Applying Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's Propaganda model to the Digital Media Landscape: An Analysis of Cambridge Analytica's involvement in the United States 2016 Presidential Elections

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I, Anke Nel, declare that this dissertation, which I am submitting for the degree MA Political Science at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and that it has not been submitted by me for a degree at another university.

Where secondary material is used, it has been acknowledged and referenced in accordance with university requirements. I am aware of University policy and implications regarding plagiarism.

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ABSTRACT

The 2021 doomsday clock has placed the world at 100 seconds to midnight in part because of the increased use of disruptive technologies, which influence the way that people think, act, and in some instances the way that people vote. Digital tools like algorithms, bots, artificial intelligence, microtargeting, and fake news have pushed society into a post-truth environment where people disagree on basic facts. This study assesses the use of these new media techniques using Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model and applying it to Cambridge Analytica's operations during the 2016 United States Presidential election. In doing so, this dissertation aims to illustrate how the elite control the information audiences' access, using more sophisticated targeting information. Ultimately, this dissertation aims to establish whether the propaganda model is still relevant in the age of new media. Furthermore, this dissertation asks whether Cambridge Analytica's involvement in the Trump campaign had any impact on the integrity of the US democratic system.

Keywords: new media, post-truth, 2016 US election, Donald Trump, propaganda model, elitism, democratic integrity, filter bubbles, micro targeting, Cambridge Analytica

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ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Artificial Intelligence
Alt-Right	Alternative Right
APP	Application
B.C.E	Before the Common Era
BDi	Behavioural Dynamics Institute
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic Acid
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
GOTV	Get Out The Vote
GSR	Global Science Research
MAN1	Make America Number 1
MTurk	Mechanical Turk
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OCEAN	Openness, Conscientiousness, Extroversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism
PR	Public Relations
PSYOPS	Psychological Operations
PWC	PriceWaterhouseCoopers
RNC	Republican National Committee
SCL	Strategic Communications Laboratories
SNS	Social Networking Sites
Super PAC	Super Political Action Committee
TV	Television
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The Doomsday Clock[1], which is one of the most respected instruments for measuring the global security landscape, has placed the world at 100 seconds (proximity) to midnight (catastrophe). This decision is made annually by the board of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists and its sponsors, who include 13 Nobel Laureates (Benedict, 2021). In 2020, 'information' was added as a multiplier to the existing threats of climate change and nuclear war. According to the scientific panel, "countries have long attempted to employ propaganda in service of their political agendas and the internet has facilitated the broadcast of false and manipulative messages to audiences around the world, enabling millions to indulge in their biases and ideological differences" (Mecklin, 2020). In 2021, information in the form of 'disruptive technologies' was included on the list of threats along with climate change, Covid-19 and nuclear risk. These disruptive technologies have led to a large-scale embrace of conspiracy theories – often "promoted by political figures and partisan media" – at the cost of facts and science (Mecklin, 2021). So much so that lexicographers at Collins Dictionary named 'fake news' word of the year for 2017, before it was added to the Oxford English Dictionary (Flood, 2017;Moye, 2019).

Some extreme examples of the deadly effects conspiracy theories and disinformation can have on society materialised in 2016 and 2020 in the United States. In 2016, a Facebook post accused the leading US Democratic Presidential nominee, Hillary Clinton, of operating a human trafficking ring, where kids were sexually abused in a satanic ritual inside the basement of a pizza parlour, Comet Ping Pong, in Washington, DC[2]. The initial Facebook post later appeared on Twitter before picking up momentum and reaching right-wing websites *Breitbart* and *Info*

[1] The doomsday clock was first created in 1947 in the context of Nuclear War. The science and security board consults a range of disciplines and uses both quantitative and qualitative information from various sources in order to 'set the clock'. It is a metaphorical clock used to remind civilisations about the perils that exist and how close "we are to destroying our world with dangerous technologies of our own making" (Benedict, 2021).

[2] This is more often referred to as #Pizzagate or the Pizza Gate Scandal

Wars[3]. Eventually, an American father of two, Edgar Welch, decided to 'free the captive children' at the pizza parlour using an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle, a knife and a .38 handgun, before being arrested by the police (Robb, 2017). A more recent example occurred in 2019 and 2020 when former US President Donald Trump used social media to disseminate false claims about the integrity of the elections. In Georgia, for example, Trump accused Democratic Party election officials of taking suitcases of ballots out from under the ballot-counting tables, to scan them "illegally and unsupervised for nearly two hours" (Mascaro, et al., 2021; Woodward, 2021). Ultimately, Trump's portrayal of election fraud led to the establishment of Facebook groups such as 'Stop the steal', who spread misinformation about the 2020 US Presidential election and eventually mobilised support for the Capitol riot, which led to five deaths (Mecklin, 2021).

These would not be the first fictional stories to mislead citizens. In 1938, American director Orson Wells, acted out a radio play based on an adaption from the science fiction novel '*War of the Worlds'* (Naddaff-Hafrey, 2018). The play mimicked a breaking news broadcast, informing listeners of an attack by Martians in New York, as well as a meteorite strike in New Jersey (Lovgren, 2005). To listeners who tuned into the radio station after the introduction – which indicated this was merely a fictional story – this sounded like a breaking news story, leading some people to flood newspaper, radio and police stations for assistance (Lovgren, 2005). The story was effective in persuading audiences of its authenticity because it was aired in 1938, in the context of an impending war, which made any invasion easy to imagine. However, today's fake news stories differ from those created many years ago in several different ways.

The first difference is the establishment of 'new media'. New media can be understood as the convergence between computing, communications, and media in which data, texts, sounds, and images, are stored in digital formats that are distributed by broadband fibre-optic cables and satellites (Flew & Smith, 2014:1-5). New media consists in part of the internet and its associated search engines and

[3] Both these sources were at their peak in 2018, with 15 million visitors and 250 advertisers on Breitbart (Schwartz, 2018) and in the same year, the Info Wars application was the number one 'trending' or popular APP on Google Play Store and number three on Apple, with approximately 30 000 downloads a day (Nicas, 2018). This is above the average for mainstream media.

Social Networking Sites (SNS) and has significantly changed the way audiences receive information. A study by Pew Research Centre indicates that, between 2016 and 2017, Americans who relied on television for news declined from 57% to 50%; similarly, those who rely on print news declined from 20% to 18%; radio, as a source of news, remained the same for 2016 at 25%; and the internet as a source of news grew from 38% to 43% (Gottfried & Shearer, 2017). Currently, at least 72% of US adults use at least one social media platform, particularly YouTube and Facebook (Pew Research Center, 2021). Globally, 59.5% of the population is online and 53.6% of the population use social media (Johnson, 2021; Chaffey, 2021).

Secondly, as a result of these changing information sources, there has been a shift away from mass communication to targeted messaging. Mass communications follow a 'top-down' approach where individuals or companies who control the information flow decide what audiences see and hear. As with the Orson Wells example above, anyone who tuned into the radio station would hear the same story unfold. Targeted communications on the other hand, create the illusion of a 'bottom-up' approach because data is collected from individuals' activity online which informs companies or political campaigns about the type of information to send a particular user, thereby ensuring different people see different information.

Lastly, there is a growing belief in conspiracy theories and false news stories as being true, at the cost of scientific evidence and facts. The more experts attempt to expose false or misleading information, the more it results in 'disconfirmation bias', where individuals prefer to ignore experts and continue to believe information that reaffirms their own beliefs (Rothschild, 2021:13). This is because people tend to use various mental frames to assess and understand the world around them. Their thoughts and beliefs are constrained by the parameters of these mental frames (Lakoff 2004:14-15). According to neuro-linguist, George Lakoff, these frames develop when people see information repeated enough times, especially when that information is linked to a person's personality. Once that frame of understanding is solidified, facts that do not fit the frame will 'bounce off' (Lakoff 2004:34).

This increased reliance on new media platforms has established a new economic order which American author, and Harvard Professor, Shoshana Zuboff, calls 'Surveillance Capitalism'. In her book, '*The Age of Surveillance Capitalism',* Zuboff

argues that the human experience is increasingly exploited for commercial purposes. More specifically, digital activities are translated into 'behavioural data' to drive behaviour toward profitable outcomes (Zuboff, 2019:8):

> *Surveillance capitalism is a rogue force driven by novel economic imperatives that disregard social norms and nullify the elemental rights associated with individual autonomy that are essential to the very possibility of a democratic society […] Surveillance capitalism and its new instrumentarian power will thrive at the expense of human nature and will threaten to cost us our humanity* (Zuboff, 2019:11-12).

Surveillance capitalism is made possible by tracking users' digital footprints or their behaviour online; every time a user visits a website and is asked to 'accept cookies' to proceed, they allow third-party actors to trace their behaviour (Kaiser, 2019). These third-parties can track what sites the user visits, the user's 'likes', 'dislikes' and the content they engage with. This information is referred to as 'data points' or 'digital footprints' and they inform algorithms, which are complex computational procedures that transform inputs into outputs. Algorithms can solve various problems, including identifying the best routes for data to travel and, using a search engine like Google, algorithms can find pages where certain information is present (Cormen, et al., 2009:1-5; Schwarz, 2019:5-7). In this way, algorithms can use inputs from a user's online activity to understand aspects of their personality, which is used by companies to decide what information to send to a user (Luerweg, 2019). The process of sending personalised content to users is known as 'Microtargeting' or 'Narrowcasting' (Howard, 2006:8; Weigel, 2006:21).

Microtargeting is not a new marketing concept. In '*New Media and the Managed Citizen'*, Canadian sociologist Philip Howard, argues that access to satellite networks, cell phones and the internet from 1996 onward gave rise to the use of 'Political Hypermedia', where political consultants could use digital tools to understand and manipulate public opinion (Howard, 2006:6-11). In this way, technology ensured that the flow of information was no longer centralised in the systems of mass media, but instead able to reach specific audiences (Howard, 2006:11; Weigel, 2006:21). In a political context, this meant that information used to

target individuals could be linked closely to the users' personality and possibly change the way they vote and behave (Bayer, et al., 2019).

To understand the way that information reaches an audience in the context of the new media landscape, this dissertation uses the American economist, Edward Herman, and American linguist, Noam Chomsky's, propaganda model, as per their book, '*Manufacturing Consent: the Political Economy of the Mass Media'*. Though this model focuses on traditional media sources, it is still relevant in the context of the new media landscape. According to the propaganda model (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 of this study), information passes through five different filters before reaching its audience, namely: Ownership and Profit Orientation, Advertising, Sourcing, Flak/Censure and Ideology (Herman & Chomsky, 1994). The model indicates that information flow takes on a 'top-down' approach, whereby a specific group of individuals, who have the means and power, decide what information a mass audience would have access to, whether on their television, in printed newspapers or on the radio. However, as previously discussed, a decline in the demand for television and print news and an increased demand for online news sources, is changing the nature of the information flow in societies. In the age of surveillance capitalism, information continues to flow through the five filters of the propaganda model, but the filters itself are adjusted and interpreted according to new media technologies and their associated tools. Here, insight into the personality of certain individuals or specific audiences are able to inform the powerful minority, or the elite, on the type of content they should disseminate in order to affect their desired change (Nix, 2016).

One such elite group, the main case study of this dissertation was the data analytics firm, Cambridge Analytica. Cambridge Analytica was an extension of its parent company, Strategic Communication Laboratories (SCL), which itself was an extension of the Behavioural Dynamics Institute (BDi).

The scandal that surrounded Cambridge Analytica was uncovered in 2018 by *The Guardian*, the *New York Times* and United Kingdom based *Channel 4 News* and it highlighted how Cambridge Analytica used new media tools to manipulate public opinion worldwide.

Specifically, this dissertation assesses Cambridge Analytica's involvement in the 2016 US Presidential election, where they harvested 5 000 data points on 230 million adults in the US (Isaak & Hanna, 2018:56-57). The data was collected by a company called *Global Science Research*, owned by Cambridge psychology Professor Alexandr Kogan. Kogan used this institute to create an application (APP) for Cambridge Analytica in 2014 called '*Thisisyourdigitallife'.* The APP – only accessible by logging onto the Facebook platform – paid users a small fee of between $1-4 to participate in a personality questionnaire involving the big five personality traits: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extroversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism (OCEAN). When users logged into their Facebook profiles to complete the survey and claim their money, they provided Kogan and the Cambridge Analytica team access to their Facebook data, as well as that of their friends. This included 'likes', 'dislikes', comments, place of birth, workplace, relationship status and in some instances, private messages. This extended data extraction was made possible through Facebook *Friends API*, which, before being shut down in 2015, allowed third-party actors, and developers to extract the Facebook data from a user's list of friends (Constine, 2015; Isaak & Hanna, 2018:57). The survey and Facebook data were combined along with other commercial data to draw up extensive psychological profiles of voters in the US to understand what types of campaign messaging would best reach them. This information assisted the '*Trump for President'* and '*Make America Number 1'* campaigns with the curation of targeted messages for voters falling within a predetermined 'Principal Audience'. The principal audience consisted of two groups, the first was the 'deterrence group' who Cambridge Analytica felt could be dissuaded from voting, the second was the 'persuasion group' which the analytics firm believed could be persuaded to vote for Trump (Cambridge Analytica, 2020). Ultimately, Donald Trump won the 2016 election against the Democratic Party's nominee, Hilary Clinton, and became the 45th President of the US.

In order to achieve Trump's victory, Cambridge Analytica appears to have exploited some of the cracks that developed within the US democratic system and were able to use new media to manipulate voter's ability to deliberate and decide, which could have serious consequences for democratic integrity in the country.

This dissertation attempts to expose the way in which Cambridge Analytica identified and exploited cracks in American society. The firm's involvement in these elections, appear to have serious implications for democratic integrity worldwide, marked by an increased distrust in mainstream media and the electoral process. This study will attempt to establish whether the propaganda model and elite theory are still relevant in the new media environment by applying the model to the 2016 US election, using Cambridge Analytica as a case study.

1.2 Research Question

This study's main research question asks whether Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's propaganda model is still applicable in the age of digital media by analysing Cambridge Analytica's involvement in the United States 2016 Presidential Elections as a case study.

The study seeks to answer the following sub-questions, namely:

- How does the propaganda model relate to the current social media landscape?
- To what extent did Cambridge Analytica exploit digital media to manipulate voters in the US during the 2016 Presidential Elections?
- How does elitism explain the way in which the social media environment influenced the key functions and norms of democracy?
- Has Cambridge Analytica's use of social media influenced the level of democratic integrity in the US?

1.3 Aim of Study

This study aims to understand whether the propaganda model is still relevant in the information age, by applying the model to the 2016 US elections using the Cambridge Analytica scandal as a case study. The original model illustrates how traditional media filters information that the public sees through five filters, which are based on elite interests. Elite Theory is therefore used in this dissertation to support the propaganda model in explaining how a handful of powerful companies like Facebook and Google are able to create 'intelligence platforms', which can be used

by companies like Cambridge Analytica to manipulate voters. These elite groups have the means and power to use these platforms to advocate for their own interests (Doward, et al., 2017; Solnit, 2019).

1.4 Limitations of the study

This study is limited by the information available about the tactics used by Cambridge Analytica in the US. Though some data is available, it would require the assistance of both Cambridge Analytica and Facebook to retrieve the advertisements created for targeted voters who fell within the principal audience. Furthermore, although the data list used by Cambridge Analytica to categorise voters for the Trump campaign was accessed by Channel 4 News, the list has not been released to the public for analysis.

1.5 Methodology: Case Study Analysis

This dissertation uses a qualitative case study method. The case study design will help develop concrete, contextual, and in-depth knowledge about the tactics used by Cambridge Analytica in the US (Crowe et al., 2011). Data collection methods include a documentary-based study that focuses on various newspaper articles, testimonies given by former Facebook and Cambridge Analytica employees, reports released by several US government departments after official enquiries in the US, and supplementary books, journal articles, and reports. These sources will provide a better understanding and contextualisation of the topic under investigation.

1.6 Theoretical Perspectives

This study uses Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's propaganda model, as well as elite theory, to understand the way in which new media tools are increasingly used against the electorate. The propaganda model, in its original form, underlines the way in which information flows through five filters – Profit and Ownership, Advertising, Sourcing, Censure and Ideology – before reaching a mass audience. This means that audiences watching television, reading a newspaper or listening to the radio, all see, read, or hear the same information, which has been filtered by an elite group. Having such control over the information audiences have access to, allows these large corporations to 'Manufacture Consent' of audiences. This idea

corresponds with elite theory, which posits that a small group of actors in a society have all the power to influence the masses. Their power and wealth, allow this elite class to push their interest onto the general populace.

When analysing the 2016 US election and the role that Cambridge Analytica played in getting former President Donald J Trump elected, it becomes clear that elite theory and the propaganda model are still relevant in the age of new media. Large corporations are able to work with companies like Cambridge Analytica to decide what information voters have access to. Thus, the elite are still manufacturing the consent of the masses, though on a much more personal and targeted scale.

1.7 Structure of the Study

The first chapter provides an overview of different research undertaken on the Cambridge Analytica scandal. Two main gaps have been identified in the existing literature: firstly, authors have omitted leaked documents by former employee of Cambridge Analytica and whistle-blower, Brittany Kaiser, which outlined key methods and strategies undertaken by the analytics firm; secondly, authors who discuss the scandal do not relate their research to the way the use of new media technologies in elections have materialised in the 2020 US elections.

The second chapter discusses the concepts of democracy as defined by key authors such as Robert Dahl, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and Joseph Schumpeter. Authors agree that a functioning democracy requires political deliberation and political participation and strong norms such as mutual tolerance and institutional forbearance. The chapter reveals that when a society displays these norms and functions consistently, especially during elections, then democratic integrity is upheld. However, new media is threatening this integrity through its use of surveillance technology and its associated data analytics, algorithms and microtargeting techniques. Societal trust is further broken down through an increase in fake news, artificial intelligence, and bots, creating a ‘post-truth’ environment. The chapter shows that individuals increasingly seek out information that confirms their pre-existing beliefs and biases and ignore contrary information. This leaves little room for deliberation and participation, further inhibiting the ability for society to celebrate mutual tolerance for each other. Finally, the chapter describes the

establishment of Cambridge Analytica and the way the data analytics firm scraped the data from millions of voters in order to build personality profiles which could assist them with their microtargeting strategy.

The third chapter examines the theoretical framework for this dissertation. Firstly, it discusses elite theory as theorised by Gaetano Mosca and C. Wright Mills to understand power dynamics in society and the resultant influence the elite have. Thereafter, the propaganda model is introduced to understand how the mass media filter information in favour of this elite class before the information reaches audiences. The propaganda model is then adapted to the new media environment to establish how new technologies used by these elite groups are able to decide what information voters see.

Chapter four of this dissertation includes a data overview of the 2016 US election. It illustrates Cambridge Analytica's involvement in the 'Trump for President' and 'Make America Number 1' (MAN1) Super Political Action Committee (PAC). Their work included establishing a principal audience of 9 million voters who they felt could either be persuaded to vote for Trump or dissuaded from voting at all. The chapter further shows how Cambridge Analytica ran the 'Defeat Crooked Hillary' campaign and targeted African Americans with voter suppression campaigns. The Cambridge Analytica case study is placed in the context of the adapted propaganda model to establish how information was filtered before reaching voters.

The fifth chapter attempts to answer the research question by analysing the data presented in chapter 4. Chapter 5 will therefore attempt to establish whether the propaganda model is still relevant in the new media environment by highlighting the way in which elite groups control the information that voter's access.

The sixth and final chapter discusses the answers to the research questions posed, the limitations of this study and offers some recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The main sources for this literature review include journal articles, dissertations, reports, conference proceedings, and articles published by international media houses, including *The Guardian*, *The New York Times,* and *Channel 4 News*. Accounts by whistle-blowers and former Cambridge Analytica employees, Christopher Wylie and Brittany Kaiser are also included.

Overall, the literature reviewed suggests that most political experts hold a similar view regarding the hostile use of new media technologies to exploit cracks in democratic systems to gain support from voters during election campaigns. For these experts, the use of new media techniques during election cycles to exploit these cracks, break down democratic norms of 'mutual toleration' and 'institutional forbearance' and threaten the core functions of democracy, namely 'democratic participation' and 'democratic deliberation'. As a result, voters lose their trust in the electoral process and in the integrity of democracy, for example in 2020, only 29% of Trump supporters felt confident in the accuracy of the election result (Griffin & Quasem, 2021:5).

There are two gaps in the literature in relation to the use of new media technologies in elections. Firstly, most published literature on the topic only broadly reference some sections of the leaked documents by Kaiser – which includes a 700-page document underlining some of the methodology and techniques used by Cambridge Analytica. Authors such as Nanjala Nyabola (Nyabola, 2020) and Carole Cadwalladr (Cadwalladr , 2020), mention the Twitter account and reference some of the leaked material in their work, but fail to present some of the important information contained in the 700-page document released in September 2020. For example, Nyabola while acknowledging the firms involvement in the US, focuses her work primarily on the Kenyan elections and the documents pertaining to the involvement of the analytics firm in that country. While Cadwalladr provides a broad overview of the content that can be found within some of the leaked documents released in January 2020. Authors Paul Lewis and Paul Hilder, merely focus on one presentation within the 700-page document, which provides an overview of the 'Cambridge Analytica,

Trump for President Data and Digital Marketing Debrief' (Lewis & Hilder, 2018). While Vito Laterza (Laterza, 2021) provides an overview of some of the data contained within the leaked documents, he fails to provide a thorough understanding of all the relevant material found in the documents which underline the firms undertaking in the US. This is because Laterza primarily relies on the account of Christopher Wylie in his book, *Mindf*ck*, which is further substantiated with the work of Kaiser in her book *Targeted*. Although the aforementioned authors mention Kaiser's leaked documents, they do not provide a comprehensive overview of the information contained therein. Therefore, this dissertation aims to close this gap by providing a better understanding around the firm's operations in the US. Secondly, there is a gap in the literature regarding the way that companies like Cambridge Analytica have established an undemocratic environment , especially as witnessed during the 2020 US Presidential elections. Laterza reiterates this sentiment by suggesting in his article that, "we will likely see more academic studies of the 2020 Trump campaign in the coming months and years, but for now [researchers] do already have at [their] disposal a large and constantly increasing amount of evidence on the 2016 campaign and the role played by Cambridge Analytica" (Laterza, 2021, p. 121). Although this dissertation focuses largely on the 2016 US Presidential campaign, it attempts to link this with some of the similarities found in the 2020 campaign.

Against this background, this dissertation aims to contribute to existing literature by including the aforementioned documents by Kaiser to shed further light on the operations of the analytics firm in the US in 2016. This is further supported by accounts from former employees – turned whistle-blowers – of Cambridge Analytica and Facebook. From a theoretical standpoint, this dissertation uses Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman's propaganda model, as well as elements of elite theory as proposed by Gaetano Mosca and C. Wright Mills. This approach differs somewhat from other literature on Cambridge Analytica, which often cite the Public Sphere theory of German philosopher, Jurgen Habermas, to explain the firm's role in shaping and influencing public opinion. In essence, Habermas proposes that public opinion is formed through debate among the public about important issues of the state, which helps to guide government decision making processes (Dahlberg, 2007:128).

The main theoretical focus of this study is not the way new media has changed the public sphere, but rather the way powerful elite groups exploit vulnerabilities in democratic systems to further their political and economic goals. Combining this information with existing literature provides a more holistic understanding of the tactics Cambridge Analytica was able to use. This approach helps the study determine whether the integrity of US elections was under threat in 2016.

This literature review chapter consists of various themes and is broken down into four sections. The first section explores democracy as a concept, where it originated, and what it means to different authors. This is important, because once there is an understanding of what democracy means, it is easier to expose the vulnerabilities that exist within the system, which will be shown, are increasingly used by companies to manipulate the electorate. The second section describes the various digital techniques applied in modern political campaigns that aim to explore and exploit cracks within different democratic systems around the world. The third section reviews what authors believe are the consequences of elite groups exploiting these cracks for democratic integrity. The fourth and final section provides a brief introduction to the case study for this dissertation, namely Cambridge Analytica, by providing an overview of the analytics firms' predecessors, the Behavioural Dynamics Institute (BDi) and Strategic Communications Laboratories (SCL) and the different digital methods applied during elections.

2.2 Democracy

2.2.1 Origins of the democratic system of rule

Democracy is believed to have started in the ancient Mediterranean, particularly Greece and Rome. During the period of 507 Before the Common Era (B.C.E), Greece constituted various sovereign states, of which Athens was one of the largest. The Athenians coined the term 'demokratia', which stems from 'demos' (people) and 'kratos' (rule) (Dahl, 1998:11-12) and established what we know today as democracy. However, the democracy practiced in ancient Greece was significantly different to democratic systems today because although they implied political freedom and equality before the law, in reality, Athenians adopted imperialistic policies whereby freedom and equality were restricted (Galpin, 1983:100). Romans,

referred to their system as a Republic, derived from the Latin words 'res' (affair) and 'publicus' (public) (Dahl, 1998:13). Both the Greek and Roman systems called on eligible citizens to assemble and discuss important state affairs. During assemblies, citizens would elect officials, selected at random in order to give all eligible voters a chance to be elected (Dahl, 1998:12; Jent, 2015:242). However, up until the 20th century, these eligible citizens consisted only of men and did not include women or slaves (Chomsky, 2017:24).

American political scientist, Robert Dahl, suggests in his book '*On Democracy*', that democracy was invented numerous times and likely started before ancient Greece and Rome, in a form of 'primitive democracy' made up of different tribal groups. This is because tribes tended to have their own identities and were considered independent from the control or interference of outsiders. It is likely that democratic tendencies arose within these entities out of what Dahl calls 'the logic of equality' (Dahl, 1998:10). Here, hunter gatherers created a system where elders would deliberate and reach decisions forming a 'natural political system'. However, the more people settled in places over longer periods of time, the more hierarchies took over, leaving behind monarchies, aristocracies and oligarchies[4]. Only once favourable conditions re-emerged together with a desire for popular participation did the demokratia and republic in Athens and Rome form (Dahl, 1998:11)

For Dahl, the Athenians and Romans laid the foundation for modern democracy, but it was a long way from being an ideal system. Firstly, the expansion of geographic areas meant that eligible voters had to travel longer distances to confer on important issues, prompting the need for representation on local, provincial, and national levels. Secondly, democracy in its nascent form, was still largely an unpopular and unknown system of rule among citizens. Thirdly, democratic systems were far from equal. For example, during the 19th century, only 5% of men over the age of 20 were eligible to vote in Britain. Furthermore, in most cases, women and slaves were not allowed to participate in elections and assemblies, and parliaments consisted

[4] Monarchy is a system of governance where a king or a queen functions as the head of state. An Aristocracy is a system of rule by a small group of privileged people who are part of an elite class. Oligarchies are similar to aristocracies in that a small group of people are in control.

predominantly of privileged members of society, which meant that elected officials had little say (Dahl, 1998:22-24).

2.2.2 Conceptions of democracy

Dahl's conception of an ideal democracy rests on the principle of equality and is based on five key criteria: effective participation; enlightened understanding; equality in voting; control over the agenda; and inclusion of all adults. This notion of democracy suggests that all adults have an equally important voice, which should allow them to participate in matters of the state. However, in order to participate effectively, eligible voters must have an opportunity to learn more about important issues and their impact, which often requires deliberation and discussion (Dahl, 1998:27-38).

Swiss-born philosopher, Jean Jacques Rousseau, author of the seminal '*The Social Contract*' in 1762, argues that man, as a political animal, can only survive by acting as a unified body, while at the same time retaining a sense of individuality and autonomy. To strike the right balance, Rousseau proposed the notion of a *social contract*, whereby citizens form a part of a unified political body called the *body politic*. Members of this body are referred to as *citizens* and the body takes on different names depending on context. For example, in a passive state, which is a state that is not threatened by external forces and thus not required to act against possible aggressors, the body is referred to as the *state*. However, when a state is active, for example when engaging or relating to other states, it is referred to as *sovereign* and it comprises of *citizens*. The driver of this body politic is the *general will,* which takes into consideration the needs and desires of all citizens and represents a compromise between them. Rousseau's argument partly mirrors Dahl's philosophy because he believes that the general will stems from deliberations that take place amongst an informed citizenry. However, Rousseau also believes that the will of the people can only exist if no other groupings are formed within the state. That is, the *common good* will be threatened if more powerful groups than the body politic begin to form, because the outcome will favour one group over others, thus preventing citizens from establishing the collective needs of all (Rousseau, 2003).

Austrian economist, Joseph Schumpeter, takes a different approach in his theory of democracy in '*Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*'. Schumpeter argues that the assumptions found within the 'classical doctrine of democracy', including Rousseau's, are refutable on three grounds. Firstly, the idea that an institutional arrangement can be used to reach a common good is not possible; because the idea of a common good is subjective as it means different things to different people. Secondly, even if there were such a thing as common good, such as health for example, there will still be a large scale disagreement about contentious issues such as vaccinations and vasectomies. Lastly, determining a common will is essentially impossible because the will of the people is rarely unified. Any outcome to reach a middle ground will rarely be representative of any supposed 'common will'. In Schumpeter's view, democracy is a form of leadership where the role of people is to produce a government where leaders go through competitive struggles to gain votes. Within this system, the will of the people is manufactured by leaders, who the electorate depend on to govern. Leaders may choose to use the will of some groups as a 'competitive offering' during elections. Democracy is, therefore, a competition through elections in which anyone can compete, but the main function of the electorate is to produce or, critically, refute a government during elections. Overall, the government is chosen through competitive elections, where the people decide which leader they prefer (Schumpeter, 2003).

American authors Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thomson write about democracy in their book '*Why Deliberative Democracy*? Their main argument is that any moral disagreement within a democracy should spur deliberation and debate. They speak about the concepts of reciprocity, publicity, and accountability. Here, citizens or representatives continue to deliberate until a mutually agreeable outcome is reached, by balancing self-interest and the needs of others. Both publicity and accountability rely on the ability to raise disagreements in public forums, where citizens can deliberate and negotiate with each other in order to establish a mutual agreement (Gutmann & Thompson, 2003).

In their book '*How Democracies Die*', American political scientists, Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblattt, argue that norms are the protectors of democracy. They believe that a constitution can be powerful in terms of written rules and that the courts

enforce those rules. However, these rules often have gaps, because they are open to interpretation and it is impossible to foresee and plan for all possible contingencies (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018:58-59). Therefore, it is those unwritten rules, the norms of 'mutual tolerance' and 'institutional forbearance' that uphold democracy. Mutual tolerance is the acceptance of one's opponent as legitimate and protecting their right to compete for and hold office (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018: 60). Institutional forbearance is having the ability to restrain yourself from exercising a legal right (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018:61). For example, the idea of a two-term limit for serving in the highest office in the US was initiated by George Washington, a principle which has been upheld ever since its introduction in 1796 (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018:62) (National Constitution Center, 2021). However, this principle was only enshrined into law in 1951 under the 22nd Amendment of the US Constitution after Franklin D Roosevelt won a total of four terms in office (Little , 2018).

Several authors, including Chris Tenove, Jordan Buffie, Spencer McKay, David Moscrop (Tenove, et al., 2018), Philip Howard (Howard, 2006), Holly Garnett, Toby James (Garnett & James, 2020) and Justine Kenzler (Kenzler, 2019), draw heavily from Jurgen Habermas' public sphere theory to understand the impact of new media on democratic integrity. By and large, these authors consider the various philosophical concepts of democracy described above, but also consider political participation and political deliberation as vital to the functioning of democratic societies, which are discussed in more detail below.

2.2.2.1 Political Participation

Political participation reflects a society where all citizens can express their will through voting in the electoral process. Former US President Abraham Lincoln famously stated that democracy is a system 'of the people, by the people and for the people'[5]. As mentioned earlier, Dahl firmly believed that equality in democracy is achieved in part because of effective participation in the election process. This idea of effective participation is further enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human

[5] According to the Washington Post, Abraham Lincoln borrowed the phrase from John Wycliffe who used it in the Bible as a part of the prologue stating the "Bible is for the Government of the People, by the People and for the People". https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/who-coined-government-of-the-people-by-the-people-for-the-people/2017/03/31/12fc465a-0fd5-11e7-aa57-2ca1b05c41b8_story.html

Rights, which explicitly states that the “will of the people should be expressed through regular and fair elections” (UNESCO, 2018:1). Thus, maintaining high standards throughout the electoral process provides the base for modern democracies and the ideas of ‘one man one vote’ and to ‘vote and have it counted’ are its pillars (Electoral Integrity Initiative, 2012; Tenove, et al., 2018).

2.2.2.2 Political Deliberation

Because voters are no longer as directly involved in politics as they were in ancient Greece, they rely on information to inform their decision on who to vote for and how to hold chosen representatives accountable (Van Gils, et al., 2020). Both Dahl and Rousseau argue that enlightened understanding and an informed populous are essential to debate and deliberate on important issues relating to an election of representatives. Traditional media, such as television, radio and newspapers continue to serve as important mediators between representatives and the public (Howard, 2005). These media sources project opinions on various political candidates and share with the polity various policy options for their consideration (Howard, 2005).

As Schumpeter (Schumpeter, 2003) described in his theory of democracy, voters depend on their chosen leadership to govern and represent their interests. However, voters can decide whether or not to re-elect a candidate based on their previous performance or their competitive offerings. It is important then for the public to be able to deliberate on information that is easily accessible, frequently updated, and that provides the same content to every individual. In this way, citizens have the same starting point when debating and/or deliberating their positions ahead of deciding at the polls (Howard, 2006).

When the polity has access to the same information from which they can decide or debate about a preferred representative, it fosters a sense of trust and a shared reality that upholds democratic norms (Van Gils, et al., 2020). Political deliberation occurs on the basis that all citizens are equal; everyone has an opportunity to voice their opinion and to be heard without discrimination. This gives the polity an opportunity to hear opposing views, which represents an opportunity for informed dialogue and fosters increased participation (Kenzler, 2019; Dahl, 1998).

Taken together, these functions and norms encompass a modern democracy and when they are enacted and adhered to (particularly during election periods), democratic integrity is enhanced and *vice versa*. However, cracks can appear in democracies, such as increased partisan polarisation, targeted communication and the establishment of echo chambers, which can break down trust in the integrity of democracy (Tenove, et al., 2018). Therefore, the following section discusses what democratic integrity entails and how different cracks in the system are exploited by elite groups such as Cambridge Analytica and the consequences thereof.

2.3 Integrity as it relates to a democratic system

The word integrity comes from the Latin term 'integras', which is translated into wholeness, harmony, consistency and coherence of values and principles (Huberts, 2018). A democratic system with integrity is therefore one that functions based on certain values and ideals. These values and ideals will be unique to each system, but could include equality, honesty, accountability, and transparency. If a system continuously displays and upholds the values it is built on, the system shows consistency, coherence, harmony, and fulfilment, implying integrity is maintained (Hall, 2018).

If the democratic functions of participation and deliberation among the public are upheld, the system is also considered to have integrity. This is because of the trust a polity has in its democratic system to ensure a free flow of information that is accessible and shared among all citizens during elections (Deb, et al., 2017). The confidence and trust that individuals have in the electoral process for their will to be equally and fairly represented, is therefore the foundation of democratic resilience (Maweu, 2019).

However, the development of new media technologies such as Google's search engine and social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp, which characterise the information age, have spurred many to question the integrity of democracy globally (Anderson & Rainie, 2020; Ilves, et al., 2020). This is because society lives in a 'post-truth' environment, where citizens within the body politic are accessing different information due to the microtargeting capabilities of these new media technologies. In other words, not only are voters and citizens accessing

different information, but they are also accessing information that tends to confirm their own ideological beliefs and biases, leaving little room for public deliberation and participation which is vital to a functioning democracy.

2.4 Techniques used to exploit the cracks in democratic systems

New media constitutes an interdependent and dynamic relationship between digital devices. These devices are continuously developed by technology companies to enable and expand people's ability to communicate. These digital devices help to foster social arrangements and new media is considered to be the convergence between computers, communications and the mass media which leads to an expanded reach “in the production and consumption of media” (Flew & Smith, 2014:3-5).

Increased technological innovation in the globalised era has helped more individuals acquire laptops and mobile devices, enabling access to new media such as the internet and, since the late 2000’s, social networking (media) sites (Shah, 2016). According to Statista, 3.6 billion people used social media in 2020 (Stipp, 2020), with both Facebook and YouTube popular among age groups ranging from 13 to 64 (Chen, 2020).

Initially, these new media technologies were regarded as catalysts for democracy, with events such as the Arab Spring, a pro-democracy civil resistance movement in the Middle East and North Africa in 2010, being a popular example cited in literature (Czerep, 2018:160). These uprisings were complemented by social media, as the platform allowed users to share with their geographical neighbours and the world a very visual example of people with power mobilising for collective action, particularly in Tunisia and Egypt (Wolfsfeld, et al., 2013:18).

Social media has also been instrumental in Kenya, for example, which is a country often marked by electoral violence (Kimani, 2018:1). Online platforms such as Twitter have encouraged voters to spread positive messages and remain patient while waiting for election outcomes. Some companies even offered incentives like money and airtime for internet users who spread positive and peaceful communications online (Mutahi & Kimari, 2017:18). Furthermore, social media has been able to assist in developing warning systems to prevent violence. One such

method was 'crowdsourcing', which was used widely in Kenya to report incidents of violence by sharing the information about possible violence online (Mutahi & Kimari, 2017:20). This information and its associated videos and pictures helped to map violence hotspots, which were used to guide Kenyan authorities. Online platforms have also enabled politicians in different countries to share information about their campaigns to large audiences at a lower cost (Mutahi & Kimari, 2017:7).

The intersection between digital communication and democracy has in some cases eroded societal trust in the integrity of democratic systems. Drivers of these digital communication methods can be broken into two groups (i) Surveillance Capitalism; Data Analytics; Algorithms and Microtargeting, and (ii) Fake News; Artificial Intelligence, Bots and Deep Fakes and they are discussed in greater detail below.

2.4.1 Surveillance Capitalism, Data Analytics, Algorithms, and Microtargeting

In capitalist societies[6], consumers have historically been exposed to various forms of advertising. By and large, consumers would receive tailored advertisements by mail (physical or virtual) based on where they lived or what magazines they subscribed to (Barbu, 2014). Marketers would rely on television, radio, magazines, and newspapers to capture their target audience's attention and encourage consumer spending.

The situation is very different today. The advertising industry is largely based on the concept Surveillance Capitalism which, as discussed in Chapter 1, is used to describe the way in which companies create a digital replica of a user by tracking their online activity and behaviour to determine their likes, dislikes, beliefs and opinions (Gordon, 2016; Zuboff, 2019; The Social Dilemma, 2020). These companies try to keep the user engaged for as long as possible to obtain large caches of data about the user. This data informs their targeted communication strategy, which play on the users' emotions to trigger a desired and profitable outcome (The Social Dilemma, 2020).

[6] Capitalist societies are controlled by an economic system called the free market, wherein prices and production are determined by corporations and private companies who are competing with each other. These societies emphasize the importance of private property, economic growth, freedom of choice, and limited government intervention.

Marketing companies, and increasingly political consultants and data analytics firms like Cambridge Analytica, source user information through data harvesting (Harari, 2015). If a user visits a website that asks whether they “accept cookies” and the user agrees, their online activity will continue to be tracked across various online platforms (unless they have manually changed their preferences) (Geary, 2012; Novak, 2018). Essentially, by accepting cookies, a user allows the website host and other third-party actors to track online activity such as the things they search for, the number of times they visit sites, purchases made, the type of content they prefer to engage, and their social media feeds, which include likes, dislikes, sexual orientation, relationship status and comments they make. All of these activities leave ‘digital footprints’ or ‘cookie crumbs’, that advertisers and political actors use to develop a profile of a person and use it against them, this is the essence of data analytics (Kaiser, 2019).

This new system of surveillance capitalism is assisted by algorithms, which help companies control what a user sees and has access to online. For example, algorithms on Google, YouTube, and Facebook curate a person’s online feed based on what they perceive will elicit greater engagement and possibly behavioural change (Makauskas, 2018). These slight behavioural changes are also referred to in the literature as ‘social nudging’, where behavioural changes are made to satisfy the interest of the nudger (Morison, 2019). ‘Nudge theory’ links to people’s cognitive processes, arguing that the psychological models of voters built and used by companies, such as Cambridge Analytica, exploit neuroscience and operate on a split level. That is, the base consists of the senses, instincts and habits, which these companies use to alter behaviour by side-stepping a person’s rational and strategic thinking, an area found at the top of the brain (Barker, 2018). Social scientists and marketers increasingly draw on this type of knowledge to alter the behaviour of “citizens in their most important democratic roles including voting and forming opinions” (Gorton, 2016). In some instances, this has led to disturbing results. For example, Google algorithms have pushed Holocaust denialist websites to the top of the search result page, while other platforms have promoted violence against women and/or minority groups (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018). Algorithms are also used to create a false sense of legitimacy, where, for instance, the repeated ranking of Holocaust denialist pages at the top of Google search engine gives the impression

that this is a popular question asked by users and that denialism of such an event is a popular opinion (Deb, et al., 2017).

Data analytics is increasingly used in the political industry for microtargeting purposes to establish psychological profiles about users (Cobbe, 2019). Data analytics firms and political consultants use microtargeting to profile users and to develop specific messaging to influence an individual user or a certain segment of a polity (Kehle & Naimi, 2019). If the message is successful, it may have the potential to alter a voters' behaviour and affect their ability to choose for themselves. Though these techniques seem quite outlandish, a report by Stephanie Hankey, Julianne Morrison and Ravi Naik suggests that these techniques have been around since the turn of the century and have continued to evolve and improve with nearly "250 companies globally now specialising in individual data and political campaigns" (Hankey, et al., 2018). Philip Howard, who authored the book '*New Media Campaigns and the Managed Citizen*' in 2006, almost prophetically discussed the rise of hypermedia campaigns marked by an elite class who understand how to use technological tools against voters in order to achieve their desired outcomes. Critically, Howard identifies the evolution of mass targeting to microtargeting and the ability of the political elite to control what users ultimately see and access. Howard argues that these techniques have developed and evolved since the late 1990s, when voters first went online (Howard, 2006), between 1996 and 2002 the number of US voters using the internet as a source for political information increased by approximately 14-20% (Howard, 2005).

However, to save time and resources, political consultants tend to favour biconceptuals (or swing voters) for targeting purposes. Voters who are undecided about which candidate or party to vote for will ultimately decide based on language used and morals presented by a candidate (Lakoff, 2004). For example, in 1968 and 1972, former US Republican President, Richard Nixon, used 'the Southern Strategy' to successfully appeal to US voters in the Southern states who usually leaned towards the Democratic Party (Feathers, 2020). Language used to communicate with Southern voters was often coded, with hidden messages which only the intended audience could understand. This is because political communication relies on pre-existing and shared beliefs and ideologies between members of the target

audience to effectively convey their message (Aistrip, 1996:19). Nixon's Southern strategy largely used fear and racism as its communication strategy to attract white Southern voters. Nixon emphasised that he would "ease pressure on the South", and repeal civil rights legislation in terms of racial integration that they deemed had "gone too far" (Bunting, 2015; Guillory, 2018; Strauss, 2020). One of Nixon's key messages during the campaign was that his presidency would mean an end to federal financial pressures on schools that refused to desegregate (Aistrip, 1996:34).

Lora Pitman argues in her dissertation, '*The Trojan Horse in Your Head: Cognitive Threats and How to Counter Them*', that the 21st century is marked by new forms of warfare fought by different actors on social networks using persuasion and online disinformation as their chosen tools (Pitman, 2019:1-20). These digital tools create non-traditional security threats, such as 'cognitive threats' where the human mind is used to change social and political life (Pitman, 2019:185). Relationships that exist within this digital environment are between (i) non-state actors and individuals (also seen as the perpetrators and the victims), (ii) non-state actors and state actors (where non-state actors lobby state actors to receive privileges) and (iii) state actors and individuals (Pitman, 2019). In the context of the Cambridge Analytica scandal, Pitman argues that non-state actors used harvested information about individuals against those same individuals through psychographic messaging to disrupt the 2016 US election (Pitman, 2019:180). In this context, the relationship between state and non-state is complex because state actors in a democratic society have limited ability to impose strict rules against social media organisations that compete for profit within the free market. This is because state actors do not generally want to appear authoritarian (Pitman, 2019:230-235). At the same time, individual actors also find it difficult to blame state actors for privacy breaches. Although they expect the state to protect them against such threats, they also understand that freedom of speech and competition are important democratic principles that need to be upheld (Pitman, 2019:233-234).

There is an ongoing debate in the literature on the extent to which Cambridge Analytica and its use of new media techniques could have delivered victory for former US President Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential election. Vito Laterza argues that Cambridge Analytica's ability to understand and use these new digital

tools against voters, specifically in swing states, may have secured a Trump victory (Laterza, 2021:122). Laterza believes that authors who argue that the role of Cambridge Analytica is exaggerated tend to only focus on one element of the firm's digital strategy and fail to recognise that (a) the Facebook model, (b) complimenting data sets, and (c) the staff that conducted focus groups and engineered and tweaked various algorithms to improve their efficiency to target specific voters, all contributed to their success during the campaign (Laterza, 2021:125). He further argues that Trump was successful as a result of 80 000 votes in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, of which two states were targeted by Cambridge Analytica. Therefore, the firm essentially needed to influence only a small number of voters to sway sentiment in their favour and get the advantage in the election (Laterza, 2021:139). However, other authors argue that Trump's victory should be attributed to the fact that he was not a career politician and the "atypical approach" (Raynauld & Turcotte, 2018) to his campaign, using fear, anger and populist messaging to mobilise voters (Mutahi & Kimari, 2017). Nathanial Persily argues that Cambridge Analytica was one of three essential components to Trump's digital campaign, and their methods together with that of the marketing agency Giles-Parscale and the Republican digital team assisted significantly in success of the campaign (Persily, 2017).

Simon Felix assessed 19 different data analytics firms and the products they offer and suggested that these companies are not transparent about the processes they use, but that people only really seemed to take concern over the Cambridge Analytica scandal because of Trump's victory (Felix, 2019). This argument suggests that Cambridge Analytica is not the only non-state actor operating under opaque pretences in commercial and political environments and that Cambridge Analytica might have been used as a scapegoat because an unpopular candidate was elected into office. The latter is worth considering because, as previously stated, Howard argues that similar techniques have been employed since the late 1990s. Therefore, it becomes questionable why states have delayed putting in the necessary "safeguards, oversight measures and enforcements" to protect citizens from these data harvesting techniques.

2.4.2 Fake News, Artificial Intelligence and Bots

In 2017, former governor of Maryland, Martin O'Malley, spoke at Boston Law College about restoring the integrity of democracy. During this talk, O'Malley quoted Neil Postman's[7] comparison of George Orwell and Aldous Huxley – two writers whose books painted pictures of a dystopian future (Lanchester, 2019). O'Malley proceeds to quote Postman's writing arguing it should be a part of American curriculum:

> *What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be nobody who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much (information) that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture* (O'Malley, 2017).

Orwell's *1984* went on to become a bestseller in 2017, right after the 2016 US election. This was because the 2016 elections ran in a 'post-truth' environment where fake news stories, stories which contained false or misleading information, became more popular than verifiably accurate stories from mainstream media outlets. So much so, that the top 20 fake news stories on Facebook outperformed the top 20 mainstream news stories (Schapals, 2018:976-977). This signalled an increased distrust in mainstream media sources, which was encouraged by the former US President Trump, who continuously referred to critics in the mainstream media, as "fake news" and "an enemy of the people" (Schapals, 2018:978; Smith, 2019; Kellner, 2018:89-91).

A report by Nicole Cooke (Cooke, 2018) on *Fake News and Alternative Facts* lays out the post-truth environment, where people increasingly believe information that confirms their existing beliefs rather than searching for factually correct information. This post-truth environment is marked by fake news, which consists of two dimensions: firstly, 'misinformation', which is information that intentionally or

[7] Neil Postman was a writer, educator and media critic, best known for a book titled "Amusing ourselves to death" (Postman, 2017).

unintentionally leaves out certain aspects of the truth and secondly, 'disinformation' which seeks to deliberately spread false information for capital gain or in order to mislead people (Cooke, 2018:2-9). The post-truth environment is one in which users no longer seek out facts to verify claims, but instead believe and repeat sources that reflect their own beliefs and feelings.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the form of 'bots' and 'deep fakes' currently dominate the disinformation landscape. Bots are "automated or semi-automated social media accounts controlled by algorithms to mimic and interact with human social media users and have the ability to spread information and enhance the importance of that information online" (Brkan, 2019). Deep fakes are also a popular tool to spread disinformation, they are more complex in nature and convey their messaging via audio or video. These videos are synthetic and are made to deceive a viewer into thinking the content is real (see below):

Political actors, populist leaders and foreign actors have used bots to spread false or misleading information to confuse users about what is real (Deb, et al., 2017) and social media facilitates the spread of such fake news because of the sheer number of users online who, in turn, are able to share such information with ease. Furthermore, the proliferation of information online makes it increasingly difficult to track and verify what is placed online (Posetti & Matthews, 2018).

These new forms of online disinformation are effective due to their ability to capitalise on a user's pre-existing beliefs which makes it difficult for users to recognise it as false or propagandist in nature (Maweu, 2019). Daphna Oystermen and Andrew Dawson (Oyserman & Dawson, 2021) believe that this is because false information tends to shift a person's reasoning from 'information-based' to 'identity-based' (Oyserman & Dawson, 2021:174). What this means is that authors of false information frame their messaging in a way that is culturally relevant, by using specific terms, phrasing and icons that reflect pre-existing, identity-based mental frames of the intended audience. Instead of using information to inform decisions (information-based), individuals use their identity (identity-based) to make sense of the information presented to them, this links to 'cognition theory' which explains that people understand certain content from the perspective of their social and personal identities (Oyserman & Dawson, 2021:175). Therefore, the more authors of false information are able to link the content to the target audience's cultural mental references, the less the quality of the argument within the content of the messaging matters, making it challenging for the target audience to distinguish between factual and false information (Oyserman & Dawson, 2021:179-182).

In his book, *Don't think of an Elephant! Know your values and frame the debate*, George Lakoff breaks down the ways in which political language can form various mental frames in our minds that determine the way we view the world around us. This is important in the context of the post-truth world because even though Lakoff agrees that facts matter, he argues that they need to be framed in a way that resonates with morality. Therefore, for a voter to accept something as true, it needs to reflect the person's mental frame, fit the structure of thinking in the brain, or risk bouncing off. This is why microtargeting can be so effective, political firms can use a person's interests, morals and values against them in their messaging to make sure it fits the mental structures that already exist within their mind. This can press on a user's deepest emotions to get them to respond accordingly and why perhaps swing voters or biconceptuals are often selected for microtargeting purposes (Lakoff, 2004).

In the run up to the 2016 US elections, most fake news stories favoured Trump, with 155 pro-Trump fake news stories shared 30 million times compared to 41 pro-Clinton

stories shared 7.6 million times (Allcot & Gentzkow, 2017:212). There were 100 pro-Trump websites citing fake news, with one anonymous creator based in Macedonia earning approximately $16 000 in the last few months of the election (Subramanian, 2017). The financial incentives offered to owners of fake news websites are thus substantial and the more users (traffic) they can attract to their website with catchy and/or exaggerated headlines, the more money they can make (Paresh, 2016). This is because advertisements run on these fake news websites, therefore when users visit the site, they are exposed to these (often targeted) advertisements (Braun & Eklund, 2019:1). Some fake news creators claim to earn between $10 000 and $40 000 a month, crediting 'clickbait headlines', which are headlines that are so intriguing that users cannot resist clicking on the links, videos from YouTube that they incorporate into their story, as well as short 400-word stories, where advertisements are shown on the side or below each post (Tynan, 2016). These creators further credit Facebook, claiming that the social media platform facilitates the process of bringing traffic to their site because they share their stories, which refers people to their website and the more people like or share the Facebook post, the more likely it is to go viral and increase traffic to the website and advertising revenue for the website owner (The Washington Post, 2016; Tynan, 2016). Popular fake news stories during this election cycle included (i) The Pope endorsing Trump as President and (ii) pizza gate – a conspiracy theory that Hillary Clinton was running a satanic child trafficking ring in a pizza establishment in Washington D.C. (Posetti & Matthews, 2018:8).

The use of these digital techniques to exploit cracks in a democracy brings to light important questions about their impact on the functions of a democratic system. The following section synthesizes literature that speaks to the way in which these new media techniques are eroding democratic functions. When a democratic system is no longer able to maintain its core functions it exposes various cracks, which, if exploited by companies like Cambridge Analytica, impedes the trust of the polity.

2.5 Consequences for Democratic Integrity

The increased dependence of people on digital technology globally and the ways in which a small group of actors use technology as tools to further their own interests, are affecting individuals' trust in their democracies. This is because of the monopoly

that technological corporations, marketing, and data analytics firms have in society and the power they hold as a result of this increased dependence of society on the internet (Reese, 2019).

A report called the '*Concerns about democracy in the digital age*', released in 2020 by Janna Anderson and Lee Raine from the Pew Research Centre, address several technology experts' thoughts on the challenge technology poses to democracy. Here respondents argued that when a minority of wealthy and powerful companies have most of the power, citizens inevitably lose their say. In turn "citizen interests (in) democratic structured countries may no longer be represented in any meaningful way" (Anderson & Rainie 2020).

As discussed above, the digital age has created a post-truth environment where it is becoming increasingly challenging to ensure everyone has access to the same factual information. Microtargeting, for instance, reaches users when they are in their private space, when their defences are at their lowest, meaning users will read these messages in the same way they may read messages coming from family or friends. This means that it can easily trigger emotions, however, as previously discussed, in order to have a functioning democracy, at least at a very basic level, all citizens have to be equal and require the same free flow of information in order to effectively deliberate and participate in the public sphere. Microtargeting is inhibiting these functions because different people see different information, making it increasingly difficult to debate with peers about important topics (Hrckova, 2021). As a result, political firms can make certain promises to one user, while making opposing promises to another user and no one will know or be able to hold them to account.

The fact that different promises can be made to different voters depending on their interests, also prevents the polity from public participation. As Dahl and other authors have explained, a democracy depends on voters who are able to make informed decisions based on deliberations with other voters, which provides them access to different opinions before casting their final vote (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018). Unregulated voter surveillance undermines the voter's ability to make their own informed decisions (Gordon, 2016; Pitman, 2019), which leads to what Samuel Cossette believes is the disappearance of a common democratic experience (Cossette, 2018) and the "shrinking of the public sphere" (Bennett, 2015).

Democratic integrity is questioned because the system is unable to prevent increased manipulation, corruption and interference from malicious actors using these new media technologies (Shiner, 2018). Ronal Gopaldas calls this a time of digital dictatorship, marked by surveillance and control where “perceptions can be managed and controlled” (Gopaldas, 2019).

Other scholars lament the fact that democracies are declining worldwide due to ongoing polarisation efforts, increased attacks on the press and a lack of trust in the systems that govern them (Kofi Annan Commission on Elections and Democracy in a Digital Age 2020). Microtargeting voters during political campaigns can also be highly inflammatory, particularly within largely polarised societies. These trends are exacerbated by the fact that many of these targeted messages contain propaganda and false or misleading information, which has the potential to segregate and polarise people in society. Ripple effects may be violent ethnic, religious, political divisions and an increased distrust in democratic institutions and electoral processes (Ilves, et al., 2020:55-70). This distortion of information is increasing society’s distrust towards real and accurate information, as well as democratic institutions. If democracy has any chance to rebuild its integrity it must find a way to fairly represent all views, balancing everyone’s voices (Anderson & Rainie, 2020). Any regulations pertaining to the use of new media technology need to be developed in a way that minimises harm to users without encroaching on freedom of speech (Judge & Korhani, 2020).

As previously discussed, Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt argued that a functioning democracy requires mutual tolerance and institutional forbearance, but there is currently an erosion of norms and therefore democracy in the US because of increased partisan polarisation (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018:12). Voters belonging to the two leading political parties in the US, Democratic and Republican Parties are no longer merely divided on matters of policy such as tax and social spending, but rather along cultural, identity, race and religious lines (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018:90). These authors argue that this division is brought on by the fact that America’s society is increasingly diversifying. Historically America has been a majority white nation, with ethnic minority groups. However, by 2044 the opposite will be true, making Caucasians the minority in the country (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018:92). The Democratic

Party is diversified and secular and as a whole has shifted more to the left, whereas Republicans are 90% Caucasian (majority of whom are evangelical Christians) and have shifted more to the right (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018:92). According to Levitsky and Ziblatt, this 'struggle' against the declining majority status has fuelled the belief that the American right are strangers in their own country and that the Democrats are not 'real Americans' (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018:94).

This divide has recently led to more violence in the US, specifically with the re-emergence of "alt-right" groups, "reenergised by President Trump's election into office" and his populist views (ADL Center on Extremism 2018). The alt-right group is "characterised by conspiracy theories and a growing tendency to espouse violence against liberals and liberalist ideologies, as a solution to the world's problems" (Simpson 2018). The alt-right has also enjoyed the use of social media and mainstream conservative media such as Fox News, to spread their views about white supremacy in America. For example, a popular Fox News presenter, Tucker Carlson, recently stated that Democrats under the Biden Administration are changing the demographics of the US by implementing the theory of 'the great replacement', whereby 'real Americans' are replaced with 'obedient' foreigners in an effort to increase the Democratic voter base (Wilson, 2021; Pengelly, 2021). In 2020, the Southern Poverty Law Centre counted a total of 838 hate groups in the US of which 63 were Neo-Nazi based (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2020). This rise in white supremacy is explicitly clear in some towns in the US, such as Harrison in Arkansas. Not only does Thom Robb, the leader of the Ku Klux Klan live and hold several rallies and youth camps there, but visitors are greeted by 'pro-white' billboards as they enter the town. Some residents boast about the towns reputation as being racist because they believe it will "keep them (other racial groups) out" (Renard, 2020). Furthermore, many US citizens believe that lynching, although not in its traditional sense, still occurs around the US, in the form of anti-black violence (McLaughlin, 2020). These continued acts of animosity towards African Americans have contributed to the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, sparked by the police violence that led to the death of George Floyd (Robinson 2019). This racial and religious battle in the US is undermining democratic norms, especially in terms of mutual tolerance, and companies like Cambridge Analytica, headed, and funded by individuals who are pro-alt right such as Steve Bannon and Robert Mercer, exploit

these cracks in democracy to suit their own interests (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018:92-94; Bunch 2018; Devine, et al 2018).

Apart from the growing partisan divide, there is also a crisis of trust, where, as previously explained, people no longer believe experts and mainstream media sources but instead believe information that links to their personality. An example of the crisis in trust is visible in the US and around the world, with the establishment of 'QAnon', an ambiguous conspiracy theory led by 'Q', believed by followers (or digital soldiers) to be US military intelligence insiders who leak clues (or 'drops') about an impending fight between 'good' and 'evil', where good represents Republicans under the leadership of Former US President Trump and 'evil' represents Democrats and celebrities who are satanic and abusive towards children (Rothschild, 2021; Steck, et al., 2020). This fight between good and evil is referred to as '*the storm*' because Trump, a hero in the eyes of the QAnon community, once declared his presence alongside military officials as "the calm before the storm" (Rothschild, 2021:16). Therefore, Q sends out drops on internet message boards such as *4Chan* and later *8Chan*, as clues to followers about when the storm will take place (Beer, 2020). Q's drops are increasingly interpreted from the perspective of the Christian religion and are believed to predominantly attract people between the ages of 50 and 70 (Gilbert, 2021; Argentino, 2020). The QAnon conspiracy is also tearing families apart, parents are either pushing their children away, or in some cases killing them, as was the case with an American father who killed his two children because he believed they "inherited serpent DNA from their mother" (Walsh, 2021; Naik, 2021). Some people claim their marriages are under strain, with one woman explaining that her husband of 20 years, who served four years in the military and has a Master's degree in economics, had fallen victim to the QAnon conspiracy and that she is too scared to go home (Gilbert, 2021). Perhaps the most concerning fact is that subscribers to this conspiracy, such as Republicans Lauren Boebert and Marjorie Taylor Green, who claimed that Hillary Clinton killed children and that Californian wildfires were started by space lasers, have won congressional seats in the US (Bergengruen, 2021).

Another example of the crisis in trust is the misinformation surrounding the COVID-19 vaccine which has established a group of so-called 'anti-vaxxers' around the world. Out of the hundreds of hoaxes and false claims about the vaccine including

that it causes infertility or a complete change in a person's DNA, perhaps one of the most profound is that co-founder of Microsoft, Bill Gates, is using the vaccines as a front to micro-chip individuals, after which 5G networks will send signals to these micro-chips in an effort to control humanity (Islam, et al., 2021).

Voters are often unaware that these digital techniques are used against them and the way in which they can alter their thought processes and behaviour. Studies show that most participants surveyed believed they were immune to these techniques, despite a total of "3800 data breaches in the first half of 2019" (Hinds, et al., 2020) or that it was a user's choice to be online or offline and if they chose to stay online, they should be prepared for the consequences (Afriat, et al., 2021). This is easier said than done though, as Jesse Gordan estimates it would take the average internet user 244 hours a year to read through privacy clauses (Gordon, 2016). Users should be able to participate online but have a choice in the way their data is used, without having to cypher through hours of complicated terms and conditions and legal texts or at least be provided with the option to pay for using social media platforms, with the condition that their data is secure from third party actors.

Studies offering a different view suggest that when users were informed about regulations, their attitudes towards data collection changed significantly (Anderberg & Fernstrom, 2018). User perceptions about the use of their data by Facebook for monetisation purposes (offering a free social media platform in return for using their data to generate an income through targeted advertisements), is the focus of a study by Pauline Brideron and Frédéric Hussler. This study found that the monetisation of data did not prompt users to delete the Facebook app, but rather minimised their usage thereof. Users, however, did indicate they would switch to another app, if it were similar to Facebook but included more data protection (Hussler & Brideron, 2018).

It becomes clear, then, that communication and democracy are linked, and to safeguard norms that uphold democratic integrity, involves genuine reflection and respect for others' inputs (Susen, 2018). As previously illustrated, this is increasingly rare in the advent of social media, just as Orwell and Huxley predicted, because microtargeting voters with information based on their own beliefs and biases, promotes the use of algorithms which push users into echo chambers to ensure they

only “interact with content that reinforces their own opinions” (Bennett & Oduro-Marfo, 2019; MacLeod & Chomsky, 2019).

2.6 Behavioural Dynamics Institute, Strategic Communications Laboratories and the birth of Cambridge Analytica

The Behavioural Dynamics Institute (BDi) – a behavioural science think-tank established in 1998 by psychology and influence experts from the Royal Institute in London, most notably Nigel Oaks[8], laid the methodological foundation for what later became Strategic Communications Laboratories (SCL) in the 1990s (Confessore & Hakim, 2017). SCL reportedly drew clientele such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the UK Ministry of Defence (Wylie, 2019:8) and as a result had board members from military and political backgrounds, boasting extensive experience in Psychological and Influence Operations.

Both whistle-blowers, Christopher Wylie and Brittany Kaiser, became employees at SCL (2013 and 2014 respectively) – and later Cambridge Analytica – after meeting with the CEO Alexander Nix, whose father was allegedly close friends with Nigel Oaks and his brother Alex. Nix, in his presentation to both Wylie and Kaiser, explained that SCL no longer used ‘antiquated’ advertising strategies which focus on mass audiences, but instead uses a ‘bottom-up approach’. This is in line with changes occuring in political targeting since the 1960’s where campaigns moved away from targeting mass audiences to microtargeting specific persuadable segments of the population, as with the Southern strategy discussed earlier in the chapter (Bunting, 2015:1). SCL’s approach required a thorough understanding of a specific audience’s needs and then tailored advertisements to address those needs in order to influence and direct the audience in the client’s preferred direction. Nix believed that it was SCL’s obligation to get people to act by creating the conditions under which they would be more likely to do so (Kaiser, 2019:38-53). The example he most often used at conferences and with most clients and first-time employees is an advertisement SCL created for residents who have their own private beach and who wish to prevent the general public from accessing it:

[8] Nigel Oaks is the founder of BDi and SCL and focused heavily on the use of communication to influence behaviour (Nicolson, 2020).

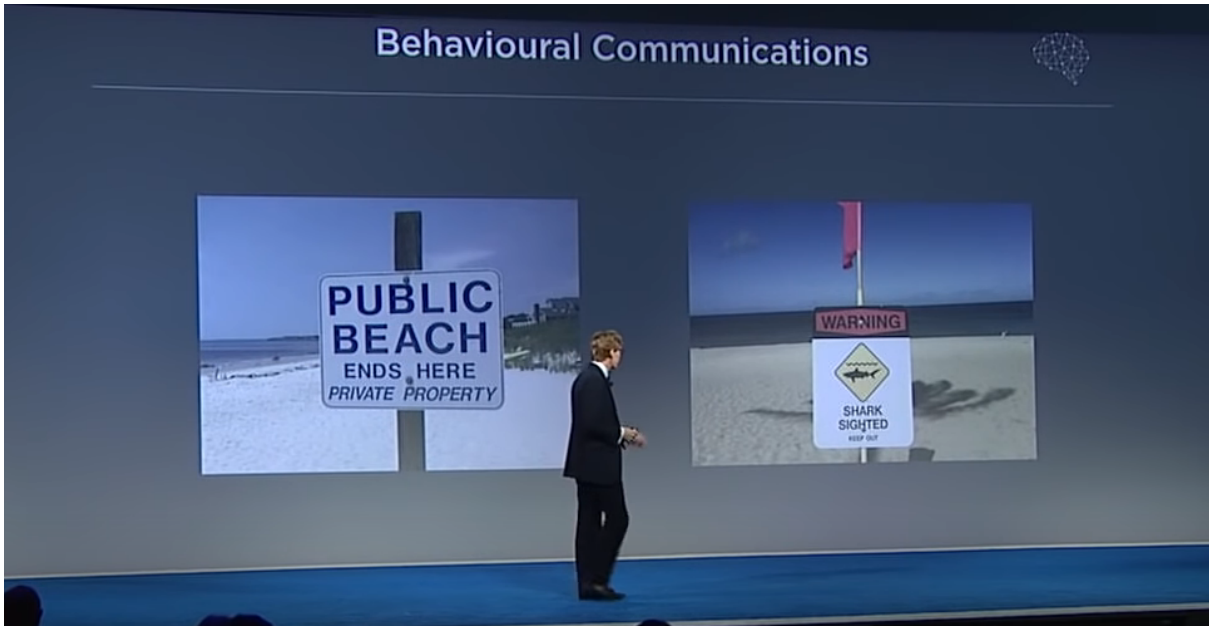

Figure 2. CEO Cambridge Analytica, Alexander Nix presenting at Concordia Summit. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8Dd5aVX 1.

In this example, he says the image on the left is a general informational sign, but the second is behaviourally focused and thus more effective as it plays on a person's fear of being attacked by a shark (Concordia Summit, 2016).

According to a leaked proposal[9] written by SCL to Tullow Oil, a multinational oil and gas exploration company, the methodology employed by both BDi and SCL includes a 'measurable approach to communication', which is achieved through 'four essential steps' including: Audience Research, Data Analysis, Modelling and Evaluation (SCL Group, 2015:15). When successfully implemented, these steps are said to provide a thorough and flexible approach in understanding an audience and the best strategies for influence. To successfully address a problem faced by a client, the methodology favours behaviour change and influence, and is measured by the success or failure of a communication campaign. As previously discussed, Lakoff confirms that the closer you can link communication to a person's morals, values and identity, the more likely the information will stick and trigger an emotional response from the audience (Lakoff, 2004). Therefore, an audience-centric approach allows the communication firm to consider the Target Audience, their logic, cultures, behaviours

[9] SCL Group: Proposal for Research and Consultancy Services – Ghana/Kenya (Tullow Oil).

and attitudes, to inform an influence strategy for clients. The use of Target Audience Analysis was initially used by the analytics firm for psychological operations for defence contracts as a method to "identify and influence target audiences for behaviour change" before being used in elections (Bakir, 2020:9). A phased research approach is necessary to understand a problem in relation to a system, after which audiences can be isolated (segmented) for the purpose of influence campaigns. This is referred to by SCL as 'behavioural microtargeting', a term that BDi trademarked (Kaiser, 2019:68-72). This technique is similar to microtargeting, which was discussed earlier in the chapter and falls under the umbrella of surveillance capitalism, where data from user's online activity is translated into behaviour modification for the purpose of generating a profit (Zuboff, 2019).

The 2012 Obama campaign was the first political campaign in the US to effectively use microtargeting strategies, particularly using email and direct mail, focusing messaging on issues that mattered most to the target audience. The campaign also used 'Project Gordon' to assist its Get Out The Vote (GOTV) strategy, where volunteers would use smartphones to input codes assigned to targeted voters to establish who has voted in real-time, thereby focusing remaining resources on reaching targeted voters who had not yet voted (Bunting, 2015:10-13).

Republicans use the Republican National Committee's (RNC) database, combined with lifestyle data to inform their targeting strategies. Lifestyle data such as preferred alcoholic beverages or the type of car a person drives would indicate which political party an individual belongs to. For example, Democrats are more inclined to like Gin and Volvos, whereas Republicans prefer Bourbon and Fords (Murray & Scime, 2010:144). However, what made Cambridge Analytica's microtargeting strategy for the Republican Party different to previous Republican campaigns is that the analytics firm supplemented the RNC and lifestyle data with psychographic data harvested from Facebook and data brokers like Acxiom to draw up personality profiles on its target audience (Ward, 2018:133). Algorithms could arrange this data according to personality types of voters, which informed Cambridge Analytica's microtargeting strategy, aimed at changing voter behaviour in other words behavioural microtargeting (Murray & Scime, 2010:144; Confessore & Hakim, 2017). Author Vian Bakir argues that behavioural microtargeting as used by Cambridge Analytica is a

form of PSYOPS meant for military contexts, where deception and coercion is used in messaging to influence audiences (Bakir, 2020:5-9). When assessing the use of behavioural microtargeting in the 2016 US Presidential election through Kantian ethics[10], author Ken Ward, believes that the data firm violated the US democratic process by taking away the autonomy of American citizens to make rational decisions about the election, removing citizens' most important democratic role (Ward, 2018:143; Gorton, 2016:61-62).

After completing a number of social, political, and commercial campaigns globally, Nix considered expanding SCL's political operations into the US. Nix focused on the use of "clean data" – which matches old and new data to ensure invalid information is removed thereby improving algorithmic accuracy (Dilmegani, 2021). Old data is data that may be outdated, it could be a persons' former address or telephone number, thus new data is updated information about a person, for example their current address and telephone number. This clean data helped SCL's operational model become more scientific and granular, by ensuring that the voter data they had was up to date and accurate, in order for targeted communication strategies to be more effective. This ultimately led to the establishment of Cambridge Analytica (Kaiser, 2019:96-122). These details are explored in greater detail in the section below. However, it is important to clarify that SCL was the parent company of Cambridge Analytica, and they signed an exclusivity agreement in which Cambridge Analytica would give its contracts to SCL to service them (Wylie, 2019:97). Employees of SCL were also employees of Cambridge Analytica, as was the case with Nix, Kaiser and Wylie.

2.6.1 Cambridge Analytica in the United States

Wylie's book, *Mindf*ck Cambridge Analytica and The Plot to Break America*, details the establishment of Cambridge Analytica in which he himself played a central role. Prior to his employment at SCL and eventually Cambridge Analytica, Wylie worked

[10] Kantian ethics are a set of universal moral principles as proposed by German philosopher Immanuel Kant, which he believes applies to all human beings equally. Kantian ethics proposes that a person's own autonomy should be upheld but that of others should also be maximised. By limiting people's information for example, you limit their ability to act autonomously, which is unethical (Ward, 2018, p. 141).

as a political assistant to the Canadian Liberal Party, which he left to join the Liberal Democrats in the United Kingdom. The Liberal Democrats had witnessed former President Barack Obama's 2012 digital based campaign which used data to reach voters more effectively. The Liberal Party sent Wylie to observe the Obama campaign and the Liberal Democrats hoped to draw from his experience to help them roll out a similar approach for their own campaign (Wylie, 2019:15-18). To do this, Wylie reached out to Brent Clickard, a Cambridge University Professor of Psychology for advice on how to reach voters in an era where data was becoming increasingly valuable in political campaigning (Howard, 2006). Clickard told Wylie that the 5-factor personality model, which records an individual's level of Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (O.C.E.A.N), is an effective tool to understand voter behaviour in greater detail (Wylie, 2019:37-39). Wylie, who was eager to try these new techniques, grew frustrated with the Liberal Democrats who were unwilling to finance the procurement of data necessary to build the sophisticated voter database they wanted. He subsequently went on to join SCL in 2013, where Wylie tested his ideas (Wylie, 2019:42).

Wylie worked closely with Clickard, his friend Mark Gettleson and a man named Tadas Judikas. Their strategy was to collect data which algorithms would sort according to individual personalities (psychographics), then use this information to predict the person's behaviour (Hinds, et al., 2020). A team of psychologists could then use the information to create messages for behaviour change (Wylie, 2019:54). Initially, this was supposed to be used in the realm of military interventions, changing the perspectives of individuals who might for example, be influenced to join a Jihadist organisation. However, about a year later at Nix's behest, Wylie met with Steve Bannon, the former editor of Breitbart News, an ultra-conservative media outlet (Wylie, 2019:19; Wylie, 2018). Wylie and Bannon discussed the possibilities of using this data to better understand the personality of voters and how they could use this knowledge to target voters in a way that affects their feelings, beliefs and behaviours (Wylie , 2018; Kaiser, 2019:16-18).

After the initial meeting in 2013, Bannon decided that Wylie and his team should run an experiment in the US state of Virginia ('The Virginia Experiment') (Wylie, 2019). At first they completed a series of informal interviews where they identified voter

beliefs and perceptions before moving into more nuanced focus groups, where they found voters to be in favour of an opposing candidate, they would change their messaging and test it out on focus groups and online panels to discover that opinions could be swayed by tailoring a candidate's message (in this case Republican Ken Cuccinelli), provided that the message resonated with the audience's psychographic make up (Wylie, 2019:62-76). In this way they were able to use messaging to 'Manufacture Consent' of voters for the preferred candidate.

After the Virginia Experiment, Wylie and his team prepared a report for Bannon, which he presented to US billionaire and Republican Robert Mercer[11] to generate funds. After hearing the presentation, Mercer invested a total of $ 15 million, which was used to fund an offshoot of SCL, which Bannon named Cambridge Analytica. Mercer owned 90% of the company and SCL obtained the remaining 10% (Wylie, 2019:95-97; Cadwalladr, 2017). Initially the project for the Mercer family was envisioned to replicate society in a computer for market forecasting. However, the project evolved with the intent to remould American culture in the guise of the Republican Party.

In 2014, Wylie met with three professors at Cambridge University: Dr David Stillwell, Dr Michal Koinski and Dr Aleksandr Kogan of whom Kogan was the only professor to continue working with Cambridge Analytica after a compensation dispute between Stillwell, Koinski and Cambridge Analytica. Through his company Global Science Research, Kogan developed an APP in 2014 for Cambridge Analytica called 'Thisisyourdigitallife', which paid individuals $1-4 to complete an O.C.E.A.N personality survey of 120 questions (Osborne & Parkinson, 2018; Cadwalladr & Graham, 2018; Hern, 2018; Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018)[12]. To access a large number of participants, the APP was placed on survey sites such as Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and Qualtrics. These sites host a community of participants called 'workers' who complete surveys for 'requesters' for a small remuneration (Hunt, 2015). Participants on these platforms would complete the survey, after which

[11] Robert Mercer and his daughter Rebekah Mercer are Republican billionaires who invested in the establishment of Cambridge Analytica and the Trump campaign.

[12] The app and its associated questionnaires were allegedly first developed by Koinski and Kogan merely replicated it for Cambridge Analytica upon Koinski and Stillwell's decision not to participate (Grassegger & Krogerus, 2017) (Wylie, 2019) (Kaiser, 2019).

they had to sign onto their Facebook accounts and input a special code to receive their payment. The survey contained questions which would determine the person's O.C.E.A.N personality score, however, this data was then combined with the user's Facebook profile data. Not only was the participant's data extracted but that of their Facebook friends as well (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018). Wylie explains that "one person's response would on average produce records of three hundred other people and each of those people would have a couple hundred 'likes' to analyse" (Wylie, 2019). This was possible because, at the time, Facebook allowed approximately 40 000 app developers (Kaiser, 2019) to access the data of users who 'consent' to their data being extracted when accepting an APP's terms and conditions. This consent extended to their friends' data as well through 'Friends API', with Facebook taking a 30% cut of developers profits (Lewis, 2018). Facebook stopped developers from accessing data through Friends API mid-2014, because the company realised how much data was being acquired (Lewis, 2018).

Eventually, through the personality survey, Kogan and the Cambridge Analytica data team extracted data from between 50-87 million (mostly American) Facebook users, in what is historically known as the largest Facebook data breach (Lewis, 2018; Wylie, 2019). This resulted in the release of 570 data points[13] on adults in the US (Kaiser, 2019:5-18). However, Cambridge Analytica combined their Facebook and O.C.E.A.N data with commercial data and other apps like 'The Sex Compass' and 'The Musical Walrus', which determined sexual and musical personalities of participants. Inputs were then translated into data along with the participant and their friends' Facebook profile data, to create psychographic profiles of voters. Eventually Cambridge Analytica had the combined total of between 2000-5000 data points on "every individual in the US" (Kaiser, 2019:68-95; Concordia Summit, 2016; Grassegger & Krogerus, 2017; Herman, 2018).

Using 'likes' from Facebook, provided valuable insight into voters' personalities, those who liked the US singer Lady Gaga for example, could be classified as extroverted and those who preferred the topic of Philosophy, more introverted

[13] Data points are bits of information a user leaves behind when they use online platforms, every data point is a new piece of information (likes, dislikes, comments, musical interests, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, relationship status, purchases, searches, subscriptions etc).

(Grassegger & Krogerus, 2017). Furthermore, according to Kaiser, 68 Facebook 'likes' could deduce race, sexual orientation, political affiliation, drug and/or alcohol use and whether the users' parents were divorced; 70 'likes' could provide more information on a user than their friends knew about them; 150 provided more insight than parents know about the user; and 300 'likes' resulted in more information than a person knew about themselves (Kaiser, 2019:238-261).

The data team along with Nix decided to test run the data they gathered on one of Bannon's visits: he would choose a person's name and the name of a US state, which could be narrowed into a single individual down to where they worked, lived, their musical interests, whether they had children, the car they drove and their voting history. They also telephoned several of these 'participants' to ensure the data collected about the individual was accurate (which in most cases it was) before providing a live computer simulation of that person's personality (Wylie, 2019:113-115).

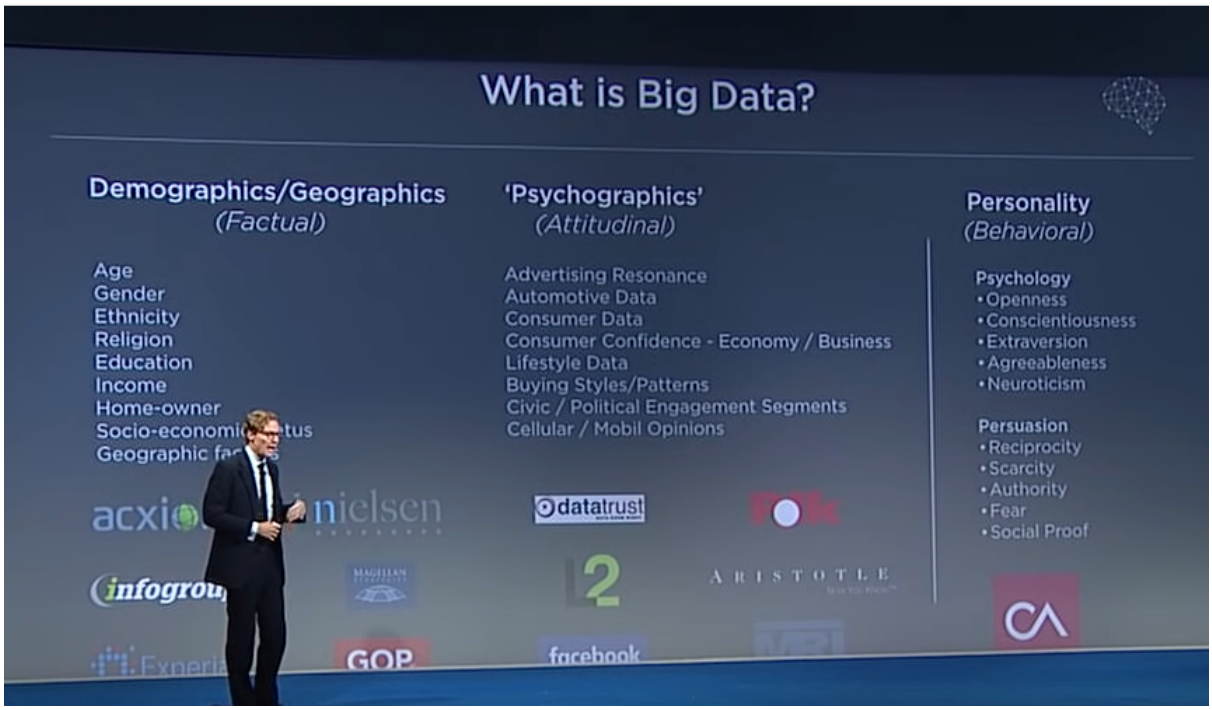

Figure 3. CEO Cambridge Analytica, Alexander Nix, explaining what big data is. Facebook data is among the various data that the company uses. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8Dd5aVXLCc

Cambridge Analytica became involved in a number of the Republican Party's political projects across the US. Some of these case studies are laid out in a 700-page

leaked document from Kaisers' Twitter account. These case studies include North Carolina, For America, Colorado, and Bolton Super Pac. In the Bolton Super-Pac, Cambridge Analytica focused on: getting voters behind Republican Senate candidates in Arkansas, North Carolina and New Hampshire; elevating security as an issue of importance among voters; and increasing voter perception around the goals of the Bolton Super Pac. Using O.C.E.A.N scores and psychographic profiling to target specific audiences with personalised messages, Cambridge Analytica was able to raise interest in national security by 34%. Target voter groups were divided into Core Republicans, Reliable Republicans, Turnout Targets, Priority Persuasion, Wildcards (see below).

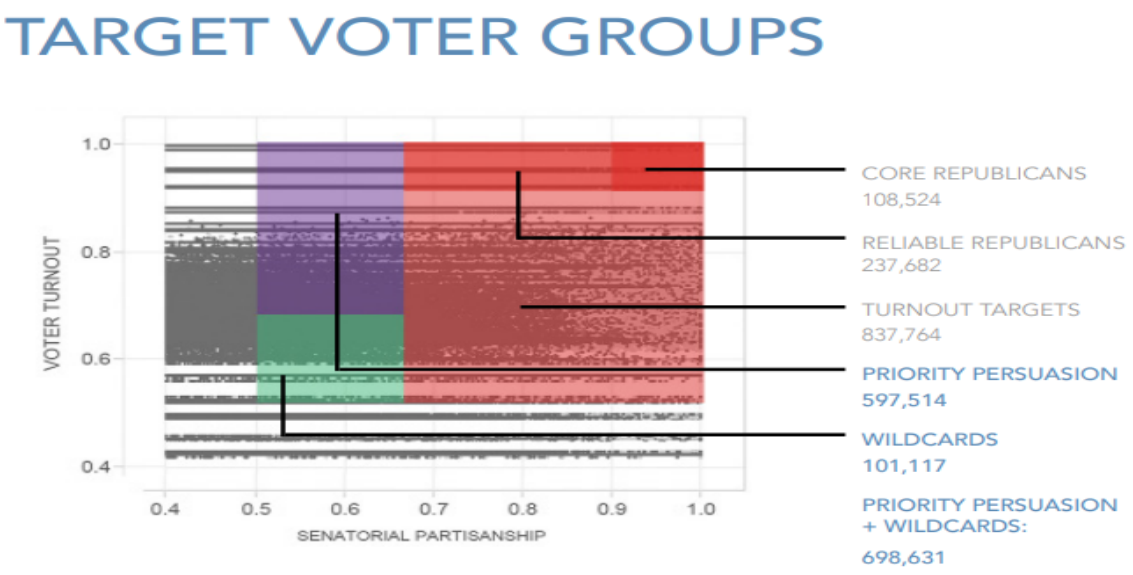

Figure 4. 'Target Voter Groups' as per the leaked documentation by former Cambridge Analytica employee, Britany Kaiser. pp34. https://archive.org/details/ca-docs-with-redactions-sept-23-2020-4pm/page/n33/mode/2up

Furthermore, for each target voter group, Cambridge Analytica would provide a personality overview, which would inform the in-house psychology team on the appropriate messaging necessary for behaviour change. For example, the document states that 'Wildcards' are unreliable soft Republicans and borderline Democrats whose vote is not guaranteed, nor their partisanship. Issues that are most important to Wildcards are Gun Rights, National Security, the Economy and Immigration (Cambridge Analytica, 2020:44). Therefore, messaging should provoke members within this group on issues most important to them. For example, messages about

gun rights in the context of defending yourself and your family during a home invasion (Ward, 2018:140).

Figure 5. An example of voter profiling for targeting purposes, with O.C.E.A.N scores to inform messaging around the voters' personality. pp 42. https://archive.org/details/ca-docs-with-redactions-sept-23-2020-4pm/page/n41/mode/2up

Cambridge Analytica also worked on the Republican Senator Ted Cruz's Presidential campaign (Davies, 2015). They knew that having such a sophisticated dataset could assist them in shaping a narrative based on a voter's emotions and thought processes, which would ultimately help to change their behaviour. Cambridge Analytica wanted to "help campaigns understand what motivates voters to turn out and the choices they make on Election Day" (Cambridge Analytica, 2020:1). They already knew from the Virginia Experiment and the series of interviews that Gettleson undertook in other states, that there was a strong identity divide developing in America, specifically among white men, who according to Bannon, had to sensor themselves from expressing their true views. In their minds, minority groups were threatening their identities and resources, spurring xenophobia and racism, which were reinforced by news sources like Fox News, who would create a narrative of "us" ('ordinary' white Americans) and "them" (minority groups and

democrats). Online forums such as Reddit and 4Chan[14] served as platforms where these individuals could 'speak freely without political correctness', to the extent that any alternative narrative would be seen as attacking their identity (Wylie, 2019:131). Cambridge Analytica capitalised on this by formulating messages that would link to the user's personality. For example, those individuals who possessed the "dark triad" (self-centred, self-interest and emotional detachment) would be more prone to behaving aggressively and believe in conspiracies. Therefore, Cambridge Analytica would create false alt-right Facebook groups, advertisements, and articles that would confirm what these individuals believed in order to engage them online and further inflame and provoke them (Wylie, 2019:125). Though it is not clear what Facebook groups Cambridge Analytica created for its Target Audiences, Facebook's algorithms ensure that users who 'like' Proud Boys or QAnon, see other similar group pages, reinforcing behaviour by offering similar groups, possibly including those started by Cambridge Analytica (Paul, 2021). In some cases, Cambridge Analytica would use these Facebook groups as a platform to set up events for group members in Republican primary states (often in small locations to make the crowd appear larger), with the aim of "helping people find fellowship in mutual anger and paranoia, giving them a sense of belonging" (Wylie, 2019:127-130).

Cambridge Analytica increased its involvement in race-oriented projects and tested various messages like "imagine a world where you cannot pronounce anyone's name" and showed subjects online platforms that would make fun of average Americans such as "people of Walmart" (Wylie, 2019:132). Bannon believed that he should help people realise what political correctness really meant, which he illustrated by showing subjects pictures of white girls with black men. He wanted to convince people that they were victims who have to supress their true feelings (Wylie, 2019:136-137). These factors together with a video of a male participant in a Cambridge Analytica experiment being provoked by researcher's questions leading him to express rage and racist feelings that led Wylie and some of his colleagues to leave Cambridge Analytica in 2014. In Wylie's mind Cambridge Analytica existed to "activate the worst in people, from paranoia to racism". Kogan (or *Dr Spectre* as he

[14] Reddit and 4chan are online forums where users can engage with one another, but these platforms have recently become known for hosting right leaning groups.

later called himself) on the other hand, ultimately decided to stay on with the company.

The Cambridge Analytica scandal illustrated the way in which new media technologies such as Google and Facebook can be (mis)used during Presidential election campaigns. Working with Facebook, Cambridge Analytica was able to utilise users' online data to generate detailed psychological profiles (Hern, 2018; Lapowsky, 2019). These profiles would then inform the company's voter targeting strategies by reaching potential voters more efficiently with messages that are considered persuadable and sometimes false or misleading (Merrill & Goldhill, 2020). These techniques continue to raise concerns among many scholars with regards to the impact they may have on democratic societies.

2.7 Conclusion

This literature review assessed the way in which the use of new media technologies in political campaigns influence trust in the integrity of democratic processes. In the context of increased use of technology and its associated platforms by citizens in democratic societies around the world, it is clear that literature agrees democratic integrity is at risk. Citizens are in unchartered territory, a post-truth world, that inhibits their ability to participate equally and fairly in the democratic functions of their society. Democratic integrity is weakened because there is a growing lack of trust that everyone can access the same free flow of information and the continued manipulation of voters' minds without their knowledge or consent. Algorithms push out specific content to ensure that citizens only engage in those parts of the online space that reflect their own beliefs, ensuring that public deliberation is weakened, and public participation is discouraged.

The literature mainly address the topic from the perspective of Jurgen Habermas and his conception of the public sphere. Authors who argue that the government is unable to keep up with the fast pace of technologies, miss the important point that these technologies have existed for over three decades, which should have provided the necessary time for governments to start transitioning their laws to protect citizens. Furthermore, the positive influences of social media have been short-lived in the face of increased use of new media technologies to manipulate and influence

public opinion for the benefit of the political elite, potentially threatening important democratic functions such as public deliberation and participation.

Due to gaps in the current literature, this dissertation will assess the topic by using Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's propaganda model, through the lens of elite theory. This dissertation will build on existing literature by exploring Cambridge Analytica's tactics in the United States in greater detail. To provide a thorough analysis, leaked documents by former Cambridge Analytica employee, Brittany Kaiser are included, and the dissertation will explore into greater detail how the consequences of new media technologies in political campaigns have materialised in the 2020 US Presidential Elections. The latter is especially important because there are many replicas of Cambridge Analytica in the political campaigning space, technology is continuously evolving, and government are slow to react.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE PROPAGANDA MODEL AND ELITISM IN THE AGE OF NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into six sections. The first section briefly introduces elite theory, which is used in this dissertation to interpret the data using the propaganda model. Elite theory is used to illustrate the way in which society is structured to promote the interests of an elite group rather than the will of the general populace[15]. This theory will help to interpret the Cambridge Analytica scandal and the way the data analytics firm used new media as a way to exploit cracks in the US democratic system to further their own aims.

The second section builds on the first by introducing Noam Chomsky's perception of the elite (as informed by elitism), in society as discussed in *Requiem for the American Dream: The Ten Principles of Concentration of Wealth and Power,* as well as *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda,* where Chomsky criticises Walter Lipmann's position that a specialised class is necessary for the function of a democratic society.

The third section of this chapter describes the propaganda model developed by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky in their book, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. The propaganda model not only recognises the existence of an elite class but also provides further insight into the methodology used by this elite class to disseminate information to the masses through mass media.

The fourth section illustrates how the media landscape has evolved from primarily mass media to new media technologies. This in turn, is the foundation for section five, which attempts to apply the propaganda model to this new media landscape, this lays the foundation for the discussion in Chapter five.

The final section illustrates how the existence of an elite class may influence the integrity of democracy, exemplified by the Cambridge Analytica scandal. This is

[15] General populace is used interchangeably with the masses throughout this dissertation.

explored in greater detail in Chapter 5 of this dissertation, but it is necessary to first define what is meant by democratic integrity and to develop a theoretical frame before exploring the topic further in the later chapter.

3.2 The Theory of elitism

Two important theorists in the study of elitism include Gaetano Mosca and C. Wright Mills. These and other key authors, agree that an elite exists, or in the case of Mosca - a 'ruling class', who make important decisions on behalf of the majority of society (Onyekachi, 2012). The elite use their wealth and power for decision-making to use and distribute resources to benefit their own interests.

Elites can be defined as a small group of individuals (minority) who have the ability to make decisions that can influence national outcomes, often because of their status, wealth, and power in society (Farazmand, 1999:330). It is important to note that theorists in this school of thought hold that any elite system, no matter the type, will contradict the full democratic ideal because not everyone's interests are equally represented as in a true democratic society (Higley, 2010:168).

The following section briefly introduces the theories of Gaetano Mosca and C. Wright Mills to understand from their perspectives, the way that the elite function in society.

3.2.1 Gaetano Mosca: The Ruling Class and the Ruled (1878-1881)

Mosca, in his book *The Ruling Class,* argues that there is an obvious fact present in all political societies, which is that it consists of two distinct classes. The first is a class that rules or 'the ruling class', which consist of the minority in society but influence all political functions and decisions. Elite theorist, Antonio Gramsci, agrees with Mosca's fundamental principle about the inevitability that all societies are divided into a ruling elite class and the ruled majority or the masses (Finocchiaro, 1998). However, Mosca further argues that a hierarchy is found within the elite class itself constituting a leader – whether that is a President, Dictator, or Prime Minister – and a minority who will support him or her (Mosca, 1938:51-53). This elite group have a monopolisation over power and enjoy the advantages that this power brings. The second class is a class that is ruled; it consists of a larger number, 'the majority' and is controlled by the ruling class.

In his book, Mosca states that a legitimate and free government is commonly conceived as one in which the will of the majority is expressed through their vote because it enables them to decide who should have the power to represent them. However, he argues that "this idea of an elected official being a mouthpiece for the majority of his electors is not consistent with the facts" (Mosca, 1938:153-154). He rather suggests that the elite impose its will on the 'disorganised majority' (Mosca, 1938:154). Furthermore, it is easier for a minority to organise itself around important issues because the smaller the community, the easier it is to govern the majority (Mosca, 1938:50-53).

Mosca believes that any governing system, even one that is representative, does not allow voters to choose their preferred candidate but rather the candidate or his friends have him elected (Mosca, 1938). This is because during elections, those individuals with the will and the means will prioritise their interests and force it on others (Mosca, 1938:154). Voting in this sense does not exhibit an expression of freedom of choice, Mosca says it becomes "null" because if voters were able to vote for a candidate of their own choosing, the result would be "a wide scattering of votes", therefore, to remain organised, and the majority are presented with a limited choice of individuals or parties (Mosca, 1938:154).

One critique levelled against Mosca concerns what authors such as Claudio Martinelli, believe is an underestimation of the basic importance of a citizen's impression of being represented in a democracy. In other words, political representation – even if mistaken, misleading or overestimated – offers citizens the "feeling" that they are in some way part of a process that leads to political decision-making. This sense of inclusiveness is important because it helps political classes from succumbing to populist regression (Martinelli, 2009:44). Another criticism of Mosca's theory, as proposed by C.J Friedrich, is that Mosca assumes that the elite class is a unified and well organised body, despite the fact that there is no evidence to support this (Femia, 1998:127). This criticism is further supported by John Higley who states that "no clear configuration of the elites can be identified in various countries in recent history" (Higley, 2010:175).

Italian theorist Vilfredo Pareto agrees that an elite group exists in society and that it consists of individuals who excel at everything that they do. However, Pareto places

less emphasis on describing the elite as a unified body by dividing them into subcategories of 'the governing elite' and the 'non-governing elite'. The former comprises of leaders who either directly or indirectly play a part in ruling society, and the latter constitute the remaining elites (Dunleavy & O'Leary, 1987:136).

3.2.2 C. Wright Mills: The Power Elite (1956)

Mills talks about an elite group rather than a ruling class in his book *The Power Elite* (1956). There is a clear distinction made between the elite, who have power, wealth and fame and the masses, who fall "into uncomfortable mediocrity" (Mills, 1956:13). He believes that the elite in American society can be divided into three different groups: economic (corporations), military and political and they all influence one another (Mills, 1956:5-7). Information and power are centralised within this elite group, who use it to make decisions on behalf of the masses (Mills, 1956:3).

Due to this higher circle of elites in society, people lose their independent thinking and form part of the masses that are manipulated by those in power (Woodard, 1956:246), who do not represent their interests, leaving them without leaders (Mills, 1956:360). Business interests merge with that of the military and political, which cements their societal position and allows them to influence political outcomes.

Mill's viewpoint on the power of the elite class and the influence of the mass media is criticised by Michael Burawoy for being exaggerated because Mill's perspective does not consider the fact that lower-ranking civil movements, such as the women, civil rights and anti-war movements, have altered the political landscape in the US. Today, civil society consists of a myriad of 'bottom-up' organisations that are not necessarily "prone to deception and a false consciousness", as proposed by Mills (Burawoy, 2008:371). However, other authors believe that Mill's account of the power elite is "a classic and considered engagement with the phenomenon of elites" and should therefore be used as a reference when defining the elite in a contemporary context (Burratt, 2014:93).

3.3 Noam Chomsky and the elite

Chomsky introduces ten principles of concentration of wealth and power in his book *Requiem for the American Dream* (Chomsky, 2017). He believes that these ten principles include: reduce democracy, shape ideology, redesign the economy, shift the burden, attack solidarity, run the regulators, engineer elections, keep the "rabble" in line, manufacture consent, and marginalize the population.

The principles within the book highlight the concentration of wealth and power in society and can be linked to the theories presented by Mosca and Mills. This is because Chomsky acknowledges the existence of an elite class, and like Mills, he considers the political and corporate elite to be closely entwined. Chomsky believes that the more money a corporation has, the more power it has to influence, establishing a 'vicious cycle'. This is because campaign financing structures in the US are such that election campaigns rely on private funding from individuals, corporations, and/or special interests (Dawood, 2015:330). A Pew Research Report showed that 77% of Americans agree limits need to be implemented to the amount that campaigns can spend and 74% of Americans argue that those who are able to make large donations should not as a result, yield more power and influence (Pew Research Center, 2018:4). Furthermore, where a concentration of wealth leads to more power, corporations, who help political parties with their campaigns often benefit from the "creation of legislation to increase their concentration of wealth" (Chomsky, 2017:18). For example, a study undertaken by economists at the University of Berkley uncovered that, during his term in office, former President Donald Trump, initiated tax cuts of $1.5 trillion which helped 400 of the richest families in the country pay 23% tax whilst the working class paid 24.2% (Rushe, 2019). This indicates that tax policy, at least during Trump's tenure, was skewed to favour the wealthy in the American society (Maldonado, 2019). Furthermore, Trump's super PAC and campaign assistance from Cambridge Analytica was funded by an elite New York investor, Robert Mercer and his daughter Rebekah, who have been increasingly influential in the US conservative circles funding think tanks, lobby groups, candidates and super PAC's (Confessore, 2016). One study on Trump's 2016 election campaign also found that technology corporations (Big Tech), such as Facebook and Google, have increasingly involved themselves in political campaigns by embedding their employees with campaign staffers in an effort to "increase advertising revenue, build relationships and service their lobbying efforts" (Kreiss &

Mcgregor, 2017:155). This further cements the idea that the corporate and political elite are intertwined, moving further away from the interest of the masses. Thus, the American society is faced with pressure for "more freedom and democracy from below[16] and more efforts at elite control and domination from above[17] (Chomsky, 2017:21).

Chomsky states that the public relations (PR) industry plays a key role in society's behaviour, both commercially and politically, because one of its aims is to shape an 'uninformed electorate' to make decisions often against their own interests. Chomsky references a piece from the PR consultant, Edward Barneys', book called '*Propaganda*', to illustrate his point. In his book, Bernays proclaims that manipulating the "habits and opinions of the masses" is a central feature of a democracy because the elite understand the mental processes of the masses and this knowledge can be used to shape their minds, tastes, and ideas (Bernays, 1928:9). This opposes what democracy stands for by undermining the principles of public deliberation and participation in an effort to control and serve the interests of the elite. The PR system therefore works to marginalize and change the behaviour of the masses to become "spectators instead of participants" (Chomsky, 2017:134). In a commercial sense, people are 'trapped in consumerism' where the advertising industry spends millions of dollars to try and create 'uninformed consumers' in an effort to manipulate and control (Chomsky, 2017:132-133). According to PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC), consumers have a substantial decrease in their rational decision making on days like 'Black Friday'[18] for example, when average spending numbers usually double in many countries globally. This is because marketers are able to "leverage consumers' cognitive make-up" to encourage increased spending through various behavioural traps which aim to trigger people's "deepest emotional and cognitive responses" (Krugel, et al., 2019). In a political context, PR firms help give people the "glitz, illusions and personalities" of candidates in order to shift their focus from policy issues

[16] Below in this context is understood as the general populace or *the masses*

[17] Above in this context is understood as the minority in society who hold the wealth and power or *the elite*

[18] According to an IPSOS report, Black Friday "started in Philadelphia 60 years ago and has become a global, digital retail phenomenon. The sales extravaganza was originally conceived as a one-day bargain bonanza in shops to be held on the day after Thanksgiving Day in America, designed to kick-start the Christmas shopping season. In 2005 it became the USA's busiest shopping day of the year, and it hasn't looked back since" (Denison, 2020).

that are, according to Chomsky, increasingly favourable to private interests as opposed to the interests of the general public (Chomsky, 2017:134-135). For example, the 2019 Trump campaign spent "$20 million on over 218 000 advertisements on Facebook, of which the large majority were substance free, where policy and initiatives were to a large extent absent (Wong, 2020).

In *Media Control,* Chomsky again points to the existence of a 'spectator democracy' (Chomsky, 2002:8). He draws from the work of liberal democratic theorist, Walter Lippman, who argues that the elite are a 'specialized class' who make up a small percentage of the population but are able to participate in the affairs of the state (Lippmann, 1922). This specialised class contrasts the masses or what he calls the 'bewildered herd', and they are proportionately larger but are regarded as spectators instead (Chomsky, 2002:10). Chomsky further explains that the PR industry is vital to helping the specialized class to distract and control the minds of the bewildered herd by keeping them distracted and entertained with the Superbowl, action movies and sitcoms, in an effort to prevent them from organizing among themselves and obtaining legislative success (Chomsky, 2002:20). To illustrate this point, Chomsky cites the *National Labour Relations Act of* 1935 (known as the Wagner Act), which is a foundational statute of US labour law. The Act gave labour the right to organize, subsequently resulting in the Pennsylvania steel strike (Chomsky, 2002:10-17). Business retaliation to the strike entailed the use of the 'Mohawk Valley Formula' which was a form of propaganda aimed at turning the general public against strikers and unions, framing them as disruptive and in violation of harmony and Americanism (Smith, 2015:112). Chomsky believes this continues today with slogans such as "support our troops", which are meaningless. This is because the question is not whether a person supports troops or not but rather what policy is behind the campaign. However, it remains in the interest of the specialized class to prevent people from organising and keep people distracted by "creating slogans no one will be against", entrapping them in commerce, or as previously mentioned, making them watch entertainment on television (Chomsky, 2002:18-19). In this way, the population is subdued through the 'manufacture of consent' by the elite, only calling upon them to vote or support their initiatives (Chomsky, 2002).

Lippman's book, *Public Opinion* (Lippmann, 1922), largely motivated the writing of Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent* (Herman & Chomsky, 1998), as the term was coined by Lippman who argued that the manufacture of consent has only improved because of psychological research and new methods of communicating with the public:

> *The manufacture of consent is capable of great refinements. The process by which public opinions arise is certainly no less intricate than it has appeared in these pages, and the opportunities for manipulation open to anyone who understands the process are plain enough. The creation of consent is not a new art. It is an old one which was supposed to have died out with the appearance of democracy. But it has not died out. It has, in fact, improved enormously in technic, because it is now based on analysis rather than on rule of thumb. And so, as a result of psychological research, coupled with the modern means of communication, the practice of democracy has turned a corner* (Lippmann, 1922:162).

In this context, the manufacture of consent is necessary according to Lippman, because he argues that "the common interests very largely elude public opinion entirely and can be managed only by a specialized class whose personal interests reach beyond the locality". (Lippmann, 1922:200). His argument is based on the fact that he does not believe access to information will assist citizens in acquiring basic knowledge of public affairs because more information can sometimes lead to partisanship and ignorance (Illing, 2018). Furthermore, the news, although it informs citizens about events, can never truly reveal the truth; it merely presents the public with specific narratives (Lippmann, 1922:230). Lastly, Lippmann believes that citizens are far too removed from understanding all aspects of public affairs, this is because when they see or hear about public affairs, they see only "abstractions from the original", therefore the public is restricted from reality and can never truly be interested in public affairs because they see only a portion of it (Lippmann, 1922:106). The masses are also susceptible to manipulation, "told about the world before (they) see it, imagine things before (they) experience them, thus becoming hostages to those preconceptions" (Illing, 2018). As a result, public opinion should be managed by a specialised class.

In 1988, Herman and Chomsky drew from Lippmann's theory and co-authored *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media,* in which they develop the propaganda model (Herman & Chomsky, 1994).

3.4 The propaganda model

Herman and Chomsky introduce the propaganda model to assess the performance of the mass media in the United States (Herman & Chomsky, 1994). In their view, the mass media's role in a democratic society is to provide checks and balances by reflecting the interest of the public and holding accountable those who are in public office (Shemelis, 2017). However, the authors conclude that, in reality, the mass media serve the interest of an elite class, by passing information through five filters, namely: (i) profit and ownership, (ii) advertising, (iii) sourcing, (iv) flak/censure, and (v) ideology, before reaching an audience (Herman & Chomsky, 1994, p. 2). The aforementioned filters are explained in greater detail below, but they indicate that an elite class manufactures the consent of the masses by selectively revealing information that serves their own interests, bringing about a "discrepancy between actual developments in the world and their treatment in the US media", (Herman & McChesney, 2018:42) thereby inhibiting the ability of the masses to make educated decisions about public affairs (Freedman, 2009:59).

3.4.1 Size, Profit and Ownership in the Media

The first filter suggests that access to information is controlled by powerful media corporations. These corporations form part of "a broader set of structures through which dominant ideologies are communicated" and elite interests are protected (Robinson, 2018:53). In 1988, the US consisted of 24 major media organisations, including television networks like NBC, newspapers including the Wall Street Journal, New York Times and the Washington Post, book publishers, news and general interest magazines and cable television (TV) (Herman & Chomsky, 1994:5). Indeed in 2019, five major corporations, including Comcast, Disney, News Corporation, AT&T and National Amusements ran majority of the media in the US (MacLeod, 2019:10).

Furthermore, the financial capital required to set up and run a news network effectively excludes many individuals who might be interested in setting up their own

network. Those who opt to create local media houses instead still largely depend on these networks as information sources for their own prints (Herman & Chomsky, 1994). The authors therefore argue that this consolidation of power in the media creates a “private Ministry of Information” with the power “set the national agenda” (Herman & Chomsky, 1994:4).

Another element to consider is the way in which government and non-media business influence which media houses gain access to specific information and who is granted the necessary operating licenses – which the authors suggest may be used as a “controlling mechanism to constrain the media to a specific narrative” (Herman & Chomsky, 1994:13) (Herman, 2000:102-103). This means that governments are able to control the media through various means of control. In Saudi Arabia for example, the government decides on the editors-in-chief of newspapers and have the power to remove those individuals should they write unfavourable narratives (Djankov, et al., 2003:353). Governments also exercise control through “content restriction in broadcasting licenses”, which has to be renewed annually in countries like Malaysia (Djankov, et al., 2003:353-354). The press also appears to have two separate identities, the first is what they present publicly which is an alternative to reality, and the second is that which goes on behind the scenes, which involves the actual story known only to those who are involved in it and whose private interests it has to promote (Vanderwicken, 1995). This is reiterated by another author who argues that “reporting these days is more a matter of manufactured behind-the-scenes consensus building than following facts” (Taibbi, 2019). Take for example the ambiguity around drone strikes used to kill terror suspects, not only are the same suspects reported to be killed on multiple occasions sometimes years apart, but some who are reported to have died are still alive. Furthermore, drones are marketed to the public as precision guided weapons that only kill intended targets. However, for every drone attack that takes place, 28 collateral deaths occur (Taibbi, 2019; Ackerman, 2014). Writers have also criticised the coverage by the New York Times over the Libyan invasion arguing that the newspaper stuck to the official government narrative without investigating perspectives on pro-Gaddafi and anti-Gaddafi sides (LaPrairie, 2017:109-110) nor did they consider the role the African Union could play in negotiating peace (LaPrairie, 2017:111).

3.4.2 Advertising

Advertising, the second filter, suggests that the media environment can be uncompetitive because lesser-known papers must raise the cost of their prints due to lack of advertising revenue that other larger brands enjoy. This is because advertising agencies select papers based on the type and size of the audience they enjoy and their ability to follow acceptable ideological positions. In this scenario, the audience is sold to advertisers (Herman & Chomsky, 1994).

3.4.3 Sourcing information from Government

The media often faces tight deadlines which sometimes result in 'sourcing bias'. This is because news media have relationships with corporations and government who become their 'go-to' official sources for information. These sources belong to institutions that are run by the elite and therefore the information they provide is often one sided, aligning to their preferred narrative (Pedro, 2011, pp. 1882-1883). As Herman and Chomsky suggest, experts consulted for the news are often biased in favour of elite institutions and reference accepted narratives and favourable messaging (Herman & Chomsky, 1994). Furthermore, this over dependence of the media on these official sources gives them a sense of credibility and legitimacy that a balanced sourcing strategy might not have (Pedro, 2011, pp. 1882-1883).

3.4.4 Censure

Although the fourth filter is generally referred to as "flak", for the purposes of using a universally recognisable term, this dissertation will use the term 'censure' instead. In this filter, the authors highlight that certain types of content from the media - when unfavourable to government or other powerful individuals – will be censured (Herman & Chomsky, 1994). For example, in 2002, two US journalists who worked for the news bureau *The Knight-Ridder* were censured by the government and other major news corporations for their publication of a story that highlighted the unsubstantiated claims by the Bush administration that the former President of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, possessed weapons of mass destruction (Follmer, 2008).

Chomsky and Herman themselves were the target of corporate power when their first book on American Foreign Policy and the Media, caught the attention of an

executive at a large publishing house. The executive ordered a destruction of all copies of the book and put the small publishing house out of business (Chomsky, 1989; Jamal, 2003;Holmey, 2017). These examples, of which there are countless others, illustrate how publishing, on any traditional platform, has to fall within boundaries of what is acceptable to individuals in the top tiers of decision-making, which will be further explored in Chapter 5, in the context of the 2016 US election.

3.4.5 Ideology

At the time of writing their book, the fifth filter specifically addressed anti-communism. However, the end of the Cold War signalled the need for an adaptation of this filter, which now represents ideology instead (MacLeod & Chomsky, 2019). Moreover, it is a specific ideological narrative used to create an enemy of the state in order to mobilise public support for a specific cause (Fuchs, 2018). Some examples of this filter include, (i) the fabrication of atrocities or 'atrocity propaganda' during World War I where allied forces used fabricated or exaggerated stories to turn a pacifist US population in favour of the war (Chomsky, 2002:4). At the time, Germans had invaded Belgium and the idea behind the atrocity propaganda was to paint German troops as barbarians (Fox, 2014). Stories therefore circulated about Germans involved in a 'Corpse Conversion factory' where they supposedly turned Belgium corpses into fertilizer and soap, others included graphic accounts of children having their limbs removed (Gullace, 2011:693). Even though men were the primary victims of this war, many stories focused primarily on barbaric acts against women and children instead (de Schaepdrijver, 2014). The media played a large role in the dissemination of this propaganda because it often sensationalised and exaggerated accounts extracted from testimonies (Fox, 2014). Even official government documents such as The Bryce papers[19] were not fully accurate in their accounts of events as the Bryce committee often lacked access to victims (Gullace, 2011:693). Another example, discussed above (3.2.4), is the fabrication of claims that Hussein's government posed an imminent threat to the US, to gain support for the 2003 Iraq invasion (Matthews, 2016).

[19] The Bryce papers was a document which outlined the alleged atrocities carried out by German soldiers while they invaded a neutral Belgium. The committee was established in 1915 to consider and advise on matters relating to the atrocities carried out by German Soldiers in Belgium.

3.5 Critique of the propaganda model

Since its publication in 1988, the propaganda model has faced "marginalisation, poorly informed critiques, and misrepresentation" (Pedro-Carañana, et al., 2018:2). Due to the model's emphasis on the media's role in shaping public opinion according to the will of the elite, it has largely been viewed as a conspiracy theory and thus been left out of mainstream debates (Klaehn, 2002:147). Robert Entman (Entman, 1990) believed that the authors were endorsing a conspiracy theory in their analysis of media performance in the US. However, Herman argues that the propaganda model rather presents a non-conspiratorial 'market system of control' (Herman, 2000:102-103), which is to say that the media operates within the market system because they are owned by wealthy people and rely on profits from advertisers who are very specific about the content they want surrounding the products they sell to an audience (Herman, 2000:102). Another key critique of the propaganda model, as provided by Daniel Hallin (Hallin, 2005) is that the model fails to account for journalistic professionalism, which is believed to be an integral part to understanding how the media functions (Herman, 2000:106; Klaehn, et al., 2018). Herman refutes this critique by explaining that the rules governing journalistic professionalism are flexible and unclear and are therefore easily overridden by the demands of the elites (Herman, 2000:106). Furthermore, the model is argued by Philip Schlesinger as being too deterministic. Herman addresses this criticism by explaining that every model is deterministic, but the criticism levelled against the propaganda model is invalid because no illustration is made as to the way in which the "alleged determinism leads to error", nor is there any presentation of an alternative model (LaPrairie, 2017; Herman, 2000:107).

However, despite the criticisms levelled against it, the propaganda model continues to bring about an important understanding about the way that media advocates for an elite class often to the detriment of the masses (Pedro-Carañana, et al., 2018:2) (Mullen & Klaehn, 2010:215). This is especially true in the age of new media, where an increasing number of people get their information online. Therefore, the following section will assess the rise in new media technologies, and how the propaganda model fits into this digital landscape.

3.6 The rise of social media

New media can be understood as any mode of communication that takes place on a digital platform, from blogs and social media to music streaming and online newspaper articles (Cote, 2020). Social media – which is the focus of this dissertation – falls under the new media umbrella and can be understood as electronic communication platforms, where individuals (often referred to as 'users'), can create virtual communities, create their own content and share information in real time (Singh, 2019). The most well-known, universally recognised social media platforms have been around since the 2000's, with the inception of Facebook and YouTube in 2004 and 2005 respectively (Ahmad, 2018).

According to the Pew Research Centre, 7 out of 10 Americans used social media for information, communication, news engagement, and entertainment in 2021, with Facebook and YouTube among the most popular social media platforms (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). YouTube is popular amongst adults under the age of 65. Those who are between 18-29 there is a 95% usage rate. The rate is 91% for individuals in their 30s and 40s and 83% for adults between 50 and 64. Facebook statistics reveal an opposing trend; those in their 30s or 40s reveal 77% usage, while 70% for those between 18-29. For people above 50 and below 64, the rate is at 73% (Auxier & Anderson, 2021).

The increased popularity of these and other social media platforms over the last 17 years, led to advancement in the advertising and PR industries. The first advertisements on Facebook started to appear in 2006, quickly spreading to other popular social media sites (Phillips, 2007). This has changed advertising, as mass media such as radio, television and print press consists of a 'unidirectional relationship' where journalists or marketing agencies communicate with an audience who are unable to communicate back (Mandiberg, 2012). However, with the shift to online platforms, communication could take place in a 'multidirectional' context (Mandiberg, 2012). This is because social media allows all users to be content creators by posting pictures, or 'tweets' or replying to a TV show via Facebook or Twitter. As discussed in Chapter 2, this increased online engagement, means that users leave behind digital footprints of their activity, producing valuable data for advertising companies to exploit. As previously mentioned, algorithms can use this

data to determine a user's personality thereby continuously feeding the user content that will increase their engagement and entice them into buying products or using services (Gil, 2019). For advertisers the shift to digital platforms has also been significantly cheaper, with cost per thousandth person reaching $17.50 for cable TV adverts as opposed to $2.80 for Google Advertisements (Doty, 2019). As a result, it is believed that within the next two years, 66.8% of advertising budgets will be allocated for the digital space (Doty, 2019).

3.7 Propaganda model in a contemporary context

At first, it may seem that the propaganda model is at odds with new media. Defenders of technology and social media will argue that these platforms enhance democracies. That may be so, as one need only look at the 2011 Arab Spring to realise how powerful social media can be for society to change their political realities (Hempel, 2016). This is because these online platforms help to organise groups for collective action, bringing together activists and helping to communicate with a worldwide audience about the uprisings, "acting like a megaphone" (Brown, et al., 2012; Wolfsfeld, et al., 2013:115). Furthermore, when the internet first started, many professors and intellectuals felt the platform would help deliberative democracy, by giving everyone access to information and "democratising knowledge" (Vaidhyanathan , 2012).

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, surveillance capitalism has sparked an entirely new method of understanding consumers and voters, the more people engage online the more valuable data they give away to advertising companies, data analytics firms, social media companies and political campaigns. In a new media environment, the propaganda model aims to illustrate the dangers that these technologies pose for democracy and its essential functions of participation and deliberation (Vaidhyanathan , 2012). In this model the information that internet users have access to has not been filtered by mass media organisations, but instead by an elite class who filter what people are able to see and can access.

3.7.1 Size, Ownership and profit orientation

'Silicon Valley' is in Northern California and today the name is synonymous with the new media landscape and its associated technologies ('Big Tech') (Canales, 2020). This is because it houses the headquarters of the most powerful technology companies in the world, including Facebook, Apple, Amazon and Google – the latter of which is owned by Alphabet (Zuboff, 2019 & Perino, 2019). These companies have formed a monopoly in the industry and have enormous amounts of money, Facebook for example recorded a total of $26.17 billion in quarter one of 2021 (Rodriguez, 2021). The sheer power of these companies led the US House Committee on the Judiciary to write an extensive report to establish whether the aforementioned companies exploited their power over markets in an anti-competitive manner (Fiegerman, 2019; Nadler & Cicilline, 2020:6; Ho, 2019).

Overall, the committee established that these technology firms are anti-competitive in three main ways. Firstly, their control over the market means that they can charge exorbitant fees, extract valuable data, and create oppressive contracts. Amazon for example, is an e-commerce website where different brands can advertise their products to consumers; however, the company was found by the committee to have favoured their own products above those of competitors by prioritizing them in search results on their website (Ghaffary & Del Rey, 2020). Secondly, they are able to maintain this market power by ensuring that competitors are intimidated, copied, cut off or bought out to stifle the competition. This was the case with Facebook who eventually bought out its competitor Instagram in 2012 (Ghaffary & Del Rey, 2020). Thirdly, these companies are able to expand their market dominance, where Google for example will pre-install its app onto Android operating systems and they will boost their content over others like Yelp when people look for restaurants (Ghaffary & Del Rey, 2020) (Nadler & Cicilline, 2020, p. 6). Just as the original filter, there are "large profit-seeking corporations owned and controlled by wealthy people" (Herman & Chomsky, 1994:5-14).

Chomsky, when talking about social media in relation to the propaganda model, argues that the amount of power and reach of the aforementioned companies is dangerous because it reduces the amount of information people see, pushing them into echo chambers (Chomsky, 2019; Pickard, 2021). This was explored in Chapter

2 and will be further discussed in Chapter 5, but key to the first filter through which information we access online flows, is the fact that although anyone can post content online, only a handful of technology companies are at the top of decision-making structures that decide whether that content should be visible or not.

3.7.2 Advertising

As mentioned earlier, the more people accessed online platforms, the more it started to make sense for advertising companies to use these platforms to reach audiences around the world at a fraction of the cost of television, newspaper and radio advertisements. This filter is similar to the original conceptualisation of advertising, except that it is based online. The audience remains the product, sold by media to advertisers by using their data to "predict and measure the behaviour of media consumers" (Napoli, 2001:66).

To place this in the context of this dissertation, the way in which this filter works is that Facebook for example, is able to track its users' activity online through the data trails they leave behind i.e. cookies. This type of data gives insight into search histories, credit card purchases, likes, dislikes, ideologies and other personal and psychological information about a user (Morrison, 2020). This data is then sold to advertisers, or in this case data analytics firms like Cambridge Analytica, who use this data to draw up accurate personality profiles of specific users, who they can target individually (or microtarget) with specific and strategic information.

Political campaigns use data to inform their strategy, in what is known as 'hypermedia campaigning', where technology experts "replace mass media tools with targeted online media tools to build a specific communications strategy" (Howard, 2006:26). This second filter illustrates how technology companies, analytics firms and political campaigns decide, based on a user's personality, what information the voter has access to.

3.7.3 Sourcing

Online information can be created by any user because anyone can post content online for a global audience. However, this is often controlled behind the scenes, because “a small elite group of users dominates online visibility and attention” (Fuchs, 2018). Users may in this case feel they have the power to create and share content on various platforms, so freedom of speech is upheld, and deliberation is fostered. In reality, it is commonplace for unfavourable content to be drowned out by bots and algorithms.

According to Woolley and Howard, Bots are “algorithms operating on social media and are written in such a way that they learn from and mimic human behaviour so as to manipulate public opinion” (Woolley & Howard, 2019:43). Bots can successfully drown out unfavourable content due to their ability to replicate human behaviour (Fuchs, 2018 & Schneier, 2020). For example, the ‘Turing test’ is based on computer scientist Alan Turing belief that by the year 2000 computers would be able to trick people into thinking they are human, at least 30% of the time. This materialised in 2014 when, during a 5-minute Turing test, Eugene Goostman, a ‘chatbot’, was able to convince 33% of judges in a panel that ‘he’ was a real 13-year-old boy (Aamoth, 2014). They are programmed by humans who use them as digital tools to manufacture consent for a specific ideological position because they can manipulate public opinion by amplifying or suppressing specific content (Woolley & Howard, 2019:242).

When a bot generates enough activity on a favourable post, that post will often start ‘trending’ or become popular on social media, therefore more people would have access to that specific messaging. However, bots can also supress content that is not aligning to a specific narrative, ensuring that specific content gets lost by amplifying favourable content instead (Howard, 2006). Bots can comment, often controversially, on content to try and distract users from the initial post.

Governments and the specialised class are therefore able to use bots and algorithms to promote their own interests on social media platforms, drowning out other critical perspectives online to maintain a specific narrative (Howard, 2006).

3.7.4 Censure

The *Guardian Newspaper* reporter, Carole Cadwalladr, who worked closely with Christopher Wylie to uncover the extent of Cambridge Analytica was in 2017, the target of a censuring campaign by Russia and Leave. EU aimed to discredit her integrity as a reporter. At first, the newspaper received a letter from the Russian Embassy in London describing Cadwalladr's reporting as "a textbook example of bad journalism raising questions about the true colours of the author" (Cadwalladr, 2017). A few days later, the Leave.EU account for the Brexit campaign posted a link on social media platform Twitter. The link led to a video – presumably created by the Leave. EU campaign – of a scene in the feature film *Airplane!* Where a female passenger is seen to be emotional, but she instead has Cadwalladr's face, which has been photo shopped. Disturbingly, it shows how Cadwalladr is hit in the face by other passengers on board, one even holding a gun. All of this occurs while the Russian Anthem is playing (Cadwalladr, 2017).

This extreme example shows that the censure filter is still relevant today: when Cadwalladr exposed the alleged ties between Leave.EU and Russia, she faced a barrage of negative push back by both parties who attempted to undermine the existence of such ties. The censure clearly showed the promotion of violence against her and portrayed her as a deranged person. Content produced online is difficult to remove, which makes it difficult for other reporters to move away from accepted narratives, because if they do, they will face a similar or worse fate to Cadwalladr (Cadwalladr, 2017).

3.7.5 Ideology

As discussed in Chapter 2, filter bubbles emerge when people only seek out information which conforms to their pre-existing beliefs, thereby "inoculating" these individuals against any counter narrative (Fantl, 2021:645) (Bessi, 2016:9). Once content is shown to be clashing with a user's ideological perspectives, it may be determined by the user to be false, even if it is factual. Neuroscientist and clinician, Drew Westen, explained in his book *The Political Brain: The role of emotion in deciding the fate of the nation*, that a person's mind does not think as rationally as many envision it to (Westen, 2007:13). Westen describes a study that he and a team

of scientists undertook in 2014 to better understand the decision-making processes of political partisans in the US namely, Democrats and Republicans. To complete the study 15 participants on each side were shown a series of slides. Some slides included Republican candidates, others Democratic candidates and other non-partisan individuals like Tom Hanks.

While observing these slides participants would have their brains scanned for activity. The first slides were always a statement by a candidate, the second would be a contradictory statement made by the same candidate, the third would ask participants whether they believed the candidate to be contradicting him/herself and the final slide would ask participants to rate on a scale of 1-4 (1 being a strong disagreement and 4 a strong agreement), whether they believed the candidate to have been contradicting their initial statements (Westen, 2007:14-16). For example, the first slide might show Republican candidate and former US President, George Bush, stating that he supports healthcare for veterans, the next slide would show Bush cutting access to healthcare for thousands of veterans. Overall, the scans showed a similar trend in the minds of both Democrats and Republicans. They would see contradictions in candidates from opposition parties, rating them at 4, while they found minimal contradiction in their own candidates, with an average rating of 2 (Westen, 2007:16-17).

The results showed that when a partisan faced information that threatened their positions, they reached emotional conclusions and their neurons would activate. The brain would, according to Westen, “register a conflict between data and desire and look for ways to turn off the unpleasant emotion” (Westen, 2007:17). Therefore, the brain would engage in faulty reasoning in an effort to eliminate unpleasant realities thereby switching off circuits with negative emotions and switching on circuits with positive emotions instead (Westen, 2007:17). This may be why the filter bubbles are so effective at keeping individuals in their respective online echo-chambers and why contradictory information is often ignored. As discussed in Chapter 2, George Lakoff also argues that the mind thinks through various established mental frames and that information which does not suit these established mental frames will ‘bounce off’ (Lakoff, 2004).

This may lead to increased polarisation; because the cohesion necessary to unite society seems to be deteriorating as a result of these filter bubbles and the fake news that reinforces them. According to a study undertaken by Daniel Geschke, Jan Lorenz and Peter Holtz, users' ideology is increasingly shaped by the 'triple-filter bubble', which are filtering processes that determine and often limit what information a user has access to online (Geschke, et al., 2019:132). These filtering bubbles include: firstly, the individual who, of their own accord, seek out information which confirms their own ideological beliefs; secondly, the social where online communities form out of a shared common interest among its members, with the ability to limit exposure to other narratives; thirdly, technological filters such as algorithms on Facebook, Google and Snapchat are able to filter out content by tailoring it to a user's likes, dislikes and preferences in order to maximise the amount of time a user spends on their respective platforms (Geschke, et al., 2019:132-133).

These echo chambers and recommendation systems mentioned above have the ability to break down important democratic functions such as participation and deliberation. Ideology is increasingly shaped by these triple-filter bubbles and their associated recommendation systems, leading to decreasing consensus and trust among citizens on important issues.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter explored elite theory as described by key theorists Gaetano Mosca and C. Wright Mills. These authors argue that an elite class has the power to make decisions about public affairs, while the general public are merely guided by these decisions. The propaganda model is used in conjunction with elite theory to explain how the mass media use five filters to process information in favour of this elite class before the information reaches audiences. The model is then placed in the context of new media to understand how information flow has changed. While still being filtered through five filters on behalf of elite interests, information is increasingly targeted and difficult for researchers to analyse. This new model then aims to show how democratic functions and norms are increasingly threatened because of triple-filter bubbles, recommendation systems and elite control.

CHAPTER 4: AN OVERVIEW OF THE ROLE CAMBRIDGE ANALYTICA PLAYED IN THE UNITED STATES

4.1 Introduction

This chapter draws from the propaganda model (see chapter 3), to assess the role played by the analytics firm Cambridge Analytica, as uncovered and presented by United Kingdom-based *Channel 4 News*, *The Guardian newspaper* and *The New York Times*[20]. These sources are supplemented by the books of whistle-blowers and former Cambridge Analytica employees – Christopher Wylie and Brittany Kaiser – as well as leaked documents[21] posted on Twitter by an account run by Kaiser.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the propaganda model consists of five filters which are controlled by an elite group to determine what information people can access. This is complimented by elite theory which similarly suggests that an elite group exists in society who imposes their will on the audiences. In the case of Cambridge Analytica, technological corporations have formed an elite class, who provide advertisers and political campaigns with the tools to communicate in a way that imposes their will on specific audiences. The increased dependence that individuals have on these online platforms for news and entertainment – with minimal understanding of how they work – has made these corporations increasingly wealthy and powerful. As discussed throughout this dissertation, the increased engagement has spurred surveillance capitalism, where companies, advertisers, political parties, and analytics firms are able to receive valuable insights into users' personalities from their digital footprints. Thus, these elite groups continue to dominate information flows, which are becoming increasingly targeted by filtering what users see and access. Thus, the use of

[20] Carole Cadwalladr a journalist who works for The Guardian, approached former Cambridge Analytica employee, Christopher Wylie after she became sceptical about the relationship the firm had with the Brexit referendum and former United States President Donald Trump's election campaign. Wylie eventually became a whistleblower, sharing with Cadwalladr information about the analytics firm and his involvement in its establishment and the fears he had for democracy as a result. This initiated a year-long investigation, in which Wylie and Cadwalladr collaborated with the New York Times and Channel 4 News, before simultaneously publishing stories about the scandal in what is now known as 'The Cambridge Analytica Files'. https://www.theguardian.com/news/series/cambridge-analytica-files This also included an undercover operation where journalists from Channel 4 news videotaped Cambridge Analytica employees boasting about the company's illegal tactics. https://www.channel4.com/news/exposed-undercover-secrets-of-donald-trump-data-firm-cambridge-analytica

[21] The Twitter account (@HindsightFiles) allegedly owned by former Cambridge Analytica employee turned whistle-blower was created in 2019 and has since released a number of crucial internal documents outlining the firm's role in various global campaigns. https://twitter.com/hindsightfiles?lang=en

psychology, data analytics, and targeted messaging is improving the way that elite can manufacture consent within targeted audiences.

In this Chapter, the filters of the propaganda model in the new media landscape are applied to the data relating to the 2016 US elections.

Finding the relevant data as it relates to the Cambridge Analytica scandal is challenging. This is because the company used Behavioural Microtargeting which makes it difficult for researchers to trace political advertisements created by the analytics firm and the messages contained in those advertisements. The targeted nature of these messages means that only specific audiences encountered them. To access these dark ads[22] would require the assistance of Facebook, who have – after numerous requests from journalists – decided to keep them secret (Channel 4 News, 2020). For this reason, only a small sample of advertisements has been collected as data for this chapter, which is laid out in the data table in section 4.2.5.

This chapter therefore focuses on the data surrounding the techniques used by Cambridge Analytica in the election campaign of former US President Donald Trump in 2016.

4.2 Trump for President Campaign and Make America Number 1 (MAN1) Super PAC

In late 2015, after conducting the Virginia Experiment (see Chapter 2) and several other Republican oriented campaigns, Cambridge Analytica - at the request of the Mercer's - switched to Trump's Presidential campaign. The analytics firm managed both the 'Trump for President' campaign and the 'Make America Number 1' (MAN1) Super Political Action Committee (PAC) (Cambridge Analytica , 2020). At the time, Trump's campaign team had neither coherent data infrastructure nor a comprehensive digital strategy. Using data from Cambridge Analytica's original datasets, together with the Republican National Committee (RNC) database and

[22] Dark ads or dark posts are ads that appear on an individual or a group of individual's social media feeds, then vanish (Channel 4 News, 2020)

data from Bridgetree[23], the analytics firm focused the campaign on Fundraising, Persuasion, and Get Out The Vote (GOTV)[24] (Cambridge Analytica, 2020). Employees from Facebook, Google, and Twitter were embedded with Cambridge Analytica, as well as Trump staff in San Antonio (Scola, 2017). These social media companies helped to shape messaging to reach voters more effectively, working closely with Trump campaign staff, during the $100 million digital campaign (Kreiss & Mcgregor, 2017).

The advertisements that are available online are laid out in the table below. The table shows data from 23 of the advertisements used by the Trump campaign during the 2016 election.[25] Some of these advertisements were placed on platforms such as YouTube, to reach wider audiences and included issues that the Trump campaign focused on, such as gun rights, anti-terrorism, immigration, and healthcare. Other advertisements targeted specific voters. The propaganda model is used in the section below to establish how information passed through the five filters before reaching a target audience.

4.2.1 Filter 1 - Size Ownership and Profit Orientation

As discussed in Chapter 3, Google, Facebook, and Twitter are some of Silicon Valley's leading technology corporations and have as a result, created a monopoly over the information that individuals receive online. Users have become so dependent on online platforms for information that most traditional news outlets rely on these platforms to reach their audiences. Furthermore, employees from Facebook, Twitter, Google, and other social media platforms increasingly involve themselves in political affairs (Kreiss & McGregor, 2018). This was the case during the 2016 US Presidential election, where employees from various social media corporations were embedded in the Trump campaign to teach campaign staff how to use the tools their platforms offered to reach potential voters more effectively (Scola,

[23] Bridgetree is a data and analytics company in the US. The company "operationalises data", where they find and organise data for businesses by building databases focused on reaching specific individuals. Who We Are – Bridgetree

[24] GOTV is a campaign strategy aimed at increasing voter turnout for the election cycle. It is the final and very important step in the campaign. A variety of methods are used to increase turnout, such as canvassing, Television, radio or digital advertisements, phone messages etc.

[25] These advertisements were collected from Channel 4 News, Archive.Org, YouTube and official Cambridge Analytica documentation.

2017). Examples are Google's 'persuasion search advertising' and Twitter's 'conversational advertising (see table below). Anyone who has the financial means to pay these technology corporations will be able to decide what information users see and can access.

4.2.2 Filter 2 - Advertising

As explained in Chapter 2, the digital footprints left by users when they engage online are increasingly valuable. Audiences remain products to be sold as with the original filter. However, instead of targeting an entire population, advertisers (both commercial and political) decide which audience is best suited for persuasion. 'Project Alamo' was the digital arm of the Trump campaign named after the Cambridge Analytica 'Alamo' dataset (BBC, 2017). The project became a part of the Trump campaign strategy in which Cambridge Analytica used the sophisticated database, which held between 2000-5000 data points on every voter in the US. This information was used to place voters into different segments or categories, for example 'Pro-Clinton' and 'Pro-Trump' supporters (*see figure below*). Thereafter, these categories would be broken down further to establish a 'Principal Audience' to target according to issues these voters cared about the most.

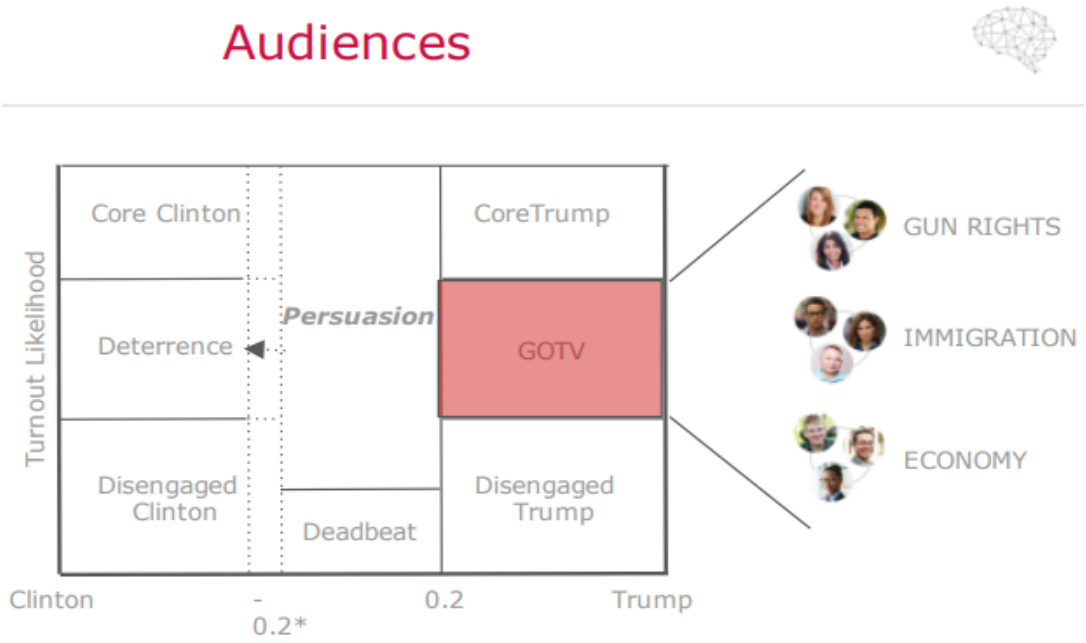

Figure 6. Data and Digital Marketing Debrief: Trump for President, pp 638. https://archive.org/details/ca-docs-with-redactions-sept-23-2020-4pm/page/n631/mode/2up

'Core Trump' supporters were used to help raise funds for the campaign, to volunteer and attend various rallies. Persuasion techniques were used against voters who were grouped in the 'Get Out The Vote' category and 'Disengaged Trump' voters and 'Core Hillary' voters would be largely ignored (Kaiser, 2019:179). Key issues were attached to constituents in different states, cities, and neighbourhoods which advised Trump on where he needed to travel to gain support and what message to use in which area (Kaiser, 2019:180). In Georgia for example, there were a total of 444 371 persuadable voters, these were broken down into different groups such as, 'persuadable', 'persuadable female' and 'persuadable Hispanics' and messages targeted at these subgroups would resonate with the issues they cared about most (Cambridge Analytica, 2020:104-105). For persuadable females these issues would be jobs, wages, and national debt. For persuadable Hispanic groups issues would be focused on jobs, taxes and education.

Another key strategy for the Trump campaign was to rally in states that traditionally lean towards Democrats but could be potentially persuaded otherwise. One such state was Wisconsin, where Trump held a total of 5 rallies accessing 50-70 000

voters. Using data to determine what mattered most to voters in the state, Trump could tailor his messaging to fit his audience's interests and persuade them to vote for him. Some of the speech would be tested and favourable bits would be made into short clips for social media in the form of GIFs or Memes[26].

Channel 4 News gained access to one of the datasets used by the Trump campaign in 2016, which consisted of 5 000 tables and 5 Terabytes of data on voters (Channel 4 News, 2020). Unfortunately, this dataset is not yet publicly available for analysis. The dataset helped Cambridge Analytica and the Trump team establish a 'principal audience' consisting around 9 million voters across the US, concentrated mostly in the states of New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina, Florida, Ohio, Iowa, Colorado, Nevada and Michigan (Cambridge Analytica, 2020:76). The overall aim was to attract a million Trump supporters from the principal audience, using targeted messaging techniques (Cambridge Analytica, 2020). Messages were tested throughout the campaign period to determine reactions and feedback. This included weekly polling of 1500 people in battleground states[27] to make necessary amendments to their advertisement and communication strategies. Overall, they ran over 5 000 advertisements which drove 1.4 billion impressions (the number of times people engage with the content). The 5 000 advertising campaigns had over 10 000 variations, according to user engagement (Cambridge Analytica , 2020:640). This analysis included understanding (i) how many times users had to see an ad before engaging with it, (ii) which variations they identified with most, and (iii) how long the user engaged with the advertisement. These factors determined which advertisement related to the user to ensure their continuous engagement – this meant that messages were tailor-made to individual users. Once again, there is no way of accessing these advertisements without the help of Facebook and other online platforms. At the time of writing it is only possible to give an overview of what was documented by Cambridge Analytica, journal and news articles and employee accounts.

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[26] Graphical Interchange Format (GIF) GIFs are a series of images or soundless video that will loop continuously and doesn't require anyone to press play, whereas a meme is a virtual image with text, usually sharing pointed commentary on cultural symbols, social ideas, or current events. A meme is typically a photo or video, although sometimes it can be a block of text (Gil, 2021).

[27] Battleground or Swing states are states in the US which consist of Democrat and Republican supporters. Presidential candidates therefore focus a lot of resources on these states during elections to try and secure votes.

The data table also indicates that some advertisements were targeted disproportionally at black voters, with the aim of dissuading these voters from showing up on Election Day. Cambridge Analytica targeted voters in the 'deterrence group' with negative Clinton advertisements in an effort to suppress their votes (Wylie, 2019:147; Kaiser, 2019:9; Grassegger & Krogerus, 2017). One such advertisement (*see table below*) was a black female actress who plays a Clinton supporter but midway through the scene she abandons the pro-Clinton script by saying "I do not believe what I am saying" (Sabbagh, 2020). Facebook received $19 000 from the Trump campaign to distribute this advertisement on its platform. These 'deterrence voters' consisted of 3.5 million black Americans across 16 swing states and were disproportionately targeted with so called 'dark advertisements' to try and supress votes (Channel 4 News, 2020). For example, Trump won by 10 000 votes in Michigan, where 15% of the electorate was black, but represented 33% of the 'Deterrence' segment within the State (Sabbagh, 2020). In other words, although Michigan's black population represented a small percentage of voters, a significant proportion of the deterrence list included black voters. It is unclear how many advertisements targeting black voters were distributed and what messaging they contained, because Facebook refuses to release data about the advertising used in the 2016 campaign (Channel 4 News, 2020). Other advertisements reached only users who Cambridge Analytica felt could be persuaded to vote for Trump. In contrast to the 'deterrence group', the 'persuasion' category consisted of 75% white voters and only 1.8% black voters.

Cambridge Analytica also targeted 300 000 voters who they classified as 'Neurotic' (Cambridge Analytica, 2020:89). They increased engagement within this group by 20% by sending emails with fear-inducing subject lines, such as 'Electing Hillary means America's Destruction'. Cambridge Analytica paid Google to prioritise their anti-Hillary websites 'Defeat Crooked Hillary' and '2016 Truths' whenever a targeted user conducted a search relating to Trump or Clinton. From July to November 2016, the Make America Number One Campaign ran fourteen different Defeat Crooked Hillary ad campaigns with 12 creative pieces totalling over 170 individual ads and reaching over 200 million users (Cambridge Analytica , 2020:85).

Trump's digital team ensured that campaign messages during debates were driven by data, testing various versions of his arguments to ensure the principal audience is "reached in the optimal psychological way" (Grassegger & Krogerus, 2017). Prior to debates, the team would have approximately 100 pre-made posts available that they could use to react to different topics of discussion during the live debate, when most of the principal audience was active online. Clinton's campaign was also monitored to ensure Trump's digital team reacted to events in real-time, increasing online engagement (Cambridge Analytica, 2020:88).

4.2.3 Filter 3 – Sourcing

The data in the table shows that Cambridge Analytica made use of 'persuasion search advertising', which promoted their content over other information on Google. For example, when voters searched specific search terms relating to Trump or Hillary, instead of a number of different information sources, targeted voters would see sponsored information at the top of their Google search engine (Cambridge Analytica, 2020). 'Conversational advertisements' on Twitter also ensured that tweets made by Trump 'trended', which meant that users were more likely to see and engage with that information (Cambridge Analytica, 2020). This drowned out alternative information, which means voters had to search harder to find other information on a specific topic. Furthermore, Facebook's algorithms could change a users' feed based on the content they most engaged with, for example, when users saw 'Crooked Hillary' advertisements and engaged with them, the algorithm would record that data and feed the user similar content.

As discussed previously, persuasion search advertising and algorithms establish 'filter bubbles' or 'echo chambers', because online platforms feed users with the content they are most likely to relate to and engage with. It is not possible at the time of writing to know exactly what content the principal audience received when they engaged with content relating to 'Defeat Crooked Hillary' or '#pizzagate'. For example, when a user liked a post relating to the pizzagate scandal, they may have received similar content by Facebook's algorithms to keep them engaged on the platform.

The lack of information on the way these algorithms work to keep users engaged is the result of Facebook intentionally hiding operational information from the public (C-SPAN, 2021). This is further complicated by the fact that the platform is able to microtarget users with specific information, which makes it difficult to track what information members in the principal audience could access. However, recent revelations by a former Facebook employee and whistle-blower, Frances Haugen, has shed some new light on the way that algorithms at Facebook work to push specific content to users (C-SPAN, 2021). For example, one of the documents released by Haugen shows how a Facebook researcher created a false Facebook account under the name 'Carol Smith' to establish how algorithms on the platform generate user content (CNN Business, 2021).

According to NBC, Carol Smith's Facebook mimicked that of a conservative mom from Wilmington, North Carolina. Her page also indicated that she liked Fox news, Donald Trump, parenting, Christianity, and politics. However, within two days of signing up and specifying her interests, Smith started receiving recommendations to join QAnon, who in 2021 was declared a terror organisation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) (Zadrozny, 2021). This gave regulators insight into the way that Facebook and other new media technologies recommend content that push users into (sometimes dangerous) echo chambers online, where they constantly engage with the same type of information, limiting their exposure to alternative sources and facts (Paul & Anguiano, 2021).

4.2.4 Filter 4 – Censure

Throughout the 2016 Trump campaign, advertisements ran which painted Trump as an honest candidate, victimised by traditional media. As a result, Trump would often demonise traditional media outlets by labelling them 'fake news' and 'an enemy of the people'. Trump also used advertising as a way to depict "Crooked Hillary" as a liar, who would destroy America. In this way the campaign tried to frame both Hillary and the media as dishonest entities, who should be feared instead of trusted.

4.2.5 Filter 5 – Ideology

Cambridge Analytica was created and owned by right-leaning Republicans Steve Bannon and Robert Mercer. As discussed in Chapter 2, since Cambridge Analytica's

inception, Bannon was focused on using the company as a tool to promote right-leaning ideology, to make middle-class white Americans feel their identity was under threat (Rowland, 2019). Bannon also proclaimed at an alt-right event in France that being called a racist or xenophobe should be worn as a badge of honour (Cummings , 2018). This rhetoric is seen throughout advertisements pushed out during the campaign, which included messages aimed to provoke fear and hate in voters. Examples of these advertisements in the table below include xenophobic messaging against Muslims and 'illegal immigrants'. These messages promoted the ideology of nationalist populism in the country. One advertisement for example, painted the Clinton presidency as one where Americans no longer had the right to bear arms in a society marked by increased violence due to 'illegal immigrants' (see below). Although hard to prove – individuals exposed to these fear-based advertisements – likely formed mental frames which associated a Clinton administration with increased violence and insecurity. This notion was further pushed onto voters by using multiple Defeat Crooked Hillary advertisements to cement the idea that she is an untruthful, crooked, dangerous and corrupt candidate who should not be allowed to run the oval office. The more voters engaged with this content online, the more algorithms pushed similar content to their feeds, cementing a specific ideology.

Below are some of the advertisements which could be found online. This aim is to provide an overview of the type of information that voters received during the 2016 election campaign:

Table 1. Advertisements used for Trump campaign during the 2016 US Presidential Election.

Advertisement & Audience	Message	Format	Platform	Wording
Ad # 1 General Audience	This advertisement focuses on Trump's ambitions to increase military power in order to "get rid of Isis"	Video	YouTube	Isis, Fear, Patriotism
Ad # 2 General Audience	This advert shows Trump declaring that he will 'Make America Great Again' by preventing Muslims from entering the US, cutting the head off Isis and taking their oil, as well as stopping illegal immigration by forcing Mexico to pay for the construction of a wall along the Southern border.	Video	YouTube	Isis, illegal immigrants, build a wall, anti-Muslim rhetoric, fear, xenophobia
Ad # 3 General Audience	In this advertisement, Trump's business plan for America is to stop the assault taking place on everything Americans stand for. Actors in this video are supporters who praise Trump for his honesty and his ability to "tell it like it is". The actors say they want to make America great and continue to have a country to be proud of and love, and that they will not lose.	Video	YouTube	Honesty, protect America, Trumpism
Ad # 4 General Audience	This advertisement focuses on Veterans and wounded warriors. Trump can be heard saying that they are treated like third-class citizens, who are unable to seek medical care due to incompetence and corruption within the Veterans Administration. Trump says his administration will change this by allowing Veterans with VA healthcare quick access to healthcare and that his administration "will take care of them like they have never been taken care of before". Trump also says that Iowa is very important, and that people need to get ready to vote so that [Americans] can be proud of their country, win, and make great deals.	Video	YouTube	Veterans, access to medical care

Advertisement & Audience	Message	Format	Platform	Wording
Ad # 5 General Audience	Trump claims in this advertisement that Washington is broken because many politicians are controlled by special interests and lobbyists. Trump says he will change this by cutting taxes, creating new trade deals, bringing back jobs, ending illegal immigration and "knocking out Isis", amongst other things.	Video	YouTube	Tax reform, job creation, Illegal Immigration, Isis
Ad # 6 General Audience	Trump argues in this advertisement that the 'establishment', the media, special-interest groups, lobbyists, and donors are against him and are trying to stop him, but that his team will win for the country, to make America Great Again.	Video	YouTube	Anti-mainstream media
Ad # 7 General Audience	In this advertisement, Trump says that he will be a unique leader and that his political opponents will simply provide the American public with "more of the same".	Video	YouTube	Leadership style
Ad # 8 General Audience	This advertisement centres on the idea that Trump is a non-politician who has met people who want to be a part of government and make America Great Again.	Video	YouTube	Leadership style
Ad # 9 General Audience	This advertisement has a narrator who introduces viewers to Jas Shaw, a seventeen-year-old football star who was gunned down outside his home and killed by an illegal immigrant gang member who just got out of prison (depicted as a Mexican man). The narrator goes on to state that Jas' dad Jamiel will support Donald Trump for President "because he knows he will end illegal immigration"	Video	YouTube	Illegal Immigrants, Mexicans, gangs, fear
Ad # 10 Persuasion Group in the Principal Audience	This advertisement features Trump's Democratic opponent, Hilary Clinton. She is presented to the viewer as a liar, similar to the fictional character Pinocchio. Her character is also described as reckless and careless, a person who is grossly negligent. Therefore, the ad suggest to the viewer not to "let Hilary Clinton do it again".	Video	Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube	Lying, negligence, recklessness, carelessness

Advertisement & Audience	Message	Format	Platform	Wording
Ad # 11 General Audience	Ad says the next President of the US faces challenges from Iran, North Korea, Isis and North Africa and that Hilary Clinton's failure as Secretary of State proves she does not have what it takes to be President and that [voters] should not let her fail again	Video	YouTube	Fear
Ad # 12 Persuasion Group in the Principal Audience	This advertisement portrays a scene where Hilary Clinton is making a speech that closely resembles one her husband Bill Clinton formerly gave about being honest and transparent and not sending classified materials.	Video	Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube	Lying
Ad # 13 General Audience	This Advertisement shows a sleeping woman woken up by the sound of someone breaking into her house. While she goes to the telephone, a narrator can be heard saying "the average police response time will be 11 minutes... "too late". After which the woman reaches for her gun, that suddenly disappears - again the narrator speaks saying that Hilary Clinton will take away her right to self-defence by taking away right to bear arms.	Video	YouTube	Fear, gun rights, self-defence, lawlessness
Ad # 14 Deterrence Group in the Principal Audience	This advertisement shows a younger Hilary Clinton referring to African American Youth as super predators with no conscience or empathy. She further says, "that we […] can talk about how these kids ended up that way, but they must first be brought to heel".	Video	Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube	Fear, racism, civil rights
Ad # 15 Deterrence Group in the Principal Audience	In this advertisement, Michelle Obama is making a speech saying that in her opinion, "if you can't run your house, you can't run the white house". This is followed by text on the screen that says, "Michelle Obama does not trust Hilary Clinton and that this does not sound like much of an endorsement".	Video	Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube	Lack of support from black women
Ad # 16 Deterrence Group in the Principal Audience	This advertisement shows an American black female actress reading a script that says, "there is a lot at stake in this election" and that is why she is voting for Hilary Clinton. After	Video	Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube	Lying, lack of support from black women

Advertisement & Audience	Message	Format	Platform	Wording
	reading a few lines of the script, the actress says she cannot continue because she does not believe what she is saying and she is not "that good of an actress", then walks off. The text on the screen then reads "some people are better liars than others", stop Hilary Clinton.			
Ad # 17 Pennsylvanian Voters	This advertisement is a filter on Snapchat that allows users to take a picture with a filter that makes the user appear to be behind prison bars. The bottom left of the filter says, "I voted to defeat crooked Hilary", with a caricature of Hilary looking angry. This "ad" filter was available in Pennsylvania on election day.	Static	Snap Chat	Crooked Hillary
Ad # 18 Persuasion Group in the Principal Audience	Defeat Crooked Hillary Advertisements had the same general theme, however they presented in several variations. Examples show the following wording used for various variations under the theme "Defeat Crooked Hillary": Hillary Clinton is still lying, let's stop Hillary, She's not with you, corrupt and dangerous, Hillary can't keep us safe, lies + corruption + Hillary Clinton, save the Supreme Court, Stop Hillary before it's too late and more emails leaked more secrets revealed.	Static	Facebook, Twitter Snapchat	Crooked Hillary
Ad # 19 Persuasion Group in the Principal Audience	These advertisements were sent via the campaign email and targeted voters who scored high in 'Neuroticism'. Headings read: "Calm the storm, stop Hillary" and "Electing Hillary Destroys Our Nation".	Static	Email	Fear, chaos, disorder
Ad # 20 General Audience	Conversational' advertisements on Twitter were used to ensure that Trump's messages and hashtags were 'trending' (popular). One example is Trump asking "what is Hillary's worst lie" to which a user can choose between four different hashtag answers: #Bhengazi, #BathroomServer #PayToPlay	Static	Twitter	Lying, scandals

Advertisement & Audience	Message	Format	Platform	Wording
	or #SheCan'tTellTheTruth			
Ad # 21 General Audience	Persuasion Search Advertising': When users searched 'Trump Iraq War', the first information that came up was from a Pro- Trump website with a heading that said, "Hillary voted for the Iraq War - Trump opposed it. When a user searched for 'Hillary Trade', an anti-Clinton website, 'lying crooked Hillary' would be promoted, sharing information with the user that Hillary is pro-NAFTA and that's she will ship jobs overseas.	Static	Google, 2016truths.com, defeatcrookedhillary.com	Crooked Hillary, Fear
Ad # 22 General Audience	For Get Out The Vote, Trump and Cambridge Analytica used persuasion search advertising, promoting Pro-Trump content. One Ad stated absentee voting has started and that voters shouldn't let crooked Hillary steal the election. The other said "Today everything changes, vote Trump and #draintheswamp"	Static	Google, 2016truths.com, defeatcrookedhillary.com	Drain the swamp
Ad # 23 General Audience	Personalised Mastheads appeared on YouTube depending on the location of a user. Some mastheads consisted of pictures of a couple of relatively well-known Trump supporters, with a tab that allows a user to 'learn more'.	Static	YouTube	Pro-Trump supporters

According to a Cambridge Analytica report, the Defeat Crooked Hillary digital advertising campaign which ran from July to November 2016 was successful in decreasing favourability towards Clinton and increasing favourability towards Trump (Cambridge Analytica, 2020:78-80). According to a Cambridge Analytica MAN1 after action report, Ad number 15 for example, titled *'Can't run her house'*, had 2 310 081 impressions and reached 1 2229 935 people. The ad was successful in persuading females who fell in the principal audience, increasing the intent to vote for Trump by 8% (Cambridge Analytica, 2020:80). Cambridge Analytica also ran Ad Recall and Impact Surveys to "measure the effectiveness" of their ads in persuading individuals in their target audience (Cambridge Analytica, 2020: 78). A total of 211,718,189 ads were placed online, driving 1,433,331 users to websites such as

defeatcrookedhillary.com and 2016truths.com. Defeat Crooked Hillary pages on Facebook reached 50 million people and generated thousands of likes, while @HillarysCrooked on Twitter received 1.5 million impressions, 20 000 retweets and 8400 followers. Defeat Crooked Hillary on YouTube posted a total of 35 videos generating 3 million views and a further 24 million views after being shared on Facebook and Twitter (Cambridge Analytica, 2020:81-88). Overall, however, Facebook and Google Search ads generated the majority of engagement, which meant that Cambridge Analytica focused most of their resources on financing adverts on these platforms.

According to Cambridge Analytica, their campaign increased Trump's favourability by 3% and created a 2% increase in the submission of absentee ballots. For Get Out The Vote, the campaign used "DataTrust[28] to ingest live ballot results into Facebook to exclude voters and follow up on individuals that had not yet voted" (Cambridge Analytica, 2020:112). This live feed informed the campaign about individuals who had already voted, which meant that resources could be reallocated to individuals who still needed to vote.

4.3 Facebook, Stop the Steal and the 2020 US elections

The polarisation within the US which seemed to have been exploited by Cambridge Analytica in their Virginia experiment and subsequently their involvement in the 2016 Trump campaign seems to have manifested in the 2019 election between Republican nominee Former President Trump and the Democratic Nominee and current President, Joe Biden. In the days leading up to the election, Trump continued to raise questions about the integrity of the election process, by claiming that the state of Georgia, for example, was allowing election officials to take suitcases of ballots out from under the ballot-counting tables to scan them "illegally and unsupervised for nearly two hours" (Mascaro, et al., 2021; Woodward, 2021). Ultimately, Trump tweeted "they (democrats) are trying to STEAL the election", which led to the 'Stop the Steal' movement first on Facebook and later on other social

[28] According to their website, "Data Trust is the leading provider of voter and electoral data to Republican and conservative campaigns, parties, and advocacy organizations". https://thedatatrust.com/

media platforms. The group became one of the fastest growing groups in Facebook's history reaching 100 users a second about 22 hours after its inception. The 'about' section of the group suggested that "Democrats are scheming to disenfranchise and nullify Republican votes. It is up to us (Republicans), the American people, to fight and put a stop to it" (Frenkel, 2020). Internal documents leaked by Haugen shows that Facebook knew about these groups and their intent to polarize the electorate but failed to prevent them from forming on its platform (Mac & Frenkel, 2021). Haugen believes that Facebook's persistence on putting profit ahead of the safety of people, led them to decide not to tweak its algorithms to keep users safe and decrease inflammatory content, which ultimately according to Haugen, assisted the hostile takeover of the US Capitol (Paul & Anguiano, 2021).

4.4 Conclusion

In 2015, Cambridge Analytica assisted the Trump for President and Make America Number 1 Super PAC in understanding the electorate by identifying the principal audiences for targeting purposes. Cambridge Analytica used its Behavioural Microtargeting techniques to send specific messages and advertisements to voters within the principal audience. In some instances, voters in this audience would be targeted and persuaded to vote in favour of Trump, in other instances voters (particularly black American voters), would be deterred from voting at all. These techniques, the focus on democratic leaning states (that Clinton took for granted) and the help of embedded social media employees could have contributed to Trump's 2016 victory. This data shows how an elite group is able to decide what information voters have access to by targeting them with specific information based on their personality. In some cases, voter suppression took place, which directly influences the ability for citizens to participate equally in the elections. Furthermore, Facebook's insistence on profit over people has led the platform to neglect the safety of its users by promoting polarizing content. This, in the eyes of Frances Haugen, is one of the leading causes behind the mobilisation of voters who later stormed the US capitol with very deadly consequences.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This study set out to investigate whether Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's propaganda model is still relevant in the age of new media. In order to achieve this, the dissertation examined the way in which Cambridge Analytica used new media techniques for both Trump for President and Make America Number 1 during the 2016 United States Presidential election campaign.

Subsequently, this study asked: (i) how the propaganda model relates to the current social media landscape; (ii) to what extent Cambridge Analytica exploited digital media to manipulate voters in the 2016 US Presidential elections; (iii) how elitism explains the way social media influences key functions and norms of democracy; and, (iv) whether Cambridge Analytica's use of social media influenced democratic integrity in the US.

The following discussion will therefore attempt to answer the research questions of this dissertation by using the data presented in Chapter 4 of this study. The data will be linked to previous literature to contextualise its relevance for this study.

5.2 Key findings

The overall findings reveal that the propaganda model is still relevant in the new media landscape. The Cambridge Analytica case study showed how elite actors continue to push their desired narratives to the general public, although on a more targeted and dangerous level. The findings further suggest that the techniques employed by the analytics firm impede not only on citizens' ability to deliberate and participate but undermine democratic norms of mutual tolerance and institutional forbearance. Therefore, Cambridge Analytica's involvement in the 2016 US election shows that the elite are still in control of information but that this can have dangerous consequences for democracy.

5.3 Discussion

This original propaganda model, as described by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, follows a similar narrative to that of elite theorists, Gaetano Mosca and C.

Wright Mills, namely that society is divided between the elite and the masses. However, Herman and Chomsky focus on the way in which information is controlled by this elite class in order to manufacture consent from the masses. To achieve this, the elite rely on the help of mass media who, instead of holding the elite accountable and informing the public, serve the interest of the elite by disseminating only the messages that the elite want the public to hear (Herman & Chomsky, 1994). Information is therefore required to pass through the five filters of the propaganda model before reaching the public. In this way, information takes on a top-down approach where the elite decide what information the masses access.

Today, sources of information are changing which brings into question whether the propaganda model is still applicable to this new media landscape. This is because citizens increasingly get their information online from social media sources such as Facebook and Google, which at first glance may signify a shift away from dominant elite narratives (MacLeod, 2019:47). The fact that anyone can post something online signals a possible change in the flow of information to a bottom-up approach (Concordia Summit, 2016). However, this dissertation suggest that this is merely an illusion, and that information is still very much top-down, controlled and decided on by the elite. What has changed, however, as will be discussed below, are the tools that the elite – in this case Cambridge Analytica – use to manufacture consent.

Digital sources of information like Facebook, Google and other social networking sites continue to filter the information users see for companies like Cambridge Analytica – a firm formerly owned and used by members of the American elite – to change voter behaviour (Grassegger & Krogerus, 2017). Facebook itself is a dominant news distributor because it allows users to access different news platforms from its site thereby driving increased traffic to news outlets. Alexis Madrigal, from *The Atlantic* newspaper says that Facebook's new role in the news media ecosystem was "like a tide was carrying (them) to new traffic records, without hiring additional staff, changing strategy or publishing more, suddenly everything was easier" (Madrigal, 2017). Furthermore, surveillance capitalism has established an online environment where the activity and behaviour of users can continuously be tracked, leaving behind data that new media platforms use to enable behavioural microtargeting and algorithmic predictability (Zuboff, 2019).

Cambridge Analytica used these tools to identify a principal audience among the electorate who they felt could be persuaded to vote for former US President, Donald Trump, and dissuaded from voting for democratic Presidential nominee, Hillary Clinton. Their communications strategy therefore relied on content that was crafted based on a voter's personality, which was derived from their OCEAN score and other available data. However, voters were unaware that behavioural microtargeting techniques were being used against them to change the way they voted. In the context of historical voter targeting techniques, such as the Southern Strategy, which was discussed in Chapter 2, these techniques may seem quite similar. In both cases, a small proportion of the electorate were targeted with communication that resonated with their identity. However, the significance of the tactics used by Cambridge Analytica is much more widespread for three reasons. Firstly, the techniques that the analytics firm used resulted in people only seeing information that resonates with them, thereby, avoiding any alternative, which may increase polarization in society. Secondly, the ambiguous nature of behavioural microtargeting and algorithmic predictability makes it increasingly difficult to track and analyse campaign communications sent to particular groups in the electorate. This in turn creates an inability for lawmakers and researchers to hold these new media technologies accountable. Lastly, the way that the elite use these new media tools to communicate with the electorate impacts on democratic norms and functions. As a result, these new media technologies are increasingly viewed as disruptive forces in society, contributing to the possibility of a doomsday scenario as discussed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

5.3.1 Filter Bubbles and Echo Chambers

Cambridge Analytica relied on the tools offered by embedded staff from Facebook, Google and other social media organisations to assist the Trump campaign's communication strategy. Using digital tools, such as priority search advertising and algorithms, assisted the analytics firm in promoting their campaign's communication content over that of others. As discussed in Chapter 4, between July and November 2016, Cambridge Analytica paid Google to prioritise anti-Hillary websites and to promote pro-Trump content when users searched for content relating to the two candidates. This means that content sponsored by Cambridge Analytica such as

'Defeat Crooked Hillary' and '2016Truths' appeared at the top of targeted users' search feed.

The concern with these techniques lies in the fact that the more Cambridge Analytica used voters' ideological and behavioural identities and their associated emotional pulls to formulate messages for them, the more they encourage these voters to access the same type of information online. For example, the data shows that African Americans were disproportionately targeted with 'dark ads' on platforms like Facebook who utilised secretive algorithms to continuously push out similar content to users. These dark ads were only visible to the advertiser and the intended target audience making it difficult to track what recommendations Facebook algorithms made to users who engaged with these ads.

However, recently leaked documents by Facebook whistle-blower Frances Haugen about Facebook's operational structure illustrated how the platform's algorithms work to determine what information to place onto a user's social feed. Haugen stated that "Facebook knows that content that elicits an extreme reaction from [a user] is more likely to get a click, a comment or reshare" (Stacey & Bradshaw, 2021). In one of the documents released by Haugen, Facebook's own research showed how the fictional account of Carol (discussed in Chapter 4), received recommendations to join extremist groups like QAnon within two days of joining the platform. These recommendations were based on the likes and preferences that 'Carol' had indicated on her page. Thus, the Carol example showed how the Facebook algorithms identified interests and ideological dispositions in order to continuously feed related content or groups to ensure continued engagement from the user. It is therefore likely that members of Cambridge Analytica's principal audience would have received similar algorithmic recommendations after they engaged with anti-Hillary or pro-Trump content.

New media platforms benefit from helping companies like Cambridge Analytica push out content to users, because the more they can get users to engage with similar content, the more advertisers are willing to spend on advertising on their platforms. Thus, increased user engagement means greater profits for companies like Facebook and Google. Often misinformation, extreme content, or content that accurately reflects users' personality results in higher engagement and that is why it

continues to be pushed to users' feeds (Edelman, 2021). However, this comes at a cost because when a user or a voter in this case, is only exposed to the same type of content, any alternative information presented to the user by experts or other organisations will be disregarded as false. As previously discussed in the literature review, George Lakoff attributes this to the fact that contrary information threatens a voters' pre-existing mental frames (Lakoff, 2004). Drew Westen similarly argues that voters have a hard time recognising alternative viewpoints because when they recognise a conflict between data and their beliefs, the brain looks for ways to turn off these unpleasant emotions by engaging in faulty reasoning (Westen, 2007:16-17). This sentiment is also addressed in an article in *The Atlantic*, where author Anne Applebaum (Applebaum, 2020) states that:

> *Deep informational divides separate one part of the electorate from the rest. Some voters live in a so-called populist bubble, where they hear nationalist and xenophobic messages learn to distrust fact-based media and evidence-based science, and become receptive to conspiracy theories and suspicious of democratic institutions. Others read and hear completely different media, respect different authorities, and search for a different sort of news. Whatever the advantages of these other bubbles, their rules render the people in them incapable of understanding or speaking with those outside of them*.

Cambridge Analytica was therefore able to not only use algorithms and persuasion search advertising to push their desired messages onto members of the principal audience, but they were also able to relate messages in some way to the voters' personality to ensure that it had the desired effect of behaviour change (Makauskas, 2018). The analytics firm recognised early on that the American electorate was increasingly divided along ideological lines and as a result, pushed out messages that resonated with Americans who felt a sense of increased insecurity under a possible Clinton presidency. Cambridge Analytica knew from the results of its Virginia experiment that certain voters felt that 'true Americans' no longer had a voice in the American society, and they played on these feelings to craft narratives for the Trump campaign (Wylie, 2019; Rowland, 2019). For example, advertisement #13 in Chapter 4 depicts a lawless society under the Clinton presidency where police response times to emergency calls are 11 minutes and people no longer have the

right to bear arms to protect themselves, all in the context of xenophobic narratives against Muslims and (especially Mexican) immigrants. Their messaging simulated that of QAnon and other right-wing sources which argue that the Democrats are an evil that needs to be destroyed and that the Republicans are the only ones who can save the country. This is not surprising given that Cambridge Analytica was run, in part, by former executive chair of Breitbart News, Steve Bannon, who has recently been suspended from Twitter for suggesting that American experts such as Anthony Fauci should be beheaded and that his head should be put on a pike (Beaumont, 2020). The Defeat Crooked Hillary campaigns adopted a similar tone by scaring voters with messages that Clinton should be feared because she is crooked and unable to protect the American people from immigrants, Muslims, and minority groups. It is likely, based on the findings of Lakoff and Westen about the way the mind works, that the more exposure voters had with this fear-based content, the more likely they were to develop mental frames which perceived a Clinton presidency as something to fear. Thus, any facts which served to discredit Trump, such as his negative sentiment towards minorities and his vulgar remarks about women was largely disregarded, which in any former Presidential race might have cost a candidate his or her presidency.

Sarah Longwell, a Republican activists who conducted several focus groups under ‘Republican Voters Against Trump’, attributed the above to the fact that reporting about Trump’s controversies was so frequent that, to most voters, it “just became white noise” or stories voters “did not want to think about” (Applebaum, 2020). Stories surrounding the use of taxpayer’s money for Trump’s golf clubs, Trump’s involvement in sex scandals and with adult film stars were presented to voters who were simultaneously being fed videos, memes, pictures and comments which reminded them of their ideological allegiance to the Republican party. Republican voters were portrayed as ‘true Americans’ (Christian, white Americans), who were under attack by Muslims, minorities and foreigners (Applebaum, 2020). These messages were stronger in their emotional pull than people’s dislike for Trump. This is just as Huxley and Orwell predicted, that facts will be “drowned out in a sea of irrelevance” (Lanchester, 2019; O'Malley, 2017). Thus, one can argue that people in filter bubbles are exposed to alternative information, but they do not accept this information. The Clinton campaign took this for granted because, according to her

adviser, the campaign operated under the false belief that voters persuaded by presenting them with facts (Applebaum, 2020).

Cambridge Analytica's involvement in the Trump campaign may therefore have facilitated the establishment of echo chambers and the inability of voters to accept alternative narratives. The firm used people's psychographic data to formulate messages that would resonate with voters' pre-existing ideologies, which Facebook and Google further cemented with their algorithms, specially curated news feeds, and priority search advertising. The use of these tools has established a post-truth environment where people are increasingly critical of mainstream news media and facts pushing users deeper into filter bubbles. The more that people disagree about basic facts, the more polarised society becomes. Cambridge Analytica was able to push out narratives to voters by using these technologies, to either persuade them to vote for Trump, by increasing his favourability or by supressing voters by deterring them from voting for Hillary. The elite are, therefore, still very much able to use new media sources to push their interests onto the public and in a secretive way (Waddell, 2021), as will be discussed in the following section.

5.3.2 The secrecy behind behavioural microtargeting

While working with Cambridge Analytica, the Trump campaign is said to have spent approximately $70 million a month on its Facebook digital advertising campaigns (Madrigal, 2017). Their advertising campaigns on the platform largely included sending behaviourally microtargeted political advertisements to voters in the principal audience. These tools made it impossible for outside observers to understand the type of messaging that voters encountered because these messages are impossible to track (Madrigal, 2017). Information that elite groups, such as, Cambridge Analytica pushed to voters were "rerouted through Facebook and therefore, hidden from view" (Madrigal, 2017).

Microtargeting as a strategy is therefore effective because law makers or researchers are unable to hold these companies accountable for their campaign messaging. This means that Facebook enabled Cambridge Analytica to spread false or misleading information to some voters, often in the effort to supress their vote, without taking responsibility for the consequences that could arise as a result. The

data shows that Cambridge Analytica ran a total of 5 000 ad campaigns with 10 000 variations. Traditional voter databases such as the RNC which gives out basic data about voting history and lifestyles were supplemented by Cambridge Analytica, with data from Facebook and other data harvesting sites, which provided them with extremely detailed information about specific voters and the information that will best achieve the desired outcome. In essence, the information that voters had access to was targeted to only the intended audiences and their messages remained "framed within the parameters of elite interests" (Pedro, 2011). Furthermore, essential aspects of elections – the information voters have access to and the events that they think happened – have been destabilised by organisations like Facebook who allow the elite to operate in a manner that no one truly understands (Madrigal, 2017). In this sense, one may argue that Cambridge Analytica is only a small part of a bigger problem facing democratic systems today. This is because the functions and norms and thus the integrity of democracy is undermined because the public's will is manipulated in favour of a particular interest group without any ability to hold them to account.

5.3.3 Consequences for democratic integrity

Though new media was originally praised for its ability to democratise knowledge and give a voice to anyone, the Cambridge Analytica scandal illustrates how the media has not been democratised and that these companies instead created anti-competitive monopolies. Instead of transforming the way information flows by establishing a bottom-up structure, these online platforms continue to follow a top-down structure where they enable the elite to push out their preferred messaging to audiences.

The digital tools that Cambridge Analytica accessed during its work for the Trump campaign, evidently impacts on the key functions and norms of the US democracy. As discussed in Chapter 2, at a very basic level, democracy requires that citizens are able to participate and deliberate in matters of the state. However, the use of microtargeting and algorithmic predictability cement voters' ideological perspectives to the extent that it prevents them from considering and acknowledging alternative information and facts. When companies like Cambridge Analytica use these tools to further their aims, they essentially disrupt the democratic functions of political

participation and political deliberation. If every news feed is carefully curated to match the individual's ideological disposition, "how can anyone understand what other people are seeing and responding to?" (Madrigal, 2017) The fact that voters no longer see the same information because their digital footprints determine the type of messaging that they have access to and the fact that algorithms reinforce this messaging, means that voters do not have an equal starting point from which to deliberate about the candidate best suited to represent them. Voters are unable to deliberate and debate information because they are not receiving the same information. Instead, their content is fragmented and divided along ideological lines, increasing polarization and decreasing the ability to debate rationally. Society is therefore structured in such a way that it promotes elite interests instead of the will of the people. The ability that new media tools provide for the elite helps them to "influence national outcomes", effectively preventing voters from participating in elections, as Cambridge Analytica did with their voter suppression messaging and preventing deliberation by pushing voters into filter bubbles and directing their ability to debate about important affairs of the state. Leaked documents about Facebook's internal operations have further supported the company's clear preference to push elite narratives by not applying its rules and policies to its elite members, thus creating "invisible elite tiers within the social network" (Horwitz, 2021). In order to achieve this, Facebook uses a programme called Cross-Check, which shields 'whitelisted' members from enforcement processes resulting from content which are against the company's policies (Horwitz, 2021).

Furthermore, the 'Defeat Crooked Hillary' campaigns run by Cambridge Analytica for the 2016 Trump campaign violated democratic norms of mutual tolerance and institutional forbearance as described by Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt in *How Democracies Die* (2016). In their description of mutual toleration Levitsky and Ziblatt argue that "as long as (political) rivals play by constitutional rules, [candidates] accept that they have the right to exist, compete for power and to govern", in other words, political opponents are considered legitimate (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018:59). Instead of displaying mutual tolerance for his opponent, Trump, with the help of Cambridge Analytica, villainised Clinton's candidacy by painting her as a corrupt force of evil not worthy of running for office. Levitsky and Ziblatt further argue that when candidates see each other as enemies rather than opponents losing to them

ceases, to be an option, which tempts politicians to abandon norms such as forbearance (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018:64). This materialised during the 2016 election campaign when, during a final Presidential debate, Trump refused to clarify whether he would accept a Clinton presidency saying "(he) will look at it at the time" and "(he) will keep (everyone) in suspense" (Collinson, 2016). These sentiments go against the democratic norms which have characterised the US democracy for centuries and points to increased partisan polarization, which was evident in the US during the 2016 elections, with Republicans and Democrats deeply divided along racial, ideological and religious lines (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018:90-91; Collinson, 2016). Cambridge Analytica used this polarization in their messaging by instilling fear in their principal audience.

This dissertation showed how Cambridge Analytica used politically charged and racist messaging to elicit angry reactions from audiences who felt they no longer have a place in their society because they ('true Americans') have become strangers in their own country. Cambridge Analytica used these messages in their advertisements to show how a Clinton presidency would only serve to worsen the circumstances of 'true Americans'. Again, these advertisements were crafted based on voters' personalities to elicit favourability for Trump's candidacy. During the 2016 election, voters did not know how their data was used to manipulate their voting behaviour in favour of Trump; they were seemingly pushed into their respective ideological bubbles, in some cases, unable to tell fact from fiction. This occurred against the background of a breakdown of democratic norms in the country. In this way, democratic integrity was not upheld in the 2016 US election because the information that voters received were pushed onto them, unknowingly, by Cambridge Analytica who used Facebook and other new media sources to try and change the way the principal audience votes. According to Alan MacLeod, the author of *Propaganda in the Information Age* (2019), the nature of the online spaces have thus only strengthened the applicability of the propaganda model because these new monopolies continue to serve elites by filtering what people see and they therefore "limit the ability for a well-informed public which is a pre-requisite for any democracy" (MacLeod, 2019:48-50).

5.4 Summary

This chapter aimed to show that the propaganda model is still relevant in the age of new media, arguably more so than in its 1988 conception (MacLeod, 2019:48). New media sources of information such as Facebook and Google, on whom an increasing number of people rely, are filtering information in the interest of elite groups such as Cambridge Analytica at the cost of democracy. By using new media tools such as behavioural microtargeting and algorithmic predictability, Cambridge Analytica was able to send out targeted information to voters who fell within their principal audiences. This information is hard to track and analyse because of their targeted nature, making it difficult for outsiders to establish to what extent voters were influenced. However, the use of these tools ensures that voters continually engage with information that reinforces their own beliefs at the cost of facts and science (Mecklin, 2021). This establishes a post-truth and highly polarized environment, where voters aren't able to agree on basic facts. The use of these new media tools by the elite to manufacture the consent of voters for a specific candidate is preventing citizens from exercising their right to participate and deliberate in democracies and this is causing a breakdown in democratic norms, which ultimately seemed to have manifested during 2016 where Trump refused to state whether he would accept the election results if he were to lose against Clinton. Ultimately, the propaganda model is applicable to the new media landscape and the way in which the elite control information has led to a breakdown of democratic integrity because of the elite's disregard for democratic functions and norms for the sake of power and profit (C-SPAN, 2021).

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

As discussed in Chapter 5, this dissertation aimed to establish whether the propaganda model is applicable by placing the model in the context of the digital media landscape. In order to answer the research question, the dissertation used Cambridge Analytica's involvement in the 2016 US Presidential election as a case study. Ultimately, the dissertation concluded that the propaganda model is still applicable because of the way Cambridge Analytica used new media tools to push out information to control voters. The case study also revealed that the elite are still in control of the information that voter's access, only on a more targeted and secretive level, making it increasingly difficult for voters to engage in meaningful functions required in a democracy. Furthermore, Cambridge Analytica's campaigns helped to destabilise democratic norms putting into question the integrity of the US democratic system.

The first chapter of this dissertation introduced the idea of a possible doomsday scenario, in part because of the increased use of disruptive technologies (Mecklin, 2020). Orwell and Huxley predicted that the truth would be concealed from society and that it would be "drowned in a sea of irrelevance" (O'Malley, 2017). This prediction materialised in the US 2016 elections, which were marked by the spread of fake news and conspiracy theories. In some instances, the embrace of conspiracy theories led to violent outbursts, as was the case with #pizzagate and #stopthesteal. Though false stories started decades ago, today they are spread using new media technologies, which facilitates the use of microtargeting and algorithmic predictability. Cambridge Analytica therefore used new media platforms, such as Facebook, to feed voters carefully crafted narratives based on their psychographic dispositions. These narratives likely pushed voters further into filter echo chambers, inhibiting their abilities to distinguish truth from reality.

Although the internet initially seemed to promote bottom-up information structures, this assumption is false. When applying the propaganda model to the Cambridge Analytica scandal, it is evident that the elite still control the narrative only on a more targeted and secretive scale. The analytics firm conducted its Virginia experiment to identify cracks in the US before harvesting 5 000 data points on every voter in the US. Through its recognition of increased polarization within the electorate,

Cambridge Analytica could use the data they gathered to compile a principal audience that they could persuade with targeted advertising to either vote for Trump or to not turn out at all. The methods that they used to influence voter behaviour are in clear violation of democratic functions like political deliberation and political participation. The reason for this; voters were unaware of the PSYOPS related techniques used to manipulate them towards the interest of the elite and therefore were unable to effectively perform their democratic roles.

Cambridge Analytica's 'Defeat Crooked Hillary' campaign also violated democratic norms such as mutual toleration and institutional forbearance by taking away Hillary Clinton's right to participate as a legitimate candidate in the eyes of the electorate. The Trump campaign's disregard for forbearance also became evident in the 2016 election, when Trump refused to say whether he would accept the election outcome if Clinton won. Though Trump won the 2016 election, he was not re-elected for a second term in office. The fact that he continued to tout 'election fraud' as a result of his loss and because of the partisan polarization in America, this led to a distrust in the integrity of the election and ultimately to the violence that took place during the storming of the US capitol in January 2020, which led to five deaths.

These factors make it easy to recognise how disruptive technologies can be used to facilitate a possible doomsday scenario. If citizens cannot agree on basic facts because an elite group is pushing voter's narratives based on their respective personalities, society becomes increasingly polarized and less tolerant of one another. Furthermore, citizens are unable to carry out their most important democratic roles because their consent is manufactured under increasingly opaque circumstances by elite who put their interests ahead of democracy.

6.2 Limitations of the research

There is currently a lack of data on the specific tactics used by Cambridge Analytica in the US. The data that is available shows how the analytics firm used harvested data from Facebook to facilitate their behavioural microtargeting strategy during the 2016 US political campaigns. However, the very nature of behavioural microtargeting makes it difficult for researchers to know exactly what messages voters received during campaigns and would require the cooperation of both Facebook and

Cambridge Analytica to retrieve the so-called dark or targeted advertisements created for members of the principal audience. Furthermore, the data list which refers to information that Cambridge Analytica and the Trump campaign compiled about US voters that Channel 4 news gained access to, is not yet publicly available for analysis, leaving some gaps in the research. Data pertaining to the firm's involvement in other countries around the world, particularly in Africa is also currently very limited. This makes it difficult to build an accurate and detailed picture about the tactics the firm used in these countries and the consequences these tactics may have for both citizens and democracy.

6.3 Key recommendations

While this dissertation focuses on the Cambridge Analytica scandal, there would be value in future research examining Facebook and other new media plans to expand their operations by creating a metaverse over the next 10 years. This would mean that actual and virtual reality would overlap with one another. However, in light of existing ethical concerns about the behaviour of Facebook and other new media platforms, their persistent need to put profit ahead of people and their inability to address warnings from their own staff, makes the idea of a metaverse worrying for the future of democracy.

There may also be value in researching how these new media tools possibly threatened basic democratic norms and functions in the US during the 2020 election between Trump and President Joe Biden. Trump lost this election, but his apparent disregard for mutual tolerance and forbearance materialised further in 2020, when his inability to concede to Biden's win, led to a distrust among his supporters about the integrity of the electoral process. This started the 'stop the steal' movement on Facebook and other social media platforms, which mobilised and encouraged Trump's supporters to carry out the violence seen at the US capitol.

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