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## A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF BIG BROTHER WATCH'S STOP COVID PASSES CAMPAIGN

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## **A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF BIG BROTHER WATCH'S STOP COVID PASSES CAMPAIGN**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* has been widely recontextualised in many different situations, but there has not been any discourse that tries to relate it with surveillance issues in the U.K. in the context of Covid-19 pandemic other than Big Brother Watch's *Stop Covid Passes* campaign. This paper aims to discuss how the civil liberties organisation brings the fear of surveillance state presented in the novel into the real life situation happening in the U.K. society via their public campaign called *Stop Covid Passes*. The campaign showcases a lot of negative evaluation of the mandatory Covid passes. However, not all agree with the campaign, and many have criticised it as an anti-vaccine movement. This paper conducts qualitative research through the three-dimensional framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) presented by Norman Fairclough to reveal the organisation's true intention behind the campaign and to examine the role of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in this particular context. The findings show that the intention is indeed to stop the U.K. from becoming a surveillance state.

**KEYWORDS:** surveillance, campaign, Covid-19, Big Brother, Nineteen Eighty-Four

### **INTRODUCTION**

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is arguably the most celebrated dystopian book since its publication in 1949. To this day, people continue to use its key concepts to define a certain political situation. For example in 2017, Sean Spicer, Donald Trump's first secretary, was accused of using "doublethink" and "Newspeak" when he lied about the number of people that were present at the president's inauguration. Other than "doublethink" and "Newspeak", the concept of "Big Brother"—the unknown ruler of Oceania, a totalitarian state in the book—remains intriguing to discuss and recontextualise. In the United Kingdom, for example, there is an organisation called Big Brother Watch. The organisation acknowledges that the name is borrowed from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Big Brother Watch is a U.K. non-profit and non-party campaigning organisation founded in 2009 that is concerned with civil liberty and privacy issues. The organisation has a strong track record, from advocating personal data protection to challenging parliamentary acts that are considered as a threat to individual freedom, for example Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act and the Investigatory Powers Act. This organisation also has a growing concern of the U.K. becoming a surveillance state, based on the common use of automated facial recognition, automated number-plate recognition, body worn video, and many more surveillance technologies. On the website, there is a statement from 2018 that says they "continue to fight the surveillance

state in 2018 – and beyond”.

However, this research project is not an examination of the organisation’s past actions, but rather it is conducted based on their recent movement. In May 2021, the U.K. government introduces NHS Covid Pass as a requirement for travelling abroad and domestically at events and venues. This has become a main issue for Big Brother Watch. They even had warned people about the danger of this policy though it was not yet mandatory. The first real campaign against the regulation is launched in May, and they successfully force the government to push back the implementation to mid-June. Their campaign is now available on their website, titled as *Stop Covid Passes*, on which they describe this regulation as “divisive, discriminatory, wrong”, urge the government to stop its implementation, and ask people to join the fight against it.

To be more specific, what is researched in this project is the use of Big Brother that is omnipresent in the campaign in addition to the organisation in general and how they interpreted George Orwell’s vision of future surveillance to justify the actions that they have done so far, particularly this *Stop Covid Passes* campaign. The reason why the particular campaign is selected instead of the others is that George Orwell never mentioned the possibility of a pandemic to be a surveillance tool by the government in his novel. In order to complete this research, the campaign displayed on their website is examined with Critical Discourse Analysis framework that is proposed by Halliday and Fairclough. This framework also helps find the intertextuality of the campaign and the condition of the U.K. that is heading toward a surveillance state. All in all, this research project tries to answer these two main questions: What is the significance of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in this particular situation of Covid pass regulation on which the organisation tries to fight? How relevant is their recontextualisation of Big Brother in today’s British society?

As mentioned earlier, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is still influential, and the discussion of the work continues to exist. In academic context, many scholars have been attracted to the novel because of its potential “truth” (Chapman, 2009), and there are some research projects that have already discussed *Nineteen Eighty-Four* recontextualised in real-life situations. For example, Hitchens (2002) breaks down Orwell’s anti-imperialist inner thoughts that are carried within the novel, using the British Empire as the case study. This breakdown is supported by McBeath (2014), stating that “the forces of oppression he so vehemently opposed remain potent today”. Ayres (2013) talks about it in the context of post-war England when people are fearful of the totalisation of politics, and this fear is represented with Orwell’s conflicted political attitude that also presents in his body of works, especially *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Similarly, Head (2002) states that the novel has “immediate resonance” with the people of England because it “was dependent upon the post-war experience of austerity, where shortages, rationing, and government control and bureaucracy made (in particular) the confinement of ‘Airstrip One’, Orwell’s depiction of London in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, seem a faintly plausible extension of reality”. The mentioned projects are critical in aiding the understanding of how Big Brother Watch resonates with the novel so that they use it to promote their agenda and change the situation of contemporary British society in which the forces of Orwellian oppression still dwell.

McQueen (2015) uses the novel to explore contemporary surveillance after Edward Snowden’s revelations, a big contemporary problem that has been discussed in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. This is also an issue that has been a main concern of Big Brother Watch since its inception. Pankowski (2018) tries to relate the novel with the modern politics of the United States and Europe,

especially on how the interpretation of the novels, which are affected by major political events happening in both continents, has changed overtime. Outside Europe and the U.S. context, Glover (2004) states that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* provides insights for the Australian left-wing organisations to challenge the conservative government led by John Howard. However, it is apparent that academically the novel is discussed mostly within major political discourse, from the politics of the British Empire to the Australian conservative regime. In regards to this research that focuses on a smaller scale political event, any papers that talk about how the novel is used as a justification for a certain civil liberty movement have not been found, let alone Big Brother Watch's movement during Covid-19 pandemic. Still, these papers are helpful to strengthen the arguments that are presented later in the results and discussion section.

Following Pankowski's suggestion, this paper argues that Big Brother Watch's interpretation of the novel is shaped by Snowden's revelations, an important on-going event starting since 2013 that discloses numerous global state-corporate surveillance affairs, including the U.K. government. This event has caused outrage of many civil liberty organisations, including Big Brother Watch, and the organisation itself has consistently reported the current updates ever since. However, it must be noted that in the U.S. and Europe, the public generally has been slow to react to it (Karatzogianni & Gak, 2015) although the affairs have arguably violated the privacy rights of the citizens. Dencik et al. (2016) also mentions that the public is not actively engaged in the activism to demand the government's transparency and policy reform, stating that "concerns with data-driven surveillance of the kind revealed in the Snowden leaks remain somewhat marginalized in activist perceptions and practices" and pointing out that there is a "disconnect" between concerns with data-driven surveillance and other (broader) social justice concerns". Later in the results and discussion section, this research project suggests that Big Brother Watch has found a way to attract more people to join the campaign while still maintaining the concerns from Snowden's revelations.

This paper also hypothesises that the organisation has loosely interpreted the meaning of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a propaganda found in their campaign, driven by the fear that the U.K. can become the same surveillance state like Oceania, the surveillance state in the novel, has been. There is an essay by Crick (2007) that talks about why *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is highly misinterpreted, especially by right-wing extremists. However, as they claim to be, Big Brother Watch is not affiliated to any parties. Then CDA is useful to clarify their claim, understand the intention behind the campaign, and prove whether the hypothesis is right or wrong. On the other hand, this paper indeed aims to broaden the discussion of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and is surely a recognition of the massive influence that the novel has had. At the same time, today's audience who enjoys the novel can also be more critical when approaching a novel that has attracted so many polarised interpretations.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This research extensively uses Critical Discourse Analysis, but several other papers are still considered to present the CDA assessment coherently. Other than the research projects discussing *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that have been mentioned earlier in the introduction, this research also looks up on some papers from communication studies to understand the nature of campaign

that tends to be persuasive, for example what makes a campaign effective in persuading people to do certain actions and what techniques that are mainly used in persuasive campaign that can grab people's attention. Headlines that tend to be bombastic or even hyperbolic turn out to be the most commonly used technique, and this particular type of headlines appears on any forms of persuasive text, ranging from advertisement to campaign, and even news. Headlines can be more impactful toward the readers than the texts as most readers only read the headlines in articles (Dor, 2003). Although it is arguably ironic, an effective headline is the one which successfully serves that purpose of making the readers curious. Therefore, in a persuasive text, it is prioritised as what Chen et al. (2015) suggests. Headlines play an important part on *Stop Covid Passes* campaign, and they are discussed later in the first stage of CDA.

Furthermore, the first stage also cites a lot of other references, whether it is to reinforce the CDA analysis like imperative mood discussed by Halliday (2004) or just adds more context for some definitions. For vocabulary classification, for example, this paper does not only consult a dictionary to understand a definition of certain words, but also cites academic papers to ensure that the definitions are deep enough and fit with the context of the arguments. For example, "legal" is an important adjective to describe the challenge presented by Big Brother Watch. Dictionary alone is unable to provide a proper validation as it is too broad and independent from context most of the time. Hence, this paper cites Pearce (2005) to seek a more specific definition, especially on how "legal" has different linguistic features from "non-legal" situations.

## RESEARCH METHOD

CDA is the main tool that is used in this research. It is a methodology whose function is to analyse issues related to language and power. Language itself is a tool used by those in power to gain dominance and perpetuate their ideology. CDA is more political than discourse analysis as it concerns issues related to power asymmetries and dominance, and it is used to expose those who hold the higher position of power relation. In this case, Big Brother Watch is the subject maintaining the high position as it is the one who creates the narrative referring to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* for their campaign.

Many linguists have contributed their ideas in this field, like Norman Fairclough, Michael Halliday, Michał Krzyżanowski, Teun A. van Dijk, Ruth Wodak, Phil Graham, Theo Van Leeuwen, Roger Fowler, Gunther Kress, Mary Talbot, and Lilie Chouliaraki. However, this research focuses on the works written by Halliday (2004), especially his approach to study grammar called systemic functional grammar, and Norman Fairclough (1997, 2013) who proposes the three-dimensional framework of CDA.

Halliday has proposed a method that emphasizes these two key points: "what is language" and "how does language work". Technically, language is a social symbol system that has some metafunctions, which is ideational function that is related to human's ability "to understand their experience of the surrounding and inner", interpersonal function that is related to how human establish and maintain their relationship with others, and lastly textual function that enables human to combine the interactions taken from the previous two functions and put them into a meaningful text. It means that language is not something that popped out of absolute vacuum, and it exists as a resource for human to make meanings in the world.

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Regarding Fairclough, his three-dimensional framework is not only useful to break down the language on the textual level, but also to put it in a broader context, which is societal level. The framework can be divided as follows: the first dimension is called textual analysis that focuses on linguistic features like lexical, semantic, and pragmatic. The second one is called discursive practice. It is related to production, distribution, and consumption of text that affects and is affected by society. The last dimension is social practice which is related to how power, hegemony, and ideology are reproduced and practiced in the society.

Fairclough highlights that language and discourse serve as important aspects of social life, and its everyday practice is implicitly inhibited by power. Related to discourse and power, Teun A. van Dijk (1993) states that power is exercised in the spoken and written discourse of the society, and CDA can be used to reveal how power works. Van Dijk (2001) argues that CDA is a type of discourse analysis research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in social and political contexts.

The theory of ideology is also considered as another theme here. Fairclough (2013) states that ideologies are the main factors why there is an inequality in power relation. On the other hand, Van Dijk (1997) argues that ideologies establish links between discourse and society. This paper also looks up on Fowler (2013) who proposes the idea of critical linguistics that complements Fairclough's statement earlier.

All in all, Fairclough and Wodak (1997) state that the main tenets of CDA as follows:

1. CDA addresses social problems
2. Power relations are discursive
3. Discourse constitutes society and culture
4. Discourse does ideological work
5. Discourse is historical
6. The link between text and society is mediated
7. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory
8. Discourse is a form of social action.

This study uses a qualitative approach to analyse the selected campaign from Big Brother Watch's website, which is *Stop Covid Passes*. CDA is an effective methodology to reveal the linguistic strategies used in that particular campaign, especially on how the campaign has the ability to convince people to join the challenge and even possibly has the chance to halt the policy once again. The three-dimensional framework by Norman Fairclough (2013) is used to point out the role of language in social discourse which Big Brother Watch has used to maintain their power and influence over both British people and the government. The campaign is available on <https://bigbrotherwatch.org.uk/campaigns/stopvaccinepassports> and can be accessed without any requirements or restrictions.

There are three steps that are adopted in this paper. The first one is reading the campaign thoroughly, checking out every subsection of it, and also reading the attached 58-page report. The report itself can be accessed on <https://bigbrotherwatch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Access-Denied-Big-Brother-Watch.pdf>. The last one is not only useful for the validity of the argument, but it can also serve as a gateway to understand the thought process of how the campaign is made. The second step is analysing the CDA's strategies using the theories

by Halliday (2004), Fairclough (2013) and Fowler (2013). Lastly, this paper also talks about the campaign's relation with today's British society and the surveillance state that the U.K. can possibly become. In this stage, this paper also refers to Ayres (2010), McQueen (2015), and Pankowski (2018) that already discuss the common thread of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, surveillance in real-life context, and British politics in general.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following parts are the analysis of the campaign shown in <https://bigbrotherwatch.org.uk/campaigns/stopvaccinepassports>. The first three parts are all related to Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional framework. Fairclough (2013) states that discourse is the use of language seen as a form of social practice. Based on the statement, the analysis does not merely cover the language aspect of the campaign, but also the sociocultural impacts. Therefore, other than the textual analysis on the first part, there are also the discursive analysis and sociocultural analysis. The final part is about the relation of the campaign with the contemporary U.K. society; how it reflects the fear of surveillance state that the country is aspiring to be.

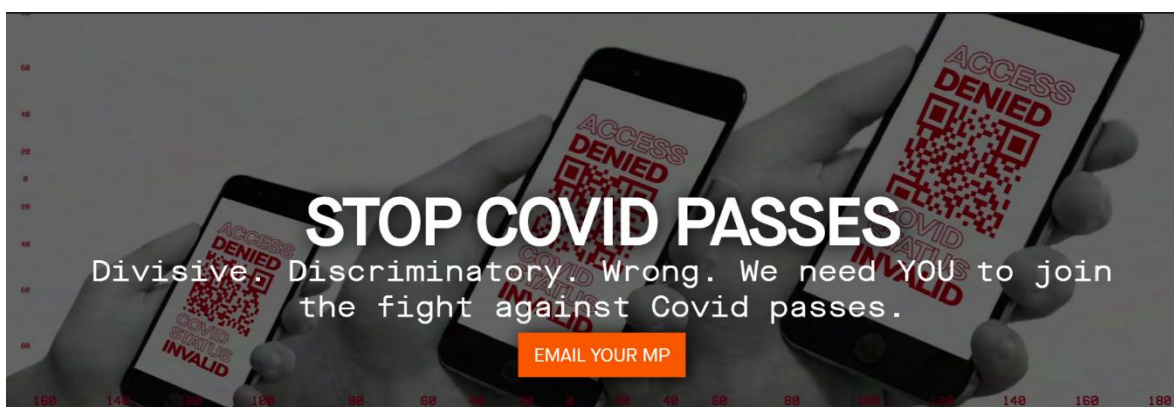
### Discourse as text

As this analysis breaks down the linguistic features used by Big Brother Watch on their campaign, this part puts an emphasis on the first step of the pyramid model of textual analysis presented by Norman Fairclough (2013). This can be broken down into two strong categories: vocabulary classification and transitivity.

However, before going further, it is needed to separate the campaign into different sections to make the analysis more comprehensible. The beginning of each section is marked with a headline, characterised with its font that is bigger than the contents and the capitalisation on every letter excepts for section 6 and section 9, #BoycottCovidPasses and FAQs.

*Picture 1.*

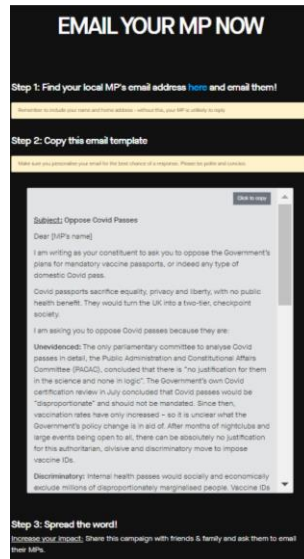
“Stop Covid passes” section (the main headline of the whole campaign)



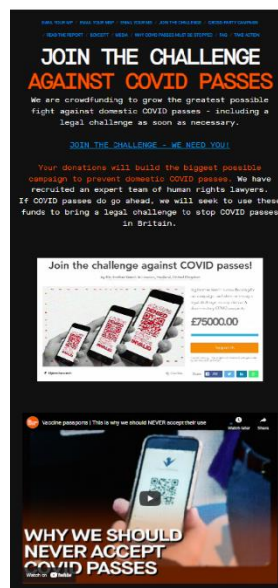
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*Picture 2.*  
“Email your MP now” section



*Picture 3.*  
“Join the challenge” section





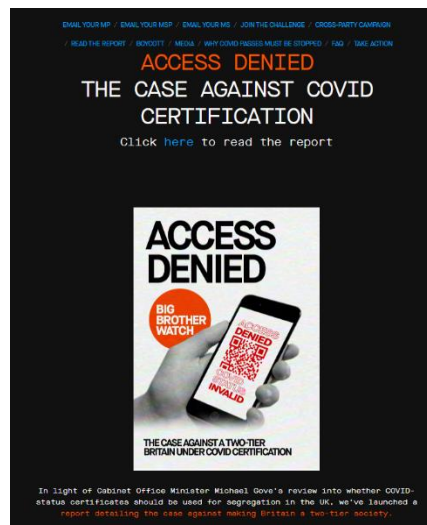
*Picture 4.*

MPs launch cross-party campaign section



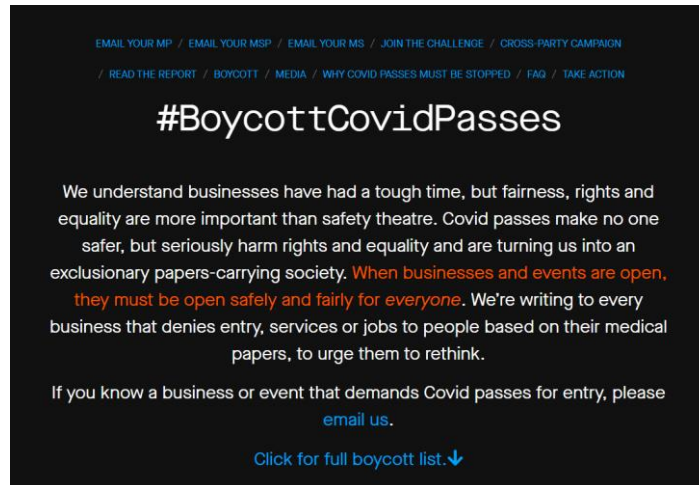
*Picture 5.*

The case against Covid certification section



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Picture 6.  
#BoycottCovidPasses section



Picture 7.  
In the media section

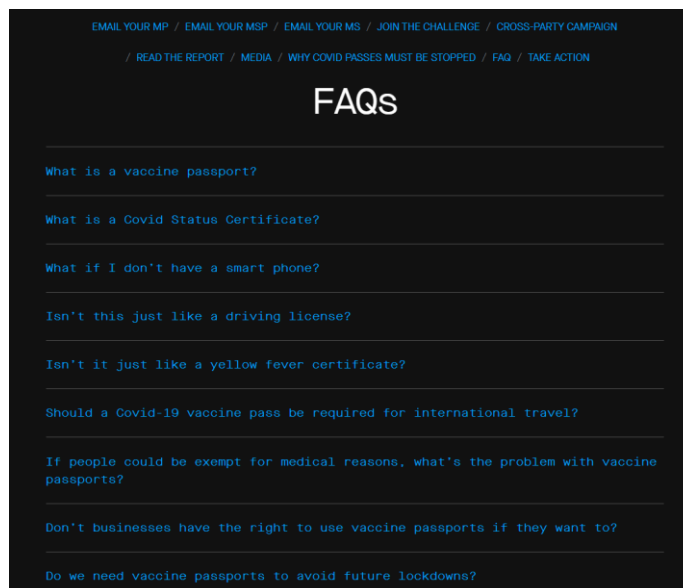


Picture 8.

Nine reasons why Covid passes must be stopped section



Picture 9.  
FAQs section



**Vocabulary Classification**

Halliday also states that vocabulary selection cannot be separated from the classification system. Vocabularies are small but essential parts that construct a discourse and help promote Big

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Brother Watch's agenda. Fairclough (2013) states that vocabulary can be investigated in many ways. It is not only related to wording and lexicalization, but ideological values within the text can be coded in the vocabulary. It means in this context, the vocabulary shown on the main campaign can reflect the organisation's ideology.

In order to classify the vocabularies, reveal the constructed ideology, and guide the textual analysis, Fairclough (2013) suggests the following key components or linguistic strategies: overwording, synonymy, antonymy and hyponymy. He also adds that formality and euphemism or metaphor are also important to help us understand the connotation that the strategies convey throughout the text and the developed relationship between the text and the readers. Positive and negative sentences also need to be recognised to determine the ideological significance of the text.

Based on the notion, the vocabulary classification starts with breaking down the campaign into two tables. The two most important issues or keywords raised on the campaign, stop Covid passes and join the challenge, are presented in each table. Each table also contains the related words that extend the keywords' meaning and how frequent the related words occur. Later, the implications of these words are discussed to see if there are any linguistic strategies contained. There is also an evaluation of the sentences to see if the campaign is leaning toward positive or negative values.

*Table 1.*  
Stop Covid passes

| <b>Keywords</b>   | <b>Related words that extend the meaning of the keywords</b> | <b>Frequency of the related words</b> |
|-------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| Stop Covid passes | Divisive   | 4                                     |
|                   | Discriminatory   | 7                                     |
|                   | Wrong  | 2                                     |
|                   | Unevidenced  | 1                                     |
|                   | Harmful (to jobs and workers' rights)                        | 1                                     |
|                   | Counter-productive   | 3                                     |
|                   | Intrusive  | 1                                     |
|                   | Boris Johnson's  | 1                                     |

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|  |                    |   |
|--|--------------------|---|
|  | Unnecessary        | 1 |
|  | Checkpoint society | 5 |
|  | Surveillance state | 2 |
|  | Mission creep      | 1 |
|  | Irreversible       | 1 |
|  | Autonomy           | 2 |

On the campaign, Big Brother Watch does not describe Covid passes using a single sentence of definition nor explain the story behind the regulation or the campaign. Instead, they have their own distinct way to describe the passes: associating the passes to certain adjectives, mostly short and negative adjectives that tend to be informal. For example, there is a slogan appearing below the headline that says the regulation is “Divisive. Discriminatory. Wrong”. Notice that the language of the slogan is loosely structured without proper sentence. It is an informal style which purpose is grabbing the readers’ attention, simulating intimacy, and making the campaign look familiar and casual. This campaign also uses a lot of ellipsis, especially on the part where they address the readers how to “join the challenge” (this phrase is discussed later), and active sentences that are common in everyday’s speech. The informality shows that the campaign is leaning toward conversation and personalised discourse instead of formal public discourse

Getting back to the use of adjectives again, it turns out that the organisation also describes the passes using different adjectives in different sections of the campaign. In “copy this email template” section, the organisation asks the readers to send a template of email to the local member of parliament. The template contains some descriptions of the passes which are “unevidenced”, “discriminatory”, “harmful to jobs and workers’ rights”, “counter-productive”, and “intrusive”. Once again, at the bottom of the campaign, the organisation uses five more adjectives within the nine reasons why Covid passes must be stopped, which consist of “unnecessary”, “discriminatory”, “counter-productive”, “irreversible”, and “divisive”. The other four reasons are nouns consisting of “checkpoint society”, “surveillance state”, “mission creep”, and “autonomy”, and the first three are made-up phrases that are discussed later in this research. Most of the adjectives that have been mentioned do not only appear in the particular section, but they also spread throughout the campaign.

Moreover, the organisation applies a hyponym for once by attributing the passes to “Boris Johnson’s” which appears in the following sentence, “Please oppose Boris Johnson’s Covid IDs”. Once again, it is a simple and active sentence with negative attitude toward the policy. Other than hyponymy, there are three more linguistic strategies from the related words that project the meaning of the word “passes”, which are overwording, metaphors, and synonymy. Overwording appears on the negative adjective “harmful”. Although the adjective only appears once on the

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campaign, it is specifically written that the harmfulness only targets “jobs” and “workers’ rights” instead of the U.K. citizens in general. Compared to the other adjective, the pattern is also different since the other adjectives are short and have general connotations.

Overwording also appears on the compound nouns that they apply, which are “checkpoint society”, “surveillance state”, and “mission creep”. This time, overwording also functions as metaphors that are borrowed directly and indirectly from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. “Surveillance state” is a well-known Orwellian term, meanwhile the other two are made-up metaphors that still have an allusion to the novel. These three phrases are carefully constructed to maximise the effect of both overwording and metaphors, which, according to Fairclough, can indicate they are the focuses of ideological struggle, which are discussed later. In this section, it is apparent that overwording and metaphor are used to show the experiential value of the regulation, which can be seen in these following sentences.

“But covid passes would turn us into a two-tier, checkpoint society where we each have to show an app or certificate simply in order to enjoy public life.”

“The combination of apps with sensitive health data and the subversion of everyday businesses and events into checkpoints could constitute the biggest expansion of the surveillance state ever seen in the UK.”

“Covid passes would inevitably expand to be used for other purposes.”

Regarding synonymy, the organisation uses this technique quite a lot although it is executed skilfully. It is fair to say that the adjectives which have been mentioned fundamentally have different dictionary meanings, but they are all used by the organisation in a similar way to declare the organisation’s negative evaluation of the Covid passes regulation. Therefore, to some degree, the adjectives that the organisation applies are synonymous. Consider these adjectives, “unnecessary”, “discriminatory”, “counter-productive”, “irreversible”, and “divisive”. It can be said that all of these words have the same expressive values to describe the Covid passes. It must be noted that the latter five adjectives can still be represented with the first one, which is “unnecessary”, but the organisation still employs all of these words to expand the negative effects of the regulation and eventually ideologically contest the main concept, which is the Covid passes itself.

“There is no evidence that covid passes will improve public health.”

“The effect of Covid passes would be to socially and economically exclude people based on private medical data, and deny them basic freedoms. In doing so, some of the most marginalised in society would suffer discrimination.”

“A recent major study from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine found that Covid passes would harden vaccine rejection among many people in the UK, particularly those in marginalised groups.”

“If we accept covid certificates, we will never be able to get rid of digital health passes.”

“As more research emerges about the effectiveness of different vaccines against different coronavirus strains, it is feasible that covid passes could be used to put controls on people who received less effective vaccines or who require boosters.”

*Table 2.*  
Join the challenge

| Keywords           | Related words that extend the meaning of the keywords | Frequency of the related words |
|--------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Join the challenge | Fight   | 4                              |
|                    | Legal   | 3                              |

Compared to the previous one in which the keywords seem to be overdefined with so many adjectives, there is not much description of the word “challenge”. The only use of adjective to expand the meaning of challenge is only “legal”. Although it only appears two times throughout the campaign, the implication is still quite efficacious. Consider the following two sentences in which the adjective appears.

“We are crowdfunding to grow the greatest possible fight against domestic COVID passes - including a legal challenge as soon as necessary.”

“If COVID passes do go ahead, we will seek to use these funds to bring a legal challenge to stop COVID passes in Britain.”

“Legal” according to Cambridge Dictionary means “connected to the law”. This adjective adds an extra dimension of the challenge and the campaign as a whole, meaning that there will be a serious follow-up action that is related to law after they get some support from the public. The use also the word “including” in the first sentence indicates that the word “legal challenge” is a hyponymy of “fight”, meaning that the “legal challenge” combined with some other activities that they are working on can create a whole “fight” that is greater than the sum of the parts. In broader context, the organisation is known for many years for its “fight” against problematic regulation implemented by the U.K. government.

Not only that, the word “legal” also deepen the formality for this campaign. Legal documents are known for its frozen style of language, with their latinate diction and impersonal syntax (Pearce, 2005). However, the whole campaign is still arguably in informal territory. The use of the word “legal” is, for sure, to create a public perception of the seriousness of the campaign, but in context of the whole agenda which is persuading the public to support it, the organisation mostly opts to informal style.

## **Mood**

It is arguable that the way sentences are written can serve different purposes. To understand the purposes of the sentences, Halliday in his systemic functional grammar proposes a classification of mood which deals with the interpersonal function of language, in which it can

elaborate the speaker-listener's relationship. In this particular context, the speaker is Big Brother Watch and the listener is the website's visitors whom the organisation persuades to join the challenge. Moreover, the sentences that appear on the campaign can be broken down into three different types of mood that can be used to analyse the campaign, which are declarative, imperative, and interrogative sentences. For textual analysis, this classification is a useful tool for analysing the purposes expressed in the campaign.

In order to present this part of analysis, it is not only necessary to recognise what kind of moods that are expressed, but also examine the structure that carries out the system. Borrowing from Halliday's term "information structure" (1967), it is related to the organisation of information within smaller units of discourse at the level of phrase or clause. The structures on each section from the campaign consist of the headline and the content or the body of the section.

The most typical use of certain mood can be seen on the headlines themselves, which is imperative. Although the content that follows the headline mostly uses declarative sentences, the headline is the one that is mostly discussed for this section as the headline already compresses and represents the main idea of what is written in the content. Headline also bears more significance as Chen et al. (2015) mentions that headline should be prioritised to make the readers curious as to what the article is about. Dor (2003) also states that headline is arguably the only sentences of the article the readers will ever read.

Below are the imperative headlines that appear on the campaign.

"STOP COVID PASSES"

"EMAIL YOUR MP NOW"

"JOIN THE CHALLENGE AGAINST COVID PASSES"

"#BoycottCovidPasses"

Big Brother Watch uses this type of mood very effectively. It is used as a headline which follows what Halliday (2004) suggests that imperatives are usually performative commands that appear in subordinate clauses. Furthermore, those headlines also omit the subject. Imperative structures in English have frequently been regarded as a derivation of affirmative structures signified with the deletion of a second person subject, which, in this case, is "you". The capitalisation also amplifies the urgency that's already been delivered by the mood, suggesting that immediate action from the readers is very much needed. One more thing to note is that all of these imperative headlines lead directly to the agenda instead of their statement from the bodies of the sections. The instructions to read the statements, reports, and et cetera appear as the sub-headline of the section.

### **Discourse as Discursive Practice**

This part of analysis is related to institutional and organizational circumstances surrounding the text. Halliday (1978) states that discursive practice analysis is about how text producers use pre-existing discourse to create a text, as well as how readers use pre-existing discourses to interpret it. Rather than merely examining the text, this section also incorporates the discourse that is priorly circulated within the history and culture because these two elements are



important in producing knowledge. Foucault also acknowledges that knowledge is an important theme in discursive practice by his statement, “Knowledge is that of which one can speak in a discursive practice ... there is no knowledge without a particular discursive practice; and any discursive practice may be defined by the knowledge that it forms.”

Based on the previous ideas, this interpretation stage focuses on the intertextuality of the campaign. This section examines the text’s production, distribution, and consumption. The method is tracing the sources used on the campaign such as the U.K. cross-party supports that the organisation has claimed (appears on section 4), the report regarding Covid-19 and vaccine passports situation (appears as an attachment on section 6), and the news related to Covid-19 and vaccine passes (appears on section 7). This paper also finds out how the source is reported on the campaign for generating a discourse related to Covid passes.

“To date, 11 rights groups, 16 peers and 83 MPs (44 Conservative, 25 Labour, 12 Lib Dems, 1 Green, 1 Ind) have joined the cross-party campaign to oppose COVID-status certificates. MPs and peers from Labour, the Liberal Democrats and Conservative parties have signed a pledge: ‘We oppose the divisive and discriminatory use of COVID status certification to deny individuals access to general services, businesses or jobs.’”

This claim from section 6 serves a purpose to convince the readers that the organisation and the campaign have some credibility. Firstly, the cross-party support shows that the organisation has an integrity to keep the campaign out of political interest from certain parties. This also strengthens their records that the organisation is independent and has never worked for certain political parties. Instead, they keep their commitment to serve the public. This claim is also an appeal to authority, which indicates that the campaign is going to be brought up into a very serious legal and political matter. In the future, not only that the campaign ideologically contests the government’s regulation, but there is also a possibility that the campaign can re-shape the course of politics in the U.K.

Furthermore, to add more credibility, Big Brother Watch also inserts a 58-page public report titled “Access Denied: The Case Against a Two-Tier Britain Under Covid Certification”. This report opens with a series of introductory content, consisting of general introduction of Covid passes regulation, recommendations for the government, summary of the report, and a review of COVID-status certificate. Then it is followed by the part one of the main bodies titled “Is there a case for introducing COVID-status certification?”. The part one mainly elaborates what they briefly state in the introductory content and explain how the mandatory application of the certificate can be a threat toward so many aspects of the U.K. society, from economy, legal issues, marginal groups, public privacy, individual autonomy, and medical issues. The second part, titled “The mechanics of how COVID-status certification would work”, specifically discusses the technological aspect of the certificate. It mainly talks about how the mechanics of the certificate work in a negative way and breaks down how the government has developed the technology used for the certificate.

Although the main campaign and the report have a similar negative evaluation of the government’s policy, the way they are presented is quite different. It has been mentioned

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previously that the main campaign uses lots of slogans, informal language, and imperative sentences, but these elements are not found on this report. In fact, the report is rather in the territory of high formality. It is expected since it is more directed toward the government because it has a list of recommendations of what the government should do in page six, but still it is attached as a hyperlink on the campaign to emphasise its seriousness. All in all, other than the stiff language that is suitable for law courts, government offices, and other formal settings, the report is meticulously written with clear methodology, coherent arguments that also include valid data, and citing many credible sources that can be publicly tracked to back the arguments up. There may be a public perception that the campaign itself shows the nature of the organisation which is an anti-vaccine group, but there is no sign of that nature in this report. Instead, this report shows that the organisation's main aim is to stop the possible misappropriation of Covid-19 pandemic through the regulation of vaccine passports.

Regarding section 7, Big Brother Watch gathers all the news from various sources, for example *The Telegraph*, *The Times*, and *The Guardian*. It is expected that the dominant news is about opposing Covid passes. However, similar to the report from the previous section, it turns out that the range of the news is wider than that. For example, there is news retrieved from *The Guardian* which is about the U.K. police considering the use of drones that is able to film from 1.500 feet. There is also news from *The Times* that reports BP, a British multinational oil and gas company, hires private intelligence service to spy on peaceful climate campaigners. All of the news other than Covid passes are related to surveillance issues. On their campaign, the organisation also emphasizes multiple metaphors such as “checkpoint society” and “surveillance state”, the results that the U.K. can possibly be if the government continues the regulation of Covid passes. It does not only prove that the discourse presented on the campaign is not only context-dependent, but also their opposition to Covid passes is actually just a small part of a bigger cause that Big Brother Watch is trying to fight.

“The combination of apps with sensitive health data and the subversion of everyday businesses and events into checkpoints could constitute the biggest expansion of the surveillance state ever seen in the UK.”

Moreover, the use of metaphors also reveals their strategy regarding the news selection, why the news and the report are attached as a hyperlink on their website, and why both are placed near the end of the campaign. Metaphors play a more important role in creating the public's perception using the fear of the future. Hence, the readers' minds are already clouded with the negative implications of Covid passes and the danger of surveillance even before they open the reports or the news, which content is carefully selected to perpetuate the organisation's agenda. Back to the report again, although it looks objective by applying scientific approach in the writing, it cannot be denied that the main conclusion is still a negative evaluation of the regulation which purpose is to drive the public's opinion in favour of their agenda.

### **Discourse as social practice**

The third level of Fairclough's CDA framework is the most macroscopic of all. This stage

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emphasises the sociocultural impact of the discourse and how it is combined with the power relations and ideology that are subtly highlighted within the text. This section mainly discusses two things. The first one discusses the labelling of “surveillance state” by the Big Brother Watch for the U.K. and whether it is based on empirical evidence or just nonsensical fears that may or may not have some other political purposes. The second one is about the relevance of the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in this particular situation and sees whether the organisation’s opposition to Covid passes is similar to what George Orwell envisioned in his novel.

In the previous stage, it is stated that Big Brother Watch is not a group of Covid deniers or anti-vaccine people, but rather they are trying to stop the U.K. from becoming a surveillance state that can be accelerated with the surveillance technology inside Covid passes. One can argue that the technology of the passes is rather beneficial for the public health such as faster contact tracing and effective crowd control, but historically speaking, the use of surveillance technology introduced by the U.K. government sometimes deviates from the initial goal. For example, the U.K. police forces have trialled an automatic facial recognition system since 2015 to monitor criminal suspects. However, there is a report from *BBC* (2020) that police forces from South Wales and Metropolitan also use this technology in public and target innocent civilians. A case involving South Wales police forces was brought into trial in the same year, and the use of facial recognition was ruled lawful. However, the controversy still endures, and later Purshouse and Campbell (2021) argue that “the relatively unfettered rise of police facial recognition in England and Wales illuminates deeper flaws in the domestic framework for fundamental human rights protection and adjudication, which create the conditions for authoritarian policing and surveillance to expand.”

Big Brother Watch is also one of the civil liberty groups that opposes the misuse of this technology. The organisation never mentions that they are against the police forces, but rather they follow the argument stated by Purshouse and Campbell. In 2020, Big Brother Watch already launch a campaign called “Stop Facial Recognition”, one year before Purshouse and Campbell publish their paper. On that campaign, the organisation boldly states, “Police and private companies in the UK have been quietly rolling out facial recognition surveillance cameras, taking ‘faceprints’ of millions of people — often without you knowing about it. That’s biometric data as sensitive as a fingerprint. The Met Police are planning to roll it out across the capital. This is an enormous expansion of the surveillance state — and it sets a dangerous precedent worldwide. We must stop this dangerously authoritarian surveillance now.” Similar to *Stop Covid Passes* campaign, it can be seen that the organisation also uses the term “surveillance state”. Overall, it is an important theme of their long-term struggle.

It has been mentioned in the first stage of this analysis that the term “surveillance state” is an Orwellian term. One more thing to note is that the organisation is not the first one that uses this term. This term also has been used in some papers that discuss similar concern. For example, Lips et al. (2009) uses this term to discuss the possible surveillance issues that can occur from the newly introduced E-government. Parton (2006) also uses this term to describe the state that becomes more interventive in children's services after introducing Children Act 2004 and a program “Every Child Matters: Change for Children”. This indicates two things. First, “surveillance state” has been a subject that scholars already try to tackle, even before Big Brother Watch exists. The organisation is founded to continue the same spirit, and the determination remains after Snowden’s revelations in 2013 which point out that the U.K. is a surveillance regime. This is a major political event which

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stories and aftermath are frequently covered by the organisation outside the campaign. Second, although George Orwell in his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* might be unable to exactly predict what kind of surveillance technologies that would be applied in the future, his core concepts that later transform into Orwellian terms such as “surveillance state” and “Big Brother” are still relevant until this day.

Regarding Snowden’s revelations, the organisation decides to avoid mentioning the event on their campaign and opts to maximise the concepts taken from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* instead. This does not mean that the leaks are not irrelevant anymore for their struggle. In fact, the data-driven negative sentiment found throughout the report attached to the campaign still corresponds to the spirit of the revelations that expose the malice of state-corporate surveillance. This strategic decision arguably alludes to the criticism from Dencik et al. (2016) that the public is disconnected from anti-surveillance resistance, and so far the reaction to the revelations is not as vigorous as what civil liberty groups show. Snowden’s revelations have also been deemed as “marginal outrage” (Karatzogianni & Gak, 2015), so it is reasonable that the organisation discards the mention of the event completely so that they can attract people to participate in the online activism to stop the passes. This is also a reason why the elaboration of the technological danger behind the passes does not appear in the main section of the campaign. Most people do not bother to read the content that follows the headlines let alone the report, and rather than elaborating the danger, the simple and short imperative sentences taken from a prophetic novel are more effective at inciting public fears and winning their sympathy

Returning to the discussion of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, other than the novel’s everlasting popularity, there are some more reasons why *Nineteen Eighty-Four* might seem suitable for Big Brother Watch to resonate. McQueen (2015) states that the text of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* encourages analyses from multiple theoretical perspectives as a means of resistance to the state. The organisation clearly has its own analysis of the novel or the core concepts at the very least although their interpretation is employed sparingly as metaphors on their campaign. Ayres (2013) adds another aspect regarding Orwell’s personality whose attitude toward politics was conflicted. He elaborates, “Despite embracing politics as the necessary means to genuinely improve people’s lives, he also remained suspicious of politics’ apparently inherent potential to diminish or even eliminate autonomy.”

This paper argues that Big Brother Watch follows that conflicting attitude. Even though this organisation states they never work for certain political parties, by challenging the government multiple times, their action has been very political nonetheless. Yet, those challenges, including the challenge against Covid passes, also resembles Orwell’s suspiciousness. Also, in the past, Head (2002) argues that the novel at some points becomes an extension of reality happening in England, with the example of Airstrip One, the capital city of Oceania, being similar to London in terms of shortages, rationing, and government control. This paper argues that the government control in the U.K. still exists in some ways although it is hard to predict if the regulation regarding Covid-19 passes can do the same damage to the U.K. society like what Big Brother does to Oceania. Still, not only that Big Brother Watch can resonate with the novel and adopt the same concept for the name of the organisation, their opposition is justifiable by looking at their track record and the history of mass surveillance in the U.K.

## CONCLUSION

This research conducts a critical discourse analysis of a campaign by Big Brother Watch called *Stop Covid Passes* by examining it using Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional analysis. The findings show that there is a certain ideology beyond their opposition to the regulation that is subtly carried within the campaign which is related to the likelihood of the U.K. surveillance state. The first and second stages of the analysis showcase the organisation's strategy to propagate their ideology, such as the vocabulary selection that tends to be negative and kept simple to catch the readers' attention, the dominant mood that is dominated by imperative sentences, and the sections that are carefully structured to strengthen their oppositional arguments and persuasive influence.

Moreover in the second stage of the analysis, it is already revealed that even though it is clear that the organisation tries to oppose the government's regulation, their intention is not to promote anti-vaccination propaganda, but rather to urge the people of U.K. that there are some surveillance issues within the technology of Covid passes and prevent the government from abusing it. This problematic nature of the passes, as the organisation fears, can lead the U.K. to become a surveillance state. As discussed in the third stage of the analysis that takes a look on a bigger context than the campaign itself, this is not the first time that the government introduces a new surveillance technology that can possibly cause issues related to privacy and civil liberty.

The danger of surveillance technology and the fear of surveillance state are also sentiments reflected in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. As the main concepts, which have been deemed as "predictions" or "prophecy" (Chapman, 2009) by some scholars and critics, are drawn into reality by Big Brother Watch, the novel becomes an effective tool for them to lay out their agenda. Furthermore, their recontextualisation of the novel for *Stop Covid Passes* campaign can be seen as relevant because Snowden's revelations in 2013 show that that the U.K. is a mass surveillance regime that uses surveillance technologies to violate human rights (Amnesty International, 2021). This paper also refers to Karatzogianni and Gak (2015) and Dencik et al. (2016) to provide an additional context that U.K. citizens in general are not really concerned with the revelations despite the fact that the exposed data breach can negatively affect their privacy rights. It is also shown that the resistance against surveillance coming from civil liberty groups such as Big Brother Watch have hitherto been disconnected from the people. This paper concludes that Big Brother Watch chooses to disregard Snowden's revelations completely although they still carry the same spirit and stick to optimise the effects of the other strategies that have been mentioned earlier.

Amnesty International and Big Brother Watch (2021) as well also report that Europe's human rights court has ruled the U.K. government for the violation, and on the basis of Pankowski's argument (2018), the organisation's interpretation of the novel may also be affected by this decision and the preceding revelations. Although the controlling impact of surveillance is not yet as massive as Oceania, the U.K. to some extent still shares similar qualities with the fictional state presented in George Orwell's novel. Therefore, even though the situation of Oceania and the U.K. that struggles with Covid-19 is different, it is no surprising that Big Brother Watch still takes the momentum caused by those two big events to use the novel as their shield in fighting against the danger of surveillance and provide the alternative reading of the text, a possibility encouraged by McQueen (2015).

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The purpose of this research is to enhance the academic discussion of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* instead of judging the organisation's action of opposing Covid passes. It is known that the novel is still widely read and recontextualised, but it is interesting that the main concepts related to surveillance still apply in the pandemic context even though the novel has never mentioned anything about it. However, this research also has some limitations, especially when it comes to natural science territory. For example, how *Stop Covid Passes* campaign, for better or worse, impacts the handling of Covid-19 pandemic and the public health system in the U.K. Future research, especially research within law studies, is also needed to monitor the organisation's fight against surveillance state, considering the fact that Big Brother Watch is going to transform their struggle into legal action.

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