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Constructing Conflict

An Investigation of Discursive Battles over Power and Reality on 9GAG and Imgur

MA in Culture, Communication and Globalisation

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Constructing Conflict: An Investigation of Discursive Battles over Power and Reality on 9GAG & Imgur

An investigation of discursive battles over power and reality in online spaces

Abstract

Themes/Keywords:

Social constructionism, ideology, post-truth, discourse, memes, membership categorisation, delegitimisation, online culture wars, democracy

This paper analyses how the online platforms 9GAG and Imgur used the phenomenon of the Canada Convoy Protest to discursively structure the political 'left' and the 'right' using memes and comments collected from the mentioned platforms. The paper delves into the complexities of discerning truth in a time where truth has become contested by a multitude of actors, and by different constructs of reality altogether.

The paper considers the discursive structuring occurring on the platforms in relation to how they impact on our ability to imagine ideologically opposed groups within the frame of democracy as being either legitimate or illegitimate actors.

Topics such as post-truth, new conspiracism, echo chambers and filter bubbles, and memes are all employed to uncover the dynamics behind the structuring of the discourse surrounding the 'left' and the 'right' on the platforms. Seeing these constructions of reality through these topics reflect the complexity of our times, as well as reflect the dizzying task it is for individuals to discern the true from the untrue.

To deal with such complexities a multimodal discourse analysis has been developed to facilitate an analysis of the chosen data that encompasses the new modes of communication that take place on the online platforms.

Prelude

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

-       *W.B. Yeats, The Second Coming*

The Second Coming was written by Yeats in 1919, one year after the first world war had ended. The poem can be read as a reflection by the author of what the world had just witnessed. There is a deep sense of grasping for reasoning - for an explanation of the unravelling and the destruction that had been unleashed upon Europe. The poem describes a massive centrifugal force that makes things fall apart - a centre that cannot hold – and it negates the Christian narrative of the salvation of the second coming, the known, and instead inserts a strange and frightening mythical being, a lion with the head of a man, the unknown, that moves towards Bethlehem.

At the heart of the poem lies an abstract imagining of the events that lead up to societal collapse and the war that ushered in a blood-dimmed tide. As the horrors of the first great war were far

too numerous and terrible to plainly convey into writing, Yeats instead relies heavily on metaphors to portray his reflections which makes his words echo through time, as they morph and take on the form of a premonition. The widening gyre, a spiral that is centred around a single point, spinning with such momentum that the gyre tears itself apart – the centre cannot hold. An escalation that no longer can be controlled.

There is a cyclical element *to The Second Coming* that is hard to be ignored. With enough momentum things will eventually tear themselves apart, and there is no guarantee for what will emerge out of their ruins. It is the repetition of history – peace, escalation, destruction, and rebuilding – that Yeats exclaims to us from the two stanzas of his work.

As we are writing this Russia has invaded Ukraine. The nations of NATO teeter on an all-out conflict with Russia – the entrenchment has already begun. Powerless, we fill our lungs with air, hold our breaths, and hope for a political de-escalation, as we try not to let our pessimism take the better of us, but it is hard not to let the imagination grow wild when it seems that the soil is rich with worry and speculation. And while we in the distance hold our breath, we feel the sting of shame as the people of Ukraine have already picked up arms and fortified their homes to fight for their loved ones and their country. We do not know of war, but we do know that it is an impossible beast that gobbles up the lives of anyone it touches. It is a paradox that only stops once it has forcefully contorted its body into peace.

The topic has become a large black hole that swallows up all attention and concentration, and slowly, it sucks dry the apparent meaning of my efforts. If the nations of the world are going to war, then the old world is dead already and something new is being birthed. We do find comfort, however, in the knowledge that there are still lessons far too important to be left behind that we must bring with us when moving forward into the vast unknown. These lessons can provide us with the room for reflection so that we might not make the same mistakes in the future as we have done in the past.

Introduction

The world has seemingly retreated into fractured representations of itself, each one with its one distinct colour of reality. The notion is complex and simple at the same time - we do not fully live in the same world, as we to some degree construct the world ourselves in our minds, through our social interactions, through the never-ending stream of information that emanates from the media landscape.

When your mother, sister, brother, partner, or friend is scrolling on their phone on the couch next to you, chances are that they are involved with a completely different representation of reality than you are. The basis of this observation lies within ontology, how we view the world and how we understand our ability to perceive it. It is a question of whether we can formulate objective statements about the world or whether the world escapes us as our senses and subjective narrative merely qualifies us to make more or less accurate guesses. Furthermore, what are the obstacles standing in our way of understanding what is True or not?

This paper will not deal with the grander ontological questions of our ability to interact with reality, but it will weave itself into the niche pockets of ontology as we investigate how discourse in online spaces inflicts upon our view of phenomena happening in the world. We will try to question and understand how reality can appear so differently to us through using specific information sources, when using platforms that facilitate negotiations and constructions of reality, and how these constructions and negotiations can play a part in constituting our beliefs and constructions about the world and the phenomena that occur in it.

The advent of the online and the transportable pocket computer, the smartphone, has meant that the real and the unreal have become interwoven. The online has manifested itself in material reality by appearing on a small screen that we hold in our hand. From the point of view of social constructionism, this is highly significant. Where modernity presented society with a freeing of thought from doctrine, postmodern theory described an untethering from the narratives that created cohesiveness in society.

The online, especially the social media platforms, being a space where almost anything goes, has presented individuals with the unique opportunity and ability to communicate anything that comes to mind, anywhere, at any time. Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have already been the topic of many media controversies due to their apparent ability to

facilitate a homogeneity of thought and opinion within certain groupings on their sites – creating less diverse and more politicised and polarised users.

The online is a marketplace of ideas and negotiation. It is a space where the world is constructed for us by a multitude of known, unknown and anonymous voices, as well as by ourselves based on what we choose to consume and react to. If you were to lean over on the couch and look at the screen of your mother's, sister's, brother's, partner's, or friend's phone then you might be surprised by what the people closest to you consume, by what kind of construction of reality they have established for themselves together with a group of strangers. You might be left uneasy by how strange and rickety that construction appears to be – how it has been mounted to defend against some imagined enemy, how strange their reasoning seems to you. Suddenly a gap appears between the two of you. Who is really this person sitting next to you? As your mind races on, the gap expands on the couch, and a pillow falls into the void. They seem changed to you, no longer familiar, and you can't quite put your finger on why.

They might show you a silly picture with a text on it, a meme. You know that it is meant to be a joke, you know that memes are supposed to be funny, but atop the picture of a crying woman with blue hair you read the text "sweet liberal tears", and you start to question how funny the meme is really supposed to be.

Suddenly they blurt out: "Hah, those truckers are really giving to Trudeau, don't you think?". You nod silently but think to yourself: "What a stupid opinion". The change of the familiar between the two of you has manifested itself. Something in your relationship has suddenly been altered, and you are not sure why. "Where did they get that idea", you think to yourself. Contemplating on this a bit further, you begin to understand the implication of the thought, and sense an immediate paranoia. "Where did I get my ideas from?". You feel a growing scepticism thinking about your own media use and online consumption. You look suspiciously at your phone before putting it face down on the coffee table in front of you.

The construction of the world through the online does not happen for the individual by adapting one sweeping statement about reality and then implementing the analysis that follows to every part of their life. It happens through a multitude of smaller whispers that come together into a more coherent narrative about the world and the people in it. For the individual living a more or less typically modern life, these whispers consist of a couple of videos here, some Twitter

posts there, and hundreds of memes consumed and shared amongst friends or strangers on various platforms. The thing is, though, you can never truly know who is whispering and why.

There is a fundamental problem connected with occupying the online. There is not a guiding principle for what opinion or narrative should be prioritised over the other, or how to categorically establish and identify Truth. How are we supposed to distinguish a joke from commentary, opinion from analysis, claim from fact in a sea of information? As any academic will attest, making any truth-claim requires rigorous research, comprehensive analysis, and a consistent method. Each individual cannot be expected to be knowledgeable on every topic, let alone an expert, so a problem with recognising the Truth of the matter, any matter, arises.

When the information we consume online aids us in the construction of reality, it seems prudent if not a necessity to verify its truthfulness before communicating it. Trouble is, however, often we do not. This, however, seems to be one of the fundamental problems with constructing social reality with the aid of the online.

It seems that almost every topic has become politicised and contested, not by a difference of interpretation of the same set of facts, but by an underlying distrust between groups who seem to operate with their own set of facts, or truths, about the world. An example of this is how lawmakers in the USA cannot come to an agreement across the political aisle, on topics such as the legitimacy of their latest presidential election between Donald Trump and Joe Biden in 2020, as well as the interpretation of the uprising that took place in Washington on the 6th of January 2021.

A separation of this kind seems to present a fundamental problem, not only for the individuals having to understand and make meaning of them, but for democracy in general. Honest disagreement and negotiation are the cornerstones of the democratic process, but a disagreement that is onset by a distrust of the involved actors, separate constructions of reality, and about the basic outline of phenomena that have taken place is a categorical non-starter for common negotiation. A growing distrust between the political groups within democracy would serve as a crisis for its continuation.

It would seem that a trend that has been on the rise is truly manifesting itself. It is defined by freely creating and using discourse without substantiating it with facts. It creates loosely defined groups on loosely defined overarching problems, and operates without friction by using new media and the online in order to gain political power and to assert narrative.

So we arrive at a question; Are online negotiations on how to construct reality and the phenomena that take place in it marred by our inability to recognise Truth from purely discursive constructions? Is Truth merely discourse? Or does the online instead add to a more diverse, nuanced, and reflected discourse in regards to disagreement on political issues?

To analyse these questions, we will investigate the Canada Convoy Protest and how it has been discussed through memes on the platforms 9GAG and Imgur, respectively. The phenomenon will serve as a basis to investigate not only the discourse and membership construction in relation to the Canada Convoy Protest itself, but also how it acted as a space to negotiate the merits and democratic legitimacy of two opposing political groups loosely defined as the 'left' and the 'right'.

The reason to choose the two aforementioned platforms lies in their characteristics and similarities to one another in terms of the posted content, feasible interactions with the content, and the way they operate. We will briefly introduce some of the similarities below, however a more detailed description of the platforms and their characteristics, hence similarities, will follow later in the paper.

Firstly, we saw them as being appropriate for collecting our data and further analysis of what this paper seeks to explore, since both platforms are image sharing platforms and their content consists mainly of images, specifically memes, uploaded by the users of the platforms. Secondly, the popularity of the platforms, and their extensive content provided an interesting ground for exploring how the Canada Convoy Protest was depicted in online spaces.

Moreover, it is important to say that both platforms are content centred, and although profile following is possible on Imgur and 9GAG, users do not primarily join the platforms to follow or befriend each other and keep up with each other's activities like it is the case on some other social media platforms, for instance Twitter, Facebook or Instagram. They are rather used to simply scroll through the sections the platforms consist of and either upvote, downvote or comment on the available content. Furthermore, both platforms have a possibility of making a post more visible and available to a greater extent to the masses by including various tags.

Thirdly, although it is not unusual to spot the content and/ or the comments in different languages, the dominant language of both platforms is English, which makes the content outspread and globally accessible.

Fourthly, the content is available not only for users of the platforms, but also for visitors - people who are not logged in.

Overall we consider the two platforms fitting, useful and significant for this research on how discourse is occuring online and how it constructs reality. The platforms serve as a space parallel with society with an almost free flowing discussion of ideas, thus a space where the construction of reality happens without the same constraints there are found within the rest of society.

Problem Formulation:

How does the construction of the political 'left' and 'right' occur on the online meme based platforms 9GAG and Imgur respectively in relation to the Canada Convoy Protest, and how do these constructions depict the political actors? Furthermore, how do the constructions of the political 'left' and 'right' on the said platforms contribute to the legitimisation or delegitimisation of the political counterparts as legitimate actors within a democratic system.

Canada Convoy Protest

This section is dedicated to providing an outline of key events that transpired in relation to the Canada Convoy Protest. As the phenomenon is intricate and highly complex, we will not be able to describe it in its entirety. We will instead limit our description to three sections:

Beginning - a short oversight of what sparked the protests and action amongst truckers and other actors in and outside of Canada.

Ottawa Protest - key events taking place from the 22nd of January 2022, where vaccine mandates were placed upon all truckers entering Canada and till the 23rd of February 2022 where emergency measures voted for by the Canadian parliament were invoked. Alongside the key events we will present central actors in relation to the protests.

Aftermath and Spillover Effects - a short overview of where similar protest tactics and sentiments have spread to other countries.

Beginning

The whole COVID-19 phenomenon in Canada and the USA can be said to be the buildup to the Canada Convoy Protest as its origins are rooted in the mandates and restrictions placed on the nation's citizens to hinder the spread of the COVID-19 disease since 2019. Trouble started brewing after the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) released new regulations in October 2021 in relation to the USA - Canadian border crossing based on guidelines stipulated by the national public health agency of the USA - Center For Disease Control and Prevention - requiring all non-US citizens to be fully vaccinated if they wished to enter the USA.[1] The DHS gave until the 22nd of January 2022 for Canadian truckers to get vaccinated in order to avoid supply chain disruptions.[2]

On the 19th of November 2021 the Canadian government issued warnings that a set of new regulations in regards with COVID-19 restrictions for border crossing into Canada - stating that starting from the 30th of January 2022 fully vaccinated Canadian citizens that had been away from Canada for less than 72 hours would not have to present a pre-entry molecular test

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[1] DHS to Require Non-U.S. Individual Travelers Entering the United States at Land Ports of Entry and Ferry Terminals to be Fully Vaccinated Against COVID-19. *Homeland Security*. 2022-01-20. https://www.dhs.gov/news/2022/01/20/dhs-require-non-us-individual-travelers-entering-united-states-land-ports-entry-and (Accessed 2022-05-16).
[2] Timeline of the Canadian Convoy Protest. *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_the_Canada_convoy_protest (Accessed 2022-05-16).

in order to enter the country.[3] They furthered that starting from the 22nd of January 2022 groups of travellers that had previously been exempt from showing proof of vaccination would be required to be fully vaccinated upon entering the country or submit to a 14-day-quarantine - truck drivers being part of this group.[4] Here is where the real controversy began.

This prompted the Canada Unity (CU) to create a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in which they called upon the Senate of Canada and Governor General of Canada (SCGGC) to cease all vaccine mandates, reemploy all employees terminated due to vaccination status and rescind all fines imposed for non-compliance with public orders.[5] If this failed, the MoU called on SCGGC to dissolve the government and name members of CU to form a Canadian Citizens Committee, which is beyond the constitutional powers of SCGGC. The original MoU did not contain specific mentions of cross-border truckers, but it was reissued for the purpose of the protest.[6]

The reciprocal vaccination requirement for the cross-border trucking industry has been in place since the 22nd of January 2022, when the USA enforced their requirements affecting unvaccinated American truckers returning to the USA. Moreover, unvaccinated Canadian truckers have been denied entry to the USA since this date.[7] That led to the formation of a convoy of truck drivers that gathered supporters along the Trans-Canada Highway to block the roads, highways, and head to Canada's capital to show disagreement with the measures and to protest against the introduced mandates in front of the Parliament.[8]

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[3] The Government of Canada announces adjustments to Canada's border measures. *Public Health Agency of Canada*. 2021-11-19. (Accessed 2022-05-16).

[4] ibid.

[5] The latest on protests against COVID-19 measures in Ottawa and beyond. *StAlbertToday.* 2022-02-08. https://www.stalberttoday.ca/national-news/the-latest-on-protests-against-covid-19-measures-in-ottawa-and-beyond-5040399 (Accessed 2022-05-28).

[6] @Justin_Ling. *Twitter.* 2022-01-25. https://twitter.com/Justin_Ling/status/1486089777799651330 (Accessed 2022-05-28).

[7] DHS to Require Non-U.S. Individual Travelers Entering the United States at Land Ports of Entry and Ferry Terminals to be Fully Vaccinated Against COVID-19. *DHS*. 2022-01-20. https://www.dhs.gov/news/2022/01/20/dhs-require-non-us-individual-travelers-entering-united-states-land-ports-entry-and (Accessed 2022-05-28).

[8] Meissner, Deb. VIDEO: Crowd of supporters greets anti-vaccine-mandate truck convoy as it leaves Vancouver for Ottawa. *The Interior News*. 2022-01-23. https://www.interior-news.com/news/video-crowd-of-supporters-greets-anti-vaccine-mandate-truck-convoy-as-it-leaves-vancouver-for-ottawa-2/ (Accessed 2022-05-28).

Ottawa Protest

In late January, after the convoy reached Ottawa on the 29th of January 2022, Patrick King who has been described as a key organiser of the Canada Convoy Protest stated in his livestream that the convoy is a well organised group that is settling in Canada's capital until Canada is a free nation again.[9] Various reports seen by *The Guardian* warned that in all likelihood different extremist groups were involved in the protest, and that the potential for violence emerging from the protest is real.[10]

Moreover, the media reported various instances of protesters drinking and dancing, e.g. on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the National War Memorial in Ottawa, Canada, as well as protesters being violent and harassing locals.[11] Even images of the Canadian flag with a swastika on it were seen among the protesters.[12] Furthermore, experts that monitor far-right movements were concerned that the Canada Convoy Protest might provide opportunities for far-right groups to normalise their presence in the society and even have a chance to recruit new members.[13]

One of the convoy organisers, Jason LaFace, compared mask mandates which forced him to wear a mask in grocery stores with living in Nazi Germany, and on top of that stated that Trudeau is a criminal who has to be overthroned.[14] The happenings during the protest have caused an avalanche of remarks such as the ones stating that the convoy supporters are advocating for civil war, calling for violence against prime minister Justin Trudeau, as well as

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[9] Humphrey, Adrian. As trucker protest shifts from convoy to siege on Parliament, a struggle for hearts, minds and message. *National Post.* 2022-02-03. https://nationalpost.com/news/as-trucker-protest-shifts-from-convoy-to-siege-on-parliament-a-struggle-for-hearts-minds-and-message (Accessed 2022-05-28).

[10] Ling, Justin. Canada was warned before protests that violent extremists infiltrated convoy. *The Guardian.* 2022. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/17/ottawa-protests-anti-terror-agency-warned-violent-extremists (Accessed 2022-05-28).

[11] Massie, Graeme. Soup kitchen says Freedom Convoy truckers 'harassing' staff for meals and used 'racial slurs'. *Independent.* 2022-01-30. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/convoy-truckers-canada-soup-kitchen-b2003765.html (Accessed 2022-05-28).

[12] Crawford, Tiffany. Mayor of Terry Fox's hometown in B.C. calls out vaccine mandate protesters for defacing statue. *Vancouver Sun.* 2022-01-29. https://vancouversun.com/news/mayor-of-terry-foxs-hometown-in-b-c-calls-out-vaccine-mandate-protesters-for-defacing-statue (Accessed 2022-05-28).

[13] Olmos, Sergio. US anti-vaccine mandate campaigners aim to mimic Canadian convoy tactic. *The Guardian.* 2022-02-04. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/04/us-anti-vaccine-mandate-convoy-canada (Accessed 2022-05-28).

[14] Taylor, Casey. Truck convoy's message muddies the closer it gets to capital. *Bay today.* 2022-01-26. https://www.baytoday.ca/local-news/truck-convoys-message-muddies-the-closer-it-gets-to-capital-4994947 (Accessed 2022-05-28).

that the protest should be used as Canada's 'January 6', alluding to the United States capitol attack from the previous year of 2021.[15]

The fact that the protesters outnumbered the police and controlled the situation on the streets led Mayor Jim Watson to declare a state of emergency for the City of Ottawa on the 6th of February 2022 due to the ongoing demonstration, as it reflected the serious danger and threat to the safety and security of residents posed by the protest.[16]

Consequently, the Distributed Denial of Secrets - a public interest non-profit transparency organisation - uncovered and shared emails sourced to Chris Garrah indicating that he and Daniel Bulford were two of the Ottawa Police Service's main contacts for planning the "Ottawa occupation".[17] The email contained a list of top 16 convoy organisers with their names and contact information.[18]

In the wake of these and similar happenings, Canadian Trucking Alliance stated on the 7th of February 2022 that many of the supporters of the Canada Convoy Protest in Ottawa had no direct connection to the trucking industry.[19] Furthermore, president of Teamsters Canada, an organisation that represents more than 50000 professional drivers, including approximately 15000 truck drivers, of which 90% are vaccinated, said in a statement that so-called 'freedom convoy' is delegitimising the real concerns of most truck drivers. Moreover, the statement stressed that the convoy does not reflect the values of their organisation and that what is happening is a "despicable display of hate led by the political Right and shamefully encouraged by elected conservative politicians".[20]

Furthermore, on the 7th of February the Facebook group "Freedom Convoy 2022 Fund Raiser" was created, and the convoy expanding from its original goals contributed to several protesters

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[15] Ling, Justin. Canada was warned before protests that violent extremists infiltrated convoy. *The Guardian*. 2022-02-21. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/17/ottawa-protests-anti-terror-agency-warned-violent-extremists (Accessed 2022-05-28).

[16] Mayor Watson declares state of emergency for Ottawa due to ongoing demonstration. *Ottawa*. 2022-02-06. https://ottawa.ca/en/news/mayor-watson-declares-state-emergency-ottawa-due-ongoing-demonstration. (Accessed 2022-05-28).

[17] LeBrun, Luke. Convoy Leaders' Emails Reveal Planning Document That Outlines Early Plans to Illegally 'Occupy' Ottawa. *PressProgress*. 2022-03-04. https://pressprogress.ca/convoy-leaders-emails-reveal-planning-document-that-outlines-early-plans-to-illegally-occupy-ottawa/ (Accessed 2022-05-28).

[18] ibid.

[19] Canadian Trucking Alliance. Statement by Canadian Trucking Alliance President on Ottawa Protests. *Canadian Trucking Alliance*. 2022-01-29. https://cantruck.ca/statement-by-canadian-trucking-alliance-president-on-ottawa-protests/ (Accessed 2022-05-28).

[20] Teamsters Canada. The Real Enemy for Truckers is Covid-19. *Teamsters Canada.* 2022-02-07. https://teamsters.ca/blog/2022/02/07/the-real-enemy-for-truckers-is-covid-19/ (Accessed 2022-05-28).

to voice opposition to the perceived authoritarianism and corruption by Justin Trudeau stating that the protest is not an anti-vaccination movement, but rather a freedom movement.[21] Moreover, on the 10th of February 2022 the Federal Conservatives reversed their position supporting the border blockades and vowed to continue pushing the governing liberals to release a clear plan for ending COVID-19 restrictions.[22]

On the 14th of February 2022, Distributed Denial of Secrets began distributing a list of GiveSendGo anonymous donors revealing their names and personal information.[23] Same day to end border blockades and occupation of downtown Ottawa Justin Trudeau invoked the Emergencies Act, which gave banks and the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada temporary power to monitor transactions and potentially freeze accounts.[24] It turned out that it had not affected donors to the Canada Convoy Protest, which was then followed by Justin Trudeau lifting the Emergencies Act on the 23rd of February, as well as premier Doug Ford lifting Ontario's state of emergency.

Aftermath and Spillover Effects

The Canada Convoy Protest that occupied the Canadian capital in late January and in February 2022 in protest of COVID-19 inflicted mandates inspired similar actions across the world. On the 4th of February 2022 *The Guardian* reported that following the example of Canadian truckers, the USA anti-vaccine mandate supporters were aiming to mimic the Canada Convoy Protest supporters.[25] Apart from that, truckers in other countries have begun organising their own versions of the 'Freedom Convoy', for instance truckers in the Netherlands, New Zealand,

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[21] Lapointe, Mike. Horwood, Matthew. 'Freedom Convoy' rolls into town, jams Parliamentary Precinct, thousands protest against COVID-19 mandates. *The Hill Times.* 2022-01-29. https://www.hilltimes.com/2022/01/29/freedom-convoy-rolls-into-town-jams-parliamentary-precinct-thousands-protest-against-covid-19-mandates/341134 (Accessed 2022-05-28).

[22] Tasker, John Paul. Federal Conservatives call on anti-vaccine mandate protesters to bring down the barricades. CBC. 2022-02-10. https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/conservatives-covid-19-restrictions-1.6346576 (Accessed 2022-05-28).

[23] GiveSendGo 3.0. *Distributed Denial of Secrets*. 2022. https://ddosecrets.com/wiki/GiveSendGo_3.0 (Accessed 2022-05-29).

[24] MacLellan, Bruce. Invoking the Emergencies Act can help build trust in government. i*POLITICS*. 2022-02-15. https://ipolitics.ca/news/invoking-the-emergencies-act-can-help-build-trust-in-government (Accessed 2022-05-29).

[25] Olmos, Sergio. US anti-vaccine mandate campaigners aim to mimic Canadian convoy tactic. *The Guardian*. 2022-02-04. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/04/us-anti-vaccine-mandate-convoy-canada (Accessed 2022-05-28).

and Australia had hit the road to send a clear message to the authorities to stop the mandates.[26] Moreover, there was a call in all European capitals for truckers to come down to Brussels in a convoy supporting the Canadian truckers in protest against the COVID-19 mandates.

A European version of the 'freedom convoy' of truck drivers was planned to occur in the Belgian capital on the 14th of February 2022, after social media users have been calling for action involving multiple European truck drivers in a chat called 'World Freedom Convoy' on Signal, which resulted in around 40000 people joining the aforementioned chat on an encrypted messaging app in the span of just one week.[27] The topics of conversation in the chat were diverse; many were focusing on the right to free speech and the right to make one's own health choices. Moreover, several sub-channels have been created for truck drivers from other European countries who wanted to organise actions.[28]

There were also many initiatives to raise money, and allegedly truckers were the ones collecting money via the GoFundMe platform. However, it turned out that the initiative came from Tamara Lich, who was a principal fundraiser for the protest. Lich has a history of association with right wing radical groups, and is a secretary of the federal separatist Maverick Party in Alberta. Moreover, she was active with other far-right movements previously, one being Wexit Alberta, a party who advocated Alberta to separate from Canada and join the Trump-led USA.[29] Since the fundraiser is not an official charity or organisation, GoFundMe stated that there is no further accountability in where the money will end up going. What we know with certainty is that the majority of donations came from the USA.[30]

In conclusion, what began as a protest against the inflicted mandates ended up as being much more; an anti-vax, anti-mandate, anti-government, and possibly even pro-separatist movement

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[26] O'Neil, Tyler. GLOBAL MOVEMENT: 'Freedom Convoy' anti-vaccine mandate protests have sparked activism throughout the world. *Your News*. 2022-02-07. https://yournews.com/2022/02/07/2295470/global-movement-freedom-convoy-anti-vaccine-mandate-protests-have-sparked-activism/ (Accessed 2022-05-29).

[27] Lyons, Helen. Still no clarity on permission for 'Freedom Convoy' in Brussels. *The Brussels Times*. 2022-02-09. https://www.brusselstimes.com/205460/still-no-clarity-on-permission-for-freedom-convoy-in-brussels (Accessed 2022-05-28).

[28] 'World Freedom Convoy' eyes Brussels as destination for massive trucker protest. *The Brussels Times*. 2022-02-03. https://www.brusselstimes.com/204546/world-freedom-convoy-eyes-brussels-as-destination-for-massive-trucker-protest (Accessed 2022-05-28).

[29] Menzies, James. The so-called Freedom Convoy was never about truckers, or border mandates. *Truck News*. 2022-01-30. https://www.trucknews.com/blogs/the-so-called-freedom-convoy-was-never-about-truckers-or-border-mandates/ (Accessed 2022-05-29).

[30] Sollenberger, Roger. The Mysterious Right-Wing Group Funding the Trucker Convoy. *Daily Beast*. 2022-02-24. https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-mysterious-right-wing-group-american-foundation-for-civil-liberties-and-freedoms-funding-trucker-convoy (Accessed 2022-05-29).

that attached itself to the small group of truckers' frustration over the cross-border vaccine mandate, making it a *cause célèbre* for the right wing in both Canada and the USA.

Political Constructions on the Spectrum

The Origins of Right and Left

In this section we want to explain how to understand the notion of 'left' and 'right'. Culturally and historically the conceptions of the 'right' and the 'left' have connotations which are still present in our common sense today, thus they still contribute to how discourse within a political context is interpreted. In religion, the 'right' is good, the place where the trusted one sits by as shown by Christian biblical passages where the right hand is the preferred hand in showing righteousness[31], while the 'left' is evil. In linguistics, 'right' means the correct, while 'left' can be used to refer to "what is left", the remains - in English; in Italian left is 'sinistra' meaning sinister, and right is 'destra' meaning capable. Essentially, these connotations contribute a certain weight to the understanding that 'the right was superior and the left inferior'.[32] While they might no longer have the importance they once had, they are certainly still evident, especially in language use and semantics.

Politically the conception of the 'right' and the 'left' started in French politics in 1789, although it only appeared in popular use in the 1820s.[33] But, are these dichotomous concepts still relevant for today's understanding of the political spectrum? There are some who reject this dichotomy, claiming to be neither 'left' nor 'right', and arguing we are now past that spectrum division.[34] While for some looking for a third placement on the spectrum means they have found no ideological alignment with neither the 'left' nor the 'right', for others it is a defence mechanism for not falling into the doom of history one side or the other holds.

Scales of Political Ideology in Context

Throughout history the concepts of 'left' and 'right' have changed, and so a horizontal scale was drawn to simplify the understanding of different political ideologies and their respective

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[31] Right Hand of God. *Open Bible*. https://www.openbible.info/topics/right_hand_of_god (Accessed 2022-05-18).

[32] Rosas, João Cardoso., and Ferreira, Ana Rita (eds.). *Left And Right: The Great Dichotomy Revisited.* Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2013, 1.

[33] ibid., 4.

[34] ibid., 5.

positions in correlation to each other. This dichotomy has helped for the creation of a common sense knowledge of what each side means and how one gets positioned there. Although, this definition has changed throughout history and, today, it is context based - so there is no universal scale to place political ideology in a 'left' or 'right' position. The scales proposed in *Left And Right: The Great Dichotomy* (2013) were drafted from an European point of view, however, they do acknowledge the differences of context on the American and the European political history, and how these manifested on the scales. In a first moment situated in the first decades of the 19th century, the left meant liberalism, and the right conservatism. While the left defended reform, a democratic republic and a turn away from clericalism, the right stood for social hierarchies and promoted "anti-egalitarian" stances.[35] The image above on the left illustrates this first moment.

The second moment, as illustrated above on

left _____ right
    liberalism   conservatism

left _____ right
   socialism   liberalism   conservatism

image on the right, occurred from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century in Europe the appearance of socialism pushed liberalism to the centre of the scale, as it favoured a higher sense of equality and opposed private property.[36] However, this reorganisation on the scale never happened in the USA, as these ideas failed to garner significant support.

The fourth and final moment, as seen on the right[37], describes the last decades of the 20th century and beginning of the 21th century in

left _____ right
  liberal-socialism   liberal-conservatism

Europe, and states that both socialism and conservatism have integrated ideas originally from liberalism. However, from an American perspective, as aforementioned, socialism did not grow the same roots it grew in Europe, and it was only with the New Deal that American liberals began supporting a stronger state, while American conservatives, who once favoured a strong state shifted their stance to the opposite.[38] Thus, according to these scales American politics are most similar with the second moment as per the second moment.

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[35] Rosas, João Cardoso., and Ferreira, Ana Rita (eds.). *Left And Right: The Great Dichotomy Revisited.* Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2013, 14.

[36] ibid., 14-15.

[37] ibid., 17.

[38] ibid., 15.

The Dichotomy Today

During the mid 1950s and early 1960s, theorists such as Edward Shills and Daniel Bell argued that with the end of the authoritarian regimes in Europe there had begun an era characterised by the 'end of ideologies'.[39] Professor Michael Freeden further concurred that macro ideologies - e.g. socialism, liberalism, conservatism - did not exist in such a simplified form as they were complex structures that shifted outside a linear continuum.[40] Freeden argued that the left-right scale "conveys the false idea that there is a fixed marketplace of political ideas, a set number of centrist, radical and extremist views that can be perceived easily and consciously by all."[41] Indeed, we can observe today the reluctance some political parties have in positioning themselves as either being on the 'left' or the 'right', considering the implications this positioning can have depending on the historical context and collective memory of a country.

Despite this, many politicians still use references of the 'left' and 'right' to position themselves or others, for instance, Donald Trump called Justin Trudeau a 'far-left lunatic'[42] earlier this year of 2022. It is not only politicians who make use of this political dichotomy, but also media organisations[43] who assert the existence of these constructions, so this continuous use by political and civil actors ensures this dichotomy is still relevant and meaningful in understanding our political reality, even in the most simplified form. And so, the collective memory and common sense of the political dichotomy of 'left' and 'right' lives on. In a way they facilitate the construction of each of those identities, one is either one thing or the other, however, they also create the potential to antagonise the other side, to see it gradually moving further and further away.

Furthermore, while the words 'left' and 'right' might not always be used when referring to a political aisle, in a political system dominated by only two parties this dichotomy is implicit and ongoing. To observe this we can look at the USA, the Democrats and the Republicans; or Canada, the Liberals and the Conservatives; or the United Kingdom, with Labour and the

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[39] Rosas, João Cardoso., and Ferreira, Ana Rita (eds.). *Left And Right: The Great Dichotomy Revisited.* Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2013, 17.
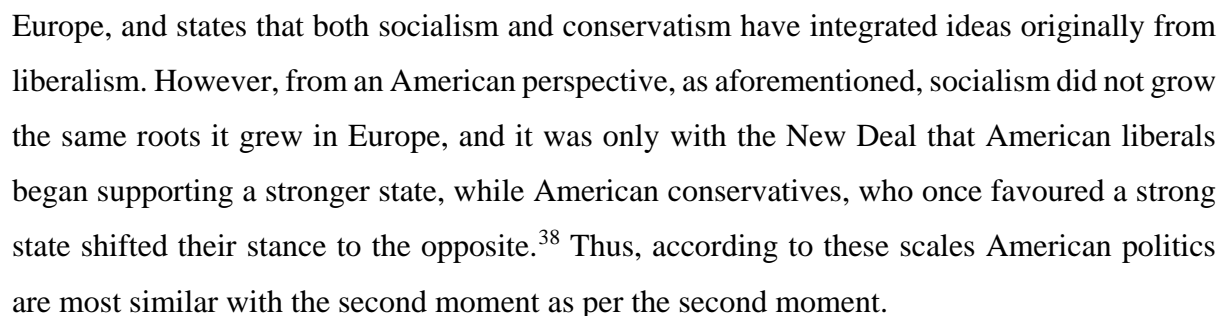
[40] ibid.

[41] ibid.

[42] Dawson, Bethany. Canada: Trump calls trudeau 'far-left lunatic' as trucker-led COVID-19 vaccine protests continue in Canada. *Insider.* 2022-02-05. https://www.businessinsider.com/canada-trump-calls-trudeau-far-left-lunatic-trucker-protests-continue-2022-2?op=1&r=US&IR=T (Accessed 2022-05-09).

[43] Malik, Kenan. The left/right divide still exists. But it's struggling to escape the lure of identity politics. *The Guardian.* 2021-02-28. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/feb/28/the-leftright-divide-still-exists-but-its-struggling-to-escape-the-lure-of-identity-politics (Accessed 2022-05-09).

Conservatives. While all of these countries have other parties in their national parliaments, there are two major ones who take the spotlight, and so we will also use the concepts 'left' and 'right' throughout this paper on a Canadian context as it provides us a window into understanding how both are being represented and their respective identities on the context of the Canada Convoy Protest. So in the context of this paper and relating to the Canada Convoy Protest, the 'left' will be equivalent to liberals represented by the Liberal Party of Canada (LPC), and the 'right' will be equivalent to conservatives or in the context of this paper represented through the truckers in the Canadian Convoy Protest.

Post-Truth

How the Colorblind Discuss a Shade of Red on Monitors With Different Calibrations

So, why do we have such difficulty agreeing on the Truth? There are a lot of possible answers to this question. Political differences have, of course, existed for as long as governance has been around, and generally, disagreement and conflict must be said to be part of the human condition. These days, however, there seems to be something else afoot. Historically speaking, truth has changed over time. How to determine reality has been a point of contention for philosophers, politicians, and academics alike for hundreds of years. Each era has had its distinct method, and reason for constituting reality, a reason and method that informed the way the societies of the time constructed the Truth about the world and the people in it.

Truth[44] was informed by something, whether it was religion, nature, power, politics, or humanity - it has always been fluid, it has always been in the process of changing. What has always governed Truth, however, are the institutions that solidify Truth - passing it on between generations as certain knowledge about the world. Today, with a wealth of information being developed independently outside the traditional institutions of Truth, Truth itself becomes unstable.

We find ourselves in yet another point in time where determining reality has become a major source of contention and political struggle. It seems as though the overarching narratives that previously tied together societies and people have been shattered into a seemingly unending

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[44] Here we would like to differentiate between our use of a capitalised 'Truth' and lowercase 'truth(s)'. Truth being a singular ideal notion about a subject that is agreed upon, whereas truth(s) are claims about reality contesting for dominance with other such claims.

individuation of how to determine objectivity and therefore *truth-claims* about the world - this process has left us in a place where any statement can proclaim to be true, not by any burden of proof but merely by being uttered and gathering support of the crowd.

If we contemplate the monumental significance of having a personal portable computer in our jacket pocket, something unheard of - even unthinkable 50 years or even 25 years ago, we have to understand that we were just recently granted a tool that gave us access to the total sum of all knowledge of all recorded history - the internet. We are let loose to navigate it freely and without guidance - leaving us to eat away at the foundation of the monuments that have acted as the gatekeepers of Truth for our time.

There are no universal guiding principles for an individual to operate in a space like this, we do not know of a definite methodology to navigate an unending cave system of information. Truth has become so individual, multiple, and political that it has become seemingly impossible to determine, as we are each standing in our own pocket at the end of a dimly lit cave through which we shout to the outside world: "It is here, I found the Truth", all while millions of others are shouting the same at us from their own pocket.

The shattering of the concept of Truth has left us with the many and lesser 'truths' that are found fighting for relevance in a seemingly ever-expanding information marketplace. How are we to conceptualise and understand these complexities?

The theory of post-truth tries to make sense of how the development of technology and the growth and marketisation of information have impacted the notion of Truth. In his book, *A Political Theory of Post-Truth*, Ignas Kalpokas spreads out both the political reasoning for the fluidity of Truth and the changes in society that led to it being so. He defines the *post-truth condition* as follows:

Post-truth is taken to refer to a general condition of detachment of truth-claims from verifiable facts and the primacy of criteria other than verifiability in the audiences' decision to affiliate themselves with a particular truth-claim, such claims being pitched to audiences as narrative fictions that constitute their own lived realities and explain the world.[45]

To Kalpokas the 'postness' in post-truth stems from a transformation that has suspended the dichotomy between Truth and lie.[46] In the quote above he describes how *truth-claims* now no longer need to be based on a verification of facts - merely an assertion can be validated with enough support - and that instead people rely on narrative fictions. The facilitation of this mode of narrative weaving, Kalpokas claims, lies within a new qualitative dishonesty amongst politicians that operate on tactics based on allegiance to narrative, rather than Truth, to target certain narrative preference in order to gain a larger audience for their political agenda.[47]

Kalpokas argues that our transition from the Information Age to the Experience Age has left us completely overloaded, and that we now are trying to deal with the overabundance of information through a new affective tactic: "The experience of — and pleasure in — encountering and potentially consuming a particular piece of information."[48]

This emphasis on experience furthers that fact checking *truth-claims* is pointless, firstly since the point of the *truth-claim* is to be experienced rather than verified, and secondly if the author wanted his statement to be in accordance with facts, they themselves would have double checked and verified their statement before claiming its truthfulness.[49] These assertions, these *truth-claims*, then, serve a different function other than asserting Truth itself. Politically oriented assertions of *truth-claims* serve to signal visceral and emotional appeal, as it is people's emotional investment that determines the value of the claim alongside its virality, transforming contemporary politics into a phenomenon that no longer operates on rational discourse, but instead on affective statements vying for attention.[50]

For Kalpokas, it is the failing consensus surrounding Truth that has made it difficult to recognise. It is not that Truth has been given up on or that people do not value it, but it is rather

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[45] Kalpokas, Ignas. *A Political Theory of Post-Truth*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2019, 5.
[46] ibid., 10.
[47] ibid., 11-12.
[48] ibid., 33.
[49] ibid., 11.
[50] ibid., 12.

a lessened trust in authorities, experts, and institutions, who themselves are fallible, that has made the notion of Truth within society much more complex.[51]

These institutions and experts tend to be challenged on their knowledge or change their analysis based on new evidence, a normal occurrence within any field - but it is this instability, Kalpokas claims, that leads people to immerse themselves in *post-truth games* where they weave together bits and pieces of information from a multitude of sources to make a stable narrative about the world for themselves, the shape of which often relies on preference[52] - the emphasis of these games being the gathering of emotionally laden narrative rather than factual representation of the world.

Generally speaking, as most people possess a shallow understanding of most fields outside of their own specific area of expertise, that they have acquired through either years of education or practise, they tend to rely on generalised information.[53] Catchy, memorable narratives are therefore important to operate as gap-filling information for the masses.[54]

Here Kalpokas points to the relationship between the producers of *truth-claims* and their interpreters which gives post-truth another kind of complexity. The *post-truth games* of individuals means that the participants actively seek out information and are not merely passive receivers - they co-create their own *post-truth narrative*s by curating their information stream and which *truth-claim actors* they trust.[55] As Kalpokas strikingly writes: "Post-truth is not manipulation of some sort — it is collusion".[56]

The construction of 'left' and 'right' in this context seems to be especially volatile, as the basis for the relationship between groups who understand themselves as being either 'left' or 'right' within a democracy is that of disagreement about various societal, philosophical, economic, and moral issues. In short the basis of democracy should be considered as being dependent on upholding the ability to negotiate these issues between a difference in perspectives between the political groups that govern society. If for some reason these negotiations cannot be held with a belief that the participants are of good-faith, the democratic system starts to fall apart. But,

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[51] Kalpokas, Ignas. *A Political Theory of Post-Truth*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2019, 14.
[52] ibid., 14-15.
[53] ibid., 16.
[54] ibid.
[55] ibid., 17-18.
[56] ibid., 18.

on the other hand, acknowledging this can also be used as a tactic to delegitimise political groups or actors, making them seem less viable.

Here we would like to enter Gabriele Cosentino and his work, *Social Media and the Post-Truth World Order,* into the conceptualisation of post-truth in tandem with Kalpokas'. Cosentino's notion of post-truth departs from a discussion of epistemic transition based in postmodernism's description of the breaking of the grand meta narratives, as formulated by Lyotard[57], giving rise to competing interpretations of reality in relation to power dynamics and ideological and political conflicts, as well as Foucault's linking together of power and truths in 'regimes of truth', underlining the historical and constructed nature of Truth.[58]

What Cosentino is formulating by referring to the theories of postmodernism, then, is that transitions between epistemes of Truth are processes that have always occurred, and that each has been defined by its own unique phenomena. As Kalpokas, Cosentino also points to the actors and institutions who have communicated Truth and misused their position, but expands on their role by introducing an interesting perspective through the notion of the fiduciary element of trust relating to Truth itself:

As the political and economic conditions underpinning previous regimes of truth are challenged by structural transformations in the media/politics nexus, established truth-enforcing institutions lose the support of citizens and audiences, both at the national level and at the broader global level. The existence of shared truths doesn't simply depend on the verifiability of information and of the evidence that supports it, but also on the trust status of the authority in charge of verifying and arbitraging such evidence. If such 'fiduciary' status is challenged, then the distinction between truth and falsity is questioned and compromised too.[59]

The problem in recognising Truth for Cosentino has started within the declined trust in, or the 'fiduciary' status of, the media and politics in general. Kalpokas' iteration of the *post-truth condition* does also hinge on dishonesty from the political actors and media institutions communicating *truth-claims*, but Cosentino's emphasis on the necessity of trust between citizens and said political actors and institutions as well as the conceptualisation of trust having a 'fiduciary' status, however, portrays Truth as a much more complex notion that acts as a

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[57] Cosentino, Gabriele. *Social Media and the Post-Truth World Order.* Palgrave Macmillan. 2020, 17.
[58] ibid., 18.
[59] ibid., 19.

resource within society that can be depleted through its relation to trust. It is a rather simple question that arises from the informational chaos amongst individuals: "Can we trust the institutions and politicians to solve the problems we face in the world, and to be honest as to how and why?". If the answer is no, then their claim to Truth is effectively not worth much in a societal context.

This conceptualisation of Truth and trust's fiduciary status also grants us a more rounded entry into the discussion of why individuals perform *post-truth games* as stated by Kalpokas and amends his argument on the degrading consensus in relation to what constitutes Truth. The *post-truth condition* is defined by a depletion of trust in the institutions and actors that historically have been governing Truth, leaving it up to individuals to seek it out for themselves. Under these kinds of conditions it is not hard to understand how certain actors might seek to gain influence by creating narratives that align themselves with certain political interests among others. The chance to gain favour, or at least undermine others' attempt to install their political will might seem like a valid strategy to pursue. The thing is, it muddies the waters. Demonstrably false claims undermine trust. False claims disguised as truths and understood as such undermine our ability to discern the real from the unreal.

Another thing we would like to consider is the setting where these narratives are being built, and we would like to suggest an amendment to Kalpokas' and Consentino's work - the *post-truth setting*. A *post-truth setting* is defined by the setting emphasis on building community by sharing information. This setting aids or restricts the buildup of the narrative by either dismissing it or by supporting it by sharing it or expanding on it. Through this iteration the setting in which the narratives are being created have a conceptualised impact on how and why the narrative gets to live on. In the context of this paper 9GAG and Imgur would serve as *post-truth settings*.

The importance of the setting works in tandem with the freedom the individual has in the online world also which comes with a far more difficult task - discerning who to trust, what sources to follow to get as close as possible to the Truth on any given subject, rather than a much more dismissable 'truth'. This task becomes especially difficult when information created by media outlets or other *post-truth actor*s seek to install a certain slant to their stories that could obscure a more engaged, diverse, and informed discussion of a number of issues.

Determining the appearance and negotiation of 'left' and 'right' should be considered in this context. How do we arrive at a consensus about how the 'left' and the 'right' should be

presented, understood and negotiated when determining Truth seems to be less than straightforward. Furthermore, how do we operate with certainty online? How do we obtain the belief that we are well enough informed to move forward from a discussion? Chances are that certainty, something entirely different from Truth, is something we manufacture through a consensus between ourselves, others, and what information we choose to consume.

From this point we can move on to where this search takes place by discussing *truth markets, affiliated truths*, and 'truth' as an asset to value creation rather than a goal in and of itself. To illustrate this, we would like to shortly present the case of *OANN* (One American News Network).

The Case of OANN and Truth Markets

First, we would like to clarify the term *truth markets.* According to Cosentino, *truth markets* are counter to Foucault's concept of 'regime of truth', where a small set of media outlets and/ or the state authority determine the discourse that should be communicated to and amongst the masses.[60] In the age of the Internet, however, there is no one central regime communicating Truth, and so the concept falls short of describing the contemporary context for establishing a 'regime of truth'. *Truth markets* are defined by competing *truth-claims*. Cosentino describes how within these new regimes of post-truth multiple actors seek to gain viewership to attain influence:

(…) resource-rich political and economic actors like politicians, media groups, State actors, as well as resources-poor activists and subcultural groups, are engaged in the co-production of competing narratives, with cacophonic and disorienting results.[61]

Truth markets should then be considered as spaces of intense competition for the attention of possible consumers of information and/ or voters propped up by both economic based market interests as well as political motivation. To illustrate the 'markedness' of the *post-truth condition* we now dive into the case at hand.

The case of *OANN* is fascinating, as within the last year several reports have shown how *AT&T* funded the obscure news enterprise to cater to an audience that was more right leaning than

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[60] Cosentino, Gabriele. *Social Media and the Post-Truth World Order.* Palgrave Macmillan. 2020, 20.
[61] ibid.

Fox News. This story will be used to comment on how media operate, not on a basis of journalistic integrity, but instead on a basis of economics.

The basis for bringing *OANN* into the discussion of *truth markets* hinges on the extensive coverage done by *Reuters* per their access to court documents from lawsuits against *OANN* describing the motivation behind the media outlet's creation. *OANN* is a USA based media company supported and funded by one of the largest communications companies *AT&T*. *OANN* has been criticised for running stories that turned out to be false, contained misinformation or misrepresentation, as well as conspiracy theories on topics such as: George Soros collaboration with Nazis at the age of 14[62], COVID-19 pandemic conspiracy theories[63], and the 2020 US presidential elections[64], among others.

The company's founder and chief executive, Robert Herrin Sr, testified in a 2019 labour suit against him that the idea for the formation of *OANN* came after a meeting with *AT&T* executives in 2013:

"They told us they wanted a conservative network," Herring said during a 2019 deposition seen by Reuters. "They only had one, which was Fox News, and they had seven others on the other [left-wing] side. When they said that, I jumped to it and built one."[65]

In his deposition he further commented on his motivation behind creating the network: "To make money, number one," Robert Herring said. "But number two, is that *AT&T* told us … they wanted a conservative network".[66]

Asides from their enthusiastic coverage of Donald Trump[67], the network received a lot of attention and gained a drastic increase in viewership during two recent major events: when *Fox News* confirmed the presidential victory for Joe Biden in 2020, and on 6th of January 2021, when the US capitol was stormed. After each event the news channel saw an increase in downloads of their app by 767000 and 517000 respectively.[68] Their website received traffic

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[62] One America News Network. *Wikipedia.*
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_America_News_Network#Litigation (Accessed 2022-04-13).
[63] ibid.
[64] ibid.
[65] Shiffman, John. Special Report: How AT&T helped build far-right One America News. *Reuters*. 2021-10-07.
https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-oneamerica-att/ (Accessed 2022-04-13).
[66] ibid.
[67] ibid.
[68] ibid.

that averaged eight million visitors, peaking at 15 million during the months of November 2020 to January 2021.[69]

OANN had seemingly discovered a market with a certain type of consumers who responded incredibly well to content that was marred with the tenants of post-truth - *truth-claims* with little to no connection to any facts, and a narrative that featured something more akin to conspiracism than news, stories based on the narrative of a failure of US democracy and its systems as well as a corruption of its political actors. *OANN*, alongside *Newsmax*, was sued by *Dominion Voter Systems Corporation* in 2021 for defamation due to their role in spreading voter fraud conspiracies that involved voting machines used in the 2020 presidential election, produced by *Dominion.*[70] In *OANN's* world, the left was coming for democracy, using any means necessary. False claims disguised as truths and understood as such undermine our ability to discern the real from the unreal.

The case illustrates how the *truth markets* operate. It shows how Truth has simultaneously become a commodity and a narrative by-product. *Truth-claims* within news media operating under *post-truth conditions*, in this sense, are features that must be packaged alongside emotionally laden stories for their existence to be valid and to gain viewership and sponsorship. They had tapped into a vein of right-wing political messaging that made the viewers come back. To be relevant enough to exist on the marketplace. There can be other motivations behind packaging *truth-claims* and narrative, of course, political power being one of them, meaning making for individuals being another. We should consider that even though some *truth-claims* might appear similar to fiction, they are created to inform people about reality and how to understand it, even if these claims are stated as being speculative, and that even the most unfounded *truth-claims* do not exist as islands in the ocean.

For there is a further dynamic to be considered. The foundation for *OANN's* existence did not spring up overnight, the conspiracism and the post-truth condition existed before the company was formed. As put by Kalpokas: "Post-truth is not manipulation of some sort — it is collusion"[71] - there had to be individuals performing *post-truth games* where the *truth-claims* made by *OANN* would fit in.

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[69] Shiffman, John. Special Report: How AT&T helped build far-right One America News. *Reuters*. 2021-10-07. https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-oneamerica-att/ (Accessed 2022-04-13).

[70] Shiffman, John. Special Report: How AT&T helped build far-right One America News. *Reuters*. 2021-10-07. https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-oneamerica-att/ (Accessed 2022-04-14).

[71] Kalpokas, Ignas. *A Political Theory of Post-Truth*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2019, 18.

The audience already existed; they were already looking for what *OANN* offered and a hole in the market was spotted. *OANN* did not invent anything new, but instead leaned into the market with stories that were somewhat similar to what already existed - *Fox News'* conservative programming being an example as it was the direct inspiration for the creation of *OANN* pr. Herring's deposition - but with a healthy twist of conspiracy. They already had a number of *affiliative truths* to base their own narrative, identity, and *post-truth* products on.

Weaving from a never ending Ball of Yarn - Affiliative Truths

Affiliative truths is a concept that, in a sense, can be conceived as being structured like discourse theory describes the structure of language, and here we must return to the notion of *post-truth games* - the creation or seeking out of narrative by the individual. The individuals that seek to curate their own truth on the available *truth-markets* through *post-truth games* the narratives that they help cocreate cannot just stand alone.

As Kalpokas writes: " However, post-truth narratives cannot be created *ex nihilo*: their appeal must be based on something shared, such as selected episodes of collective memories and experiences of the past (...)[72]". *Affiliative truths* are effectively the *truth-claims* that are structured around grander post-truth narrative. An example of this is the previously mentioned story about *Dominion*'s voting machines, an *affiliative truth* to the stolen election narrative.

Affiliative truths are a way to build up something akin to an 'ecosystem' of truths that can validate post-truth narratives but also validate each other in the process in order to strengthen *truth-claims* but also to build community that reaffirms the *truth-claims.*[73] It is, according to Kalpokas, especially on online platforms - on social media that communities that are based around such *affiliative truths* spring up, since the cost of building community online is fairly negligible.[74] *Affiliative truths* support and galvanise each other within certain communities and amongst a certain audience that has preconceptions, prejudices and pressing desires in terms of supporting certain narratives.[75]

In the case of *OANN* one of the precursors for its conspiracism narratives and buildup of affiliative truths was the conservative news corporation *Fox News*. The station had created a

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[72] Kalpokas, Ignas. *A Political Theory of Post-Truth*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2019, 28.
[73] ibid., 23-24.
[74] ibid., 25-26.
[75] ibid, 29.

hole in the market for conspiracism that they would not pursue themselves, but that *OANN* could and would.

To give and indication how effective *affiliative-truths* can be to uphold *truth-claims*, we note that a 2021 Reuters/ Ipsos poll of 1005 USA adults showed that six in ten of the interviewed republicans still believed that the 2020 USA election was stolen from Trump due to voter fraud[76]. The narrative of the 'left' stealing away the presidency is a catastrophic claim that undermines an elemental tenet of democracy, the integrity of its elections. Believing it to be true, that an election was stolen, would have an monumental impact on any one individual within a democracy - it is a narrative that is designed to bring forth an emotional reaction.

Truth markets and *affiliative truths* should be considered as working in synchronisation under *post-truth conditions*. In an information environment where there is no guarantee for accuracy but a lot of incentive to create engagement in the quest for value creation - Truth can become politically entrenched. Insisting on Truth in these conditions can, for the media companies behind, be necessary for their existence when their commodity is based on it. To cover their bases and secure their assets then, rigid post-truth regimes will need to be built up, ones that cannot easily be toppled by any one-two or a dousing of fact checking expeditions that might undermine their *truth-claims*. There is power in having the rightful claim to Truth.

Here we should take some time to reflect on how the construction of the 'left' and 'right' might play into a *truth market*. Considering that *truth markets* turn 'truth' into a competitive asset for value creation, as it is essential when making truth-claims and supporting narrative, then, 'truth' when it comes to determining the 'left' and 'right' respectively, should also be understood as having this dynamic. Based on what platform an individual might receive their information from, what audience there is in mind, there might be a considerable interest in how the construction of the 'truth' about the 'left' and 'right' happens.

In the context of this paper, 9GAG and Imgur should not just be considered as being neutral platforms where individuals voice their opinion through the sharing of memes and discussion of phenomena. It would indeed be prudent to determine what kind of construction and representation of the 'left' and 'right' serves to engage the visitors and users of the sites and

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[76] Kahn, Chris. Oliphant, James. Half of Republicans believe false accounts of deadly U.S. Capitol riot-Reuters/Ipsos poll. *Reuters*. 2021-04-05. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-politics-disinformation-idUSKBN2BS0RZ?taid=606af4c8a0a3570001acce1f (Accessed 2022-05-22).

reflect on why this is the case. That is something that cannot avoid discussion after thorough analysis of our data.

Conceptually, however, we should consider the motivation behind communicating Truth for individuals without a stake in direct value creation on a market. Individuals who co-create, consume, and communicate truth do so to make sense of the world and the phenomena that occur in it, to create a cohesive meaningful narrative. Without being a company or a politician, individuals still have a vested interest in making true claims about reality, something that can guide them and others forward with the knowledge that "this course is relatively safe, I will find what I intend to seek out". It is why they dig through dark caves and shout out: "I found Truth", as others will also need to know. There comes a palpable uneasiness from not fully understanding how your life or the world will be impacted upon by actors and phenomena that lies outside your sphere of control. The implication of being the gatekeeper of Truth also means that other actors' claim to Truth on the same topic have the potential to make either seem dishonest. There can only be one Truth of the matter, right? 'Left' and 'right' serve as benchmarks in the process of meaning making in a world that is highly complex, packed with more information that you could ever decipher. But how the 'left' and 'right' is understood under *post-truth conditions* becomes a matter of what is claimed about the two concepts, rather than what they really stand for.

Within a democratic system this uneasiness of not understanding how your life might be impacted upon can be amplified if the political actors across the aisle from you seem to be withholden to an entirely different set of beliefs, or a different regime of 'truths' than yourself - it is not a matter of difference in political views, but rather if we can distinguish between honest and dishonest actors, those who are speaking truthfully, and those who aren't . In a *post-truth setting* where *truth-claims* flow freely, the stakes are only as high or as low as they appear to be through the various *truth-claims*, and we must imagine that high stakes are preferable in a market economy based on attention. In the U.S. the stake for their democracy has seemingly never been higher, and the political groups and actors seem to have lost all faith in their opponents. In Canada phenomena such as the Canada Convoy Protest are moments of contingency in relation to how well democracy is fairing, and how the continuation of democracy should be envisioned.

Individual commentary on phenomena that have a perceived significant impact is a negotiation of what we as a collective and as individuals should, feel, say, and do/not do in response to

phenomena. These phenomena could range from dating advice to war and politics, and in our case protests conducted by truckers especially in online spaces such as 9GAG and Imgur, where you can engage in specific topics any time you would like.

But how should we then understand the dynamics of online platforms' impact on distinguishing Truth? How do they aid us in weaving our narratives about the world? Most of the time we are not really sure about with whom we are negotiating, and in the context of 9gag and Imgur other people simply appear through usernames and text. How do we fully discuss and appreciate the complexity of reality and the construction of Truth when the starting point for the negotiation is a reduction of said complexity - when we can't even fully realise the person(s) we are conversing with. Concepts that come to mind when understanding the online's impact on our construction of the world, political entrenchment, and polarisation are Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles. These concepts have floated around the popular imagination for some time, but are rarely fully explained or challenged. In terms of how the 'left' and 'right' were constructed through the Canada Convoy Protest, we might see radically different interpretations and resources offered on 9gag and Imgur.

To understand how we ought to think about how online platforms inform our creation of Truth and the 'left' and 'right', we will dive into these two concepts, Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles, in our next section.

Algorithmic Filtering within Chambers of Truth

Echo Chambers, Filter Bubbles & Algorithms

The information that informs reality in a *post-truth setting* is filtered somewhat consciously by interpreters, for instance through their choices on the sources of information, but it is also filtered by the platforms where the information is displayed at, and consequently the echo chambers, filter bubbles and algorithms that may be in place in those online spaces. Therefore, it is important to understand the influence these three concepts can have in *post-truth settings*, especially in regards to how one reaches the Truth or truth.

Defining echo chambers and filter bubbles has proven to be a challenge, as there is still no consensus on their definition. It seems that different authors have different understandings of them, and as a result the studies that have tried to prove their existence are equally confronted

by those who disprove it, or at the very least lack enough substantiating to confirm they exist - hindered by this lack of consensus on their meaning and how to measure them.

As a result, some authors have simply called the concepts "metaphors"[77] that reflect the public's fear of a funnelling experience online - the more they use it the narrower it becomes. Which in turn leads to concerns that this merged with "tendencies to interact with like-minded others both limits users' exposure to diverse viewpoints and encourages the adoption of more extreme ideological positions".[78]

While Kitchens' et al. identify the reasons why they have reached contradictory results, they do not provide a meaning of the concepts, so we have resorted to other researchers for a meaning we will adopt when referring to these two concepts throughout this paper. Some problems have been highlighted as the root cause of these turbulence on finding a consensual definition, from the vagueness and conflicting definitions used in different studies, to the difficulties in recreating and comparing the data outcomes due to their distinct measuring tools, the unrepresentative data sets, and algorithmic adjustments.

It is especially important to pay attention to algorithms, as they are the least vague and abstract terms that directly influence polarisation. Simply put an algorithm is the process of outlining a series of steps in an order to solve a problem[79], that is the mapping of a branching path of steps that directs to the next logical step to be taken in accordance to the previous. When it comes to algorithms, we are particularly interested in dark patterns, as

"different types of interfaces that trick users into doing things that are not in their best interest (...) that are used to benefit developers more than the target audience (...) it intentionally unbalances the well-being gains towards the creator of Pt[80] and away from its users."[81]

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[77] Kitchens, Brent., L. Johnson, Steven., and Gray, Peter. Understanding Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles: The Impact of Social Media on Diversification and Partisan Shifts in News Consumption. *MIS Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4. 2020, 1.

[78] Kitchens, Brent., L. Johnson, Steven., and Gray, Peter. Understanding Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles: The Impact of Social Media on Diversification and Partisan Shifts in News Consumption. *MIS Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4. 2020, 1.

[79] What is an algorithm?. *BBC*. https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/z3tbwmn/articles/z3whpv4 (Accessed 2022-05-10).

[80] Pt stands for persuasive technology.

[81] Nyström, Tobias., and Stibe, Agnes. When Persuasive Technology Gets Dark?. *Information Systems: 17th European, Mediterranean, and Middle Eastern Conference, EMCIS 2020,* Dubai, United Arab Emirates, November 25–26. 2020, 5-6.

as it denotes a clear intention the platforms have in potentially furthering their interests even if they may cause harm. This becomes worrisome in a context of political discourses, multiple truths and frameworks that narrow one's access to reality in online spaces. A combination of dark patterns allied with echo chambers and filter bubbles, which we will further explain, can contribute to a growing polarisation where one does not interpret information from the opposite political aisle, but instead only what one's political aisle says about the other side - truth, then, becomes beholden to political affiliation, to the construction of discourse on online platforms instead of lived experiences in material reality. This process might lead to the perpetuation of a distance between political sides, to the point that they can become so distant that meeting eye to eye may seem unthinkable and outrageous. Our analysis of the content from 9GAG and Imgur will inform us if such a phenomenon is taking place amongst the interpreters on the platforms.

Verifiable Concepts or Abstract Metaphors

The following definition presents a comprehensive meaning of the concept of echo chambers, it "refers to situations where people ´hear their own voice´ - or, particularly in the context of social media, situations where users consume content that expresses the same point of view that users themselves hold or express."[82], proposed in a paper researching the phenomenon on Twitter. This definition is comprehensive enough to include all the discourse surrounding one's social media feed, instead of restricting it to very specific types of interactions or active engagement to those discourses, as some other studies tend to favour. Essentially, it is a space where mono-discourses bounce within, keeping opposing ones outside. This can be potentially achieved unbeknownst to users through algorithmic processes or dark patterns included by the platforms, or by users through the choices they make as to what is presented on their feeds and who is allowed to be there - thus creating a highly personalised space.

Akin to echo chambers, filter bubbles is also a recent concept rising from this social media age. It was first proposed in 2011 by Eli Pariser as

"(…) a persistent concept which suggests that search engines and social media, together with their recommendation and personalisation algorithms, are centrally culpable for the societal and ideological polarisation experienced in many countries: we no longer encounter a

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[82] Garimella, Kiran., Gionis, Aristides., Morales, Gianmarco De Francisci., and Mathioudakis, Michael. Political Discourse on Social Media: Echo Chambers, Gatekeepers, and the Price of Bipartisanship. In The Web Conference 2018, 2.

balanced and healthy information diet, but only seem to see information that targets our established interests and reinforces our existing worldviews."[83]

Recently this definition has gone through a shift, while initially focussed on the results search engines would provide, now it has transitioned to the results social media offers[84] - the suggestions, recommendations, perhaps even ads.

As for echo chambers, Bruns proposes it happens when people "choose to preferentially connect with each other, to the exclusion of outsiders (e.g., by befriending on Facebook, following on Twitter, etc.)"[85] - essentially entailing the choices that include or exclude people to enter one's 'chamber', where the 'what' and the 'who' one is exposed to exists. In regards for filter bubbles, Bruns suggests that it "emerges when a group of participants choose to preferentially communicate with each other, to the exclusion of outsiders (e.g., by comments on Facebook, mentions on Twitter, etc.)"[86] - that is those with whom one has active engagement with, the existence of a back and forth between the two.

While this definition provides a more simple approach to both concepts, it fails to include a crucial aspect that contributes to creating polarisation - it does not inhabit separately on search engines and on social media platforms. Additionally, browsers save cookies and other data that potentially influence the results that will be offered to the user. And the proposed definitions Bruns presents seems to define these two concepts as entirely dependent on the agency of users, while neglecting how the platforms create their own rules and algorithms as if these are of minimal impact on creating polarisation.

It is why we believe to be of relevance to reference algorithms, and dark patterns, to echo chambers and filter bubbles in order to provide a more comprehensive overview on how all of these conditions contribute to post-truth spaces online, whether that is by actions dependent on the user or on the platform.

The combination of these conditions - echo chambers, filter bubbles and algorithms - poses a serious concern to one's understanding of the world as what appears in front of one's eyes seems to be the totality of the world, the truth of what reality is and this truth can be found in its most varied forms, including memes. But the truth does not appear as the Truth, but as one

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[83] Bruns, Axel. Filter bubble. *Internet Policy Review,* vol. 8, no. 4. 2019, 1.

[84] ibid., 2.

[85] Bruns, Axel. Filter bubble. *Internet Policy Review,* vol. 8, no. 4. 2019, 3.

[86] ibid., 3.

of the truths existing in the various *post-truth settings* and *truth markets* - one truth one gets confronted with is another, both after being carefully filtered and subjected to algorithmic profiling.

The Assault on Reality: I Found This Online, and it Says They are Lying

Conspiracies, Delegitimation & Polarisation

To underline the importance of why we need to face reality on the same terms, why we need to operate with the same notion of Truth, we will now dive into how untruths impact on society. A shared understanding of the world acts as a glue for a group of people, something that unites all the members of the group because all of them, in varying degrees, have a foundation of common sense that enables them to interpret discourse and ultimately what that discourse reveals about their reality through its construction. To acquire this foundation of common sense, we rely on others, we trust and learn from them, rather than embarking on personal crusades to understand the whole of reality.[87]

We rely on 'gatekeeping' and authority institutions to provide a certain level of common sense, to know what the political entails, what 'left' and 'right' represent. These knowledge producing institutions, for instance like news organisations or research institutes, have been subjected to rigorous codes which inform their conduct. Each has been placed under a set of ethical principles, which create a structure of trust because they can also be scrutinised and accountable for their actions. Trust is, thus, imperative for the continuum of a shared common sense. To find one or ones in whom to place trust in, is to recognise them to be "worthy of epistemic trust", which in turn implies this action sets the meaning of learning common sense.[88]

Thus, common sense represents the accepted knowledge of facts and the Truth, but what happens when it is shaken to the core and the facts and Truth that constituted it are no longer accepted? In *A Lot of People Are Saying: The New Conspiracism and the Assault on Democracy* (2019), the authors suggest that "absent common ground, without the possibility of a shared set of facts, standards of verification, and modes of argument, the reasons

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[87] Muirhead, Russel., and L. Rosenbaum, Nancy. *A Lot of People Are Saying: The New Conspiracism and the Assault on Democracy*. Princeton University Press. 2019, 124.

[88] ibid., 125.

underlying decisions become illegible (…) Misinformation, falsehood, and sheer fabulation seep in."[89]

The instated doubtfulness on the common sense understandings deriving from the 'gatekeepers' creates an opening to look for other sources, other truths that are not told by the mainstream organisations due to some hidden conspiratorial agenda they have - the alternative facts. As such, the knowledge distribution shifts from a finite centralised system of sources to an infinite decentralised system of sources, *truth-claims* can stem from anyone and suit any theory, amplifying the disorientation and polarisation of the understandings of one's reality. So, as the common sense gets teared down, so does the shared understanding of the social and the political, and conspiracism emerges ready to fill in that opening. Disagreement, thus, becomes impossible when we cannot make ourselves understandable for others, and not can them to us.

"Without recourse to the sometimes unspoken shared understanding (…) embodied in common sense, the scope for collecive and political action closes down (…) by disorientation. (…) It creates divergent accounts of political reality. (…) Where the new conspiracism extinguishes common sense, there can be no argument or negotiation or compromise - all of which require some shared terrain of facts and a shared horizon of what it means to know something."[90]

As Kalpokas states, *truth-claims* no longer need to be substantiated by evidence, the validation of the *truth-claim* is instead done by support they garner and by affiliative truths, which help build an ecosystem of 'truths' supporting each other. In this sense, conspiracies find the ideal ground to thrive, disregarding the "burden of explanation"[91] and replacing "social validation for scientific validation".[92] New conspiracies rely on repetition, and online spaces provide ample opportunities for its distribution. For instance, posting and reposting on platforms like 9GAG and Imgur increases its reach, and on top of that the engagement the 'truth' receives contributes to its placement algorithmically, as well as into which echo chambers those 'truths' will permeate into, and which of the 'truths' will appear on one's feed.

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[89] Muirhead, Russel., and L. Rosenbaum, Nancy. *A Lot of People Are Saying: The New Conspiracism and the Assault on Democracy*. Princeton University Press. 2019, 120.

[90] Muirhead, Russel., and L. Rosenbaum, Nancy. *A Lot of People Are Saying: The New Conspiracism and the Assault on Democracy*. Princeton University Press. 2019, 129-130.

[91] ibid., 3.

[92] ibid.

But what exactly is new conspiracism? The new conspiracism is different from the classic conspiracism, it is "conspiracy without the theory".[93] It seeks to delegitimate those who it stands against, whether it is individuals or institutions, it steadily "corrodes the foundations of democracy"[94] by disorienting the perception of reality and their political actors. It shows contempt for facts and knowledge producing institutions, engaging in disinformation and rejecting authorities and institutions in order to delegitimate them, leading to the erosion of the "legitimacy of democracy".[95] It is simply an "assault on reality (…) [which] strikes at what we think of as truth and the grounds of truth. It strikes at what it means to know something."[96]

As the meaning of knowing something, even common sense, is broken down by our shared understanding of knowing something, such as the politics that govern the society we live in or even democracy, ceases to exist as "Common sense is the required touchstone of democratic public life".[97] And, so democracy itself enters a state of crisis. In fact, polls have reported a decrease in support of democratic institutions in recent years, which leads us to deduce there is a crescent trend of antidemocratic ideas on the rise.[98]

Thus, one wonders where these antidemocratic ideas may be being distributed? Where do they have the potential to reach large crowds, and perhaps even spread faster due to the medium that is used to broadcast those ideas? Nowadays online platforms are the ideal medium to share ideas with the largest crowd possible, their ease in accessibility increases the likelihood of virality and the engagement they welcome allow for those ideas to be discussed and furthered. There is a dialogue between the producer and the interpreter of discourse. As a result it seems logical to understand 9GAG and Imgur as platforms which have the ideal features for these discussions to take place - the learning, debating and solidification of common sense.

Both 9GAG and Imgur are decentralised platforms, whose content is completely reliant on users, and often feature political content on their homepages - on 9GAG most political content can be found to be posted on 'Politics', while on Imgur it is posted to 'Current Events'. The content that majorly comprises the platforms are memes, and they have the particular potential

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[93] Muirhead, Russel., and L. Rosenbaum, Nancy. *A Lot of People Are Saying: The New Conspiracism and the Assault on Democracy*. Princeton University Press. 2019, 2.
[94] ibid., 4.
[95] ibid., 6-7.
[96] ibid., 9.
[97] Muirhead, Russel., and L. Rosenbaum, Nancy. *A Lot of People Are Saying: The New Conspiracism and the Assault on Democracy*. Princeton University Press. 2019, 123.
[98] ibid., 166.

for virality because they "appeal to the immediate, unreflective reactions of the Internet crowds."[99] It is interesting for us to consider the implications of having memes distribute common sense or truth-claims on a matter, particularly in regards to the political reality of the Canada Convoy Protest as it is the crux of this paper. Suddenly, these decentralised platforms, with obscure algorithms that shape its featured content and homepages, become places where one can find the 'truth' - and, thus, memes become a weapon, "Memes have become the fast food of modern politics."[100]

Then, platforms like 9GAG and Imgur can become the sources to the 'truths' of the social political reality, for instance the first encounter with an ongoing Canadian trucker protest, and if not the first still an impactful one - through a small cultural unit there can be the necessary connotations to influence and inform one's understanding of a happening. And if not satisfactorily, many more present themselves either in support of those same ideas or in opposition - there is always one more meme to look at, one more comment to read, their simple nature facilitates this. But it also poses as a dangerous medium for learning about common sense or the Truth when its function is to elicit a reaction.

Social, Attitudinal & Affective Polarisation

We believe it is important to recapitulate echo chambers and filter bubbles in more detail, as they contribute to one's experience and journey online, and they can influence polarisation. These two concepts are introductory to the following concepts of polarisation: *social*, *attitudinal* and *affective*. We will use Kitchens et al.'s definitions to understand if we can observe instances where they reveal themselves on the memes, and comments. Kitchens et al. discuss polarisation as multidimensional, diverging into three: *social*, *attitudinal* and *affective*.

Social polarisation contemplates the interactions and affiliations, for instance the higher propensity of maintaining a connection with like-minded people on social networks - a tendency that demonstrates homophily in consumption behaviours.[101] For instance, we can observe this by seeing which comments are the most upvoted and if they agree with the ideas of the OP's meme.

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[99] Denisova, Anastasia. *Internet Memes and Society – Social, Cultural, and Political Context*. Routledge. 2019, 186.

[100] ibid., 187.

[101] Kitchens, Brent., L. Johnson, Steven., and Gray, Peter. Understanding Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles: The Impact of Social Media on Diversification and Partisan Shifts in News Consumption. *MIS Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4. 2020, 1624.

Affective polarisation refers to the emotional charging that leads to hostility towards individuals of contradicting viewpoints, those who are part of a different social group or identity, these individuals can consume oppositional discourses to the ones they agree with but remain unchanged, sometimes even reinforcing their views as a result.[102] This type of polarisation reveals itself through the emotional appeals present in the meme, and comments, the centrality of emotion to the idea the meme transmits and in how it is expressed. Once again, the comments will serve as a way of observing how commenters interact with the viewpoints of the meme, and in particular its emotional argumentation.

Attitudinal polarisation pertains to beliefs and attitudes, as individuals tend to consume more information that more closely resembles their own ideology.[103] As the authors state "Social, attitudinal, and affective polarisation are all potential antecedents or consequences of the content a user is exposed to, engages with, and consumes."[104] These types of polarisation are visible on an individual, population and group level. This type of polarisation will be evidenced by looking at the sources and information that is displayed, by comprehending how the slant of the information source is correlated to the slant of the meme, and comments.

Memes are a Fun & Disturbing Way to Communicate Everything

To discuss the importance of memes in relation to our problem statement, we will be using Anastasia Denisova's conceptualisation and definitions written in her 2019 book, *Internet Memes and Society*. Denisova begins her task by bringing up the original author of the concept, Richard Dawkin. In his book, *The Selfish Gene,* from 1976 Dawkin describes a meme as the cultural

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[102] Kitchens, Brent., L. Johnson, Steven., and Gray, Peter. Understanding Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles: The Impact of Social Media on Diversification and Partisan Shifts in News Consumption. *MIS Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4. 2020, 1624.

[103] Kitchens, Brent., L. Johnson, Steven., and Gray, Peter. Understanding Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles: The Impact of Social Media on Diversification and Partisan Shifts in News Consumption. *MIS Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4. 2020, 1624.

[104] ibid.

equivalent to a gene but with one fundamental difference.

Whereas genes are meant to convey highly accurate biological information when passing on from individual to individual or from generation to generation in order to heighten chances of survival and to maintain the integrity of key biological functions, memes thrive on mutation and alteration and survive within culture because of this.[105] A meme, then, in its first iteration was described as a means to pass on cultural information through a process of alteration and mutation, but with a loss of accuracy - Dawkins likening the process to a game of Chinese Whispers.[106]

Within this definition, memes do not require accuracy for cultural survival, but it still does not fully explain what a meme is other than some kind of mechanism of information transmittance that loses its original messaging somehow. To further expand on the concept, Denisova supplements that memes serve a different function - they are potent to use when you want to transmit and discuss ideas.[107]

A meme in this expansion of the concept, then, not only delivers accurate, factual information, but instead transmits ideas using culture as means of delivery. Rather than conveying a grand and complete narrative, memes compresses units of culture into their smallest meaningful replicable representation in order to complement their idea[108] - this is something akin to how *affiliative truths* compliment *post-truth narrative* It is important to note, however, that this paper has a specific focus on *internet memes* and not on memes in general. An example of a meme, not being an internet meme, could be the usage of the opening motif from Mozart's 5th symphony within culture at large - 'dun dun dun duuun, dun dun dun duuun'. There is an important point to be made here before moving on to *internet memes*. You know the motif, but when did you actually last listen to the symphony in full? Have you ever? Your knowledge of the piece most likely is due to its use in popular culture in series or in movies. The motif lives on as a meme.

Internet memes work with the same manner of association but are specific to the internet, in the way that they are most prevalently used in the online spaces, group chats, or text messages

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[105] Denisova, Anastasia. *Internet Memes and Society – Social, Cultural, and Political Context*. Routledge. 2019, 6.

[106] ibid., 7.

[107] Denisova, Anastasia. *Internet Memes and Society – Social, Cultural, and Political Context*. Routledge. 2019, 8.

[108] ibid., 9.

between individuals rather than in other parts of culture. Still, this does not fully explain how an *internet meme* works, and so it might be best if we offer an example. Moving forward we will simply be referring to the internet memes in our paper as memes, since no other types of memes occur.

In the meme to the left, made by us using templates from *imgflip.com* (a process that took three to five minutes), we see a scene from the 1981 movie, *Raiders of the Lost Ark.* In the scene the protagonist of the movie, Indiana Jones, tries to steal a piece of treasure, a golden statue, from a tombstone without activating any traps. The scene is tense with Indiana eyeing the golden statue to assess its weight, removing sand from a small sack he is holding to try to match the weight of the treasure, as he will try to quickly switch the two. The meme captures the tense atmosphere from the scene as well as the action taken by Indiana.

By compressing the scene into a single frame we still reference the whole scene in a meaningful way for people who have seen it. The scene is culturally significant for many people, and this shared frame of reference makes up half up the meme itself. There is another implication regarding this process that should be considered. There is a loss of complexity when making a meme - due to the format of the meme, only small parts of larger narratives are communicated. As the meme is not meant to facilitate accurate information nor an abundance of it, the content of the meme exists adjacent or complementary to other already established information or pre-understanding about certain phenomena, about social reality and social relations. This means that the meaning of the meme is to be unearthed by individuals' own interpretative attempts in an interplay between the meme and the interpreters' own pre-understanding as well as the context in which it is referring to. Let's take a look at how the alteration of a cultural unit can be done to communicate a message.

By inserting a "ME" into the meme, we, the creators of the meme, are indicating that we are trying to avoid some sort of trap while achieving an object or a concept of our desire. We are to understand that the "ME" in the meme wants both the "COFFEE" and "A NIGHT OF DECENT SLEEP" without activating the trap from the scene. Now, people who have seen the

movie will know a trap is activated and that Indiana has to flee the tomb. Herein lies the joke. The "ME" of the meme knows that by drinking too much coffee he will risk losing "A NIGHT OF DECENT SLEEP". The "ME" might be able to pull it off, but given the negative outcome of the following scene it makes it highly unlikely.

In this example we also see another fundamental aspect of how memes function: audience participation. Denisova suggests that memes function much like half-baked jokes:

It conveys a message that the task is challenging and a person is aware of it – yet he or she is trying to nail the issue, and is open to irony and criticism. A format of the meme here suggests the frame of perception, yet it is the audience who needs to finish the sentence to complete a joke and interpret its meaning.[109]

It is by applying culturally specific information and pre-understanding that we get access to the sometimes humorous meaning that a meme is trying to convey. A meme can communicate meaning without having the intended culturally specific knowledge, but the impact of the message is then somewhat lessened, as the implicit cultural reference is lost in the interpretation process. A meme, then, is understood by the interpreter by combining shared pre knowledge about culture, but also by certain assumptions. Without operating on assumptions about the knowledge and ability to understand the messaging in the memes, the loss of complexity though the process of compression would make the meme untethered from any meaningful interpretation and would be meaningful only to the creator.

The creator of the meme has to assume certain things about the interpreters of the meme for it to be interpreted in the intended way - "will they know the cultural unit? Will they understand the units relation to my alteration of it? Is the intended meaning clear?" This specific combination of modalities might explain memes' appeal and widespread use today. You can communicate almost anything without having to finish a full sentence, others will do that for you using their own available resources in the process of interpretation. It is a mode of cultural production and reproduction that would never be able to exist at the same scale outside of technology that can instantaneously copy and modify cultural units such as a scene from Indiana Jones. It is a very unique kind of communication that has a certain kind of novelty that

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[109] Denisova, Anastasia. *Internet Memes and Society – Social, Cultural, and Political Context*. Routledge. 2019, 11.

repeats itself as each meme has the potential to mix and match any unit of culture with any message.

We want to suggest that even though memes oftentimes use humour, humour is not always the explicit point of communication using memes. The main reason behind the transmittance of this mode of communication is to engage others in an idea - a key point to make here is that humour is not always the end goal of a meme, but rather a means to make you engage to begin with. The open ended, mixed modality, and rather abstract format of memes makes them effective tools for discussing rather abstract ideas, feelings, or phenomena. Denisova reflects on the social function of communicating through memes herself:

Moreover, circulation of memes has a vivid social function – people discuss and form social norms and values through memes (Gal et al., 2016). When users endorse, like or adjust memes, they by doing so agree or disagree with the norms and values that these spreadable texts promote. Memes are a site of contestation of collective identities, the arena where the hegemonic meets the alternative, and the public chooses the winner by clicking 'like' or 'dislike', and, most importantly, 'share'[110]

Testing your idea on a platform means that other people can express their opinion about it. The platform could consist of a group chat with your family, between a couple of friends or larger social platforms that exist online. The idea might take hold and go viral / become popular on the platform - a popular meme attest to the popularity of the idea. On sites and in forums such as 9GAG and Imgur memes might therefore appear as being only humorous, but the real purpose behind the memes is to establish a lively marketplace of an exchange of ideas, or at least ideas that drive up engagement for the sites. The idea, in this way, is manifested and survives in the popular imagination through approval.

The aspect of popularity, or rather expressing approval and disapproval of ideas, is seen manifested on both 9GAG and Imgur, as upvoting, downvoting or commenting. Measuring approval or disapproval is, in fact, one of the main features of the platforms - granting upvotes/downvotes to the user who posted the meme. Approval and virality also determines how prominently the memes are featured on the platforms.

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[110] Denisova, Anastasia. *Internet Memes and Society – Social, Cultural, and Political Context*. Routledge. 2019, 10.

Here we might reflect on how memes are designed to keep certain ideas 'alive'. The potential virality of the meme is one of its defining features, the meme becoming a 'full blown' meme[111] when others share, alter and participate in the idea behind the meme. This can be done by using the same cultural unit as originally used by the meme or by taking the idea and placing it into another cultural unit. Here lies a crucial element in our conceptualisation of the meme, as we emphasise the idea behind the meme inside the cultural unit. Achieving virality becomes a matter of acceptance and prevalence of the idea amongst interpreters. Here we start to find a connection between post-truth and memes. Denisova expands on the sociological importance of approval in relation to memes:

From the sociological perspective, memes function as "performative acts": each person decides whether to ratify or oppose a specific way of interpreting the situation – and he or she adjusts a meme accordingly. By doing this, a user agrees with or redefies [redefines] *the social norms that a meme propagates (Butler, 1997, as cited in Gal et al., 2016: 1700). Not all memes are explicitly connected with the negotiation of social norms and values – yet even in the cases that seem purely entertaining, the political and social underlining may be pinpointed.[112]*

Under post-truth conditions memes as facilitators of 'truthful'-ideas or *truth-claims* are powerful tools for creating and maintaining *affiliative truths* amongst interpreters. As memes enter into an open and relatively unregulated *truth marketplace*, their ideas become much more than just half-baked jokes, they become opportunities to engage in negotiation and subversion amongst online groups using memes as their main mode of communication. Memes can, in other words, temporarily suspend social norms by taking them out of context, dressing them in units of cultural references and presenting a new perspective. Memes discussing current events for example, can use a unit of shared culture to make a comment on, let's say, the rise of inflation.

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[111] Denisova, Anastasia. *Internet Memes and Society – Social, Cultural, and Political Context*. Routledge. 2019, 8.
[112] Denisova, Anastasia. *Internet Memes and Society – Social, Cultural, and Political Context*. Routledge. 2019, 29.

The meme to the right was taken from 9GAG under the title "How much more???" on 13th of April 2022.[113] The meme features a stock picture taken of the Hungarian András Arató, also known by the online community as "Hide the Pain Harold"[114], a stable character within meme culture.

His uneasy smile makes him seem sad, or at least not genuinely happy. The cultural unit serves to provide the emotional reaction to the text above itself, the steadily rising discrepancy between the increase in wages and inflation - making the meaning of the meme being 'having to hide the pain of living through a period of economic uncertainty/instability'.

Being that the phenomenon of living through inflation is being experienced worldwide, the context has the potential to have a large audience engage with it as the cultural specific experience is common - which might explain the high amount of engagement the meme received more than 140000 upvotes, 185 downvotes, and 891 comments. The meme displays humour, as the awkward smile signals a laughable attempt to hide 'the pain' about the experience. If the idea behind the meme is a touchstone for millions, millions have incentive to interact with the idea.

Here it would be prudent to underline the aspect of virality in relation to memes. A meme does not fully become a meme simply by adding text to the image. A central function of a meme is its ability to disseminate ideas for their survival, and so virality is a key aspect. Denosiva writes on the issue of virality:

They suggest that when a user alters a unit of media production, such as a music video or an expressive photograph (what Gal et al. (2016) call 'a prototype'), he or she coins an 'emergent meme'. This emergent meme escalates to a full 'meme' when other users contribute and share their alterations, thus validating the popularity and interest of the community towards this text.[115]

Virality of the meme encourages community participation by interpreters, adapting aspects of the meme, reproducing it and resharing it with a community themselves, keeping the idea embedded in the meme alive amongst the community.

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[113] How much more???. *9GAG*. 2022-04-12. https://9gag.com/gag/abgxL28. (Accessed 2022-04-18).

[114] Hide the Pain Harold. *Know Your Meme*. 2011. https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/hide-the-pain-harold. (Accessed 2022-04-18).

[115] Denisova, Anastasia. *Internet Memes and Society – Social, Cultural, and Political Context*. Routledge. 2019, 8.

Now we can imagine how a meme can be tranformed into discussing more abstract political ideas such as the "left" being "communists" or the political "right" being "nazis", a not too uncommon occurrence in the various online spaces in existence today, in relation to topical events. Any *truth-claim* could be attached to and reproduced by the idea transmitting process of a meme.

On the platforms 9GAG and Imgur, there is no demand for accuracy in the content of the memes set by the institutions, rather, there is instead a focus on trying to prevent profanity and extreme language or imagery. Given the format of the memes, how easily they are created and shared, and how massively they are used to communicate with, they should be considered to have a tremendous impact on how discourse takes place online. Denisova contemplates on the use of memes within discursive structures:

Gal et al. (2016) go as far as suggesting that often Internet memes become the norm, and then the imitated versions of memes can either follow the suggested patterns or deviate from them. In this choice of either reaffirming or confronting the ideology of a prototype (the initial text that triggered memes), users engage in 'performative acts' (Gal et al., 2016: 1710). These acts seek to convince or raise awareness. They are means of discursive interventions.[116]

It is the seemingly innocuous appearance of memes, their humour and cultural referencing as well as opportunity for self-expression, that make them effective for being tools of subversion.

Because of the prevalence of memes, and due to their alter to alter appearance all the time due to the free access by their creators to sea of cultural material existing on the internet, it is important to understand how these transmitters of ideas are used to influence social construction and social relations, how they intervene in discourse, how they can be used to impact on *ideology* and *power*, as well as how they are used to construct individuals and groups participating in the democratic process.

Memes in *post-truth* settings should be seen as an important inclusion in the understanding of how social reality is being constructed in contemporary online spaces as well as how discourse analysis and theory should be applied in order to approach these novel expressions of discourse. It is especially through their ability to negotiate and define the discursive structures in relation to interpreting phenomena, that they can be used to negotiate the *contingency* and *continuity* of

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[116] Denisova, Anastasia. *Internet Memes and Society – Social, Cultural, and Political Context*. Routledge. 2019, 35.

social reality and social relations that democracy is dependent on, aspects that will be covered in more depth in our chapter on theory.

Summarisation - The Complexity of Our Times

Before moving on, we would like to acknowledge how complex the synthesis of the chosen literature is, and therefore we will offer a summarised version of the previous chapters that will tie all the key concepts and perspectives together.

A meme is an idea, a piece of information, that applies units of culture to disseminate itself amongst interpreters - these units of culture can consist of different kinds of media, such as video clips or pictures. It is the alteration of the unit of culture, the recontextualisation of the unit of culture, that allows the producer to comment on a phenomenon and thereby birth the meme. It is oftentimes humorous in appearance, as it is intended to gain virality amongst a community, so that the community, then in turn produce memes with similar ideas, or simply reproduce the original meme by sharing it. Individuals use these memes as resources in a meaning-making process of building narrative about the world and the people and groups in it. The spread of the idea by interpreters of the community should be understood as an affirmation of the idea, likewise the failure for a meme to achieve virality should be understood as a rejection of the idea.

These communities, these online platforms where the ideas are disseminated, are thought of as *post-truth settings*, settings that facilitate the propagation of ideas with little demand for accuracy. These *post-truth settings* are part of larger *post-truth markets* where truth has become a necessary commodity for media producers to tie in with their content to create viewership, and thereby justifying their existence, resulting in emotionally laden narratives becoming more prevalent, since they drive up engagement.

These tendencies are reinforced by the concepts of echo chambers, filter bubbles, and algorithms that explain how narratives are being built up based on preference and popularity. This process might lead to a significant *slant* in the production and interpretation of discourse occurring on online platforms.

Echo chambers, filter bubbles, and algorithms serve as a way to understand how the platforms themselves reinforce narratives, or ideas, that already have a high standing within the online communities, creating a less diverse set of ideas and resources about the world for the interpreters on the platform to construct the world with. In relation to the Canada Convoy

Protest, the narratives that are being constructed on 9GAG and Imgur should be understood as being impacted by the inability to clearly determine between the discourse taking place on the platforms using various user provided resources from the actions taking place in the material reality.

The construction of how 'left' and 'right' appear on the platforms, then, should be understood not only as matter of the discourse reflecting real actions taken by real people, but as something that lies within the almost free flowing buildup of narrative, the loss of complexity facilitated by the use of communication through memes, an inability to recognise Truth under *post-truth conditions* and in *post-truth settings*, and preference by the community. And while the trust in political leaders, institutions, and experts decline, individuals seek out their own community to test and verify *truth-claims*.

Furthermore, the influence of new conspiracism should be seen as an especially problematic inclusion the *post-truth markets* of media and building of *post-truth narratives* as new conspiracism explains the world through the lense of conspiracy without theory, further delegitimising societal structures and political groups and actors in the process. These processes, we argue, become problematic for democracy when the discussion and negotiation of opposed political actors and groups become reduced to pure discourse, one that more likely facilitates political entrenchment and polarisation. Since the integrity of democracy relies on its participants to trust in the actors and groups of the democratic process - a negotiation of issues, the outcome of which is determined by voting - phenomena of political importance and relevance serve as moments of contingency in the process of negotiating the continuity of democracy itself.

It is the reduction of reality to discourse on online platforms that prompts our choice of theory and analytical tools in the following chapters. We argue that analysing the discursive structuring that is tied together with the processes explained above will lead to an understanding of how separate realities are constructed on different platforms through the negotiation of phenomena such as the Canada Convoy Protest.

Theory

In this chapter we will introduce the theories we are going to use to build our analytical apparatus, Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, Harvey Sacks' Membership Categorisation Analysis, and Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Analysis. This section of the paper will discuss the theories in a manner that discusses the concepts introduced in the last section in a way that makes the connections between post-truth, memes, polarisation, echo chambers and filter bubbles, as well as political constructions apparent.

Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis

Norman Fairclough's critical discourse theory offers us a comprehensive methodological approach to analysis using critical theory by aiming to show connections between language, power and ideology.[117] He believes that language is not only a system of signs which we use to express our basic needs and thoughts, but a system that has its social function, and can therefore be used to establish, maintain and curate structures that construct one's approach to interpreting and explaining society and social relations.[118]

In his work, *Language and Power*, he states that "Language is a part of society; linguistic phenomena are social phenomena, and social phenomena are (in part) linguistic phenomena."[119] However, Fairclough does not claim that all of our constructions and understanding of the social phenomena are based on discourse alone.[120]

He differentiates between the social and discoursal, but states that these two have a dialectic relationship with each other, which means that discursive practices might have an impact on the social reality, and vice versa, creating a structure of influence between the two – influence that is mediated through the use of language.[121] Fairclough believes that language should be studied as a dynamic system, as it changes through time and is not socially isolated, rather socially embedded and has a strong relationship with power and ideology.[122]

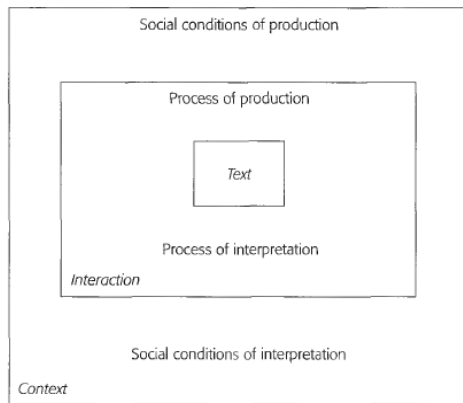[117] Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd edition. Longman. 2001, 4.
[118] ibid., 3.
[119] ibid., 19.
[120] ibid.
[121] ibid., 31.
[122] ibid., 6.

Discourse for Fairclough is, then, a linguistic process that involves social conditions of production and social conditions of interpretation.[123] The figure to the left[124] illustrates how texts, in our case memes and comments posted on 9GAG and Imgur, are interpreted and produced in an interplay between the individual's own creative interpretative process and societal conditions put on the individual.[125] To avoid confusion of terminology throughout this section we will use memes as a way to refer to Fairclaugh's conceptualisation of text, as for the purpose of our paper, as we consider them being essentially the same. Fairclough defines texts in the following way:

The formal properties of a text can be regarded from the perspective of discourse analysis on the one hand as traces of the productive process, and on the other hand as cues in the process of interpretation.[126]

This conceptualisation of text is comparable to how memes operate on cultural pre knowledge by using cultural units, the *traces* of the productive process, with *cues* pointing to the meme's meaning and proper interpretation being communicated through the cultural unit in tandem with provided text or other types of alteration to the cultural unit. Furthermore, as seen in the figure above, interpretation and production of discourse The process of interpretation is of importance to us in regards to Faiclough's theory and analysis as uncovering how memes and comments on internet platforms influence the construction of social reality and social relations.

Faiclough's critical discourse analysis (henceforth referred to as CDA) is to be considered critical in the sense that the approach to discourse is to uncover connections hidden for people in language that determines distribution of power in society and its subsequent influence on social relations and the construction of social reality.[127] It is especially these dynamics, social relations and power that is of interest to us in relation to the topic of online spaces' influence on the stability of democracy.

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[123] Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd edition. Longman. 2001, 22.
[124] ibid.
[125] ibid., 20-21.
[126] ibid., 20.
[127] ibid., 4.

Fairclough's framework can help us uncover assumptions about the involved groups the 'left' and 'right that are embedded, operationalised, and furthered by the language used by interpreters on the platforms. In other words by using CDA, we can more precisely analyse how the negotiation of the Canada Convoy Protest and the 'left and 'right' on 9GAG and Imgur influenced these linguistic structures, and whether the discourses and the distribution of power that is embedded in them are likely to be reproduced in a manner that is *conservative*, *sustaining continuity*, or *transformatory* as Fairclough would put it[128], and if these structures further polarisation between political groups.

Interpretation

In this section we would like to explain how to conceptualise the interpretative process. An interpreter of a text draws on his/her pre-understanding of the world and incorporates this understanding into the situational setting of the text, or in this context, meme, to produce meaning by using the *cues* the text offers for interpretation. Fairclough eloquently describes the role of the interpreter in the interpretation:

For neither the world nor the text does the interpretation of what is 'there' impose itself; both the production and the interpretation of texts are creative, constructive interpretative processes.[129]

It is in the interpretative process that the discursive construction of the world occurs, and in this process a text offers new resources for the interpreter alongside his already available member resources (henceforth known as MR) and understanding of the situational setting. It should be noted here that the *cues* offered by a text are already constituted by the producer's own MR, and so a text should be understood as being an interpretation of an interpretation and that *cues* simultaneously act as *traces* of the producer's own MR.[130]

The way that an interpreter gets access to the meaning of a text occurs through the understanding of the surface utterance by a text, through pre-understanding of phonology, grammar, and vocabulary - through the meaning of utterance, through the preunderstanding of semantics and pragmatics - through local coherence the cohesion and pragmatics of a text, as well through the understanding of text structure and point, the understanding of schemata - the

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[128] Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd edition. Longman. 2001, 32.
[129] ibid, 67.
[130] ibid.

stereotypical patterns of texts.[131] These linguistic structures, then, carry interpreters' understanding of the relation between the text and the world.

It is why the analysis of language alongside other modes of communication reveals how the world is constructed by individuals. The analysis of grammatical features, modes of sentences, modalities, and pronouns will reveal the aforementioned hidden connections, the construction of social reality and social relation carried by the MR of interpreters.

The memes and the subsequent comments we analyse on the platforms, then, serve as our window into how social reality is already constructed by the producers of the memes as well as how it is being constructed, and how this understanding is amended through the situational setting of both the platforms and the Canada Convoy Protest in the creative process of interpretation. It is through this process, between the creative interpretations of the resources offered by memes, pre-understanding of the world in the MR, and the situational setting, that we find the construction of 'left' and 'right'.

Ideology and common sense

To fully use Fairclough's analytical apparatus it is essential to understand his conceptualisation of *ideology* and *common sense*. Fairclough states that linguistic phenomena are social phenomena in the sense that their articulations are socially determined and have social effects[132], and so we should consider the concepts of *ideology* and *common sense* through this lens. *Common sense* is, in short, the assumption we make about how social reality is structured, whereas *ideology* pertains to the distribution of power in social relations that *common sense* structures.[133] Articulations with an *ideological* or *common sense* nature should therefore be understood as having an impact on the construction of social reality and social relations.

It is important to add that for *ideology to be effective* within society it needs to to become *naturalised* into *common sense*. In the process of *naturalisation,* discourse loses its *ideological* character and becomes *commons sense*[134] - or in other words, an ideological interpretation and reproduction of discourse becomes common for the interpreter through *naturalisation*, and can be used to maintain power relations without questioning the nature of the distribution of power.

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[131] Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd edition. Longman. 2001, 119-120.
[132] ibid., 19.
[133] ibid., 2.
[134] ibid., 76.

For Fairclough these two concepts serve as means to administer control through language, to manufacture consent amongst people in regards to the social constructions of society[135], these being maintained through discursive processes. It is generally assumed that there are two means of controlling people, through *coercion* and through *consent*, the latter being preferred as it is far less disruptive for society.[136] An effective way to manufacture *consent* is to determine the resources that are available for individuals to apply when interpreting phenomena and coming to their own conclusions.

Here we find a connection between Fairclough's theory and the chosen platforms. As the appearance of certain memes on the sites becomes more prominent based on the agreement or upvotes regarding their message, an implicit preference of *ideology*, or prevailing *common sense assumptions*, might adhere to each site.

The memes and the ideas they carry would in the context of Fairclough's theory be considered resources for interpretation that work in tandem with *ideology* and *common sense assumptions* about social reality and social relations. These resources are what Fairclough calls *member resources (MR).*[137]

MR are cognitive in nature, they are sets of pre-understandings of the societal, institutional, and situational conventions that are based on the interpreters own experience, embedded in language, making Fairclough's analytical emphasis partly consisting of cognitive processes, rather than just linguistic structures.[138] We will have to note here that the concept of *common sense* and *ideology* is comparable with the concept idea from our chapter regarding what memes disseminate, in the way that the information, or the idea, that the meme is supposed to disseminate using cultural units can be *ideological* in nature or disguised as a *common sense assumption*.

It is the interpretational process by individuals that is at the very core of Fairclough's theory, as by influencing interpretative processes *en masse* by defining the MR, interpreters themselves will reproduce the prevalent ideologies through their interpretations and production of discourse, as seen on the table below.[139]
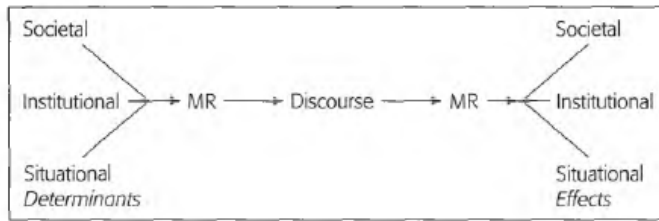
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[135] Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd edition. Longman. 2001, 3.

[136] ibid.

[137] ibid., 9.

[138] ibid., 118-122.

[139] Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd edition. Longman. 2001, 136.

This emphasis on interpretation is also in line with the participation aspect of memes, as well as the meaning making attempts by individuals that are a core part of the *post-truth* condition which is why we consider the individuals participating on 9GAG and Imgur such as visitors, poster, commentators or other, as interpreters.

Understanding memes as being transmitters of ideas under *post-truth conditions* can, in theory, be used to freely define the MR of the interpreters of the platforms and thereby structure a discourse with *common sense assumptions* that are ideological in nature. In short, memes under *post-truth conditions* can be used to freely negotiate how a moment of *contingency* such as the Canada Convoy Protest can influence *continuity* - of how to understand social reality and social relations that is informed by *ideology*.

This conceptualisation of the interplay between concepts is made to underline how and why constructions of social phenomena on the sites are relevant relation to democracy, as the discursive structurering on the sites can be said to have implications for how social practice is interpreted and constituted in processes of negotiation and renegotiation of phenomena relevant to the democratic process, in our case this phenomenon being the Canada Convoy Protest.

Here we return to the *conservative*, *sustaining continuity*, or was *transformatory* reproduction of memes and the ideas embedded in them. By approaching memes with an understanding that they have the ability to inform interpretations by providing MR for interpreters on 9GAG and Imgur, since they carry ideas informed by societal conventions, they find their way into Fairclough's theoretical and analytical apparatus. With the MR on the sites being communicated through a medium whose appearance is oftentimes comical and subversive, the interpreters engaged in interpreting memes, might not fully appreciate the ideological implications behind the ideas being communicated.

In this context we would like to reiterate and underline the critical aspect of Fariclough's discourse analysis: "Critical is used in the special sense of aiming to show up connections

which may be hidden from people - such as the connections between language, power and ideology referred to above."[140]

The hidden connections between language, power and ideology should also be understood alongside the novelty of the mediums that they are expressed through, memes being one such novelty that transforms people's interpretation and understanding of power and ideology by hiding it in new media. What memes facilitate are new conditions for interpretation, production and reproduction of the power that lies within discourse - potentially reinforcing *ideology* and *common sense assumptions,* if these are not challenged by *transformatory* interpretations and productions sustaining the same structure of power informed by the prevailing *ideology*. But what does power mean in online settings? How should we understand power in settings where material reality is seemingly suspended by the online?

From here we would like to delve into Fairclough's conceptualisation of power.

Power relations

Fairclough's explanation of power is centred around controlling and constraining contributions to discourse of non-powerful participants.[141] These constraints on contributions include the contents (what is known or what can be said or done), relations (the social relations people enter into in discourse), and the subjects (the subject positions/identities people can occupy).[142] The structural, or social, effects of these constraints can be explained and understood through

Dimensions of meaning	Values of features	Structural effects
Contents	Experiential	Knowledge/beliefs
Relations	Relational	Social relations
Subjects	Expressive	Social identities

an analysis of the linguistic features that communicates the relevant values, as seen on the table to the left.[143] *Experiential value*s, then, impacts on the *knowledge and beliefs* held within a discursive structure, while *relational values* impacts on the structure of *social relations*, and the *expressive values* used in language impacts on the structure of *social identities*.

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[140] Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power.* 2nd edition. Longman. 2001, 4.
[141] ibid., 38-39.
[142] ibid., 39.
[143] ibid., 94.

It is how we can explain why a doctor holds more power over a patient when being in a hospital. The institutional setting, hospital, affords the *subject positions,* doctor and patient, different resources in terms of interaction - what to do, what to say, how to act - defining their social relationship through the power of their roles and the institution. This conceptualisation of power is descriptive, however, of face to face interactions, and is thus not fully representative for what our study is analysing. A concept closer to the kind of power we will encounter on 9GAG and Imgur is the idea of *hidden power* in media. Here the age of Fairclough's work becomes apparent.

For Fairclough media production of discourse is one sided with a clear divide between producer and consumer of media[144], being that the media institutions determine what appears and is interpreted. It is a conceptualisation of *hidden power* that does not compare to how it might operate on 9GAG and Imgur, as the platforms facilitate its interpreters to participate by stating preference through upvoting and downvoting, commenting, as well as posting content themselves. We do find his concept of the *ideal subject*, an intended audience of interpreters, useful.[145] An *ideal subject* is the imagined interpreter of the producer of a meme that affords built in subject positions for the interpreter that they can negotiate by accepting or rejecting them.[146]

Certain topics might perform better when considering what themes are popular on the site, what kind of current events are taking place, and what kind of articulations with a certain expression of *ideology* will win the approval of the platform's interpreters, securing a higher amount of upvotes, keeping the idea behind the posted meme alive, and increasing the chance of it being reproduced. Experienced interpreters of the platforms will arguably have a better understanding of how to conceptualise an *ideal subject* for the platform as well as what content and ideas will gain the most popularity and thereby virality. Furthermore, Fairclough's explanation of the cumulative effect of media is still highly relevant in terms of how what he calls *hidden power* should be considered:

A single text on its own is quite insignificant: the effects of media power are cumulative, working through the repetition of particular ways of handling causality and agency, particular ways of positioning the reader, and so forth. Thus through the way it positions readers, for

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[144] Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd edition. Longman. 2001, 41.
[145] ibid.
[146] ibid.

instance, media discourse is able to exercise a pervasive and powerful influence in social reproduction because of the very scale of the modern mass media and the extremely high level of exposure of whole populations to a relatively homogeneous output.[147]

It is the continued *en masse* appearance and reappearance of constraints on discourse and positioning of the interpreters of the platform that should be considered a powerful way to establish and continue a certain structure of knowledge and beliefs, social relations, and social identities found within ideologies - and so the appearance and reappearance of similar constraint on discourse inform the structure of MR, making up their pre-understanding of the world. This way, the reappearance of certain ideas, certain structures informed by ideologies, can lead to pervasive, coherent interpretations of social reality and social relations. These structures can be reproduced by interpreters in ways that are either *transformatory*, *conservative*, or *sustain continuity*. Still, the quote above reveals that Fairclough's work was created in a different media setting, where his comment on exposure to homogeneous output is more adherent to the former singular 'regime of truth' *a'la* Foucault's conceptualisation of managing power in society, rather than the new 'regimes of truth' that are part of the *post-truth* conditions of our times, as it has been discussed in our section on *post-truth*.

We consider that it is not the homogenous output of information from a single or a few authors such as media companies or the state that constitutes the most prevalent MR offered on the platforms, but rather the combination of the multiplicity of authors that text/memes that serve to curate the MR of other interpreters on the platforms through expressions of preference ideology - and so we once again return to Kalpokas' statement: "Post-truth is not manipulation of some sort—it is collusion".[148]

Power on platforms where co-creation and co-curation determine how discourse occurs is a matter of creating discursive structures based on collusion - a willful reproduction of memes and their ideas with a *common sense* that supports preferred expressions of *ideology*, *sustaining continuity*, securing the appearance of certain MR for interpreters on the site. Sustaining power on online platforms, in short, consists of providing MR that facilitate similar interpretations that in turn *sustains continuity* of *ideology* on the platforms that can influence social reality and

[147] Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd edition. Longman. 2001, 45.
[148] Kalpokas, Ignas. *A Political Theory of Post-Truth*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2019, 18.

social relations. Challenging power, then, consists of offering resources for interpretation that *transforms* the discourse in relation to distribution of power.

So, furthering *ideology* and *common sense assumption* on the platforms such as 9GAG and Imgur includes providing certain content with a potential for popularity and thereby achieving virality that might mean that the MR offered by the memes featured on the platforms will be used by interpreters that, in turn, might reproduce the *ideologically* informed constraints on discourse in regards to *content*, *relations*, and *subjects*, whose *experiential*, *relational*, and *expressive* values impact on the structure of *knowledge and beliefs*, *social relations*, and *social identities*. To further certain *ideologies* the interpretations would have to fall under the category *conservative* or *sustaining continuity*. Introducing new ideologies on the platforms will have to follow the same pattern, but would have to introduce MR that have a *transformatory* influence on the discourse of the platforms.

It should be noted here, however, that the process described above does not automatically occur. The ideas communicated through the memes can be rejected by the interpreters of the site and renegotiated, especially on sites where approval and disapproval are of central importance to their function, which adds another caveat to the conceptualisation of power on the platforms - ideas with higher approval has a higher chance at gaining virality, survives longer, and extends the constraints on the discourse that comes along with the idea through popularity. As seen in *Appendix D, 9GAG* and *Appendix D, Imgur*, not all memes with the same topic fare equally well.

Power to determine constraints is therefore linked with popularity, virality, and collusion on the platforms in question. As memes should be considered an expression of reaffirmation or rejection of an idea - as *performative acts* as Denisova puts it[149] - means that managing mass outcomes of interpretations with an ideological nature on platforms with interpreters of millions should be considered an intricate affair to say the least.

Every post on the site should therefore be considered as a moment of *contingency* in terms of negotiating the *continuation* of *ideology*. A post on the platform is connected with the possibility for the interpreters to negotiate - to affirm or reject the *ideology* that the post communicates through their interpretation and subsequently own production of discourse.

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[149] Denisova, Anastasia. *Internet Memes and Society – Social, Cultural, and Political Context*. Routledge. 2019, 29.

Furthering this line of thought, we should also consider the Canadian Convoy Protest as being a phenomenon that is used to negotiate the *contingency* and *continuity* of the *ideology* and *common sense assumptions* of the platforms, as the protest serves to facilitate negotiations that are political in nature. The construction of 'left' and 'right' is therefore also beholden to this process and the preferred iteration and explanations of who and what the 'left' and 'right' should be understood as, in part, an extension of preference of *ideology*.

Social order

A way to conceptualise how to maintain a certain kind of ideologically informed discourse is to understand Fairclough's *orders of discourse*. For Fairclough *orders of discourse* is to be imagined as a clustering of conventions that carries constraints which defines both how discourse and practice takes place within particular social settings.[150] He argues that we act and articulate in accordance with the types of situations we find ourselves in, as we operate on an understanding of convention of the type of practice or discourse that is associated with the setting.

He goes on to state that much of our interaction with society occurs through various social institutions that determine what types of practices/discourse is expected to take place as well as the actual practices/discourse.[151]

Social order	Order of discourse
Types of practice	Types of discourse
Actual practices	Actual discourses

In the case of our paper, we will have to adapt these concepts, displayed in the table to the left[152], onto the social institutions that are the platforms, with a type of practice that ascertains to posting on these platforms in relation to a type of discourse that ascertains to the humorous, subversive nature of memes simultaneously with the potentially multiple types of discourse that are drawn upon to discuss the subject matter. For, especially the use of memes have the potential to draw on multiple types of discourses due to their

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[150] Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd edition. Longman. 2001, 22-23.
[151] ibid., 23.
[152] ibid., 24.

potential use of any cultural unit with an vide assortment modality of different modalities, that in turn can be drawing on multiple types of discourses and practices.

The creation and distribution of a meme has the potential to subvert different established and agreed upon discourse types due to this reason. The actual discourse and practices that occur on the site, such as posting memes, upvoting and commenting on actual practices can be said to be influenced by the overall order of society at large, the order of the institution of the platform, order of discourse, types of practice, and the types of discourse.
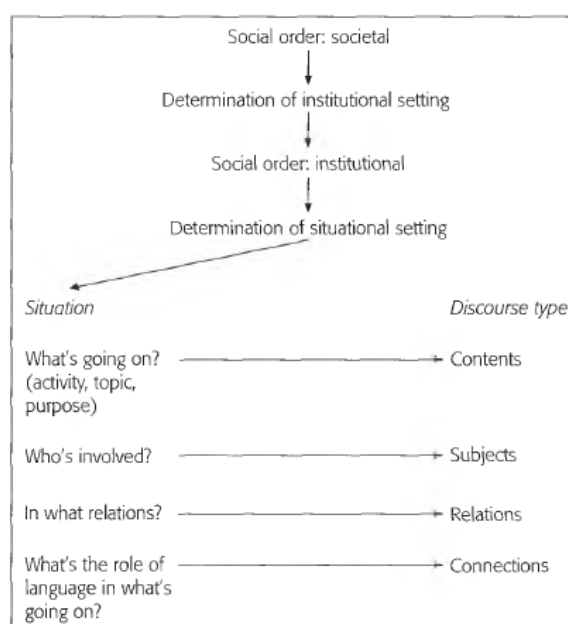
These *orders of discourse* should not be understood as having a mechanical relationship to the outcome of articulations, as Fairclough states[153], but should rather be understood as MR in relation to societal and discursive conventions that go into the creative process of interpretation and production. In short, Fairclough's *orders of discourse* are the assessment of what clusters of linguistic and societal conventions that influence the constraints on discourse in terms of what context the discourse and the practice occur, as seen in the table on the previous page.[154]

We consider, however, that these conventions become ambiguous and hard to understand on online platforms such as 9GAG and Imgur, even if they are highly relevant. The reason for this is connected with the relative freedom from societal conventions and the specific culture that is to be found on the Internet and on the chosen platforms, a freedom that subverts normal societal order, and so we find order in relation to our paper to be a bit of a curiosity. In order to deal with this ambiguity, we will look at how Fairclough explains how a producer of discourse might experience problems:

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[153] Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd edition. Longman. 2001, 25-26.
[154] ibid., 122.

The position of the producer may be problematized in terms of subjects, either in terms of the subject position or social identity of the producer, or in terms of the subject position or social identity of the interpreter(s). (...) These discoursal dimensions of producers' problems can be seen as a consequence of discourse conventions becoming destabilised - or, in the terminology I introduced in Chapter 2 (p. 31), the 'de-structuring' of orders of discourse, in the sense that a relatively stable relationship between discourse types in an order of discourse comes to be disrupted. In other words, producers experience problems because the familiar ways of doing things are no longer straightforwardly available. (...) a strategy for dealing with the problematization of one's position is to be creative, to put together familiar discourse types in novel combinations as a means of finding new ways of doing things to replace the now-problematic old ones. [155]

On the platforms of 9GAG and Imgur, then, in order to investigate the social order of the institutional setting, we will need to analyse how social order itself is being dealt with by the producers by how they creatively combine different types of discourse that can replace old ones. We consider memes as being the vehicle for the producers to creatively challenge or affirm structures with restrictions on knowledge and beliefs, social relations, and social identities that exist within society. Through the analysis of our chosen data we will build a more comprehensive understanding of how the platforms' producers negotiate constraints on the discourse that stem from societal order as well as how we should understand the institutional setting of the online platforms. Furthermore, by understanding the negotiation of order happening on the platform, we can through our analysis assess how memes work to subvert or reinforce these orders to reaffirm or reject *ideology*. The topic of order on online platforms, then will become relevant to look closer at in our discussion on the basis of our findings in our analysis.

Harvey Sacks' Membership Categorisation Analysis

Harvey Sacks' Membership Categorisation Analysis or MCA is an apparatus, which facilitates the understanding of subjects in society based on their actions, how they interact with each other, and how their understanding of others also derives from the group, or category, they and others belong to. Generally speaking MCA belongs to the sociological discipline of Ethnomethodology, a descriptive discipline that concerns itself with the analysis of actions rather than the building of theory in order to explain identity formation as well as how social

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[155] Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd edition. Longman. 2001, 141-142.

order is maintained.[156] For these reasons, it is the ideal toolset to investigate how the 'left' and the 'right' appear represented via memes on the platforms, which characteristics are ascribed to each, and to understand how *contingency* and *continuity* plays a role in identity building in a political context.

The categories members are assigned to - whether that is 'left' or 'right', liberal or conservative, or any other relational pair - can be informed, for instance, by posing questions in regards to the actions made by individuals in regards to a certain context or how they position themselves. Sacks refers to these questions as 'inference-rich'[157] since they contribute to unravelling one's group membership.

The association of characteristics to a category is anchored on previous knowledge prompted by a question or an activity and its perception of it. This association aligns with *common sense knowledg*e as "When you spot some activity, you often know immediately the kind of person who might have done it"[158], as Sacks states. Interestingly, Sacks, in opposition to Fairclough, does not understand *common sense* as being informed by *ideology*, but rather as a way to understand what each 'member' of an interaction knows and thereby reach a conclusion about the identity and actions by categorising individuals or groups based on this *common sense knowledge.[159]*

This neutral formulation of *common sense* goes together with Ethnomethodology's overall grounded approach to analysis. In our view it lacks an appreciation of how people are informed by not only their own experiences with the world but also by indirect experiences as formulated by others through media that they in turn use as resources to create meaning and understand the world. These indirect experiences constitute parts of the pre knowledge of individuals and are part of what Fairclough would call the MR of interpreters. Subsequently these resources might be ideological in nature, making the *common sense knowledge* not 'commonsensical', but instead informed by a political understanding of the world that in turn constitutes political construction of social reality and social relations. In Fairclough's theory, all *common sense* is in some way *naturalised ideology*. We will therefore be operating with Fairclough's iteration

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[156] Fitzgerald, Richard. Housley, William. Introduction to Membership Categorisation Analysis. *Advances in Membership Categorisation Analysis*. SAGE Publications Ltd. 2015, 3. DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781473917873,

[157] Silverman, David. *Harvey Sacks: Social Science and Conversation Analysis*. Oxford University Press. 1998, 74.

[158] ibid., 75.

[159] ibid., 77.

of *common sense* for our analysis and discussion. Fairclough himself criticises Ethnomethodology, and specifically conversational analysis, because it refuses to connect the micro structures of language with the macro structures of society, stating that:

As a result, it [conversational analysis] gives a rather implausible image (similar to the image I attribute to pragmatics) of conversation as skilled social practise existing in a social vacuum, as if talk were generally engaged in for its own sake[160]

Looking at language taking place on platforms where 'conversation' cannot be considered as happening between two or three people but rather a multitude of people at once based on a shared resource, the post/meme, underlines Fairclough's point and the shortcomings of Ethnomethodology. This new mode of communication is one facilitated by the development of technology, and so a development of Ethnomethodology would be necessary as well, if it were to truly be a grounded approach.

We will agree with Fairclough's critique of Ethnomethodology, as we cannot consider the practice of 'conversation' to be separated from the underlying structures of society, which requires a theoretical formulation of said structures to understand the results of a subsequent analysis. Furthermore, we see the construction of discourse as a way to understand how structures in language inform interpreters' understanding of *knowledge and beliefs*, *social relations*, and *social identities*.

There are advantages and disadvantages to a grounded approach such as MCA, due to its atheoretical and arguable ahistorical approach to understanding identity, but for the sake of this paper this will be mended by working in tandem with - and expanded upon by the theory of Fairclough as well as his CDA method to better accommodate an analysis that investigates how social construction and social relations are formed.

This is because we view the phenomenon, the Canada Convoy Protest, that we investigate as being interwoven with politics and power in such a way that understanding the constructions that arise from the discourse surrounding the phenomenon as being informed by the political nature of the phenomenon. A central part of our analysis hinges on understanding how the resources offered on the platforms might lead to interpretations that lead to polarisation between the groups 'left' and 'right'. Without operating with concepts such as *ideology* we lose an understanding of what informs certain interpretative outcomes.

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[160] Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd edition. Longman. 2001, 9-10.

The merits of MCA lies within its grounded and therefore flexible approach to understanding how language can be used to form and negotiate identity of individuals and people and representations of said identities. It is this analytical focus that informs our decision of combining MCA together with CDA, as seeing identities and groups constructed through actions and membership categories serves as a highly tangible way to understand how to conceptualise the construction of the involved groups in Canada Convoy Protest, but also how these groups are defined and negotiated on the platforms of 9GAG and Imgur.

We have selected a few concepts of the apparatus to help us identify how categories and membership is represented through discourse and images in the memes - the selected tools will be outlined in the methodology section.

In a way the process that leads to this automatic association to our previous knowledge or common sense acts as a way of informing the *continuity* of the existing constructions of categories and their subsequent identities - "Both people and society are understood as historical phenomena that are compelled to work on the basis of the existing structures, presupposing and ensuring *continuity* in the social."[161]

As the negotiation of meaning of categories is not done overtly, but instead through an inconspicuous continuum of representations, the aspect of *contingency* in regards to the constitution of categories is not overt. The *contingent* and *continued* identity of groups and individuals relies on ongoing negotiations, ascriptions and re-ascription of actions to categories. By seeking to understand how group categories are ascribed to their members, we hope to understand how the phenomenon of the Canada Convoy Protest offers a moment of *contingency* in terms of group representations on 9GAG and Imgur, since the actions taken under the protests serve as an opportunity to ascribe and re-ascribe actions to certain groups and categories that depicts the 'right' and the 'left'.

As representations of a category are posted and reposted, so too are the explanations of what actions describe each group, as well as how the groups are characterised. And by this *continuity* of representations the characteristics that describe the group are maintained.

It is, thus, possible to identify and ascribe the members that belong to a certain group, because it has an explanation attached to it that has gone through a process of negotiation in moments

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[161] Jørgensen, Marianne., and Phillips, Louise. *Discourse Analysis Theory as Method*. Sage publications. 2002, 38.

of *contingency* of representations and identity making, and can thus be furthered by becoming *common sense* thereby securing its *continuity*. We expect that these negotiations will occur differently on each platform, as the resources made available for the interpreters who are ascribing and re-ascribing actions to categories will not be the same, thus making different iterations of the *contingency* and *continuity* of the 'left' and 'right' in relation to the Canada Convoy Protest.

The idea of *continuity* is quite visible in some ideas of Sack's apparatus, especially those concepts which emanate from associations on previous knowledge in deciphering member's categories and ascribing them a group, and essentially *contingency* is an ongoing process where the representations on the memes continuously attempt to ascribe identity and define the 'right' and the 'left' on each of the platforms - users are the ones engaged on *contingency*.

Furthermore, Sacks' membership categorisation tools enable us to observe how identity creation is being conducted online in *post-truth settings*, memes are being used to distribute ideas and assessments of identities with no demand for accuracy to base truth-claims on.

Sacks' MCA alongside Fairclough's CDA will aid us in developing a granular analysis of how identity creation on different platforms with different resources can be used to facilitate polarisation between political groups through the representation of members of the groups categories 'left' and 'right' actions in relation to the Canada Convoy Protest.

Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's Visual Analysis

Visual means of communication have always been a part of our society, and are present in both offline and online spaces. Visual analysis of images can on one hand be performed without any resource to the verbal or written information which may accompany them, while on the other it can include the accompanying text, or even see words and images as one inseparable unit of analysis. This is usually the case in memes and it is one of the reasons why we developed a multimodal approach to our analysis. Although it is possible to communicate the same both visually and verbally, there are differences when doing it one way or the other. For example, what is expressed in language by using different words classes and modes of sentences, in visual communication it can be expressed through usage of colours, compositional structures,

etc. All of the above affects the meaning of what has been said, and therefore it is important to underline that expressing something verbally or visually makes a difference.[162]

Social phenomena can be studied from both verbal and visual perspective by looking at linguistic and visual structures of what has been expressed through either language or images. For a couple of decades, possibly centuries, people have been trying to find ways to understand certain phenomena by introducing charts, maps, diagrams, and images along with written texts. There are of course different types, forms, and even genres of visual expression, however it is important to emphasise that this paper is not going to cover them all. This project aims to explore and explain how memes as a combination of linguistic and visual means of expression in the online space and post-truth setting can carry certain meanings and ideas, hence serve to contribute to construction and representation of 'left' and 'right' and understanding of ongoing processes of polarisation between political groups.

Moreover, memes have in the past decade become a crucial communication tool in the online sphere and taking into account that memes are visual creations with an image as the centre of the idea or meaning they are supposed to outspread, reading images has rapidly become an inevitable part of creating a better understanding of what has been communicated through them. In their work from 2006 Kress and van Leeuwen argue that visual communication is going to be less and less the domain of specialists, and more and more crucial in the domain of public communication - they believe that visual literacy will begin to be a matter of survival.[163]

What must be taken into account when studying memes is the cultural explicitness of semiotics and bear in mind that memes are often produced to be consumed and understood not only within one nation, but for greater masses that do not belong to one culture, but several of them all around the world. Globalisation is what makes the study of memes challenging, due to numerous social, epistemological and rhetorical effects of visual communication within different cultures.

As previously stated, memes are often a combination of text and image, and therefore it is essential to comprehend the relationship between the two. Barthes distinguishes between an image-text relation in which the verbal text extends the meaning of the image, or vice versa,

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[162] Kress, Gunther and van Leeuwen, Theo. *Reading Images, The Grammar of Visual Design*. 2nd edition. Routledge. 2006, 3.

[163] Kress, Gunther and van Leeuwen, Theo. *Reading Images, The Grammar of Visual Design*. 2nd edition. Routledge. 2006, 4.

and image-text relation in which the verbal text elaborates the image, or vice versa.[164] The example of the first image-text relation are speech balloons in comic strips.[165] In this case new meanings are added to complete the message. In the latter case, the same meanings are paraphrased in order to elaborate and be more precise and definite in communicating a message. Elaboration is surely the more dominant of the two, and there are two types of it according to Barthes.[166] First one is where text comes first, so it offers the interpreter some pre knowledge on what is going to be shown on the image. In this case, the image serves as an illustration of what has been communicated with the use of language. Second one is where the text comes after the image, so it forms a more fixed and precise summary of what has already been communicated through the image itself.[167] Both types of elaboration can be found in memes - the former either as a title or a text at the top of the meme, the latter as a text at the bottom of the meme, as well as in the form of comments to the meme.

Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Analysis is an apparatus, which facilitates the understanding of how subjects or people are depicted on images by providing us with a toolset for analysing how 'major compositional structures which have become established as conventions in the course of the history of Western visual semiotics' are used to produce meaning by contemporary image-makers.[168] Understanding of the notion of semiotics is necessary in order to be able to delve into the subject of meaning of particular visual entities, and therefore we will briefly introduce it.

Semiotics, as a study of signs and sign processes, aims to examine a few theoretical questions; how do signs function; how can they carry over information; how can they communicate a certain message; and how can they be studied. Using signs people can communicate through all of the five senses, and therefore semiotics is often presented as a field that has both anthropological and sociological dimensions, and as a discipline that can be studied from many perspectives.

In the field of semiotics linguistics has a significant impact on non-verbal communication and visual forms of expression. Different languages contain numerous combinations of signs, and

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[164] Kress, Gunther and van Leeuwen, Theo. *Reading Images, The Grammar of Visual Design*. 2nd edition. Routledge. 2006, 18.
[165] ibid.
[166] ibid.
[167] ibid.
[168] ibid., 2.

as much as they may be referring to the same entity, they differ in usage of signs. Similarly, in the field of visual communication, particular codes bear certain meanings and demonstrate certain things. Typical example of this are highway codes, that are regulated by a specific instruction, and even though that type of instruction might be useful regarding those particular codes, it is not the case in other forms of visual expression, for instance numerous forms of modern art.[169]

Moreover, even though memes bear certain cultural units, hence one might suppose that they would be understandable to almost anyone who understands the cultural unit depicted in them, the possibility of editing and adding the textual elements to the meme still makes them diverse - it makes them a combination of elements that refers to the same entity, but differs in usage of signs, hence spreading a different meaning.

Social semiotics of visual communication includes not only description of what can be said and done by using images, but also interpretation of the ideas expressed by them. It provides a detailed and explicit method for analysing the meanings, which can be representational, interactional, and compositional, established by the syntactic relations between the people, places and things depicted in images. For the purpose of this paper we will focus only on a few concepts, a couple of tools that play a role in realisation of the three aforementioned meanings, namely those we see the most fitting in relation to the selected data. The chosen tools will be outlined in the methodology section.

To sum it all up, in order to support the complexity of modalities that are related to communication in memes, the visual aspect cannot be neglected. As the discursive structuring and membership categorisation relies on a combination of visual and textual elements, an analytical toolbox for visual analysis had to be created to work alongside Norman Fairclough's CDA and Harvey Sacks' MCA. Although it was necessary for us to establish a multimodal approach to analysis by using different tools Kress and van Leeuwen provided us with in their work *Reading images, The Grammar of Visual Design*, attention must be drawn to the fact that visual analysis only has a complementary function to our theory and analysis of memes and comments, and that it does not have further theoretical impact on our paper.

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[169] Van Leeuwen, Theo and Jewitt, Carey. *The Handbook of Visual Analysis, Visual Meaning: a Social Semiotic Approach*. Sage Publications. 2004.

Information Sources

As the amount of data that we will be able to analyse in this paper using our multimodal discourse analysis will not cover all posts collected from the platforms, we will work out a method for creating an overview of all the collected data in order to assess and discuss the observations and results obtained during our analysis. We consider that the negotiation of social relations and social reality that takes place on the platforms potentially happens through an accumulation of negotiation of the resources made available - all the content that is provided to the interpreters of the platforms in some form help shape the construction of the discourse that takes place on the platforms.

Therefore it is important to understand what ressources the community of producers and interpreters on the platforms made available to each other in relation to the Canada Convoy Protest, if the resources are diverse or ideologically narrow, and if the resources posted on the website could said to have aided interpretations that *sustained the continuity* through discourse as well as ideologically informed member categorisation of political actors that lead to further polarisation between the 'left' and 'right'. This section will serve as a guide to how we will assess and discuss the resources made available on the platforms. In short this section will outline how we will collect data from the platforms that describes the quantitative aspect of how the the *en mass* discursive construction of social reality and social relations took place in relation to the Canada Convoy Protest - this heap of data will help us reflect on and discuss how our analysis of the specific memes and comments should be considered in relation to the sheer mass and scale of instances of discursive structures that takes place in online spaces

To support our choice of analytical focus on diversity and slant in regards to information as they are formulated in the following research paper, *Understanding Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles,* we will be using the different constructs related to diversity of information to sort and select our data from 9GAG and Imgur. As the focus of this thesis, however, does not contain the collection of data from participants, but rather the analysis of CDA, MCA, and Visual Analysis we will modify the use of Kitchens', Johnson's, and Grey's model of diversity of information slightly.

Here, in our modified table, we will focus on generating data - that is, in extracting data from our collected memes according to the information sources of the table we will further explain - that will elaborate and expand on the sophistication of our discursive, membership, and visual analysis by understanding the quantitative aspects of their appearances on the respective sites.

This approach gives us several valuable insights into how the phenomenon we are discussing are constructed and represented amongst and by millions of users, which sets it apart from traditional means of mass communication. We highlight that discursive constructions and membership representations happen in hundreds of instances on the 9GAG and Imgur, this means that the hundreds of memes that we have collected show an overview of the multiple and simultaneous negotiations over power, common sense, identity and subject positions. All of this takes place on the two platforms through the use of memes.

This differentiation is critical. In a more traditional approach to the use of discourse and membership categorisation analysis the sources that undergo analysis are more or less singular with an audience of potentially thousands or millions - one sender with multiple receivers. In these online spaces the users can potentially inhabit many roles; sender, receiver, commentator, curator, and author and are in the millions and we must, then, understand that the building of the discursive and membership categorisation structures occur en masse and simultaneously over many different sources at the time.

We must also understand that each site should not be considered as a vacuum of purely original user generated content. The users of the sites, theoretically, have access to the same information as everyone else surfing the internet, and therefore exists in several hubs of information simultaneously that impacts upon them. To refer to Fairclough - they operate with their own understanding of common sense beholden to the ideology and discourses that they inhabit.[170]

As the content on the platforms is sorted and ordered, so too is its discursive and membership structures, leaving the users to maintain or alter them as the cocreators and curators of the online space. These processes and systems are what necessitates an approach that marries both quantitative and qualitative analysis as the sites are defined by both.

There are in total four constructs of diversity in relation to the consumption of information in accordance with the paper, *Understanding Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles[171]*, and each of these as well as their use in relation to the paper will be explained in detail. The most important change to the table's function also lies within its fundamental analytical use - instead of measuring user behaviour and consumption of individuals as done by the research paper[172], we

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[170] Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd edition. Longman, 2001, 70-71.

[171] Kitchens, Brent., L. Johnson, Steven., and Gray, Peter. Understanding Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles: The Impact of Social Media on Diversification and Partisan Shifts in News Consumption. *MIS Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4. 2020, 1630.

[172] ibid. 1631-1632.

instead measure constructions and representation by focusing on the appearances and re-appearances of the types of information on the sites. The constructs in question are represented in the table below:

Table 4: Outcome Measures for an Individual's Within-Period News Site Visits					
Dimension	**Construct**	**Measure**	**Description**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**
Diversity	Information source quantity	Distinct news sites	Number of unique news sites visited (count)	No news site visits	Visit all 177 news sites in the sample
	Information source dispersion	Slant dispersion	The time-weighted standard deviation of political slant of news sites visited	All visited news sites have the same political slant	50% of visits to the most liberal news site, 50% to the most conservative
	Information source parity	Reverse Gini Index	(1 - Gini Index)*100 calculated based on time spent on each visited news site (0 to 100 range)	One news site predominates with minimal time on others	An equal amount of time spent at multiple news sites
	Information source variety	Audience variety	Time-weighted mean variety of news site visits based on the frequency of overlapping site visitors (0 to 100 range)	Visit a small set of news sites that have the same readership	Visit multiple sites with minimal audience overlap

[173]

Information Source Variety

First, let us discuss the one construct that will not be relevant, or is otherwise inaccessible to this paper; information source variety. As we do not have participants to collect data from in relation to their news consumption behaviour of a variety of news websites, we cannot utilise this construction to sort our data to implement in our analysis on. The removal of this construct does mean that we cannot say anything about how the construction and representation of the Canadian Convoy Protest and the political 'left' and 'right' influence on the news consumption behaviour of the users of 9GAG or Imgur.

This is, however, not what we are trying to accomplish by altering and implementing the table to categorise our data. We are also not trying to determine how the audience of the sites cobble together information from other sources, but instead how a specific phenomenon and specific political groups are constructed, represented and discussed on two specific platforms. With this construction out of the way we can move on to our modified version of the table.

[173] Kitchens, Brent., L. Johnson, Steven., and Gray, Peter. Understanding Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles: The Impact of Social Media on Diversification and Partisan Shifts in News Consumption. *MIS Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4. 2020, 1630.

Dimension & Constructs Table

Dimension	Construct	Measure	Description	Minimum	Maximum
Diversity	*Information Source Engagement/ Popularity*	User engagement/ website popularity	How much engagement a meme has gotten in regards to the number of comments, upvotes/ downvotes, and/ or views	The meme that has the least comments, upvotes and/ or views	The meme that has the most comments, upvotes and/ or views
	Information Source Dispersion	Slant dispersion	Type of political ideologies represented	All the memes have the same political slant	50% of the memes represent liberal views, and the other 50% conservative views
	Information Source Frequency	Frequency of multiple representations	Frequency of the repetition of sources	One source of information predominates with minimal representation of others	Equal amount of frequency with regards to information sources
	Information Source Quantity	Distinct sites of information	Number of different information sources or types of memes	Singular source of information	Multiple sources of information

Information Source Engagement

The information source engagement construct is an adaptation of the construct information source variety on the original table from Kitchens' et al.[174] This construct measures the readership of news sites, but since readership does not directly apply nor can be measured in regards to memes, we have taken readership and converted it into engagement. Similarly to readership, engagement takes into account to some degree the amount of time being spent on each individual meme, though this cannot be measured, we understand that a meme that has received more internet points, upvotes/ downvotes, views or comments is a meme on which a user or visitor has spent more time on than on others - thus denoting the engagement towards an action that can be measured and is visible on the platform.

This construct corresponds to the engagement of users and visitors on Imgur, through the counting of internet points, upvotes/ downvotes, comments and views - for the latter the visitors possibly count as views as well since posts are public[175], despite Imgur not clarifying this aspect it would make sense considering the abysmal difference in internet points and comments,

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[174] Kitchens, Brent., L. Johnson, Steven., and Gray, Peter. Understanding Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles: The Impact of Social Media on Diversification and Partisan Shifts in News Consumption. *MIS Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4. 2020, 1630.

[175] Post Analytics and Views. *Imgur*. https://help.imgur.com/hc/en-us/articles/210932463-Post-Analytics-and-Views (Accessed 2022-03-31).

compared to views on some posts. It corresponds on the same way to the engagement of users on 9GAG, taking into account the upvotes, downvotes and comments on each post - visitors seem not to account for any visible way of measuring their engagement on 9GAG, since there is no views on the platform and all the engagement factors that are available require an account.

Information source engagement measures the traction each meme has gotten by understanding the relation of number of upvotes/ downvotes and comments on 9GAG, and number of internet points, views and comments on Imgur. We calculate the engagement by organising all the memes and adding the total measurable information each has, creating a result. This result informs us of the total of engagement, and we can then list all the memes by the ones who have the most engagement to the ones who have the least engagement. Then, we can infer what kind of information source quantity is more and least popular on each platform.

By popularity we consider it to be the agreement with the post, measured by the upvotes. In case of the same number of upvotes and downvotes, or more downvotes than upvotes we consider that there is disagreement on the platform in regards to the discourse of the meme. Engagement is measured by the actions that can be taken on a post, or the possible interaction, including upvotes, downvotes and comments.

Information Source Quantity

Originally, this construct is related to the "number of unique information sources an individual consumes"[176], measuring the news sites where the information is taken from, and which news sites got no visits to the individuals who visited the 177 in the sample. In our table, we are applying the basics of the same construct, collecting the unique information sources present on the memes, not only from news sites, but from all sources. As such, we have come up with a list of categories of the information sources, in order to produce data that is more adapted to the platforms we are collecting the data from. The categories of the information sources, or types of memes, from the memes we have outlined are the following:

(1) *Original Meme (OM)* - this category consists of memes that include original content that was not created within the template of a meme already existent. It includes videos if they are original and have no editing in the form of a compilation, to which we have called *Original*

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[176] Kitchens, Brent., L. Johnson, Steven., and Gray, Peter. Understanding Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles: The Impact of Social Media on Diversification and Partisan Shifts in News Consumption. *MIS Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4. 2020, 1623.

Video (OV). This category includes a combination of pictures/videos that individually can be seen as: OM and/or MT and/or T and/or NA, original video and/or OM and/or MT and/or T and/or NA - although as a unit of a meme they are to be considered an original meme.

(2) *Meme Template (MT)* - this category includes classic meme templates that can be modified with an image or text that fits to the template of the meme. It also includes a template video or template GIF, essentially if the meme can be found at a meme generator website and simply filled.

(3) *Compilation (C)* - this category includes video compilation of different sources, few videos of the same source, and altered videos. It does not include meme template videos and individual non-modified news videos.

(4) *Tweet (T)* - this category includes only screenshots from Twitter.

(5) *News (N)* - we have separated this category between *News Articles (NA)*, that include just a headline as well as excerpts from an article, and *News Videos (NV)*, undoctored news video clips.

(6) *Other (O)* - this category includes a comprehensive list of options that do not fit into any of the others, and was not significant enough in amount to have its own category, so we have aggregated them. It includes GIFs, screenshots and videos from YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and other known and unknown sources, as well as different combinations previously mentioned.

Information Source Dispersion

This construct is altered to fit in with the theoretical notion of members' resources'[177] and ideology[178] as formulated by Fairclough to inform us on the slant of the sites. The information posted on the sites can be traced back to their sources such as news organisations and Tweets from politicians etc. The research paper defines slant as follows:

We define a shift in slant in terms of differences in an individual's consumption choices between points in time. In comparing the information sources consumed at various times, a change in

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[177] Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd edition. Longman. 2001, 118-119.
[178] ibid., 70-71.

the dominant ideological position towards a more centrist perspective represents a moderating shift and a change towards the extreme represents a partisan shift.[179]

Here we again face the paper's original focus on individual behaviour and consumption whereas we are focusing on appearances and re-appearances of information sources that adds to construction and representation. By determining the amount of liberal or conservative sources of information we can make a judgement of the platforms' slanted presentation of the phenomenon in question. The construction and representation of the phenomena is done, in part, by the information used to discuss it on the sites, and the slant from the original sources therefore play a part in determining the ideology that is connected to the negotiation of the Canada Convoy Protest.

Some sources might not appear on Imgur in relation to 9GAG, and some might be used to create further polarisation - this will be determined through further analysis of the data. The use of the information on the respective sites and its original slant is therefore important to determine the dispersion of ideology operating on the sites. The idea here is that the resources, or information, made available to the members, or the users, of the sites are already ideologically slanted, serving to colour future interpretations of the Canadian Convoy Protest as well as the imagined opposing political faction that is depicted through the information.

An overrepresentation of either 'liberal' or 'conservative' media does not mean that the negotiation and discussion that take place on the sites are inherently slanted or ideologically motivated, by we consider them as being a point of departure for the discursive structuring and membership creation that follow - you can freely agree or disagree with the post by upvoting, downvoting or by commenting, the question is rather if some ideas go reinforced on the platforms whereas some are challenged.

Information Source Frequency

This construct is a modification of the construct; information source parity. Whereas the original construct was meant to measure the individuals time spent on each news site, here the construct has been modified to measure the reappearance, or the frequency, of certain information sources. This construct works alongside the former construct, the information source dispersion, to determine the ideology of the sites as this also measures the available

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[179] Kitchens, Brent., L. Johnson, Steven., and Gray, Peter. Understanding Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles: The Impact of Social Media on Diversification and Partisan Shifts in News Consumption. *MIS Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4. 2020, 1624.

member resources and ideologies. In short, this construct, when modified to measure appearance and reappearance of constructs and representation, will give a percentage overview of the types of information that appear on the sites, letting us know about the reinforcement of the ideologies of the respective sites.

Methodology

In this chapter, firstly we will delve into our multimodal analytical apparatus, and its corresponding tools. As well as how this combination makes for the optimal combination to answer the core of what this paper seeks to find. Secondly, we will explain how the data collection, categorisation and selection was conducted; and how the tools were used to access political slant. Finally, we will look at the ethical considerations for this paper.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis

To fully understand the complexities of how discourses and membership categories operate through memes and subsequent comments under *post-truth* conditions we have had to create a comprehensive multimodal toolset for analysis. The complexity of the toolset is meant to reflect not only the complexity of the subject matter, but also the complexity of our data - memes and comments. This multimodal discourse analysis might seem overly ambitious, and so we would like to shortly reflect on our choice for creating this approach.

As our lives expands further and further into the globally shared, non material online realm, the freedom individuals have to almost unopposed use creativity to reshape, subvert, and challenge social norms by mixing different modalities in the production of discourse will continue to impact our lives. It is within this space, and due to these reasons that a greater need for an interdisciplinary approach to analysis arises. Kalpokas reflects on the same need for interdisciplinarity when trying to think, analyse, and understand politics in the age of post-truth, as he draws from political theory and media and communication studies, as well as domains such as aesthetics and neuropsychology in his work.[180]

Furthermore, our multimodal approach reflects the emphasis of the modes of communication that is to be found online - where there is an emphasis on the merger between the visual and the textual - something Fairclough briefly reflects on in his 2nd edition of *Language and Power* when writing in his introduction that some postmodern writers were claiming that visual were ousting language, referring to postmodern culture as being 'post-linguistic'.[181] We see this manifested through the use of sound, pictures, video, and text that the production of memes

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[180] Kalpokas, Ignas. *A Political Theory of Post-Truth*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2019, 3.

[181] Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd edition. Longman. 2001, 2.

facilitate, and so the construction of social reality and social relations should also be understood through the use of these modalities. If we submit new phenomena to modes of analysis that have not changed alongside with the expression of how individuals communicate, a sizable analytical blindspot is created by not recognising that reality is somehow different than when the theory and the analytical tools were developed. Our multimodal approach should therefore be seen as an attempt to adjust the chosen theory and analytical tools to reflect the contemporary settings they are being used in, as well as contemporary modes of communication.

A further complexity is added by the inclusion of *slant* and *diversity*. The use of *slant* and *diversity* works as an amendment to our multimodal discourse analysis in the way that the complete overview and assessment of the origin of the collected data will be made during the discussion and will further contextualise our main multimodal discourse analysis. This overview and assessment in tandem with the in depth multimodal discourse analysis will provide a perspective in relation to scope and scale of the information and ideas presented on the platforms, that should be considered when thinking about the construction of social reality and social relations. The inclusion of *slant* and *diversity*, then, is the inclusion of the perspective that different landscapes of information with potentially different ideologically *slants*, might add to a separation of how discourse is constructed, and therefore also how social reality and social relations are constructed.

We will now break down the use of each of the chosen analytical tools as well as our reasoning for adding it to the analysis.

Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis Tools

Grammatical features and Values

This part of the analysis has to do with the description of the formal features of a text, that is the values of words and grammatical features. Fairclough distinguishes between three types of values that formal features may have; experiential, relational, and expressive.[182] It is important to emphasise that any given formal feature may have two or three of these values.

Experiential value has to do with how the producer's experience of the world (natural or social) is represented in a text, as well as with contents, knowledge and beliefs.[183] Experiential values

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[182] Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd edition. Longman. 2001, 93.
[183] ibid.

of words can be understood as ideological coding, namely because some words can be ideologically contested by different discourses and therefore become the centre of ideological struggle.[184] Experiential values of grammatical features have to do with agency, that is how by analysing subject, verb, object usage we can determine agency of subjects, which can then point back to the common sense of the producer and the implicit ideology.[185] It will be of interest to see if similar beliefs and the 'knowledge' in terms of the 'left' and 'right' will be repeated by the memes on each respective platform as well as if these beliefs and the 'knowledge' of the groups will be contested, questioned or furthered by the comments. The furthering of certain 'knowledge' about the 'left' and 'right' can be expressed with negative or positive connotation and evaluations.

Expressive value has to do with subjects and social identities, and the producer's evaluation of reality a text relates to.[186] The expressive values of words can be positive or negative evaluations of a given phenomena, thing, person or a group of people.[187] Expressive value of grammatical features reveals a categorical commitment of the producer to truth using verbs such as are and must be.[188] Expressive values are therefore of special interest to our analysis, as the frequent use of these values, positive or negative, will inform us if the 'left' and 'right' are viewed favourably by the interpreters and producers on each platform.

Relational value has to do with relations and social relationships which are enacted through a text in the discourse.[189] The choice of words in a text can both help determine or be determined by the social relationship of the participants.[190] Relational values of grammatical features of a text are separated into three terms: modes of sentences, modality and pronouns.[191]

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[184] Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd edition. Longman. 2001, 94.
[185] ibid., 100.
[186] ibid., 93.
[187] ibid., 97.
[188] ibid., 107.
[189] ibid., 93.
[190] ibid., 97.
[191] ibid., 104.

Modes of sentences

Determining the mode of sentence used in memes and comments will help us understand the established relationship between the represented actors in the meme, and in certain cases what the relationship is between actors and interpreters.

There are three main modes of sentences: *declarative, imperative, and grammatical question.* Declarative sentences have an S-V-O order, meaning that subject is followed by a verb, and often object. For example, *Robert (S) creates (V) memes (O).* They position the producer as the provider of information and the receiver as the interpreter of it.[192]

Imperatives on the other hand normally do not include subject, leaving them with a V-O order, meaning that verb is followed by an object. For instance, *Close (V) the window (O).* Imperative sentences show the producers of the text as either demanding or calling for action.[193] Imperatives do not have to, but often end with an exclamation mark, which helps the receiver understand the tone sentence should be interpreted in.

Grammatical question can, for example, begin with an interrogative pronoun, so called WH-word, such as *what, where, who, when, why*, etc., or with a (modal) verb, as in; *Do you like winter? Are you tired? May I borrow your pen? Can you help me?* The latter type of grammatical question results in yes/no answers, and are therefore known as yes/no questions. In a grammatical question the producer is asking for information from the receiver.[194]

Modality

Modality stands for producer's authority and there are two dimensions to it: relational and expressive modality. Relational modality represents the authority one participant has in relation to other(s), while expressive modality refers to the producer's evaluation of truth.[195] Modality is expressed by modal auxiliary verbs such as *can, may, might, must, should,* and *ought.*[196] Here we will look for whether or not the experiential and expressive values are supported with

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[192] Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd edition. Longman. 2001, 104.
[193] ibid., 105.
[194] ibid.
[195] ibid.
[196] ibid.

a high degree of certainty, if these are presented as *truth-claims*, or if there is room for doubt when making claims about the 'left' and 'right'.

Pronouns

Pronouns are tied in with relationships of power, and can be used to express solidarity and identification or differentiation between groups and individuals.[197] In relation to our paper, it is especially in the context of a negotiation between 'left' and 'right', as well as the possibility of ascription and self ascription to either side through language that is of interest. Where the use of 'we' and 'us' signals a sameness and self ascription from a producer in terms of groups and identity, the use of pronouns such as 'they' and 'them' can be seen as signalling distance to the group in question. Furthermore, we can analyse if the certainty of the expressive and experiential values are connected with a relational value that is defined by sameness or distance to the group in question.

Intertextuality

For our analysis understanding the intertextual elements of the memes and the comments is key, since memes themselves consist of units of culture that have been appropriated for communicating by them posting online. Furthermore, since in the given context of the platforms with global audiences, the discourses appearing on the platform would have vast amounts of points of intercultural reference. Intertextuality is connected to articulations of different elements in one discourse from various texts and past events. Fairclough argues that intertextuality is when participants in any discourse operate on the basis of assumptions about which previous series of discourses the current discourse is connected to.[198]

Texts, and in the context of our paper, memes, always exist in intertextual relations with other texts, thus interpretation of intertextual context is a matter of deciding which series a text belongs to.[199] The concept of intertextuality therefore requires us to look at discourses and texts on the platforms from a nigh global cultural-historical perspective, as well as incorporating research of each of the cultural units being used for the memes into analysis.[200]

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[197] Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd edition. Longman. 2001, 106.
[198] Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd edition. Longman. 2001, 121.
[199] ibid., 129.
[200] ibid.

Sacks' Membership Categorisation Analysis Tools

Category-based explanations

This tool will serve for the identification of the groups, or categories, represented in the memes, by looking at the descriptions and explanations that are provided to each of the members of the meme - including what they represent and what characterises them. By this we mean that through this tool we will identify the groups connected with the Canada Convoy Protest phenomenon.

Explanations, or characteristics, attributed to a category, or a group, rely on previous knowledge of the group by interpreters. The explanations are deeply entrenched, and a contradiction to them would not be enough to have them overturned - as Sacks puts it they are in a way 'protected by induction'. For instance, the assumption that all Scotsmen are mean does not get overruled if one knows a Scotsman who is 'generous'.[201] That is because this 'protection against induction is closely tied with the *continuity* of representations which further entrench the characteristics to the category. This categorisation tool will be supported by Fairclough's experiential and expressive values.

Category-bound activities

This tool allows us to comprehend the connection between previous knowledge, or *common sense*, of a particular group and how the group behaves to the activity the group is represented as conducting in the memes. As well as how the activity the group or members of group engage in also act as a way of identifying them in a manner of exclusivity, a category that is characterised for engaging in a certain act.

Activities which are associated with specific categories or groups, the act of participating in it entails a previous knowledge connection to the membership category which is able to carry it out. This means, one's ascription is tied to the activities they engage in. These activities can also have negative or positive moral assessment, and they can be avoided if they are considered inappropriate to the attributed category.[202]

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[201] Silverman, David. *Harvey Sacks: Social Science and Conversation Analysis*. Oxford University Press. 1998, 75.
[202] ibid., 85.

Positioned categories

This tool reflects how different categories are presented or represented in the memes in a hierarchy, this can be achieved through the way they are described and which characteristics are ascribed to which of the categories in the memes - as positive descriptions will position the category in a higher position than negative descriptions, thus denoting a hierarchy of power and importance.

Within the same categories there is a hierarchy of positions for the members that are ascribed to it, in relation to the other members in the same category. For instance, the categories 'baby', 'adolescent' and 'adult' are all positioned higher or lower in accordance with each other.[203] This positioning can serve as a way of praising or criticising members, thus evidencing the discourse that is articulated as a result of activities. Let's look at the example Sacks provides, if an adolescent's behaviour is described as being alike as the one of a baby it carries a different significance, than if it was described as being alike to the one of an adult.[204] This articulation of positioning categories can help decipher the meaning of the message by understanding the hierarchy of the categories. Here too, we can observe how contingency is a continuous process, the way 'baby' and 'adolescent' is thought of has changed throughout history. The use of these positioned categories will aid us in understanding the order that is to be found on the platforms, as the implicit hierarchy of the categories will reveal how constraints on discourse not only work by exclusion on content, but also by structuring identities and groups to reflect approval or disapproval.

The consistency rule

This tool is useful to understand how different categories, which form collections, can still be represented and interpreted in a similar way. For instance, we might have two different political parties in the meme, and each represents a category which could be 'liberals' and 'conservatives'. Although, there can be a consistency observed, in which both categories are understood as being part of the same collection of political parties and thus their explanations are of similar tenor.

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[203] Silverman, David. *Harvey Sacks: Social Science and Conversation Analysis*. Oxford University Press. 1998, 84.
[204] ibid.

The economy rule states that when people are being categorised, and if a category from a collection has been ascribed to the first person, then that category or others included in the same collection can be used to categorise the remaining people.[205] The use or expansion of categories within the same collection forms a consistency, it explains why we understand certain categories as belonging to a collection. For instance, 'grandfather' and 'uncle' would be included in the collection of 'family'. This tool will help us uncover what *common sense assumptions* about the political groups are carried and furthered by the platforms, as well as how seemingly unrelated categories have merged within the discourse on the platforms such as for example 'right' and 'nazi'.

Standardised relational pairs

Recapitulating from the previous example of two distinct political parties, this tool explains how interpreters can see a relation between the two, even though they can be from a different category, they are connected by something, which can be their political role. Standardised relational pairs which have an implicit relation to each other, and the absence of the other is noticeable. Each category of the pair has certain standardised 'rights' and 'obligations'.[206] For instance, the pairs 'husband-wife', 'boyfriend-girlfriend', 'neighbour-neighbour'.

Duplicative organisation

Duplicative organisation offers a parallel understanding for the concepts of 'collection' or 'unit', these terms can be used somewhat interchangeably. If a population were to be counted, the numbers of 'dads' or 'mothers' would not be accounted for individually, but as part of a unit, the unit of 'families'.[207] Duplicative organisation explains how some categories can be seen as aggregated with others explicitly as deriving from our *common sense assumptions*, and thus part of the same unit.

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[205] Silverman, David. *Harvey Sacks: Social Science and Conversation Analysis*. Oxford University Press. 1998, 80.
[206] ibid., 82.
[207] ibid., 81.

Kress & van Leeuwen's Visual Analysis Tools

Contact

One of the key roles of understanding what has been depicted on an image is the concept of 'contact'. An image can create a particular relation between the interpreter and its content, as well as between the two or more speakers in one image, in the case of this paper - a meme. The way we will use the concept of contact in our paper is to recognise and single out the speaker's gaze, and analyse whether it has an impact on how the interpreters understand the meme, as well as to isolate the speaker's gestures and facial expressions.

Various images depict people who look directly at the interpreter, thus make contact with the interpreters and establish a relation with them, even if only on an imaginary level - meaning that the speaker does not necessarily need to directly address the interpreter by the presence of a speech bubble, rather just face them, thus create the imaginary contact.[208] That contact, when the speaker looks directly to the interpreter has to do with a call for action and/or demand something from the interpreter. Similarly, two or more speakers in a meme can establish a certain type of contact among them. For instance, it can be an interviewer-interviewee relationship. Furthermore, facial expressions and gestures of the speakers can communicate a certain reaction, for example a reaction of pleased or displeased, deferential or defiant, and so on.[209]

Distance

Images can either bring people, places and things close to the interpreters or keep them far apart. The norms of social relations determine the distance we keep from each other. The choice of distance in an image can insinuate different relations between represented speakers and interpreters and position speakers in a power hierarchy. Although there are many different levels when trying to describe distance, Kress and van Leeuwen distinct three 'shots' - a close-up, medium shot, and a long shot.[210] We will focus on a close-up and long shot in this paper by recognising the influence they can have on familiarity between the speaker and the interpreters, as well as on creating the hierarchy in relation to power.

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[208] Kress, Gunther and van Leeuwen, Theo. *Reading Images, The Grammar of Visual Design*. 2nd edition. Routledge. 2006, 117.
[209] ibid., 12.
[210] ibid., 114.

Kress and van Leeuwen argue that the main usage of a close-up is to insinuate an intimate/personal relationship between the speaker and the interpreter.[211] However, it should be underlined that other shots can also indicate a familiarity between the speakers and the interpreter. Similarly, the usage of a long shot mostly suggests an impersonal relationship, however this either cannot be understood as a rule. In a close-up every detail of one's face and their expression is visible, and it reveals one's individuality and personality, as opposed to a long shot that leads us to see people portrayed from a distance as strangers and as types rather than individuals. However, this does not mean that the people we see represented in a close-up are actually close to us, or vice versa, that people depicted from a long shot are strangers to us.[212]

Point of view

The term 'point of view' allows people, places, and things to be portrayed from above or below (vertical dimension), and from the front, side or the back (horizontal dimension).[213] The way this tool is going to be used in the analysis is by distinguishing how the speakers are being presented and how it can affect the process of interpretation.

Vertical dimension of point of view has to do with bird's eye view, eye-level and worm's eye view. If you look down on something/someone, you look at it from a position of a symbolic power, while if you look up at something/someone, that something/someone has some kind of symbolic power over you. Are you at eye-level with something/someone, there is a relation of symbolic equality.[214]

Horizontal dimension of point of view has to do with the range of angles between frontality and the oblique point of view. It represents the involvement or detachment from what is represented on an image. It should be noted that an image can include numerous speakers and they can be represented in different ways - some of them frontally, while others from the side or back.[215]

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[211] Kress, Gunther and van Leeuwen, Theo. *Reading Images, The Grammar of Visual Design*. 2nd edition. Routledge. 2006, 114.

[212] ibid., 17.

[213] Kress, Gunther and van Leeuwen, Theo. *Reading Images, The Grammar of Visual Design*. 2nd edition. Routledge. 2006.

[214] Van Leeuwen, Theo and Jewitt, Carey, *The Handbook of Visual Analysis, Visual Meaning: a Social Semiotic Approach.* Sage Publications. 2004, 3.

[215] Kress, Gunther and van Leeuwen, Theo. *Reading Images, The Grammar of Visual Design*. 2nd edition. Routledge. 2006, 135.

Information value

The idea behind the term 'information value' is that the role of any particular element will depend on whether it is placed on the left or right, centre or margin, top or bottom part of an image, page, etc.[216]

When it comes to this tool, for the purpose of this paper we will focus merely on the direction of reading the memes and comments. In societies that use Roman script, the English language being one of them, the direction of reading is left to right, top to bottom. That is the order all memes and comments from our data collection are going to be read and analysed in, since all of them are made, written and posted in English. Therefore this tool will only be mentioned here, and not in each particular analysis.

Framing

The term 'framing' indicates that elements of a composition can either be given separate identities, or represented as belonging together. In other words, framing 'connects' or 'disconnects' elements of an image, signifying that they either belong or do not belong together in some sense.[217] What can make framing more precise is the context.

This tool will serve for establishing a connection or disconnection between images, if a meme consists of more than one, various subjects and people depicted in a meme, as well as to recognise the connection or disconnection between a meme and the comments. The latter will be done by combining Kress and van Leeuwen's, Fairclough's and Sacks' apparatuses by recognising and analysing certain visual and/or textual elements that create a connection or disconnection between the meme and its comments.

Disconnection can be achieved in many ways; through framelines, empty space between elements, contrasts of colour and form, dissimilarity in used fonts, and basically any other visual feature. It is created through any form of discontinuity, disconnection or contrast that can be visually signified.[218] Connection on the other hand can be achieved in exactly the

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[216] Kress, Gunther and van Leeuwen, Theo. *Reading Images, The Grammar of Visual Design*. 2nd edition. Routledge. 2006, 177.
[217] ibid.
[218] ibid., 210.

opposite way; through the absence of framelines or empty space between the elements, similarities of colour and form, and the usage of the same font within one meme.[219]

Salience

The term 'salience' is used by Kress and van Leeuwen to indicate the fact that some elements of the image can be more eye-catching than others. This can be achieved in numerous ways, for instance through size, colour contrasts, tonal contrasts, placement in the foreground or background, differences in sharpness. In essence, through anything that can make a given element stand out from its surroundings.[220] This tool serves to separate elements that are more central to discourse, hence to determine the category a speaker belongs to, and therefore it is for the most part to be used in combination with Sacks' apparatus.

The overview of all tools and the order they will be used in the analysis of the memes are presented below.

Kress and van Leeuwen (Visual Analysis)	Fairclough (Critical Discourse Analysis)	Sacks (Membership Categorisation Analysis)
Assessment: *Visual features of memes, visual features' relation to message*	*Assessment:* *Power dynamics in social relations, determination of common sense and ideology, MR and process of interpretation*	*Assessment:* *Group formation and identity formation, group actions and beliefs*
Framing: connects or disconnects elements of an image (colour, form, framelines)	**Modes of sentences:** declarative, imperative, grammatical question	**Category-based explanations:** Explanations/ characteristics attributed to a category/group, which rely on previous knowledge
Contact: direct or indirect	**Modality:** modal auxiliary verbs: can, may, might, must, should, ought, etc.	**Category-bound activities:** Activities which are associated with specific categories/groups
Facial expressions: pleased, displeased, deferential, defiant, etc.	**Pronouns:** personal, possessive, etc.	**Positioned categories:** hierarchy and relationship of positions ascribed to the members of a group/category
Distance: close-ups, medium shots and long shots	**Intertextuality:** presence of texts/images from different sources	**The consistency rule:** if a category from a collection has been ascribed to the first person, then that category or others included in the same collection can be used to categorise the remaining people
Point of view: vertical dimension – above or below, horizontal dimension – front, side or back	**Order:** What institutions and social conventions informs how the discourse takes place and how the power relations should be understood	**Standardised relational pairs:** they have an implicit relation to each other and the absence of the other is noticeable
Salience: eye-catching elements (size, shape, colours, placement, sharpness, etc)		**Duplicative organisation:** shows how some categories can be seen as aggregated with others

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[219] Kress, Gunther and van Leeuwen, Theo. *Reading Images, The Grammar of Visual Design*. 2nd edition. Routledge. 2006, 210.
[220] ibid., 177.

Accessing Dispersion of Political Slant

Finding Slant

We have chosen two intermediaries, *AllSides* and *Media Bias/ Fact Check*, to find the slant of the news sources we have found on our meme collection. While we do possess an apparatus that would enable us to investigate the slant of the news sources we have found on the memes through the discourse that is presented on the excerpts of the memes, we face various obstacles to this, which we will delve into further. We will, thus, use these two websites for the assessment. We do, however, have to underline that we do not consider the information from ideologically slanted news outlets as being the same as the news outlets having that slant in general, but rather that finding slant information is only the departure point for the negotiation and discussion of a a meme and the ideas in it.

The immense variety of memes that exists is such that on some memes there would be enough text to analyse and find the type of discourse and slant of the news source, because the OP has either included a significant portion of the original article of the media source, or the whole article. Although, in many cases OPs carefully select phrases or short snippets that would make it very hard to find the slant of the article by only having a very limited part of the original article - and since we are analysing the meme with all its components and not the article we would have to limit ourselves to the snippets included on the meme.

Furthermore, the articles included on the memes are not exclusively informative, some might be an opinion article - of which we would not be able to extrapolate the slant of the news source since opinion pieces do not mean the news source is endorsing that exact opinion, despite hosting them. These are the reasons why we have decided to resort to independent sources for the evaluation of the slant of the news sources.

These two platforms will be used to find the slant of the news sources we have found to have been included on the memes, by this we mean the overall slant of each particular news media in their reporting - not opinion pieces. This will help us understand if there is a correlation of which news sources are more referred to in each platform, if there is a particular 'slant' that is more favourable to each of the platforms, and the diversity in the news sources present in the collected memes. The slant of all the news sources collected from all the memes we have

collected from Imgur and 9GAG will be accessed, and these quantitative results will provide some support for a later discussion posterior to the analysis into the discourses and the reality and power represented through the memes of the Canada Convoy Protest.

This process was done by first collecting the news media mentioned on the collected memes - some of the memes linked to the original sources, others we had to research the original article to find the source. We then compiled a list of 36 mentions on Imgur's memes from 15 different news sources on the 164 memes collected from Imgur. And 51 mentions from 13 different news sources on the 125 memes collected from 9GAG. This means that some news sources were mentioned more than once. Secondly, we researched the total of 28 news sources on both websites, most had been analysed on both so we cross-checked the results of the analysis on both platforms, and we found that the results were placed on similar positions on the scales of each platform. Although, we used mostly *AllSides* analysis to measure slant, and then cross-check with *Media Bias/ Fact Check* or if the news source has not been analysed by *AllSides*.

AllSides

AllSides - Don't be fooled by media bias and misinformation[221], founded in 2012 by John Gable and Scott McDonald, is a website that assesses media organisations' bias and presents how current affairs are being covered by the left, the centre and the right. The website states that "We expose people to information and ideas from all sides of the political spectrum so they can better understand the world - and each other."[222] *AllSides* focuses on five activities: **'Balanced News'** - daily coverage of current affairs through a left, centre and right slant; **'Media Bias Ratings'** - a rating of media organisations' slant; **'AllSides for Schools'** - a programme designed for schools to promote news literacy, dialogue and critical thinking[223]; **'Mismatch'**[224] - a programme to connect classrooms of different backgrounds across the USA; **'Balanced Dictionary'**[225] - also called the 'Red Blue Translator', comprised of a list of words or concepts to provide a broader understanding across the political spectrum; and **'Civil**

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[221] *AllSides*.2022. https://www.allsides.com/unbiased-balanced-news (Accessed 2022-04-06).

[222] About Us. *AllSides*. https://www.allsides.com/about (Accessed 2022-04-06).

[223] *AllSides for Schools.* 2022. https://allsidesforschools.org/ (Accessed 2022-04-06).

[224] Mismatch for Schools Summary and FAQs. *AllSides*. https://www.allsides.com/schools/mismatch-summary-and-faqs (Accessed 2022-04-06).

[225] Red Blue Translator. *AllSides*. https://www.allsides.com/translator (Accessed 2022-04-06).

Discourse'[226] - a partnership with Living Room Conversations to begin conversations with people from different sides of the same topic.

AllSides has a very transparent approach to the information they display. Firstly, they list their team[227], their role, and the media bias of each individual team member, except from the Advisory Board and the External Development members. Of the 38 team members, the media bias seems to be closely balanced, 5% identify as Left, 16% as Lean Left, 32% as Centre, 11% as Lean Right, 5% as Right, and 32% are not disclosed. Secondly, there is a high transparency of the practices and information the website displays, highlighted on their 'Editorial Philosophy'[228] and 'News Curation Principles'[229] that are in place to ensure that despite acknowledging media bias, they strive to provide an holistic overview across the political spectrum. Additionally, the website provides educational information on how to identify media bias[230], listing it in 12 types, and also 14 types of ideological bias.[231]

The methodology[232] used to rate media bias by *AllSides* lists five methods: 'Editorial Review' - performed by the website's team; 'Blind Bias Survey' - through an inquiry with people from different political leanings; 'Independent Research' - research or review by a team member of externally produced content, usually provides the initials bias; 'Third-Party Data' - academic research or surveys from parties who provide transparency on their methodology; 'Community Feedback' - enables the audience to vote on whether they agree or disagree on a scale with the displayed bias. Furthermore, *AllSides* includes a 'Confidence Level' scale on certainty they have on the rating they display, from Low, Medium or High. The website also goes into detail

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[226] Discourse Across Divides. *AllSides*. https://www.allsides.com/civil-discourse (Accessed 2022-04-06).

[227] Our Team. *AllSides*. https://www.allsides.com/our-team. (Accessed 2022-04-06).

[228] AllSides Editorial Philosophy. *AllSides*. https://www.allsides.com/about/editorial-philosophy (Accessed 2022-04-06).

[229] News Curation Principles. *AllSides*. https://www.allsides.com/about/news-curation-principles (Accessed 2022-04-06).

[230] How to Spot 12 Types of Media Bias. *AllSides*. https://www.allsides.com/media-bias/how-to-spot-types-of-media-bias (Accessed 2022-04-06).

[231] Beyond Left vs Right: 14 Types of Ideological Bias. *AllSides*. https://www.allsides.com/blog/beyond-left-vs-right-14-types-ideological-bias (Accessed 2022-04-06).

[232] How AllSides Rates Media Bias. *AllSides*. https://www.allsides.com/media-bias/media-bias-rating-methods (Accessed 2022-04-06).

on how it classifies the categories it attributes to the media organisations it rates: Left[233], Lean Left[234], Centre[235], Lean Right[236], and Right.[237]

Media Bias/ Fact Check

Media Bias/ Fact Check was founded in 2015 by Dave van Zandt, aiming at rating the "bias, factual accuracy, and credibility of media sources"[238] The platform has been cited on Reuters Fact Check, The Washington Post, NPR, etc.[239] - and claims to have been used as a resource for research by the University of Michigan and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, as well as having been referenced in a number of publications.[240]

The website states that its methodology includes a combination of objective and subjective measures to determine the slant of the media sources. The report attached to the analysis of each media source includes considerations on the way factual information is displayed and referencing to trustworthy sources. Additionally, as stated, the scale is adapted to the USA political setting, as there might be differences on the political spectrum when comparing countries or regions, for instance the USA and Europe.[241] *Media Bias/ Fact Check* looks at four criteria for its analysis:

(1) Biased Wording/ Headlines - "Does the source use loaded words to convey emotion to sway the reader. Do headlines match the story?"; (2) Factual/ Sourcing - "Does the source report factually and back up claims with well-sourced evidence"; (3) Story Choices - Does the source report news from both sides, or do they publish one side"; (4) Political Affiliation - How strongly does the source endorse a particular political ideology? Who do the owners support or donate to?".[242]

The scale the platform uses to visually transmit the bias of the analysed media source starts from the left on 'Extreme', 'Left', 'Left-Center', 'Least Biased', 'Right-Center', 'Right',

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[233] Left. *AllSides*. https://www.allsides.com/media-bias/left (Accessed 2022-04-06).

[234] Lean Left. *AllSides.* https://www.allsides.com/media-bias/left-center (Accessed 2022-04-06).

[235] Center. *AllSides*. https://www.allsides.com/media-bias/center (Accessed 2022-04-06).

[236] Lean Right. *AllSides*. https://www.allsides.com/media-bias/right-center (Accessed 2022-04-06).

[237] Right. *AllSides*. https://www.allsides.com/media-bias/right (Accessed 2022-04-06).

[238] About. *Media Bias/ Fact Check*. 2022. https://mediabiasfactcheck.com/about/ (Accessed 2022-04-06).

[239] ibid.

[240] ibid.

[241] Methodology. *Media Bias/ Fact Check.2022.* https://mediabiasfactcheck.com/methodology/ (Accessed 2022-04-13).

[242] ibid.

'Extreme'.[243] The position where the media is placed on this scale is achieved through the punctuation of zero to ten points on each of the previously mentioned four categories - 'Biased Wording/ Headlines', 'Factual/ Sourcing', 'Story Choices' and 'Political Affiliation'. In addition to this spectrum scale each media source includes a table on the level of factual reporting it has, ranging from 'Very High', 'High', 'Mostly Factual', 'Mixed', 'Low', and 'Very Low'.[244]

The transparency the platform exhibits is particularly pristine, as it details the processes of how it calculates the results it presents. Furthermore, it pledges to five principles: **(1)** 'A commitment to non-partisanship and fairness', **(2)** 'A commitment to transparency of sources', **(3)** 'A commitment to transparency of funding and organisation', **(4)** 'A commitment to transparency of methodology', **(5)** 'A commitment to open and honest corrections'.[245] The list corrections are included on a page, listing correcting from 2019 to 2022.[246] It is worth mentioning that the website lists references to the sources of information which informed the structure of its methodology, of which several are academic journals.

Platform Description & Preemptive analysis of 9GAG and Imgur

In this chapter we will introduce the two platforms we have chosen to collect data from: 9GAG and Imgur. We will explain their unique setting and characteristics, as well as the inner workings of each of the two, and how their similarities and differences make them ideal for data collection for the purpose of this particular paper. We will first set out to find the similarities that allow for a comparison and justify our choice of platforms, afterwards we will explore the differences, and we will finalise by reflecting on 9GAG and Imgur in relation to post-truth.

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[243] Methodology. *Media Bias/ Fact Check.2022.* https://mediabiasfactcheck.com/methodology/ (Accessed 2022-04-13).
[244] ibid.
[245] ibid.
[246] Changes/ Corrections. *Media Bias/ Fact Check*. 2022. https://mediabiasfactcheck.com/changes-corrections/ (Accessed 2022-04.13).

9GAG

9GAG is an online platform founded in 2008, whose users are called '9gaggers'.[247] The platform's content includes memes, images, GIFs[248], and videos. The language of the platform is English, and although it is not uncommon to see content or comments featuring other languages when selecting a non-English speaking country, it is clear that English is the dominant language of 9GAG. A study conducted in 2014 highlighted the dominance of English on the platform, stating that content produced in other languages receives wide criticism, while content in English is considered to be "a thrilling transnational experience".[249]

9GAG doesn't divulge information on its users, so there is no official information from the platform on the demographics of those who use the platform. Throughout the years some posts have appeared on 9GAG claiming to have the demographics of the platform, however these posts did not link to a webpage where the information could have been found. In 2015, a post[250] claimed that 57% of users were male, and 41% were under 24 and younger. We were not able to find more posts on the demographics of 9GAG after the said post from 2015. It is relevant to mention that this post did not get considerable engagement having only 34 upvotes, 5 downvotes and 14 comments. Moreover, we were not able to find this information elsewhere, and the said post seems to be legitimate and to have been created as a way to attract potential advertisers to the platform as it states "To learn more or to enquire about pricing, drop us a line at ad@9gag.com". The post claims that the source is 9GAG's Google Analytics and Quantcast.

While we were able to find the latest research from 2015 pointed to a majority of men being the demographics using 9GAG, we are not able to tell with certainty the current demographics so it is possible that in the seven years that have passed since the research was conducted the panorama has changed and perhaps now looks more evenly distributed. Although, since we cannot say for sure if it has or has not changed, we can only consider the implications of having a majorly young male audience on the platform - as it is more likely than not that at least a significant part of the data collected might have been posted by this demographics and that, while significant, poses low diversity.

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[247] How to be a better 9gagger. *9GAG*. 2021. https://9gag.helpshift.com/hc/en/3-9gag/faq/30-how-to-be-a-better-9gagger/ (Accessed 2022-03-15).

[248] GIF is an abbreviation for Graphics Interchange Format.

[249] Wagener, Albin. Creating Identity and Building Bridges Between Cultures: The Case of 9gag. *International Journal of Communication 8*. 2014, 1.

[250] 9GAG's User Demographics. *9GAG*. 2015. https://9gag.com/gag/aEG3pQx (Accessed 2022-03-28).

Hundreds or Thousands

The exact number is unknown, but one could estimate that 9GAG gets hundreds, possibly thousands, of posts every day. Surely some of them, if not a significant amount, will be reposts - but they still count as a new post since they are uploaded with no links or trail to the previous posts of the same content on the platform. Reposting is not encouraged, on the other hand original content is praised by 9GAG.[251] Tenured users and lurkers will recognise reposted content, and often call it out in the comments.

While most of the time reposts are not well received on the platform, there are exceptions to the rule - an example of this is the photo Beyoncé attempted to have deleted from the Internet. The photo led to a Streissand effect, and every now and then there is another repost of the photo which seems to be received with a grand majority of upvotes and light-hearted comments - despite it being a clear repost. This can be observed in a post from the 3rd of February 2022 titled "Yesterday was exactly 9 years since everyone traditionally congratulated Beyoncé's lawyer on winning the lawsuit to remove this photo from the Internet."[252]

As per the TOS of the platform on section "5.5. You Must Have Rights to the Content You Post"[253] Beyoncé's posts would have been taken down, but the reality is that the posts not only exist on the platform, as they continue to be posted, but are open to access to anyone who searches for them. This leads us to two questions. Can 9GAG filter copyrighted content? Does 9GAG enforce its TOS?

According to 9GAG's TOS,

"9GAG does not pre-screen any User Content, but reserves the right to remove, disallow, block or delete any User Content in its sole discretion (...) 9GAG also has the right - but not the obligation - to take remedial action in connection with any Objectionable Content Posted to the Service".[254]

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[251] Respect originality and creativity. *9GAG*. 2021. https://9gag.helpshift.com/hc/en/3-9gag/faq/33-respect-originality-and-creativity/ (Accessed 2022-04-13).

[252] Yesterday was exactly 9 years since everyone traditionally congratulated Beyoncé's lawyer on winning the lawsuit to remove this photo from the Internet. *9GAG*. 2022-02-03. https://9gag.com/gag/a51WOrE (Accessed 2022-04-13).

[253] End User Licence Agreement and Terms of Service. *9GAG*. 2020. https://about.9gag.com/tos (Accessed 2022-04-13).

[254] End User Licence Agreement and Terms of Service. *9GAG*. 2020. https://about.9gag.com/tos (Accessed 2022-04-13).

While 9GAG has a list of rules[255], to which users agree when signing up, perhaps due to the significant amount of content that is posted everyday on the site it is not able to remove the content that does not abide by those rules. Additionally, some rules are violated in plain sight in such a conspicuous way that an inattentive eye would not give it a second thought. An example of this is a post from the 9th of March 2021 titled "U BIG idiOT"[256], posted under the category 'Funny'. At first glance, it is clear what the title is, but when looking at the use of the capital letters the word 'bigot' is formed. So it would be fair to presume that while 9GAG has rules in place that enable it to take action when content is posted in violation of them, it does not always enforce those rules by taking action.

It is estimated that the platform receives over 12 million unique daily visitors and over 386 million monthly visitors.[257] Despite having a large number of visitors and habitual users, the platform is not user centred. By this we mean that visitors and users of 9GAG do not join the platform to follow other profiles and keep up with what they share, but instead it is the content that is put at the centre of the experience of scrolling. This form of deindividualised content is maintained by not only designing the visitor's experience around the different types of content the platform is a host of, but also by making it nearly impossible to find the original poster (OP) of each piece of content posted to the platform.

OP's profile is discoverable only if he/she comments below the post, as it will show 'OP' highlighted next to the user's name. While once it was possible to find the OP through the meme, 9GAG has removed this feature, so unless one knows the exact username a user has or the OP comments on his/her own post, it is not possible to find the source of the content. There are some posts on 9GAG referencing to this[258], where a user explains how this used to be a feature present on the post until it was removed, and what is the way of finding an OP now.[259] This change has created an almost anonymous environment on the platform, where one can scroll through many memes never knowing who is their OP. In this way it is relevant to consider that one could be viewing posts from the same OP without even knowing it.

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[255] 9GAG Rules. *9GAG*. https://9gag.helpshift.com/hc/en/3-9gag/section/11-9gag-rules/ (Accessed 2022-04-13).

[256] U BIG idiOT. *9GAG*. 2021. https://9gag.com/gag/a27ZPze (Accessed 2022-04-13).

[257] 9gag.com. *Site Rank Data*. 2022. https://siterankdata.com/9gag.com (Accessed 2022-03-15).

[258] How can you check the OP of a post?. *9GAG*. 2015-01-20. https://9gag.com/gag/amLEd19 (Accessed 2022-03-28).

[259] @fahr. *9GAG*. 2015-07-26. http://9gag.com/gag/amLEd19#cs_comment_id=c_143791384611908692 (Accessed 2022-03-28).

Anonymity is not only a feature or a preference for 9GAG. While the OP is associated with the meme or image it posts, the importance is not the 'who' but the 'what', the content that has been posted. At the same time, memes while a creation involving cultural units are neither created or shared with a copyright, nor is the copyright ever claimed to belong to the OP, and not to the user who reposted the content a second or third or fourth time. Memes thrive on a remix cultural realm, where copyright and proprietary attribution is not present. Memes are made by the community, for the community. Thus, reposting while not always encouraged due to its repetitiveness is neither forbidden nor looked down on.

Posting & Interacting on 9GAG

The sections the platform offers for users to post their content on are limited, so when making a post one must decide where to post it, only being allowed to choose one of the 64 sections. These are the following: 'Funny', 'Latest News', 'NSFW', 'Politics', 'Girl', 'WTF', 'Cryptocurrency', 'Anime & Manga', 'Random', 'Animals', 'Anime Waifu', 'Awesome', 'Car', 'Comic & Webtoon', 'Cosplay', 'Gaming', 'GIF', 'Girl Celebrity', 'League of Legends', 'Meme', 'Relationship', 'Savage', 'Video', 'Among Us', 'Apex Legends', 'Ask9GAG', 'Coronavirus', 'Countryballs', 'Cozy & Comfy', 'Crappy Design', 'Cyberpunk 2077', 'Drawing, DIY & Crafts', 'Elden Ring', 'Football', 'Food & Drinks', 'Formula 1', 'Guy', 'History', 'Horror', 'K-Pop', 'LEGO', 'Movie & TV', 'Music', 'NBA', 'Sport', 'PC Master Race', 'Pokémon', 'Resident Evil 8', 'Satisfying', 'Science & Tech', 'Star Wars', 'Superhero', 'Teens Can Relate', 'Travel & Photography', 'Wallpaper', 'Warhammer', 'Wholesome', 'Anime Wallpaper', 'Fashion & Beauty', 'Fortnite', 'Game of Thrones', 'Overwatch', 'PUBG', 'Dark Humor'.

Of the 64 sections 12 are related to gaming, either to games (Among Us, Apex Legends, League of Legends, etc) or the topic in general (Gaming, PC Master Race); and nine are dedicated to cultural artefacts, those being series (Game of Thrones), a film franchise (Star Wars) or genre (Anime & Manga). Posts are allocated to one of the 64 sections, but these are subject to change. New sections can be added when they gain significant relevance such as the addition of 'Coronavirus' and 'Cryptocurrency' sections.

While users are only allowed to choose one section per post, there is more liberty in adding extra tags to the post. They appear below the post and 9GAG does not state a maximum number of tags allowed. Tags can make the post be more easily found, as they act as a search word, aggregating the same content which uses the exact same tag allowing it to be found by 'Hot'

or 'Fresh' when searching by tag. Despite this it is not uncommon to see posts with no tags attached. It is worth noting that the search feature on 9GAG is not very user friendly. Searching for a tag on the search bar will not give the same results as searching a tag using the URL - when new content is posted to the platform it receives its unique URL link. When using the search bar the offered results will be endless. The results may include the words searched as a tag, a title, perhaps even include comments - and will very often include posts that do not feature the searched search words but that the platform will deem relevant, thus creating an endless scroll. 9GAG employs an upvote/ downvote system and displays the count of each for every post. This count is public and can also be seen without having to click on the post, simply scrolling through the homepage or one of the sections.

By using one of the aforementioned sections displayed by the platform, or using the search bar, visitors can filter through the content they prefer. In addition to the sections, the platform enables filtering by content: 'Hot' has content that has been getting significant number of upvotes/ comments lately; 'Trending' includes new content which is starting to get upvotes/ comments; 'Fresh' lists the content from most recent downwards; and 'Top' shows content by the most upvotes/ comments.

The content posted on the platform can be accessed by any visitor. To upvote/comment a visitor must create an account and become a user, to which only an email is required. The platform also features NSFW[260] and sensitive content. To be able to view these a visitor must log in. The platform relies solely on content created by the community, and acts as a place to simply host content. Visitors who do not engage or contribute to the community are commonly known as lurkers.[261]

Becoming a 9gagger & Lurkers

The fairly simple requirements to create an account allow users to have more than one account, by only having different email addresses. Thus, by not having stricter requirements for creating an account, like requiring a phone number or a secondary email address, users can easily have several accounts at the same time. Once access to the profile's username is found the profile's previous posts and comments are publicly available, and with time spent on the platform it creates a trail of information that is associated with that user.

Therefore periodically changing or deleting accounts is not unheard of on 9GAG in an attempt

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[260] NSFW is an abbreviation for Not Safe For Work.

[261] Lurkers is online slang for Internet users who passively observe.

of minimising the information a profile has and keeping sensitive information posted separate or somewhat limited in access, as well as limiting the odds of being 'doxxed'. Doxing refers to "the action of finding and publishing private information about someone on the Internet without their permission".[262] This can be seen when scrolling through posts who feature comments from 'deleted' users, who could have been banned or could have decided to 'ditch' their account. An account can get suspended or banned from 9GAG if a user breaks the platform's rules.[263] This can also lead to users creating new accounts.

Lurkers, as commonly known online, are usually visitors who do not engage on the platform. They may have an account, hence users can also be lurkers by simply being passive towards the content they consume, neither commenting nor upvoting/downvoting it.

Terms of Service Applied

As we will be conducting research on social media generated data, that is the content hosted by 9GAG, we have familiarised ourselves with the Terms of Service[264] and Privacy Policy of 9GAG as to not infringe it. We have found a clause on third-party use, which would overlay on our work.

While we have noted before that it is possible to find the OP, we are at odds to find all OPs of the memes we have collected, and while we consider that this information could prove useful to understand if the memes are balanced by poster or if there are posters of special relevance, we acknowledge that we do not have the resources to scroll through hundreds or thousands of comments per post in the hopes of possibly finding the original poster's username. So we have opted out of collecting the usernames of 9GAG OPs due to this technicality. As a result, we are unable to know whether there are recurrent 9gaggers behind the collected posts or whether the collected posts come from unique 9gaggers who only post once, so we will not be able to discuss the findings or implications that might have arisen from this data.

As such, we include this brief section to state the compliance of our research with 9GAG's TOS. While it does not anticipate the use of the platform's content for research, it mentions

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[262] Doxing. *Cambridge Dictionary*. 2022. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/doxing (Accessed 2022-03-28).

[263] Multiple failings: I can't upload/I can't comment anymore. Why? - 9GAG Help Center. 2020. https://9gag.helpshift.com/hc/en/3-9gag/faq/14-multiple-failings-i-can-t-upload-i-can-t-comment-anymore-why/ (Accessed 2022-03-28).

[264] TOS is an abbreviation for Terms of Service.

that by using 9GAG users may be providing third-parties information.[265] In this case we are, thus, considered to be a third-party. Additionally, 9GAG's Copyright policy mentions the fair use that "allows the use of a work for certain limited purposes such as criticism, commentary, parody, news reporting, research, and teaching."[266]

Imgur

Imgur is an image sharing platform founded in 2009, comprised of "the funniest, most informative and inspiring images, memes, GIFs, and visual stories"[267] according to the platform. Imgur promotes and harbours the community environment by naming its users 'Imgurians'.[268] Despite not being the only language in which posts or comments are written in, English is the dominant and main language on the platform.

Although following others' profiles and activities is possible on Imgur, profiles are not the centre of the user's way of interacting with the platform. The crux of the attraction to the platform is simply the content, not its individual users. Similar to 9GAG and unlike Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, Imgur is a content centred platform, where scrolling through the tags is a more common way to interact with the platform's content.

The platform gets over 31 million daily unique visitors, and over 991 million per month according to estimations.[269] Similarly to 9GAG the majority of users are predominantly male, specifically young men.[270] According to a study made in 2016 Imgur's audience consists of 83% male users with 71% being under 35 years old.[271] An internal study done by the site in 2020 shows different numbers.[272] It states that 64% of the platform's audience is male (not specifying whether only users or also visitors), 60% are between 18-34 years old. The average time spent on Imgur per week is over four hours, and it has a global reach of 300 million.[273]

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[265] Privacy Policy. *9GAG*. 2020. https://about.9gag.com/privacy (Accessed 2022-03-15).

[266] Copyright. *9GAG*. 2018. https://about.9gag.com/copyright (Accessed 2022-03-15).

[267] About. *Imgur*. https://imgurinc.com/about (Accessed 2022-03-15).

[268] ibid.

[269] Imgur.com. *Site Rank Data*. 2022. https://siterankdata.com/imgur.com (Accessed 2022-03-16).

[270] ibid.

[271] P. Mikal, Jude., E. Rice, Ronald., G. Kent, Robert., and N. Uchino, Bert. 100 million strong: A case study of group identification and deindividuation on Imgur.com. In *New Media & Society*, vol. 18. 2016, 6.

[272] Advertise - Imgur: The magic of the Internet. *Imgur*. https://imgurinc.com/advertise (Accessed 2022-03-28).

[273] Imgur Statistics, User Counts, Facts & News (2022). https://expandedramblings.com/index.php/imgur-statistics/ (Accessed 2022-05-16).

A Fun Place on the Internet

At the bottom of the homepage, as well as upon opening different sections, there is a small taskbar having a link to a page titled "Wellness"[274] which opens with the following: "Suicide Prevention & Emotional Health Resources: *Mental health is just as important as physical health. Needing help is nothing to be ashamed of.*"[275] Imgur seems to put considerable thought into designing the platform around creating a positive experience for both users and visitors, from carefully picking the tags that show up on the homepage to listing tips that can help towards a good mental health - each of these tips includes a reference in a different colour from the rest of the text referring to webpages that expand on the overall advice that is being given. The advice focuses on the following: "Hygiene", "Going Outside", "Music", "Cleanliness", "Avoid Isolation", "New Hobbies", and "Exercise".

Imgur seems to be aware that online spaces can be hostile and "a breeding ground for negativity"[276], and by acknowledging it[277], it presents itself as wanting to be part of the 'Net Positive' - an initiative that refers to a way of mitigating the negative impacts companies have on society, by promoting sustainable approaches that prioritise people's well-being.[278] In a short report produced by the company, Imgur claims to have interviewed over 2000 young Internet users, of who an overwhelming majority confided that they wished for the Internet, specifically social media to be a more positive place, that spending too much time on social media is bad for their mental health, and that these negative aspects of spending time online are not talked about enough.[279] The report from 2018 includes mentions of major social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Tumblr, Reddit, etc; and even

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[274] Community - Imgur: The magic of the Internet. *Imgur*. https://imgurinc.com/community-resources (Accessed 2022-03-28).

[275] ibid.

[276] Imgur. *Net Positive: How social media gets us down - and how community powered entertainment will pick us back up. Imgur: 2018.* https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59b44ed8ccc5c5736a2f490d/t/5aeb5e4188251b94310ec7f0/15253745314 63/Imgur_Happiness_Infographic.pdf (Accessed 2022-03-28).

[277] ibid.

[278] Net Positive: The Future of Sustainably Business. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. 2015. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/net_positive_the_future_of_sustainable_business. (Accessed 2022-04-26).

[279] Imgur. *Net Positive: How social media gets us down - and how community powered entertainment will pick us back up. Imgur: 2018.* https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59b44ed8ccc5c5736a2f490d/t/5aeb5e4188251b94310ec7f0/15253745314 63/Imgur_Happiness_Infographic.pdf (Accessed 2022-03-28).

presents a scale where these platforms are rated from the ones that cause users to feel better to the ones who have the opposite effect.[280]

Posting & Interacting on Imgur

Imgur fosters the existence of communities and bonding among users, often referred to as 'Imgur family', 'Imgur community' or 'Imgurians'.[281] The user on Imgur is easier to find than on 9GAG, and the search bar even states to search by "Images, #tags, @users oh my"[282], indicating what can be searched and encouraging the search of users by referring to it on the search bar.

Imgur features tags[283] appearing with a #, although the platform does not present how many tags there are. The homepage displays only 26 tags: 'Cats', 'Funny', 'Aww', 'Oc', 'Awesome', 'Coffee', 'Memes', 'Gaming', 'Dog', 'Unmuted', 'Artcrawl', 'Staff Picks', 'Science And Tech', 'Parkour', 'Dress Up Your Pet', 'Crab', 'Wholesome', 'Uplifting', 'Current Events', 'Movies And Tv', 'Dungeons And Dragons', 'Valentine's Day', 'Sci Fi', 'Pizza', 'Hippo', 'Panda'.[284] An interesting detail to note is how Imgur has chosen to feature mostly tags which would be associated with a positive feeling, by the use of adjectives such as 'Funny', 'Awesome' or 'Wholesome' as one of the featured tags; thus keeping tags which would perhaps be more divisive barely represented, such as 'Current Events'.

However, 26 is not the total number of tags on Imgur. Each of the 26 tags appears with the number of features posted corresponding to it. The number of tags is hard to know, since Imgur does not display it and only three suggestions appear on the search bar upon starting to type - the tags are identifiable on the URL link since they appear after "/t/"[285]. The platform does, however, provide the number of posts under a specific tag when searched.

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[280] Imgur. *Net Positive: How social media gets us down - and how community powered entertainment will pick us back up. Imgur: 2018.* https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59b44ed8ccc5c5736a2f490d/t/5aeb5e4188251b94310ec7f0/15253745314 63/Imgur_Happiness_Infographic.pdf (Accessed 2022-03-28).

[281] P. Mikal, Jude., E. Rice, Ronald., G. Kent, Robert., and N. Uchino, Bert. 100 million strong: A case study of group identification and deindividuation on Imgur.com. In *New Media & Society*, vol. 18. 2016, 6.

[282] *Imgur.* 2022. https://imgur.com/ (Accessed 2022-03-22).

[283] Tags appear as #tags.

[284] ibid.

[285] *Imgur.* 2022. https://imgur.com/t/memes?source=featured_tag_module (Accessed 2022-03-22).

The homepage includes options of listing by 'Popular', 'Newest', 'Best', and 'Random', and within each of these it can be further filtered by 'Most Viral', 'User Submitted', and 'Highest Scoring'.[286]

Upon writing a search term the bar expands offering three results for search words on images, three results for tags and three results for users which match the written search word - the search bar also proposes results matching to what has been written. If we select on one of the first three options, we are directed to a post that has the search term as the title. If we select one of the three tags, the platform presents the number of posts made under that tag and underneath the posts matching to it. If we select one of the last three options we are directed to the profile of the selected user.

Under the title of each post there is the name of the user who posted it, which is as aforementioned clickable and leads to the profile of the user. User's profile is public, so it is open to other users as well as to visitors. If we are logged in, we are able to follow the user and initiate a chat with him/her. If we are on the platform as a visitor these two aforementioned features are locked out, but the posts, favourites, comments and about are still visible. On the about option there is the date the user joined Imgur, the trophies he/she has earned, a bio if the user chooses to write one, the internet points, medallions earned and level of notoriety. Internet points are earned through upvotes on posts, which directly increase the internet points of the user on Imgur.[287] Notoriety is directly linked to internet points, "Each time another Imgurian gives you an upvote, your reputation score increases. As your reputation score increases, you rise the ranks of notoriety."[288]

Each post includes the number of upvotes and downvotes, comments and views it has, as well as the title, an optional description, the date it was posted, the user who posted it, the tags used on the post by which the post can be found, and the internet points - "the number of downvotes subtracted from the number of upvotes".[289] In case of a post being recent there will be shown how many hours ago it was posted, followed by the days, and if the post is older it will include the day and month.

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[286] *Imgur*. 2022. https://imgur.com/ (Accessed 2022-03-22).

[287] Internet Points and Notoriety. *Imgur*. https://help.imgur.com/hc/en-us/articles/203610939-Internet-Points-and-Notoriety-Levels (Accessed 2022-03-29).

[288] ibid.

[289] ibid.

Becoming an Imgurian

To become a user one must provide an email and a phone number, which is then verified. This combination ensures that it is harder for Imgur users to have more than one account at a time, unless they have two phone numbers.

Rules & Good Practices Terms of Service Applied

As aforementioned in the previous section regarding 9GAG, it is important to be familiar with the platform's TOS. Under Intellectual Property any content posted to Imgur grants it an irrevocable licence, including if the content is deleted.[290] By collecting data from the website, we are using user generated content[291], to which the nature of our research falls under the conditions of the fair use law anticipated on Imgur's TOS, granted we will be complying with the request to include the content collected with a clear attribution as either "Imgur" or "courtesy of Imgur" besides the content.[292]

Comparison of 9GAG to Imgur

On a macro point of view 9GAG and Imgur have similarities in the type of content they host, how they operate, and the possible interactions with said content. These similarities are enough to be able to conduct a comparison between the two in terms of analysis of data from the platforms, and how data displays the interactions it enables with the content as well as between the users. All of this makes 9GAG and Imgur the ideal platforms for data collection and further analysis for what this paper seeks to explore.

Firstly, both platforms have a very explicit manner of including 'fun' as an innate aspect that is to be had while experiencing them. The slogan of 9GAG is "Go Fun The World"[293] - it illustrates what the goal for the visitors or users' experience is expected to be 'a place where they can find fun and create it as well with and for a community of people from all over the world'. Imgur's slogan "The magic of the Internet" stresses that 'Imgur is the easiest way to discover and enjoy the magic of the Internet', indicating that 'you will always find something on Imgur to make you smile, brighten your day, and have fun'[294]. The platform states that it is

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[290] Terms of Service. *Imgur*. 2019. https://imgur.com/tos (Accessed 2022-03-16).

[291] UGC is an abbreviation for User Generated Content. It is as it appears on Imgur's Terms of Service.

[292] Terms of Service. *Imgur*. 2019. https://imgur.com/tos (Accessed 2022-03-16).

[293] About. *9GAG*. 2022. https://about.9gag.com/ (Accessed 2022-03-15).

[294] The magic of the Internet. *Imgur*. https://imgurinc.com/ (Accessed 2022-05-16).

a place 'where you will find the funniest, most informative and inspiring images, memes, GIFs, and visual stories'.[295] This way Imgur expresses that 'fun' is at the core of what they hope their users experience.[296] There's a certain implicit levity in attaching fun to the platforms, as it alludes to a place of no malice or hostility.

Secondly, the core of the platforms is image hosting, and while they do host videos too, both are overwhelmingly image based, including a large amount of memes - each having their own way of categorising them by requiring them to be posted to an available section, not to the whole platform. Although Imgur has more daily and monthly visitors than 9GAG, both remain the top platforms for image sharing, particularly memes. Moreover, there is a sense of community in being part of them, on 9GAG users are referred to as 9gaggers, and on Imgur users are Imgurians - there is also an incentive to becoming a member, a wider range of interactions is permitted once logged in. Furthermore, there are minor differences in the available comments under a post for visitors on one hand, and for users on the other. Comments including certain words that are not forbidden to use on the platforms, but are harsh or offensive in a way, thus censored, can be seen only by users once logged in.

Thirdly, both platforms have a scrolling homepage where the posts are displayed. When compared, although similar, homepages of the two platforms show clear differences. While Imgur has a very welcoming page, full of colours and soft lines, and choosing tags one could associate with calm or happiness, 9GAG appears as the complete opposite. The homepage is black, the only colours come from the posts or the top bar in the form of emojis, and the five sections that appear first by opening the side menu are 'Funny', 'Latest News', 'NSFW', 'Politics' and 'Girl'. Of these five sections three could be understood as causing mixed feelings, being that 'NSFW' implicitly conveys sensitive content.

Finally, content is certainly the crux of 9GAG and Imgur, while the latter does allow profile following it is clear that there's no centrality in following certain users because of the content they might post - like it is the case on some other social media platforms, for instance, Twitter, Facebook or Instagram. When it comes to becoming a user on any of the platforms, they differ on smaller technicalities - Imgur requires a phone number and an email for account creation, while 9GAG only requires an email. Here we note a clear distinction between 9GAG and Imgur, as the former makes it so it is nearly impossible to find the OP of a post unless he or

[295] The magic of the Internet. *Imgur*. https://imgurinc.com/ (Accessed 2022-05-16).
[296] Terms of Service. *Imgur*. 2019. https://imgur.com/tos (Accessed 2022-03-16).

she comments, while the latter facilitates that the OP can be found by including it on the post and encourages the search of users by referring to it on the search bar. The common ground is that on both platforms all commenters' usernames are displayed, and unless the account has been deleted, profiles can be found through the comments users make.

Overall we consider that the minimal differences between the platforms do not overshadow the grand similarities which are useful for us, such as the similar ways of interacting with content, their great incidence on memes, and the availability of content to visitors and not only users.

One aspect we must highlight, not only because both platforms give special recognition to it, but also because it is related to how discourse is discussed online and how it constructs meaning. The community is central to 9GAG and Imgur, as we have explained when referring to 9gaggers and Imgurians - the sense of having a place where one can share ideas and have a discussion with others acts as an incentive that foments the activity on the platforms - essentially community members keep the platforms alive.

As aforementioned, memes are not a mere innocuous image with text or a joke, but a way to discuss ideas. This part of the discussion happens through the interaction between the poster's ideas and the interpreters, the users of the platform - through comments or upvotes/downvotes. These interactions have meaning, they reveal what the community thinks of the ideas of the meme in an explicit (comments) or implicit (upvotes/downvotes) way. On both 9GAG and Imgur users engage in this discussion of the ideas the meme is exhibiting through upvoting, downvoting, and commenting. Nonetheless it is important to stress that Imgur does not display downvotes while 9GAG does, as well as that both platforms have content that is hidden, only they call it differently - on 9GAG it is called 'Sensitive Content' while on Imgur it is called 'Mature Content'.[297]

Commenting, upvoting or downvoting a post is also the way meaning is negotiated, how the contingency of different ideas in different memes is interpreted in relation to how it constructs and represents reality - and which realities are set apart, and which are fully 'baked'. There is such a surplus of memes, and ideas, that one can pick and choose the one that is closest to what one perceives to be the reality. There is, thus, an infinite supply of 'truths' spread through memes in a market, such is the diversity and frequency of this production of memes that it becomes hard at times to find a meme one just saw a few hours ago, if it has not been saved.

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[297] Community Rules. *Imgur*. https://imgur.com/rules#mature (Accessed 2022-03-28).

In a way, these platforms serve as a site for the free discussion of ideas that pertain to the construction of reality, of those who constitute reality, and their representations - memes as cultural units refer to moments of reality and can also, thus, influence how said reality is viewed.

Data Collection

Initially we had collected memes from 9GAG on the 28th of January 2022, a total of 98 memes using four search words. However, we soon realised that using the method of researching the search words in the search bar as we had done on Imgur did not give us the accurate results on 9GAG, so we had to restart the collection of the 9GAG memes to ensure that we were only collecting the memes which had been tagged with the search word we were aiming for. While searching through the search bar on 9GAG, we realised the platform offers an endless list of memes, which probably matches somehow with the searched term, but the search bar does not enable doing it by tag, date or any other filtering system, so we found ourselves with an endless scrolling page. We understood that we would have to employ an iterative approach to collecting our data - as our understanding of the subject and its appearance of the platforms grew, so too did our understanding of how to collect data in a manner that would provide us with a sufficient data saturation in regards to the the Canada Convoy Protest.

To exemplify, by typing 'Canada'[298] in the search bar - this is what the URL looks like "https://9gag.com/search/?query=canada" - and the result is an endless supply of memes. By searching through the URL bar[299] - which looks like this "https://9gag.com/tag/canada" - we are given limited results which we can list, ordered by the 'Hot' or 'Fresh' section. The second way of searching on 9GAG displays only the memes in which the user tagged the search word we are searching for, so we end up with a more accurate way of collecting data, as well as with a limited supply of memes.

We will further explain how the collection we are using, the accurate one, was performed on 9GAG and Imgur. Additionally, we decided to add new search words to the search as it is possible some search words resulted with a great deal of memes on one platform, but none on the other, but were still significant and relevant. This is the case of 'Flutruxklan', a search word we found tagged on a post that included various other search words we had initially used for

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[298] 9GAG: Go Fun The World - G. *9GAG*. 2022. https://9gag.com/search/?query=canada (Accessed 2022-03-29).

[299] Best 30+ Canada fun on 9GAG - G. *9GAG*. 2022. https://9gag.com/tag/canada (Accessed 2022-03-29).

the data collection, such as 'Truckers' and 'Truckers Canada', as these were common terms that were being used to refer to the Canada Trucker Protests at the time.

Imgur

On the 25th of February 2022 we collected memes from Imgur in regards to the Canada Convoy Protest posted between the 22nd of January and 23rd of February 2022, the timeframe when the protest was ongoing. We selected tags or search words to narrow down our search using the following: 'Truckers', 'Freedom Convoy', 'Truckers Canada' and 'Truckers for Freedom' - all of these were terms used during the protest to refer to it so we hoped to collect a significant amount of memes with these search words.

The search words, as mentioned, were found in an iterative fashion, we started with search words we knew to be connected to the Canada Convoy Protest, such as 'Truckers' and 'Truckers Canada', the others have come mostly from tags used in the posts we found from the initial data collection with the two first keywords, and by reading some comments and understanding how the protests were being referred to, such as 'Freedom Convoy' and 'Truckers for Freedom'. The more we searched for memes related to the Canada Convoy Protest, the more tags we found. The same process was conducted on 9GAG, for instance, some tags were found initially on Imgur, such as 'Flutruxklan' but when searching it on 9GAG there were no results. Although, we searched the same search words on both platforms.

In addition, we collected from four more, which we found to be commonly tagged on posts we had collected with the first four search words we used: 'Flutruxklan', 'Truckers Vaccine', 'Ottawa Canada', and 'Ottawa Truckers' on the 21st and 22nd of March 2022. The total amount of memes collected using these eight search words was 168 memes, of which 26 were either a video or a GIF. Individually there are 168 posts, but often we found more than one image being posted on the same post on Imgur, which is not uncommon for the platform. These 168 memes were posted by 101 users.

We found 28 memes on 'Truckers', two on 'Truckers Canada', 42 on 'Freedom Convoy', one on 'Ottawa Canada', two on 'Ottawa Truckers', and 93 on 'Flutruxklan'. For the tag 'Truckers for Freedom' and 'Truckers Vaccine' we found zero memes. Upon revisiting the memes, we discovered eight had been removed so we could not collect further information on them. From the rest we then compiled the URL link, date of upload, title of the post, original poster, number of views, internet points and comments, and to which kind of information source it matched to

each individual meme under each category. Regarding the categorisation of the kind of information source we will further explain it in the next section, where we present and explain the various criteria through a table. We will also provide an overview of all the data collected.

9GAG

On the 22nd and 23rd of February 2022, we collected the memes from 9GAG using the same search words we had used to search on Imgur. The result was a total of 125 memes, of which 24 were either a video or a GIF, and two were marked as Sensitive Content so a log in was required to view them. We did not find any meme that has been removed upon revisiting the memes to collect further information, such as the URL link, date of upload, title of the post, section on 9GAG to which it has been uploaded, number of upvotes and downvotes, total of comments, and the kind of information source the post was.

Of the 125 memes, 70 were found on 'Truckers', 52 on 'Freedom Convoy', two on 'Ottawa Canada', and one on 'Ottawa Truckers'. Zero were found on 'Truckers Canada', 'Truckers for Freedom', 'Truckers Vaccine', and 'Flutruxklan'. We then realised we needed to collect further information, which would fit under the constructs of information source quantity used to categorise the data collected - which we will develop on the data categorisation section as we have adapted a table of constructs of information to help us rigorously select the data we will then analyse.

Comments

As for the comments of each post from each platform, we have decided it is relevant to include them, as they can provide further insight at how other users interact with the post and its discourse, in particular if there is agreement/disagreement with it and how contingency and continuity are in play. By this we mean if the ideas represented in the meme are challenged or accepted. We have, therefore, outlined a few rules that will help us collect the comments we will add to the analysis of each post we have selected. Our comment selection process is as follows:

(1) Include only up to two comments from the first ten comments that show on the predefined listing of comments of each platform - on 9GAG the predefined view of comments is by 'Hot'; on Imgur the predefined view is 'Best'. Our rationale for this choice is that it is more likely

that these are the comments which garnered more engagement, and also possibly a lower amount of users and visitors switch to another option when reading through the comments.

(2) Prioritise the comments which pertain information about the 'left', the 'right' or politics in general, and which we can extract information beyond agreement or disagreement, by this we aim to find the comments which provide an additional interpretation of the meme. It is not uncommon to find comments somewhat unrelated to the post, or troll comments - these we will disregard, unless relevant to this criteria.

(3) Only the main comment counts for analysis, and not the replies to the individual comment. The comments are not the main focus of our analysis, and provide only an additional dimension into how the users engaged with that meme. Unlike comments, replies only show in the order that were posted - and at times within the replies there are lengthy discussions about the comment. As the comments are not the core of the meme analysis we consider this exhaustive process of diving into the replies of the selected comments, though interesting, not pragmatic for this research due to the resources we have.

Data Categorisation

A Guide to Data Categorisation

As a way to exemplify how the data categorisation was done of the collected memes, we will include here an example of a categorisation done to one meme from 9GAG and another from Imgur. Some of the collected information was not related to the constructs relating to the information sources table. For instance, the title, date of upload, Original Poster (OP), URL link, and section meme was uploaded to, was not anticipated to be collected from our adapted table from Kitchen's - however, we found this information to be equally as relevant as the information pertaining to the constructs. However, we did collect upvotes, downvotes and comments as pertaining to the information sources constructs; and we used the calculation of *internet points* exhibited on Imgur to understand popularity, having recreated the same - by calculating upvotes minus downvotes totaling internet point - this calculation will be further explained on the data selection section.

Information related to the constructs includes: **(I) Information source engagement/ popularity** - number of upvotes, downvotes, comments, views and internet points (the two former are only available for Imgur); **(II) Information source dispersion** - collection of people

and organisations mentioned on the memes, and assessment of their political slant; **(III)** **Information source frequency** - collection of news sources cited and included in the memes; **(IV) Information source quantity** - number of different total news sources cited and included in the memes.

Information source frequency and quantity gives us an overview of the news sources cited and their frequency on a holistic view of all of the data collected from 9GAG and Imgur - it proves more relevant when looking at the data collection of each of the platforms, instead of an individual meme. The following is a guide of the information collected:

> Meme number in the collection. URL of the meme. Title. Date of upload (and section uploaded to if on 9GAG). Category of meme according to our categorisation. Number of upvotes. Number of downvotes. Number of comments. (and Number of views; and Number of total score if on Imgur). (Date of access).

In some cases, we have also collected additional information, such as the subtype of meme within the categories we've outlined (for instance, 'picture' as part of Original Meme), or the people mentioned on the meme in the case of a Tweet (for instance, Dr. Genevieve Eastabrook, or @placentadoc on Twitter) - and the OP, views and total score on Imgur as these measures are only available on Imgur. Here we present the categorisation applied to the first meme collected of 9GAG and Imgur respectively:

> ***9GAG No. 1.*** https://9gag.com/gag/aM4Emjx. Title: "24 years old and in control of 70 tons". Uploaded on Feb 23 in Funny. Category: Original Meme (picture). 28 upvotes, 22 downvotes, 41 comments (Date of access: March 22, 2022).
>
> ***Imgur No. 1.*** Imgur: https://imgur.com/gallery/BaaW27O. Title: "Truckers Assets Frozen!". Date: Feb 22. Uploaded by: markdotlehtonen. Category: Twitter (Dr. Genevieve Eastabrook, @placentadoc). 2522 views, 4 comments, 49 total score - 49 upvotes, 0 downvotes (Date of access: April 11, 2022).

By having this set of criteria for the categorisation of the data we are able to correlate several points of collected data to the overarching context of the Canada Convoy Protest, as well as understanding if there are patterns in terms of popularity on the platforms and the kind of engagement and agreement the memes garnered. For instance, the collection of the date of the post provides us with information on the timeline of the protest during that time frame and its developments. The collection of the usernames of the OPs on Imgur - since 9GAG's does not

display them next to the post - enables us to understand, assuming each account is one person, the frequency of which the posts come from the same account. The collection of the category of memes facilitates the understanding of which kind of memes are being posted and if there is a correlation to popularity per the category with the most posts, and which category was the most popular per platform on memes about the Canada Convoy Protest.

Data Selection

Popularity and engagement are two different concepts, both can be measured, although the latter can be more difficult to grasp. We found that 9GAG and Imgur might have different approaches to what these two concepts mean, and while they do not directly state what each means to them and how each influences their curation and algorithm - it is certain that they do. So we have decided to define these two terms ourselves, and use the measuring tools each platform displays to collect information about the memes - which will then inform our data selection.

By popularity, we will understand agreement and the overall virality of the memes in the platform, which means the meme that has a ratio of mostly upvotes, and few to none downvotes - thus indicating that the users and visitors of the platform agree with the meme. If a meme has an equivalent amount of upvotes and downvotes, we will consider that there is disagreement in the platform, and that the meme is not overall popular on that platform. By engagement, we will consider that total amount of interaction with the meme, measured through the upvotes, downvotes and comments - all the active actions a user can partake on the platform. Although, we will mostly focus on the number of comments as the popularity already covers the ratio of upvotes and downvotes.

Despite having collected the number of upvotes, downvotes, comments, and views and internet points when available, we will be primarily focussing on the measure of what is popular on which platform - how the agreement creates a moment of shared common sense knowledge on the identity of a group represented on the memes, and a platform engages in a negotiation of discourse about the reality - the significant ratio of upvotes when compared to the downvotes. However, we will also use these measures of the comments per meme.

We present, then, the criteria for the data selection on each platform: **(a)** Highest ratio of upvotes when accounting for the total of upvotes and downvotes; **(b)** Most engagement through comments; and **(c)** Relevance in relation to our problem formulation evidencing the Canada

Convoy Protest, and constructions and representations of the political 'left' and 'right' - a total of six memes will be analysed, three from each platform.

Additionally, we have decided to exclude memes in video format which include over two minutes, and in case of them being on the top of the list on our criteria we will choose the next meme. We consider the memes over two minutes would provide an unbalanced analysis when analysing memes which have only a picture or no text, which would lead to a larger amount of data to discuss later in only one of the platforms as videos are not very common, so we have opted out of selecting memes which have over two minutes to avoid a potential unbalance in data analysed of only one platform. We have also found that some memes have exactly the same number of upvotes, downvotes or comments, so there is not one that stands out - in this case we have decided on one of them by looking at the relevance and comments - as they present the same popularity. The results of the data selection according our criteria are the following:

(a) 9GAG

Meme no. 32 | https://9gag.com/gag/amgPOP2 Title: "Honk". Uploaded on Feb 10 in Funny. Category: Meme template. 5500 upvotes, 471 downvotes, 750 comments (Date of access: March 22, 2022).

Meme no. 63 | https://9gag.com/gag/azem11N Title: "Ohhhhhhh Canada!". Uploaded on Jan 29 in Funny. Category: Original meme. 4200 upvotes, 259 downvotes, 482 comments (Date of access: March 23, 2022).

Meme no. 113 | https://9gag.com/gag/aYrygb0 Title: "Truck Trudeau". Uploaded on Jan 29 in Politics. Category: Meme template (altered video). 467 upvotes, 86 downvotes, 55 comments (Date of access: March 23, 2022).

(b) Imgur

Meme no. 81 | https://imgur.com/t/flutruxklan/kwzMNs2 Title: "We need more of them to be this way.". Date: Feb 14. Uploaded by: DWolf. Category: Twitter (Mrs. Betty Bowers, @BettyBowers). 121888 views, 133 comments, 2150 total score - 2260 upvotes, 110 downvotes (Date of access: April 11, 2022).

Meme 148 | https://imgur.com/t/flutruxklan/HuQQuch Title: "FluTruxKlan". Date: Feb 3. Uploaded by: HeShallKnowYourWaysAsIfBornToThem. Original meme. 157822 Views, 456

comments, 1900 internet points - 2087 upvotes, 187 downvotes (Date of access: April 11, 2022).

Meme no. 149 | https://imgur.com/t/flutruxklan/aZjqTQw Title: "The terrorists need to be arrested already.". Date: Feb 2. Uploaded by: rainbowsandunicorns575. Category: Other (Instagram posts by theottowadiaries). 112379 views, 495 comments, 2426 total score - 2506 upvotes, 80 downvotes (Date of access: April 11, 2022).

Ethical Considerations

It is important to consider the ethical implications of using user generated content (UGC) collected from online platforms for research, especially if this UGC was not primarily created with the purpose of being analysed. Additionally, considerations about the information collected should be made to ensure that only necessary information is collected, as well as explaining the need for that collection and its relevance in the research.

This being said, as stated before our reading of the TOS found paragraphs on both platforms which state that by posting content on the respective platforms users are waiving their copyright rights to the platforms, who then hold a licence of the content. Furthermore, both platforms state the permission of the content under fair use, for which our paper qualifies for.

We will collect the image/ video/ GIF of the post and its title, both of these components are essential for the analysis. Upon testing we have found that while on Imgur it is not possible to find a post by searching its title, on 9GAG the title can be used to find a post. We do not find this to be an issue as the focus and core of our analysis will be using publicly available information and only the data that is going to be analysed will be collected, disregarding all other.

On 9GAG we will also collect the number of upvotes, downvotes, and comments; and on Imgur we will collect the internet points - which are the total number of upvotes minus downvotes - upvotes, downvotes, views, and comments. Exceptionally, on Imgur we will collect the usernames of original posters, as they are available, and we consider them to be important to understand how many users are responsible for the posts, if there is a significant discrepancy between the amount of posts among users, and if it is significant enough for us to observe a filter bubble effect on the posts about the Canada Convoy Protest. The collection of usernames on 9GAG will not be done, as the platform does not include the OP's username on each post and the only chance of finding it is by combing the comments in the hopes of finding a potential

comment the OP might have posted - due to the large amount of comments and replies to comments we have decided not to include this.

Additionally, we will be collecting some comments from each of the selected memes for the analysis. We find them to be relevant in understanding how the comments are positioned in relation to the meme. However, the comments we will be including in our analysis will be carefully selected according to our comment selection process, and will not feature the comments as the centre of the analysis, instead as an additional dimension.

As a final note, we are aware of some of the limitations our choices carry from the theoretical apparatus, to the data collection and selection. However, we believe that at this time it is best to leave the limitations section for the conclusion, as we will have a greater understanding of the limitations of our paper once we are through with the analysis of our data and its subsequent discussion. We will, then, add the limitations to the end of this paper.

Analysis

In this chapter we will analyse three memes from each platform, starting with the memes from 9GAG followed by the ones from Imgur, according to the criteria we have established in the data section. A total of six memes will be analysed, as well as two comments per meme.

9GAG

"Honk"[300]

Meme number 32 of our 9GAG data collection[301] found under the search word 'truckers', titled "Honk", was posted on the platform on the 10th of February 2022, to the 'Funny' section. It was categorised as a meme template (MT) in our data categorisation, as it can be found on meme generating websites such as *imgflip*.[302] The meme is tagged with "freedom convoy 2022" and "canada". Until the 22nd of March 2022, the meme garnered 5500 upvotes, 471 downvotes and 750 comments - qualifying it as the most agreed-upon meme of our 9GAG data collection.

The meme is composed of three conversational lines that are placed vertically one after the other. In the first and the third conversational lines there are two speakers. The first speaker is identified as the USA as seen by the attachment of the USA's flag to the speaker, and the second as Canada as seen by the attachment of the Canadian flag to the speaker. In the second conversational line we find a picture of trucks appearing to be in thick

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[300] Honk. *9GAG*. 2022-02-10. https://9gag.com/gag/amgPOP2 Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 1. (Accessed 2022-04-18).

[301] 9GAG data collection can be found in Appendix C.

[302] *imgflip*. 2022. https://imgflip.com/memegenerator (Accessed 2022-05-26).

fog tinted in red. Although there seems to be a disconnect between the first and the third conversational line by inserting a picture of the trucks, this has been done in order to contextualise the cultural unit and leave a cue in relation to the situational setting depicted in the meme. The cultural unit used to create this meme is a scene from the series *Seinfeld,* episode 142, named "The Chicken Roaster".

The meme is a meme template (MT) known as "Kramer, What's Going On In Here?".[303] In the scene[304] depicted in the meme, the first speaker, Jerry, sees a strong red light coming from Kramer's, the second speaker of the meme, door spy hole. Jerry knocks on the door and is taken aback by an even stronger light as Kramer opens the door. Puzzled by what must be happening inside his apartment, Jerry questions Kramer about the red light, to which Kramer replies that the red light is due to a chicken roaster sign hanging outside his window. Jerry asks if he can shut the shades, to which Kramer replies that they are already shut.

The use of the cultural unit to comment on the Canada Convoy Protest lends from both the characteristics of the characters from the series, and the situation of the scene itself. Kramer is an irrational, spontaneous, chaotic, and humorous character, who often gets into unbelievable situations. Jerry often plays the straight-man in the series, and even though he himself can be ridiculous, he appears more rational than Kramer in the series. This has the implications that there is an attribution of an active role to Canada and a more passive one to the USA, as Jerry oftentimes simply reacts to Kramer's antics. This understanding of the cultural unit amends the interpretation of relationship between the speakers, in that they are to be understood as Jerry/ USA and Kramer/ Canada simultaneously.

There is a coherency added to the framing, and thereby to the interpretation of the meme, by the salient red light that is a main feature of the cultural unit in the first and third conversational lines as well as in the second conversational line featuring the trucks, tying to put the cultural unit together with the picture of the trucks.

The distance between the two speakers also tells us about the relationship between the two involved nations. In the scene the characters are close and the use of a close-up shot in the meme suggests a familiar relationship between them. The familiarity and distance between the speakers, Jerry/ USA and Kramer/ Canada is also mirrored in the way that both the nations and

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[303] Kramer, What's Going On In There?. *Know Your Meme*. 1996. https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/kramer-whats-going-on-in-there (Accessed 2022-04-18).

[304] Seinfeld: Jerry & Kramer - Chicken Roaster Sign. *YouTube*. 2009. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q40fKsRsHFU (Accessed 2022-04-18).

the characters in the series are neighbours, creating an ever closer tie between the use of the cultural unit and the situational setting. As for the vertical dimension of the point of view, the two speakers are positioned at eye-level, which indicates a level of symbolic equality between them. The two speakers interact with each other and are positioned opposed to one another, which indicates a dialogic ambience.

The horizontal dimension of the point of view shows the two speakers portrayed both frontally and from the back depending on the conversational line. In the first conversational line we see Jerry/ USA positioned with his front towards the interpreter and towards the other speaker who is visible only from the back in it. However, focus shifts in the third conversational line putting Kramer/ Canada with their front to the interpreter, while seeing only the back of the Jerry/ USA.

There are not many linguistic features in the meme. The title of the post is "Honk", honking being a sound a truck makes. Honk within internet culture has connotations to another type of meme that has to do with "clown world"[305] that is used to mock/ satirise the irrationality of the world, often in connection with left wing policies or beliefs. The use of the "Honk" in this context, however, is ambiguous. In the first conversational line there is a grammatical question, and in the third an answer to the question. The question is made by using an interrogative pronoun by Jerry/ USA. The answer consists of a declarative sentence with Kramer/ Canada stating: "Revolution, Jerry", implying that it is a revolution that is happening in Kramer's apartment and simultaneously in Canada. The sentence includes a punctuation mark of a comma, which shows basic literacy of the producer.

We should also consider, however, how the grammatical features can be understood through the experiential, relational and expressional values of the visual elements in the meme. The characters themselves, their characteristics can be understood as an extension of expressional values normally found in language and that has to do with social identities. The character Kramer/ Canada carries the expressional values connected with humour, chaos, and irrationality, whereas Jerry/ USA carries the expressional values of rationality and being less active. The relations between the two speakers should also be understood through the experiential values they carry. We need to know that there is a new ascription of characteristics to the two speakers due to the situational context - Canada being defined by its association with

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305 Clown Pepe / Honk Honk / Clown World. *Know Your Meme.* 2018.
https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/clown-pepe-honk-honk-clown-world (Accessed 2022-05-26).

Kramer and Jerry with the USA. The use of different discursive types plays into this new discursive construction of the speakers. The relational values we see should be understood through the familiarity that comes from the nations being neighbours, which defines their social relation.

We can identify several types of discourses being used in the meme. We find the discourse type related to memes, a humorous internet culture type of discourse that carries few to no restrictions on the contents, relations, or subjects. Another type of discourse we find being implemented in the meme is that of politics as seen through the inclusion of trucks and the mention of revolution, which also simultaneously informs us of the situational setting. This discourse type is usually connected with the restrictions of formality and seriousness. The third type of discourse type we see being used in the meme is that of comedy series - a type of discourse that depends on setting up the premise of a joke for it to be delivered on. Through this creative combination of the different discourse types the producer of the meme has succeeded in subverting the restriction that comes with any one of the discourse types. The mention of revolution as seen through the creative combination of the types of discourse becomes a humorous notion, rather than a serious step to overthrow a government in the process of political struggle and rejections of existing power relations.

Were such a suggestion made, let us say, in the setting of a parliament, the ramification for the articulation would be very different than on the platform 9GAG. Even in the situational context of a casual conversation the humour might be lost without the use of the visual element and context of the *Seinfeld* series. Societal order in this instance, seems to have been suspended to such a degree that the mention of revolution can be reduced to the humorous outburst of a comedic character. Here the truth-claim as to the Canada Convoy Protest being a "revolution", seems to only be supported by the statement in the meme. The tag "freedom convoy 2022" used for the meme uses expressive values to define the convoys identity and supports the idea proposed in the meme, that being the idea of the Canada Convoy Protest being a revolution - revolutions, historically speaking, being uprisings against oppressive regimes. In the situational setting of the Canada Convoy Protest the oppressive regime is the liberal government of Canada.

In relation to the categories being represented in the meme, there are three, USA and Canada, and also by extension of the situational context offered by the trucks in the second conversational line, truckers. We can observe a duplicative organisation happening between

the truckers and Kramer/ Canada. In this meme the speaker's opinion or relation to the Canada Convoy Protest is expressed through the characteristics of Kramer with him simultaneously being a representative of Canada.

The duplicative organisation is used in an attempt to subvert the societal identity of Canada. Normally, category-based explanations that are connected with Canada and Canadians are that of politeness and calmness - here we acknowledge that we are using assumptions about Canada and Canadians, but we see these assumption supported by a comment under the meme by user @mule2014, stating that: "you know it's bad when canadians rise up".[306] The comment was posted on the 10th of February 2022 and garnered 643 upvotes and only 12 downvotes, indicating a high agreement with the comment.

The subversion of the category-based explanation is happening through the actions taken by the truckers, the aforementioned revolution, meaning that the category-bound activities normally connected with Canada and Canadians are being negotiated here. We see how the meme in this way by using this duplicative organisation between Kramer, Canada, and Truckers tries to redefine what the category of Canada is supposed to be. It can be said that this meme uses the moment of contingency made by the Canada Convoy Protest to negotiate the continuity of Canada's identity by ascribing different actions to the category other than the ones that are to be expected. The inclusion of Jerry/ USA also points to this, since revolution, historically speaking, is an action that is ascribed to that nation and its citizens rather than Canada.

Through the inclusion of Jerry/ USA and Kramer/ Canada the meme engages in a comparison between the two categories and positions them on the basis of the action revolution. The two nations become positioned categories through the characters - Jerry/ USA being the straight-man and Kramer/ Canada being the wild and rebellious one. The meme plays with the category-based explanations and actions that are normally ascribed to the two categories to reverse the hierarchy between the two categories, meaning that the categories now are positioned differently to each other than before the Canada Convoy Protest, Kramer/ Canada being higher positioned than Jerry/ USA. The grammatical question posed by Jerry/ USA supports this new positioning, as the question implies that Jerry/ USA no longer recognises revolution when it occurs.

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[306] @mule2014. *9GAG*. 2022-02-10. http://9gag.com/gag/amgPOP2#cs_comment_id=c_164445796699706272 (Accessed 2022-02-26).

This comment on the left[307] by the user named @snafer, was posted under the meme "Honk" on the 10th of February and it has gained 226 upvotes and 3 downvotes. The user posting this comment, rather than commenting in writing, chose to use an original meme (OM). The meme features two speakers, Pepe the Frog who is riding the second speaker, a Canadian goose. The meme uses many saturated colours such as orange for the sky and sun and green for the trees, but the most salient colour is red and is featured on Pepe's red beaver fur hat and on the Canadian flag. Pepe the Frog was created by artist Matt Furie in 2005 for his comic *Boys Club,* but during 2015 and onwards the character became a meme through its adoption of online platform 4chan and was appropriated by the alt-right.[308] In 2016, the Anti-Defamation League added Pepe to their hate symbol database, but stated that in most instances Pepe was not used to express hate.[309]

We see the meme using the term 'honk', same as in the "Honk" post. The meme's use of "honk honk" is again made ambiguous due to the inclusion of the Canadian goose - being that the sound a goose makes in English is expressed as 'honk' in written language. Still, we find the inclusion of the use of 'honk' to be a suttle tongue in cheek reference to the 'clown world' meme subverted by the situational setting of the Canada Convoy Protest, as it simultaneously refers to the honking of trucks, and in this case the honking of geese as well. The expressive values featured in the meme are connected with the use of these symbols, it is again a humorous subversion of the social identity of Canada that is at play. The inclusion of the Canadian goose, Canadian flag, and arguably also the red beaver fur hat can be seen as the inclusion of standardised relational pairs through the use of visual symbols that are associated with Canadian identity, making the meme specifically Canadian. We also want to underline the absurdity of the image as it features an anthropomorphic cartoon frog riding a Canadian goose, adding humour to the meme.

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[307] @snafer. *9GAG*. 2022-02-10. http://9gag.com/gag/amgPOP2#cs_comment_id=c_164446689019277225 Comment can be found in Appendix B, Figure 7. (Accessed 2022-05-26).

[308] Pepe the Frog. *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pepe_the_Frog (Accessed 2022-05-26).

[309] ibid.

The meme can be seen using the same kind of duplicative organisation as the "Honk" meme. Here, however, we see the duplicative organisation be that of Pepe the Frog, a symbol commonly associated with the alt-right, and Canada through the use of the Canadian flag and arguably also through the use of the Canadian goose speaker. The meme, then, also subverts the category-based explanation of Canada and Canadian, by having the speaker Pepe be surrounded by and wearing canadian symbols - distancing the category Canada and Canadian from a more liberal ideology and ascribing an alt-right character to the categories instead. The meme seems to combine a political discourse type that is seemingly intertwined with an identity discourse with that of the discourse type of online culture to humorously subvert the seriousness of the latter types. This interpretation should, however, be understood in the context of its use to comment on the "Honk" meme and the situational setting of the Canada Convoy Protest.

The interpretation of the meme works from the same premise of understanding the element of the cultural unit, as there is a high degree of intertextual *traces* of the production of the meme that acts as *cues* being used for the interpreter that rely on a pre-understanding of highly specific internet culture and types of discourse as well as politics and Canadian identity. The situational setting of the meme is not made overtly clear, but as it acts a a comment to the "Honk" post, it is safe to say that the commented meme should be understood as a reaction to the Canada Convoy Protest in extension of the "Honk" post.

We, then, see the same tools for subverting the understanding of the category Canada and Canadian as being implemented in the meme "Honk", with many elements mirroring each other, even with the use of different cultural units being used in the creation of the meme.

The comment on the left[310] made by a user named @lil_chick posted under the meme "Honk" on the 10th of February has garnered 615 upvotes and 32 downvotes. Same as the previous commenter, the user chose to use a meme to comment on the post. The meme consists of a single conversational line with three 'speakers'. The meme is an alteration of a well known meme template (MT) called *Are ya winning, son?*. The original meme consists of a father walking in on his son playing a VR (Virtual Reality) hentai porn game having sex with a virtual machine, rendered in a stick figure style.[311] We yet again find an emphasis on intertextuality,

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[310] @lilchick. *9GAG*. 2022-02-10. http://9gag.com/gag/amgPOP2#cs_comment_id=c_164446197175926394
Comment can be found in Appendix B, Figure 8. (Accessed 2022-05-26).

[311] Are Ya Winning, Son? *Know Your Meme*. 2014. https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/are-ya-winning-son
(Accessed 2022-05-26).

however in this meme template the informational value makes the meaning of the meme less dependent on the pre knowledge of internet culture.

This meme template has been altered to fit into almost any context and is widely used on the Internet. Generally speaking, the meme template conveys a moment between a father and son, where the son displays behaviour that disappoints the father.

The alteration of the meme template is here made to fit into the situational setting of the Canada Convoy Protest and consists of replacing the stick figure father with Fidel Castro by photoshopping his face on top of the father. A further alteration is made to the stick figure son who is hiding under bed, peeing - the face of Justin Trudeau photoshopped on top of the son. Furthermore, a truck is added, honking outside the window. We are to understand that the honking of the truck has elicited this response from Trudeau - hiding and peeing under the bed in fear. The simplicity of the trucks' 'honk', makes the action of the protesters seem negligible, and makes the response from Trudeau seem exaggerated.

The simple style of rudimentary black lines on white background used in the meme conveys a simple yet easily legible cohesion between the different elements and is supported by the framing, being that a single conversational holds every element of the meme. The first speaker, the father/ Fidel Castro enters the door and asks the second speaker, his son/ Justin Trudeau, if he is winning. Outside the third 'speaker', a truck, almost as if to respond to the first speaker, honks. The faces of Fidel Castro and Justin Trudeay break with the simplicity of the style, making them the most salient features of the meme - as their faces are depicted as realistic images of the two leaders, drawing in the interpreters gaze, making the focus of the meme centre of the two characters.

Furthermore, the two images photoshopped on top of the meme has both Castro and Trudeau looking directly at the interpreter with somewhat content facial expressions, showing faint smiles on both their faces, suggesting an emphasis on the contact between interpreter and the speakers in the meme. The truck also breaks the rudimentary style of the meme template, being rendered more realistic than the rest of the surroundings, making it a more salient element alongside Castro and Trudeau.

By using the noun 'son' a standardised relational pair under the collection family is established, encompassing both Castro and Trudeau. The grammatical question posed by the first speaker, Castro, "Are ya winning, son?", suggests two things. It implies a conflict that is to be won by Trudeau and it also implies the nature of the relationship between the first and second speaker - that of father and son - as well as the relationship between the truck and Trudeau - that of conflict. We see that the producer of the meme has left a *trace* of the intended reading from the producer, a *cue* for the interpreters that has to do with the closeness of Castro and Trudeau.

The closeness of Castro and Trudeau in the situational setting of the Canada Convoy Protest of the meme infer that Trudeau belongs to the same category as Fidel Castro, a communist dictator, delegitimizing the prime minister through the comparison as the identity of dictator does not comply within democracy or the leader of a democratic nation.

In this meme, then, we see how Trudeau's leadership is being compared to that of a communist dictator, his actions prompted by protesting truckers. The meme plays with the same subversion of categories as seen in the other comment, as well as in the "Honk" post. The difference here being that it is not the identity of Canada or Canadians, but rather the identity of -.and actions taken by - Justin Trudeau. Curiously, we see the same duplicative organisation and negotiation of the category-based explanation of the prime minister in another comment under the post "Truck Trudeau", comparing him with Fidel Castro, creating a sense that the economy rule is being used across memes on 9GAG when it comes to categorising Justin Trudeau.

Order, Ideology & Common Sense

What we have analysed in the post "Honk" and the subsequent comments are pervasive ideological interpretations of the involved subjects. There appears to be a negotiation of the social relation between the truckers, the alt-right, and the liberal government at play in the analysed memes. First of all, the mention of revolution in the post "Honk", indicates that the power relations that are informed by the current ideology of the Canadian society are putting too many constraints on its citizens, namely citizens who are not part of the mainstream Canadian identity, but who are more like Kramer, crazy, humorous and spontaneous. Furthermore, the tag "freedom convoy 2022" that was added to the post suggests an alignment with the cause of the truckers - the expressive value of "freedom" connected with the convoy being used by the producer stating an approval of the protest and its rejection of the restrictions of the current social order.

Revolution, here imagined through the political struggle of the truckers using blockades and protests in the capital of Canada, seems to be inspired by the United States, even if the United States, being represented by Jerry in the meme, seems to not understand the current state of affairs in Canada. The identity of Canada and Canadians seems to be the focal point of both the "Honk" meme and the comment containing the Pepe the Frog meme. These memes seem to reject and negotiate the ideal subject that the Canadian government is assuming exists in Canadian society during the COVID-19 - this has been a point of contention during the protests since the protesters position on the COVID-19 restrictions were only a minority opinion, and that a larger percentage of Canadians are vaccinated and complying with restrictions[312]. This position by the Canadian government on the truckers should be seen as also informed by the association with the truckers and far-right elements.

Furthermore, up to 90 percent of Canadian truckers have been reported vaccinated, making the protest seem even less representative of the people affected by the new rules instated in January 2022.[313] It would seem that the memes try to tackle the governmental messaging along with common sense assumptions connected with the both the basis and legitimacy of the protest, by countering it with a new constructions of Canadian identity while simultaneously positioning the political authorities of Canada, namely Justin Trudeau, as being an illegitimate actor within democracy along the lines of Fidel Castro.

The constrictions of the conventions offered by conventional societal order can seem to be swept away and subverted through the creative combining of different discourse types in the "Honk" meme as well as in the comments - the humour offered by the use of the cultural unit alongside the Canada Convoy Protest undermining the seriousness of the inherently political discourse.

The interpretations offered by the meme and in the comments, however, does not substantiate this negotiation with further information, rather it relies on a humorous subversion of common sense to instil further ideological interpretations of both the Canadian identity and Canadian leadership, by offering simple member resources (MR) that would further a more right leaning interpretation of the situational setting. This interpretation is also connected with a delegitimisation of the political leadership of Canada and a negotiation of the Canadian societal

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[312] Gilmore, Rachel. 'Fringe minority' in truck convoy with 'unacceptable views' don't represent Canadians: Trudeau. *MSN*. 2022-01.26. https://www.msn.com/en-ca/news/other/fringe-minority-in-truck-convoy-with-unacceptable-views-don-t-represent-canadians-trudeau/ar-AATaYzc (Accessed 2022-05-26).
[313] ibid.

identity - a negotiation that ascribes together right leaning ideology and less correct and polite actions with the identity of Canada.

The negotiation of 'left' and 'right' does not overtly happen through the "Honk" meme or the comments, but rather implicitly. The 'right' as depicted through the comment with Pepe the Frog serves as an alternative to the Canadian liberal government, but more on the basis of what identity is can be ascribed to the category Canadian, while the 'left' does not feature as an identity option in replacement of the liberal government.

Instead we see the category 'left' being represented through the inclusion in the comment featuring the altered, *Are you winning, son?,* meme but through an extreme representation of 'left' ideology, authoritarian communism. Extreme 'left' leaning ideology is represented as being the implicit source of the conflict in the comment - a 'left' leaning ideology informing the restrictions on the population of Canada that the "Honk" meme is calling for revolution against.

The polarisation we can observe happening on the basis of this can be said to fall under attitudinal polarisation, as distance between the imagined 'left' here stems from the reproduction of ideology, first suggested by the meme and then furthered by the comments.

"Ohhhhhhh Canada!"[314]

Meme number 63 from our 9GAG data collection[315], titled "Ohhhhhhh Canada!" was posted on the 29th of January 2022 to the platform's 'Funny' section. It was categorised as an original meme (OM) in our data categorisation, as it includes partly an image from a meme template[316] and another image from a different source, and since the meme template does not include the possibility of adding another image to it, it is, thus, an original meme. Until the 23rd of March 2022, this meme's collection date, the meme had received 4200 upvotes, 259 downvotes, and 482 comments - making it the second most popular meme of all our data collection and also the one who has garnered the most agreement among users. Additionally, the meme was found through the search word 'Truckers', although it also includes two other tags: 'Canada' and 'Trudeau'.

The meme consists of two conversational lines. In the first we find a cultural unit, a still from the movie *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) with a photoshopped Canada flag, in the second Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau peeking through the blinds. The framing of the meme indicates that although the meme is composed of two images, or conversational lines, of different categories it is posted as a unit, and therefore there is a level of connection obtained between the two images. The film's still image is a meme template that can be found on *imgflip.com*, while the image of Justin Trudeau is an original meme - were they to be separated.

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[314] Ohhhhhhh Canada!. *9GAG*. 2022. https://9gag.com/gag/azem11N Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 2.(Accessed 2022-04-27).

[315] 9GAG data collection can be found in Appendix C.

[316] Mad Max Meme Templates. *Imgflip.* 2022. https://imgflip.com/memesearch?q=mad+max (Accessed 2022-04-27).

The premise of the film is set in a post-apocalyptic time, where resources are extremely scarce and society has been reorganised. The plot follows Imperator Furiosa[317], a commander in Citadel who works with logistics, and is therefore sent to get supplies of gasoline and ammunition. Citadel is the city led by Immortan Joe, the antagonist of the movie who had made himself the lead figure of a cult, promising an afterlife to the loyal War Boys, who act as his army. However, unbeknownst to Joe, Furiosa has taken Joe's five wives with her to escape.[318]

Later she crosses paths with Max Rockatansky, who is being held hostage by the War Boys, who are sent after Furiosa to recover the wives. The film still references the moment the War Boys are seen in the horizon chasing Furiosa's truck, and antecedes the various close confrontations both groups have while chasing their goal. The scene is packed with high intensity, as the War Boys group fearlessly advance forward, highlighted by the dust they leave behind and the attentive poses the bodies evidence ready to attack at any moment.

Since the images are set in such a distinctly different background, there's a sense of disconnection in terms of framing; one is outdoors, another is indoors, there's a contrast of the spaces each of the groups is in when compared to the other. The first conversational line has a framing from a long shot, a wider angle than that of Justin Trudeau, who appears through a close up - the difference in the framing implies also the nature of the power relation. While in the first conversational line a long shot is needed to show all the speakers involved, the group represented is larger than a closer shot could illustrate, on the second conversational line the speaker appears in a close-up with no other subjects around, and yet there is plenty of space around the speaker showing that he stands alone. So when comparing the conversational lines the salience of how the two groups of speakers stand is visible, one alone and the others in a large group.

The distance in the representation is, here, very distinct as the truckers are presented from a long shot, a far away distance in the horizon, while Justin Trudeau is presented in a close-up - highlighting the populous convoy which needs a more distance framing in order to depict its entirety, while Justin Trudeau appears alone with no one else in sight. The second conversational line with Justin Trudeau exhibits a completely opposite attitude, his facial

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[317] Imperator Furiosa. *Wikipedia.* 2022. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperator_Furiosa (Accessed 2022-04-29).

[318] Mad Max: Fury Road. *Wikipedia*. 2022. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mad_Max:_Fury_Road (Accessed 2022-04-29).

expression is of dread, apprehensively peeking through the blinds for what is to come, while only opening enough in order to see but keeping the rest of his body hidden.

Through the image, we are led to interpret that Justin Trudeau is afraid, evidenced by his facial expression slightly arched eyebrows and his staring eyes, those who are 'chasing' him, the big crowd who angrily moves towards him, while he appears to be immobilised by what seems to be an impending moment of confrontation between the Canadian truckers and him, to face the angry crowd. Moreover, him hiding behind the blinds seems to have an additional layer to it - the same way Trudeau is hiding on the meme, he may too be hiding from the Canadian truckers. The blinds also indicate the place he is hiding in seems to be indoors, the most usual place to find these blinds, perhaps he is hiding in his government office, while he should be in the streets talking to the Canadian truckers as he was elected by them to represent them. We see Trudeau hiding in the comment of the "Honk" meme as well[319], Trudeau being scared and hiding from the truckers being a recurring motif.

The salience of the flag is quite notable, as the conversational line above has a very toned down and dimmed palette of colours, with the Canadian flag drawing the eye for its vibrant colour in comparison to the setting it is placed in. As aforementioned, the flag introduces a nuanced layer to the identity of those it is supposed to represent on the meme, firstly by having the truckers identify themselves as Canadian, beyond identifying themselves with being a trucker - there's also an attachment of the category 'Canadian Truckers' and the category 'Canadians' alluded by the use of the flag - as if the truckers are representing Canadians, perhaps more than the elected Prime Minister. Citizenship is an important detail here, as the mandates that led to the protests were being imposed in Canada.

Through the use of critical discourse analysis we can observe there is no text on the meme, besides the title which we will analyse further ahead, so we are left to understand the grammatical features' values through the visual elements depicted in the images of the meme. The experiential value depicted in the meme could be understood as representing the Canada Convoy Protest, where truckers drove their trucks towards Parliament Hill in Ottawa, the OP here shows the truckers as the group who bravely moves towards Trudeau, who fearfully attempts to hide from them. Although there is no text from which we can infer the evaluations of each of the groups represented on the meme, it is clear that one of the groups is depicted with a positive evaluation in regards to the expressive values, while the other is depicted with

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[319] Comment can be found in Appendix B, Figure 8.

a negative evaluation. While the War Boys - or truckers - are shown with an assertive body language, upright and agile from the way they hold themselves on top of the trucks, in contrast to what we can observe from Trudeau's body language and facial expression which denotes fear and apprehension. The relational values should be understood through the War Boys equation with the protesting truckers relation with Trudeau, a relation being defined by conflict due to restrictions.

This understanding of the situational setting stems from looking at the meme in the context of the tags that are attached to it, which identify both 'Canada' and 'truckers'. This dual tagging indicates inclusivity, of the group the flag represents, Canadians, and the group whose characteristics are evidently pointing to truckers. Although, both groups are represented parallelly, as if on the same side, while the truckers are more visually prominent, there's still room for inclusion of those who are not truckers but are Canadians - despite the core of the image centring on the truckers as the majority of that group of protesters, instead of Canadians. Here we can see how 'Canadians' and 'truckers' can be interpreted as a duplicative organisation, as two categories who can be seen as aggregated to each other.

Additionally, the inclusion of Canada's flag induces the interpretation that this group of truckers represents more than those who are part of that convoy, the ones who are driving, but it also includes all Canadians or at the very least a significant majority, being that the flag is one of the symbols that represents them, beyond their profession. Perhaps their advances towards the parliament is a metaphor to a rebellion towards the establishment, Canada led by Liberals whose leader is Trudeau, and it is those who should be prepared for another kind of Canada, the kind the truckers and Canadians wish to have and the government is not ensuring.

The flag in the meme is understood as connected to the national anthem, as it is usual to have the flag hoisted as the anthem is sung, both are symbols of patriotism to a country, and of a certain meaning to those who the country has meaning for. Perhaps it symbolises that it is not only the truckers, but many other Canadians who are against Trudeau's decisions, thus, having a flag as an inclusive symbol, instead of exclusive. Furthermore, it has an underlying connotation that one who was elected and whose job is to represent the citizens' of a country stands at this time, on the opposite side of the barricade, in opposition to the flag's side. As if the flag that was supposed to represent all Canadians, and subsequently their institutions, is now being claimed by truckers to represent Canadians, as if its own meaning had been diluted by the governing institutions and representatives, and as truckers and Canadians no longer see

themselves represented by their representatives they are claiming the flag as their own in a plead for a different and more 'free' Canada from the current state of order.

In relation to membership categorisation it is relevant to add that in the film the War Boys are depicted as aggressive fighters, who viciously follow the orders of their leader in an uncritical manner, and even sacrifice themselves[320] for the greater plan, denoting the lengths they are willing to take. So it is fair to infer that the Canadian truckers are themselves willing to sacrifice something and to fight for what they believe is right, the "freedom" they aspire to as to have named their protest the "Freedom Convoy", the sacrifice might not be as hyperbolic as in the film, but it could be seen as the willingness to travel to Ottawa and to miss work to join the protest, perhaps even more. The category 'War Boys' is used in the meme as a duplicative organisation for 'Canadian Truckers' and 'Canadians'.

In the meme the War Boys represent the Canadian truckers, and who they're chasing is Justin Trudeau. The presence of the flag adds a certain nuance to the identity of the group depicted in the first conversational line, and as to whether they're only representative of Canadian truckers, or of all Canadian citizens through the flag. As such, we can understand here that there is a duplicative organisation aspect in regards to the category 'Canadian truckers' and 'Canadians', and since the meme it is ambiguous as to which the War Boys represent and we can, then, as interpreters understand them to be represented interchangeably in the meme.

Although, since there are trucks present and the meme and the speakers in it are shown not only driving the truckers, but also on top of them - which is fairly unusual - we could assume it would be more likely for people who are familiar and comfortable with trucks to be on them in unregular manners, and as such the category 'Canadian truckers' would be more likely than 'Canadians'.

The category 'Canadian truckers' is explained in the meme as a majority group, when compared to the lone Trudeau, who are bound by the activity of readiness for action and furiously go after the one standing between them and their goal, the one who holds the power of what can change their condition. Similarly to the War Boys, the Canadian truckers are category-bound to their most familiar activity - driving a truck - and this time their profession, which is used to characterise and explain their identity or category, is being used as a form of

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[320] Mad Max Fury Road 2015 4k Witness me scene. *Youtube*. 2018.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4OuGXlwO3Mo. 0:22-0:45. (Accessed 2022-04-22).

protest - akin to the large Ottawa protest which united truckers from all over the country in a convoy close by Parliament Hill where the Parliament of Canada stands.

As we have established before, the War Boys in the film are portrayed as aids to the antagonist, the villains who help Imortan Joe hold his power, and and so the consistency rule would lead us to assume the truckers in the meme can also be understood as being the villains, the anti-establishment and anti-authority group who rejects the governing's group decisions as understanding them as being unfair and unfree, and appearing fiercely and intimidatingly in their journey of fighting for what they believe to be their freedom. In a way, they seem to be portrayed as a celebration of rebellion against the institutions who govern society, and could be understood as a subversion of the prevailing social order.
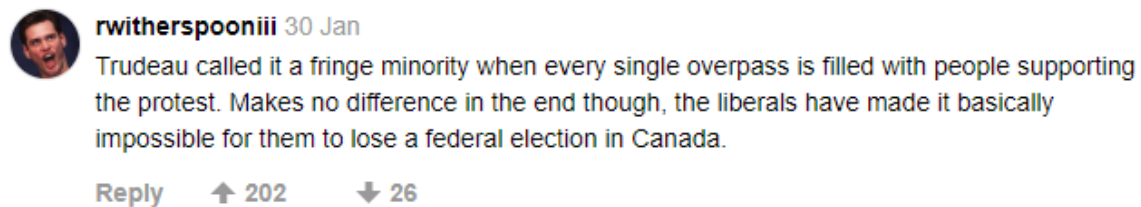
In regards to the title the use of the interjection 'Oh' in a prolonged form, expresses an ironic surprise and understanding for the situation at hand, denoting a slight humorous tone especially through the interjection 'Oh' in a prolonged form. In a way the interjection seems to enthusiastically await the scenario the meme presents us with, the coming confrontation between the pugnacious truckers and the dreading Trudeau. Considering how the title relates to the meme we can denote an ironic tone, as if Canada - in the title appearing as referring to the Canadian government - has put itself in a situation that has now led to the events that are being uncovered - the convoy in the direction of the parliament.

Although, the interjection can also be interpreted as a reference to the beginning of Canada's national anthem, "O Canada!"[321], which when sung produces a long interjection similar to the one we see in the title, this can be interpreted through the use of the interpreter's member resources. Through the reasoning that the title can be an intertextual reference to the anthem, we can infer that there's a sense of patriotism attached to what the meme is representing, considering an anthem is a symbol that unites different people through a snipped of their identity they share with many others - citizenship - and signals the pride one has in the country invoking a shared sense of cultural and historical traditions.

As a meme is only half-baked and half-analysed by looking at it through the producers ideas, we now must look at what completes the baking: the comments. We will look at two comments as sorted by 'Hot' as the ones which have received more engagement.

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[321] Anthems of Canada. *Government of Canada*. 2020. https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/anthems-canada.html (Accessed 2022-04-29).

The first comment we have chosen was posted by @rwitherspooniii, and offers a perspective of the protests and the political climate in Canada. Firstly, by drawing from Trudeau's quote saying the protesters were a 'fringe minority' "who do not represent the way most Canadians feel"[322] - the commenter is putting into question Trudeau statement, stating that contrary to what had been said the protesters were not a fringe minority as the crowds were filling overpasses during the protest:

rwitherspooniii 30 Jan
Trudeau called it a fringe minority when every single overpass is filled with people supporting the protest. Makes no difference in the end though, the liberals have made it basically impossible for them to lose a federal election in Canada.

Reply   ⬆ 202   ⬇ 26

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Additionally, the commenter reflects on the predicament the protesters are in, since he believes that with the liberals continuing to win the elections nothing will change. So, the category liberals is here bound to have no action in favour of the protesters, and being positioned as a category that holds the most power when compared to the truckers.

The 'liberals' are here represented as the Liberal Party of Canada (LPC)[324], of which Justin Trudeau is the leader of. Moreover, Trudeau is here represented as part of the liberals, alluding to the consistency rule, that states the way one category (liberals) is characterised can be extrapolated to other members of that category or collection, thus forming a consistency in the ascriptions of the members.

The second comment we have chosen was posted by @alex9600, and provides an additional account on the identities of the protesters, this category is described as "anti-vax, anti-science, violent nutjobs"[325] - an ascription the commenters to be Trudeau's of the protesters. While, in the commenter's opinion the protesters are exactly the opposite, they are "not violent, and 90%

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[322] Trudeau says 'fringe minority' in trucker convoy with unacceptable views don't represent Canadians. *Global News*. 2022-01-27. https://globalnews.ca/video/8542159/trudeau-says-fringe-minority-in-trucker-convoy-with-unacceptable-views-dont-represent-canadians/ (Accessed 2022-04-29).

[323] @rwitherspooniii. *9GAG*. 2022-01-30. http://9gag.com/gag/azem11N#cs_comment_id=c_164349891293193919 Comment can be found in Appendix B, Figure 9. (Accessed 2022-04-27).

[324] Liberal Party of Canada. *Wikipedia*. 2022. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_Party_of_Canada (Accessed 2022-04-29).

[325] @alex9600. *9GAG*. 2022-01-29. http://9gag.com/gag/azem11N#cs_comment_id=c_164349634533025130 Comment can be found in Appendix B, Figure 10. (Accessed 2022-04-27).

are vaxxed".[326] In this case there is a clear ongoing negotiation of the category-based explanation of the identity of the group 'truckers'. We are confronted with two oppositional accounts of the identity of the group, being that the commenter sides with the latter:

alex9600 🇩🇪 29 Jan
It is infuriating though how Trudeau in his speech to the public tried to portray them as anti-vax, anti-science, violent nutjobs. When they are not violent, and 90% are vaxxed.
Governments need to realize that the people are not stupid. They see the abuse of power and push for authoritarianism on a global scale.

Reply   ⬆ 274   ⬇ 39

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On top of that, there's an additional category being described, 'governments', as being unaware of people's intelligibility, and entities with authoritarian tendencies. Additionally, the category 'governments' is characterised as being corrupt, idly standing by 'abuses of power', and instead of acting against it choosing to ignore it and create a more strict system of authority that favours them. The liberals are implied to be abusing their power, and perhaps even pushing authoritarian measures such as the vaccine passport which defines and impacts one's freedom of movement, and as such they are to blame for provoking the protest. Their actions were in such a manner unacceptable that a widespread protest ensued against the government.

While there is no use of a personal pronoun, the commenter's phrase is a declarative phrase in the form of the transmission of factual information; and the commenter expressed feeling infuriated at the identity Trudeau perpetuates of the protesters, following by proving the identity he/she deems to be the accurate and truthful one.

While the meme doesn't make a direct reference to the Canada Convoy Protest, the two commenters seem to have clearly understood that as a cultural unit of the meme, the piece of context that provides the tools to decipher the layers of meaning the meme has. Each of the comments provides an explanation to the categories represented in the meme, and in some instances to others not in the meme but also related, categories which can be considered to have an aspect of duplicative organisation and to be relational to each other.

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[326] @alex9600. *9GAG*. 2022-01-29. http://9gag.com/gag/azem11N#cs_comment_id=c_164349634533025130 Comment can be found in Appendix B, Figure 10. (Accessed 2022-04-27).
[327] @alex9600. *9GAG*. 2022-01-29. http://9gag.com/gag/azem11N#cs_comment_id=c_164349634533025130 Comment can be found in Appendix B, Figure 10. (Accessed 2022-04-27).

In general, the two comments as well as the meme seem to express continuity of the identitary explanations of the categories that can be seen as part of the collection 'politics', the categories related to it - as they are represented in a bad light, either for being incompetent with the measures, by incorrectly perpetuating the falsehood of the 'fringe minority', or by taking advantage of their position of power by imposed what could be called authoritarian courses of action.

Order, Ideology & Common Sense

The order of this meme includes several discourse types which reveal the kind of discourse that we are interpreting. The discourse types are the following: cinema/ popular culture - as it refers to specific cultural elements from the film *Mad Max: Fury Road*, politics - as part of the context the meme stems from of the Canada Convoy Protest, and creation of memes - since the meme itself is constrained to how a meme is normally structured to be understood as such, as well as he prerequisites one has to fill when posting a meme to 9GAG (the same is applied to Imgur), starting with an obligatory title and image. The situational setting is the Canada Convoy Protest, and the institution in this case is the online platform 9GAG - although, we highlight that there is a destabilisation of the discourse conventions in 9GAG which creates a problem to which creativity is the solution Fairclough suggests, so while we can recognise some discourse types, we may find the combination of them to be unusual.

In regards to polarisation we can observe two types of polarisation in the meme. There is the presence of social polarisation, evidenced by how there is a strong reinforcement of the ideas perpetuated by the meme in the comments we have analysed, which are some of the comments which have received the most upvotes, and also the ones who show on the predefined view of the website, so we consider that those have garnered significant agreement as to be the considered popular and symbolise a significant way of thinking the users of 9GAG share. The other type of polarisation we can notice is affective polarisation, denoted by the hostility evidenced in the meme and the comments towards the liberals, and subsequently the left from the associations that are made connecting the two from how the liberals and the left characterise the truckers.

Taking from this thought of the liberals being associated with the left in the meme, there are additional undertones in regards to the political particularities of the Canadian liberals as being authoritarians who have been the governing party for too long. This leads us to think how democracy is also being framed when the liberals are being called out for their tenure in

government and their authoritarian dispositions, as if democracy as a system has becomes rigged and no longer works as it should - if it is impossible for one party to win one could be led to question the integrity of the system in which choice and vote being the pillars no longer matter. We could also understand a feeling of disillusionment, what motivation does one have for voting and participating in politics if the result will always be the same - as it is implied by the first comment we analysed.

The power that is attributed to each group, or category, how they behave and how this is represented are the features that expose ideology in a discourse. In the "Ohhhhhhh Canada" meme the incompetence of the government is used to contrast with the competence and ability to organise of the protesters, in the same way the government is attributed with negative connotation of being authoritarian, of viewing and evaluating the people it is supposed to be represented in an incorrect manner, of calling a large group of protesters 'fringe minority' and as violent and ignored, and being wrong in this assumption - as evidenced in the comments. So we can see a connection of the same truth-claims present in the meme being further recuperated and advanced in the comments.

There is a conflict in the ideology of the characterisation of the protesters and their identity, while the government has come forward with their assumption of what is the truth, the OP and the commenters are engaging in a contingency process, where they are trying to negotiate the identity of the protesters to have it divert from the one perpetuated by the government by providing strong truth-claims, based on information they present as factual evidence by mentioning the percentage of truckers who are vaccinated, and thus contradicting the government's assumptions.

"Truck Trudeau"[328]

Transcript:

"So they banned all the truckers in Canada. From crossing the border without a vaccine passport. So the truckers rebel, start organizing a massive convoy to Ottawa. Trudeau is shitting his pants and tells everyone he took a Covid test but it came back negative instead of lying and saying it's positive. "He tells them it's negative?" Now he tells the truth!? At the stupidest fucking time. If it's negative you literally do nothing. So now the truckers are coming to rip his dick off and needs a reason to hide from his negative test. So he tells everyone he was around someone who had it. But we know sex dolls can't get Covid. So now he says he is isolating for 5 days. In the same house as the sex doll. That tested positive to cause his negative. While the truckers protest against absurd mandates. While imposing an absurd mandate on himself!"

Meme number 113 from the 9GAG data collection[329] was uploaded on the 29th of January 2022 to the 'Politics' section. The meme received 467 upvotes, 86 downvotes and 55 comments until the day of the data collection, and included the following tags 'Justin Trudeau', 'freedom convoy' and 'truck Trudeau'. We have categorised it as a Meme Template (MT), since it is using a popular meme known as 'Spanish Laughing Guy/ "El Risitas" Interview Parodies.'[330] The original video is used with added subtitles in English. The meme has a runtime of one minute and 38 seconds, and the transcript of the subtitles has been included above.

Visually the meme shows two speakers in a setting of a live television programme. Both speakers are sitting in front of each other at a table centred on the stage - so there is a direct contact between the two and the point of view is at eye level - the background has a vivid pink colour, and the horizontal dimension is shown when the camera pans to a wide framing of the setting, revealing an audience watching the two speakers. On the table both speakers have a

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[328] Truck Trudeau. *9GAG*. 2022-01-29. https://9gag.com/gag/aYrygb0. Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 3. (Accessed 2022-05-09).

[329] 9GAG data collection can be found in Appendix C.

[330] Spanish Laughing Guy/ "El Risitas" Interview Parodies. *Know Your Meme*. 2021. https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/people/spanish-laughing-guy-el-risitas-interview-parodies (Accessed 2022-05-23).

glass of water and a microphone in front of them. One of the speakers is dressed in a beige suit and white shirt, a somewhat formal attire, and appears to be the host of the programme. The other speaker seems to have a much less polished appearance, when compared to his speaker counterpart, he is wearing a grey sweater and behaves in a much less contained way. The quality of the video is not the best, so the video is quite grainy and blurry. Originally the video shows the Spanish programme *Ratones Coloraos* of 2007, the host is the journalist Jesus Quintero, and his interviewee is the comedian Juan Borja Gorja, known as El Risitas.[331] The cultural unit consists of a scene from this programme. The meme is known as 'Spanish Laughing Guy/ "El Risitas" Interview Parodies'.[332]

The main speaker is El Risitas, as the framing only shows the host for a few brief seconds as he reacts to what the comedian is saying, and the audience is only shown once from behind with a frame of the two in the centre of the room. The video retains the original sound of the programme, as the laugh of the comedian is one of the main characteristics that led the meme to reach virality. As El Risitas talks he uncontrollably laughs in a very prolonged strained sound. While he is talking, we are able to understand that he has an accent from the south of Spain, as the comedian is from Andalusia he speaks with an Andalusian accent - of which one of the characteristics is the dropping of the 'd'.

This is an important detail as the name of the programme is *Ratones Coloraos*, although the correct way of writing the second word is 'colorados' with a 'd' - so the name of the programme also makes reference to the Andalusian dialect in Spain and, thus, creates an understanding that it is an informal or humoristic programme, since for instance information programmes would not have grammatical errors in their title. This type of accent is not considered to be the neutral Spanish accent, which is mostly used by journalists, but instead it is associated with a regional pronunciation with very little prestige, it is unlikely to find a Spanish learner wanting to learn how to speak with the regional accents that, for instance, drops the 'd' making the pronunciation of words less correct - so in a way, this accent also denotes a certain approximation to the average Spaniard, perhaps an even more hillbilly/yokel/redneck version. In this way we can draw a parallel to El Risitas representing the average Canadian or the average trucker when in the context of the Canada Convoy Protest.

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[331] Spanish Laughing Guy/ "El Risitas" Interview Parodies. *Know Your Meme*. 2021. https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/people/spanish-laughing-guy-el-risitas-interview-parodies (Accessed 2022-05-23).
[332] ibid.

The informal name of the programme provides some context to what the programme is about and what can be expected from it, as *Ratones Coloraos* translates to red mice. In the programme, El Risitas tells an anecdote of a time when he worked in a restaurant as a cleaner and lost the paella pans to the sea, although it is hard to understand what he is saying due to his strong accent and the continuous interruptions to the story with his iconic laugh.[333] Furthermore, the interviewer begins by questioning in a somewhat smug way how many of his 45 years of life he has worked, implying El Risitas is a slacker, to which he replies only seven of those years.[334] It is suggested by the answer that El Risitas has an anti-work stance, by his work history and that at some point he decided he would stop working as if an act of rebellion against work itself, a rejection of the social norms of what is considered to be common or expected for people in society. As El Risitas speaks there are English subtitles translating what he is supposedly saying, although there is no correlation to what is being told in the original audio to what is written on the subtitles.

In a comparative aspect, El Risitas visually seems closer to the 'average Joe' by the way he is modestly dressed and his unconstrained behaviour, gesticulating, muttering while uncontrollably laughing. Additionally, El Risitas appears to have some missing teeth, visible when he laughs, which could suggest he does not have enough money to fix his teeth. There seems to be no filter or any stage coordination to how he acts in the video. El Risitas seems to behave, unlike the host, in a much closer manner to the "average Joe" or the common man from his mannerisms, to the clothing and his aplomb laugh - this would position him in a closer proximity to the truckers, than Trudeau or the government.

Perhaps it even indicates a parallel of the nature of the Canada Convoy Protest, as being organised and led by common Canadians. However, we must consider that since he is a comedian the way he presents himself can be somewhat "strategic" as to fit with his humour style or persona. Nevertheless, when compared to the host he seems to be closest to a person one could meet on the street, even perhaps a hillbilly due to his appearance of a big moustache, hair slicked back, a dull sweatshirt, and shoulders slightly tilted forward - he is clearly not trying to come off as someone who seems to care about how he looks.

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[333] Spanish Laughing Guy/ "El Risitas" Interview Parodies. *Know Your Meme*. 2021. https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/people/spanish-laughing-guy-el-risitas-interview-parodies (Accessed 2022-05-23).

[334] ratonescoloraos. Risitas y las paelleras. *Youtube*. 2007-06-25. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDphUib5iG4 (Accessed 2022-05-27).

On this meme, El Risitas is represented talking about the context of the Canada Convoy Protest through the subtitles. While there are no explicit visual clues that El Risitas is part of the protesting group, it is possible to interpret him as being aligned with the group of the protesters. Firstly by the way he dresses and conducts himself - which is more similar to how truckers would behave and dress, than politicians or government officials - hence the 'average Joe' reference. Secondly, because of the differences in his discourse when he is addressing the truckers and Trudeau, particularly by saying "Trudeau is shitting his pants"[335] and "now the truckers are coming to rip his dick off and he needs a reason to hide".[336] This strong use of language salients a very colloquial use of language with no qualms over the use of words which could be considered of poor taste when referring to the Prime Minister of a country - and also hinting at a lower socio-cultural background.

The combination of the video with the subtitles gives the impression of a television commentator discussing the protest in a style of a colloquial conversation, akin to a café conversation between friends. This aspect is implicit by the discourse and the behaviour of the speakers participating in it, this combination alludes to the mocking of Trudeau for having a negative test and still deciding to isolate as an excuse to not face the protesters. The OP mocks Trudeau for telling the truth, it is not a lie that makes him the target of mockery, but the truth - a lie would have probably evoked a similar reaction, as a way to avoid facing the truckers, yet the truth evoked the exact same reaction, there is no possible reaction Trudeau can have that will not elicit criticism. Through this we can observe an attempt at delegitimising Trudeau.

The discourse refers to when Prime Minister Trudeau tweeted, on the 27th of January 2022, that he would isolate himself after having been in contact with someone who had tested positive to COVID-19, although his test had been negative - "Last night, I learned that I have been exposed to COVID-19. My rapid test result was negative. I am following @OttawaHealth rules and isolating for five days. I feel fine and will be working from home. Stay safe, everyone - and please get vaccinated."[337] Although, contrary to what Trudeau had announced in the tweet

[335] Truck Trudeau. *9GAG*. 2022-01-29. https://9gag.com/gag/aYrygb0. 0:08. Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 3. (Accessed 2022-05-09).
[336] ibid.
[337] Justin Trudeau @JustinTrudeau. *Twitter*. 2022-01-27. https://twitter.com/JustinTrudeau/status/1486704426449379329 (Accessed 2022-05-23).

the health authorities did not require isolation for asymptomatic people who had tested negative.[338]

The timing of the period of isolation had coincided with the 'freedom convoy' protest that was estimated to arrive by that weekend to Parliament Hill - this dubious coincidence led many to question why the Prime Minister had decided to isolate himself, when there was no requirement to do so, and when an incoming protest of significant adherence was to be held in the coming days.[339] Trudeau's decision is implied to have been interpreted as a way to avoid the protesters, or "hide", in a way it is suggested he is running away from his functions by attempting to evade the protest. We will further explore this interpretation below.

The grammatical features of the discourse reveal the OP's experience establishes a correlation between the vaccine passport and the trucker protests, denoting a generalisation that this mandate affects all truckers in Canada - "So they banned all the truckers in Canada.". The OP attributes agency to Trudeau as being the one responsible for the institution of the mandates, thus, leading the truckers to organise a convoy protest in Ottawa. While Trudeau has the power to institute or remove the mandates, the truckers are merely left with the option of protesting as they do not hold enough power to reverse the mandate they are protesting against.

Therefore, there is an understanding that Trudeau is positioned above the truckers in terms of power and hierarchy in what each group has the ability to do. The relational value between the two groups is that Trudeau represents those who govern Canada, and as a result the truckers as well, and the truckers through their actions also have the power to influence or create pressure towards decisions governments or elected officials can enact.

The discourse is mostly comprised of declarative phrases, indicating the OP is providing information as facts - that all truckers were banned from crossing the border, and so they rebelled against Trudeau and are aggressively coming for him, and as a result Trudeau finds a way to avoid the convoy by claiming health concerns because of a close contact with a sex doll. There are two grammatical questions, which are used in a tone of bewilderment, "He tells them it's negative? Now he tells the truth!?", the questions imply surprise for Trudeau telling the

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[338] Aielo, Rachel. PM Trudeau in isolation after COVID-19 exposure. *CTV News*. 2022-01-27. https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/pm-trudeau-in-isolation-after-covid-19-exposure-1.5756676 (Accessed 2022-05-23).

[339] Gilmore, Rachel., Boutilier, Alex. Big rigs, passenger vehicles snarl downtown Ottawa as trucker convoy parks by Parliament. *Global News*. 2022-01-29. https://globalnews.ca/news/8580547/trucker-convoy-freedom-covid-vaccine-mandate-ottawa/ (Accessed 2022-05-23).

truth, which indicates that the OP believes that previously Trudeau had lied. The questions here used are rhetorical.

On top of that, there is surprise for Trudeau imposing the mandate on himself, even though the health requirements no longer advised for it, by calling it "absurd" the OP adding a negative connotation to that action, deeming it useless and as such a manoeuvre to hide from the protesters who "are coming to rip his dick off", to rip here is used as an active verb that grants agency to those who act on it, the ones who will do the ripping in contrast to the one or the what that will be the target of it.

The OP does not position himself as being part of either of the groups he represents in the meme, that being Trudeau/ government or the truckers, there is no use of the pronoun "us" throughout his discourse. Although there is the use of "we", which seems to be employed as a meaning of everyone in general, but not of either of the groups in particular, here "we know sex dolls can't get Covid" seems to pertain to a common sense that "we" all have, the fact that sex dolls cannot test positive to COVID-19 - this information is assumed to be known to everyone and not something that is questioned.

However, there is a use of the pronoun "they" - "they banned all the truckers in Canada", here the pronoun refers to the government and as a logical extent to Trudeau, as the agency of imposing a vaccine mandate that can instate or not a 'ban' is theirs, and denotes a quite radical action of 'banning' truckers, as if applying this ban to all truckers in the country. So the OP is positioning himself as not belonging to that group.

As we have established, there are two groups, or categories, represented in the meme - that of the 'government/ Trudeau' and the 'truckers'. The government and Trudeau are categories that can be observed as duplicative organisations, that means that they can be used interchangeably and are seen as aggregated categories. At the same time we could comprehend the 'truckers' being also a duplicative organisation for the category of 'average Joe' of which El Risitas is a member. Therefore, we will be using 'Trudeau' as a category as it is the category mentioned in the discourse, but it can be used to refer to both categories. The category of 'Trudeau' is explained as being powerful due to having the power over the vaccine mandate, and of being fearful and incompetent, hinted through the use of the expression "shitting his pants" and "absurd".

These words are not lightly chosen, so they do seem to try to instil an emotive appeal that is in no way discursively contained, as these are the words that are used to describe the category

that represents the Prime Minister of Canada. Additionally, the category bound activities ascribed to it are the power over the course of the vaccine mandates as well as to what the protesters are demanding - the end of the vaccine passport. So by ascribing these activities and explanations to the category of 'Trudeau', the OP is placing the accountability of the Canada Convoy Protest in it as well, for being the category that holds the power that can change the conditions that have led to the protest and the ones that can also end it.

On the other hand the category 'truckers' is explained as being the underdog, the affected category by the vaccine passport, the ones who did not conform with it and became angry. Their activities are bound by their determination to protest and figuratively the capability of being aggressive in the journey of fighting for what they want to achieve, for "coming to rip his [Trudeau] dick off" and being the ones who Trudeau should be fearful of. There is, then, a use of expressive values in the way that the category 'Trudeau' receives negative evaluations from the OP, while on the other hand the category 'truckers' receives positive evaluations.

Additionally, the two categories are positioned in a manner that denotes a hierarchy of power clearly attributed to one, that is of Trudeau (and the government) while placing the 'truckers' in an inferior position, those who are affected, who have to protest to have their voices heard and ultimately those who are subjected to the choices of those who hold the power. However, from a positioning according to competence the two categories are inverted. The truckers are represented as the rational and organised group, while Trudeau and by extent the government are the incompetent ones who shun away from their duties by coming up with excuses to ignore the people they are supposed to be representing.

It is also relevant to understand the importance of the title, as aforementioned with the example of the "U BIG idiOT"[340], standing for "U BIGOT". This word play is accomplished through the mixing of upper and lowercase letters and is a common practice in platforms like 9GAG, in which users find creative ways to surpass the restriction of the terms that that platform has in place, as well as the words that can lead to a user being banned or suspended. For this meme, the title "Truck Trudeau" makes a connection between the two distinct elements which reveal the situational context the meme refers to, so we as interpreters know that it involves trucks and Trudeau.

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[340] U BIG idiOT. *9GAG*. 2021. https://9gag.com/gag/a27ZPze. (Accessed 2022-04-13).

Although the title is not exactly a phrase, not a coherent combination of words that could be used in a normal setting to mean something, they make sense together because they have meaning within the Canada Convoy Protest. However, there seems to be a word play in the title with the word 'Truck', while seemingly innocuous the word seems to have been chosen to substitute and signify the word 'fuck'. Both words end in the same sound, and considering the strong word use in the discourse - "shitting his pants", "stupidest fucking time", "rip his dick off" - it seems plausible the OP was trying to evade 9GAG's rules by choosing a word similar enough that the word 'fuck' could be read from it. Which would not be surprising considering the language use the OP makes through the subtitles of the video, and perhaps the word 'fuck' was not used in the title to avoid being reported as being 'sensitive content' and thus not shown to visitors not logged in, as well as perhaps being subjected to other algorithmic filtering 9GAG might do regarding its content. So through this interpretation of the title, we are able to learn the OP's thoughts on the matter, who he sides with and what he thinks of Trudeau, as well as the truckers.

Moreover, we have selected two of the top ten comments of the meme, as per the predefined view of a visitor to the website. Whereas comments typically are in the form of text, on platforms such as 9GAG comments in the form of an image or even a meme are common. In particular in the meme "Truck Trudeau" eight of the ten top comments were either an image or a GIF. So the following two comments we have chosen are memes in the form of images, as we have found them to be two of the most relevant according to our criteria.

The first comment[341] was posted by @darkcyde1127 on the 27th of January 2022, receiving 25 upvotes, 1 downvote and 0 replies.[342] The comment can be seen on the right, a montage of a picture of Justin Trudeau besides one of Fidel Castro. The commenter seems to try to imply a resemblance between the two, by the choice of picture, the way both Trudeau and Castro are facing the same direction and even their smile. It suggests the commenter is trying to establish a relationship between the two, the two categories - 'Trudeau' and 'Castro' - are here represented as a duplicative organisation, as if saying that liberals are the same or at the very least similar to communists. This could mean the commenter is proposing a truth-claim that both categories share the same ideology. So Trudeau, a liberal, is here being compared to

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[341] @darkcyde1127. *9GAG*. 2022-01-27.
https://9gag.com/gag/aYrygb0#cs_comment_id=c_164347265120632987 Comment can be found in Appendix B, Figure 11. (Accessed 2022-05-24).
[342] The upvotes, downvotes and replies the comment received were collected on the 24th of May 2022.

Castro, a communist, denoting an alignment of Trudeau's political spectrum on the left or radical left - this is how the commenter perceives Trudeau in the political spectrum.

Fidel Castro[343] was the communist leader of the Communist Party of Cuba[344] from 1961 to 2011. After the Cuban Revolution of 1959, Cuba became a one-party state and the Communist Party of Cuba has since been the ruling party in the Cuban parliament, the National Assembly. Consequently, Castro was associated with communist authoritarianism in Cuba. With this political context, and considering both Trudeau and Castro were not only politicians but the heads of state, the meme establishes a connection beyond similarities in appearance, and seems to imply that Trudeau like Castro is also an authoritarian and a communist - this is an aspect we will discuss further in the next comment analysis.

Moreover, there is another layer of comparison we can observe when looking at the parties of Trudeau and Castro. The obvious differences are that Trudeau's party exists in a democracy, while Castro's party existed in a one-party system, where all other parties were banned. A comment posted on the "Ohhhhhhh Canada", by @rwitherspooniii, stated the following *"(…)the liberals have made it basically impossible for them to lose a federal election in Canada."*.[345] The commenter indicates an impossibility for Trudeau's party to loose, Trudeau himself has been the leader of the majority party since 2015.[346]

In the same way Castro's political party, being the sole one since no other party is allowed, was also in a position that made it impossible for it to lose an election. The meme, like the comment, suggests that Trudeau's party like Castro's will continue being the majority party and governing Canada, insinuating that no matter what the liberals or how incompetent their politicians are their party will continue winning elections, this denotes a continuity of the ideas

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[343] Fidel Castro. *Wikipedia*. 2022. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fidel_Castro#Ideology (Accessed 2022-05-25).
[344] Communist Party of Cuba. *Wikipedia*. 2022. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communist_Party_of_Cuba#National_Assembly_elections (Accessed 2022-05-24).
[345] @rwitherspooniii. *9GAG*. 2022-01-29. http://9gag.com/gag/azem11N#cs_comment_id=c_164349891293193919 Comment can be found in Appendix B, Figure 9. (Accessed 2022-04-27).
[346] Liberal Party of Canada. *Wikipedia*. 2022. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_Party_of_Canada#Electoral_performance (Accessed 2022-05-25).

perpetuated in the meme in the comments, there is a high agreement with the meme, which also boosts its popularity, considering the top comments tend to reflect the user's views to an extent through the use of upvotes both to the meme and comments.

The second comment[347] we have selected was posted by @jsquier6, on the 29th of January 2022. The comment, on the right, is composed of only one image. The commenter mocks Trudeau implying he has tested positive to a new variant called "COWARD-19", which describes his symptoms according to his reaction to having been in close contact with a positive case, while testing negative. This further suggests that Trudeau's excuse for isolating himself was due to "Fear of truckers and patriotic Canadians", which seems to indicate he is not a patriot and has lost the respect of Canadians for removing himself from public at the same time a convoy protest was organised to meet in front of the parliament - the parliament being Trudeau's place of work.

So the commenter conveys that those who Trudeau is supposed to be representing are those who he is avoiding and shunning away from. Furthermore, there is a word play with "COWARD-19" instead of 'COVID-19', this aspect highlights how the commenter is being ironic and parodying Trudeau's actions. Even the choice of the picture shows Trudeau with a concerned face, with an anxious pout arching his eyebrows as if fearing something. This facial expression creates a continuity of the representation of Trudeau as fearful, which the meme "Truck Trudeau" had already established in its discourse - through this aspect, we can see the commenter agrees with the OP's representation of reality and promotes it by establishing a continuity of a representation which denotes the same meaning.

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[347] @jsquir6. *9GAG*. 2022-01-29. https://9gag.com/gag/aYrygb0#cs_comment_id=c_164347187644659130 Comment can be found in Appendix B, Figure 12. (Accessed 2022-05-25).

Order, Ideology & Common Sense

In relation to the order there are three discourse types: popular meme culture - as the original video that serves as the sound and visuals to the meme refer to the meme "Spanish Laughing Guy/ 'El Risitas' Interview Parodies"; politics - as the context and text of the meme refers to the Canada Convoy Protest; humour - as the meme uses humour to communicate the ideas of the OP; and creation of meme - as a meme has a set of features it needs to have in order to be perceived as a meme, as well as the requirements 9GAG imposes before posting (title, image, tags). The situational setting of the meme is the Canada Convoy Protest, and the institution is 9GAG, as we have mentioned previously discourse is engaged through unusual combinations, thus destabilising previous discursive conventions.

Furthermore, there are two types of polarisation in the meme and comments. There is a continuity of the ideas in the discourse of the original meme, and a stronger enforcement of them in the comments, which denotes a social polarisation between politicians and more common people. Additionally, the emotional appeals visible through the strong use of colloquial language and profanity indicates an emotional investment in the truth-claims in regards to what the OP and commenters assume about Trudeau's actions and what is to be done to him , this represents an affective polarisation.

Concerning inferences on the political spectrum, there is a perceived hostility towards the liberals, and by extention, the left as they are understood, in the comments and the way that Trudeau as the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada and the government is represented by highlighting incompetence and constructing an association to an authoritarian communist leader.

Through discourse ideological and common sense articulations are distributed, this naturally applies to discourse in memes as well. As such, it is relevant to pay close attention to the presence of ideology in the meme. In the meme the OP alludes to a common sense of something that everyone knows, that sex dolls cannot get infected, the sentence is phrased in such a way that this information is given as redundant since it is something that belongs to everyone's knowledge - "But we know sex dolls can't get Covid." - furthering a common sense assumption that politicians lie.

By including its mention the OP is not only rejecting Trudeau's justification for isolating, but also devaluing his motives in a demeaning way by stating his close contact was an inanimate object, with no positive associations it, therefore, ridiculing him. This brief excerpt denotes a

devaluation of Trudeau's words, when he tells the truth he is accused of going into hiding and derided for not lying, and when he provides a justification he is ridiculed for imposing it on himself. The discourse seems to try to delegitimise Trudeau in any way possible, by taking a situation that happened in reality and twisting it in a way that any of his actions appear to be silly and disproportionate.

Trudeau as a politician, ideally, is expected to tell the truth. Although, there is a common sense assumption that politicians lie, and it is to some extent expected for him to do so too, but when he tells the truth he is mocked for not lying well enough he is in a conundrum where any of his actions will be picked apart. His health concern is depicted with scorn, as him doing something to avoid dealing with the decisions he made that led truckers to organise the protests. While the truckers are depicted as the ones who are conducting 'serious' actions, theirs are justifiable - the truckers are pictured as normal folk who as result of being heavily affected by a governmental measure (the vaccine passport) organised a convoy protest to show their displeasure for it - "While the truckers protest against absurd mandates.". The normalcy of how the trucker's actions are explained is strikingly distinct when compared to Trudeau's.

Imgur

"We need more of them to be this way."[348]

Meme number 81 of our Imgur data collection[349] titled "We need more of them to be this way." was posted on the platform on the 14th of February 2022 by @DWolf.[350] Until the 11th of April 2022 the meme garnered 121888 views, 133 comments, 2150 internet points, out of which 2260 are upvotes and 110 are downvotes. Since the cultural unit behind the meme is a Tweet, the meme was placed in a category of Twitter (T) in our data categorisation. Additionally, the meme has a text under it stating the following: "And where are supply chain issues and inflation coming from again? EDIT: Wow, I go to a movie and dinner with a friend on V-day, and you make this the 'most viral'? Thanks!"[351] The post was tagged with the following keywords "flutruxklan", "canada" and "republicansareterriblepeople".

The tweet was posted on Twitter the 12th of February 2022 by Mrs. Betty Bowers, whose Twitter handle is @BettyBowers. Betty Bowers who is a character portrayed by Canadian comedian Deven Green. Mrs. Betty Bowers 'America's Best Christian'[352] makes videos for her Youtube channel on various political topics in an American context, her channel is organised by sections featuring 'Jesus's Favourite Betty Bower's Videos', 'CHURCH:

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[348] @DWolf. We need more of them to be this way. *Imgur*. 2022-02-14. https://imgur.com/t/flutruxklan/kwzMNs2 Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 4. (Accessed 2022-05-09).

[349] Imgur data collection can be found in Appendix C.

[350] Apart from identifying the users' names by having "@" before the name of the account, it is also used to signal to the platform that one intends to find only posts from that particular user in the results upon searching on the search bar.

[351] @DWolf. We need more of them to be this way. *Imgur*. 2022-02-14. https://imgur.com/t/flutruxklan/kwzMNs2 Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 4. (Accessed 2022-05-25).

[352] Deven Green. *Wikipedia*. 2022. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deven_Green (Accessed 2022-05-25).

Religious Videos' and 'STATE: Political Videos'.[353] By her profile picture on Twitter, she portrays herself in ways that support the idea of her being 'America's Best Christian', we will analyse these aspects straight away.

In the back of the profile picture of Betty Bowers featured on the meme there is an American flag, symbolising the country Betty Bowers is a citizen of and also showing the character's patriotism. She has short hair and minimal makeup, making the red on lips a salient element. Moreover, she is wearing a pearl necklace and earrings, and she has a medium-cut neckline black blazer. These visual characteristics allude to a conservative imagery, by the choice of clothes, jewellery, hairstyle and flag in the background. Another detail worth mentioning is the positioning of herself in front of the flag, slightly facing towards the right side, resembling patriotic political posters denoting intertextuality with a panoply of posters featuring a subject slighting turned to the side looking forward while a flag waves in the background - with all the patriotic connotations that arise from seeing such image. From all of these characteristics we understand Betty Bowers as portraying herself as being an American conservative political figure who belongs to the elite.

The tweet has a picture attached to it of what seems to be a cropped screenshot of a group chat. In the screenshot, the names of two speakers are visible; 'rivercitygiver' and '9windsorconvoy22'. The speaker 'rivercitygiver' wrote "I'll go to jail forever if it means freedom", which was read by 562 people. Next to his text bubble there is a picture of a man with glasses and a stern look forward. Both pictures, of Betty Bowers and 'rivercitygiver', appear from a similar distance in a close-up of their faces, although when looking at the quality of the pictures and the lighting there is a clear distinction, in which Betty Bowers intends to portray herself in formal manner. 'rivercitygiver' seems to have a more informal picture that did not have much thought put into it, which suggests he does not worry about how his picture can be interpreted. The speaker 'rivercitygiver' is presented as being a trucker, as he is being referred to as such by Bowers.

Furthermore, the whole meme's framing seems to be merely a screenshot of Betty Bowers' tweet and not an altered picture as it shows the date and hour of the Tweet, alongside the three dots that provides Twitter users with a few more interactions other than like, retweet and reply. However, the likes, retweets and replies do not appear on the screenshot of the tweet.

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[353] Mrs. Betty Bowers. *Youtube*. 2022. https://www.youtube.com/user/MrsBettyBowers/featured (Accessed 2022-05-25).

From the use of critical discourse analysis we can analyse that the experiential value of the texts highlights the agency of the trucker by declaring he would go to jail forever, and to this Bowers clarifies his terms are acceptable, thus granting him agency to do so. The expressive values evidenced in Bowers' text reveal a negative evaluation of the truckers, as she is calling them "illogical Canadian trucker pest", this reveals the OP's understanding of reality is aligned with that of Bowers' as the title given to the meme is as follows "We need more of them to be this way.". The OP, too, has a negative evaluation overview of the Canadian Convoy Protest and the truckers. Bowers' and the trucker's texts are declarative mode of sentences, which means they are to be understood as truth-claims, where the speakers are providing information as factual. The relational value of the meme is seen through the response and the ascription of the social identity trucker to the second speaker from Betty Bowers, amended by the negative expressive value, meaning that the social relation between Betty Bowers and truckers is determined by conflict.

The speaker's authority is claimed by Bowers, as she replies to the trucker's claim as if it is a proposal she is willing to accept "Your terms are acceptable", although showing disdain for them by calling them derogatory words. Furthermore, the OP's choice of a declarative text evidences how invested he is in this truth-claim to use it as if his own, thus furthering it. Additionally, the OP's text includes a grammatical question he poses to interpreters "And where are supply chain issues and inflation coming from again?", implying that the truckers are the ones to blame those problems due to their protesting which is disrupting everyone's life.

Furthermore, the OP's use of tags further demonstrates which group he positions himself with as the use of 'flutruxklan' when referring to the Canada Convoy Protest denotes a detrimental view of the protest, 'flu' referring to COVID-19, 'trux' referring to the trucks, and 'klan' referring to the Ku Klux Klan - a white supremacist group. One of the other tags used by the OP is 'republicansareterriblepeople' implying that Republicans, which are inherently known as conservative, are bad folk - as seen through the use of negative expressive value in relation to the social identity of republicans. While the OP makes reference to Republicans, the character of Bowers is herself representative of those Republicans that the tag encompasses, which have significantly demonstrated their support for the Canada Convoy Protest[354], which

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[354] Olson, Tyler. Congressional Republicans back Canada 'Freedom Convoy' protest: 'Not some fringe minority'. *Fox News*. 2022-02-22. https://www.foxnews.com/politics/republicans-congress-canada-trucker-convoy-vaccine-mandates-trudeau (Accessed 2022-05-28).

Bowers as a satirical conservative should do so as well to subvert the identity - though, there is a break in character.

So, we have identified two categories represented in the meme, the 'truckers' and 'Republicans" or "Conservatives, as these two can be seen as a relational pair of the collection of right-wing political ideology - although due to the elements of the situational setting and the identity of Betty Bowers we could also be ascribed as a member of the categories 'Conservative' and 'Republican' as a duplicative organisation of each other, as the equivalent to the Conservative Party of Canada is the Republican Party (US), and both can be referred to as conservatives - which also tend to be more Christian than Liberals (Canada) or Democrats (USA).

The category-based explanation for 'truckers' is as an illogical pest, who are willing to go through great lengths for freedom and for the protest, which implies they are willing to sacrifice themselves for the protest, as shown by 'rivercitygiver' by stating "I'll go to jail forever if it means freedom". The category-bound activity is fighting for freedom and going against the established power and institutions, who are represented by Trudeau.

On the other hand, the category 'Republicans', to which Bowers is a member of, is explained as an American Conservative, who positions herself in a position of power in relation to the trucker as she is framing an interaction in which a trucker proposes an action and she is the one in the position of power to accept the terms. Although, as she is a satirical character 'America's Best Christian' her actions are to be understood as ironic to what she is commenting on. Although Bower's category bound activity as a member of the category 'Republicans' should be of showing support for the protest, as that is what many Republicans have done[355]. What is remarkable about her tweet, then, is that she seems to break the character by not subverting the actions, identity, or speech normally ascribed to the category 'Republican'. Rather she criticises and demeans the second speaker, abandoning satire, something that indicates that the situational setting influenced the actress Deven Green to act from within a more authentic category that could be considered a member of, such as Canadian, or some iteration of 'left' when we take into account that she satirises Republicans through her character.

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[355] Olson, Tyler. Congressional Republicans back Canada 'Freedom Convoy' protest: 'Not some fringe minority'. *Fox News*. 2022-02-02. https://www.foxnews.com/politics/republicans-congress-canada-trucker-convoy-vaccine-mandates-trudeau (Accessed 2022-05-28).

In the meme, the representation of 'Republicans' by Bowers, breaks down. She instead positions herself as a rational actor, and as a result the other subject is characterised as the irrational one, and as stated by her the "illogical".

In regards to the title "We need more of them to be this way.", the OP is siding with Bowers in accepting the trucker's conditions of going to jail for "freedom". The OP suggests that more truckers should volunteer themselves for jail time if that means "freedom" for them and for the rest of the Canada Convoy Protest's truckers. So we denote that the OP is against the protest and sees this trucker's proposition as a potential solution to the protest. In the description, the OP refers to chain supply issues and inflation, and implies that the protest has contributed to these issues, highlighting the inconveniences and disturbances the protest has caused, and completely disregarding the trucker 'rivercitygiver' motivations for freedom in return for jail.
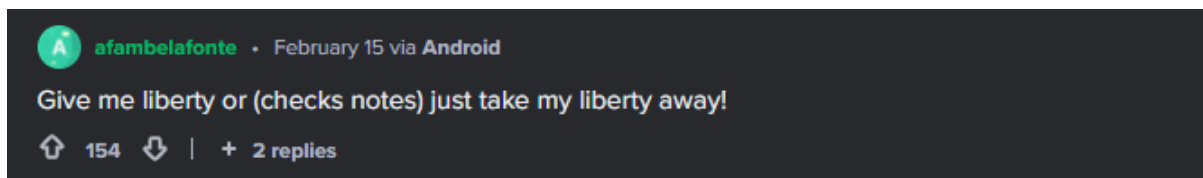
We will now look at two selected comments from this meme, both comments are in the form of text and both were posted on the 15th of February 2022.

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The first comment (above) is by @activeracer28, and it received 315 internet points and 5 replies. The comment is in form of a declarative sentence reflecting the trucker's text, the declarative mode of sentence indicates the commenter provides it as factual information on which he has a strong investment in the truth claim he is writing about. The use of the interjection "Ah" to indicate irony, salients the trucker's contradiction by equating the meaning of jail with freedom, being that jail implies the removal of freedom or at least of the freedom of movement, so the commenter ironically scoffs at 'rivercitygiver' for thinking that it is jail that will bring freedom, as if by trading one he would be rewarded the other. The comment indicates an expressive value of a negative evaluation of the trucker, which hints that the commenter is siding himself with Bower's position of the truckers as being "illogical" and a "pest" - there is then agreement with the OP's post.

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356 @activeracer28. *Imgur*. 2022-02-15. https://imgur.com/gallery/kwzMNs2/comment/2195260621 Comment can be found in Appendix B, Figure 13. (Accessed 2022-05-26).

afambelafonte · February 15 via Android

Give me liberty or (checks notes) just take my liberty away!

⬆ 154 ⬇ | + 2 replies

357

The second comment (above) is by @afambelafonte, and it received 154 internet points and 2 replies. The mode of sentence used by the commenter is an imperative, the verb is ordering something "Give me liberty", the experiential value of the comment grants agency to someone to 'give' and also 'take away' liberty. There is a use of the pronoun 'me' and the possessive determinant 'my', which places the commenter as the subject of which the actions are to be enacted, the one who will get and be deprived of liberty. The commenter seems to ironically be referring to the trucker's claims of the meaning of freedom, although this commenter uses the word 'liberty' we understand them as having similar meanings. The comment ironically follows the logic of the trucker departing from what he is protesting for - freedom for not needing a vaccine passport - which is what the trucker and the protesters want - to include a pause in the argumentation denoted by the use of parentheses stating "(checks notes)", as if checking the conditions stated by the trucker of going to jail, to then realise they do not coincide with getting the freedom that is at stake, as going to jail is in opposition to getting freedom.

Order, Ideology & Common Sense

In the memes and comment we see the use of three discourse types: humour - illustrated by having the satirical Betty Bowers as the speaker; politics - considering the discourse is centred on the truckers' protest against the vaccine passports; and creation of memes - as the discourse has been adapted to fit to that of a meme and be understood as a meme. The situational setting is that of the Canada Convoy Protest, and the institution is Imgur - similarly to 9GAG, on Imgur there is also a combination of discursive practices, more or less familiar, which makes it hard to see its true constraints in regards to order.

Elements of polarisation are seen through the comments as they agree with the ideas Bower communicates, as well as embracing the satirical aspect and the commenters themselves also commenting in a humoristic manner, affective polarisation is also visible in the meme by the use of expressive values such as 'illogical' and 'pest' attributed to the Canadian truckers, and

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357 @afambelafonte. *Imgur*. 2022-02-15. https://imgur.com/gallery/kwzMNs2/comment/2195270713 Comment can be found in Appendix B, Figure 14. (Accessed 2022-05-26).

finally attitudinal polarisation is clear in this particular meme as it depends on the information source, this being Bowers whose slant is that of an American 'Republican' which would place her on a right positioning in a political spectrum. Yet as she is a character used to mock Republicans, the interpreters understand this dynamic and the same mockery is visible through the two analysed comments.

To understand ideology we must look at how discourse is articulated in the meme, the values that inform how the OP sees the social reality, and the dynamics of the social relations between the subjects. In this meme there is a negotiation of the category of 'truckers' as an "illogical" and annoying crowd, implied by "pest" being attached to them as a characteristic inherent to their social identity. The description by the use of the declarative sentence and the partial screenshot of the conversation - which is not sourced - was to be received as a stronger source of information.

On a parallel level the screenshot text is used to extrapolate from the singular to the whole, it is the trucker's message that is used to show an irrational argumentation for freedom which is then used to substantiate the claim for calling truckers 'illogical'. Additionally, as the truckers are the ones depicted as irrational, the suggestion indicated on the text message is then framed to be subjected to the power of decision of someone who is 'rational' - Betty Bowers, the satirical American Conservative character - this construction entails a positioning of hierarchy of power and of intelligence, as the irrational one - the trucker - is bound to the rationality and verdict of the rational one.

The comments of the meme further the OP and Bower's ideology on the identity of the truckers, subsequently revealing what they think of the Canada Convoy Protest as well, the two comments we have analysed highlight the continuity of the ideas articulated in the meme. As both commenters salient the contradiction of the trucker's message in argument he is willing to go to jail forever and still get freedom. There is a furthering of the discourse of the meme, a continuity of those ideas.

Furthermore, the rejection of the notion of freedom being connected with the activities of truckers informs us that the ideology behind the understanding of freedom is not connected with the protest, delegitimising their political struggle through the use of humour.

"FluTruxKlan"[358]
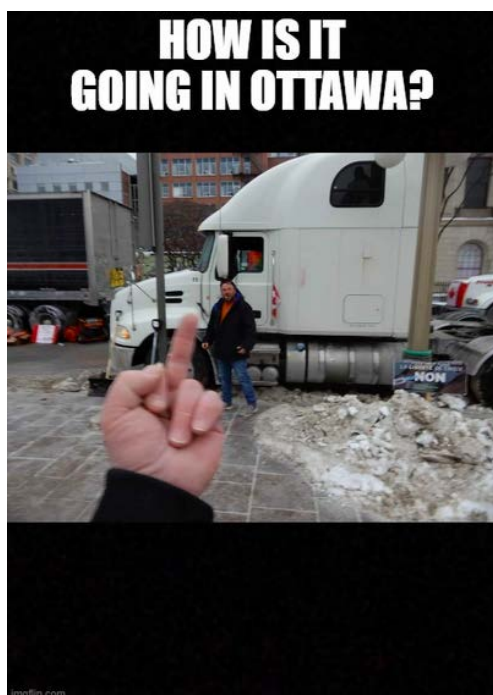
Meme number 148 of our Imgur data collection[359] titled "FluTruxKlan" was posted on the platform on the 3rd of February 2022 by a user named @HeShallKnowYourWaysAsIfBornToThem.[360] Until the 11th of April 2022 the meme accumulated 157822 views, 456 comments, 1900 internet points, out of which 2087 are upvotes and 187 are downvotes. The meme was categorised as an Original Meme (OM) according to our data categorisation, as it consists of one image that is, despite having a watermark imgflip.com in the bottom left corner, not to be found on the meme generating websites, for example *imgflip*.[361] The reason a watermark appears on the image is quite possibly because the OP uploaded the image to the meme generator website *imgflip* in order to add the text to it. The meme includes 'flutruxklan', 'trucker', 'convoy', 'antimask', 'antivax' tags below the image, as well as a short text: "Locals have had enough of the antivax convoy. Oh wow! Most viral! Thanks fellow Imgurities. Glad to see support for the besieged Ottawans.", written by the OP.

The vertical dimension of the point of view in the meme depicts the two speakers at an eye-level, which determines a relation of symbolic equality between them. The fact that locals and truckers are portrayed as being equal in the meme helps us understand the power distribution in the given discourse; neither, or both of the depicted categories have the power, there is no power hierarchy that accentuates one speaker as more powerful in the discourse.

As for the horizontal dimension, one speaker is positioned frontally, while the other is behind the camera and we cannot fully see him/her. This offers interpreters a possibility to participate in the meme, seeing the arm as their own and ascribing the identity of a local to themselves,

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[358] @HeShallKnowYourWaysAsIfBornToThem. *Imgur*. 2022-02-03. https://imgur.com/t/flutruxklan/HuQQuch Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 5. (Accessed 2022-05-20).

[359] Imgur data collection can be found in Appendix C.

[360] Apart from identifying the users' names by having "@" before the name of the account, it is also used to signal to the platform that one intends to find only posts from that particular user in the results upon searching on the search bar.

[361] *imgflip*. 2022. https://imgflip.com/memegenerator (Accessed 2022-05-20).

simultaneously putting themselves in the membership category of locals and being bound by the same activities as the mentioned category. As for the concept of distance in this meme, the trucker is positioned in the back of the image, which means that he/she is depicted from a long-shot. The intention behind the long-shot is to portray people as types rather than individuals - the focus is not on their personality, but on the collective, the person serves as a representative of the whole membership category, in this particular meme the category of truckers.

As previously mentioned, the meme establishes a contact with its interpreters through positioning the arm in front of the camera making it look like the interpreter's hand is flipping the trucker off, and simultaneously making the interpreters bound by the same activity as the speaker in the meme. Non-verbal communication plays a big part in interpretation of the given meme, the gesture of giving the finger to the trucker is to be interpreted as disagreement between the two categories, hence suggesting the above-mentioned relation of conflict between them. The speaker in the back of the image looks directly at the other speaker who is behind the camera, and simultaneously establishes a direct contact with the interpreters too.

Were the hand placed somewhere else, or were the gesture something else, there might be a sense of disconnection in the meme, but in this case of placing the hand in the centre of the image and flicking the speaker in the back off creates the feeling of strong connection between the two speakers. Moreover, it makes them two very salient elements of the meme along with the truck the speaker in the back stands next to. Salience of the elements in the meme contributes to contextualisation of the meme.

The visual elements in the meme, then, serve to position the interpreter alongside the 'local' category, enabling an action done by the locals in reaction to the category 'trucker'.

There are not many textual elements in the meme; it contains one sentence, and looking at the relational values of grammatical features we see that it is a sentence in the form of a grammatical question. The proposed question serves to contextualise what is happening in the meme as it explains the situational setting. Apart from the title, tags and the text in the meme, and the Canadian flags put on the trucks allude to the fact that the image is of a recent date, and that it is actually taken in Ottawa during the Canada Convoy Protest. Going on the visual elements, understanding them through their grammatical values, we can interpret the meme as a way to explain the expressive values that helps define the relation between the two categories, between locals and truckers. The image reads as a local articulating disapproval of the truckers and their actions, either exclaming "fuck" or using the expressive verb in the clause "fuck

truckers" through the gesturing seen in the picture. The expressive value of "fuck" being the defining feature that illustrates the social relation between the categories, underlining the conflict between the two categories. The relational value, then, mirroring the expressive value by letting us understand that the relation of the subjects are defined by conflict. The experiential value to be found is informed by our understanding of the POV of the locals, letting us know that the experience with the truckers' presence in Ottawa has been frustrating to a point that produced the meme in question.

When looking at the types of discourse that are to be found we can find a type that pertains to personal experience. This discourse type has few limitations, no formal restrictions to speak of, and is underlined by the use of the POV in the meme. The use of the harshness of the expressive value that impacts negatively on the depiction of the social identity of truckers as well as the social relation between the two categories, locals and trucker, can also be understood by this personalised discourse type. This personal discourse is also implicitly intertwined with a political discourse, as the situational setting envelops truckers protesting, protest being a political act.

The political discourse in this meme, however, steps into the background for the more expressive personal discourse type. There is a slight element of humour to be found stemming from the discourse type of meme - as the grammatical question sets up a response that occurs in the meme, suggesting extreme frustration. The use of different discourses here, however, seems to be incidental rather than intentional, as they do not serve to overtly subvert one another, or change the meaning of the content of the meme to comment on social order. The meaning of the meme is straightforward and clearly expressed through the use of the personal discourse type.

When looking at the text added to the meme we see that the OP presents him-/herself as the voice of the locals saying that "Locals have had enough of the antivax convoy.", underlined by the POV of the image.

Underneath the meme we see a continuation of the written text in the headline. OP has commented: "Oh wow!", due to the fact that the post reached so many people and got supported by many, as the OP calls them "fellow Imgurities". Judging by the content, the text has been edited and the other part of the commentary below the meme has been written additionally. We suppose that the sentence "Locals have had enough of the antivax convoy" was the only one in the first version of the text, and then later, after garnering views and upvotes, the OP shared his

excitement and gratefulness by adding "Oh wow! Most viral! Thanks fellow Imgurities. Glad to see support for the besieged Ottawans." to the meme. The popularity of the meme is, then, reflected by its virality on the site. What they, "fellow Imgurities", are supporting in the opinion of the OP are "the besieged Ottawans".

Once again we see usage of expressive values which describe residents of Ottawa as someone who has a passive role in this conflict, as someone who is enduring with the activities of the category of truckers without taking action in the form of fighting against them. So the activities bound to the category of locals are of passive character, while the activity ascribed to the category of truckers is an active role of "besieging" the locals and occupying the city of Ottawa.

The use of 'besieged', while acting as an expressive value, also serves as an experiential value, giving us a *cue* about the ideology of the producer. The legitimacy of the protest is non-existent to the producer, and rather the protest serves as an illegitimate siege. The use of the tag 'flutrox klan' also informs us of the ideology behind the producer. 'FluTruxKlan' is a nod to the racist organisation of Klu Klux Klan, this seen emphasised in the use of 'x' instead of 'ck' when spelling 'truck' as well as the use of 'k' instead of 'c' when spelling 'clan'.

The duplicative categorisation between the truckers and the Klu Klux Klan serves as an extreme interpretation of the category, and could be understood as an attempt to delegitimise the protest and the truckers from a moral standpoint, and as in the context of the information provided by the meme an unfounded truth-claim. Furthermore, the use of 'antivax' and 'antimask' in the tags acts as a set of experiential value from the producer, which indicates that he/she understands the convoy as being against health measure, even though no further context for this truth-claim is provided.
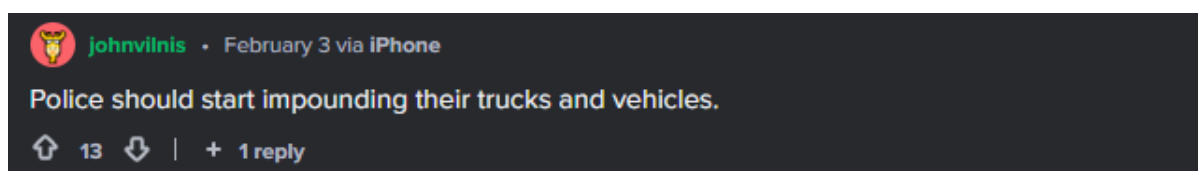
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The first comment was posted on the 3rd of February by a user named @johnvilnis and has accumulated 13 internet points and one reply until the 26th of May 2022. There are two subjects involved in the comment; the police and another subject indicated by "their", which due to the

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362 @johnvilnis. *Imgur*. 2022-02-03. https://imgur.com/gallery/HuQQuch/comment/2190865885 Comment can be found in Appendix B, Figure 15. (Accessed 2022-05-26).

situational setting should be understood as truckers as pointed to by the mention of trucks Looking at the relational values of grammatical features we see that the comment consists of one declarative sentence. The use of modality and modal auxiliary verb "should" helps us understand and interpret the message coming from the commenter. "Should" is used to indicate obligation, duty, or correctness, typically when criticising someone's actions. Therefore, the comment is to be understood as a critique to the police and their actions thus far, and as a proposition how the police could accomplish their obligation and duty of protecting the locals from the truckers who "besieged" their city.

The commenter is clearly against the protest and the activities ascribed to the category of truckers, and suggests that the police should react to the protest. Moreover, the discourse sustains its continuity when it comes to ascribing a passive role to the locals. Looking at the construction of the sentence in the comment, we notice that the commenter calls for action.

We can see the use of a discourse type that has to do with the role of authorities, alongside an implicit political discourse due to the situational setting. The discourse type of authority informs us about the interpretation of the protest, an interpretation, that lends from the MR, the cues, that are to be found in the "FluTruxKlan" meme. The meme offers a strong disapproval of the category 'trucker' and this disapproval is expressed through the use of the discourse type connected with authority, and seems to sustain continuity of discourse from the previous comment.

ciscoxing626 · February 3 via Android

Pro tip: I'm a trucker (the vaccinated kind) and if you are being hassled by these assault weapon racist nazis, just run 50 yards they can't
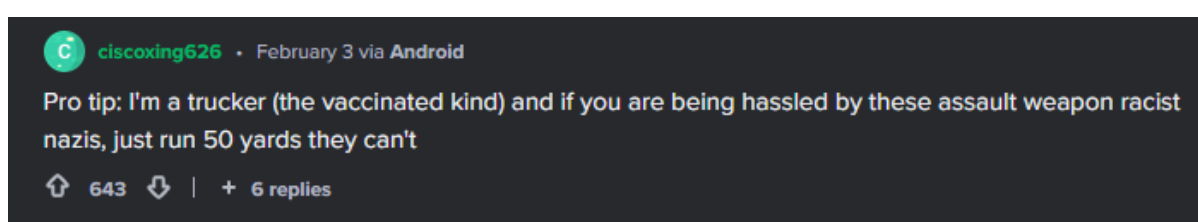
⬆ 643 ⬇ | + 6 replies

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The second comment was posted on the 3rd of February by a user named @ciscoxing626 and has garnered 643 internet points and 6 replies by the 26th of May 2022. Looking at the punctuation, the commenter shows a rudimentary level of grammar, and fails to separate the sentence properly into four clauses. The second clause is a subordinate clause, since it is a dependent clause in a conditional sentence, meaning that it is dependent on the first which is a declarative sentence. The third clause appears after the comma and is an imperative, indicating

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[363] @ciscoxing626. *Imgur*. 2022-02-03. https://imgur.com/gallery/HuQQuch/comment/2190860865 Comment can be found in the Appendix B, Figure 16. (Accessed 2022-05-26).

that the commenter's investment in the truth of the sentence is high, and the fourth clause coming after '50 yards' is another declarative sentence. The use of declarative and imperative sentences suggest a high level of investment in the truth of the sentence.

We find the comment to contain three subjects: trucker, an intented interpreter, and nazis. The producer amends the inclusion of the self ascribed category, 'trucker', by stating that he/she is the vaccinated kind, using vaccination to negotiate a sub categorisation to trucker - one that serves to differentiate the category from the construction of the category trucker in the meme "FluTruxKlan".

The second subject, the you, is constructed thorugh their relational value to 'assault weapon, racist nazis' as being someone your should run from, infering a distance and dissagreement between the subjects . The subject, 'nazis', serve as a duplicative organisation between unvaccinated truckers who are participating in the protest and Nazis. There is a heavy use of negative expressive values for the construction of the social identity of this subject, consisting of 'assault weapon racist' - the noun 'nazi' can also said to be highly expressive on its own. Moreover, we see the use of the pronoun 'they' to indicate further distance between the vaccinated truckers and the nazi truckers. The experiential value of the comment also let us know that not alone are the unvaccinated truckers racist nazis, they are also fat, understood by their inability to run a short distance.

The highly negative expressive values used in the the comment can be seen to reflect the highly negative expressive values in the meme, but the inclusion of assault weapon, racist, and nazis seem to tranform the discourse found in the meme, escalating the conflict between the truckers and the rest of society through the use of duplicative organisation with categories that are highly frowned upon within most societal conventions such as nazis and racists. This interpretation falls in line with the use of the tags 'flutruxklan'. The truth-claim, as to whether the truckers protesting are nazis or racist or not, is not supported by the inclusion of other sources in the comment, and instead seems like a rather ideological interpretation of the protesters made from assumptions. The claim, then, seems to grow from the MR offered in the meme, that comment is   directed   towards.

Order, Ideology & Common Sense

What we see in the meme in terms of ideology and common sense is that the protesting truckers'' disruption of the normal functions of society, the disruption of everyday life of the locals, is met with an abundance of negative expressive values that further entrench the involved categories by positioning the category of as being even further removed from rest of society. The prominent use of the personal discourse type with little to no use of subversion through the use of other discourse types found in the meme informs us that the producer sees himself/herself as being in line with the prevailing order of society, being that the restrictions offered society that inform the producer of the social relation between his/her social identity identity, a local, and the identity of the truckers are in conflict.

This points to the common sense assumptions and therefore ideology behind the producer's meme. Normalcy, the normal order of things, and the practices taken within society, are prioritised over the need for protest, over the political struggle of the truckers. The use of the highly negative expressive values serves to strongly affirm the order, and we see that the in the comments, there is a call for the intervention of the authorities, as well as an further distancing to the category truckers through the use of the duplicative organisation of trucker and nazi.

The negotiation of 'left' and 'right' in the instance of this meme happens through the ascription of the truckers to the category nazis, being one of the most extreme iterations of a right leaning ideology there is, as well as through the use of the tag 'flutruxklan'. The use of nazi and the association with Klu KLux Klan becomes grounds for non negotiation, as within the social order of society at large, nazism and racism are an ideologies that are not tolerated. The mention of such categories in relation to the truckers should be seen as a means to delegitimise the political struggle of the protesters, without the need to substantially delve into their concerns or grievances with the authorities, circumventing political negotiation.

What we can observe, then, is an affective polarisation type of polarisation happening between the involved categories, a type of polarisation that occurs through the emotional appeals first found in the meme, and repeated in the comments. These emotional appeals seem to be constructed on the basis of the social identity of the truckers, through generalised ascriptions of actions and values of the social identity, and the following effect that has on the social relations of the category with other categories. We do, however, also find a social polarisation

occurring on the basis of agreement with and the furthering off the experiential values about the truckers, creating a homogenous interpretation of the social identity of the truckers as being extremist in reference to nazis and the Klu Klux Klan.

"The terrorists need to be arrested already."[364]

Transcript:

"What's happening in Ottawa right now, from someone who actually lives here.

I love Ottawa. This is my home. But those of us who live downtown are in absolute hell right now.

We haven't had a moment's peace from this nightmare in 5 days. I hear the consistent honking from my apartment. It's driving people crazy, and I mean that literally. Sound torture is a type of psychological warfare, after all.

My stomach is in knots. I've developed a twitch from the stress. People are suffering from severe anxiety and sleep deprivation.

Protesters have been using my beloved neighbourhood as their toilet and trash can.

Most of the business around us, which are struggling enough as it is, have had to close due to safety concerns and road closures. And the ones that remain open? Their employees are faced with harassment by protesters who refuse to wear masks.

Even our grocery store had to close early.

Let that sink in. Our essential businesses, which have been operating throughout this pandemic, are closing their doors.

[Fuck the 'freedom protestors']

People are receiving death threats for simply walking down the street wearing a mask.

Many people, especially POC, are scared to leave their homes. I've seen Trump flags, Nazi symbols, and signs with homophobic slurs. There have been so many reports of hate crimes that the police had to set up a hotline.

I know residents who have even fled the city to avoid this absurdity.

This, all of it, should upset you. Because this is our home, and we should feel safe here.

[If this isn't a reason to arrest them what is?]

To the protesters: You are holding my city hostage over your persecution complex.

Read that again.

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[364] @rainbowsandunicorns575. I*mgur.* 2022-02-02. https://imgur.com/t/flutruxklan/aZjqTQw Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 6. (Accessed 2022-05-22).

We are not responsible for the public health mandates you hate so much. The Parliament building you enjoy yelling at is empty.

Not to mention the fact that vaccine passports and lockdowns are provincial, not federal, so if that's what you're protesting, you've come to the wrong city.

Those of us who live here feel totally abandoned by the police and the City of Ottawa. They are allowing our residents to endure what is essentially psychological torture.

And maybe that's just not enough of a reason for them to step in. But the public health risks definitely should be.

Look, this is almost certainly a super spreader event. Thousands of unvaccinated people who refuse to wear masks are partying together in our streets. COVID cases will rise as a result. Which will accomplish the exact opposite of what these people want. Because, as we know by now, increased cases = increased mandates.

It's time for this nonsense to end. People here are delirious. They are suffering more severely than they did under any public health mandate.

It's clear that the convoy has no intention of leaving. In fact, there have been reports of more returning to protest this weekend.

So, @cityofottawa, @ottawapolice, what's your next move? Allowing this to go on another week is simply not sustainable. Not for our downtown businesses, and certainly not for our residents who are being terrorized.

Stop treating this like a peaceful protest when it resembles something alarmingly close to a hostage crisis."

theottawadiaries
Ottawa, Ontario

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN OTTAWA RIGHT NOW, FROM SOMEONE WHO ACTUALLY LIVES HERE.

Meme number 149 of our Imgur data collection[365] named "The terrorists need to be arrested already." was posted on the platform on the 2nd of February 2022 by a user named @rainbowsandunicorns575. Until the 11th of April 2022 it collected 112379 views, 495 comments, 2426 internet points, out of which 2506 are upvotes and 80 are downvotes. The meme has been categorised as Other (O) according to our data categorisation, since it

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[365] Imgur data collection can be found in Appendix C.

consists of screenshots of an Instagram post made by @theottawadiaries, and includes the following tags: 'flutuxklan', 'covidiots', 'home grown terrorists', and 'free the hostages'. Meme qualifies as the most popular of our Imgur data collection, hence it was an obvious choice for the analysis.

Even though the speaker does not make a direct connection to the Canada Convoy Protest in the meme, it is clear that the mentioned protest has to do with Canadian truckers for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the usage of specific tags makes a connection to the Canada Convoy Protest, such as the tag 'flutruxclan'. Secondly, the connection is determined by the fact that the speaker introduces the events in Ottawa, Canada's capital, during a protest that is not only happening at the same time as the Canada Convoy Protest, but sharing the same characteristics as the mentioned protest. Therefore we can state that the situational setting of the meme is a post on Imgur in relation to the Canada Convoy Protest and the subjects involved are Ottawa police, City of Ottawa, protesters and the local residents. The relation between the said subjects is the one of conflict; local residents are in conflict with the protesters and on the verge of conflict with the officials, while protesters are in conflict with the officials. Since the cultural unit that has been used to make a meme is an Instagram post, the discourse type we have here is of Instagram post, which is a personal post, personal expression and storytelling, which in itself entails a few constraints on the discourse.

There is no possibility for us to know or find out whether the OP - the Imgur user, and the speaker - the Instagram user, are the same person. We will throughout the analysis assume that they are two different people based on the fact that the Instagram post is text-heavy, grammatically and semantically well-considered, and it is gradually building a logical argument, hence we can only assume that there was no intention by the speaker to break the coherence of the story that is being told in the post by inserting two remarks. Moreover, the remarks are transcribed in square brackets[366] namely because this type of brackets are mainly used to enclose words added by someone other than the original speaker, typically in order to clarify the described situation. Additionally, even though both persons are using heavy expression values, only the OP uses profanity, which we can understand as a derailment from the content of the instagram post, and therefore as something written by another person. Furthermore, the speaker has shown a high level of literacy looking at the coherence of the

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[366] The two mentioned sentences were placed in the gaps between Instagram screenshots in the meme. See Appendix A, Figure 6.

written text, used vocabulary and punctuation, as opposed to the OP who almost does not use punctuation.

Bearing in mind that this meme's speaker is an Instagram user, we will briefly introduce her. The user writes the following in her Instagram bio; her name is Maddy, people should address her by using she/her pronouns, she characterises herself as a Blogger, and what her profile consists of is "Ottawa Life + Style", which is further explained by stating that she is "a fiercely proud local who doesn't gatekeep the good stuff." and that she is "Keeping you connected to #Ottawa events, local businesses, and Canadian brands."[367] The self-description we see here can contribute to interpreting the speaker as someone who sees herself as serving the common good by being a self-proclaimed voice of the people of Ottawa. It might be useful to mention that she has nearly 17 thousand followers on Instagram[368], and that having so many followers means that her posts are able to reach greater masses more easily, hence that it is probably one of the reasons why her post ended up on Imgur as a meme.

Since the meme consists of simple screenshots from Instagram, there are not many variations in visual elements, what stands out are the profile picture of the user, colours and font used. User on the profile @theottawadiaries has a close-up profile picture where we see that the person is a female with long, curly hair, serious facial expression, black business jacket on and a shiny, round earring hanging from the one ear perceptible on the camera. Based on the bio she provided her followers with, as well as the business-look on the profile picture, we can conclude that she is mostly focused on business related subjects in her posts. Furthermore, having an orange background as opposed to the black clothes and dark brown hair makes her appear more salient and eye-popping. What all of the above can tell us about this person is that she presents herself as a serious, mature person whose attitude, statements and observations can be taken soberly and without further questioning.

Additionally, by choosing a close-up picture of herself she is creating certain contact with her followers. Deciding to show her face on the profile picture helps her achieve a closer, more intimate and familiar relationship with her followers, which once again contributes to how seriously she and her statements will be taken by both her followers and people who stumble upon her profile in one way or another. Furthermore, having in mind that Instagram is a

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[367] @theottawadiaries. *Instagram*. 2022. https://www.instagram.com/theottawadiaries/?hl=en (Accessed 2022-05-22).
[368] ibid.

platform where people mostly share pictures taken by themselves to reflect on and share their personal experiences, the meme should be understood as an individual expressing her personal opinion and when it comes to discussing socially relevant and important topics.

Even though the meme consists of a few screenshots, framing of the meme helps interpreters understand the meme as a whole, since there is a certain connection between the said screenshots. Connection is established by usage of the same font, same colour and size of the letters the text is written in, same background colour, and no additions to the screenshots, but simply having them listed one after another by the order they appear in the original post. The fact that there are smaller gaps between each image should not be unrecognised. The gaps serve as a space for the OP to express his/her opinion towards what has been said in the meme. However, despite having those gaps, the meme is to be interpreted as a whole, as the gaps do not create a sense of disconnection in the meme since all of the mentioned characteristics that create connection prevail.

Moreover, apart from creating a sense of connection, chosen background colour and colour of the letters used in the post contribute to making the text more salient and eye-catching to the interpreters, as there are no unnecessary details around the text. Furthermore, the font used in the post is playing a part in how salient the text is going to appear to interpreters, as well as how serious the speaker is going to be taken. By using a formal font, the speaker presents herself as a person whose words you can trust, words you do not need to question, as they come from a seemingly unquestionable source.

Nevertheless, what the meme primarily and altogether consists of is text, so the focus of its analysis are going to be different linguistic features. Therefore the main tools to be used in the analysis are the ones from Fairclough's CDA apparatus.

Looking at the relational values of grammatical features we can see that the meme consists mostly of declarative sentences, along with a few grammatical questions and imperatives. Declarative sentences position the speaker as the provider of the information and display the information communicated as facts, and it is of these types of sentences that almost all the discourse is composed of. Declarative sentences and expressive values show how invested the speaker is in the truth behind what she is saying. Excessive usage of declarative sentences and strong expressive values means that there is a strong investment in the truth the speaker is putting forth. The whole meme is constructed as a truth-claim, so it is to be interpreted as an experiential value the speaker believes in and how much she believes in the truth she is bringing

out. Furthermore, the situational setting of the meme contributes to interpreters reading the discourse as being embossed with an ideology, and make assumptions of the speaker being leftist, while the right being Nazis, even though the speaker never mentions left nor calls the right Nazis directly at any point.

The use of modal auxiliary verbs is not very extensive in the meme - there are two modal auxiliary verbs in the post, 'should' and 'will'. They appear at the end of the text and contribute to the meme being interpreted as a doubtless statement that expresses the speaker's strong investment in the truth. 'Will' is used to express inevitable events which in this discourse are an increase of COVID-19 cases as a result of the protest, and the fact that the protest is going to accomplish the opposite of what protesters stand for and want to get out of the protest. 'Should' on the other hand indicates an order coming from the speaker towards the interpreters on how they are supposed to interpret these events by stating that all of it should upset them. Furthermore, 'should' is used when expressing what would be the right state for something/someone to be in, for instance in "[...] we should feel safe here.", emphasising that the category of the local residents together with the speaker should not feel threatened or unsafe in their own neighbourhood.

The post starts with an introduction to what is happening in Ottawa using an experiential value to explain the Canada Convoy Protest is a "nightmare" for the local residents among whom is the speaker too, since she uses a pronoun "we" while addressing this issue, thus making herself part of the same group. By using yet another experiential value, the speaker also states that they live "in absolute hell" due to the protest. These phrases, these experiential values are not chosen lightly, they are to evoke an emotional response in an interpreter towards a category that represents the protesters and activities bound to this category, since they are used to describe the social identity of the protesters.

So what we get to know in the beginning of the meme is that the speaker's intention is to draw attention to the happenings in Ottawa during the Canada Convoy Protest, and that speaker self-ascribes herself with the local residents by using pronouns such as 'we', 'us', 'our', 'I', 'me' when referring to herself and the residents affected by the protest, simultaneously distancing local residents and herself from the category of protesters. It is, though, interesting to see and worth to mention that sometimes the speaker refers to Ottawa as "my home" while other times as "our home" making a distinction between locals as a group and herself as an individual suffering from the protest.

The speaker articulates the assumptions about the protesters, generalising that all protesters are the same by not stating a possibility of exception, as well as the assumption that all the residents share the same attitude towards the Canada Convoy Protest with her. Moreover, by looking at the expressive values used in the meme, certain actions are ascribed to the category of protesters. Here we see the presence of an intertextual and historical reading, where the actions ascribed to the category of protesters are of negative nature, such as the protesters being violent, not wearing masks, thus jeopardising other people's health, and undermining safety in the mentioned neighbourhood. On the other hand, actions ascribed to the local residents are of them being scared, suffering maltreatment that reflects on the psychological condition of the residents, and feeling unsafe in their own neighbourhood.

The introduction is followed by an explanation of what consequences local residents and the speaker herself are facing at that moment - "severe anxiety and sleep deprivation", "a twitch developed from the stress", as well as having her "stomach in knots". Furthermore, it is described how most of the businesses have had to close "due to safety concerns and road closures", while the employees of the ones that remain opened "are faced with harassment by protesters who refuse to wear masks". Experiential values related to the category of protesters are ideologically affected, since they are used to express the knowledge and information about the said group that is to be passed on to the interpreters.

What follows is a comment from the OP of the meme in form of a sentence put in the gap between the two screenshots. The sentence expresses the agreement with the speaker by saying "Fuck the 'freedom protestors'", which indicates that the OP supports speakers interpretation of the happenings. Putting quotation marks around 'freedom protestors' indicates the use of irony through grammar, more closely the punctuation, suggesting that the protesters are not struggling for freedom, which also expresses the OP's stance around the Canada Convoy Protest's participants.

Hereafter the speaker deepens the storytelling about the actions seen during the protest, such as "hate crimes", waving "Trump flags, Nazi symbols, and signs of homophobic slurs", and stresses the intensity of these happenings by saying that "the police had to set up a hotline" due to these issues, as well as that residents had to flee the city to avoid what the speaker characterises through the use of the experiential value "absurdity" about the experience. Here we can see traces and cues of the speaker's ideology. The speaker has an ideological interpretation of the events happening during the protest, comparing the protesters with Nazis

and Trump supporters. In the speaker's membership construction of categories Nazis equal Trump supporters, the speaker also ascribes all protesters to the same categories by refring to all the groups engaging in activities such as disruption and harrasment of the category local residents.

By mentioning Nazi symbols, Trump flags and other props used in the protest, and ascribing activities bound to the former category to the latter, speaker puts the protesters in the same category as Nazis and American conservatives, thus trying to create a duplicative organisation that makes protesters and Nazis/ Trump supporters into a standardised relational pair. She is also distancing herself from these groups by the absence of usage of pronouns or other linguistic features or category bound activities that would otherwise characterise her as a part of the same group.

Furthermore, in the next gap between the screenshots the OP of the meme once again agrees on the speaker's interpretation of events by stating that the usage of all of the aforementioned flags and symbols, as well as the instances of activities such as conducting hate crimes makes it a valid reason to arrest the protesters. What the OP expresses here is stated in the title of the meme too, where the OP by using the verb 'need to' and an expressive value 'terrorists' articulates that arrest of the 'terrorists' is a necessity, or rather an obligation, and nearly offers a solution to the authorities on how to put an end to the protest. The OP is, then, also making a duplicative organisation that goes even further than the speaker of the meme, ascribing the actions taken by the protesters to that of what normally would be ascribed to terrorists, an extreme ascription, that can only be based on an ideological interpretation of the situational context and the meme itself, as the actions taken by the protesters would not normally be considered to the category 'terrorist', which also serves as a harsh negative expressive value in relation to the identity of the protesters.

Besides separating herself from the group of protesters, the speaker distinguishes another category in the given discourse, the one of the government - "the Parliament" and state actors that act on the "federal level", which neither she nor the local residents are a part of. All of the given categories are positioned in a hierarchy according to certain characteristics ascribed to them. On top of the hierarchy there is a government that due to the group's abilities denotes importance and power to change the course of the protest at any point, then there is another group, the protesters that throughout the protests have obtained power over local residents, which are then the lowest positioned group in the given hierarchy.

Moreover, protesters are also depicted as subverting the power of officials and implementing restrictions on the locals through their presence. By using expressive values and generalisations, the speaker underlines the fact that the local residents are "abandoned by the police and the City of Ottawa" and that they "endure what is essentially psychological torture", a strongly worded experiential value. The chosen vocabulary serves to once again evoke an emotional reaction from the interpreters, and verbs used are to ascribe the passive role locals have in the protest. Furthermore, protesters are described as "unvaccinated people who refuse to wear masks [and] are partying together in the streets", not caring about the facts, that by not protecting yourself and others COVID cases will essentially rise, which automatically means increased mandates, meaning that further actions ascribed to the protesters through the use of expressive values are implying that they are uncaring and illogical.

At the end of the meme, the speaker again uses expressive values to state that it is time for "this nonsense" to end, since people are "delirious" and are "suffering more severely than they did under any public health mandate". She also says that "it's clear that the convoy has no intention of leaving", and therefore calls the @cityofottawa and @ottawapolice for action by proposing a question: "what's your next move?", tagging them in the post by using "@", as well as arguing that the protest cannot go on due to not being sustainable for "downtown businesses" and "residents who are being terrorized". Usage of strong expressive values as the word "terrorized" suggests that the speaker finds the authorities too lenient, too liberal. Finally, the story that has been constructed throughout the meme ends with the use of more expressive values and an imperative where the speaker demands from the authorities to "stop treating this like a peaceful protest when it resembles something alarmingly close to a hostage crisis".

Although memes oftentimes use humour to communicate a message, that is not the explicit point of communication in this particular meme. As opposed to having humour to engage interpreters, memes consisting of posts discussing hot topics attract interpreters to engage by making them a part of heated debate, often regarding globally trending viral discussions and issues, in the comment section below the post. Therefore we will now delve into the two chosen comments out of the top ten, and since both of them are in the form of text, we will be using Fairclough's CDA and Sacks' MCA apparatus in our analysis.
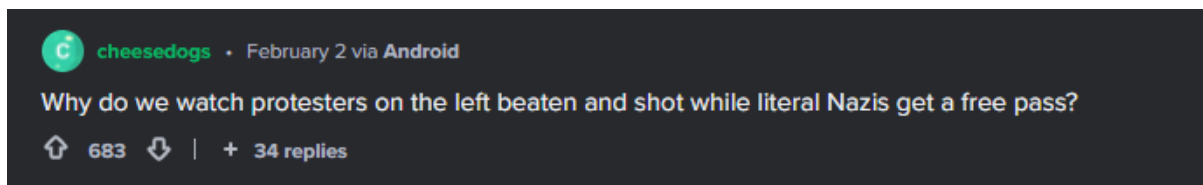
The first comment was posted on the 2nd of February by a user named @chesedogs and has collected 683 internet points and 34 replies until the 23rd of May 2022. The comment consists of one grammatical question and when looking at the usage of capital letters, punctuation and the choice of vocabulary we can see that it is a well written comment indicating a decent level of literacy. In the comment we notice that the duplicative organisation created in the meme is supported by the commenter, which means that the commenter agrees on the speaker's representation of truth and reality construction. The speaker's interpretation of the happenings in Ottawa in relation to the protest is being reused by the commenter, hence the comment is furthering the same ideological interpretation of the events, as well as the created categories subjects belong to. In other words, discourse and the ideology in the meme sustains its continuity in the comment.

There is a direct use of the term 'left' in connection to the protesters that through intertextuality shows us that, historically speaking, protesters have always been people supporting the left, while in the case of the Canada Convoy Protest, protesters are "literal Nazis". The commenter hereby assumes that the protesters in the Canada Convoy Protest are supporters of the right. Usage of the same expressive values in the meme and the given comment once again denotes a continuity of membership categorisation established in the meme. The term 'Nazis' serves as a duplicative organisation between the protesters and Nazis and can also be tracked back in the comment by @ciscoxing626[370] under the meme "FluTruxKlan"[371], which hereby serves to indicate continuity in discourse construction in the comment section on Imgur.

The commenter condemns the authorities for not taking action in this protests, giving the protesters - the "literal Nazis"- a "free pass". The commenter furthers by saying that the authorities react by beating and shooting the protesters from the left, while giving the current

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[369] @cheesedogs. *Imgur*. 2022-02-02. https://imgur.com/gallery/aZjqTQw/comment/2190655733 Comment can be found in Appendix B, Figure 17. (Accessed 2022-05-23).

[370] @ciscoxing626. *Imgur*. 2022-02-03. https://imgur.com/gallery/HuQQuch/comment/2190860865 Comment can be found in Appendix B, Figure 16. (Accessed 2022-05-26).

[371] @HeShallKnowYourWaysAsIfBornToThem. *Imgur*. 2022-02-03. https://imgur.com/t/flutruxklan/HuQQuch Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 5. (Accessed 2022-05-20).

protesters a free pass. Moreover, he/she ascribes actions of violence to the authorities and current protesters. Use of the strong expressive values alongside proposing a question in the comment is supposed to evoke an emotional reaction within the interpreter, and possibly initiate a deeper discussion on the issue, as well as find a solution to the matter in question.
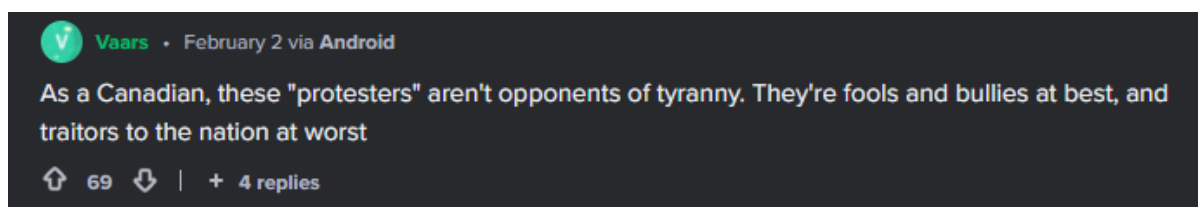
The second comment was posted on the 2nd of February by a user named @Vaars and has accumulated 69 internet points and 4 replies by the 23rd of May 2022. The comment consists of two declarative sentences with high use of expressive values among which "tyranny", "fools", "bullies", and "traitors". Through the presence of declarative sentences and absence of either imperatives or grammatical questions normally used to challenge what's being said, it is visible that the commenter shares the same ideological interpretation of the subjects involved as the speaker of the meme. According to Fairclough, discourse can sustain its continuity when being reproduced[373], and as the commenter structured his/her comment and reproduced the discourse in a way that it mirrors everything that has been brought up during the analysis we can conclude that discourse sustains its continuity in the given comment.

Furthermore, usage of quotation marks around the noun protesters indicates intertextually embossed interpretation of the category of protesters, who have, historically opposed tyranny, while these protesters are actually to be perceived as tyrants who are bullying and betraying the nation. Moreover, it manifests delegitimisation of the said protesters. Additionally, the category of protesters has been ascribed the actions of a negative nature by the use of the expressive values "traitors", "bullies", and "fools" making the said category very dangerous and sinister.

When looking at the way the comment is structured, the commenter expresses its national belonging to the category of Canadians at the beginning, which follows by a generalised

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[372] @Vaars. *Imgur*. 2022-02-02. https://imgur.com/gallery/aZjqTQw/comment/2190650373 Comment can be found in Appendix B, Figure 18. (Accessed 2022-05-23).

[373] Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd edition. Longman. 2001, 32.

statement that is to be interpreted as something every Canadian believes in. Moreover, by portraying him-/herself as a Canadian, the commenter gives him-/herself the power to speak in the name of the whole nation, as well as the characteristics of a credible representative of the group, and as someone whose opinion should be perceived and interpreted as a truth-claim. What contributes to interpreting the commenter's statement as a truth-claim is the use of declarative sentences, which are used to present given information as facts, that are not to be questioned.

Order, Ideology & Common Sense

Considering that every discourse is affected by commonsensical and ideological utterances, including the one in memes it is of great importance for our paper to take notice of the ideologies manifested in the analysis of the chosen memes. In the case of this particular meme, the type of discourse used, the personal discourse type connected with Instagram, carries the notion that the provided meme carries the truth of the speaker's experience with it in terms of the Canadian Convoy Protest. The type of discourse that is connected with the original platform, Instagram, serves to provide constraints on the discourse connected with the portrayal of the authenticity of the speaker - meaning that the speaker implicitly understands that she is speaking on her own behalf and about her own experiences and through her own interpretation of the phenomenon. Furthermore, we find the discourse type of political discourse amended by the personal portrayal of the first discoursal type. This means that the truth-claims and interpretations provided in the meme serve to be both political and personal.

The types of discourses used in this meme, then, serves to reinforce the truth-claims offered by the speaker as well as the construction of the contents, relations, and subjects portrayed in the meme. Politically, the meme serves to negotiate the relation between the category protesters and locals, by offering several cues for the interpreters that constructs an extreme identity connected with the protesters.

There is no negotiation on the behalf of the political struggle of the protesters, but rather a delegitimisation of the protesters and their identities, on the basis of the disruption of the normal social order that is supposed to be upheld by an inactive police force, stated to disrupt the lives and businesses of the locals of Ottawa. It is through this position, through the category of local, that the producer of the Instagram post constructs the relation between the protesters and the other subjects and categories in the meme. The producer relies on the common sense assumptions offered for the justification of the restrictions, stating that the protesters are

undermining their own cause by potentially spreading COVID-19 during the protest, extending the restrictions, prolonging the basis of why the protesters are protesting.

The common sense assumption displayed by the producer about the need for restrictions, then, becomes a cause of contention between the involved subjects, and we see the concepts safety versus freedom being held up against each other during the post, where the producer of the instagram post favours safety over the protesters' demand for 'freedom', - the producer using quotation marks to underline the disagreement with the protesters about the premise of restrictions undermining freedom. The speaker seems to further the social order stemming from the institutional setting of the government of Canada, following an ideology that favours safety precautions through restrictions over freedom - this dichotomy being emphasised in the meme, even if it only serves to mock the protesters. The ideology of the speaker, then, seems to fall in line with the liberal party of Canada, supporting the already established power-relations that are to be found within the social order of the Canadian society.

The interpretations of the Instagram post provided by the OP serves as a framing that adds to the entrancement and negative portrayals between the involved groups furthering the interpretation of the actions taken by the group to categorise them alongside 'nazis' and 'traitors'. What is to be especially noted is the role of the OP, whose commentary between the screenshots and in the title serves this further ideological interpretation of the original post which is being reflected in the comments. The OP does not negotiate with the truth-claims of the speaker of the meme, but rather adds commentary that underlines the most egregious experiential values and expressive values about the protesters. The duplicative organisations especially serve as a powerful means to define the category-based explanations about the protesters. The addition of the 'nazi', 'traitor' and 'racist' serve to simultaneously facilitate an attitudinal and social polarisation, as the strongly negative expressive values in the post are mirrored in the comments, but we also see a rejection of subjects by the OP and the interpreters on the comments subjects based on their assumed ideology.

Discussion

Understanding the platforms and their impact on discourse - a discussion of order

To start our discussion we would like to deal with how we saw how order was being dealt with on the platforms by interpreters - how they negotiated conventions and restrictions offered by the social order - as well as how the institutional setting impacted on this process. What we saw in our analysis was that the institutional setting of the platforms rather than emphasising restrictions of the discourse on its interpreters, instead acts as a mirror for societal order based on the situational setting of the meme, that is then negotiated by the interpreters on the platforms. What we mean by this is that because the platform is online, removed from a material setting with 'real individuals' who act in accordance with the subject positions afforded to them by an institutional setting, the situational setting works to inform the interpreters of the social order in question to a higher degree than the institutional setting. What we did see impacted upon, however, was the emphasised dichotomy of choice, either upvoting or downvoting - agreeing or disagreeing with the idea presented in the meme. This dichotomy we saw reflected in the comment under all the memes, that they did not interrogate the idea of the meme, it's truth-claim, but rather they all showed a tendency to use declarative sentences and strong expressive values in favour of the meme.

It would seem that since the institutional setting of the platform, while seemingly not offering overtly recognisable restrictions to discourse for the producers, other than the ones stated in the terms and service and the very few formal elements such as the title of the meme, tags, and voluntary comment under the meme, the interpreters navigate their understanding of order in a way that emanates from the content of each meme in relation to the choice of affirming or rejecting the idea. These restrictions by the institutional settings might explain why we witnessed a lack of nuance in the constructions of the involved categories and subjects. What this institutional setting adds to the construction of discourse should be understood as the primary facilitator of the modes of communication that appear on the platforms. We note, however, that the memes appearing on 9GAG had a higher emphasis on brevity and offered less contextual information meaning that the memes on 9GAG were less substantial when it came to informing interpreters of the content, subjects, and the relations in question. We do consider, though, that the mix of visual, textual, video and auditory elements used in the

production of the memes is afforded to them by the lack of restrictions on producers but still seen through the emphasis on informing interpreters of whether or not they should agree or disagree with the idea they present. The institutional setting, then, offers a space where communication of the producers is dependent on creativity, on how they producers *want* to communicate, rather than how they *should* communicate, while it offers its interpreters an emphasis on affirming or rejecting the idea of the producer.

We underline, however, that in relation extreme iterations of discourse, be it depictions of extremely graphic violence and extreme language are banned from the platforms, but even so graphic depictions of violence, rather extreme language can still be found on the platforms, so what constitutes as extreme becomes a point of contention, as this is not made abundantly clear in the TOS of the platforms.

In the context of the Canada Convoy Protest, we saw this freedom of the producer through the analysis of how interpreters used less or more creative combinations of discourse types to either reject or reaffirm order. What we found was that in relation to the topic of the Canada Convoy Protest, there was a difference on each platform as to whether they rejected societal order or not. What we found through our analysis of the memes and subsequent comments on Imgur was a tendency to affirm societal order in the context of the Canada Convoy Protest, demands for the upholding societal functions alongside with societal conventions - something made very apparent in the meme titled "The terrorists need to be arrested already."[374] when the speaker of the meme laments the impact of the truckers' protest on local businesses and the safety of the locals, and makes a call for action for the local institutions.

We find a similar affirmation of order in the "FluTruxKlan"[375] meme, where the speaker flips off a trucker, gesturing "fuck", emphasising the need for normality rather than the uprising against government authority. Instead we saw a demand for the use of force by the authorities against the protestors on several comments - as well as in the meme "We need more of them to be this way."[376], where the speaker, Betty Bowers, entertained the notion of locking up the truckers.

We observed a less creative, less subversive use of different discourse types in the memes of these posts, as well as in the comments, and we assess that this was exactly due to the agreement

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[374] Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 6.
[375] Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 5.
[376] Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 4.

with the conventions stemming from societal order. We can consider how this reflects Fairclough's explanation of how the creative combination of discourse types is used to solve issues that stems from the problematisation of the producers position:

(...) a strategy for dealing with the problematization of one's position is to be creative, to put together familiar discourse types in novel combinations as a means of finding new ways of doing things to replace the now-problematic old ones[377]

A notable point from our analysis was the meme with Betty Bowers[378] breaking with her normal use of satire, abandoning the otherwise subversive premise of the character. This can be seen as a reduction in the types of discourse of discourses normally being used by the character Betty Bowers, as her position in relation to the Canada Convoy Protest, but more specifically the response to the second speaker in the meme, was not problematised and instead was in line with the societal order. The abandonment of humour as a discourse type was recurring in the analysed memes from Imgur. Something we might consider as being rather odd considering the typical implementation of discourse type in the production of memes, as well as them appearing on a platform whose focus is on fun.

This difference was also notable in the reliance of text rather than images on Imgur. The most agreed with meme on Imgur, "The terrorists need to be arrested already."[379], featured straight forward text with a personal discourse type that was implicitly political. The agreement with the meme on the platform most likely has to do with the construction of the knowledge and beliefs, social identity, and social relation done by the speaker, but this construction also stems from an agreement with the social order - the upkeep of social functions and conventions emphasised in the meme.

There were also less comments that used a creative combination of discourse types used on Imgur. Six out of the six chosen comments featured straight text as well. Only in the comments under the "We need more of them to be this way."[380] did we find an implementation of irony, but even then the comments did not employ the combination of more discourse types in an effort to subvert. Something worth noting was that the "We need more of them to be this

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[377] Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd edition. Longman. 2001, 142.

[378] Meme can be found Appendix A, Figure 4.

[379] Meme can be found Appendix A, Figure 6.

[380] Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 4.

way."[381] meme featuring a normally satirical character, was the only one eliciting the use of irony in one of the chosen comments. This suggests that discourse types used in the posted meme informs the use of discourse types for the interpreters' in the comment section when they produce their comments - something we saw repeated on 9GAG as well, but we will return to this.

And so, not only would it seem that the less creative combination of discourse types was seen in the memes in relation to affirming social order but was also furthered by the less creative combination of discourse types in the comments. This would also suggest that neither the commenters' nor the OP's or speaker's positions were problematised by the social order, suggesting that the knowledge and beliefs, social relations, and social identities of the interpreters suggested by the social order. From this we can extrapolate that the position of the interpreters upvoting the meme, signifying agreement, also signifies whether or not their position is problematised in relation to the social order being dealt with in the meme.

The affirmation of order, instead, served to delegitimise the cause and political struggle of the protesting truckers, a group that was going against societal order. What we can say that the analysis showed was that we saw a connection between affirmation of order and a less creative combination of discourse on Imgur. When looking at how 9GAG dealt with order we get a different use of discourse types.

To begin with, we saw that the use of images was more prevalent in the chosen memes. Both "Honk"[382] and "Truck Trudeau"[383] featured a primary use of salient visual elements. This was also seen in the selected comments, four out of the six chosen comments featured made use of visuals rather than text. Our analysis of "Honk"[384] showed how the creative combination of the discourse types, comedy series, politics, and meme, served to undermine the seriousness of the notion of revolution.

The subversion of social conventions, the notion that within democracy negotiation between political groups serves as the basis of how problems are resolved rather than through uprising against an elected government. The comment made under "Honk"[385] implied the same use of the combination of discourse types to achieve a similar effect of subverting social order. The

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[381] Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 4.

[382] Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 1.

[383] Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 3.

[384] Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 1.

[385] ibid.

meme posted in the comment section under "Honk"[386] featuring Pepe the Frog[387], while negotiating the social identity and category of Canada and Canadian in favour of a more right leaning ideology also subverted the social conventions of Canada, that is usually defined by a liberal outlook, as seen in the consecutive choice of the Liberal Party of Canada (LPC) for government.

The subversion of order was also seen in the comment featuring the "Are ya winning, son?"[388] meme in the comment section under "Honk".[389] While this meme focused on Trudeau rather than Canadian identity he should also be seen as a leading representative of order since the restriction connected with the power relations in society. The depiction of Trudeau connected with Fidel Castro subverted the legitimacy of the order emanating from the LPC leadership. "Truck Trudeau"[390] and "Ohhhhhhh Canada"[391] see the use of the same creative use of discourse types to subvert order, the recurring type being that of humour. The use the discourse types in the posted meme, can also be argued to influence the types used in the comment sections, as we argued it was the case on Imgur, and as we saw the use of memes with the discourse of humour in four out of six of the chosen comments in comments on 9GAG suggest the same pattern occurred on 9GAG.

We can understand the position of the producers of the meme "Honk"[392] and the producers of the meme in the comments is that the combination of the types of discourses is brought on by the problematisation that order serves for their position to the Canada Convoy Protest. The delegitimisation of authority operated through the subversion of order, and through this construction the positions of the producers of the memes in question were no longer problematised. The same patterns showed up in our analysis of both the "Truck Trudeau"[393] and "Ohhhhhhh Canada"[394] memes.

It seems then that the producers of the two platforms developed different tactics in terms of dealing with order. On Imgur we saw one that was defined by affirmation and a less creative

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[386] Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 1.
[387] Comment can be found in Appendix B, Figure 7.
[388] Comment can be found in Appendix B, Figure 8.
[389] Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 1.
[390] Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 3.
[391] Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 2.
[392] Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 1.
[393] Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 3.
[394] Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 2.

use of discourse types, and on 9GAG we saw a more creative use of discourse types to subvert order to avoid a problematisation of their position in relation to the Canada Convoy Protest. These rejections and affirmations were then furthered by all the analysed comments on all the memes.

Here we would like to note how curious it seems that the order of the Canadian society was being negotiated on the platforms by interpreters that might not even be Canadian. The potentially global audience of interpreters, however, became invested in either affirming or rejecting order, to undo the problematisation of their position in the face of the order presented to them, and we wonder how we might consider this discovery. Fairclough himself speculated about how the effect of the 'global', in our paper represented by the online platforms, would have on order:

A consequence of this 'global' presence in many different countries is there is a constant external point of reference and horizon for their own discursive practices. (...) Each society has its own order of discourse and its own dynamic, and how 'global' practices colonize it or are appropriated within it will depend on that dynamic (...) Politics is constructed as an autonomous domain which is represented in news, whereas our experience is of a transformed, 'mediatized' politics. These differences are part of differences in the social order and the order of discourse. They indicate that the globalization of discourse is a domain of struggle, not just a domain of homogenization.[395]

The 'globals' - 'the onlines' - colonisation of the Canadian social order could be understood through Fairclough's iteration of mediatised politics suggesting that political struggle follows discourse into the realm where it is taking place, from the streets and newspapers and onto the online platforms such as 9GAG and Imgur. As the platforms become the media from which politics are being represented, any political struggle shown on the platforms becomes relevant for the interpreters, and not just something tethered to specific local settings, but rather as a part of their meaning making of the world. We should consider that the freedom of the institutional setting of the platforms, then also means freedom from purely local/ national context.

The consequence of this, however, is that the local understanding, the situational setting, and the involved subjects as well as the relations between the subjects becomes dependent on the discursive structures presented through the platforms. Understanding the platforms as domains of struggle, as Fairclough would do, explains why the interpreters affirmation and rejection of

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[395] Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd edition. Longman. 2001, 206.

order - but we might have to look closer at Fairclough's rejection of homogenisation happening through the globalisation of discourse.

As our discussion of order in relation to our analysis showed, we saw a similarity in terms of rejection or affirmation of order on each website, and these similarities seemed to be ideologically informed, and were made to create a further distance between the involved group leading to cases of delegitimisation and polarisation, many of them based on just the basis of the truth-claims found in the posted memes. One of the consequences of this seemed to be a higher degree of ideological informed interpretations and constructions of the involved groups. To discuss this let us look at how the discursive structuring occurred alongside membership categorisation and delve into what we found during our analysis, and discuss how these constructions dealt with the truth about the 'left' and 'right'.

The construction of the 'left' and 'right'

9GAG

Starting with 9GAG, we saw through our analysis that through the rejection of order, the discourse that was structured to support this rejection showed some clear patterns across the memes. There was a high use of expressive values, meaning that the structural effects that were impacted were that of the social identities involved in the discourse. These social identities on 9GAG primarily had to do with the Liberal Party of Canada (LPC) and more specifically their leader, Justin Trudeau.

Here the element of the political dichotomy of 'left' and 'right' comes in. The position that was problematised by the social order in Canada was that of the identity of the truckers - anti-government, anti-vaccination, anti-mask, and anti-COVID-19 mandates, alongside their affiliation with far-right elements, and through this, their relation with the rest of society became problematised, aiding in delegitimising the social identity.

What our analysis showed was that to solve this, a discursive structuring surrounding the social identity of the truckers as well as the government and the 'left', represented through the inclusion of Justin Trudeau, was developed using mainly visual elements.

Looking at the "Honk" meme[396] we see that the expressive values alongside the declarative sentence, seen through the duplicative organisation of the character Kramer, Canada, and truckers, subverted this problematised social identity into something that instead was structured with around an experiential value relating to the humorous notion of 'revolution', something with more positive connotation such as 'freedom' - implying the need to overthrow government. The tag "Freedom Convoy 2022" also supported this construction.

This new positioning of the government was a reversal of the problematisation of positions. In this construction the truckers became the voice of Canadians, rather than the government.

This structuring transformed the social identity of the truckers and simultaneously that of the Canadian government. In this discursive construction the truckers are no longer the problem, the government is. Looking our chosen comments posted under "Honk"[397], we saw how the altered "Are, ya winning, Son"[398] meme used a duplicative organisation to categorise Trudeau with Fidel Castro, having the effect of delegitimising the prime minister, but also tone that impacted the discursive construction of the political scales in terms of defining the 'left' and 'right'.

The comparison between Trudeau and Castro served to imply the closeness between the ideologies

left _____ right
　　socialism　　　　liberalism　　　conservatism

of the two, meaning that while the right remained unchanged in the meme, the construction of 'left' was moved further to the left, beyond socialism and into that of authoritarian communism. We saw this construction based on duplicative organisation between Castro and Trudeau mirrored in another comment made under the meme "Truck Trudeau"[399]. The meme "Truck Trudeau" also furthered the incompetence and common sense assumption about the lies made by the political leader. The appearance of such duplicative organisations leads the mind back to Muirhead and Rosenbaum's point of new conspiracism - it being that new conspiracies present conspiracy without theory.[400] The speculation on the validity of and the deserved trust in political leaders we also saw mirrored in the "Truck Trudeau"[401] meme. There we saw the

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[396] Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 1.

[397] ibid.

[398] Comment can be found in Appendix B, Figure 8.

[399] Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 3.

[400] Muirhead, Russel., and L. Rosenbaum, Nancy. *A Lot of People Are Saying: The New Conspiracism and the Assault on Democracy*. Princeton University Press. 2019, 3.

[401] Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 3.

claim of Trudeau lying as being commonsensical without discussing the possible merits of his claim.

This tactic of validation of the truckers should also be seen as a way to gain endorsement of the ideology behind their actions. As the legitimacy of social identities is tied together with the power relations of society, so too are the ideologies that inform those identities. The clash of identities and categories on the platforms, then should also be seen as the clash ideologies. But we did not find any discussion on the basis of the problem of the lockdown, the COVID-19 pandemic, rather, only attempts at tearing down the political establishment upholding the restrictions.

Here we might find a reason for the producers not engaging in verifying the truth-claims on 9GAG and discussing 'left' and 'right' through more nuance and complexity, as well as understand why memes serve the construction of discourse that goes against social conventions more effectively than outright political discourse. We saw these truth-claims supported by the high use of declarative sentences in the "Truck Trudeau" meme[402], suggesting a strong support for the claims found in the meme.

Discursive constructions relying on creating affective, attitudinal, and social polarisation between groups in the context of emotionally laden topics serves to underline how post-truth conditions play into the structuring of discourse that explain the relations between groups with different ideologies. Why would the producers of 9GAG, seen agreeing with the ideologies of the truckers in our analysis, try to structure discourse around the negotiation of other ideological viewpoints? We turn to Kalpokas to understand this question:

In an environment of ever-increasing speed and simultaneity of interactions and ever-increasing awareness of the temporality of everything, which, in turn fuels even more demand for speed (see, generally, Couldry and Hepp 2017: 104–108), a natural question to be asked is why waste time verifying and thinking deeply. (...) Essentially, political communication is about 'blending entertainment values with political values' (Marshall and Henderson 2016: 3); in that context, 'using emotional cues helps to get audiences' attention and to prolong engagement' (Suiter 2016: 27). In this environment, packaging—and, indeed, branding—becomes more important than content in effectively—which, in this case, means affectively— asserting one's truth-claim.[403]

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[402] Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 3.

[403] Kalpokas, Ignas. *A Political Theory of Post-Truth*. Springer Nature. 2019, 36-37.

Why spend time discussing the merit of the 'left' when you agree with the 'right'. What became apparent through our analysis of the memes and comments on 9GAG was how short and precise the communication was. Here the reliance on expressive values and declarative sentences makes sense as they are easily read and understood as either negative or positive evaluations of the social identities in question, and so relying on this kind of construction of the 'left', as negative as can be, seems to fall in line with how Kalpokas asks why we should spend time thinking deeply - why would we need more complexity in our structures of the world when it appears so readily while I scroll? We can see this reflected in the most popular meme on the platform, "Honk"[404] only consisting of two lines of dialogue, three conversational lines, and visual elements.

The emphasis on brevity that the institutional setting seems to produce can also be used to explain the need to create less complex discursive constructions when an agreement upon a topic has already been reached. What was notable was that the construction of the 'left' was not done overtly, but rather implicitly and seemed to operate on interpreters' pre understanding, their MR of what should be considered 'left', only skimming the surface of what the 'left' entails, making a larger space for ideology to inform interpreters of how they should interpret the world.

The construction of the 'left', then, also became an exercise of seeing it through interpretations of interpretations, through the intertextual elements used in the memes, without the complexities tied together with the context of the matter.

As to the reason why an ideology exists on 9GAG that constructs the 'left' in a way that lead to further polarisation cannot be answered by us, rather we can speculate that this construction is an continuation of former interpretation and productions of social reality and social relations that now serve as the prevalent member resources (MR) for the interpers on the platform.

Imgur

The structuring of discourse on Imgur relied on the same use of highly negatively laden expressive values and duplicative organisations that served to instill further polarisation between the interpeters of Imgur and the truckers or the 'right', equating the protestors with Nazis, the Klu Klux Klan, and terrorists, extending the political scale past the point where 'right' meant conservative and into the extremist territory past the point of negotiation with a

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[404] Meme can be found in Appendix A, Figure 1.

democratic frame. This reduction of social identities to facilitate social, attitudinal, and affective polarisation facilitated by the formation of discursive structures on the platform mirror the one discussed in the analysed memes and comments on 9GAG, the difference being ideology, or preference of ideology.

The institutional setting seemed to add some more complexity to the memes added to the platforms, allowing for multiple consecutive memes on one post, as well as affording the OP space to comment and contextualise the memes. The use of this, however, was not used to engage in more nuanced constructions of the protestors, but rather seemed to add more texture to the delegitimisation. The institutional setting of the platform still emphasises a dichotomy of choice, affirmation or rejection, and the presentation of the ideas in the memes seemed to reflect that on Imgur as well.

The use of tags in the analysed memes included more explicit and radical assumptions of the protesters, for instance in the three analysed memes the tag 'Flutruxklan' was used. Additionally, all memes had at least one tag that either indicates the political affiliation - 'republicansareterriblepeople' - or an ideological belief that describes the identity of the truckers as a group in a negative light - 'antimask', 'antivax', 'covidiots' and 'home grown terrorists'. By making a reference to a side of the political spectrum, the OPs and the commenters positioned themselves, especially expressionally ladened valued like saying Republicans are terrible people one is placing oneself as opposite to it, thus indicating that his ideological spectrum sits on the left, as Republicans are considered to be 'right' on the political spectrum.

We consider that the most popular meme, "These terrorists need to be arrested already", also contained some of the harshest negative expressive values in regards to the social identities of the truckers seen in the use of the noun 'terrorists', and with the analysed comments using expressive values such as 'racists' and 'nazis'. The meme itself did not contain the mention of these extreme values, but was critical of the protest. Instead it was the OP that added the more extreme expressive value 'terrorists'. And so, we see that the blending of entertainment values and political values, as formulated by Kalpokas[405], did not forego use on the platform of Imgur in favour of thinking deeply.

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[405] Kalpokas, Ignas. *A Political Theory of Post-Truth*. Springer Nature. 2019, 36-37.

We also find that in this context the brevity we argued for in the relation to 9GAG, did not apply in the same way on Imgur, as we observed more textual, longer posts in general. We have also found that, when compared to 9GAG, Imgur's memes contained many more information sources references in terms of media organisations being mentioned, as well as information sources from Twitter - which are both mostly textual in nature.

The ideology being disseminated on the platform seemed more substantiated, and had a higher count of information sources of news organisations, a point being discussed in detail later, but as mentioned earlier it led to the same polarisation. What we saw on Imgur was that the analysed memes did lead to the same homogeneous interpretation of the Canada Convoy Protest but with a different ideological flavour, leading us back to Fairclough's thoughts on globalisation and discourse again.

What we saw through our analysis might point towards the fact that the online effectively facilitates a clustering of like minded people, that the globalisation of discourse does not necessarily homogenise discourse, but that instead connects people with similar beliefs about social reality and social relations. Consequently, these clusterings create spaces where echo chambers can easily be created, especially when looking at the top comments as in every meme we have analysed from Imgur the comments provided a continuity of the ideas of the meme, indicating that they represented the majority vote from the users and what was that gathered the most agreement in the platform: the disregard and delegitimisation of the trucker's protest and motivations, as the memes reject the trucker's motives for freedom as valid, and instead state they are based on anti-vaccine and racist believes.

The difference in ideology on the platforms, as well as the interpreters' reinforcement of said ideology through discursive structures should be considered in the context of their ability to operate within the same democratic settings. We do not know of the platforms' interpreters' specific nationality, only that they represent a global community, and even so, the interpreters on each platform respectively seem to share and support similar ideologies across nations. However, there are elements that point to an international and intercultural environment, from the inclusion of the tag mentioning Republicans even though such party does not exist in Canada, the equivalent would be called Conservatives, as well as the use of an American Conservative satirical character to comment on status of a situation happening spatially in Canada.

Overall assessment of the discursive structuring

When the 'left' and 'right' on each platform respectively seems to be structured with such repeated negative connotations, we consider their impact on the discursive construction of its interpreters' ability to uphold the faith in their political counterparts to be undermined - as discussed above through the analysed tactics of polarisation we found in our analysis.

We did not find any well substantiated, nuanced, or reflective discussions on the questions relating to how each ideology would tackle the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, and instead the discourse surrounding this as seen through the Canada Convoy Protest deteriorated the construction of what should be considered 'left' and 'right' on each platform. We ask ourselves how the current state of the understanding of 'left' and 'right' is on either platform after these constructions have found place, and we consider them to be worse off in terms of accuracy and sophistication.

The structural effect of this in relation to the democratic institution, discursively speaking, is devastating. The construction of social reality and social relation did not only not happen based on the same resources, but the discursive structuring of the Canada Convoy Protest itself was not recognisable when comparing one platform to the other. In this way the establishment of common sense drifts apart on the platforms, as the MR of the interpreters become more determined by the input of the platforms.

The seriousness of the polarisation occurring through the discursive structures becomes apparent when we consider the scope and scale that it occurs in outside of the chosen data for our analysis, which is why we want to discuss patterns we saw in our data collection.

Scope and Scale - An Overview on Data Collection & Categorisation

The processes of data collection and data categorisation we have carried out have provided us with a panoply of information that, due to assignment constraints, we were not able to analyse fully. By this we mean that it would have been impossible to discuss all 293 memes we collected with the used eight search words on both 9GAG and Imgur. Although, this thorough collection and categorisation has provided us with relevant information from which we can somewhat extrapolate from to understand in a wider overview how the Canada Convoy Protest was represented through points of objective and concrete information that does not require analysis, yet that it provides an insight on the platforms and the memes regarding the protest. We will then look at some of the information we have collected from the memes, and the

subsequent information we generated that stemmed from the collection, through our adaptation of Kitchens et al.'s table on the constructs, in particular information source engagement, information source quantity, information source dispersion, information source frequency.

Search Words

We will start by looking at the results the eight search words have generated, and what they reveal about the platform and also about the memes on Figure 21.[406] Firstly, the search words have equated to 43 more memes on Imgur than on 9GAG, although not a significant discrepancy it is still one worth mentioning. By looking at the number of memes we have found per search word we can, to some level, infer the overall sympathies of the meme producers, or OPs, on each of the platforms. For instance, the two search words 'Truckers for Freedom' and 'Truckers Vaccine' produced no results on both platforms. However, more relevant is to look at the search word 'Flutruxklan' which resulted in 93 memes on Imgur, but zero on 9GAG - as we discussed in the analysis of the "Flutruxklan" meme, this word has a negative connotation, by creating an underlying association of the truckers as antivaxxers who are racists - evidenced by the use of 'klan' as in Ku Klux Klan. As this word is understood as having such associations, we could infer that 9GAG's users did not consider it to be a word that reflected the identity of the group and as such did not use it, while at the same time it also draws a line of Imgur's users positioning themselves against antivaxxers and racists.

Additionally, the search word 'Freedom Convoy', a name which was also used during the Canada Convoy Protest to refer to it alludes to the nature of the protest as having to do with freedom, as the thing that was being fought for and at stake - this was the second most used search word in both platforms, although it represented 42% of memes from 9GAG[407], it was only 25% of the memes from Imgur[408]. This indicates that despite it being the second most tagged search word in the memes we have collected, when looking at the ratio the difference is significant. This leads us to ask which is the search word that was the most used on each of the platforms. On 9GAG 56% of the memes, meaning 70 memes in total, the search word 'Truckers' was the most used - a search word that has a more neutral description of what is is about, unlike 'Flutruxklan' we cannot conclude on the sympathies in regards to the protest from it. On Imgur 56% of the memes, that is 93 memes, were tagged with the search word

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[406] Chart can be found in Appendix F, Figure 21.
[407] Chart can be found in Appendix F, Figure 21A.
[408] Chart can be found in Appendix F, Figure 21B.

'Flutruxklan' making it the most popular of our data collection in the platform. We should note, though, that while having the same percentage in regards to the most popular search word that corresponded to a difference of 23 more memes for the top category on Imgur.

Information Sources Quantity

In regards to information source quantity[409] we remark that while the most popular category is Original Meme (OM) with 52 memes on both platforms, they account for a different ratio - on 9GAG that is equivalent to 42% of memes[410], while on Imgur that is only 33%.[411] We also note that the least popular categories were Compilation (C) and News Videos (NV) on both platforms. Looking at the panorama of information source quantity on Imgur the most popular categories for memes were Original Meme and Meme Template (MT), these together account for 68% of the memes, followed by a much lower incidence of News Articles (NA) and Other (O). On the other hand, Imgur has a significant recurrence of OM and Tweets (T), being that the two account for 61% of the memes on the platform, being followed by a significantly close number of memes being O with 24 memes (15%) and NA with 21 memes (13%).

Overall on 9GAG most of the memes are original memes or memes relying on already existing templates, while on Imgur memes are mostly original memes or tweets - to which we highlight that Imgur also has a significant number of memes which are NA. Thus, a pattern becomes visible, the News category including articles and videos as well as the Tweets category are the only categories which refer to media sources or the source of the information that is being used in the meme. This means that by looking at the media sources, according to the information source dispersion, from the information we can uncover slant on a left or right basis. As we explained in Methodology we used two independent sources to access slant, and based on these assessments we will explain ahead the slant we have found on the data collection pertaining to news articles. We have not collected the individual information sources of each tweet, apart from the frequency of tweets as a category, as we realised that it would be difficult to find the slant of individuals on Twitter from a single tweet. So we have decided to only categorise the slant of news media found in the data collection, it is on the slant found we will delve into next.

An overview of all the data collected per category illustrates the kind of memes that were created and posted about the Canada Convoy Protest on 9GAG and Imgur. The most common

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[409] Chart can be found in Appendix F, Figure 22.

[410] Chart can be found in Appendix F, Figure 22A.

[411] Chart can be found in Appendix F, Figure 22B.

category was OM with 104 memes and making up 37% of all memes; the second was T with 55 corresponding to 19%; and the third was MT with 41 memes and 14%. The total of these three categories makes up for 70% of collected memes about the protest, so we can conclude that overall users prefer to create memes that are either original or resort to recognisable templates to create their cultural units, with the particular feature of having a large incidence in combining discourses from Twitter with those of 9GAG and Imgur, by using Tweets as memes.

News Sources & Information Source Dispersion

In total we found 15 memes categorised as news on 9GAG, and 27 on Imgur.[412] Although we found that media sources were also being mentioned in other categories of memes, so we decided to count mentions of media sources in all of the memes, instead of only on the ones we had categorised within the News category. As a result we collected a total of 36 media sources mentions on Imgur[413], and 15 on 9GAG.[414]

On Imgur's memes the most cited information source was CBC, appearing a total of 12 times, CBS and CTV, as the second most mentioned, appear four times each, Toronto Star and NPR two times each and the following ten sources appear once.[415] For this reason CBC occupies 33% of the 36 media sources mentioned, being the most cited, the two second most mentioned sources take 11% each. So the top three most mentioned media sources make up for 51% of the media sources of all memes with information sources from a media organisation.[416]

Our assessment of information source dispersion or slant, according to *AllSides* and *Media Bias/ Fact Check*, evidences the political positioning of the news sources mentioned, from a left to right spectrum. This assessment of political bias positioning can be found on Appendix F, Figure 31. On Imgur we have found that it significantly leans more towards left/ liberal with seven out of the total of 16 news organisations, leading to a ratio of 44% of information sources aligning with the political left. The second most frequent leaning in information sources is centre, with seven news organisations equating to Following the left leaning with five information sources is the political centre corresponding to 31% of ratio. This means that 75%

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[412] Chart can be found in Appendix F, Figure 22.

[413] Chart can be found in Appendix F, Figure 23.

[414] Chart can be found in Appendix F, Figure 24.

[415] Chart can be found in Appendix F, Figure 23.

[416] Chart can be found in Appendix F, Figure 23A.

of the news organisations that have been mentioned in the meme collected from Imgur have a left leaning bias. As an addendum we should emphasise that two news organisations have been classified as 'unknown' as we were unable to find their slant.

On 9GAG's memes most media sources were mentioned once or twice, so there is not one source that stands out.[417] The two most mentioned media organisations with two mentions each are Fox News and Daily Mail UK, all the remaining 11 organisations are only mentioned once each. This means that the two most mentioned news organisations only make up for 26% of the information sources[418] - as there are less mentions of news organisations, by less than half than Imgur, the ratio is also more divided without emphasising any in particular. This assessment of political bias positioning can be found on Appendix F, Figure 30. 9GAG's assessment of information source dispersion is more balanced than on Imgur, nine sources have been classified as right/ conservative, two sources as centre, and five sources as left/ liberal. This shows that on 9GAG, while the right takes up 56% of the mentions, the left follows with 31%. This means that, unlike Imgur, 9GAG has a more balanced information source dispersion, with a clear majority bias leaning towards the right, yet there is a significant slant to the left as well.

We can, thus, through the inference of the information source dispersion of each platform conclude on the slant of the user's of 9GAG and Imgur, as well as taking into account the search words that were used, and by looking at both measures we can find a slant that appears to be predominant in each of the platforms. For instance, the information source dispersion of Imgur suggests that the users of the platform tend to lean more towards the left and centre, and that the favoured type of meme according to our categorisation is OM and T. On the other hand, on 9GAG there's a predominance of right leaning slant in information sources, yet there is also a significant presence of left leaning information sources - which indicates a higher variety of information sources overall - and the preferred types of memes are OM and MT.[419] Moreover, when looking at the ratio of memes on 9GAG and Imgur that had an information source of a news organisation we found that there is a ratio of 21,42% of memes on Imgur that include a sourced mention - in a total of 168 memes we found 36 has a referenced source; while on

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[417] Chart can be found in Appendix F, Figure 24.
[418] Chart can be found in Appendix F, Figure 24A.
[419] Chart can be found in Appendix F, Figure 25.

9GAG the ratio is significantly lower at only 12% of references sources - in a total of 125 memes 15 referenced an information source.

Polarisation & Platforms

As we have established before polarisation can be amplified by filter bubbles and echo chambers - which can occur in online platforms through overt or covert modes, being that echo chambers are spaces where the predominant discourse is in agreement with our own, and filter bubbles which by algorithmic processes create highly curated spaces where opposing discourses are excluded. When applied to the context of our paper, echo chambers can be particularly visible if we take into account who the producers of the meme are, how much in frequency they have contributed to the total amount of memes, and how much engagement or popularity their meme achieves. Due to 9GAG's concealment of the OP we could not gather data on the posters of the platform, although Imgur does provide the name of the user who makes the post, so we have gathered and counted who they are.

From a total of 168 collected memes on Imgur, we found that 161 memes were posted by different users[420] 18 users posted two memes, five users posted three memes, two users posted five times, and one user named @Mech0T1 posted 21 times - of which most were tweets. This is part of the information source frequency. While we have not analysed all the memes from @Mech0T1 to understand to which extend we are able to recognise an echo chamber or a filter bubble, we can declare that a single user being responsible for 21 posts of the 168 memes on a single platform is significant, it accounts for 12,5% of ideas of one single user being communicated on a topic. The amount of times the user posted about the Canada Convoy Protest also denotes how much the user felt invested on the topic, as to have created 21 separate memes, which means his positioning on the protest created a continuity through his own posts, the user could potentially have created a small echo chamber of truth-claims all in support of each other as to provide a stronger argument. Considering how popular tweets are on Imgur's data collection, we can deduce that there is a likelihood that at least one of the memes @Mech0T1 has created has received substantial popularity and agreement on Imgur, which makes up for a polarising effect as the ideas of one single person are so recurrent their changes of popularity grow, and so does the support for the truth-claims one meme makes as there are still 20 more which potentially support it.

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[420] Chart can be found in Appendix F, Figure 27.

Limitations

We are aware that there are some unavoidable limitations to be mentioned, especially since we are analysing data taken from the Internet, more specifically user generated content (UGC) collected from two online platforms, which was not primarily created with the purpose of being used and analysed in an academic research. By realising the several limitations related to the research design, data selection and analysis, we are hoping to minimise the risks of being unaware of the impact our choices have on our research. We acknowledge that as analysers of data that is ideologically driven we may have a bias, but by recognising it we are hoping to avoid it influencing our research. Nonetheless, we have addressed that in the Ethical considerations section.

First we would like to present the limitations related to the platform choice, as well as the data selection process that we have done in the paper. What is important to underline and point out as a possible limitation in relation to the platform choice is that there might have been other platforms that could have been used to conduct research of this kind, as well as that we have collected our data while not being logged in to the platforms, thus being merely visitors but not users, and that this might carry certain changes to how we see data as visitors instead of as users of 9GAG and Imgur.

Another thing we have to acknowledge is that we could not have known all of the search words that would lead to the content related to the Canada Convoy Protest, so we started from the general terms that were more likely to be connected to the protest and we found a few others through the iterative process of the collection. We used only the ones presented in the data collection section of this paper, until we considered that we had reached a point of data saturation, where we were already seeing the same meme being repeated in the data collection under another search word we had already been collecting from. This, however, leaves a possibility of having some search words that might have been attached to the memes in relation to the Canada Convoy Protest overlooked. Even though we arrived at a point of data saturation, there could still have been a lot more data extracted from the platforms, thus our Discussion, as well as the Scope and Scale section could have been affected by this, as they possibly could have been more all-encompassing than it essentially was presented in the paper. In summation, not being able to focus on more data restrained us from conducting a more thorough investigation of the matters in question, although we are aware that without a direct

collaboration with both 9GAG and Imgur we would have been at odds with finding all the memes shared on those platforms about the Canada Convoy Protest.

One more thing that bears limitations is the fact that we could not delve into the comment section to the extent that would have provided for a more complete insight into the continuity and contingency that is ongoing on the platforms. So the replies to the comments were not covered due to the previously mentioned data saturation, as well as due to the lack of resources in terms of time, space and manpower. However, despite choosing to focus on three memes per platform, and two comments per meme, we were able to go in a significant depth with the analysis in regards to what we sought to find.

Furthermore, 9GAG becoming less transparent over time affected our research - such as the removal of the OP from each posted meme unless the OP commented, the deletion of some pages that described in more detail the inner workings of the platform and how content was selected to the curation filter 9GAG has: 'Hot', 'Trending', 'Fresh', 'Top'.

Additionally, lack of transparency on both platforms might have had an influence on our paper, since for example there are no offered clarifications on what the platforms consider being the best comment; whether it is based on the number of upvotes, downvotes or replies, or whether it is relevancy that matters when the platform classifies a comment as being the best one, thus places it on top of the comment section.

Besides the collection of memes and comments, there are certain limitations in regards to the collection of information sources; it was not feasible to collect all of the information sources from both platforms, meaning that we were not able to gather names of all the people being mentioned in the memes and in the comments, so we focused on collecting sources from news organisations instead.

In addition, collection of the OPs was possible on Imgur, although due to the complexity and the low chance of finding the OP's usernames on 9GAG we did not collect that data. That restricted us in regards to having only insights to which users contributed to discourse on Imgur. For example, what we have found on Imgur is that one user @Mech0T1 contributed to discourse to a much greater extent than others[421], however we were not able to determine whether the same person behind this profile posted from other profiles as well. In general, a limitation that is absolutely necessary to be mentioned in research conducted on the data

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[421] See Figure 27 in the Appendix F.

extracted from online platforms such as 9GAG and Imgur is that we cannot know with certainty who is the person behind the profile that is posting/ commenting on the content.

Moreover, due to the difficulties in consensus when it comes to echo chambers and filter bubbles we were left with finding different approaches to the concepts and piecing them together. As authors' approaches tended to be of a narrower nature, that seemed to emphasise too much individual's agency regardless of the platform and the algorithms in place, that on their own already create personalised paths for each user. It would have been very relevant to try to understand if these two concepts do, indeed, exist on 9GAG and Imgur - but this would have required a closer partnership with the platforms and a level of transparency we do not find in less complex elements pertaining to them.

Conclusion

As we reach the conclusion of our paper we must reflect on our findings and our discussion.

The impact of moving away from material reality and relying on signs and symbols, letting the construction of the world to be perceived through - and beholden to - pure discourse, can have massive consequences that might work to undermine a fundamental tenet of why we live within society at all - that we benefit from coexisting. Furthermore, the discursive structures built up on platforms such as 9GAG and Imgur at some point leave the ephemeral spaces of ideas and clash with, and come to inform the very real limitations of material reality.

As we do not know what the future consequences of this seemingly widening gap between online, discursive reality and material reality might be, the discourse that rose up around the COVID-19 pandemic might be a powerful indicator. In some countries the pandemic facilitated and shed light into a seemingly growing political divide amongst their citizens, it brought to light how new conspiracism and free flowing narratives can be used to challenge and even delegitimise government authority to a point where they grind against the carrying capacity of government. The Canada Convoy Protest serves as a contemporary example of how discourse under *post-truth conditions* constructed in *post-truth settings* impacts society.

What we found in our paper was that the discourse constructed on the two platforms, 9GAG and Imgur, served to further distance the interpreters' of the respective platforms' constructions of the 'left' and the 'right' in terms of their role in the Canada Convoy Protest. As the 'left' and 'right' were not directly discussed by the interpreters on the platforms, these discussions instead operated on the implicit understanding of what the 'left' and 'right' was, and in the context of the Canada Convoy Protest these ideologies were represented through truckers or Republicans, and through the mention of liberals and Justin Trudeau.

We found that there was an emphasis on the negative social identity of the political actors connected with 'left' and 'right', with negative constructions of the 'left' appearing on 9GAG and negative constructions of the 'left' on Imgur. These negative constructions were egregious enough to delegitimise the involved political actors, placing them outside the workings of democracy, as these discursive constructions. These tactics for delegitimisation based on discursive constructions and membership categorisations were found in all the analysed memes on 9GAG and Imgur.

The memes used for this construction offered a brevity for the producers in their messaging, and the different modalities used in the memes meant that a higher sense of media literacy and pre-understanding of cultural context was necessary to facilitate the interpretation of them. This also meant that our multimodal discourse analysis became highly relevant and offered a detailed account of how discourse, membership categorisation, and visuals played into the construction of 'left' and 'right'.

Each platform showed an explicit preference when it came to the political actors, 9GAG supporting the political struggle of the truckers by subverting Canadian identity to include the category truckers while simultaneously challenging the societal order stemming from the liberal government by depicting them as authoritarian, communist, incompetent, and liers, by among other, categorising Justin Trudeau alongside Fidel Castro.

Imgur on the other hand, appealed to the social order that was disrupted by the protesting truckers, not by supporting the Canadian government, but instead by decrying the protesters anti-vaccination, anti-mask, and anti-government alongside their disruption of the lives of the locals of Ottawa. Their construction of the truckers followed the same tactic of categorising the protesters alongside extreme political actors such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), nazis, and racist, while problematising their identity.

We saw a difference in the substantiation of truth-claims of the two platforms, Imgur paying more due diligence in terms of including more referencing of their sources of the memes posted to the platforms, but still, this due diligence did not hamper a discourse that negatively affected the social identity of truckers on the platform. These discursive constructions facilitated social, attitudinal and affective polarisation on both platforms, but on each in relation to political actors representing different ideologies.

The freedom that the institutional setting afforded producers of memes encompassing the discursive structuring, meant that the producers were free to be creative in their expressions. On 9GAG we saw a higher need for a creative combination of different discourse types, as the producers on this site had to subvert social order and the problematisation of the identity of truckers. By this we say that on 9GAG categories such as Original Meme (OM) and Meme Template (MT) are the top two categories in frequency of memes about the Canada Convoy Protest, we denote that these categories rely mostly on OP's creativity and are of a more freeform style. On Imgur we saw a less creative combination of discourse types, and a more straightforward messaging, which suggested to us that the difference in creative use of

discourse type stemmed from whether or not producers of discourse affirmed or rejected order. On Imgur, the most frequent categories were OM, News Articles (NA) and Tweets (T), while there is a correlation of OM still being the most popular category in both websites, we highlight on Imgur OPs rely much more on external sources, that being news organisations or profile accounts from Twitter, so there is a much higher dependence on information sources that stem from third-parties, or external sources to the OP as if the OP invest more time on building a *truth-claim* and substantiating it with evidence instead of just claiming it.

We must conclude that discursive structuring on the sites, as seen through our analysis and discussion, only led to worsening conditions for the integrity of democracy, as its members, representatives of the 'left' and 'right' respectively were constructed as illegitimate actors, whose political struggles were neither throughly represented, nor substantially discussed on either platform, instead the constructions only offered surface level insight into the actors morals and ethics, that is, when they were not constructed as extreme.

These impacts on the structures carried forth by the member resources (MR) of the platforms' interpreters does not seem to facilitate space for negotiation, as the construction of the political actors of the 'left' and 'right' only seem further apart than before the Canada Convoy Protest was dealt with on the platforms.

We want to leave our contemporary findings and discussions with a thought to the past, where ideology informed the separate reality of others.

A historical example of what the consequences might be when truth is undermined can be seen through the case of Operation Infection. During the Cold War, the Soviet government started a rumour that the government of USA had created the AIDS virus as part of a bioweapons program partly aimed at the African American population of USA - the rumour was first planted in a Soviet friendly Indian newspaper in 1983, and later more concerted efforts were made by the KGB and the Stasi to spread conspiracy.[422]

As AIDS started spreading through the Soviet Union in the late 1980s Soviet scientists needed the help from their American counterparts to fight the virus, but due to the American government's awareness of the disinformation campaign an exchange of information was

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[422] Simchayoff, Elad. Operation Infection. *Medium.* 2020. https://medium.com/lessons-from-history/operation-infektion-a1485fe85443 (Accessed 2022-05-22).

declined.[423] As a result, Gorbachov apologised to Regan for the disinformation campaign, and the Soviet Academy of Sciences publicly disavowed the conspiracy.[424]

Most interesting, however, are the differences that distinguish the two phenomena from each other. What put the misinformation campaign to rest was the intervention of government and experts - government sanctioned *truth-claims* in response to the conspiracy put a stop to the significant spread of further misinformation.

Government and expert *truth-claims* and public health measures is what fueled the Canada Convoy Protest to begin with. Furthermore, the existence of an easily identifiable external enemy to the USA where the information could be traced back to (the Soviet Union) must be considered as being significant.

This is not to say that the response from governments and experts killed the conspiracy altogether. A study, *Are HIV/AIDS Conspiracy Beliefs a Barrier to HIV Prevention Among African Americans?,* conducted in 2005 by the RAND Corporation and the Oregon State University, supported by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, showed that the conspiracy still affected African American communities. A survey of 500 randomly selected African Americans showed that:

- *Nearly 27 percent agreed that "AIDS was produced in a government laboratory."*
- *About 16 percent agreed that AIDS was created by the government to control the black population.*
- *About 15 percent agreed that AIDS is a form of genocide against African Americans.[425]*

We wonder what untruths will live on after the Canada Convoy Protest, when experts and government no longer suffice to verify Truth within their own nations.

If we do not reaffirm the people and institutions around us in their ability to contribute and partake in society and democracy, if we do not validate their right to negotiate the power that is prevalent in society, then democracy as an institution will cease to function, as it can only survive through the belief in our shared interest in sustaining it.

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Glossary

@ - mentions, usernames

9gagger - common name for 9GAG users

AT&T - American Telephone and Telegraph Company

CDA - Critical Discourse Analysis

CU - Canada Unity

DHS - Department of Homeland Security

GIF - Graphic Interchange Format

Imgurian - common name for Imgur users

Lurker - common name for visitors/users who are passive towards the platform's content

LPC - Liberal Party of Canada

MCA - Membership Categorisation Analysis

MoU - Memorandum of Understanding

MR - Member resources (Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis)

NSFW - Not Safe For Work

OANN - One American News Network

PC - Progressive Conservative Party (Canada)

POC - People of colour

POV - Point of View

OP - Original Poster

SCGGC - Senate of Canada and Governor General of Canada

TOS - Terms of Service

UGC - User Generated Content