



IDEOLOGICAL MISINFORMATION: How News Corp Australia amplifies discourses of the reactionary right

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Abstract

This paper analyses the interactions between Australian mainstream media and social media political influencers and how these interactions amplify ideological misinformation. Social media, particularly YouTube, is increasingly a primary source of news and information for people, principally in the younger 18 – 35-year demographic. Yet while social media has opened up horizontal networks of mass self-communication that allow anyone with an internet to communicate on a mass scale, it has also precipitated a significant rise in the dissemination of reactionary right and extremist messages. The analysis is embedded in Manuel Castells network society theory and utilising Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework and José van Dijck's combination of the Network Society theory with Actor Network Theory. By analysing the discourses employed by News Corp around notions of "identity politics" "western civilisation" and "the left", this paper argues that the discourses of News Corp Australia are largely the same as the Alternative Influence Network (AIN) on YouTube – a loosely connected group of reactionary right-wing influencers. It further analyses the way News Corp reports on these influencers, concluding that the intertwining discursive patterns of both News Corp and the AIN have the effect of discriminating against a range of minority groups due to its centring of white, western identity as default. News Corp produces and amplifies ideological misinformation through both power and counterpower communication networks. This is concerning considering News Corp's prominence and influence in the Australian media landscape. Finally, it argues that the ideological misinformation amplified by News Corp Australia is contributing to a new ideological paradigm that combines populist nationalism with neoliberalism.

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Introduction

Social media has lost its shine. The last three years in particular have stripped away any notions that web 2.0 would bring about a rebirth in participatory democracy, as somewhat optimistically suggested by Henry Jenkins (2006) and Axel Bruns (2006). Instead, democracy is in retreat around the world (Freedom House 2019) while

“an amalgam of conspiracy theorists, techno-libertarians, white nationalists, Men’s Rights advocates, trolls, anti-feminists, anti-immigration activists and bored young people [have leveraged] both the techniques of participatory culture and the affordances of social media to spread their various political beliefs” (Marwick & Lewis 2017 p.3).

Social media has become a fertile ground for spreading personalised, targeted misinformation and manipulating mainstream media to amplify far-right messages. Horta Ribeiro et. al (2019) show how YouTube’s algorithms can be exploited to expose users to more extreme views. The study analyses over 300 thousand videos and 79 million comments, finding that the so-called Intellectual Dark Web, a loose network of pundits, university professors and internet celebrities is a clear gateway to far-right ideological and extremist views, classified as the Alt-right (Horta Ribeiro et. al. 2019). These videos and YouTube channels have skyrocketed in the last four years, with many of the influencers gaining millions of follows through constant collaborations and attention seeking techniques (Horta Ribeiro et. al. 2019; Lewis 2018). A report from non-profit, Data & Society argues that although these influencers ostensibly hold a variety of disparate views, they form a ‘coherent discursive system’ that is reactionary in nature, with a general opposition to concepts of feminism, social justice and left-wing politics (Lewis 2018).

YouTube is the second most visited site on the internet, behind only Google.com. One in 5 users, amounting to 13% of the world’s adult population, say YouTube is “very important for helping them understand events that are happening in the world” (Smith et. al. 2018, para.2), while in Australia almost half of those aged 18 to 21 get their news and information about the world almost exclusively from social media, like YouTube (Smith et. al. 2018; Fisher et. al. 2019). As Lewis (2018) shows, the AIN is capitalising on this through the repurposing of influencer marketing techniques that “impart ideological ideas to their audiences” (Lewis 2018, p.5).

But the decline of investigative journalism and editorial independence, and ever dwindling resources for fact checking have all contributed to a continual decline in trust in traditional news sources, which remains at historically low levels in the US, UK and Australia (Cohen 2015; Fisher et. al. 2019; Brennan 2019). Mainstream media’s voracious appetite for novelty and sensationalism has further opened up avenues for exploitation and the spreading of reactionary messages (Cohen 2015; Marwick & Lewis 2017). As I will discuss, this combination of factors has led mainstream media to increasingly amplify ideas that are ultimately harmful to democracy itself.

In Australia, the problem is further compounded by a highly concentrated mainstream media market dominated by Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation. The organisation accounts for 59% of all daily newspaper sales (Flew & Goldsmith 2013) and is the most read online news organisation with a combined total of about 11 million people reading its various online mastheads each month (Roy Morgan 2018). Its nearest competitor, Fairfax media, merged with television network Nine Entertainment in 2018 to become Australia’s biggest media organisation, further concentrating an already concentrated market.

In this context and drawing on the approaches of critical discourse analysis and discursive psychology, this paper will consider the following research questions:

- How do Australian mainstream media and social media political influencers interact to amplify ideological misinformation?
- How are certain discourses replicated across media to reinforce dominant narratives?

- What is the nature of the socio-political environment that allows for misinformation to spread between social and mainstream media?

Specifically, it will focus on News Corp media due both to its prominence in the Australian media landscape and its reputation as an organisation that peddles propaganda and misinformation (Cooke 2019; McKnight 2010). I analyse 21 articles from a selection of News Corp's mastheads, as well as the social media political influencers mentioned throughout these articles. The analysis is embedded in Castells' (2004; 2007; 2015) theories on power and counterpower in the network society and José van Dijk's (2013) work combining the Actor Network Theory with Castells' political economy approach. I am particularly interested in Castells' (2015) notion that the "fundamental power struggle is the battle for the construction of meaning in the minds of the people" (p.5) and the discursive psychological view of ideology, that contends ideology is a form of discourse that categorises the world in order to maintain and legitimate the status quo (Jorgensen & Phillips 2011).

My research aims to map the orders of discourses utilised by News Corp Australia and members of the AIN on social media, focusing on the topics "identity politics", "it's ok to be white" and "western civilisation". Through an analysis of the discourses emanating from these topics, I will argue that the discourses employed by both the AIN and News Corp form a "cohesive discursive system" that is ideological in nature due to its effect of excluding particular groups based on gender, sexuality or race. I intend to demonstrate how News Corp facilitates the amplification of ideological misinformation through its constant reactionary nature (Cooke 2019) and uncritical promotion of AIN political influencers. Finally, I will consider Pühringer & Ötsch's (2018) contention that a discursive groundwork is being laid for a new 'authoritarian neoliberalism' paradigm, linking this to the discourses identified in my analysis. To begin however, a review of the existing literature and research on this phenomenon is necessary.

Existing research and contribution

There are currently two major empirical academic studies (Ribeiro et. al. 2019; Rieder et. al. 2017) that examine radicalisation pathways and YouTube algorithms. As discussed, research non-profit, Data and Society also released a 2018 report focusing on ideological misinformation spread on YouTube. While Data and Society is an organisation funded by a number of major corporations, such as Microsoft and the study is not peer reviewed, two of their studies (2018) are at least partly corroborated by Ribeiro et. al (2019) and Rieder et. al. (2017), as I will discuss in the following section. I will use Ribeiro et. al (2019) and Rieder et. al (2017) to inform my research academically. However, Lewis 2018 report analyses a particularly important component of YouTube that is lacking from these two academic studies: the social aspect. I have operationalised Castells (2004) Network society to further explain and strengthen the underlying mechanisms powering the results from Lewis' (2018) research.

In that respect I have identified a significant research gap, which is how far-right discourses circulate, both technologically and socially, through the interactions between social and mainstream media. This paper contributes to this important area of study by highlighting how the issue of ideological misinformation is much bigger than just social media and is able to easily enter mainstream discourses through these networks of communication between social and mainstream media nodes in our converged media environment.

YouTube and its influencers

The explosion of right-wing social media celebrities is a very recent phenomenon according to Horta Ribeiro et. al. (2019). Their study found that active channels, comments, views and likes on right-wing YouTube channels really only took off from 2015 during the initial stages of the US election campaign. Horta Ribeiro et. al. (2019) set out to test Rebecca Lewis' (2018) claim in her report on the Alternative Influence Network, that YouTube creates pathways to radicalisation through its recommendation algorithms. Analysing the videos of 360 YouTube channels, they classified the

videos broadly into three categories: the Intellectual Dark Web (IDW) the Alt-right and the Alt-lite. They also had a control group consisting of popular mainstream traditional media channels from across the political spectrum. Acknowledging the inherent artificiality of the categories, they define each as such: the IDW often broach controversial topics like race and IQ, while the Alt-right actively “sponsor fringe ideas like that of a white ethno-state. Somewhere in the middle, individuals of the Alt-lite deny to embrace white supremacist ideology [but] constantly flirt with concepts associated with it (e.g., the great replacement, globalist conspiracies...)” (p.1). As such, only the most extreme channels and videos were categorised as Alt-right. The study examined more than 300 thousand videos, over 79 million comments and over 2 million video and channel recommendations through a combination of keyword searching and manual data analysis. Even with its limitations, such as an inability to account for the personalisation aspect of YouTube’s algorithm, the study was able to establish pathways to extreme content from popular channels in the IDW and Alt-lite. Further, the study’s examination of the comments, highlights how the three communities increasingly share the same user base who tend to comment across all communities. In particular, they found that more than half of commenters in Alt-right communities, also commented in the other two communities (Horta Ribeiro et. al 2019), showing a clear link between the communities.

This research corroborates Rebecca Lewis’ (2018) findings that political influencers have exploited social media and built large followings that spread reactionary right messages “by becoming nodes around which other networks of opinions and influencers cluster” (p.5). Lewis (2018) argues that influencers across the AIN regularly collaborate with or appear as guests on other influencer’s channels to boost exposure and grow audiences. The AIN, as described by Lewis (2018) consists of channels from all three categories as described by Horta Ribeiro et. al. (2019) and I will be using the AIN terminology as a descriptor for the group throughout this analysis. As Lewis’ (2018) study shows, users are exposed to openly white nationalist or thoroughly discredited ideas through these collaborations. By using these collaborative techniques and taking advantage of YouTube’s algorithms the AIN is attempting to create an “alternative news media system” (p.5) on YouTube. Lewis (2018) highlights how influencers in the AIN harbour a severe distrust of mainstream media, with many influencers unhappy with its apparent progressive, liberal bias. AIN members regularly “criticise the very concept of objectivity, as well as the mainstream media’s claims that they adhere to it” (Lewis 2018, p.18). In this way they are also capitalising on the existing distrust in traditional news sources and the converged media space.

The 2019 Digital News Report: Australia highlights how trust in news has fallen globally, with overall trust in US media at 32%. Just 14% of Republican voters trust in the accuracy and fairness of mass media (Fisher et. al. 2019; Lewis 2018). Trust in Australia’s mainstream media is slightly higher at 42% (Fisher et. al. 2019) But perhaps what is most interesting is the generational shift in news consumption, with almost half of Gen Z (18-24) and one third of Gen Y (25-37) using social media and YouTube in particular as their main source of news in Australia (Fisher et. al 2019). Further, these audiences are blurring the lines between what is and is not considered news and showing significantly less interest in individual news brands (Newman et. al. 2019). Gen Z and Y prefer to receive their news in a range of styles, from videos and podcasts to blogging, vlogging and social media posts. A 2017 Data & Society report that researched young news consumers in the US also found that teenagers have shifted the boundaries as to what they consider “news”, often preferring news sources that are not considered mainstream due to their perceived credibility and authenticity (Madden et. al. 2017). This is impacting on traditional news media sources and translates to a gravitation towards individual reporters or small independent news organisations. The report highlights how the reputation of the content producer is the critical factor in determining the level of trust, rather than the media organisation itself (Madden et. al. 2017).

This is exactly what the AIN are exploiting, according to Lewis (2018) who highlights how many AIN influencers frame their channels as a new experiment to provide news and information in “more meaningful and accurate ways” (p.16), generally from individuals who are unhappy with mainstream

media narratives (Lewis 2018). They have regular interaction with their audiences and adopt the vlogging style of production, filming much of the content in their homes, which builds an air of authenticity. These are all social influencer marketing techniques that are being utilised to “promote reactionary ideology” (Lewis 2018, p.25). But instead of selling a product, they are selling an ideology that largely revolves around rejecting any notions of left-wing politics, feminism and social justice (Lewis 2018). These findings correspond to Nicole Cohen’s (2015) examination of the increasingly precarious state of media work, highlighting how journalism has become about “self-marketing” where journalists “are building [their] brand, rather than actually making a living” (p.516). Except in the case of the AIN, they are taking advantage of declining trust in institutional journalism, to market themselves as a new way to get news and information.

In a detailed investigation into YouTube’s search and recommendation algorithms, Rieder et. al (2017) point out how their study could identify examples of ‘issue hijacking’ where content creators take advantage of SEO and information vacuums on social media to gain views. Popular AIN influencers like Dave Rubin, Milo Yiannopoulos and Steven Crowder all dominated the search results for terms such as ‘refugees’ and ‘syria’ above other mainstream media channels. Rieder et. al. (2017) noted that often far right influencers and members of the AIN appeared in search results from a range of different search terms. This coincides with Lewis’ (2018) contention that the AIN have mastered Search Engine Optimisation to influence search results on YouTube’s recommendation algorithms. Their regular collaboration with other AIN members further increases the potential for extreme content to be recommended.

In relation to YouTube’s search function, they found that it “is highly reactive to attention cycles” with native content dominating the search results (Rieder et. al. 2017 p.64). In this respect, the study draws special attention to the ranking culture within YouTube and how it rewards content creators who use strategies that activate their audiences “through strongly opinionated expression” (p.64). The reactionary and controversial nature of the AIN fits neatly with this profile. However, the Rieder et. al. (2017) study also stresses the importance of considering not just the technical side of YouTube’s algorithms, but its sociocultural influences that are deeply intertwined in the structure of the algorithms. As they note, the ethical and social problems arising from “the ranking of viewpoints is not a problem to be solved but an ongoing conundrum and site of struggle” (Rieder et. al. 2017 p.65).

Lewis (2018) also highlights how pathways to radicalisation on YouTube are inherently a social problem not just a tech issue and argues that the AIN “fits neatly into YouTube’s business model” (p.43), due to their ability to generate advertising revenue. There is no incentive to change it. But of course, the increasing popularity of YouTube political influencers is just one factor contributing to the increasing polarisation across the English-speaking western world in particular. Lewis’ examination fits neatly into Castells’ (2004) theories on power and counterpower and will allow me to demonstrate how the AIN is able to amplify its misinformation through Australia’s News Corp media, a seemingly willing participant. But to do this, we first need to examine Castells’ (2004) theory on the network society.

Power, counterpower and construction of meaning in the network society

Lewis’ (2018) study provides a good segue to Castells’ (2004) theories on power and counterpower in the network society. For Castells (2015), the “fundamental power struggle is the battle for the construction of meaning in the minds of the people” (p.5). He argues that the transformation of the communication environment “directly affects the forms of meaning construction and therefore the production of power relationships” (p.6). But it is the process of communication in the network society that is key to power (Castells 2004), because society is organised around networks of power “according to the interests and values of empowered actors” (Castells 2015, p.7), who exercise their power “by influencing the human mind predominantly (but not solely) through multimedia networks

of mass communication” (p.7). The state plays a fundamental role in the distribution of the global power network that is dominated by the US. Networks are organised around the state,

“...because the stable operation of the system, and the reproduction of power relationships in every network, ultimately depend on the coordinating and regulatory functions of the state, as was witnessed in the collapse of financial markets in 2008 when governments were called to the rescue around the world” (p.8).

Yet this power is very unevenly distributed and, as Castells (2015) points out, the state is not the only centre of power, but is dependent on other nodes of power in the network in order to be effective. He highlights the intimate links between global multimedia networks and global financial networks, which gives them immense power. But not *all* the power, as both are still reliant on the political network for regulation, taxation and other matters, and the political network itself is reliant on the military/security and science & knowledge networks among others. The intricate complexity of the network society makes power multidimensional. However, these nodes of power all share the same goal, that is controlling the ability to define the “rules and norms” of society (Castells 2015). This is done predominantly through the political system and why the state plays such a fundamental role in reproducing power relationships. But how is this power challenged?

Castells (2015) posits that counterpower is exercised through social actors and movements, who have developed “autonomous networks of horizontal communication” (p.9) through the production of mass self-communication that does not rely on institutional power to amplify its message. These movements offer a counter influence to the networks of power, constructing meaning around new values and norms that challenge and eventually change the dominant institutionalised power relations (Castells 2015; 2004).

Castells (2007) acknowledges that very often “social movements and insurgent politics reaffirm traditional values and forms, e.g. religion, the patriarchal family or the nation...social movements may be progressive or reactionary” (p.249). However, his focus seems to be much more on the progressive side of the social movements and how counterpower is used as a force for positive change (2007; 2015). Yet what Lewis’ (2018) research shows is that AIN political influencers have infiltrated the counterpower networks through the cultivation of alternative social identities that appeal to the countercultural identities of the 60’s and the punk rock scene of the 80’s. Further, they utilise the same mass self-communication techniques that Castells (2015) says are critical to the counterpower movement. But as Lewis (2018) writes:

“The entire countercultural positioning is misleading: these influencers are adopting identity signals affiliated with previous countercultures, but the actual content of their arguments seeks to reinforce dominant cultural, racial and gendered hierarchies. Their reactionary politics and connections to traditional modes of power show that what they are most often fighting for is actually the status quo—a return to traditional gender and racial norms, or a belief in the individual over an understanding of group oppression” (p.24).

Brenda Cossman (2018) provides an excellent analysis of how one member of the AIN exploited countercultural networks to gain influence by utilising what Lewis (2018) terms “strategic controversy” (p.31). This is where a political influencer capitalises on a controversy in order to gain attention (Lewis 2018). Jordan Peterson, a clinical psychologist and prominent node in the Alternative Influence Network, gained his notoriety after releasing a video on YouTube titled “Professor against political correctness” in 2016 (Cossman 2018). His video focused on a proposed bill that would add gender expression and gender identities to the Canadian Human Rights Act. Peterson argued that the passing of the bill would “make pronoun misuse subject to hate speech” (p.43), suggesting he would be prosecuted for even critiquing the law (Cossman 2018). Bill C-16 does not contain any specific references to gender pronouns and but, as Cossman (2018) establishes, this reframing of the argument was taken up by conservative politicians who long had issues with gay, lesbian and trans rights and

were now able to shift the discourse to one about infringements on freedom of expression, rather than an outright rejection of trans rights.(Cossman 2018). The Bill and Peterson’s opposition to it became a lightning rod for controversy, transforming the situation “into the very thing that Peterson was criticising” (p.72). Students started protesting Peterson’s video and disrupting his classes, then the university of Toronto, where he is tenured, sent him a letter warning him of his obligations under the Canadian human rights legislation. All this provided Peterson with ample evidence that his freedom of expression was being attacked by a radical leftist elite who have infiltrated universities in order to force compelled speech on society (Cossman 2018). His YouTube subscriptions skyrocketed (Cossman 2018).

But as I have touched on, the mainstream media plays a vital role in the amplification of these messages and the people that propagate them. Cossman (2018) highlights how Peterson capitalised on the media’s hunger for spectacle and controversy and effectively inserted himself into the centre of the debate that massively boosted his profile. Lauren Southern also utilised a form of strategic controversy to gain Australian mainstream media attention prior to her Australian tour and I will discuss this further during my analysis. But most importantly, as Cossman (2018) notes, the furore around Bill C-16 that Peterson ignited marked a new discourse in the construction of meaning: freedom of expression. Of course, the term itself is well known in western democracies, but Peterson’s opposition provided a connection between political correctness and the criminalising of speech even though, as Cossman (2018) points out, when it came to pronoun use in particular these were civil matters, not criminal. Yet Peterson repeated the claim many times during media appearances and on his YouTube channel (Cossman 2018).

Marwick & Lewis (2017) highlight several times in their report on media manipulation how the notion of free speech is treated as an absolute right and used as a tool to attack “political correctness” as censorship and an assault on western civilisation itself. According to Castells’ (2007; 2015) perspective, this is all about constructing meaning around new norms and values, a key component of counterpower social movements. The occupation of physical space is another important aspect of the counterpower movement according to Castells (2015), as they create a sense of community and togetherness. Further, Castells (2015) notes that occupied spaces are often highly symbolic. “By constructing a free community in a symbolic place, social movements create a public space...which ultimately becomes a political space” (Castells 2015, p.11). For Castells (2015) the “autonomy of communication is the essence of social movements because it is what allows the movement to be formed” (p.11). It is this autonomous communication between the digital and urban spaces that is the critical public space in the network society (Castells 2015).

As Cossman’s (2018) study shows, Peterson has utilised the autonomous communication channels of YouTube and the physical space of the university as a flashpoint for building his “free speech” movement. Of the political influencers I analysed for this study, they also utilised physical space to further their cause, with many of them appearing in the articles I analysed because of an Australian tour. Further, their events were framed as a place for free speech and backlash against a powerful elite who’s trying to suppress it. But my research will demonstrate how this phenomenon of amplifying misinformation is occurring in Australia. Members of the AIN have taken advantage of the disrupted media environment in an attempt to build an international counterpower movement that is particularly interested in connecting collective human rights movements to attacks on free speech. In Australia, far from being manipulated by the AIN, News Corp appear to be a willing participant in spreading its message.

David McKnight’s (2010) examination of News Corp from 2010 highlights how owner Rupert Murdoch has made the claim for decades that the mainstream media is run by an elitist liberal media.

“The key to understanding the political view of the world that distinguishes Murdoch and News Corporation is the recurring notion that a powerful elite promotes left wing ideas and liberalism” (McKnight 2010, p.311)

McKnight (2010) argues that the attacks on liberal bias “also operated as a form of product differentiation for Fox News in relation to CNN” (p.310). Similarly, in Australia where it owns 60% of the newspaper circulation (Flew & Goldsmith 2013), News Corp papers regularly attack liberal and leftist bias and this is a consistent theme in my analysis. McKnight highlights how Murdoch’s News Corp has railed against ‘political correctness’, the liberal elite, the threat to free speech and left-wing bias; all popular topics discussed in the Alternative Influence Network and key arguments of media manipulators (Lewis 2018; Marwick & Lewis 2017).

This corresponds with my analysis that found all these topics were key features in the articles I analysed. When considered through the framework of Castells’ (2004; 2007; 2015) network society, my research aims to show how News Corp is a key node for promoting the AIN in Australia and plays an active role in uncritically spreading its message. Through analysing the discourses used by both News Corp Australia and the AIN, I intend to highlight topics like identity politics, free speech and western civilisation are centred around populist discourses that, when analysed together, form a coherent ideology. This ideology expands through both the power and counterpower communication networks from social to mainstream media, to state power centres and across international boundaries. I will expand on the ideological aspect in the following section.

Discourse and Ideology

What is discourse? Fairclough (1992) takes the Foucauldian (1983) perspective on discourse and contends that it both shapes and is shaped by social practices. He understands discourse as “the kind of language used within a specific field” (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, p.66), such as media, politics or science. It is a way of understanding and making sense of the world and forms the language and images we use to construct that understanding and meaning (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002). Castells (2004; 2015) also stresses the fundamental role construction of meaning in the mind is to the reproduction of power. The communication networks are at the centre of this. Therefore, an analysis of the language, images and symbols used by influential nodes in the networks of power, such as News Corp and YouTube for example, can provide insight into the discourses used to construct meaning and whether they reproduce or challenge power relations.

Fairclough’s (1992; Jorgensen & Phillips 2002) critical discourse analysis (CDA) aims to reveal the role of discursive practice in the maintenance of the social world, “including those social relations that involve unequal relations of power” (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, p.63). It is interested in the role discursive practices play in further certain social groups’ interests (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002), Fairclough also enlists the concept of ideology and this diverges from Foucault (1983; Daldal 2014), who rejects the notion of ideology as abstract, anachronistic and a relic of structuralist thinking (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002; Daldal 2014). Fairclough understands ideologies as “constructions of meaning that contribute to the production, reproduction and transformation of relations of domination” (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, p.75). In this way, ideology takes a more Gramscian approach (Daldal 2014). It is real, “it determines the way a human being acts, thinks, produces. That is the reason why ideology is “material”” (Daldal 2014, p.158). It is also fluid and constantly changing. For Fairclough’s CDA (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002), ideological discourses are those that contribute “to the maintenance and transformation of power relations” (p.13). But, as Jorgensen & Phillips (2002) point out, this definition has its own problems, as it still does not clarify what is, or is not, an ideological discourse.

The discursive psychology approach of Wetherell & Potter (2002; Jorgensen & Phillips 2002) helps answer the question of ideological discourse. Wetherell & Potter (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002) “understand power as a practice and its power as diffuse and discursively organised. The ideological content of a discourse can be judged by its *effects*” (p.108). In this way the aim is to demonstrate how one group’s interests are furthered at the expense of another through the use of particular discourses (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002). The discursive psychology approach is less concerned with the linguistics of a text or speech like CDA, but its rhetorical organisation, such as how a person’s world

is constructed in a text or speech or how representations of the world are established as stable and factual (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002). Thus, we can consider how the discursive practices we are exposed to help us understand the world a certain way and how this might be manipulated. Another important aspect of discursive psychology is its conception of identity as a product of social interaction (Wetherell & Potter 2002; Jorgensen & Phillips 2002). “The dominant view is that identities are constructed on the basis of different, shifting discursive resource and are thus relational, incomplete and unstable, but not completely open” (p.1). In other words, identity changes but there is still a sense of self, it is not completely unstable. Jorgensen & Phillips (2002) highlight how this can open up the possibility of *imagined communities*, as conveyed by Benedict Anderson (1983). Anderson (1983) argued that the nation is an imagined political community because the idea of the communion lives in the minds of its citizens. Likewise, women, men, experts and activists are all part of imagined communities. But they are not permanent and can change often, depending on the circumstances and the interactions with others (Anderson 1983). People selectively draw from different discourses depending on the social context (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002).

This approach then, can provide a framework for analysing the rhetorical organisation of how people form identities from different discourses, but it cannot explain why a person might invest in certain discourses (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002). Indeed the “why” is outside the scope of this paper. But when combined with the CDA approach, discursive psychology offers a more comprehensive understanding of the notion of identity construction and how seemingly disparate groups of people can form an ideologically consistent set of ideas. Further, it allows me to examine the effects discourses have on particular groups and connect this to larger societal issues. For example, using this approach in my research, I will argue that by amplifying the messages of the AIN and neutrally reporting on far-right activists, News Corp is moving far-right discourses into mainstream consciousness. It is shifting the boundaries as to what is considered acceptable discourse in the public domain and it can do this due to its command over the Australian mainstream media market. As McKay (2010) notes, although part of a network of power, News Corp positions itself as an underdog against a liberal media. My analysis highlights how many of its commentators talk about a powerful “leftist elite”, utilising the same techniques as the AIN. Yet these discourses almost always tend to target marginalised or minority groups. I will operationalise the discursive psychological perspective of ideology, to examine how the discourses established in my analysis not only reproduce traditional values around family and society, but enable the mainstreaming of far-right extremist discourses.

The theoretical framework

As mentioned previously, my analysis is built on Fairclough’s (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002) three-dimensional model for critical discourse analysis. For Fairclough (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002):

“Every instance of language use is a communicative event consisting of three dimensions:

- It is a *text* (speech, writing, visual image or a combination of these);
- It is a *discursive practice* which involves the production and consumption of texts; and
- It is a *social practice*” (p.69)

As such, “the analysis of a communicative event thus includes:

1. Analysis of the discourses and genres which are articulated in the production and consumption of the text (the level of discursive practice);
2. Analysis of the linguistic structure (the level of the text); and
3. Considerations about whether the discursive practice reproduces or, instead, restructures the existing order of discourse and about what consequences this has for the broader social practice (the level of social practice)” (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, p.70).

A *genre* is “a particular usage of language which participates in, and constitutes, part of a particular social practice, for example, an interview genre, a news genre..” (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002 p.67) and

this also forms part of the *order of discourse*. Within an order of discourse, there are specific “discursive practices through which text and talk are produced and consumed or interpreted” (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, p.67). For example, in the media industry there are specific discursive practices occurring between news anchors and their audiences, reporters and editors, and executives and the organisation’s culture. Wetherell & Potter (2002), conceive a similar notion with their use of “interpretative repertoires”, in which things like culture, race and nation are constructed around particular discourses. Further, they also highlight the necessity of examining both institutional practices and social structures in maintaining discourses (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002). The patterns in the chosen interpretative repertoires and their relationship to wider social structures are what my analysis aims to uncover.

But to help build this framework further and address some of the criticisms of the CDA approach, I will also consider some notions from Castells (2004;2015) network society and utilise José van Dijck’s (2013) combining of this approach with Actor Network Theory (ANT). Castells’ (2004) theory on the network society is a vital component, as it allows me to highlight how the dominant power networks operate to construct meaning. Castells (2004) reminds us to consider the pre-existing economic and global capitalist power structures the network society was built. However, van Dijck (2013) points out Castells’ (2004) approach to examining power and counterpower “lacks the ability of ANT to expose how power is executed from technological and computation systems” (p.27). van Dijck (2013) provides a way to deconstruct technological platforms as techno-cultural constructs, which includes its technology, users and content, and socioeconomic structures like its ownership status, governance and business models. This will help us understand “the coevolution of social media platforms and sociality in the context of a rising culture of connectivity” (van Dijck 2013, p.28). This culture of connectivity has also been one of convergence in the media sphere as my analysis highlights. Social media posts are embedded directly into many of the articles or links to social media platforms are a constant presence within the News Corp texts. In the case of my analysis I will be focusing on the point of intersection with the technological platforms utilised by AIN influencers on the one hand and the platforms used by News Corp on the other. The ANT framework will allow me to consider how the technology influences the social and vice-versa, as I conduct my critical discourse analysis.

In linking my analysis to the wider societal structures, I will consider Stephan Pühringer and Walter Ötsch’s (2018) comparative analysis of neoliberalism and right-wing populism. Noting the ambiguity of the term, they characterise the concept as a “thought collective” (p.196). Pühringer & Ötsch (2018) argue that neoliberalism is fundamentally organised around the concept of “the market”. It is essentially the notion of “entrepreneurial freedom, open markets, free trade and reductions in government spending” (Lueck et. al 2015, p.610), which was turbocharged during the Reagan and Thatcher era of the early 1980’s. Pühringer & Otch (2018) argue that the categorical analogies between neoliberal market fundamentalism and right-wing populism are laying the ground work for an authoritarian neoliberalism. Lueck et. al. (2015) also highlight how neoliberal policies have been used to achieve nationalist goals and vice-versa, suggesting that “neoliberal values may actually be dependent on nationalist policies” (p.610), as both promote “the restriction of migration to only those considered ‘desirable’ to the nation itself, (Lueck et. al 2015, p.610). Neoliberalism requires nationalism in order to maintain social order (Lueck et. al. 2015). Castells’ (2004) posits that the network society was built under a neoliberal framework as it was primarily formed under the policies of market freedom and capitalist globalisation from the Reagan and Thatcher era of the 1980’s (Castells 2004), and I will discuss this further in my analysis.

Method

For my mainstream media analysis this paper focuses on News Corp media only, due to its prominence and influence in the Australian media, owning 59% of daily newspaper sales and commanding the largest online audience across its various mastheads. But further to this, as McKay (2010) points out, Murdoch is “deeply committed to an ideological stance, which he is prepared to

further through media outlets in some cases at the cost of significant losses” (p.313). News Corp Australia often focuses on the same topics as the AIN. Several of its pundits that are included in my analysis posture themselves as defenders of traditional western values and free speech against a powerful leftist elite.

To obtain my empirical data I utilised open source media analysis platform *Media Cloud*. Media Cloud is a content analysis tool that tracks millions of news articles, blogs and other media stories online and archives the information to be used for analysis (Media Cloud 2019). The website tracks a large number of Australian publications, including News Corp papers and allows Boolean keyword searching. I searched for articles from media outlets News.com.au, The Daily Telegraph, Herald Sun and The Courier Mail. News.com.au is Australia’s most popular online news site, attracting over 9 million unique visitors in April 2019 alone (Nielsen 2019), with a high readership across demographics but particularly in the 18 – 35 age group. For this reason, it tends to target the millennial audience. The other three outlets are News Corp’s daily east coast capital city newspapers and News Corp’s next most popular newspapers respectively. I was unable to gather any articles from national paper, The Australian due to almost all of its content being stuck behind a paywall.

Using Media Cloud and the selected news outlets as described above, I conducted three searches using different phrases: “identity politics”, “western civilisation” and “ok to be white” for the period 1 Jan 2018 to 31 December 2019. I chose these phrases due to the prominence with which these in both the AIN and within News Corp. The “ok to be white” phrase was chosen, as there was quite a bit of discussion over this phrase in 2018 when AIN member Lauren Southern arrived in Australia wearing a shirt with this written on it then, several months later, one of Australia’s far-right senators filed a motion in parliament to affirm that it’s ok to be white. This provides an interesting opportunity for me to analyse the discursive links between the AIN, News Corp and the Australian parliament.

The phrase searches gave me 132, 107 and 100 results respectively. However, many of the same articles appeared across publications. I counted the unique articles appearing in each category, there were 68, 64 and 57 results respectively. There was also some crossover between articles appearing across all search results. I picked 21 articles from the three categories. Jorgensen & Phillips (2002) write that when choosing a sample size for analysis, “it is often sufficient to use a sample of just a few texts (for example, under 10 interviews)” (p.120). This is because the focus for analysis is on the language use and linguistic style, rather than an individual and “discursive patterns can be created and maintained by just a few people” (p.20).

I am looking for discursive patterns that form ideological misinformation between News Corp and the AIN and, as such, I obtained a range of articles from throughout 2018, choosing a combination of news and opinion pieces to get a mix of news and opinion genres. A research period of 12 months was used so I could identify the discursive patterns exhibited over a wider period of time and my analysis would not be constrained to a single event. I tried to pick a variation of authors, as well as articles that discussed social media political influencers and where identity politics, western civilisation or ok to be white were more prominent topics. I then built a questionnaire in order to ask a series of consistent questions for each article around the framing of articles, their content, the themes and prominent discourses. I also examined the discourses of the political influencers found in my analysis through their social media channels or as. This study intends to compliment Rebecca Lewis (2018) and Horta Ribeiro et. al. (2019) research by adding another component of analysis to networks of influence, in its examination of the role Australian mainstream media plays in spreading ideological misinformation in Australia. The influencers I analysed are shown in Table 1.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations with my analysis. Of course, this is not a comprehensive examination of all articles discussing these topics, as only 21 articles are analysed. Further, Media Cloud does not find many articles that are behind paywalls, which rules out a significant portion of

News Corp content in Australia. Nevertheless, I have included several articles from News Corp's most prominent and popular commentators and the combination of editorials with "news" reporting, provides a solid base for understanding the common orders of discourse favoured by News Corp and the AIN. The aim of this study is to highlight how ideological misinformation is amplified by particular mainstream media in Australia. A detailed qualitative analysis of 21 News Corp articles will provide a starting point and a framework for analysing this phenomenon on a larger scale, that can add a quantitative component to the research in the future.

On "misinformation"

Misinformation can be a subjective term, with "fake news" have become popular catchery of the Trump Administration to describe anything it disagrees with. Marwick & Lewis (2017) propose that it "generally refers to a wide range of disinformation and misinformation circulating online and in the media" (p.44). They point out how the social media networks have made it essentially impossible to control the spread of misinformation even when it has been debunked. Further, media outlets might sensationalise news, or focus on a particular partisan aspect simply to increase intrigue and gain more clicks and money, or they "may spread information that falls on a continuum between true and false (Marwick & Lewis 2017, p.44). Spreading misinformation does not necessarily mean it is done intentionally, although it often is. Rather it forms part of the systemic problems in the way societal values are organised, something that van Dijck (2013) and Castells (2004) can assist me to explore further in my analysis.

Ethical considerations

My analysis focuses on a number of columnists and influencers from both mainstream media and social media, naming many of them directly. As they are public figures, all with their own by-lines and publishing content on major public platforms, I consider that there are no ethical issues in the use of their names or analysis of the content they have published. I also analyse the user comments of one article, including a screenshot of some comments in this paper (figure 3). Commenters in News Corp comments sections are not required to use their real name or a full name. As such, I consider that my use of these publicly available comments will not result in these commenters being identified as it is only their usernames that are visible.

There is, however, an ethical question relating to the CDA approach itself due to its inherently subjective nature. Fairclough (1992) points out the trouble with justifying a subjective process is made more difficult by the,

"slipperiness of constructs such as genre and discourse, the difficulty sometimes of keeping them apart, and the need to assume a relatively well-defined repertoire of discourses and genres in order to use the constructs in analysis" (p.214).

Jorgensen & Phillips (2002) highlight the discursive psychology approach by evaluating the *validity* of the research. They argue that a researcher can judge their work "in terms of the role that the research plays in the maintenance of, or challenge to, power relations in society, that is, in relation to the ideological implications of the research" (p.117). My research, in identifying ideological misinformation perpetuated across social and mainstream media networks, aims to challenge power relations by revealing the role discursive practices play in enabling the amplification of far-right discourses into the mainstream consciousness. I consider that this is a vital area for study and my research is valid as it aims to add nuance to and broaden a set of very narrow yet dominant discourses perpetuated through Australian mainstream media that in their current form ultimately discriminate against particular minority groups that do not fit within the dominant discourses.

The Texts

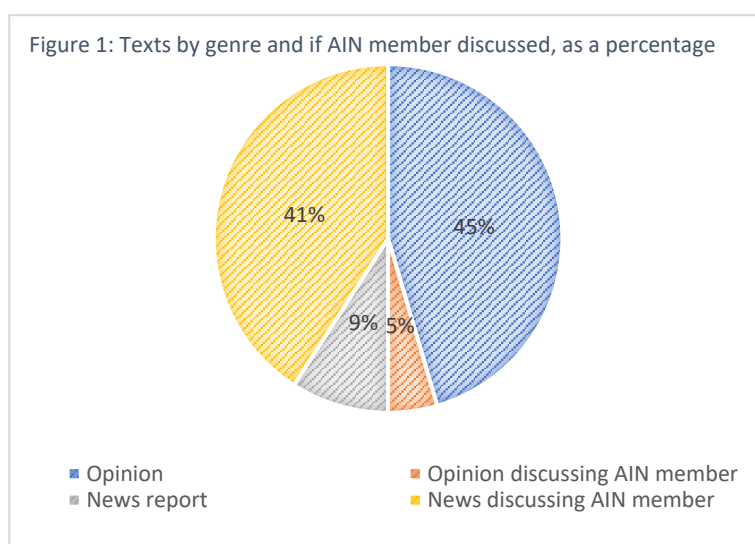
Table 1 - Articles collected for analysis

	Article title	Media outlet(s) published	Social media influencer mentioned	Author	Type
1	Right-wing activist Lauren Southern touches down in Brisbane wearing 'It's okay to be white' T-shirt	News.com.au	Lauren Southern	Frank Chung	Report
2	Is it too late to save our universities	News.com.au	Jordan Peterson	Frank Chung	Report
3	Proud Boys founder Gavin McInnes heading to Australia in November	News.com.au	Gavin McInnes	Frank Chung	Report
4	Far-right activists banned from the UK are coming to Melbourne	News.com.au	Lauren Southern, Stefan Molyneux	Luke Kinsella	Report
5	Joe Hildebrand: How Scott Morrison is 'The Pelican Brief' Prime Minister	News.com.au, Courier Mail		Joe Hildebrand	Opinion
6	Onward Christian soldier into politics	Daily Telegraph, Herald Sun, Courier Mail		Miranda Devine	Opinion
7	The west is falling and it's all our fault	News.com.au		Joe Hildebrand	Opinion
8	Our sense of unity lost to the new tribes dividing us	Daily Telegraph, Herald Sun		Andrew Bolt	Opinion
9	What I learnt about the far right from Lauren Southern	News.com.au, Herald Sun, Courier Mail	Lauren Southern, Stefan Molyneux, Milo Yiannopoulos, Jordan Peterson	Luke Kinsella	Opinion
10	Hanson was right. Anti-white racism is real	Daily Telegraph		Miranda Devine	Opinion
11	Moment Senator David Leyonhjelm crossed the line	News.com.au		Joe Hildebrand	Opinion
12	Suicide by sneering: the mad hatred of our own civilisation (video)	Daily Telegraph		Andrew Bolt	Opinion
13	The sinister origins of 'It's OK to be white'	News.com.au	Lauren Southern	Sam Clench	Report
14	Uni student encourages people to understand their white privilege with racially-split performance	News.com.au, Daily Telegraph, Herald Sun		Natalie Wolfe	Report
15	28 senators vote for Pauline Hanson's 'It's OK to be white' motion in the Senate	News.com.au, Daily Telegraph, Courier Mail	Lauren Southern	Sam Clench	Report
16	Pauline Hanson tweets a box of tissues to Sarah Hanson-Young	Herald Sun, Courier Mail		Stephanie Bedo	Report
17	Describing the left's dream is not "racist"	Daily Telegraph, Herald Sun		Andrew Bolt	Opinion
18	Government tries to explain away its support for 'It's OK to be white' motion	News.com.au, Daily Telegraph, Herald Sun		Malcolm Farr and Sam Clench	Report
19	Lauren Southern insults Melbourne, city fires back	News.com.au, Daily Telegraph, Herald Sun	Lauren Southern	[Not listed]	Report
20	Undercover video in Melbourne backfires for right-wing provocateur	News.com.au	Lauren Southern	Ben Graham	Report
21	George Pell and the priest who went to Mardi Gras	News.com.au		Joe Hildebrand	Opinion

The analysis

Studying the *intertextuality* of texts is vital to understanding the social practices of discourses (Fairclough 1992). Intertextuality “is a matter of ‘the insertion of history (society) into a text and of this text in history’ (Kristeva 1986, cited in Fairclough 1992, p.195). In other words, texts are created by drawing on social and historical resources. They are influenced by other texts, reproducing and challenging discourses and genres. A text “should be understood as a complex set of discursive strategies that is situated in a special cultural context” (Joye 2009, p.49) and can relate to any media, such as video, audio or written mediums. An analysis of texts can “reveal the precise mechanisms and modalities of the social and ideological work of language” (Fairclough 1992, p.211).

Through an intertextual analysis of my empirical samples, I can identify how different discourses are employed and link these historically and geographically by building the orders of discourse. Of the 21 articles analysed, 10 were published in two or more news outlets, exposing them to wider audiences and demographics. Eleven articles formed the news genre and eleven the opinion genre (figure 1). Eight of the news articles feature a political influencer as the primary subject and one of the opinion articles. One of the opinion pieces was also a video.



The topics of ‘identity politics’, ‘western society’ and ‘the left’ were common across the texts, each being discussed in 16 of the articles. ‘Political correctness’ and ‘free speech’ were also used frequently, discussed in 10 and nine articles respectively. Across all the articles “the left”, “political correctness” and “identity politics” had distinctly negative connotations, whereas “western society” and “free speech” were inherently positive. Some of the more prominent themes around these phrases included: ‘political correctness stifling free speech’ (11 articles), ‘western civilisation’s culture under attack’ (10), ‘identity politics destroying western culture’ (9) and ‘free speech under attack’ (9). All these themes interact and build new discourses depending on the context of the article. But, like Lewis’ (2018) findings, they tend to be reactionary in nature and generally result in laying direct or indirect blame for societal polarisation on so-called left-wing ideas. I will explain this position in more detail as we move through the analysis. First, I will consider the top identified topics with a bigger focus on the opinion articles before moving onto the articles referencing AIN political influencers, then the last remaining news reports.

Prominent topics

Identity politics appears to be loosely defined and is often used interchangeably with notions like political correctness. In the opinion articles, it is consistently used as a negative term to describe various issues associated with left-wing politics such as LGBTQI and particularly trans rights, multiculturalism, hate speech and the ideological grip of the left on universities. Popular News Corp commentator, Miranda Devine describes it as “a dehumanising reversion to an ancient caste society in which people are judged, not on the quality of their character or their actions, but on characteristics buried in their DNA, like skin colour” (2018, para.6). In this particular instance Devine was highlighting identity politics’ contribution to so-called anti-white racism and the rise of hatred against white men in particular.

As this example shows, she has taken the assumed historical knowledge of racism against people of colour and applied it directly to contemporary discourses around white privilege. Further, as evidence

of ‘anti-white racism’, she lists a series of unconnected anecdotes, from a political party who sold “mediocre white men” stickers at a fundraiser to New York Times columnist, Sarah Jeong, being appointed to its editorial board, “despite her record of racial hatred towards white people. Among her twitter offerings: “#cancelwhitepeople.” (Devine 2018, para.23). What’s interesting about this particular incident is that Jeong wrote the tweet as a satirical response to abuse she was receiving online (Romano 2018) and when she was hired to the NY Times, she again received a barrage of racist and misogynistic abuse (Romano 2018). This demonstrates how the way ‘identity politics’ is operationalised, completely ignores the long-lasting and ongoing systemic effects of racism. It highlights a contradiction in the discourse which, on the one hand dismisses the systemic issues most often associated with human rights, but on the other, reappropriates the same language to argue that there is a systemic undercurrent of anti-white racism.

Andrew Bolt (2018), Australia’s most read opinion columnist, utilises a similar approach in his article lamenting the decline of Australian culture due to “a tidal wave of immigrants” (para. 1). He writes that “Immigration is becoming colonisation, turning this country from a home into a hotel. We are clustering into tribes that live apart from each other and often do not even speak the same language in the street” (para.8). His evidence is to list the percentages of languages other than English people speak in particular suburbs around Australia. Here, the identity politics is multiculturalism – “a policy to emphasise what divides us rather than celebrate what unites” (Bolt 2018, para.21). Bolt ties identity politics to an assumed historical knowledge of a time of unity, but his framing of immigration as a “tidal wave” and using negative terms such as “colonisation” and “clustering into tribes”, adds a distinctly racial theme to his version of identity politics. Again, we see the reappropriation of academic terms used to describe the systemic oppression of people of colour. “Colonisation” is stripped of any context and repackaged as a representation of recent foreign immigration from predominantly non-white countries.

As discussed, this decoupling of historical context is an important discursive technique when using ‘identity politics’ and this was utilised by all of the opinion columnists. Academic terms to describe historic and system discrimination were attributed new meanings that re-centred white, western culture.

Miranda Devine and Andrew Bolt present some of the more explicit examples of ‘identity politics’, but Joe Hildebrand, editor-at-large at News.com.au and a popular opinion columnist, is more subtle. In his rhetoric, identity politics are the projects of “inner-city bourgeoisie” who are consumed with things like “gender neutral birth certificates” or shutting down **free speech**” (Hildebrand 2018). In all these examples identity politics is used as a way to reframe discourses around issues such as race, LGBTQI identity and white privilege away from viewing them as systemic issues and towards the concerns of a minority of well-funded individuals. This allows the inclusion of further themes around censorship and the role of political correctness in destroying free speech.

These antics are usually ascribed to “**the left**”, another loosely assigned term that includes a broad range of groups and individuals, from human rights and environmental protesters to the unemployed, academics, politicians and scientists. The language across all the articles discussing ‘the left’ was generally negative, regularly comparing actions like protest and civil disobedience directly to far-right extremism and authoritarian regimes. For example: “A left that has so tightened its ideological grip on academia that it has effectively recast neo-Nazis as champions of free speech”, (Hildebrand 2018, para. 5); “Like her radical left-wing enemies, Lauren understands half the story of whatever she talks about (Islam, feminism, multiculturalism), and thinks it’s the whole story”, (Kinsella 2018, para.24); “Shelton is the most persuasive advocate of social conservatism in Australia, and the most potent foe of the new authoritarianism of identity politics”, (Devine 2018, para.3), “the only thing more hysterical than Trump’s antics is the left’s hysterical reaction to them” (Hildebrand 2018, para.17). In this way, “the left” are framed as irrational, reactionary and destroyers of free speech. Joe Hildebrand’s (2018) allusion to the left’s ideological grip on academia is another common trope used throughout several of the articles and by the AIN. It is the notion that the universities have been

infiltrated by radical leftists who hate western society (Chung 2018). One of the articles analysed, *Is it too late to save our universities* - a report in the work and finance section of News.com.au - is dedicated to this topic and contends that

“for many, the universities are a lost cause after decades of postmodernism — which holds that there is no objective truth — eating away at the intellectual foundations of most disciplines. Melbourne University now teaches a course in “whiteness studies”, pushing concepts like “white privilege”, “white fragility” and “toxic whiteness”. (Chung 2018, para.11).

In this case, the term ‘postmodernism’ implies a new meaning alluding to a secretive cabal of radical leftists who have destroyed universities. The next sentence simply names the new courses at Melbourne University, which, out of context, provides all the justification that “the left” are ideologically possessed. The ‘radical left’, as seen in this example is a recurrent concept across the AIN and conservative media commentators. Jordan Peterson is a key contributor to the notion of a radical leftist takeover of social science departments, lending it credibility due to his tenure as a psychology professor at University of Toronto. I discuss this further in the political influencers’ analysis.

Again, we can identify how academic terms, that are generally employed to describe complex systemic issues, are stripped of context by social commentators and repurposed to attack the very notions they criticise. They lay blame for larger, societal problems onto individuals and their actions, rather than the economic and political systems maintaining them. Further, the consistent utilisation of ‘extreme left’ to describe protesters and those practicing of civil disobedience has the effect of minimizing the acts of far-right violence and extremism, that is now considered a very real and increasing threat across western societies (Koehler 2019). For example: “the first leg on her Australian tour was met with protests from the left, including some from the extreme left, who rushed the stage and tried to disrupt proceedings” (News Corp 2018, para.9). This is indicative of the casualness with which terms like ‘extreme’ are applied to perceived disruptive “leftists” and draws a direct link to extremism on both sides of the political spectrum, even though the evidence overwhelmingly highlights that the increase of politically motivated violence and extremism in western democracies can be attributed to the far-right (Koehler 2019). “The left” is consistently referred to as a homogenous entity. Interestingly, Joe Hildebrand refers to ‘the left’ in the singular throughout his articles, which has the effect of destroying any nuance and pitting one group against another. In this case it’s ‘left’ vs ‘right’.

But perhaps the most common concern about the left throughout the opinion articles in particular, is its “hatred” for **western civilisation**. Andrew Bolt considers that “most of the values that have shaped this nation and for the best, they are from the west...But a great sickness is growing. It’s a suicidal self-hatred of this same western civilisation” (Bolt 2018, 1:20). In another article he argues that

“The Western civilisation that gave this nation its character — and especially its democratic institutions — is damned as oppressive and racist even by our universities, with the academics’ union attacking “the alleged superiority of Western culture and civilisation”” (Bolt 2018, para.27).

In both these quotes we can see how Bolt places ‘western civilisation’ on a pedestal and ties it directly to national identity. Anyone attacking ‘western civilisation’ is attacking the nation itself. Bolt also appears to be referring to an incident in Australia at the time of this article, where two Australian Universities pulled out of a deal with a philanthropic organisation called The Ramsay Centre that was funding a western civilisation degree. The universities refused the deals due to concern over academic freedom, with academics extremely concerned that it represented “the institutionalisation of ideas in the curriculum that strengthen racism and European supremacism,” (McGowan 2018, para.9). Indeed, Ramsay Centre board member and former Australian Prime Minister, Tony Abbott had previously

stated that the centre “was not merely about western civilisation but in favour of it,” (McGowan 2018, para.9).

Discussing the same topic, Joe Hildebrand (2018) also echoes Bolt’s sentiment, claiming that:

“as we trash our liberal democratic legacy, not a single university in the country can be found to even house a fully funded institute devoted to the study of Western civilisation. Among the newly straitened ideological orthodoxy that all too often poses as academia the West is not just falling: It was pushed” (para.21).

The language of both Bolt and Hildebrand characterise any criticism of the current ‘western’ political and socio-economic system as an attack on people that they associate with so-called western civilisation. In doing so, they dismiss systems that do perpetuate discrimination and shift the focus on the individual. Any overt attempts at questioning these systems are instead labelled as ‘identity politics.’ Miranda Devine (2018) further adds a religious theme to her concerns:

“No longer can Christian politicians be regarded as fringe-dwellers. Whether you are religious or not, Western civilisation has its roots in Christian values, and an assault on one is an assault on both. Without such a framework, you are literally blind to the dangers of identity politics, Marxism’s new guise” (para.9).

The language Devine uses like ‘assault’, ‘dangers’ and ‘Marxism’s new guise’, creates two camps of people: those ‘for’ western civilisation and those ‘against’ it. Indeed, the article’s title is “Onward Christian soldier into politics” creating clear connotations of a ‘good’ and ‘bad’ side. Devine also uses the term ‘framework’ clearly differentiating it from the ideological ‘identity politics’, that is associated with Marxism. Hildebrand (2018) utilises the same language, calling western civilisation a “framework that does not just tolerate dissent but celebrates it” (para. 26). Yet in the very same article he claims that:

“If people truly love Western values — which in truth are human values — such as freedom, democracy and fairness, then we should be sharing them, not sheltering them. We should be a beacon, not an ivory tower. And we should celebrate them, not be ashamed of them” (Hildebrand 2018, para.28).

Throughout the article he refers to ‘western civilisation’s’ critics as ideological. This is a sentiment that is also expressed by Devine and Bolt. Bolt regularly claims that, “my offence lies actually in describing what is going on, and without cheering it as they do” (Bolt 2018, para.16). Here he was referring specifically to how multiculturalism has become colonialism in Australia.

This opens a further contradiction and it is one repeated across the opinion articles. Western civilisation is lauded for its free speech and democratic values, yet when perfectly normal and healthy democratic actions, such as questioning the status quo, calling out racism and fighting for human rights occur they are condemned as aggressive, threatening actions. The examples above also highlight the flexible and generalised nature of the themes. Individual perpetrators, who are variously academics, inner-city hipsters or unemployed activists, are generically labelled as “the left”. This is endemic across the articles. If you are criticising a specific idea or issue it can be labelled “identity politics”. But most critically, attacking “western civilisation” is attacking the nation and its people. We can begin to see the threads across topics and how they combine to create new meanings, often around academic terms that already carry the weight of meaning.

This reappropriation of academic terms has the effect of delegitimising both the individuals who push notions like social justice and the institutions that study and question social norms. One news article in particular provides a good example of this. Titled *Uni student encourages people to understand their white privilege with racially-split performance*, the language instantly evokes the narratives of identity politics and ideological universities. The first line reads: “Isabella Whāwhai Mason might still be a student at Melbourne University but her assignments are already getting her national attention”

(Bedo 2018, para.1). Although the article quotes the student extensively, the article focuses on how the performance excludes separates white people from people of colour.

“Outside the theatre, the remaining group, made up entirely of white or people of European descent, are left in the foyer to watch a second show. Performers there speak about the history of colonisation in Australia before talking about how their own “whiteness” has given them privilege. (Bedo 2018, para.8).

The language describing white people as being ‘left in the foyer’ subtly indicates a level of discrimination, rather than it being a key part of the performance. Further, the use of quotation marks around ‘whiteness’ highlights that it is not the author’s word but from the performance itself. The article then spends seven further paragraphs discussing the performance’s focus on ‘whiteness’ and how “whiteness has afforded them basic niceties in society” (para.11). In providing countering opinions, the article quotes a far-right extremist group and a right-wing libertarian thinktank, both of who suggest it is “reverse-racist”. It also quotes the federal Multicultural Minister stating that the university had “adopted identity politics” for allowing the performance (Wolfe 2018, para.4). This is illustrative of the way universities are delegitimised in the media due to the linking of academic concepts with “the left” and “identity politics”. The binary concepts of ‘left’ and ‘right’ that are so active throughout the articles I analysed, remove all nuance and justify the juxtaposition of academic arguments with far-right extremist arguments through an artificially derived “both sides” logic.

Considering these articles intertextually, there is a clear relationship between the narrative and discourses used by News Corp commentators and the AIN political influencers. But, as I will discuss in the next section, these narratives and discourses that have been created around “the left” “identity politics” and “western civilisation” are often just repeated as fact in News Corp’s news articles.

The influencers

Nine articles I analysed referenced one or several social media political influencers. They are all prominent AIN influencers, according to Lewis’ (2018) research. The identified influencers are as follows:

- **Lauren Southern** - the most referenced political influencer in the articles I analysed, appearing eight times. In five of these articles Southern is the focus. Southern is a Canadian YouTuber and far-right political activist who became an internet personality after posting a video on YouTube called “The Great Replacement” in which she argues that white Europeans are being replaced by non-European people, specifically those from African or Middle Eastern countries (Southern 2017). This is a white nationalist conspiracy and is echoed in Andrew Bolt’s narrative about Australia being ‘colonised’ that I have already analysed. She has over 700 thousand subscribers on YouTube.
- **Stefan Molyneux** - a Canadian podcaster and YouTuber with 930 thousand subscribers. He’s also a white nationalist and promoter of scientific racism, and a prominent node in the AIN, regularly collaborating with other AIN members (Lewis 2018). He is a prominent node in the AIN, regularly collaborating with a range of members on topics like “the ugly truth about diversity”, “leftist fascism” and “western civilisation” (YouTube 2019).
- **Jordan Peterson**, as discussed, is a clinical psychology professor at University of Toronto who became influential when he stood up against a bill that would add trans-rights to the anti-discrimination legislation.
- **Gavin McInnes** - a Canadian far-right provocateur and political commentator who regularly promotes violence against political opponents (Southern Poverty Law Centre 2018) and has now been banned from Twitter, Facebook and Instagram for his promotion of hate speech and extremist groups (Statt 2018).
- **Milo Yiannopoulos** a British far-right political commentator and former editor of Breitbart News. He has been banned from all prominent social media platforms for hate speech and promoting white nationalism (Paul & Waterson 2019).

Two of the articles focused on the upcoming 2018 tours of Lauren Southern and Stefan Molyneux's, and Gavin McInnes and both articles share the same approach in reporting style. Although they are designated as 'news' articles, they appear to be more like promotions for the tours. For example, both articles provide the significant tour details, including where to get tickets and where the tours will be travelling to, with the article on Southern and Molyneux highlighting that the website selling tickets had crashed due to demand (Chung 2018). The language used throughout the articles tends to characterise these political influencers as simply 'controversial' because of the reaction they cause "the left", rather than because of the views they promote. They're also sensationalist, highlighting the "violent" clashes with "the left" at past events. Yet all of the articles introducing political influencers focus on their convictions to "free speech" and "western civilisation," and their refusal to shy away from "controversial topics". The article promoting Molyneux and Southern also highlights their particular focus on Islam, feminism and political correctness.

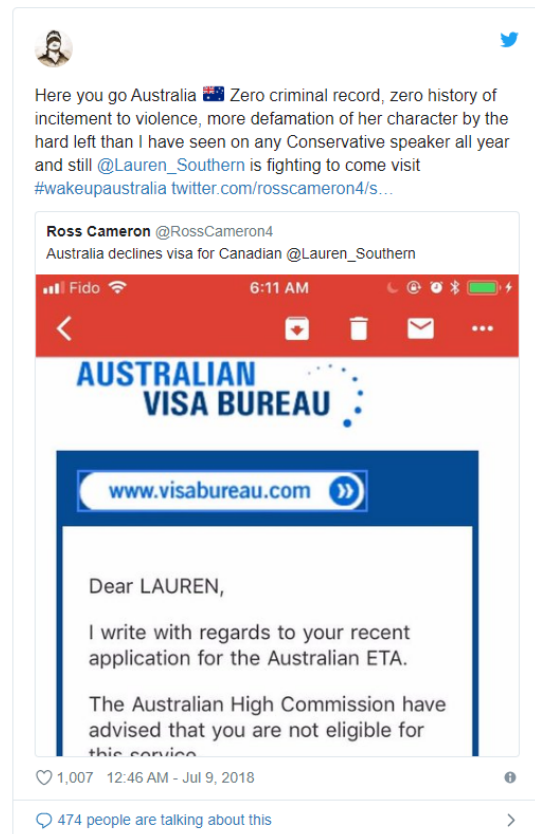
In emphasizing these words and concepts, the articles contribute to the wider News Corp narratives around these topics and of course their negative connotations. Further, its focus on the 'mayhem' that they hope to bring to Australia and the potential for "clashes" lends a certain 'excitement' to their upcoming tour for the potential outrage of "the left". This is indicated throughout the article where Southern's tour is compared several times to Milo Yiannopoulos' tour six months earlier, when "left-wing" protesters clashed with supporters. "It is yet to be seen if Southern and Molyneux bring the same level of mayhem as Milo Yiannopoulos brought last year, when violent demonstrations broke out outside his speaking venues" (Kinsella 2018, para.19).

Another article reports on her arrival to Australia wearing an "it's ok to be white" t-shirt. The slogan was popularised by chat forum, 4chan in 2017 and while it was originally designed as a trolling exercise, white supremacists quickly started using the phrase and combining it with white supremacist language or imagery (Anti-Defamation League 2019). It's publicity in mainstream media has further fuelled its semiotic potency. While the article briefly discusses its online origins, it does not directly link it to white supremacist movements, instead using indirect language: "in April, Target sacked an employee who left "It's okay to be white" cards featuring links to white nationalist websites inside boxes of nappies" (Chung 2018, para.5). However, most of the focus of this article is on how Southern's tourist visa was denied at the last minute, "leading to accusations the Australian government was preventing her from entering the country...organiser Axiomatic Events described [it] as an 'unusually prolonged application process'" (Chung 2018, para.7). Both the wearing of the t-shirt and the denied visa appear to be successful attempts at "strategic controversy", as described earlier and I will discuss this in further detail.

Firstly, Southern appears across eight of the articles I analysed, primarily due to her wearing of the 'it's ok to be white' shirt, with News Corp crediting her for popularising the term in Australia. A motion to endorse the phrase was even put forward in the Australian parliament and the articles I analyse on this subject all mention Southern as the person responsible for mainstreaming the phrase. Of course, this could not have happened without the assistance of mainstream media reporting on it in the first place and provides another illustrative example of News Corp's tendency to ignore the systemic reasons why certain phrases are amplified and instead focuses on the individual.

Secondly, while the article promotes the narrative that her visa issues were a conspiracy, the images and social media accounts embedded in the article appear to confirm that the issue was purely administrative and because she applied for an ETA tourist visa instead of a work visa (Chung 2018). The article contains a tweet from a journalist who had obtained Southern's visa rejection email, which clearly states that she should apply for a different visa. Although, one needs to click through to the social media account to view the full email (figure 2; Chung 2018). Even so, the entire article on the issue is framed from Southern's perspective, quoting her extensively on the reasons for the "unprecedented number of hurdles being put in her way" (para.8) and including tweets of her mocking proposed protests against her tour. The hurdles are variously due to governments covering to people "offended by debate and free speech" and her criticism of "radical Islam". It further quotes her views, suggesting that "You won't see Christians violently attacking people for criticising their religion like you do with Islam" (para.10). These quotes are provided uncritically with no further analysis. This language of creating a distinct "other" provides a clear link to the binary discourses operationalised by Bolt and Devine. Like Bolt, Hildebrand and Devine, Southern refers to those offended by and trying to shut down "free speech", as ideological and totalitarian.

Figure 2: Image of the tweet embedded in article showing Southern's rejection email



The approach of uncritically reporting from the influencer's perspective is repeated in the article promoting Gavin McInnes' upcoming tour. It quotes McInnes and his supporters extensively throughout the article but only speaks about his detractors. For example, it states he "has been labelled by critics as sexist, racist, white supremacist, Islamophobic and transphobic among other things," (para.6), but then spends seven further paragraphs quoting his promoter about why he is not any of these things, and blaming "the left" for shutting down free speech. The article itself blames "violent left-wing protesters" for a \$50,000 police bill to Milo Yiannopoulos' promoters during his tour earlier in the year (Chung 2018). It then quotes the promoter again, stating that: "the left didn't actually get as violent as everyone thought they did. The residents of the housing trust, a Sudanese group, came down and caused the problems. "They're a protected species, no one was allowed to talk about that. The police weren't allowed to touch them" (para.19). The inclusion of this quote is unnecessary and irrelevant to the story, yet it contributes to the overall narrative around the importance of free speech for western society and "the left's" attempts at stopping it.

An opinion article reviewing Southern and Molyneux's show is slightly critical of some of the ideas, highlighting that "to pretend she's some kind of intellectual authority is ridiculous" (para.20). Yet it consistently draws comparisons to 'fundamentalist social justice' and far-right violence, even implying equality and diversity in their extremes are somehow equivalent to right-wing violent extremism.

"Feminism, Islam and multiculturalism aren't beyond criticism. Most polls suggest that the majority of women don't even identify as feminists. Are we not allowed to question why? Or is that yet another topic that's off limits?"

There's a fundamentalist brand of social justice out there that takes values like equality, diversity and acceptance to their perverted extreme. Lauren's \$67,000 security bill is evidence of it.

But I'd like to warn Lauren against adopting the tactics of her adversaries" (Kinsella 2018, para.16).

Note also the underlying assumption that certain concepts cannot be discussed, which is accepted as fact. Likewise, that her \$67,000 security bill is evidence of fundamentalist social justice. The author later highlights how he saw "that same intolerance in their own audience; the same dogmatism, anger and stubbornness displayed by Lauren's supposed arch-enemies: the social justice warriors" (para.30). When we consider the questions this article asks against the backdrop of the larger News Corp narrative explored so far, we can see how they fit around notions of 'identity politics' and 'ideological universities destroying free speech'. These concepts are taken as fact throughout the article, again falsely equating protesting racism to far-right violence.

The final two articles discussing Southern are written more as blog posts, criticising her for "bumbling her way through a series of awkward interviews" with Australians and 'insulting' Melbourne. Although these articles are critical of her, it is from the perspective of Southern's ignorance of "Australian temperament" and mannerisms, not her views on white nationalism. The article criticising Southern's insult to Melbourne, where she sarcastically suggests it should be 'nuked' at one of her shows, focuses on the social media responses to Southern's statement, highlighting the role that social media plays in generating news content for these influencers. But this article too draws a false equivalence between 'left' and 'right', stating:

"Southern is making a living from her opinions, most of which can reasonably be described as right wing but have been labelled far-right by many. The first leg on her Australian tour was met with protests from the left, including some from the extreme left, who rushed the stage and tried to disrupt proceedings" (para.8).

As we can see, these themes are repeated throughout the articles. In, *Is it too late to save our universities* (Chung 2018), the auto-play video at the top of the article is an interview with Jordan Peterson, where he repeats his misrepresentation (Cossman 2018) that the C-16 Bill would force compelled speech and highlights his mistrust of the "radical left" and their "compassion programme", where he thinks "they're trying to occupy the linguistic ground and define the territory of the political argument" (Peterson 2018, 3:10). The article itself also repeats this misrepresentation: "Bill C-16 — a law making it illegal to refuse to refer to transgender people by their preferred pronouns" (para.6). While it is a 'news' report, it reads more like a review of an event, as it quotes extensively from three people speaking at an event held by a libertarian thinktank, but these three people, Claire Lehman, Lindsay Graham and Tiffany Jenkins, have close affiliations with the AIN network (Chung 2018). In essence then, the entire article is dedicated to furthering the notion that universities have been destroyed by "radical leftist ideology", suggesting that identity politics is leading to both censorship and the undermining of western civilisation (Chung 2018), and it is all conveyed as fact.

'It's ok to be white' in the Australian Senate

Finally, I analysed a series of articles related to the phrase "it's ok to be white" and a motion that was presented to the Australian senate by far-right politician, Pauline Hanson, and subsequently passed with the support of the government. The government later claimed the vote was an administrative error and resubmitted it to parliament the following day in order to vote the motion down. All of these articles reference Lauren Southern as the person who popularised the phrase in Australia. Three of the articles start with a clear novelty, sensationalist angle. One in particular, is simply a report on a response Pauline Hanson tweeted to another senator. It is clearly for the novelty, as it's about how Hanson tweeted a box of tissues to another senator who had complained about finding an 'it's ok to be white' poster outside her office. At the top of that article is an auto-play video asking "how powerful

is the far-right”, playing text over footage and images of the ‘far-right’. The conclusion is that although they can be dangerous, they are mostly disorganised and prone to infighting. Interestingly it draws a link between far-right rhetoric and social media political influencers, yet this link is not made between how these ideas are being amplified. Although subtle, it minimises far-right extremism and the very real growing threat it poses (Khoeler 2019).

Two of the articles are relatively critical of the phrase, highlighting its “sinister history” and association with white supremacists. These are the only two articles I analysed that clearly linked the phrase to white supremacism. Yet for one of these articles, this is just a brief statement at paragraph 15. Instead it leads with a sensationalist angle about how “Pauline Hanson has unleashed on the government after its humiliating “unforeseen backflip” on her controversial “It’s OK to be white motion”” (Farr & Clench 2018, para.1) and dedicating the first six paragraphs to Hanson’s response to the re-vote by the government. In reporting neutrally throughout, it uncritically allows Hanson to repeat racist notions.

The other article provides a relatively detailed history of the phrase and its origins, leading with the criticism of the government for endorsing “the words used by white supremacists and neo-Nazis” (Clench 2018, para.3). The article also puts that sentence in quotes to provide a more neutral tone, but it does highlight the racist nature of the phrase and even of 4chan, the chat forum where it was conceived. Yet, it contains a direct link to an archive of the 4chan website, where a user can easily start accessing its other pages. Because this is the only article I analysed that was overall critical and comparatively analytical of the phrase, I examined the comments from readers. Of the 58 comments to the article, 57 of them are highly critical of the article and the notion that the phrase is in any way problematic (Clench 2018). At least 15 of the comments refer to the “left’s agenda”, “free speech” or “indoctrination” in relation to the labelling of the phrase as racist, with some suggesting this is racist in itself. When we consider this intertextually with the themes explored throughout this analysis, we are provided with an interesting example of how orders of discourse flow across time and space through complex networks formed around key nodes. I will discuss this notion further and draw in my overall conclusions from the text analysis in the following sections.

The discourses

Jorgensen & Phillips (2002) remind us that discourse “both *constitutes* the social world and is *constituted* by other social practices. As social practice, discourse is in a dialectical relationship with other social dimensions” (p.61). As such, new meanings are created from the interactions between texts. But as they write:

“That a society is not controlled by one dominant discourse does not mean that all discourses are equal. For instance, it is obvious that some discourses have a stronger impact on the mass media than others. It is more difficult for a purely academic discourse to be taken up in the media than it is for a hybrid discourse that combines academic discourse (from the order of discourse of the university) and popular discourse (from the order of discourse of everyday life)” (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, p.74)

The creation of hybrid discourses combining academic and popular discourses was a common occurrence throughout the articles I analysed. Academic terms like ‘authoritarian’, ‘Marxism’, ‘western civilisation’, ‘postmodernism’, ‘whiteness’ and ‘colonialism’ were all reconstructed around new discourses and new meanings, generally used as a flag to indicate ideological possession.

Further, out of these discourses a dominant narrative developed around a predominantly white western society. If we again consider the discursive psychology approach of Wetherell & Potter (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002), they are not interested in “finding out if an interpretative repertoire is a true or false reflection of the world but in analysing the practices through which the repertoires are constructed to appear as true or false” (p.108). In this way, when identifying the “ideological content of discourses”, the discursive psychological approach is looking for the *effects* particular discourses

have on maintaining or furthering one group's interests over another. In particular, "how people's accounts of themselves, experience and events are established as solid, real and stable and how competing accounts are exposed as false and biased" (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, p.108). My focus here is to examine whether these discourses reproduce or challenge dominant discourses that favour one group over another.

Throughout the articles, we can see the shifting, flexible nature of the discursive patterns. These are what you could call high-level discourses and are general in nature, such as 'identity politics polarising society', 'free speech under attack' 'western civilisation as superior' and an 'ideological left'. But these can be combined with themselves or other relevant discourses as needed. For example, the notion that the ideological left is using identity politics to shut down free speech, thus polarising society, is a combination of these discourses. Throughout my analysis, these discourses are regularly stated as fact. 'Christian values' is an additional discourse adding a further layer to the orders of discourse. Christianity is framed as an integral component of 'western civilisation'. Devine (2018) makes the explicit link when she notes that "Western civilisation has its roots in Christian values, and an assault on one is an assault on both" (para.9). Bolt (2018) is also concerned that "Christianity is losing its hold as the country's faith and is followed now by just over half the population" (para.28). He cites 'identity politics' as the primary cause for 'western civilisation's' woes, particularly the deliberate 'shattering' of the "us" through multiculturalism (Bolt 2018). Joe Hildebrand (2018) too addresses recent revelations around systemic child abuse within the Catholic church by suggesting there is a "high" church and a "low" church. He rationalises the historic corruption within the church by arguing that even if education, "health care and relief for the poor", were conducted in the most corrupted fashion, "at least it was done" (para.27). He further reminds us that Christianity is "an institution that was integral in the foundation of what we now call Western civilisation" (para.24).

These views on Christianity and western civilisation are applied in stark contrast to its regular portrayal of Islam. A 2018 report highlighted how News Corp Australia published 2891 negative articles referring to "Islam or Muslims alongside words like violence, extremism, terrorism or radical" (OnePath Network 2018, p.6). A 2017 report also highlighted how 60% of opinion articles analysed in a 6-month period portrayed Muslims negatively through the use of stereotypes and linking to crime and violence, published mainly in News Corp Australia outlets (All Together Now 2017). Andrew Bolt and Miranda Devine are two of the largest publishers of negative articles about Muslims and Islam (OnePath Network 2018). These examples show how moral superiority is applied to western civilisation through its close association with so-called Christian values. 'Western civilisation' is further labelled as a neutral 'framework' that is open to everyone, thus absolving it of any ideological leanings. Both Devine (2018) and Hildebrand (2018) do this explicitly.

This has two effects: firstly, it centres white, western culture as the norm and secondly it ignores the centuries of civil rights movements that have had to fight simply to be included in these democratic values. It also ignores the ongoing discrimination still faced by groups based on their sexuality, gender or race. A further discourse that compliments this and was common throughout the analysis, is the notion that because 'western civilisation has been perfected over millennia, it is therefore beyond criticism. In one text Andrew Bolt (2018) goes into detail highlighting the ancient origins of 'western civilisation', which all coincidentally only stemmed out of Western Europe. This notion is expressed explicitly throughout the opinion articles and in the news reports on the AIN and "it's ok to be white" stories, these discourses were overwhelmingly treated as fact.

Stijn Joye points out that,

"it is important to 'recognise that textual or journalistic meaning is communicated as much by absence as by presence; as much by what is "missing" or excluded as by what is remembered and present'" (Richardson 2007, cited in Joye 2009, p.54)

This is evidenced in the articles criticising Lauren Southern, where there is a distinct lack of critique of her views on Islam or ‘western civilisation’ for example. Instead, they focus on her ignorance of Australian culture. This is also the case with the ‘it’s ok to be white’ phrase. As I discussed earlier, only two articles explicitly link the phrase to white supremacy. The remaining articles discussing it focus more on its use as an attempt to ‘troll’ “leftists and journalists” (Chung 2018). One article even attempts to downplay the links between Southern’s rhetoric and that of avowed white nationalist, Richard Spencer:

“To lump Lauren in with Spencer is lazy and uncharitable. Whereas Spencer believes different races can’t coexist, Lauren believes different cultures can’t coexist. Spencer takes pride in the white race; Lauren takes pride in Western culture” (Kinsella 2018, para.14)

Here we can see how semantics are utilised to soften what is still fundamentally the same form of discrimination. ‘race’ and ‘culture’ are equally vague and undefined. These are known and common tactics utilised by white supremacists to legitimise their views. What the article does not include is that while Southern may focus on culture, that culture is overwhelmingly ‘Islamic’ or ‘Africa’, which are both generic and homogeneously defined. Like the News Corp commentators, Southern also promotes her pride in western culture:

“It’s a pleasure to land here and see Australia upholding its commitment to free speech and Western culture — something that may not be here for much longer if left-wing Australian politicians continue their pathological worship of multiculturalism” (Chung 2018, para.2).

But as this quote shows, Southern’s pride in western culture relies on a white-centric perspective. Like the News Corp commentators, she ties western civilisation to Christianity, pitting it against Islam, which is consistently linked to terrorism or authoritarianism. As we can see, there are a number of discourses flowing throughout the articles that interact and combine with each other to create new discourses. Teun van Dijk (2009) highlights the prominent role that news media plays,

“in the (re)production of ideologies in society. The evidence shows that on the whole, despite some variation between different (liberal vs. conservative, and popular vs. elite) newspapers, these dominant ideologies are associated with the very position and power of white, male, middle class journalists working within a corporate environment. Women, poor people, workers, black people, immigrants, and all those who have no access to, and control over public discourse are thus largely ignored, or represented negatively when seen as a problem or a threat to the social mainstream.” (p.202).

This is clearly evident throughout my analysis, from the unnecessary reporting of racist comments, such as those made by Gavin McInnes promoter (Chung 2018) to the dismissal of genuine concerns around hate speech and other forms of discrimination, as ‘identity politics’. Repurposed academic terms such as Marxism and postmodernism are linked with ideological possession in the universities. These generalised nature of these discourses means they can be easily adapted to different stories and contexts. This is why terms like “the left” and “identity politics” are so loosely defined. All these discourses work together, each being employed under various contexts, to maintain dominant discourses and therefore power through both the power and counterpower networks. As noted previously, Castells (2015) writes that, “the fundamental power struggle is the battle for the construction of meaning in the minds of the people” (p.5). Communication networks are key to this and utilising Actor Network Theory (ANT), as described by van Dijck (2013) will allow me to examine how and why these discourses proliferate across time and space through social platforms.

Sociotechnical & socioeconomic

As discussed in the theoretical framework, van Dijck (2013)’ blending of ANT and Network Society “offers sublime insights on the sociotechnical level” (p.28). It “maps relations between technologies and people and tries to explain how these relations are both material and semiotic” (p.26). ANT’s

focus is on online platforms, arguing that they too play a vital role in structuring meaning and our understanding of the world. However, the combining of this with Castells (2004) framework allows the further consideration of how these platforms influence and are influenced by the wider socioeconomic environment. van Dijck (2013) notes that in,

“approaching platforms as sociotechnical constructs, we need to analyse **technology, users** and **content** in close alignment; highlighting platforms as socioeconomic structures, we will scrutinize their **ownership status, governance, and business models**” (p.28).

I will not refer to the six parts specifically, but will consider each as part of the analysis. News Corp’s online platforms that host its media content are highly social in nature. Indeed, Rebecca Lewis (2018) highlights that although the spread of far-right propaganda on YouTube is understood as a major issue, the potential for radicalisation is treated as a technical problem, when it is fundamentally a social one, borne out of the interactions between humans and the platforms they utilise. Like YouTube, News Corp online is also a social media platform. Most of the articles have a comments section where users can comment under the article. Interestingly, the comments are moderated and only shown if approved, meaning News Corp has complete control over which voices are amplified or muted. Due to space constraints, a detailed analysis of the users is outside the scope of this paper. However, my examination of the comments under one article that was critical of the “it’s ok to be white” phrase and linked it to white supremacy (Clench 2018), revealed that users were overwhelmingly unhappy with this framing. Instead they evoked News Corp and AIN talking points about ‘the left’ and ‘identity politics’ to criticise the article. Several of them used the article as an example of the extreme “leftist bias” in the mainstream media.

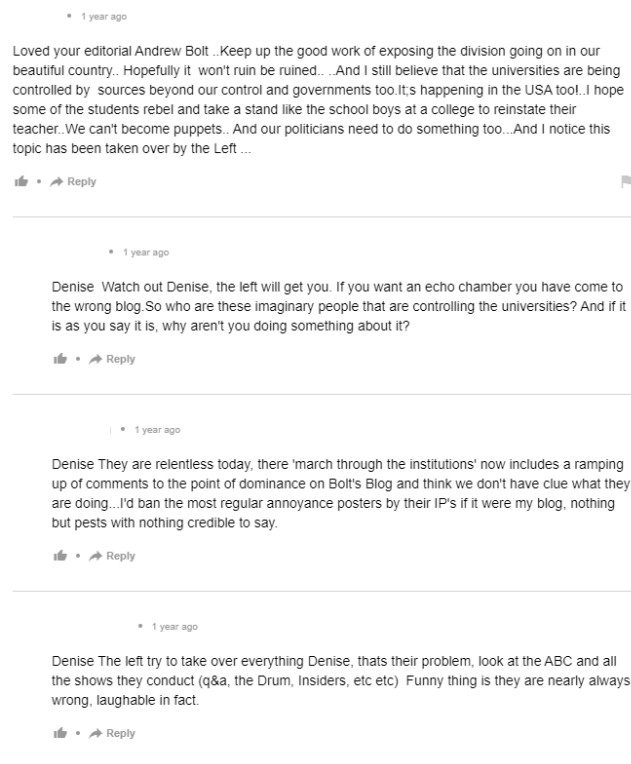
Lewis (2018) highlights that part of the reason “political influencers of the AIN” (p.20) and media outlets like Fox News and Breitbart News have been so successful is that they “provide a metaphorical “family” to those who reject mainstream news.” Considering Fox News is part of Murdoch’s second company Fox Corporation, I contend that News Corp Australia is using its news platforms for the same purposes: to build imagined communities, as conceived by Benedict Anderson (1983). These communities centre around a notion that they are social underdogs, against a dominant, powerful “leftist elite” (Lewis 2018).

An example of how News Corp build imagined communities can be shown through two article I analysed. These were from Andrew Bolt’s blog, which is part of the News Corp website, but is a space for Bolt to provide regular updates, quoting other news reports and commenting on world affairs extensively. He updates prolifically, sometimes up to 15 times per day and users can comment under each post. Each of the two blog posts I analysed had hundreds of user comments, the vast majority of them praising or in agreement with Bolt’s various stances on western society and identity politics as I have discussed (Bolt 2018). Most of News Corp’s columnists have their own blog page, with several others following a similar tactic to Bolt. Although he does not interact directly with his audience, the constant updates and posts combined with the audience interacting with one other, creates a sense of community where different discourses come together but all sharing a particular ideological understanding. In the one or two comments that were challenging the discourse of Bolt’s blog (2018), there were several replies criticising the original commenter, as a “Marxist” or a “leftist” (figure 3). The shared culture is built around a notion that their views are normal and objective and that it is all other views that are ideological. As Jorgensen & Phillips (2002) point out, in imagined communities

“people do not necessarily experience that they share interests with, or feel affiliated to, the same groups permanently. At one point, people can have a politically motivated affiliation to a group, while later on they may relate antagonistically to some of the group’s members” (p.112).

In this way, my analysis shows how News Corp has created imagined communities that coalesce around many different notions including ‘free speech’, ‘Christianity’, ‘national identity’ and ‘western society’. As I have discussed, these notions contain a narrow set of discourses that tend to link ‘western civilisation’ to the state and a national identity that is centred around white, western culture. If we consider Lueck et. al. (2015) these notions fit within the definitions of nationalism. Lueck et. al. (2015) highlight that nationalism operates as a political community that is imagined by its people through unifying concepts. They define nationalism as “the project to make the political unit, the state (or polity) congruent with the cultural unit (the nation)” (p.610). Its exclusionary practices “enacted at the border are central to defining who does and who does not belong within this imagined nation” (p.610).

Figure 3: Excerpt of comments from Andrew Bolt (2018) article



But Lueck et. al. (2015) also point out the similarities between nationalism and neoliberalism as ideological concepts. They posit that like nationalism, which is concerned with the enforcement of social order, neoliberalism is also “responsible for establishing institutional structures such as the military, police, and judiciary” that use force to maintain social order and protect the “proper functioning of the markets at all costs” (p.610). In relation to migration, both also promote the restriction of ‘undesirable’ migrants, though neoliberalism’s focus is often more around economic policing. In Australia these discourses have been employed simultaneously for decades in relation refugees arriving by boat; framing them as both potential terrorists and economic migrants (Lueck et. al. 2015). This is why the discourses analysed in this paper are ideological in nature, as they have the effect of being exclusionary in nature and in particular, ignore the brutal and discriminatory history of colonialism that still has not been adequately reconciled in Australia.

A 2005 report on Australian identity found that the typical Australian has always been portrayed as Anglo-Celtic, “in part a reflection of the make-up of the population at the time but also a cultural suppression of the identities of Aborigines, Torres Strait and Pacific Islanders, Chinese, Germans and many more” (Cousins 2005, p.3). Andrew Bolt (2018) reflects this clearly in his article lamenting the loss of “us” due to a “tidal wave” of immigrants. Indeed, the discourses propagated through News Corp articles reflects the combination of nationalist cultural and neoliberal economic based discourses: Increasing anxieties around immigration due to both national identity fears and infrastructure anxieties; declining institutional trust from government to the media; questions around national identity at a time when immigration into Australia is at the highest levels it has ever been. Furthermore, in the past several decades immigration demographics have changed rapidly with Asia, particularly India and China, now accounting for 56% of Australia’s migrant intake. Australia is also a recently colonised territory, only founded as a country in 1901 by mostly Western European convicts and settlers. As a Western settlement, it has no real common national identity based on centuries or millennia of shared cultural history. Further, it has never fully come to terms with its colonial history and is the only Commonwealth country in the world to not have a treaty with its indigenous people (BBC 2017).

News Corp capitalises on this information vacuum, importing discourses from North America that are not directly relevant to Australia, but nonetheless speak to a white-centric identity. Of course, as McKnight (2010) pointed out in 2010, Rupert Murdoch's Fox News in the US has long sought to carve out its own identity that differentiates it from other mainstream media outlets, rejecting social justice and human rights issues as ideas from an out of touch and 'ideological liberal elite'. In Australia, News Corp and AIN political influencers appear to be mutually capitalising on global concerns about issues such as immigration and the decline in institutional trust to build discourses that re-centre 'white western identity' as the default identity. I will finally argue that it reflects attempts to define a new authoritarian neoliberal discourse internationally.

The social practices

Of course, all these discourses were not conceived in a vacuum. They form part of a vast network that stretches around the globe and across time. The ubiquity of micro-electronic devices, constantly connected to communication networks through social media has had a massive impact not just on the way we consume media, but how it is produced by journalists and traditional media sources more generally. As Castells (2004) notes, to understand the network society we need to contemplate the historical context that it arose in. Specifically, Castells (2004) pinpoints the wave of economic liberal policies that took over the world in the two decades following the 1980's. These focused on deregulation, massive tax cuts for the rich and a notion of 'trickle down economic' – the idea that cutting taxes to the rich results in more investment in their workers, thus increasing prosperity for all of society. Instead this has led to a cannibalisation of the media industry, as deregulation has created an environment where news making is solely about getting clicks in order to make a profit (Cohen 2015). Indeed, Nicole Cohen (2015) points out that the media "attention economy" in an increasingly converged media environment, declining trust in mainstream media and significantly and the desertion of younger audiences, who are increasingly moving away from traditional mainstream media sources to social media like YouTube for news, have created significant strains on the profits of media companies (Cohen 2015). This has in turn led to the dwindling of resources available for fact-checking and investigative journalism, limiting the capacity for media to effectively hold the powerful and governments to account.

The 24-hour news cycle has also created a constant need for sensation and novelty to fill up the space; writing for clicks, rather than journalism (Cohen 2015). Marwick & Lewis (2017) highlight mainstream media organisations' increasing reliance on social media for content. This was evident throughout my analysis. All of the articles discussing the AIN influencers contained webpage links that went directly to the influencers' profiles, or their social media profile was embedded directly into the article. Furthermore, several of the analysed articles were written purely in response to trends on social media, the two mildly critical Lauren Southern articles, for example. In almost all of the articles discussing Lauren Southern, three paragraphs discussing Southern's views were copied and pasted across them. This highlights how discourses are re-used and infused with other discourses, creating new meanings in the new articles. This of course also demonstrates how the lack of resources for stringent fact-checking and analysis provides a fertile environment for the spread of misinformation. For me, this highlights that ideology is not necessarily intentional. Rather, it forms through the repetition and recombining of discourses that, when considered historically, have the cumulative effect of discriminating against particular groups of people.

Cossman (2018) highlights how Jordan Peterson capitalised on anxieties around the destruction of free speech at a time when several violent protests had broken out around US universities in response to alt-right provocateurs giving speeches on campuses. Milo Yiannopoulos in particular brought the issue into the international spotlight and spearheaded the movement to destroy political correctness and protect free speech (Cossman 2018). Through a combination of search engine optimisation and strategic controversy, Peterson was able to take advantage of the increasing tension around the issue and insert himself into the middle of it (Lewis 2018; Cossman 2018). By defining the university as a

site of struggle, Peterson created a physical space that people could rally around. Further, he declared the universities 'ideologically possessed' and full of an out of touch radical leftist elite who are intent on destroying western society (Cossman 2018). In this way, Peterson simultaneously utilised the power and counterpower networks, as formulated by Castells (2015), using his authority in a position of power as a university professor, while using the rhetoric of the counterpower movement and framing himself as a social underdog standing up against the power holders and a radical global leftist agenda (Cossman 2018: Peterson 2018). We can see this same tactic employed by the AIN influencers in my analysis, particularly Lauren Southern. Her "it's ok to be white" t-shirt brought her national media attention and kept her name in the newspapers for several months after it happened, possibly even inspiring a motion to parliament bearing the phrase.

This further highlights how closely linked the power and counterpower communication networks are in our converged media societies. The 'ok to be white' motion put forward by far-right senator Pauline Hanson in the Australian senate was done several months after Lauren Southern's highly publicised tour. This statement clearly indicates Hanson is putting the motion forward because of what she sees on the news and social media:

"Anyone who pays attention to the news or spends any time on social media has to acknowledge that there has been a rise in anti-white racism and a rise in attacks on the very ideals of Western civilisation" (Hanson, cited in Clench 2018, para.6).

As we can see, the above statement and her motion to parliament, contained numerous discourses around western civilisation analysed in this paper. This provides some interesting insight into how intertwined our communication networks of power and counterpower are. Moreover, it provides an example of the 'authoritarian neoliberalism' discourse. I will finish my discussion on this topic.

Pühringer & Ötsch (2018) argue that the similarities between neoliberal market fundamentalism and right-wing populism are laying the groundwork for a new authoritarian version of neoliberalism. They identify four attributes to populism:

1. "It is based on the central image of a system divided into two separated parts.
2. Both parts are homogeneous. Every part has its distinct characteristics.
3. Every part exhibits an own (homogeneous) force. Both forces are antagonistic.
4. Every part is used in very different, polysemous meanings" (p.194).

Indeed, these attributes can be associated with many of the discourses identified in the News Corp analysis. We see the dividing of 'left' and 'right' and the false equivalence provided by their use. The terms are also treated as homogenous. Where anyone can be labelled from "the left" if they deviate from the dominant narratives. The discourses consistently divide groups into an us and them. For example, through the use of terms with negative connotations such as "identity politics" or "the left". Further, the terms are malleable and can be applied to different contexts, so different meanings can be constructed around them. Pühringer & Ötsch (2018) point to the market fundamentalist concepts of neoliberalism as defined by the Mont Pelerin Society, a core neoliberal thinktank founded in 1947. Like populism, Pühringer & Ötsch (2018) highlight how neoliberalism also treats terms like "the market", "capitalism" and "socialism" as homogenous. The two systems of capitalism and socialism cannot be mixed. Further,

"the market' is always described in positive terms, such as "freedom", "consumer service", "natural", "scientific and systematic", "equilibrium", "theoretic insight" or "protection of all those willing to work". "Non-market" on the contrary is associated with "authoritative command", "prohibition", "arbitrariness", "police regulations", "violence" and "chaos". Instead of rational thought, "socialism" is ruled by "naivety", "rigid dogmas" and a "closed doctrine"" (p.198)

In this way we can clearly see the same theme here as are in my analysis and identifies a reason for why the delegitimization of universities as ideological plays such a key role in the discursive battle. Naturally, universities are locations where knowledge is generated and the lessons we are learning

through psychology and societal studies about the effects that societal discourses can have on individuals, present a direct threat to the dominant power discourses that have centred white, western identity as the default. Further, from an economic perspective, it challenges dominant narratives around everlasting growth and 'the market' as natural. My analysis highlights the many discourses that are employed to reinforce these dominant narratives. When considered against a wider societal backdrop, these narratives tend to relate to nationalist, populist and neoliberal paradigms.

McKay (2010) notes that Rupert Murdoch, through Fox News most explicitly, but across his worldwide mastheads has presented the organisation as a lone media organisation against a global liberal elite. However, I propose that News Corp is trying to capitalise on the converged media environment and the exodus of young audiences to social media, by uncritically promoting popular and influential online political influencers. Its most popular online site, News.com.au, has its highest readership amongst the 18-35 age group (Roy Morgan 2018). Fifteen of the articles I analysed also appeared on the website, including all the articles that mentioned an AIN political influencer. News Corp is attempting to straddle both the power and counterpower networks, using its dominance and power in the Australian mainstream media market to amplify countercultural message. Unfortunately, as my analysis has shown, these messages are often replete with ideological misinformation that play a significant role in the generation of polarising and harmful discourses.

Conclusion

This analysis provides a small study on the various discourses disseminated through information networks in our Australian converged media environment. It highlighted the clear patterns in ideological misinformation spread by the AIN and News Corp Australia. The AIN have clearly developed some finely tuned techniques to manipulate media and gain attention. But as my analysis highlights, the discourses employed by News Corp around topics that are frequently discussed in socially conservative media, align very closely with the AIN political influencers. Far from being manipulated, News Corp appears to be a willing and active participant in spreading misinformation. Further, the overall themes employed throughout these networks are ideological in nature due to their cumulative effect being the discrimination of minority groups. This presents a significant challenge for Australia due to the prominence and political influence of News Corp, combined with successive governments who have tended to opt for relaxing Australia's media ownership laws than strengthen them.

This study is one small segment of a massively complex communication network. In terms of building on this study, an expansion of critical discourse analysis to Australian media outlets and the way they report on concepts identified would provide a richer understanding of the dominant discourses that are reproduced in Australian society, as well as those that challenge them. Likewise, broadening the search topics and exploring discourses on a range of different topics. Including an analysis of comments under all the articles could further the map the discursive links across the communication networks from the individual user to social and mainstream media and the state. This could assist in identifying the discourses that resonate most with audiences. In my view this is a vital area of study and one that is particularly pertinent to Australia, which has a highly concentrated media market, but has not experienced the same levels of polarisation as the US for example. Our converged media environment has become so ubiquitous with our life, allowing it to penetrate into all aspects of our world through our smartphones and we continue to understand more about how the human mind is influenced. So, knowing the stories we tell ourselves as a society can help us improve the way we tell them.

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