



**Politics of the Heart and Mind: Using WhatsApp to Drive Support
Amongst Evangelicals in Brazil**

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Declaration:

I, Tyesha Pillay, declare that this dissertation is my own original work and has not been submitted by me to another University for certification. Where secondary sources have been used, these sources were referenced and acknowledged in accordance with the requirements of the Department of Political Sciences. All data findings in this dissertation have not been falsified or embellished.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Pillay'.

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ABSTRACT

On the 28 October 2018, Brazilians elected right-wing populist Jair Messias Bolsonaro as the 38th President of Brazil. Bolsonaro defeated his opponent Fernando Haddad from the PT, by a significant margin of 55,13% as against 43,87% (Araujo & Prior 2020). Even against the backdrop of surging support for right-wing candidates and parties, the election of Bolsonaro still surprised observers and academics. Bolsonaro's success, as Leticia Cesarino (2019) and Stuart Davis and Joe Straubhaar (2020) found, was due to his campaign's communication strategy on social media. At the heart of these strategies is the use of emotive messaging on WhatsApp, which micro-targeted Evangelicals through the use of fake news, particularly disinformation, and populist communication derived from crises occurring in Brazil leading up to the 2018 election.

Grounded in these arguments, this dissertation studies the effects of fear, anger and enthusiasm/hope in communication shared by the Bolsonaro campaign on WhatsApp. In doing so, the study applies a two-step analysis method. Firstly, the 12 sample WhatsApp messages were analysed using a latent content analysis to identify and explore the topics addressed in these messages. Secondly, these messages were then subjected to an emotional sentiment analysis to measure their emotive elements using the Linguistic-Inquiry and Word Count software. Guided by the *Theory of Affective Intelligence*, this dissertation found that anger and enthusiasm are evoked by WhatsApp messaging based on political habits, while fear is evoked by messaging grounded in an unknown threat. Moreover, anger and enthusiasm are found to decrease information-seeking, while fear encourages individuals to seek alternative information. The Bolsonaro WhatsApp network acted as both an echo-chamber for individuals experiencing anger/enthusiasm, and an alternative source of information for individuals experiencing fear. This dissertation shows how the Bolsonaro campaign used emotive strategic communication on WhatsApp to appeal to Evangelical Christians, specifically their desire for social recognition.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Anti-PC	Anti-politically correct
Anti-PT	Anti- Partido dos Trabalhadores
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Queer+
LIWC-22	Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count 2022
PC	Politically correct
PSDB	Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira
PSL	Partido Social Liberal
PT	Partido dos Trabalhadores
TAI	Theory of Affective Intelligence

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

In October 2018, Brazil held its 38th national election. Following a highly controversial election period dominated by a left-right ideological divide, Jair Messias Bolsonaro and his party Partido Social Liberal (*Social Liberal Party or PSL*) were elected into office during the second round of voting. Bolsonaro defeated his opponent Fernando Haddad from the Partido dos Trabalhadores (*Workers Party or PT*) by a significant margin of 55,13% as against 43,87% (Araujo & Prior 2020). This victory constituted a prominent shift to the right within a wave of global right-wing populist victories that saw Donald Trump elected to office in the United States of America. However, even against the backdrop of surging support for right-wing candidates and parties, the election of Bolsonaro surprised observers and academics. Indeed, both the nature of the candidate and the election outcome were considered untraditional and unusual, as Brazilian elections were historically a contest between the rich and poor, with political parties and veteran politicians playing a crucial role (Ribeiro & Borba 2021: 12).

From 1995 to 2014, both the runner up and winning candidate were either from the PT or the Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (PSDB or the *Brazilian Social Democratic Party*) (Ivanov 2020: 71). Given this trend, observers, academics and polls predicted that despite their growing rejection (discussed in chapters 2 and 4), either PT's Haddad or Gerlado Alckmin of the PSDB would emerge victorious. However, by defeating Haddad by more than 10 million valid votes, the election of Bolsonaro disrupted this 30-year de-facto presidential competition between the PSDB and the PT (Bloch & Lemonte 2019: 13).

Moreover, since 2004, populism in Brazil was associated with the left, marked by the election of the PT led by Luis Ignacio da Silva (commonly referred to as 'Lula' and the 'People's President') from 2003 to 2011 and later Dilma Rousseff in 2011 to 2016. The PT's populism was inclusive, and included all those who were excluded and discriminated against by the previous government's neo-liberal economic policies (Singer 2009: 83; Ivanov 2020: 71). As such, the PTs populism was "grounded in macro-economics, and emphasised the need for growth and income distribution,

while also de-emphasising the risks associated with deficit finance, inflation, external constraints and the reaction of economic agents towards non-market policies” (Silva 2019: 44). The PT went on to obtain 14 years of uninterrupted governance and significantly expanded the welfare state (Heller 2020: 597). The Brazilian shift towards right-wing populism, therefore, is the most drastic in the region and signified the most conservative turn since the Brazilian military dictatorship (De Ros 2018; Silva 2019; Visser-Simmens 2022).

According to Javier Lafuente (2018), this shock is further attributed to the Bolsonaro campaign’s lack of traditional political structure and its extremist statements. An example includes racist statements such as “Bolsonaro stating that Black individuals in quilombo’s¹ are not even good for procreation” (Chacko 2017: 6; Hunter & Power 2019: 77). Lafuente (2018) argues that in any other circumstance, these statements would have ruined the public image of a candidate, particularly in a country such as Brazil marked by diversity and socio-economic inequality.

Instead, as Leticia Cesarino (2019) and Stuart Davis and Joe Straubhaar (2020) found, Bolsonaro’s electoral success was due to the campaign’s strategic communication. Here, strategic communication refers to a well-articulated plan to achieve the campaign’s electoral objectives by targeting voter segments, identifying issues/problems, outlining election themes and strategies, and allocating financial and organisational resources (Norris *et al* 2000: 1-3). In line with this definition, the Bolsonaro campaign capitalised on a range of existing fundamental conditions, namely: an economic recession; corruption; the rise of pro-minority, particularly Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Queer + (LGBTQ+) policies that was coupled with an emotive backlash campaign on WhatsApp; and, put forth a political agenda that weakened the opposition and strengthened Bolsonaro. In contrast to studies which examine these conditions within the broader Brazilian context, this dissertation focuses on a specific and understudied condition which gave rise to Bolsonaro - *political aspirations of Evangelicals in Brazil* (Visser-Simmens 2022: 17) and emotive strategic communication on social media.

1.1.1. Evangelicals’ aspirations

According to a sample survey by Datafolha (2017), Brazil is home to the fourth-largest Evangelical

¹ Hinterland settlement founded by African individuals who escaped slavery (da Silva 2019).

population, with over 32% of the total population identifying as such. The concept ‘Evangelical’ is an ambiguous one and as such, this dissertation defines Evangelicalism as a heterogeneous group, which comprises of churches that belong to the Protestant tradition (Hoover 2019: 8).

Despite being a secular state since re-democratisation, Evangelicals have played a vital role in Brazilian politics. Trends show that the growth of Evangelicalism was accompanied by a rise in Evangelical political representation, and thus, increased influence in Congress (Larcerda 2018: 98). However, this representation was fragmented, with churches typically endorsing multiple candidates² (Zilla 2020). The 2018 election reflects a shift from this heterogeneous voting preference and alliance, with 70% of Evangelicals casting their vote for Bolsonaro (Datafolha 2019). Against this historical trend, Bolsonaro’s election is attributed to the support of a unified Evangelical electorate (Visser-Simmens 2022: 17) and an emotive election campaign that appealed to their issues and sentiments.

1.2. Research problem

There is a growing body of literature on Evangelicalism and political mobilisation in Brazil (Gaskill 2002; Zilla 2020; Seman & Bossio 2021). Despite this growing body of literature, no study explores the relationship between the Bolsonaro campaign’s emotive strategic communication on social media, particularly WhatsApp and its role in facilitating support amongst Evangelicals.

Jurgen Nai and Alessandro Maier (2021: 77) claim that to maximise their share of the electorate, politicians, especially those advocating a populist agenda, appeal to a voter’s emotions. This is not a new concept. In ‘*The Political Brain: The Role of Emotions in Deciding the Fate of the Nation*’, Drew Westen (2008: 33) found that “the *political brain is the emotional brain*” because voters typically support a specific candidate/party based on their values, wishes and fears – with emotion being the cornerstone of all three. Westen (2008: 35) claims: that when determining whom to vote for, voters first decipher how they “*feel about the candidate’s: party and its principles, personal*

² A strategic alliance existed between Lula/Rousseff and specific Evangelical denominations, emphasising the difficulty in establishing a homogenous Evangelical bloc. In an era marked by the growing prominence of gender and identity politics within the PT, led to a collapse of this relationship in 2016 (Lapper 2020: 150).

characteristics, and lastly the candidate's stand on the issues". Given this, our brains determine how we vote through a network of associations, which comprises of beliefs, images and feelings that have become interconnected. The campaign phase of an election is hence the 'marketplace' of these emotions, and successful campaigns must ensure that they appeal to and administer voter emotions by formulating positive associations with their candidate while creating negative associations with the opposition (Westen 2008).

Moreover, several trends emerged regarding interactions between populist actors and their use of social media. Studies have shown that populist actors utilised social media in both the Global North and Global South. According to Paul Gerbaudo (2019: 752), despite social media being "used by mainstream politicians, the underlying narrative and dominant value orientation of social media run counter to the key traits of establishment politics". Social media offers a celebrity element, which lends itself to social media, as social media provides "individuals with an opportunity to quickly gain recognition, while also allowing voters to come together multiplying the power of each of its members" in support of a populist, whereas these individuals would otherwise be disconnected" (Gerbaudo 2019: 758). By doing so, this connection with members allows populists to create a sense of community (Day 2020: 24).

In Brazil, up until the 2018 election, political advertising on television was the primary means to reach out to the electorate. The 2018 election marked a departure from previous election campaigns, with Brazil's growing digital environment creating a fertile ground for innovative strategic communication tactics to be utilised with the intent of garnering support (Singer 2018: 22). Bolsonaro relied on social media, particularly WhatsApp to connect with the electorate. At this time, approximately 66% of Brazilians were online, with 93% of them using WhatsApp. As such, Brazilian WhatsApp accounts were micro-targeted and infiltrated with pro-Bolsonaro content, which reinforced his anti-establishment and anti-others narrative (Rodriguez 2019). Bolsonaro's opponents were unable to disseminate a similar WhatsApp strategy and respond to the 'slander' campaign launched on the App. Despite this, Bolsonaro continuously remained on the offensive, never felt pressure to defend his ideas and established a sizable lead in the opinion polls (Weylan & Madrid 2019).

The dominance right-wing populists seem to hold over social media platforms highlight a key area

of concern – *how do these features of social media lend themselves to implement strategic communication tactics and promote politicians especially those with right-wing opinions?* Grounded in these findings, this dissertation addresses this research gap by analysing the use of a populist, micro-targeting and fake news emotive strategic communication messaging on WhatsApp.

1.3. Research aim

The purpose of this dissertation is to contribute to the broad field of political psychology, which focuses on the psychological underpinnings and consequences of political behaviour (Kaltwasser 2021: 333). As such, this study investigates *how right-wing populist Jair Bolsonaro used emotive strategic communication to win the 2018 Brazilian election*. To do so, this dissertation analyses how emotive communication on social media, particularly WhatsApp, shaped the political reality of Evangelicals and contributed to the rise of right-wing populism in Brazil. It then explores how specific strategic communication techniques evoked emotions that influenced this religious group's voter behaviour.

1.4. Research questions

This study centres on the following research question: *“What tactics were used on WhatsApp to drive Evangelical support for the right-wing populist Jair Bolsonaro?”*

This dissertation therefore answered the following sub-questions:

1. What conditions facilitated the shift towards right-wing populism in Brazil?
2. To what extent do strategic communication techniques facilitate an increase in support for populist dynamics?
3. What strategic communication techniques did Jair Bolsonaro use?
4. How did Jair Bolsonaro use the WhatsApp platform to his advantage?

To do so, this dissertation makes use of secondary sources, which have been obtained from a range of peer-reviewed journals, books and articles. This dissertation engaged with various bodies of literature. First, the focus was placed on conceptualising and contextualising populism, micro-targeting, fake news and WhatsApp. To do so, seminal works which have defined these topics are discussed – particularly Cas Mudde's (2004) framing of populism, Lawrence Freedman's (2014)

conceptualisation of strategy, Drew Westen's argument on emotions, strategic communication and elections, and Nicole Cooke's (2018) articulation of fake news. Second, it explored the works of George E. Marcus, Russell W. Neuman, and Micheal Mackuen (2000) and their book *Affective Intelligence and Political Judgement* to guide its articulation of the Theory of Affective Intelligence. This dissertation also makes use of dissertations/theses and a range of news articles published by the Brazilian media houses *Folha de S.Paulo* and *BrasilWire*.

1.5. Theoretical lens

This dissertation uses the Theory of Affective Intelligence (TAI) as its theoretical framework. Presented by George E. Marcus, Russell W. Neuman, and Micheal Mackuen (2000) in the book *Affective Intelligence and Political Judgement*, TAI challenges the conventional rational choice model which states that emotions prevent sound political judgment. Rather, according to TAI, during political decision-making, psychological forces, particularly emotions, are at play when voters make political decisions. TAI, therefore, is built on three assertions.

Firstly, emotions and emotion-led judgment occur at a sub-conscious level. As such, key emotions such as enthusiasm, anxiety and fear are viewed as the determinants which inform the strategies voters use to construct their political judgments and dictate political behaviour (Johnston & Lavine 2015: 2). In 2010, Marcus et al. (2010) included anger as a new emotional strategy within the empirical literature of TAI.

Secondly, two emotional subsystems exist – the disposition and surveillance system. These subsystems reflect two distinct decision-making strategies and regulate the emotional response to the political environment (Marcus et al. 2000: 44). Pavlos Vasilopoulos (2019: 33) claims that the disposition system guides habitual ways of thinking and behaving that occur without individuals consciously considering them since individuals rely on their habits to guide their behaviour. The disposition system also accounts for an individual's ability to experience enthusiasm and anger when processing information; with enthusiastic and angry voter's eager to participate politically due to their previously held partisan attitudes and beliefs. In contrast, the surveillance system is invoked when individuals find themselves in a threatening or unfamiliar situation, which in turn allows novel information to challenge their expectations (Vasilopolous 2019: 39). The surveillance system is linked to anxiety and fear invoked in the face of a threat.

Thirdly, individuals have two types of reliance – reliance on consideration and reliance on habits or learned behaviour. The disposition system is responsible for the management of reliance of learned behaviour whereby a constellation of dispositions attached to previous experiences dictate an individual's behavioural repertoires (Marcus et al. 2000: 64). Individuals, Marcus and his colleagues (Marcus et al. 2000) maintain, learn habits through everyday experiences and they use these experiences to deal with complex circumstances. The disposition system relies on an emotional analysis to control the execution of habits. In other words, how we sustain habits that fuel enthusiasm and how we abandon habits that cause despair. As such, within the political realm, individuals learn which political ideas and loyalties will reward and which will not. In contrast, as the surveillance system scans one's environment for threats, it alerts one when they cannot rely on habits to handle what confronts them. In doing so, the surveillance system compares the information with expectations and invokes anxiety to stop a perceived threat (Marcus et. al 2000: 67).

1.6. Research methodology

This dissertation makes use of a two-step analysis method to conduct its analysis.

1.6.1. Case study and data extraction

This dissertation makes use of a case study analysis method to contextualise and develop in-depth knowledge about the emotive strategic communication tactics used by the Bolsonaro campaign on WhatsApp, especially messaging that targeted Evangelicals. Prior to conducting its analysis, the study used the convenient method of sampling to collect images and messages shared via the instant messaging app. As such the WhatsApp data set used in the study consists of secondary data collected and made available by Rafael Evangelista and Fernando Bruno (2019) and da Silva (2020), and news outlets El Pais (2018), Comprova (2020) and BrasilWire (2018). These authors gathered their data by joining pro-Bolsonaro groups during the campaign period between August-October 2018.

It is important to note that there are images used in this study that could be perceived as offensive. For this reason, this study has intentionally blurred them in the main text and has included the original image in the appendix.

1.6.2. Sentiment analysis

To extract emotional sentiment from these messages, this dissertation used the computer software Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC-2022). LIWC-22 “calculates the degree to which a text contains words that belong to an empirically defined psychological and structural category” (Pennebaker et al. 2015: 19). The software is useful because it was able to determine the rate at which cognition and/or emotions are present in a given text (Pennebaker et al. 2015). Furthermore, LIWC-22 comprises of a range of categories and this study used the following categories and word stems:

Negative emotions: *dissatisfaction, suffering, ignorant, pain.*

Anger: *hate, kill, rape, brutal, sinister.*

Fear: *suspicious, worry, anxious, feared, nervous and worry.*

Positive emotions: *satisfaction, happiness, excitement, hope.*

Enthusiasm: *pride, hope, interest.*

1.6.3. Content analysis

The study then uses a qualitative latent content analysis to interpret and describe the content of text data through a coding process. This identified themes and patterns within the text (Shannon & Hsieh 2005: 1278) and using images and messages shared across on WhatsApp, the topics behind the messages was analysed. This data was then coded using ATLAS.ti to identify populist themes. The coding frame was as follows:

1. **Anti-pestismo:** *communism, PT, corruption.*
2. **Moral Crusade:** *religion, Jesus, corruption, sex, gay, gender ideology.*
3. **Bolsonaro as a Messiah:** *guidance, God, Jesus, against.*

1.7. Structure of the study

This dissertation is divided into 6 chapters. Chapter 1, provides an introduction to the background of this study and does so by contextualising the 2018 Brazilian election and factors scholars attribute to Bolsonaro’s electoral victory. It then goes onto provide a brief overview of existing

literature and its limitations, while also providing an overview of the research methodology and theoretical lens that guides this study.

Using a thematic review, Chapter 2 reviews the arguments, characteristics and concepts central to this dissertation. It provides an overview of strategy and strategic political communication and its relationship with emotions. It then discusses the types of strategic communication tactics used by the Bolsonaro campaign, the role of WhatsApp as an election campaign communication tool, and lastly it discusses the campaign's use of populist strategic communication.

Chapter 3 discusses the Theory of Affective Intelligence (TAI). It does so by tracing its theoretical roots, discussing its core tenets and limitations. It concludes by illustrating the data collection method and two-step analysis method which guides this study. Twelve WhatsApp messages are chosen as the data sample and are retrieved from multiple secondary sources. The two-step method first involves a latent content analysis using ATLAS.ti and then goes on to conduct an emotional sentiment analysis using the software LIWC-22.

Chapter 4 presents this sentiment and latent content analysis. It is primarily descriptive and seeks to outline the key topics addressed in these WhatsApp messages. Chapter 5 furthers this study's analysis using the TAI and discusses the findings. The final Chapter concludes the dissertation by summarising key findings, discussing this study's contribution to research, and offering avenues for further research.

1.8. Significance of study

A limitation found in the literature was that much of the focus on social media and elections are analysed from a Global North perspective. The majority of Global South studies focus on social media and digital activism/social movements/protests particularly the Arab Spring (Mourão & Chen 2019; Jamenez-Martinez 2020; Wolfsfeld et al. 2020) and its effects on democracy (Dzisah 2018; Mitchelstein 2018; Ndelea 2020). Studies which offered a Global South perspective on the use of WhatsApp place primary focus on the relationship between WhatsApp and information sharing, particularly during an election period (Hitchen et al. 2020 Maweu 2020). Indeed, the majority of literature focuses on Bolsonaro's use of Twitter and Instagram (Mello 2018). Moreover, despite the abundant body of literature on Bolsonaro's 2018 election victory, no study

seems to measure the emotive elements at the centre of these political communication strategies on WhatsApp. Furthermore, there is a limited understanding on how WhatsApp is used by campaigns to shape the electorate's political reality and promote a right-wing populist agenda. It also seems as if no research study explores the relationship between the Bolsonaro campaign's emotive strategic communication on social media (particularly WhatsApp) and its role in facilitating support amongst Evangelicals. Lastly, studies on political micro-targeting focused on the niche of online political micro-targeting (Boregesius et al. 2018; Guerrero-Sole 2020; Ortega 2021). Moreover, as the relationship between populism and Evangelicalism is a new phenomenon, this relationship is understudied.

This study makes an important contribution to the field of political psychology. Given the findings mentioned above, this study seeks to fill these research gaps.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2. Introduction

Using a thematic review, Chapter 2 reviews the arguments, characteristics and concepts central to this dissertation. It provides an overview on strategy and strategic political communication and its relationship with emotions. It then discusses the types of strategic communication tactics used by the Bolsonaro campaign, specifically micro-targeting and fake news and populism; and it highlights the role of WhatsApp as an election campaign communication tool. The review includes peer-reviewed journal articles, books, dissertations/theses, and a range of news articles published by Brazilian media houses namely: *Folha de S.Paulo*, *BrasilWire*, *Gazete do Provo*, and *O Globo*.

2.1. Strategic political communication

Lawrence Freedman (2014: xii), in his book *Strategy: A History* offered a broad definition of strategy, one that refers to the “art of creating power”. Here, Freedman (2014) asserted that strategy was more than creating a detailed plan, strategy also considers the effects of external and unexpected factors, interests and individuals who may disrupt ones’ strategy. In relation to this dissertation, a key component identified by Freedman (2014: xi) was that strategy also included the significance of mobilising public opinion in support of a political campaign or ideology.

From this perspective, strategic political communication shapes the electorate’s political attitudes and behaviour (Freedman 2014: xii). Savera Shami and Ayesha Ashfaq (2019: 44) argued that strategic political communication is used to interact both directly and indirectly with the public, run political campaigns, and build a positive image of the candidate amongst the public. Similarly, Carsten Reinemann (2014) claimed that an election campaign uses strategic political communication to reach voters directly, which occurs through various forms of controlled³ communication or uncontrolled⁴ communication.

According to Torun Dewan et al. (2019: 89), strategies used in political communication are designed to target specific groups of voters who may or may not support the position even in the

³ The campaign’s own communication infrastructure.

⁴ Mass media infrastructure that is controlled by institutions existing outside of the control of political actors.

absence of a campaign. Second, what works for one group may not work for another and therefore strategies must tailor their appeal to suit different voters. Lastly, strategic communication requires a persuasive medium to distribute their strategies (Dewan et al. 2019). From these, and for the purpose of this research, strategic political communication was viewed as a campaign's intentional planning of contact, messaging and circulating other pertinent information to attain a desired political outcome, specifically winning the 2018 Brazilian Presidential election.

In a reflection of the 2004 book *Political Communication*, Resul Çelik (2021) noted that individuals try to understand their existence primarily through the interaction they establish with others. Thus, communication satisfies an individuals' curiosity and provides a means for them to share their feelings or thoughts on an emotional level. Given this emotional role, individuals were found to be directed and influenced by the information conveyed (Celik 2021: 714; Garaj et al. 2020: 89). Celik (2021: 715) concluded his analysis by claiming that the emergence of communication and how it makes an individual feel, depends on the use of symbols that have common meaning among individuals. The role of symbols and its relationship with emotions is not a new concept, Freedman (2014: 339), for instance, referenced the words of American political scientist Harold Lasswell, who said that "the management of collective attitudes occurs by the manipulation of significant symbols". Grounded in this assumption, Freedman (2014) concluded that strategic political communication is cultural, and comprises of symbols, language, rituals and performances which are familiar to a particular context.

From a political science perspective, Lasswell (1950: 107) argued that "political symbols satisfy the needs of human beings for important values" and "serve to set-up, alter or maintain power" (Gill 2018: 18; Susila 2020: 167). This relationship between symbols and individuals is derived from emotions created that are created by political habits (Lasswell 1960: 173; Baldi 2020: 8). These political habits echo the values and beliefs held by an individual or group and dictates their political behaviour. As such, the roots of fear and anger towards an opposing candidate is attributed to ones' belief system (Lasswell 1935: 73). These symbols are used to bind people together by defining a 'we' and 'they' and stimulating decision-making. Symbols were also found to influence public opinion by offering motivations for an individual to seek new information by considering alternatives and making decisions based on these alternatives (Stefano 2018: 90). As such, symbols

help both the campaign and the electorate decide topics of concern, which groups count more than others, and which groups they should sacrifice (Lasswell & Kaplan 1950: 103).

Communicators thus need to develop long-term campaign strategies that introduce and cultivate ideas and images. Moreover, voters must be taught to associate emotions such as anger/fear with these symbols (Lasswell 1927: 67). By successfully cultivating strategies, candidates create collective symbols which are delivered through various approaches (e.g. social media) and stimulate large-scale mass action (Lasswell 1927: 78). Given, this composition, candidates must express themselves in a manner that evokes emotions, to create a change in the voters' heart, mind and behaviour – or to ensure the continuity of behaviour that favours the candidate (Dewan et al. 2019). This highlights the role of emotive strategic political communication.

2.2. Emotive strategic political communication

2.2.1. Persuasiveness of emotional appeals

There is no single definition of emotion. However, a general consensus is that emotions comprise of four distinct elements. According to George Marcus, Michael MacKuen and Russell Neuman (2000: 44) “emotions are a response to an object/symbol/event that is relevant to the people – emotions are about something”. Secondly, emotions arise prior to conscious evaluation of an object/symbol/event (de Lafregeyre 2022: 8). Thirdly, emotions are motivational impulses and spur the need to do something. Consequently, emotions held towards a political candidate result in a particular voting decision and behaviour. Lastly, emotions are categorised as either positive (enthusiasm/hope) or negative (anger/fear/anxiety) (Marcus et al. 2000; Gruber 2019: 89).

According to Aristotle in *Rhetorica*, “emotional arousal” is essential in persuading judgment (Rapp 2002: 67). In a more recent study, the role emotions play in elections and political communication is best described by clinical psychologist Drew Westen (2008). Westen (2008: 48) argued that “the political brain is the emotional brain”. This is because voters typically support a specific candidate/party based on their values, wishes and fears – with emotion being the cornerstone of all three. In a critique on the lack of emotional appeals in Democratic campaigns, Westen (2008: 35) found that when determining whom to vote for, voters first decipher how they “feel about the

candidate's: party and its principles, personal characteristics, and lastly the candidate's stand on the issues". As such, the voters head and heart fight against each other, with voters relying on their heart's interpretation. Westen (2008) argued that our brain determines how we vote through an interconnected network of associations, which comprise of beliefs, images and feelings. The campaign phase of an election is thus the "marketplace" of these emotions, and successful campaigns must appeal to a voter's sentiments by re-enforcing positive associations with their candidate and creating negative associations with the opposition (Westen 2008: 37).

Expanding on the claims presented by Aristotle and Westen (2008), Nico Frijda and Batja Mesquita (2020) found that emotional campaigns influence beliefs in two ways. First, emotions promote information-seeking, which in turn establishes beliefs where none existed or a change in ones existing beliefs (Beswick 2022: 408), and second, emotions enhance/decrease the strength of the belief/s (Quartararo 2022: 56). Moreover, Frijda and Mesquita (2020) argued that certain beliefs are strongly held, even when confronted with weak evidence. Furthermore, individuals holding a particular belief accept doubtful information as credible. This argument echoes the core characteristics of the Theory of Affective Intelligence, discussed later in this dissertation where belief strength is seen to be grounded in their previously learned political habits (beliefs) (Kiss 2013: 90). As such, the use of emotions in a campaign were found to stimulate people into acting and is the lens through which individuals approve the actions of others in a political context (Frijda *et al* 2019).

Recently, more academics have focused their research on the use of emotional political communication strategies. Scholars established that positive campaigning aims to elicit positive emotions such as hope, pride and enthusiasm⁵ amongst the electorate (Marcus et al. 2014; Close 2020). By eliciting positive emotions, campaigns evoked a positive enthusiastic response where primarily partisan voters were invested in the electoral process and were eager to participate (Brader 2006). In doing so, positive emotions motivated the electorate to go out and vote (Brader et al. 2008; Redlawsk & Pierce 2019; Close 2020) such as those used to persuade positive emotions in the Brazilian political arena.

⁵ It is important to note that scholars use the terms hope and enthusiasm interchangeably (Marcus & MacKuen 1993: 672; Brader 2006; Chen et al. 2019: 90).

At the forefront of emotional campaigning in 21st century Brazil is former President Luiz Inácio da Silva⁶ (Lula) of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT). Lula ran for President for the fourth time in 2002 (Westerlund 2008: 44) and like his previous campaigns, the 2002 operation focused primarily on the working class struggle and economic policies (Richard 2008: 102). However, in contrast to previous campaigns, Lula implemented an emotional [leftist] populist strategy and re-branded himself as the man of the people. At the cornerstone of his strategy was an open letter titled ‘A Letter to the Brazilian People’ which was aimed at both the people (Brazilians) and external parties/interests. The letter outlined his campaign themes of Brazil’s socio-economic situation, respect for Brazil’s current contracts, fulfilment of the Real Plan and a commitment to price stability (David 2004: 999). Throughout the letter, Lula attempted to evoke emotions of hope and enthusiasm amongst the audience by making use of words with positive connotations (e.g. change, hopeful and support).

Moreover, Lula adopted an inclusionary approach and tried to ensure that various identities and institutions were fully represented (Westerlund 2008: 49). In doing so, Lula aimed to present something different (an alternative in the information seeking process) and to showcase that the public’s hopes for better social conditions, decreasing social inequality and a functional democracy was possible (da Silva 2002). In other words, he sought to facilitate a strong sense of excitement and eagerness towards a new Brazil, one that could only be achieved by voting for him. Lula went on to win his first Presidential election with 61.27% of the vote, and his legacy as a man of the people with an uplifting message is still prevalent today (Mitchell 2022).

It is important to note that the majority of the literature on emotions and elections focused on negative emotions. A general consensus found that negative emotions have a more persuasive and motivational affect than positive emotions, because evoking anger and fear through negative campaigning elicits curiosity and facilitates information retention among the electorate – a feature which is more likely to motivate political behaviour against the opponent (Marcus et al. 2000; Freedman 2004; Brader 2006; Mai 2021; Segovia 2021; Webster 2022). As such, the use of anger

⁶ It is important to note that Lula was once again elected President of Brazil in October of 2022.

and fear appeals are arguably more powerful than positive appeals – especially in a society defined by political polarisation and/or engulfed in a crisis (Rico 2017; Abadi 2021).

Across the literature scholars concluded that emotional strategies, particularly in the form of negative messaging, evoked anger amongst the electorate when an individuals' basic beliefs were breached and reflecting a conflict with the opposition (Marcus et al. 2000; Steenbergen & Ellis 2006; Weeks 2015; Mai 2019; Frijda et al. 2019; Segovia 2021; Quartararo 2022; Beswick 2022). Angry voters were identified to feel revengeful and went onto to create what scholars have coined 'the other' (Frijda et al. 2019; Segovia 2021; Quartararo 2022; Beswick 2022). This 'other' comprises of individuals who exist outside of the individuals' belief system, in other words, they do not possess the same political habits (Webster 2022: 78). This anger encourages voters to take part in the electoral process and campaigns capitalise on this anger by mobilising voters around a specific group/identity against the 'other'. This was done by encouraging voters to strengthen their own/group position and it offered proof of the rightness of their political position (Valentino et al. 2011; Mai 2021; Segovia 2021). Moreover, scholars (Hadit 2003; Brader 2006; Redlawsk et al. 2016, Maingi 2020; Webster 2022) found that anger motivates an individual to persuade those 'sitting on the fence' or outside spectators to stand-up against 'the other' by participating in the electoral process, to cure the treacheries that has allegedly 'engulfed' society.

In addition to anger, campaigns elicited fear amongst a particular group against the perceived 'other'. Scholars concluded that using a campaign narrative that villainised 'the other', campaigns articulated a range of unknown results to a particular group with the aim of making individuals feel threatened (Marcus et al. 2000; Gutierrez 2014; Jenkins 2020; Mai 2021; Nisan 2021: 90). Research reveals that fear facilitates information seeking by triggering the reader to find more and new information on the fear-eliciting object, as angry individuals tended to focus their response on diminishing the risk or threat presented by 'the other' (Marcus et al. 2000; Gonzalez-Bailon et al. 2012).

It can, therefore, be concluded that emotions are a very effective political persuasion tactic. As such, campaigns create particular campaign messages and themes in line with particular issues that seek to evoke the desired emotion towards their own candidate/party and the opposition (Gerstle

& Nai 2019: 413). Like the 2002 Lula campaign, studies show that the 2018 Bolsonaro campaign was also emotionally driven (Silva 2019; Dibo 2020; da Silva 2020; Franco & Pound 2022: 9). However, in contrast to Lula who aimed to promote inclusivity among Brazilians and inspire hope and enthusiasm, the Bolsonaro campaign implemented an exclusionary approach that aimed to evoke emotions of fear and anger, which was supported by evoking hope and enthusiasm for a selective group. This dissertation looks to unpack and analyse these strategies that were implemented by the Bolsonaro campaign.

2.3. The Bolsonaro campaign and strategic political communication tactics

The 2018 Bolsonaro campaign was a watershed moment in Brazilian politics. Following the end of the 21-year military dictatorship and a period of instability, Brazilian elections were dominated by two parties: the PSDB (1995-2002) and the PT (2003-2016). Between them, they held the presidency till 2018 with the PT occupying 68 seats and the PSDB maintaining 54 seats in Congress (Ressende *et al* 2019). Their electoral success also meant that they received constant coverage from mainstream media. However, in 2018, Brazilians elected 'niche' congressman Jair Messias Bolsonaro as President. Bolsonaro was a member of Partido Social Liberal (PSL)⁷, who at this time was Brazil's smallest party with almost no registered supporters. Moreover, Bolsonaro was relatively unknown amongst the population, and garnered very little mainstream media coverage until 2014 when he made appearances on multiple popular television shows and shared extremist rhetoric (Evangelista & Bruno 2019: 3).

Scholars and the mainstream media saw Bolsonaro's election as a surprise. Javier Lafuente (2018) attributed this to the campaign's non-traditional political structure and the extremist statements made by Bolsonaro. According to Lafuente (2018) in any other circumstances these statements would have ruined the public image of a candidate, particularly in a country such as Brazil that is marked by diversity and socio-economic inequality. However, Leticia Cesarino (2019) and Stuart Davis and Joe Straubhaar (2020) found that Bolsonaro's electoral success was due to the campaign's communication strategy, particularly its use of micro-targeting, fake news and populist communication on WhatsApp.

⁷ In 2021, Bolsonaro left the PSL and joined the Partido Liberal (*Liberal Party*) (Audi & Dias 2022).

2.3.1. Political micro-targeting

As mentioned above, political communication strategies are designed to target specific groups of voters who may or may not support the position even in the absence of a campaign (Torun et al. 2019).

The notion of ‘targeting’ has long been practiced by political campaigns, such as targeting specific districts) (Howard-Williams 2012; Lipsman & Davidsen 2019). In recent years, this targeting has evolved into ‘micro-targeting’ which is defined as a marketing strategy that uses demographics to create audience segments (Bunting 2015; Borgesius et al. 2020; Loland 2022). This occurs by segmenting⁸ the electorate along personal lines such as: subjective beliefs, religion, personality and their perception of other candidates. As such, through the information obtained from political micro-targeting, campaigns were found to tailor their messages to match the specific interests of the segmented groups (Krotzek 2019: 89).

Micro-targeting was identified as a key campaign strategy across the world, as it overcomes problems attached to classic campaigning (Serrano et al. 2018: 9; Papakyriakopoulou et al. 2015: 9). Firstly, micro-targeting allows the campaign to track the group’s predispositions [political habits and beliefs] and use these to tailor a candidate’s public image in a manner that suits the voters’ opinions (Bond & Messing 2015: 90). Additionally, by communicating directly with a specific group, candidates reduce the possibility of alienating voters that disagree with a message. Secondly, micro-targeting allows campaigns to target specific segments of the political spectrum, rather than structuring their campaigns based on the views of the median voter (Woo 2015: 9; Jungherr 2017). Thirdly, in a study of Barack Obama’s historic 2008 election victory, David Axelrod and Karl Rove (2019) claimed that micro-targeting persuaded the undecided voter by providing them with alternative information, one that portrayed the candidate positively and villainised the opposition. Lastly, in a reflection of the 2016 United States of America and 2017 German elections, Juan-Carlos Serrano et al. (2018: 45) found that micro-targeting provided

⁸ How this data is obtained will be discussed in more detail in section 4. In summary, given that Brazil requires consent for data to be obtained and used by third parties, the Bolsonaro campaign obtained this data through purchasing mobile numbers through American marketing companies. Then using a software called WNL managers were able to segment the electorate along personal lines and curate messages that resonated (Dias 2020).

campaigns with a methodology to overcome political decisions that were based on polls. This last point is vital to the study of Brazil and Bolsonaro. Here, polls conducted by Datafolha between 2014 to 2018 did not favour Bolsonaro's candidacy. In 2015, Datafolha (2017) did not include Bolsonaro in their Presidential polls but in 2016 and April 2018 Bolsonaro polled at 9% and 15% respectively (Datafolha 2015; Datafolha 2017). However, in October 2018, Bolsonaro led the first round of the election with 46.03% of the vote and in the second round received 55.13% of the vote to defeat Fernando Haddad (Datafolha 2019). Using these findings, chapter 4 and 5 of this dissertation studies how micro-targeting helped Bolsonaro transcend these earlier polls and facilitate support for Bolsonaro's right-wing populism.

Research in the field of commerce marketing generally supported the argument that micro-targeted messaging and adverts are more persuasive than non-tailored messaging (Hirsh et al. 2019; Jozwick 2020; Madsen 2022). Similarly, from an election perspective, Fedrick Borgesius et al. (2020: 6) concluded that given this curation, political micro-targeting optimises the match between electoral concerns and the campaign, while also boosting campaign engagement and political participation in favour of the campaign. This is attributed to the relationship between micro-targeting and emotions. George Lakoff (2004) argued that for a voter to accept something as true, the content must reflect their mental frame. Here, political micro-targeting often contains messaging grounded in ones' interest, values and morals [political habits] – to ensure it fits the mental structures that exist in their mind. In doing so, political micro-targeting content plays on the users' deepest emotions by presenting messaging that: resonates with readers own political habits, presents a threat to this political habit or encourages the reader to seek alternatives, to ensure that they respond accordingly (Lakoff 2004).

In the case of the 2018 election, Bolsonaro appealed and centred his micro-targeting strategy around Evangelicals, aided by support from a range of Evangelical pastors and leaders (Polimedio 2019). This reasoning behind this strategy is presented in Chapter 3, and the implementation of this strategy is discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

2.3.2. Fake news

In the report *Fake News and Alternative Facts*, Nicole Cooke (2018) describes the post-truth environment in which she finds that there is an increased belief in information that confirms and verifies ones existing beliefs or feelings instead of searching for verifiable facts. She further describes the environment as one dominated by two dimensions of fake news. Firstly, **misinformation** – which refers to the intentional or unintentional removal of certain truths, and secondly, **disinformation** which aims to deliberately spread fake information with goal of misleading individuals for capital gain. Fake news is often displayed through the “following components: news appearance, fictitious sources, viral reach, verifiable falsehood, potential to generate deception and intentionality” (Lim & Ling 2018: 89).

Fake news is seen as a product of a complex strategic communication process, that occurs within a specific political and socio-economic context that facilitates its production and spread (Salgado 2019: 19). For instance, fake news is associated to a specific political objective, most notably, obtaining leverage over opponents to win the elections. To do so, fake news entails “cherry-picking truthful aspects of reality and mixing them with falsehoods to amplify impact” (Pyrhönen & Bauvois 2020: 33). Moreover, “the incorporation of fake news in political communication strategies aim to pre-existing opinions that accommodate a given bias or political habit” (Dourado & Salgado 2019: 78). This is done to improve the capacity for online virality through sharing fake news across multiple social media platforms. Evidently, the success of fake news depends on the political and socio-economic environment and context of a particular society (Lim & Ling 2018).

In recent years, research on fake news has gained momentum. This is attributed to the growth of political extremism (particularly right-wing populism), and the growth of social media. Research showed that the structure “of social media has amplified hyper-partisanship, confrontation, antagonism and social division through the creation of like-minded communities” (Rahman & Somer 2018: 4). Since these online communities are fragmented given differing ideologies, polarisation is vital to create a division of contrasting groups (i.e. us vs them) and to strengthen social intolerance (Rahman & Somer 2018; Levitsky & Ziblatt 2018). Studies showed that: fake news spread faster in polarised networks, that right-wing conservatives are “more likely to share

⁹ The rapid circulation of content across social media (Mello 2018).

and engage in fake news” and that this fake news can reinforce a group identity (Marwick 2018: 447). Moreover, the context plays a key role in distributing and accepting (or resisting) fake news (Chadwick & Vaccari 2019).

The spread and belief of fake news is particularly effective during an election campaign because it capitalises on a user’s pre-existing beliefs which is why users struggle to recognise false information (Maweu 2019). Daphna Oyserman and Andrew Dawson (2020), for instance, argued that false information shifts reasoning from one based on information to one based on identity. Here, false information frames messaging in a culturally relevant manner through the use of phrases and icons which reflect pre-existing identity based mental frames. Grounded in cognition theory, which states that individuals understand content from the perspective of social and personal identities, Oyserman & Dawson (2020) argued that individuals use their identity to understand information that is presented. As such, false information incorporates content which reflects cultural mental references rather than real and quality arguments. This in turn, makes it difficult for one to distinguish between fake and factual information. Similarly, and as mentioned earlier, the notion of mental frames is reflected in the work of George Lakoff who determined that political language and symbols form multiple mental frames which shape a person’s perception of the world. Lakoff (2004: 7) acknowledges the importance of facts, however, these facts must be framed in a manner that resonates with a person’s morality. Hence, for a voter to accept something as truth, the information must reflect the individual’s mental frame and fit their structure of thinking. If not, this information is at risk of being conferred and forgotten (Lakoff 2004: 8)

Within the domain of political fake news literature, evidence suggests that negative emotions reinforce conspiracy theories, particularly when emotions are related to a conspiracy (Cooke 2018). In other words, if a conspiracy presents a threat or unknown situation, it results in individuals believing this theory to be true (Forgas 2019). Research (e.g. (Mashuri et al. 2016: 78) suggests that relying on existing feelings or habits contribute to “inaccurate analysis of the truth by increasing the credulity of implausible content, rather than analytical thinking”. Moreover, content which evokes anger seems to make fake news more believable when it is politically aligned. Content that raises fear amplifies a person’s doubt and increases belief in discordant fake news. Fake news content that evokes enthusiasm fosters false hope amongst the reader, and in

doing so makes content more believable due to the need for hope fulfilment (Fraccoli et al. 2019: 89).

Fake news is a type of external stimulus shared to emphasise an unknown threat, re-enforce political habits and encourage one to cease/continue seeking information (Marcus et al. 2000) and was a key communication strategy deployed by the Bolsonaro campaign. How the campaign disseminated fake news, particularly disinformation, over WhatsApp is the subject of this study and these tactics are discussed in subsequent chapters.

2.4. Social media as a strategic communication tool

The concept of mediation is described as a fundamental process where distinct types of institutionalised media communication channels (e.g. radio and television) circulate symbols in society (Silverstone 2002). In doing so, the media defines and determines social meanings, while also holding the power to work against or with these symbols (Silverstone 2002). Motiff (2016) found that the mediatised environment has undergone two distinct changes. Candidates are no longer dependent on using traditional media as a stage to reach their audience and have transcended the geographical limits of traditional media. This is attributed to the rise of social media, which has become a political asset for politicians to mobilise and organise their electorate (Motiff 2016: 8).

Following the Obama 2008 campaign, researchers became concerned that the evolving technological landscape would affect politics (Rohim & Wardana 2019; Lewa et al. 2019). A general argument indicated across the literature is that social media and networking sites offer candidates and political parties a “one-stop campaigning avenue” to establish connections with the electorate, stimulate and facilitate conversation, provide a feedback mechanism, and bypass mainstream media (Marquart et al. 2019: 1). Ralph Schroeder (2018: 56) argued that “social media has become a necessary precondition for the success of right-wing populist movements, as they allowed circumventing traditional media gatekeepers”. According to Urbinati (2019: 15), the revolutionary nature of social media is a key factor behind the *‘right-wing populist renaissance’*. Populists make use of social media to evoke emotions and ideas immediately within a propaganda environment to inaugurate a new reality rooted in the emotions generated by social media. Additionally, politicians use social media as a means to perform commentary, similar to ordinary

citizens (Urbinati 2019). As such, social media has narrowed the distance between “the people and the power” by situating the politician as one of the people and the flag bearer of a particular set of ideals (Urbinati 2019: 19).

In addition, “instant messaging apps are increasingly used for interpersonal political discussion, which has been defined as episodes of political conversation [...] that take place between the non-elite members of a political community” (Schmitt-Beck 2008: 341). These apps provide a controlled and intimate environment for political conversations and exchanges to occur. As such, these apps have transformed the manner in which individuals discuss politics, as it facilitates information exchange through enabling users to create their own online communities (Valeriani and Vaccari 2018; Swart et al. 2018a). This in turn enables users to discuss content related political content in a private environment (Masip et al. 2018: 89). An example of such an instant messaging app is WhatsApp.

2.4.1. WhatsApp as a platform

Launched in 2009, WhatsApp was acquired by Facebook in 2014 and has approximately 1.6 billion active users globally (Guess 2019: 55). Via one-on-one communication or in groups of 256 members, WhatsApp allows users to video or voice call, and share voice notes, PDFs, images and locations, and the status feature allows for a particular message to be broadcast and saved by contacts. In addition to one-on-one or group communication with friends and family, WhatsApp is often used to communicate with larger social groups, such as organising support for a specific political party (Maurico & Michealson 2019).

In 2016, the app introduced end-to-end encryption, which allowed for greater security and given its affordability, accessibility, and popularity, the platform has become the “main tool for political campaigns in the Global South, and its influence is continuing to grow” (Hitchen et al. 2020: 56). Moreover, the encryption means that one cannot track how messages are shared and by whom. In addition, it allows messages to be sent directly to a user’s phone from known contacts offering a more personal experience, creates a feeling that the message is urgent, allows campaigns to reach more communities, mobilises supporters, provides a medium to micro-target groups and, increases the probability of a message “going viral” (Cruz & Harindranath 2020: 6).

2.4.2. Contextualising WhatsApp in Brazil

Between 2000 and 2011 the Brazilian Information and Technology (IT) sector boomed (de Oliveria 2016). During this time, industrial expansion and increased consumer interest in purchasing computers led to a range of government initiatives which supported the development of Local Area Networks and telecentres (de Lopes & Lemos 2019). These programs allowed for the expansion of Internet access across Brazil and the creation of a ‘digital culture’ which extended beyond middle and upper-class households and into the favelas (urban slums), which were historically marginalised in terms of investment and access to IT (Nemer 2020: 692). Moreover, a substantial number of working-class citizens could self-finance their own digital integration through purchasing smart phones and data plans (Spyer 2019: 99). These factors lead to the emergence of “mobile internet services and increased participation across social media platforms” (Pereira et al. 2019: 9).

Close to a decade later, a 2018 Reuters Digital Report claimed that Brazilians are the most ‘enthusiastic’ users of chat-messaging apps worldwide, particularly WhatsApp. In 2018, Brazilians accounted for approximately 120 million active WhatsApp users and 127 million Facebook users, thus comprising 10% of the company’s subscribers worldwide (Newman et al. 2019). Moreover, 93% of Brazilian smartphone users were found to use the app daily (Pereira et al. 2019: 11). Overtime, WhatsApp has become the key communication tool amongst citizens, while also being used as a means for e-commerce and for the public sector to communicate with citizens (Estadão 2017).

Evidently, in the case of Brazil, “WhatsApp has enabled multimodal communication at a relatively low cost for a population whose access to digital technologies has historically been limited” (Pereira et al. 2019: 14). As mentioned above, Carsten Reinemann (2014) claimed that an election campaign uses strategic political communication to reach voters directly, which occurs through various forms of controlled¹⁰ communication. Similarly, the Bolsonaro campaign made use of WhatsApp as their key platform to share their controlled communication. This dissertation will study how the campaign used WhatsApp to evoke emotions amongst Evangelicals.

¹⁰ The campaign’s own communication infrastructure.

It is important to note that Bolsonaro's use of social media is not a new tactic within the Brazilian Evangelical realm. According to João Guilherme Bastos dos Santos (2020), the use of fake news, populist division and micro-targeting on social media was prevalent amongst neo-Pentecostal fundamentalists, particularly on Twitter. In 2011, neo-Pentecostal leaders used Twitter as a tool to mobilise a diverse range of Evangelical denominations against the draft bill de-criminalising homophobia. This was done by attacking the PT on false grounds of distributing a 'gay kit' (please see Chapter 4). Similar tactics were used to exert pressure in Congress (please see Chapter 4), and then on a Presidential level (Santos 2020). Thus, Santos (2020) argues that the Bolsonaro campaigns did not create these emotive strategic communication strategies or this WhatsApp network. Rather, the campaign's social appropriation of WhatsApp is part of a long-term learning process that drew from other networks. For example, Santos (2020) found that the Bolsonaro campaigns focus on the 'gay kit' and the PT's leftist gender ideology (please see Chapter 4) mirrored tactics used by Evangelical denominations to evoke emotions of fear and anger.

2.5. Populism as a communication strategy

2.5.1. Theoretical overview of populism

The study of populism was pioneered by Cas Mudde (2004), who offered a succinct ideological interpretation. Here, an ideology refers to as a value system which guides and frames the order of political, socio-economic and religious events and which in turn, enables "one to structure reality into a hierarchical overview, which shows the respective importance of different issues" (Visscher 2017: 14). According to Mudde (2004: 543), populism is a thin centred ideology which comprises of two distinct elements – a binary divide that is leader-centric.

The binary divide exists between two groups which are the homogenous 'pure' people and the antagonistic corrupt elite. Therefore, politics must express the general will of the people and to achieve national sovereignty, it must focus on the 'pure' people – a unified group that have rights and freedoms within their national territory (Stavrakakis et al 2020: 17). Based on this, populism views society as monist, whereby the people are classified as homogenous due to having the same interests, morals and values. For Mudde (2004: 543) the people are linked to the "imagined heartland" and are the "mythical sub-set of the whole population". Individuals who comprised of the people, are considered to always be right and their consciousness (i.e. common sense) is viewed

as the basis of good politics (Mudde 2004: 547). Ernesto Laclau (2007) highlighted the importance of constructing the people within this framework, as without this structure one is unable to rally against the antagonists.

The antagonistic group comprises of the elites and external others, with populists holding an anti-elitism and anti- others stance. Here, anti-elitism involves critiquing the ruling elites. These ruling elites are presented as a ‘corrupt group’ who have betrayed the nation and prevented the nation from experiencing and exercising true sovereignty (Antonov 2019: 538). In doing so, populism promotes the anti-establishment rhetoric against political, media and intellectual elites (Antonov 2019: 546). Similarly, their stance towards anti-external groups seeks to ostracise others - those in society who are viewed as not ‘pure’ and should be prevented from enjoying national sovereignty (da Silva et al 2019). This antagonistic group “varies depending on the economic, social and political context of the country and are regarded as the dangerous others or third rate” (Finchelstein 2018: 77).

The construction of ‘the people’ further attributes societal demands to an actor whose responsibility is to fulfil the demands of the people (Laclau 2007: 14). As such, the second distinct element focuses on the centrality of the leader. Benjamin Mofitt (2016: 8) argued that populists play two roles – an ordinary leader and extraordinary leader. In an attempt to understand how populism transforms democracy, Nadia Urbinanti (2019: 89) noted that an extraordinary leader is understood to be the key figure capable of echoing unifying sentiments, representing the people and becoming their voice. These characteristics embody the people and relates to the populist claim of authority and legitimacy. By using a specific rhetoric, populist politicians reiterate the idea of condemnation against the corrupt elite/others (Urbinanti 2019: 67). Moreover, populists portray themselves as having outstanding leadership skills and as saviours whose mission it is to save the pure people. As such, populist figures “present themselves as strong in order to present the people as strong” (Urbainanti 2019: 118). According to Urbinanti (2019: 118), in doing so:

“The populist leader plays the role of the re-constructer of authority, not merely that of counter power. Not by chance, this leader emerges in times of social distress, which see the decomposition of traditional representation. This does not mean that he replicates mandate representation and party democracy, though: he absorbs the collective body in his person and acts as the people, which is the

condition for him to act for the people. This further distinguishes this leader from any ordinary party representatives, who would never claim to be like and speak as their people in order to act for them”.

Motiff (2016) claimed that as populism is ultimately about the people, the notion of extraordinariness must be combined with ordinariness. As such, populists must play a contradictory game and project themselves as having political experience while also acting as a political outsider. Miguel Carreras (2014: 89) defined a political outsider using a classification model. Here, the definition is broken into three degrees of outsider politicians:

- i. **Full outsiders:** candidates who have no prior political experience or involvement in politics and run as independent candidates or compete in a newly created party.
- ii. **Mavericks:** candidates who have prior political experience but run as independents or in a newly created party.
- iii. **Amateurs:** candidates who have no prior political experience but are running in a traditional political party.

Additionally, a political outsider is seen within the conceptualisation presented by Robert Barr (2009), who attempted to clarify these characteristics. For Barr (2009) a political outsider is an actor or group who exists outside of the established party-system. These outsiders bid for political power by contesting and/or rejecting the legitimacy of the established political parties and traditional media gatekeepers. In doing so, political outsiders claim that:

“established (party) elites are out of touch with the grievances of the people, in the pockets of big business, that the machinery is rigged in favour of insiders and that the media exclude dissenting voices and thereby compromise their role as neutral arbiters of political competition” (Barr 2009: 44).

For the purpose of this dissertation, the conceptualisation of a political outsider is seen within the framework presented by both Carreras (2012) and Barr (2009).

This dissertation uses these concepts but does not view populism as an ideology. Instead, populism was used to denote a political communication style, in other words how the communication of politics occurs (Negrine & Papathanassopolous 2011) or “how ideas are believed and advocated by political actors in this case, populist actors — rather than the truth or falsity of their content” (Block & Negrine 2017: 180). Expanding this definition, Elena Block and Ralph Negrine (2017) claim that political style is centred around a rhetoric element and contains a range of rhetorical structures and conventions (e.g. word choice, word order, emphasis) and how these structures or conventions are communicated to persuade a specific group and construct collective or individual identities.

Right-wing populists, for example, were identified to centre their strategy around negative emotional messaging that echoes fear, exclusion and an anti-establishment narrative (Devinney & Hartwell 2020: 5). These approaches signal the populist's commitment towards situating themselves as the 'authentic political outsider' (McDonnell & Ondelli 2020). A populist's success depends on exploiting these emotions to perpetuate the image that the elites and others are a threat to the people and that these elites and their politics are the root cause for a crisis that only the populist can repair (Moffitt 2015). As such, by creating a “sense of crisis, populists may elicit from the public the intense emotions populism thrives upon—anger, fear, and rage—and which are used to construct us vs. them binaries” (Yilmaz & Morieson 2021: 6).

It is important to note that in addition to evoking negative emotions, the populist simultaneously evokes positive emotions. This is a future-orientated approach, where positive emotions (e.g. enthusiasm and hope) are triggered to increase political involvement or engagement and create the expectation that better outcomes are possible (Widdman 2021: 23). According to Hamleers et al. (2020:117):

“negative emotions resonate the most with the threat emphasised in populist communication, but positive emotions correspond to the evaluation of the virtuous in-group (the imagined community of the ordinary people) or the celebration of the heartland”.

Studies show that by evoking positive emotions, the populists' express "closeness" to the people" (Wirtz 2019) and in doing so present themselves as the voice of the people and the one who is advocating for a "better situation in the people's heartland" (Aalberg et al. 2019: 456).

As such, populist communication is centred around the emotional bond between populist actors and a targeted segment of the population who are disenchanted/angry with the elite or because they feel threatened by the others or change. According to Corina Lacatus and Gustav Meibauer (2021), to supporters, this approach highlights the populist's commitment towards protecting their interests, even if it requires breaking rules which have been in place for centuries. This technique also helps to portray the candidate as one of the people with solutions to existing problems (Wodak 2015: 127). Using these findings, research suggests that both negative and positive emotions are motivating factors behind political behaviour (Marcus et al. 2000). This finding is explored in relation to the case study of Bolsonaro.

2.5.2. Religion and populism

Mirjam Künkler and Julia Leininger (2020) argue that overtime, religion will gradually disappear from modern society. However, the growing "prominence of religion and politics is evident in populist rhetoric dominating political life globally" (Grzymala-Busse 2012: 6). This relationship between religion and populism is well studied. A general consensus across academia argues that religion provides the ground for constructing a receptive audience, notably the 'pure people', while also providing materials which aid populists in creating and perpetuating an 'us vs them' binary (Roy 2016; Zuquete 2017; Yilmaz & Bashirov 2018; Peker 2019). This is an indication of how populism can be considered a 'thin ideology'. In the past decade, however, scholars have expanded this notion by arguing that right-wing populism in particular tends to attach itself to a 'thick ideology' such as religion (Jaffrelot & Tillin 2017; Hadiz 2018; Tas 2020). This attachment results in populists "turning religion into a tool of power consolidation, specifically in societies where religion plays a significant role in citizens lives" (Dietze & Roth 2020: 67).

Religious populism is identified to have a 'Manichean character'. Grounded in the ancient religion of Manichaeism whose teachings are characterised by a "cosmic war between two co-eternal powers of light and darkness" (Baker-Brian 2011: 2), religious populism divides society into two opposing categories – good and evil (Case 2019: 89). Furthermore, at the forefront of debates on

religious populism is the attachment of populism to one aspect of religion, predominantly religious identity. In doing so, allocating individuals into this category of good or evil is grounded in their religious identification. As such, by attaching a religious dimension to their construction of elites, others and the people, populists use religion to ‘sacralise’ this dichotomy (Ozzano & Bolzonar 2020: 678). Populists are also found to use religion to construct an ‘outsider’ status grounded in portraying themselves as a messianic figure or saviour (de la Torree 2019).

This relationship between religious identity and populism is argued to be the cornerstone of right-wing populist success, because even in a secular society where religious individuals are stripped of their spiritual teachings, religion has the capacity to retain the power to define its follower’s values and culture (Yilmaz 2019: 301). This assumption will be explored in this dissertation.

2.5.3. Bolsonaro’s populism

According to Urbinanti (2019: 173) “right-wing populism finds fertile soil in countries in which the distrust of parties and partisanship has been very strong”. Urbinanti’s articulation on the roots of populism was particularly relevant to the case of Brazil. By July 2013, the range of corruption scandals and an economic, cultural and political crisis, Brazil found itself angry and frustrated which found expression in a wave of protests. The cornerstone of this crisis was a cultural war between conservatives and Brazil’s left. Here, left-liberal alliances and ideology were perceived to be engulfing Brazil’s political establishment and policies (Reis et al. 2016: 109).

According to Brazil’s renowned philosopher Olavo de Carvalho (2015), this formed part of the left’s grand strategy of cultural hegemony, where left-wing policies were used to expand political power in the long term, by sowing left-wing ideas about culture and expanding their influence in schools in universities. This, he argued, squeezed out the circulation of religious conservatives and religious ideas within mainstream society. Ultimately, this alienated a large segment of Brazil’s conservative population and left many Brazilians feeling unhappy with the inclusive policies implemented, as they did not align with their beliefs (Lapper 2020: 43). Moreover, anger and frustration also intensified as the inequalities of Brazilian society seemed to make these non-progressive political views unpopular, once again “alienating and silencing right-wing/non-progressives from the political conversation” (Romancini & Castilho 2019: 56). According to Brian Winter (2017: 9) Carvalho was the only person at this time to recognise the deep polarisation

bubbling within Brazil, making him a key right-wing figure in Brazil's media sector. As Bolsonaro's campaign began in 2017, the campaign began structuring their populist strategy around this left-wing perspective provided by Carvalho (Granji & Morin 2021: 89).

In an attempt to redefine the people, Bolsonaro adopted an exclusionary approach. However, this approach differed to the global trend which saw right-wing exclusionary approaches focus on anti-immigration and ethnic components (Tait 2020: 87). Rather, Bolsonaro's approach can be viewed within the lens presented by Ronald Dahl (1989: 44) which describes political exclusion as a "situation wherein specific groups cannot fully participate in the democratic system and are consciously unrepresented in public consultation". Bolsonaro's construction of the people was grounded in demographic cleavages. In doing so, he articulated the people in relation to typically Evangelical values. For Bolsonaro the people encompassed "good citizens, workers, conservatives, Christians that preserve family values; that don't want gender ideology in classrooms; that want Brazil doing business with the entire world, without an ideological bias" (Ribeiro & Borba 2021: 17). During this time, external groups consisted of those individuals that existed outside this grouping of 'conservative good citizens' (e.g. members of the LGBTQ+ community) (Ribeiro & Borba 2021: 19). In his articulation of the enemy and his anti-elitism and establishment stance, Bolsonaro focused on the notion of anti-*petismo* (anti-PT), and the growing anti-PT sentiments which were expressed during the 2013 protests. Throughout the campaign, Bolsonaro constantly critiqued the PT and their supporters, which included left-liberal scholars, media and anyone with an alternative view to that of Bolsonaro.

Given these circumstances, Bolsonaro's second step towards right-wing populism was to portray himself as a political outsider – a portrayal which differed from that of Lula and the PT. According to Carreras' (2012) definition Bolsonaro can be classified as maverick who, prior to the 2018 elections, was an experienced politician – a congressman for over 28 years. In an analysis of party discipline in the Brazilian Chambers of Deputies, Marcelo Griebeler and Luna Schefeeler (2019) argued that Bolsonaro was able to situate himself as an outsider, as during his terms as a congressman he often played the role of antagonist and disagreed with party leadership. In a study on Outsider politicians in Brazil, Marcelo Griebeler and Guilherme Stein (2020) concluded that Bolsonaro belonged to the "*baixo clero*" (*lower clergy*) of congress, which comprised of

congressmen who had little influence in congress and did not participate in congressional commissions. Moreover, Bolsonaro chose to run in a non-traditional party – Partido Social Liberal (PSL) who, despite being founded in 1994, only elected its first congressman in 2006 and was considered non-traditional given its minor role in Brazilian politics because the PSL occupied only a few seats in congress. These characteristics allowed Bolsonaro to use the party as an “electoral vehicle”, specifically a new party (Griebeler & Stein 2020: 7), that he represented as a political outsider and through which he adopted specific characteristics of an outsider in relation to his economic stance, religious and anti-political correctness.

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature on the arguments, characteristics and concepts central to this dissertation. It first provided an overview on strategy and strategic political communication and its relationship with emotions. It emphasised the role of WhatsApp as an election communication tool and then turned its attention to the types of strategic communication tactics populists use.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the theoretical framework and research methodology that guides this dissertation. In doing so, it traces the theoretical origins of the Theory of Affective Intelligence, defining key concepts and then discusses the theory's limitations. The chapter concludes by describing the case study, data extraction and analysis tools for this study.

3.1. Theoretical framework: The Theory of Affective Intelligence

In recent years, voting behaviour has been studied as acts that are purely rational and grounded in social psychological accounts. Here, social psychology relates to numerous aspects of life, and encompasses accounts focused on social identity, conformity, self-esteem and impression management. As such, social psychology is a scientific field which is concerned with the behaviour, feelings and thoughts of individuals in social settings. These accounts have increased in influence and have been generated by academics who speculated about what occurs within the “black box” of the human brain, how personal experiences are coded, and its effects on political behaviour (Lodge & Taber 2013: 4).

In doing so, the social psychological field helps explain why voters vote for a specific candidate or political party, how they choose whom to support and how the election campaign influences their choice (Baron & Deimier 2007: 89). An example of such a theoretical approach is provided by the Theory of Affective Intelligence (TAI) popularised by George Marcus, Russell Neuman and Micheal MacKuen (2000) in the book *Affective Intelligence and Political Judgement*.

3.1.1. Theoretical origins

The impetus for TAI stems from a debate among American Political Scientists (Bartels 1996; Lau & Redlawsk 1997; Schudson 1998) which focused on the question ‘*is the American electorate competent to make collective political decisions?*’ (Marcus 2017: 13). Much of this debate was dominated by the ‘reason-passion’ dichotomy that was inspired by the scholars of the Enlightenment era such as Immanuel Kant. A consensus across the literature, is that passion is a

threat to competence and reason, which is grounded in dispassion, is the key to channel competence (Maiz 2014: 90).

In a reflection on this ‘reason-passion’ dichotomy debate, Marcus (2017) refers to the work of David Sears and Jack Citrin (1982: 222) who studied how Californians passed a referendum (Proposition 13) to limit property tax in 1971. According to Marcus (2017: 9), Proposition 13 was identified to be a period of “blind emotion”¹¹, with anger dominating the public’s thinking (Sears & Citrin 1982: 223). The authors recognised that the traditional explanation of rational thinking during voting was valid, however, anger and hostility was also a “potent weapon for the tax revolt” (Sears & Citrin 1982: 223). The tide of anti-government emotions¹² stemmed from the perception of the bureaucracy’s inefficiency and increased the public’s desire for change (Sears & Citrin 1982). Using Sears and Citrin (1982) findings, Marcus et al. (2000) aimed to re-examine the longstanding presumption that emotion¹³ is the opposite to reason.

According to Marcus (2017) the research on voter competence typically falls into two camps. The first camp largely neglected the study of emotions in favour of the rational choice model presented by Anthony Downs and John Rawls. In this instance affective reactions, or the emotional reaction an individual has to a situation, were excluded from the political behaviour debate because emotions were classified as “difficult to measure and conceptualise” (Marcus et al. 2013: 22). Marcus et al. (2000) and Marcus (2017) further claimed that the rational choice model makes the empirical error of generalising political judgement. In doing so, the rational choice model presumed that voters have an invariant pattern of behaviour and judgement (MacKuen et al. 2010).

The second camp linked emotions the electorate failing to make a ‘correct’ judgment as evident by Sears and Citrin’s 1982 study. In tracing the roots of TAI, Marcus (2017) reflects on American survey research conducted in the 1940s-1950s that captured systematic empirical data to examine the public’s knowledge and how voters made political decisions (e.g. Lazarsfeld et al. 1944; Converse 1964). According to Marcus (2017: 8), a general argument put forward by this camp,

¹¹ Citizens guided by emotions and their stance or opinions.

¹² Anti-government sentiments stemmed from rising inflation rates and increased property taxes.

¹³ Emotion is defined as a “complex reaction pattern, involving experiential, behavioral and psychological elements” (Kazdin 2022: 33). Emotions are how an individual deal with significant matters on a personal level (Jiang et al. 2020).

was that of the American electorate as poorly informed and were motivated by party affiliations, rather than reliance on consideration and understanding of issues that dominate the public domain (Converse 1964; Camprini & Keeter 2000; Lodge & Taber 2013). This dystopian view was not without its criticisms, with scholars such as Samuel Popkin (1991) and Paige Shapiro (1992: 89) arguing “that the electorate was not completely gullible to misinformation and irrational forces”.

Despite this debate between scholars, a golden thread was identified – that the electorate’s competence depended on their emotions and reason. In other words, the “more influential reason is, the less influential emotion is, and the more the electorate is competent” (Marcus 2017: 3). Decades have passed since the publication of these works (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944; Converse 1964; Popkin 1991; Shapiro 1992; Camprini & Keeter 2000; Lodge & Taber 2013), however, Marcus et al. (2000) and Marcus (2017) recognised that this approach to the reason-passion dichotomy remains influential (e.g. Claw 2016) and it gave rise to TAI, which aimed to challenge the presupposition that passion was a threat to competence, and that reason is the key to channelling competence (Marcus et al. 2002: 87).

As such, the TAI rejects this portrait of an ill-informed voter and the utopian aspirations of a rational voter. Rather, TAI claims that the fear of the unknown presents itself as an emotion and, therefore, emotions play an essential role in the ability to reason. The reason-passion dichotomy and rational model, therefore, are viewed as inappropriate tools for analysing political behaviour because they ignore the role emotions play in facilitating or hindering rational thought (MacKuen et al. 2010; Marcus 2017).

The TAI is the first political science theory grounded in neuroscience. In broad terms, neuroscience is the scientific study of the brain and the nervous system with a specific focus placed on the study of brain cells and the connectivity between the visual, auditory and thinking areas of the brain (Oktar 2019: 89). The relationship between political science and neuroscience is best expressed in the notion ‘neuropolitics’, which focuses on the use of neuro-scientific methods and theories on brain function and structure, to better understand how people make political decisions. This method is particularly useful to political psychologists who aim to analyse the interplay between political and human behaviour (Haas 2020: 8). At the heart of political psychology is the focus on

individual and situational characteristics which are conducive to a successful political system (Mutz 2013: 236). Political psychologists who are interested in political cognition¹⁴ and decision-making, utilise neuro-scientific methods to answer and understand how psychological and neural mechanisms give rise to specific political behaviour such as candidate support (Hegazy 2019: 18).

Discussions on the potential ties between neuroscience and political psychology began gaining momentum in the early 2000s spearheaded by cognitive scientist, George Lakoff (2004) and his book the *Political Mind*. Lakoff (2004) argued that human beings are not rational creatures. Instead, the reasoning is mostly unconscious [pre-conscious], metaphorical and emotionally laden. Lakoff's (2004) work inspired a range of studies analysing political psychology, more specifically emotions and elections. For example, Drew Westen's (2008: 48) research which was discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 and who admitted that the relationship between elections and emotions was inspired by Lakoff's earlier work. Moreover, scholars such as Matthew Schreiber and Kevin Oscher (2003) focused on the strengths and limitations presented by including neuroscientific elements in studying politics. Others such as Ingrid Haas (2016) and William Brady et al. (2017) have contributed to political neuroscience by analysing racial attitudes, motivated reasoning, and the role of emotions.

TAI finds its theoretical roots in the works of Jeffrey Gaey¹⁵ (a neuroscientist who specialised in affective neuroscience) and Edmunds Roll's Theory of Affect¹⁶ who offered a complex account of reason and emotion. These works played an instrumental role in generating the dual process model of the TAI, which describes an individual's two modes of judgment. In general, a dual process model includes: the system 1 mode, which refers to the *normal default mode of judgment* and focuses on intuitive and automatic judgment; and, system 2, which refers to *the rational mode of judgment*. Emotions are involved in both modes. TAI understanding is "reshaped by this

¹⁴ Refers to how individuals understand the political world and how this understanding shapes political behaviour (Hamilton 2013).

¹⁵ Consciousness is viewed as a late error detector. Here, many unconscious systems detect errors where the brain considers what to do next at the unconscious stage (Gray 2002). As such, not all circumstances are well suited for the "automaticity of the pre-consciousness" (Gray 2002: 34).

¹⁶ Rolls (2005) adopts a scientific approach to emotions and its functions. He identifies a reward-punishment system that provides the foundation for classifying different emotions and understanding the information processing systems, and how these systems are involved in manifesting emotions. This reward-punishment system helps one understand the significance of emotions and motivational behaviour (Rolls 2005). Motivation is seen as the state one is in when working towards a specific goal; and emotion is the state obtained/not obtained after this goal.

formulation with reason serving a different function in the two modes of judgment” (Marcus 2017: 8). This will be discussed in detail in subsequent sections.

In addition to the neuroscientific findings, the TAI is inspired by the works of psychologist Robert Zajonc (1980). Dating back to the early 1980s, Zajonc (1980) claimed that individual preferences develop from exposure to stimuli and without the individual being consciously aware. Following the argument presented by Zajonc (1980), neuroscientists (Humphrey et al. 1989; Baddley 1996) identified that “brain systems have fast access to information and access to procedural memory (i.e. the memory system that stores previously learned habits)” (Marcus et al. 2000: 56). Moreover, these pre-conscious¹⁷ affective systems are identified to control one’s state of conscious awareness¹⁸ (Marcus et al. 2000). As such, these systems form a unified unit and enable one to process information, before conscious awareness. This is based on: sensory streams which flow into the brain (i.e. external information), the somatosensory stream (i.e. one’s current physical and mental state), and the downstream process (i.e. the articulation of habituated¹⁹ behaviour).

Both political psychology and neuroscience view *affect* within a similar lens. Within the discipline of political psychology, the term “affect is used to describe if an individual likes or dislikes a political object”, such as an election campaign or snippet of political information, and if these individuals are ‘affectively charged’ or the extent to which an individual experiences a positive or negative emotion in line with this political object (Mutz 2013: 19). At the cornerstone of affect understood within neuroscience, is the recognition that emotions are a psychological phenomenon which involves changes to one’s body, nervous system activity, subjective responses and the urge to act in a particular way. As such, within the neuroscience field, affect describes the emotions one feels as they experienced their daily life and can include emotions generated when confronted by a political object (Pankskepp 2022: 4).

¹⁷ Pre-conscious refers to the position preceding consciousness. These thoughts are considered pre-conscious when individuals are unconscious (i.e. activities an individual conduct without awareness) in a moment but their thoughts are not repressed (Elliot 2017: 8).

¹⁸ Conscious awareness refers to an individual’s awareness of their thoughts, memories, feelings and environments. As such, conscious awareness is one’s awareness of themselves and the world around them, it is also subjective and unique to each individual (Bowins 2022: 43).

¹⁹ Habituated behaviour refers to learned behaviour. As such, the articulation of habituated behaviour focuses on how this behaviour is formed over time. Moreover, an individual’s response to stimuli begins to decrease overtime, as they become comfortable with what goes on around them and may no longer respond to the stimuli (Elliot 2017:10).

In discussing the relationship between neuroscience and the TAI, Marcus (2017) reflects on Sigmund Freud's (1915: 23) "claim that consciousness is the tip of the mental iceberg, with the bulk of the mental processing occurring below the surface of consciousness". This notion was also studied by Benjamin Libet (1971), who claimed that focus should not be placed primarily on consciousness when trying to understand political behaviour. Rather, many of the evaluations which orient political behaviour occur at a preconscious level.

Neuroscientists (e.g. Gates et al. 1989) have determined that there is a difference in the brains to process information, and in the capacity of the mind to display it. During a range of 50 to 120 milliseconds, numerous pre-consciousness affective systems²⁰, in other words the automatic or intuitive system, are active. According to Marcus et al. (2019), this suggests that unconsciousness neural activity motivates human behaviour, with consciousness serving to provide post-semantic²¹ accounts. As such, for these pre-conscious appraisals, affect is the key mechanism through which pre-consciousness influences human behaviour (Marcus 2017). TAI is focused on "identifying these pre-conscious systems, their interactions among themselves and their role in guiding both habituated action and deliberative strategies" (Marcus et al. 2013: 19). The memory-related to habituated action (coined procedural memory²²) is separate from the memory which supports consciousness (coined semantic memory²³). Habituated actions are identified to be executed with requiring an active role of consciousness.

For example, when faced with a threat or fear, incoming streams of information from external signals is processed by the brain. The brain then generates an appropriate action to manage the situation. This occurs prior to the brain representing this information in conscious awareness (LeDoux 1996: 438). As such, habituated actions occur without requiring consciousness playing an active role (Bargh & Ferguson 2000: 925). Rather, consciousness plays an observation role and generates subjective control both in terms of free will and the construction of prior non-conscious processes (Weiskrantz 1997: 45). Despite this, these systems are identified to work together to

²⁰ Systems which modulate the affective processing of daily activities.

²¹ To derive meaning of a situation.

²² Stores memories related to routines (e.g. walking, writing).

²³ Stores visual memory (e.g. personal and place names, dates).

support one's ability to navigate themselves. For example, despite knowing one has the skill to write, one is also unable to access the memory systems which stores the programs that guide the pencil (Milner & Goodale 2008: 774). As such, knowledge develops in two different forms – semantic information which is accessible to our consciousness and semantic information which is not accessible to our consciousness (Wilson 2002: 625).

TAI emerged within the political science discipline to describe the role of these pre-conscious systems in articulating one's emotions, behaviour and various states of consciousness. In doing so, TAI describes processes in which individuals modify their modes of engagement, decision-making and levels of attention. Here, the modes of engagement refer to the manner in which individuals engage with information, while the modes of decision-making refer to the process which results in a specific course of action among alternatives and levels of attention refers to an individual actively processing information while tuning out other details (Marcus et al. 2013).

TAI also focuses on the mechanism which sustains one's habit of thought and actions. This includes how an individual self-defines their personal and collective identity or actions (e.g. holding certain stereotypes and prejudices) and when an individual is prone to strengthening their reliance on pre-existing tendencies and abandoning these pre-existing tendencies for new alternatives (Marcus et al. 2013). By drawing on the neuroscience findings, TAI rejected the rational model or reason by arguing that emotions are pre-conscious, distinguishing between negative emotions (fear and anger), and validating that anxiety enhances the information-seeking process rather than rendering citizens irrational (Vasilopoulos 2019).

3.1.2. Pillars of the TAI

The TAI is a theory focused on how “emotion and reason interact to produce an attentive citizenry” (Marcus et al. 2000: 67). As such, the TAI offers a theoretical link between *feeling* and *thinking*, its role in information seeking and their impact on political judgement (Yates 2019: 10).

For the brain to retain and learn patterns of actions to deal with conditions relating to reward and punishment, the brain requires access to three kinds of information (Marcus et al. 2000: 9). Firstly, somatosensory information or information that relates to aspects of the body. Secondly, the memory system where information concerning recurring actions are stored, and lastly, “access to

the ongoing sensory stream which depicts the immediate context” (Marcus et al. 2013: 87). At the cornerstone of the TAI, is the argument that emotional systems hold more information about the surrounding environment than one’s consciousness, and as such, emotions are the first to intervene in a situation (Marcus et al. 2000). Emotion-led judgement, therefore, occurs at a pre-conscious level, with key emotions such as enthusiasm, anxiety, anger and fear being the determinants that inform the strategies voters use to construct their political judgments and dictate political behaviour (Johnston & Lavine 2015: 2).

As already mentioned, the findings presented by Marcus et al. (2000) are based on the works of neurophysiological studies. Based off of this, Marcus et al. (2000) described that a person’s behaviour is governed by two emotional sub-systems, the disposition system and the surveillance system that are found in the limbic region²⁴ of the brain (Bogdan 2019). These subsystems reflect two distinct decision-making strategies and regulate the emotional response to the political environment (Marcus et al. 2000: 44), thus dictating if people act habitually (based on previous habits) or based on new information (Johnstone & Lavine 2015: 8). The disposition and surveillance systems were found to have various inputs, namely external stimulus such as political messaging. Thus, each subsystem affects political behaviour and learning in different ways (Derryberry 1991: 267). Moreover, these systems have unique effects on emotions and habits.

According to Marcus et al. (2013: 25), the disposition system is a:

“fast system which integrates the somatosensory (so it knows in detail our bodies, including the locations of all our parts, skeletal and muscular, and our energy sources), our memories of the apt actions that master familiar task execution in familiar circumstances, and it has swift and fulsome detail about the immediate world (i.e., sensory streams)”.

²⁴ It is important to note that Marcus et al. (2000) acknowledged that three systems are found in the limbic region of the brain. In addition to the disposition and surveillance system, this region comprises of the ‘fight or flight’ system. This system controls innate responses to unconditioned punishment. However, it does not deal with conditioned or secondary stimuli. Using these findings, Mackeun et al. (2010: 44) concluded that the fight or flight system must be ignored, as “it has limited application to politics”.

In a reflection on the TAI, Pavlos Vasilopoulos (2019: 33) found that the disposition system or system 1, the intuitive system, guides habitual ways of thinking and behaving. This occurs without individuals consciously considering them, since individuals rely on their habits to guide their behaviour. According to Marcus et al. (2000) individuals acquire entrenched beliefs or values early in life and these define how an individual will behave within the political climate. As such, emotional markers²⁵ assess the success and failure of an activity that derive from external stimuli such as a political speech. The disposition system relies on an emotional analysis to control the execution of habits. Here, within the political realm, individuals learn which political ideas and loyalties will reward and which will not. Reward conditions, or information that resonates with one's habits, result in the affect condition of enthusiasm (Marcus et al. 2000: 8).

In extending their theory to the campaign phase of an election, Marcus et al. (2000) argued that the electorate relies on the same habits when voting. When guided by political habits such as ideology or group identity, the outcome depends on how much enthusiasm a campaign can generate amongst the traditional voting base (Marcus et al. 2000: 54; Zoonen 2010: 65). This is due to habits prevailing over rational deliberations, as voter habits defy change and inhibit deliberation of information that exists outside of these habits or interests in contemporary political issues (Marcus et al. 2000: 7; Laubbe 2018: 90).

The surveillance system (system 2) is evoked when individuals find themselves in a threatening or unfamiliar situation, which allows novel information to challenge their expectations (Vasilopoulos 2019: 39). In face of a threat, the surveillance system ensures a change in anxiety and fear levels such as remaining calm when the situation is normal and then increasing anxiety or fear when there is a discrepancy between expectations and the circumstances that exist. The surveillance system then goes on to inhibit the habituated action by shifting from learned patterns to the source of novelty, where one's consciousness asks '*what is going on here*'? and then towards their deliberative mechanisms which searches for new and unbiased solutions (Marcus et al. 2013). This means that when an individual is fearful or anxious about a particular external stimulus, they

²⁵ Feelings associated with emotions, e.g. increased heart rate when experiencing anxiety. From a political perspective, emotional markers are identified to be applied to political speech, where truth is replaced by an appeal to the individual's emotions when making decisions (Munoz 2017).

seek more information and are hence able to act in line with the rational choice model that states that voters make informed decisions (Marcus et al. 2000: 98; Gulati & Williams 2010: 93). As such, the surveillance system inspires individuals to pay closer attention to issues and to seek alternatives, effectively transforming habitual voters into better informed interest maximisers (Laubbe 2018: 87).

In 2010, Marcus et al. (2010) included anger as a new emotional strategy within the empirical literature of TAI, specifically within the characteristics surrounding the disposition system. According to Marcus et al. (2010), within their environment individuals can be exposed to aversive stimuli. In such punishment conditions, such as confronting an antagonistic group, emotional markers assess the success and failure of a situation by using the affective dimension of anger (Bang-Petersen 2010). In contrast to the negative emotions (fear), people confronted with anger rely on previously learned political habits similar to a rewarding case which evokes enthusiasm (Mackuen et al. 2010: 89; Laubbe 2018: 98). Hence, angry individuals will cling to their political habits and entrenching them (Mackuen et al. 2010: 442). Given that anger is embedded in the disposition system, voters will protect their views, become close minded and seek less information. Ultimately, they are less willing to compromise. Moreover, when seeking information, individuals will only search for information that supports their own stance, while ignoring contrasting information (Ryan & Ryan 2019: 1145).

As such, Marcus et al. (2010) claimed that rather than an individual experiencing ‘homogenous negativity’ they experience two contrasting negative situations. The first negative situation is fear or an uncertain risk, while the second negative situation is anger. Marcus et al. (2013) noted that if an individual possessed only the disposition system, one would be vulnerable as they are unable to adapt to changing circumstances, and as such, survival will then depend on staying within a familiar environment. However, the surveillance system assists in preventing such vulnerability (Marcus et al. 2013).

3.1.3. Criticisms of TAI

These conclusions provided by Marcus et al. (2000) are not without their criticisms. One such criticism was presented by Howard Lavine, Christopher Johnson, and Marco Steenbergen (2012)

in the book *The Ambivalent Partisan: How Critical Loyalty Promotes Democracy*. Here, Lavine et al. (2012) offers an alternative argument to the claim that longstanding attachment to a party and the reconsideration of prior political choices does not include elements of anxiety. Rather, the authors argue that voters who identified with a party are ambivalent towards their party, specifically when they identify a divergence between party performance and party images. This results in partisans relying less on habitual attachments and more on their political values. As such, the authors conclude that “anxiety may be a sufficient condition if it is experienced as dissonant with one’s partisan identity, but it is not necessary to instigate careful thinking” (Lavine et al. 2012: 173).

The second challenge was presented by Jonathan Ladd and Gabriel Lenz (2008) in the article *Reassessing the Role of Anxiety in Voter Choice*. Using a cross-sectional panel survey of ANES 1980 ‘Major Panel’ data, the authors question the claim that anxiety affects political judgments indirectly. This occurs by reducing the role of predispositions and the increase the role of contemporary information (Brader 2011: 17). Ladd and Lenz (2008) go on to propose two alternatives to the TAI. Firstly, positive or negative emotions towards a particular candidate are a direct trigger of the positive or negative perceptions of these candidates. As such, anxious citizens voting against party identification stem from “lower candidate evaluations among partisans rather than the causal effect of anxiety” (Ladd & Lenz 2008: 87). Secondly, Ladd and Lenz (2008) criticise the TAI based on the endogenous effect, which claims that candidate evaluations generate emotions, rather than the reverse. As such, TAI is a product of reverse causation, where emotions are driven by prior candidate evaluations.

In the article *Parsimony and Complexity: Developing and Testing Theories of Affective Intelligence*, Marcus et al. (2011) responded to the criticisms made by Ladd and Lenz (2008). According to Marcus et al. (2011: 335), Ladd and Lenz replace the original dependent variable of ‘voter intention’ with ‘a comparative feeling thermometer’. Their analysis, therefore, “pivots on alternate specifications of the model, which mask the capacity of the emotion variables to interact with partisanship” (Ladd & Lenz 2008: 12). As such, Ladd and Lenz (2008) appear to alter the theoretical argument and show how this alteration failed to understand the true essence of the TAI (Marcus et al. 2011). Ladd and Lenz’s (2008) argument was also disputed by Ted Brader (2011)

in *The Political Relevance of Emotions: Reassessing Revisited*. Brader (2011: 27) argues that TAI is a broad theory, with much of its implications for cause-effect “unchallenged by Ladd and Lenz’s reassessment and cannot be explained by their alternatives”. Secondly, Brader (2011) recognised that there are many studies which are consistent with TAI reasoning as presented by Marcus et al. (2000). Indeed, a range of research has tested the TAI in numerous contexts and using varying methodologies, which have provided evidence validating theory. For example, in an investigation on the aftermath of 9/11, Leonie Huddy et al. (2005: 187) found that anxiety experienced over the 9/11 terrorist attack was “positively associated with the tendency to follow the news and negatively associated with knowledge of the attacks”. In an analysis of the interaction between information and emotions, Nicholas Valentino et al. (2008) found that anxiety had a positive impact on participant’s motivation to garner political knowledge. Here, anxiety was found to increase the quantity of information read and the reader’s retention of this information. Moreover, anger and enthusiasm were negatively associated with actual information seeking. In an experimental analysis on the criteria of Barack Obama’s emotional public appeals, particular anxiety and enthusiastic appeals, anxiety was identified to recall contemporary situations while enthusiasm triggered long-standing considerations (Groenedyks 2016). These findings were consistent with the foundations of TAI.

The second stream of research focused on testing TAI within the framework of how emotional reactions influence voting behaviour. Through the use of an experimental setting that tested the extent to which emotional appeals in political advertisements impact voter decisions, Brader (2005) found that fear in political ads increases a participant’s reliance on a candidate’s campaign issues and personality, while enthusiasm increases the impact on the voter’s pre-established convictions. In an analysis on the role of anger and anxiety on voting behaviour, Nicholas Valentino et al. (2018: 17) found that fear towards women/feminists/gender ideology reduced the effect of sexist attitudes on the Trump vote, while anger towards women/feminists/gender ideology mobilised sexist voters to vote for Trump”. Similarly, in an analysis on the affects of fear and anger on voting for the far-right in France, evidence suggested that anger stimulated support for the far-right National Front Party, while fear resulted in the same group of voters being less likely to rely on their original political belief (Vasilopoulos et al. 2019; Marcus et al. 2019). These findings

resonate with the TAI claim of fear decreases reliance on political habits, while anger increases reliance on existing political views in voting behaviour.

Despite these responses, this dissertation's literature review indicates that no study has analysed how Bolsonaro's campaign evoked emotions among the electorate. Instead, studies and news articles have made general reference to this possibility (Tharoor 2018). In addition, much of the literature applying the Theory of Affective Intelligence (TAI) is focused on Global North case studies and their use of Twitter. For example, as discussed earlier George Marcus et al. (2015) used the TAI to study support for authoritarian policies in Paris, following the Charlie Hebdo Terrorist attack. This dissertation offers a new perspective by describing the meaning of the content shared across WhatsApp, measuring the emotive elements within the message, and applying these findings to the TAI from a Brazilian perspective.

3.2. Research methodology

This dissertation investigates how emotive strategic political communication disseminated via WhatsApp motivated Evangelical support for right-wing populist Jair Bolsonaro. To do so, this study implemented a two-step analysis method that is discussed below.

3.2.1. Data extraction

To interpret the content and sentiment of the text data, the study used the convenient method of sampling to collect images and messages shared via the instant messaging app, WhatsApp. Collecting primary data on WhatsApp posed a challenge given the timeframe of this research. This study began in 2021, 3 years after the election, so the researcher was unable to join these WhatsApp groups. For this reason, the researcher searched for peer-reviewed articles and forums with the following variables: *Bolsonaro 2018 election*, *populism*, *WhatsApp* and *2018 Brazilian elections*. As such the WhatsApp data set used in the study consists of secondary data collected and made available by Rafael Evangelista and Fernando Bruno (2019), Gulimero da Silva (2020), and news outlets El Pais (2018), Comprova (2019) and BrasilWire (2018). These authors gathered their data by joining pro-Bolsonaro groups during the campaign period between August-October 2018. Table 1 provides a brief summary of the number of groups or data sets studied by each author during this period.

Table 1: Data sets studies

Author	Pro-Bolsonaro groups	Data set
BrasilWire	246	
Comprova		242,124
Da Silva	4	1000
El Pais	170	
Evangelista and Bruno	209	

These researchers (excluding da Silva²⁶) and news outlets concentrated their analysis on the role of WhatsApp in spreading disinformation and misinformation. In contrast, this dissertation took these messages and analysed the emotions they purported to evoke. Moreover, it studied how the various crisis that engulfed Brazil dictated the topics addressed in these WhatsApp messages.

3.2.2. Content analysis

The first data analysis approach used a qualitative latent content analysis that involved interpreting and describing the content of text data through a coding process. This was done by identifying themes and patterns with the text (Shannon & Hsieh 2005: 1278). To do so, an operationalisation and measurement frame was created. This dimension focused on how these messages reflected elements of populism, as defined by Cas Mudde (2001) and discussed in chapter 2. This included elements which: (1) appealed to voters by presenting information that resonated with their Evangelical values; (2) attacked the elite by emphasising the distance between the people [Evangelicals] and the elites; and, (3) ostracised ‘the other’, a specific group that were identified as the enemy.

The gathered data was then organised into a coding frame that contained various dimensions of interest in line with the dimension frame mentioned above. This thesis adopted Penelope Mayring’s (2000) three-step *Inductive Category Development Approach* which includes identifying themes, clustering the identified themes into categories and then interpreting them. These dimensions captured a specific aspect and concept of the text and ensured that the unit of analysis was coded (Schierer 2012).

²⁶ Da Silva’s study (2019) focused on the use of imagery by the Bolsonaro campaign.

Using images and messages shared across the platform as the units of analysis, the underlying meaning behind the messages portrayed in the content shared was analysed using the objective and systematic technique. This data was coded using ATLAS.ti to identify populist themes. The coding process was guided by a set of coding rules which identified categories for the type of populist strategy with specific titles, words and phrases attached to each category. This process of identifying emerging codes began by identifying units of meaning. Here, the messages and images were divided into words as there were multiple ideas shared in the messaging. These codes helped to guide the focus of this dissertation in line with the research questions. The coding frame was as follows:

1. **Anti-pestismo:** communism, PT, corruption.
2. **Moral Crusade:** religion, Jesus, corruption, sex, gay, gender ideology.
3. **Bolsonaro as a Messiah:** guidance, God, Jesus, against.

This method was deemed suitable for this study for several reasons. The latent content analysis acknowledges that the researcher is involved in the research process and that their role is to utilise theories to interpret and understand the data. Moreover, this method allowed the researcher to establish a pattern of characteristics within the content itself. In doing so, the latent content analysis allowed the researcher to: find correlations in how concepts are communicated; analyse the intentions of a particular group; reveal communication differences; and, analyse the consequences attached to this communication (An & Gower 2009). In other words, content analysis was used to analyse the strategic communication tactics and content shared by Bolsonaro, the intentions behind the material shared by the campaign and how this communication evoked particular emotions among the electorate and their effect on voter behaviour.

This method does not exist without its limitations. A key criticism is the methodological objectivity. Here, content analysis is identified to define certain dimensions, which pushes the researcher to make a subjective choice regarding the analytic criteria and increasing the possibility of personal bias (Krippendorff 2012). To minimise this possibility, this study formulated the coding guide before the start of the analysis. Moreover, to ensure the credibility and validity of the

data, this thesis made use of triangulation, which used two methods of data collection on the same phenomena. These methods included multiple data sources and taking notes. As mentioned above, it is important to note that efforts were made to obtain primary data but, given that primary data is difficult to obtain, these messages were gathered from a range of secondary sources which were peer-reviewed and whose authenticity have been verified. As this study was limited by a language barrier (i.e. most messages were in Portuguese), the researcher worked with the Department of Ancient and Modern Languages and Culture at the University of Pretoria to translate content from Portuguese to English.

3.2.3. Sentiment analysis

Given the rapid growth of social media in the last decade and the growing ways to obtain social media data, various computing techniques within the information retrieval domains have been developed to analyse this data (Tumsajan et al. 2019). As mentioned above, the aim of this dissertation was to analyse the use of emotive strategic communication used on WhatsApp to drive support for Bolsonaro. To do so, this dissertation analysed multiple messages shared on the app. Given this, computer assisted sentiment analysis is particularly relevant to analysing social media content as this data contains a diverse range of sentiments and opinions (Daou 2020: 89).

To extract emotional sentiment from these messages, this dissertation made use of the computer software Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC-2022). With a lexical approach, LIWC-22 calculates the degree to which a text contains words that belong to an empirically defined psychological and structural category. LIWC-22 then determines the rate at which cognitions and emotions are present in the given text (Pennebaker et al. 2015). Here, LIWC-22 measures variables relating to linguistic style (e.g. word count) and psychological processes (e.g. emotions). For each psychological dimension, a frequency is calculated showing which words relate to what dimension. For example, furious is counted as a word that constructs anger (Tumasjan et al. 2010: 407).

Given that LIWC-22 uses a lexical approach, it incorporates several international dictionaries, developed by scientists and psychologists, for different categories (Laubbe 2018: 450). In addition to using these international dictionaries, users can create their own custom dictionary (Pennebaker 2022: 19). Here, the researcher chose to use the existing international Portuguese dictionary. It is

also important to note that LIWC-22 comprises of a range of categories and this study chose to use the following categories and word stems²⁷:

- **Negative emotions:** *dissatisfaction, suffering, ignorant, pain.*
- **Anger:** *hate, kill, rape, brutal, sinister.*
- **Fear:** *suspicious, worry, anxious, feared, nervous and worry.*
- **Positive emotions:** *satisfaction, happiness, excitement, hope.*
- **Enthusiasm:** *pride, hope, interest.*

When recognising words from these categories, LIWC-22 generated a numerical score for each message – a positive number greater than zero based on the total number of words presented in the message that match words, and word stems within one of the sentiment categories (Pennebaker 2022: 78).

3.2.4. Case study

This dissertation used a qualitative exploratory research design to understand *how emotive strategic political communication was used on WhatsApp to drive support for the right-wing populist Jair Bolsonaro*. As such, this research adopted a case study approach focused on Bolsonaro, the communication strategies used by his campaign on WhatsApp and how these tactics elicited emotions among Evangelicals. This sampling plan was purposive and this case study was chosen for the following reasons: the use of WhatsApp in Brazil, political re-alignment in Brazil and the role of Evangelicals in Brazilian politics. These reasons are discussed in detail below.

3.2.4.1. WhatsApp and Brazil

WhatsApp is the most popular messaging App in Brazil, which John Costine (2020) attributed to three reasons. Firstly, WhatsApp has a simple interface where chats are shown in simple text bubbles with time stamps and receipt and read notifications. Users are also constantly logged in so they never miss a message and recent messages can be saved for when users re-open the app. Moreover, unlike iMessage, users do not need to own the same brand of cell phone as the recipient

²⁷ Chain of words which form part of a single vocabulary and convey the same meaning.

to communicate (Moawad 2022: 67). Secondly, Brazil has lower service fees for mobile internet. In 2018, for instance, unlimited plans sold for BRL 25 (\$4.82) per month and daily plans sold for an average BRL 0.33 (\$00.64) per day. Thirdly, WhatsApp has a seamless overlay with mobile telephony (World Bank 2020). WhatsApp treats every phone number as a user by automatically adding the users contact list to their WhatsApp contacts.

Moreover, the 2018 Brazilian elections marked a watershed moment in Brazilian history. For the first time, an election was primarily conducted through social media and presented a new phenomenon in this context (Araujo & Prior 2020:18). This shift was driven by the introduction of the Political Reform Law (or commonly known as Lei do Facebook/Facebook Law), which was approved in 2017. Under the new Facebook Bill, for the first time in Brazilian history, candidates were granted permission to use social media to produce and share political advertisements. Secondly, company donations to electoral campaigns were banned (da Silva 2020: 20). Thirdly, candidates with limited funding could use social media to boost their campaign online, rather than paying for traditional advertising on radio and television, Lastly and most importantly, the Bill provided an alternative to popular state-regulated advertising (*horário eleitoral gratuito*), which dominated political media since re-democratisation (Skidmore 2009).

The 2018 Brazilian election also differed from other countries due to the use of WhatsApp as a key campaign communication tool. As such, these elections were labelled Brazil's first ever 'WhatsApp elections' and offered an opportunity to conduct an in-depth study on a recent and unique phenomenon.

3.2.4.2. Political re-alignment

As detailed in Chapter 1 and 2, prior to the election of Bolsonaro, the Brazilian electorate historically supported and cast their vote for inclusive left-wing populists, who elicited emotions of enthusiasm and hope among the electorate. The election of Bolsonaro reflected a re-alignment, and a reinvention of Brazilian politics. As such, Bolsonaro's campaign presented a peculiar situation, and emphasised the role played by political messaging to persuade voters (Heller 2020: 89). By studying this case, it allows one to understand how this tactic of persuasion differed from those implemented in previous elections.

3.2.4.3. Unifying Evangelicals

Bolsonaro was and is notorious for making extremist statements throughout his political career. However, according to Richard Lapper (2020: 29), these anti-democratic views shocked the Brazilian middle-class progressives and liberals but resonated with the grassroots of Brazilian society, particularly those in the *interiorzão* (the big interior). This *interiorzão* comprised of socially conservative towns and rural areas, which was a stark contrast to the so called liberation paradise of the big cities (Garcia 2022). At the cornerstone of these socially conservative beliefs, is Christian Evangelicalism.

Evangelicalism is a heterogeneous group, which comprises of churches that belong to protestant tradition (Hoover 2019: 8). Across these churches, Brazilian Evangelicals are found to adhere to four common principals. Firstly, ‘conversionism’ that emphasises the need for life. Second, ‘activism’ which includes Evangelical and missionary efforts. Third, ‘biblicalism’ where the Bible and its teachings (Freston 2001) are centralised. Here, Evangelicals follow a literal interpretation of the Bible, particularly through the *sana doctrine* (or the healthy doctrine) which heals sin and glorifies Jesus. Using this, Evangelicals believe that Christians foster a deeply direct and personal relationship with God, who will reward good faith with material and health prosperity (Potter et. al 2018). Lastly, ‘crucicentrism’, where emphasis is placed on Jesus sacrifice on the cross (Freston 2001).

According to a recent sample survey by Datafolha (2017), Brazil is home to the fourth-largest Evangelical population, with over 32% of the total population identifying as Evangelicals who live mostly in rural areas and who are identified as urban lower class. The most successful denominations are Pentecostal churches, with over 22% to 27% of Evangelicals affiliating with a protestant church in 2012, making it the fastest growing denomination in Brazil (IBGE 2012; Datafolha 2012). Despite this, Catholic is still the most prominent religion in Brazil. However, statistics show that between the years 1980 to 2010, Catholic affiliation reduced from 89.2% to 64.6%, while Evangelicalism increased from 6.6% to 22.2%. This shows an upward trend in Evangelicalism and a decrease in those identifying as Catholic. At the time of the election, the latest Brazilian Census (2010) found that 22, 2% (42 million) of the Brazilian population were Evangelicals and the number was set to increase in the years that followed. This was bolstered by

the fact that a 2017 sample survey by Instituto Datafolha showed that 32% of Brazilians self-identified as Evangelicals.

According to Andrew Chestnut (2020), the popularity and appeal of Evangelicalism is attributed to their leadership being delegated to local communities. This contrasts the way the Catholic church in Brazil operates, as these pastors are mainly white and European. Second, services offered by these Evangelical churches are personal and focus on spiritual gifts, thus, encouraging participation and accessibility by focusing on the needs of ordinary people. In doing so, this spiritual gift provides healing for ordinary people's grievances (Montero 2020).

It is important to note that Brazil is a secular state. However, since re-democratisation, Evangelicals have played an important role in Brazilian politics. Trends show that the growth of Evangelicalism was accompanied by a rise in Evangelical political representation, and thus, increased influence in Congress (Larcercda 2018: 98). Since the 1960s, this political impact of Evangelical churches in Brazil has received scholarly attention. Within these debates, focus is placed on the premise of religion and morality and the legalised separation of the church and state (Machado 2012). Jolien Visser-Similon (2020) argues that this argument is not in line with contemporary Brazil. Drawing on the Weberian modernity thesis, Visser-Similon (2020) argues that the religious shift from Catholicism to various Evangelical denominations has led to increased religiosity and religious heterogeneity. Other scholars argue that these Evangelical churches use clientelistic practices, to garner electoral support from fellow Evangelicals through a herd vote²⁸, and these factors are thus harmful to democracy (D'Epinay 1970; Bastian 1994; Chesnut 1997; Gaskill 1997).

A Datafolho (2017) survey also revealed that 19% of the Brazilian electorate considered voting for the candidate proposed by a church. Of this 19%, 31% of Pentecostal Evangelicals stated that they would vote for a candidate proposed by a church. However, in an historical analysis of Evangelicalism in Brazilian politics, Amy Smith (2019: 8) found that despite Evangelicals being a strong voting bloc with a growing influence in Brazil's legislative assembly, the Evangelical

²⁸ Refers to a group of individuals who are influenced to cast a vote for a particular candidate based on beliefs or ideologies (Istalo 2020: 89).

endorsement for Presidential candidates was unsuccessful due to their heterogeneous nature and the inability of religious leader to agree on a single candidate. According, Eric Miller and Roland Morgan (2016), unity within the Evangelical Church does not exist. Rather, it is an assortment of groups or churches who are classified based on their practices, histories and rituals. This changed in 2018 with Evangelical churches across Brazil endorsing one candidate, Bolsonaro (Chestnut 2019).

It is important to note that former left-wing President Lula fostered an alliance with evangelical churches in 2008 (Hunter 2007). However, the growing prominence of gender and identity politics within the PT led to a collapse of this relationship in 2016 (Lapper 2020: 150). In an interview with numerous Evangelical leaders, Lapper (2020: 155) found that generally Evangelicals were unhappy with the PTs support for homosexuality and believed that the PTs involvement in corruption and their implementation of leftist policies was the root cause of moral decay in Brazil.

This historical shift towards a unified Evangelical bloc presents an anomaly. This case provides a unique insight into how the Bolsonaro campaign used emotive strategic communication on WhatsApp to break the historical shackles of a fragmented religious right and create a unified right that represented the interests of the people. In chapters 4 and 5, this dissertation explores how Bolsonaro capitalised on Evangelical unhappiness through the use of conservative messaging that resonated with their specific personal values. In doing so, it examines how Bolsonaro was able to break the historical shackles of a fragmented religious right and create a unified right that represented the interests of the people, using emotive messaging on WhatsApp.

3.3. Conclusion

This chapter focused on the theoretical framework and research methodology which guided this dissertation. In doing so, the chapter traced the theoretical origins of the Theory of Affective Intelligence, defined its key concepts and tenets, and discussed the theory's limitations. This chapter concluded by describing the data capture method and analytical approach.

CHAPTER 4: DATA CAPTURE AND ANALYSIS

4. Introduction

This dissertation set out to investigate how emotive strategic political communication was used on WhatsApp to drive Evangelical support for the right-wing populist Jair Bolsonaro. To do so, this chapter implements a two-step analysis method. First, the chapter measured the sentiment [emotive] elements within these messages using the text analysis application called Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC-22). Then, through the use of a latent content analysis, the underlying meanings and topics addressed in the sample messages were described. In doing so, this two-step process contextualises the relationship between the emotions evoked by the WhatsApp content and the topics presented. The political communication strategies used by the campaign is addressed in the next chapter.

This chapter provides a brief overview of the data collection, how emotive elements were measured and the categorisation of topic fields. The sample messages are then discussed in line with these categories. In doing so, this chapter provides the foundation for how the role of emotive strategic communication is assessed by drawing on the Theory of Affective Intelligence.

4.1. WhatsApp and Bolsonaro

4.1.1. The Bolsonaro campaign and WhatsApp

As discussed in chapter 3, 2018 was the first time a Brazilian national election was primarily conducted through social media, due to the Political Reform Law. Researchers concluded that Bolsonaro had ‘manipulated’ these new changes, proposed by the Facebook Bill, to reach voters online (Machado et al. 2018; da Silva 2020; Stringhini et al. 2019).

In comparison to smaller parties, larger and popular parties receive more airtime on television and radio for political advertisement. As discussed in Chapter 2, Bolsonaro belonged to a small party and therefore only received 8 seconds of airtime on television and radio. Despite this limitation, his campaign avoided participating in political debates and preferred reaching his audience through live streams over Facebook and Twitter (Stringhini et al. 2019: 90). Moreover, following his hospitalisation, Bolsonaro ceased the majority of his in-person campaigning (Pacheco 2018). As a

result, Bolsonaro went onto inaugurated a “new communication *modus operandi* during electoral campaigns in Brazil” (da Silva 2020: 20).

In an examination of the use of encrypted groups on WhatsApp during the 2018 election, Rafael Evangelista and Fernanda Bruno (2019) found that WhatsApp played a vital role in the Brazilian elections. Given WhatsApp’s embeddness in the everyday life of Brazilians, the campaign recognised that “establishing communication with voters through the app was crucial to the campaign’s success” (Mello 2019: 1). Moreover, according to Richard Lapper (2020), Brazilians felt disconnected from party leaders in the run up to the 2018 election. As such, WhatsApp narrowed the gap between the leaders and the electorate and was vital for the Bolsonaro campaign. Research showed that messaging apps are increasingly being used for interpersonal political discussion among non-elite members of a political community (Schmitt-Beck 2019: 341). In comparison to social networking sites (Facebook/Instagram/Twitter), WhatsApp depends on the user’s willingness to add known contacts and join groups to create a network which is dependent on the users’ social capital. Using this feature, the Bolsonarista network created a ‘Bolsoesfera’ (Bolsonaro Bubble) (Paia & Alves 2022: 8) to replace Bolsonaro’s traditional political advertising on television and radio and provided an open space for the leader to coordinate the campaign and create or share content over the app (dos Santos et al. 2022: 9). Most importantly, WhatsApp worked as a mechanism for the fast spread of news among general voters. In doing so, Bolsoesfera allowed for general voters to act as campaign managers and offset Bolsonaro’s limited time on traditional media outlets, while also using WhatsApp as a means for information sharing amongst the general population.

As such, the Bolsonaro campaign identified the app to deliver messages and fake news with the goal of exacerbating feelings of anti-pestismo, distrust in traditional media, and morality with regards to anti-feminism and anti-LGBTQ+ positions (Evangelista & Bruno 2019: 8). In order to deliver information, evidence suggested that WhatsApp was weaponised by the Bolsonaro campaign through the formulation of a Bolsonarista network. Letica Cesarino (2019: 19) organised the Bolsonarista network on WhatsApp into five categories:

- i. Official: which included Bolsonaro's exclusive circle comprising of himself, his children, close campaign managers and candidates.
- ii. Unofficial: content was distributed vertically and unilaterally by managers.
- iii. Militancy: populous groups with a horizontal exchange between members.
- iv. Personal networks: groups created by users with personal bonds.
- v. Media ecosystem: the circulation of content and links from other platforms.

A recent study by the Institute for Technology and Society (2019) found that pro-Bolsonaro groups comprised of users who showed signs of automation and shared the same message and material across multiple groups, repeatedly. These automated accounts, called 'bots' are defined as "(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" (Assenmacher et al. 2020: 33). In the case of Brazil, these bots acted as a catalyst to expose political content across a network of groups. These bots were used to spread misinformation and confuse the user between real and fake content. Similarly, Cesarino (2019) recognised that digital bubbles were not formed spontaneously, instead, paid-bulk messaging was shown but not investigated by the electoral courts.

In 2018, Brazilian newspaper Folha de S.Paulo (2019) alleged that pro-Bolsonaro businessmen signed contracts with US-based marketing agencies. These agencies specialised in bulk messaging on WhatsApp and acquired user lists sold by data brokers. Using a series of data bases (obtained from Census and purchased from telecommunication companies) marketers generated international numbers to administer and participate in WhatsApp groups. It was further revealed that algorithms were used to segment "group members into supporters, detractors and neutrals and that content shared with these groups depended on this segmentation" (Evangelista & Bruno 2019: 9; Mello 2018: 2). Moreover, active Bolsonaro supporters were contacted to create groups in favour of the candidate (Valente 2018). Given WhatsApp's deep penetration in the population and zero-rating policies²⁹ users received and sent content, even in the absence of access to the internet (Pena & Veron 2019: 67).

²⁹ "Data that does not count towards one's data cap" (Mello 2018).

Given that WhatsApp does not offer micro-segmentation, marketing agencies played this role through the use of software called WNL, which monitors interest groups and distributes content. In a video article titled *Your Phone Number is Worth 9 Cents on Politicians Zap* Amanda Audi and Tatiana Dias (2020) concluded that WNL users were measured in terms of their emotions and receptivity towards content shared by the campaign. As such, these agencies identified an ideal target group and specific timeframe to share this content. This segmentation was refined through observing user reactions to the content shared. These reactions were then rated as positive, negative or neutral. Positive users received information in favour of Bolsonaro, while neutral users received content opposing the ‘other’ and ‘establishment’. Negative users received content which “target values dear to the person, such as family and religion, in an attempt to inflate rejection towards the candidate's competitor” (Audi & Dias 2020). By observing reactions, these WhatsApp users were then segmented into individual files and categorised into groups depending on trending issues, such as corruption, that the campaign used strategically. WNL enabled group observers to gather and select keywords to discover various interests, and to find people with similar interests. For example, if a cancer patient speaks on their treatment, data finds individuals in similar conditions, and they receive content focused on the candidate’s health policies (Audi & Dias 2018).

4.2. Overview of data collection and analysis

As discussed in the previous chapter, the WhatsApp data set used in this study consists of secondary data collected and published by numerous peer-reviewed studies. This dissertation diverts from the analysis put forward by the mentioned sources. Rather than studying the misinformation and disinformation in these messages, this dissertation analysed the emotions these messages aimed to evoke. It also studied how different crises that engulfed Brazil dictated the topics addressed.

To conduct its latent content analysis, the sample messages were categorised into 3 topic fields, anti-pestismo (anti-Workers Party), moral crusade and Bolsonaro as a Messiah. To measure emotional sentiments, LIWC-22 was used. As mentioned in Chapter 3, LIWC-22 “calculates the degree to which a text contains words that belong to an empirically defined psychological and structural category and determines the rate at which cognitions and emotions are present in the given text” (Pennebaker et al. 2015: 43). After the data cleaning procedure, a total of 12 messages were analysed. The messages were divided into three sections that measured fear, anger and

enthusiasm. Here, LIWC-22 generated a positive numerical score, by reading the messaging and comparing each word to the list of words in the Portuguese dictionary. A percentage was then generated of the total words which match the categories of: anger, fear and negative emotion; and enthusiasm and positive emotion. This division of measuring fear, anger and enthusiasm is vital for the discussion presented in Chapter 5. For a more detailed description of the coding frame used and LIWC-22, please see Chapter 3.

4.3. Sentiment analysis

According to the summative figures shown in Table 2, 41.66% of messages contained elements of only anger, while 25% of messages contained elements of only fear. 8.33% of messages contained elements of anger and fear. Lastly, 25% of messages contained elements of enthusiasm.

Table 2: Summative measurement of emotions

12	All messages	%
Anger > 0	5	41.66%
Fear > 0	3	25%
Anger and Fear > 0	1	8.33%
Enthusiasm	3	25%

These results confirm that that the strategic political communication tactics implemented aimed to mobilise the electorate by providing them with an image and narrative that played on the emotions of anger, fear and enthusiasm. As mentioned in Chapter 2 (da Silva 2020: 20; Schroeder 2018), much of the literature on emotions and populism claims that fear is the primary driving force behind support for right-wing populists, however these scores show that anger and enthusiasm also drive support for right-wing populism.

4.4. Topic categories

This section provides a detailed examination of the emotive elements within the sample messages and described the topics addressed. Moreover, it illustrates the relationship between the emotive elements, topics and strategies used, namely: populism, fake news and micro-targeting. Studies by Folha de S.Paulo (2018), Marco de Barros et al. (2020), Tatiana Dourado and Susana Salgado (2021), found that majority of the fake news shared on WhatsApp reflected far-right values promoted by Bolsonaro during the months of August and September 2018. These fake news stories

fell into four categories: conspiracy theories, misleading information about Bolsonaro's stabbing attack, dismissing the political establishment/elites and targeting left-wing politicians and activists (Isaac & Rose 2018).

For the purpose of this dissertation, focus was placed on fake news, primarily disinformation, relating to dismissing the political establishment, religion and targeting left-wing politicians. This was done to examine how Bolsonaro used fake news to elicit anger, enthusiasm and fear, foster a sense of group-identity and present a threat towards political habits or the alternative.

4.4.1. The Moral Crusade

Politics does not occur in a vacuum of values, rather it occurs in a normative environment that is subject to religious influences³⁰ (Fox 2007: 12). As such, religion and politics have a reciprocal and complex relationship, even in a secular state like Brazil (Zilla 2020: 76). By shaping the lifestyle and beliefs of its followers, religion can inspire and drive political decision-making, particularly during an election (da Costa 2020: 78).

Under the PT administration, Brazil became more accepting of LGBTQ+ individuals, and since the early 2000s Brazil has passed a range of laws granting LGBTQ+ individuals equal rights. These included legalisation that allowed same sex unions, the right for same-sex couples to jointly adopt children, recognising same-sex couples as stable family units by granting them broader inheritance rights and pension plans and ruling that same-sex unions be converted to marriage if requested (Human Rights Watch 2012). In addition to expanding federal rights, the government also implemented several policies to tackle LGBTQ+ specific issues. These include the 2004 *“Brazil without Homophobia Program: Program for Combating Violence and Discrimination against Gays, Lesbians, Transgender and Bisexuals (GLBT), the National Plan for the Promotion of LGBT*

³⁰ For example, recognising Rousseff's unpopularity among religious and moral arenas during the 2010 elections, Evangelical churches pushed Rousseff to commit towards vetoing projects that went against life and family values, and to reject homosexuality (Michel & Pace 2019: 261). In the midst of anti-religious accusations, Rousseff released a statement committing herself to: not de-criminalising abortion as she initially campaigned towards, rejecting initiatives which jeopardise the family and guaranteed that if a Bill criminalising homophobia was passed, she would sign into law “articles that do not violate freedom of belief, expression and other Constitutional guarantees” (Folha 2010: 4). Following this statement, both Evangelical and Protestant pastors released statements providing reasons for why Christians should vote for Rousseff (Michel & Pace 2019: 262).

Rights, and the National System to Combat Violence against LGBT and Promotion of Rights” (Irineu 2014: 89).

However, in the past decade Brazil witnessed a growing moral agenda in congress (Smith 2019: 8). Within the Brazilian political realm, pressured by the Congressional Evangelical coalition who claimed that gender ideology threatened family values, Rousseff vetoed a bill allowing for the distribution of LGBTQ+ education materials and opposed a bill classifying “bias-motivated attacks based on sexual orientation as a prosecutable hate crime” (Human Rights Commission 2016: 8). Similarly, outside of Congress, religious (mainly Evangelical groups) engaged in a ‘cultural war’ against feminists, the left, and LGBTQ+ groups who were seen as immoral due to their promotion of leftist gender ideology (Michel & Pace 2019: 250).

As mentioned in Chapter 2 and above, Evangelical Christianity plays an important role in Brazilian politics. As such, their desire for belonging and dignity make Evangelicals a strong voting bloc. Like other religions, Evangelicals have a world view grounded in a particular set of values and beliefs that act as vectors of approval/valuation and of prohibition, sanction and punishment. These values are the lens through which they distinguish between moral and immoral behaviour (Lelo & Caminhas 2020: 186). Across Evangelical demonitations, Biblical text is regarded as clear. In other words, Evangelicals observe a literal meaning of the Bible. As such, this literal interpretation is a mark of identity and encourages a connection between text and action (Trimm 2020: 89).

A study by sociologist Christina Vital (2020) shows that both religious Catholics and Protestants in Brazil are conservative, with many longing for a return to social norms, which were lost due to the leftist social agenda that protects minorities and promotes diversity. ‘Gender ideology’ is rooted in canon law, a set of regulations made by the Vatican church leadership for the government of a Christian organisation/church and its members (Osle 2018: 6). According to canon law, leftist ideology serves to deconstruct gender differences and leads to the dismantling of traditional family values (Vaggione 2020: 85). By deconstructing gender differences, a war between the sexes emerges. Within this war, motherhood is devalued, people no longer marry, contraception and abortion are promoted, and homosexuality is accepted (Case 2019). This leftist gender ideology, as the Evangelicals label it, contradicts their interpretation of gender, which they perceive to be

biblically based on the ‘creation order’. Here, men and women have separate roles, defined by male headship and female submission (George et al. 2020). Moreover, Evangelicalism disapproves of homosexuality, same-sex marriage and sex outside of marriage (Smith 2019: 17). As such, the leftist gender ideology threatens the core beliefs and values of Evangelicals – and consequently, the Evangelical view of morality (Vital 2020: 6).

Grounded in this context, the Bolsonaro campaign micro-targeted Evangelicals to capitalise on this moral panic (Messenberg 2017: 13). Central to Bolsonaro’s Evangelical communication strategy was the creation and distribution of content on WhatsApp which appealed to these values, emphasised how these values have been eradicated and the urgency to reinstate these values. This is discussed in detail in the WhatsApp messages below which depicted a:

“war of images between religious values and the pernicious values raised by feminist movements, intellectuals and relativists, establishing emblems, constructing their reputations, evoking feelings and producing religious truths to fight against bills, groups and themes that are enemies of the Gospel” (Duarte 2020: 77).

According to BrasilWire (2018), Comprova (2019) and Bruno and Evangelista (2019), attacks on the women and the LGBTQ+ community were the second most frequent fake news topic shared on WhatsApp. As such, this section is divided into two sub-sections. First, *sexuality as moral panic* that focused on homosexuality and gender ideology. Second, *feminism as moral panic* which concentrated on feminism, women and sexuality.

4.4.1.1. Sexuality as moral panic

According to Comprova (2019), Figure 1 was shared approximately 400 000 times on WhatsApp, making it the most popular image distributed during the period of September-October 2018. This image laid the foundation for what is referred to as the ‘gay kit’. When examined through LIWC-22, it received an **anger score** of 29.78, the highest anger score amongst the sample. Figure 1 also received a **fear score** of 30.4, the highest fear score amongst the same.



Figure 1 (Comprova 2019)

Translation: If you want to protect the children, don't vote for him. Haddad is the inventor of Gay Kit for 6-year old's.

The term 'gay kit' had been circulating for 8 years and was a convenient launching pad for the Bolsonaro campaign to structure their messaging. The 'gay kit' stems from Haddad's attempt, while he was Minister of Education (2005-2012), to introduce a book on gender education for public schools and to tackle homophobia among children and teens (Oualalaou 2019: 5). However, Evangelical pastors such as Silas Malafaia (2012) criticised the gay kits for trying to turn children into homosexuals.

Moreover, since 2012, Bolsonaro has been vocal against progressive academics and teachers who support homosexuality by blaming these progressives for "perverting' children" (Fisher & Taub 2019: 90). This messaging is particularly evident in Figure 2 which reached over 3 million WhatsApp users according Comprova (2019). The video alleged that Haddad distributed erotic bottles, with penis shaped teats pre-schoolers, and was attached with the caption "*look what PT [Haddad's party] is putting in the child day care, oh my God*" (Piaia 2021: 56). When analysed through LIWC-22, Figure 2 received an **anger score** of 15.38.



Figure 2 (BrasilWire 2018)

Still from a video claiming that Haddad distributed erotic baby bottles in pre-school.

(Please note that this still was sensitised for the purpose of this dissertation. The de-sensitised image can be found in the appendix).

Echoing the sentiments sowed by Malafaia and capitalising on a well-known conspiracy theory, Figures 1 and 2 portrayed the PT as a party who wants to sexualise children and entice them towards homosexuality. They do so by highlighting the role Haddad played in establishing the ‘gay kit’ and situating him as the antagonist, who has the potential to harm and indoctrinate children. Within Evangelicalism and Christianity as a whole, targeting children in such a manner is particularly offensive. From a biblical perspective, God’s plan is for children to be protected, specifically from the influence of bad company who are corrupted by lust and deception (The Holy Bible: Corinthians. 15:33; The Holy Bible: Proverbs. 13:20; The Holy Bible: Romans. 13:14)³¹. Moreover, parents are responsible for guiding and training children to live by the word of God (The Holy Bible: Deuteronomy. 11:19)³².

In Figures 1 and 2, classrooms are shown to promote values that contradict Evangelicalism and aim to shape students’ moral judgement and attitudes towards certain subjects, specifically sexual orientation, gender issues and traditional family models. According to Isabela Kalil (2019: 115) exposure to such content aims to turn students into homosexuals and eradicate the nuclear family model. The goal of this type of education, is not to impart knowledge, but to instil feelings and values in the consciousness of children to determine their behaviour (Bengsston et al. 2020: 199).

³¹ “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Holy Bible: Romans. 13:14), and “Be not deceived, evil companionship corrupts good morals” (Holy Bible: Corinthians. 15:33).

³² “You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” (Holy Bible: Deuteronomy. 11:19).

This equates sex education and homophobia to brainwashing. In this case books and bottles are used as a mental manipulation technique (Nagib 2014: 21). As such, the gay kit and video were portrayed as a direct threat to the natural sexual binary (or the classification of gender into male and female) of Evangelicalism and to the morality of children and the family. Therefore, pushing the narrative that the only way to protect children and family values was to not vote for Haddad (Evangelista & Bruno 2019: 78).

Figure 3 describes the consequence of such indoctrination and was the 5th most shared image across the 209 pro-Bolsonaro WhatsApp groups studied by Evangelista & Bruno (2019: 9). This image received a **fear score** of 6.25.



Figure 3 (Evangelista & Bruno 2019)

Translation: This is the rights they want, and if you don't agree they will call you homophobic.

This image was attached with the caption “people from Globo-Trash [Rede Globo, a news outlet] who do not support Bolsonaro” (Bruno & Evangelista 2019: 7). Figure 3 portrayed children as a ‘generation of zombies’ who are used to fulfil the perverse ideas of the left and same-sex couples (Hamlin 2021: 1022; Tunek 2019: 110). This ‘zombie’ generation are the result of Haddad’s personal agenda that brainwashed children and labelled those who do not support this initiative as being homophobic (Tunek 2019: 111). The narrative continues to say that children are no longer be able to distinguish between what is morally right and wrong.

Moreover, in recent years, ‘politically correct culture’ (PC) has risen to importance (Shafter 2017: 4). Given that PC is embedded within the fibre of society, many individuals seek to avoid actions and expressions that may marginalise or discriminate others (Shafter 2017: 5). By claiming that “they will call you homophobic” if one does not accept homosexuality, it emphasises the

prominence of PC in Brazilian society and how PC dictates opinions held. As per Figure 3, gender ideology is depicted to hinder religious freedom and branding someone as ‘homophobic’ clearly opposes the PC culture. It is also important to note that Bolsonaro adopted an anti-PC stance. Given that the PC culture is often associated with the left, Bolsonaro distanced himself from this culture by presenting a lack of sensitivity towards other groups and marginalising others. An example includes the constant discriminatory statements – “Bolsonaro stating that Black individuals in quilombo’s³³ are not even good for pro-creation” (Chacko 2017: 6, Hunter & Power 2019: 77). These statements were made prior to their running, but were reiterated in the campaigns messages/themes to appeal to certain sentiments, particularly anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments.

Figures 1, 2 and 3 also emphasised the lack of control parents have over the content their children are exposed to, which resonated with Brazilians who consider sexual education of children to be the exclusive responsibility of parents (Cotroneo 2020: 4). More specifically, in doing so, this prevents Evangelical parents from carrying out their inherent duty, which is guiding and training children to live by the word of god (Holy Bible: Deuteronomy. 11:19). Moreover, this dissertation argued that by emphasising this lack of parental control, the Bolsonaro campaign effectively portrayed the PT as an authoritarian regime that demanded blind submission to their authority. Hence, playing into the portrayal that the communist PT devalue religious freedom and inclusion of religious voices.

Both Figure’s 2 and 3 were found to be fake news. There was no evidence to show that Haddad had distributed these erotic bottles to children, and the electoral court demanded that the video be removed off Facebook and WhatsApp (Kroon & Ying 2019). By making reference to Brazilian news outlet Rede Globo, this caption pushed the narrative that this image was taken in Brazil, however this image was taken in New York during the 2015 pride month (Evangelista & Bruno 2019).

³³ Hinterland settlement founded by individuals, particularly escaped slaves, of African origin.

4.4.2. Feminism and gender as moral panic

Ahead of the first round of the elections in September 2018, Bolsonaro led the polls with 28% of support but also had the highest rejection rate (44%) of any candidate (Datafolha 2018). According to an Ibope poll (2018), his support amongst women was thin, with only 18% of women supporting him, while 36% of men surveyed supported Bolsonaro.

This gap between male and female voters was unsurprising. Over his 30-year political career, Bolsonaro became notorious for his sexist remarks. These included, but were not limited to, statements such as: “I would be incapable of having a homosexual son, I rather he dies in an accident”, women should earn lower salaries because they get pregnant”, I have five children, four are men, and then in a moment of weakness the fifth came out a girl, and in a conversation with a fellow female deputy “I would not rape you because you do not deserve it” (Fishman 2019).

On 29 September 2018, protesters took to the streets of Brazil chanting ‘#EleNao’ (#NotHim). Organised on Facebook, with approximately 4 million women joining the “Mulheres contra Bolsonaro” (*women against Bolsonaro*) group and supported by feminist movements and political parties, protestors campaigned against Bolsonaro and his sexist declarations (Uchoa 2018). Around 1 million people participated in the protest across 300 cities and 21 countries.

However, days after the protest, female support for Bolsonaro increased by 5% (Datafolha 2018), which was attributed to Bolsonaro’s social media strategy. Brian Mier (2018) argues that in response to the #EleNao protests, the Bolsonaro campaign and his followers immediately moved to discredit the protest by circulating messages, primarily photos, on WhatsApp that attacked feminism and feminists. According to Mier (2018) the Bolsonaro network specifically created content to micro-target Evangelical Christian women on social media, specifically WhatsApp. Here, small groups of influencers, shared these WhatsApp images in large groups made up of pro-Bolsonaro supporters. These supporters then forwarded these messages to Christian groups and groups comprised of ordinary Brazilians (Nemer 2019).

Figures 4 and 5 are examples of messaging curated to discredit the protest. Figure 4 received a **fear score** of 7.41, the highest fear score amongst the sample. Figure 4, shows a picture of topless

women at the #ElNao protest, with the caption “*Feminists display themselves as sluts going out onto the streets naked. What about you? Do you think the person denigrating the image of women is Bolsonaro?*”. Similarly, Figure 5 shows a montage of photos taken at Brazilian churches – a same-sex couple having sex in a church and a woman defecating on a church stairway – with the caption “feminists invade church, defecate and have sex” (Evangelista & Bruno 2019: 8). When examined through LIWC-22, Figure 5 received an **anger score** of 10.00.

The captions fed into the Evangelical narrative, particularly the anti-gender ideology [anti-feminist] and anti-LGBTQ sentiments, and were not proven to be true. Figure 4 purportedly portrays feminists at the 2018 #EleNao protests but the image was proven to be a doctored picture of lesbian activists at the Gay Pride Parade held in Portugal in 2017 (BrasilWire 2019). Similarly, the images shown in Figure 5 did not occur in Brazil. The photos originally show a same-sex couple having sex in a church in Oslo and a woman defecating on a church stairway in Buenos Aires – in 2011 and 2015 respectively (Evangelista & Bruno 2019).



Figure 4 (BrasilWire 2019)

Translation: Feminists display themselves as sluts going out onto the streets naked What about you? Do you think that the person denigrating the image of women is Bolsonaro? (Please note that this image has been deliberately blurred, the original image can be found in the appendix).



Figure 5 (Evangelista & Bruno 2019)

Translation: Feminists invade churches and defecate and perform sexual acts therein. (Please note that this image has been deliberately blurred, the original image can be found in the appendix).

In an analysis on Bolsonaro, leftist gender ideology and social media in Brazil, scholars such as Sonia Correra (2020), Debbie Ging and Eugenia Siapera (2019), Jenny Sunden and Susanne Paasonen (2018) and Claudia Alvares (2018) found that the Bolsonaro campaign attacked gender ideology by re-enforcing shame towards the hyper-sexualised behaviour of feminists, while also emphasising the importance of modesty and prudence as per the Evangelical interpretation of Biblical scripture. For example, by referring to women as sluts and emphasising their nudity, Figures 4 and 5 portray these women as promiscuous, who do not respect their bodies. According to Christian scripture, specifically Hebrew 13:4³⁴, promiscuity is viewed as a repeated violation of God's standards for sex. Evangelicals interpret the scripture to say that God created sex to be a beautiful expression of love and one that will propagate the human species. However, God is aware of the devastation that results from abusing sex and puts limits on one's sexual expression. As such, promiscuity is an abuse of sexual power, that robs participants of their self-worth and dignity (The Holy Bible: Hebrew. 13: 4).

By depicting women in this manner, the message intended to tap into the Evangelical belief that sex outside of marriage or so-called promiscuous behaviour is a form of sexual immorality, a sin that separates us from God (Klassen 2022: 45). Moreover, a lustful appetite is classified as one of the worst sins that can be committed. Evangelicals, therefore, assume a literal interpretation of the Bible that glorifies Christ and his ability to heal sin and that those who desire a relationship with God must have clean hands and a pure heart (Zilla 2020: 67). They argue then that it is impossible to be a good person and have a pure heart or clean hands when you engaged in promiscuity (Klassen 2022). This narrative resonated particularly with Evangelical women, due to a purity culture which engulfs these women. Purity encourages gender norms and is attached to a woman's virginity and the need to be modest. If women do not abide by these 'rules' they are subjected to eternal damnation. These rules create a powerful sense of shame and feeds the narrative that there is no other sin that would seem worthy of hell (Gardella 2016: 9). Within this hell, individuals, particularly women in this case, who do not conform to the Evangelical view on purity face endless suffering and are banished from God's presence (Lewis & Peterson 2005: 97).

³⁴ "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (Hebrew 13: 4).

Moreover, by altering the images of Figure 5, the Bolsonaro campaign intended to portray feminists and supporters of the protests as blasphemous individuals (Evangelista & Bruno 2019). Blasphemy refers to the actions and words that are against God, which is an unforgivable sin in Christianity. By showing images of women having sex in church and defecating on church steps, these women (feminists) are viewed to be vandalising the church (the House of God) and destroying a religious object, which is sacrilege. As such, the behaviour exhibited in Figure 5 represents a deliberate turning away from God. Individuals who commit sacrilege are believed to descend immediately into Hell (Launonen 2022: 90).

According to Mier (2019: 8) and Evangelista and Bruno (2019: 14), Figures 4 and 5 were accompanied by a text which read *“this [is] what Haddad thinks about family values”*. This portrayed Haddad as a threat to family values and one that supports immorality and the destruction of Evangelical beliefs (da Silva 2020). Scholars such as da Silva (2020: 14) and Silvana Marinho (2022: 17) found that Evangelical family values are rooted in the concept of ‘cis-hetropatriarchy’. As per these hetropatriarchal ideals, cis-gender³⁵ heterosexual men occupy the highest position of power within society. Thus, femininity and masculinity are constructed to maintain the binary distinction between male superiority and female submission. As described above, this relates to the canon law which states that men and women have separate roles. Here, men are the leaders, providers, protectors of the family and should provide spiritual direction; while women are homemakers (Kersh 2022: 778). Heterosexuality and gender norms is perceived as the standard. As such, LGBTQ+ individuals and women/men who do not live by this benchmark, are perceived as a threat to Evangelical family values (Marinho & Anastacio 2022: 19).

It is evident by Figures 4 and 5 and the caption attached to these messages, that the Bolsonaro campaign capitalised on the role played by Haddad in promoting ‘leftist gender-ideology’. Figure 4 demonstrates that exposure to feminism and gender ideology by the PT, has “destroyed women” (da Silva 2020: 239). Given this leftist indoctrination, women are now unable to fulfil their submissive roles as per Evangelical family values. Moreover, Figure 5 pushes the narrative that

³⁵ An individual whose gender and personal identity corresponds with their sex assigned at birth.

this gender ideology promoted by Haddad, eroded Evangelical values to create a morally corrupt government, that erased the practice of meritocracy and favoured minorities at the expense of Evangelicals (da Silva 2020: 240).

4.4.3. Anti-pestismo

As mentioned above, like other religions, Evangelicals have a world view grounded in a particular set of values and beliefs that act as vectors of approval and valuation (Lelo & Caminhas 2020: 186). According to their scripture, corruption is a manifestation of sin, and people who partake in corruption are guided by the devil (The Holy Bible: Isaiah. 14:12-14; The Holy Bible: Revelation. 12:7-9; The Holy Bible: Ezekiel. 28:1-19). As such, no man or nation should be corrupt (Romans 12:1-2). Those who sincerely worship God must reject corruption, as justice ensures stability while corruption impoverishes a nation. If God's followers do not reject corruption, society (Brazil) will corrode as it did in Rome and Israel. Thus, God wants each and every one of us to replace greed with unselfishness and corruption with "righteousness for He is forgiving" (The Holy Bible: Isaiah. 55:7).

In a study of Bolsonaro's 2018 election, Andreza Asuka (2021: 99) found that the Bolsonaro campaign micro-targeted Evangelicals based on their religious values, particularly their discontent for corruption. As discussed in Chapter 2, the PT tenure (2004-2016) was marked by a range of corruption scandals and an economic and political crisis. According to Brian Winter (2017) the most common critique of the PT was their excessive public spending, 'communist'³⁶ economic policies and corrupt practices. These events spurred public anger and gave rise to an anti-pestismo (anti-PT) sentiment (Samuels & Zucco 2018).

Scholars such as Evangelista and Bruno (2019), Stuart Davis and Joe Straubhaar (2019) and da Silva (2020), and news outlets Comprova (2020) and The Guardian (2020), found that pro-Bolsonaro groups on WhatsApp maximised on this sentiment, by pushing an anti-PT narrative, particularly in the form of creating a personal resentment towards the PT and their corruption (Samuels & Zucco 2018). This was done through the articulation and dissemination of fake news. For example, in an analysis of 11,957 viral messages shared across 296 groups, The Guardian

³⁶ The Bolsonaro campaign used the concepts of socialism and communism interchangeably.

(2019) found that 42% of information shared on WhatsApp was fake. Within these messages, 16% of messages reflected key elements of an anti-PT rhetoric (i.e. false content which reflected the PT as corrupt and communists). These negative sentiments were encouraged by the following messages which highlighted an anti-PT stance.

According to Evangelista and Bruno (2019: 8), Figure 6 was the most shared message across the WhatsApp groups studied and was attached with the caption “*Rousseff, a communist sympathiser*”. When analysed through LIWC-22, this message generated an **anger score** of 15.79.



Figure 6 (Evangelista & Bruno 2019)

In this message, Rousseff is seen socialising with Fidel Castro, former President of Cuba. As mentioned above, Brazilians had lost faith in the PT’s attempt at communism, particularly their attempt at communist economic policies, and many maintained that the left had failed them with these policies (Winter 2017). Associating Rousseff with Castro was thus particularly strategic (Evangelista & Bruno 2019: 89). Firstly, Castro is a symbol of the Communist Revolution in Latin America. Secondly, the communist project pioneered by Castro, it could be argued, had failed the people of Cuba. Here, in an analysis on Cuban Communism, Melisa Chan (2018) found that Cuba had slipped in and out of recession and their gross domestic product barely exceeded a growth of 1.6% between the years 2000-2017. Citizens were directly affected by these policies, with state controlled farms being unable to feed the population resulting in a food shortage and citizens earning extremely low wages (less than \$17 a day) and making it difficult to attain an acceptable standard of living (Stott 2021). Thirdly, the Cuban government was identified to have a lack of political willingness to change these policies in the face of economic crisis and were found to put

their ideological preferences above the needs of the people. Fourthly, Castro and his communism viewed upper class Cubans as the enemy of the people and chose to implement policies which benefited the poor and minorities over upper class concerns. This led to a mass migration of Cuban elites following the fall of the Batista regime (1952-1959) (Blizzard & Batalova 2018). Lastly, Castro followed the tradition of communist-atheism, and barred religious activity in Cuba and Christians from joining politics between 1962-1990 (Goldenziel 2019: 179).

Grounded in these assumptions, Figure 6 aimed to highlight the similarities between Rousseff (PT) and Castro's communism, particularly emphasising that the PT drew inspiration for their governance and policies from the Castro regime (de Moraes 2022: 34; Evangelista & Bruno 2019). Like Cuba, Brazil was also experiencing an economic crisis because of the failures in government policy. By showcasing a friendly relationship between Rousseff and Castro, the campaign intended to create the narrative that the PT held deep rooted communist beliefs, and like their Cuban counterparts, were unwilling to break from their ideological preferences, at the expense of Brazilians (Santos 2022: 87). Secondly, given that these economic policies catered to poorer Brazilians, it emphasised the grievances held by upper/middle class Brazilians, particularly feelings of exclusion from these policies and the inclusion of poor Brazilians in upper/middle class spaces (e.g. universities) (Winter 2017: 8). Lastly, the PT are portrayed as putting their ideology above God and excluding religion and religious individuals from the political conversation. Once again, emphasising the narrative that the PT excludes and demonises those who do not conform to their ideologies (Taddei 2020: 45). Moreover, this image creates doubt surrounding the PT and their ability to handle economic uncertainty. More specifically, that if the PT continued down this communist path, freedom of religion could be barred as it was in Cuba (Evangelista & Bruno 2019: 8). Evidently, this image put forward the narrative that Brazil was repeating the same mistakes as Cuba at the hands PT politicians, and the current experiences, particularly the exclusion of upper/middle class and religious individuals, and communist policies, could be amplified given the lack of political willingness and thus becoming worse (de Moraes 2022: 37).

As mentioned above, fake news relating to anti-PT dominated the WhatsApp groups. Figure 6 was a prime example of this. This photo of Castro was originally shot by renowned photographer, John Duprey, in 1959 (NY Daily News 1959). At the time of this photo, Rousseff was only 11 years' old. According to Evangelista and Bruno (2019: 18), this tampered image intended to associate the

PT with communism. This association of the PT and communism was a recurrent theme amongst Bolsonaro supporters across the 209 WhatsApp groups studied.

Figure 7 shows the 8th most shared image across 209 WhatsApp groups. When examined through LIWC-22, Figure 2 generated an **anger score** of 9.30.

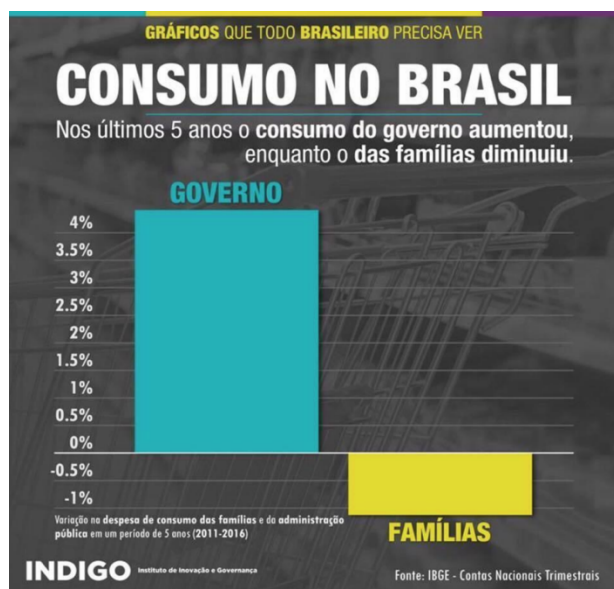


Figure 7 (El Pais: 2019)

Translation: Graphs that all Brazilians must see

Consumption in Brazil

In the last 5 years, the government consumption increased while family consumption decreased.

Government (green)

Families (yellow)

Change in household consumption expenditure and public administration expenditure in the space of 5 years (2011- 2016).

The graph shows government and household expenditure in Brazil over a 5-year period (2011-2016). According to the graph, public administration expenditure by the PT government increased, while household consumption expenditure decreased (El Pais 2019). As such, this graph referred to one of the initial motivators of the 2013 unrest, specifically concerns surrounding the commitment of public funds to build stadiums for the FIFA World Cup and Olympics without public discussion (Reis et al. 2016: 107). Here, this graph was used to depict the PT as reckless spenders who, despite witnessing the plights of the ordinary hardworking Brazilians, continued to prioritise their personal interests. Essentially this narrative emphasised the PT's misuse of power and mismanagement of funds (Evangelista & Bruno 2019: 17).

Figure 7 was another example of fake news shared across WhatsApp groups. According to an investigation conducted by Brazilian news outlet Folha (2018: 87), contrary to what the graph shows, during this period (2011-2016) expenditure by families grew by 1.8%, while expenditure of the public administration rose by 3.1% , not 4% as the graph indicates (El Pais 2019).

In October 2018, 24 newsrooms across Brazil came together to report fake news in a collaborative project called Comprova which was supported by the American think tank First Draft. By setting up a central tip line on WhatsApp, Brazilians were requested to submit tips that Comprova could investigate through its application program interface³⁷ called Zendesk (Comprova 2019: 8). Given WhatsApp’s end to end encryption, this method was the only way to solicit tips without violating the app’s terms of service and privacy conditions (Comprova 2019, First Draft 2018).

From a data set of 242,124 messages received, Figure 8 was shared over 663 times across multiple WhatsApp groups (Comprova 2019: 3). This screenshot shows a fake³⁸ WhatsApp conversation between former Petrobras (a state-owned company) executive Jose Sergio Gabrielli and Fernando Haddad (Comprova 2019: 3).

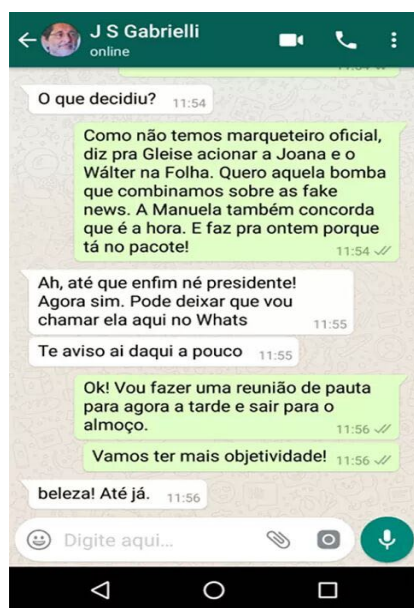


Figure 8 (Comprova 2019)

Translation: What did you decide?

Since we don’t have a marketing agent, tell Gleise to add Joana and Walter to the Folha (newspaper). I want that bombshell that we planned about the fake news. Manuela also agrees that the time is now. Do it as soon as possible as we’ve got it in the bag.

Ahh, at last Mr. President! Now you’re talking. You can leave it in my hands as I’ll call her here on WhatsApp. I’ll let you know in a little while.

Ok! I’m going to plan an agenda meeting for this afternoon and I’m going to go for lunch. We will have more objectivity.

Wonderful! See you soon.

Figure 8 shows Gabrielli and Haddad coordinating attacks against Bolsonaro with the help Brazil’s largest news outlet, Folha. This screenshot was attached to a cheque and a claim that Folha was paid to attack Bolsonaro. This screenshot generated a **fear score** of 1.08 on LIWC-22 and portrays

³⁷ “API is an interface that software developers use to programmatically interact with software components or resources outside of their own code” (Altextsoft 2022) .

³⁸ This screenshot was also classified as fake news by research conducted by the Federal University of Minas Gerais (2018: 8).

three scenarios.

The first scenario focuses on corruption, with the screenshot emphasising that despite repercussions, the PT are still stealing from the public purse. By naming a Petrobras executive, this message references Brazil's largest corruption scandal, Operação Lava Jato (Operation Car Wash). During Operation Car Wash, investigators uncovered an arrangement between the private and public sector, where businesses provided illegal campaign donations³⁹ and bribes to politicians in exchange for favourable treatment, particularly construction contracts at inflated prices (Guerra 2019: 78). During this operation, several corruption charges were filed against Lula. At the same time, Rousseff was also accused of assisting Lula in avoiding prosecution while she was his Chief of Staff. These revelations eventually discredited Brazil's political establishment and resulted in the controversial impeachment and removal of President Rousseff in August 2016 (Kerche & Junior 2018: 56) and the arrest of Lula. In 2017, Lula was found guilty and sentenced to 9.5 years in prison (Afrouzi 2020: 87).

Secondly, by mentioning the involvement of Folha, a mainstream news network, both in the screenshot and the message attached, it pushed the narrative that the media could not be trusted. Here, mainstream media were portrayed as biased and having a personal agenda against Bolsonaro and, by implication, the Brazilian people (Comprova 2019; Evangelista & Bruno 2019: 17). As such, mainstream media was viewed to purposefully mislead Brazilians and could therefore not be trusted. This approach against mainstream media was used to both discredit the establishment and promote the idea that pro-Bolsonaro WhatsApp groups were the only source of true information (da Silva 2019: 7).

Lastly, Figures 8 and 9 (found below) showed that Haddad was no different to his predecessors. Following his arrest, Lula endorsed Haddad as his successor (Igelesias 2018) referring to him as a 'student of PT'. Lula's choice of description highlights that Haddad had been indoctrinated by the PT and was unable to form a stance that existed outside of what he had learnt. This is also reflected in the red suit worn by Haddad in Figure 9. Red is the PT party's colour and wearing it leads the audience to perceive him as representing the PT rather than Brazilians. Moreover, the colour red

³⁹ These donations were considered to be illegal as during this time private companies were granted permission to donate only 2% of their revenue to political parties (Boadale 2015: 8).

is associated with communism and socialism in Brazil (Pehe 2015) and therefore reiterates Haddad's political ideology.

The reference to 'gang', moreover, hints at the PT being an organised criminal group who engaged in illegal activity for their own profit. The use of the word 'student' in Figure 9, the references to corruption and money laundering in Figures 8 and 9, and his conversation with a company renowned for corruption shows that Haddad mirrored Lula's actions. Using the word 'Professor' indicates that Haddad has graduated from being a student and is now a professional in corruption and criminal activities. The inclusion of #PTNAO (#PTNO) was a call for citizens to oppose the PT and vote them out of government (Tamaki et al. 2020: 89).

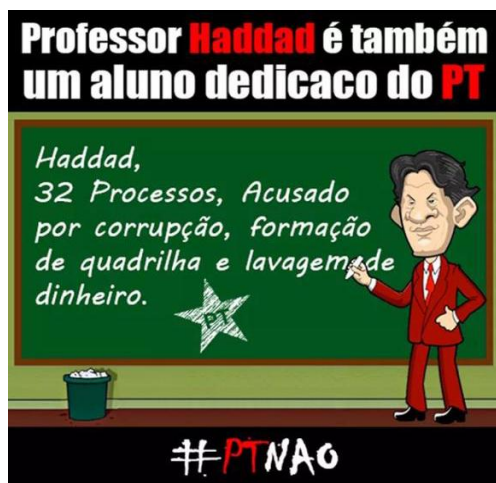


Figure 9 (El Pais: 2019)

Translation: Teacher Haddad is also a dedicated student of the Workers' Party.

Haddad,
32 accusations, accused of corruption, gang formations and money laundering.

When examined through LIWC-22, Figure 9 received **an anger score** of 26.09, the second highest anger score amongst the sample.

These images thus put forward a 'us' versus 'them' narrative, while also situating Bolsonaro as a member of the people and an outsider to the PT political club. A commonality found across the images is the portrayal of the PT as elites who place their interests such as: communist policies, and the interests of other groups (e.g. LGBTQ+ individuals/feminists) above the interests of the Brazilian people, namely the Evangelicals (Day 2020: 76). Moreover, these messages attacked traditional media outlets such as Folha and Rede Globo. Lastly, those who existed outside of the Brazilian people were 'othered' by playing on their differences. As such, these messages push an

anti-establishment sentiment which provides a set of motivations for the people to stand-up against the current of order (Laubbe 2021: 34).

4.4.4. Bolsonaro as a ‘Messiah’

Leading up to the 2018 campaign, Bolsonaro sought to appeal to Evangelicals. These appeals were aided by support from a range of Evangelical pastors and leaders⁴⁰ (Polimedio 2019). It is claimed that Bolsonaro’s first campaign act was his public re-baptism in the Jordan River, by celebrity Pastor Everaldo Pereira, where Bolsonaro emerged as the ‘Messiah’ (Oualalou 2019: 89). Moreover, prior to and during the campaign, Bolsonaro claimed that Brazil maybe a secular state, but it is a Christian country. Bolsonaro reasserted his commitment to Christianity by using the slogan “Brasil acima de tudo, Deus acima de todos or in English, *Brazil above everything, God above everyone*” during his campaign (Vissers-Similon 2019: 78).

Bolsonaro played into the fact that his middle name is Messias [Messiah] and proclaimed that he was the chosen one who would bring salvation and save Brazil (Perillo 2018). This Messiah persona intensified following a knife attack at a campaign rally on 6 September 2018 during which Bolsonaro was stabbed in the lower abdomen by Adelio Bispo de Oliveira. Following this stabbing, Bolsonaro was said to have lost 40% of blood and to have suffered life threatening injuries but miraculously survived (BBC News 2018). According to the police report (2018) Oliveria claimed that by stabbing Bolsonaro he was fulfilling an order from God. Following the near fatal-stabbing, Bolsonaro gained 2% points, increasing from 22% to 24%. This is attributed to the social media marketing campaign, particularly information shared on pro-Bolsonaro WhatsApp groups Bolsonaro’s team deployed to take advantage of the incident (Evangelista & Bruno 2019; da Silva 2020). Examples of this content are shown in Figures 10 and 11. According to da Silva (2010: 256), these images focused on the relationship between Bolsonaro and God represented the most popular content shared across the four pro-Bolsonaro groups studied.

⁴⁰ Prior to the elections, despite being raised Roman Catholic and declaring to remain Catholic, Bolsonaro attended the Evangelical Baptist church with his wife, while his sons are also Evangelicals. Moreover, Bolsonaro’s second marriage was performed by leader of the Assembly of God Victory in Christ pastor, Silas Malafaia, which earned Bolsonaro credibility to gain support from significant leaders such as Malafaia (Polimedio 2019).

Figure 10 portrays Bolsonaro as having his hand guided by Jesus, while Figure 11 shows Bolsonaro on the day of the attack being kissed and protected by Christ. Figures 10 and 11 were attached with the caption “Bolsonaro the son of God” or “Bolsonaro our saviour” (da Silva 2010). These images particularly targeted Evangelicals who were followers of millenarianism and believe that the return of Jesus Christ is imminent (Zilla 2020: 44). These images depict Bolsonaro as the ‘chosen one’ – the Messiah who was handpicked by Jesus Christ to be the saviour of Brazil and bringing salvation to all Brazilians and ultimately saving humanity (Brazil) (Tamakia et al. 2020: 78).

Figure 10, which received an **enthusiasm score** of 30.48, particularly emphasises that Bolsonaro was led by Jesus, and particularly the Holy Spirit⁴¹. As such, Bolsonaro is depicted to follow the guidance of the Spirit, to be submissive to His will and making His desires the way of life (Spurgeon 2016: 89). Moreover, being led by the Spirit makes one (Bolsonaro) a son of God (The Holy Bible: Romans. 8: 14). Thus, both Bolsonaro and the Holy Spirit want ‘us’ [Brazilians] to do the right thing and avoid sin – they have the ability to captivate one’s heart and mind. It is through the conviction of the Holy Spirit that Brazilian’s can repent and turn back to God (Cessario 2016: 119).



Figure 10 (da Silva 2020)

Description: Bolsonaro portrayed as having his hand guided by the hand of Jesus Christ

The depiction of Bolsonaro in Figure 11 is a play on the resurrection of Jesus. According to Figure 11, like Jesus who was resurrected on the third day, Bolsonaro survived the attack and was

⁴¹ When Christ enters a person’s life, the Holy Spirit enters simultaneously (The Holy Bible: Romans. 8:9).

resurrected by Jesus himself who protected him, like God protected Jesus. As such, Bolsonaro had ‘died’ for the sins committed by Brazilians and the left/PT – and his resurrection had removed these sins from Brazil (Tamakia et al. 2020: 67). When examined through LIWC-22, Figure 11 received an **enthusiasm score** of 37.55, the highest enthusiasm score amongst the sample.



Figure 11 (da Silva 2020)

Description: Bolsonaro photographed on the day he was stabbed, portrayed as being kissed and protected by Jesus.

When examined through LIWC-22, Figure 12 (found below) received an **enthusiasm score** of 10.00. As mentioned above, Evangelicals were micro-targeted by the campaign given their discontent for corruption (Paglarini 2021: 339). Figure 12 shows how Bolsonaro marketed himself as a warrior against corruption. In Figure 12, Bolsonaro is depicted as a warrior, with the caption calling Brazilians to take a stand. The use of the word ‘battle’ highlights an ideological war between the left/PT and ordinary citizens. Depicting Bolsonaro as a warrior effectively situates him as a heroic figure leading the crusade against the left. The cross on the amour refers to Bolsonaro’s military career, specifically reminding voters that he is a recipient of the *Ordem do Mérito Militar (Order of Military Merit)*, which is awarded to members of the Brazilian army who made exceptional contributions (Hunter & Vega 2022: 78). This imagery also reinforces Bolsonaro as a ‘strongman’ and the only politician capable of protecting Brazil’s morality (Ben-Ghiat 2020: 44).

The cross also refers to Bolsonaro’s Christian faith while the fire symbolise martyrdom and implies that he is willing to die for Brazilians. This portrayal mirrors Jesus’s death on the cross, whereby Jesus died for our [Brazilian] sins and reconciled Evangelicals closer to God by bearing our sins

himself (The Holy Bible: Mark. 10:45). Moreover, Jesus died to conquer evil (The Holy Bible: Eph. 4: 18). In using this Biblical scripture, this dissertation argues that this image presented Bolsonaro as a conquer of evil, with the evil being the PT and their communism/leftist-policies.



Figure 12 (da Silva 2020)

Translation: It is time for battle 26/05⁴². A new era against communism is going to start. Come to the streets.

By presenting Bolsonaro as a Messiah and saviour, the campaign implemented the strategy of messianic populism. At the centre of this strategy was Bolsonaro situating himself as a political outsider (Hutta 2020: 45). Unlike the political elite that are anti-Christian and a threat to Evangelical values, Bolsonaro is depicted as having God on his side and a warrior for the Brazilian, particularly Evangelical, material and spiritual well-being. Moreover, Bolsonaro is presented as the embodiment of Evangelical strength and union against these morally corrupt elites (Demuru 2020: 34). This dissertation argues that these WhatsApp messages micro-targeted Evangelicals who were looking for optimism amid suffering and pain, by presenting them with a solution grounded in God's choice and power (Fea 2018: 67).

⁴² 26/05 was the date of a pro-Bolsonaro rally, which mobilised hundreds of thousands of people across Brazil (Phillips 2019).

4.5. Conclusion

Chapter 4 provided the contextual foundation for the TAI analysis that will be discussed in the next chapter. In doing so, this study analysed 12 WhatsApp messages through a two-step analysis method.

The chapter measured the sentiment [emotive] elements within these messages using the text analysis application LIWC-22. The results showed that the Bolsonaro campaign used a variety of strategic communication techniques on WhatsApp to trigger emotional cues. This was done through images and words that tapped into a reservoir of personal experiences or deeply rooted sentiments of danger and failure. Images associated with communism received the highest anger score while images associated with gender ideology received the highest fear score. Moreover, messages targeting gender ideology received an anger and fear score. Lastly, the highest enthusiasm score was found in messaging relating to the relationship between religion and Bolsonaro.

Using a latent content analysis, the underlying meanings and topics addressed in the sample messages were described. According to this analysis the Bolsonaro campaign used micro-targeting, messaging that emphasised populist rhetoric and shared factually inaccurate images and messaging on WhatsApp. In doing so, these tactics targeted frustrated Evangelicals who disliked the PT leftist policies and viewed gender ideology as immoral. These tactics also targeted Evangelicals who wanted a sense of optimism by presenting them with a solution grounded in God's choice and power.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5. Introduction

This dissertation set out to answer the question: *How was emotive strategic communication used on WhatsApp to drive support for right-wing populist Jair Bolsonaro?* The fourth chapter implemented a sentiment analysis to measure the emotive elements within a text, and then described the topics addressed in these messages using a latent content analysis. In doing so, a sample of 12 messages shared on pro-Bolsonaro WhatsApp groups were studied. Chapter 5 processes these analyses using the Theory of Affective Intelligence (TAI). This was done to examine the relationship between the emotive elements and topics addressed against the key tenets of TAI. Both the content and sentiment analyses were analysed within four categories – *the disposition system, the surveillance system, information seeking and measuring fear and anger*.

5.2. Applying the Theory of Affective Intelligence

5.2.1. The disposition system: evoking anger and enthusiasm

5.2.1.1. Evoking anger

Within the disposition system individuals are confronted by aversive stimuli which causes discomfort and produces the emotion of anger. As such, when people are confronted by conditions of a known threat, they perceive a familiar environment as threatening. According to the TAI, individuals acquire deeply entrenched values early in life. These values define how they behave both outside and within the antagonistic climate of politics (Marcus et al. 2000: 44). Anger is found to be most potent amongst those who are attached to these core norms, specifically when these norms are challenged. As such, opposition parties are also able to use this anger to motivate individuals to protect these values and to retaliate against ruling parties (Vasilopoulos 2019: 19).

Given the deeply entrenched values held by Evangelicals, these assumptions made Evangelicals a strong demographic to emotionally micro-target. As evident in Chapter 4, this tactic was implemented by the Bolsonaro campaign, specifically through sharing aversive stimuli, in the form of WhatsApp messages. This aversive characteristic was supported by fake news that presented the narrative that Evangelical values are under threat, at the hands of the Workers Party (PT), feminists, LGBTQ+ individuals and traditional media establishments (Laubbe 2018: 90). This

aversive nature was further supported by a populist strategy which emphasised this threat by presenting an ‘us’ [Evangelicals] versus ‘them’ [PT, feminists, media, LGBTQ+ individuals and leftist allies] narrative (Lapper 2020: 98).

Within the sample, 5 out of the 5 messages [aversive stimuli] which evoked anger, were grounded in known threats. As described in Chapter 2 and 4, amongst the Brazilian electorate, the failure of the PT’s leftist economic policies and their numerous corruption scandals grew into a point of unhappiness and resentment towards the PT (Londoño & Darlington 2018). Similarly, in the 2000’s, minority rights, particularly LGBTQ+ rights were improving under the PT tenure. However, expanding the rights of these minorities were met with religious resistance. Evangelical blocs felt that these policies contradicted their Christian values and went onto push for legislation which protected the concept of a nuclear family (Klassen 2022: 303). This dissertation argued that given these circumstances, the PT’s corruption and preference for leftist policies was a known threat, as the public were aware of these circumstances prior to the election. This argument is grounded in the point that Operation Car Wash was the biggest corruption scandal in Brazilian history and garnered mainstream news coverage (Pinto et al. 2019: 56), while criticisms towards the PT’s leftist gender policies was a dominant topic of discussion within the political realm, churches, and on teleministry⁴³, and were specifically pioneered by popular Evangelical ministers such as Silas Malafaia (Bandeira 2020: 170; Burdick 2019: 8).

As such, pro-Bolsonaro WhatsApp groups were found to maximise the growing anti-PT sentiments and pushed an anti-PT narrative, particularly by creating a personal resentment towards the PT and their corruption and leftist gender policies (Samuels & Zucco 2018: 56). These messages used emotion invoking words that derived from the political and socio-economic context described above. Stimuli focused on tapping into anti-PT sentiments and included words such as ‘corruption’, ‘money laundering’, ‘public expenditure’ and ‘communism’, while also linking Haddad to his predecessors and being someone who will continue this cycle of corruption. Stimuli on gender ideology and LGBTQ+ rights portrayed Christian spaces and values as being disregarded and disrespected.

⁴³ Use of media, specifically television and radio to share the Christian message.

In portraying these narratives, the once familiar environment of their home country Brazil, was now depicted as being a hostile environment for Evangelicals and their morals (Day 2020). As such, and per their interpretation of scripture, Brazil had corroded in the same manner as Rome and Israel (The Holy Bible: Micah. 3:9). Brazil was painted as undergoing a moral decay as Brazilians were unable to distinguish right from wrong according to Evangelical values. At the cornerstone of this moral decay was the PT and their policies, which encouraged immoral behaviour to satisfy their own corrupt and ‘perverse’ desires (Fisher & Taub 2019: 90).

According to the TAI, anger motivates one to act against the responsible agent by promoting a corrective response (Yates et al. 2019: 870). The TAI also claims that angry individuals are less willing to accept compromise. As such, by grouping the PT and left as enemies, the Bolsonaro campaign promoted a corrective action against the enemy which was to vote them out of power. The consequences of not doing so, the campaign implied, was the obliteration of Christian values and that the people would continue to shoulder the PTs failed policies (Dias 2021). The sample messages did not directly portray Bolsonaro as an outsider or saviour, however given the support received from renowned Evangelical leaders, his involvement in the Evangelical church and history of anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments in an era of leftist domination and political correctness (please see Chapter 2 and 4), these messages portrayed him as a protector of the people, namely the Evangelicals, and pushed the impression that the people should not have to compromise their values for others (Ribeiro & Borba 2021: 17).

Given these findings, this dissertation argued that by micro-targeting Evangelicals through the use of fake news and an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ narrative, the Bolsonaro campaign tapped into an anti-PT sentiment throughout the election and repeatedly reminded them about how they had been exploited and provided them with a reason to remain angry. Moreover, this analysis supports the claim put forward by this dissertation that fear is not the only emotion that drives support for right-wing populism, anger is also a principal driver.

5.2.1.2. Evoking enthusiasm

As detailed in Chapter 3, enthusiasm forms part of the disposition system. However, in contrast to anger which stems from entrenched values that have turned into habits, enthusiasm is guided by political habits based on group identity and ideology (Marcus et al. 2000: 56). The outcome of support, therefore, depends on the campaign's ability to generate enthusiasm amongst the electorate. Here, feelings of enthusiasm are found to increase candidate preference, which effectively increases interest in the campaign. As such, voters are engaged and supportive of this candidate rather than antagonistic (Laubbe 2020: 56).

Given the strong group identity amongst Evangelicals (see Chapter 2), this assumption made Evangelicals a strong demographic to micro-target. As evident in Chapter 4, this tactic was implemented by the Bolsonaro campaign, specifically through sharing external stimuli in the form of WhatsApp messages, that resonated with the Evangelical group identity. Within the sample, 3 out of 3 of external stimuli [WhatsApp messages] which contained enthusiasm, were grounded in Evangelical beliefs that were rooted in the theme of religion. These religious beliefs were supported by fake news, particularly disinformation, that presented the narrative that Bolsonaro is a 'Messiah' or the 'chosen one' who is guided by God. These external stimuli were further supported by a messianic populist strategy which emphasised Bolsonaro as a political outsider (Hutta 2020: 45). Here, unlike the political elite that are anti-Christian and a threat to Evangelical values, Bolsonaro is depicted as having God on his side and a warrior for the Brazilian, particularly Evangelical, material and spiritual well-being. Moreover, Bolsonaro is presented as the embodiment of Evangelical strength and union against a group of morally corrupt elites (Demuru 2020: 34).

The TAI also claims that enthusiasm is triggered by a familiar environment which is perceived as rewarding (Marcus et al. 2000: 35). The Bolsonaro campaign used the mentioned strategic communication techniques to tap into entrenched values and beliefs which engulf Evangelical identity. By micro-targeting groups who felt under attack or under-represented, these images attempted to sooth the mental drives that agitated the people and urged these voters to support Bolsonaro by creating a positive feeling of what could happen to and for the people, notably a glimpse of the future. Moreover, by situating Bolsonaro as a messiah and saviour, support was

facilitated for Bolsonaro as he was presented as the only candidate, an alternative, who could deliver them to this utopian future. Thus, increasing candidate preference for Bolsonaro, which effectively increases interest in the campaign. While also encouraging voter engagement and support towards this candidate, rather than antagonism (Laubbe 2020: 56; Silva 2019: 3).

5.2.2. The surveillance system: evoking fear

According to the TAI, within the surveillance system and when confronted by unfamiliar stimuli, an individual experiences fear due to an unknown threat. As such, this fear motivates the reader to call on arguments for supporting a candidate and their stance on an issue (Marcus et al. 2000: 98). This proposition presented by the TAI, was evidently implemented by the Bolsonaro campaign, specifically through sharing unfamiliar stimuli in the form of WhatsApp messages, that micro-targeted Evangelicals.

Within the sample, 3 out the 3 WhatsApp messages which evoked fear and were grounded in unknown threats. This unknown nature was supported by fake news that presented a value system which contrasted Evangelical values and was further supported by a populist strategy which emphasised this unfamiliarity by presenting an ‘us’ [Evangelicals] versus ‘them’ [PT, feminists, media, LGBTQ+ individuals and leftist allies] narrative.

As described in Chapter 4, Evangelicals are guided by an entrenched world view grounded in a particular set of values and beliefs that act as vectors of approval and valuation. These values are derived from their interpretation of the Bible and are the lens through which they distinguish between moral and immoral behaviour (Lelo & Caminhas 2020: 186). Figures 3 and 4, showed a difference in value systems between feminists/LGBTQ+ individuals/allies and Evangelicals. Evangelicals are firm believers in the nuclear family structure and are thus against same-sex relationships. Evangelicals are also against promiscuity⁴⁴, and believe that it is impossible to be a good person and have a pure heart/clean hands when you engage in promiscuity (Klassen 2022). These fake news stories tapped into Evangelical fear of change and difference by presenting this difference in value systems as the unknown threat (Zilla 2020: 18).

⁴⁴ Please see chapter 4 for a more detailed explanation.

Both Figures 3 and 4 referred to political correctness. These Figures stated that the PT and its allies are supporters and enablers of the behaviour exhibited in these images, while also making an underlying reference to PT policies which paved the way for a different and offensive value system. This provided the reader with reasons to reject the PT and Haddad, namely, the PT supported contradictory values and alienated and demonised those whose value systems did not meet their criteria of political correctness (Day 2020: 78; Dias 2021: 655).

Figure 8 used fake news as a tactic to portray corruption between the PT and the establishment. In doing so, the reference to Haddad and members involved in Operation Car Wash (please see chapter 4) was used to fuel dislike towards Haddad by showing that he puts his own interests first. Moreover, he cannot be trusted to put the people first given Haddad's relationship with known offenders who 'harmed' Brazil (Guerrera 2019: 78).

The TAI claims that when confronted by fear, individuals seek alternatives to ease their fear. This assumption was evident within these sample messages (Johnston & Lavine 2015: 2), which reflected populist principles that demonised the 'other'. Like anger, these messages aimed to fuel dislike by promoting an 'us versus them narrative' and portrayed perpetrators as having ill intentions which is why they should vote for an alternative, namely Bolsonaro. They also provided the voter with reasons to not support the PT and Haddad and positioned Bolsonaro as an alternative choice. For example, the reference to Bolsonaro in Figure 3, which portrayed him as a critic of contradictory values. Hence, showing that he is an alternative candidate that protects their Evangelical interests.

5.2.3. Information seeking

According to Marcus et al. (2000: 90), within the disposition system, angry and enthusiastic individuals search less for new data and ignore uncomfortable information that does not align with their beliefs. Moreover, TAI also postulates that angry and enthusiastic voters will cling to their [political or group] position, making it an entrenched factor. In other words, the voter will protect their own view and become unwilling to compromise (Marcus et al. 2002). As such, they inform themselves through sources that have the same subjective viewpoint (Bogdan 2019: 8).

Furthermore, to facilitate the flow of information and to discourage information seeking on perspectives that contradicted the Bolsonaro campaign, WhatsApp was used to manufacture an ‘echo-chamber’ of news. According to Leticia Cesarino (2019: 44), Bolsoesfera acted an echo chamber for those who wanted information that resonated and re-enforced their political habits and beliefs, while also providing information for those who wanted news that existed outside of mainstream media. Similarly, in a study on the use of mobile networks in the 2018 Brazilian election, João Guilherme Bastos dos Santos (2020: 886) found that the Bolsonaro campaign diffused information through a bipartite polycentric network⁴⁵. Here, multiple groups were interconnected through common participants, who bridge information from one group to another. These ultimately disseminated information to gain visibility beyond the private communication design which characterises the app.

Pierce Ekstrom et al. (2020: 145) found that, when one’s viewpoint is at stake it is difficult to persuade an individual to believe political information that is unappealing. Pro-Bolsonaro WhatsApp groups provided a community of likeminded individuals to share views that are repeated back to them, while also providing a safe space for opinions which if posted on another social media platform would be subjected to political correctness. As such, their belief systems culminate in a confirmation bias and will thus share these messages more readily. As evident in Chapter 4, the sample messages were shared thousands of times, and across multiple groups. For example, despite election authorities stating that the erotic baby bottle video was fake news, information surrounding this claim continued to circulate across WhatsApp (Marins & Moura 2018: 7). This dissertation argues that given that these images were shared despite their falsity; it is evident that WhatsApp was a trusted source of political information. An Ibope (2019) opinion poll showed that 57% of Brazilians consider WhatsApp to be a reliable source of political information.

Given the great levels of social capital found on WhatsApp, information shared on these groups were viewed as credible for two reasons. Firstly, confirmation bias where one’s political habits

⁴⁵ Entities that work together towards a common goal.

guide their interpretation of information and confirms the credibility of the information because its messaging aligns with their beliefs (Mello 2018). Second, given the fact that users choose their contacts, this information was deemed trustworthy (da Silva 2021). For example, family groups were responsible for 51% of fake news that went viral (Wardel 2019: 11). Moreover, given the de-centralised and encrypted nature of WhatsApp, individuals could share information anonymously thus ensured that conversations remained private and individuals could avoid possible backlash. This feature was vital in an era of political correctness also called cancel culture, and allowed users to express their thoughts without ‘censorship’ or being policed (Simpson et al. 2019: 1991).

In relation to the surveillance system, according to the TAI, by promoting an unknown threat, individuals are motivated to search for new information from alternative sources (Marcus et al. 2000: 54; Zoonen 2010: 40). By sharing WhatsApp messages which emphasised the distasteful and fearful qualities of the left, voters were provided with an impetus to learn about politics and find information from an alternative source (Marcus et al. 2000: 76), namely the Bolsonaro network on WhatsApp. Moreover, the reference to fake news and the role of the establishment in manipulating issues in Figure 3, reinforced the point that traditional information sources could not be trusted and alternative news sources were necessary. By highlighting that traditional information sources are untrustworthy, it easily propelled WhatsApp as a trustworthy medium due to the personal relationships that exist between users (da Silva 2021). As such, voters turned to “better informed interest maximisers” (Marcus et al. 2000: 452) who consider Bolsonaro and his politics as the best alternative, an alternative that protects Evangelical interests.

As detailed in Chapter 3, Marcus et al. (2013) noted that if an individual possessed only the disposition system, one would be vulnerable as they are unable to adapt to changing circumstances, and as such, survival will then depend on staying within a familiar environment. However, the surveillance system assists in preventing such vulnerability (Marcus et al. 2013). It is evident that the Bolsonaro campaign attempted to share information [WhatsApp messages] that was centred around opponent rejection in order to appeal to the surveillance system. Here, strategies were centred around increasing opponent rejection amongst voters, as evident by portraying the elites as corrupt enemies of Evangelicals through fake news. According to Datafolha (2019) 40% of the

electorate stated that they would not vote for Bolsonaro. Thus, it was vital for the campaign to create an opponent which did not resonate with the people. These strategies were successful in increasing opponent rejection, with Haddad's rejection rising from 20% in August 2018 to 44% in October. This rejection was predominantly amongst Evangelicals with 63% of this electorate rejecting Haddad and only 32% rejecting Bolsonaro (Datafolha 2019). Thus, providing users with alternative information ensured that users were not dependant on the surveillance system.

By promoting an 'us' versus 'them' narrative, and situating Bolsonaro as a member of the people, the campaign increased the likelihood that people would turn to the Bolsonaro WhatsApp network for information as his views re-enforced their own or because the network provided an alternative source of information. Moreover, fake news stories that provoke anger, enthusiasm and fear were found to be easily propelled on WhatsApp and went unchecked in the echo-chamber of WhatsApp groups (Chagas et al. 2019).

5.3. Evoking anger and fear

This study was restricted by TAI's inability to consider that an individual may experience anger and fear simultaneously. According to TAI, fear and anger are distinct and operate in different domains of political life. Here, fear was found to regulate behaviour and an individual's opinion in the face of hazards, while anger was perceived to form part of a collection of moral emotions which regulate opinions towards people (Marcus et al. 2000). As such, the use of anger and fear, as displayed in Figure 1 could not be analysed.

5.4. Discussion: facilitating the rise of Bolsonaro

5.4.1. Social belonging and support for right-wing populism

According to Nadia Urbinanti (2019: 173), "right-wing populism finds fertile soil in countries in which the distrust of parties and partisanship has been very strong". This dissertation argues that this statement perfectly described why Brazil, a country with a legacy of supporting left-wing policies and left-wing populists elected Bolsonaro, a candidate that contradicted this trend of support.

From 2013, Brazil endured a range of crises that included a rise in economic insecurity due to unemployment and an economic recession. Over time, these crises shifted from being purely economic to adopt a moral dimension (please see Chapter 4). This dissertation attributes this shift to the desire for social belonging, which is a fundamental desire. Here, a weak support system encourages individuals to seek interpersonal relationships that also provide security. Global trends show that poorer individuals experience more stress and insecurity in times of economic uncertainty, and as such, insecurity at a collective level results in increased identification with religion (Storm 2019: 146).

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the growing practice of Evangelicalism in Brazil is due to the desire for dignity, particularly amongst the poorer segments of Brazilian society, which the Evangelical church provided. Here, the church offered a venue for one to feel worthy and honoured, a place of belonging. This notion of dignity reiterates Francis Fukuyama's (2019: 8) claim that dignity is bestowed rather than innate. However, the inclusion of policies that presented a difference in values and the alienation of Evangelical voices in the social sphere led to Evangelicals losing their dignity at the hands of the PT and minorities.

Using this assumption, this dissertation argues that one of the key elements facilitating support for Bolsonaro amongst Evangelicals, is the campaign's ability to unify the Evangelical Church (please see Chapter 3). As detailed in Chapter 3, prior to the 2018 election, Evangelical endorsement for Presidential candidates was previously unsuccessful due to their heterogeneous nature and the inability of religious leaders to agree on a single candidate. Moreover, according to Amy Smith (2019), Evangelicals were critical of religious leaders who publicly state their political opinion. Despite this, Smith (2019: 67) found that churchgoers are more inclined to vote for a 'conservative' politician who shares a similar set of values. This vote for a conservative politician is not due to the political stance of their church leader but rather the beliefs held by the community (Zilla 2020: 13).

Bolsonaro's campaign was thus highly context specific, characterised by an interplay between emotive strategic communication on WhatsApp, changes in the political landscape and demands for recognition. In doing so, the campaign appealed to various Evangelical denominations to

facilitate support. With 70% of Evangelicals casting their vote for Bolsonaro in 2018 (Datafolha 2019), it is evident that the Bolsonaro campaign was able to unify the Evangelical demographic by resonating with these values, specifically through the use of religious master signifiers (Žižek 2019: 87).

In a time of crisis these master signifiers are empty of a single meaning, rather they symbolise a multiplicity of demands. Four conditions were found to have dictated the emergence of these signifiers used by the Bolsonaro campaign. These include identifying a particular element of meaning that is credible. In relation to the Bolsonaro campaign, this was done by providing an abstract articulation of a 'better future', with the goal to evoke hope among the electorate. Third, given the distrust in traditional politicians and Bolsonaro's maverick outsider status, the campaign was in a strategic position to construct this empty signifier that aligns with the political objectives of the campaign. Fourth, the 'unequal division of power' due to the positive relationship between the elites [PT] and others [LGBTQ+/feminists], which improved the social standing of these minority groups while resulting in the loss of social status for Evangelicals provided the grounds for this signifier to articulate meanings grounded in anger, fear and hope. When grievances are present, individuals are found to be "inherently lacking and seeking fullness, like happiness" (Laclau 2006: 98). Within an organisation, such as a church, these grievances are diverse and depend on individuals. However, these grievances may relate to commonality, for example economic concerns or the loss of social recognition, and these grievances become demands when articulated together (Mackillop 2019: 209). Here, unequal power relations allowed for the campaign to accommodate multiple demands which resulted from a past hegemonic struggle. Moreover, these signifiers offer a means to critically explain to Evangelicals why their social relations are modified, while emphasising the power play that exists, particularly between the elite [PT], others [LGBTQ+ individuals] and the people [Evangelicals] and allows individuals to attach meaning to these signifiers that are both personal and collective. As such, this religious signifier linked a range of demands together, in turn reducing difference and limiting contestation amongst Evangelicals. This effectively allowed the Bolsonaro campaign to unify Evangelicals under the umbrella of a common holy mission (Webber 2020: 90).

This analysis found that these religious signifiers are supported by the use of religious symbolism. Here, the campaign managed collective attitudes through sharing WhatsApp messages grounded in three out of the four common Evangelical principals: activism, biblicalism and crucicentrism (please see Chapter 3). For example, elements of activism are found in WhatsApp messages focused on Bolsonaro as messiah and saviour promote an Evangelical mission. Second, elements of biblicalism are found in WhatsApp messages grounded gender ideology and corruption, which highlights the differences between leftist values and Evangelical values. Lastly, elements of crucicentrism is evident in Figure 12, where Bolsonaro is portrayed as willing to die for Brazilian sins. In doing so, management of collective [Evangelical] attitudes occurred through the manipulation of religious symbols that were familiar to the Evangelical context (Freedman 2014).

Such messaging was grounded in disinformation and based on religious symbolism and signifiers and it effectively capitalised on the pre-existing beliefs of Evangelicals, while also cherry-picking truthful aspects of reality and combining them with falsehoods to amplify its impact on evoking emotions (Pyrhönen & Bauvois 2020: 33). Thus, as discussed in Chapter 2, these religious symbols “satisfy the needs of human beings for important values” and “serve to set-up, alter or maintain power” by capitalising on the need for social recognition (Gill 2018: 18; Susila 2020: 167).

From a psychological perspective, individuals who seek a sense of belonging are “extremely lonely” (Haslam 2022: 89). Lonely voters are found to suffer from increased social fear and more negative expectations of the future (Lagenkamp & Bienstman 2022: 87). By evoking negative emotions through WhatsApp messaging, which attributed blame to the PT and minorities, the campaign facilitated support by corresponding affective reactions to loneliness. This study argues that the campaign exploited this loneliness by promoting the affective need to protect themselves from these policies and to avoid insecurity (Yann et al. 2019: 45). In addition to this, by evoking positive emotions through offering a utopian description of the future, this WhatsApp messaging promoted the affective need for solutions to address their insecurity.

By unifying the Evangelical Church and structuring emotional WhatsApp messaging around topics which magnified the various crises, the campaign used religion as a ‘buffer for economic stress’ (Storm 2019: 78). This is evident in Figures 6,7,8, and 9 which related to anti-pestismo and

religion. Moreover, this dissertation argues that by sharing messaging centred around gender ideology and feminist values which contrast Evangelical values, economic stress is attributed to the loss of Evangelical morality and values. As described, distrust in politicians and political institutions is prevalent in Brazil and research shows that by fostering social belonging amongst religious groups [Evangelicals] fosters social trust. This reduces the friend-foe paradigm that exists between politicians [Bolsonaro] and the electorate, while also promoting voting for a populist [Bolsonaro] as a civic or religious duty (Blais & Achen 2019: 473). Therefore, creating a sense of belonging through WhatsApp messages increased the propensity to turn out for Bolsonaro.

As lonely individuals seek community, the ‘people-centered’ narratives offered in these WhatsApp messages, such as Figure 13, resonates with the needs of these individuals (Caller & Gorodzeisky 2021: 1628). In turn, the Bolsonaro campaign facilitated support amongst Evangelicals by structuring the peoples’ [Evangelicals] outlook on the world and offering them a means and an ends to regain their sense of belonging – which will be described in the upcoming sections.

5.4.2. Anger, fear and strategic communication

Brazil’s polarisation along demographic lines was weak⁴⁶ and was not apparent in previous elections (Reydon et al. 2020: 104). However, the 2018 election presented a watershed moment in this regard. Frustration towards leftist policies leading up to the election, showed that Brazil was deeply polarised along demographic lines, particularly with regards to religion. As detailed in Chapter 2 and 4, following the 2013 protests, Brazil found itself immersed in a cultural war between conservatives and Brazil’s left. Here, left-liberal alliances and ideology were argued to dominate Brazil’s political establishment and policies. According to the Brazilian right-wing pioneer, Olavo de Carvalho (2015), this formed part of the left’s grand strategy of cultural hegemony, where left-wing policies were used to expand political power in the long term, by sowing left-wing ideas about culture and expanding their influence in schools and universities. This in turn, squeezed out the circulation of religious ideas leaving conservatives angry and unhappy with the current system. Ultimately, this alienated a large segment of Brazil’s conservative population and left many Brazilians feeling unhappy with the inclusive policies implemented because they did not align with their beliefs (Lapper 2020: 43). Moreover, anger and

⁴⁶ Please see chapter 1 and 3 for more information.

frustration were further intensified as the inequalities of Brazilian society seemed to make these non-progressive political views unpopular. Once again alienating and silencing right-wing/non-progressives from the political conversation (Romancini & Castilho 2019: 56). This dissertation found that the Bolsonaro campaign capitalised on this deep polarisation by constructing his strategic communication around exploiting this divide and the value of difference to attract Evangelical support (Evangelista & Bruno 2019; Day 2020; Diaz 2021).

As LIWC-22 provides a means to analyse the language in the text, functional words such as second-person pronouns, particularly the constant reference to the pronoun 'you' were found to reflect attentional allocation, where people experiencing emotions often concentrate on themselves (Pennebaker 2017: 100). It can be argued that making reference to 'you', the reader is directly addressed. Moreover, the use of the word 'you' aimed to resonate with the people by making it clear that the individual and their group affiliation is under attack. As such, LIWC-22 argues that the focus on a second person pronoun is most found in negative ads which attack the opponent and focus on their past actions. Moreover, the use of 'you' is found to reflect a low-quality relationship (Pennebaker et al. 2020: 773) portraying the relationship between the people and the left/PT as poor with the people perceived as second-class citizens whose views are ignored. This sentiment is reflected in these messages, with the images making direct reference to Haddad and feminists and their policies/belief systems. From this analysis, this dissertation found that an emotional populist, fake news and micro-targeting strategy emphasised difference and allowed the Bolsonaro campaign to promote Evangelical identity based on a hostility towards the PT and 'the other'.

Evoking emotions such as fear and anger amongst the electorate was central to the Bolsonaro campaign's strategy. The elites (PT), establishment (the left) and 'the others' (e.g. LGBTQ+ individuals) were blamed for the peoples' grievances in an emotionalised way. This 'other' was portrayed as working against the people and only being in politics to enrich themselves or act in the interest of certain groups (e.g. LGBTQ+ individuals). By flooding WhatsApp with messages that threatened the people, the Bolsonaro campaign aimed to incite the people's attitudes by blaming those who posed a threat. As such, the use of content that appeals to anger and fear is effective for two reasons. Firstly, fear was used to convince the people that the 'them' are threatening the heartland through failing policies and views and values that were non-Christian.

Secondly, anger was associated with the ‘others’ and blocking the goals of the people, namely a Christian value system. It is clear that these emotional appeals were used strategically by tailoring communication to attachments held by the people. Given these factors, Evangelicals had lost their social status in Brazilian society. In turn, Evangelicals became a “humiliated group seeking restitution of its dignity” (Fukuyama 2019: 88).

This loss of social status fuelled a cult of resentment against those who were believed to erode their religious identity [others, particularly supporters of gender ideology and LGBTQ+ individuals] (Cohen 2019: 7). Resentment was also felt towards the political establishment and the PT who Evangelicals criticised for not responding to their concerns and for favouring minorities (Abts & Baute 2022: 56). Given the deep polarisation within Brazilian society at this time, these emotive strategies encouraged Evangelicals to regain their dignity, in a manner that demanded recognition for Evangelicals only rather than all Brazilians (Callaway 2020: 117).

It is evident that support for Bolsonaro amongst Evangelicals stemmed from hostility towards the PT and others, as they were the cause for frustration amongst Evangelicals. These WhatsApp messages referred to a range of topics, that acted as triggers which justified their rejection of the elites, establishment and other groups. This dissertation argues that by centring their WhatsApp messages around topics which resonated with the Evangelical demographic and evoked emotions of anger and fear, the campaign aimed to encourage voters to cast a protest vote. This protest vote was one that supported an unlikely candidate (Bolsonaro) and should be done as a means for the people to express their dissatisfaction towards current leaders.

5.4.3. Hope and strategic communication

As mentioned in Chapters 3, political psychologists use the terms ‘enthusiasm’ and ‘hope’ interchangeably (Marcus & MacKuen 1993: 672; Brader 2006; Chen et al. 2019: 90). Thus, for this section, this analysis will make use of the word ‘hope’ to conduct its discussion.

At the start of the early 2000s, Brazil was listed as the 10th most unequal country out 134 countries and had a Gini coefficient of 0.567 in 2005 (Destradi & Jakobeit 2020: 68). Thus, this period was

coined a time of “unwritten class apartheid⁴⁷” (Salata 20120: 63). However, with the election of the PT in 2002, the party, led by Lula, presented a new era to Brazilians - an era where “hope triumphed over fear” (Lula 2002: 8). Here, the PT promoted a range of policies which eased economic fears amongst Brazilians and pushed the narrative that financial security and comfort is possible. Thus, increasing feelings of hope amongst voters. This hope was further emphasised by Lula’s ‘Letter to the Brazilian People’ (please see Chapter 2). During their tenure, to keep this flame of hope burning, the PT implemented policies aimed to expand the welfare state. This expansion consisted of four elements: (1) a 75% increase in minimum wages over a span of 10 years and the *Bolsa Familia* transfer program, (2) the formulation and implementation of new constitutional provisions for the de-centralisation of resources, (3) the formalisation of informal labour sectors which gave segments of the working class social protection and new forms of bargaining power, and (4) the universalisation of healthcare and expansion of public education characterised by affirmative action policies (Gethin & Morgan 2018, Heller 2020).

Given these policies, traditional spaces and political institutions once dominated by the upper middle class population, were now more inclusive and diverse (Heller 2020: 597). Thus, “hope triumphed over fear”, as Lula (2002: 8) promised. However, the 2013 crisis reflected a shift from this hopeful outlook, towards fear surrounding economic security and the corrosion of Evangelical values. This dissertation argues that given the discontent amongst Evangelicals due to a loss of social status and a desire for recognition as described, Brazil became a fertile ground for a new type of hope. A hope grounded in the recognition and support of Evangelical values.

The Bolsonaro campaign capitalised on this ‘hope vacuum’ by constructing a campaign that evoked hope for selective individuals. According to Liz Chardon (2013), anger and fear separates people while hope brings them together. Using this assumption, this study argues that anger and fear is a response to one’s ‘disappointed hopes’ (Stockdale 2021: 82). As described above, the Bolsonaro campaign evoked anger and fear by highlighting the injustices faced by Evangelicals and their loss of dignity. In addition to evoking negative emotions, the campaign aimed to evoke positive emotions through the “formation of hopes for repair” (Stockdale 2021: 83). Here, the

⁴⁷ Segregation between social classes dependent on their wealth (Salata 2020: 63).

Bolsonaro campaign inspired hope by encouraging Evangelicals to cast a ‘faith based vote’. This was done by implementing a hope-based communication strategy, in the form of WhatsApp messaging that contained messianic populist and fake news narratives which micro-targeted Evangelicals.

Within Evangelicalism hope originates from various sources. These include eternal heaven (The Holy Bible: Titus. 1:2)⁴⁸ and hope of God living within a believer (The Holy Bible: Romans. 5:5)⁴⁹. Thus, God is found to be a source of hope amongst Evangelicals. The campaign maximised this religious hope by drawing similarities between Bolsonaro and Jesus and fostering a close relationship between Bolsonaro and God. For example, the campaign put forward a range of known Biblical ‘stories’ by flooding pro-Bolsonaro WhatsApp groups with messages which showed similarities between Bolsonaro and Jesus. These included: (1) Bolsonaro dying for Brazilian sins, as Jesus did; (2) Bolsonaro being resurrected following his stabbing, as Jesus was following his crucifixion; (3) Bolsonaro being guided by the Holy Spirit; and (4) both Bolsonaro and Jesus being seen as sons of God (please see Chapter 4).

The cornerstone of these strategies was re-building trust between Brazilians [Evangelicals] and politicians, particularly Bolsonaro. In 2017, trust in government amongst Brazilians was at 17%, the lowest in a decade (Gonzalez & Smith 2017: 8). Mary Stuckey (2019: 667) argues that distrustful and hopeful voters are more inclined to vote for systematic political change. Grounded in this assumption presented by Stuckey (2019), this dissertation argues that the campaign used fake news and populist strategies to encourage Evangelicals on WhatsApp to vote for alternatives who would help accomplish their goals, specifically those that hail from outside the traditional party structures (Ladd & Hadley 2022: 24). The Bolsonaro campaign maximised this lack of trust by promoting a narrative that depicted him as a trustworthy politician. In portraying himself as a messiah or saviour, Bolsonaro added a future orientated characteristic to the campaign and gave a voice to Evangelical fears, anger and aspirations. As such, the use of content that appeals to hope was effective for a range of reasons.

⁴⁸ “Hope of eternal life, which God, promised before the ages began” (The Holy Bible: Titus. 1:2).

⁴⁹ “Hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us” (The Holy Bible: Romans. 5:5).

Firstly, these WhatsApp messages captured the positive orientation of the campaign. Here, Bolsonaro was depicted as not only as a critique of the left, but also as a candidate who was solution driven, more specifically, solutions grounded in Evangelical values. These solutions addressed the policies implemented by the elite [PT] and supported by the others [LGBTQ+ individuals, left allies and feminists]. As it is compulsory to vote in Brazil, in line with the foundations of the TAI, this study argues that this hope based strategy encouraged voter turnout towards Bolsonaro and away from opponents. Here, hope plays a significant role in facilitating the rise of populism (Howe & Parrot 2019: 734) and Evangelicals are shown that it is possible to control their own future, rather than having it dictated by others who have also stripped them of their dignity and social status (Tagg et al. 2019: 278). Second, these WhatsApp messages were appealing because they were associated with religious ‘nostalgia’, specifically a recollection of Biblical stories as described above. This implies a promise for a better future by returning to law and order as dictated by Evangelical values (Maher 2022: 56).

Evangelicalism also attaches specific meanings to particularly economic-orientations, such as the discussion presented in Chapter 4 on communism. In addition to the moral code of hope which revolves around a divide between the people and the elites and the promotion of a ‘godly’ alternative’, this study argues that the campaign maximised the effects of the economic crisis. Evangelism proclaims that financial prosperity and happiness flows from individual moral action as prescribed by the Bible. Given that Evangelicals have a literal interpretation of the Bible, God is believed to ensure that Evangelicals experience abundance (The Holy Bible: Genesis. 1-2). However, as described in Chapter 3, Evangelicals are from the poorer spectrum of society, thus, they do not experience this abundance. This is attributed to sin (The Holy Bible: Proverbs. 14-23). By articulating the PT [elites] and LGBTQ+/feminists [others] as enemies of Evangelicals, these groups are portrayed as the origin of this sin, and their policies the main cause for Evangelicals not reaching their full potential. In turn, making Evangelicals victims of ‘the other’s’ sins (Scheffler 2022: 349).

Grounded in this assumption, the sample WhatsApp messages were found to inspire hope in the second coming of Jesus. By drawing similarities between Bolsonaro and the imminent return of

Jesus, a return which will defeat the Anti-Christ [The PT] and result in Jesus [Evangelical values] ruling again, a vote for Bolsonaro was sold as a way to bring about peace for Brazilians (Wolley et al. 2022: 89). According to The Holy Bible (John. 3:3), “the prospect of seeing Jesus face to face is the primary cause of motivation in sanctification, for, everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure”. As such, these similarities encourage Evangelical voters to cast their vote for Bolsonaro, to ensure that they are closer to God and re-gain their self-esteem while also providing a method to alleviate the pressure of the economic crisis (Maher 2022: 57).

Thus, it can be concluded, that by micro-targeting Evangelicals and implementing a populist strategic communication strategy supported by fake news grounded in Evangelical values, the Bolsonaro campaign offered a “psychological coping mechanism among the people [Evangelicals], by addressing their grievances” (Spruyt et al. 2016: 344). As such, populists promote meaning and self-esteem which is reflected in elements of their faith (Salmela & von Scheve 2018: 434).

Given the discussions presented in the preceding sections, it is evident that these emotive political communication strategies used on WhatsApp were able to drive support for Bolsonaro. This occurred by the strategies emphasising identity cleavages, and in doing so, these strategies affected their voting choices as individuals and within a group. As Evangelicals felt threatened by differing values, they cast their vote for a right-wing populist [Bolsonaro] as he upheld Evangelical values and pushed the narrative that he could restore Evangelical dignity, restoring hope and trust in traditional institutions.

5.4.4. WhatsApp and strategic communication

As mentioned in Chapter 2, 4 and above, WhatsApp was the appropriate tool to propagate these strategies and maximise this polarisation. By promoting an ‘us’ [Evangelicals] versus ‘them’ narrative and situating Bolsonaro as a member of the people, the campaign increased the likelihood that people would turn to the Bolsonaro WhatsApp network for information because his views reinforced their own or because the network provided an alternative source of information. Moreover, fake news stories that provoked anger and fear were found to be easily propelled on WhatsApp and went unchecked in the echo-chamber of WhatsApp groups given its end to end encryption feature (Chagas et al. 2019: 255). This tactic was vital to facilitating the rise of

Bolsonaro as it provided a direct connection between the people and the candidate, while acting as an information hub that the people trusted given their values or need for an alternative outside of mainstream media. As such, the campaign could share favourable messaging towards Bolsonaro while antagonising the other (Pereira & de Aguiar 2019: 9). This argument is further supported by an editorial published by Mundo Marketing's Bruno Mello (2018), which investigates the electoral efficacy of Bolsonaro's campaign. For the article, Bolsonaro was identified as a successful example of the marriage between populism and social media and was able to achieve this without large sums of money or a professional digital marketing approach. According to Mello (2018), Bolsonaro's success in communicating his populist discourse is attributed to two distinct reasons:

- (i) utilising social media, particularly WhatsApp, to engage with a large portion of his voter base.
- (ii) defending similar ideas to the people, while also articulating them in a simpler manner.

As such, Bolsonaro was identified to communicate a 'revolt' against the elites/others primarily using a "keyboard, mouse, and a smartphone connected to Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and WhatsApp" (Mello 2018: 44).

5.5. Conclusion

Both the content and sentiment analyses provided in Chapter 4, were analysed within four categories – *the disposition system, the surveillance system, information seeking and measuring fear and anger*. It concluded with a discussion on the key findings.

In an analysis of the disposition system, it was found that strategies of fake news and populism used elements of anger to ensure that Evangelicals clung to their political position by re-telling and emphasising the past indiscretions committed by the PT and their support for conflicting value systems. In contrast, elements of fear were used to present an unknown threat to Evangelicals, to motivate voters to seek alternative candidates. By flooding WhatsApp with messages containing a sense of threat to the people, the Bolsonaro campaign aimed to incite attitudes against the 'them' (de Barros et al. 2020; Salgado 2021). Moreover, enthusiasm [hope] was evoked as a response to elements of anger and fear, while also providing a future orientated element to the campaign.

Given that TAI claims that anger and enthusiasm reduces information seeking while fear increases the need for alternative information, it was clear that by creating an ‘us versus them’ scenario and emphasising the untrustworthy nature of the others and establishment, and also offering future orientated solutions in line with Evangelical values, this tactic allowed for WhatsApp to become an echo-chamber dominated by fake news and pro-Bolsonaro messaging. Moreover, by pushing the narrative that mainstream media is untrustworthy it encouraged the electorate to turn to the Bolsonaro campaign as their primary source of information.

In its discussion, this chapter attributed support for Bolsonaro amongst Evangelicals, to the campaign’s ability to unify the Evangelical Church through the use of WhatsApp messages grounded in a religious signifier. Support is further attributed to evoking affective reactions in relation to loneliness and the demand for social dignity.

This study was restricted by TAI’s inability to consider that an individual may experience anger and fear simultaneously. As such, the use of anger and fear, as displayed in Figure 1 could not be analysed – TAI claims that fear and anger are distinct and operate in different domains of political life. Despite this limitation, this dissertation found that these emotive political communication strategies used on WhatsApp were able to drive support for Bolsonaro, as the identity cleavage which these strategies emphasised affected their voting choices. In 2018, 70% of Evangelicals voted for Bolsonaro (Vital 2020: 9).

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Prior to the election of Bolsonaro, the Brazilian electorate tended to vote for inclusive left-wing populists who elicited emotions of enthusiasm and hope. Bolsonaro's 2018 election reflected a re-alignment and a reinvention of Brazilian politics. This dissertation set out to investigate how emotive strategic political communication contributed to this dramatic political shift.

Chapter 1 contextualised this topic by discussing the peculiarities surrounding this re-alignment towards right-wing populism. In doing so, it provided a review of the literature, defined key terms, introduced the research methodology and provided reasons as to why this topic should be further researched.

Chapter 2 reviewed the scholarly arguments, characteristics and concepts central to this dissertation. It began by first providing an overview on strategy and strategic political communication and its relationship with emotions. It then turned its attention to the types of strategic communication tactics used by the Bolsonaro campaign and lastly, it emphasised the role of WhatsApp as an election communication tool. It also discussed Evangelicalism in Brazil.

Chapter 3 focused on the theoretical framework and research methodology which guided this dissertation. In doing so, this chapter began by tracing the theoretical origins of the Theory of Affective Intelligence (TAI) and concluded by describing the case study, data extraction and analysis tools used to conduct this study.

To answer the main research question, Chapter 4 undertook a sentiment and latent content analysis of the messages shared by pro-Bolsonaro groups on WhatsApp. To measure emotional sentiments, Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count 22 software was used. As mentioned in Chapter 3, LIWC-22 calculates the degree to which a text contains words that belong to an empirically defined psychological and structural category and determines the rate at which cognitions and emotions are present in the given text (Pennebaker et al. 2015). After the data cleaning procedure, a total of 12 messages were analysed. The messages were divided into three sections: *measuring fear*, *measuring anger* and *measuring enthusiasm*. The LIWC-22 generated a positive numerical score,

by reading the messaging and comparing each word to the list of words in the Portuguese dictionary. A percentage was then generated of the total words which match the categories of anger, fear and negative emotion. The sentiment analysis concluded that 41.66% of messages contained elements of only anger, while 25% of messages contained elements of only fear. A total of 8.33% of the messages contained elements of anger and fear. Lastly, 25% of messages contained elements of enthusiasm. These results confirmed that the strategic political communication tactics implemented aimed to mobilise the electorate by providing them with an image and narrative that played on the emotions of anger, fear and enthusiasm. To conduct its latent content analysis, the sample messages were categorised into 3 topic fields: anti-pestismo (*anti-Workers Party*), moral crusade and Bolsonaro as a Messiah.

This sentiment and descriptive analysis was then processed through the TAI in Chapter 5. Following this analysis, it can be concluded that the Bolsonaro campaign used populist, fake news and micro-targeting strategies on WhatsApp to trigger emotional cues. These emotional appeals were tailored to the prevailing socio-economic and political context. TAI argues that deeply entrenched values define how the people behave both outside and within the antagonistic climate characteristic of politics (Granji & Morin 2021: 99). It appears that the technique of micro-targeting Evangelicals was used to appeal to their values and to ensure that the Evangelicals remain true to their value systems. By pushing a narrative that retells a story of injustice and showing an image of feminists and members of the LGBTQ+ disrespecting Christian values and spaces, the Bolsonaro campaign triggered anger and fear among this group (Vital 2020).

Moreover, the campaign aimed to facilitated support for Bolsonaro by portraying the scenario of ‘us versus them’, which is a defining characteristic of populism. By flooding pro-Bolsonaro WhatsApp groups with messages that seemingly threatened the people, the campaign used elements of anger to show that the ‘them’ were blocking the goals of the people, while elements of fear showed that Brazil was under threat due to the failing politics and values of ‘others’ (Tait 2020: 87).

Similarly, as per the TAI, when confronted by unfamiliar stimuli, an individual experiences fear due to an unknown threat. As such, this fear motivates the reader to call on arguments for

supporting a candidate on an issue (Vasilopoulos 2019: 33). This proposition presented by the TAI, was evidently implemented by the Bolsonaro campaign, specifically through sharing unfamiliar stimuli in the form of WhatsApp messages which presented differing value systems. This was done to micro-target Evangelicals. The TAI claims that when confronted by fear, individuals seek alternatives to ease their fear (please see Chapter 5). This assumption was evident within these sample messages and reflected populist principles that demonised the ‘other’. Like anger, these messages aimed to fuel dislike by promoting an ‘us versus them narrative’. In doing so, they portrayed perpetrators as having ill intentions and the need to vote for an alternative, namely Bolsonaro.

Given that TAI claims that anger and enthusiasm reduces information seeking while fear increases the need for an alternative (please see Chapter 5), it was clear that by creating an ‘us versus them’ narrative and emphasising the untrustworthy nature of the others and establishment, WhatsApp became an echo-chamber dominated by fake news and pro-Bolsonaro messaging. Chapter 5 further expands this discussion by attributing Evangelical support for Bolsonaro to unifying the Evangelical Church through religious signifiers and capitalising on the need for social belonging.

It was evident that these emotive political communication strategies used on WhatsApp were able to drive support for Bolsonaro, as the identity cleavage which these strategies emphasised affected their voting choices while also offering a sense of hope through future orientated solutions. As Evangelicals felt threatened by differing values, they cast their vote for a right-wing populist [Bolsonaro] because he upheld Evangelical values and pushed the narrative that he could restore Evangelical dignity through his solutions. It can, therefore, be concluded that by playing on the emotions of anger, and fear, the campaign aimed to trigger a protest vote amongst the people. In other words, instead of voting for the PT who have historically dominated elections, Evangelicals shifted their support to an unlikely candidate who also lived and understood their grievances and was willing to defend the people against these threats. Moreover, by evoking hope along religious lines Evangelicals were motivated to cast a faith based vote.

6.2. Contribution to research

A limitation found in the literature was that much of the focus on social media and elections are analysed from a Global North perspective. Moreover, majority of Global South studies focus on social media and digital activism/social movements/protests particularly the Arab Spring (Mourão & Chen 2019; Jamenez-Martinez 2020; Wolfsfeld et al. 2020) and its effects on democracy (Dzisah 2018; Mitchelstein 2018; Ndelea 2020). Only a few Global South studies have analysed the effects of social media on elections and the use of social media as a political communication tool during elections. For example, by studying the impact of social media on political efficacy in India using the purposive sampling technique, Rizwan Sajid (2015) concluded that social media has a strong impact in establishing, nurturing and modifying political affiliation and voting attention. Much of the literature on social media and elections study the use of Twitter and Facebook in political and advocacy campaigns from the Global North. In this regard, most studies focus on the relationship between the WhatsApp platform and information sharing. For instance, using a range of methodological tools, Jon Palomo and Maria-Bella Sedano (2018), Paula Herrero-Diz et al. (2020), and Jacob Gursky and Samuel Woolley (2021), conclude that given WhatsApp's end-to-end encryption, lack of governmental surveillance, and the high level of trust users have in the app, the platform has become rife with fake news and misinformation.

Similarly, studies which offered a Global South perspective on the use of WhatsApp, also place primary focus on the relationship between WhatsApp and information sharing, particularly during the election period. For example, studies by, Jonathan Hitchen et al. (2020), and Jacinta Maweu (2020) conclude that WhatsApp is a 'blackhole' of fake news and is used to spread propaganda and disinformation, which threatens the integrity of the election outcome and democracy. Fewer studies have analysed the use of messaging platforms, such as WhatsApp, and its ability to shape political behaviour in the Global South. For example, in their assessment of the impact of WhatsApp on the 14th Malaysian general election and using a systematic analysis, Mohd Nizah and Afi Bakar (2019) concluded that WhatsApp acted as the primary platform for political marketing and was influential in increasing political participation. In contrast, in their regression analysis of WhatsApp and its impact on political participation in Chile, Sebastian Valenzuela et al. (2019) claim that there is no direct relationship between the use of WhatsApp and the inclination to vote, rather, WhatsApp operates in an indirect fashion by producing political learning. Moreover, to this study's best knowledge, no study has examined the use of fake news as a

communication strategy.

As such, this dissertation addressed this limitation by contributing to this field of study from a Global South perspective.

Secondly, from a Brazilian perspective, majority of literature focused on Bolsonaro's use of political campaign strategies on Twitter and Instagram. For example, Bolsonaro was identified to use Twitter live streams to spread a binary political token⁵⁰ and his populist discourse and solidify his position as a digital influencer (Mello 2018). Bolsonaro's role as a populist digital influencer is further studied by Daniel Silva (2019) who conducted an empirical analysis of the discursive patterns evident in the Instagram accounts of Bolsonaro and his sons. In an exploration of political communication on social media from a Social Media Logic and Network Media logic perspective, Thamiris Dibo (2020) examined elements that characterised Bolsonaro's most user engaged tweets, and the themes and discourses in the hashtags related to the candidate during the 2018 campaign, through the use of a Discourse Analysis.

Moreover, studies on political micro-targeting were predominantly focused on the niche of online political micro-targeting. Here, studies focused on describing how online data is gathered through data harvesting, and how this online data allowed campaigns to formulate a targeted communication strategy and send online tailored messages to individuals and groups (Boregesius et al. 2018; Guerrero-Sole 2020; Ortega 2021). This information was primarily applied to studying how campaigns deployed their micro-targeting techniques across Facebook and Twitter, with majority of the literature focusing on Donald Trump's 2016 campaign (Fielding 2019). In general, only few studies (Bruno & Evangelista 2019; Ceseranio 2019) have studied the use of micro-targeting techniques on WhatsApp. These studies were focused on Brazil, however, these examinations focused mostly on the dissemination of fake news and offered a superficial account on how the core features of WhatsApp lends itself for micro-targeting. This dissertation addressed this limitation by contributing to literature on how WhatsApp's group feature and encrypted nature was used by the Bolsonaro campaign.

⁵⁰ Symbolic effort to be inclusive to underrepresented groups, with the goal of putting forward the appearance of group solidarity and acceptance, while also excluding groups that exist outside of the chosen underrepresented group (Hogg et al. 2008).

Third, few studies focus on the relationship between populism and Evangelicalism (Zuquete 2019: 445). This is attributed to this relationship being relatively new, particularly gaining prominence with the election of Donald Trump in 2016 (Melkonian-Hoover 2019: 50). Studies tend to focus on predominately at the historical populist voting trends of Evangelicals (Zuquete 2017: 2019; Smith & Woodhead 2020). Other scholars argue that the decline for Catholicism and increased support for Evangelicalism is due to distrust in traditional institutions, while others examine populism as a broad religious identity (Christianity) rather than specific denominations like Evangelicalism (Brubaker 2017; Raderstorf & Reif 2018)

As such, this dissertation addressed this limitation by contributing to this field of study by addressing this research gap.

6.3. Recommendations

As described in Chapters 1 and 2, studies on emotions and populism are dominated by the narrative that fear drives populism. However, this study used TAI to show that anger and enthusiasm are also key vectors of populism. By ignoring anger and enthusiasm, we misunderstand how people respond to threats and their desire for solutions (Peterson 2010). There is thus an urgent need to consider the effects of anger and hope in driving populist messaging. If the academic and political arena fails to recognise grievances and aspirations of the people, it further perpetuates the belief that leaders are distanced from the people. This in turn may have dire consequences for democracy, attempts at building multiculturalism and overall co-existence amongst civilians.

This dissertation has highlighted the role played by individuals in legitimising fake news, particularly through sharing these stories (Coehlo 2020: 6). At the time of this research, Brazil had passed legislation to regulate fake news. However, despite making the creation of bots illegal (unless a purpose is given), this Bill does not tackle the fact that real accounts are also responsible for creating and distributing fake news. This gap in the law should be considered with suggestions for appropriate measures towards those found disseminating fake news.

The TAI fails to consider that an individual may experience anger and fear simultaneously. As such, the use of anger and fear could not be analysed. This serves as a recommendation which

must be discussed. In light of this study, and including a 2018 study by Marcus et al. (2018) which found that fear and anger drive support authoritarian policies, there is need to conduct a study on the neurological possibility of these two emotions occurring at the same time and its impact on an individual's disposition and surveillance systems. Moreover, attempts at broadening the TAI to consider this relationship is vital.

Lastly, only one study (Santos 2020) analyses the Bolsonaro campaigns social appropriation of WhatsApp and the similarities between tactics used by the Bolsonaro campaign and various Evangelical denominations. This research gap provides a further avenue for research.

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APPENDIX

Figure 1



Note. Translation: If you want to protect the children, don't vote for him. Haddad is the inventor of Gay Kit for 6-year old's (Comprova 2019)

Figure 2



Note. Still from a video claiming that Haddad distributed erotic baby bottles in pre-school (BrasilWire 2019).

Figure 3



Note. Translation: This is the rights they want, and if you don't agree they will call you homophobic (Evangelista & Bruno 2019).

Figure 4



Note. Translation: Feminists display themselves as sluts going out onto the streets naked What about you? Do you think that the person denigrating the image of women is Bolsonaro? (BrasilWire 2019).

Figure 5



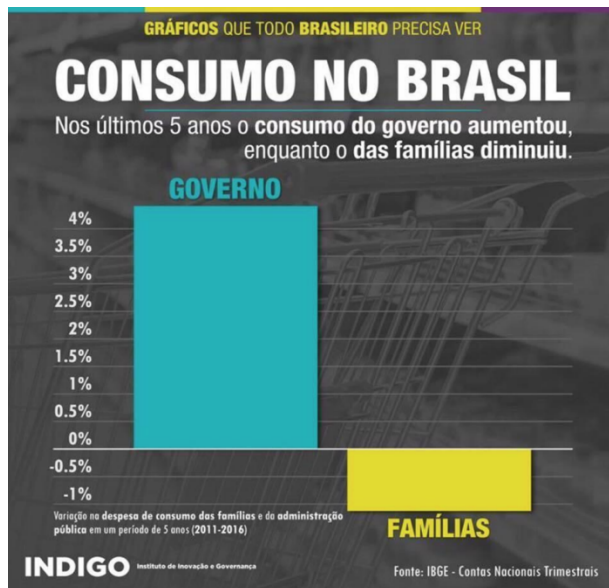
Notes. Translation: Feminists invade churches and defecate and perform sexual acts therein (Evangelista & Bruno 2019).

Figure 6



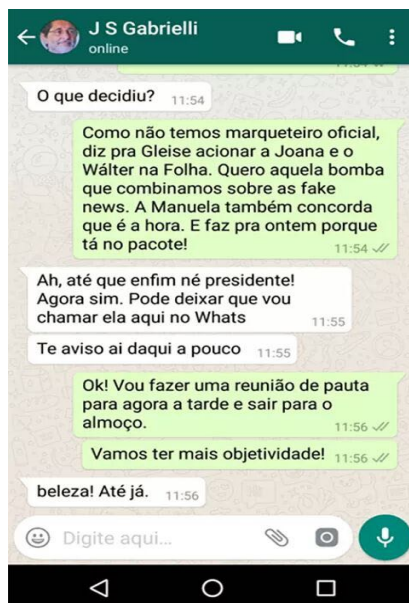
Notes. "Rousseff, a communist sympathiser" (Bruno & Evangelista 2019: 8).

Figure 7



Notes. Translation: Graphs that all Brazilians must see. Consumption in Brazil in the last 5 years, the government consumption increased while family consumption decreased. Government (green). Families (yellow). Change in household consumption expenditure and public administration expenditure in the space of 5 years (2011- 2016) (*El Pais* 2019).

Figure 8



Notes. Translation: What did you decide? Since we don't have a marketing agent, tell Gleise to add Joana and Walter to the Folha (newspaper). I want that bombshell that we planned about the fake news. Manuela also agrees that the time is now. Do it as soon

as possible as we've got it in the bag. Ahh, at last Mr. President! Now you're talking. You can leave it in my hands as I'll call her here on WhatsApp. I'll let you know in a little while. Ok! I'm going to plan an agenda meeting for this afternoon and I'm going to go for lunch. We will have more objectivity. Wonderful! See you soon (Comprova 2018).

Figure 9



Notes. Translation: Teacher Haddad is also a dedicated student of the Workers' Party. Haddad, 32 accusations, accused of corruption, gang formations and money laundering (El Pais 2019).

Figure 10



Notes. Description: Bolsonaro portrayed as having his hand guided by the hand of Jesus Christ (da Silva 2020).

Figure 11



Notes. Description: Bolsonaro photographed on the day he was stabbed, portrayed as being kissed and protected by Jesus (da Silva 2020).

Figure 12



Notes. Translation: It is time for battle 26/05. A new era against communism is going to start. Come to the streets (da Silva 2020).