



BRANCHE	SECTION	ÉPREUVE ÉCRITE
Anglais	I	<i>Durée de l'épreuve :</i> 150 minutes <i>Date de l'épreuve :</i> 10/06/2020

A) Text Comprehension & Personal Opinion (30 marks)

The weaponisation of information is mutating at alarming speed

As countries and companies line up to enter the disinformation business, privacy has to be reclaimed.

Communication has been weaponised, used to provoke, mislead and influence the public in numerous insidious ways. Disinformation was just the first stage of an evolving trend of using information to subvert democracy, confuse rival states [...] and control public opinion. Using the large, unregulated, open environments that tech companies once promised would “empower” ordinary people, disinformation has spread rapidly across the globe. The power that tech companies offered us has become a priceless tool in propagandists’ hands, who were right in thinking that a confused, rapidly globalising world is more vulnerable to the malleable beast of disinformation than straightforward propaganda. Whatever we do, however many fact-checking initiatives we undertake, disinformation shows no sign of abating. It just mutates. [...]

The next stage in the weaponisation of information is the increasing effort to control information flows and therefore public opinion, quite often using the spectre of disinformation as the excuse to do so. [...] The control of information can take more benign forms, such as the total disintegration of the White House press briefings that have made Donald Trump’s Twitter the de facto mouthpiece for the US executive, or the attempt by Boris Johnson to establish a direct channel of communication with his audience through Facebook. Removing regulated, accountable and experienced journalists from the equation can only be deleterious to the public interest. The fourth estate is a fundamental part of our political systems. The never-ending series of social media privacy and political scandals proves that tech companies are not able to play that role – and in any case, they don’t want to.

The third stage in the weaponisation of information may be even worse. As invasive and stealth data mining practices are becoming commonplace, we may soon be dealing not just with disinformation or communications blackouts, but with mass-scale surreptitious manipulation through nudging. Prof Karen Yeung of Birmingham Law School has used the term “hypernudges” to define adaptable, continuously updated and pervasive algorithmically driven systems that provide their subjects – us – with highly personalised environments that define our range of choices by creating a tailored view of the world. [...]

Communication mediated through hypernudging can gradually shift our moral values, norms and priorities. YouTube recommendations and their alleged promotion of far-right content in Brazil, causing the radicalisation of certain users, was a form of nudging – unwitting as the tech company claimed it was. But intentional nudging using models built on our individual preferences and vulnerabilities will become much more impactful in the future. While the effectiveness of personalised propaganda such as that employed by Cambridge Analytica may still be debatable, there is no doubt long-term nudging can be powerful – if not to swing a close election, maybe to

increase apathy or foment dissent and distrust towards our institutions. The possibilities for manipulation are endless.

Still, to categorise the weaponisation of communication as “information warfare” could distract us from the fact that the root of the problem is not information per se. We have to address the fact information manipulation is employed by political actors taking advantage of regulatory and legal vacuums to change power dynamics. [...]

In the midst of this, people remain confused, disempowered or too petrified to reclaim our agency and confront this attack on our information space and our digital rights. Reclaiming our privacy is the first step. We are going to need it if we are to stand a chance of resisting the information weapons being used to discipline and control us.

(595 words)

The Guardian (August 2019) – Sophia Ignatidou
This text has been adapted for the purpose of this exam.

A1) Comprehension

(20 marks)

Answer the following questions using your own words as much as possible.

- 1) To what extent has communication become a ‘weapon’? **(6)**
- 2) How has the fourth estate become a fundamental part of our political systems? **(6)**
- 3) Explain the ‘hypernudge’ concept elaborated by Prof. Karen Yeung. **(4)**
- 4) How does the author want society to deal with the ‘weaponisation of communication’? **(4)**

A2) Personal Opinion

(10 marks)

React to the STATEMENT below. Indicate your word count. Your answer must not exceed 150 words.

The thought that so many people get their news from social media really is scary. - *Rush Limbaugh*

B) Essay (30 marks)

Write a well-structured essay of between 300 and 400 words on one of the topics below. Do not forget to copy the title and to indicate your word count.

- 1) Brexit is the beginning of the downfall of the European Union. Discuss.
- 2) Food waste is a serious environmental, social and economic concern. Discuss.
- 3) The fashion industry should change their way of advertising. Discuss.