LUISS ▥

Department
of Political Science

Chair of Political Sociology

DO MEDIA INFLUENCE POLITICS OR DOES POLITICS CONTROL MEDIA?
two media models compared

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Academic Year
2018/2019

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1 Introduction

Nowadays, electors have plentiful occasions to involve in selective exposure, i.e. the selection of news meeting their views. Whether this is happening is still a theme of dispute, that this dissertation aims to resolve.

The purpose of this research is to analyse the relationship between media and politics, if there is any. The core of this study is a case studies' comparison of the elections held in the two examined nations, Italy and the United States of America, in 2018 to establish the impact of the media on the vote and also whether diverse media models (newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet) are more apt to stimulate selective exposure. However, before going looking at the date, there are some previous chapters with the aim to help to contextualise the phenomenon, by defining the media history of both the nations and only after that examine the current situation with the help of the most recent data.

The first chapter following the introduction (2) deals with a brief historical background of the established relationship between media and politics in each of those two nations up to this point in time. The mostly-bibliographic chapter explains and compares the two media models, defying their typology and underlining their differences, but focusing only on the 'old' media of press and radio and the 'new' media of television in the most recent decades of the last century and this one.

The following chapter (3) analyses the *medium* not dealt with in the previous chapter: the Internet, in general, and then the social media. It investigates the effects that these 'new-new' media have on the way people inform themselves about the elections, discovering whether they actively look for information or just passively scroll the homepage. Moreover, there is also a section dedicated to the phenomenon of the politics that becomes the media, i.e. what happens when a political leader opens a social media account and starts talking with their followers without a journalist making the questions.

After having defined the general picture of the phenomenon, the case studies' comparison in the next chapter (4) practically examines the outcomes. The elections are for both countries the ones of 2018 — hence, parliamentary for Italy and congressional for the United States of America — and the timeframe considered for the data collected for the elections themselves

is the biennium composed by the year of the election and the previous one, while some previous studies are also used to support the thesis. The data used are mostly quantitative and come from surveys, interviews and polls, mostly expressed through graphs, with the purpose to see the attention given to the different media throughout the campaigns and their actual impact on the voting preferences, to understand whether the voters used media to form their own opinion or they just confirmed it following only media who supported their preexistent thought.

The last chapter draws the conclusions, hence finally answering the initial question of the media impact on politics or of the politics impact on news media, and then it tries to assess what the future implications might be.

2 Historical Background

The nations that will be considered by this case studies' comparison are Italy and the United States of America and before the analysis of the results, it is necessary to define the media model of each of the two nations with a brief historical recapitulation. After having assessed both the different media models it will be possible to better understand whether the dissimilarity in those held an impact on the outcome and at what extent.

This chapter will only deal with those media who still hold to the type of communication one-to-many, hence, the discussion will be on the press, and then the radio and the television; the media such as the Social Networks, those who offer a direct link between the politics and the citizens without the filter of a third intermediary, will be discussed in the following chapter.

2.1 When the politics owns the media: the Polarized Pluralist Model in Italy

From the most traditional and old communication medium of the press to the newer radio and then television, Italy has always had the peculiarity of having developed a media system strongly influenced by politics.

The publication of the socialist *Avanti!* was followed by the publication of daily newspapers by every political party, from Anarchists to Republicans (Press Reference, 2019a) and since the 'First Republic' those ties between Italian newspapers and politics have only strengthened. The reason why this happened is easy: "the functions of the parties are highly compatible with the capabilities of the newspapers" (Seymour-Ure, 1974, p. 52). Thus, each newspaper was sponsored by a party and had not only the mere duty to inform the citizens, but also to inform the supporters of that party, which would buy that specific newspaper over another one. Hence, there clearly was a strong "connection not only between individual papers and parties but also a correspondence, or parallelism, between the range of papers and the range of parties" (Seymour-Ure, 1974, p. 159). Considering this, it would be easy to assume that as the State subsidies to the printed press lowered then the ties between politics and newspapers loosened, however, this is not what happened: nowadays the situation is not that different, after all, it seems that separating news from opinions is "something not

usually done in Italy" (Shugaar, 1993). On the contrary, "partisanship has mixed with commercialization" (Mancini, 2015): to make sure their audience did not stop buying them, even more than before newspapers made sure not to just inform the citizens but to inform the polarized part of the people that read them, "to further confirm their traditional readers in their one opinions" (Mancini, 2015). Examples of this behaviour can be found on both ends of the political spectrum, and all in between: on the left, *La Repubblica* asked its *dieci domande* (ten questions) about his sex scandals to the rightist, at the time, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi; on the opposite side, *Il Giornale*, owned by Berlusconi, attacked Gianfranco Fini, opponent of Berlusconi. Since then, even more "partisan journalists have emerged: Marco Travaglio, Michele Santoro, Alessandro Sallustri, and many others mix partisanship with a high level of dramatization to address their segmented audiences" (Mancini, 2015). Moreover, the strong affiliation between a party and a newspaper has led to journalists moving to be high-level politicians and vice versa. A clear example is the Giovanni Spadolini's career: he started as the editor of *Il Corriere della Sera* to then become the leader of the Italian Republican Party and the prime minister. A more extreme example is the one of Silvio Berlusconi, which was Mediaset media mogul and prime minister at the same time. (Press Reference, 2019a)

With the coming of the television, those dynamics did not change and the party press was placed beside the party channel. In 1975, the RAI (*Rai – Radiotelevisione Italiana S.p.A.*) reform was implemented with the aim to preserve the autonomy of the public broadcasting service from the Government, this should have been achieved by placing the Rai under the direct control of the Parliament so to grant a free competitive system. However, this plan backfired and it became "certainly true that the parties controlled television through job appointments (for the RAI) and concessions (for private channels)" (Ricolfi, 1997). Indeed, the parties appointed the directors of the channels, after having allotted them among themselves: it was known that the TG1 was Christian democratic, TG2 was of the socialists and the TG3 was owned by the Italian Communist Party. This repartition was implemented also for the radio stations: the PSI obtained the Gr1, the DC obtained the Gr2 and the laic social-democrats got the Gr3 (Preziosi, 2019). This process was called "*lottizzazione*, a partitioning of the political parties' grasp on all sectors of communication" and it "allowed

political power to exert tight control over the broadcasting media and to keep the press in check" (Mazzoleni, 2010). Likewise to the printed press, the same structure still holds in the audio-television broadcasting, even if those exact parties are no longer existing, and it is easy to prove it by looking at the AGCOM data on political pluralism in television (2018), stating which are the political orientations of the people interviewed by or talking in that particular television news, proving that in spite of the attempt of Renzi to put the "parties out of RAI" they still are rooted in it. Moreover, it has to be added in this regard that on May 3rd, 2004 the so-called *Legge Gasparri*, the media law, was implemented and it led to put the *Consiglio d'Amministrazione*, composed by nine members all appointed by and linked to a political party, to head the broadcast station. According to Ciaglia (2013), "since then, the broadcasting in Italy has become even more political" because the composition of the management board reflected perfectly the political power composing the Chambers of Deputies in the Parliament (Bettels, 2013).

Therefore, it can be stated that the Italian media present a commentary-oriented journalism, a parliamentary model of broadcast governance, a politics-over-broadcasting systems and, foremost, an high political parallelism, which de Albuquerque (2018) defines as "a pattern of relationship in which given media organizations systematically echoes the views and agenda of particular political groups". Hence, this media model has all the requirements to be identified as the Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist Model (Hallin and Mancini, 2004).

2.2 When the media set the politics: the Liberal Model in the United States of America

While the media in Italy follow the Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist Model, the media in the United States of America follow the North Atlantic or Liberal Model, which means that media are a formally autonomous system, having a professional model of broadcast governance that allows the public broadcasting to be largely insulated from direct political control (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Indeed, in the United States of America, the media are better known as the "Fourth Estate, an appellation that suggests the press shares equal stature with the other branches of government created by the Constitution" (U.S. Diplomatic Mission to Germany, 2010) and the freedom of the press is a so crucial factor to be

protected by the clear First Amendment to the United States Constitution itself against state regulation and censorship: "Congress shall make no law […] abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press". (Orme, 2015)

Differently from Italy, in the United States of America, newspapers do not receive subsidies from the State but are owned by privates or trusts. In the '80s and '90s, there was a proliferation of corporate ownership, and now there are ten companies that own more than half of the United States' daily circulation of newspapers, with three of them being private (Press Reference, 2019b).

In the beginning, the newspapers used to be founded and funded by privates and so they used to change depending on the changes in the political beliefs of their owner. An example of this 'newspapers-not-being-controlled-by-government' is offered by the case of Joseph Pulitzer, which bought the *Westliche Post* and then combined it with the *St. Louis Dispatch* with the purpose to create his own newspaper, the *Post-Dispatch*: the interesting thing is that he started off as a member of the Republican Party and then he switched factions to join the Democratic Party, and hence his newspaper changed political orientations with him too (Press Reference, 2019b).

Because the Congress nor the local governments cannot interfere with the freedom of the press, the journalists in the United States of America, in a complete opposition to what happens in Italy, are required to be fair in reporting the news and not support plainly any particular political party, moreover, "they are either explicitly prohibited or at least discouraged from holding public office" (Press Reference, 2019b). Furthermore, they are not supposed to be biased towards their own political preferences, however "though surveys have always revealed national-level journalists to be heavily Democratic in their personal beliefs, the news media over the years of the late twentieth century have raised up presidencies and candidates, then smote them down again, seemingly without much regard to substantive issues or ideological affinities" (Pasley, 2001).

The Constitution itself guarantees the freedom of the press, however, the situation for broadcasting — television or radio — journalism is a little bit different, but still not in regard to the Congress controlling what is transmitted; this media area has been federally managed since the beginning in the sense that it was set as a prerequisite to retain a radio

frequency to provide public-service content, and radio and television stations fulfilled this obligation by having regular news programs, like hourly news bulletins (Orme, 2015). This regulation is administered by the Federal Communications Commission, which cannot interfere on how broadcast stations report a story, as long as they oblige to the aforementioned direction, but has only the duty to grant them a license because there is just a certain number of available frequencies, it can in no way interfere in any other questions except from this (Press Reference, 2019b).

3 The Internet and the Social Media

Since the advent of the Internet the ways to get easy information from different sources are increased, and this should be taken as a very useful occasion to have more possibilities to diminish the polarization in the news broadcasting industry, also because a lot of people may tend to look on the Internet for a news without wanting to wait for the television to discuss it, after all, "the same news that I see on TV is already online" as said by a respondent to a study from the Bertelsmann Foundation.[1]

In Italy, 88% of Internet users access the Internet every day (We Are Social, 2019a, p23) while in the United States of America 86% of Internet users use any device to surf the web at that same frequency (We Are Social, 2019b, p23). Moreover, looking closely at the social media area, we can see that in Italy 98% of the people using social media visited or used a social network or messaging service in the past month (We Are Social, 2019a, p32), while in the United States of America the percentage is only 1% lower with a little bit more than an average of two hours spent every day on social media (We Are Social, 2019b, p32).

Because of this, 'old' media had to adapt and moved on the online world: the printed press offered a digital counterpart and the television and the radio created a streaming service to be able to watch and listen to them even from a computer. However, they are not the only that flourished, next to the old renowned names, different new sites are born. While this is not a bad thing *in se* because it could help the decline of polarization, it can have dangerous consequences when they pretend to have more value than institutionalized names.

"Quite frankly, I get more substantial "real" information from The Blaze and Infowars than I get from today's 'fake news' media and government pundits" states a respondent to the survey conducted by Newman (2018), and he is not the only one to think so. The topic of the fake news is not be going to be dealt with in this dissertation, however, it is important to know that some people do not believe what the media, and the government through them, say. Without entering in the merit of the information offered by the most famous newspapers and television's channels, what should be take from this declaration is that, if before, when

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[1] Bertelsmann Foundation @BertelsmannFdn wrote this comment on the image posted on this Twitter thread https://twitter.com/BertelsmannFdn/status/1000039357867331584

they were the only means through which the government could try to influence people they already were not very effective because citizens had preferences on which one to read or watch and so might never know what the other side of the politics they were not interested in said, now they may never know what political parties say at all. Hence, proving that the effectiveness of media to influence people — if there was some, to begin with — is highly decreased.

But how could, then, politicians do? The answer came easier, if the citizens would no longer go on 'old' media (even with a digital always-available-version printed press, television and radio remained old) then the politicians would go on these 'new' media, but not by opening a site that once again could be never visited, but by opening an account on the social media already used by the population.

3.1 When the politics become media: the political leaders' social accounts

If social media were once only a trivial space for political debate, now they are largely surpassing television as the chosen mean for speeches. The impact of a politician now depends on their social media, how they use them and how many likes or followers or shares they have can launch or destroy their whole career. As George Osborne said, politicians failing to comprehend the value of social media belong to a "dinosaur age"[2] (Gerbaudo, 2019).

Gerbaudo (2019) defines this new figure of the politician able to talk on social media with anyone at any moment without a journalist to mediate as the "hyperleader". A lot of politicians, especially in the United States of America are becoming this kind of political leader, but also in Italy, the social media are well-often used by the current Interior Minister, Matteo Salvini. He, but a lot of others, use these social media to talk directly to the people and with the people and, most importantly, to look like the people they are representing, the image of a politician petting a dog or eating a slice of bread with a Nutella would never end on the top page of a newspaper or on the homepage of a site, unless the politician themselves makes it happen.

"I like it because I can get also my point of view out there, and my point of view is very important to a lot of people that are looking at me" is the opinion of Donald Trump, current president of the United States of America, on the utility of social media (Murse, 2019) and a similar view is shared

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[2] He makes this statement into this article https://www.theguardian.com/media/2019/mar/07/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-is-the-new-politics-says-george-osborne

by Gerbaudo (2019) when he talks about Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez saying that "self-generated popularity and large social media presence means she doesn't need to ask anyone's permission to say anything", proving the point that without an intermediator the politician is freer to act as they please.

Obviously, some concerns have been raised and the social media have been called an "authoritarian medium" (Beauchamp, 2019) for this exact capacity to let anyone say what they like without filtering it. While it may be shared some sort of apprehension, it goes without even saying that this is exactly what made the use of social media for politics so successful, possible misinterpretations and all.

4 Media influence in the 2018 political elections: a case studies' comparison

On 4th, March 2018, Italy voted to renew its Parliament and on 6th, November 2018, the United States of America voted to renew their Congress, two years into the Trump administration. The aim of this case studies' comparison is to establish the weight that the media discussed up to this point (newspapers, television, radio, social media) have held in those polling stations.

4.1 Italian parliamentary election

To establish how much the media weighted on the result, it should be firstly defined the amount of exposure they had, discovering whether people did follow the media, otherwise it would be pointless talking about the influence of something not considered by anyone. However, this extreme option does not occur and the media were indeed followed by the people. According to Cornia's study (2018, p89), the sources of news most used in Italy during the period of the campaign have been the television and the online (press and social media), hence, it could be deducted that whoever controlled those should have won.

SOURCES OF NEWS 2013–18
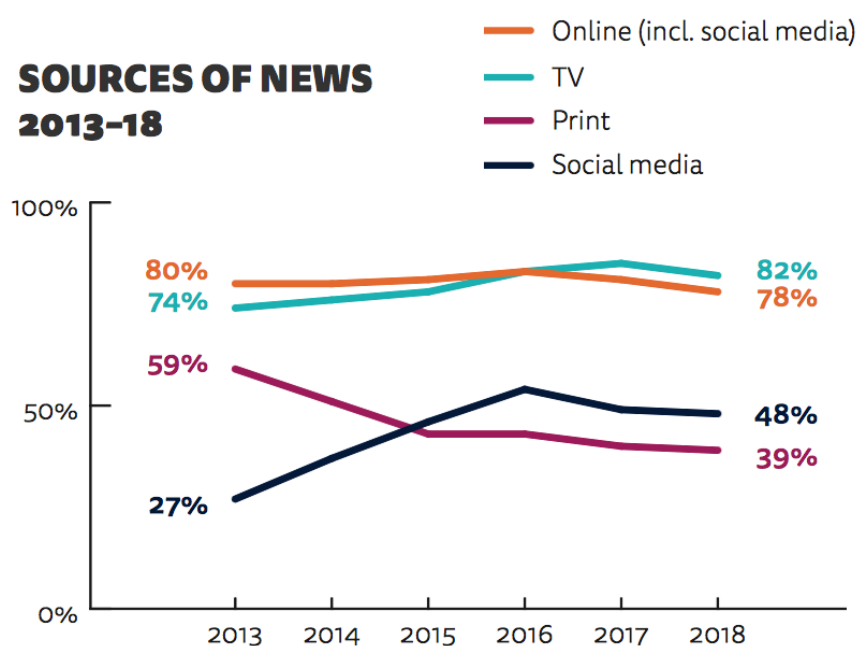
This case study is going to discuss the impact of television first. Keep considering the same research (Cornia, 2018, p89) it appears clear that the RAI still holds a solid first position in regarding to the audience.

TV, RADIO AND PRINT

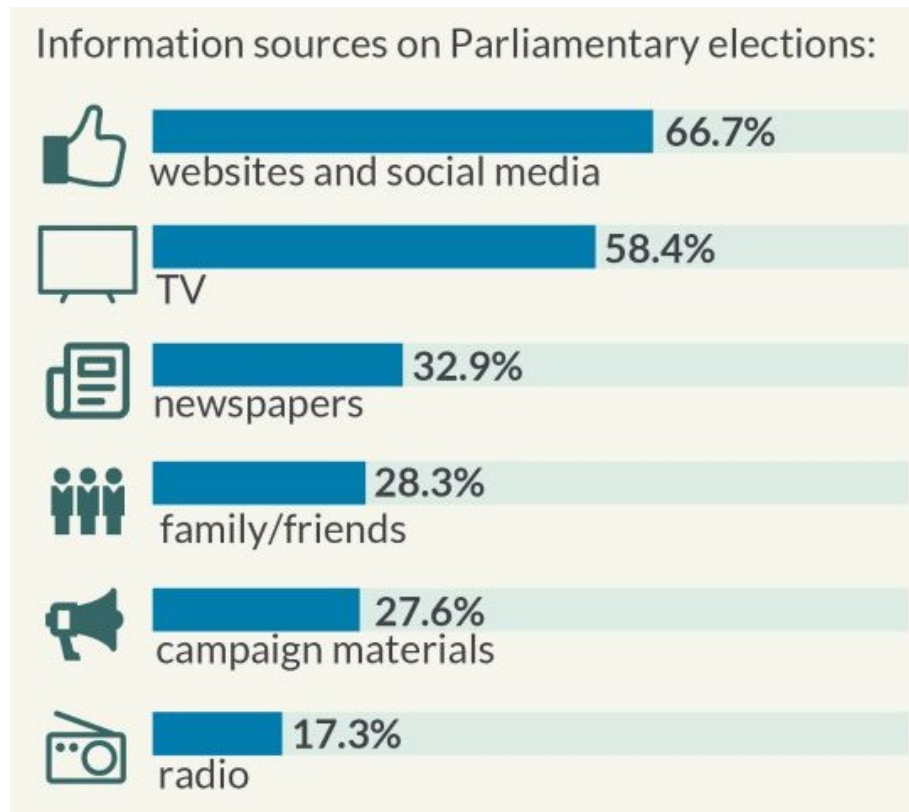| Source	Value
RAI News (Tg1, Tg2, Tg3, Tg4)	59
Mediaset News (Tg4, Tg5, Studio Aperto)	42
SkyTg24	35
RaiNews24	33
TgCom24	33
Tg La7	31
La Repubblica	23
Il Corriere della Sera	22
TGR	22
Porta a Porta	21
Regional or local newspaper	18
Piazza pulita	18
Quinta colonna	17
Dimartedi	14
Commercial radio news	14
Il Sole 24 Ore	13
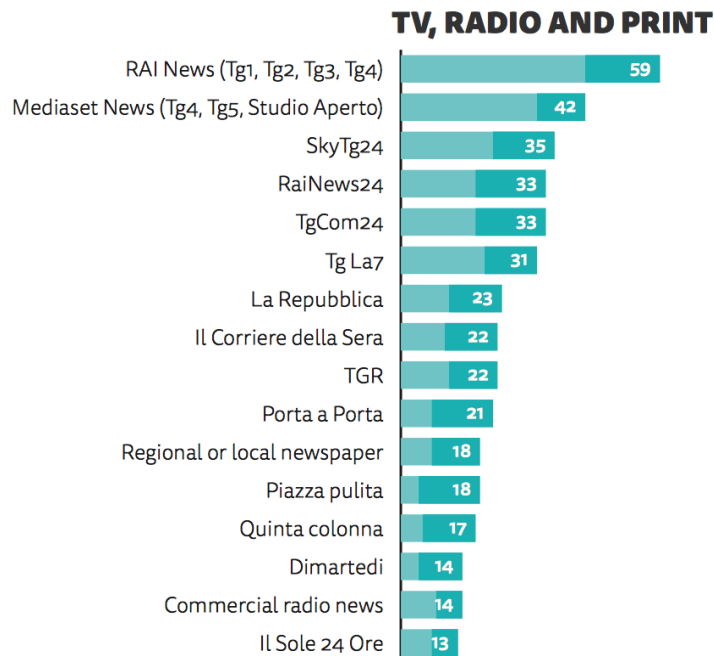
To follow the same prior reasoning, then, whoever controlled the RAI consequently should have had the maximum exposure and reach. However, as stated before in chapter 2.1, in Italy the control of the media is still quite evenly distributed among all the parties, hence, each party had its own channel to use if it wanted to make propaganda. It has to be noted that, in spite of the major control of one party over a channel, that channel has anyways the duty to give speaking time also to other parties, to guarantee a fair share of information. Whereas this stands still, looking at the AGCOM (2018, p5) data it is quite evident the actual inclinations of that channel: the data analysed summarizes, in all the editions of the TG (in particular we are focusing on the RAI's TGs), the speaking time offered to all those political and institutional subjects. However, even considering the Mediaset News (second in the ranking as most used sources) a similar division holds, however a little bit more skewed towards the rightists parties (AGCOM, 2018, p10). However, this is not a very effective tactic for the simple reason that, while is it true that a channel reflects the orientation of that party in charge, at the same time, the audience of that channel reflects

already the voters of that party. Hence obtaining as a result of just convincing already convinced voters, that follow that channel because it supports their party, and not acquiring new ones.

Information sources on Parliamentary elections:

- websites and social media — 66.7%
- TV — 58.4%
- newspapers — 32.9%
- family/friends — 28.3%
- campaign materials — 27.6%
- radio — 17.3%

It has also to be considered that television is identified as a source of news in the wide sense, in particular for this parliamentary election the most used source has been the websites and the social media.[3]

Nonetheless, it doesn't really matter because a reasoning similar to the previous can be made also in this case. While the online one may pass as a free world not polarized because anyone can google and search for whatever they like, this is exactly why it becomes more polarized, because people look for what they want to see, they became active polarizers of their own social media accounts by clicking like on the politicians they are going to vote for and pages that deal with similar topics, mostly visited by other users with that same vote inclination (Marino, 2018).

[3] Bertelsmann Foundation @BertelsmannFdn posted this research on this Twitter thread https://twitter.com/BertelsmannFdn/status/1000039357867331584

Measuring the Domain Engagement Metrics in reference to the Partisanship Attention Score (10% most productive domain)

Media Source — AVG_total_engagement

Media Source	AVG_total_engagement
ilblogdellestelle.it	7.040
repubblica.it	4.220
beppegrillo.it	4.161
ilfattoquotidiano.it	2.912
palermo.repubblica.it	2.759
corriere.it	2.123
fanpage.it	1.992
lastampa.it	1.917
ilpost.it	1.852
ilgiornale.it	1.768
ilpopulista.it	1.725
video.repubblica.it	1.653
tgcom24.mediaset.it	1.424
huffingtonpost.it	1.390
linkiesta.it	1.340
ilmessaggero.it	1.157
video.corriere.it	1.052
democratica.com	1.042
ilmattino.it	990
ansa.it	863
today.it	824
ilsole24ore.com	797
orizzontescuola.it	749
secoloditalia.it	717
giornalettismo.com	666

Partisanship Attention Score
5 STARS MOVE.. | LEAGUE | DEMOCRATIC P.. | Neutral

Media Source — AVG_share_count

Media Source	AVG_share_count
ilblogdellestelle.it	1.202
beppegrillo.it	726
repubblica.it	565
ilfattoquotidiano.it	425
palermo.repubblica.it	406
corriere.it	254
ilpost.it	254
lastampa.it	245
ilgiornale.it	197
linkiesta.it	183

Media Source — AVG_reaction_count

Media Source	AVG_reaction_count
ilblogdellestelle.it	5.227
beppegrillo.it	3.029
repubblica.it	2.473
ilfattoquotidiano.it	1.776
palermo.repubblica.it	1.690
corriere.it	1.256
ilpopulista.it	1.130
lastampa.it	1.091
ilpost.it	1.087
ilgiornale.it	1.062

Media Source — AVG_comment_count

Media Source	AVG_comment_count
repubblica.it	1.182,5
fanpage.it	894,5
ilfattoquotidiano.it	710,6
palermo.repubblica.it	661,9
corriere.it	613,3
ilblogdellestelle.it	611,1
lastampa.it	581,6
ilpost.it	510,8
ilgiornale.it	509,4
video.repubblica.it	484,0

The fact that the most engaged media sources were the ones of the Five Stars Movement, which then received the majority of votes as a single party, may mislead people to think that it was only their influence on media online that helped them win. However, it is exactly in the previous sentence "the ones of the Five Star Movement" that the answer lies. Especially online, there is the necessity to go on a site — enter its link in the search bar or write its name on Google — and then scroll through the page and then read it, it must be an active action, initiate by the person.

Whereas the printed press may still have a minor possibility to influence a passive reader that while looking for their newspaper might happen to read the headlines of the others too, or even better the television because it is obliged to offer some space to every party might, even not on purpose, influence a passive viewer, although there are no confirmations on these hypotheses, on online media this is highly impossibile. It is true that after the first digitation the search engine memorizes what has been written and then offers it as a suggestion the following times and also every publicity in even other sites not related to politics may bring back to that first search, but that is not a subtle influence because the users was already influenced the first time they searched for it. At most it can become a

'solidification' because by seeing always the same things the user may strengthen their own beliefs and not be lead to change them, but still those views and opinions were already there in the first place. If they did happen to change, for whatever external reason, then is very likely that the user would make another search to a more fit site and then they would keep going back there, making the searching engine memorize the new one and not suggesting the old one any longer.
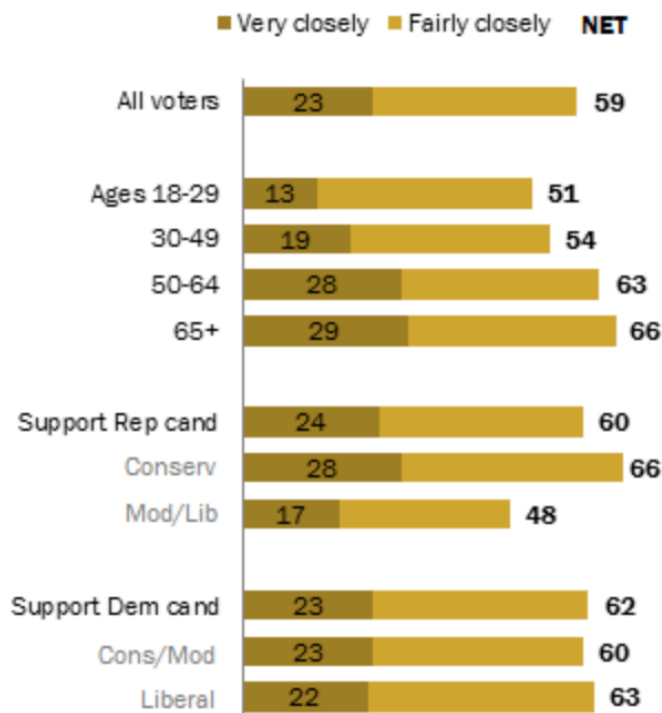
4.2 US congressional election

To understand the extension to which the media influenced the campaign, it is of primary importance to define the width of their own exposure, i.e. how much people followed media and how many of them. If the media were followed by no one, then it would be easy to establish that they had no influence at all. Nonetheless, this is not the situation.

A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (2018, 21) proves that news about the mid-term elections were followed and, most importantly, they were followed by electors of both parties. It is yet to be defined who followed which source, but it is clear that both parties were heeded equally, hence, there was no stronger party in terms of news pervasiveness.

No partisan gap in attentiveness to election news

% of registered voters who say they are following news about elections very/somewhat closely ...

■ Very closely ■ Fairly closely **NET**

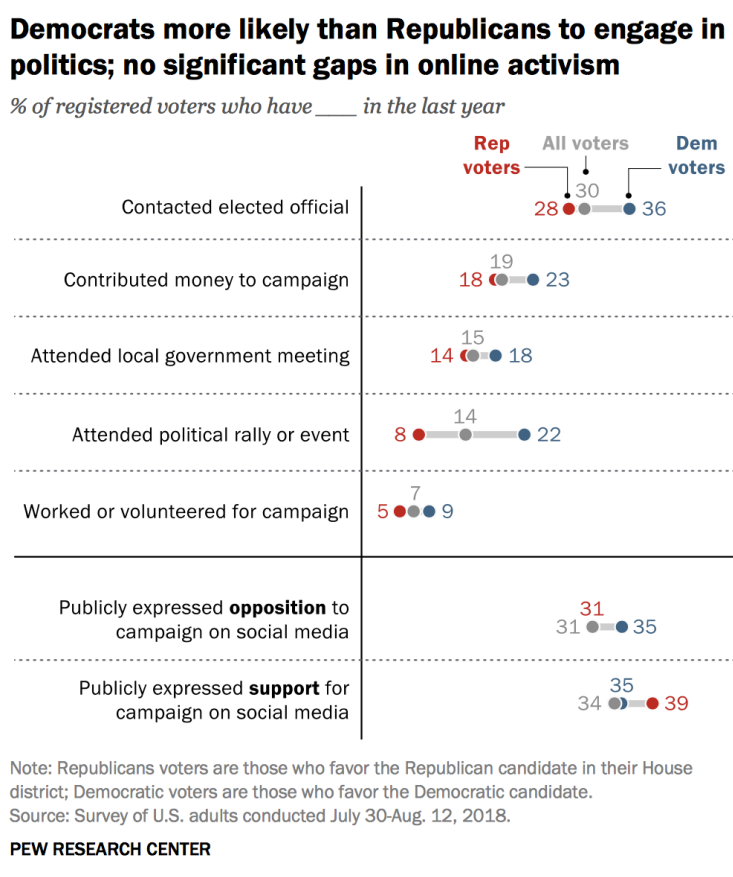|	Very closely	NET
All voters	23	59
Ages 18-29	13	51
30-49	19	54
50-64	28	63
65+	29	66
Support Rep cand	24	60
Conserv	28	66
Mod/Lib	17	48
Support Dem cand	23	62
Cons/Mod	23	60
Liberal	22	63

Note: Based on registered voters.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 5-12, 2018.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Similar equality is discovered also on online social media (Pew Research Center, 2018b, 1) because both parts expressed support towards their favourite candidate and opposed the adversary.

Democrats more likely than Republicans to engage in politics; no significant gaps in online activism

% of registered voters who have _____ in the last year

	Rep voters	All voters	Dem voters
Contacted elected official	28	30	36
Contributed money to campaign	18	19	23
Attended local government meeting	14	15	18
Attended political rally or event	8	14	22
Worked or volunteered for campaign	5	7	9
Publicly expressed **opposition** to campaign on social media	31	31	35
Publicly expressed **support** for campaign on social media	34	35	39

Note: Republicans voters are those who favor the Republican candidate in their House district; Democratic voters are those who favor the Democratic candidate.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 30-Aug. 12, 2018.
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Moreover, still in regard to social media, it is important to keep in mind that there was a '"reciprocity" among them, meaning that who had an account on one site was likely to have also another account on a similar social media platform (Smith and Anderson, 2018), hence it is not a sum of all the likes and hearts that should be done to see how much a politician is appreciated for the simple reason that it may be the same person on multiple platforms (or even with multiple accounts).

Substantial 'reciprocity' across major social media platforms

% of __ users who also ...

	Use Twitter	Use Instagram	Use Facebook	Use Snapchat	Use YouTube	Use WhatsApp	Use Pinterest	Use LinkedIn
Twitter	–	73%	90%	54%	95%	35%	49%	50%
Instagram	50	–	91	60	95	35	47	41
Facebook	32	47	–	35	87	27	37	33
Snapchat	48	77	89	–	95	33	44	37
YouTube	31	45	81	35	–	28	36	32
WhatsApp	38	55	85	40	92	–	33	40
Pinterest	41	56	89	41	92	25	–	42
LinkedIn	47	57	90	40	94	35	49	–

Source: Survey conducted Jan. 3-10, 2018.
"Social Media Use in 2018"

90% of LinkedIn users also use Facebook

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Having defined that electors were exposed fairly to news about the mid-term elections, the following stage is to establish which media was the most used and by whom. The answer to this question is obtainable by looking at the outcome of another survey (Pew Research Center, 2018c) that shows a clear generational gap. New voters and those in their twenties had more interest in social media, against the television of the older voters.

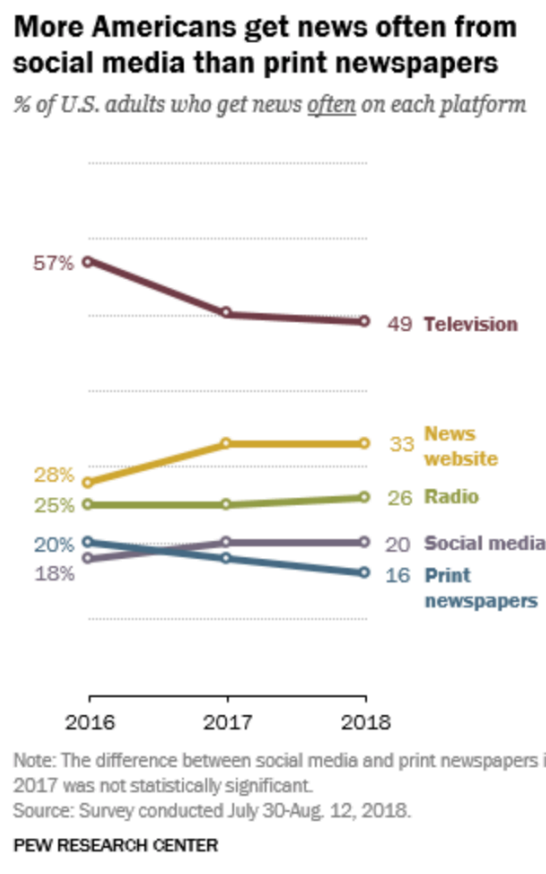## Television dominates as a news source for older Americans

% of each age group who often get news on each platform

Legend: TV · News website · Radio · Social media · Print newspapers

Age group	TV	News website	Radio	Social media	Print newspapers
18-29	16%	27%	13%	36%	2%
30-49	36	42	29	22	8
50-64	65	28	28	14	18
65+	81	28	30	8	39
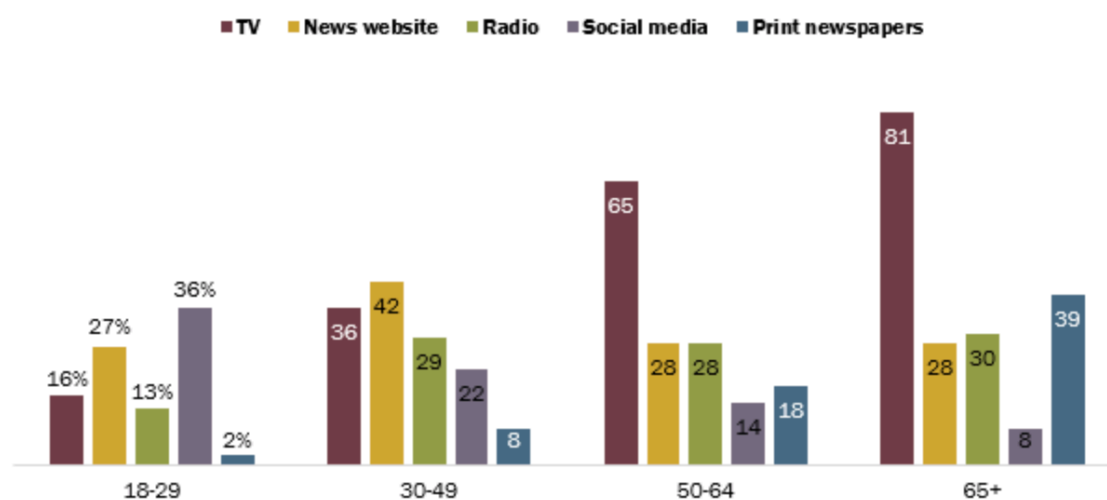
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 30-Aug. 12, 2018.
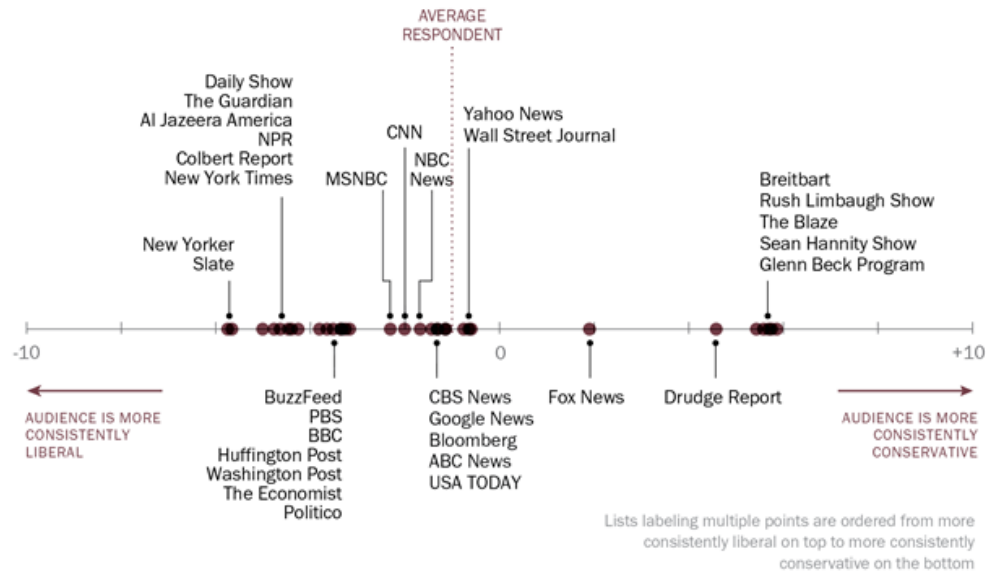
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

It is also interesting to notice how the news are no longer looked for on paper, but the sites of the newspapers occupy a stable high rank among each category and a solid second place calculating the mean. Considering the mean also attests how the television, in spite of having lost some percentage since the beginning of the mid-terms' campaign, still detains the first position.

More Americans get news often from social media than print newspapers

% of U.S. adults who get news often on each platform

57% ○——○ 49 Television

33 News website
28% ○
25% ○——○ 26 Radio

20% ○ 20 Social media
18% ○ 16 Print newspapers

2016 2017 2018

Note: The difference between social media and print newspapers in 2017 was not statistically significant.
Source: Survey conducted July 30-Aug. 12, 2018.

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Keeping this in mind, an assumption that could be made is that, hence, whoever controlled the television then should have won because, as aforementioned, the voters were following from both sides attentively the election news. However, having assessed that both the electorates were exposed equally to the news does not, in any way, imply that both were exposed to the same source of that news. Indeed, whereas in a perfect world the media would be neutral and would present fairly each party, the Pew Research Center (2016) published a trend panel proving how not neutral the televisive media are and how much they — the channel with its audience — are inclined towards one or the other party.
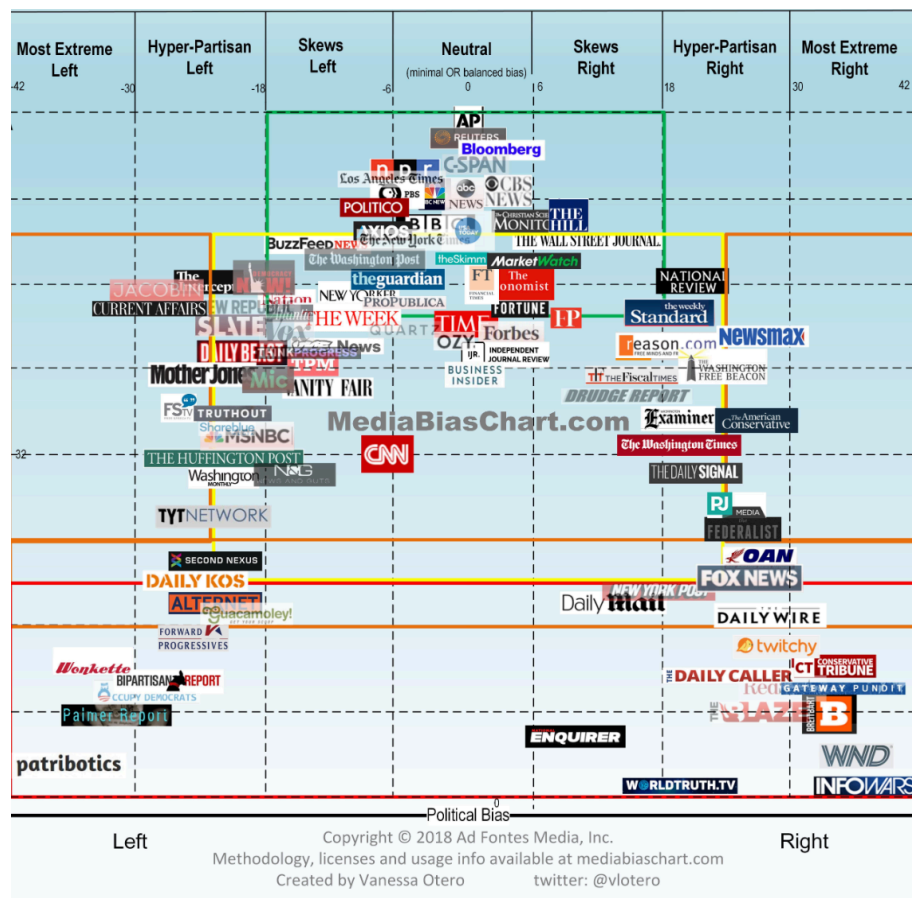
Ideological Placement of Each Source's Audience

Average ideological placement on a 10-point scale of ideological consistency of those who got news from each source in the past week...

AVERAGE
RESPONDENT

Daily Show
The Guardian
Al Jazeera America
NPR
Colbert Report
New York Times

Yahoo News
Wall Street Journal

CNN

NBC
News

MSNBC

Breitbart
Rush Limbaugh Show
The Blaze
Sean Hannity Show
Glenn Beck Program

New Yorker
Slate

-10

0

+10

← AUDIENCE IS MORE
CONSISTENTLY
LIBERAL

BuzzFeed
PBS
BBC
Huffington Post
Washington Post
The Economist
Politico

CBS News
Google News
Bloomberg
ABC News
USA TODAY

Fox News

Drudge Report

AUDIENCE IS MORE
CONSISTENTLY
CONSERVATIVE →

Lists labeling multiple points are ordered from more
consistently liberal on top to more consistently
conservative on the bottom

American Trends Panel (wave 1). Survey conducted March 19-April 29, 2014. Q22. Based on all web respondents. Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see About the Survey for more details.) ThinkProgress, DailyKos, Mother Jones, and The Ed Schultz Show are not included in this graphic because audience sample sizes are too small to analyze.

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That study has been conducted a lustrum ago, however since then those positions did not come closer to one another, on the contrary some of them even moved further more to the extremes, like the now hyper-partisaned rightist Fox News (Ad Fontes Media, 2018). Obviously, television networks are not the only subject to polarization, this applies also to newspapers and even on the internet, on social media.

Copyright © 2018 Ad Fontes Media, Inc.
Methodology, licenses and usage info available at mediabiaschart.com
Created by Vanessa Otero   twitter: @vlotero

It may seem strange to consider social media subjected to polarization because anyone could open an account and post online, but still they are, only that this time is not a *per se* polarization: it is not, for example, Facebook to be ideologically oriented — it could never because it grants all the political parties the possibility to promote their contents on the platform — but it is the user that orients its own account. Indeed, it is essential to keep in mind that Facebook has an algorithm that shows people what they may be more interested in interacting with. Which happened to be, in the case of the congressional elections, advertisements in line with the political view of the user. Mitchell and Weisel (2014) proved this in a survey they conducted.

Consistent conservatives see more Facebook posts in line with their views

% who say posts about politics on Facebook are mostly or always in line with their own views ...

Total	23%
Consistently conservative	47
Mostly conservative	28
Mixed	17
Mostly liberal	13
Consistently liberal	32
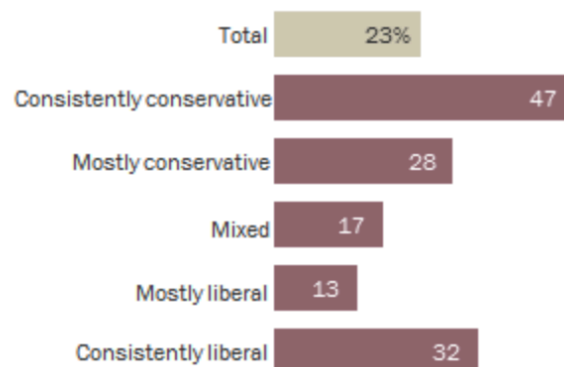
Nevertheless, this is not the only aspect they had investigated. While this "see your preferences" on Facebook might be a sort of "passive" polarization because it derives from all the previous likes and researches, without people actually telling Facebook where they are politically oriented, there is also an "active" polarization, i.e. the "block your disfavours". A lot of social media offer the possibility to block whoever is not liked and, still in the aforementioned report, it has been verified that this is true on Facebook: it turned out that a lot a people tended to act like this, in particular liberals were likely to block who had political opinion different from their own. Hence, it may be wondered how it was possible for the conservative party to influence liberal voters if they did not even see their posts or advertisements.

Consistent liberals more likely to block others because of politics

% of Facebook users who have hidden, blocked, de-friended or stopped following someone because they disagreed with something that person posted about politics ...

Total	26%
Consistently conservative	31
Mostly conservative	24
Mixed	19
Mostly liberal	25
Consistently liberal	44
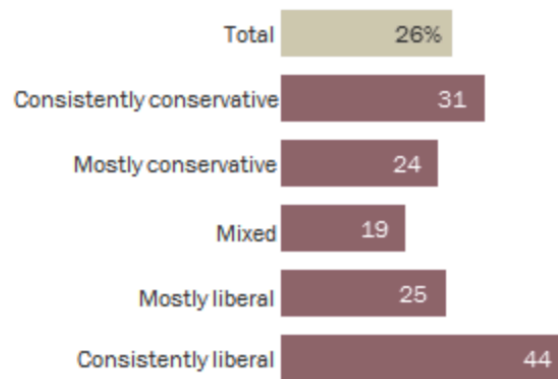
Source: Survey conducted March 19-April 29, 2014.
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

After having discussed the major influencing media and having proved that they were not neutral, it is time to study the results of the elections and see how much impact they had. Looking at the recapitulation on how many likes the candidate and the party had (Roose and Keith, 2018) it is possible to have a personal idea of who is going to win and where, however, when those previsions are confronted with the actual results (CNN Politics, 2018) there are a couple of interesting surprises: with 3.5m of interactions on Facebook over the 1.5 of the Republicans candidates, the Democrats win in the House, while the Republicans win, but with a small difference like the one on the interactions, the Governor elections; quite surprising is, however, the result of the Senate, in spite of having 10m interaction over the 2.2m of the Republicans, the Democrats lose in the Senate with a really short margin: in particular, in Nevada, Heller (29k of interactions on Facebook's posts in the last 30 days previous the election) lose to Rosen (20k interaction); in Arizona, McSally (31k interactions) loses against Sinema (23k interactions); in Florida, Nelson (105k interactions) loses to Scott (102k interactions); in North Dakota, Heitkamp (96k interactions) loses to Cramer (23k interactions); anyway, the biggest shock comes from Texas, where the

Democratic Beto O'Rourke (1.6m interactions) cannot beat Ted Cruz (with only 820k interactions) for only 214,921 votes.

Because of that, it is straightforwardly deducible how the likes on a social media page are not a counter of the actual voters. It has always to be remembered that whereas for a person from the opposite party is easier to check on a social media what a rival candidate is up to than watching or reading constantly the news more favourable to the other side, for the politician might be impossible to actually convince them to change their vote but they are still misled to believe that their online campaign is having a significative impact.

5 Conclusion

"The evidence strongly suggests that people think about what they are told but at no level do they think what they are told" said Trenaman and McQuail (1961) when discussing how the media could set the political agenda of a state, and this statement still holds true, somehow, the only exception is that, nowadays, is the people who decide what they want to be told to think about.

It appears clearly from the two case studies that no matter the where — may it be in Italy or in the United States of America — or the when — may it be in March or in November — or the media model — may it be polarized or liberal — the direct influence that media have on politics is not as large as a journalist may expect, or desire. People do not make a political opinion through media, but they already have one and look for external confirmation to strengthen it even more.

In other words: people do not vote for a party because they read or watch about it, people read and watch about a party because they vote for it.

This should, thus, imply that the influence of politics on media is stronger, but it is not a matter of 'influence' but more a question of 'selling'. If a newspaper or a television or radio program knows that its audience wants that sort of things — that they are expecting that sort of things — they will publish it to accommodate them, after all the one of the media is an industry that just like any other has to obtain an income return, if the readers or watchers or listeners happened to be more interested in something else, then they would talk about that something else, still offering different points of view on it.

This whole concept is not something new, discovered only now, already in 1843, Honoré de Balzac recognised this notion in his pamphlet, titled *The Journalists*: "there is every reason to think that the editors of Premiers-Paris are mediocre by birth, and they become so even more so with this annoying, sterile work, in which they are much less committed to express their thoughts than to represent those of most of their subscribers. Do you know which class of people is predominant in a mass? These *tartine* producers are very committed to being nothing more than the blank canvas on which they project, like Chinese shadows, the ideas of the subscriber. The tenor of each newspaper therefore plays a little game with its

subscriber. At each event, the subscriber forms an opinion and falls asleep saying: «I'll see tomorrow what *my newspaper* says». The Premier-Paris, whose only reason for existence is the continuous divination of his subscriber's thoughts, pleasantly surprises him the next day by making his thoughts rise. The subscriber rewards this game of *Vive l'amour, la carte a fait son tour!* with twelve or fifteen francs every three months.[4]"

In conclusion, what has transpired throughout this dissertation is that people already have selected their own set of ideas, they are just looking for someone to represent them, hence, they are willing to follow whoever that someone may be.

It clearly could never be the other way around because, through all the blocking and the preference filters activated, a politician with different views would not even be successful in getting in touch with that audience not interested in being approached.

Nonetheless, here lies the new question that might be interesting to analyse in a future more extensive research: if people do not form their opinion through media, how do they form it? Might it be for the place where they are raised? Might it be for the family where they are from and that they are trying to please? It should be an interesting field in which expand this study.

Having assessed that media is not the basis for the creation of the influence, however, does not imply that the media industry is useless or that there is no point for a politician in being interviewed by a newspaper or in accepting the invitation to a news broadcasting program anymore.

Media still play a huge role in the political arena, just not the same everyone thought it was: they are important to 'fidelize' the electorate. The media do not need to persuade anymore because if the people are listening or watching or reading it, then they have already made up their mind, however, they can help in making that already formed opinion persistent: if people were not to see passively any longer the person they want to vote for, they might start looking actively again to find someone else, still in the same ideological position, to replace them.

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[4] From *I giornalisti* published by Medusa Edizioni, English translation made by the author of this dissertation.

Some people may consider problematic this partiality towards media that validates former beliefs and ideas because it should be the foundation of the democracy the exchange of opinions, however, as deducted before, if this partition was not to be offered anymore to the people, they would just actively research it.

After all, this is not a violation of the freedom of the press — more like a border-line use, maybe — it would be a bigger violation to order to any site or newspaper or program to deal with the same arguments in the exact same ways.

Quite the opposite, indeed, if this were to happen, then, it would practically leave people with only one broadcasting station and one newspaper, which is exactly what democracies should be against.

Hence, what has to be done? Nothing should be done because there is nothing to resolve, this discovered in this paper is a preexistent truth that would be very hard, if not impossible to change: media and politics have cooperated and coexisted together since a long time and up to this moment the democracy has been preserved, the people have been free to vote for whoever they liked, politicians could be elected if they guess the right electoral program and the media industry is still earning money. All in all, a perfect politically biased media world.

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Riassunto

Questa tesi si propone come obbiettivo di capire se esista o meno una relazione tra i media e la politica e, in caso di esito positivo, a quale livello questa relazione sia e chi delle due parti in considerazione abbia più potere sull'altra.

Il campione di riferimento per l'analisi in questione è composto dalle due nazioni di Italia e Stati Uniti d'America, le elezioni considerate sono quelle del 2018 per entrambe, pertanto le parlamentari in Italia e le congressuali negli Stati Uniti d'America.

Prima di analizzare direttamente i dati, in un capitolo introduttivo viene ripercorsa brevemente la storia dei media nelle due nazioni, concentrandosi sugli anni più recenti di stampa e televisione. Il primo capitolo dopo l'introduzione analizza, dunque, la storia dei media in Italia, in particolare quelli creati durante la 'Prima Repubblica' e quelli a essa successivi. Viene dedicata una minuziosa attenzione al media audiovisivo e, con esso, al fenomeno della lottizzazione: la ripartizione, tra i tre partiti che all'epoca dominavano il parlamento dei tre canali della televisione nazionale (Rai 1 alla Democrazia Cristiana; Rai 2 al Partito Socialista Italiano; Rai 3 al Partito Comunista Italiano). Vengono, quindi, evidenziati gli effetti che tuttora sopravvivono, anche nella divisione delle reti radiofoniche. Viene, pertanto, dedotto che il modello mediatico usato in Italia sia quello del pluralista polarizzato, richiamando lo studio di Hallin (2004), ciò significa che i media seguono un sistema di trasmissione delle notizie che comporta un alto parallelismo con la politica.

Un'analisi analoga viene effettuata anche per i media dell'altra nazione in esame, gli Stati Uniti d'America, tuttavia, in quanto il modello mediatico tipico del paese è quello liberale, essa fornisce risultati differenti. Infatti, negli Stati Uniti d'America la stampa è vista come il Quarto Potere e la sua libertà è tanto importante da essere garantita dal Primo Emendamento della Costituzione. L'analisi prosegue specificando come, al contrario dell'Italia, la stampa non abbia mai ricevuto sussidi statali, mantenendo pertanto una sua indipendenza dal governo e rispecchiando invece la visione dei suoi autori. Un'altra differenza è che, mentre in Italia con notevole frequenza i giornalisti intraprendono una carriera nella politica o i politici sono magnanti dei media, negli Stati Uniti d'America ai giornalisti è esplicitamente proibito o sono scoraggiati dal detenere una carica pubblica. Leggermente diversa è la

situazione per televisione e radio: difatti in quell'ambito vi è la Commissione Federale per le Comunicazioni a regolare la concessione delle licenze, tuttavia, oltre a ciò, non ha ulteriore potere d'interferenza, l'unica dettaglio che essa può supervisione è che venga mantenuto l'impegno di 'fornire contenuto di servizio pubblico', spesso elargito in notizie diramate tramite aggiornamenti orari.

Non vengono trattati in questo capitolo i nuovi media digitali perché ad essi è dedicato quello successivo, nel quale viene spiegata l'influenza che i social media hanno avuto nel panorama mediatico e, in particolare, ci si dedica ad analizzare l'uso che ne fa la politica e, più accuratamente a quello che accade quando i politici si trovano a comunicare direttamente col popolo senza l'intervento dei media classici.

Per prima cosa, vengono brevemente forniti alcuni dati statistici sull'utilizzo di internet e dei social, per poi discutere il valore effettivo di avere una possibilità infinita di posti in cui cercare e l'uso che ne viene fatto.

Dopodiché viene aperta una parentesi sull'uso fattone dai politici, riportando alcune loro citazioni secondo cui si sentono molto più liberi sui social media perché possono scrivere ciò che vogliono senza aver bisogno della mediazione di un giornalista. A questo proposito viene anche brevemente affrontata la possibilità che i politici abusino di questa libertà di parola, ma viene notato come sarebbe impossibile chiedere loro di non pubblicare proprio tutto ciò che vogliono perché è esattamente questo il motivo per cui apprezzano i social media.

Concluso il capitolo terzo, si apre dunque il *case studies' comparison* che analizza le elezioni in Italia e Stati Uniti d'America, per entrambi i paesi vengono utilizzati grafici che mostrano dati quantitativi raccolti da interviste e sondaggi da fonte differenti, partendo dai numeri l'autore traccia il profilo di come i cittadini sono arrivati a votare per qual partito e quanto, quindi, i media abbiano inciso.

Il primo *case* study è dedicato all'Italia ed alle elezioni del 4 Marzo 2018, in cui si è votato per rinnovare entrambe le camere del Parlamento, ossia quella del Senato e quella dei Deputati, e cerca di fornire le risposte a due domande in particolare: come si è giunti al risultato che ha trovato il Movimento Cinque Stelle come partito non di coalizione con la maggioranza dei voti e quale peso hanno avuto i media in questo processo?

Prima di tutto, viene analizzata la penetrazione dei media, in quanto attribuirgli la vittoria di un partito se neanche venivano seguiti sarebbe un'azione impensabile.

Ovviamente, viene dimostrato che i media venivano sfruttati come fonti di notizie e la prima di queste fonti è la televisione, dove la RAI con i suoi telegiornali si imponeva. Per quanto detto, chiunque primeggiasse in RAI avrebbe anche dovuto primeggiare durante le elezioni. Invero, come precedentemente anticipato all'interno del secondo capitolo, in RAI ancora vige la divisione di un canale per orientamento politico, come dimostrato dai dati AGICOM (2018), ed anche in Mediaset, pertanto era impossibile che un singolo politico potesse spiccare in tutte le tre reti principali.

La fonte di informazioni più usata per documentarsi sulle elezioni parlamentari viene dall'online e si compone di social media e stampa digitale, qui viene dimostrato che i siti più visualizzati erano quelli del Movimento Cinque Stelle, notizia che potrebbe portare a credere che sia esso il motivo per cui il Movimento ha vinto le elezioni, per la prevalenza mediatica, tuttavia viene presto chiarito che non era quello il motivo perché più visualizzazioni potevano essere originate da una stessa persona sostenitrice del partito, ma, sopratutto, online bisogna cercare un sito per visualizzarlo, ma per andare a cercare un sito bisogna anche esserne interessati, pertanto chiunque lo abbia visitato aveva già intenzione di approcciarsi a quel partito. Ragion per cui, non si può attribuire alla maggioranza online la capacità di aver influenzato nuovi elettori, perché, per quanto veritiero che i motori di ricerca memorizzano quanto digitato e tendono a riproporlo, è pur necessario che quel qualcosa venga scritto in primo luogo, altrimenti nessun algoritmo sostituirebbe ricerche esistenti con altre mai effettuate.

La sezione del *case study* dedicata agli Stati Uniti d'America è focalizzata sulle elezioni congressuali del 6 Novembre 2018. Anche qui, seguendo la stessa metodologia del precedente *case study*, per prima cosa, è stata valutata la penetrazione dei media durante la campagna per stabilire se effettivamente ve ne fosse una: si è scoperta una pari attenzione ad informarsi sulle elezioni da parte di Repubblicani e Democratici, in egual modo si è rivelata la similare attenzione nel postare sui social media in relazione alla politica. Dopo aver definito che gli elettori sono stati esposti equamente alle informazioni sulle *mid-term*

elections si è passati ad analizzare da quale media le avessero apprese, trovando la televisione al primo posto, seguita dalla stampa, in particolare quella online.

Avendo stabilito questo si è ipotizzato che chiunque dominasse nella televisione avrebbe anche dovuto dominare le elezioni, tuttavia è stato provato che il fatto che i simpatizzanti di entrambi i partiti siano stati esposti equamente a notizie sulla campagna non vuole in alcun modo implicare che siano stati esposti a notizie trattate allo stesso modo sulla medesima. Difatti, è stata analizzata la polarizzazione delle diverse reti statunitensi ed è stato dimostrato che anche nelle piattaforme digitali viene a crearsi una polarizzazione nel momento in cui l'algoritmo del social network mostra solo post affini ai gusti del titolare dell'account, o addirittura egli stesso blocca chiunque la pensi differentemente da lui, rendendo quindi vana qualsiasi possibilità di influenzarlo della parte opposta.

In conclusione, sono quindi stati analizzati i risultati delle elezioni, comparando le interazioni sui post di Facebook con gli effettivi voti ottenuti, ed è stato dimostrato che in realtà un 'mi piace' alla pagina non equivale ad un appoggio sicuro nel seggio elettorale.

Il quinto ed ultimo capitolo trae, dunque, le conclusioni su quanto analizzato nei precedenti *case studies*, ossia che non importa il luogo, Italia o Stati Uniti d'America, o il momento, Marzo o Novembre, od anche il modello mediatico in utilizzo in quel paese, alla fine in tutti i casi l'influenza dei media sulla politica è quasi inesistente perché le persone hanno già le loro idee preesistenti e sono quelle a portarli a vedere un particolare telegiornale o a prediligere la lettura di un giornale piuttosto che una qualsiasi altra testata.

La conclusione derivata è, pertanto, che: un elettore non vota un determinato partito perché lo vede o ne legge nei media, bensì un elettore vede o legge nei media di un determinato partito perché lo vota.

Viene, quindi, avanzata la possibilità inversa che se non siano i media ad influenzare la politica, allora valga il contrario. Tuttavia, anche essa viene presto confutata perché si dimostra che i giornali trattano di politica per vendere, non è tanto la politica in sé ad interessare i giornali, quanto il fatto che i lettori o spettatori siano anche elettori e quindi interessati nella politica.

A questo punto viene, però, messa in dubbio l'utilità effettiva dei media per la politica, ma anche quest'ultima possibilità viene negata, poiché, sebbene i media non abbiano più — se

mai ne hanno avuto in primo luogo — puro valore persuasivo, offrono, comunque, la possibilità di 'fidelizzare' l'elettore, infatti il lettore o spettatore cercherà la prima volta attivamente un politico che rispecchi la sua preesistente idea, ma dopo si limiterà ad osservarlo passivamente al di là di uno schermo o su un foglio, ma se questo riscontro passivo dovesse venire a mancare, allora l'elettore sarebbe forzato ad andare a cercare costantemente qualcun altro.

Al chiudere della dissertazione, viene, dunque, ribadita l'importanza di avere media vari e diversificati che non riportino tutti gli accadimenti allo stesso modo, altrimenti verrebbe a mancare quello che è uno dei principi fondanti della democrazia, ossia la libertà di stampa.