Notice of the Final Oral Examination for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

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BA Hons. (University of Saskatchewan, 2016)

“When Data Crimes are Real Crimes: Voter Surveillance and the Cambridge Analytica Conflict”

Department of Political Science

Wednesday, August 21, 2019
10:00 A.M.
Clearihue Building
Room B021

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Colin Bennett, Department of Political Science, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Arthur Kroker, Department of Political Science, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Peter Chow-White, School of Communication, Simon Fraser University

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Reuben Rose-Redwood, Department of Geography, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

This thesis asks what conditions elevated the Cambridge Analytica (CA) conflict into a sustained and global political issue? Was this a privacy conflict and if so, how was it framed as such? This work demonstrates that the public outcry to CA formed out of three underlying structural conditions: The rise of the alt-right as an ideology, surveillance capitalism, and a growing and unregulated voter analytics industry. A network of actors seized the momentum of this conflict to drive the message that voter surveillance is a threat to democratic elections. These actors humanized the CA conflict and created a catalyst for a large scale public outrage to these previously ignored structures. Their focus on democratic threat also allowed this conflict to transcend the typical contours of a privacy conflict and demonstrate that the consequences of this conflict are societal, rather than personal. Despite these issues, Canada and the United States have yet to address the wider implications of voter surveillance adequately. Voter surveillance can broadly undermine personal autonomy and the democratic system, and will be a central question in upcoming elections.