Alexander Gregson
Aalborg Univesity, 2018
Culture, Communication and Globalization

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to revise the original agenda-setting function proposed by McCombs and Shaw. In the light of mediatizing dynamics, characterizing the post-modern era, it has been argued that Trump, with the use of Twitter, has been able to determine the public agenda. Findings furthermore show a more polarized U.S population in terms of trust and opinion towards the news media as well evidence of echo chambers contributing to the polarization. Furthermore, the parrot script created by Sinclair Broadcast Group, and echoed throughout all its local TV stations, were analyzed through Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model. Conclusively, findings indicate that structural factors and regulatory factors are contributing to an unhealthy U.S. media environment in terms of democratic values.

Keywords: Agenda-setting, news consumption, Trump, Twitter, bias, propaganda, local tv news

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Introduction

" This was the largest audience to ever witness an inauguration ever. PERIOD!" (Gajanan, 2017). This is how former White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer began his first White House Press meeting. The comment ignited a media storm claiming that Trump's inauguration was not bigger than Obama's in 2008. In *Meet the Press,* Kellyanne Conway, a Counselor to Trump, defended Spicer's comment about the number of attendances at Donald Trump's inauguration by coining the phrase *"alternative facts"* (Peters, Rider, Hyvönen, & Besley, 2018, p.28). This episode encapsulates the essence of this thesis, and will be returned to at the end of the introduction.

Public opinion constitutes one of the cornerstones of democracy (Aalberg & Curran, 2012, p.3). Citizens are required to have knowledge about certain policies and to know how specific candidates are positioned in relation to specific issues. Put differently, democracy functions best when its citizens are politically informed (Aalberg & Curran, 2012, p.3). Access to information is thus crucial for the health of democracy for two reasons: it enables people to make rational and informed choices; and it serves as a 'checking function' forcing the representatives to uphold their oath. The U.S. Supreme Court has written: "The First Amendment [of the U.S. Constitution] …rests on the assumption that the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources is essential to the welfare of the public, that a free press is a condition of a free society".

Anthropology has in the recent decades become increasingly concerned with providing accounts of large-scale political subjects, or "publics" that are thinkable and practicable by means of mass-mediated communication (Cody, 2011, p.38). The late-twentieth-century's increasing concentration of economic power, as well as the global dissemination of digital media technologies has certainly added urgency to the tasks of understanding the development of mass-mediated subjectivity and communicative practices that shape the field of politics (Cody, 2011, p.38). Cody further argues how some social actors exert power over the field of mass-mediated self-organization more than others do, which opens up for questions combining political theory with questions of how communicational infrastructure and the semiotics of presentation work (Cody, 2011, p.38).

In his study, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* Jürgen Habermas describes the rise of a bourgeois "public sphere" where sphere can be characterized by the production of a democratic discursive space among property owners who would supervise the state

(Cody, 2011, p.38). Habermas's definition of the underlying premise that is required for what today is known as the mass media is of critical importance for this thesis:

> "This concept of a public that is assembled of private citizens who mediate between state and society rests on the premise that critical discourse can only play its political function if arguments are made in terms of rational common interests and if communication remains free from coercion. […] this liberal model of the public sphere has since degenerated in industrialized mass-welfare democracies through processes of commodification, monopolization, and competition among private interests" (Cody, 2011, p.38-39).

Delli Capini and Keeter (1996) have demonstrated that informed citizens are more likely to participate in politics; more likely to have meaningful, stable attitudes on issues; and more likely to choose political candidates who represent their views (Aalberg & Curran, 2012, p.3). However, political relevant information is today more widely available then ever before (Aalberg & Curran, 2012, p.3). The rise of of cable TV and the Internet, they furthermore argue, have given people geater control over what media they consume. In the U.S, this has enabled people to limit or be selective of the world of politics to a greater extent than ever before (Aalberg & Curran, 2012, p.3).

Some researchers have critized the quality of information provided by news media today. This has mainly been grounded in the increasingly commercialized market and how this has changed the news values (Aalberg & Curran, 2012, p.3). It is by many researchers argued that the increasing competition in the news market has encouraged journalists to sensationalize the news and to present politics in a more interesting way. Cody's notions stated above being a clear example of this.

The change in market structure and in the nature of the news can be related to the notions of Ulrick Beck's risk society thesis, which, due to the chaning relations in the society and technological risks, result in public interpretation of risks increasingly dependind on information provided to them by social institutions and experts (Chatterjee, 2014).

This delimiting of focus of this thesis has followed this line of literature as inspiration so far; however, what happens when the institutions, which the public, according to Beck, increasingly depend on in the mediatized state of society we live in today, also are faced with changes and challenges?

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The current state of the U.S media market is messy. Especially after Donald J. Trump was elected as President of the United States, the situation is unstable as ever before. In 2016, the word of the year, named by the Oxford Dictionary, was 'post-truth' (Waibord, 2018, p.19). 'Post-truth' can be defined as:

> "*relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief*" (Waibord, 2018, p.19)

This can be linked to the event described in the beginning of this introduction, where Spicer, on his first White House press conference representing the President, fed the press with 'alternative facts'. Almost everything about Trump as president has ignited discussions: his way of communicating through Twitter; his political discourse in his tweets and press conferences; his negative campaigning (i.e. delegitimizing opponents while glorifying himself with, at times, alternative facts).

The structure and regulatory nature of the U.S. media market, combined with Trump's excessive use of Twitter as a means of communicating with his followers and the nature of his tweets, has inspired this thesis to make this the focus point. Thus, it seems interesting and relevant to analyze whether Trump is actually able to set the public agenda through Twitter. Furthermore, perhaps more interestingly, is, how the political news consumers in the U.S. are affected in terms of ideology by the President's high use of Twitter. Finally, this thesis will analyze how structural factors can influence the dissemination of news in the contemporary U.S. media market. The research question of this thesis will thus be:

Methodology

The research question of this thesis will be:

> How can Trump's "Fake News" agenda on Twitter be said to challenge the existing notion of the public Agenda-setting function? And how is this affecting the U.S. political news consumers in terms of ideology? Furthermore, how can Trump's agenda-setting function be said to influence local news in the U.S?

This thesis uses social-constructionism as reasoning for the research and interpretations. As the mind is active in the construction of knowledge in the research, we subsequently distance ourselves from positivism and realism, as these two theories believe that there exists one external objective reality,

which we cannot interact with, only conduct experiments and tests from. This thesis will instead follow the reasoning of

> "*Constructivism means human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it. We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience*". *[..] we do not construct our interpretations in isolation but against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language, and so forth.* (Schwandt, 2003, p.305).

This way of defining social constructionism is in contemporary epistemology called for perspectivism (Schwandt, 2003, p.306). Knowledge, claims and their evaluation takes place within a conceptual framework through which the world is described and explained. How could, let us say, the sharp divide of partisan believers be explained using a naïve realist view? Or the fact that when watching news, it would be hard to imagine that 50 people watching the same news would interpret and evaluate the news the exact same way, simply mirroring the reality. In other words, the researcher following social constructionism is invited to consider the ways in which social reality is an ongoing accomplishment of social actors rather than something external to them.

The research design of this thesis will be two-folded. In the first section, the objective will be to define Trump's use of Twitter in terms of characteristics. Furthermore, the frequency of his use of "fake news" will be illustrated which consequently will point towards the President's agenda on Twitter. Further, as this project has been influenced by scholars from the school of globalization and cultural globalization, this thesis has been interested in the effects of globalization on society. The emergence of Twitter and other popular platforms like Facebook, Snapchat etc., inspired this thesis to conduct a theoretical-minded analysis. McCombs and Shaw's agenda setting theory is one of the most used theories within the field, however, like they, and many other researchers, no one seemed to incorporate social media platforms into the agenda setting theory. The three dynamics of Hjarvard et.al.'s theory is therefore applied to McCombs and Shaw's agenda setting model, which then leads to a proposal of an agenda-setting model in which the social media platform Twitter is the point of departure compared to mass media in McCombs and Shaw's model. By applying the model on to the case of Trump's use of Twitter to push forward his "fake news" agenda, interpretations about the effect of the model on the U.S. political news consumers will be seen. The goal will, thus, be to investigate to what degree individuals are affected by Trump's use of Twitter and, categorized by their ideological beliefs, determine whether the number of polarized U.S. political news consumers

has increased or decreased.

In the second part of the analysis, the objective is to analyze to what degree Trump's agenda setting effect can be said to have influenced Media conglomerate Sinclair Broadcast Group's decision to force its 191 local TV stations to run a predetermined script about fake news that had a conservative bias. This will be further elaborated in the analysis part. Local TV news is among the most trusted and used source for news today, subsequently making it a very relevant aspect to include when focusing on market communication strategies within the media market.

The main source of data used as empirical data in this thesis is secondary data. Using secondary data from extensive large-funding surveys and polls, the date used in the project is both trustworthy and allows the research to use high quality data and reduce cost and time. Furthermore, due to the size of the surveys and polls, it has been possible to include subgroups into the research (e.g. Republican/Democratic-leaning groups. In order to interpret how different groups react to the same thing, this data has been invaluable for this thesis.

Several other scholars than the ones used in this thesis have all played part in the shaping of the project. Especially the globalizing effects of our society including cultural globalization has helped narrow the focus. Theorists like David Harvey and his notions of the space-time compression; Arjun Appadurai and his notions about how different aspects of the world interconnect with each other thus creating and shaping new cultures; Jean Baudrillard and his notions of a 'hyperreality'; Anthony Giddens and Ulric Beck.? However, as the situation in the U.S. at the moment is more unstable than ever, the research of this thesis was narrowed down to market communication and news consumption in the U.S. The amount of Trump coverage, especially of his tweets, were extensive which, subsequently led the topic towards his use of Twitter. The unpredictable nature of the tweets was the first thing that was surprising. Questions were then starting to occur: why is the news covering them so intensively what are the consequences and what is Trump trying to accomplish (if anything).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this project will consist of McCombs and Shaw's notion of the agenda-setting function of the mass media. First the second level of agenda setting will be discussed followed by McCombs et.al's addition of the second-level of agenda setting will be discussed. Then Hjarvard et.al.'s theory of the three dynamics of Mediatization will be defined; and, conclusively, Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model will be defined.

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Agenda-Setting Theory

The agenda-setting function of the mass media is one of the most discussed theories within the field of communication and journalism. The focus in this thesis will be on the original agenda-setting hypothesis examined by McCombs and Shaw, which, later on, has come to be known as the first-level of agenda-setting. Afterwards, the second-level agenda-setting will be defined.

In 1972, associate professors of journalism at the University of North Carolina, Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, published an article in which they propose an agenda setting theory. They introduce the article by stating that "*today, more than ever before, candidates go before the people through the mass media rather than in person*" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p.176). Since their observation in 1972, the media coverage of 'candidates', and other political figures, has only been intensified in contemporary societies. Consequently, it can be argued that the information provided in the media is the only contact many people have with politics (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p.176). This information, which many rely on to make descisions (e.g. voting), can be argued to come to them "second" or "third" hand from the mass media and other people (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p.176).

McCombs and Shaw point out that even though evidence of the mass media changing the attitudes of voters is lacking, the evidence is much stronger than voters learn from the immense quantity of information available during each campaign (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p.176). However, they argue, people vary greatly in their attention to the political information they are exposed to by the mass media. People who are better eucted and more politically interested (and those least likely to change political beliefs), actively seek information (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p.177). They refer to Berelson's study, which states: "*On any single subject many 'hear' but few 'listen'*"(McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p.177). However, voters *do* learn McCombs and Shaw claim. They note how Lang and Lang observed that the mass media possess an agenda-setting function:

> "*The mass media force attention to certain issues. They build up public images of political figures. They are constantly presenting objects suggesting what individuals in the mass should think about, know about, have feelings about*" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p.177).

In extension to Lang and Langs' observation, Bernard Cohen (19639 claims that "*the press may not be successful much of the time in telling its readers what to think, but it is stunningly sucessful in telling its audience what to thank about*" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p.177).The following hypothesis

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has been made by McCombs and Shaw, in order to theorize the agenda-setting function of the mass media: *the mass media set the agenda for each political campaign, influencing the salience of attitudes toward the political issues* (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p.177).

In their study on the 1968 American presidential election, 100 residents of Chapel Hill, North Carolina were interviewed about the topics which they thought were most important issues, and what the mass media reported as the main topic of issue (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p.177-78). Their findings illustrated "*a very strong relationship between the emphasis on different campagin issues by the media (reflecting to a considebly degree the empahsis by candidates) and the judgements of voters as to the salience and importance of various campaign topics*" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p.180-81). In their study, they furthermore noted that even though the presidential candidates placed widely different emphasis upon different issues, the judgements of the voters seem to reflect the *composite* of the mass media coverage (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p.181). This may illustrate, they argue, that voters, or media consumers in general, reflect on the composite of news coverage regardless whether they agree or not.

To sum up, the public agenda (i.e. what issues are being regarded as the most important in society) is mainly being determined by the mass media. It is, according to McCombs and Shaw, the mass media that are the gatekeeper through which all information must pass. The most important news, according to the mass media, receives the most coverage. And as the only way for most people to have any form of contact with their government is through the mass media, the news they provide extensively becomes the issues that voters regard as most important. McCombs and Shaw's findings, thus, illustrate that there can be found correlations between issues being focused by the mass media and how important voters perceive the issues to be. However, as they stress, their study does not prove the existence of an agenda-setting function of the mass media, but merely provide evidence that might point towards such an effect.

The second-level agenda-setting was tested by (McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escorbar, & Rey, 1997) during the 1995 regional and municipal elections in Spain. In short, they discuss the influence of the mass media on *how* people think about persons and topics in the news (McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escorbar, & Rey, 1997, p.703). In other words, the first level of agenda-setting can be defined as transmission of object-salience and, on ther other hand, the second level of agenda-setting can be defined as the transmission of attribute salience (McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escorbar, & Rey, 1997, p.704). They introduce their paper by refering to Walter Lippmann's notions, presented

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in his thesis in the chapter "*The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads*". Here Lipmann argues that:

> "*the news media are a primary source of the pictures in our heads about the vast external world of public affairs that is "out of reach, out of sight, out of mind"* (McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escorbar, & Rey, 1997, 703).

In other words, for each object given focus by the mass media, there is also a set of attributes that are emphasized or, in other cases, given less or not attention at all. It is these attributes that, in the secon-level of agenda-setting, influence *how* we think of the issues that the media intensively covers. McCombs et.al. argues that "*an important part of the news agenda and its set of objects are the perspectives and frames that journalists and, subsequently, members of the public employ to think about and talk about each object*" (McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escorbar, & Rey, 1997, p.704) subsequently subjecting the theory to a comparison with the theory of *framing*. According to Robert Entman, to frame is to:

> "*select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item describe*" (McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escorbar, & Rey, 1997, p.704).

Calling attention to some issues, subsequently attributing specific aspects of issues, is in other words called *priming* and is one of the best-documented consequences of issue salience (McCombs, 2002, p.12). Priming, on a psychological basis, relates to the selective attention of the public. Today, the amount of information people is exposed to makes it impossible to pay attention to everything. So, instead, people use simple rules of thumb and intuitive shortcuts (McCombs, 2002, p.12). This means, in other words, that rather than analyzing their total store of information, citizens routinely draw upon those bits of information that are particularly salient at the time judgement must be rendered (McCombs, 2002, p.12). It can therefore be argued that citizens, to some degree, use the agenda of salient objects and attributes in their minds when making decisions or making an opinion about a topic.

Three Dynamics of Mediatized Conflicts

Media studies have a long tradition of considering how media influence the representation and public perception of conflicts. Especially, Hjarvard et.al. states, in the case of military and political conflicts, the presence of propaganda and bias has been a major growing field of enquiry (Hjarvard, Eskjær, &

Mortensen, 2015, p.1). Recent research within media studies has shown that the media today play both performative and constitutive roles for the development of conflicts in contemporary society (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.1). In their book, *Dynamics of Mediatized Conflicts*, Hjarvard et.al.seeks to build upon these previous insights in order to theoretically develop the perspective of 'mediatized conflicts' (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.1). To simplify, the authors seek to encapsulate the shifting role of the media in contemporary societies; departing from the traditional sense of 'mediation' (i.e. being used as a medium for communication and interaction) to 'mediatization' which denotes the changing relationships between media, culture and society, which creates new *conditions* for communication and interaction (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.5). Before explaining the dynamics through which they argue conflicts are being mediatized, it is important to establish their meaning of 'conflict'.

Hjarvard et.al. deliberately defines the notion of 'conflicts' in a broad sense in order to theorize and analyze various ways in which mediatization interacts and influences different conflicts. In their definition of conflicts, Hjarvard et.al. states,

> "*Conflicts typically imply a public dimension: they are located in a public setting, involve public figures, or pertain to public or institutionalized activities. In this sense, conflicts refer to disputes between stakeholders which may or may not be formally organized but which are usually recognized as representing certain aims or interests. A working definition of conflict thus entails socially disruptive situations in which two or more actors (individuals or collective entities) recognize that they have differing goals, interests, or opinions and act (or plan to act) in order to change the balance of power between them. To suggest that conflicts are socially disruptive does not imply that they are necessarily undesirable from a normative perspective. Conflicts may be socially functional or dysfunctional depending on their context.* (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.2).

Consequently, Hjarvard et.al.'s definition of mediatized conflicts therefore describes how the balance of power between stakeholders may be influenced by the media and information technology, which, for instance, can occur through the way which the media make strategic communication imperative for the maintenance of public legitimacy (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.2).

Hjarvard et.al. has been informed by two lines of developments in the literature on media and conflict. The first line of development of fields of literature encompasses a number of related phenomena (e.g. media and crises, media and disasters, media and terror, media and armed

conflicts etc.) (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.2) However, as this thesis will not adopt as broad a definition of conflicts as Hjarvard et.al., focus will be on the second line of development in the literature on media and conflict, which is a new and more complex understanding of the role and function of media in relation to conflicts (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.2). What is characteristic of this line of development, according to Hjarvard et.al, is:

> "[…] *a growing recognition that various conflicts are being increasingly influenced and shaped by the omnipresence of media and information technology. Our notion of mediatized conflicts is based on the recognition that media today connect nearly every aspect of public and private life in new and unprecedented manners, thereby altering the structural and political impacts as well as personal and social significance of conflicts*" (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.3).

In other words, the core assumption behind the concept of mediatized conflict has become integrated in the social processes *"through which conflicts are defined and recognized* […] *and that media are utilized for particular interests during conflicts"* (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.3). The emergence of the digital media has allowed social actors and individuals to communicate, establish relationships, and act through media networks. During times of conflicts, this development presents both new opportunities and threats for individuals and organizations seeking to manage the flow of communication to their own advantage (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.3).

Hjarvard et.al. starts developing their theory of particular dynamics that the media may generate in conflicts by taking a starting point in Joshua Meyrowitz's (1993) distinction between three metaphors of media (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.9). Meyrowitz uses the three metaphors: conduits, languages, and environments as a means of specifying the different perceptions of media in existing research (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.9). Each metaphor, they argue, represents specific framings of what the media are and how their influence can be conceptualized. However, instead of going into further detail about Meyrowitz's metaphors, Hjarvard et.al. uses the metaphors in order to suggest a typology of three dynamics, each of which may contribute to the evolution of conflicts (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.9). The three dynamics are defined as:

1) As 'conduits', the media may expand and amplify conflicts across time and space, that is, increase the speed, geographical reach, and level of involvement in conflicts. They may, of course, also be used to downplay or silence a conflict through, for

instance, censorship or the nonreporting of events (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.9). In other words, *amplification* functions as Geographer David Harvey's notion of 'Time-Space' compression (Harvey, 1989), encapsulating how contestants now can widen its scope which, consequently, often makes the conflict less controllable. An example of this can be the dissemination of news via international news services or the transnational sharing of content through social network media.

2) As 'languages', the media may be used to *frame* conflicts, allowing diverse social actors (including the media as actors) to *perform* in particular ways and resulting in a particular *dramaturgy* of the conflict in question (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.9). This dynamic is mainly associated with the discursive practices through which the media can frame a conflict in a certain way as well as how media representations of conflict may in themselves actively contribute to the conflict. Consequently, as languages, media have both a signifying function (representation/framing) and a performative function (agency with a particular dramaturgy) (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.9)

3) Considered as 'environment', media are integral to various social institutions and at the same time constitute a public sphere (to various degrees, depending on the context). Structural conditions thus influence initial access to and control over communicative resources at the same time as media are involved in *co-structuring* power relations over the course of a conflict (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.3)

Table 1. Three dynamics of mediatized conflicts

Media Metaphor	Dynamics	Influence
Conduits	Amplification	Volume, speed, reach, level of involvement
Language	Framing and performative agency	Representation, performance, and dramaturgy
Environment	Co-structuring	Media practices both embedded in and constitutive of structural relations of power

Table 1 provides an easy overview of the three dynamics and their influences. (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.10).

Hjarvard et.al. stresses the fact that these dynamics of media influences are not exclusively found in conflict situations (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.10). In non-disruptive social circumstances effects of the media can be found in the everyday life, as these dynamics merely reflect the general mediatized conditions of high modernity. However, the three dynamics become increasingly important during times of conflict since they are subjected to strategic usage by the actors involved. The nature of the relationship between the media and social actors, the authors argue, is not a simple one-way street. The media themselves are often affected and influenced by social actors seeking to make them serve political, religious military, or other purposes, just as media systems are implicated in stratified systems of social power (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.10). Furthermore, Hjarvard et.al. carves out that their typology of media dynamics is *not* a typology of *different* kinds of conflicts. It is, on the other hand, a typology of the mediatized conditions including a set of particular dynamics that may influence conflicts. In this sense, the conflicts themselves may not be different from earlier in time; however, they often come to be acted out differently as a consequence of the mediatized conditions of contemporary societies (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.10).

The three dynamics of mediatized conflicts are not mutually exclusive. They are, in other words, interconnected and often take place simultaneously in a given conflict (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.11). For instance, the authors argue, by framing a conflict in a given way, the media amplify course of action, or the number of agents involved in a conflict; or, by amplifying the conflict, the media may attract the attention of a large number of different agents and stakeholders, thereby changing – and thus co-structuring – the nature of conflict in new and unexpected manners (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.11). The typology of dynamics has to be perceived as the inner mechanisms that shape the course of action of mediatized conflicts (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.11). These inner mechanisms create four possible outcomes: two quantitative outcomes (the scale of the conflict) and two qualitative outcomes (the character of the conflict) (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.11).
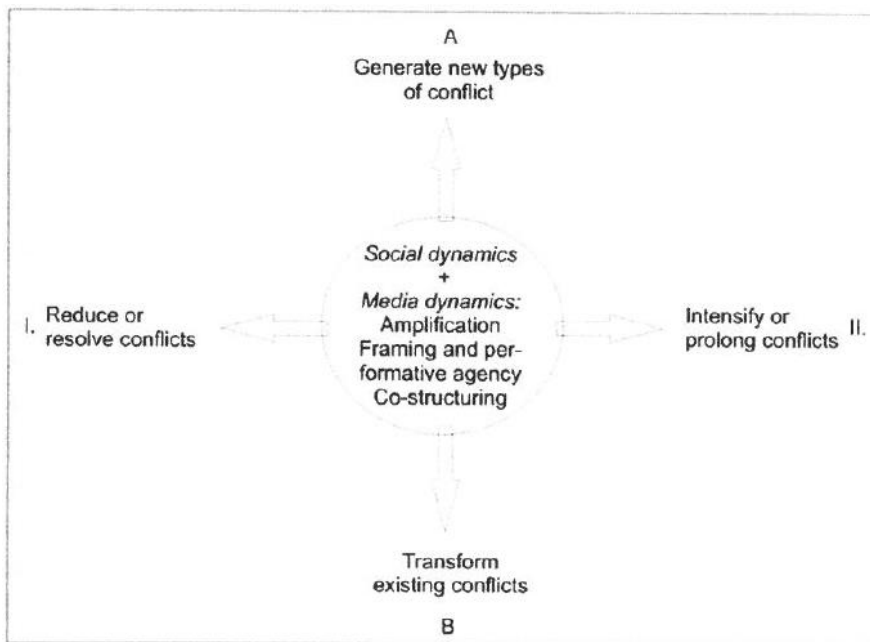
Figure 1 illustrates the variable outcomes of mediatized conflicts. (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.11).

As for the quantitative dimension, dynamics may:

    I.   Reduce or resolve conflicts or
    II.   Intensify and perhaps prolong a given conflicts

As for the qualitative dimension, dynamics may:

    A. Generate new types of conflicts or
    B. Transform existing conflicts

As such, Hjarvard et.al. proposes a theoretical framework to conceptualize and explore mediatized conflicts. Conflicts involving media and information are thus, according to the authors, influenced in various ways by the mediatized conditions of contemporary societies. Furthermore, it has also been argued how mediatization may produce its own sort of conflicts as information technology enables new types of illegal activity and political control.

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A Propaganda Model

The Propaganda Model is a conceptual model produced by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky and was, originally, published in their book: *Manufacturing Consent* in 1988. The Propaganda Model constituted an analytical framework, Herman and Chomsky argue, which attempts to explain the performance of the U.S. media in terms of the basic institutional structures and relationships within which they operate (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p. XU). The Propaganda Model was published with the intention of being able to analyze whether and how elite agendas are being served through shaping and constraining media policies. This is, according to the authors, done not by crude interventions, but by the selection of right-thinking personnel and by the editors' and working journalists' internalization of priorities and definitions of news-worthiness that conform to the institution's policy (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.XU). Structural factors incorporated into the analytical framework, which will be defined and explained shortly, are, argued by the authors, influencing what journalists do, what they see as newsworthy, and what they take for granted as premises of their work are frequently well explained by the incentives, pressures, and constraints of the structural factos (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.XU). As a concluding remark (but definingly important) in this short introduction, it has to be stressed that the conceptual model focuses on media structure and performance, not the effects of the media on the public. In other words, the propaganda model describes the forces that shape what the media do (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. XU)

The Propaganda Model was originally published in Herman and Chomsky's book in 1988 and is often perceived to be a landmark of its time and is, still, to this day, argued to be highly relevant. In 2002, the authors published a revised edition of the book, in which they consider the relevance of the propaganda model in the light of new changes within the US media market.

> "*In short, the changes in politics and communication over the past dozen years have tended on balance to enhance the applicability of the propaganda model. The increase in corporate power and global reach, the mergers and further centralization of the media, and the decline of public broadcasting, have made bottom-line considerations more influential both in the United States and abroad. The competition for advertising has become more intense and the boundaries between editorial and advertising departments have weakened further. Newsrooms have been more thoroughly incorporated into transnational corporate empires, with budget cuts and a further*

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diminution of management enthusiasm for investigative journalism that would challenge the structures of power" (Herman & Chomsky ,2002, p.xvii).

Even though a lot has happened from 2002 and to the present day, most of all the present-day characteristics were already seen in 2002 and have simply just scaled exponentially. The changes will be addressed when defining the propaganda model, but the point being stressed here is that the applicability of the propaganda model has increased in correlation with the changes of the U.S. media market. Neoliberalism is shaping, and has been, shaping the U.S. media market, as well as all other types of business, as the value of free market competition and minimal intervention from the State has dominated the recent decades. What is meant by minimal state intervention is the policy and regulations previously constraining the actors within the media market. As the U.S. media system during the past decades seems to have been consumed by the neoliberal ideology, the actors competing for media power have become major media conglomerates and are important in both producing and distributing all kinds of media (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.xiii). The consolidation of power constitutes an important part of the propaganda model and will therefore not be defined in detail now. However, the fact that the number of media firms/corporations dominating almost every mass medium has decreased from fifty in 1983 to five in the contemporary U.S. media system will be used to discuss another 'new development' since the propaganda model was originally published (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.xii).

The emergence of the internet has, by critics of the propaganda model, fostered reason to doubt the relevance of the model today with the main argument that the internet functions as a democratic vehicle around corporate and biased news. Some argue that the internet and the new communication technologies are breaking the corporate stranglehold on journalism and opening an unprecedented era of interactive democratic media (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.xv). The efficiency and scope of individual and group networking has increased, Herman and Chomsky argue, and see this as a very positive development. The social media inspired ARAB spring has probably become the most prominent example of this in recent times; as the will of the democracy overruled the despotic leaderships in several Arab countries, mobilized through social media, the importance of the internet was manifested. While more positive examples like this can definitely be found, rather negative examples of the emergence of various social media platforms can also be found. As this thesis will focus a great deal on a case involving the social media platform, Twitter, the emergence of the social media platform in relation to the relevance of the propaganda model today will not be further discussed now. Instead, online reporting, on the other hand, can be argued to foster better

opportunities for journalists to conduct objective, constraint-free reporting. However, Herman and Chomsky argue:

> "*The past few years have witnessed a rapid penetration of the Internet by the leading newspapers and media conglomerates, all fearful of being outflanked by small pioneer users of the new technology, and willing (and able) to accept losses for years while testing out these new waters*"[…] "*the large media entrants into the Internet have gravitated to making familiar compromises-more attention to selling goods, cutting back on news, and providing features immediately attractive to audiences and advertisers*"[…] "*the Internet is not an instrument of mass communication for those lacking brand names, an already existing large audience, and or large resources. Only sizable commercial organizations have been able to make large numbers aware of the existence of their Internet offerings. The privatization of the Internet's hardware, the rapid commercialization and concentration of Internet portals*" […]" together *threaten to limit any future prospects of the Internet as a democratic media vehicle*" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.xvi).

Online news reporting can, thus, be characterized as an expansion of the media conglomerates, as the same structural constraints, as news broadcasting function under, seem to exist within online news reporting. The recent developments within online news reporting can subsequently, to some extent, be perceived to limit the democratic values of the emergence of the internet. A recent example that further illustrates the limitation of democratic values of the internet is the filter bubble integrated by Google in the site's search engine (Pariser, 2012).

On December 4, 2009, Google published a post on their corporate blog under the headline: Personalized search for everyone (Pariser, 2012, p.1). Few people noticed this post, but not Search engine blogger, Danny Sullivan, who described the news as "the biggest change that has ever happened in search engines" (Pariser, 2012, p.1). In their post, Google announced that:

> "*starting from that morning, they would use fifty-seven signals – everything from where you were logging in from to what browser you were using to what you had searched for before – to make guesses about who you were and what kinds of sites you'd like*" (Pariser, 2012, p.2).

This means, in other words, that when individuals, since 2009, make similar words searches in Google, they will receive different results. The results will be determined by Google's algorithm as

what is best for you to see (e.g. Republican and Democratic voters most likely will receive completely different suggestions when searching for the same topic). In recent years, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter etc. have incorporated the same algorithms that result in personalized news feeds. Algorithms that result in personalized news/suggestions thus seem to question the democratic value of the internet. As Pariser states:

> *"Democracy requires citizens to see things from one another's point of view, but instead we're more and more enclosed in our own bubbles. Democracy requires a reliance on shared facts; instead we're being offered parallel but separate universes"* (Pariser, 2012, p.5)

In conclusion, this can, combined with the other briefly mentioned changes that have occurred since the book: *Manufacturing Consent* was published, be said to have seriously weakened the public sphere (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.XVIII). As discussed earlier, the public sphere is "the array of places and forums in which matters important to a democratic community are debated and information relevant to intelligent citizen participation is provided" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.XVIII). They further argue that "the steady advance, and cultural power, of marketing and advertising has caused 'the displacement of a political public sphere by a depoliticized consumer culture" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.XVIII). The current nature of the U.S. media system and the socio-cultural developments strongly indicates that the propaganda model is relevant like never before.

The main focus of the propaganda models the inequality of wealth and power and how this affects mass-media interests and, more importantly, its choices. It provides an analytical framework for analyzing how news become newsworthy and how the government and dominant private interests get their messages across to the public (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.2). The model is divided into five "filters": (1) the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms; (2) advertising as the primary income source of the mass media; (3) the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and "experts" funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power; (4) "flak" as a means of disciplining the media; and (5) "anticommunism" as a national religion and control mechanism (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.2). Similar to Appadurai's -scape theory, as discussed in the introduction, these five filters interact and reinforce on another. The filters do not function as a physical sieve through which news is removed layer from layer. The process of the 'filtering' occurs, according to the authors, so naturally that even people working with news on a daily basis, and operating with integrity and

goodwill, automatically convince themselves that they choose and interpret the news "objectively". However, as we shall look further into later on, there can be found plenty of examples which illustrate the opposite (i.e. news anchors being forced to read a transcript on air on which they do not agree). In most cases, the people working with news are often being objective within the limits of the filter constraints; however, the constraints are so powerful and integrated into the system in such a fundamental way that alternative news choices are hardly imaginable (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.2). The following part defines each filter and its characteristics.

1) SIZE, OWNERSHIP, AND PROFIT ORIENTATION OF THE MASS MEDIA

The first filter is introduced with how an emerging radical press in the first half of the nineteenth century in Great Britain that reached a national working-class audience was perceived as a major threat to the ruling class. Herman and Chomsky note that the alternative press was effectively reinforcing class-consciousness. Furthermore, it unified the workers by repeatedly emphasizing the potential power of working people to affect social change (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.3). According to a member of the British parliament, the working-class newspapers.

> *"[…] inflame passions and awaken their selfishness, contrasting their current condition with what they contend to be their future condition-a condition incompatible with human nature, and those immutable laws which Providence has established for the regulation of civil society"* (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.3).
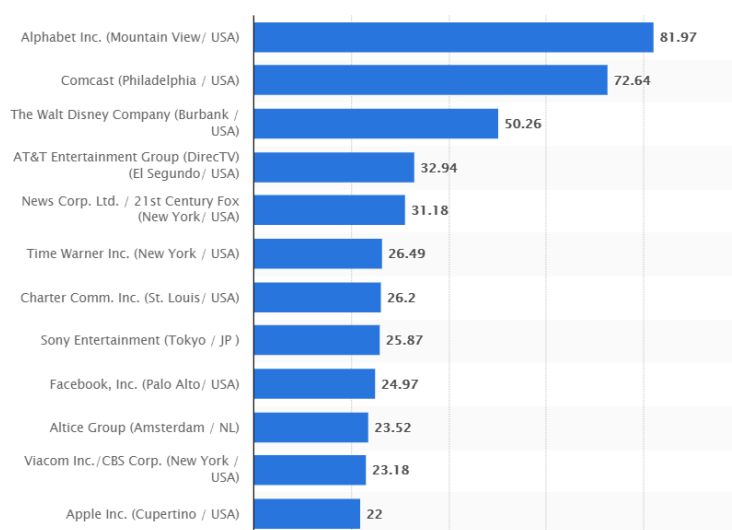
Consequently, libel laws, prosecutions and various taxes were imposed in order to squelch the working-class media by raising their costs (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.3). This did, however, prove ineffective, and the state-intervention approach was replaced by the liberal view that the market would enforce responsibility. Herman and Chomsky refer to Curran and Seaton's study that showed how following the repeal of the punitive taxes on newspapers, a new daily local press came into existence between 1853 and 1869 but not one new local working-class daily was established through the rest of the nineteenth century (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.3).

An important reason for this, Herman and Chomsky point out, was the rise in scale of newspaper enterprise, which, along with technological improvements and the owners' increased desires of reaching large audiences, increased the capital costs dramatically (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.3-4). In 1851, the start-up of a newspaper in New York City was $569,000, and in the 1920s, city newspapers were selling at $6 to $18 million (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.4). By 1945, the cost of machinery alone ran into a substantial amount, subsequently making even small-newspaper

publishing a big business (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.4). The limitation of ownership of media has thus been applicable for a long time and has only increased in relevance.

In 1986, there were about 1,500 daily newspapers, 11,000 magazines, 9,000 radio, 1,000 TV stations and 2,400 book publishers, and seven movie studios in the U.S. (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.4). Many of these media entities were small in size and dependent on the large national companies, and many more were subject to common ownership. In other words, Ben Bagdikian stresses, that the twenty-nine largest companies, in 1986, accounted for over 50 % of the output of newspapers, and most of the sales and audiences in magazines, broadcasting, books, and movies. Bagdikian argues that these large media companies constitute "a new Private Ministry of Information and Culture" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.4). In the contemporary U.S. media system, the number of media entities controlling the majority of power has decreased significantly. In 2012, according to an article published by the Business Insider, 90 % of all media in the U.S. was owned by six corporations, also known as the "big six" (Lutz, 2012). Today, all U.S. media is owned by five; however, due to mergers and acquisitions, the top five media conglomerates today are: Comcast, Walt Disney, 21st Century Fox (Rupert Murdoch's new News Corp), Warner Media (the new conglomerate forged by the merger of AT&T and Time Warner Inc.), and CBS/ Viacom. Herman and Chomsky state that the news agenda is being defined by these media conglomerates and the government in a top-down structure (i.e. the media conglomerates who have the most prestige, resources, and reach supply the lower tiers with national and international news and, thus, control the agenda) (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.4-5). The top tier media conglomerates are very large and profit-seeking corporations, owned and controlled by very wealthy people.

Leading media companies in 2017, based on revenue (in billion euros)*

Company	Revenue
Alphabet Inc. (Mountain View/ USA)	81.97
Comcast (Philadelphia / USA)	72.64
The Walt Disney Company (Burbank / USA)	50.26
AT&T Entertainment Group (DirecTV) (El Segundo/ USA)	32.94
News Corp. Ltd. / 21st Century Fox (New York/ USA)	31.18
Time Warner Inc. (New York / USA)	26.49
Charter Comm. Inc. (St. Louis/ USA)	26.2
Sony Entertainment (Tokyo / JP)	25.87
Facebook, Inc. (Palo Alto/ USA)	24.97
Altice Group (Amsterdam / NL)	23.52
Viacom Inc./CBS Corp. (New York / USA)	23.18
Apple Inc. (Cupertino / USA)	22

Alexander Gregson
Aalborg Univesity, 2018
Culture, Communication and Globalization

Table 2 shows the revenues of the top five media conglomerates (and other media companies) in 2017. Note that AT&T and Time Warner today functions as the same corporation. (Statista, 2018)

The increase in size combined with the favorable market, that the media market has become, has increased the competition. The U.S. media market has seen a loosening of rules limiting media concentration, cross-ownership, and control by non-media companies (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.8). Rules limiting the use of commercials has also been loosened providing media corporations with unlimited use of commercials. One of the main characteristics of the current U.S. media system is often being defined as commercialism. The greater profitability of the media has attracted bankers, institutional investors, and wealthy individual investors, which ultimately has led to increased pressure for the owners of large media corporations:

> "*The greater profitability of the media in a deregulated environment has also led to an increase in takeovers and takeover threats […] if the managers fail to pursue actions that favor shareholder returns, institutional investors will be inclined to sell the stock (depressing its price), or to listen sympathetically to outsiders contemplating takeovers. These investors are a force helping press media companies toward strictly market (profitability) objectives*" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.11-12).

Another significant structural relationship within the first filter, and in the holistic picture of the model, is the media companies' dependence on and ties with the government (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.13) as all TV companies and networks all require government licenses and franchises and are consequently subject to government control or harassment. The media can and do, however, protect themselves from this contingency by lobbying and other political expenditures, the like the cultivation of political relationships, and caring in policy (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.13). The political ties, Herman and Chomsky stress, have been impressive. Fifteen of ninety-five outside directors of the media giants are former government officials (in 1986) (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.13). Furthermore, the media conglomerates also depend on the government for more policy support. Examples here can be labor policies, and enforcement and non-enforcement of the antitrust laws.

It can therefore be concluded that the media conglomerates are major forces, often said to constitute the 4th branch of the US system and are controlled by managers who are subject to sharp constraints by owners and other market-profit-oriented forces; and, more importantly, they have important common interests with other major corporations and the government (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.14).

2) THE ADVERTISING LICENSE TO DO BUSINESS: THE SECOND FILTER

Advertising plays a major role in the contemporary U.S. media system. The fundamental dynamic, which has increased the importance of advertising, is captured in Herman and Chomsky's extension of the development of the press in the mid-nineteenth century in Great Britain:

> "*Advertising did, in fact, serve as a powerful mechanism weakening the working-class press […] Before advertising became prominent, the price of a newspaper had to cover the costs of doing business. With the growth of advertising, papers that attracted ads could afford a copy price well below production costs. This put papers lacking in advertising at a serious disadvantage: their prices would tend to be higher, curtailing sales, and they would have less surplus to invest in improving the salability of the paper (features, attractive format, promotion, etc.)*" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.14).

In other words, the media corporations receive substantial advertising subsidy in relation to their audience size. Thus, the real product which the media corporations in reality are trying to sell is audience or, in the eyes of the advertisers, consumers. Being able to attract a large and affluent audience gives them a price-marketing-quality edge and can make their rivals lose market share (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.14-15). An example of this, pointed out by James Curran, is how the working-class in the mid-nineteenth century Great Britain, was perceived to be a waste of money due to their lack of buying-power; they simply did not buy enough copies. As a consequence, working-class newspapers as The *Herald,* the *Sunday Citizen,* and the *News Chronicle* were strangulated by lack of advertising support (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.15). The important notion here is that both audience size *and* the buying-power is of crucial importance in the eyes of advertisers. The increased importance of affluent audiences for the media corporations, Herman and Chomsky argue, hurts the idea of the mass media being "democratic" as it strives to attract large audiences.

In their selection of programs and advertisements, media corporations are very selective as advertisers, as well as stakeholders, will often only support programs on the basis of their own principles and ideologies which, with rare exceptions, are culturally and politically conservative (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.17). One should think that real investigative journalism should capture the eye of the mass thus reaching out to the largest audience; however, programs and content are mainly chosen to capture the attention of the affluent audience and, furthermore, programs that will not give the audience cognitive dissonance. Google's personalized search engine algorithm relates to

that point, as everything seems better when an individual is not introduced to notions that contradict his or her own world-view.

3) SOURCING MASS-MEDIA NEWS: THE THIRD FILTER

The third filter relates to the nature of the sources that are required for trustworthy and objective news. Herman and Chomsky state:

> "*The mass media are drawn into a symbiotic relationship with powerful sources of information by economic necessity and reciprocity of interest. The media need a steady, reliable flow of the raw material of news. They have daily news demands and imperative news schedules that they must meet*" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.18).

Even today, news corporations cannot afford to have reporters everywhere at any time. Consequently, reporters are clustered around places where important stories often occur and regular press conferences are held. Prime examples, according to Herman and Chomsky, are The White House, the Pentagon and the State Department in Washington D.C. Furthermore, government officials and other bureaucratic corporate sources have the great merit of being recognizable and credible by their status and prestige (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.19). As Mark Fishman states:

> "*News workers are predisposed to treat bureaucratic accounts as factual because news personnel participate in upholding a normative order of authorized knowers in the society. Reporters operate with the attitude that officials ought to know what it is their job to know.... In particular, a news worker will recognize an official's claim to knowledge not merely as a claim, but as a credible, competent piece of knowledge. This amounts to a moral division of labor: officials have and give the facts; reporters merely get them*" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.19).

Working within a media system that constantly requires news, real investigative journalism seems to be impossible to conduct. Therefore, government officials are an ideal source of news as fact-checking often is not required. Public-information services within, for example, the Pentagon have thousands of employees and are spending hundreds of millions of dollars on controlling what information is acceptable to feed the reporters. Table 3 illustrates the U.S. Air Force's public-information outreach during a one-year period.

140 newspapers, 690,000 copies per week
Airman magazine, monthly circulation 125,000
34 radio and 17 TV stations, primarily overseas
45,000 headquarters and unit news releases
615,000 hometown news releases
6,600 interviews with news media
3,200 news conferences
500 news media orientation flights
50 meetings with editorial boards
11,000 speeches[65]

Table 3 illustrates the U.S. Air Force's public-information outreach from 1979-1980 (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.20).

This example illustrates how big an effort is being invested in effectively packing information packages for reporters. In this way, the 'right' information and stories are given to reporters, which is in the interest of the government officials as well as the reporters.

What becomes clear with the above-mentioned, is a mutual dependency between the powerful sources and the media. In order for the media to maintain the status quo, they might become 'obligated' to carry out dubious stories and mute criticism (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.22). Critical sources are often excluded from the news coverage, as the primary source of information may be offended and, consequently, exclude the reporters from further use of sourcing. An example that can illustrate this notion can be found within the system of embedded journalism. Journalists embedded into the military in times of war are under strict control in regards to what they can publish. Since the Vietnam War, coverage of war has been notoriously known for only covering one side of the war. In case of journalists who do not follow the guidelines provided, they are simply disembedded and banned from further coverage. The structure of mutual dependency between the media and the government, and other powerful sources, allow the ones bringing the story to frame it in a way beneficial in accordance with their own agenda. So, in other words, by flooding the media with 'facts', powerful sources can take advantage of the media routines subsequently manipulating them into

following the desired agenda. A rather controversial example, controversial because not a lot of information can be found to back the claim, can be found in Chomsky's claim that the Watergate scandal was, in reality, a cover-up (Chomsky, 2010). At the same time as the Watergate scandal occurred, FBI-led COINTELPRO was leaked to the press. COINTELPRO was a series of covert, most of the time illegal (it has even been associated with a political assassination (Chomsky, 2010)) projects, with the aim of surveilling, infiltrating and discrediting domestic political organizations like the civil rights movement, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Black Panther Party. The story here is a full exposure of how a covert operation like COINTELPRO would be fatal for the US government in term of legitimacy and trust in the eyes of the Americans, so, as the Watergate scandal would result in less damage, the news was flooded with government official sources all speaking about the Watergate scandal (Chomsky, 2010). The point here is not to determine whether this is true or false, as it will be difficult to provide sources to prove either, but the scenario played out in this 'theory' illustrates how sources can be provided by the government whenever it will suit the government's agenda.

'Experts' are, thus, an important element of the third filter and, in the big picture, of the propaganda model. They can be used in order to make news credible and trustworthy and can be used in the act of "persuading" the public or, in other words, framing/manipulating the truth in favor of the desired agenda. Unofficial powerful sources are usually co-opted by "punning them on the payroll as consultants, funding their research, and organizing think tanks that will hire them directly and help disseminate their messages" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.23). Herman and Chomsky point out that the media themselves also provide "experts" who regularly echo the official view (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.24). A parallel to Beck's notions of the role held by experts in the risk society that were discussed in the introduction, Beck contends that, in the risk society, it is the social institutions that are responsible for defining risks and informing the public of any risks (Chatterjee, 2014). As a result, public interpretation of risks depends on information provided to them by the social institutions and experts. As he further argues that key institutions of modernity such as science, business and politics, which are supposed to guarantee rationality and security, find themselves confronted by situations in which their apparatus no longer has a purchase and the fundamental principles of modernity no longer automatically hold good; thus arguing, these key institutions no longer seem only as instruments of risk management, but also as a source of risk (Chatterjee, 2014).

4) FLAK AND THE ENFORCERS

Flak, the fourth filter, is described as:

> *"[...] negative responses to a media statement or program. It may take the form of letters, telegrams, phone calls, petitions, lawsuits, speeches and bills before Congress, and other modes of complaint, threat, and punitive action. It may be organized centrally or locally, or it may consist of the entirely independent actions of individuals*" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.26).

Flak produced on a large scale, or by individuals or groups with substantial resources can result in severe consequences to the media. One possible outcome can be the withdrawal of advertising subsidy. Consequently, as advertisers also go to great length in not offending any constituencies that might produce flak, the demand for 'suitable' programming continues to be an important feature of the contemporary U.S. media system (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.26). An extreme example of flak, is the McCarthy-era, which is known for the notorious political repression orchestrated by U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy. The political repression was a consequence of the fear for the spread of communism. As a result, individuals, institutions or other forms of actors were recklessly accused of not following the 'official line' and, more often than not, without any facts to back the accusations. Hence, the term McCarthyism today refers to reckless and unsubstantiated accusations.

Herman and Chomsky argue that the ability to produce flak, and especially flak that is costly and threatening, is related to power (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.26). Flak produced by powerful actors/entities can either be direct or indirect. Direct examples of flak can for example be letters or phone calls from the White House, of from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), irate officials of ad agencies or corporate sponsors. Indirect examples of flak, on the other hand, can be when:

> "*the powerful complains to their own constituencies about the media, by generating institutional advertising that does the same, and by funding right-wing monitoring or think-tank operations designed to attack the media. They may also fund political campaigns and help put into power conservative politicians who will more directly serve the interests of private power in curbing any deviationism in the media*" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.26).

Herman and Chomsky conclude the fourth filter by stressing that "*the producers of flak add to one another's strength and reinforce the command of political authority in its news-management activities*" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.28). According to them, the government is in many cases a major producer of flak, regularly threatening and "correcting" the media in order to maintain status quo (i.e. the established line of behavior and the ultimate 'agenda').

5) ANTICOMMUNISM AS A CONTROL MECHANISM

In the years of the publishing of their book: *Manufacturing Consent*, Herman and Chomsky defined communism as "*the ultimate evil and has always been the specter of haunting property owners, as it threatens the very root of their class position and superior status*" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.29). Even though communism today is no longer an eminent threat, the fifth filter remains very potent. It is the idea of being able to mobilize the populace against an enemy, for instance communism, that is the main focus in this filter. Instead, today, anybody advocating for policies that may result in a decline of the powerful (e.g. property owners, government officials etc.) or anyone who supports accomodation with communist states and radicalism is subject of the fifth filter. 'Islamophobia' in a post-9/11 U.S. is a very prominent example. Through media framing and other tools employed to manipulate the general poulation, Islamophopia was employed as a control mechanism in that it unified the American population against the Middle-East. Even though the 2003-led invasion of Iraq was not supported by the United Nations (UN), the Government had support from the general population.

Thus, the fifth filter can be described as a control mechanism that can be deployed for different reasons. In the case of the invasion of Iraq, the goal was to gain public legitimacy of an invasion. The construction of the Iraqi people as an evil force, combined with an extensive amount of framing and biased news, has been described as one of the darkest moments in history in U.S. journalism. Especially Fox News, notoriously known to support right-wing neo-conservative politics, has been accused of airing an extreme amount of biased news. This claim can very well be supported by a major Poll-study conducted by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA). They analyzed frequent misperceptions, according to their main source of news, regarding the invasion of Iraq. In every question asked, FOX News audience have the highest rate of misperceptions. For instance, asked the question: "*Since the war with Iraq ended, is it your impression that the US has or has not found Iraqi weapons of mass destruction?* 33 % of the Fox News viewers believed that the US had found clear evidence of WMD's in Iraq compared to 11 % of viewers receiving their news

from the Public Broadcast Service (PBS) (Program on International Policy Attitudes/ Knowledge NETWORKS, 2003, p.14). To further extend the point being made here, when asked whether the US had gone to war supported by the majority of the people in the world, 35 % of FOX viewers answered yes compared to 5 % of the PBS audience (Program on International Policy Attitudes/ Knowledge NETWORKS, 2003, p.15).

In other words, the anti-Communist control mechanism reaches through the system to exercise a profound influence on the media (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.30). In times of peace as well as in times of conflict, issues are often framed in dichotomized terms which, in other words, means that contesting sides are allocated with gains and losses and rooting for one side is considered an entirely legitimate news practice (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.30-31).

Analysis

The analysis conducted in this thesis can be said to be two-folded. The first part will investigate to what degree U.S. President Donald Trump's war on "Fake News" can be said to challenge the existing notions of the agenda-setting function of the mass media and, furthermore, how this may be affecting the U.S. media consumers in terms of ideology. The latter part of the analysis will, through a structural analysis, investigate how Trump's agenda-setting function is influencing the structure and contents of local news. The findings and their interrelations will then be discussed, in order to draw a conclusion.

Part I

What is 'Fake News'?

During his election campaign, now President Donald Trump abused the media, organizations and individual journalists by branding them as liars, the purveyors of "fake news" (Mcnair, 2017, p.13). An example can be found during a media conference where CNN reporter Jim Acosta asked Trump for a question. He was replied with a "No" followed by "No I'm not going to give you a question. You're fake news." (Mcnair, 2017, p.13). Later, both the CNN and the BBC were banned from the conference room in which Sean Spicer gave his briefings because Trump perceived them to be fake news. In the context of U.S. political history, this exclusion of 'critical voices' was an unprecedented act by a president (Mcnair, 2017, p.22).

Today, the charge of fake news is not simply a statement about factual accuracy; it has become much more a way to counter any ideological bias (Mcnair, 2017, p.35). 'Fake News', as a phrase, is today used by voices of right and left, and can be defined as a discourse about journalistic

bias as much as it is about the fabrication of facts. The goal is often to delegitimize sources that claim to be objective, but is in the eyes of the accuser biased against their side of a particular issue (Mcnair, 2017, p.35). The political economy school of media scholarship has tended to view the media as biased against the left, reflecting right-wing values. Viewing "fake news", almost, as a covert coercive strategy, one could argue that it related to Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony. In essence, Gramsci's notions of cultural hegemony focused on how the capitalist ruling-class maintained its power by maintaining the consent of the governed (Exoo, 2010, p.8). Hegemony today can be argued to have been integrated into the mass media system, allowing for those in control of the media to appeal to citizens' common sense (Exoo, 2010, p.11). It can do so by not challenging our common sense, but instead reaffirming it. Decades of research have concluded that this is the most profound effect the mass media have on our culture: "*reinforcing a particular way of seeing the world by telling the same stories over and over*" (Exoo, 2010, p.11).

As argued above, Trump has frequently used the phrase 'fake news', when referring to critical media outlets or individuals. By incorporating 'fake news' into his tweets he is able to "denounce, dismiss, or deride journalism which he regards as flawed, motivated, biased, invented, without really having to explain why" (Mcnair, 2017, p.19). The notion of 'fake news' can, thus, be said to have helped him convince his voting base to dismiss any criticism of him. Fake news has emerged as a serious threat to journalists and the liberal democracy in general, by stripping away all previously agreed upon notions of a fair and objective press, and, today, leaving citizens wondering what is true and what is not. In the eyes of the public, the legitimacy of journalists has decreased significantly, as we today have moved into the post-truth era. Alternative facts can be used without further consideration, as any criticism can be delegitimized by categorizing it as fake news. Labelling news for 'fake news' and the journalists or producers for 'the enemy of the people', Trump is, to some extent, taking the same position as notorious populists as Chairman Mao and Comrade Stalin (Peters, Rider, Hyvönen, & Besley, 2018, p.89),

Trump's Use of Twitter and the Most Frequent Agenda in His Tweets

President Donald Trump is well known to be very active on Twitter. In fact, many observers point towards the use of Twitter during his election campaign in 2016 as one of the important factors in securing his victory. The use of social media during the 2016 presidential election has widely been discussed; however, it will not be addressed in this thesis, as the alleged interfering and meddling by Russia is a whole topic in itself. Since his inauguration on January 20, 2017, Trump has maintained

an extensive use of his personal twitter account. Figure 3 illustrates how the number of tweets posted per month beginning from Mach 2017 to August 2018 has developed.
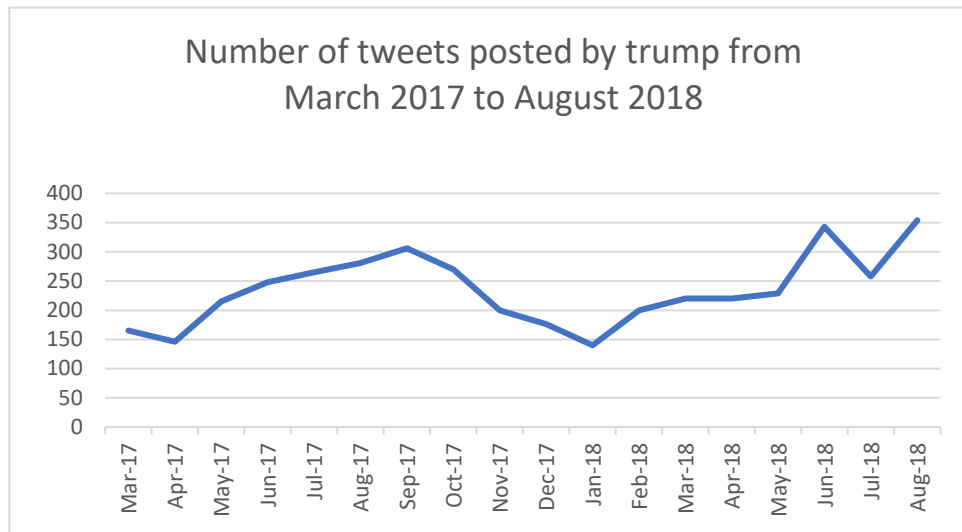

Figure 3 shows tweets per month posted by President Donald Trump. Numbers were collected from http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com/ *and then used in Excel to create the graph.*

As seen in figure 3, Trump's use of Twitter has increased from his inauguration to today. The total amount of tweets from March 1st to August 31st is 4,016. His average tweet per day has since March 2017 risen from 5.3 (165/31) per day to 11.4 per day (354/31).

Today, it is well-known that Trump is at war with "fake news". In order to determine whether or not his war against "fake news" can be said to be his agenda on Twitter, his tweets have been scanned for two words: "Fake News"; "Fake Media"; and "Fakenews" and "Tax cuts". By recording the frequency of each word, it will be possible to get an idea of what issue Trump focuses on the most in his tweets. In this thesis, "Fake news" is perceived to be the more important issue subsequently defining his agenda on twitter. "Tax Cuts is, on the other hand, one of, if not *the* most, important key issues of the Trump Administration throughout their election campaign as well as a key focus point during Trump's almost two first years in office. A search for Fake News"; "Fake Media"; and "Fakenews" showed that Trump has posted 302 tweets containing one of these words from March 1st 2017 to August 31st. On the other hand, a search for "Tax cut and Tax cuts" showed 137 tweets posted by Trump in the same period. The search results are illustrated in figure 4.
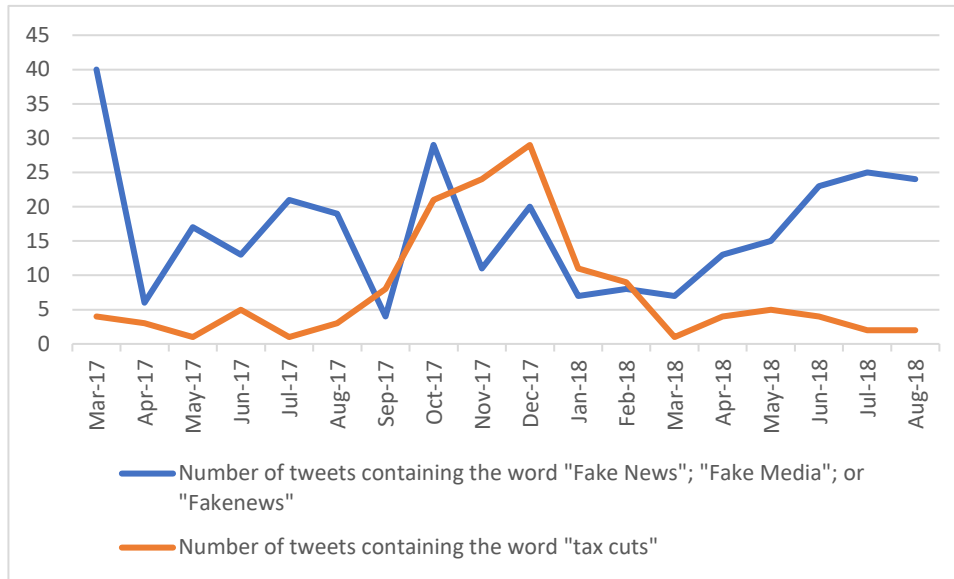
Alexander Gregson
Aalborg Univesity, 2018
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Figure 4 illustrates the number of tweets per month from March 1st, 2018 to August 31st 2018 containing "Fake News"; "Fake Media"; and "Fakenews" and "Tax cut"; and "Tax Cuts" respectively. Numbers were collected from http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com/ and then used in Excel to create the graph.

Except from mid-October 2017 to mid-February 2018, Trump's tweets have more frequently had a "Fake News" agenda compared to "Tax Cuts". These figures and statistics, however, cannot determine that his clear-cut agenda is one of the two, but they point towards the most frequent agenda of the two in the specific period of time. It thus seems fair to say that "Fake News" is an important agenda for Trump in his tweets. Trump has also stated himself, through a tweet, what he himself perceives fake news to be, and which media outlets he is blaming for bringing fake news.

Donald J. Trump Verified account @realDonaldTrump

The Fake News is working overtime. Just reported that, despite the tremendous success we are having with the economy & all things else, 91% of the Network News about me is negative (Fake). Why do we work so hard in working with the media when it is corrupt? Take away credentials?

4:38 AM - 9 May 2018

Donald J. Trump Verified account @realDonaldTrump

The FAKE NEWS media (failing @nytimes, @NBCNews, @ABC, @CBS, @CNN) is not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American People!

1:48 PM - 17 Feb 2017

In the first tweet, he claims, without any documentation, that 91 % of all Network News about him is negative (fake). He concludes with "take away credentials?" referring, presumably, to their licenses. As stated by Herman and Chomsky, the government can withdraw licenses from news organizations (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.13). Doing so would probably have severe consequences but by mentioning it in a tweet it creates attention. What is notable in the first tweet, is how he adds the word "fake" after negative. By doing so, he defines all negative news coverage of him as fake. In the second tweet, he claims that the fake news media is not his enemy but the enemy of the people. The media outlets mentioned in his tweet are, besides being some of the traditionally most respected media outlets in the U.S., known to have a left-leaning audience (Pew Research Center, 2016).

Furthermore, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting, PolitiFact, who won the prize due to their fact-checking initiative during the 2008 presidential campaign, has fact-checked 598 statements made by Trump. In order to be able to define the nature of Trump's statements, a comparison of Trump's 598 statements and 599 Barack Obama statements from his presidential period has been made. The figures below show how their statements are classified from "True" to "pants on fire".

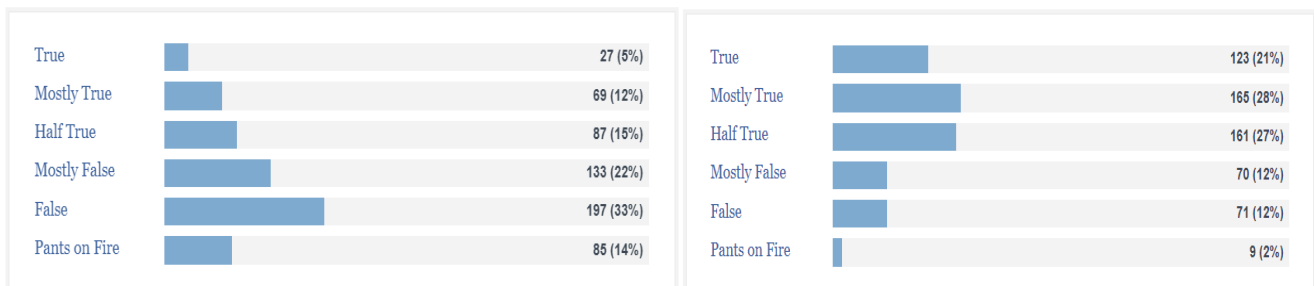|	Trump			Obama
True		27 (5%)	True	123 (21%)
Mostly True		69 (12%)	Mostly True	165 (28%)
Half True		87 (15%)	Half True	161 (27%)
Mostly False		133 (22%)	Mostly False	70 (12%)
False		197 (33%)	False	71 (12%)
Pants on Fire		85 (14%)	Pants on Fire	9 (2%)

Figure 5 (to the left) shows how Trump's 598 statements are categorized after being fact-checked. Figure 6 (to the right) shows how Obama's 599 statements are categorized after being fact-checked. Figure 5: (Politifact, 2018) Figure 6: (Politifact, 2018).

Even though these statements are not exclusively retrieved from Twitter, the comparison will provide some valuable factors that can contribute in understanding the media environment now and then. It turns out that 32 % of Trump's statements have been defined to be true; mostly true; or half true, whereas 69 % of the statements have been checked to be mostly false; false; or 'Pants on fire'. Obama's statements, on the other hand, have been checked to be 76 % true; mostly true; or half true, whereas 26 % of his statements were defined as mostly false; false; and 'pants on fire'. The high degree of Trump's statements that are mostly false or less true seems to illustrate how the use of 'alternative facts' today is being used by the Trump administration. The figures furthermore relate to what Paul Krugman, journalist for the *The New York Times,* defines as a "big liar technique"

(Krugman, 2016). "The big liar technique", according to Krugman, relates to "*make their falsehoods so huge, so egregious, that they would be widely accepted because nobody would believe they were lying on that grand a scale*" (Krugman, 2016). Furthermore, according to *The Washington Post'*s fact checker, President Trump has made 4,713 false claims between his first day in office to the 4th of September (Kessler, Rizzo, & Kelly, 2018).

Mediatized agenda-setting – towards a new structure?

In this section, Trump's use of Twitter to push his "Fake News" agenda will be analyzed within the theoretical framework of the two levels of agenda-setting, proposed by McCombs & Shaw and McCombs et.al. respectively, and the three dynamics of mediatization proposed by Hjarvard et.al. The objective here is to determine whether it can be argued that the dynamics of mediatization have made it possible for, in our case, President Donald Trump to set the public agenda.

Let us begin by looking at the original model of public agenda-setting.
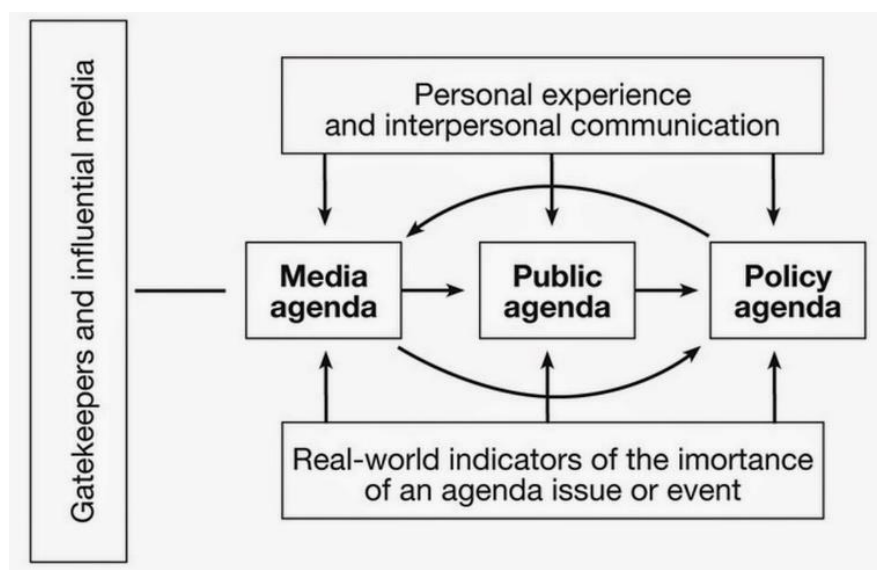
Figure 7 is a depiction of the mass media's agenda-setting function (McQuail & Windahl, 1993)

However, the model does not include McCombs et.al's level of attribute salience. Furthermore, the policy agenda will not be focused on in this analysis. It illustrates, however, in a sufficient manner, how the mass media, in the traditional sense of an agenda-setting function, function as the ultimate gatekeeper. Influenced by external factors, the mass media deem what news is the most important which, subsequently, becomes what the public thinks about and, furthermore, how the people react to specific issues.

Hjarvard et.al. argues that the media today play both performative and constitutive roles

of conflicts in contemporary societies. Trump's war against the "fake news" media can be argued to be a very dysfunctional conflict for the U.S. public and everyone working within the media sector. Very similar to Appadurai's notions of the interconnected -scapes, which through interplay shape and create new cultures, Hjarvard et.al. argues that certain dynamics, which in today's post-modern era lead to a mediatization, denoting the changing relationships between media, culture and society, consequently are creating new *conditions* for communication. In the case of President Donald Trump's war against "Fake News" on twitter, this thesis will now argue that, due to the dynamics of mediatization proposed by Harvard et.al, the premise of the public agenda-setting function has ultimately changed.
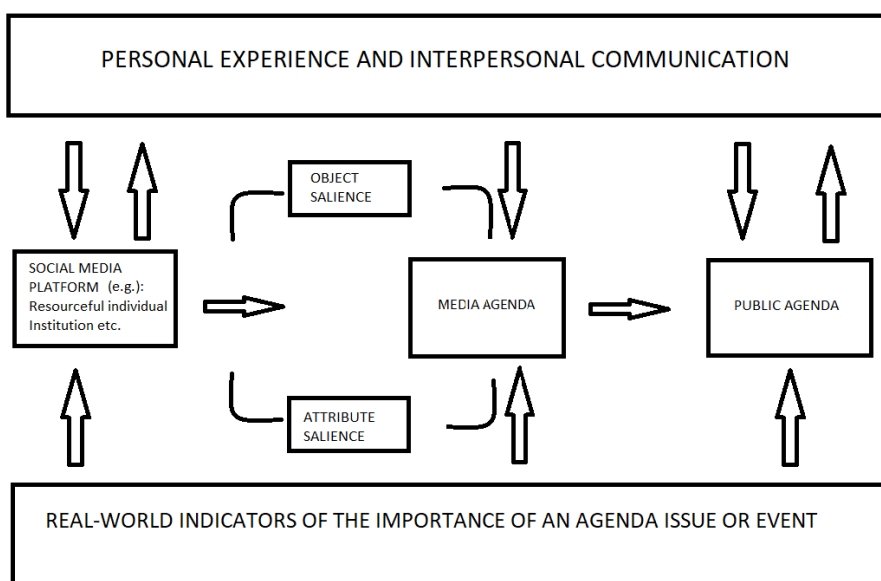
Figure 8 illustrates the agenda-setting function of social media platforms, in this case Twitter.

Firstly, it should be stressed that this model has not replaced the original theory proposed by McCombs and Shaw. It simply illustrates how this thesis argues and subsequently conceptualizes how technological developments have created new media that transcend previous boundaries of communication. As a consequence, powerful individuals today can influence the media and public agenda. As President Trump's war against "Fake News" can be considered to be a socially disruptive conflict, it will now be analyzed whether or not Trump's agenda-setting power can be said to challenge the existing notion of the mass media's public agenda-setting power.

"The Social Media" box has replaced the "gatekeepers and influential media" box in the previous model of agenda setting. As Waisbord states, "*the collapse of traditional news gatekeeping has ushered in new, multilayered forms of news sharing and engagement*" (Waisbord, 2018, p.22). In other words, Twitter can be defined as:

> […] the open, transparent, and low-threshold exchange of information and ideas Twitter allows shows great promise for a reconfiguration of the structure of political discourses towards a broadening of public debate by facilitating social connectivity (Maireder & Ausserhofer, 2014, p.306).

On his personal Twitter account, President Donald Trump (@realddonaldtrump), Trump has 54.4 million followers. The ability to spread information in an immediate, fast, and wide-spread way to at least 54.4 million people, who then have the opportunity to "retweet" his tweets (i.e. re-send it to one's own followers), enables a channel of extreme empowered communication. In a theoretical context, the core mediatization dynamic influencing the change of roles is the "environment" – in terms of Hjarvard et.al's metaphor for the *co-structuring* dynamic. It is through this dynamic that Twitter today has become an integrated part of U.S. households. Trump's feud with the "fake news" media is not a new thing, as presidents before him have strongly opposed the omnipresent media (e.g. Harry S. Truman, Richard Nixon) (Mattimore, 2018). Thus, Trump's conflict with the media is not a new kind of conflict, but the way it is played out, as a consequence of the mediatization dynamics, has made the situation unique.

As mentioned before, the social media platform, Twitter, in itself can be said to co-structure the construct thus generating a new type of conflict (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.3). As explained by Hjarvard et.al., the three dynamics often intertwine, subsequently reinforcing one another to shape the conflict. It can therefore be argued, that the amplification dynamic has expanded and amplified the conflict across time and space. Trump's ability to post a tweet any time he wishes, which in an instant will reach out to 54.4 million people who, then, can retweet it or tell their friend and family about it, strongly suggest an interconnection with the amplification and co-structuring dynamics. His very active use of this channel of communication, which does not require the mass media as a gatekeeper, has intensified Trump's feud with the mass media consequently making the situation less controllable.

To illustrate the function of the model proposed, we can focus on his posting of the tweet also looked at earlier:

The Fake News is working overtime. Just reported that, despite the tremendous success we are having with the economy & all things else, 91% of the Network News about me is negative (Fake). Why do we work so hard in working with the media when it is corrupt? Take away credentials?

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The instant he posted his tweet, 54.4 million people received a notification and most likely saw the tweet. As of the time writing, the tweet has been retweeted 26,846 times, received 117,320 likes and been commented on 55,000 times. The amplification of the scope and reach of audience Trump is capable of reaching with a simple click relates to Harvey's notion of the space and time compression (Harvey, 1989), which, today, makes us interconnected like never before. The tweet will affect two directions: it goes towards the media box and to the personal experience and interpersonal communication box. The latter will be addressed last, as it has a direct connection to the public agenda box. The object salience and attribute salience boxes respectively illustrate McCombs and Shaw's first and second-level agenda-setting function.

Independent of the media's interpretation of his tweet; any ideological bias; or question of reach, his tweet will contain exactly what he intends to say and is not being filtered by anyone. The two boxes, object salience and attribute salience refer to how, simultaneously, when posting tweets can increase the salience of a specific issue and *frame* his view on the topic. This dynamic is referred to, by Hjarvard et.al. as the framing and performative agency (Hjarvard, Eskjær, & Mortensen, 2015, p.9). This dynamic is, perhaps, one of the most important tools of strategic communication today. In the time of the "fake news" era or, in other words, the "post-truth" era, framing is an integrated function of everyday life. It allows individuals to share and distribute highly personalized ideas. McCombs and Shaw quoted Lang and Lang from their study, "*The mass media force attention to certain issues. They build up public images of political figures. They are constantly presenting objects suggesting what individuals in the mass should think about, know about, have feelings about*" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p.177). The mass media still hold an extremely influential position in doing so. However, in this thesis it is argued that, in our case, Trump through his tweets has an increasingly constitutive role of setting the mass media's and subsequently the public's agenda. As argued in the previous sections, a correlation between Trump' frequent attacks on the, in his words, fake news media outlets can be found. How this relates to the connection to the "personal experience and interpersonal communication" box will be addressed in the upcoming section. In relation to the media agenda, on the other hand, his tweets ultimately become the media's agenda; subsequently making the media the dependent variable of the two.

According to John Thompson, "*this new world of mediated visibility, the making visible of actions and events is not just the outcome of leakage in systems of communication and information flow that are increasingly difficult to control: it is also an explicit strategy of individuals who know very well that mediated visibility can be a weapon in the struggles they wage in their day-to-day*

lives" (Thompson, 2005, p.31). Trump's frequent attacks on the "fake news" media receives a lot of attention in the U.S. news media, mainly because of the controversial nature of his tweets. Whether it is a strategy explicitly deployed by Trump or it is simply part of his nature has been widely discussed. However, the media today in the U.S. have been commercialized and require news constantly to keep up with competition (Aalberg & Curran, 2012, p.5). As a consequence, from the beginning of Trump's campaign and still, to the day today, Trump's tweets were and still are covered consistently (Novak, 2016). As the structure of the U.S. media market today is profit-driven, as argued by Herman and Chomsky in their propaganda model, they are increasingly dependent on traffic or audience, put differently. Susan Milligan, who covered the White House in the 1990s, states,

> "The troubling irony, White House reporters say, is that they are working in what is arguably the freest press in the world, in an era of easily delivered information, and in a nation where an aggressive and unfettered media is considered essential to democracy. Yet they find it nearly impossible to accomplish what they see as their central mission: to explain why the president does what he does" (Milligan, 2015).

The increasing need for stories and a fierce competition among media outlets in the U.S. is a threat to investigative journalism. During press conferences, journalists are all looking for the "gotcha" question which, frequently, results in the same questions about the same issues (Milligan, 2015). Furthermore, Milligan characterizes the nature of the press conferences as consisting of long answers from a predetermined transcript, leaving little time for questioning of the President (Milligan, 2015). As a consequence of this scripted and choreographed nature, news is almost never made at the press conferences any more (Novak, 2016) (Milligan, 2015). Press conferences dating back to when technological advancements were not as prominent as they are today, the press-conferences were a prominent place for reporters to gain news and cover the news in the way they wished to.

It is this combination of the change of the U.S. media structure (i.e. the commercializing of the mass media) and the emergence and nature of the social media that has allowed Trump to push his agenda on a daily basis. It would be suicide, in the words of Novak, not to cover Trump's tweets (Novak, 2016). The easy access; the unpredictable fashion (e.g. 3 A.M tweets at times occur); and finally yet importantly, the character of the tweets provide reporters and media outlets with material to feed the need for constant, newsworthy news. Trump's tweets have thus been a substantial part of news coverage since entering office. Trump announced that he would stop tweeting when he was elected to President (Carr, 2018). This has not been the case, however, and now, more than any time before, Trump is blurring the lines between private and public discourse and in such an extensive

manner that it manhandles the public's attention by yanking the media spotlight back on himself whenever it starts to wander (Carr, 2018).

Thus, in a commercialized media environment, the mass media has become independent on constant and relevant news. Government sources are invaluable to the press, according to Herman and Chomsky, consequently making Trump's tweets a goldmine of news for media outlets. Of course, the President of the United States will always attract a lot of attention, but Trump's way of communicating through twitter benefits himself and the press greatly. The nature of his tweets, short, relevant and controversial, provides great material for the mass media. On a same note, Trump spreads his personal agenda of "fake news" media (i.e. the de-legitimization of the mass media outlets and, sometimes, specific individuals whom Trump perceives as a threat or enemy). The frequency and the contents of his tweets can, in sum, be said to be adopted by the media (due to different reasons) and thus become the agenda of the media. During his first 100 days in office, Trump was the topic of 41 % of all stories covered on national TV – three times the usual amount for a president (Patterson, 2017, p.5). It can be deluded from figure 9 that Republicans have 80 percent of the talking time in 41 % of all news stories covered on national TV during his first 100 days in office.
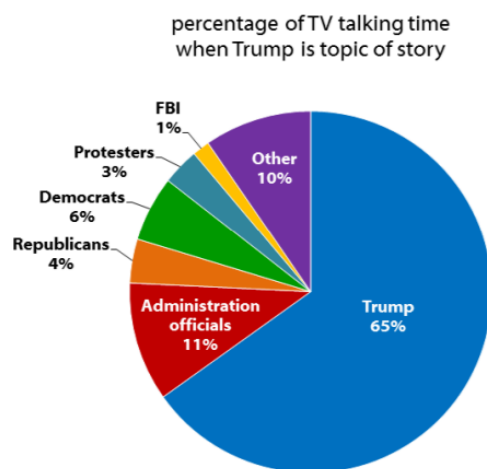

Figure 9 illustrates the TV talking time when Trump is the topic (Patterson, 2017).

And given his negative focus on the "fake news" media, his view of which issues are important and how he attributes these issues gives him a fertile ground to 'plant his seeds'. The public is the final stage of the model, and, as in the traditional model and sense of the public agenda-setting theory, affected by the agenda of the news media. In the public sphere, the public is faced with a rather dysfunctional dilemma in their everyday encounter with media, and in their search for the 'objective truth'. Trump consistently puts forward attacks on the mass media and journalists, which both challenges rights constituted as amendments of the people to opinionate themselves, as well as de-legitimizes the main source of information for many Americans. Trump's agenda can, to some degree,

be said to create a sense of moral panic among the citizens. By moral panic, it is here meant, that Trump's agenda is to transform the mass media (the "fake news" media) into a folk devil (Critcher, 2006, p.2). By doing so, he almost "exaggerates" the seriousness of how the notion of fake news being fake news story on social media sites in the beginning was perceived, into mass media being the enemies of the people. The consequence of such a state of moral panic in the public sphere can very well result in a "state of panic where emotion rules over reason" (Critcher, 2006, p.3). In this view, one could argue that Trump is strategically attacking the critical news media in order to divert attention from other issues such as the ongoing investigations from his campaign time, the whole Russia investigation or simply his leadership or agenda in general. However, the creation of an environment where emotion rules over reason, the creation of a moral panic, can also be used to explain the nature of his supporters, who at rallies are known for very emotional and at times outrageous outbursts.

The external factors (i.e. the real-world indicators of the importance of an agenda issue or event; and the personal experience and interpersonal communication) affect both the individual creating the agenda, in our case Trump, the media agenda and the public agenda. To use Lippman's notions of the images in our head, the individual is on a daily basis shaping his own world-view, which then, when encountered with a piece of news of any form, is reproduced in the mind and subsequently shaping a new world-view. The latter box, which defines the aspect of "*personal experience and interpersonal communication"* can be said to have a constitutive role.

As the arrows connecting the "social media box" and the "public agenda" box indicate, they are interconnected by Twitter subsequently creating a new alternative public sphere in which politics can be discussed. In this new alternative public sphere, the President can reach out to the public directly, not being dependent on the media as previously in time, and, on the other hand, the public gain a sense of '**closeness'** to the president. Trump and other government officials using Twitter become more 'visible' and their personal messages, pictures, videos or even live 'streaming' of rallies, press conferences etc., are available in an instant.

However, the structure of Twitter itself, as well as the affluent amount of news to choose from, has been argued to create "echo chambers" which is connected, in a sense, to Pariser's notion of the filter bubble. Echo chambers are defined in the Oxford Social Media dictionary as "a mainstreaming ideological effect in which a group worldview is reinforced through continual circulation amongst like-minded people (such as an online or social media echo chamber" (Oxford Reference, 2016). Critical voices are increasingly pointing at social media sites, like Twitter, as one

of the main reasons for the increasing polarization of views on the internet. One of these reasons for the increasing ideological polarization is "the ideological fragmentation of those outlets; by providing audiences with an "*echo chamber2 for their own beliefs these potentially contribute to the polarization of public opinion*" (Hong & Kim, 2016, p.777). Others are positive, though, arguing that the openness of the Internet and social media exposes the individual to a wider range of, ideologically speaking, news consequently enabling a democratic debate. In recent times, however, the notion of 'bots', which refers to automatic Twitter profiles that send a friend request to other users and thereafter send links to news and other things that this person most likely would be interested in based on algorithms has become widely used (Weller, Bruns, Burgess, Mahrt, & Puschmann, 2014, p.184). Also Pariser's notion of the filter buble here becomes relevevant, as it extends the argument that the structure and functionings of the internet and social media sites may have a negative influence on the democratic nature of these post-modern pars of our everyday lives

Polarization of Trust and Public Opinion

In this section, we will look at national U.S. surveys conducted by Pew Research Center, the Gallup/Knight Foundation and Quinnipiac/Poll University. The goal in this section will be to determine whether or not there can be found a correlation between Trump's agenda against the "fake news" media). Furthermore, the data will also be considered in relation to the consumers' ideology, to analyze whether or not the polarization between Republican and Democratic voters have increased as a consequence of Trump's agenda-setting function.

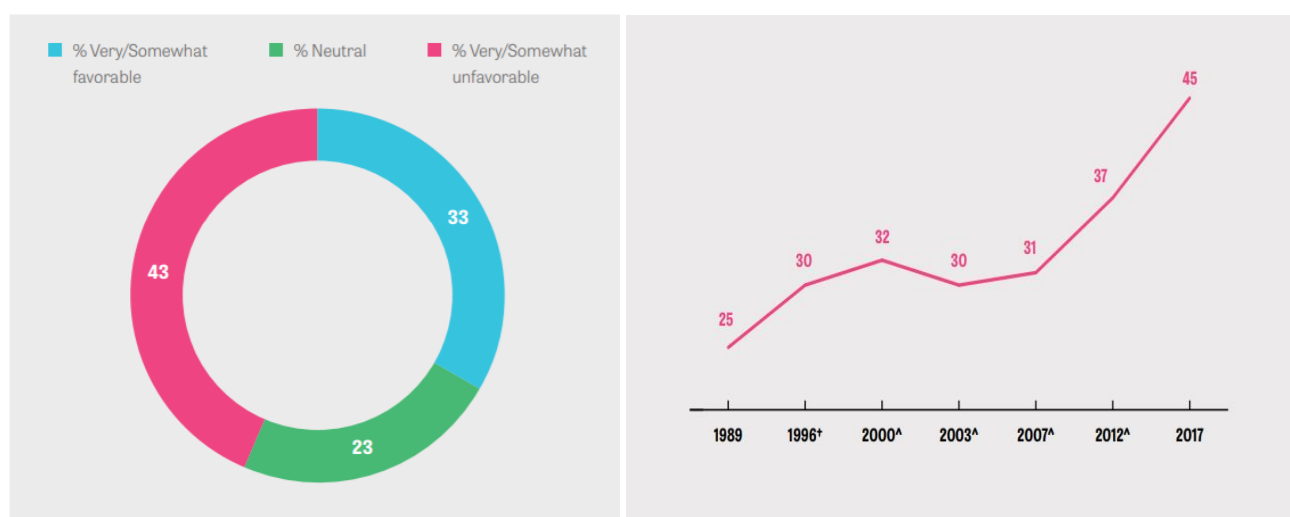**What is your overall opinion of the news media today?**

Figure 10 (to the left) illustrates Americans' trust in the news media (Knight Foundation, 2018).
Figure 11 (to the right) illustrates the percentage of Americans seeing a great deal of political bias in news coverage (Knight Foundation, 2018, p.9).

Figure 10 shows an overall opinion of the news media. 43 % of all Americans in the survey have a very or somewhat unfavorable opinion of the news media, 33 % have a very or somewhat favorable opinion, and 23 % have a neutral view on the media. The favorable opinion towards the news media has declined to 33 % in 2018 from 54 % in 2003 (Knight Foundation, 2018, p.1). It can be argued that Trump's frequent attacks on the media can have affected the public's opinion in a negative way. Furthermore, his frequent statements of the "fake news" media in fact being the enemy of the people can also be said to have affected the public to some degree.

```
35. Which comes closer to your point of view: the news media is the enemy of the people,
or the news media is an important part of democracy?

                                                          WHITE......
                                                          COLLEGE DEG
                  Tot    Rep    Dem    Ind    Men    Wom    Yes    No

Enemy of the people  26%    51%     5%    24%    28%    23%    23%    32%
Part of democracy    65     36     91     65     64     65     70     56
NEITHER(VOL)          4      4      1      4      4      3      4      3
DK/NA                 6      9      3      7      4      8      4      9
```

Figure 12 illustrates the percentage of people interviewed saying that the news media is the enemy of the people, part of democracy or neither (Quinnipiac/ Poll University, 2018).

```
TREND: Which comes closer to your point of view: the news media is the enemy of the
people, or the news media is an important part of democracy?

                        Impt
              Enemy     Part    NEITHER    DK/NA

Aug 14, 2018    26       65        4          6
Jul 25, 2018    21       71        3          4
Jun 20, 2018    23       65        6          6
Apr 26, 2018    22       66        4          8
```

Figure 13 illustrates percentage of people who perceived the media to be the enemy of the people or an important part of democracy varying from April to August 2018 (Quinnipiac/ Poll University, 2018).

Of the total people interviewed, 26 % perceived the news media to be the enemy of the people. 51% of the Republicans perceived the media as the enemy while 36 % of the Republicans perceived them as being important for democracy. Of the Democrats, 5 % perceived the mass media as the enemy and 91% as an important part for democracy. A polarized picture begins to emerge; however, the issue of polarization will be addressed shortly. Figure 13 shows how the total percentage of people perceiving the news media to be the enemy has increased from 22% on April 26 to 26% on August 14. A correlation between figure 4 and 13 can now be seen. During April 2018, President Donald Trump posted 13 tweets containing the word "Fake News". The number of tweets containing the word "Fake News" increased to 24 in August 2018. So, put differently, as Trump increased his attack on the news media, which, according to the model proposed in the previous part of the analysis, meant

that the news media probably also have focused more on the subject, people with a negative attitude towards the media has increased by 4%. Even though not the biggest number and strong evidence for Trump's agenda setting, this correlation can still be perceived to be an indicator of a public agenda-setting function.
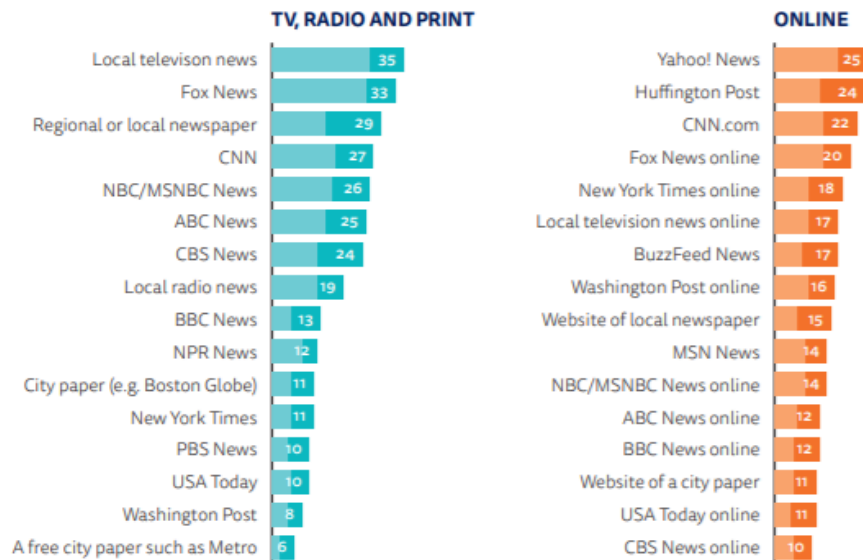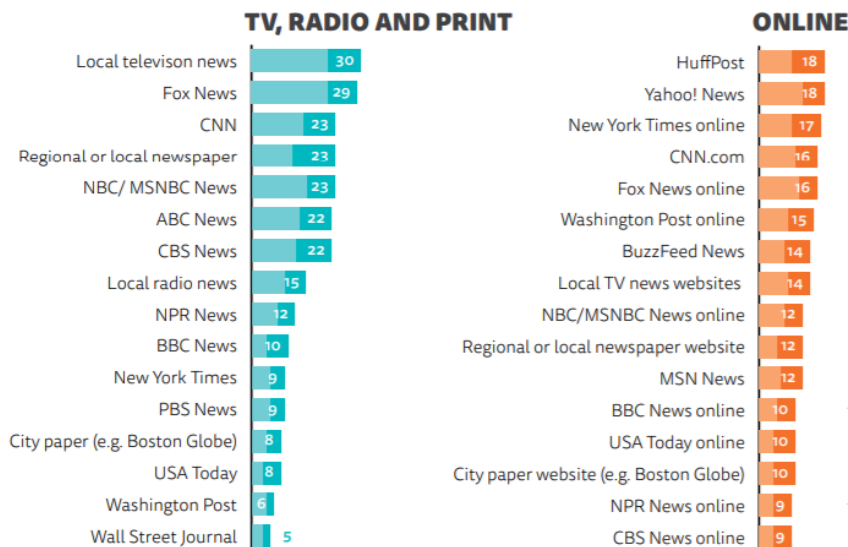

Figure 14 illustrates percentage in weekly use of a selection of the main TV, radio and print sources on the left, and Online sources on the right in 2017(Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, 2017, p.102-103).

Figure 15 illustrate percentage in weekly use of a selection of the main TV, radio and print sources on the left, and Online sources on the right in 2018 (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2018 , 2018).

By comparing the numbers, it becomes evident that there has been a decrease of usage of every outlet. This might suggest that Trump's attacks on the news media have made the American people more critical in their use of media.

The field has been chalked and the American media consumers have been placed on each side of the middle; ready to discuss the role of the mass media and its trustworthiness.

Overall Opinion of News Media, by Age, Race and Party Identification

	FAVORABLE	NEUTRAL	UNFAVORABLE
% All	33	23	43
% 18-29 years old	22	31	45
% 30-49 years old	29	26	44
% 50-64 years old	35	20	44
% 65+ years old	43	15	39
% White	28	20	51
% Black	51	26	21
% Hispanic	38	29	32
% Democrat	54	26	18
% Independent	25	25	48
% Republican	15	16	68

Perceptions of "Fake News" as a Threat to Democracy, by Age, Race and Party Identification

How much of a threat do you believe "fake news" is to our democracy?

	A VERY SERIOUS THREAT	A SOMEWHAT SERIOUS THREAT	NOT MUCH OF A THREAT
% All	56	32	11
% 18-29 years old	56	33	10
% 30-49 years old	53	34	12
% 50-64 years old	57	30	12
% 65+ years old	60	28	11
% White	56	32	11
% Black	52	31	16
% Hispanic	59	30	10
% Democrat	49	34	16
% Independent	53	35	12
% Republican	67	27	5

Figure 16 (to the left) shows the overall opinion of the U.S. news consumers in terms of demographics (Knight Foundation, 2018, p.5). Figure 17 (to the right) show the percentage of people perceiving "fake news" to be a threat to democracy (Knight Foundation, 2018, p.30).

It is obvious from the figure that there is a sharp division of partisan beliefs, as 54 % of the Democrats are favorable in their opinion of the news media, a stark contrast to the 68 % of the Republicans that are unfavorable in their opinion. Furthermore, 67 % of Americans in the survey perceives "fake news" as a very serious threat to Democracy, 27% somewhat a threat and 5% not much of a friend. On the other hand, 49% says it is a very serious threat, 34% somewhat a threat and 16% not much of a threat. The partisan lines become clearer, even though the gap is not as significant in figure 17 as in figure 16; however, in terms of their overall opinion of the news media *and* in terms of the seriousness of "fake news", the Republicans are much more inclined to view it as a threat. An explanation here could certainly be that the Republicans are much more likely to seek Conservative news outlets, such as FOX news, and furthermore, to a higher degree than the Democrats, believe Trump's many attacks on "the fake news" media labelling them as the enemy of the people.

One of the reasons why the Democratic voters can be said to have increased their trust and overall opinion of news media can perhaps be because the press is needed as a watchdog today more than ever, in order to control Trump. As figure 18 below illustrates, 2007 measured the sharpest divide ever measured when asked if criticism from news organizations k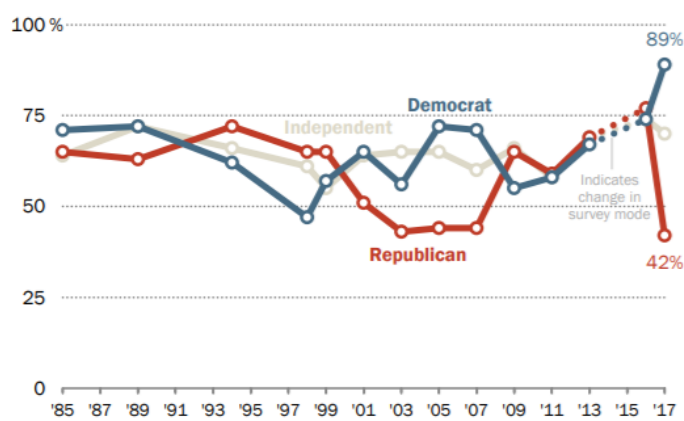eeps political leaders from doing things that should be done, 89% of Democratic voters think the news media has an important watchdog role, whereas only 42 % of Republicans believe this to be true.

... but 2017 reveals sharpest divide ever measured

% of U.S. adults who think that criticism from news organizations keeps political leaders from doing things that shouldn't be done

Figure 18 illustrates % of U.S. adults who think criticism from news organizations keeps political leaders from doing thigs that should be done (Barthel & Mitchell, 2017, p.3).

Deluded from the statistics above, U.S. media consumption is very polarized in terms of their trust towards the news media's objectivity and role. As we shall see now, there are signs of an exhaustive population who lives in an affluent news society and an omnipresent media.

Almost seven-in-ten Americans are exhausted by the news – Republicans more so than Democrats

% of U.S. adults who _____ these days

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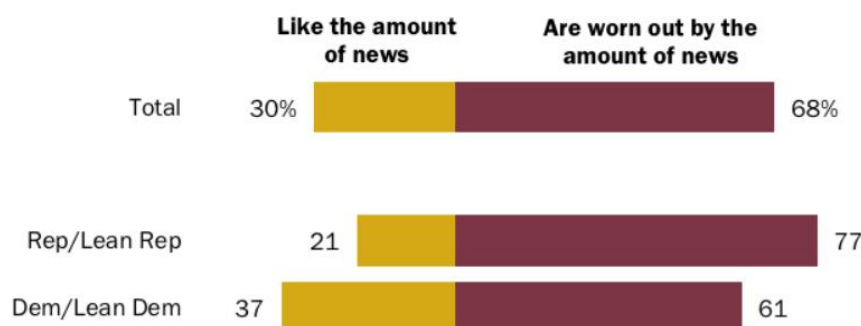
Figure 19 illustrates percentage of adults who "like the amount of news" or are "worn out by the amount of news" (Gottfried & Barthel, 2018).

A total of 68 % of U.S. adults are worn out by the amount of news they receive. 77 % of the Republican leaning voters have a news fatigue whereas 61 % of the Democratic feel the same way. Both are high numbers, indicating that the U.S. population are living in a society with affluent news to which they constantly have to position themselves. One of the fundamental ideas of the age of Enlightenment is that the more news of a true and objective character you provide for an individual, the more informed he would be and consequently make better decisions. However, the excessive amount of news leads to news-fatigue among a big part of the U.S. population. This, thus, means that the individual have to be responsible to curate the news and information himself. Given the amount of news, and the intense discussions the U.S. is currently experiencing about the objectivity of news, and fake news etc., the individual today, in the U.S. is much more likely to narrow the news he consumes down to his ideological liking. In this way, the individual will not have to curate a massive amount of news in order to find what he identifies as the objective truth. Put differently, he continues to live in his own ideological world, where the biggest part of the news he consumes reaffirms him that his believes are the true picture.

Sharing News With Others Who Have Similar vs. Different Views, by Age, Race and Party Identification

Do you share news stories mostly with people who have views similar to your own or mostly with people whose views differ from your own?*

	SIMILAR VIEWS	DIFFERENT VIEWS
% All	68	29
% 18-29 years old	66	32
% 30-49 years old	68	30
% 50-64 years old	68	29
% 65+ years old	70	26
% White	71	26
% Black	58	39
% Hispanic	60	38
% Democrat	70	28
% Independent	60	37
% Republican	73	24

Figure 20 shows percentage of people who share news with others who have similar vs. different views (Knight Foundation, 2018, p.38).

Figure 20 shows that 70 % of Democrats and 73 % of Republicans mostly share news with people who have the same views as themselves. Combined with the degree of exhaustion caused by the amount of news, this furthers the argument of the echo chambers among, or within, the U.S. population. A much-used definition of the echo chambers is selective exposure. However, selective exposure does not come out of the blue, and the statistics analyzed above provide small indicators of why in fact echo chambers seem to exist in the U.S. today.

Thus, in sum, it can be argued that President Donald Trump is setting the agenda of the media as a consequence of the dynamics of mediatization. In this way, news today has never been spread as fast as it does; had such a big impact; and, lastly, been a commodity that has to be sold in order to be consumed. The trust in the media is divided by the partisan lines of the U.S. consumers, and the truth, or objective news, have difficult conditions for prevailing, as there will always be critics of one side of the story in a polarized society.   Finally, the democratic function of the internet, social media and the competitive nature of the society today, in the U.S., can be said to be challenged by the echo chamber-effects that are currently existing. Individuals are faced with impossible tasks and are therefore forced, to some degree, to keep living their lives in an unproblematic way.

Part II

In the final part of the analysis, the underlying question that guides the research is how Trump's agenda-setting function is influencing local broadcast news. The case in focus is Sinclair Broadcast Group's coverage of Trump's 'fake news' agenda. More specifically, Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model will be used as a theoretical framework in order to identify and analyze structural factors that can, in a theoretical context, explain how and why Sinclair forced all their local stations to air a corporate made must-run segment.

The Case

The case that will be analyzed through Herman and Chomsky's theoretical framework will be the 'parrot script' that was run as 'must-run' segment across all of Sinclair Broadcast Group's local affiliations (Deadspin, 2018). The YouTube video and the video published by ThinkProgress (Schmitz, 2018), shows how anchors of different local Sinclair affiliations are present in the exact same script. Appendix 1 illustrates the transcript received from the Seattle-based affiliate KOMO-TV. They claim that their owner, the Conservative-leaning Sinclair Broadcast Group, forced them, as well as all its other affiliates, to film and air pre-scripted segments about bias and fake news as well

as accusing mainstream media outlets of bias (Vogel, 2018). In her blog, Vogel states that between March 23 and March 27, *at least* 62 Sinclair stations, reaching 29 states, ran the exact same script (Vogel, 2018). Many sources have come forward, anonymously in fear of losing their jobs, and shared their concerns and dissatisfaction of being forced to air Conservative right-wing news to the local cities (Stelter, 2018). Furthermore, in an interview, responding to a question of whether the anchors *had* to air the script David Folkenflik, an American reporter and media correspondent for National Public Radio, answered:

> "We know this from a variety of sources. We know this from Sinclair's top news executive, whom I interviewed a few weeks ago, when he was talking about this, saying, yes, we are having everybody do this. We think this is part of our corporate news journalistic mandate to explain what it is we're up to. We see this from station managers who sent out memos to their people saying, you don't have a lot of choice in this, folks" (Folkenflik, 2018)

Pre-scripted news, however, is not a new thing in the news media, as can be seen in these two YouTube videos (Conan, 2013) (Conan O. , 2013). The case here, however, will only be on the script about fake news aired by all of Sinclair's local stations. The case will be analyzed through each of the five filters in order to illustrate how local broadcast news in the U.S is being affected by Trump's "Fake News" agenda.

Why it Matters

In their report, Reuters Institute Digital News Report, Reuters shows that local television news has the highest weekly use of all media outlet offline and online (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2018 , 2018, p.113). Furthermore, local news has the highest brand trust score leading with more than a point or more, on a 0-10 scale, to some of the previously most-trusted outlets like *NPR news*, the *Washington Post*, and the *New York Times* (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2018 , 2018, p.113). Deluded from these statistics, it can be argued that local news is a very important and powerful channel for communicating news, as it is one of the most used used and trusted sources of news in the conteomporary U.S. society. Furthermore, given the very uneasy and polarized situation, documented in the previous section, local news tend to be less skeptically viewed and is, usually, perceived not to be affected by the ideological biases as the rest of the U.S. media sector is claimed

to be. As can be seen in figure 21 below, most adults get their news from local TV and, furthermore, the partisan divide is close to equal (benefits of this will be discussed in the second filter)
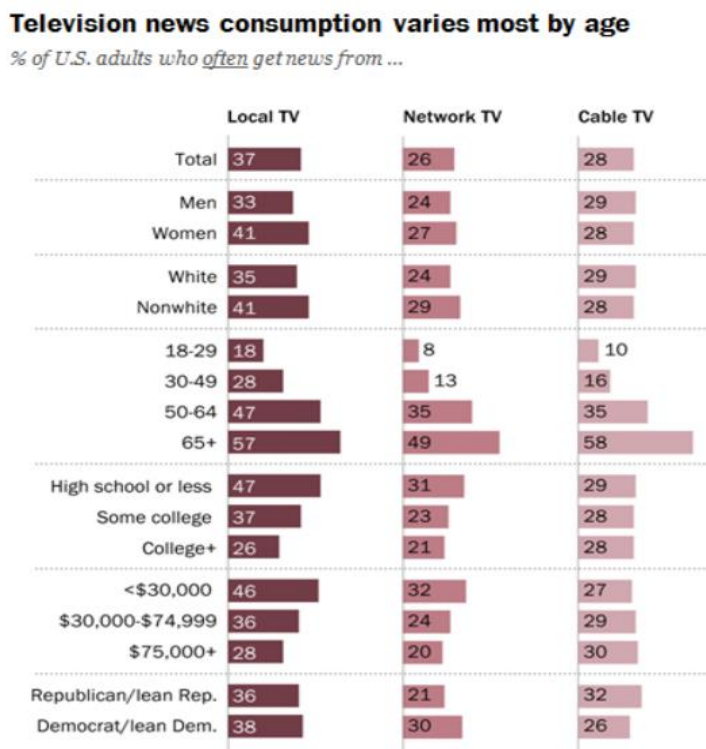
Television news consumption varies most by age

% of U.S. adults who often get news from …

	Local TV	Network TV	Cable TV
Total	37	26	28
Men	33	24	29
Women	41	27	28
White	35	24	29
Nonwhite	41	29	28
18-29	18	8	10
30-49	28	13	16
50-64	47	35	35
65+	57	49	58
High school or less	47	31	29
Some college	37	23	28
College+	26	21	28
<$30,000	46	32	27
$30,000-$74,999	36	24	29
$75,000+	28	20	30
Republican/lean Rep.	36	21	32
Democrat/lean Dem.	38	30	26

Figure 20 illustrates the percentages of U.S. adults in 2017 who often get their news from local TV, Network TV or Cable TV. Demographics is also included in the answers (e.g. ideology, education and age) (Matsa, 2018).

Before beginning the analysis, let us briefly establish the connection between President Donald Trump and the Sinclair Broadcast Group (the SBG). During his election campaign Jared Kushner states that Trump's campaign struck a deal with the SBG that secured him better media coverage (Dawsey & Gold, 2016). Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, who functions as a senior adviser for Trump, further claimed that Sinclair would have more access to Trump and the campaign and, in return, Sinclair would broadcast their Trump interviews across the country without commentary (Dawsey & Gold, 2016). Consequently, in states like Ohio, the Trump interviews would reach around 250,000 viewers compared to CNN's 30,000 (Dawsey & Gold, 2016). Furthermore, the SBG is along with FOX news, the only two media outlets that have not been publicly critizied by Trump. On the contrary, Trump has on several occasions praised the SBG while simultanously slamming the "fake news" media. Three tweets posted by Trump are illustrated in the appendix #2. The nature of the tweets indicates a very frustrated President Trump, almost disspointed that the SBG has faced

criticism, let alone that the descision of the Sinclair-Tribune merger most likely not will be approved (we shall look closer on this merger in the upcoming analysis).

A Propaganda Model: The Sinclair Broadcast Group

First Filter

Media conglomerates are today very influential and huge businesses. The size and ownership of the conglomerates are the main focus in the first filter and is thus where we start this analysis. Sinclair Broadcast Group is an American telecommunications conglomerate, controlled and owned by the Smith family. It was founded by Julian Sinclair Smith in 1971, and is today today by his son, David Smith (Berg, 2018). The SBG is one of the largest and most diversified television broadcasting companies in the U.S. (Sinclair Broadcast Group, 2018). It is furthermore the leading local news provider in the country, and owns a total of 191 television stations, aired on a total of 601 channels throughout 89 U.S markets (Sinclair Broadcast Group, 2018). With a $2.73 billion annual revenue in 2016 (Sinclair Broadcast Group, 2016), it is a multi-million-dollar business. The rapid expansion of the conglomerate is evident in their 281 % growth over the last decade increasing its share price with 367 % (Berg, 2018).

Sinclair's many stations give them an audience reach of almost four out of 10 American households. Regulations in the current U.S. media market allows companies to own a maximum of 39 % of the total market. In 1996, Bill Clinton signed the Telecommunications Act of 1996. It was a major change in regulations since the last Telecommunications Act of 1934. The official function of the act was to, "*To promote competition and reduce regulation in order to secure lower prices and higher quality services for American telecommunications consumers and encourage the rapid deployment of new telecommunications technologies*" (The U.S. Government, 1996, p.56). This was achieved by several de-regulatory initiatives; for instance, "Local Ownership Limitations" were lifted; "The national ownership limitation" was increased to 35-39% of the national market; and the "local marketing agreement" (The U.S. Government, 1996, p.111). Herman and Chomsky stated in their theory that "t*he greater profitability of the media in a deregulated environment has also led to an increase in takeovers and takeover threats"* (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.11-12). Even further expansion has clearly been the SBG owners' market strategy for a long time. A consequence, according to Herman and Chomsky, is the pressure from media conglomerate's shareholders. In a letter to their shareholders, the SBG writes, "*as of this writing, a new Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has publicly supported changing the paradigm and bringing the national and local broadcast ownership rules forward to reflect today's media and communications marketplace.*

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[…] the national ownership cap, which restricts television broadcasters from reaching more than 39% of the country's population, is one such rule that prevents our industry from competing at the national level" (Sinclair Broadcast Group, 2016). Recently, the SBG tried to buy Tribune Media in a $3.9 billion deal, which, if allowed by the Federal Communications Committee, would have made the SBH the largest media company in the U.S. with a reach of about 70 % of the total U.S media market (Levitz, 2018).

This possible merger was a major topic in the news, even though not a lot of people were aware about it or the consequences of such a merger. One of the most notable dynamics of the first filter is the interconnection between the government and the media corporations. In relation to the case in hand, the SBG and President Trump have strong ties. The SBG is well known for its Republican/Conservative slant, and has throughout the years supported several Republican administrations (Folkenflik, Warm Relations With Trump Appear To Benefit Sinclair Broadcasting, 2018). This furthermore explains why Trump so frustratedly tweeted positive things about the SBG while slamming the other media outlets. Many people believed the SBG–Tribune media merger would be accepted by the FCC, but it was ultimately terminated. Shortly after entering office, Trump handpicked Ajit Pai as the new Chairman of the Federal Communications Committee (Levitz, 2018). Pai had the year before been fighting to dismantle regulatory obstacles to media consolidation, including two rules that stood in the way for the SBG's merger with the Tribune Media (Levitz, 2018). This was by many seen as a covert attempt by Trump to create a major Republican voiced media conglomerate that would control a major part of the local media market.

Herman and Chomsky's first filter can thus be seen in the SBG's attempt to expand their market communication strategy and their mutual relationship with the Trump administration. The fake news and bias script, which all the local SBG-owned TV stations ran, was created by the owners of the SBG and sent out to all their affiliates expecting them to air the segment. In this way, due to the media consolidation, the owners of a major media conglomerate were able to spread their ideological bias through their local news stations (Folkenflik, Warm Relations With Trump Appear To Benefit Sinclair Broadcasting, 2018). Simultaneously, Trump got his "fake news" agenda pushed out to, arguably, an audience that he might not have been able to reach if not for the SBG. This will be addressed in the next filter.

The Second Filter

Advertisement is, according to Herman and Chomsky, the license to do business. No audience no business. As can be seen in figure 21, local TV generates many billions of dollars annually.

Total local TV advertising revenue (in U.S. dollars)
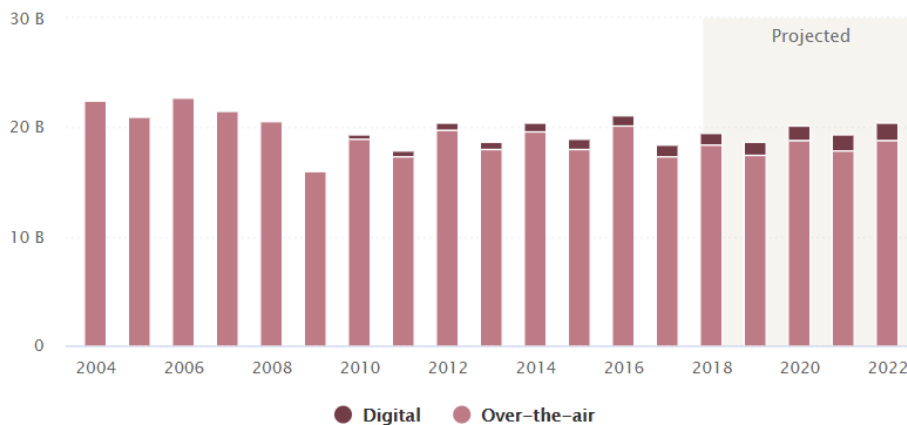
Figure 21 illustrates total local TV advertising revenue in U.S. dollars (Pew Research Center, 2016).

The decrease since 2016 can most likely be explained by the presidential elections. As the trust and use of local TV is currently receiving top scores compared to cable and national TV, advertisers will perceive local TV as a profitable investment. Furthermore, local TV has a very diverse audience in terms of ideology. This is illustrated in figure 20, where it can be seen that 36 % percent of local TV viewers are Republican-leaning compared to 38 % who are Democratic-leaning. This is also a very attracting aspect for Trump's war on the "fake news". If the FCC would have allowed the SBG – Tribune Media, Trump would have been able to spread his ideological beliefs to 70 % of all American households 'covertly' through the local news. In this way, Trump would have been able to reach audience groups (i.e. Democratic or, even more importantly, the independent swing states), which he presumably would never have reached through the traditional Conservative-leaning media outlet FOX News.

What is important in the second filter in relation to the "fake news" transcript aired by all Sinclair's local stations is the fact that advertisers and shareholders, who, perhaps, have invested in the company due to ideological interests, may threaten the SBG to stop funding them if they do not air the transcript.

The Third Filter

In the mass media, government sources are used to generate trustworthiness and objectivity in a news story. As argued by Herman and Chomsky, this need is often taken advantage of by governments, in order to push their agenda. It furthermore relates to Beck's notions of the risk society, and how the

public today is dependent on experts to inform them. As Trump's "fake news" agenda is being spread through the local channels, the public will be less inclined to perceive this as propaganda. As illustrated in figure 14, 15 and 20, local news is the most trusted of the three 'channels' of TV (i.e. Local, National and Cable). It might furthermore be argued that some people choose local television in order not to be exposed to ideological biased news. This is what makes Sinclair's covert market communication strategy both clever and a threat to democracy, as people unknowingly might consume Conservative, biased news.

The transcript itself can also be said to have been shaped by the third filter. Very similar to Trump' negative campaigning (i.e. delegitimizing others by spreading alternative facts himself), the transcript aired by Sinclair's local affiliates is accusing 'some media outlets' for spreading fake news stories without fact checking the stories first: " *More alarming, some media outlets publish these same fake stories… stories that just aren't true, without checking facts first [..] Unfortunately, some members of the media use their platforms to push their own personal bias and agenda to control 'exactly what people think'…This is extremely dangerous to a democracy"* (Schmitz, 2018). Actually, one might argue that this is exactly what Sinclair is doing. Without any sources indicating *who* these media outlets spreading fake stories without fact checking the stories are, or where one can find the stories to determine themselves whether or not it is biased. The local communities with the SBG owned stations, the public are almost told, "we at Sinclair tell the truth. But some other media outlets do not; instead, they spread fake news without fact checking. Trust us not them". As figure 20 indicates, 57 % of local TV consumers are 65+ years old, subsequently making them a bit more inclined to believe the news they receive through their local TV news.

Another characterizing aspect of the SBG in relation to the third filter is their programming which has received a lot of criticism for having a Conservative slant. All local TV stations are required to run these programs. The most notable example is how all local TV stations are required to run the segment "the bottom line" with the former Trump spokesman, Boris Epshteyn, who now functions as the SBG's chief political analyst. Think Progress have published some examples of Conservative-slanted must-run segments that on a weekly basis are aired in the SBG's local stations. In the Bottom Line program with Boris, Trump's argument against Obama's DACA reform is presented as a fact (Baird, 2017); and the Behind the Headlines program with Mark Hyman, another SBG must-run program, says that with Obamacare, Americans are dying more than ever before – but of course, Mark Hyman stresses, it does not mean that Obamacare is killing anyone, it just means that we are not getting healthier (Baird, 2017). In another episode of the Bottom Line,

Boris speaks with Congress man, Lamar Smith, about the need for media people to push forward their own biased opinion, to label their reporting as opinion based (Epshteyn, 2018). The video has ignited critical voices labelling this as fighting bias with more bias, and stating that the things Boris is advocating to avoid it is exactly what he and Sinclair are doing. Experts are in the post-modern era perceived as more trustworthy, and people are thus more likely to believe their local anchors when they inform them about the other biased media outlets that are spreading fake news without fact checking, and, furthermore, being manipulated into watching D.C influenced news when, in fact, local news used to mainly focus on news in the respective local communities.

The Fourth Filter

The Fourth filter focuses on 'flak', which refers to any form of negative response to a media statement or program (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.26). Anchors at the SBG owned local stations might have been and, for those still working at one, still are afraid to do anything else than air the must-run segments. So when they are told to echo Trump's "fake news" agenda, the anchors do not really have any options than to do so. Jeff Simmons used to work for KHGI TV in Nebraska, which is a SBG owned local TV-station, but quit his job after being forced to echo Trump's agenda (CBC Radio, 2018). He further describes how his job at the must-run program, *Terrorism Alarm Desk,* at times forced him to neglect the actual local news to make room for minor terrorist episodes around the world, which, often, he claims, consisted of unverifiable sources (CBC Radio, 2018).

The denial of the SBG and Tribune Media by the FCC can also be argued to be a form of flak. One of the reasons as to why the acquisition of Tribune Media was denied was the way the SBG used loopholes in the regulations to virtually sell parts of minor local station while still, actually, running them. Trump's response (see appendix 2) to this decision is also a clear example of flak. The actual "fake news" transcript run by all the local SBG TV stations is also, in some degree, a form for flak. The segment is accusing some media outlets for intentionally reporting fake and biased news without fact checking the stories. By delegitimizing the other media outlets, they attempt to appear as more trustworthy and objective themselves.

The Fifth Filter

The fifth filter refers to the notion of demonizing or identifying someone or something as the common enemy, in order to mobilize the public against this 'common enemy'. In Herman and Chomsky's book, the common enemy was at the time communism. Anti-communism was used as the example of the ultimate evil, and was used against anyone who were perceived to be a threat of the 'common good'. The Bush administration frequently used and invoked Islamophobic feelings in order to gain

public legitimacy to invade Iraq.

Trump's agenda is clearly identifying the "fake news" media as the enemy of the people, by frequently stating that they deliberately report biased and ideologically slanted news, in order to serve own interests. Individuals trusting the local TV stations for news will subsequently be exposed to news that perceives the "fake news" media to be the enemy of the people, as the SBG is supporting Trump's agenda.

In sum, government regulations have created a favorable environment for the SBG to expand its business while simultaneously pushing their own ideological agenda. Even though they were denied their acquisition of Tribune Media, they remain the largest TV station owner, reaching out to 39 % of the U.S. households. Their must run segments, and in this case, the pro-Trump transcript, which were sent out to all SBG owned local TV stations, can, to some extent, be said to result in a decline of diversified local news and, consequently, resulting in even more biased news.

Conclusion

President Donald Trump has been very active on his Twitter since his inauguration in January 20, 2017. Figure 3 showed the increased frequency of his tweets, and figure 4 illustrated an increased number of tweets containing "Fake News" "Fake Media" or "Fakenews". The three dynamics of mediatization were applied to the original two levels of agenda-setting (i.e. first and second level agenda-setting). As globalization has affected almost every part of society in the post-modern era, new actors have gained the ability to set the agenda. Figure 8 shows a mediatized version of the agenda-setting theory. The case in part I of the analysis was how Trump's "Fake News" agenda on Twitter can be said to challenge the existing notion of the public agenda-setting function. Trump's use of twitter proved to be successful, with one of the major reasons being the commercialized structure of the U.S. media market. The many daily tweets combined with the controversial nature of the tweets has been ideal for reporters. On a similar note, during his first 100 days, Trump was the topic of 41 % of all stories covered on national TV, which have given him a lot of opportunities to push his agenda covertly and overtly.

Figure 10 illustrates that 43 % today have an unfavorable opinion towards the news media while 33 are favorable. Figure 11 shows an that people today are seeing a lot more biased news coverage. As of August 14, 2018, 26 & perceive the media to be the enemy of the state. This number increased to 26 from 22 % on April 26, 2018. In the same period, Trump ramped up his frequency of

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"Fake News" mentioning in his tweets. This could be argued to be an indicator towards a correlation between the variables.

Statistics furthermore showed a very polarized picture ideologically speaking, when looking at the overall opinion of the news media in figure 16, and figure 17 in which perceptions of fake news as threat to democracy. 54 % of the democrats were favorable of news media while 68 % of republicans were unfavorable. Another important notion is how both the democratic and republican votes feels exhausted of the extensive amount of news. Combined with the fact that they are both most inclined to share news stories with people with same views as themselves indicates that there in fact exist echo chambers and they are making the public even more polarized. In order for the democracy to work, as argued by Aaberg & Curran; Cody in the introduction, people need to able to have access to objective, informative information. The U.S. media environment seems more likely to fit the media corporations needs than the population and the democracy. Furthermore. it can be concluded, that it seems as if Trump succeeding in setting the agenda. The declining trust in the media suits him very well, as his use of alternative facts will be easier to defend against a press without lacking legitimacy.

The transcript that echoed through all of Sinclair Broadcast Group's local TV stations had a strong conservative leaning slant, and was proven through the five filters to be a right-wing propaganda. Sinclair is covertly spreading their ideological bias through all of the 191 local communities subsequently making their market communication strategy a serious threat to democracy.

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Appendix

  1)

Hi, I'm(A) _____, and I'm (B) _____…

(B) Our greatest responsibility is to serve our Northwest communities. We are extremely proud of the quality, balanced journalism that KOMO News produces.

(A) But we're concerned about the troubling trend of irresponsible, one sided news stories plaguing our country. The sharing of biased and false news has become all too common on social media.

(B) More alarming, some media outlets publish these same fake stories… stories that just aren't true, without checking facts first.

(A) Unfortunately, some members of the media use their platforms to push their own personal bias and agenda to control 'exactly what people think'…This is extremely dangerous to a democracy.

(B) At KOMO it's our responsibility to pursue and report the truth. We understand Truth is neither politically 'left nor right.' Our commitment to factual reporting is the foundation of our credibility, now more than ever.

(A) But we are human and sometimes our reporting might fall short. If you believe our coverage is unfair please reach out to us by going to KOMOnews.com and clicking on CONTENT CONCERNS. We value your comments. We will respond back to you.

(B) We work very hard to seek the truth and strive to be fair, balanced and factual… We consider it our honor, our privilege to responsibly deliver the news every day.

(A) Thank you for watching and we appreciate your feedback.

 (Schmitz, 2018)

2)

Donald J. Trump ✔
@realDonaldTrump

Follow ∨

So funny to watch Fake News Networks, among the most dishonest groups of people I have ever dealt with, criticize Sinclair Broadcasting for being biased. Sinclair is far superior to CNN and even more Fake NBC, which is a total joke.

6:28 AM - 2 Apr 2018

18,074 Retweets 79,427 Likes

Donald J. Trump ✔
@realDonaldTrump

Follow ∨

The Fake News Networks, those that knowingly have a sick and biased AGENDA, are worried about the competition and quality of Sinclair Broadcast. The "Fakers" at CNN, NBC, ABC & CBS have done so much dishonest reporting that they should only be allowed to get awards for fiction!

3:34 AM - 3 Apr 2018

20,319 Retweets 83,940 Likes

Donald J. Trump ✔
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Follow ∨

So sad and unfair that the FCC wouldn't approve the Sinclair Broadcast merger with Tribune. This would have been a great and much needed Conservative voice for and of the People. Liberal Fake News NBC and Comcast gets approved, much bigger, but not Sinclair. Disgraceful!

5:39 PM - 24 Jul 2018