

Transcript

The interviews transcribed below were conducted by Dr Emma L Briant, a Senior Lecturer at the University of Essex, as part of academic research into the EU Referendum campaign and propaganda during conflicts. The research was also collected as part of an upcoming book, titled “What’s wrong with the Democrats? Media bias, inequality and the rise of Donald Trump”.

The audio files to which these transcripts relate can be found on the Committee’s website. All text in square brackets has been added by either the Committee or by Dr Briant.

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Interviewees and dates

Andy Wigmore – Former Director of Communications, Leave.EU (interviewed on 4th October 2017)

Nigel Oakes – Founder and CEO of SCL Group (interviewed on 24th November 2017)

Sam Patten – Former employee, Cambridge Analytica (interviewed on 23rd July 2017)

Gerry Gunster – Former Leave.EU Campaign Strategist, and CEO at Goddard-Gunster (interviewed on 30th March 2017)

Transcripts

Clip 1 – Andy Wigmore: US Campaign

Andy Wigmore: We found that the media here, because they were so anti-us, the only way we were going to make a noise was to follow the Trump doctrine, which was: the more outrageous we are, the more attention we'll get, and the more attention we get, the more outrageous we'll be. And that's exactly what we did. So our tiles were provocative, and they were designed to be provocative, and they got the attention. The amount of bollockings we got.

Emma Briant: So you were copying the Trump campaign?

Andy Wigmore: Completely. Completely. Completely. And you've got remember: when we first started, Trump wasn't even the Republican nomination – no one even gave him a hope in hell's chance. Ted Cruz, which Cambridge Analytica worked for. [inaudible] If you take a look at the Ted Cruz campaign, and the use of facts and data, it didn't work. So this idea that Cambridge Analytica were crucial to the Trump campaign is total bollocks. They [Trump campaign] had probably ten Cambridge Analytica [-style companies]. This is interesting; that's all public information as well. If you go to the CPAI – I'll send you the link – all the data analytics companies that worked on the Trump campaign: they're all there, including Cambridge Analytica. But the reason why they think Cambridge Analytica was important was because of [Steve] Bannon, and the Mercers: the Mercers own Cambridge Analytica, and this weird thing in Canada called SCL, which is who Vote Leave used.

This interview was conducted by Dr Emma L Briant, University of Essex, for research and publications on the EU Referendum.

Clip 2 – Andy Wigmore: Immigration

Andy Wigmore: When he [Nigel Farage] started to realise, when he started going around the country, that actually immigration is absolutely the problem, immigration has to be the main thrust of what we do. And we backed it up and said, “There, you’re right Nigel”. He [Farage] said right, if we keep immigration at the top of the debate, his instincts said we would win. The reason why we polled so much was because we were so unsure – constantly – if we were doing the right thing. Particularly when you have horrific incidents like Jo Cox, and you think: well... that’s... too much. Then the blame from the media, immigration, you’ve created a-

Emma Briant: It’s gonna create a wave against you.

Andy Wigmore: Yeah. Created a wave of hatred and racism, and all this “right movement” – empowering... all those things, which Trump has experienced as well. We were very: “Well... Maybe we have gone too far”. The only thing you can do to test is look at what’s the reaction. London, here, is a very different country to the rest of the country. Out there, where people had different reasons to London: the Jo Cox thing was sad, dreadful, but it didn’t change their views. There was no shift on the dial as they call it. And we thought, “well goodness...”. So everything was going well up to that point, and even Nigel thought: “That was it, we’d lost”. The “breaking point” poster that we had put out: again, everything we did was tested, so here, the outrage by the press was understandable, but out there, they understood it.

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Clip 3 – Wigmore: Leave.EU methods in relation to Cambridge Analytica (Pt. 1)

Emma Briant: After the referendum, he [Arron Banks] tweeted that they [Cambridge Analytica] were significant. As well as Gerry [Gunster].

Andy Wigmore: He did tweet that, you're absolutely right. Gerry was the architect. Cambridge Analyt-

Emma Briant: Gerry told me they were really powerful.

Andy Wigmore: They weren't. If we had got designation [as the official Leave campaign], yes they would have been. But what they did tell us they were going to do, was probably, yes, probably was useful, because we copied it. We didn't use them, because we couldn't. Believe me, they're commercial: they would do nothing for nothing. It would have cost...

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Clip 4 – Wigmore: Leave.EU methods in relation to Cambridge Analytica (Pt. 2)

Andy Wigmore: Some of the things they [Cambridge Analytica] did tell us, which we did copy – no question about that – was about these small clusters: you need to find out where these people are and what matters to them. What we were able to deduce from that – remember, as an insurance company, you have actuaries who work for you. Actuaries are brilliant: they're mathematicians. If you give them a problem, and you say right we want to... here's some stuff, give us probabilities, they came up with the probabilities of the areas that were most concerned about the EU. We got that from our own actuaries. We had four actuaries, which we said: "right, tell us what this looks like from our data". They [the actuaries] are the ones that pinpointed twelve areas in the United Kingdom that we needed to send Nigel Farage to, so there it was, it's like a slug.

Emma Briant: And that's his tour.

Andy Wigmore: That's his tour.

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Clip 5 – Andy Wigmore: Nazi methods of propaganda

Andy Wigmore: The propaganda machine of the Nazis, for instance – you take away all the hideous horror and that kind of stuff – it was very clever, the way they managed to do what they did. In its pure marketing sense, you can see the logic of what they were saying, why they were saying it, and how they presented things, and the imagery. And that is propaganda. ISIS interestingly... And you know this, course you do. And looking at that now, in hindsight, having been on the sharp end of this campaign, you think: crikey, this is not new, and it's just- it's using the tools that you have at the time. I think 2016 was unique: I don't think you could ever repeat it, and I don't think you could ever repeat the techniques that people had used in 2016. It was of its time. And Twitter, and Facebook, were of its time for political campaigning. You could never repeat that.

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Clip 6 – Nigel Oakes: Brexit

Emma Briant: How do you feel about the whole Brexit thing? I've interviewed people in relation to that as well because obviously I do research on migration as well as I'm sure you know, and I've heard conflicting things from different people to be honest. But speaking to people immediately after what came out about Cambridge Analytica and speaking to a couple of other people since then, I do believe that you guys worked on the campaign to some degree, at least in the beginning.

Nigel Oakes: Which Campaign?

Emma Briant: The Leave.EU.

Nigel Oakes: So, there were two campaigns and they were both vying for winning the contract.

Emma Briant: Gerry Gunster in particular was talking about the role of Cambridge Analytica and I know that the role wasn't huge-but-

Nigel Oakes: No, no but it was there.

Emma Briant: It was there...

Nigel Oakes: There were two campaigns. Well four campaigns. There were two for the "for", and two for "against", and they both had to fight internally to who gets the money and they were given equal money to fund to try to make it as fair as possible. We were with the campaign that lost, that's all it was. So, we were fully engaged and if we were going to work on it we would have worked on it and been paid by that campaign and that was all lined up and whatever. But the truth was, we lost. We were not on the winning bid. So we hadn't- there was no contract and no money.

Emma Briant: No, but there was also preparatory work.

Nigel Oakes: But that's not work.

Emma Briant: I got told that you guys did analytics.

Nigel Oakes: What we did was- we had to *prove* to the team, our bidding team, and we had to *do the work* so that our bidding team could present, and to show that quality of what they've got.

Emma Briant: So, you had to prove your method.

Nigel Oakes: Yes. But there was no work that was done, so when Alexander Nix says "we did not work on the campaign", it's actually the truth. There was no work we did, because none of *this* group [Vote Leave] used anything from the lost bid work. They didn't say "can we take all the work that you've done and use it ourselves", because they hated each other. So, the press twist these things round into the most extraordinary ...machinations.

Emma Briant: Well it doesn't help that some people sound like they are trying to backtrack and are looking scared and when people look scared and they look like they are backtracking, then you start to wonder. With me as a researcher I've started to think, well this seems ...inconsistent. That actually sounds like the truth.

Nigel Oakes Interviewed by Dr Emma L Briant, University of Essex for research and publications on the EU Referendum.

Clip 7 – Nigel Oakes: Company Relationships

Nigel Oakes: We've all worked with other people, we all have. But internally in a company that's a different thing. But the actual corporate entities. Alexander [Nix] will call me in, I'm going in this afternoon. But in fact, it's our conversations apart, throughout the part you know, we all work together, but I would never ever say, what we do, we'd never touch politics. I mean, I have in the past, because we were, I set up the company, but now I'm totally defence and I've got to be totally defence and I've got to be very, you know, because you know, they...

Emma Briant: Can I ask you about how, because I think the perception anyway is that the companies been rebalanced towards politics by and over, towards commercial, by the weight of the money. Where the money is coming from?

Nigel Oakes: This is where Alexander Nix has been very clever, and genuinely clever. He's turned it into a very successful commercial entity. Whereas, and he would say exactly the same about me, he'd say – I'm too academic and too... and the analogy on a tiny, tiny lot more arrogant scale, is that if he's the Steve Jobs, I'm the Steve Wozniak. I'm the sort of guy who wants to get the engineering right and he's the guy who wants to sell the flashy box. And he's very good at it and I admire him enormously for doing it. But I'm the guy who says without this you couldn't do any of that.

This interview was conducted by Dr Emma L Briant, University of Essex, both for the upcoming book "What's wrong with the Democrats? Media Bias, Inequality and the rise of Donald Trump", and for other upcoming publications.

Clip 8 - Nigel Oakes: Nazi methods of propaganda

Emma Briant: It didn't matter with the rest of what he's [Donald Trump] saying, it didn't matter if he is alienating all of the liberal women, actually, and I think he was never going to get them anyway.

Nigel Oakes: That's right

Emma Briant: You've got to think about what would resonate with as many as possible.

Nigel Oakes: And often, as you rightly say, it's the things that resonate, sometimes to attack the other group and know that you are going to lose them is going to reinforce and resonate your group. Which is why, you know, Hitler, got to be very careful about saying so, must never probably say this, off the record, but of course Hitler attacked the Jews, because... He didn't have a problem with the Jews *at all*, but the people didn't like the Jews. So if the people... He could just use them to say... So he just leverage an artificial enemy. Well that's exactly what Trump did. He leveraged a Muslim- I mean, you know, it's- It was a real enemy. ISIS is a real, but how big a threat is ISIS really to America? Really, I mean, we are still talking about 9/11, well 9/11 is a long time ago.

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Clip 9 – Nigel Oakes: Muslims

Emma Briant: Resonance with American audiences [...]

Nigel Oakes: Now, you picked absolutely the right word there, because when we explain in the two-minute lift pitch what happened with Trump, you can forget all the micro-targeting and micro-data and whatever, and come back to some very, very simple things. Which is, Trump had the balls, and I mean, really the balls, to say what people wanted to hear. And we all thought it was a joke every time he said it. Every time he said we are going to put up a wall for the Mexicans, everyone went “you can’t say that, it’s loony” and then “we are going to get the Mexicans to pay for it” and the Mexican President was saying “I’m not bloody paying for any of this”. But it didn’t matter cause in the rust states the guys were saying “look I’ve got people, Mexicans coming across illegally not paying any tax, taking all our healthcare, taking our jobs and putting the price down of things anyway and I’m bloody sick of it”. And so if a man comes up and says - he didn’t say “we are going to redress the-” he said “we are going to build a wall and keep these fuckers out”, and to a lot of people that really resonated. He also said, ridiculous things, like “we are going to ban Muslims from coming into the country because I am sick of people taking machine guns and pointing them at schools and our children, and our children are the most important thing”. Well there’s never been a Muslim ever that has put a gun on an American school. But it seems to-

Emma Briant: But the perception is there that...

Nigel Oakes: That’s terrorism, and it must be Muslims, there have been a lot of shootings. They are all Americans who do the shootings. And people go “that’s our children and we don’t want that”. So you’ve got Hillary Clinton going “we are going to increase the fiduciary financial spending and 4% growth in our area” and people go, “well good luck with that I want to build a wall; I’ve got a wall in my garden it keeps out the badgers. I understand a wall.”

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Clip 10 – Nigel Oakes: Unethical Company

Nigel Oakes: Well let me tell you something now, this is off the record. Alexander Nix has one downside, which I don't agree with. This is very much off the record, he believes that all press is good press and if he can keep the journalists saying well did they, didn't they. Were they...

Emma Briant: You guys remain in the news.

Nigel Oakes: Yeah. Instead of saying "we did not do Brexit, we were on the losing side". He goes "well you know, we were flirting with them" and then everybody gets more interested, and then of course he has the trump card at the end because he then goes "right we didn't work with them", but he's got six months of press out of it and this is what has encouraged people to still come to us. You know, we are still... I've got a Swedish contingent, business unit, coming on Tuesday, they are bringing over 37 representatives to come and talk to us about, and we just wouldn't be on the radar if we hadn't been in the thing. And I imagine on the politics side, you know, when people say oh well these guys, they've got some pretty unethical ways of achieving their results. Well to the average President, and they go well that's what we need, we are gonna lose another election. So, we have to play a very delicate line as well, about what... You know... People coming to us are not ethical, they are not saying we want to do this in the most... you know, Kenyatta and whatever. You know he's saying that that – you know, that – I mean frequently people come to us and say we've got so many dirty tricks against us, we now need to know the dirty tricks to go back. Or we need to know how to counter the dirty tricks and you guys seem to know how to do it.

Emma Briant: And if anything in some circumstances the stuff that's being talked about in the media at the moment will sell.

Nigel Oakes: Well exactly, so, it's um... I mean, no company is whiter than white.

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Clip 11 – Nigel Oakes: Julian Assange

Nigel Oakes: Especially over the recent, WikiLeaks, Julian Assange.

Emma Briant: Can you tell me anything about that? It's disturbing to see.

Nigel Oakes: I can only tell you what- It's- when you're running an election campaign... it is disturbing, but, at the end of the day it's- when you are running an election campaign, and remember we are talking in hindsight...

Emma Briant: What actually happened? I'm just reading the papers...

Nigel Oakes: And I think what happened was exactly what it was said to happen. Is that Alexander [Nix], if he could have got the release of the Hillary Clinton emails it would have dramatically pushed her down in the polls. But there's nothing wrong with that; that's perfectly legitimate. Julian Assange was releasing things every day and Alexander rang up and said "any chance that we can help you release the Hillary Clinton things?" and Julian Assange said "no", that's all it was.

Emma Briant: But at the same time that possibly Russian-, you know- campaign, from Julian Assange's end I mean.

Nigel Oakes: But there wasn't any Russian involvement in that.

Emma Briant: It sounds like there might have been on his end.

Nigel Oakes: Not on our end. So-

Emma Briant: But then, the trouble is you sully yourself by association.

Nigel Oakes: But we didn't know that at the time. See at the time you didn't know there was an- that anyone was going to ever mention the Russians. But the Russians were massively involved in trying to dick about with the election. They just did it as a joke. They had whole agencies operating with hackers. They just fuck us about cause it's fun. They don't need to go via people in the West and have secret meetings. If they want to do -you know, they just do it, it's on the internet, why would they bother going via all the Mercers you know.

Emma Briant: They handed the stuff over on their end as far as I'm aware, to Assange and then Assange goes off and does his thing, I suppose. But yeah, certainly from the Cambridge Analytica end, it seems like a silly thing to do.

Nigel Oakes: Well in hindsight it does. I don't know. Remember this was eighteen months before, and it was a year before the election, so, and no-one had been in the press. The silly thing was that anyone who associates with Assange – or Snowden, if I rang up Snowden, I'd have to think very very carefully about whether I was doing the right thing, because it's gonna backfire. Anybody who talks to Snowden it's gonna backfire, just because, he is the most hated man in American defence, and Julian Assange is the second.

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Clip 12 – Sam Patten: Cambridge Analytica: working in corrupt countries

Sam Patten: And I've worked in Ukraine, Iraq, I've worked in deeply corrupt countries, and our [the American] system isn't very different.

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Clip 13 – Sam Patten: Cambridge Analytica’s work in Kosovo

Sam Patten: When they contacted me, they said they had a short fuse sort-of-thing, Kosovo, and they didn’t really get into details. And they said: “Can you be ready in one day if this happens?” I said yes, without even... I assumed it was the dirty bad guys, the mafia guys. You know, the gangsters? Well, the Clinton’s have had those for years, because Kosovo is the last country on earth that still believes it owes its existence to the Clintons. As everyone gets tired of all these [inaudible] CGI people, and nobody’s hiring them anymore, at least the gangsters in Kosovo will continue to. Because they have a statue of the guy, they believe that the Clintons’ created their country. So anyway, the irony was, because it was SCL I assumed it was the bad guys. It wasn’t, it was the old liberal professors, they were the clients. And so it was an interesting... one of these three-week campaigns.

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Clip 14 – Gerry Gunster: Cambridge Analytica

Gerry Gunster: Although they [Cambridge Analytica] were involved early on, um... they sort of gave a bit of a backbone on how to do behavioural targeting and micro-targeting. They didn't actually do the execution though, that was done...

Emma Briant: So they [Cambridge Analytica] didn't do this psychographic stuff that's being claimed?

Gerry Gunster: They did not, no. I mean they provided some backbone for *how* to do it, and then a lot of it was handed over to the campaign staff.

Emma Briant: Did they [Cambridge Analytica] do it themselves do you know?

Gerry Gunster: Not that *I* am aware of. That's a question you would have to ask Arron and Andy ...Wigmore. But, I know that they were there early on, but I don't know, past that...

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