

MINISTRY OF NATURAL GAS DEVELOPMENT

BRIEFING NOTE FOR INFORMATION

I PREPARED FOR: Rich Coleman, Minister of Natural Gas Development and Minister Responsible for Housing

II ISSUE: Building social license – Getting the facts out to the public regarding the natural gas industry, hydraulic fracturing, responsible water use and greenhouse gas emissions/climate change.

III BACKGROUND:

Many in the mainstream media take their cue from tweets (postings on the social media website Twitter) for next day stories. These tweets can then be re-tweeted (reposted or forwarded) by any individual who comes across the posting while using Twitter, a phenomenon which creates a cascade of misinformation. This is not unique to just Twitter, as other social media platforms, such as Facebook, have similar systems in place under different jargon (Facebook uses “wall posts” and a “like button”). Appendix 1 further explains how information can spread quickly through Twitter. One tweet can result in thousands of re-tweets.

Having a platform that allows information to travel this fast becomes an issue when dealing with information that is false and/or misleading. Researchers have begun to analyze fake content on Twitter. One such study¹ looks at content generated on Twitter during the event of the Boston Marathon Bombing that occurred in April of 2013. As displayed in Figure 2 of Appendix 2, the results indicated that 29% of the content on Twitter was rumors and fake content; while 51% was generic opinions and comments; and the remaining 20% was true information.

Misinformation about hydraulic fracturing (fracking) technology, water usage, and greenhouse gas emissions related to natural gas extraction and LNG production facilities is rampant in the community, particularly in social media. Allowing this kind of “framing” to occur is not in the public interest as social license is eroded.

It’s rather difficult to win back the public once the misinformation is etched into the memory of British Columbians. As Winston Churchill pointed out: “A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on”. Churchill’s words can be taken quite literally in today’s world that is so connected via the internet and its various social media platforms.

.../2

¹ Gupta, a., et al (2013). \$1.00 per RT #BostonMarathon #PrayForBoston: Analyzing Fake Content on Twitter. Indraprastha Institute of Information Technology. Retrieved from http://precog.iitd.edu.in/Publications_files/ecrs2013_ag_hl_pk.pdf

IV DISCUSSION:

s.13, s.17

V CONCLUSION:

s.13, s.17

APPROVED BY:

Fazil Mihlar, ADM/OSID
Linda Beltrano, ED/OSID
Ines Piccinino, ADM/UDD
Steve Carr, DM

✓
✓
✓
✓

Attachment

Appendix 1 – The Power of a Retweet

Figure 1

Copyright

Figure 1 helps to visualize how quickly information can spread through Twitter (or a similar social media platform). In the first panel on the left, Kevin Gibbons has tweeted a web link, which is immediately visible to his 722 followers². Mr. Gibbons' original post may generate a handful of clicks, but the real value to promote his message is in the power of a retweet, which can potentially reach a far wider audience and perhaps be retweeted again and again. If Mr. Gibbons' tweet was picked up and retweeted by Darren Rowse (seen in the middle panel of Figure 1) this would then reach out to an additional 43,467 followers, many of which are likely to retweet this themselves and potentially create a snowball effect of retweets. It may also reach additional highly-followed users, such as Stephen Fry who has close to 300,000 followers, helping to spread your message further.

² Followers are the people who have agreed to receive your tweets through Twitter. If you add someone else to the list of people you read, you "follow" them. Popularity on Twitter is often measured by the number of followers a person has. The top 100 most popular Twitter users, a list which includes pop stars and the President of the USA, have between **8.7-53.3 million followers**.

Appendix 2 – Misinformation in Social Media

Figure 2 – Breakdown of Tweets related to Boston Marathon Bombing

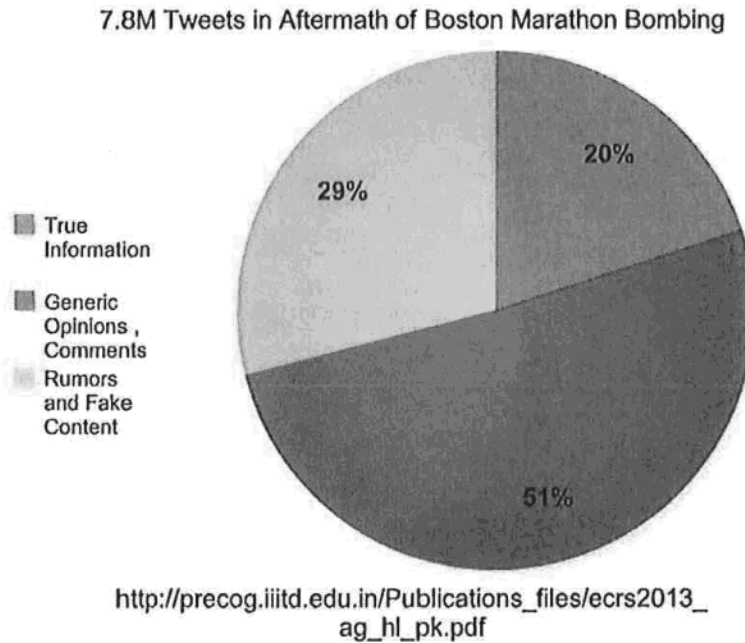
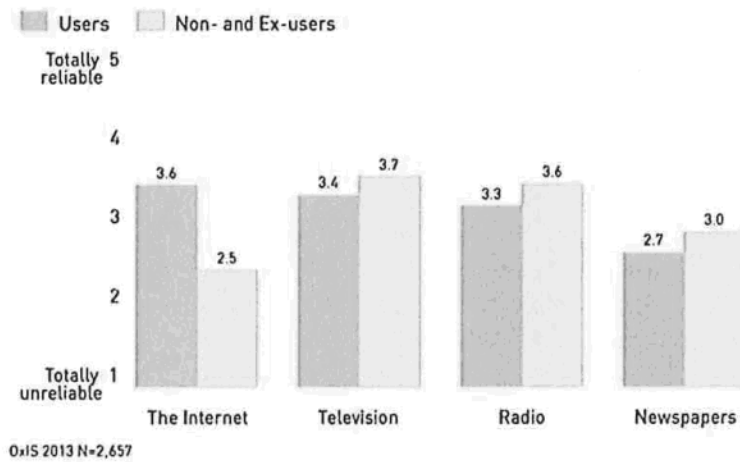


Figure 3

Reliability of Information by Internet Users and Non-Users (QA4 by QH13)



Source: <http://pando.com/2014/05/06/hard-evidence-how-does-false-information-spread-online/>