governance and creating mistrust by spreading conspiracy theories and doing harm by undermining the general public's belief in the system that governs them.¹³⁸ The end goal then seems to be the unravelling of the systems of governance, eventually causing democratic systems to fail.¹³⁹ That is not to say that there were no short-term goals, as pointed out previously with the general assistance towards those they view as sympathetic, but pointing out that these short-term goals were part of a wider long-term strategy with grander aspirations. According to the ICA 2021 report Russian operations were particularly concerned with the American presidential election and that the primary objective of Russian interference efforts, at least for this limited section of time, was to prevent the election of Joe Biden.¹⁴⁰ However I argue that to achieve those short-term goals they utilized their long-term project of increasing division and distrust in the democratic system. Within the framework propaganda is a long-term project creating a lasting change within the individual to make them actionable. The Russian efforts to enflame social tensions and eroding public trust in the established system of governance allows them to undermine candidates like Biden, whose long service time in the political sphere means he can be considered an establishment candidate.

The Ellulian view is that of a long-term effort which makes people actionable. From that perspective these short-term goals, attempting to prevent the election of a particular candidate, can be considered less of a propaganda effort itself and more of an attempt to

¹³⁷ ICA 2021: Page 3; Hanson et al. 2019: Page 9

¹³⁸ Hanson et al. 2019: Page 15; ICA 2021: Page 4

¹³⁹ Hanson et al. 2019: Page 13

¹⁴⁰ ICA 2021: Page 4

utilize the propaganda infrastructure already built over a period of several years to achieve short-term gains while at the same time continuing ongoing propaganda efforts to further radicalize individuals and increase political divisions by inflaming existing social divisions and perceived inequalities. This was then achieved not by supporting any particular ideology, outside of the attempts to support presidential candidates they saw as being friendly to Russia, which is why there is no ideological consistency. Russian services do not seem to support any political movement, rather they support anyone who is hostile towards someone else within the United States who can be reliably pushed towards creating or escalating internal conflict within the US. Although there was a slight preference towards those they perceived as less hostile towards the Russian Federation, particularly candidates whose geopolitical policies matched those of Russia. When that was not possible then they seem to have supported anyone not part of the general section of mainstream American politics, which they perceived as anti-Russian.¹⁴¹ Not limiting themselves to people in direct support of Russian interest, Russian operations had a secondary focus on political persons and groups focusing on internal issues and whose geopolitical programs remained underdeveloped or in line with Russian intentions. Particularly people whose focus on internal issues could be relied upon to distract the public, the media, and the politicians away from international affairs, keeping them from enacting any geopolitical policy or to maintain an effective hostile posture towards Russian geopolitical moves. This is expected from the reports' claims that the long term goal was creating distrust in the political system itself, with radicalized persons committing themselves further to working against the system and replacing political disagreement with hostility. This has the effect of making honest debate more difficult as political debate is founded on good faith discussion, an honest belief in the opposition speaking honestly and combating their standpoint by countering the arguments they put forth, rather than strawmen built around hostile representations of the opposition's character.

The Chinese influence operations, in contrast with the Russian efforts seem to be less targeted and less destructive. The Hacking democracies report points out how, rather than the Russian focus on eroding public belief in the system, Chinese efforts are focused on a general goal of promoting China's viewpoints across the political spectrum with a widespread methodology most of which are outside the digital space, for example financial donations and encouraging

¹⁴¹ ICA 2021: Page 4

individuals to advocate on their behalf.¹⁴² The Chinese are about repurposing the existing system to work for them, rather than causing damage to the systems themselves.

The Chinese methodology seems to fit closer to the propaganda of Bernays more marketing centric propaganda of opinion than that of Ellul's focus on creating actionable citizens of the targeted country. Though the Chinese efforts are clearly working a long-term in the spirit of Ellul, they are less concerned with direct action from those influenced. The Chinese efforts, at least internationally, seem focused on simply creating friendly attitudes and beliefs attuned to their existing long term foreign policy goals, for example building support for their territorial claims by creating an image of their validity.

The Chinese and Russian efforts primarily share one characteristic. They are long-term goals demonstrating an intention of carrying out influence operations targeting the populations of other states over long periods of time. That is to be expected as all propaganda must be a long-term project to be effective, which not just Ellul states but also Bernays and his work on propaganda as a way of creating a habit and the subject's understanding of the world. Knowing the goals of are long term and having this understanding of how propaganda functions this demonstrates a reason to be concerned particularly about social media. In chapter 2.1 I pointed out how much time the average user spends online on any given day, with that time spent online comes a considerable ability to influence the average person through control over their viewing habits. Ellul spends significant time in his theory on propaganda on the importance of controlling the information consumption of the person being influenced. Social media provides a whole new method of doing so, and with that comes the new concern of these companies and their ability to control narratives. When the question is about foreign states and their ability to influence the public of their adversaries the main concern becomes the pathways these states have to maintain influence operations over long periods of time.

¹⁴² Hanson et al. 2019: Page 9

6.2 Information gathering

For this section the focus is on the coverage provided by the JRA and ICA reports on the intelligence-gathering operations as conducted by the Russian intelligence services, primarily those conducted by the groups these reports refer to as Advanced Persistent Threat 28 and Advanced Persistent Threat 29, hereafter referred to as Fancy Bear and Cozy Bear.¹⁴³

These hacker groups, either affiliated with or directly employed by The Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, hereafter referred to as GRU, target government organizations, think tanks, universities, and corporations. Though the democratic party in particular was repeatedly attacked and GRU units gathered large amounts of data belonging to the DNC.¹⁴⁴ The Russian primary avenue of attack seems to have been phishing and spearphishing¹⁴⁵ campaigns intended to gain access to the target organization's computer network.¹⁴⁶ Through these access points they have been able to find and extract information that could then be analyzed and used for further operations, or simply dumped as generalist leaks of harmful material.¹⁴⁷ *The Report On The Investigation Into Russian Interference In The 2016 Presidential Election*, commonly referred to as the Mueller report, claims that these hack and release operations were used during the 2016 American presidential election to weaken presidential candidates.¹⁴⁸ The information gained through these operations varied but mostly consisted of various confidential information on the organization's operations in addition to the credentials of workers. This was subsequently used to establish links to other potential targets and to infiltrate further into target systems. The JRA report provides a simple explanation of how such a phishing campaign functions:

“In spring 2016, APT28 compromised the same political party, again via targeted spearphishing. This time, the spearphishing email tricked recipients into changing their passwords through a fake webmail domain hosted on APT28 operational infrastructure. Using the harvested credentials, APT28 was able to gain access and

¹⁴³ Ward 2016

¹⁴⁴ ICA 2017: Page 2

¹⁴⁵ For a definition of these terms see list of terminology on page

¹⁴⁶ For a definition of these terms see list of terminology on page

¹⁴⁷ JRA 2017: Page 3

¹⁴⁸ Mueller: Page 41-47

steal content, likely leading to the exfiltration of information from multiple senior party members.”¹⁴⁹

As the report explains, once they had access to the information most easily attainable they subsequently leveraged the knowledge gained to craft more accurate and convincing spearphishing campaigns against targets of notable value. Spearphishing campaigns function in two different ways. The primary way was by sending a simple email designed to appear as a message from a member of the organization, causing the recipient to respond to it without checking the email’s sender thereby spilling confidential information directly to the creator of the campaign. These emails can be something as simple as a short message asking a question on an ongoing project or giving the person a simple task, addressing it from their immediate superior. The secondary method was to use a similar method to gain access to information hubs. This was done, for example, by placing links into emails that when clicked were designed to gain access to the target individual’s computer, through which they could gain further access into the organization’s network. The basic methodology of information gathering used here is relatively simple. The initial process used simple tools and threw a wide net to catch just about anything of interest, which could then be utilized to craft more targeted operations and gain further information with the intent of gathering useful material for later efforts in propaganda. This is also reflected in the ICA 2021 report which also claims that the initial round of interference came in the form of information gathering operations using similar methodology, though this report was less specific on the exact manner. As quoted from the 2021 report:

“For example, shortly after the 2018 midterm elections, Russian intelligence cyber actors attempted to hack organizations primarily affiliated with the Democratic Party. Separately, the GRU unsuccessfully targeted US political actors in 2019 and 2020; this activity aligned with the tactics of a larger intelligence-gathering campaign.”¹⁵⁰

The ICA 2021 and ICA 2017 reports both demonstrate similar targeting profiles for information gathering operations, demonstrating similar target profiles over time. From the

¹⁴⁹ JRA 2017: Page 3

¹⁵⁰ ICA 2021: Page 3

Ellulian perspective this is to be expected, with its focus on propaganda being long-term operations.

The ICA2021 report seems to say that this round of information gathering operations were less successful than previous operations, possibly as a result of protective measures taken after the JRA reports previous findings. With Phishing and Spearphishing operations being relatively simple strategies that rely on the target not being aware of the attempts against it and simple human error, countermeasures are thus similarly easy to implement as the target profiles simply have to actually check the source of emails and other forms of digital communication. Despite the ease with which countermeasures can be made, the report concedes that Russian intelligence still managed to gather some information it could have released as part of its operations.¹⁵¹

The Russian target profiles for their intelligence-gathering operations are noteworthy for its correlation with their future operational plans as they have been described by these reports. The main targets are those politically active individuals tied to political and activist organizations, the exact kind involved in high tension issues that Russian intelligence wants to influence. While looking at the targets we can see which information they are trying to get a hold of and which individuals and organizations they are attempting to gain information on. The information they seek is that which will be relevant to later propaganda efforts. The target profile being politically active individuals means the later influence operations will be targeted at either the organizations themselves or people associated with them. This is also important from the perspective of the propagandist who needs to create interest in their target population. As explained in section 4.4 on the importance of facts, a statement that is too easily checked and discovered as untrue won't be as successful simply because anyone not already fully propagandized won't accept something that is untrue, particularly if it also fails to meet their prior belief system. The obvious solution to this is to do what the GRU¹⁵² units here are doing, collect a set of information that they can distribute as necessary. Ellul claims that the propagandist must know what they can lie about, how the group functions, and which buttons to push in order to create the desired effect. In that respect I argue the information gathering operations are not simply trying to get sensitive information that can be used to simply create a public backlash, but they are studying their targets for information on the

¹⁵¹ ICA 2021: Page 3

¹⁵² For a definition of these terms see list of terminology on page

inner workings on the organization. By doing this they both create a larger knowledge base they can use to intercept or steal further information, but more importantly, they gain access to the inner workings of political organizations that can then be manipulated into desirable actions.

The digital space offers new pathways for this aspect of pre-propaganda efforts and Russian intelligence services have clearly dedicated a considerable effort towards maintaining these information gathering operations over time, with at least 6 years' worth being covered in the ICA 2017 and 2021 reports. While it is not explicitly stated in these reports I consider it highly probably that these intelligence gathering operations also studied online groups, particularly various fora already populated with people whose ideological framework was suitable for their influence operations, in order to find the most effective ways to distribute the information found using preexisting groups and borrowing the credibility of leaders in the field, something that will be covered in greater detail in section 6.3 laying foundation for influence. I find the study of target groups to be a crucial part of the influence operation process that the reports fail to capture, but it must have occurred as without it they would be unable to know which middlemen to feed information to or which groups were most likely to accept which information. To successfully spread their desired stories a study of target groups must have been part of their information gathering operations.

6.3 Laying foundation for influence

In section 4.10 I explained the need for propaganda to be active on an individual over long periods of time in order to successfully change a person's framework, which is necessary to make them accept the propaganda. The Sivertsen report brings up 'operation secondary infektion' (sic), which spanned a large network of social for a, blogs, and various online profiles spreading what the report refers to as "fake news" targetting not only the US but several European countries. The analytical company Graphika claims that this operation had been active since 2014 and was still ongoing as of 2020.¹⁵³ This is of course only one operation and seems to have been active for at least 6 years, possibly longer.

For the effort described in the ICA 2021 report Russian actors began as early as 2014 to spread a narrative of President Biden and his family, along with other US officials, having ties to Ukraine. Ukrainian linked proxies with connected networks were used to create plausible

¹⁵³ Sivertsen et al. 2022: Page 16

deniability of Russian involvement in the attempt to undermine Biden's presidential campaign.¹⁵⁴ The focus on President Biden this early is notable. Biden was, at the time, not running for any continued office yet seems to have already been a focus during the planning of operations. Targets for negative information campaigns were selected several years before they were necessarily ready to be used in an actionable way, which Ellul would call tilling the land intended to prepare the target group for more information to be dispensed later. Russian intelligence services are here beginning the slow feed of repeating information which continues until those listening start believing it simply because of having been told so many times over, while building the credibility of sources. Information networks of people already likely to believe this type of information had been built up over time which left fact checking, if there ever was any, by the wayside long before the operation needed to kick into gear to activate the target populations. Russian intelligence likely identified who were likely to be presidential candidates, analyzed which ones they found preferable, before they studied how to effectively support or denigrate each candidate to achieve a preferable result.

The second aspect of interest here is the use of proxies and proxy networks to hide Russian involvement. The report uses the words plausible deniability, likely because a sophisticated intelligence network is unlikely to be fooled by simply using proxies to spread information. The proxies are then not there to prevent US intelligence from understanding where the information is coming from, rather it is there for the targets of the Russian interference effort. In the theory section I covered the idea that the propagandee must be complicit in their own propagandization. They must, at some level, choose to consume what the propagandist puts in front of them. Even the politically indoctrinated would find it difficult to rationalize taking what they know to be foreign disinformation campaign at its word, but that doesn't mean they don't want it to be true. A thin veneer of plausible deniability could be sufficient for them to mentally compartmentalize the information as true without asking any more questions. As I covered in section 4.15, vertical spread of propaganda, Ellul claims that people tend to have a compartment of people and sources of information that they fundamentally trust. When information comes from these sources they are less likely to question it, often not at all. Further, in section 4.4 I spoke about Ellul's concept of local facts¹⁵⁵, to not be immediately and obviously contrary to what the target of influence knows to be true. In that section I also

¹⁵⁴ ICA 2021: Page 3

¹⁵⁵ For a definition of these terms see list of terminology on page

argue that in our digital age with mass consumption of information fact checking everything you hear is no longer functionally possible even if it was something people were willing to do. A cover for misinformation then doesn't have to be perfect, only good enough to withstand immediate and highly superficial scrutiny. Russian services achieved this by simply feeding their targets with the right information based on the target's personal preference, as well as hiding that information was manipulated through proxies and false news sites.¹⁵⁶ The amount of cover needed was minimal as it only needed to be sufficient to become accepted. As said in section 4.6 people do not change their minds when informed that they are factually wrong. Getting the information out there and accepted then was the key as once that element had been achieved the opposition's complaints could be portrayed as lies about the information's purity.

In section 4.6 I covered cognitive dissonance and the power it has to maintain opinions, people do not change their minds once committed. By being early and getting the information accepted by the propagandized the attempts by to correct the picture by explaining any information caused the already propagandized to double down on their first impression, rather than course correct. This issue was likely increased with the move to the digital space. During Ellul's time a person was more limited in their ability to select contacts. Their communities and social groups had to be within a reasonable physical distance. The digital space allows communities across endless distance, effectively making the entire world a possible member of each community. With that comes the ability of the individual to make more choices for their sociological contact points. They can engage with anyone, anywhere. Therefore, they have also increased their ability to select groups who fit their personal ideas more closely. Communities become more closed, more isolated, and with that even less likely to accept contradictory information. As was covered in section 4.12 on the propagandee's participation, the move to digital fora has damaged cross ideology communication to the point that online less than 10% of communication was across political aisles, and when it does it consists mostly of attacks rather than effective communication. This is why the Russian effort here is based around getting their foot in the door and getting their information to become that accepted truth. The psychology of the human mind, and online group dynamics, will do the rest. This is a curious new aspect of online group dynamics. Despite widespread groups of various sizes, people appear to self-select into a variety of groups consisting of people of

¹⁵⁶ Sivertsen et al. 2022: Page 15-16

similar psychological profiles, and with that access into some turns into access into a large amount of them. Individual users exist within a variety of groups and appear to drag information from one into the other, where it appears to be accepted. This is where the horizontal spread effect that Ellul speaks on, and that is part of Powell's modernized propaganda, happens. The propagandist inserts desired information into the group and through group membership overlap it spreads through related communities until it is fully infused into the entirety of the echosystem.¹⁵⁷

As part of laying their foundation of influence Russian services participated in coverup operations. During their interference in the 2016 US presidential election Russian services participated ran operations creating false information pointing towards Ukrainian intelligence services and that this effort of covertly attributing their own efforts to Ukraine was maintained during the Trump presidency. Further, the JRA report claims this was done specifically to make the Trump administration less likely to provide support to Ukraine.¹⁵⁸ The invasion of Ukraine changes the picture on this somewhat. International support, particularly that of the US, has been a vital part of Ukraine's ability to withstand the Russian invasion. We can reasonably infer from this information that the intent was to create a belief within the Trump administration, possibly with Trump himself, that the election interference in 2016 was real, that it was carried out by Ukraine, and that this effort was intended to keep him out of office. While the JRA report claims that the intent of this was simply covering up hostile cyber-attacks and deflecting the political fallout onto Ukraine as a third-party, I believe that the invasion creates credible reason to think this was part of long-term strategy to influence Trump into denying material support to Ukraine.¹⁵⁹ This is relevant for the continued effort of influencing Trump's supporters within the general public, the likely primary targets of influence operations. Shifting the blame of these operations away from Russia and any connection with Trump toward the political opponents of his supporters likely being the goal. Not just creating hostility towards Ukraine but also in how this lays the groundwork within Trump's supporters for future distrust of the electoral system. This then becomes an example of using a temporary operation as part of a larger scale operation, intended to lay a foundation for future influence operations based around distrust in the democratic system and laying

¹⁵⁷ For a definition of these terms see list of terminology on page

¹⁵⁸ ICA 2021: Page 3

¹⁵⁹ JRA 2017: Page 1

down a history of suspicion towards the integrity of the democratic system itself. This is further enhanced by continuing the influence effort during the Trump administration, maintaining this section of propaganda over time. The propagandee here gets indoctrinated with the idea that the opposition is cheating, they're always cheating, even when you won it was against them cheating and you were just too smart for them to get away with it, and you must always be on guard or they will cheat again and win next time. This works on all sides of the political spectrum as the fear of foreign involvement itself becomes a tool of propaganda, even when there is no proof.¹⁶⁰ Fear is a base emotion and fear of interference within your national elections, which decide the leaders of your state, most assuredly is a powerful force for creating significant and lasting engagement with information placed within these groups. If the idea that national elections are possibly illegitimate first gains ground within the group identity that makes for highly fertile ground for future influence operations inserting claims of election interference and similar illegitimate information.

6.4 Method of distribution

After the pre-propaganda phase the Russian efforts turned towards distributing the information gained. To explain the Russian structure for distributing information during their influence operation I utilize a slightly modified 4-stage model as presented in 4.16.

The first stage, as Ellul explains, is the primary method of disseminating information. The official Russian channels of communication. In this section Russia utilizes its own government-owned media organizations. As a large and relatively functional state Russia has its own media organizations that continually produce media content, allowing the state to spread information directly to the channel's followers. This stage is relatively direct and uncomplicated. These are the official organizations directly connected to Russia, so they naturally fall under the umbrella of white propaganda.¹⁶¹ They are Russia's news services in which they, by owning the platform, get the benefit of the doubt. Those who chose to consume this media already trusts Russian outlets and consider them reliable. These people follow Ellul's concept of the propagandee's participation. These people have deliberately sought out Russian propaganda outlets and have already decided to accept information coming from this source as it caters to their pre-selected opinions. To an extent, they have already accepted the information that they subconsciously expect to be presented.

¹⁶⁰ Sivertsen et al. 2022: Page 15-16

¹⁶¹ For a definition of these terms see list of terminology on page

These organizations have had some success as demonstrated by Russia Today, their state network, which has established branches in other nations including the UK and the US. They do make some attempts to present themselves as independent, and as part of that Russia Today hires personnel from western states. These are people employed for their preexisting agenda or similar views to Russia Today. Particularly people who display an interest in working against western mainstream thinking and those who defend Russia Today on social media and are already active supporters of their organizations. These affiliates do not necessarily present themselves as associated with RT when interviewing people, many of these hires and associates have affiliations to other media and activist organizations in the United States and as a result of this effort Russia Today has, according to the report, gained large amounts of influence across the Anglo-Saxon world and become the most-watched foreign news network in the UK.¹⁶² There are also records of disinformation operations funneled through RT targeting France and Italy.¹⁶³ The stage 1 efforts also include a multitude of pro-Russian sites portraying themselves as non-affiliated to the Russian state. For example The Strategic Culture Foundation which is connected to the Russian foreign intelligence service SVR.¹⁶⁴ RT also being a considerable mention on social media, being the most common source linked to in Norwegian Russian aligned social media networks.¹⁶⁵ All of this combining to demonstrate an increase in the number of people who choose to consume the content of both known and concealed Russian state media organizations.

The second stage consists of smaller more localized accounts that are more directly aimed towards specific groups. In the case of Russian influence operations their focus is on foreign news services and other third-party intermediaries.¹⁶⁶ These organizations are not partnered with Russian organizations but are selected for their pre-existing bias. These have been selected because they, like the people who run them, have a bias that means they will accept information provided to them by Russian services and can be relied on to distribute it. These are partners of convenience who are given access to information that lines up with the objectives shared by the Russian state through unofficial leaks. During this stage the Russian intelligence network utilized existing information networks that are not connected to them,

¹⁶² ICA 2017: Page 6-12

¹⁶³ Hanson et al. 2019: Page 12

¹⁶⁴ Sivertsen et al. 2022: Page 26-27

¹⁶⁵ Sivertsen et al. 2022: Page 44

¹⁶⁶ ICA 2017: Page 12; Sivertsen et al. 2022: Page 15-16

removing the Russian footprint from the information being shared and borrowing the perceived legitimacy of those intermediaries utilized. These official channels are not required to appear non-partisan, but they can build their legitimacy by utilizing organizations that do have an image of non-partisan authenticity. For this purpose the Russians utilized the organization WikiLeaks to deploy information they wanted to release.

“We assess with high confidence that the GRU relayed material it acquired from the DNC and senior Democratic officials to WikiLeaks. Moscow most likely chose WikiLeaks because of its self-proclaimed reputation for authenticity. Disclosures through WikiLeaks did not contain any evident forgeries.”¹⁶⁷

As noted in the theory section the appearance of truth is of some importance. The information disseminated through WikiLeaks, therefore, had to stand up to a fact check in order to help maintain WikiLeaks’ appearance of authenticity. The extent to which the Russian connection was hidden is somewhat disputable, but the WikiLeaks connection was not public. Regardless of factuality Russian media distributing the information directly would have appeared as attacks and have the information be more likely to be dismissed. Hiding the source of the information made it appear trustworthy, which provided a perception of it being factual which, as was covered in section 4.4 on facts and lies, is of outmost importance for the propagandist. I argue that these contacts with activist groups not just functioned to distribute information, but they also allowed official Russian media groups to enhance their perceived veracity in the eyes of those not already convinced that they were reliable organizations. They got to be the first to report from trusted sources that hold up to fact checks, building on their public perception as reliable distributors of perceived truth, and as the information itself was actually accurate any non-affiliated media organization that attempted to downplay the information automatically had their perceived truthfulness lowered.

The use of public third-party intermediaries was not limited to public transparency organizations like WikiLeaks. Personnel associated with Russian intelligence attempted to utilize established US media companies as well as people of note who could be relied upon to handle the material given out in a manner that was suitable for Russian interests, further establishing their perceived necessity of cleaning their hands to reach the public. This is also an acknowledgment of the need for perceived truth. The need for the propagandee’s participation is based around the built-in skepticism towards anything outside of their chosen

¹⁶⁷ ICA 2017: Page 12

media. By building it into the operations of a network trusted by the propagandee Russian intelligence bypasses this issue. To achieve this they sought out prominent persons and popular media networks. People linked with the Trump administration were pushed to advocate for formal investigations, US firms were hired to petition US officials and attempts were made to contact senior officials.¹⁶⁸ Media figures were contacted and there was even a documentary produced that aired on US television.¹⁶⁹ This follows a more traditional methods of disseminating propaganda, although not using government media organizations Russian intelligence here utilized the existing media organizations of the target country. We can assume there was an effort to analyze the ideological basis on which these organizations operate to allow for precise targeting. The organizations that could be trusted to present the information in the way desired by Russian intelligence without being controlled or ordered to do so where fed information catering to their preexisting bias. From the Chinese side even simpler methods like attempted bribery of public officials has also been attempted.¹⁷⁰ Though someone bribed is not propagandized, as they do not believe in the facts they say. As covered in section 4.4, the propagandist cannot believe in what they are saying, they believe in the cause of why they are saying it. They are trying to create a specific effect. To that effect, any third party that has been recruited or supported by the Russian services as a result of their actual beliefs are not propagandists because it can be assumed they are speaking their genuinely held beliefs. This does create something of a conundrum because they effectively become propagandists by virtue of spreading the Russian narrative, though simultaneously they psychologically speaking are part of the propagandized.

In addition to the real sites, Russian networks have also used false versions of real more verifiable news sites to create articles that are false but stand up to a superficial glance, manipulate videos and imagery to create false news stories, and similar methods of borrowing the reliability of established news networks to spread narratives.¹⁷¹ For people who are already committed to the belief this is not important, however as covered in section 4.4 and 4.5 some appearance of factuality is important when dealing with people who are not committed, and borrowing the credibility of other news creates entry points for Russian influence efforts into new groups that would otherwise be unavailable. Particularly non-

¹⁶⁸ ICA 2021: Page 3

¹⁶⁹ ICA 2021: Page 3

¹⁷⁰ Sivertsen et al. 2022: Page 17

¹⁷¹ Sivertsen et al. 2022: Page 15-16

decided groups who may be vulnerable but who distrust the media whose bias already matches Russian influence efforts. In section 4.14 I covered modern radicalization theory, notably the case of Tom Olsen whose entry to neo-Nazi community happened through a shared fight against what they perceived as a common enemy. I argue that Russian efforts, by impersonating trusted news, they can provide information which an individual may have a highly negative emotional reaction to, causing them to engage with it and naturally end up taking on that specific fight, where they end up fighting side-by-side, metaphorically speaking, with the groups Russian intelligence services consider as friendly. An association that will also have a potentially negative reaction from the individual's current group identity, alienating them from their current group identity and pushing them towards their new allies. Olsen's case is an excellent example of how this can cause people to further entrench within extremist ideology, especially when they feel they are having their eyes opened. Most propaganda is based on some form of factuality, including Russian efforts as covered in section 6.2 on the information gathering operations that were undoubtedly done for that reason, providing more fuel where an individual in the beginning of their propagandization can come into conflict with their current group.

For the next section I choose to combine the third and fourth stages, in the theoretical framework the third step is for individuals participating, while the fourth step is horizontal spreading through the userbase. For practical reasons these are combined here as this is the introduction of social media and internet personalities in the Russian efforts, and these are functionally indistinct from each other. The Russian services do not, for the most part, directly control social media influencers and as such they have effectively abandoned official control over who spreads the information and in what manner. This includes social media accounts owned by contractors and employees of official organizations, as well as selected social media personalities known for being supportive who Russian media.¹⁷² These are provided signal boosts by Russian controlled entities, but they are not being managed. Russian organizations monitor the social media sphere for these personalities whose existing views match what Russian intelligence wants to spread.¹⁷³ These personalities are fed

¹⁷² Sivertsen et al. 2022: Page 15-16

¹⁷³ ICA 2017: Page 21

information and when appropriate for the Russian goals given signal boosts through means available only online, like the use of so-called troll farms.¹⁷⁴

Troll farms are organizations operating thousands of social media accounts that produce content of a specific type or can be used to engage with the content produced at scale. These types of organizations serve a dual nature as they can dominate social media algorithms and force content to the forefront of what is being viewed by the public, but they also have psychological function as they can create an impression of consensus within the viewing public. As covered in section 4.15, the individual informs the group, but the group also informs the individual. People are liable to follow what they believe other people are already following. These farms created tailor-made content to be shared onto public-facing social media platforms where it can be boosted through manipulating the algorithm to push specific material into the relevant communities, at which point the group consensus can take over and naturally create a horizontal spread of the information that Russian intelligence wanted to disseminate.

“The Kremlin-linked influence organization Project Lakhta and its Lakhta Internet Research (LIR) troll farm—commonly referred to by its former moniker Internet Research Agency (IRA)—amplified controversial domestic issues. LIR used social media personas, news websites, and US persons to deliver tailored content to subsets of the US population. LIR established short-lived troll farms that used unwitting third-country nationals in Ghana, Mexico, and Nigeria to propagate these US-focused narratives, probably in response to efforts by US companies and law enforcement to shut down LIR-associated personas.”¹⁷⁵

As mentioned, these troll farms are used to control narratives. The communities of propagandees must have their dialogue controlled in some manner to ensure that they reach the desired conclusions, as Ellul describes on group dynamics in section 4.7 individual and masses, the creation of somewhat tenuous groups formed around ideology works but their dialogue must then be guided to ensure they reach the correct conclusions. A sufficiently propagandized group will do so on their own, as they have already decided which information to believe before they encounter it. However, the digital space is filled with many

¹⁷⁴ Sivertsen et al. 2022: Page 50: ICA 2021: Page 4

¹⁷⁵ ICA 2021: Page 4

communities in varying stages of propagandization. The groups still in the earlier stages of propagandization may yet reach the wrong conclusion if not properly guided. Russian intelligence uses these troll farms to guide propagandees in the desired direction, both as a group and individually, by controlling their perception of which narratives have been accepted by others in social media. A small artificial signal boost can then lead to natural spread through the general population sharing the media product with other like-minded people. Through this method they effectively spread misinformation through several intermediaries that are on the surface not in contact with them directly. They do not only use these for likes, but for commentary or to quickly share articles over a widespread network, and by utilizing multiple social media groups these farms can share information of a very large area very quickly.¹⁷⁶

This method of utilizing existing personalities is helpful to them as the increased spread allows them to utilize the existing networks of people pre-committed to the political or ideological sphere that is being targeted. These intermediaries come with premade followings who trust the intermediary and so will accept information coming through their chosen source of information. The utilization of these social media intermediaries are more successful than simply using traditional intermediaries like news organizations as the public's trust in news media has significantly declined. The Hacking democracies report mentions a poll from 2018 in Australia, where when asked if they feel like the news media they read provide them with balanced and neutral information a whole 54% of them answered 'never' and 'rarely', the report also references similar results in other democratic nations.¹⁷⁷ A clear distrust of news media adds to the confusion as people end up going to whichever source of media they most consume. As we covered in the introduction section most people consume up to 2 hours' worth of online media content every day, and they do so willingly and with some trust. The rise in parasocial relationships with online media personalities may contribute to this somewhat, with your 'friend' the social media influencer taking priority as a news source over your local TV station's news segment. By utilizing these specifically chosen intermediaries selected from the following of politically active and ideological social media personalities Russian intelligence inserted their chosen narrative into communities formed around these social media personalities. This led to their narrative being accepted by the group, which then

¹⁷⁶ Sivertsen et al. 2022: Page 46: Page 53-54

¹⁷⁷ Hanson et al. 2019: Page 11

translates into being accepted by the individuals within the group. Who, as previously covered, once they are committed to an opinion are almost impossible to move off the path. The group becomes a self-functioning asset that continues to spread Russian propaganda practically unprompted. These group members become further contact points for further spread. The ICA 2017 report claims that the Russian state particularly base its influence operations on narratives that are self-reinforcing and therefore suitable for exactly this type of vertical spread, self-replicating narratives that can be inserted into groups who will take them on in the desired way without needing management.¹⁷⁸

This has allowed them to outsource the dissemination of propaganda from paid cyber operatives. A single organization, even a state one like Russian intelligence, can only operate as many operatives as they can afford to manage. The number of propagandized communities is however unlimited, there are as many of these as the propagandist can create. Once created they are partly if not entirely self-reaffirming. These communities naturally draw towards the information sources they have available to them, which are the state-owned Russian media organizations. These communities sourced are based around persons functioning as ideological leaders, much as how Ellul explains the function of ideological propaganda groups with ideological leaders forming to act as propagandists for the group. These groups function as signal boosters for the information given to them by the Russian media organization, allowing it to reach further into other communities that might be closed to the public or which the Russians themselves might be unable to access for various reasons. Through this sideways spread propaganda can reach places horizontally that it would be unable to get to vertically. The sideways spread also allows the use of a multitude of organizations and fora for communication, distributing the risk and limiting the damage caused by possible detection.¹⁷⁹

The issue is however not solely related to the standard social media personality. The digital space and its disconnectedness from face-to-face interactions create a new problem, invented social media personalities who do not exist at all. Similarly to how they can create false versions of trusted news media sources to borrow credibility, when a sufficient number of false personalities of sufficient radical thinking are not found the Russians have discovered that they can simply create one and brute force it into the mainstream by copying the correct

¹⁷⁸ ICA 2017: Page 5

¹⁷⁹ Sivertsen et al. 2022: Page 15-16

ideological speech while manipulating the algorithm. The Hacking democracies report brings up the issue of Luisa Haynes:

“Have you met Luisa Haynes? She was a prolific force in the #BlackLivesMatter community on Twitter. In just over a year, she amassed more than 50,000 followers; and her outspoken, viral takes on everything from Beyoncé to police brutality earned her hundreds of thousands of retweets and media coverage in more than two dozen prominent news outlets. She was, on the surface, a symbol of a new generation of Black activists: young, female, and digitally savvy—except—she was fake”¹⁸⁰

This case demonstrates how the digital space does not only allows the use of social media personalities as intermediaries, when a suitable one could not be found Russian intelligence services simply created a fake one and quickly signal boosted them into being a known person of middling importance in less than a year, despite existing solely online as a Russian invention. In sections 4.7, 4.15, and 4.16 I cover Ellul’s opinion on the group and leaders, specifically in the form of community leaders. These, in Ellul’s work, function as contact points between the propagandist and the group, who guides the group into the correct belief. This case of Luisa Haynes is a stellar example of a new development, where leaders who can drive the ideological development of the group do not have to be found or recruited, they can be fictional creations that exists entirely online, always pushing the exact narrative their creator wants to be pushed. The digital space provides a pathway to not just insert group leaders but to manufacture them directly within the group that is being targeted.

The Luisa Haynes case, as well as the aussie infidels group mentioned in 5.2, are notable also for the emotional structures they are attempting to jump on to negative feelings of bitterness, feeling aggrieved, or rage against the status quo, which all can be considered as examples of the strong negative emotions identified in section 4.6 as the most important feelings to activate to create immediate engagement with the propaganda material. These are also negative emotions that are connected to specific group causes centered around these feelings of aggrieved, which I argue means they are most likely to be self-replicate as they are most likely to create engagement. In addition, the doomscrolling concept described in 4.13 becomes relevant. In my opinion the fact that a notable section of the population is unable to stop themselves from consuming negative information likely participates in this element of

¹⁸⁰ Hanson et al. 2019: Page 11

online self-replication of Russian intelligence's influence operations, not just in their ability to spread the information directly but also through their engagement with the material which fuels its presence within the social media algorithms that drives forward the material's presence within the digital space.

Within Ellul's theory, as covered in section 4.10, propaganda should be continual and long lasting. We see this within the ICA 2021 report which brings up how Russian intelligence utilizing their established information dissemination networks began pushing stories praising President Trump and denigrating then presidential nominee Joe Biden.¹⁸¹ In addition to pushing stories attacking President Biden they also released information implicating both him and other in corrupt activities in Ukraine, further tying President Biden to the story. Worth noting here is the pressure is maintained using the Ukrainian connection tying Biden and the former Obama administration with corruption and insidious activities in Ukraine which had been spreading since 2014.

“As part of his plan to secure the reelection of former President Trump, Derkach publicly released audio recordings four times in 2020 in attempts to implicate President Biden and other current or former US Government officials in allegedly corrupt activities related to Ukraine. Derkach also worked to initiate legal proceedings in Ukraine and the US related to these allegations.”¹⁸²

By sticking to existing threads Russian intelligence here utilized the pre-propaganda threads that had already been active for 5-6 years. These threads had been repeated for years and so were already present within the subconscious of the propagandees, ready to be picked up on again by people who already believed there was a connection with Biden and corruption within Ukraine. By using these existing threads any further information the Russian network provided to the propagandees was received, accepted, and internalized. In addition to this they attacked on Biden as a no-good candidate, attempting to use divisions with the democratic party to disincentivize people from voting. Specific demographics were targeted, presumably based on voting patterns.¹⁸³ Though stories were by no means one sided, as actions made by the Trump administration that went against Russian interests were also attacked.¹⁸⁴ Here we

¹⁸¹ ICA 2021: Page 4

¹⁸² ICA 2021: Page 3

¹⁸³ Hanson et al. 2019: Page 11

¹⁸⁴ ICA 2021: Page 4

see a mistake in the Russian effort of getting Trump reelected. The criticism of actions done that were contrary to Russian efforts was likely done to counter the Trump administration's actions, however, it breaks one of the central tenets of Ellul's theory on propaganda. Namely that Propaganda must be continuous and those being propagandized cannot be given a reprieve. By letting this element go Russian intelligence hampered their own efforts to get Trump elected as it provided a break in the stream of propaganda, the message regarding Trump became disjointed which possibly caused confusion and lessened the effect of the Russian efforts.

Post-election efforts of activating online influence actors continued, utilizing the previously mentioned existing threads that had been worked into the minds of the propagandees for 6 years. These groups continued to be targeted with disparaging messages raising doubts about the validity of the United States electoral system.

“Even after the election, Russian online influence actors continued to promote narratives questioning the election results and disparaging President Biden and the Democratic Party. These efforts parallel plans Moscow had in place in 2016 to discredit a potential incoming Clinton administration, but which it scrapped after former President Trump's victory.”¹⁸⁵

The Russians had previously created threads of information that had been left to fester within the minds of the members of the group since 2016, though temporarily abandoned by the propagandist after Trump's victory it could be taken back up once it was necessary to do so. This is a case that demonstrates the ability of the successfully propagandized to accept contradictory information, as explained by Ellul and covered in section 4.10. The successfully propagandized does no longer resist contradictory information, they simply adjust to whatever the currently stated direction happens to be. In this case it begins when the election of 2016 is not legitimate because of interference, but once their preferred candidate unexpectedly wins the election suddenly becomes legitimate again, yet despite its legitimacy it is simultaneously true, within the minds of the propagandized, that the other side was cheating. When the candidate then loses the next election the system becomes illegitimate once again. As Ellul says, the successfully propagandized believe what is told to them without question, even if the information is directly contradictory to what was said previously.

¹⁸⁵ ICA 2021: Page 4

6.5 Delegitimization of the opposition

As covered in the previous sections most of the Russian efforts were tied towards their goal of delegitimizing democratic institutions and political opposition, in that order. The attack on political oppositions seems to have been secondary, as part of a wider plan of caused general havoc and delegitimizing the democratic system itself. “Russia, like its Soviet predecessor, has a history of conducting covert influence campaigns focused on US presidential elections that have used intelligence officers and agents and press placements to disparage candidates perceived as hostile to the Kremlin.”¹⁸⁶ The theft of confidential information held internally within the relevant political groups created materials which allowed them to do so directly, creating relatively valid information which could be effectively weaponized for their intended goals. Their historical method of using state-funded media organizations and third-party media organizations bolstered with social media personalities and hired social media users allowed them to spread their desired messages about their perceived opposition.

The truth, I argue, has a particular value in such cases. Truth is not just valuable by itself, it has a secondary value because it provides the possibility of paltering, misrepresenting and selectively choosing facts to create a false idea of what the truth is. When Russian services had a more complete picture they could carefully select which facts to share and in what manner to share them. Further, the misrepresented facts are difficult for the opposition to deny or explain without appearing deceptive, as they are fundamentally based in truth. By denying the presentation the story presented only appeared more valid to those who had already begun to buy in. As I covered in section 4.6, those who have been sufficiently propagandized will accept their truth as total and without question. Any attempt to correct them or give a more complete picture will be received as if it is propaganda. Someone successfully propagandized by the Russian intelligence services to be against an individual of anti-Russian sentiment will therefore not only be resistant to adjusting their opinion, but they will also perceive any attempt to change their mind as an effort to mislead.

The ability to selectively provide information to delegitimize the opposition is a crucial part to the Russian operations intended to create further hostility between the two sides. They both feel that they are being misrepresented by the opposing side yet they cannot explain why they are misrepresented without creating a negative spiral as both sides feel the other is attempting to mislead them while at the same time feeling that they are being misled. In section 4.6,

¹⁸⁶ ICA 2017: Page 4

knowledge of the psychological terrain I explain Ellul's opinion on the use of emotions, specifically that the baser and more powerful emotions are the primary tool of the propagandist. This is further explained in section 4.14, where I point out that the radicalization techniques used by extremists also focus on strong emotions, particularly emotions related to feelings of unfair treatment. This is also why Russian operations focus so heavily on simply causing havoc and furthering opposition, as within the social media sphere this becomes a naturally self-reinforcing radicalization spiral where, once the two sides are committed to throwing mud at each other over meaningful dialogue, they continue to self-radicalize by participating in and consuming mudslinging over meaningful dialogue, furthering their own alienation from opposing viewpoints.

Further, in section 4.11 I argue that based on Rose Powell's 4-stage model the move to social media communication has created groups in the digital space that self-replicate and spread information faster and more effectively than any propagandist can hope to achieve on their own, and in section 6.4 I point out how the Russian intelligence services use troll farms to create, distribute, and signal boost propaganda, to further increase the spread of Russian influence operations.¹⁸⁷ The procedures found within that review, much like what was shown by the JRA and the two ICA reports, were hacks and digital spying intended to gather information was followed by the use of state media outlet and social media platforms to distribute this information to the target populations.¹⁸⁸ Ellul's work on group management becomes relevant, as the group's he describes were managed to reach the correct conclusions through controlled debate. The Russian services stole information, an attempt to reach propaganda's demand for factuality, presumably knowing that because the information was factual any attempt to contextualize the information would be perceived as a lie. They then dropped the information into the online sphere through intermediaries who were considered reliable distributors on account of their political ideology, and at that point it naturally shifted from a vertical to a horizontal spread as it moved through the ecosystem, relying on social proofs and the social group dynamics in which people are desperate to be the most in line with the group's chosen narrative.

¹⁸⁷ For a definition of these terms see list of terminology on page

¹⁸⁸ Hanson et al. 2019: Page 9

7.0 Conclusions - Becoming actionable

The key aspect of the theoretical framework of Ellul is not that people be convinced, but that the propagandee must become actionable. That the propagandized should react to any propaganda they receive immediately and emotionally, exactly as they have been conditioned to do over their period of radicalization. In Ellulian theory once someone has been successfully propagandized a propagandee can do anything they are told to do. The way the reports demonstrate this is when they speak on the matter of causing discontent and conflict within the United States. Russian intelligence feed information designed to create hostility and create conflict between people, and the propagandee reacts to it by being hostile and causing conflict. To see how this could work in practice I will explain through an example that, while not connected definitely, at least not in the reports. I see it as likely that there is a connection between the influencing efforts covered in the report with this particular event.

The propagandization described begins in 2014 with information designed to create a feeling of distrust toward then vice-president Joe Biden and his family. The reports are clear on the fact that information was disseminated over time intended to make those targeted believe there were elements of corruption between Biden and foreign individuals, as well as creating distrust towards the US electoral system. Throughout the 2016 election these messages of electoral were increased, though now targeted towards the at the time presidential nominee Hillary Clinton. While President Trump, who was preferred by Russian intelligence won, these messages of government distrust did not stop. This messaging continued throughout the presidency, with a notable increase when the United States was heading towards the 2020 election.

Once former vice-president Biden became the presumptive nominee of the democratic party these efforts increased, of note are the callbacks made towards earlier operations. The influence operations attempting to denigrate candidate Biden in 2020 utilized similar messaging and groundwork which had been laid as much as 6 years earlier. Particularly in the form of supposed connections to Ukraine, as well as general corruption and accusations of election malfeasance. I argue that the first evidence of this was the rapid rise in the number of votes, which is demonstrative of a more enflamed political environment. The 2020 US election left Biden and Trump with the highest and second highest number of votes for any candidates in US presidential election history. Demonstrating that people were emotionally invested in the election to the degree that voter turnout increased substantially.

Once the election was over and Biden had become the president-elect this messaging continued, with further accusations of electoral misconduct. Which created feelings of discontent. The groundwork which had been laid for 6 years was at this point ready to be activated as a sizeable group of propagandees fully believed there to have been electoral misconduct. Several anti-government groups gathered in Washington DC and a major pro-Trump anti-Biden rally began called “stop-the steal”. With relatively little direction and simply being told to head towards congress to “stop the steal” they marched towards and eventually stormed the capitol.¹⁸⁹ Through a multi-year effort they had been effectively propagandized to the point that when told there was election malfeasance, they accepted it. And when told to stop it, they attempted to do so as directed.

7.1 Conclusions - Mass media vs post mass media

The traditional forms of media, while still present and still powerful, are being replaced by the digital media platforms online by way of blogs, podcasts, social media platforms, and various other decentralized content distribution platforms empowering people to both produce and consume large amounts of content. The Hacking democracies report specifically mention the loss of traditional news media’s ability to gatekeep information production and distribution. Where news media in the past were effectively in control over which information was disseminated to the public, in the digital space individuals can produce and distribute content freely to their audience without having to go through mediators. Social media has opened the sluices and with that information has become functionally endless. This expansion of the production of content allows for individuals to have global reach, where previously reaching even nationally required a media organization backing a dedicated individual can now have global reach with nothing more than a phone and access to social media platforms, which was so clearly demonstrated by the Facebook riots when a young Dutch girl’s social media invitation for her sweet sixteen birthday party was accidentally set to public, at which point it quickly went viral and led to 3000 people showing up in a Dutch suburb in what became a notable riot during which caused 34 people to be injured and caused millions in damages.¹⁹⁰ It is difficult to imagine anything remotely similar ever happening before the advent of social media.

¹⁸⁹ Jacobo 2021

¹⁹⁰ Dijck & Poell 2013: Page 3

These social media platforms then, to a degree, function as the news media of old. Although not entirely as they are not themselves content producers but rely on the users to fill the content of the websites. These sites live and die by the amount of content produced by their users and the engagement created by said users, some of which are traditional mass media organizations. I argue that the post mass media world has consumed the mass media world, mass media organizations now function online and to a large degree have become organizations dedicated to feeding the post mass media world with content that can be consumed and redistributed on the new platforms. This makes the old mass media more reliant on post mass media as they become users and are reduced to content producers rather than distributors. These sites rely on the participatory culture that exists online where the users create content for other users to consume, they are thus only in control in the way of having the ability to remove users creating content the site deem wrong for some reason and can guide the direction of opinion by limiting the discussion on certain topics. From our modern post-mass media perspective, the control over the methods of communication should be of particular concern. Where traditional mass media were somewhat held in control through official communication channels like public broadcasting and media controlling organizations like the FCC within the US. Contrary to this popular social media apps like Douyin/TikTok, which are apps owned by ByteDance which is a company that is effectively controlled by China, are exempt from most existing methods of controlling media. These social media apps provide multiple propaganda points over time. Not simply in their ability to control the content available on the app, though that is also a concern by itself, but also in monitoring the target population by seeing the content that is produced by them and access to comment sections and monitoring personal messages between users. This type of total surveillance provides them with the ability to customize propaganda targeting the population, control when they see it, how much of it they see, and prevent them from seeing contrary viewpoints.

In the post mass media world we are already seeing a rise in social bubbles, these bubbles appear to not be limited to specific platforms but crossing into the individual's entire online experience. Ellul commented on the individual's preference for media which they agree with, and the moving of not just media consumption but also social interaction into the digital space seems to have enhanced this. As we see with less than 10% of political discourse being across the aisles rather than people simply speaking to others they already agree with, and as previously mentioned most of the across the aisle discourse that does happen is just

mudslinging, hardly conducive to a functional political debate environment nor something that helps understanding the viewpoints of those we disagree with. As covered in sections 4.10 and 4.12, Ellul speaks extensively on the importance of propaganda to be total and the importance of isolating the propagandee for it to take hold, in the mass media world this was partly why the propagandee had to participate for this to be achieved. With social media however this is almost done on behalf of the individual, with algorithms that shows you that which is similar to what you have engaged with previously which effectively creates echo chambers by default that show people only what they are most likely to engage with.¹⁹¹ Not necessarily positively or negatively, but that which gets a reaction and retains the user. Social media apps are then, I argue, a perfect storm for the propagandist were potential targets for manipulation self-isolate into manageable groups, provide information on their own thought process, and communicate openly with each other on shared channels where they also self-isolate according to ideology. Functionally speaking post mass media creates all the elements of Ellulian propaganda.

This situation is exacerbated because of social media's horizontal communication form. As described in section 4.14 on vertical spread, Ellul claims that social relationships are naturally more trusted and this is why he claims that social spread of information is more effective, because social connections are treated as more trustworthy than that of mass media. In the post mass media world however there has been a rise in parasocial relationships with content producers, the social nature of social media bypasses the wall that previously existed between content producer and consumer. Mass media is a natural barrier, the consumer does not think the newscaster is their friend, but the social media personality is psychologically classified as a friend. This is why I claim that that people trust social media information more than they do traditional media for this reason, the interactive nature functions more like a face-to-face conversation than that of a lecturer speaking to a crowd and because of that it is more readily accepted by the content consumer. Social media are by default interactive and create a social experience, which is the form of communication that people are most receptive to. Ellul also explains the importance of the personal touch, his example of groups having discussions guided by a trusted leader being an example of just that. Social media is practically nothing but the personal touch, guided directly to the target audience.

¹⁹¹ Bucher 2021: Page 117-122

I argue that Ellul's model remains a good theoretical work for future understanding of influence operations, though with some modifications. The concept of technique as a base lends the theoretical framework to modernization, and while technology and culture changes over time the fundamental psychological and sociological precepts on which the theory is built remain as the basis of human behavior. Much as we see within the social media communities affected by Russian influence operation efforts, which are built on the same fundamental properties of human behavior that Ellul described. We also see that modern works on concepts like radicalization, as covered in 4.14, bring up the very same issues that Ellul pointed out in *Propaganda* in 1962. The human mind remains with the same baseline needs and has the same vulnerabilities. The move to a digital space mainly changes the ease with which the propagandists of the world can get access to the minds of their desired targets and their ability to utilize specific aspects of the propaganda theory, for example that they no longer need to separate the target population into groups manually because the digital space create such a large interconnected society that this is essentially done for them by the people themselves and the technology on which social media platforms are built. The fundamental toolkit of a propagandist however remains the manipulation of specific psychological vulnerabilities present within human beings that Ellul described and those remain unchanged.

List of terminology used in the text

- White propaganda = Propaganda that does not hide its origin.
- Grey propaganda = Grey propaganda is propaganda that attempts to hide the direct source of information.
- Black propaganda = Propaganda that intends explicitly to mislead the target of the source of information.
- Echcosystem = The collection of media a person consumes, all of which are providing the same opinions.
- Paltering = Using selected truthful statements with the intent to mislead
- Phishing = Sending fraudulent messages to trick the receiver into revealing sensitive information (most commonly used against civilians by sending fake emails trying to trick people into revealing sensitive information like their social security number or access information to bank accounts).
- Spear phishing = A more carefully selected phishing method where the phisher gathers information to create a more easily believable message of contact. More often used against organizations by gathering information on a specific business deal, sending a message, which gets a reply because the target is unaware and responds without checking its authenticity.
- Propagandist = One who spreads propaganda.
- Propagandee = One who is the target of propaganda.
- Actionable = Can be targeted for an act of propaganda.
- Technique = The application of sciences for the means to achieve an end.
- APT = Advanced Persistent Threat.
- GRU = Russian foreign military intelligence agency.
- RIS = Russian civilian and military intelligence Services.
- LIR = Lakhta Internet Research, also known as the Internet Research Agency. A troll farm operated by Russian intelligence.
- Troll farm = Organization based around manipulating social media narratives.
- Myth = Ideas considered as truth within the group.
- Local fact = Things known to the propagandee to be true.

Reference list

- Adorno, T. W. (1951). Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda

- Basit,S. (2018). *Fenomenkunnskap: Konspirasjonsteorier og radikaliseringsprosesser*. In E. Reiss, E., & Noor, L (eds.), *Radikalisering fenomen og forebygging* (p. 104-116). Minotenk.

- Bennett, N.-K., Rossmeisl, A., Turner, K., Holcombe, B. D., Young, R., Brown, T., & Key, H. (n.d.). *Parasocial relationships: The nature of celebrity fascinations*. Find a Psychologist. Retrieved March 12, 2023, from <https://www.findapsychologist.org/parasocial-relationships-the-nature-of-celebrity-fascinations/>

- Bernays, E. L. (2005). Propaganda. (Original work published in 1928). ig publishing.

- Bucher, T. (2021). *Facebook*. Polity Press.

- Bøhn, E. D. (2022). *Teknologiens filosofi. Metafysiske Problemstillinger*. Cappelen Damm.

- Center for Countering Digital Hate. (2021, March). The Disinformation Dozen. https://www.counterhate.com/_files/ugd/f4d9b9_b7cedc0553604720b7137f8663366ee5.pdf

- The Central Intelligence Agency, The Federal Bureau of Investigation, & The National Security Agency. (2017, January). *Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections*. Office of the Director of National Intelligence. https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf

- Central Intelligence Agency, The Federal Bureau of Investigation, The National Security Agency, The Department of Homeland Security, & The Bureau of Intelligence and Research. (2021, March). *Foreign Threats to the 2020 US Federal Election*. The National Intelligence Council. <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ICA-declass-16MAR21.pdf>

- Department of Homeland Security & the Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2016, December). *GRIZZLY STEPPE – Russian Malicious Cyber Activity* (JAR-16-20296A). National Cybersecurity and Communications Integration Center. https://www.cisa.gov/uscert/sites/default/files/publications/JAR_16-20296A_GRIZZLY%20STEPPE-2016-1229.pdf

- Dijck, J. V., & Poell, T. (2013). *Understanding Social Media Logic*.
<https://doi.org/10.12924/mac2013.01010002>
- Doob, L. (1948). *Public opinion and Propaganda*. Henry Holt and Company, inc. New York.
- Ellul, J. (1973). *Propaganda: The formation of men's attitudes*. Random House, Inc.
- Hammer, E. (2006). *Adorno and the political*. Routledge.
- Hanson, F. et al. (2019) *Hacking democracies - Cataloguing cyber-enabled attacks on elections*. rep.
- Herman, E. S., & Chomsky, N. (2008). *Manufacturing consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. The Bodley Head Random House.
- Hobbs, R., Kanižaj, I. & Pereira, L. (2019). *Digital Literacy and Propaganda*. *Medijske studije*, 10 (19), 1-7.
- Jacobo, J. (2021, January 10). *This is what Trump told supporters before many stormed Capitol Hill*. ABC News. Retrieved May 14, 2022, from <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trump-told-supporters-stormed-capitol-hill/story?id=75110558>
- Jeřábek, H. (2011). *Merton and Lazarsfeld: Collaboration on communication research-two papers, two research instruments, and two kindred concepts*. *Czech Sociological Review*, 47(6), 1191–1214. <https://doi.org/10.13060/00380288.2011.47.6.04>
- Koch, H. L. (1936). *propaganda: Its psychology and technique*. L. W. Doob. *The International Journal of Ethics*, 46(4), 515–517.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/intejethi.46.4.2989294>
- Marlin, Randal (2014) Fortner, R. S., & Fackler, P. M. *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory: Handbooks in communication and Media*. John Wiley.
- Mills, C. W. (1963). *The Power Elite*. Oxford Univ. Press.
- Mueller, R. S., Helderman, R. S., & Zapotosky, M. (2019). *The Mueller Report: Presented with related materials by the Washington Post*. Scribner, a division of Simon & Schuster.

- Mullen, A., & Klaehn, J. (2010). The Herman-Chomsky propaganda model: A critical approach to analysing mass media behaviour. *Sociology Compass*, 4(4), 215–229. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2010.00275.x>
- Nissen, Thomas (2015). *#TheWeaponizationOfSocialMedia - Characteristics of Contemporary Conflicts*. Royal Danish Defence College.
- Nyhan, B., & Reifler, J. (2010). *When corrections fail: The persistence of political misperceptions*. *Political Behavior*, 32(2), 303–330. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-010-9112-2>
- Noor, L. (2018). *Fortellinger om ekstremisme: Hjemmedyrkede jihadister*. In E. Reiss, E., & Noor, L (eds), *Radikalisering fenomen og forebygging (p. 41-51)*. Minotenk.
- Olsen, T. (2018). *Fortellinger om ekstremisme: En gang var jeg nynazist*. In E. Reiss, E., & Noor, L (eds), *Radikalisering fenomen og forebygging (p. 12-22)*. Minotenk.
- Peters, J. D., & Simonson, P. (2004). *Mass communication and American social thought: Key texts, 1919-1968*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Phillips, W. and Milner, R.M. (2021) *You are here: A field guide for Navigating Polluted Information*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Taylor, A., & Kaplan, S. (2015, March 11). *Why did victims in islamic state beheading videos look so calm? they didn't know it was real*. Washington Post. Retrieved May 12, 2023, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/03/11/why-did-victims-in-islamic-state-beheading-videos-look-so-calm-they-didnt-know-it-was-real/>.
- Thorson, Kjerstin. Cotter. Kelley. Medeiros, Mel & Pak, Chankyung (2021) *Algorithmic inference, political interest, and exposure to news and politics on Facebook*, *Information, Communication & Society*, 24:2, 183-200,
- Powell, R. (2014, June 24). *Cats and Kalashnikovs: Behind the Isil social media strategy*. The Sydney Morning Herald. Retrieved April 7, 2023, from <https://www.smh.com.au/world/cats-and-kalashnikovs-behind-the-isil-social-media-strategy-20140625-zsk50.html>.

- Published by Statista Research Department, & 21, M. (2022, March 21). *Daily Social Media Usage Worldwide*. Statista. Retrieved May 12, 2022, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/433871/daily-social-media-usage-worldwide/>
- Reiss, E., & Noor, L. (2018). *Radikalisering fenomen og forebygging*. Minotenk.
- Sharma, B., Lee, S. S., & Johnson, B. K. (2022). *The Dark at the End of the Tunnel: Doomscrolling on Social Media Newsfeeds*. *Technology, Mind, and Behavior*, 3(1: Spring 2022). <https://doi.org/10.1037/tmb0000059>
- Sivertsen, E.G. et al. (2022) *Uønsket utenlandsk påvirkning? – kartlegging og analyse av stortingsvalget 2021*.
- Strømmen, Ø. (2018). *Fortellinger om ekstremisme: Internet og høyreekstremismen*. In E. Reiss, E., & Noor, L (eds), *Radikalisering fenomen og forebygging* (p. 30-40). Minotenk.
- Soules, M. (2015). *Media, persuasion and propaganda*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Ward, A. (2009). Potter Stewart. Retrieved January 30, 2023, from [https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/1359/potter-stewart#:~:text=Potter%20Stewart%20\(1915%E2%80%931985\),pithy%20prose%20resulted%20in%20a](https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/1359/potter-stewart#:~:text=Potter%20Stewart%20(1915%E2%80%931985),pithy%20prose%20resulted%20in%20a)
- Ward, V. (2016, October 24). *The Russian Expat Leading the Fight to Protect America*. *Esquire*. Retrieved May 13, 2022, from <https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a49902/the-russian-emigre-leading-the-fight-to-protect-america/>
- Zelnhefer, S. (2008, September 5). *Der Stürmer. Deutsches Wochenblatt Zum Kampf um die wahrheit*. *Der Stürmer. Deutsches Wochenblatt zum Kampf um die Wahrheit – Historisches Lexikon Bayerns*. Retrieved February 28, 2023, from https://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Der_St%C3%BCrmer._Deutsches_Wochenblatt_zum_Kampf_um_die_Wahrheit