

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following has been prepared for the Gupta family in a confidential manner. It is intended to provide a summary of the information gathered during the course of the investigation. The information is confidential and should not be disclosed to any third party without the prior written consent of Bell Pottinger.

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**BELL POTTINGER**

**PR SUPPORT FOR THE GUPTA FAMILY**

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24 JANUARY 2017

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**STRICTLY PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Bell Pottinger has been working for the Gupta family, in a contract worth £100,000-a-month, since March 2016. Whilst contracted officially to the Gupta owned Oakbay Investments, their support has been focused predominantly on supporting the family.
- Leading the project is 33-year-old Victoria Geoghegan. Educated at the University of Manchester, Geoghegan has experience of working in South Africa having previously worked on both the Investec and the Richemont Group accounts before they sacked Bell Pottinger as their PR advisors.
- Bell Pottinger's mandate has been to repair and protect the reputation of the Gupta family and their portfolio of assets across South Africa. The project has had the full approval of South African President, Jacob Zuma, who has also requested specific help from Bell Pottinger to protect the reputation of his son, Duduzane Zuma as part of the project.
- President Zuma also reportedly asked members of the Bell Pottinger team to create a media environment which 'would be advantageous' to his chosen successor, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma. This additional support for the President has been provided at the behest of the Gupta family.
- Using a series of 'underhand tactics', Bell Pottinger have sought to divert public outcry towards the Gupta family and refocus attention upon other examples of state interference and capture, notably by 'white capital'. With a heavy focus upon the use of social media, a series of fake bloggers, commentators and Twitter users have been launched in an effort to manipulate public opinion.
- Following an investigation by South Africa's *Daily Maverick* website, over 106 of these bogus profiles have now been publicised on their website. Twitter handles, designed to build public momentum, have also been generated including: #TalkLeftWalkRight, #HandsofftheGuptas and #PravinMustGo.
- The social media campaign carried out by Bell Pottinger has been described by a former Partner of the company as 'a failure', which he puts down to an inability to effectively operate digital technology for these purposes. They explained: "The reality is, social media campaigns can only ever get you so far and few people can do it properly... these sorts of things just don't work on something like this. Bell Pottinger can not do it properly, other agencies rarely do it properly. It ends up just causing more harm than good and detracts from the effectiveness of the campaign."
- A commercial intelligence report was commissioned at the beginning of the project in March 2016 to provide information to then use in their media campaign. The specific wording Bell Pottinger used to explain their enquiry to selected research



consultants was 'we want to try and better understand deliberate efforts to target the Guptas by members of the ANC faction (and possibly others) which is anti-Zuma.'

- Bell Pottinger are no strangers to working within African politics. In recent years they are known to have provided electoral campaign support in Zambia, Kenya, Nigeria and Malawi. Their work has rarely been funded by the political party or candidate that they are working for, but often by a commercial third-party.
- During the 2015 Nigerian election campaign, where they were working for Goodluck Jonathan, their polling – which demonstrated a lead for opposition leader Muhammadu Buhari – has been cited as the reason Goodluck Jonathan then chose to postpone the election. This strategy was designed to provide him with additional time that could be used to manipulate the process and rig the results.
- Their involvement in African elections however has not always been well received by the party they are working for. In Zambia in 2011, one senior party official of the MMD blamed their involvement for his party's loss saying: "Our campaign was the most well funded in Zambia's history, but we lost because of divisions in the party. We had been the stalwarts of the party since 1991, but when it came to the election, he [Rupiah Banda] brought in his sons and these outsiders from Bell Pottinger who ran everything. We knew there were so many resources available, and yet we hardly saw any of these in the party. This anger boiled over on a number of occasions and the rift between the party and Rupiah's sons and advisors became quickly irreparable. When there is no collaboration or unity between the party, things fall apart very quickly. That is why we lost the 2011 election."
- The decision to take on the work for the Guptas has, albeit indirectly, caused 'considerable internal disruption' to Bell Pottinger with the departure of a number of senior employees, including Lord Bell, the company's founder, as well as a closure of the company's Geopolitical division.
- The CEO, James Henderson, is reported to 'not care one bit' about the international criticism being levelled at Bell Pottinger because of their work for the Guptas. A former Partner explained this brazen approach: "The whole strategy of the development of Bell Pottinger [since completing the management buy out of the company in 2012 with a £12m loan from the banks] has been based on three objectives. Firstly, to increase revenues across all divisions of the company, secondly pay down the debt on the loan, and then, finally, sell the business... they do not care one bit about the criticism that has been levelled towards the company. They are just chasing revenue and this project is seen as outside the core business anyway."
- Despite the strong relationship between Bell Pottinger and Jacob Zuma, it is not thought likely that the company will be providing additional campaign support in the build up to the 2019 election. This is, according to a former Partner of Bell Pottinger, largely down to the fact they no longer have the capability internally to provide this sort of work because everyone who used to do this has now left the company.



## PART ONE: WORKING FOR THE GUPTAS

As has been widely reported within the media, UK based public relations firm, Bell Pottinger, has been providing 'communications support services' to the Gupta family since March 2016. According to a former Bell Pottinger partner, the contract is reported to be worth £100,000-a-month and, having agreed an initial set period of support, the contract is now on a rolling monthly basis with no set date for conclusion.

### A DEFLECTION CAMPAIGN BUILT AROUND SOCIAL MEDIA

Using a series of underhand tactics, Bell Pottinger have sought to divert public outcry towards the Guptas and refocus attention upon other examples of state interference and capture, notably by 'white' capital. A full list of campaign tactics deployed to manipulate public opinion can be found in **Appendix I**. They include the launch of Twitter hashtags #HandsofftheGuptas and #PravinMustGo; bogus social media accounts and fake bloggers and commentators.

Other tactics have included the launch and support of Foundations, such as Black First, Land First, which, as was reported in Business Day as "suddenly appearing on the scene with murky sources of funding as well as names based on wolf-whistle terms."<sup>1</sup>

A senior South Africa digital strategist, familiar with these sort of covert activities, however told us: "You can see that these so called independent commentators have all been created within a similar timeframe to share a consistent message. Look at their set up details these are very unlikely to be real people, but moles created – albeit badly – to try and create a sense of a movement gathering momentum."

Suspicious over the genuineness of the users behind these profiles were also raised by journalists at the The Times, Roxanne Henderson and Nomahlubi Jordaan, who reported that "these Tweepers were dedicated only to retweeting messages such as #TalkLeftWalkRight Johann Rupert is Stellenbosch Mafia. Rupert give EFF money to defeat Zuma".<sup>2</sup> A total of 106 Twitter accounts were identified as automatically retweeting tweets that are pro-Gupta and anti-Madonsela.

A more extensive investigation into the use of fake Twitter accounts and set up to support the Bell Pottinger campaign was carried out by journalists from the Daily Maverick in November 2016 which ran under the title 'Manufacturing Dissent, helping Guptas'<sup>3</sup>. This investigation, which was conducted using a free downloadable analytical tool,

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/opinion/columnists/2016-11-28-mastering-the-art-of-conspiracy-invention-in-bid-to-distract-from-the-truth/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/opinion/columnists/2016-11-28-mastering-the-art-of-conspiracy-invention-in-bid-to-distract-from-the-truth/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2016-11-10-paid-twitter-manufacturing-dissent-helping-guptas/#.WICq17aLS8V>



demonstrated how the sequence in tweets was computerised and that these profiles who were spreading the selected hashtag campaign #HandsoffGuptas were computerised fakes. For the findings of the full investigation by the Daily Maverick please see **Appendix II**.

Commenting on the social media campaign adopted by Bell Pottinger, a former Partner told us: "The reality is social media campaigns can only ever get you so far and few people can do it properly. These sorts of thing just don't work on something like this. Bell Pottinger can't do it properly, other agencies rarely do it properly. It ends up normally just causing more harm than good and detracts from the effectiveness of the campaign. It is all a mess now for them [Bell Pottinger]."

### **COMMISSIONING OF COMMERCIAL INTELLIGENCE...**

Through conversations with those involved in the project we know that one of the first activities undertaken by the Bell Pottinger team responsible for handling the Gupta account was to commission a significant piece of investigative research into the political landscape in South Africa with a focus on identifying those, both within the ANC and externally, who were responsible for the anti-Zuma campaign and pushing the story of state-capture by the Gupta family.

Commercial intelligence companies traditionally operate by managing a network of international freelance consultants who are specialists in certain sectors or geographies. Depending on the size of the research required different numbers of consultants are commissioned to investigate outlined issues, which they are then able to do through their own individual networks. Their findings are then submitted to a case manager from the commercial intelligence company who is then responsible for drawing together the collective findings of the consultants commissioned and turning their work into a final report.

### **...TO PROVIDE CONTENT FOR THEIR MEDIA CAMPAIGN**

One freelance consultant, based in South Africa, who was commissioned by the commercial intelligence company, explained to us: "The mandate I was provided with was to investigate the allegations surrounding the Gupta family with a view to being able to use the intelligence gathered to support their media campaign. The specific wording of the enquiry was 'we want to try and better understand deliberate efforts to target the Guptas by members of the ANC faction (and possibly others) which is anti-Zuma'."

For the final report produced for Bell Pottinger in April 2016 please see **Appendix III**. This report has been redacted accordingly to protect the identities of the consultant's sources.



**FULL PR SUPPORT ALSO MADE AVAILABLE TO PRESIDENT JACOB ZUMA.**

Many of the names mentioned within the research undertaken by Bell Pottinger have since become the subject of the campaign supporting the Guptas, and none more so than the embattled Finance Minister, Pravin Gordhan.

Shortly after agreeing to the project with the Gupta family in February 2016, senior members of the Bell Pottinger team met with South African President, Jacob Zuma, at the behest of the Gupta Family.

**“THE BOY NEEDS HELP ON HIS REPUTATION. DO WHAT YOU CAN TO HELP THERE TOO” – JACOB ZUMA**

According to the former employee of Bell Pottinger, the meeting was set up with the President for him to explain to the Bell Pottinger team the priorities of the project as he saw them, as well as to outline any other communication request that he might like them to focus on. The former BP Partner added: “Shortly before the brief discussion on the project to be undertaken for the Guptas with President Zuma concluded, Zuma said ‘there is one extra thing I would like done – the boy needs help with his reputation. Please do what you can to give him some help.’ By the boy, it was clear Zuma was referring to his son, DuduZane.”

DuduZane Zuma had become the center of a number of media stories during this time surrounding his use of the Gupta private jet and his work at the Gupta-owned mining company. Following the conversation with President Zuma, the Bell Pottinger team made it a priority of their campaign to devote resources into attempting to improve his reputation and remove him from criticism he was facing regarding his relationship with the Guptas.

In addition to assisting with the reputation management of his son, the other priority that Jacob Zuma asked for communications assistance with, according to the former employee, was to create an environment which would be advantageous to enabling his ex-wife, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, to replace him as leader of the ANC when the time was right.



## PART TWO: BELL POTTINGER IN AFRICA

Bell Pottinger has had a number of transitions in ownership and personnel since 2005, however throughout this time the company has maintained a reasonable regular flow of work in Africa. The company's founder, Tim Bell, first began working in South Africa in the run up to the first post-apartheid election working as a media advisor to F.W. de Klerk – a project which he writes extensively about in his 2014 autobiography *Right or Wrong*.

Since then, the majority of the work in Africa has been focused on election campaigns and run through Bell Pottinger Sans Frontières, a division of the company that has been specifically focused upon elections.

In recent years Bell Pottinger is known to have provided election campaign support in Kenya, Zambia, Nigeria, Malawi, Congo Brazzaville and Gabon.

### FEES OFTEN COVERED BY 'THIRD-PARTIES'

With Bell Pottinger campaign fees charged normally in the region of £150,000 per month for a three-month engagement, excluding the cost of polling and other additional services, their support is often beyond the budget of many African political parties. Instead, it has often been the case in the past that their fees have been covered by a single third-party with a vested interest in the outcome of the election or a consortium of interested parties.

One of these third-parties known to have provided the funding for Bell Pottinger's services for a number of African Presidential campaigns is South African businessman, Ivor Ichikowitz. Specifically, the campaigns in which he is known to have financed electoral support from Bell Pottinger on behalf of a candidate include: Raila Odinga's campaign in Kenya in 2013, Rupiah Banda's campaign in Zambia in 2011 and Joyce Banda's campaign in Malawi in 2012.

One member of the BP team, who worked on these campaigns and was familiar with the financial arrangements, explained to us: "Ivor had a long standing relationship with Bell Pottinger. Part of Ivor's business model is based upon the closeness of his relationships with African leaders, and possible new leaders. If someone he has worked with comes into power or reinforces their power, then he is in a strong position to do business with them."



In addition to the election campaigns, Ichikowitz's defence company, The Paramount Group, have previously been longstanding clients of Bell Pottinger with regular press releases appearing online citing Bell Pottinger as the appropriate media contact.<sup>4</sup>

The Paramount account at Bell Pottinger had been run between 2006 and 2011 by Nico De Klerk, a University of the Free State graduate who moved to London from Johannesburg in 2006. In 2011, he left Bell Pottinger and joined Paramount Group full time in the company's Johannesburg headquarters as Global Marketing Director, a position he remains in today.

Bell Pottinger's most recent high profile election campaign in Africa came in 2015 when they provided campaign support in Abuja for then President of Nigeria Goodluck Jonathan. The project was being managed by Jonathan Lehrle, a former Chief of Staff to Michael Ancram, who became a partner at Bell Pottinger in 2008.

According to a former member of the BP team involved in the Nigeria election campaign, it was the the presentation of the BP polling to the former President, Goodluck Jonathan in late January 2015, that indicated he was going to lose the upcoming election to his rival, Muhammadu Buhari, that led to the elections being delayed by six weeks. This strategy was designed to give Jonathan and his PDP party more time to carry out proposed rigging plans, yet the public reason for this delay was to curb the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency in certain North Eastern states.

It has since been suggested that significant amounts of finance that was designated to assist the efforts to counter Boko-Haram, as well as to secure the release of the 276 Chibok schoolgirls who were kidnapped in April 2014, had been diverted into Goodluck Jonathan's campaign funds. There is no indication however that Bell Pottinger directly benefited from this, and according Jonthan Lehrle, the Bell Pottinger team providing support to Goodluck Jonathan were financed by 'a business syndicate wishing to support the President.'<sup>5</sup>

#### PERCEIVED TO BE THE 'GUCCI SHOES' BY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

Bell Pottinger's work across Africa has regular been the source of controversy, both amongst the international media but also domestically. Indeed, there are accusations that their involvement has in the past actually hindered campaigns as opposed to benefitting them.

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[http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=28491&catid=74&Itemid=30](http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=28491&catid=74&Itemid=30)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/in/jonathan-lehrle-75a29014?authType=name&authToken=jhfl&trk=prof-connections-name>



This was most notable in Zambia during the Presidential re-election campaign of Rupiah Banda in 2011, where a team of four BP consultants were publically embedded into the campaign, much to the displeasure of other senior members of Banda's party, the MMD.

Their responsibilities largely focused on speechwriting, candidate presentation training, international PR and material branding. Whilst international consultants working on an African election campaign is not uncommon, their presence is usually discreet and low profile. The Bell Pottinger approach was the opposite, and they regularly appeared in local papers, on the stage at rallies with the candidate and travelled in official state vehicles. Their involvement in the election campaign also featured prominently in a book written on Rupiah Banda's presidency by his Press Secretary, Dickson Jere, called 'Inside the Presidency.'<sup>6</sup>

A senior member of Rupiah Banda's MMD, who was a former intelligence officer, explained to us the disruption felt within the MMD when the Bell Pottinger team were brought in prior to the 2011 election. "In 2011, our [the MMD] campaign was the most well funded campaign in Zambia's history, but we lost because of divisions within the party. Many of senior officials within the party felt betrayed by the old man [Rupiah Banda]. We had been the stalwarts of the party since 1991 when we came to power, but when it came to the election, he brought in his sons and these outsiders from Bell Pottinger who ran everything. We knew there was so many resources available, and yet we hardly saw any of these in the party. This anger boiled over on number of occasions and the rift between the party and Rupiah's sons and advisors became quickly irreparable. When there is no collaboration or unity between the party, things fall apart very quickly. That is main reason why we lost the 2011 election."

A consultant to Bell Pottinger, who was part of the campaign team in Lusaka referred to previously, reinforced this issue during a private conversation shortly after arriving back in the UK in 2011. "It became a pretty uncomfortable situation. When the materials and other campaign resources did not reach some elements of the party, there was huge backlash and we were on the receiving end. Certain members of the party were trying to undermine us throughout the campaign, and a rumour went around that we were the ones stopping the materials getting to them. When this happened, a group of party officials with cadres stormed our lodge looking for us. Whenever anything went wrong on the campaign, we were at the receiving end of the blame. It became very difficult to work like that. We made the decision to pull out close to polling day as we felt it had become too risky for us."

The same consultant, who had worked on a number of African electoral campaigns for Bell Pottinger, then recounted a conversation he had with another senior party official in Zambia when he raised the security issues they with him at the time. "I went to speak to XXX about the situation we were facing as I trusted his thoughts. We had a long

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Inside-Presidency-Trials-Tribulations-Zambian/dp/1926906365>

conversation and I raised a number of points to him that I was not happy about. I will not forget his response, 'Look, what you and your colleagues need to remember is, to many people in the party or wider African politics, you [white] guys are just the President's Gucci shoes. It has become increasingly popular for African Presidents and opposition leaders to hire white guys. Now it has been done, they all think they need a pair [of Gucci shoes] to look good, but in reality people don't see the shoes as doing much apart from looking flash and being very expensive.'"



## PART THREE – A COMPANY IN TRANSITION STRUGGLING FOR IDENTITY

When the opportunity arose for Bell Pottinger to take on the work with the Guptas in March 2016, it was a far from unanimous decision amongst the company's leadership to take the project on.

Since a management buy out from Chime Communications in 2012, Bell Pottinger has been divided into a number of divisions responsible for different areas of communications. Under normal circumstances, the Gupta project would have been handled by the Geopolitical Division, run by the Charles Vivian and Lord Bell. However, since the project begun it has been handled by Bell Pottinger's Financial PR team, led by Victoria Geoghegan.

33-year old Geoghegan, who recently got married in a lavish ceremony at the private Villa Di Uignano in Tuscany, which costs €17,000 euros-a-week to rent, also counts other clients she has previously worked for whilst at Bell Pottinger as Investec and Richemont Group – both of which have since sacked Bell Pottinger as a result of their work with the Gupta family.

### UNDERLYING TENSIONS WITHIN THE COMPANY LEADERSHIP

Explaining this decision, the former Partner told us: "When the Gupta project first arose, senior members of the Geopolitical team, including Lord Bell, were quite outspoken that we should not do it as it would not be worth the trouble it would cause. Other partners, specifically, Chief Executive James Henderson and Financial Partner, Victoria Geoghegan, felt differently and were insistent on doing the project. Neither Victoria or James really appreciated just how divisive the project would be and the implications it might have, specifically on the Geopolitical team, who were seeing the immediate impact of the company's decision to work with the Guptas in their marketing meetings. This was not an issue however to James or to Victoria. To them it was just a lucrative contract at a time when the company needed lucrative contracts."

To fully understand the brazenness with which the concerns raised over the Gupta contract were dismissed by Henderson, one needs to understand the internal dynamics taking place at Bell Pottinger during this time.

The former Partner, who was at the forefront of these developments, continued, "When James Henderson led the management buy out of the company in 2012, he did so with the help of a £12m loan from the banks. The remaining £2.9m was paid for by the other directors at the company. Since then, Henderson's whole strategy of the development of the firm has been based upon three core objectives: firstly to increase revenues across all divisions of the company, secondly to pay down the debt on the loan, and then, finally, to sell the business. This plan made sense for the Henderson and a few partners, but not for the staff and the working atmosphere at the company collapsed."



When the former Partner was asked whether the subsequent high-profile media criticism of Bell Pottinger since their work with Guptas became public had made Henderson or Geoghegan re-evaluate their decision to work for the family, his responded: "absolutely not. They do not care one bit about the criticism that has been levelled towards the company. They are just chasing the revenue and this project is seen as outside the core business anyway."

The relationship between Tim Bell and Henderson became increasingly strained, to the point where Henderson confided he was going to do everything he could to prioritise Bell's departure from the firm. In August 2016, it was announced that Bell was leaving the company to set up a new company, which would continue to focus upon Geopolitical work. The new company, which is called 'Sans Frontières', has brought over a number of the former Geopolitical team from Bell Pottinger and Jonathan Lehrle has been appointed as the Managing Director. They are known to have launched with one seed client, The Bahrain Economic Development Board in a contract reported to be worth \$16m over a five-year period.<sup>7</sup>

#### LIMITED CAPACITY FOR FUTURE CAMPAIGN SUPPORT

Given the relationship developed with the Gupta's and President Zuma himself, it would have been expected previously that a deal would be done for Bell Pottinger to provide full election campaign support to the ANC in the build up to the 2019 general election, however the former partner felt this was unlikely. When asked this question, his response was: "I think that is very unlikely to be honest. Although they [Bell Pottinger] are still working with the Gupta's as of this month, there is not a longer term plan for additional electoral support for the ANC. They are enjoying the contract for as long as it last, but their focus, driven by [James] Henderson will be to get back to their core service of more traditional financial and corporate PR work. Besides, they do not have anyone left working there now who is focused on electoral support; they have all left either to join Tim's new company or gone elsewhere."

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.holmesreport.com/latest/article/bahrain-retains-bell-pottinger-for-lucrative-global-pr-mandate>



## APPENDIX I

### FAKE NEWS OUTLETS, SOUTH AFRICA

#### Foundations and Organisations

##### Black First Land First (BLF)

Movement created in 2015 by former EFF figure Andile Mngxitama after his acrimonious exit from the party. While the movement was created before the Bell Pottinger account with the Guptas began, Mngxitama's public attacks on Johann Rupert began in April 2016 and the official launch took place in 2016. Mngxitama's frequent appearances on Gupta owned news channel ANN7 have been noted.

BLF is active on Twitter [@Black1stLand1st](#) with 6,353 followers.  
Andile Mngxitama is active on Twitter [@Mngxitama](#) and has 66.7k followers

##### Decolonisation Foundation

The Decolonisation Foundation was established in August 2016. Founder Mzwanele Manyi since opened a case at the office of the public protector against former finance ministers Trevor Manuel, Nhlanhla Nene and incumbent Pravin Gorhan on behalf of the Decolonization Foundation.

#### News sites and Blogs

##### Black Opinion

The site linked to BLF national convener Andile Mngxitama, who has a column on the news site. Content on the site started in April 2016.

Black Opinion is active on Twitter [@BlackOpinion2](#) with 854 followers.

##### Uncensored Opinion

Run by columnist Pinky Khobane, the Uncensored Opinion site has been producing content since May 2016, with a heavy focus on state capture. Khobane is a columnist of the Gupta-owned newspaper 'The New Age.'

Khobane is on Twitter [@pinkeykhobane](#) with 16,400 followers. Her pinned tweet is a link to an article on the Uncensored Opinion site with the comment: "Rupert stooges linked to Daily Maverick came up with research detracting WMC from state capture. We expose them."

## **Twitter**

Various outlets have investigated the phenomenon of 'bot' Twitter accounts, i.e. those created simply to retweet and echo the sentiments of the above identified personalities and outlets.

The Sowetan<sup>8</sup> and Daily Maverick<sup>9</sup> have been at the forefront of investigations into these fake accounts, linking to a [list of 106 examples](#) of fake accounts published on Twitter and analysing the relationship between these accounts. The Daily Maverick article has detailed how many of these accounts work in clusters and were created within hours of one another.

Notable suspicious accounts identified include:

**@ranierpretoriu1** – Joined September 2016, has 56 followers  
**@abrahamcpt19** – Joined September 2016, has 119 followers  
**@Tim Mosia** – Joined August 2016, has 18 followers  
**@Sibonelokgasi** - Joined Sept 2016, has 112 followers  
**@fikile\_samuel** – Joined November 2016, has 83 followers  
**@Samkelo\_Zama** – Joined December 2016, has 32 followers  
**@Sogoni\_** - Joined November 2016, has 14 followers

Accounts they frequently retweet include:

**@BlackOpinion2**  
**@Mngxitama**  
**@Black1stLand1st**  
**@LindsayMaasdorp**

Hashtags they commonly use include:

**#AbsaMustPay**  
**#TalkLeftWalkRight**  
**#RupertMustFall**  
**#BLFVictory**  
**#PravinMustGo**

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2016/11/08/exposed-the-twitter-army-pushing-a-pro-gupta-agenda>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2016-11-10-paid-twitter-manufacturing-dissent-helping-guptas/#.WIDSrraLTUo>



## APPENDIX II

### INVESTIGATION BY THE DAILY MAVERICK 10 NOVEMBER 2016

[HTTPS://WWW.DAILYMAVERICK.CO.ZA/ARTICLE/2016-11-10-PAID-TWITTER-MANUFACTURING-DISSENT-HELPING-GUPTAS/#.WIAQULALQ\\_W](https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2016-11-10-paid-twitter-manufacturing-dissent-helping-guptas/#.WIAQULALQ_W)

***On September 27, the day after the first presidential debate between now President-Elect Donald Trump and Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, the Democratic Party discovered that an army of cyber-trolls, paid by Russian President Vladimir Putin, had advanced the #TrumpWon hashtag. Research indicated that the tweets had originated in Saint Petersburg. Closer to home, a researcher has uncovered several paid Twitter accounts which were particularly active after the release of the State of Capture report and which advance the agenda of the Gupta family as well as a tailored narrative of "white monopoly capital". By DAILY MAVERICK STAFF REPORTERS.2***

*The suspicious tweets in South Africa were first picked up on October 30, 2016 and were investigated in earnest on November 3 and 4 after the public release of outgoing Public Protector Thuli Madonsela's State of Capture report.*

*More than 100 fake Twitter accounts were tracked, all of them advancing three specific narratives; that the State of Capture report was "useless and rubbish", that the media and Thuli Madonsela were "captured and biased" and that the real enemies of the people were "white monopoly capital" and specifically the Rupert family.*

*A researcher began tracking "suspicious tweets" from the accounts of Mzwanele (Jimmy) Manyi, President of the Progressive Professionals Forum and a staunch supporter of President Jacob Zuma, and Esethu Hasane, a former UCT student activist and current spokesperson for the Department of Sport and Recreation.*

*To determine who benefited from the tweets and retweets, the researcher analysed and tallied words that were retweeted, using a word cloud. The words most frequently used fell into three broad narratives – discredit, destroy and deflect. The most telling word used was #handsoffguptas which our researcher concluded clearly points to the Guptas being "beneficiated in this exercise".*

*While the fake accounts are easy to spot, proving that they are fake required some effort and cyber sleuthing.*

***This is how it was done.***

*The researcher first became aware of the existence of these suspicious-looking accounts on the evening of October 30, 2016 after noticing that a posted tweet that had had 27 retweets, although none of these retweets actually commented in support of the reply. Scrolling through some of the accounts it was immediately apparent that they were retweeting the same tweets in the same order. Their timelines looked identical, save for their twitter handles.*

***Finding the fakes***

*The accounts had to be manually located – a suspected fake account was selected, its timeline scrutinised, and posts and similar retweets identified. The researcher was bargaining on the fact that the fake accounts would sometimes RT a tweet that was not particularly popular, which would limit all of that tweet’s RTs to the fake accounts ONLY. The ideal tweet to look for would be an obscure user (i.e. not many followers, instead of a celebrity) with the same number of retweets. Examples are the following:*

*<https://twitter.com/ranierpretoriu1/status/791631654993485824>*

*<https://twitter.com/ranierpretoriu1/status/791628301806829573>*

*Or*

*[https://twitter.com/tim\\_mosia/status/791622100117106688](https://twitter.com/tim_mosia/status/791622100117106688)*

*[https://twitter.com/tim\\_mosia/status/791622214445436929](https://twitter.com/tim_mosia/status/791622214445436929)*

*Since the fake accounts cluster, it became easier once names were recognised and could all be “grabbed” simultaneously. The researcher soon began to identify the clusters in which they were operating as well as the characteristics of each account (they rarely have bio entries, and always use generic or stock profile pics – as an example @Anton\_dj99 and @Evelynday999 have the same yellow motorbike as a profile picture). The main identifying factor was however the absence of their “own” tweets, and the overwhelming prevalence of retweets.*



**Linking the Liars**

Once the list of suspect accounts had been identified the next step was to show that they are linked besides looking at their timelines and the order of their retweets. Twitter has an API (application programming interface) which enables the access of tweet-related data (this is mostly useful for marketing professionals and the like, and is used to identify key role players and influencers in networks). There is also a free analytics tool for Twitter, Twitter Archive Google Spreadsheet (TAGS), created by Martin Hawksey. The spreadsheet is created on Google Docs, and is then saved to Google Drive as a separate instance of the document. Linking a Twitter account to the spreadsheet enables access to its search and archive features.

The screenshot shows a Google Spreadsheet with columns labeled A through R. The data includes tweet IDs, user handles, tweet text, timestamps, and other metadata. Several cells are highlighted with colored boxes: blue for user handles, red for tweet text, and purple for timestamps. The spreadsheet is titled 'RanletPretou1Fakes' and has a menu bar with options like File, Edit, View, Insert, Format, Data, Tools, Add-ons, Help, and TAGS.

The highlighted cells were instructive :-

From user (Blue): (just place @ in front to get their handle) indicates WHO tweeted.

Text (Red): indicates WHAT was tweeted.

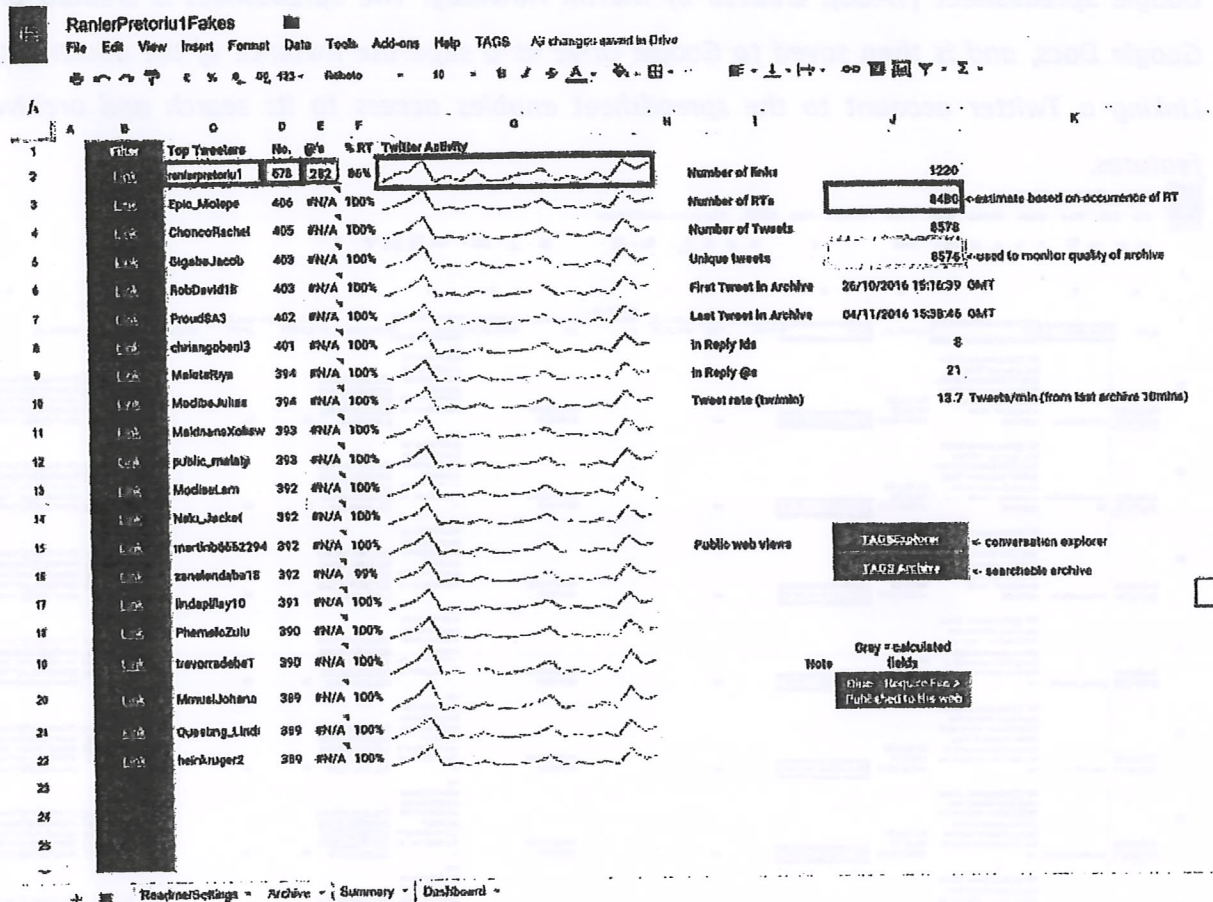
Time (Purple): indicates WHEN it was tweeted.

Source (Green): indicates what device was used to tweet.

Other interesting columns are the geolocation co-ordinates (none of the accounts had this switched on) and the follower/following columns.

The Red and Orange highlights show that the different tweets were tweeted to the exact second. In addition, the Yellow highlights pointed to the fact that Tweetdeck was used. This was the first revelation the researcher had been under the impression these were “bot”, but Tweetdeck rather pointed to what is known as a “sockpuppet” account.

TAGS can create a summary page automatically, which includes plotting a timeline and activity graph for each user account in the Archive. This is where the pattern became very clear:



Again, Green highlights the username, which is self-explanatory.

The Blue highlight is the number of tweets made, and the Yellow shows the percentage of retweets. Red indicates the user’s activity over the period as a graph.

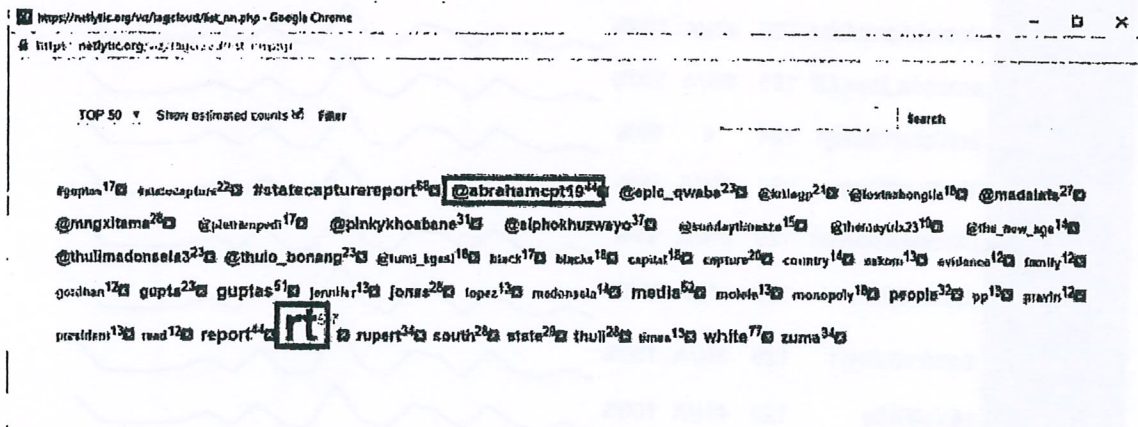
The activity pattern was identical – the accounts would all post their tweets at the same time, and stop tweeting at the same time. This is too similar for coincidence, and looking at the raw data one can see that the timestamps of the tweets are exactly the same. This was proof enough that the accounts were fake.



This is also when it became apparent that @ranierpretoriu1 is in control of the other accounts, since his was the only account that made “other” tweets in addition to the usual retweets, as indicated by the Orange column.

**Down the Ranier Hole:**

Using another online tool, Netlytic, which our researcher linked to his Twitter account, enabled him to compile datasets using search terms, which are updated automatically every 15 minutes. It is, however, even more restrictive than Twitter’s API, but it provides awesome analysis tools while looking at a smaller dataset. One of the tools is a word counter, and running @ranierpretoriu1 through this presented the following:



The Red “RT” was due to the number of times retweets were sent. It became apparent that @abrahamcpt19 was getting a high number of mentions. A searched for @abrahamcpt19 on Twitter yielded that he too had similar suspicious RTs, which led to the discovery of even more fake accounts.

It was now a case of finding the suspicious handles, running them through TAGS, and compiling a spreadsheet for each cluster of tweets. The clusters showed the following patterns:

Filter	Top Tweeters	No.	@'s	% RT	Twitter Activity
<a href="#">Link</a>	Phiri_N1	222	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	ITebogop	200	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	NatashaQueen11	189	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	IMariaTweets	175	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	MatthewKekana1	174	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	EmmanuelSA7	142	36	98%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	Zulu1Bongani	142	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	GamaChristo	140	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	BusisweManamx	137	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	Anesu_22	136	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	FilemoneMoses	135	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	KagisoNtul4	135	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	PatrickRamolebe	135	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	amanda_love_Lif	135	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	ImRichardBaloyi	134	4	99%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	TheGreatRayy	131	#N/A	99%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	Cindeyramoshat	129	#N/A	99%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	KhozaCylvia	129	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	SandraBaloyi1	129	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	MoloiFikile	126	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	tabane_z	125	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	CRamalobeng	121	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	Mpho_4u1	121	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	Tshepo_Magadi	121	30	99%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	JacquesKriel10	107	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	esaia_kekana	105	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	mmasina3	103	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	LindoShabalala6	102	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	roux1_jonathan	99	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	zand_molefe	97	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	IMTebogo1	95	#N/A	100%	



Filter	Top Tweeters	No.	@'s	% RT	Twitter Activity
<a href="#">Link</a>	reuben147	99	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	ralphgodfrey3	90	102	88%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	UncMunaa	78	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	VoilaVenom	76	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	Epic_Qwabe	73	150	71%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	Lve_ive	73	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	wiseman932	72	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	Choc_Boy_JNB	64	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	luiz_judy	64	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	Glamour_Twiste	58	#N/A	98%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	Simon_Natel	57	#N/A	98%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	za_Junga	57	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	Hateman17	53	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	boniface456	49	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	landiwe451	49	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	athe7866	48	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	lebogang3211	48	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	nokwas11	48	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	portla1256	48	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	shandani6	48	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	Siphamandla_Le	47	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	Thabo3264	47	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	marcia983	47	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	matheso372	47	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	sabelo412	46	#N/A	100%	
<a href="#">Link</a>	ScheepersLiezle	42	#N/A	100%	