

Washington's Russiagate Conspiracy Theory on Life Support

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The latest bid to keep Washington's desperate Russiagate conspiracy theory alive has energized distilled segments of the public still convinced of Moscow's global omniscience and its role in manipulating and undermining virtually every aspect of their daily lives.

But recent "revelations" are simply the same accusations made against a Russian-based click-bait farm, repackaged and respun.

The Washington Post's article, "[New report on Russian disinformation, prepared for the Senate, shows the operation's scale and sweep](#)," would in fact present no new report. Instead, it would present repackaged narratives involving "Russia's disinformation campaign around the 2016 election."

The Washington Post would claim:

The report, obtained by The Washington Post before its official release Monday, is the first to study the millions of posts provided by major technology firms to the Senate Intelligence Committee, led by Sen. Richard Burr (R-N.C.), its chairman, and Sen. Mark Warner (Va.), its ranking Democrat. The bipartisan panel also released a second independent report studying the 2016 election Monday. Lawmakers said the findings "do not necessarily represent the views" of the panel or its members.

The two reports were put out by Oxford University's Computational Propaganda Project and New Knowledge. No information is provided by the Washington Post as to what either of these organizations are, who runs them, or who funds them.

Both reports rehash allegations claiming the Russia-based Internet Research Agency (IRA) conducted an extensive influence campaign through social media during the 2016 US elections.

The total amount of money spent on such operations amounted to approximately \$100,000 in Facebook ads. To put this amount in context, the very same Washington Post [would report in April 2017](#) that the total amount spent on the 2016 elections amounted to \$6.5 billion – in other words – the amount allegedly spent on Facebook ads by IRA was about 0.001% of total US campaign spending.

Both reports cited by the Washington Post and presented to US Congress did not dispute this. Instead, they attempted to claim the impact of IRA's activities far exceeded this \$100,000 in ads.

The New Knowledge report would claim:

The Instagram and Facebook engagement statistics belie the claim that this was a small operation — it was far more than only \$100,000 of Facebook ads, as originally asserted by Facebook executives,” the New Knowledge white paper said. “The ad engagements were a minor factor in a much broader, organically driven influence operation.

And to unskeptical, untrained eyes, the figures presented by both Oxford and New Knowledge tabulating millions of views, shares, and likes do appear to “*believe the claim that this was a small operation.*”

Context is King

But organically driven influence simply means whatever was posted by IRA was picked up by ordinary people and spread by them, not IRA. And while the numbers presented by Oxford and New Knowledge may seem impressive, how do they compare to the “*scale and sweep*” of the 2016 candidates’ efforts on Facebook?

Since neither group of “researches” bothered to provide this important context, it is fortunate that the Western media itself has, albeit deeply buried in older articles.

It stands to reason that the \$81 million US President Donald Trump and presidential candidate Hillary Clinton spent on Facebook - [according to TechCrunch](#) - also translated into “*organically driven influence.*”

In fact, a 2017 Washington Post op-ed titled, “[Why Russia’s Facebook ad campaign wasn’t such a success](#),” would explain:

...the Russian content was just a tiny share of the 33 trillion posts Americans saw in their Facebook news feeds between 2015 and 2017. Any success the ads had in terms of reach seems attributable largely to the sheer doggedness of the effort, with 80,000 Facebook posts in total. Facebook reported that a quarter of the ads were never seen by anyone. And — with the average Facebook user sifting through 220 news-feed posts a day — many of the rest were simply glanced at, scrolled past and forgotten.

With \$81 million spent on Facebook by the Trump and Clinton campaigns, mostly to mobilize core supporters to donate and volunteer, a low-six-figure buy is unlikely to have tipped the election.

In proper context, whatever IRA’s \$100,000 bought them, Trump and Clinton’s \$81 million bought them much more of.

So what is Oxford University’s Computational Propaganda Project and why is it publishing [a 47-page report \(.pdf\)](#) claiming, “*Russia’s IRA launched an extended attack on the United States by using computational propaganda to misinform and polarize US voters,*” when freely available facts reported on by the Western media itself proves exactly the opposite?

And what is New Knowledge and why is it publishing a [101-page report \(.pdf\)](#) claiming \$100,000 in Facebook ads constitutes a, “*long-running and broad influence operation*” when the Washington Post itself has featured experts depicting it as anything but?

Who is Keeping Russiagate on Life Support?

Oxford University's Computational Propaganda Project [is funded by](#) the US National Science Foundation and the European Research Council as well as by Oxford University itself.

The fact that the former two sponsors are supposedly dedicated to funding scientific pursuits yet are funding the Project's role in buttressing Western propaganda – specifically that aimed at Russia and China – is particularly troubling.

New Knowledge is more interesting still. It poses as a business claiming to provide the service of, *“protecting brands from social media disinformation attacks.”* It explains further on its [“Our Company”](#) page that:

New Knowledge is a team of national security, digital media and machine learning experts with decades of experience who are dedicated to defending public discourse and providing brands with disinformation protection.

New Knowledge claims it provides clients with a *“dashboard”* to track and alert them to *“disinformation attacks”* on their brands. It is difficult to believe anyone would pay New Knowledge for their “services” when most companies already have marketing teams more than capable of minding their brand.

Further down on the same page is New Knowledge's “Leadership Team.”

It includes CEO Jonathon Morgan who boasts of contributing to corporate-financier funded Brookings Institution – a pro-war policy think tank. He also claims to have served as a *“Special Advisor to the State Department.”*

There is also COO Ryan Fox, who claims he spent 15 years at the National Security Agency (NSA) focusing on signals intelligence and before that as an analyst for the US Army.

Renee DiResta – New Knowledge's director of research – also claims to have worked as an adviser to the US State Department as well as for Congress and other state and federal government institutions regarding *“the spread of disinformation and propaganda.”*

Both the Oxford operation and New Knowledge intentionally omitted context from their lengthy reports to deliberately portray a minuscule click-bait operation as a threat to American national security. If the \$100,000 spent by IRA on Facebook ads was compared side-by-side to the gargantuan sums spent by Trump and Clinton during the 2016 campaign – and that fraction of 1% properly presented to the public – the Russiagate conspiracy theory would drop dead instantly.

No genuine researcher would have committed to reports of up to 100 pages long and failed to put IRA's impact into proper context and provided a sense of proportion within the 2016 elections IRA supposedly attempted to influence.

But an Oxford-based team funded by the US government might. So might New Knowledge – lined by “advisers” to the US State Department and former employees of the NSA.

It is ironic that amid supposed efforts to expose Russia's attempts to target the American public with propaganda, it is Oxford, New Knowledge, and the US Congress itself which requested and approved of deliberate propaganda – aimed at targeting the American public

to keep the Russiagate conspiracy alive.

Why?

Because Russiagate serves as a central pillar in cultivating hatred across the West against Russia – serving as a pretext for continued expansion of NATO along Russia’s borders, creating leverage against Moscow regarding US wars of aggression across North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia, and the undermining of Russia’s position in global energy markets.

There hasn’t been a conflict of confrontation the US has elected to pursue that hasn’t included crude, baseless propaganda aimed at manipulating the American public. Iraq had “weapons of mass destruction.” Now Russia has “Facebook ads of mass persuasion.”

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