

# Case Study

## Chapter 14

A corporate lawyer in a big Canadian city is running to be mayor. He has been an executive on the board for his political party. It is rumoured that he has received substantial funding from large corporations and this specific political party. His expensive television ads and other promotional materials seem to support this viewpoint. The incumbent mayor who is also running asks for all candidates to publish their donor lists. The lawyer refuses to do so.

Leading up to the election, the lawyer takes to social media to criticize the incumbent mayor and spread misinformation. Some media outlets repeat this misinformation, such as a purported 51% tax increase since the incumbent mayor has been in office. The information is proved to be false, but the social media and news reports continue unabated.

Some news outlets refuse to report the misinformation and interview the incumbent mayor instead to get his perspective. The lawyer is outraged and blasts these news outlets and calls out specific journalists on Twitter and Facebook. Various forms of media play a crucial role in the campaigns and election.

- 1. What role does social media play in elections? What are the advantages and disadvantages?**
- 2. What are some possible consequences to politicians using social media to voice their opinions?**
- 3. Is there evidence to suggest that Canadians use social media to get news and follow elections?**
- 4. How might sociologists view this incident as an example of the mechanisms of control exerted by the elite through mass media?**
- 5. Discuss media ownership and convergence in Canada. Should we be concerned? Why or why not? How can citizens address this issue?**

### Sample Answers:

1. Social media is an example of new media that “offers a decentralized form of content production,” as discussed in the text. As a result, we see information about candidates from their own social media platforms and discussions about these candidates by others. The advantage is that we get a lot more information about candidates, including how well they communicate, or not, online. A disadvantage is that the prevalence of fake news and misinformation on social media can negatively skew voters’ opinions. Another disadvantage is the increased likelihood of tampering by others, including foreign countries who want to influence the outcome of an election.
2. We have seen many examples where politicians post inappropriate messages based on misinformation and hostile messages that inflame already volatile situations. Politicians may also post offensive messages, thus alienating a group of the electorate and demonstrating the politician’s prejudices, thus encouraging others with similar views to be more emboldened.
3. According to the text, “As many as 23.68 million Canadians have a Facebook account, many logging in daily (Statista, 2019).” This is a large number, so we can see why candidates use social media to communicate with voters. Young-adult Canadians, especially use Facebook to access news. Many politicians have had their careers built or toppled due to online activity.
4. Sociologists, especially conflict theorists, suggest that elites control mass media for their own purposes. In sociology, it is important examine “the inequalities and power imbalances inherent in media access production, and dissemination,” as the text suggests.

5. We should be concerned that most traditional media outlets in Canada are owned by only a few corporations. The people who run these corporations are elites in Canada with both power and money. They can influence what stories get published and which slant these stories should take. If news outlets, such as television news programs and newspapers, are truly to reflect the notions of “free press,” then they should be owned by several sources and maintain objectivity and unbiased reporting, as much as possible, regardless of the owners. Citizen journalism is one way to address this issue because it’s not heavily edited or censored. The text defines it as “original reporting and news coverage by ordinary people, who commonly use the internet, blogs, and social media to voice their opinions and to counter the ‘messaging’ present in the dominant ideology.” Looking at various and diverse sources and applying critical thinking skills are two of the best ways to stay informed in an age of information overload.