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Smart phones, multi-purpose mobile computing devices, everyone has one from children in adolescence to the elderly. These ever present devices allow the user to have around the clock access to the internet. The use of social media in the 21st century enables manipulation of public opinion through propaganda. These smart devices allow for public exchange of ideas, information and misinformation. Applications created to share and connect people around the world have become just that, having both damaging and liberating qualities on media globalization.

Popular social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and Facebook have over 3.81 billion users combined accounting for 63% of the world's population. (Dataportal) In a world where radio and television once served as the collective public sphere social media has shifted that. Ever present devices such as the smart phone allows access to instant temporality of the web. Social media becoming a space for people around the world to share their beliefs, debate and share information either in truth or not. Social media websites grant the ability for millions of users to create their own unique public and private spheres.

Social media played a dominant role in shaping the course of the 2016 presidential election. Between candidates trolling each other on twitter to automated accounts that accounted for one-third of pro-Trump tweets and nearly one-fifth of the pro-Hilary tweets. (Detrow) In 2016 the Internet Research Agency (IRA) which is a Russian company that engages in online influence operations on behalf of Russian business and political interest created a Facebook

group called “Being Patriotic.” where they engaged in posting a meme which promoted users to “Like & share if you think our veterans must get benefits before refugees.” (Figure 1) Paired with a caption implying that “liberals” were to blame for inviting 620,000 refugees into the US while 50,000 homeless veterans are “dying in the streets”. This meme reached over 640,000 facebook users even though the claim about refugees was proven to be false information through Politifact, this information came from one of Trumps standard stump speeches during the election. (O’Connor)

The IRA’s influence during the 2016 campaign shows how social media can be used for propaganda and spread false information that could potential pursued viewers. “Russia orchestrated the best known examples of government propaganda and disinformation on social media when its operatives posted millions of times on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube in the run-up to the 2016 U.S. presidential election.” (Ingram) (figure 2)

Using the semiotic approach you can see how this meme (figure 1) targeted a specific audience, the older conservative generation. The denotation being an elderly scruffy man wearing a United States navy hat, connotation being this man is a veteran and fought in the war and is now homeless. The caption below confirms these symbols. The use of an older man triggers relateness for people over the age of 45. Where as this same imagery would not be used to swing the younger generation. The text on the meme targets a specific person that believes refugees come secondary to veterans often conservative views that tie to republicans. Data collection done by Cambridge Analytica (a political consulting firm) in the 2016 election in partnership with Facebook made it possible to target a specific group or person . Alexander Nix, the currently suspended CEO of Cambridge Analytica said “if I talk to enough people who look like you, in terms of what data they have, I'd be able to quantify your personality based on the

discussion I've had with other people.” (Sanders) Ultimately developing detailed psychological profiles for every American voter, so that campaigns could tailor their pitches from person to person, like the veteran post. Data collection shows how the user shares, views and interacts with specific content collecting public and private information from online users. This authorizes certain organizations and groups to use this data to their advantage thus promoting propaganda targeted for the specific person.

Governments, organization, and political groups become the producer of this propaganda while the users of these social media platforms become the consumers. Applying Roland Barthes theory that the meaning of the content extends beyond the producers intended meaning helps us understand how the meaning of the content can be negotiated. This fluidity of meaning is ever changing depending on who is consuming the content, the dominate meaning may exist among many other interpretations. The IRAs involvement in the 2016 election was to divide the country by race, political and religious differences allowing the content of their posts to be successful no matter who the consumer is, left or right.

Propaganda is only one result of Social media in the 21st century. Social media also presents the idea of the prosumer, allowing the user to also be the producer of the content they want to share. Social media technologies also allows for the resistance of dominate opinion and offers countercultural perspectives. Marshall McLuhan theory that technologies were “simply extensions of our natural senses, helping us better to hear, see, and know the world and, moreover, helping us to connect ourselves to geographically distant communities and bodies.” (Sturken, 243) Couldn't be more true in todays mediascape, users are now able to connect to anywhere or anyone in the world instantly. A rise in citizen journalism counter offers

perspectives that challenge mainstream media and connects users globally to one another and the content they share.

The Black Lives Matter movement shows how social media can also demand attention of public engagement and media globalization. Social media grants the prosumer with agency over the image and content they post essentially transforming the act into a liberating expression of the demand for justice. (Sturken, 246) The Black Lives Matter movement began after the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murder, George Zimmerman. Quickly becoming an international activist movement sparking public out pour on social media platforms, the use of the hashtag #blacklivesmatter connected users across the globe. Protesters around the world shared their solidarity through social media posts, from Dublin to London to South Africa. (Winsor) In the fatal shooting of Walter Scott a bystander video of the killing shows evidence needed to convict officer Michael Slager. The footage contradicted the police report, this imagery became viral "it was among the images that launched a public discussion about documentation and the credibility of police reporting of violent incidents." (Sturken, 246) Thus bringing awareness to the public about the unjust actions that are being "practiced and hidden—in this case." (Sturken, 246)

After the killing of Micheal Brown by Ferguson police imagery of protests held in solidarity around the country circulated on social media. (figure 3) Protestors began to carry signs stating "Hands Up. Dont Shoot." this followed with imagery of protestors with their hands up, referencing the fact that witnesses stated Brown had his hands up before police opened fire in August 2014 ultimately taking his life. (figure 4) Images from the protests made it onto every social media platform resulting in mainstream media coverage as well, this imagery and phrase speaks to the lack of trust between communities of color and police. Social media facilitated and gave support to the Black Lives Matter movement shifting it into a global media event, "citizens

determine what to photograph and post and how best to express political agency through image and text without the direct filter of the media industry.”(Sturken, 247)

Social media in the 21st century plays a role in shifting public opinion through propaganda, as seen in the 2016 election, but it can also change public opinion on mainstream media as seen throughout the Black Lives Matter movement. Smart devices allow for ever present access to the internet and social media platforms, opening up and broadening what the traditional ideology of the public sphere is. Users have 24hr access to a digital vortex of information, misinformation and a space to share any intention. Social media has damaging qualities when used by the wrong people, but it also grants the consumer the power to be the producer and counteroffers perspectives that go against mainstream media.

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At least 50,000 homeless veterans are starving dying in the streets, but liberals want to invite 620,000 refugees and settle them among us. We have to take care of our own citizens, and it must be the primary goal for our politicians!



Figure
1

Figure2



Figure3
Figure4



