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Honours Thesis

Democracy in the Information Age: The New Political Enigma

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The introduction of the Internet to the toolkit of political campaigns has cardinally altered the landscape of democratic elections. As the Internet has expanded so has the level of information it brings alongside, where the amount of data produced in 2017 outweighs the entirety of human societies. Prior to the Age of Information, society has been limited in their capacity to access information, now we are purview to information glut; with unprecedented information comes unprecedented consequences. Data has provided a means for institutions to accumulate, calculate, and nudge human interaction based on predictive analytical techniques where this compendium of information, produced through the Internet, has reduced citizens into analytical nodes. But what is the long run impact of a future predicated on predictive analytics, where individuals are compiled into grand data sets and outcomes are the result of scaled data operations? This paper seeks to rectify this question. When applied to the democratic process, how will political campaigns utilize this technology to advance their campaigns? What is the impact of Big Data and predictive analytics on individual autonomy and how does this contribute to an increasingly fragmented society?

In pursuit of this question, I will first provide an overview of the relevant literature; examining the scholarly foundations of political mobilization and political communication theory. Illustrating the processes of group mobilization to social and political mobility; what factors influence groups to mobilize, and their potential to influence existing institutions. I will also explore the strategies of communication; the processes of agenda setting, framing, and priming in constructing narratives, and how political campaigns utilize quantitative techniques to identify and then target audiences to advance their agenda. This will provide a context to the remainder of the paper.

Following, I will develop a cross-case study analysis on the American Presidential cycle, examining the 2008 Barack Obama campaign and the 2016 Donald Trump campaign. Delivering an overview of their campaign strategies; how these were framed to the electorate, as a social movement and the role that Big Data and predictive modelling played in their respective campaigns. In both instances the advent of Big Data and new statistical modelling techniques afforded their campaigns with the ability to isolate subsets of the population, enabling a personalization of targeted messages that would effectively mobilize or demobilize them. In the Information age, data has become the most valuable commodity; to achieve outcomes, political strategy must be rooted in data operations.

The American electorate has become reduced to an analytical node, whose behaviour can be predicted and nudged through emotive triggers. As predictive analytics and Big Data becomes increasingly integrated into the operations of legacy institutions the collection of data and statistical techniques will only improve. When institutions have an incentive to know their consumer, what will prevent them from achieving their ultimate end – creating a population comprised of “Managed Citizens”.

Literature Review:

The 2008 and 2016 United States Presidential elections produced two of the most historically unlikely President elects in Barack Obama and Donald Trump, respectively. How were a relatively unknown first term Senator and a former reality TV star able to captivate the American public, becoming the 44th and 45th Presidents of the United States. Simply put, they capitalized on emerging statistical tools that would hedge their mobilization and communication efforts. Where each campaign would emphasize the implementation of Big Data analytics, enabling them to manage their electorate and quantify their campaign.

Prior to analyzing each campaigns strategic employment of analytic tools there must be a relevant discussion of the literature concerning mobilization and communication efforts. How campaigns communicate and mobilize their electorate, with respect to emerging Information and Communication Technologies.

Political Communication:

The process of *Agenda Setting* refers to the narratives constructed through the discourse of media, elites, or political actors and the saliency these narratives convey to public opinion. The notion of agenda setting materialized through the work of Maxwell McCombs and Danial Shaw, where the media is of crucial influence to individual discourse; impacting what individuals consider and how long these events remain salient (McCombs & Maxwell 1972). Their theoretical work has been reinforced empirically, where Scheufele and Tewksbury have demonstrated a correlation between the emphasis media places on an event and the magnitude of emphasis that mass audiences place on an issue (Scheufele & Tewksbury 2007, Neuman *et al* 2014). To the majority of citizens, the media serves as their only political outlet. In the Agenda Setting process, what is salient in public opinion can be linked to what information elites place emphasis on (Scheufele & Tewksbury 2007, Neuman *et al* 2014, Wolfsfeld 2014).

Following the notion of Agenda Setting is the process of *Framing*, the organizing theme that provides context to an event, selected through a process of exclusion, to establish a casual interpretation (Khaneman & Tversky 1984, Entman & Rojecki 1993, Valentino *et al* 2001, Shen 2004, Weaver *et al* 2004, Scheufele & Tewksbury 2007, Vreese & Lechler 2012). The process of Framing can be divided between *Frame Building* and *Frame Setting*. Frame Building denotes the internal and external factors that contribute to the given frame; where Internal factors are, those influences provided through a media outlet, their specific editorial policies, institutional values,

and journalistic bias; External factors being pressure from elites in society or salient social movements (Entman & Rojecki 1993, Vreese & Lechler 2012). The presentation of a given frame will have varying effects to public opinion, where each specific frame in context will affect individual's decision making and how they evaluate scenarios (Khaneman & Tversky 1984, 2003, Gamson 1992, Scheufele 2000).

The remaining concept in discussion will be the process of *Priming*, where Higgins and King (1981) define this as an increased exposure to content will increase an individual's mental exertion spent on that concept. This can be viewed as an extension of the Agenda Setting process, whereby increasing the saliency of an issue will shape the context of thought to individual's value judgements (Tversky & Khaneman 1973, Iyenger & Kinder 1987). Individuals initiate value judgements based on the information available, under continued exposure to a particular narrative or event, they will perceive said event as more salient. As a result, the evaluation of an event relies on this new set of accessible information.

When establishing a frame, organizations must be conscious of the how the public will respond, whether this will have a negative or positive effect on public opinion. When evaluating decisions individuals revert to their accessible information, this being the readiness in which previously understood knowledge can be drawn upon to construct a decision (Shen 2004). Defined as *Chronic Accessibility*, these are the concepts that define an individual's core belief system, the bias individual's appeal to when deciphering an event (Iyenger 1990, Roskos & Ewoldson 1997). When observing the usage of framing in political campaigns, elites and institutions understand that the public has menial interest in policy oriented coverage, rather they opt for character based frames that focus on the emotional or physical delineation of a candidate (Valentino *et al* 2001, Shen 2004). Individual's biases are constructed through a process that removes themselves from

interest in policy discussion, rather they are interested most in the how the candidate appears; where media narratives are most effective on the “least sophisticated”. Those with the strongest bias and who are the least informed will be influenced most by a single news story (Valentino *et al* 2001, Hirsch 2015, Marland 2017). Considering the former, the effectiveness of a frame is greatest when an issue is framed in a negative context, negative information is more memorable and is likely to resonate greatest with the mass, (Khanemen & Tversky 1984, Fridkin & Kenny 2012) becoming part of the chronically accessible information. To this extent, the reiteration of cynicism during a campaign contributes to a political malaise, where public trust in democratic institutions decreases along with the capacity to elect effective government (Valentino *et al* 2001, Kahn & Kenny 2004, Fridkin & Kenny 2012, Hirsch 2015).

Behavioural Analytics:

In the Information Age, successful political campaigns have embraced the usage of Big Data analysis, shifting from demographic and geographic targeting to personalized strategies of behavioral analytics (Kreiss 2016, Marland 2017). While Big Data has become a fixture in political strategy, the internet has fundamentally transformed what is understood as Big Data, shifting from completely *latent* data to *user generated* data that is easily accessible and relatively cheap (Finlay 2014). This transformation has provided institutions with a capability to process deep insights into individual belief systems and preferences (Burke 2013, Tufekci 2014). Advancements to machine learning algorithms and analytical technology have enabled developers to process semantic unstructured data, where person-to-person conversations can be transcribed into data points (Tufekci 2014). These advancements in conjunction with the advent of Social Network usage enables institutions to accurately model individual interactions, developing a real-time analysis of human behavior. As campaigns develop more accurate behavioural models, their potential to

influence the “persuadable voter” –those who are undecided without strong values or bias– (Hirsch 2015, Marland 2017) increases alongside.

To briefly describe the process, institutions utilize regression modelling, attempting to describe the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent explanatory variable –in relation to political campaigns, what variables impact mobilization. A quintessential example are the algorithms developed by Michael Kosinski and Cambridge Analytica, using Facebook’s analytics to mine user generated data, which can be modeled to accurately generate psychometric profiles in coordination with the Big 5 personality traits¹ (Kosinski, Stillwell, and YouYou 2013). For the political strategist, this data is used to create predictive models designed to trigger emotive responses in the electorate. *i.e.*, what emotional trigger (*Independent*) will cause a reaction in the “persuadable voter” (*Dependent*), with the goal being *what factor contributes to generate an increased or decreased mobilization outcome*. When applied to traditional qualitative methods of campaign analytics, these algorithms further distinguish the fault lines in populations; enabling campaigns to triage information to population subsets therefore reaffirming the population’s bias (Fletcher & Young 2012, Gibson & Ward 2012, McChesney 2012, Albright 2016, Marland 2017). As user rates of Social Network Sites and Information Technologies increase, so will the availability of user generated data. As more data is generated on individual behavioural preferences, the possibility of effective persuasion through predictive analytical techniques will also increase (Albright 2016).

¹ Measuring psychophysical differences in individuals based on perceived personalities traits; these being the “Big Five” as defined as: Introversion/Extroversion (the level of social agreeableness), Neuroticism (levels of security), Agreeableness (compliance, cooperative), Consciousness (an individual’s willingness to achieve), Intelligence (imaginative, cultured, open-mindedness) (Barrick & Mount 1991, Burke 2017)

While social media provides the bulk of user generated unstructured data leading to improvement of individual modelling, the greater concern for campaigns is in developing *network centric models*, understanding the relationships between groups and where influence can be derived (Finlay 2014, Albright 2016). If political campaigns can monitor the flow of information, their ability to successfully influence the electorate will increase due to a capacity to microtarget outlets with advertisements. With regards to the 2016 election, “fake news” sites have increased in popularity, alongside their influence on Social Network Sites. These propaganda or “fake news” sites are highly insecure, where user data is susceptible to in depth monitoring and potential hacking, leading to personal content being captured and sold (Albright 2016). While these sites have in house data collection, there are additional behavioral tracking algorithms on these sites derived from Alphabet, Facebook, and Twitter analytics. Sites that contain a “like” or “share” function monitor site activity and transcribe personal data back to said Social Network Site to create targeted advertisements (Albright 2016). When predictive analytics is added to the equation, this becomes a negative feedback loop. Where advertisements are increasingly tailored to direct attention towards “fake news” because the algorithm can predict your emotional trigger, making you predisposed to visit these sites again. Data provides insight into individual behavior, informing Social Network Sites, campaigns, and corporations of the psychological triggers that would capture the attention of their user base. Firms have an incentive to use this data for their personal convictions. Rather than providing individuals with their needs – the truth – they provide them with what gets their attention, creating a vicious feedback loop that results in homophilic populations and users that are addicted to content. In the Information Age, the truth is of no concern, what matters to campaigns is how they can grab your attention.

Political Mobilization:

Collective Behaviour theory argues that social movements are not derived from social strife, rather movements are framed with a unique political dimension to enable group mobilization (McAdam 1982, Carty 2011). Victoria Carty posits that by centering on a political narrative, it allows for a collectivization of social strife that would otherwise not be possible on social contention alone (Carty 2011). In the Information Age, the ability for campaigns to engage an electorate has become increasingly effortless. Social Networking Sites have led to a decentralization of information replacing the hierarchical structure of engagement for a more horizontal approach, leading to an environment that is more conducive for political engagement (Habermas 1993, Castels 2001, Conroy 2015, Mercea 2016). This decentralization has contributed to an expansion of collective identities, where previously isolated segments of the population now have the necessary tools to form peer groups through a digital medium (Bimber & Davis 2003, Howard 2006, Jenkins 2006, Papacharissi 2010, Shirky 2011).

Charles Tilly (2004, 2006) argues that for campaigns to advance their political movement there are three necessary dimensions: i. Campaigns must be organized and sustainable; ii. Campaigns need to utilize repertoires unique to their environment; iii. Campaigns must embody a sense of WUNC –Worthiness, Unity, Numbers, Commitment. With respect to both the 2008 and 2016 campaigns, each candidate successfully capitalized on their changing environment. Utilizing Social Network Sites to organize rallies and recruit donors, embracing the new ecosystem of online communication, and coopting existing social movement into an organized political collective. Through their implementation of “data regimes” these tactics amalgamated to produce what Phillip Howard (2006) describes as “Managed Citizens”, where the electorate is viewed through the lens

of their digital profile thereby enabling campaigns to triage information that would produce optimal mobilization results.

We must also consider the impact of cultural norms to the development of a campaigns mobilization tactics. Francesca Polletta and Beth Gardner (2008) argue that the institutional reinforcement of norms impacts both the operations and potential for success of a movement. What separated the President elects from their competition was their campaigns embodiment of Big Data analytics. The contemporary ecosystem has turned data into a commodity, where individual behaviour has the potential to be quantified (Tufekci 2014). Successful campaigns recognize that the practice of commodifying information results in a more accurate representation of their electorate; with respect to the Obama and Trump campaigns their institutional capacity to legitimize data operations as a central aspect of their campaigns increased their potential for success.

Resource Mobilization theory posits that mobilization occurs due to the strategic repertoires employed by campaigns, including the organizational structure, leadership, resources, and collective identity (Carty 2011). Bob Edwards and Patrick Gillham (2013) cite four mechanism that movements utilize to gain access to resources:

- i. *Internally produced resources*, the in-house operations provide campaigns with their initial sources of resources, from here they can then orient the direction of movement. The data operations of the Democratic National Committee and the Republican National Committee serve as the first mover in procuring sets of managed citizens; once the initial base is isolated campaigns can then extrapolate this information to procure supporters on the margins.

- ii. *Aggregating human resources by establishing a sense of collective identity*, methods of predictive analytics allow for campaigns to generate lists of population subsets oriented around behavioural preferences and networks of influence (Burke 2013, Finlay 2014, Tufekci 2014). Through understanding factors that impact behaviour and what authority individuals are receptive to, campaigns can strategically target populations with messages intended to foster a sense of collective identity (Marland 2017).
- iii. *Co-opting existing institutions*, the Information Age has provided campaigns and movements alike with exponentially increasing sets of data through online activity, most notably through Social Networking Sites. These sites collect and analyze data, producing their own interpretation of individual behavioural profiles (Finlay 2014). Successful campaigns will co-opt data produced through these institutions, serving as a supplemental reinforcement to their behavioural profiles.
- iv. *Externally provided support*, the degrees of institutional access by campaigns determines the potential strategies that will be employed, the alliances they will form, and their decision to mobilize (Kreisi 2004).

In determining how resources will be utilized, campaigns apply cost/benefit analysis in their decision making, where the conditions to mobilize must align with a political opportunity such that grievances of a group are sufficient to warrant mobilization (Gamson 1975, Buechler 1999, Carty 2004, Tilly & Tarrow 2005). With the advent of Big Data operations, campaigns are able to isolate where mobilization would be most effective; where groups would rally behind a political call to arms.

Framing Analysis refers to the manifestation of collective identity through the present narrative, where cultural groups form their collective identity through a preordained socialization

process. How groups utilize resources and their respective political institutions is not enough to understand how social movements occur, there must be an exploration in the narratives that caused collectivization. Growing theories of behavioural economics posits that individuals should no longer be perceived as *Homo Economicus*, rather we are *Homo Sapiens*, irrational with normative aspirations (Polletta & Jasper 2001, Thaler & Sunnstein 2017). It is this understanding that necessitates alternative approaches to classical theories, where the appeal to a sense of identity enables group mobilization (Gamson 1992). Social movement organizers need to frame issues that will resonate with specific cultural narratives. David Snow argues that when articulated as “Injustice Frames” constructing an appeal to moral principles, social mobilization will have a greater resonance with societal actors (Snow *et al* 1986). We observe a dichotomy of action on the same scale between the Obama and Trump Campaigns, where Obama framed the movement as a liberation from institutional power, reinstating the “power” of the citizens; Trump attacked the legacy institutions, framing the recent “injustices” against middle class, blue collar America, from the “globalists” and liberal institutions. Social movements should utilize the scapegoating of outsider factions, propose solutions to contending problems, generate appeals to third parties, and insist on a call to arms to generate a tangible plan of attack. If this precedent is compounded with a frame around moral principles, a sense of longevity, and an urgency to action the movement would be in a convincing position to capitalize on their environment. (Snow *et al* 1986, Tilly & Tarrow 2006).

Engineering Consent and the Future of the Democratic Process

Once viewed as the savior of democracy – with the power to engage citizen participation, incite revolutions, and liberate access to information – has the Internet fallen victim to its own vice? What was once perceived as a tool for liberation, the internet has quickly been adopted to

keep us in chains. We are free to explore an endless stream of information from a multiplicity of reputable sources, yet the experience has been one of isolation and confirmation bias. Or worse, the direct consumption of “multiple truths” where discourse has stagnated due to an inability to communicate through a shared lexicon. I have presented an overview of the rise of big data and predictive analysis in relation to electoral targeting and mobilization efforts; constructed to both mobilize or demobilize political consciousness. My case study will illustrate the dichotomy of its institutionalization, where the Obama campaign was designed to invigorate political consciousness in citizens, expanding the virtues of liberal ideology; the Trump campaign was designed to extort political fragmentation, creating a political malaise and a further dissemination of post truth regimes. The advent of the Information Age instilled hope to the diffusion of the liberal doctrine, yet we are left with a fragmented populous where public discourse has been engineered to favor partisan bias. We exist in a society of engineered consent, where the propagation of information through online mediums have contributed to a cyberbalkanization of the discourse.

From analytics to echo chambers

Algorithms function as a dictatorship of attention, influencing social groups through predictive analytics, where belief systems are planned, produced, and managed through institutional reinforcement (Harsin 2015). In the Information Age, individual perception is filtered through a biased lens, in which belief systems are not the volition of individual autonomy rather they're reinforced through social networks and triaged sets of information. While the expansion of the internet has increased the potential for the diffusion of information and opportunity of exposure to differing perspectives, it has also created the environment for limited exposure to challenging viewpoints (Messing & Westwood 2014). In a study conducted by Eytan Bakshy, Salomon Messing, and Lada Adamic (2015) they measured the exposure to differing ideological viewpoints

via Facebook, attempting to determine the effect of homophily in social networks. Their research indicates that Facebook filters, social networks, feed population algorithms, and individual content selection combine to decrease exposure to differing ideologies from a random baseline by up to 25% for conservatives and up to 50% for liberals (Bakshy, Messing, Adamic 2015). Individual biases are linked through homophily, where we affiliate with those who are similar. Social Network feeds reinforce and amplify this tendency to exist within a filter bubble, in which “truth” is therefore a resultant of preconceived bias. Their study is succeeded by the work of Dimitor Nikolov (2015), where empirical evidence suggests that social media limits populations exposure to a wider range of information when compared to a baseline test of an individual’s ability to seek out information without direction from social media outlets. This is a stark realization considering that 60% of Americans use Social Networking Sites as their primary source of information (Greico 2016).

Social Network analysis has allowed us to isolate the flow of information between individuals and institutions. Algorithms can isolate with high centrality the networks that contribute to individual’s information (Dijick 2014, Tufekci 2015, Albright 2016), in relation to the democratic process, institutions would then have the capabilities to tailor information from sources that an individual would be most receptive to. Quantified politics is undermining civic discourse, eliminating the ability for mass publics to have “biased free judgements”, where campaigns have shifted to a paradigm in line with modern marketing techniques (Sunstein 2016; 2017, Tufekci 2015). Users of these platforms are led to believe they are seeking information because they enjoy the content on their own volition but the reality is that they are nudged to this addictive content without ever questioning if this has been a product of coercion. The Information Age has led to a dissolution of political consciousness, where individuals are subject to post truth

discourse in which their beliefs are not dictated on fact, rather cognitive dissonance. In the post truth era, legacy institutions are designed to manage citizens having them: i. accept that there are no means to verify truth, ii. believe that their bias is the truth, iii. and then engage in vigorous counter claims against their opposition (Harsin 2015, Albright 2016). In an age of information glut we find no truth – absent of a universal sovereign – this has made engagement in discourse pedantic; where institutions were designed to liberate us from information tyranny they have been coopted to capture attention and create a malaise in citizen participation.

How echo chambers contributed to social fragmentation

The Democratic National Committee’s website features a link titled “People”, which provides the reader with a page designed to appeal to atomized identity groups, featuring pages for Latin Americans, African Americans, LGBT peoples, Women, and so on (*Democrats.org*.) But what this doesn’t provide is a uniform appeal to the Democratic vision of the American future. Predictive analytics have afforded the DNC (and others alike) the ability to triage and tailor information designed to invoke a spirited political consciousness. While the result was spirited, it was not one of uniformity, rather we’ve been witness to a society fixated on consuming themselves. Where the left is unable to have a consensus for the American future and the Right is dominated by demagogues who retreat into nationalism and xenophobia (Lilla 2017, Sunstein 2017). In a media environment that is rapidly changing where the temporality and geography has expanded exponentially, media is now composed of thousands of actors, each providing a multiplicity of articles (Harsin 2015). Society is now exposed to an endless stream of information, where each outlet is in competition for your attention. Mass publics are only interested in outlets that represent their bias, resulting in a regime of post truth where the gap between “truth regimes” is so wide that the starting point for discourse is beyond the horizon; resulting in social

fragmentation, segmented media markets, and targeted content. While truth circulates throughout society, our changing ecosystem fragments population into preordained subsets determined through individual confirmation bias. We are no longer self-organizing with reflexive forms of expression, we are managed citizens whose consent has been engineered.

Case Study:

2008 Obama Campaign.

Contemporary political campaigns have been purview to an ecosystem ravaged by stark changes, where Big Data analytics have become the pathway to political success. Campaigns understand the influence that analytics have in generating bias and mobilizing electorates, where citizens have become managed in the information they're receptive to –determining their “consciousness”– and the factors contributing to mobilization efforts. The following will outline the trajectory of Big Data analytics in contemporary campaigns, with the institutional introduction of analytics in the DNC under Howard Dean, to the apex of quantified campaigning under Donald Trump and the RNC.

The Data:

Prior to the 2004 Howard Dean campaign, quantitative campaigning was viewed primarily as “backroom” politics that were outside of traditional “proven” strategies (Kreiss 2012). The introduction of new statistical techniques, presented to the mainstream Democratic National Committee would not have been available had it not been for the Dean campaign of 2004 and his subsequent rise to power as the Head of the DNC in 2005 (*Ibid*). The following will outline three central aspects to the DNC’s data collection methodology: The in-house data collection of the DNC, Third party analytical services, and the real time data updating provided through the Neighbor-to-Neighbor service.

DNC Data and Blue State Digital

The DNC's national voter file would be created under the services provided from Blue State Digital (BSD) who began the development of a Big Data campaign for the modern Democratic party, where data would be centralized, analyzed, and systemically deployed to each institutional level in the party to provide a cohesive strategy and a unified opposition to the dominant Republicans (Kreiss 2012). The usage of traditional canvassing methods (Door-to-door surveying, Phone surveys, leaflets) in combination with new media technologies such as Social Networking Sites (MyBarackObama.com, Facebook, Myspace, YouTube) and email operations generated a total 223 million data points on 170 million registered voters² (Talbot 2008, Kreiss 2012). These metrics were amalgamated to provide base numerical scores between 1-100 determining: i. Voter likelihood to support Obama, ii. Voter likelihood to vote, iii. Voter persuadably to vote, and iv. Voter persuadably to vote for Obama (Kreiss & Welch 2015). The advent of Social Networking Sites, most notably the in-house creation of MybarackObama.com, contributed an additional resource to accumulate voter data, providing the DNC with *user generated content*. Where data would be freely provided from the voter to the institution, eliminating the cost and skewedness of traditional canvassing methods (Talbot 2008, Kreiss & Howard 2010, Levenshus 2010). MyBarackObama.com provided the campaign with voter information of who they are, why they are in support of Obama/Democrats, are they active or passive supporters, what issues are of concern (Talbot 2008, Kreiss 2012). Social Networking Sites fundamentally altered the future of data analytics, where the introduction of user generated content provided institutions with the quantitative capacity to influence individual actors. The

² Including: Phone numbers, email addresses, geographic locales, demographics (sex, age, ethnic and religious background, formal education, household information)

2008 Obama campaign demonstrated the early stages of Data Analytics while only having access to limited variables and the categorization of demographic and geographic locales, however what these rudimentary categorizations established was the possibility to conduct empirical tests that reinforced expert's assumptions (Bimber 2014).

Third Party Analytics

The DNC Voter Activation Network (VAC) gained crucial reinforcement through secondary Data Analytic firms and the user generated content from Social Network Sites. Through a similar process as MyBarackObama.com the expansion of Facebook, YouTube, and to a lesser extent Myspace afforded the DNC with additional sources of user generated content, where the party was able to extrapolate voter information from users posts, likes, and comments (Talbot 2008, Kreiss & Welch 2015). These Social Networking Sites also collected time statistics, monitoring the longevity of viewing specific content, where they could determine the time span of content viewership (Talbot 2008, Levenshus 2010, Kreiss & Howard 2010), in turn this data could be extrapolated to determine what content resonates to a particular voter and if the user could be considered an active or passive supporter. To supplement user generated content, the campaign also employed outside analytics firms such as the Catalyst Group and Aristotle Analytics (Kreiss 2010). Where prior to the official launch of the campaign, Catalyst underwent their own surveying campaign and random voter population samples attempting to determine correlations among the DNC's national voter file categorization, *i.e.*, do the behavioural tendencies of selected populations remain similar from Catalyst and DNC messages (Kreiss & Welch 2015). In total Catalyst would contact 49 million potential voters, where they were able to extrapolate data points on 35 million potential voters (Ambinder 2009), in addition to their

previously mined reports on consumer consumption behaviour, they served as an ample supplement to the official data operations.

Neighbor-to-Neighbor

“Party Builder”, in its original conception by the 2004 Dean campaign, was a strategic device used to supplement data collection and voter mobilization, where in absence of or supplemental to formal ground operations, volunteers could print official campaign literature from their homes to be distributed throughout their neighborhoods (Kreiss & Howard 2010, Kreiss 2012). This device would be later redefined as “Neighbor-to-Neighbor” during the 2008 Obama campaign, where this became viewed as means to collect voter information and supplement mobilization efforts (Levenshus 2010). From an information perspective, this service offered the campaign with real-time voter analytics, where the VAC could be readily updated with emails, phone numbers, message resonance, and population demographics (Levenshus 2010). From the other side, Neighbor-to-Neighbor increased the potential for voter mobilization, where the campaign could disseminate messages more effectively and to a greater audience without a costly ground operation (Levenshus 2010, Kreiss 2012). In conjunction, the data operation of the Obama campaign demonstrated the early developments of institutionally reinforced quantified campaign strategies, where the rudimentary collection techniques opened the door for the future of institutional behavioural influence.

The Target:

Joseph Turrow conducted a survey in 2012 to determine the willingness of voters to receive target political advertisements, in conclusion his survey articulated that 86% of Americans do not want to be the recipients of targeted advertisements (Kreiss & Welch 2015). While the American people may dislike their data being quantified into personalized messaging

and sold to political campaigns for strategic purposes, the Privacy Act of 1974 enables campaigns to act as such. The Act outlines campaigns as quasi-state entities that have free reign on their data collection operations and how they choose to use said data, where there is an absence of legal authority that necessitates transparency of data collection, storage, and use (The Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. § 552a (2012)). Absolved of legal repercussion, the Obama campaign initiated the future of democratic campaigning. Data became the heart of every decision throughout the campaign, following a rigid computational management style they could predict who to target, what to target them with, their potential for fundraising, and who to mobilize and when to do so (Kreiss 2012).

The data operations of the Obama campaign enabled them to strategically target their potential voters with messages crafted to their demographic and geographic categorization to effectively resonate with them (Hindman 2005, Kreiss 2012). This initiated the contemporary personalization of political discourse, where political messages became increasingly tailored in direct communications through emails, phone calls, and canvassing while online advertisements on Social Networking Sites could be tailored to most effectively captivate an emotional attachment (Levenshus 2010, Kreiss 2012 and 2016, Bimber 2014). The electorate was segmented into population subsets where the campaign could isolate them based on their likelihood of supporting Obama and their likelihood to turn out and vote; if no, could they be persuaded to vote for Obama; if no, could they be persuaded to turn out to vote (Kreiss & Welch 2015). Having accumulated a monumental collection of data on the American electorate, the campaign could then employ these strategic tactics to effectively communicate and mobilize potential Obama voters. The Obama campaign designed these messages and advertisements to give the appeal of “grassroots” sentiment, where Obama was presented as candidate who could

be perceived as “wholesome” (Kreiss 2012, Wells 2015). This sentiment is illustrated through his YouTube channel “MyBarackTV”, which presented a style of home movies deliberate intended to establish an emotive connection with his audience (Kreiss 2012 and 2016).

The computational style of politics employed throughout the Obama campaign enabled his campaign to exceed previously understood conceptions of the financial capabilities from small budget candidates. Where they would raise more than \$500 million entirely from online donations contributing to a total fundraising capacity of \$657 million, which was nearly twice of that raised by Republican opposition John McCain (Bimber 2014). Wanting to maintain the legitimacy of a small budget operation, the campaign focused donation efforts from small donors, collecting 45% of donations from single contributors of \$200 or less (Bimber 2014). The early stages of Big Data operations employed by the Obama campaign crafted the future of personalized discourse, how to strategically target population subsets with messages to both get persuadable voters to the polls and turn supporters into donors (Levenshus 2010). While this is nowhere near the capabilities of contemporary campaigns, as will be demonstrated, the early developments during the 2008 Presidential Election created the environment for the personalization of the discourse to flourish and institutions to have the quantitative capacity to manage their citizens.

The Frame:

The Obama campaign strategically employed the usage of personalized digital infrastructure to generate the perception of a social movement as opposed to solely a political campaign in the traditional sense (Bimber 2014, Wells 2015). What is apparent in the analysis of the campaign is the hybridization of campaign strategy, where individual autonomy is perceived to be maintained while simultaneously existing in parallel to a rigid bureaucratic structure

(Chadwick 2006, Wells 2015). The campaign's efforts to heavily invest in a digital apparatus that included the development of an independent Social Networking Site (MyBarackObama.com) and coopting existing sites, such as Facebook, Myspace, and YouTube beseeched the consciousness of a grassroots campaign. MyBarackObama.com allowed citizens with the opportunity to craft personable campaign pages dedicated to Obama; MyBarackTV on YouTube enabled a sense of personability with the incumbent where Obama would be presented as "down to earth" who appreciates family values; Social Network connections were made through a personalized communication effort between institution and individual; and Neighbor-to-Neighbor, which allowed any willing supporter to become an engaged member of the official campaign (Levenshush 2010, Kreiss 2012, 2016, Wells 2015). These efforts of the campaign all contribute to decentralize information from elites, creating the perception of a social movement. The digital campaign of the Obama campaign directly aided their ability to contrive an electorate of managed citizens, each message, campaign slogan, and personalized communication had empirical support that they would have an effective resonance to their given population subset.

Trump Campaign 2016:

In similar fashion to the Dean campaign of 2004 and the later Obama campaigns of 2008 and 2012, the 2016 Trump campaign embraced the new medium of the digital environment and strategically designed his campaign with the application of Big Data in mind.

Voter Modelling:

The data operations of the Trump campaign can be segmented into three categories: The infrastructure of the Republican National Committee, the role of third party analytic firms, namely the role of Cambridge Analytica, and the Giles-Parscale marketing agency, the "gatekeeper" of Trump's data operation.

RNC Data

The defeat of Mitt Romney during the 2012 Presidential elections created the environment for the RNC to remodel their digital infrastructure, ensuring they provide a more competition to their Democratic opposition (Kreiss 2016, Persily 2017). As identified earlier, the role of Big Data analytics was largely seen as “backroom” politics that existed on the fringe, while the DNC had moved this to the forefront during the 2012 Obama campaign, the Republicans were late to the game. This amounted to a remodeling of the infrastructure and a massive increase in spending, where Reince Priebus, head of the RNC, would elect to spend \$100 million on infrastructure development following their 2012 loss (Kreiss 2016, Cadwalladr 2017). In June 2017, the RNC experienced a monumental breach in their data operation, allowing us to acquire an in depth understanding of their voter modelling and collections technique. In addition to traditional collection techniques involving field operations and voter surveys the RNC employs four central private firms to collect and analyze their data, these being; Deep Root Analytics, Target Point Consulting, Data Trust, and i360 (Kreiss 2016, O’Sullivan 2016). From the leak, there is an understanding that the RNC has collected data on 198 million US voters, where 9.5 billion data points have been considered, equating to 137 various metrics³ on the American voters (O’Sullivan 2016). The collected data has been used to generate individual profiles based on consumer preferences and behavioral types, where the RNC would then create personalized scores on where voters would be on a spectrum of no support to partisan supporter (O’Sullivan 2016).

³ Including but not limited to: *religious and ethnic identity, sexual orientation, voting history, emotional receptiveness to messages, receptive methods of contact, passive or active voter, health indicators, geographic indicators, consumption habits, household sequence, and marital status*

Cambridge Analytica

Cambridge Analytica's contribution to the Trump campaign came in two forms: the traditional usage of Big Data to generate targeted lists of voters, and the nontraditional development of psychometric profiling. The development of psychographics as a political tool represents a shift in digital warfare; where traditional messages were designed on segmented demographics, messages are now designed at an emotional basis in accordance with your psychometric profile (Illing 2017). Cambridge Analytica utilized the work of a former employee, Michael Kosinski, to develop these profiles. Using the five-factor model of psychometric profiling⁴, these personality traits when applied to Facebook "likes" can be used to generate personality scores of individuals (Kosinski, Stillwell, Graepel 2012, Kosinski, Stillwell, YouYou 2014). Their work has demonstrated, with high external validity, that the machine learning algorithms employed by Cambridge Analytica can accurately predict the political attitudes, sexual orientation, level of intelligence, openness to new ideas, and neurotic tendencies of individuals (*Ibid*). When contracted as a "political warfare" firm, their goal is to generate lists of persuadable voters who could be targeted with specific messages that have the ability to influence them at an emotional level; finding your emotional trigger and attacking it (Cadwalladr 2017, Illing 2017). Cambridge Analytica had access to real time data modelling, to the Trump Campaign this meant they could determine the resonance of a message and then modify Trump's schedule in accordance with the most effective mobilization and communication strategy (Illing 2017). The advent of Cambridge Analytica allowed the campaign to selectively target a list of 13.5 million "persuadable voters" in 16 "battleground" states with over 4000 varying messages that would eventually result

⁴ Openness, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Extraversion, Conscientiousness are considered the "Big Five" personality traits representing the independent differences that account for the taxonomy of an individual's personality (Barrick & Mount 1991)

in a Trump victory (Green & Issenberg 2016, Persily 2017, Illing 2017). Together, the data operations of Cambridge and the RNC created the tools for the Giles-Parscale Agency to target voters with the messages that would resonate most effectively in accordance with their profiling (Green & Issenberg 2016).

Targeted Advertisements

The marketing agency of Giles-Parscale became the gatekeeper for the Trump campaign. Along with staffers close to Trump, they became the first movers in the digital sphere. To increase the dissemination and effectiveness of their marketing strategy, Brad Parscale developed a series of algorithms that utilized the lists of persuadable voters to identify “lookalike” voters on Facebook (Green & Issenberg 2016, Persily 2017). Simply put, they extrapolated the data on their persuadable voters to target voters whose data had previously not been collected. The ads were intended to trigger an emotive response, to the uninformed voter whose political affirmations develop through their social media feed, this is an effective means of mobilizing (Marland 2017). To create the sense of real news or reduce the potential to identify the advertisement as an actual ad, the Parscale team utilized what is known as “Native Advertisements” or “Dark Ads” (Persily 2017). In relation to the Trump Campaign, these are advertisements designed to look like a news article that upon further reading would reveal itself as an article with significant bias towards issues that are in line with the Campaigns goals. This development of tailored ads designed to produce an emotive response under the guise of an authentic medium contributed to the advent of “Fake News”. When combined with “Bots” designed to spread the narrative to a maximal number of recipients, we observe a growing sense of cynicism in the electorate towards legacy institutions. (Swift 2016, Gallup 2016). The Trump Campaign was steadfast in their deployment of bots and

fake news propaganda, designed to instill cynicism in the opposition and spur movement in their base.

Making America Great Again:

The success of the Trump Campaign can partially be attributed to their usage of digital infrastructure in communicating and mobilizing populations. However the medium is not the message. The success of a campaign was highly dependent on the ability to set and maintain the agenda, however their digital infrastructure provided the necessary conditions for Trump's platform. While the Trump campaign spent less than three times the Clinton team on paid advertising and news media, the Trump campaign generated almost two and a half times more free media coverage (Confessore & Nourish 2016). He was constantly being covered by mainstream media outlet, where the topic of 41% of all news stories were in regards to Trump (Patterson 2017). Nathaniel Persily argues that Trump could control the agenda setting process through his Twitter presence (Persily 2017, Faris *et al* 2017). Observing a strong positive correlation between the mainstream media coverage and his "Twitter rants". In measuring the volume of new stories whose narrative involves Trump, there is an increase of tweets directly prior to his "tweetstorms", possibly indicating that during periods of low coverage Trump will tweet to reorient the narrative (Wells 2016, Persily 2017). Much like Obama's usage of Facebook during the 2008 campaign, Trump's usage of Twitter enabled him to disseminate his own agenda in a personalized way. Through Twitter, this message spread rapidly and reached an order of magnitude greater than his competitors; eight times more than any Republican nominee, three times more than Sander's campaign, and four times that of Clinton (Barbano 2015).

Political Communication's literature suggests that those who are least informed can be persuaded through a means of simple and blunt communication, with effective visuals.

Supplemented with theories of mobilization from the formation of a social movement around a collective identity we can apply this the effectiveness of Trump's rhetoric throughout the campaign. Following an empirical analysis of Trump's Twitter, J. Eric Oliver and Wendy Rain find evidence to support the dominance of populist rhetoric by Trump. He constantly attacked the elites, employed a usage of blame language, and created an environment of fear from foreign threats (Oliver & Rahn 2016). Employing a lexicon of public discourse equivalent to a 3rd to 4th grade student, following a discourse centered around a "we" narrative, his Tweets were designed to convey emotive responses (Oliver & Rahn 2016, Ott 2017).

Make America Great Again, a slogan plastered throughout America depicts the narrative around the Trump campaign, but what is the concern? Following the Reagan Presidency, the politics of identity was a principal of the American Right. The Republican epoch centered on individualism. Through the progression of the Republican party's narrative, the famed epoch of individualism has been redefined around growing economic anxiety, a rising fear of terrorism; a sense of nationalism and xenophobic tendencies around immigration, and the growing social fragmentation; all while being positioned around the fears of the white working class (Wells 2016, Illing 2016, Degani 2016). To the Trump supporter, who primarily correlates to at least one of the domains of white, middle income, or undereducated, these represent a moral injustice (Tyson & Manaim 2016). The framing of the campaign was strategically designed to both mobilize an increasingly frustrated "working class" while fostering political malaise in the opposition. Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow argue that the success of a campaign will increase if the frame centers around moral injustices, where the movement scapegoat's others for their problems, provide solutions to these provocateurs, and insist on a call to arms (Tilly & Tarrow 2006). The campaign targeted Mexicans for decreasing occupational opportunity, Muslims for attacking America's

“Evangelical traditions”, and Liberal institutions for allowing this; Constructing a wall and implementing travel bans to solve immigration and cultural transformation; and to quote “This American carnage stops right here, and stops right now... We will follow two simple rules, buy American and hire American” (Zurcher 2017, *Donald Trump’s inauguration speech*). As this segment of the population continued to perceive themselves as being increasingly isolated from the decisions of elites, the Trump campaign capitalized on their frustrations, converting a salient political opportunity into a mobilized opposition to establishment elites.

Demobilization

The mediatization of politics has contributed to the increasingly dominant culture of post modernism –the emergence of multiple truth regimes in absence of a universal sovereign–, where ICT’s are increasing the dissemination of authority. As news is increasingly read through social media, political campaigns are left playing the game of performance politics where they compete for attention on the same platforms as entertainment content (Postman 1985, Kreiss 2016). This has resulted in politics becoming about entertainment not policy; information being consumed under selective bias; and authority questioned based on partisan reasoning. This creates an environment conducive to emotive appeals in campaigns. A study from the Pew Research Center identifies that 62% of American adults use social media as their primary source of news (Greico 2016). Because of the incentive provided by social media sites to monetize articles, the importance of an article is determined by their likes, shares, and clicks (Solon 2016) This monetization of news directly contributes to the dissemination of fake news. Citizens are directed through algorithmic sequences to consume their predisposed bias in articles resulting in the creation of an echo chamber of misinformation (Ott 2017). The Trump team actively contributed to the spread of fake news through social media sites directed to convey an emotive appeal to their base, and

create an environment of cynicism in the opposition (Wells 2016, Green & Issenberg 2016, Persily 2017). Cynicism throughout the campaign contributed to a decrease in public confidence in democratic institutions that leading to a political malaise (Valentino *et al* 2001). To effectively demobilize subsets of a population, the campaign must undercut their trust in government, creating an environment of cynicism (Kahneman & Tversky 2003, Hirsch 2015). The digital infrastructure of the Trump campaign and an environment primed for cynicism enabled them to implement narratives designed to strategically demobilize certain subsets of the population.

The resources provided by Cambridge Analytica enabled the Trump campaign to isolate the electorate based on their psychographic profile, this meant that the campaign had a rudimentary understanding of the electorate's emotional triggers (Kosinski 2013). In developing a quantitative understanding of their population, they could effectively tailor advertment to impact their decision making. In addition to the services of Cambridge Analytica, the team regularly employed Twitter bots to spread their message and actively participated in the development and dissemination of fake news (Bessi & Ferrara 2016). Fake news contributes to an ever-growing barrier in informed political decision, which results in difficulty for readers to disseminate truth from campaign propaganda (Persily 2017). The Trump campaign actively tried to capitalize on this environment; with their digital infrastructure behind them they focused on the demobilization of three groups: white liberals, young women, and African-Americans (Green & Issenberg 2016, Persily 2017). To demobilize the white liberal vote, their targeted narrative centered around Clinton's support of the Trans Pacific Partnership and her email scandal. For women, the narrative became about Bill Clinton's sexual harassment history and the role of the DNC in "looking the other way". African-Americans were targeted with messaging centered on Clinton's relation with fellow African-Americans and her usage of the term "Super-Predators" along with mandatory minimum

sentencing which disproportionately affected the African-American community (Green & Issenberg 2016). The gravitas of their demobilization strategy capitalized on an increasingly fragmented American Left, whose ideology has fallen victim to the politics of identity. Where identity politics does not conflict with the Right's ideology of individualism, this is in direct opposition with the American Left. Characterized as a pseudo-politics of self-regard that is increasingly exclusionary the Left is unrepaired to seek a common good – “For every advance of liberal *identity consciousness* has marked a retreat of liberal *political consciousness*.” (Lilla 2017) – liberal consciousness demonizes those in opposition to their individual atom. The targeting executed from the Trump campaign capitalized on this dichotomous discord in the American Left; rather than a unification of political consciousness the left exhibited symptoms of balkanization and malaise. The Trump campaign set out to foster an environment of discord, where the continued social fragmentation would percolate under the influx of misinformation.

The success of both the Obama campaign of 2008 and the Trump campaign of 2016 can be attributed to numerous factors, but two are more prominent than others. First, the framing of the campaign as a social movement. Both the “Hope” campaign of Obama and the “M.A.G.A.” campaign of Trump utilized a fractured political environment to mobilize key segments of the population around a collectivized narrative creating managed citizens. Second, the accumulation of digital infrastructure and statistical tools provided a mathematical understanding of how to efficiently and accurately target populations to mobilize or demobilize. Marketing techniques applied to the political arena enable the propulsion of campaigns to new heights. While these cases are very different in scope they share a common message. The future of the democratic process has fundamentally changed. The import to campaigns is no longer their partisan policy, their concern is of the electorates data. Initiated under the DNC in 2005 and catapulted to a new extreme

under Trump in 2016 what is crucial for campaigns is their digital infrastructure; in the future, there will be two kinds of candidates those who know how to use data and those who do not.

Conclusion:

The Information Age has produced a society where data has become the most important commodity; where citizens are valued by the information they can provide to institutions. During the 2008 Obama campaign, the American polis was purview to an expansion of political opportunities, where citizens became invigorated around the political process and social networks invoked a dissemination of political consciousness. The ability to appeal to citizen led initiatives captivated a public into political discourse and generated a feeling of renewed hope to the democratic process, which would not have been possible without the Internet and the introduction of new Social Networking Sites. However, this brief idealization of the Internet to generate a new vision for the American future and advance an international Liberal agenda was rapidly destroyed. The efforts of the Trump campaign demonstrated how quickly, a tool that was once viewed as liberator and the savior of democracy could be reengineered to foster political malaise and generate socially fragmented populations who exist solely within their own echo-chambers. In 2018, society has been rapidly disposed to an era of multiple “truth regimes”, in which political discourse has become a pedantic effort due to the lack of a common lexicon between citizens.

The moral turpitude of citizens in western democracies have been severely eroded through the spread of increased information, with the exposure to truth regimes citizens are increasingly isolating themselves in bubbles where they feel most comfortable. Rather than collectivizing under forms of universality and human experience they are increasingly isolating themselves into chambers that reinforce their bias. In the Information Age, what is of concern to

institutions is not generating an epoch of universal values consistent with moral virtue; what is of concern is how these institutions can capture your attention, ordering you into isolated population subsets. *Individualism* reaches its natural evolution; you hear, see, and consume what is entirely personal. The institutionalization of Big Data, not just in political campaigns, but all facets of society is directly contributing to the creation of your own “daily-feed” where you are lulled into a bliss consummated by personalization of discourse.

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