THE FLOW OF ONLINE POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

A case study of Donald Trump's 2016 presidential election campaign

MASTER THESIS

Jesper Andreas Vedel

Aalborg University, Sep. 2019

Abstract

This research paper intends to contribute to the understanding of the effects of digital technology and marketing practices in U.S. political communication in an increasingly fragmenting communication landscape. The analysis contained in this thesis will largely take place through theoretically oriented concepts. However, rather than testing or verifying theory, the purpose of this thesis is largely concerned with generating theory on the basis of relevant empirical evidence. Therefore, this thesis is not strictly inductive nor deductive, hence taking an adaptive approach to research.

Rooted in critical theory, the purpose of this research paper is to construct a model that encapsulates the flow of contemporary political communication in a digital media environment. This is done with inspiration from two existing models namely Paul Lazarsfeld & Elihu Katz's *Two-Step Flow of Communication* (1955) and Lance Bennett & Jarol Manheim's *One-Step Flow of Communication* (2006), while drawing in empirical evidence through a case study examining the online communication of Donald Trump's 2016 presidential. More specifically, this research investigates three aspects that are relevant to the flow of online political communication. These include 1) the relationship between Trump and the mass media, 2) Trump and digital political marketing practices, and 3) Trump as an online opinion leader exemplified through his use of Twitter. The model created on the basis of this is then used as a springboard to discuss how the practices of contemporary online political communication may be understood as either facilitating or impeding democracy.

What the research concludes is that Trump relied heavily on the use of data and psychographic profiling in his campaign in terms of gathering preliminary information on the electorate to construct an overall communication strategy, smart targeting voters through micro-segmentation, and as a constant feedback loop that provided information on how the general strategy was panning out. In this sense, data was used to effectively optimize any communication efforts made by the campaign, including how Trump engaged with the mass media, what he wrote from his personal Twitter, and the advertising he targeted specific individuals with within a micro-segmented electorate. In this sense, the analysis found that current political communication is heavily influenced by a spillover effect from traditional marketing practices.

What is more, the increased implementation of digital technology and marketing practices in political communication in the U.S. has the potential to undermine certain democratic values within a liberal democratic system. It argues that data in particular represents a double-edged sword that has the potential for both human emancipation and constraint depending on how it is incorporated into

political practices in the future. Given that online political communication seems to conflict with the realization of the normative ideal of the public sphere, I argue that one must adopt a critical stance in regards to contemporary practices of political communication and its effect on democracy.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

In recent years, the debate surrounding the strength and stability of modern democracy has intensified around the world. Especially in the United States, where the election of the country's 45th president, Donald Trump, and his subsequent captaincy, has sparked both national and international debate around the U.S. political system. In an essay from November 2018, Hillary Clinton put Trump under criticism stating that he is "weakening the social fabric of the country" and that "right now, [U.S.] democracy is in crisis" (The New York Times, 2018). Although these kinds of remarks are perhaps not unexpected, coming from Trump's 2016 campaign rival, a 2018 U.S. survey hints that her comments do not come from a solitary point of view. Among other things, it indicates that Americans are feeling the stress on democracy with 61 percent saying that "significant changes" in the "design and structure" of the political system is needed in order to make democracy in the U.S. work in times of today (Pew Research Center, 2018). In order to obtain a broader understanding of the democratic foundations that underpins society, and why civil society are growing increasingly skeptical of democratic institutions (Perloff, 2018, p. 9), it is necessary to also understand aspects of the contemporary entanglement of digital technology and politics.

Like most things, political communication has been subject to significant change over the years. Especially in the last few decades, there has been a dramatic transformation in political communication within Western democracies (Crozier, 2007, p. 1), which among other things has taken place parallel to rapid developments in technology and the continuous modernization of society. Those with a particular interest in political campaigns, political communication, or politics in general, was probably following the 2016 U.S. presidential election closer than normal. Not many years ago, most people would have discarded the idea that a for-profit company through cutting-edge data technology would come to play a key role in an U.S. election. Nevertheless, this is what happened as it was revealed how Cambridge Analytica, a data analytics, advertising, and consulting firm based in the UK that uses "(..)data to change audience behavior" (Cambridge Analytica, 2018), assisted the Trump campaign in their communication efforts (Opensecrets, 2018).

Digital technology and marketing practices play an increasingly central role in modern politics and in achieving political goals. Market research is crucial when trying to understand what the voting public wants and needs; voter profiling identifies new voter segments to target; while the strategy influences the overall political brand and determines the means of execution. All these largely influences the discourse and outreach of contemporary political actors. Although these are not new

concepts to politics, they have changed radically alongside the digital revolution of society, creating a new paradigm for modern political communication (Gillies, 2018, p. 2).

1.1 Problem Formulation

Seeking to investigate this new paradigm, this thesis will utilize Trump's 2016 U.S. presidential campaign as a case to show how digital technology and political marketing have evolved and are shaping contemporary political communication. Therefore, I pose the following research questions:

> What are the implications of Donald Trump's use of digital technology and political marketing in his 2016 presidential campaign? Furthermore, how can the flow of contemporary political communication be seen as either facilitating or impeding democracy?

The analysis will take an adaptive approach to research in the sense that, rather than testing or verifying theory, I will contextualize empirical evidence with existing communication theories to develop a model that captures the flow of political communication in a digital environment. This will, as the research question suggest, involve looking at various facilitating elements including the use of digital technology and marketing practices in the Trump's 2016 presidential campaign. More specifically, I will mainly draw on Lazarsfeld & Katz's *two-step flow of communication* model (1955) and Bennett & Manheim's *One-step flow of communication* model (2006) in the analysis and for the construction of the model. Lastly, the findings of the analysis will be summarized in regards to normative theories of democracy in an effort to discuss to what extent the use of digital technologies and marketing practices in contemporary political communication may be understood as either facilitating or impeding democracy.

2. Literature Review

The scholarship on political communication is comprised of various different academic disciplines, which, among others, includes history, communication, psychology, sociology, and political science (Miller & McKerrow, 2010, p. 61). Coming up with an exact definition as to what political communication entails is challenging, with definitions ranging from a "simple exchange of information and persuasion" (Miller & McKerrow, 2010, p. 62) to more detailed definitions of political communication as a "(…) means of which political influences are mobilized and transmitted between formal governmental institutions, on the one hand, and citizens voting behavior on the other hand" (Nimmo & Sanders, 1981, p. 12) However, in order to fully grasp the contemporary concept of political communication this section seeks to chronologically go over its development starting with the ideas of Walter Lipmann.

Walter Lippmann was a journalist and scholar and one of the great pioneers within academic research on political communication. Lippmann spotlighted the entanglement of media and politics arguing that the interpretation of media symbols has profound effects on the attitudes and opinions of the public (Perloff, 2018, p. 67). This thinking was largely inspired by late 19th century research on human behavior with scholars, such as Gustave Le Bon, starting to talk about a new force in society that acts on the basis of their emotions instead of reason: the crowd (Perloff, 2018, p. 66). Forecasting the trends of contemporary society, German sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies brought forth the idea that newspapers was influencing public opinion in significant ways through its power to inform. With the propaganda efforts of World War I fresh in his memory, Lippmann developed a highly critical perspective in regards to governments ability to spin and control information (Perloff, 2018, p. 66-67). Lippmann rejected core concepts of liberal democracy in regards to the power of rational thought and the ability of the press to provide accurate information (Perloff, 2018, p. 67). On the contrary, he stated that due to the modernization of society, people had moved from living in small communities where issues were experienced in close proximity, to a modern time where people had to rely on indirect experience in the form of information from the press and officials when taking a stance on complex problems in a world that was increasingly "out of reach, out of sight, out of mind" (Lipppman, 1922, p. 29). According to his thinking, this allowed governments to successfully manipulate symbols to 'manufacture consent' (Perloff, 2018, p. 68), a concept that Edward S Herman and Noam Chomsky further popularized in their book *Manufacturing Consent* (1988). Some of Walter Lippmann's most important writings in regards to the scope of this research paper includes his books *Public Opinion* (1922) and *The Phantom Public* (1925).

Harold Lasswell, an American political scientist best known for his early studies of power relations and the relationship between personality and politics, followed Lippmann as a major seminal contributor to the study of political communication and political science in general (Britannica, 2019). Lasswell and some of his contemporaries applied the term 'propaganda' to the power political communication could have on the public masses. However, in the wake of its widespread application during World War II it acquired some heavily negative connotations (Robinson, 2016), which saw the term dissolve into more digestible concepts such as persuasion, information control, strategic communication and perception management (Robinson, 2016).

Research in the 1940s, interested in the effects of radio as a means of communication, took a more empirical approach to the study of political communication compared to that of early propaganda scholars (Perloff, 2018, p. 70). Paul Lazarsfeld, an American sociologist born in Austria with a particular interest in the influence of communication and mass media on society (Britannica, 2019), whose study of the influence of newspapers and radio on voting behavior in Erie County, Ohio propelled him to the forefront of contemporary scholarship on political communication and voting behavior (Perloff, 2018, pp. 70-71). The study, published in the book *Voting: a study of opinion formation in a presidential campaign* (1954), found that the direct influence of media consumption was modest, converting only a small number of voters to the other side. The findings proved significant in that it directly contradicted contemporary confidence in the power of the political communication media. Instead of mass media directly impacting public opinion it was in fact interpersonal communication that was the biggest influencing factor. Lazarsfeld and his colleagues argued that the 'opinion leaders' of a community would distill the information and political views flowing from media, before conveying them to less involved members of society. The researchers named this phenomenon the *two-step flow* and is a concept I will look much further into in the theory section of this research paper.

In essence, this indicated that the direct influence of media was less extensive than previously assumed by scholars of propaganda. Instead, information emanating from the media was watered down and tempered with by influential members of society before reaching the electorate, which meant that the media was not nearly as powerful as interpersonal communication to the process of persuasion (Perloff, 2018, pp. 70-71). This opinion leader concept provided an opposing view of the media audience as an "undifferentiated mass of clay shaped by an all-powerful mass media (…), emphasizing that the audience was composed of social networks of opinion leaders and their peers,

with interpersonal leaders exerting a persuasive impact on acquaintances and followers" (Perloff, 2018, p. 72).

In 1960, the ideas as presented by Lazarsfeld and his colleagues was reinvigorated with the release of Joseph Klapper's book *The Effects of Mass Communication* (1960). Here, Klapper put forth a series of "generalizations" in an effort to highlight how, when and why the mass media may influence behavior. Klapper wanted to systematically summarize and analyze knowledge on the effect media had on individuals, which saw him compile more or less all relevant information of media effects research produced until 1960 (Wicks, 1996). He too came to the conclusion that the media did not exercise primary influence on political attitudes and behavior in society, however, it worked in tandem with other social environmental factors, ultimately reinforcing the effects that other agents asserted (Perloff, 2018, pp. 72-73). In other words, Klapper argued that mass media had the potential to strengthen ideas, beliefs and attitudes (Wicks, 1996), rather than acting as the primary force in creating individual standpoints. He saw individuals, not as blank sheets of paper on which the media could imprint their message, but as people with preexisting group identifications and attitudes that largely determines the way they interact with media (Perloff, 2018, p. 73).

However, with the introduction of television news in the 1960s, things started to change. Before, television was far behind printed news in terms of the public news source, but, with the expansion of television news, people soon took to the new medium to update themselves on the headlines of the day. Now, when major news broke, it affected an entire country at the same exact time (McLaughlin, 2014). Intuitively, with a decade including events such as the civil rights movement, the Vietnam war, antiwar protests and political assassinations (History, 2019) in mind, scholars began to question Klappers 'limited effects model'; clearly, the media must exercise greater influence than what had previously been documented (Perloff, 2018, pp. 73-74). Inspired by Lippmann, Maxwell McCombs & Donald Shaw investigated presidential campaigns in 1968, 1972 and 1976, from which they developed a model know as Agenda-setting. In a an academic article titled *The Agenda-setting Function of Mass Media* (1972) published in Public Opinion Quarterly, they argued that the news media assisted the creation of public attitudes and beliefs by drawing attention to salient issues, stating that: "The pledges, promises, and rhetoric encapsulated in news stories, columns, and editorials constitute much of the information upon which a voting decision has to be made. Most of what people know comes to them 'second' or 'third' hand from the mass media or from other people" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 176). One can summarize the core assumptions of agenda-setting in two statements: "(1) the press and the media do not reflect reality; they filter and shape it; (2) media concentration on

a few issues and subjects leads the public to perceive those issues as more important than other issues" (University of Twente, 2019).

These new ideas set the pace for future political communication analysis. As demonstrated by Thomas E. Patterson in his book *The Mass Media Election: How Americans Choose Their President* (1980), arguing that presidential campaigns of the time had become the equivalent of a mass media campaign (Petrocik, 1981, p. 1054). What was being discovered was that messages containing political information emanating from the media had profound effects on voting behavior mainly through agenda-setting and priming cognitions. Although argued to be wrong in some aspects, Lazarsfeld's idea that media was a prime actor in the activation of attitudes, and his opinion leader concept, was still considered highly relevant (Perloff, 2018, p. 75). A shift had happened within academia, and it was now widely recognized that media almost certainly had the power to influence individual voter behavior and interfere with the dynamics of the entire political system at large (Perloff, 2018, p. 76).

Today, with the proliferation of social media, messages and symbols no longer reach the public simultaneously and homogeneously in the same way as before. Many scholars have now reached a consensus; information is no longer centralized, as was the case with the traditional mass media. Instead, the media has become increasingly decentralized via the multitude of diverse online platforms creating a much less linear flow of information (Perloff, 2018, pp. 81-82). This development have prompted various academic questions regarding the current state of political communication, many of which fall under the overarching topic of whether or not digital technology should be understood as facilitating or impeding democracy (Perloff, 2018, p. 80), and/or attenuating or exacerbating political polarization of the electorate (Dezelan & Vobic, 2016, p. 1). The former largely relates to the impact of the new media landscape on citizens and their opinions; referred to as the ultimate variable of interest (Chong & Druckman, 2012, p. 5) by Dennis Chong & James Druckman in *Dynamics in Mass Communication Effects Research* (2012). In many ways, the relationship between new digital media and citizenship are one of the overarching topics that are frequently under investigation. Bruce Bimber have identified and landscaped five topics of existing research within political communication that are directly linked to questions regarding citizenship in the era of digital media; "(1) the effects of digital media on political participation rates (…), (2) digital media and exposure to political difference (…), (3) differentiation in media itself, (4) the changing character of political participation and engagement and (5) changing opportunities for collective action" (Bimber, 2012, p. 3). The latter is thoroughly analyzed by Justin Holmes & Ramona McNeal

from University of Northern Iowa in the book *(R)evolutionizing Political Communication Through Social Media* (2016). Although the measurement of polarization is fairly straight forward, its exact sources are harder to pinpoint. As the authors put it: "There are several possible sources of increased polarization in the American public, ranging from geography, to cues from partisan leaders, to media consumption habits, including social media use. It is difficult to disentangle the relative contributions of these sources, but it is likely that all have a hand in polarization" (Holmes & McNeal, 2016, p. 4). In line with other scholars, Holmes and Ramona also argues that the contemporary change in media consumption patterns have moved away "(..) from a broadcasting model, characterized by large audiences, homogeneity of content and an ideal of objectivity in news, to a world where people have much greater choice over what information they are exposed to" (Holmes & McNeal, 2016, p. 5).

Recently, social networking sites have received increased scholarly attention in regards to its potential of promoting civic engagement and political participation (Jiang, 2016, p. 22). Here, a lot of research within political communication academia has been centered around how campaigns are utilizing new media, and if this provides new possibilities for overcoming the democratic deficit that stems from a lacking inclusion of citizens in the decision-making process (Vesnic-Alujevic, 2016, p. 191). A lot of contemporary research within this field has focused on the two social media giants in the West; Facebook and Twitter. The book *(R)evolutionizing Political Communication Through Social* Media (2016) by Tomaz Dezelan & Igor Vobic is a highly relevant source of information. In many ways, the emergence and rapid development of digital media have rejuvenated the study of political communication and given birth to a whole range of new questions, many of which are still subject of debate.

3. Methodology

3.1 Philosophy of Science

Both the ontology and epistemology of this research paper relates to 'critical theory'. Here, the original understanding of critical theory as presented by Max Horkheimer as well as what has come to be known as 'the second generation of critical theory', with the work of Jürgen Habermas, is the most relevant. Critical theory arose with the establishment of the famous Institut für Sozialforschung (IfS) in Frankfurt am Main in 1923 (Elling, 2018, p. 137), now generally referred to as the Frankfurt School, by a group of German philosophers and social theorists from the Marxist tradition (Stanford Encyclopedia of

Philosophy, 2005). Its normative nature opposes the positivist and rationalist understanding that there is no fundamental difference between natural- and social science. Critical theory highlights the need for social sciences to be aware of how scientific enquiries co-creates the social reality it investigates, further distancing itself from the aforementioned objective approaches to research (Langergaard & Sørensen, 2015, p. 251).

In terms of ontology, early critical theory draws heavily on the philosophical understandings of truth, reason, and freedom. Critical theory strives towards presenting the truth about a given case, however, as mentioned above, it is to be understood differently than in the context of traditional theory, where truth is achieved once assumptions are confirmed through measurements or observations (Langergaard & Sørensen, 2015, p. 261). Early critical theory's understanding of truth is largely inspired by Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's philosophical definition:

> "Truth is at first taken to mean that I *know* something *is*. This is truth, however, only in reference to consciousness; it is formal truth, bare correctness. Truth in the deeper sense consists in the identity between objectivity and the notion. It is in the deeper sense of truth that we speak of a true state, or of a true work of art. These objects are true, if they are as they ought to be, i.e. if their reality corresponds to their notion" (Stirk, 1992, p. 60).

To Horkheimer in particular, this means that a common observation of something cannot claim the etiquette of truth, because this only constitutes a formal truth, i.e. a correct statement. According to Horkheimer, and in line with Marxist school of thought, the existence of a proletariat is evidence that the capitalistic society is incomplete in that the very notion of "society" is not as it 'ought to be' because it involves social injustice. Ultimately, this means that the capitalist society, by its very nature, is 'untrue'. A researcher studying any aspect within a capitalist society can therefore say nothing about the truth, but through his/her research merely contribute to the historical development towards it. In this sense, truth, in a critical theoretical understanding, is normative in nature and symbolizes something that is strived towards – the perfect, ideal society, free from suffering and injustice – and not something that can be objectively observed or theorized (Langergaard & Sørensen, 2015, p. 261-262).

Aside from truth, reason and freedom are also essential in the construction of a true society. Since a true society has not yet been fulfilled, critical theorists argue that social scientists must again turn to the idealistic idea of reason and freedom in an effort to explain and highlight the unreasonable aspects of societies. Thinkers of critical theory would argue that the bourgeoisie understanding of reason and

freedom is attached to the individual, and that there is no requirement for this to be replicated in the broader society (Langergaard & Sørensen, 2015, p. 263). They would say that we live in a capitalistic society that appeals, not to reason, but to the desire of individuals; a society that is driven by individual greed and not by a reasonable interest in the common good, and where the economy subjects the individuals instead of vice-versa. Therefore, when one cannot experience the true form of reason and freedom under these current conditions, one is referred to its philosophical understandings in an effort to highlight how the contemporary organization of society is contradicting those ideals in the pursuit of a just and true society (Langergaard & Sørensen, 2015, p. 264). It is this close relationship to philosophy and normativity that is one of critical theories most characterizing features (Langergaard & Sørensen, 2015, p. 264).

While a most of this resonates with this research's understanding of the world, some of it is closer related to Jürgen Habermas and the second generation of critical theory. My approach to the research that will be carried out in this paper has been largely been inspired by a critical perspective and, in line with critical theory, also see the need to draw on normative theories for many of the same reasons. However, early critical theory is often argued to have an almost pessimistic understanding of capitalism and enlightenment. In Max Horkheimer & Theodor Adorno's book *Dialectics of Enlightenment (1947)*, they investigated the concept of reason in the historical development from "myth" to "enlightenment", that is, from a society that relied on mythology for the explanation of the structure of the world and as a means for man to master nature and decrease fear, to a society where rationality, science and technology fills that role (Langergaard & Sørensen, 2015, p. 268). When man through objective reasoning aims to control nature, reason becomes instrumental; a type of reasoning that is limited to reaching self-centered goals. This is, according to Horkheimer, the dominant form of reason in a capitalist society. Their point is that enlightenment increases man's ability to control nature, and since Horkheimer and Adorno sees man as a natural part of nature, it also increases the ability to control man. It is this sense, enlightenment has, in Horkheimer & Adorno's understanding, not contributed to true emancipation, but only to emancipation in the sense that it has increased the opportunities for societal barbarity (Langergaard & Sørensen, 2015, p. 268-269).

In many ways, this view largely contributed to the bleak understanding of critical theory as a protest against an apocalyptic system of alienation and reification (Langergaard & Sørensen, 2015, p. 270). In this sense, Habermas' understanding and relative optimism resonates more with this paper. While he still has deep roots in critical theory, his approach is far more optimistic and constructive than that of earlier thinkers (Den Store Danske, 2019), as he sees the enlightenment as a step towards human

emancipation. In an attempt to revitalize critical theory, he created a new paradigm with the purpose of making critical theory more relevant in the social sciences. Where Horkheimer & Adorno saw only a specific kind of 'enlightenment' rationality as dominant in Western culture which has resulted in a system of increased opportunities for societal barbarity, Habermas identifies two types of reasoning, or "actions", that operates simultaneously (Lykkeberg, Rune, 2005). Here, what he defines as "instrumental actions" comes closest to that of the earlier thinkers, and characterizes the goal-oriented behavior of the outer structure that influences the productive forces power over nature. The "communicative actions" is the type of reasoning that arises between subjects in a domination-free environment, i.e. an environment that is free from the influence of the instrumental actions (Langergaard & Sørensen, 2015, p. 275). Only by limiting the structural influence over "the lifeworld", where reason occurs through open and unconstrained debate can humanity achieve true emancipation (Langergaard & Sørensen, 2015, p. 275.). In this sense, this thesis seeks to contribute to the historical development towards human emancipation by providing a critical perspective of how the implementation of digital technology in political communication may be constraining the democratic process (Langergaard & Sørensen, 2015, p. 272-273). More specifically, and in Habermas' terms, this will be done by investigating how outside instrumental actions, in the form of powerful political communication, are colonizing the lifeworld of the public to interfere with the communicative actions of the electorate.

As a result of this ontology, the epistemology of critical theory are proponents of a critical reconstruction of reality and existing theories hereof (Fuglsang, Olsen, & Rasborg, 2018, p. 46). As Habermas argues, true emancipation may only take place through scientific insight into the structural forces subjecting mankind in an effort to establish new and better alternatives (Lykkeberg, Rune, 2005). In this sense, it predicates that the objective of social science is not merely to register the nature of social reality, but must also provide "descriptive and normative bases for social inquiry aimed at decreasing domination and increasing freedom in all their forms" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005). In this particular research, the descriptive nature of critical theory becomes evident through the construction of a model that attempts to account for the flow of contemporary political communication that acts as a springboard for a critical discussion of how this interferes with normative democratic values.

3.2 Research Design

In order to investigate the nature of political communication in a modern digital environment, I have chosen to examine the use of online political communication and marketing practices of the Trump campaign during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. The collection and analysis of data in this thesis will be carried out under the framework of a case study. A case study can be considered particularly advantageous when seeking to provide an in-depth examination of the complexities and particular nature of a given case (Bryman, 2016, p. 60). It is important to note that there are several distinct types of case studies, and that the respective defining elements of these often overlap. In this sense, any case study can involve a combination of different elements, and is best understood in terms of the rationale behind the choice of case (Bryman, 2016, p. 62-63).

This thesis will adopt the overall framework of an 'extreme' case study. In contrast to a 'typical case' the "(…) objective is to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation" (Yin, 2009, p. 48), an extreme case is primarily used to obtain as much information as possible about an unusual case in an effort to examine and exemplify core problematic issues within a narrowly defined context (Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2016, pp. 507-508). In this specific instance, the context is to be understood as online political communication during the 2016 presidential election. Many writers on case studies argue, that the best way to examine a problem is most often not through a 'representative' or 'randomized' case as these kinds of cases often does not contain the most information. Instead, an atypical or extreme case can often provide more information given that they open up for the analysis of additional actors and basic mechanism (Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2016, p. 507). Complementary to the purpose of this research, these types of cases are typically understood as enabling the analysis of core reasons behind a given phenomenon and its consequences, rather than a description of the symptoms and frequency of the problem (Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2016, p. 507).

On the basis of the development covered in the introduction to this thesis, I argue that the current state of political communication in the U.S. justifies the definition of an extreme case. This is further supported by the amount of general media coverage and scholarly interest in the 2016 election and its result, which took many people by surprise, and where the world saw Trump rewrite the rules of political communication with his strategic use of data and different online social networks (Perloff, 2018, p. VIIII). I seek to utilize this case to unravel the unique features of modern digital technology as implemented in the campaign process, and contextualize these new communicative practices to relevant theories and concepts. From this, I intend to create a model that captures the flow of online

political communication in a digital age. The model will be drawing inspiration from Lazarsfeld & Katz's *two-step flow of communication* (1955) and Bennett & Manheim's *one-step flow of communication* (2006). Lastly, I intend to use this new model as a point of departure for the broader discussion of the extent to which contemporary online political communication can be understood as either facilitating or impeding democracy. In this discussion, I will rely on normative theories of democracy as a reference point.

In regards to generalizability, some writers on case study research claim that case studies in general have a low level of external validity (Bryman, 2016 p. 62). To counter this assumption, some scholars are proponents of the 'critical case', through which the generalizability of a case study is strengthened. As such, aside from an extreme case, this research will also borrow ideas from the critical case study. The critical case defines the method of choosing a case so that it strengthens the external validity of a case study. Here, the purpose is to gather information that allows for a logical deduction of the kind: "If it is (or is not) to find in this case, it is to find in all (or no) cases". These are known as either 'least likely' and 'most likely' cases (Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2016, pp. 508-509). Although this study is not the perfect example of critical case, I argue that the concept of *Americanization* justifies the applicability of similar logical deduction in regards to this research. Given the multifaceted nature of the term *Americanization*, which enables it to be used in a whole range of different contexts, some clarification is required in order to understand its applicability in this instance. As such, the term *Americanization* becomes relevant through its following definition:

> "Americanization is often applied to both domestic and international contexts, and encompasses political, linguistic, cultural and economic dimensions. (…) The term usually indexes a process of change in patterns of social organization, political structures, or consumption seen as a result of contact with ideas, goods, or practices originating in, or strongly associated with, the United States" (SAGE Knowledge, 2019).

That is, given that we often see tendencies and trends happen in the U.S. before diffusing to other countries, the technologies, strategies and practices applied to political communication here, might also be influencing the practices of political communication elsewhere. In this sense, the logical deduction is that if the implementation of digital technology and marketing practices in political communication in the U.S. may be said to undermine core values in its democratic system, similar

tendencies may with *some degree of likelihood* also be found in other democratic systems, although perhaps *to various degrees*.

The analysis of this paper will be divided into two parts. Firstly, I will investigate the case of Trump's 2016 presidential campaign in an effort to highlight the communicative nature and practices of the Trump campaign. From these findings, a model will be generated that documents the flow of political communication in a digital environment. Secondly, I intend to use the model as a springboard for a shorter discussion of how political communication in this instance may be said to undermine democratic practices. The communication models of Lazarsfeld & Katz and Bennett & Manheim will act as an underlying influencer for this research paper and be contextualized and drawn upon when relevant.

3.3 Adaptive Theory

Theory plays an important role in the analysis of a case study and may either function as an analytical guide or constitute a goal in and of itself (De Vaus, 2001, p. 253). The analysis contained in this thesis will largely take place through theoretically oriented concepts. However, rather than testing or verifying theory, the purpose of this thesis is largely concerned with generating theory on the basis of relevant empirical evidence. Therefore, this thesis will not be strictly inductive nor deductive, and hence look towards adaptive theory (Layder, 1998, p. 5). Adaptive theory sees the relationship between empirical evidence and theory as continuously co-constructing. That is, adaptive theory understands theory and data as reciprocal, where selected concepts or theory constitutes the backdrop of an investigation while at the same time these concepts or theories are developed through empirical evidence (Layder, 1998, p. 167). Accordingly, I intend to use Lazarsfeld & Katz' two-step model and Bennett & Manheim's one-step model as underlying theories while supplying empirical evidence with the purpose of developing new theory. To some extent, adaptive theory may be thought of as a modified form of grounded theory in that the inductive element becomes evident in the development of theory on the basis of empirical evidence, while drawing in new concepts or theories as required. However, grounded theory is more inductive in regards to its analytical inductive approach to empirical evidence and continuous construction of hypotheses about the phenomena under investigation (Layder, 1998, p. 20).

In this sense, adaptiv theory is talked about as "the third way" (Jacobsen, 2007, p. 249), as it tries to overcome a number either or's; deduction vs. induction, objective vs. subjective, and individual vs system (Jacobsen, 2007, p. 251). More specifically, Derek Layder advocates a methodological approach that encapsulates the understanding of society as existing both within and without the individual, meaning that both internalization and externalization are central aspects to social life and that the objective and subjective is co-constructive and exists simultaneously in time and space (Jacobsen, 2007, p. 251). What is more, this is an ontological understanding that resonates well with critical theory as covered above. Lastly, the theoretical aim of an adaptive approach to research aligns neatly with critical theory and its purpose of investigating and explaining what is wrong with a given phenomenon.

3.4 Methodological Considerations

In the process of writing this research paper, I have made several methodological considerations, all of which would have resulted in different end product. As described above, this research will take an adaptive approach, but one could also consider investigating the field of study through either deductive or inductive reasoning.

Deductively, I could have chosen to test either Lazarsfeld & Katz's or Bennett & Manheim's theories of the flow of public communication as covered in the theory section below. In this sense I could have chosen to conduct a theory-testing analysis on the basis of one or the other to see how well they could each explain the flow of communication of Donald Trump in regards to his use of digital technology and political marketing in his 2016 presidential campaign. What is more, I could also have chosen to analyze both with the purpose of seeing which one, or what elements of each, if any, would best be able to account for his use of digital technology and marketing practices in his communication efforts. This form of analysis would be based around the falsification or verification of the respective theories, and would therefore not have allowed me to generate new theory nor engage in the discussion of the potential effects of contemporary political communication on democracy. If one wanted to deductively investigate aspects of U.S. democracy, I could have gone with the theory-testing of normative theories of democracy with a focus on the U.S., however, this would have required looking at different empirical evidence, and I would therefore not have been able to say anything about the flows of contemporary political communication. In regards to the metatheoretical considerations for both these types of projects, critical rationalism would be suitable,

in that it relies on deduction and falsification of hypothesis and the rejection of general statements on the basis of contradicting findings. According to critical rationalism, a statement about reality is true if it corresponds with reality, however, approaching the truth is the most one can realistically hope for (Fuglsang, Olsen, & Rasborg, 2018, p. 45). There is a case to be made that critical theory could also be applied to this kind of deductive research. In this case, I could have chosen an existing critical theory relevant to the scope of this research paper, to deductively highlight the implications and shortcomings of contemporary political communication. However, as I see it, this would to some extent lessen the effect of critical theory's epistemological understanding that social research must give new insight into the structural forces that subjects mankind as a means of increasing human emancipation (Lykkeberg, Rune, 2005). This is the case in that it would risk merely confirming what an existing theory has already highlighted, only contributing to the strengthening of that hypothesis. Ultimately, this would result in an analysis that was far less explorative in nature.

On the contrary, an inductive reasoning would have enabled me to develop a theory of the flow of contemporary political communication, while maintaining the critical theory's philosophical understanding of science. The research questions could be the same, but it would have required more space and time than what I have available. More specifically, an inductive approach would have required me to meticulously empirically clarify the subject before drawing in theory that could account for different aspects of the Trump campaign's digital communication and construct a subsequent model. What is more, the discussion regarding the effects of contemporary political communication on democracy would also have had to be based on an empirical analysis of the state of U.S. democracy. This is the case given that an inductive analysis predicates the empirical evidence should lead the way in both research and discussion. There is no doubt that such an inductive research would be equally as enlightening and extensive. Realistically, given the restrictions on this research paper, a pure inductive reasoning would only have allowed me go in depth with one or two smaller aspects of the research topic at hand. Instead, I have chosen to rely on existing theories while drawing in smaller amounts of empirical evidence. As can be seen, aspects of both deduction and induction are present in this research paper, which is largely enabled by implementing adaptive theory as explained above.

4. Theory

In order to fully engage in a discussion of the complex topic at hand, a relatively large theoretical foundation and understanding is needed. Hence, this section seeks to construct a theoretical framework able to support the findings of this research as I move forward. This involves going over and explaining various existing theories and concepts relevant to the topic so that the theoretical assumptions made in this paper can be evaluated critically on a scientific backdrop. The theories and concepts presented in this section has been chosen on the merit of its perceived relevance to the overall research question and the phenomena under investigation. This mainly involves looking into existing literature on 1) the flows of communication 2) public opinion, and 3) normative theories of democracy. The rationale behind this is the scientific evidence that there is a strong and interactive link between them. More specifically, it is often argued that we live in an "age of information", where various means of communication plays an important role in shaping public opinion, with public opinion in turn being a vital component in the democratic process (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016).

4.1 The Flow of Communication

As covered in the literature review, communication research is a large area of research. Given the topic of this research paper, the communication part of this theoretical framework will mainly be focusing on the development of the understanding of the flow of public communication. I will begin by laying out the foundation by going over the 'two-step flow of communication' model as popularized by Paul Lazarsfeld & Elihu Katz in their study *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications* (1955), considered by many as a classic in communication research. This will then be contemporized through *The One-Step Flow of Communication* (2006), an analysis by Lance Bennett & Jarol Manheim that tracks the transformation of public communication from a two-step flow of communication to a 'one-step flow of communication' (Bennett & Manheim, 2006, p. 213).

4.1.1 Two-Step Flow of Communication

Based on a study of the decision-making processes of voters in Ohio during the 1940 presidential election published in *The People's Choice* (1948), Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, & Hazel Gaudet formulated the first draft of a communication theory that highlighted the significance of opinion leaders and interpersonal interaction in mass media influence (SAGE reference, 2011). In 1955, these early roots grew into a celebrated volume authored by Paul F. Lazarsfeld & Elihu Katz entitled *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications* (1955), which many scholars tend to refer to for statements of 'the two-step flow of communication' (Bennett & Manheim, 2006, p. 213). Here, Lazarsfeld & Katz argued that mass communication generally passes through two steps before reaching its audience. Step number one takes place with the mass media's influence on 'opinion leaders', defined as the more active members of society who follow the media more closely, either with formal or informal authority, with the common characteristic of having relevant expertise or specialized interest (SAGE reference, 2013). The second step involves the opinion leaders' interpretation and redistribution of the information they receive and gather from the mass media to their social network of less active members of society (SAGE reference, 2011). The study of voters in Ohio found that the majority of the electorate that made up their minds late in the campaign primarily attributed the reason for their decisions to influence from their social network. Data also showed that this voter segment was more likely to have received information about the presidential candidates from opinion leaders, such as family members or other social contacts, than from the news media (SAGE reference, 2011). Lazarsfeld & Katz proposed that the familiarity of face-to-face communication between opinion leaders and their audience helped increase trustworthiness and lessen skepticism in the recipient of communications. Simultaneously, a face-to-face setting enable opinion leaders to employ friendly persuasion, tailoring the message to each individual according to the receiver's personality. Combined, the opinion leader comes across as a more reliable source of information than the mass media (SAGE reference, 2013).

As alluded to in the literature review earlier, the theory contributed to a shift in the dominant understanding of the mass media as having a powerful and direct influence on people. By highlighting the importance of interpersonal communication in the decision-making process of individuals, the theory gave rise to the idea that the mass media only had limited and indirect effects on individuals and did not act as a "hypodermic needle" (SAGE Research Methods, 2010). Although the model has been widely supported by empirical evidence, confirming the influence of social networking in various settings, including areas such as technology diffusion and advertising providing the basis for

subsequent and more recent research, it still has its shortcomings according to critics, some of which argues that the model is simply outdated (Bennett & Manheim, 2006). Other scholars have pointed out, that individuals may act as both opinion leaders or recipients depending on the topics (SAGE reference, 2013). Critique is also directed towards the unambiguity surrounding how many people an opinion leader must influence in order to be classified as such, and then there is the question of those who influence the opinion leaders. Furthermore, the theory has also been criticized for being overly simplistic, given its stance on the flow of information as "(…) unidirectional, linear and limited to two levels: opinion leaders and followers" (SAGE reference, 2013). While there seems to be many methodological challenges when trying to measure to what extent the two-step flow of communication is applicable (SAGE reference, 2011), its fundamental ideas contributed heavily to the field of communication research and continues to be relevant even today (SAGE reference, 2013).

4.1.2 One-Step Flow of Communication

A lot of water has gone under the social scientific bridge in the more than 60 years since Lazarsfeld & Katz published their classic study of the two-step flow. The intellectual community knew much less about communication, political sociology and social psychology in 1955, compared with today, and several theories relevant to aspects of the two-step flow was not yet even on the drawing board (Bennett & Manheim, 2006, p. 219). The communication landscape has drastically changed alongside the digital revolution which, according to Washington University professors Lance Bennett & Jarol Manheim, has resulted in public communication shifting away from a "two-step flow" involving social filtration and mediation, and towards a much more individual-oriented and effective "one-step flow" of communication (Bennett & Manheim, 2006, p. 213). In their analysis *The One-Step Flow of Communication* published in *The Annals of the American Academy*, the pair points out how the earlier findings of Lazarsfeld and Katz had implications for the work of communication professionals in that in order to achieve an impact on the public through mediated messages, one would have to both understand and control the filtration process. According to Bennett & Manheim, this meant that "(…) the so-called 'water cooler effect' – by which mass mediated messages reach audience members who were not directly exposed to them through secondary interactions with friends and colleagues – was not merely a means of expanding the audience for a given message but was a potentially success-critical mechanism for assigning it meaning" (Bennett & Manheim, 2006, p. 214). What grew from this realization at the time was an increased focus on individual communication habits and opinion

dynamics in any political persuasion efforts (Bennett & Manheim, 2006, p. 214). Their analysis further suggests that the two-step flow model was satisfactory for the understanding of communication flows in "(…) American society from roughly the early decades of the twentieth century until the 1980s" (Bennett & Manheim, 2006, p. 217), arguing that the dissolving group-based society, alongside new research suggesting a much more direct effect of mass media (agenda setting, framing, and priming theories), has contributed to a decline in the popularity of the two-step flow of communication model (Bennett & Manheim, 2006, p. 218).

Today, the evolution of communication technologies alongside a change in individual and collective communication habits have fundamentally changed the way individuals obtain and process information. What Bennett & Manheim argue is that the development in these social and technological areas are "(…) directly [challenging] the underlying assumptions of the two-step flow hypothesis because they have isolated increasing numbers (though surely not all) of today's citizens from the very groups that traditionally provided vital cues for interpreting information" (Bennett & Manheim, 2006, p. 214-215). They further underline how the interplay between social isolation, the fragmentation of communication channels, and new information and communication technologies have created a very different environment for both the flow of communication and processing of information (Bennett & Manheim, 2006, p. 215). Bennett & Manheim argue that this transformation has resulted in a "one-step flow" of public communication characterized by an audience that is subject to elaborate targeting of direct messages (Bennett & Manheim, 2006, p. 213). This process largely involves the processing and accumulation of vast amounts of differentiated data on the targeted audience. In the hands of a communication professional, this data can then be organized and manipulated to tailor communicative messages that speaks directly to the targeted individual. By factoring in the location, social status and personality, messages can be constructed that appeal to the core emotions and personal identity of the individual audience member (Bennett & Manheim, 2006, p. 216).

The collection of data may take place stealthy or transparently depending on privacy policies and the agreements between those who collect data and their audience, and individuals may or may not have the opportunity to opt in or out of databases. However, it is not always the case that audiences are aware of what they share with data miners and their, either know or unknown, clients (Bennett & Manheim, 2006, p. 226). Given the amount of data a large-scale one-step communication strategy requires it is neither simple nor inexpensive (Bennett & Manheim, 2006, p. 216), and the complexity of the nature of communication in a "one-step era" is particularly suitable for professional

communication strategists (Bennett & Manheim, 2006, p. 227). As Bennett & Manheim notes, the current culture of one-step communication creates a culture that "(…) favors a top-down, war room, strategic control relationship between client and target audience (Bennett & Manheim, 2006, p. 227)". In a political context, and interesting to the scope of this paper, this means that as long "(…) as shaping audience responses by pushing emotional buttons is thought to favor client success more than, say, initiate open dialogues between candidates and voters, client interests will trump democratic values" (Bennett & Manheim, 2006, p. 227).

4.2 Public Opinion

Ultimately, what can be drawn from the two theories above is the ability for communication to shape public opinion. The phrase 'public opinion' is something one may often hear as it is widely discussed both politically and culturally. Even though one may consider it to be somewhat self-explanatory, its complexity and relevance to this research merits a section dedicated to its explanation.

4.2.1 The Relevance of Public Opinion

Public opinion arises from the interplay of various social processes, and interests people from a lot of different disciplines; political leaders is interested in it because they want to know what kind of political initiatives would resonate with the voters, interest groups want to know which battles to wage in an effort to increase support, and corporate executives have to stay on top of cultural trends to maximize profits, wanting to know what consumers think about, their purchasing habits, and generally, their lifestyle preferences (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 3). Politics is probably one of the first things that come to mind when thinking of public opinion, and the link has indeed also been widely studied. However, the importance of how public opinion is intertwined with aspects of communication is often overlooked by scholars. The same technological developments I touched upon in the previous section plays an important role in shaping communication flows and public opinion alike (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 4). Public opinion constitutes a broad field of research, and engages many scholars from various disciplines due to its cross-sectorial nature. Below, I will go over some of the reasons as to why the concept is considered by many to be so important.

Firstly, public support is the foundation of any stable and legitimate democratic government (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 5). According to the US Declaration of Independence, the government possesses no legitimate power should the public withdraw their consent; the government "deriv[e] their just powers from the consent of the governed" (The U.S. National Archives, 2019). Although this statement might have a normative ring to it, many scholars have argued that widespread public dissatisfaction with a government makes for an unstable democracy, arguing that this may in fact have been one of the enabling factors for the Nazi Party to take over in 1930's Germany (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 5). For many years, public opinion research has helped identify and inform governments of the attitudes, wants, and needs of the public, often acting as a catalyst for debate and deliberation (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 5).

Secondly, public opinion should, in theory, be able to influence policy making and hold political leaders in check. However, research on this often generate ambiguous empirical evidence that is difficult to evaluate. According to Glynn et al. "Some researchers perceive public opinion as substantially directing many policy debates; others see it as usually only constraining policy outcomes, and perhaps not even constraining them very much" (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 322). One area where many researchers seem to agree is in regards to whose opinion matters the most. Research, such as James Gibson's study of anticommunist attitudes during the 1950s in *Political Intolerance and Political Repression During the McCarthy Red Scare* (1988) and Martin Gilen's examination of 1,779 policy survey questions between 1981 and 2002 in *Affluence and Influence* (2014), have indicated that elite opinion weighs heavier on the scale of policy makers compared to that of the mass public (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 315-316). Nonetheless, most evidence suggests that government responsiveness to public opinion is minimal (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 319-320). Even though the role of public opinion in politics and policy making have never before been more direct and dynamic, findings such as these continues to fuel debate on various aspects of democratic practices and democratic theory (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 322).

Thirdly, public opinion gives crucial insight into cultural currents. Over the years, lots of data have been collected about public attitudes towards various government initiatives. For example, the antipoverty programs initiated by the U.S. in the 1960s has since its implementation been subject to follow up research interested in public opinion on such programs (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 7). The results of these surveys allows for social scientists to uncover clues about

changing norms and values in society from which hypotheses may be created for more rigorous study. Given that culture may be defined as the "(…) sum of people's norms, values and sentiments" (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 7), and these being some of the core subject of public opinion research, it can be argued that culture and public opinion are so interwoven that it is hard to separate the two (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 7).

Fourthly, while public opinion may act as a check on political leaders, they also try and influence it. One of the best examples of when political leaders try to influence public opinion is during wartime, when citizens are urged to make large sacrifices on behalf of the country (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 7). Sometimes this is easier to do, as with the case of Word War II, where U.S intervention was percieved as a justified war, where the U.S. fought both for the freedom of themselvses and others. At other times it may be more difficult, as was seen with the widespread public dissatisfaction towards the idea and reasons behind U.S military action in Vietnam in the 1960s (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 8). In cases such as these, political leaders may engage in various efforts to win over public opinion. The cases of U.S. official sources continuously claiming that Iraq was developing weapons of mass destruction despite receiving conflicting information from UN weapons inspectors (The Guardian, 2004), and the official spin of the Private Jessica Lynch story during the 2003 Iraq war (Pew Research Center, 2003) are examples of how political leaders try and influence public opinion during wartime. For anyone interested in how to effectively influence or mobilize public opinion, an understanding of public attitudes, beliefs, and values are required. This goes both for the political leader who wants to persuade the public with rhetoric, and the student who are interested in understanding government-inspired public opinion (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 9). Lastly, one must also consider the dynamics between media and public opinion, i.e. how "(…) different channels of communication have different effects on audiences, and the like" (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 11).

4.2.2 Public Opinion and Democracy

As mentioned earlier, although the term "public opinion" to some may seem self-explanatory, it eludes a simple and common definition. This is largely due to its multidisciplinary nature, with different applications prompting different definitions (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 11). A 'public' is commonly understood to be a separate entity to crowds and masses (Glynn,

Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 13). The scientific definition of a crowd grew out of the twentieth century research on "crowd psychology", with the aim of explaining how people could be collectively enticed to divert from their normal behavior, characterized by a shared emotional experience (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 12). A 'mass' is comprised of "(…) an aggregation of individuals who are separate, detached, anonymous" (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 12), i.e. defined by their interpersonal isolation. Here, American sociologist Herbert Blumer suggests that the mass is comprised of people who engage in mass behavior, "such as those who are exited by some national event, those who share in a land boom, those who are interested in a murder trial which is reported in the press, or those who participate in some large migration" (Martin, 2015, p. 13). The members of a mass share a common idea or experience, but due to lack of awareness or isolation, they might be unaware of that fact (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 12). Contrastingly, Blumer argues that a public is characterized by "a group of people (a) who are confronted by an issue, (b) who are divided in the ideas as to how to meet the issue, and (c) who engage in discussion over the issue" (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 13). Hence, a public goes beyond the "sharing of an emotion" as in the case with a crowd, in that a public is also defined by the ability to think critically and reason with other members of society, and unlike a mass, is self-aware and interactive (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 13).

Besides the separate understanding of crowds, masses, and publics, the precise definition of public opinion is largely context dependent. Hence, one must accept a certain level of ambiguity, and the fact that an exact definition does not exist when working with the concept of public opinion (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 23). Having said that, in their book *Public Opinion* (2008), Glynn et al. propose 5 general understandings of public opinion which encompasses the most commonly used definitions: "[1)] Public opinion is an aggregation of individual opinions, (…) [2)] public opinion is a reflection of majority beliefs, (…) [3)] public opinion is found in the clash of group interests, (…) [4)] public opinion reflects media and elite influence, (…) [5)] public opinion is a fiction" (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, pp. 13-21).

According to Lippmann, it is impossible for the average citizen to stay on top of all public issues and therefore also impossible to produce any meaningful opinions about them. Hence, the public opinion was not elaborate nor sophisticated, but instead based on what they derive from the occasional opinion leaders and the media (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 16). He

attributed this, not to the laziness of people, but, to ingrained human limitations. In *The Phantom Public* (1925), Lippmann wrote:

> *"My sympathies are with [the private citizen], for I believe that he has been saddled with an impossible task and that he is asked to practice an unattainable ideal. I find it so myself for, although public business is my main interest and I give most of my time to watching it, I cannot find time to do what is expected of me in the theory of democracy; that is, to know what is going on and to have an opinion of every question which confronts a self-governing community. And I have not happened to meet anybody, from a president of the United States to a professor of political science, who came anywhere near to embodying the accepted ideal of the sovereign and omnicompetent citizen"* (Lippmann, 1925, pp. 20-21).

His earlier book, *Public Opinion* (1922), was centered around how Americans generally think about political issues, for example, through yes-or-no reactions based on broad "stereotypes" constructed by others, and around how media reporting and opinion leaders influence it. Lippmann also covers how newspapers and political parties tend to base arguments on symbolic principles, such as "justice," or "Americanism," that are hard for people to disagree with, instead of going into specific policies that could potentially interfere with people's opinions and beliefs. He further points to how advances in research concerned with communication and psychology have wielded elites with unprecedented opportunities to "manufacture consent" (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 19) – a concept later borrowed and popularized by Noam Chomsky & Edward Herman in their book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988).

As established, public opinion is a multifaceted, and, to many disciplines, including democratic theory, essential concept. The meaning and understanding of public opinion is largely tied to historical parameters including the state of political culture, communication technology, and the level of public participation in the workings of government (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 11). Its long and varied intellectual and social history, can be traced back many centuries (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 26). In many ways, the concept of public opinion is as old as democracy itself, with ancient Greek philosophers stressing the importance of a thorough understanding of popular sentiments for democratic institutions to be effective (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 4).

4.3 Normative Theories of Democracy

Some may think of 'people power' when they hear the term 'democracy' based on the Greek word *demoskratia*; *demos* representing 'people' and *kratia* meaning 'rule of' or rule by' (Watts, 2010, p. 68). Others think of Abraham Lincoln's definition of democracy as "government of the people, by the people and for the people" (Epstein, 2011, p. 19). No matter the case, one cannot engage in a discussion of how political communication influenced by digital technology and marketing practices affects democracy, without a thorough understanding of the entity which it is supposedly influencing. Hence, this section seeks to go over three normative theories of democracy, each celebrating a different perspective. When combined, they allow for an understanding of the most central values of democratic government (Perloff, 2018, p. 41).

4.3.1 Classical Direct Democracy

Ancient Greece had a distinctive and unique rule. The classical direct democracy was concerned with liberty and equality, and offered citizens a way of "ruling and being ruled in turn" (Clayton, 2019). In a section of a famous speech attributed to Pericles, a distinguished Athenian citizen, general and statesman, described the ideals and aims of the ancient Greek democracy. Being more than 2,500 years old (Education Services Australia, 2019), its relative timelessness clearly illustrates the idealistic influence of the Athenians ancient classical direct democracy on contemporary democratic systems:

> "*Let me say that our system of government does not copy the institutions of our neighbors. It is more the case of our being a model to others, than of our imitating anyone else. Our constitution is called a democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the whole people. When it is a question of settling private disputes, everyone is equal before the law; when it is a question of putting one person before another in positions of public responsibility, what counts is not membership of a particular class, but the actual ability which the man possesses. No one, so long as he has it in him to be of service to the state, is kept in political obscurity because of poverty. And, just as our political life is free and open, so is our day-to-day life in our relations with each other. We do not get into a state with our next-door neighbor if he enjoys himself in his own way, nor do we give him the kind of black looks which, though they*

do no real harm, still do hurt people's feelings. We are free and tolerant in our private lives; but in public affairs we keep to the law. This is because it commands our deep respect" (Held, 2006, p. 13).

In this sense, democratic values in ancient Athens carry many similarities to those we cherish today. However, in a classical direct democracy, the idea of basic private and individual rights did not really exist. Although the Athenians acknowledged the need to respect the individual freedom of male citizens, the autonomy of the community or *polis* was more important than the individual (Lakoff, 2018, p. 37). Hence, it was the participation in democracy, the affairs of the polis, that provided you with different rights, such as voting in an assembly, sitting on a jury, standing for various positions of power (Education Services Australia, 2019), and direct participation in discussions, debates, and policy making concerned with anything from taxes to war (Perloff, 2018, p. 35). Regarding participation, Pericles was explicit. Citizens did not only have the opportunity to participate; they were expected to:

> "(…) *each individual is interested not only in his own affairs but in the affairs of the state as well: even those who are mostly occupied with their own business are extremely well-informed on general politics – this is a peculiarity of ours: we do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he has no business here at all.*" (Held, 2006, p. 14)

If a modern politician spoke in this way, he or she would most likely be labelled as both elitist and sexist. In order to be qualified as a citizen and allowed participation, you firstly had to be male and over the age of 20. Slaves were not allowed, and women had no political rights at all (Perloff, 2018, p. 36). The segregation of societal groups in ancient Greek democracy is perhaps one of the more striking differences compared to modern democratic values; especially those concerned with libertarianism and equality. Although man was understood as a "*polis* animal", as described by Aristotle (Lakoff, 2018, p. 23). It can be argued that the Athenian focus on communal autonomy, i.e., the freedom and the right to self-government of the *polis*, hindered the development of a democratic model that would have been able to encompass and balance communal autonomy with the rights and freedoms of individuals as an individual (Lakoff, 2018, p. 37). Nonetheless, classical direct democracy laid the foundation and put forth key principles and ideals, heavily influencing subsequent theories of democracy and contemporary democratic governments alike (Perloff, 2018, p. 35).

4.3.2 Liberal Democracy

Theorists behind the concept of liberal democracy includes some of the most prominent thinkers of democracy, such as John Stuart Mill, James Madison, and John Locke (Perloff, 2018, p. 36). Although there are several models of liberal democracy, the common definition is that it is a democratic system of government in which government intervention and power is disdained and kept in check by law, with an emphasis on individual liberties that are officially recognized (Oxford Dictionaries, 2019) and protected from restrictions or interference by majorities or coercive social groups (Lakoff, 2018, p. 99).

Theories of liberal democracy grew out of frustration with the restrictions put on individual freedom by monarchies and authoritarian rulers of the 17th and 18th centuries. The role of a liberal democratic government was to uphold and reinforce the natural rights of individuals, the rights that each individual had which could not be tampered with or restricted by government. Included in the early liberal democratic approach was the right to life, liberty, property, and pursuit of happiness, underlining the right for individuals to act and behave unattached to prevalent societal norms regarding matters of speech, press, religion and economics. Among other things, theories of liberal democracy also advocated for the rights to private property and private enterprise; the idea was to create a 'private sphere', where authoritarian rulers could not intervene (Perloff, 2018, p. 36). However, how could the natural rights of people be reconciled with the need for order facilitated through government? Here, recognizing that the application of direct democracy to mass society would be unrealistic, the first thinkers of liberal democracy came up with a visionary idea; 'representative government' (Perloff, 2018, p. 37). This included the practice of electing individuals to represent the viewpoints of certain groups of people, much like we know it today. This serves two major purposes: "First, they make public officials the servants rather than the masters of the citizenry. Second, they provide representatives of each of the constituent interest of society" (Katz, 1997, p. 63).

One of the cornerstones in liberal democratic models is free communication. According to Richard Perloff, a Cleveland State University professor of communication, political science, and psychology, "(…) liberal democracy theorists view politics as a marketplace of ideas, in which a variety of media products – good and bad, accurate and inaccurate – compete for audience attention. Just as different products compete in the economic market, political ideas collide in the intellectual marketplace" (Perloff, 2018, p. 37). In this marketplace of ideas, contemporary scholars of liberal democracy

advocate the need for an ultimate free and independent press encompassing "mainstream media; public, educational television; cable television shows; blogs; and social media" (Perloff, 2018, p. 37), to inform and present diverse viewpoints. The importance of this is further highlighted by Michael Walzer, a professor at the School of Social Science at Princeton University and one of America's foremost political thinkers, saying that liberal democracy, and democracy in general "(…) puts a premium on speech, persuasion, and rhetorical skill. Ideally, the citizen who makes the most prominent persuasive argument – that is the argument that actually persuades the largest number of citizens – gets his way" (Benhabib, 1996, p. 50).

While this in theory makes sense, it also gives rise to some difficult conundrums. Walzer's assumption seems to be that the agent that are able to convince the most people is the best argument, and while that may be the case in a normative sense, it neglects the fact that arguments which are constructed to deliberately scare people can come across as particularly persuasive. This is often seen during campaigns when candidates highlight the, often unrealistic, potential negative consequences of the election of his/her political opponent. Furthermore, as argued by Perloff, when talking about a nation like the U.S., all arguments are not equal given that "[in] a nation where money buys access (…) the arguments that carry the greatest weight with most people may be those formulated and delivered by the wealthiest few" (Perloff, 2018, p. 38). With this in mind then, while the idea of the intellectual marketplace allow for various ideas to be heard and judged before the jury of the voters, it has its problems when, as Walzer puts it, "power 'belongs to' persuasiveness" (Benhabib, 1996, p. 50), stating that voting is only "[a] kind of power perhaps (…) but choices still depend not on single votes but on the accumulation of votes – hence on influence, persuasion, pressure, bargaining, organization, and so on" (Benhabib, 1996, p. 50). And while these may be accepted as fair criticisms, they are far outweighed by the general advantages of free speech, according to liberal democrats (Perloff, 2018, p. 38).

4.3.3 Deliberative Democracy

Like theories on liberal democracy vary, so too can various definitions of deliberative democracy be found across the literature (Chappell, 2019). Theories of deliberative democracy is one of the newest positions within scholarship on democracy. Thinkers of deliberative democracy points to various faults in the liberal democratic model, stating that the marketplace metaphor, as mentioned above, undermines the essential purpose of politics in society. Their core argument is that voters should not

be degraded to 'consumers' of different political brands, but seen as citizens whose participation in politics make out the fabric of democratic government (Perloff, 2018, p. 38). In other words, politics "should not focus simply on protecting the *rights* of individuals, but on discovering ways to enhance the collective *good* of society" (Perloff, 2018, p. 38). Therefore, theorists of deliberative democracy request a creative rethinking of democracy with the aim of increasing the power and influence of citizens through an alternative avenue of participation (Held, 2006, p. 235).

Evidently, deliberation, defined as "long and careful consideration or discussion" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2019), serves as the foundation for a deliberative democracy. It differs from conversation or dialogue in that it inherently has a tendency to involve discussions. This is also true in a deliberative democracy. People are supposed to disagree, assessing the merits of other people's arguments while having a willingness to reconsider possibilities and actions when presented with new ideas. When facing shared social or political problems there should be a concerted effort to formulate a solution that is favorable to all or most parties (Perloff, 2018, p. 38). Jennifer Stromer-Galley, author of the award winning book *Presidential Campaigning in the Internet Age* (2014) and President of the Association of Internet Researchers, provides a useful definition of deliberation in a democratic context as "a process whereby groups of people, often ordinary citizens, engage in reasoned opinion expression on a social or political issue in an attempt to identify solutions to a common problem and to evaluate those solutions" (Perloff, 2018, p. 39). Scholars of deliberative democracy argue that deliberation helps reinvigorate democracy by inviting citizen discussion, bridging the gab between government and civil society. This will help build a widespread understanding of the public sphere as an effective avenue for political contribution and citizen participation (Perloff, 2018, p. 39).

Deliberative democracy relies heavily on the involvement of citizens in politics, and hence on a vibrant public sphere. The public sphere can largely be defined as the interpersonal or virtual domain in which different ideas, opinions, collective problems and solutions are discussed and developed communicatively (Oxford Bibliographies, 2018). It exists "(…) in the space between the private domain of our individual lives, and the sphere of government" (Perloff, 2018, p. 39). The modern public sphere is characterized by a multitude of different spheres – often online – with crisscrossing and overlapping networks. The old idea of a public sphere vocalized through a conventional press has been surpassed by an arena dominated by online social media and networks where people engage in discussions and arguments in an often unnecessarily heated fashion. Although deliberative democrats encourage vibrant public spheres, they emphasize the importance of level-headed and thoughtful discussion in order for it to be constructive. They stress that the foundation of a healthy democracy

is dependant on the ability of citizens to "(a) engage in broad, reflective consideration of political issues; (b) take into account a variety of perspectives that extend beyond their own material self-interest; and (c) articulate sound arguments that can be competently justified in group settings and will ultimately influence public policy" (Perloff, 2018, p. 39). Without constructive discussion, politics is no more than a loud echochamber of competing self-interest. Hence, deliberative democrats are strong proponents of initiatives that facilitates public dialogue, such as websites that enables citizens to discuss community problems, or e-democracy programs where people can engage in healthy discussion with one another. In this sense, deliberative democrats are largely inspired by the ideas of the classical direct democracy which underlined the importance of participation and the obligations of citizenship in a healthy democracy (Perloff, 2018, pp. 39-42).

4.3.4 Definition of Democracy

The aforementioned normative models of democracy each celebrate different aspects of democracy. The classical model of democracy emphasizes the importance of citizen participation, liberal democracy prizes an intellectual marketplace of ideas and individual rights, while deliberative democracy highlights the need for thoughtful deliberation and widespread inclusion of the public sphere in politics. Given the multifaceted definition of democracy, the concept is perhaps best understood by braiding these different normative perspectives with work of various scholars of democracy. By doing so, Richard Perloff, Professor of Communication, Political Science, and Psychology at Cleveland State University, presents seven core characteristics of democracy:

> "(1) The right of all adult citizens to vote and run for office; (2) free, fair elections involving more than one political party; (3) individual liberty and freedom of expression, including for those who oppose the party in power; (4) protection of human rights, notably those of minorities, or those out of step with the majority; (5) freedom of news media to challenge the power that be; (6) a civil society characterized by the right to form associations, such as parties and interest groups, that attempt to shape the agenda and influence public policy; and (7) to the extent possible in a large complex society, a culture of public communication that provides opportunities for reasoned public deliberation" (Perloff, 2018, pp. 42-43).

No two democratic nations operate exactly the same, and hence nations naturally differentiate in regards to these characteristics, making democracy something that should be understood as lying along a continuum (Perloff, 2018, p. 43). Although there are yearly measurements done on the health of democracy around the world, such as *The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index*, where 167 countries are scored from 1-10 based on 60 indicators (The Economist, 2019), democracy can never be fully achieved, and is always a "work in progress". Democracy, as good as it may sound in theory, is not a perfect form of government, and many still adhere to the saying that "(…) democracy is the worst form of government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time (…)" (International Churchill Society, 2019), as Winston Churchill put it.

5. Analysis

With political communication in a digital setting as the focus of this research, it seems fitting to structure the analysis around the more prominent actors of online communication and the role they play in online political campaigning. While there may be plenty of relevant research to be conducted in terms of the online political communication originating from personal or party websites, or video sharing services such as YouTube, this analysis will put its primary focus on social networking sites, with the understanding that its social, interactive and informative characteristics plays an important role in contemporary online political communication (Bennett & Manheim, 2006). As Richard Perloff notes, "social media has transformed political campaigns" (Perloff, 2018, p. 18). For clarification, the references to 'political actors' in this paper should from this point onwards be understood as entities or persons that engages in observable actions that is purposely oriented towards political influence and is sufficiently unified to the extent that it makes sense to speak of them as a single actor (Page, 1996, p. 20).

5.1 Political Actors and the Mass Media

In this day and age where (literally) almost anyone and their mother have an account on social media, a business with no online presence is missing out on potential customers. This is also true for news outlets. With 2.41 billion monthly active users, Facebook is the biggest social network platform worldwide (Statista, 2019). Considering the size of this potential market, it is easy to understand why

the news media are increasingly moving away from traditional press and towards online presence – an online presence that for many of the same reasons are equally important to political actors, especially, during an election. It is safe to say that media technology has contributed to a change in media itself, and communication, in all its forms and for all its purposes, have become a multimedia game. It is now more important than ever for political actors to control communications and increase their online reach (Perloff, 2018, p. 18).

Political actors and mass media have a long and shared history. As argued by Benjamin I. Page, one may even consider the mass media as a political actor in its own right, as in a case where executives of media organizations seek to influence policies of particular interest to themselves or others, effectively converging a media organization into an interest group (Page, 1996, p. 20). Nonetheless, media outlets have a unique position as disseminators of political information and in the formation of public opinion, as acknowledged by both Lazarsfeld & Katz and Bennett & Manheim in their communication theories covered above. This unique position makes the mass media an important strategic entity in any election.

One may helpfully look towards Edward Herman & Noam Chomsky's *Propaganda Model* presented in *Manufacturing Consent* (1988) for an explanation of how political actors are able to advantageously influence the reporting of the mass media. According to Herman & Chomsky, "the mass media are drawn into a symbiotic relationship with powerful sources of information by economic necessity and reciprocity of interest" (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). By this, they refer to the fact that information is the raw material of news, and that modern news outlets must meet the increasing demand for new information to be successful. As it is practically impossible to have reporters and journalists on every corner waiting for a story to break, they tend to concentrate their resources on locations where significant news often occurs (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). These information hotspots include places such as the White House, the Pentagon, the State Department, etc., as these are physical and static locations from where important rumors or leaks come from, and where regular press conferences occur. What is more important, the information origination from government sources are also widely recognized as legitimate in terms of their recognizability, status and prestige. According to Herman & Chomsky, the news media 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, 1988).

This relationship has only increased with modern digital technology, resulting in a situation where
most news outlets need to adapt to an around-the-clock news cycle to satisfy the ever-present public
demand (Herman & Chomsky, 2006, p. 270). They argue that, similar to other businesses, most
modern media companies operate within a profit driven system where the purpose of viewer retention
trumps the importance of quality news (Herman & Chomsky, 2006, p. 267-269). Increased demand
and competition within the news industry is one of the factors that have contributed to what some
scholars refer to as the 'tabloidization' of news (Mackay, 2017). More specifically, this refer to a
move away from traditional journalistic practices of keeping the public up to date on government
policies and societal issues, and towards values of entertainment, where the purpose is to
sensationalize, shock, and awe (Mackay, 2017). In the following section, I will look at how Donald
Trump was able to take advantage of the sensationalizing nature of the news media in his road to
presidency.

5.1.1 Trump and the Mass Media

Although many would perhaps at first glance argue that the election of Trump happened despite being
the most negatively covered candidate of the 2016 election (Patterson, 2016), this section seeks to
present an alternative view. No matter the case, his use of the mass media, or, the mass media's use
of him, has an interesting story to tell.

Given mass media's link to public opinion, as suggested by Lazarsfeld & Katz *two-step flow of
communication* (1955) and Bennett & Manheim's *one-step flow of communication* (2006)*,* the ability
to influence mass media itself become a valuable asset to anyone seeking to influence public opinion.
Trump seemingly defied logic when elected the 45th President of the United States despite 90% of
the overall reporting on him by ABC, CBS and NBC one year in to his presidency was negative
coverage according to a study conducted by the Media Research Center (Washington Times, 2018).
During his campaign, Trump received his most favorable coverage on Fox News, but even here, 73%
was negative (Patterson, 2016). Similarly, a Harvard professor of government and press notes how
"his coverage was negative from the start [of the general election] and never came close to entering
positive territory. (…) During his best weeks, the coverage ran 2-to-1 negative over positive. In his
worst weeks, the ratio was more than 1-to-10" (Washington Post, 2016). So how did Trump prevail

over this "bad" publicity, despite only spending slightly over half ($334.8 million) of what Clinton did ($623.1 million) on her campaign? An explanation for this could have something to do with the nearly $2 billion worth of "free" advertising he received from the media during his campaign (mediaQuant, 2016)[1]. Reading from these numbers, it could look like his negative media publicity, whether intended or otherwise, nonetheless may have directed voters towards him.

A study from the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public policy suggest exactly that. According to the author of the study, Thomas E. Patterson, "[t]he news is not about what's ordinary or expected. It's about what's new and different, better yet when laced with conflict and outrage. Trump delivered that type of material by the cart load" (Patterson, 2016). This statement aligns neatly with both Herman & Chomsky's idea of the mass media's need for a steady source for significant news, in this case Trump, and with the concept of a tabloidization of the news media. The study further highlights how since Watergate, scandals and cynicism in the media coverage of presidential nominees seems to have taken precedence over policy and healthy skepticism (Patterson, 2016)[2]. As a result of the skewed media bias, Perloff argues that "the media's persistent criticism of government reinforces the right wing's anti-government message," that results in the creation of "a seedbed of public anger, misperception, and anxiety" (Patterson, 2016), which can then be fruitfully exploited by politicians seeking to direct public dissatisfaction towards government.

While freedom of speech and a critical press acts as cornerstones in a liberal democracy (Perloff, 2018, p. 36-37), often exercised to uncover political ineptitude or wrongdoings in a constructive manner, there is a fine balance being skeptical and overly negative. Overt and incessant negativity and criticism may have erosive effects in regards to public trust in political leaders and institutions (Patterson, 2016). Furthermore, when everything is portrayed in a gloomy light, the liberal watchdog loses its bite. As Patterson notes: "When everything and everybody is portrayed as deeply flawed, there's no sense making distinctions on that score, which works to the advantage of those who are more deeply flawed" (Patterson, 2016). In this sense, it really did not matter that much whether the percentage of negative publicity on Trump was 90 percent or 73 percent; people did not care.

Trump clearly harnessed the potential of public skepticism in his campaign. One need not look far for examples of how he on several occasions has criticized previous political leaders, either in public appearances or on his personal Twitter account, in an attempt to resonate with public dissatisfaction (The Guardian, 2016). The clearest example of this is perhaps Trump's "make America great again"

---

[1] See Appendix 1
[2] See Appendix 2

slogan, which clearly indicates that current conditions are not as they should be, again appealing to dissatisfied members of the electorate (Journal Media, 2016). George Lakoff, the Director of the Center for the Neural Mind & Society and former Professor of Cognitive Science and Linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley, notes how Trump's 'unpolitical' appearance resonated with many dissatisfied conservatives. According to his studies, many of these had grown increasingly tired of what they call "political correctness" and public pressure against their conservative viewpoints, which they describe as limiting "free speech" (Lakoff G., 2016). Since 911, anti-Muslim attitudes had become both stronger and more common, and the election of Barack Hussein Obama caused outrage among many strictly conservative voters. According to Lakoff, they "(…) refused to see him as a legitimate American (…), much less as a legitimate authority, especially as his liberal views contradicted almost everything they believe as conservatives" (Lakoff G., 2016). Enter Donald Trump, whose rhetoric "with force, aggression, anger, and no shame (Lakoff G., 2016)" expressed everything they felt. They finally had a candidate they could simply just vote for with no need of expressing their 'politically incorrect' beliefs themselves as he served as their spearhead.

Discursively, Trump made it his craft to constructs simple, emotional points often in repetitive language (Conley, 2018, p. 38). These are well known tactics applied in marketing and advertising, and Lakoff even talks from a cognitive science perspective about how Trump applies these mechanisms to "use your brain against you" (Lakoff G., 2016). Trump is a prominent user of repetitions. Consider this: "Win. Win, Win. We're gonna win so much you'll get tired of winning" (Lakoff G., 2016), or: "To be honest, I inherited a mess. It's a mess. At home and abroad, a mess. I inherited a mess" (USA Today, 2017). According to Lakoff, words are linked to certain neurological circuits that helps determine meaning, and the more a word is heard amplifies these circuits, creating strong associations and make it stick in your memory (Lakoff G., 2016). Similar to advertising where this is used to sell products, Trump uses it to make you buy his ideas (USA Today, 2017). Other examples of repetition also include framing, such as framing Hillary Clinton as 'crooked' (The Guardian, 2016), which he spent a lot of time doing in various debates and interviews. Lakoff argues that this made a lot of people unconsciously think of her as someone who would commit deliberate crimes for her own gain, as a crook does. Although investigations into the alleged crimes of Hillary found nothing, the framing was still powerful (Lakoff G., 2016). Lakoff goes through a list of mechanisms regularly used by Trump that may be used to influence the subconscious of people. Aside from the examples above, this include mechanisms such as drawing on well-known examples, metaphors, specific use of grammar, and more (Lakoff G., 2016). Through these mechanisms and by

carefully incorporating his message into controversial bites irresistible to the mass media Trump saw his message echoed further and wider than his opponents.

In many ways. it seems that Trump was able to use the mass media to his advantage during the 2016 election. Whether this was purposefully orchestrated by him or a result of the workings of the mainstream media, or perhaps a combination of the two, is hard to say. However, as Patterson describes it: "The car wreck that was the 2016 election had many drivers. Journalists were not alone in the car, but their fingerprints were all over the wheel" (Patterson, 2016).

5.2 Political Actors and Marketing

From a political marketing perspective, the 2016 presidential election was one of the most interesting in US history. Observers are right when they talk about a change in the U.S. political landscape in recent years (Gillies, 2018, p. 2). One of the more prominent developments can be witnessed in the governing dynamics of public political communication and marketing, in that transformations in the structure and composition of what constitutes the 'mass media', alongside the fragmentation of communication channels and available political information, have changed the way individuals and organizations "(…) are exposed to, seek out and share information about, perceive, understand, and take part in US politics" (Raynauld & Turcotte, 2018, p. 28). Steadily, political actors have come to the realization that politics cannot be treated as an isolated concept separate from technological and societal changes. Philip Kotler's 1980 definition of marketing as "an exchange process between an organization and the environment in which a firm operates" (Kumar, Dhamija, & Dhamija, 2016, p. 116-117), prompted many political parties and leaders to view politics in the similar light. Although some traditional scholars of politics argued that politics would not succumb to marketing practices, due to the immaterial and uncommodifiable nature of political leaders and policies, the universal applicability of marketing have since announced its arrival (Kumar, Dhamija, & Dhamija, 2016, p. 117).

In marketing, strategy is key. It is all about identifying and satisfying customer needs, wants, and desires, and for an organization or business to figure out how their products may achieve that. In similar fashion, an election is very much based on the same principles; the candidate or party that can best identify the needs, wants, and desires of the electorate, and provide policies that addresses that, wins the election. According to Amit Kumar, Somesh Dhamija, & Aruna Dhamija, a "(...) strategy or tactic is something which is fundamental or basic in nature as it leads to formation of offerings based

on the inputs received from the customer" (Kumar, Dhamija, & Dhamija, 2016, p. 117). On the other hand there is the promotion of a product. This falls under marketing and also follows a strategy, but is more concerned with advertisement, i.e. increasing the visibility of a product. In terms of politics, this may include "(…) talk shows, rallies, road shows, various symbols, slogans, signages, and a host of other paraphernalia" (Kumar, Dhamija, & Dhamija, 2016, p. 117). These are largely concerned with the efforts of drawing attention to the choices a customer, or voter, has in terms of buying a product, or with trying to convince them to give it a try (Kumar, Dhamija, & Dhamija, 2016, p. 117).

For clarification purposes, this paper will adopt Bruce Newman's definition of political marketing as presented in his *Handbook of Political Marketing* (1999):

> "Political marketing is the application of marketing principles and procedures in political campaigns by various individuals and organizations. The procedures involved include the analysis, development, execution, and management of strategic campaign by candidates, political parties, governments, lobbyists and interest groups that seek to drive public opinion, advance their own ideologies, win elections, and pass legislation and referenda in response to the needs and wants of selected people and groups in society" (Kumar, Dhamija, & Dhamija, 2016, p. 120).

In this context, it may be noted that contemporary politics in many ways are understood to have become equally as concerned with understanding and segmenting the electorate in an effort to be elected, as to actually deliver on the promises put forth during a campaign (Kumar, Dhamija, & Dhamija, 2016, p. 117).

According to James Gillies, editor of the book *Political Marketing in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election* (2016), the election was in many ways a turning point for the conventional understanding of political marketing: "The 2016 American presidential election was a cataclysmic event, not just in terms of the surprise of Donald Trump's victory and the nationalism and populism at play in American politics, but also in how the election campaigns challenged conventional political marketing paradigms, theories and frameworks to the party-voter relationship, personal legitimacy, and political credibility, the brand 'promise' of candidates and the phenomenon of political outsider challenging the status quo" (Gillies, 2018, p. 2).

Trump made widespread use of modern marketing techniques in his campaign. So much in fact, that author and political observer Paul Waldman commenting how "Democrats don't have a policy

problem. They have a marketing problem" (The Week, 2017). Trying to go over Trump's marketing and advertising campaign in its entirety would simply be too extensive given the limitations of this research paper. Instead, I intend to focus on the most defining feature of his digital marketing campaign; the use of data and voter micro-targeting. Through this, I will try and highlight what made the 2016 election so unique seen from a political marketing point of view.

5.2.1 Trump, Political Marketing, and Voter-Segmentation

Alongside Trump's appearance in the mass media, the use of marketing strategies was probably one of the more interesting aspects of the 2016 U.S. presidential election. It challenged existing paradigms, of political marketing theories, understandings of the party-voter relationship, personal legitimacy and political credibility, stressing the need for further research within the field of political marketing and branding (Gillies, 2018, p. 2). The increase of digital channels for communication, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, have created new ways for candidates and voters to interact, forcing political actors to rethink the way they market political campaigns (Williams, 2017, p. 207). According to a Pew Research Center about where Americans got their information from on the 2016 presidential election, 44 percent of U.S. adults cited social media. In perspective, this is more than the percentage of candidate websites, emails, and local and national print newspapers combined. A further 24 percent of those who said they have received information from social media stated it to have come directly from posts by either Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump (Pew Research Center, 2016). In regards to followers, "Trump had almost 10 million Twitter Followers to Clinton's seven million, and his nine million Facebook followers were about double her number. In May of 2016, the Pew study found that candidates averaged five to seven posts per day on Facebook and 11 to 12 per day on their Twitter accounts" (Williams, 2017, p. 207). The re-tweet numbers of their top 100 tweets were 29,262 and 27,619 in favor of Trump (Galdieri, Lucas, & Sisco, 2018, p. 17). Through these numbers one can start to gauge the importance of social media and digital marketing in the 2016 presidential election.

When looking into Trump's online marketing campaign, one name seems to regularly come up; Brad Parscale, the founder of the Giles-Parscale agency and chief executive of Trump's digital marketing campaign (Digital Marketing Institute, 2019). The entire team working on Trump's digital campaign was operating out of San Antonio, with copywriters, web developers, data scientists, and more, all working under the same roof. In his presentation for Web Summit 2018, Parscale mentioned

how this was an important part of the success of their campaign. He mentions how for the first time in campaign history, all the different departments responsible for strategy and communication had been combined into one team:

> "As the data, and digital director, I was in charge of TV, the mail program, the phone program, the door-knocking program, the social media program, the advertising, the fundraising, and all of that from the centric view of digital and data. Now, the other campaign ran 'siloed' (referring to different departments operating independently of one another). I think that is a disadvantage, because they do not know what is happening, and it drives you to failure because the coms team goes one way, the mail team goes one way, the phone team goes another way, and the digital program goes another way" (Pascale, 2018).

What is important to note here is not so much the benefits from working under one roof as a combined team, but that he mentions how all their marketing efforts was driven forward by data.

One may look to Vincent Raynauld & André Turcotte for an understanding of why this may be considered an important and powerful strategy. What they argue is that the increased "(…) availability of large volumes of data on individual voters in the USA coupled with growing access to expertise and technical resources to process these data has impacted positively formal political players' ability to target specific segments of the electorate and to engage in direct marketing over the last decade" (Raynauld & Turcotte, 2018, p. 25). Interestingly, as they pointed out, the potential of data will only be realized through technical resources and qualified expertise. Before appointed CEO of Trump's digital campaign, Parscale had limited experience working with political campaigns, which meant that he approached the job as if it was a regular "business-to-consumer" campaign. In an interview he said the following: "I always wonder why people in politics act like this stuff is so mystical. It is the same [stuff] we use commercially, it just has fancier names" (Digital Marketing Institute, 2019). Given the spillover of conventional marketing techniques into politics, Trump was able to make use of the potential of data driven marketing by hiring someone with extensive knowledge within the field.

Many scholars have argued that the political landscape of the U.S. has seen an increasing fragmentation of communication channels and the breakdown of a commonly shared awareness and understanding of politics and other issues. According to Bruce Bimber, the results of this

fragmentation can be witnessed in three ways: "(1) the division of the public's political action across more 'channels' and consequent reduction of exposure to common political messages, (2) the ability of individuals to self-select and segregate themselves communicatively into myriad, homogenous in-groups, (3) decreased capacity of political insiders to design and dictate a broadly accepted agenda to the general public" (Raynauld & Turcotte, 2018, p. 14). While Bimber, among others, argue that fragmentation have hindered the capacity for political insiders to broadly influence the general public, it is also worth noting how the fragmentation have created new opportunities to utilize new marketing tactics tailored for targeting "smaller and more homogeneous audiences that can be reached through specific media channels, especially with the emergence and sophistication of voter identification and targeting techniques (Raynauld & Turcotte, 2018, p. 15)".

One concrete example of this can be found when looking at the Trump campaign's initial use of a Facebook tool called "Lookalike Audiences", which caption reads: "Reach new people who are likely to be interested in your business because they're similar to your best existing customers" (Facebook, 2019). By locating existing Trump supporters through their names on Facebook, the campaign set out to target other members of the electorate who had things in common with them, such as shared interest or demographics (Digital Marketing Institute, 2019). Parscale later stated how these lookalike audiences were crucial to the success of the campaign, sinking millions of dollars into Facebook ads (Digital Marketing Institute, 2019). The team also generated more than 100,000 pieces of unique content to share with different people depending on their segmentation. As he explained it:

> "What we found in the data was, [that] there was people in America that was hurting. There were people in America that felt left behind. There were people in America that felt that their infrastructure was crumbling. We found people in America that wanted change. They were sick of the status quo. Whatever people want to believe, (…) America is a very diverse country, and what we understood from the data was, [that] they had real human needs. And Mr. Trump had a message that resonated with them. (…) We created tens-of-thousands pieces of content to each of the different messages [that Trump wanted to give to those people], we had to do it for raising money, for getting people to show up, and to vote. (…) If I am going to take Mr. Trump's message of infrastructure, I cannot show that to a person in a city that does not care about that, or a person that is not sure about that. I want to show them something that is related to *them* (…) I need to show them a piece that makes them feel emotion" (Pascale, 2018).

This form of data-driven micro-targeting of voters, defined as "the process of subsetting an electorate according to politically salient characteristics and reaching out to groups that comprise high concentration of receptive voters" (Raynauld & Turcotte, 2018), largely enabled by the fragmentation of communication channels and social groupings, was prominently used throughout the Trump campaign (Digital Marketing Institute, 2019), and is normal practice in traditional marketing campaigns (Kumar, Dhamija, & Dhamija, 2016, p. 117).

In comparison with the Clinton campaign, Trump relied heavily on the use of data in his marketing, especially on "psychographic" profiles of potential supporters (Conley, 2018, p. 38). Despite publicly downplaying the effects and value of so called 'big data', a continuous refinement of his data use took place throughout his campaign. By the end of the summer, his marketing team was spending "at least $100,000 a week on polling, and would, in September alone, spend five million dollars to retain the services of the then little-known data analytics firm Cambridge Analytica" (Conley, 2018, p. 38). What the data did for the Trump campaign, and particularly the highly diverse data from Cambridge Analytica, was enabling him to swiftly and accurately identify the individual voters who was most likely to be receptive to his messaging (Conley, 2018, p. 38-39).

With the support of Cambridge Analytica, the campaign scaled up their data-based activities. They started utilizing more data-driven marketing features including "Facebook's 'brand-lift' functions to assess the recall rate of ads, and programs like 'Deep Root,' which as Jamel Toppin explains, informed the campaign's 'scaled-back TV ad spending by identifying shows popular with specific voter blocks in specific regions'" (Conley, 2018, p. 39). The campaign also got a custom "geo-location tool" made, which "plotted the location density of about 20 voter types over a live Google Maps interface" (Conley, 2018, p. 39). Included in this tool was a data "dashboard", that allowed for the digital marketing team to interpret the data of 220 million U.S. individuals. All of this with a user-friendly interface designed and built by the Cambridge Analytica team (Conley, 2018, p. 39). The use of data got to play such an important role to the Trump campaign that, as Conley describes it, "by election eve, data were shaping every major decision made by the campaign, from how it raised money to where Trump held his rallies" (Conley, 2018, p. 39).

Prior to the election the Trump campaign had identified various contextual factors that made it possible for him to succeed. The most important one continues to be the high level of public dissatisfaction with status quo in the U.S., including a distrust in, and hostility towards, the overly 'professional' political elite in the country and the traditional media. Trump made the most of his

outsider role as a successful businessman, compared to, as he described it, the "elitist" politicians, who in many ways had given up on America's working class, and caused economic turmoil within the country (Raynauld & Turcotte, 2018, p. 12). Simultaneously, his xenophobic utterances resonated with the targeted voter's anti-Muslim attitudes in the wake of 911. As Conley experiences it, the combination of existing conditions and Trump's use of data made for a presidential campaign that "highlighted just how eager Trump was to indulge in rumor, falsehood and outright discrimination if that was where elements within his targeted segments were in their thinking" (Conley, 2018, p. 39-40). A lot can be said about Trump's campaign during the 2016 presidential election but, in a political marketing perspective, the election will most likely have far-reaching effects on political marketing and branding given the extent to which voter targeting techniques played a crucial role in both the campaign strategies of Republicans and Democrats (Gillies, 2018, p. 2).

5.3 Political Actors as Opinion Leaders

Looking back over time, presidential candidates have a history of using new technology as political weapons. Take for example Franklin Roosevelt's use of radio, John F. Kennedy and Ronald Regan's use of the visual component of television, and John McCain and Howard Dean experimented with small-donor fundraising through online channels (Galdieri, Lucas, & Sisco, 2018, p. 1-2). More recently, Barack Obama revamped voter contact through the internet with the clever use of social media during and after his campaign as the first president to make use of Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram (The Atlantic, 2017). Following the 2016 election, we must now also consider Donald Trump as the latest addition to this list. More specifically, with his use of the social networking platform 'Twitter', Trump regularly shared his thoughts with the world in short messages restricted to 140-characters known as "tweets". According to some scholars, his presence and use of the platform was so effective that it should be considered as "crucial to his political rise and his unlikely victory in the 2016 presidential election" (Galdieri, Lucas, & Sisco, 2018, p. 2). However, before venturing into the rabbit hole that is "Trump and Twitter", I intend to start with a discussion of how Lazarsfeld's concepts of 'opinion leaders' should be understood in an online setting, and indeed by this paper.

5.3.1 Online Opinion Leaders

Although all of the above seems to follow the proposed one-step flow of communication model of Bennett & Manheim, the direct role played by opinion leaders in an online political communication setting seems overlooked by them. Therefore, I intend to dedicate this section to argue the continued relevance of this concept in an online communication environment.

Originally, Lazarsfeld & Katz defined opinion leaders as the more active members of society who follow the media more closely, either with formal or informal authority, and with the common characteristic of having relevant expertise or specialized interest (SAGE reference, 2013). According to a study from the Institute of Policy Management from the Chinese Academy of Science in Beijing, published in *Active Media Technology* (2012) these opinion leaders exists in online networks as well. Through a combination of content analysis and social network analysis, they conclude that "opinion leaders on the internet play an important role in prompting the formation of online public opinion, which can influence the direction of public opinion" (Ning, Yijun, Ruya, & Qianqian, 2012, p. 483). The study proposes several attributes for the identification of an online network opinion leader. According to the authors, these follow many of the same characteristics as highlighted by Lazarsfeld & Katz, and include things such as how much activity he/she generates in terms of the sheer number of posts and replies, how many views or overall attention a post get, and how well-connected the person is (Ning, Yijun, Ruya, & Qianqian, 2012, p. 484). In a similar vein to Lazarsfeld & Katz, the bottom line that determines the power of an opinion leader is how far they can spread a message or opinion through their network and how many lesser active members of society they are able to influence (SAGE reference, 2011).

From a marketing point of view, online social networks have become an important point of intersection between customer communication, brand identity and promotion due to its capacity to enhance, facilitate and influence "buyer-seller" relationships. Today, many purchases are prompted by social media including sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to name a few (Haron & Ramli, 2016, p. 1). As covered above, a similar understanding has found its way into the realm of politics. Therefore, it would also make sense to think of an opinion leader in the flow of online political communication in a way closer related to its definition within marketing. In marketing, an opinion leader is understood as "(…) an individual who is involved in products or services or brand name" (Haron & Ramli, 2016, p. 1), and who are able to either influence or manipulate consumers' decision making. According to a study on opinion leaders and their influence on purchase intentions, the online opinion leader is less researched but seem to be very important in affecting purchasing

behavior because social media networks have enabled them to be both more interactive while also appearing more real and sincere (Haron & Ramli, 2016, p. 2). That is, online social networks have in many ways helped bridged the "professional" gap between seller and buyer, or, candidate and voter. In this section, I will argue Trump's position as an opinion leader as exemplified by his use of Twitter.

5.3.2 Trump as Opinion Leader

Trump was not the first politician to tweet his mind on Twitter, and nor will he be the last. Twitter has in many ways become equally as important for a presidential candidate as a Facebook page, web site, television ads, and campaign volunteers (Galdieri, Lucas, & Sisco, 2018, p. 2). However, the manner in which Trump has used the platform is unique. His presence on Twitter documents his road from real estate mogul, to reality show host, before entering the political debate with inappropriate conspiracies about President Obama and his birthplace, and thoughts on other political developments (Galdieri, Lucas, & Sisco, 2018, p. 2). According to Christopher Galdieri, Jennifer Lucas & Tauna Sisco, authors of *The Role of Twitter in the 2016 US Election* (2018), "Twitter has been such an important part of Trump's political persona for so long that we risk forgetting how unusual it is, just as many Americans may rarely stop and consider how bizarre it is that Donald Trump, object of endless New York tabloid newspaper coverage and *spy* magazine parodies when entered the national conversation in the 1980s, now occupies the White House" (Galdieri, Lucas, & Sisco, 2018, p. 2).

The reason I argue for the relevance of the opinion leader concept stems from the fact that it is highly relevant to contemporary marketing practitioners, and given the spillover of marketing practices into politics, the concepts may, at least to some extent, also be relevant in an online political communication setting. As noted in the theory section, there seem to be a grey area in defining opinion leaders, which makes is hard to empirically conclude why Trump should be considered as such. However, if an online opinion leader is identified in a similar vein as an offline opinion leader, as alluded to by Ning et al., coupled with the marketing understanding of someone who are able to either influence or manipulate voters decision making, one would assume that the authority that comes with being the President of the United States of America would, if anything, warrant that title. Even before elected president, Trump would have had enough weight to his name to be considered an opinion leader, with the status of a multi-millionaire real-estate developer, businessman and reality-tv star in his own show *The Apprentice* (Britannica, 2019).

During his campaign, Trump had already established a very large network of followers online. In the 2nd Presidential debate, he said so himself: "Now, tweeting happens to be a modern-day form of communication. You can like it or not. Between Facebook and Twitter, I have 25 million people. It's a very effective way of communication" (Galdieri, Lucas, & Sisco, 2018, p. 8). This size following allows him to influence the "feeds" of millions of people at the click of a button, ultimately leveraging his power and status as an opinion leader in an attempt to influence the online information environment of online individuals through his social media presence (Galdieri, Lucas, & Sisco, 2018, p. 99).

Most voters will never meet a presidential candidate, however, in a modern digital environment, the everyday individual is able to get more "personal" with politicians through social media sites (Galdieri, Lucas, & Sisco, 2018, p. 98). Through their personal social media accounts, they are able to bridge the professional gab between politicians, providing an alternative way to influence the public perception of them compared to the traditional media portrayals (Galdieri, Lucas, & Sisco, 2018, p. 98-99). Evidently, Trump often used his personal Twitter account for various purposes during his campaign. However, if you thought he was alone at the keyboard, you would be wrong. The digital director of the Trump campaign, Brad Parscale, was allowed to tweet from his personal Twitter account (Digital Marketing Institute, 2019). Talking on how a matrix calendar is important in the flow of data and the creation of content, Parscale says: "We also use this on debate-nights, (...) as a lot of people know, I actually Tweeted as Mr. Trump on debate-nights, and having the matrix calendar of all the content strategies, so I did not have to make up one hundred tweets every 90 seconds was very helpful" (Pascale, 2018). In this sense, Trump's personal Twitter account was an important tool in their marketing efforts, with the campaign having pre-made content strategies available so that they could immediately cater to the online twitter environment (Pascale, 2018) based on where targeted segments were in their thinking at any given time (Conley, 2018, p. 39-40). As Parscale describes it, one of their strategies was to make use of his personal Twitter during debates, where his opponent(s), for obvious reasons, was not able to respond. Indeed, this seemed to be a prominent theme for the overall 2016 election. In Trump's case, the use of personal twitter accounts and other social media channels afforded the opportunity to communicate freely with his supporters, often attacking his opponents without the risk of being scrutinized himself (Conley, 2018, p. 38).

Additionally, Trump's use of twitter was also a means of setting the agenda. There is a major focus from scholars of political communication on social media's agenda setting capabilities (Perry & Joyce, 2018, p. 64), and his tweets in the early-morning (or late-night) often influenced the content,

and set the stage, for the morning news cycle (Galdieri, Lucas, & Sisco, 2018). As I touched upon in the section covering Trump and the mass media, Trump blew the Clinton campaign out of the water in terms of "free" advertising. In many ways, the change in how journalist view social media, "(…) to the point where many reports see Twitter as 'the new AP wire'" (Gandberg-Rademacker & Parsneau, 2018, p. 22), coupled with Trump's attention-grabbing use of twitter generated much of this "free" coverage (Gandberg-Rademacker & Parsneau, 2018, p. 23). Combined, Trump's use of twitter may be said to constitute an interesting hybrid role of both opinion leader and agenda-setter, which I will go further into detail with in the upcoming section.

5.4 The Flow of Online Political Communication

Having looked at some of the different aspects of online political communication during the 2016 presidential election, I find that the *one-step flow* and *two-step flow of communication* models are to some extent each capable of explaining different aspects of the flow of contemporary online political communication. While Lazarsfeld & Katz's *two-step flow* of communication may be considered both simplistic and outdated by many (Bennett & Manheim, 2006, p. 217), Bennett & Manheim's one-step flow of communication seems to overlook some important factors, at least when trying to implement it in an online political communication setting. What I intend to argue is that it is only when combining aspects of the two models with each other while drawing in concepts from traditional marketing practices that one can fully understand the flow of contemporary online political communication. Before explaining it, I intend to present a new model for the understanding of contemporary online political flow of communication. The model can also be found in the appendix. On the basis of what I have looked at throughout this research paper, this is the model I propose:
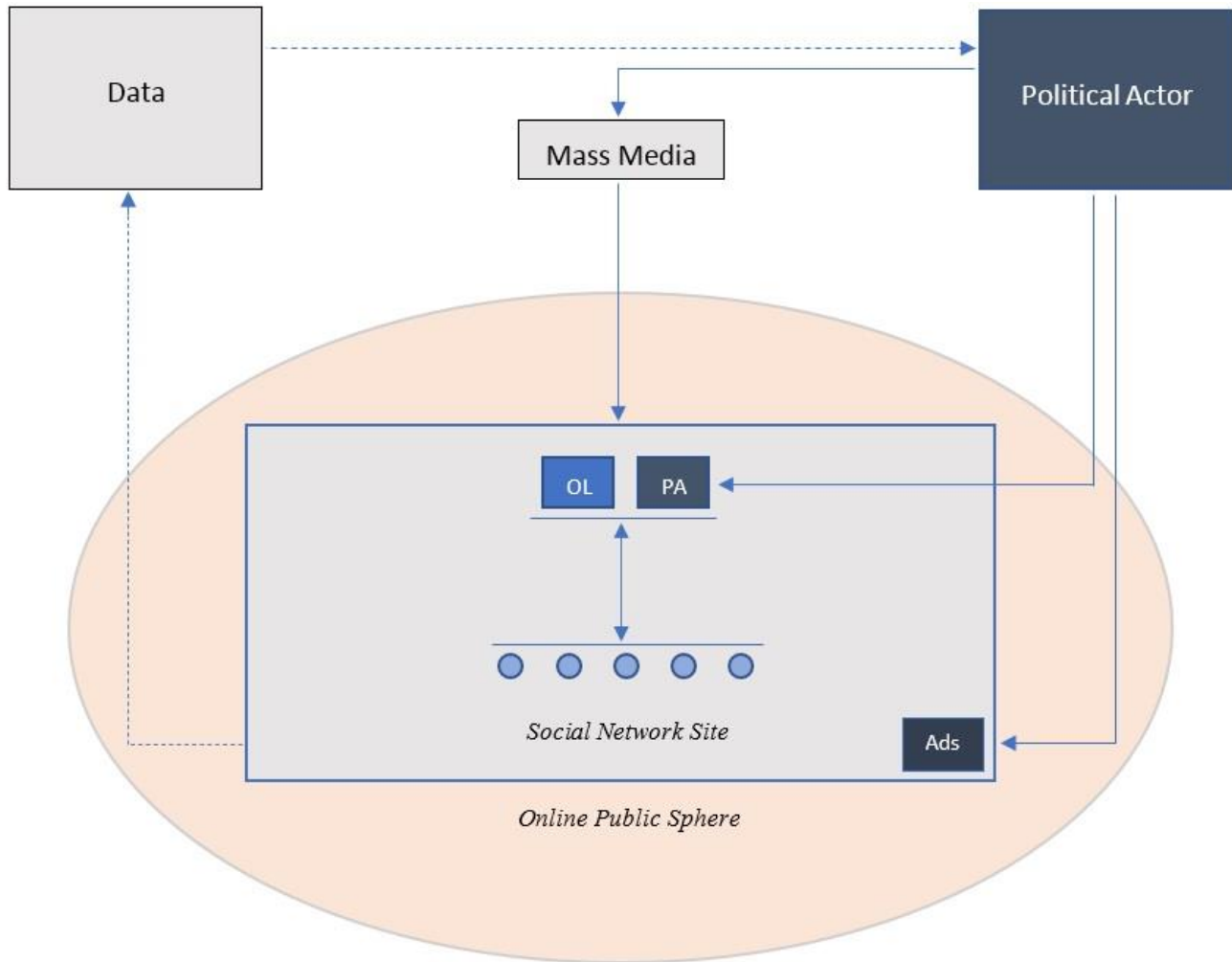
As explained in the analysis, there are at least three ways for a political actor to attempt to influence online public opinion. These include the use of mass media for the spread of information in an online social network environment, political actors as online opinion leaders, and political advertising and marketing. As some of these are either intertwined or have various steps and facilitating circumstances in common, I intend to clarify in the following section. I will go over these in the same order as covered in the preceding analysis.

5.4.1 From Political Actor, to Mass Media, to Social Network

As covered in the first section on political actors and the mass media, I noted how modern mass media are "drawn into a symbiotic relationship with powerful sources of information by economic necessity

and reciprocity of interest" (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). What this essentially means is that these powerful sources of information are able to use the mass media to get a message out, partly because the rise of modern technology has resulted in a situation where most news outlets need to adapt to an around-the-clock news cycle, and thus need a reliable and credible source of information such as a political actor (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). This flow of communication, from political actor to mass media, exists both online and offline in the form of online news material or as analog sources of news such as TV or print newspapers. However, due to the number of people with an online presence, the news media are increasingly focusing on their online efforts.

In recent years, we have experienced a development facilitated by various technological advancements that has resulted in more people getting their news from online sources, including social network sites. According to a 2018 study from Pew Research Center, one-in-five U.S. adults explain how "they often get news via social media" (Pew Research Center, 2018), and 33 percent say the same about news websites. What is more, the age group covering U.S. individuals aged 18-29, 36 percent cite social media as their most favorable source of news, with offline news sources such as TV, radio, and print only accounting for a combined 21 percent (Pew Research Center, 2018). As a steady source of information, Trump was able to get his message out into the mass media, who then helped disperse this to online platforms. As such, these dynamics and developments account for the first flow of the model; the flow from political actor, to mass media, and to social media networks. I will go into more detail with how this information disperses and reaches individuals through "feeds" within a social network once I get to the concept of opinion leading.

5.4.2 Political Advertising, Marketing, and Social Networks

In regards to political advertising and marketing, I found that Trump relied heavily on data in his campaign efforts. In fact, the use of data was not just restricted to advertising, but acted as a general influencer of all his political communication. That is, it simultaneously acted as a way of gathering preliminary information on the electorate to construct an overall communication strategy, carrying out micro-segmentation to most effectively target individuals, and as a constant feedback loop that provided information on how the general strategy was panning out, and what, if any, adjustments were necessary to optimize the communication efforts (Pascale, 2018). Data was influencing both online and offline decision-making. As Conley describes it: "By election eve, data were shaping every

major decision made by the campaign, from how it raised money, to where Trump held his rallies"
(Conley, 2018, p. 39).

This form of one-to-one communication, largely enabled by developments in digital technology
and the subsequent fragmentation of communication channels, is something that is explained very
well by Bennett & Manheim's *one-step flow* model. Indeed, their notions of how location, social
status and personality in a one-step flow of communication can be used to appeal to the core emotions
and personal identity of the individual audience member seems very relevant for the understanding
of the flow of online political communication. Similar to what we saw in the Trump campaign where
most major decision and communication efforts was controlled by data, Bennett & Manheim argues
that the current practices of a one-step flow "(…) favors a top-down, war room, strategic control
relationship between client and target audience (Bennett & Manheim, 2006, p. 227)".

In the model, this overall influence of data is represented by the dotted arrow that runs from the
'online social network', to the data 'company', and back to the political actor. More specifically, it
represents the flow of 'information' rather than the flow of 'communication'. Through this, a
feedback loop is created that encapsulates how data continuously influenced Trump's online
communication efforts throughout the campaign. As the arrows from the 'political actor' indicates,
this includes how he communicated with the mass media, how he communicated as an opinion leader
on social media including Twitter, and directly determined the different and diverse online advertising
efforts each micro-segment was subject to.

5.4.3 Political Actors as Online Opinion Leaders

Where this model probably differentiates itself the most from the proposed one-step flow of Bennett
& Manheim is in regards to the value attributed to opinion leaders. An interesting thing happens with
Lazarsfeld & Katz's original concept when attempting to plot it into a model concerned with online
communication. Lazarsfeld & Katz's concept of opinion leaders were to be understood in an "offline"
setting. To them, opinion leaders were the people that obtained information from conventional mass
media outlets, such as radio or tv, before interpreting and distributing it to a broader audience.
According to Lazarsfeld & Katz, this process mainly took place either through formal or informal
interpersonal relationships such as those between co-workers or family (SAGE reference, 2011).

Scholars now point to how these "offline" relationships and settings essential for the spread of information by traditional opinion leaders have largely been replaced by social media networks (Ning, Yijun, Ruya, & Qianqian, 2012). This is not to say that offline opinion leading has completely disappeared, but merely refers to an overall tendency of people receiving more and more information through digital channels as I also touched upon above. In regards to the 2016 election, only 57 percent of the voters relied on television as their primary source for information, a number that has been decreasing over the years. Contrastingly, 38 percent of the US electorate mentioned online sources (websites, social media, and apps) as their main source of information. Unsurprisingly, this number amounts to over 50 percent for younger people between the ages of 18 and 49 (Galdieri, Lucas, & Sisco, 2018, p. 99). This does not resonate with Lazarsfeld & Katz idea of a two-step flow involving the analog mass media as the overshadowing disseminator of information and local opinion leaders as distributors hereof to the wider public (SAGE reference, 2011).

In this sense, Bennett & Manheim are correct when arguing that we to some extent have gone from a one-to-many to a one-to-one model of communication. Trying to encapsulate the effects of digitalization and the resulting crystallization of communication in a modern communication landscape, Bennett & Manheim's one-step flow shifted the focus from a model that relied on opinion leaders to a model focused on the influence of a much more direct form of communication. According to this model, public communication is largely characterized by an audience that is subject to elaborate targeting of direct messages by actors capable of doing so (Bennett & Manheim, 2006, p. 213). This shift largely bypasses the traditional opinion leader by ascribing more power to various social actors capable of utilizing the personal data of individuals and fragmented communication channels and online social networks to tailor messages directly to the individual (Bennett & Manheim, 2006, p. 216), as exemplified by a political actor in the model above.

It is clear that the communication environment in which candidates compete for voter attention has changed drastically in recent years. However, the one-step model seems to come short in terms of acknowledging the importance of "online" opinion leaders that, although under different circumstances, serves a similar purpose as the opinion leaders described by Lazarsfeld. The "physical" setting for the spread of information and influencing of opinion may have changed, but the opinion leaders, described by Lazarsfeld as people with either formal or informal authority and with the common characteristic of having relevant expertise or specialized interest (SAGE reference, 2013), still exists online. According to recent studies, online social networks should to a large extent

be thought of as extended local networks (Hung & Calderón), meaning that a person with authority and influence "offline" often has similar status "online".

What primarily has changed, is the fact that individual citizens have gained more influence over the "information ecology" through the power and choice that comes with the ability to customize one's social media profile through post, repost, links etc. (Galdieri, Lucas, & Sisco, 2018, p. 99) This means that the information one receives through one's "feed", e.g. the timeline on Facebook, depends on the people in one's network and what they choose to share, or repost in the case of Twitter. As a result, there are as many different "feeds" as there are individual users, essentially turning the individual citizen into a gatekeeper of information (Galdieri, Lucas, & Sisco, 2018, p. 99). In many ways, this form of many-to-many communication (Jensen, 2009) have ended the overwhelmingly unidirectional flow of communication as understood by Lazarsfeld & Katz, and to a lesser extent also Bennett & Manheim.

What I argue in this research paper is that the opinion leader concept is still relevant to the flow of modern online political communication. However, the concepts should not be understood in Lazarsfeld & Katz's terms, but, given the spill over of marketing practices into politics, in terms closer related to the understanding of the concept within marketing. Here, an opinion leader is understood as "(…) an individual who is involved in products or services or brand name" (Haron & Ramli, 2016, p. 1), and who are able to either influence or manipulate consumers' decision making (Haron & Ramli, 2016, p. 2). In many ways, a politician communicating from a personal social media account opens for interaction between them and the voters, ultimately bridging the professional gap between them and the electorate by appearing more approachable and personal, making their opinions and messages seem much more real, and sincere (Haron & Ramli, 2016, p. 2).

Besides Trump's use of Twitter, another great example can be found when looking at how, the now Danish Prime Minister, Mette Frederiksen, used this in her campaign during the 2019 election in Denmark. Frederiksen had to cancel a debate with her direct opponent due to a suspected food poisoning, and turned to her personal Facebook-page to give an explanation. Here, she posted a 9-minute video explaining herself and her situation while sitting in her at home at her kitchen table, wearing a white knitted turtleneck sweatshirt, obviously looking under the weather (TV2, 2019).

I argue that Bennett & Manheim's model is not sufficient in terms of accounting for the potential influence of opinion leaders in the online flow of political communication. Although Lazarsfeld & Katz old idea of opinion leadership is perhaps outdated, at least in an online setting, the way in which political leaders are able to position themselves as opinion leaders through their personal social media

profiles definitely seems relevant to the understanding of the flow of online political communication. In an online social network setting where each individual to some extent can be thought of as a gatekeeper of information in that what they choose to share, like, or re-post, whether it originates from the news media, directly from a political actor or otherwise, influence the feeds of their network. In this regard, Lazarsfeld & Katz's idea of the opinion leader indeed seems outdated. However, drawing on the marketing concept, the size of the following of many current political leaders allows them to influence the "feeds" of large numbers of people at the click of a button. By doing so, they leverage their power and status as an opinion leader in an attempt to influence the online information environment of online individuals through their social media presence (Galdieri, Lucas, & Sisco, 2018, p. 99), ultimately playing "(…) an important role in prompting the formation of online public opinion, which can influence the direction of public opinion" (Ning, Yijun, Ruya, & Qianqian, 2012, p. 483).

Therefore, the model I suggest above have put a political actor on the same level as an opinion leader, as they themselves may take on the form of one within the setting of an online social network. The arrows flowing from the audience (the blue dots in the bottom of the 'social network site'-box) to the opinion leaders accounts for the interactive nature of social media, where people can either comment, like, share, re-post, and so on, or write directly to the opinion leaders profile. This interactive nature is important in that it allows for an opinion leader to engage in communicative actions with their audience, be it discussion, deliberation, or persuasion.

5.5 Democratic Considerations

With critical theory and its normative understanding of research as a contributor to human emancipation as my ontology, it makes sense to broaden out this research and highlight its societal relevance. More specifically, critical theory seeks "(…) to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers" (Horkheimer, 1972, p. 246) of human beings. In this sense, it "provides the descriptive and normative bases for social inquiry aimed at decreasing domination and increasing freedom in all their forms" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005). As such, this section will engage in a shorter discussion about the democratic implications of contemporary political communication based on the analysis of this research paper.

5.5.1 The Online Public Sphere and Public Opinion

As you may have noticed, there is one part of the model I have yet to talk about: The light-orange oval around the 'online social network' box, entitled the 'online public sphere'. Including this in the model allows for an interesting discussion, which I will engage in shortly. Firstly, however, I intend to briefly go over Habermas' original concept of the public sphere as an ideal type before presenting the argument for how online social networks may be considered a 'public sphere' in its own right.

As a central concept in democracy, Habermas' defines a public sphere as a "place where private people come together as a public for the purpose of using reason to further critical knowledge which, in turn, leads to political change" (Kruse & Norris, 2018, p. 62). Additionally, the ideal of a public sphere stresses the importance of 1) free access to information, 2) equal and safe participation, and 3) no outside institutional influence (Kruse & Norris, 2018, p. 63). In line with his roots in critical theory, Habermas understands the public sphere as a normative concept currently unfulfilled due to the influence of profit seeking corporate interests in modernity which has restricted the fulfillment of these criteria. However, Habermas argues that this may be overcome through 'speech communities' where coercive discourse is replaced by "respectful and open communication without intimidation" with a common and constructive purpose. Overall, a healthy public sphere should be considered integral to a healthy participatory democracy (Kruse & Norris, 2018, p. 63).

The argument for online social networks as a public sphere arises from its potential to comply with the aforementioned criteria. Its structure provides widespread and free access to information, while promoting equal and protected participation. Facebook are probably the first of such sites that comes to mind, having 43.3 percent of the world's Internet users as members while being completely free, only requiring Internet access and an e-mail address to participate (Kruse & Norris, 2018, p. 63). Furthermore, given the universal accessibility to the Internet, anyone can contribute to the distribution of information, which, in theory, makes "(…) participation and information acquisition free from outside influence" (Kruse & Norris, 2018, p. 63). According to some scholars, this enables people to freely "challenge discourses, share alternative perspectives and publish their own opinions", while granting "the networked population (…) greater access to information, more opportunities to engage in public speech, and an enhanced ability to undertake collective action" (Kruse & Norris, 2018, p. 63). In general, it may be argued that online social networking sites in many ways have "revitalized the public sphere" (Kruse & Norris, 2018, p. 63). It is with this in mind that the concept of an online public sphere has been implemented into the model, as it may facilitate the discussion of how practices of contemporary online political communication interacts with democracy.

What is more, the concept of a public sphere is directly tied to public opinion. According to Nancy Fraser, the public sphere can be understood as "(…) a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk" (Fraser, 1990, p. 57), constituting, according to Robert Asen, "(…) a realm of social life in which public opinion can be formed" (Asen, 1999, p. 117). As I presented in the theoretical framework, public opinion is a central concept in politics because it, in theory, should be able to influence policy making and hold political leaders in check, as political leaders use it to guide the direction of political initiatives (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 3). Hence, given the public sphere is where the formation of public opinion occurs, the concept becomes additionally relevant in a discussion about online political communication and democracy.

5.5.2 Digital Technology, Political communication, and Democracy

What the case of Trump's 2016 presidential election campaign shows, is that the political landscape is rapidly changing alongside the evolution of digital technologies. The Internet has created endless new avenues for parties to promote themselves through storytelling of hope and salvation, and humiliation and perdition, that appeals to the core emotions of the voters. What is more, the fragmentation of communication channels in an online environment has enabled these messages to be catered to the very individual through an ongoing micro-segmentation of the electorate largely facilitated by the acquisition and incorporation of increasingly detailed personal data of individuals into campaign strategies. By incorporating the concepts of an online public sphere into the model documenting the flow of online political communication, one is able to see how contemporary political communication practices may interplay with normative theories of democracy. As a liberal democracy (Galston, 2018), and as the setting for the case analyzed in this research paper, I will focus the discussion of the pros and cons of the role played by digital technology in contemporary political communication in the U.S. with the normative theory of liberal democracy as the backdrop.

As summarized by the model, advancement in digital technology has changed the way political communication works. We see how the flow of communication in a modern environment is radically different from the *two-step flow* model originally proposed by Lazarsfeld & Katz, while Bennett & Manheim's model seems insufficient in explaining certain aspects of the flow of online political communication. As covered, this primarily has to do with the opinion leader concept. Considering this as a component of the flow of online political communication involves considering the ability of

political actors to participate in peer-to-peer interactions in a modern media environment. According to the normative theory of liberal democracy, this has the potential to be a good thing in that it enables political actors to communicate more freely, while fertilizes the marketplace of ideas by bringing qualified political viewpoints to the public debate (Perloff, 2018, p. 37). While the flows of my model do not account for this, there is an argument to be made that communication is also flowing from the public sphere to political actors, increasing the possibilities for public political influence. This includes the interaction with political actor's personal profiles on networking sites, which has decreased the professional gap as it allows for greater interaction between them and civil society. Furthermore, online social networks have made the ideas and discussions that exists within the public sphere more visible while increasing access to information. This means that the media have an easier time picking up on public dissatisfaction, political malpractices, ultimately strengthening the liberal watchdog.

However, as we see from the overall model, the communication is primarily flowing in one direction: From the political actor and into the online public sphere. Overall, this paints a picture of how political actors are primarily able to influence the online public sphere, not vice versa. As anyone within an online public sphere, a political actor may contribute to the information environment in which opinions are formed. However, through data and "smart targeting" of individuals, political actors are to some extent short-circuiting political information through the information environment in an attempt to directly influence individual voter decision and public discourse. This conflicts with two of Habermas' normative criteria for a healthy public sphere. Firstly, that the public sphere should encourage and support equal participation, and secondly, that the public sphere should be free from outside institutional influence (Kruse & Norris, 2018, p. 63.). Given that online political communication seems to conflict with the realization of the normative ideal of the public sphere, I argue that one must adopt a critical stance in regards to contemporary practices of political communication and its effect on democracy.

As Michael Walzer also suggests, a problem arises when it is the actor within the marketplace of ideas who is the most persuasive that prevails in a liberal democracy. Similar to what we have seen in Trump's rhetoric, Walzer states that it is often the arguments that are constructed to scare people who come across as particularly persuasive, and even more so when these are purposefully tailored appeal directly to the core emotions of individuals on the basis of psychographic profiling and micro-segmentation (Benhabib, 1996, p. 50). More specifically, Trump widely engaged in such arguments, drawing on xenophobic and hateful rhetoric directed towards, but not limited to, Obama, Clinton, and

U.S. immigrants. Here, particularly the Hispanic population was subject to hateful rhetoric, largely being the primary cause for Trump to begin the construction of his infamous border wall (BBC, 2019). As summarized by the model, his controversial arguments reach online social networks primarily through the mass media, advertising, and his personal social media outlets through which he seeks to influence the debate and information environment of the online public sphere in an effort to sway public opinion in his favor.

Another consideration is that digital media may be utilized by various powerful actors to subvert the principles of liberal democracy (Oxford Brookes University, 2019). This becomes even more relevant in a liberal democracy like the U.S., where all arguments are not equal given that "[in] a nation where money buys access (…) the arguments that carry the greatest weight with most people may be those formulated and delivered by the wealthiest few" (Perloff, 2018, p. 38). In the analysis we saw how Trump, with the help of Cambridge Analytica, "smart targeted" political messages to micro-segments of the electorate based on data primarily collected from online social networks, where Facebook was the biggest contributor (DR Nyheder, 2018). The services of Cambridge Analytica did not come for free but charged the Trump campaign millions of dollars for its activities related to the 2016 U.S election (Opensecrets, 2018). This is also a testament to how the public sphere is neither free from institutional influence, nor an equal setting for public deliberation, as Habermas' normative ideal prescribes. Instead, this paints a picture of how those with wealth and power are able to successfully utilize expensive data to maximize their persuasion effort in an attempt to influence public opinion. Therefore, if powerful political actors with the intent to "rally support for populist and demagogic causes" (Oxford Brookes University, 2019) are fueled by "big money", they could pose a serious threat to democracy (Oxford Brookes University, 2019).

From a deliberative democratic standpoint, the spillover of marketing practices into political communication is a testament to what they understand as a fault in the liberal democratic model. From this point of view, contemporary practice has resulted in a situation where voters are degraded to consumers of different political brands, rather than active citizens whose participation in politics should make out the fabric of democratic government (Perloff, 2018, p. 38). Furthermore, deliberative democratic theorists are proponents of a vibrant public sphere, where ideas, opinions, collective problems and solutions are discussed in a constructive manner (Perloff, 2018, p. 39). While the Internet certainly provides new avenues for this, one may argue that the marketing practice of trying to "push a political brand" to market is interfering with this, as well as the ideal of the public sphere, when the product that is pushed is ideas and information tailored to change political beliefs. As

Bimber and others note, the fragmentation of communication channels in the wake of the evolution of digital technology may at first glance seem as an obstacle for political leaders to influence public perception. However, it should also be considered that the very same fragmentation also have presented new opportunities to engage in marketing practices tailored for reaching "smaller and more homogeneous audiences (…) through specific media channels, especially with the emergence and sophistication of voter identification and targeting techniques" (Raynauld & Turcotte, 2018, p. 15).

Conclusively, I intend to stress that this research is not to be understood as a general critique of the implementation of digital technology or use of data in political communication or politics at large. I merely seek to argue that digital technology is a double-edged sword in terms of its applicability in politics and subsequent influence on democracy. It has provided us with very power tools, and it is up to us to use them for the common good. Especially data, referred to by some scholars "as the new oil" (Affelt, 2017, p. 39), contains both the potential for human emancipation and constraint. In a democratic sense, it may be used to quantify and localize underlying reasons for public dissatisfaction as a basis for things such as policy formulation, or it may be used to manipulate the public in the interest of power accumulation or for other self-serving purposes. What I will say, however, is that the 2016 presidential election may indicate that the nature of political communication in a modern digital environment seems to encourage manipulation rather than persuasion and argumentation. In this regard, I intend to forward the calls of deliberate democratic theorists for further research into digital initiatives and programs specifically designed to directly facilitate public participation in various political processes (Perloff, 2018, pp. 39-42).

6. **Conclusion**

Through an adaptive approach to research rooted in critical theory, this research has proposed a model that encapsulates the flow of contemporary online political communication. This has been done with inspiration from Lazarsfeld & Katz's *two-step flow of communication*, and Bennett & Manheim's *one-step flow of communication* models, while drawing in relevant empirical evidence through a case study of Trump's 2016 presidential election campaign to elaborate and expand on the existing models.

The analysis showed how Trump relied heavily on the use of data and psychographic profiling in his campaign in terms of gathering preliminary information on the electorate to construct an overall communication strategy, smart targeting voters through micro-segmentation, and as a constant

feedback loop that provided information on how the general strategy was panning out. In this sense, data was used to effectively optimize any communication efforts made by the campaign, including how Trump engaged with the mass media, what he wrote from his personal Twitter, and the advertising he targeted specific individuals with within a micro-segmented electorate. In this sense, the analysis found that current political communication is heavily influenced by a spillover effect from traditional marketing practices.

The findings of the case study were converted into model that summarizes these findings into a visual representation of the flow of political communication in a digital environment as exemplified by Trump's 2016 presidential election campaign. By incorporating the concept of an online public sphere into the model, I highlighted the avenues for contemporary online political communication practices to influence the formation of public opinion, giving rise to the debate of whether the current state of political communication in a digital environment is more persuasive or manipulative in nature.

What the research concludes is that the increased implementation of digital technology and marketing practices in political communication in the U.S. has the potential to undermine certain democratic values within a liberal democratic system. It argues that data in particular represents a double-edged sword that has the potential for both human emancipation and constraint depending on how it is incorporated into political practices in the future.

7. References

Affelt, A. (2017). Big Data Is Back From the Dead. *the accidental data scientist*, 39.

Asen, R. (1999). Toward a Normative Conception of Difference in Public Deliberation. *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 115-129.

BBC. (2019, May 23). *Why does Donald Trump want to build a wall?* Retrieved from BBC: https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/46811167

Benhabib, S. (1996). *Democracy and Difference.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Bennett, L. W., & Manheim, J. B. (2006). The One-Step Flow of Communication. *The Annals of the American Academy*, 213-232. doi:10.1177/0002716206292266

Bimber, B. (2012). Digital Media and Citizenship. In H. A. Semetko, & M. Scammell, *The SAGE Handbook of Political Communication* (pp. 115-126). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Brinkmann, S., & Tanggaard, L. (2016). *Kvalitative Metoder.* Latvia: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Britannica. (2019, July 24). *Donald Trump*. Retrieved from Encyclopædia Britannica: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Donald-Trump

Britannica. (2019, Februrary 9). *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved from Harold Lasswell: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Harold-Lasswell

Britannica. (2019, Februrary 9). *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved from Paul Felix Lazarsfeld: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Paul-Felix-Lazarsfeld

Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods: 5th edition.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cambridge Analytica. (2018, December 3). *Data drives all we do.* Retrieved from Cambridge Analytica: https://cambridgeanalytica.org/

Chappell, Z. (2019, May 23). *Deliberative Democracy*. Retrieved from Sage Knowledge: http://sk.sagepub.com.zorac.aub.aau.dk/reference/power/n96.xml

Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2012). Dynamics in Mass Communication Effects Research. In H. A. Semetko, & M. Scammell, *The SAGE Handbook of Political Communication* (pp. 307-324). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Clayton, E. (2019, March 28). *Aristotle: Politics*. Retrieved from Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: https://www.iep.utm.edu/aris-pol/

CNBC. (2018, December 12). *Facebook-Cambridge: A timeline of the data hijacking scandal*. Retrieved from CNBC: https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/10/facebook-cambridge-analytica-a-timeline-of-the-data-hijacking-scandal.html

Conley, B. (2018). Thinking What He Says: Market Research and the Making of Donald Trump's 2016 Presidential Campaign. In J. Gillis, *Political Marketing in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election* (pp. 29-48). palgrave macmillan.

Crozier, M. (2007). Recursive governance: Contemporary Political Communication and Public Policy. *Political Communication, 24:1*, 1-18.

De Vaus, D. (2001). *Research Design in Social Research.* SAGE Publications.

Den Store Danske. (2019, August 26). *Kritisk Teori.* Retrieved from Den Store Danske: http://denstoredanske.dk/Samfund,_jura_og_politik/Sociologi/Sociologisk_teori/kritisk_teori

Dezelan, T., & Vobic, I. (2016). *(R)evolution of Political Communication through Social Media.* Hershey PA, USA: IGI Global.

Digital Marketing Institute. (2019, September 3). *How Social Media Can Enhance Political Campaigns.* Retrieved from Digital Marketing Institute: https://digitalmarketinginstitute.com/en-ca/blog/15-02-2018-how-social-media-can-enhance-political-campaigns

DR Nyheder. (2018, March 21). *Overblik: Sådan fik - og brugte - Cambridge Analytica 50 millioner profiler.* Retrieved from DR Nyheder: https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/viden/teknologi/overblik-saadan-fik-og-brugte-cambridge-analytica-50-millioner-profiler

Education Services Australia. (2019, April 02). *Discovering Democracy Units.* Retrieved from Citizens: https://www1.curriculum.edu.au/ddunits/guide/g4_citizens.htm

Elling, B. (2018). Kritisk Teori. In L. Fuglsang, P. B. Olsen, & K. Rasborg, *Videnskabsteori i Samfundsvidenskaberne* (pp. 137-170). Frederiksberg C: Samfundslitteratur.

Epstein, R. A. (2011). Direct Democracy: Government of the People, by the People, and for the People. *Chicago Unbound*, 819-826.

Facebook. (2019, September 3). *Kopimålegrupper.* Retrieved from Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/business/help/465262276878947

Fraser, N. (1990). Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of actually Existing Democracy. *Social Text*, 56-80.

Fuglsang, L., Olsen, P. B., & Rasborg, K. (2018). *Videnskabsteori i Samfundsvidenskaberne.* Frederiksberg: Samfundslitteratur.

Galdieri, C. J., Lucas, J. C., & Sisco, T. S. (2018). Introduction: Politics in 140 Characters or Less. In C. J. Galdieri, J. C. Lucas, & T. S. Sisco, *The Role of Twitter in the 2016 US Election* (pp. 1-6). pelgrave macmillan.

Galston, W. A. (2018). The Populist Challenge to Liberal Democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 5-19.

Gandberg-Rademacker, S. J., & Parsneau, K. (2018). Tweet You Very Much: An Analysis of Candidate Twitter Usage from the 2016 Iowa Caucus to Super Tuesday. In C. J. Galdieri, J. C. Lucas, & T. s. Sisco, *The Role of Twitter in the 2016 US Election* (pp. 21-44). palgrave macmillan.

Gillies, J. (2018). Introduction. In J. Gillies, *Political marketing in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election* (pp. 1-9). pelgrave macmillan.

Glynn, C. J., Herbst, S., Lindeman, M., O'keefe, G. J., & Shapiro, R. Y. (2016). *Public Opinion.* New York: Westview Press.

Haron, H., & Ramli, Z. F. (2016, October). *Online Opinion Leaders and their Influence on Purchase Intentions.* Retrieved from ResearchGate: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319118159_Online_opinion_leaders_and_their_influence_on_purchase_intentions

Held, D. (2006). *Models of democracy.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Herman, E., & Chomsky, N. (1988). *A Propaganda Model*. Retrieved from Chomsky.info: https://chomsky.info/consent01/

Herman, E., & Chomsky, N. (2006). A Propaganda Model. In D. Meenakshi, & K. Douglas, *Media and Cultural Studies: Key Works* (pp. 257-295). Machechuttes, Oxford, Carlton: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

History. (2019, March 14). *History*. Retrieved from 1960s: https://www.history.com/topics/1960s

Holmes, J. W., & McNeal, R. S. (2016). Social Media, Participation, and Attitudes: Does Social Media Drive Polarization? In T. Dezelan, & I. Vobic, *(R)evolutionizing Political Communication Through Social Media* (pp. 1-21). Hershey, PA, USA: IGI Global.

Horkheimer, M. (1972). *Critical Theory.* New York: Seabury Press.

Hung, E. S., & Calderón, C. A. (September). Online opinion leaders in Latin America and the Middle East: The case of the top 20 most-viewed Twitter users. *Informação & Sociedade: Estudos*, 139-155.

Højbjerg, H. (2018). Hermeneutik: Forståelse og fortolkning i samfundsvidenskaberne. In L. Fuglsang, P. B. Olsen, & K. Rasborg, *Videnskabsteori i Samfundsvidenskaberne* (pp. 289-324). Frederiksberg C: Samfundslitteratur.

International Churchill Society. (2019, August 5). *The Worst Form of Government*. Retrieved from International Churchill Society: https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/quotes/the-worst-form-of-government/

Jacobsen, M. H. (2007). Adaptiv Teori - Den tredje vej til viden. In R. Antoft, M. H. Jacobsen, A. Jørgensen, & S. Kristiansen, *Håndværk & Horisonter - Tradition of nytænkning i kvalitativ metode* (pp. 249-284). Syddansk Universitetsforlag.

Jensen, K. B. (2009). Three-step flow. *Journalism*(10), 335-337.

Jiang, S. (2016). Microblog, A Public Sphere? An Examination of Opinion Expression about "Snowden Affair" on Twitter and Sina Weibo. In T. Dezelan, & I. Vobic, *(R)evolutionizing Political Communication Through Social Media* (pp. 22-39). Hershey, PA, USA: IGI Global.

Journal Media. (2016, November 9). *What made Trump's 'Make America Great Again' slogan so powerful*. Retrieved from The Journal: https://www.thejournal.ie/trump-slogan-make-america-great-again-3071552-Nov2016/

Katz, R. S. (1997). *Democracy and elections.* Oxford New York: Oxford University Press.

Kruse, L. M., & Norris, D. R. (2018). Social Media as a Public Sphere? Politics on Social Media. *The Sociology Quarterly: volume 59*, 62-84.

Kumar, A., Dhamija, S., & Dhamija, A. (2016). Political Marketing: The Horizon of Present Era Politics. *Journal of Indian Management*, 116-126.

Lakoff, G. (2016, July 23). *Understanding Trump*. Retrieved from George Lakoff: https://georgelakoff.com/2016/07/23/understanding-trump-2/

Lakoff, S. (2018). *Democracy: History, Theory, Practice.* New York: Routledge.

Langergaard, L. L., & Sørensen, A. (2015). Kritisk Teori. In M. H. Jacobsen, K. Lippert-Rasmussen, & P. Nedergaard, *Videnskabsteori* (3. ed., pp. 251-286). Finland: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Layder, D. (1998). *Sociological practice: Linking theory and social research.* SAGE Publications.

Lippmann, W. (1925). *The Phantom Public.* New York: MacMillan.

Lipppman, W. (1922). *Public opinion.* New York : Free Press.

Lykkeberg, Rune. (2005, November 10). *Information*. Retrieved from Den frie fornuft mod den undertrykkende rationalitet: https://www.information.dk/2007/07/frie-fornuftmod-undertrykkende-rationalitet

Mackay, J. B. (2017, November 27). *Tabloidization*. Retrieved from Oxford Bibliographies: https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756841/obo-9780199756841-0191.xml

Martin, G. (2015). *Understanding Social Movements.* New York: Routledge.

McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The Agenda Setting Function of Mass Media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 176-187.

McLaughlin, K. (2014, August 25). *CNN entertainment*. Retrieved from 5 surprising things that 1960s TV changed: https://edition.cnn.com/2014/05/29/showbiz/tv/sixties-five-things-television/index.html

mediaQuant. (2016, March 15). *The New York Times*. Retrieved from $2 Billion Worth of Free Media for Donald Trump: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/16/upshot/measuring-donald-trumps-mammoth-advantage-in-free-media.html

Miller, J. L., & McKerrow, R. E. (2010). History of Political Communication. *Review of Communication*, 61-74.

Nimmo, D. D., & Sanders, K. R. (1981). *Handbook of political communication.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Ning, M., Yijun, L., Ruya, T., & Qianqian, L. (2012). Recognition of Online Opinion Leaders Based on Social Network Analysis. In R. Huang, A. A. Ghorbani, G. Pasi, T. Yamaguchi, N. Y. Yen, & B. Jin, *Active Media Technology* (p. Chapter 48). Springer.

Opensecrets. (2018, March 23). *News & Analysis*. Retrieved from Before Trump, Cambridge Analytica was on team Cruz: https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2018/03/before-trump-cambridge-analytica-was-on-team-cruz/

Oxford Bibliographies. (2018, January 11). *Public Sphere*. Retrieved from Oxford Bibliographies: https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756841/obo-9780199756841-0030.xml

Oxford Brookes University. (2019, September 10). *Digital Democracy in Britain: Big Data, Social Media and the Open Society*. Retrieved from Oxford Brookes University: https://www.brookes.ac.uk/hss/events/digital-democracy-in-britain--big-data--social-media-and-the-open-society/

Oxford Dictionaries. (2019, May 28). *English. Oxford Living Dictionaries*. Retrieved from Deliberation: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/deliberation

Oxford Dictionaries. (2019, April 10). *Oxford Living Dictionaries*. Retrieved from Liberal Democracy: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/liberal_democracy

Page, B. I. (1996). The Mass Media as Political Actors. *Political Science and Politics*, 20-24.

Pascale, B. (2018, March 22). *Making Marketing Great Again: Inside the Trump 2016 Advertising Campaign - Web Summit*. Retrieved from YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ats-ep1asLU

Patterson, T. E. (2016, December 7). *News Coverage of the 2016 General Election: How the Press Failed the Voters*. Retrieved from Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy: https://shorensteincenter.org/news-coverage-2016-general-election/

Perloff, R. M. (2018). *The Dynamics of Political Communication: Media and politics in a digital age.* New York: Routledge.

Perry, L., & Joyce, P. (2018). Tweeting on the Campaign Trail: The When, How, and What of Donald Trump's Tweets. In C. J. Galdieri, J. C. Lucas, & T. S. Sisco, *The Role of Twitter in the 2016 US Election* (pp. 63-74). palgrave macmillan.

Petrocik, J. R. (1981). Reviewed Work(s): The Mass Media Election: How Americans Choose Their President. *The American Political Science Review*, 1054-1055.

Pew Research Center. (2003, June 23). *Jessica Lynch*. Retrieved from Pew Research Center: https://www.journalism.org/2003/06/23/jessica-lynch/

Pew Research Center. (2016, July 18). *Election 2016: Campaigns as a Direct Source of News*. Retrieved from Journalism.org: https://www.journalism.org/2016/07/18/election-2016-campaigns-as-a-direct-source-of-news/

Pew Research Center. (2018, December 10). *Facttank: News In the Numbers*. Retrieved from Pew Research Center: https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/10/social-media-outpaces-print-newspapers-in-the-u-s-as-a-news-source/

Pew Research Center. (2018, April 26). *FACTTANK: News In The Numbers*. Retrieved from Key Findings on Americans' views of the U.S. political system and democracy: http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/04/26/key-findings-on-americans-views-of-the-u-s-political-system-and-democracy/

Raynauld, V., & Turcotte, A. (2018). "Different Strokes for Different Folks": Implications of Voter Micro-Targeting and Appeal in the Age of Donald Trump. In J. Gillies, *Political Marketing in The 2016 U.S. Presidential Election* (pp. 11-28). palgrave macmillan.

Reuters. (2016, December 9). *Figues show Trump spent $66 million of his own cash on election campaign*. Retrieved from Reuters: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-trump/figures-show-trump-spent-66-million-of-his-own-cash-on-election-campaign-idUSKBN13Y0AE

Robinson, P. (2016, June 30). *Munitions of the Mind*. Retrieved from The Age of Propaganda: https://blogs.kent.ac.uk/munitions-of-the-mind/2016/06/30/the-age-of-propaganda/

SAGE. (2006). Methodologies for the Study of Political Advertising. In A. Johnston, *The SAGE Handbook of Political Advertising* (pp. 15-34). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

SAGE Knowledge. (2019, March 7). *Sage Knowledge*. Retrieved from Sage Knowledge: http://sk.sagepub.com.zorac.aub.aau.dk/reference/globalstudies/n18.xml?term=americanization

SAGE reference. (2011). Two-Step Flow of Communication Theory. In S. reference, *Encyclopedia of Social Networks* (pp. 889-890). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

SAGE reference. (2013). Two-Step Flow Theory. In SAGE, *Encyclopedia of Public Relations* (pp. 939-940). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

SAGE Research Methods. (2010). *SAGE Research Methods*. Retrieved from Extreme Cases: http://methods.sagepub.com.zorac.aub.aau.dk/reference/encyc-of-case-study-research/n142.xml

SAGE Research Methods. (2010, March 7). *SAGE Research Methods*. Retrieved from A comparative Case Study: http://methods.sagepub.com.zorac.aub.aau.dk/reference/encyc-of-case-study-research/n64.xml

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. (2005, March 8). *Critical Theory*. Retrieved from Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/critical-theory/

Statista. (2019, August 28). *Number of mothly active Facebook users worldwide as of 2nd quarter 2019*. Retrieved from statista: https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/

Stieglitz, S., & Dang-Xuan. (2014). Social Media and Political Communication: a social media analytics framework. *Social Network Analysis and Mining*, 1277-1291.

Stirk, P. M. (1992). *Max Horkheimer: A New Interpretation.* Lanham: Harvester Wheatsheaf: Barnes & Noble Books.

The Atlantic. (2017, January 6). *Obama Was Too Good at Social Media*. Retrieved from Technology: https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2017/01/did-america-need-a-social-media-president/512405/

The Economist. (2019, August 5). *The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index*. Retrieved from Economist: https://infographics.economist.com/2019/DemocracyIndex/

The Guardian. (2004, October 7). *There were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq*. Retrieved from The Guardian: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/oct/07/usa.iraq1

The Guardian. (2016, May 25). *Trump calls Clinton 'Crooked Hillary' - should she ignore it or fight back?* Retrieved from The Guardian: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/may/25/donald-trump-crooked-hillary-clinton-nickname-ignore-fight

The Guardian. (2016, May 7). *Unhappy with the Obama economy, voters are buying what Trum's selling*. Retrieved from The Guardian: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/may/07/us-economy-election-obama-donald-trump

The New York Times. (2018, September 17). *The New York Times*. Retrieved from Hillary Clinton Condemns Trump in New Essay: 'Our Democracy Is in Crisis': https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/17/us/politics/hillary-clinton-trump.html

The U.S. National Archives. (2019, August 15). *Declaration of Independence: A Transcription*. Retrieved from The U.S. National Archive: https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript

The Washington Post. (2016, December 2016). *Donald Trump was right. He got incredibly negative press coverage*. Retrieved from The Washington Post: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/12/07/donald-trump-was-right-he-got-incredibly-negative-press-coverage/

The Week. (2017, June 22). *Democrats don't have a policy problem. They have a marketing problem*. Retrieved from The Week: https://theweek.com/articles/707277/democrats-dont-have-policy-problem-have-marketing-problem
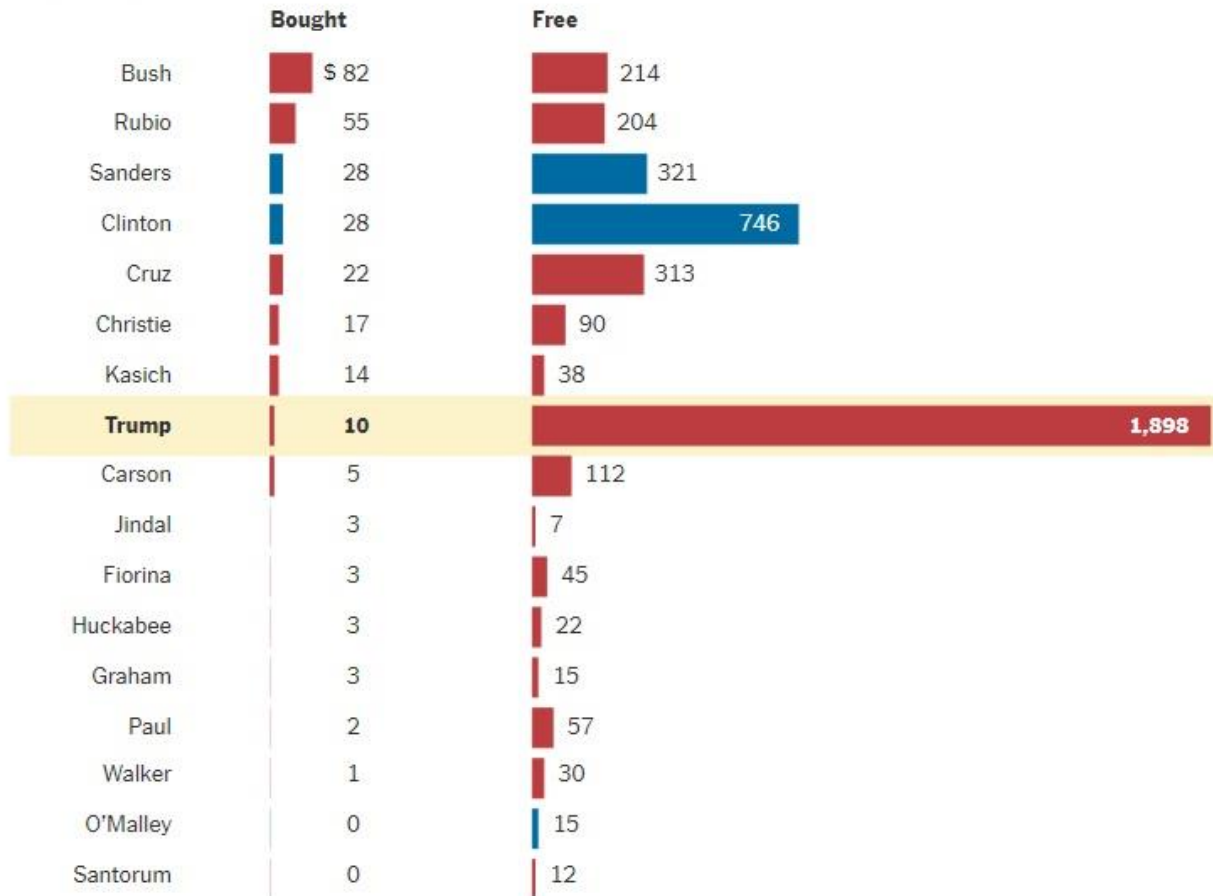
TV2. (2019, Maj 7). *Mette F. forventer sig klar til valgkamp i løbet af et par dage*. Retrieved from Nyheder TV2 DK: https://nyheder.tv2.dk/video/R0x5bnE0dzhJZE5Wb01BM3JGcDM1MGFMeHBzM0RzRmI=

University of Twente. (2019, March 14). *Communication Studies Theories*. Retrieved from Agenda Setting Theory: https://www.utwente.nl/en/bms/communication-theories/sorted-by-cluster/Mass-Media/Agenda-Setting_Theory/

USA Today. (2017, Feburary 17). *Trump's repetitive rhetoric is a trick used in advertising*. Retrieved from USA Today: https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2017/02/16/mess-fake-news-disaster-trumps-repetition-advertising-tactic/98014444/

Vesnic-Alujevic, L. (2016). European Elections and Facebook. In T. Dezelan, & I. Vobic, *(R)evolutionizing Political Communication Through Social Media* (pp. 191-209). Hershey, PA, USA: IGI Global.

Washington Times. (2018, March 6). *Unpresedented hostility: Broadcast coverage of President Trump still 90% negative says study*. Retrieved from The Washington Post: https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/mar/6/trump-coverage-still-90-negative-says-new-study/

Watts, D. (2010). *Dictionary of American Government and Politics.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd.

Wicks, R. H. (1996). Standpoint: Joseph Klapper and the effect of mass communication: A retrospective. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 563-569.

Williams, C. B. (2017). Introduction: Social Media, Political Marketing and the 2016 U.S. Election. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 207-211.

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods. 4th edition.* Los Angeles: Sage.

8. Appendix
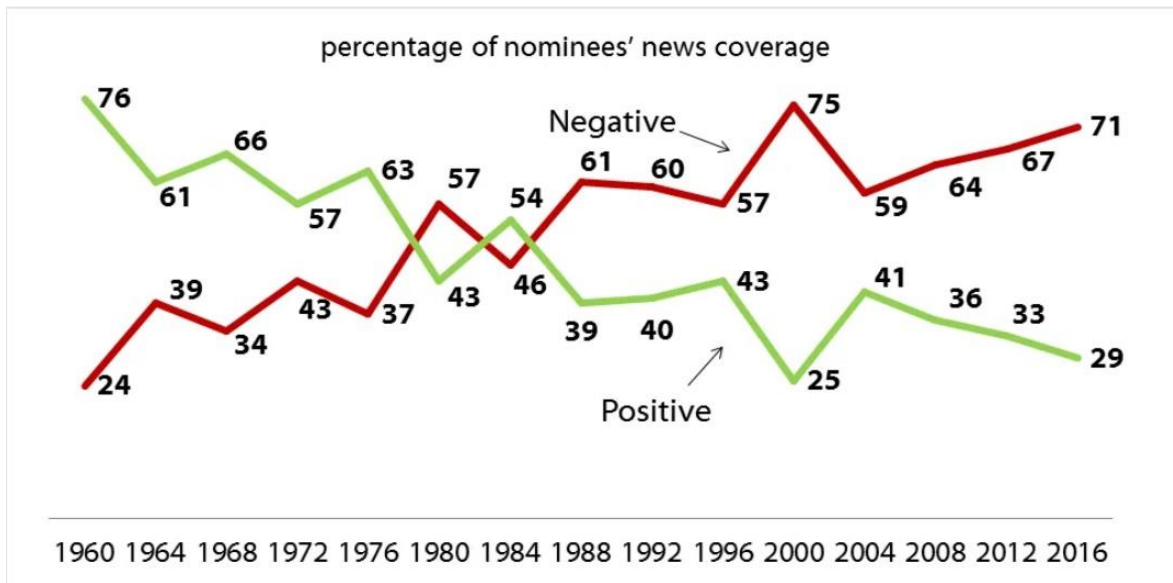
Appendix 1:

Bought Versus Free Media
In millions.

	Bought	Free
Bush	$ 82	214
Rubio	55	204
Sanders	28	321
Clinton	28	746
Cruz	22	313
Christie	17	90
Kasich	14	38
Trump	**10**	**1,898**
Carson	5	112
Jindal	3	7
Fiorina	3	45
Huckabee	3	22
Graham	3	15
Paul	2	57
Walker	1	30
O'Malley	0	15
Santorum	0	12

Sources: mediaQuant, SMG Delta

By The New York Times

Appendix 2:

Figure 3. Tone of Presidential Nominees' Coverage, 1960-2016

percentage of nominees' news coverage

Sources: Patterson, *Out of Order*, 1960-92; Center for Media & Public Affairs, 1996; Pew Research Center, 2000-2012; Media Tenor, 2016. Neutral stories are excluded. Percentages are the average for each election for the two major-party nominees.

Appendix 3: