Presentation:In what ways do social media also allow populist leaders like Donald Trump to spread propaganda and manipulate public perception post -2020 US Presidental election.

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Introduction

- The 2020 U.S. presidential election revealed how social media, can be used to spread misinformation and mobilize political action. Donald Trump repeatedly claimed the results of the elections were fraudulent, promoting narratives such as the #StopTheSteal campaign, the fake elector scheme, and attacks on voting systems like Dominion. He amplified this rhetoric primarily through Twitter. His followers spread these messages to other platforms, which culminated in the historic storming of the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, an event where people rioted to contest the results of the election. This presentation draws on multiple authors and theories to analysis the effect of the propaganda leading up to the January 6 protest.

Design justice By Costanza-Chock

PROPAGANDA

- Design Justice emphasizes that design systems tend to reinforce existing power hierarchies.
- Here:
- A sitting U.S. president uses a global platform
- to preemptively delegitimize democratic processes
- without evidence
- and the platform architecture gives him enormous reach.
- This illustrates a core Design Justice critique: platforms privilege powerful creators over vulnerable users, enabling top-down misinformation that can undermine democratic participation.
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Design Justice: Undermining Marginalized Voters

- By attacking mail-in ballots, Trump's message disproportionately harms,

  - disabled voters
  - minority voters
  - low-income voters
  - communities with limited access to in-person polling.
- communities.

- Design Justice stresses that design choices that harm marginalized groups must be analyzed as systemic injustices, not isolated incidents.
- Trump's framing that mail-in voting is rigged directly undermines the democratic participation of these groups.
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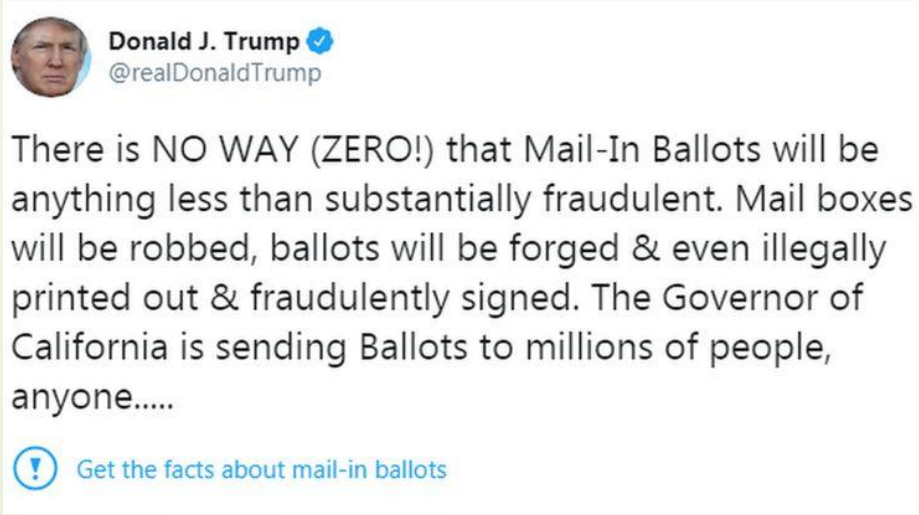
Participatory Culture

Donald trump tweet during elections

- **Participatory culture** (Jenkins, 2006) emphasizes that audiences are not passive; they actively engage, remix, and circulate content. Key aspects:
- **Low barriers to expression:** Donald Trump was able to spread false information because X(twitter) allows for freedom of expression even if the information is false. The platform does label false information like in this tweet but usually late. Trumps tweet was already circulated through shares and reposts.
- **Social connection:** The MAGA follows began sharing the content #StopTheSteal forums, Parler, Telegram groups. This led to January 6,2021 rally to protest the results.
- **Content creation & remixing:** Users turn Trump tweets, rally footage, and January 6 imagery into memes, TikTok videos, and infographics.
- **Appropriation:** Followers repurpose news, speeches, and images to reinforce narratives (stolen election, "legitimate protest").

Algorithmic World-Making (Wihbey)

propaganda



Algorithms Shape Political Reality

- Wihbey says algorithms function as invisible editors of public life, deciding :what is seen by the people
- After the 2020 election:
- Trump's tweets has a lot of followers on Twitter which meant that his tweets would pop up on many people's timelines making it easier for him to spread propaganda.
- TikTok recommended voter fraud theories to people, ahus creating conspiracy loops.

  Facebook groups turned into echo cambers which led to misinformation going unchecked.
- This built a parallel political reality where the election appeared stolen, even though evidence said otherwise.
- This is algorithmic world-making.
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Popper: Democracy Is Vulnerable to "Enemies" Within

Propaganda

example

- Popper said authoritarianism does not only arise from dictators taking power by force.
- It often emerges when:
- a leader fosters cult-like loyalty e.g. Trump has a large group of supporters
- encourages citizens to reject shared facts: Trump repeated tweeted that mainstream media outlets were fake news to:
  - delegitimize critical reporting
  - frame himself as the only source of truth
  - build distrust toward democratic institutions

divides society into us vs. them: framed himself and the MAGA supporters as victims of a conspiracy.

January 6 as a Supermind Action Event

- Malone explains that superminds don't only exchange information—they act.
- January 6 was the result of:
- Distributed information → millions seeing the same posts
- Distributed emotional escalation → outrage cycles
- Distributed mobilization → logistical coordination in real time
- This event is an example of how a superminds can:
- self-organize,
- coordinate with minimal hierarchy,
- and produce collective physical action.

Livestreaming to Create Authenticity

Jenkins argues that people share content that:

- feels authentic
- evokes emotion
- has cultural relevance
- can be remixed into different contexts or formats

January 6 livestreams had:

- real-time chaos,
- emotional intensity,
- shocking visuals,
- high stakes political meaning.
- The event was spread across other platforms almost instantly.

Jenkins – Participatory Culture
Supporters actively remixed, shared, and spread election-fraud claims → misinformation spread online fueling #StopTheSteal.

Design Justice – Costanza-Chock
Platform algorithms amplified Trump's posts; engagement-based design boosted polarizing content and reinforced power imbalances.

Wihbey – Algorithmic World-Making
Algorithms created a closed reality where fraud claims felt true.

Malone – Superminds
Trump's online base functioned as a collective to mobilize against perceived injustice.

Popper – Open Society
Trump's attacks on courts, elections, and media reflect demagogic threats Popper warned against—undermining democratic institutions.

Fisher – The Chaos Machine
Platforms profited from outrage; engagement algorithms intensified polarization and helped radicalize the movement leading to January