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Technology and Campaigning
What role does Big Data, AI, and other forms of technology play in political campaigning?

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Abstract

In this paper, I will analyze the relationship between political campaigning and technology. I will argue that big data, artificial intelligence, and new forms of media have enabled politicians to proactively target specific members of society, allocate campaign resources much more effectively, and design policy platforms that are tailored to mobilize the maximum number of voters. In the US, voters were traditionally identified by party affiliation, voter database records, and public records regarding race, ethnicity, socioeconomic backgrounds and geographical location. In this way, campaigns were developed in order to achieve the widest satisfaction and voter turnout. However, modern technology has provided a much deeper look into the minds of voters, fundamentally changing the landscape on which politicians and voters interact.

In the introduction, I will begin by briefly outlining the evolution of political campaigning and the evolution of media and technology, as well as the evolution of the relationship between them. Next, I will analyze modern forms of technology such as big data, algorithms, and social media and how these modern forms of technology differ substantially from traditional forms of technology, and what this means for the ever-changing landscape of political communication. I will then look to the recent Cambridge Analytica scandal to illustrate the relationship between modern forms of technology and campaigning.

In Chapter 3, after having established the technical aspects of technology and campaigning, I will examine the sociological aspects of their relationship. I will start by looking at the history of political communication from World War II until the turn of the 21st century – the so-called first through third waves of political communication. This brief analysis will contextualize what is called the "fourth age" of political communication, which is a concept that has come to prominence in recent years. I will then place my conceptualization of technology and campaigning into the

framework of the fourth wave of political communication. In doing so, I will outline why I think this placement is apropos, and why I believe this fourth wave of political communication captures the societal conditions which have fueled the growth of the relationship between modern technology and campaigning.

In my conclusion, I will put forth the claim that where campaigning was traditionally a *reactive* exercise, insofar as voter opinions were uncovered and then campaigns were molded to best suit those opinions, modern technology such as big data, AI and algorithms have allowed campaigning to become a *proactive* exercise, wherein the discourse, narrative and opinions are molded into that which provides any given candidate with the best opportunity to achieve success.

Definition of Terms

In this paper, I will primarily use the United States as my political system of reference. In other cases, I will specify which country or political system I am speaking of. Let me define some common terms that will utilized in this paper. Data in the traditional sense can be understood as facts or statistics about a person, group, thing or phenomena. However, data in a more modern, political and technological sense – and in the sense that I intend to emphasize in this paper – can also be understood as the psychological profiles of individual voters. Psychological profiles can contain an analysis of the big five personality traits, as well as opinions, beliefs and/or morals that can be ascertained from the information collected on any given individual. I will refer to this type of data as psychographic data. Psychographic data may not fall under the rubric of traditional "data" as it could be argued that psychological or character profiles lack objectivity. However, these profiles give rise to ways in which politicians *perceive* their voters. Politicians can then act

on these perceptions *as if* they were objective, thus allowing the consideration of such information as objective in our analysis. I intend to use both definitions of data, as both definitions are integral to my argument about the transition of campaigning from a reactive exercise to a proactive one.

Next, I would like to define political communication. This phrase certainly poses a challenge, given that it is difficult enough to define the words political or communication on their own – let alone in tandem. In Aeron Davis's book *Political Communication: A New Introduction for Crisis Times*, he defines political communication as the following: "Purposeful communication about politics. This incorporates: 1) All forms of communication undertaken by politicians and other political actors. 2) Communication addressed *to* these actors by non-politicians such as voters and activists. 3) Communication *about* these actors and their activities, as contained in news reports, editorials and other forms of media…" (*Aeron Davis, 2019, p. 9*). Here, I would like to add another dimension to Aeron Davis's definition: 4) The communication that occurs *between* non-political actors. This added dimension is integral for my analysis of the effects of technology on campaigning, because communication between non-political actors is the very form of communication where psychographic data on voters is created and proliferated, and, as we will see, psychographic data is an integral part of campaigning. Without analyzing this mode of communication between non-political actors, the very foundation of my argument would be debased. After analyzing how a firm like Cambridge Analytica is able to achieve its goals, it becomes evident that communication between non-political actors is, in fact, inherently political, and that these communications are collected, analyzed, and used to target members of the voting public for political ends.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Evolution of Campaigning

Traditionally, politicians would campaign so that their strategy would appeal to the largest number of voters. Candidates would often base their strategies on historical notions of which states could "swing" an election, by nature of such states being more or less equal in party affiliation (*Nickerson and Rogers, 2013*). Constituents of these swing states would assess their potential leaders and make a decision based on the prevailing information, quite often deciding the fate of elections.

However, in early 20th Century America, local election offices began printing voter registration lists in an attempt to collate important information (*Eitan D. Hersh, 2015*). These voter lists became easily accessible to politicians and their campaigns, and afforded success to candidates who were able to collect, interpret and construct policy platforms and campaign strategy based on this data. The first collection of voter data was likely the single most important event in the history of political campaigning. Before such data collection took place, politicians were, so-to-speak, in the dark about their constituents.

Voter data essentially enabled politicians to turn the magnifying glass on society and give politicians a chance to analyze the public mind in a very rudimentary way. Given that it is difficult, if not impossible, to boil the complexity of a human society down to numbers on a piece of paper or categories on a spreadsheet, data, at bottom, gave rise to ways in which politicians *perceive* their voters (*Eitan D. Hersh, 2015*).

These voter perceptions stem from generalizable characteristics about voters. For example, a person may vote for a candidate based on his or her party affiliation, endorsements, or demographics, and not because of a comprehensive understanding of that politician's beliefs,

morals or policies. By the same token, voter data allows politicians to determine where their political support lies by coming to understand general, synoptic information about voters' race, ethnicity, socio-economic background or geographical location. These general categories enable the collation of data that aids in determining which types of people support which types of politicians, and how to effectively mobilize or optimize campaign resources. In fact, voter data has been, and still is, the backbone of electioneering. So much so is this the case, that politicians have transformed the voter registration system and open record laws – tools originally intended to limit political influence – into publicly subsidized campaign resources (*Eitan D. Hersh, 2015, p. 9*).

To better understand the importance of data in campaigning, we should turn to an analogy. Campaigning can be understood as a motor vehicle: the raw data is the fuel for the engine, where other factors such as the electoral college, party nomination process, campaign finance laws, single-member districts and media communication can be understood as the structural components of a motor vehicle and the rules of the game that determine how much, and what quality, of fuel is to be used and when. If the motor vehicle is well built, the proper fuel employed, and the driver capable, then it is possible, if not likely, that the driver is able to bring his team to victory. Each component is important, but the data in this equation transformed campaigning from a horse-and-carriage race to a motor vehicle competition.

Thus, campaigning has evolved over time such that voter data is a requirement for electoral success. Newer technologies that increase the amount of data available or change the method in which that data is created or collected (i.e. surveys, in-depth statistics, television, privatized media, etc.) are not categorical changes to the political landscape, but rather changes of a degree. Thus, I believe that access to raw voter data fundamentally changed the relationship between politicians

and voters – data enabled *politicians* to assess the mass public, as opposed to only the mass public assessing politicians.

Evolution of Technology and Media

As I alluded in Chapter 1.1, data in its rawest form has been a cornerstone in political campaigning for the last hundred years, and the technology of today plays an integral role in generating data. For example, a horse drawn carriage enabled politicians to campaign far from home, print allowed the wide dissemination of political ideologies, and social media has created a virtual reality where communication across vast distances and between vast numbers of people, both foreign and familiar, happens instantly. These technologies allowed for increased political communication with the public, ultimately molding the opinions, beliefs and values (an important dimension of "data") of the society which participated in these political communications. In other words, technology has increased the amount of political communication, and this increased communication has affected the quantity and quality of raw voter data. In today's world, technology provides not only an efficient means for enhancing political communication, but also an extremely efficient means of *collecting* data about the individuals who have had such communication. But how has technology, and data collection, evolved from the time of simple voter registration lists?

Some of the more noteworthy technological advances of the 20th century include radio, television and personal computers. These inventions, perhaps, are most important when considering the role they play in political communication. To highlight the extent of influence that radio first held, we need not look further than Orson Welles's famous "War of the World's" broadcast. On the evening of October 30, 1938, Orson Welles broadcast a message informing

viewers that "Martians have invaded New Jersey", which resulted in millions of Americans being left in a frenzied panic, some even packing up their homes and heading for the hills. This story, although not political in nature, demonstrated how easily the American public could be swayed. Over the decades, and most certainly in recent years, there has been revelations about the ubiquity of "fake news", but it remains difficult for any person to ascertain exactly which news is to be considered fake, and which sources reliable. The simple fact remains that the invention of radio, as well as other technologies, expanded the dimensions of communication to new and unprecedented levels. These increased dimensions of communication have invariably increased the amount and flow of data, but not necessarily the veracity of that data. To a certain degree, politicians were able to control the quality and quantity of information that was being disseminated to the public and now increasingly they are able to do so as computing and communicating technologies have advanced over recent decades.

The Relationship Between Technology, Media, Politics and Campaigning

The relationship between technology, data and campaigning is a sort of two-way street; politicians disseminate information via technological channels and then this information is absorbed by the public, ultimately changing their beliefs, opinions and ideas about the political landscape. These changes in beliefs are then tracked and observed by the very politicians who played a role in molding those beliefs, whether it is known to either party or not. As technology has improved, so too has the ability of politicians to extend their sphere of influence. The evolution of data collection has enabled politicians to collect more and more information about their constituents, where traditionally access to that information was limited. And the scope of influence that technology now holds has been evidenced numerous times, with Orson Welles's broadcast

being only one noteworthy instance. The introduction of registered voter lists allowed campaigns to collect data, which changed the fundamental nature of the relationship between political candidates and their constituents. Voter lists changed the political landscape from one-way scrutiny, to two-way scrutiny – both politician and constituent alike were analyzing the facts about each other.

However, in the modern age of technology, we have reached a point now where politicians are able to uncover deeply personal information about voters, and then use this information to target voters with specific information "packages". This information targeting is commonly referred to as political microtargeting, and forms the backbone of my argument. The nature of this political microtargeting is evidence of a fundamental change in the political landscape, similar to the introduction of voter lists at the turn of the 20th century, because politicians can target individual voters and proactively shape the opinions and beliefs of the public.

This practice of shaping the opinions of voters is not, however, an entirely new practice. Opinion polling is perhaps the first example in the realm of political communication that attempted to master the public mind, instead of discovering it. Polling was originally a tool of the "mass-psychology" parties of the European right, and it was soon discovered that there was money and power to be had in opinion polling. In a 1949 book by political scientist Lindsay Rogers, the term "pollster" was coined (*Rogers, 1949*) in order to invoke sentiment about the word huckster. In the words of George Gallup, the popular will had been tapped through what he called the "sampling referendum," otherwise known as the opinion poll: "This means that the nation is literally in one great room. The newspapers and the radio conduct the debate on national issues, presenting both information and argument on both sides, just as the townsfolk did in person in the old town meeting. And finally, through the process of the sampling referendum, the people, having heard

the debate on both sides of every issue, can express their will. After one hundred and fifty years we return to the town meeting. This time the whole nation is within the doors." (*Gallup, 1973*)

By framing questions in a certain way, proposing yes or no answers, and not allowing for the possibility of a non-answer, the pollsters can wield the gavel at the town meeting. It is this ability to shape the debate, and then present the "facts" about such a debate, that allows the political establishment to alter the way in which the public thinks and responds to certain issues, or candidates. It is clear now the effects of polling are no longer entirely theoretical.

In his book *For the Sake of Argument: Essays and Minority Reports*, Christopher Hitchens writes about the time he met a famous pollster by the name of Patrick Caddell. Caddell had been one of the most successful pollsters of the 1970s and 1980s, and in his discussion with Hitchens, Caddell recalled the time he had been hired by Alan Cranston, a Democratic senator from California, to lead the polling effort for Cranston's 1988 campaign. Cranston was running against Ed Zschau, who was moderate, smart and young. All the polls suggested that the voters wanted a younger guy to win, so the prospects for Cranston were dim. However, there were peculiar features about the voter demographics at that time. The voters were alienated, weren't strongly disposed to vote and hated negative campaigning. Cranston had name recognition and was the incumbent and could squeak through if his tried-and-true voters showed up to the booths. In other words, the fewer people who voted, the better it would be for Cranston. So Caddell suggested that Cranston's team run the most negative campaign possible. The tactic worked – the "politics" had agitated a lot of people and turned them away from voting. Cranston prevailed. After realizing what he had done, Caddell retired from the business the next day (*Hitchens, 1993*).

This example serves to illustrate the veil behind which political campaigning operates. Many voters are unaware of the very strategies that are being implemented against them, strategies

which are designed to influence their opinions, and change the outcome of an election. Usually, it is not the best candidate who wins, but rather the best informed. Today, the best informed candidates utilize social media to uncover the most vital information about individual voters, and then adjust their campaign strategy to best influence those key voters.

Chapter 2 – Modern Tactics

Social Media, AI, and Algorithms

In today's world, opinion polling has been surpassed by the likes of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram in their ability to influence the beliefs, and actions, of the public. In fact, social media platforms are much more effective at influencing the public than any form of polling. But how does social media work, exactly?

The big social media platforms have created an alternate, virtual reality where communication can happen across vast distances and between large numbers of people, almost instantaneously. These communications have, in effect, created a social reality where opinions, beliefs, facts and political and moral stances are debated and spread like wildfire between people, across national borders and even across languages. Essentially, access to communication with the outside world is readily available at our fingertips, where previously this access was limited to narrower channels of communication, or travel. The resulting overflow of information from these social media platforms gets sorted with the use of algorithms.

Algorithms are, to put it simply, a component to the broader more general category of Artificial Intelligence. AI can do many things on social media, such as track your geolocation, utilize facial or vocal recognition technology, as well as gain insights about who searches what,

how long they read, and where their eyes go on the screen – among a host of other things (*Jeff Orlowski's documentary, The Social Dilemma, 2020*). Social media platforms then use algorithms to prioritize information. For example, if one were to search "cat videos" on YouTube, and that person were to go back to YouTube the next day, there would be a whole host of cat video recommendations on the home page. This is because YouTube, and other social media platforms like it, track the movements of users and record that information; an algorithm then sorts through the entire catalogue of YouTube videos, and procures a list of specially selected cat videos that the user may find interesting. However, it goes further than that. If you were to search "cat videos" on YouTube, you might also get an advertisement about cat food on a website found through Google. Yet, it goes further still. If you are having a conversation with someone, say about cat food, it is not uncommon to find a cat food advertisement on your next internet search. This is because phones, computers and tablets are monitoring each person so closely that they are even eaves-dropping on real time conversations. These monitoring activities are legal, even if they seem morally ambiguous.

Social media platforms then take all the information that they collect on individual users and store it in their servers. This information is used to create "profiles" of individuals. These profiles are what constitute psychographic data. For example, imagine if a person has a computer with an IP address in Texas – they search gun videos on YouTube, follow "Christian gospel quotes" on Twitter, and message their friends about football (American football, that is). It is likely that the psychographic profile of this individual will suggest that he or she is a "Republican".

These psychographic profiles are then sold, quite often, to politicians or organizations working on behalf of politicians. To show just how valuable this business is, data recently surpassed oil as the world's most valuable commodity (*The Economist, 2017*).

What is Data?

I mentioned previously, politicians now use data to understand and categorize members of the public. However, the psychographic data gleaned from social media platforms is slightly more complex than statistical data, as it examines people under a fine psychological microscope. The substance of psychographic data is derived mainly from the big five personality traits – openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. This analysis is done in an attempt to understand the willingness of an individual to change their stance on any given topic, and also, how to effect such a change. However, it is without a doubt extremely difficult, if not impossible, to perfectly profile members of an entire society, and then break that society down into categories on a spreadsheet. This is why I present the argument that psychographic data is not used to define voters, but instead gives rise to ways in which politicians can *perceive* their voters (*Eitan D. Hersh, 2015, p. 7*). These perceptions are used to create campaign strategies that are specifically tailored for different types of people. For example, a video title I quite often see on Instagram is "This is the video the left doesn't want you to see". The video shows footage of anarchists looting stores and throwing Molotov cocktails into police car windows, while the subtitles claim that these anarchists are Democrats, or members of "Antifa". An unsuspecting viewer might assume that all members of Antifa, or the Democrat party, are anarchists. This video might also be filtered into the news feed of an individual who has a psychographic profile similar to the Texan I mentioned previously, in the hope that it will inflame that persons belief about certain topics. On the other hand, there is no shortage of videos of white nationalists or Ku Klux Klan members organizing rallies against African-Americans or immigrants, with Republicans being to blame. It appears these videos are playing into the worst

fears of each side. To see the extent to which social media can influence voters, let us turn to perhaps the most famous example in recent history – Cambridge Analytica.

Cambridge Analytica

Cambridge Analytica gained public attention in the spring of 2018, when the *New York Times* and *The Observer* published information about the firm's business practices. In an undercover video of Alexander Nix – Cambridge Analytica's former CEO – it came to light that the firm would use prostitutes, bribery sting operations and honey traps to blackmail opposition politicians. Nix also claimed that his firm ran Trump's 2016 campaign. This information caused a chain of events that led to investigations, whistleblowers coming forward, and eventually to the discovery that Cambridge Analytica had illegally used the data of millions of Facebook users. However, the exact role of Cambridge Analytica in the Brexit and Trump campaigns is at times obscure, which I am sure is no accident. What is not obscure, is the fact that Cambridge played a role in influencing election outcomes in a number of different countries.

Cambridge Analytica has admitted to running campaigns in Trinidad & Tobago, Malaysia, Lithuania, Romania, Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, the United States, as well as for the Brexit campaign. First, I will elucidate the example of Cambridge Analytica's campaign in Trinidad & Tobago, as this example is fairly simple and captures the essence of what the firm does to influence elections. Then, I will turn to Cambridge Analytica's more complicated history in America, with the Trump campaign.

In Trinidad & Tobago the political establishment is bipartisan: there is the Afro-Caribbean party and the Indian party. Cambridge Analytica was hired by the Indian party to help win the election. After analyzing scores of big data, Cambridge went to their client and insisted on a

campaign that would target members of the youth, with the aim of increasing apathy. The campaign had to be non-political because the kids were not disposed to political issues, and it had to be reactive because the kids were lazy. So Cambridge created a youth movement group called "Do So", whose slogan was "Do so, don't vote". It was a sort of radical youth group, not with the intention of going against the government, but rather with the intention of encouraging kids to go against politics in general by encouraging abstention from the voting process. It was perceived by the kids as a sort of "gang", members of which were esteemed and quite often included in music videos on YouTube. As the group began to increase in popularity, group membership began to increase as well. However, the campaign targeted *all* youths, so as not to appear as though it was targeting a specific ethnic group. This was part of the plan. Cambridge knew that when it came to voting day, Indian parents were much more involved in the political process, and also that Indian kids would not disobey their parents; in Indian culture, the family is a sacred, hierarchal structure that must never be disobeyed even into late adulthood. The Afro-Caribbean kids, on the other hand, do not have such a cultural family structure, and quite often disobey their parents. As a result, the Indian kids were told by their parents to go vote, where the Afro-Caribbean kids were not; Cambridge Analytica's strategy worked, and voter turnout between the ages 18-35 was affected by nearly 40%, which swayed the overall election by 6% – enough to secure a victory for the Indian party, in what would have been a very close race (Karim Amer and Jehane Noujaim's film *The Great Hack, 2019).*

The role of Cambridge Analytica in Trump's 2016 campaign is not exactly clear. However, given numerous investigations and whistleblowers who exposed the inner workings of Cambridge, a puzzle has been somewhat pieced together. Brittany Kaiser, former Cambridge employee, went on the record and described how the firm was able to target American voters as a result of

psychographic information that had been gleaned from a Facebook application. The collection of this psychographic data began when Cambridge Analytica was working for Steve Bannon of Breitbart news. Bannon was also Trump's former chief strategist. Bannon had wanted to find a way to understand the public mind (and ultimately influence it), and so Cambridge Analytica had developed a personality test application with the help of Cambridge University psychologist Aleksandr Kogan called *This is Your Digital Life*; this personality test was able to uncover 4,000-5,000 data points on any individual who completed the personality quiz. However, if a Facebook user completed this test, the application also gained access to all the data points of that individuals "Facebook friends". In the end, sources confirmed that data points on about 87 million Americans were collected and utilized. How exactly were these data points utilized?

As Brittany Kaiser explained it, the psychographic profiles of all these Facebook users enabled Cambridge to develop a scale of personality types. On one end of this scale were voters who were not disposed to changing their political convictions whatsoever. On the other end of the spectrum, were the people who were very open to changing their minds. The people who were open to change were called the "persuadables". These so-called persuadables were most important in the swing states such as Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Florida. The swing states were further broken down into zones, or counties as the Americans say. Cambridge was able to identify *x* number of persuadables in county *y,* and then target said persuadables with specific information packages that were tailored for their individual preferences. This practice is called microtargeting. Microtargeting includes relentless political messages on every conceivable social media platform. The aim was to present an image of the world that could mold the persuadables, eventually, into ideal Trump supporters. Political messages quite often included videos on illegal immigration, terrorist threats to America, and the corruption of the Democrat party, followed up with video clips

of Trump's classic talk-show style one-line responses to the media and political opponents, with ominous music in the background. After one county fell, the others followed suit. In no significant amount of time, an entire state had been converted from blue to red. Soon after, the other swing states followed suit, and the Trump campaign prevailed.

This political microtargeting must, by nature, be provocative enough to make someone seriously change their opinions and political beliefs. However, provocation comes with a cost.

Polarization

Polarization is a phenomenon that is quite often cited in today's political debate – especially in the United States, and increasingly so in Europe. In fact, the Pew Research Center has found that polarization in the US has increased drastically from the years 1994-2017 (*Pew Research Centre, 2017*).

The data on polarization was collected over a number of years, by conducting numerous surveys of the general public. The data from the Pew Research Center suggests that in 1994, the average Democrat and the average Republican were close to the center of the political spectrum – "moderates" we could say. Then in the years leading up to 2017, the average Democrat and average Republican shifted increasingly towards the opposing ends of the spectrum, where they lay now. What is interesting to note, is that polarization increased exponentially more between the years 2011-2017 than it did between the years 1994-2011, almost by a factor of two. I would argue that this increased rate of polarization is a result of the information revolution brought on by social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

Before social media, humans were restricted in their ability to acquire information. We watched the TV or read the newspaper, and then talked to groups of friends, family, or

acquaintances. With social media, however, we have expanded our available choice of TV, newspaper, and information input, and – most importantly – we have exponentially expanded the scope of the audience with whom we can discuss these matters. This process of expanding the available channels of communication has, in some ways led to an increased knowledge on many topics. However, the increased scope of the audience has led to an increase in hostility towards those who adopt, advocate or perpetuate viewpoints that may be contrary to our own. As a result, there is no shortage of hostility between people on social media. Hostility – the kind that does not aid in reasoned debate – leads to deeper entrenchment in our own beliefs. In addition, social media platforms utilize algorithms that have been programmed to keep feeding similar information to the end user. This creates echo chambers that push the user deeper into their own beliefs.

Politicians, or more precisely organizations that engage with social media platforms on behalf of politicians, have discovered ways to leverage psychographic data about individual voters, in a way that has exploited and contributed to this trend in growing polarization. On the one hand, firms like Cambridge Analytica could target voters who have been identified as increasingly polarized, so as to push them further towards one end of the political spectrum and assure that these individuals will offer their support come election day. On the other hand, firms like Cambridge Analytica could target individuals who have been identified as unpolarized, the so-called persuadables, in an attempt to *push* them towards a position of polarization, or certainty about a topic. In either case, the outcome appears to be that polarization is inevitable, given the strategies employed by modern campaigning firms such as Cambridge Analytica.

The Anticipated Objection

Some argue that the impact Cambridge Analytica had on the 2016 US elections was minimal, if at all. Proponents of this argument claim that psychographic data is simply an unproven hypothesis, and too theoretical to have any substantial impact on an election. It is believed that it is close to impossible to really understand an individual's preferences, let alone influence such preferences. Others believe that Cambridge Analytica either never supplied psychographic data to the Trump campaign, or that they did, but this information was then given to Russia so that the Kremlin could influence the US election. Another common point of departure from the Cambridge Analytica discussion is that the real concern should not be about how the data was *used*, but rather how the data was *obtained.* All claims are fair and should be considered.

First, psychographic data can indeed seem like a rather esoteric field. It is not, at first sight, exactly clear how the many data points collected on an individual's personality has anything to do with influencing their political opinions or beliefs. However, before one can understand how a firm like Cambridge Analytica operates in practice, it is paramount to consider how such a firm operates in theory. Once done, it is not implausible to consider the reality of political microtargeting.

Consider modern digital sales. Online companies manufacture a product or offer a service, and then hire a marketing agency to promote their product or service. These marketing agencies make it their stock and trade to target individuals who demonstrate preferences akin to what their client is offering. Thus, if I type coconut water into Google, I will receive numerous online advertisements for coconut water in the following days or weeks. At this point, my data has been collected and analyzed by a digital marketing firm who focused their advertising efforts on me, as a potential customer of coconut water. To imagine how effective this is, I will offer a personal, empirical example.

When I was younger, I had a summer job selling coconut water. I would walk around different neighborhoods and select corner-stores or gas stations that I thought might be interested in purchasing a flat of coconut water. I would, on average, get one customer for every 10-15 stores I visited. Now, consider if I had a dataset that told me which stores had searched for coconut water online, how often they searched, the amount of time they spent searching, and their most recent purchases. What could have happened if this information were put through a special algorithm that generated a list of the most likely customers for coconut water? And then a list of stores who were indifferent, but likely to be convinced about my coconut water? I imagine my sales career would have been much more successful. At bottom, campaigning is a lot like selling coconut water – there are those who manufacture a product, those who market that product, and those who consume the product. Firms like Cambridge Analytica are revolutionizing the campaign process because they are beginning to understand and conquer the public mind, much in the same way that marketing firms are harnessing data to target online consumers.

In regards to those who believe that Cambridge Analytica never actually retrieved or supplied the Trump campaign with this psychographic data, the Federal Trade Commission ruled that Cambridge did, in fact, access the data that they purported to have from millions of Facebook users (*Federal Trade Commission, 2019*), and evidence from numerous other sources suggests that Trump's Facebook advertisements outpaced Clinton's by a factor of 5:1. Not only that, in the months leading up to the 2016 Presidential elections, Trump had spent about $8 million on online ad campaigns whereas Clinton had spent just over $100,000. These numbers suggest that there was significant online activity from the Trump campaign, which leads one to consider the possibility of psychographic data being part of this strategy. After all, Trump's Cambridge

Analytica connection began with Steve Bannon, who wanted to create a method to fight a culture war and ultimately help Trump win the election.

Others, however, claim that this psychographic data was passed to the Kremlin through Lukoil, after employees from Cambridge had apparently met with members of the Russian oil giant. However, these claims are unsubstantiated, and all parties involved deny that any such meetings took place. Brittany Kaiser, former Cambridge Analytica employee and principal whistleblower during the scandal, claimed that there was never a Russian connection with Cambridge Analytica. In addition, the special prosecutor Robert Mueller's investigation into Russian influence in the 2016 elections proved fruitless.

Finally, the argument that society should not be concerned with how the data was *used*, but rather how the data was *obtained*, presents a very reasonable perspective on the issue. It is true that this data was obtained illegally, and that this is something that should be of the utmost concern to everyone. However, I would argue that this perspective is legal in nature, and of secondary importance to a sociological approach to the study of technology in campaigning. Yes, the data was obtained illegally. Yes, Facebook failed to protect their users' information. I agree this is a serious problem – but it is primarily a legal problem that faces society *today*. The problems that worry me the most are the problems that society will face *tomorrow*. I believe this road of social manipulation and influence through political microtargeting, as witnessed in the Trump campaign, presents a fundamental change in the political landscape that transcends existing legal parameters. Politicians are becoming those who shape the public – not the public who shapes the politicians.

Chapter 3 – Sociology of Political Communication

The Evolution of Political Communication

In this chapter, I will contextualize my technical analysis of political microtargeting by placing it into a wider social framework. I will achieve this, first, by discussing the evolution of political parties and their methods of campaigning and communicating. Then, I will discuss the societal conditions which have evolved along with political parties. Finally, I will analyze the current state of social conditions, so as to shed light on how modern forms of technological campaigning are able to work in today's day and age, and how they fit into the larger, modern sociological phenomenon sometimes referred to as the fourth age of political communication. This analysis is fundamental, because understanding *how* political microtargeting works is important but understanding *why* it works is equally, if not more, important.

Over the course of the last century, the ways in which parties have emerged, been managed and communicated with the public has changed tremendously. As I mentioned before, parties developed such that they came to represent the interests of specific groups. Such groups consisted of industrial workers, religions, racial and ethnic groups, geographical regions, and many more. The party was quite often local and financing came from its members. Communication here focused on local issues and networks of people who faced problems that needed resolving. The benefit of this style was that parties were able to develop a consistent ideological basis and attract a clear voter base. Quite often, many of the problems that politicians pledged to resolve were indeed given significant attention. However, as democracy progressed in the 20th Century, parties transformed first into mass "catch-all parties" whose objective it was to convince the largest

number of voters. Then, parties transitioned into "electoral-professional parties" (*Aeron Davis, 2019, p. 55*) whose method for attaining political power became less focused on an ideological standpoint and more focused on the work of professionals to design platforms which could lead to electoral success. The benefits of these transitions include a less ideological, dangerously polarizing public discourse, as well as a rational approach to the political and communication process. However, there were some drawbacks with this new approach. For example, parties became too oriented towards elite interests and winning elections, rather than representing the interests of their supporters.

In addition, parties used to be more formally aligned on the left-right spectrum. Parties on the left include communism and socialism, and on the right conservatism and fascism. Left-wing parties traditionally focused on issues that dealt with equality (or lack thereof), such as workers' rights, distribution of wealth through higher taxes, healthcare, education, and gender and sexuality topics. Right-wing parties traditionally advocated for less government intervention, by means of free-market economics, smaller welfare states, privatization, and lower taxation (*Aeron Davis, 2019, p.57*). However, as the twentieth century progressed, parties began to turn their attention towards nationalism and professionalism, opting to focus on the larger citizen body as a whole. Over time, paid party membership and partisan alignment began to drop significantly, and it was feared that the traditional party was dead.

There are two possible analyses of the decline of the traditional party: either as a result of wider societal shifts ("demand-driven"), or as a result of internal party dynamics ("supply-driven"). We will analyze both in the next section.

Second Age of Political Communication

With the decline of the traditional party, society entered into what is often called the second age of political communication. There are two well-known explanations for the decline of the traditional party. First, the argument from demand states that wider societal shifts, such as changes in demographics, caused the decline of the traditional party. With advancements in technology, the traditional working classes were consistently displaced, with workers often relocating from rural to urban areas in search of employment. For example, in the UK in 1951, 64.9% were classified as "working class", but by 1997 that number had decreased to 34.1%. In 1979, 52.7% of employees were unionized, but by 1997 that number decreased to 27.3% (*Aeron Davis, 2019, p. 57*). The shrinkage in the traditional working-class meant a lesser need for parties to represent the interests of the working-class, and it also meant support from a smaller percentage of the population. In addition, recent research indicates that the importance of class is much less pronounced than it once used to be (*Savage, 2015*). The decline of class can be attributed to a number of factors, one of which being the increasing focus on issues that affect *everyone*, regardless of class – issues such as environmentalism, religion, ethnicity, feminism and nationalism.

Second, the supply argument about the downfall of the traditional party, posits that the introduction of broadcast media led to a serious change in internal party organization and dynamics. The introduction of broadcast media allowed for digital campaigning that proved itself to be a far more cost-efficient model than did traditional models. It is certainly no coincidence that the "mass" party was conceived around the same time as the introduction of broadcast media. It can be said that political parties reaped the benefits of broadcast media by shifting away from traditional party structures, towards a newer model of mass communication, ultimately changing

the structure and organization of the party itself so as to accommodate this change and target the mass public.

Regardless of whether parties evolved as a result of internal or external factors, the fact remains that parties underwent a significant change during this time. From advocating for specific classes of people who had clearly defined issues, to becoming "mass" or "catch-all parties" as a result of broadcast media and increasingly blurred social stratas, the political party structure undoubtedly went through its first fundamental transformation in recent times.

Third Age of Political Communication

The second major evolution occurred when parties began to "professionalize". The beginning of party professionalization is a hallmark characteristic of what is commonly referred to as the third age of political communication. During this time, which occurred in the early 1970s in the US and late 1970s in the UK, parties began to incorporate more centralized structures, rigid campaign hierarchies and employed a number of professional experts from different fields, which displaced traditional, amateur party organizers. Professions that were utilized during this phase include advertisers, public relations practitioners, pollsters, marketing specialists, journalists, television producers, professional writers, film makers, media trainers, and image consultants (*Aeron Davis, 2019 p. 59*). The result is that party leaders today are surrounded by a plethora of experts and advisors, from a number of different fields. It is with this party "professionalization" that we begin to see the initial use of psychographic data, for the purposes of understanding the public mind. Data points that focused on "lifestyle research" attempted to identify general attitudes, opinions and beliefs, and detailed media consumption habits of the voting public. Out of these data points came a rudimentary way in which politicians could perceive voters and their

motivations, finances, political dispositions, and media preferences (*Aeron Davis, 2019 p. 60*). However, this stage of psychographic data was simply used to try to *understand* the public mind, not necessarily *influence* it – at least not influence it in the same way that is being done today.

This early phase of party "professionalization" is important because it also marks the beginning of the age of "game-show" politics. By game-show politics, I mean to say that the political process has evolved such that the objective of politics has become increasingly about *form*, instead of *substance*. Political leaders are market tested, and their viability is determined by how well they might be received by the public. This, to a large extent, also includes a physical dimension. Many world leaders, such as Margaret Thatcher, Silvio Berlusconi, and Donald Trump, have spent numerous hours and countless dollars constructing a physical image that pays particular attention to hair, wardrobe and oration. These factors combine to create an "image" of an individual, an image which either helps or hinders that individuals' chances at success.

In addition, political debates are often prepped long in advance, with particular talking points and rapid rebuttals thought out before the speakers take the podium. Q&A is done from a script, and response time is limited to such an extent that the discussion becomes an exercise in rhetoric. Then, spin doctors interpret and malign the debate in order to fit it into a narrow ideological tunnel, often out of context and lacking credibility. The end result has been that political parties have become extremely effective and ruthless organizations, working around the clock to further their grip on power.

This "professionalization" of the parties has meant an increase in costs; with less and less volunteers and amateurs at the helm, and an increasing number of professionals, there has also been an increasing cost associated with running a successful political party. This increase in cost has meant an increased reliance on wealthy donors. Thus, a strange power dynamic has emerged;

namely, that as party costs increase, so too does reliance on wealthy financial donors, resulting in more and more power being vested in the hands of a smaller number of uber-wealthy donors. These wealthy, powerful donors often exercise their power by using the political establishment to further their own agendas. The result of this power dynamic has been a public that feels increasingly dispossessed. The public interest is not being tended to, and this has resulted in voter alienation. Perhaps this is another reason for Trump's success in the 2016 elections. Trump presented himself as a man who need not rely on wealthy, powerful donors to succeed, and who also promised to stand for ordinary Americans. Where does public sentiment stand today?

Fourth Age of Political Communication

The first three ages of political communication have each played a part in laying the socio-political groundwork for modern times, and it is without a doubt that Western democracy again finds itself on a changing landscape. The first age of political communication is characterized as the "Golden Age" of parties, occurring in the first two decades after World War II and including large party membership, loyal citizens, and a deferential print media. The second age was largely driven by the advent of broadcast media, which drew attention away from traditional partisan presses. Then, the third age of political communication is characterized by the establishment of party "professionalization". The third age of political communication can be said to have persisted up until as recently as 2013, after which Jay Blumler is credited with having declared the beginning of the fourth age of political communication (*Blumler, 2013*). What are the defining features of this fourth age of political communication?

There are several defining features of the fourth age, such as: A significant weakening of state institutions' ability to enact policy or operate accountably, the development of large, complex

policy areas and risks beyond the understanding of most leaders, a pronounced break-down of faith in political institutions, experts and elites, ideologically fragmented parties, cultural identity and nationalist challenges to traditional left-right politics, rapidly growing unstable new parties, interest groups and social movements, hollowed-out legacy news media operations, unaccountable and untraceable news and information flows across social media networks, problems of information overload and "truth", unaligned and very volatile electorates, audiences fragmented and polarized across multiple divides, and, finally, a growing divide between the world of public, visible, symbolic politics on the one hand, and that of private politics, encompassing opaque policy-making, lobbyists and experts, on the other hand (*Aeron Davis, 2019, p. 7-9*).

Each of these components presents a challenge to the modern political establishment, and in particular they pose a challenge to core democratic values that have been the foundation of Western society for centuries. The resulting public attitude is one of confusion, and dispossession. This feeling of dispossession has created a sort of vacuum where a general distaste for the political system itself has begun to grow, and, as such, it is no surprise that anti-establishment figures like Trump have been able to capitalize on this growing discontent. Trump bypassed traditional means of communication by using Twitter to make promises of eradicating political corruption, or, as Trump likes to say, "draining the swamp". Whether Trump's messaging is clear or not, his methods for communicating these messages are unprecedented.

However, the Trump "phenomenon" is not endemic to the US only – it is a growing global trend. Across Europe, North America, and Central and South America there has been increasing support for populism. Populists can be described as anti-establishment in both the political and economic spheres, having an affinity for strong leaders, supporting nationalistic and mono-cultural movements, and preferring traditional social and family values. Populists also oppose globalization

and liberalization. These defining characteristics serve as an adequate summary of Trump's position, and it appears that populist, anti-establishment support is growing across the Western world. This growing populist support seems very closely related to the issues, and defining features, of the fourth age of political communication, as previously outlined.

As regards political parties, one of their defining features in the fourth age of political communication has been a radical departure from the traditional left-right spectrum. This trend of movement away from the traditional political spectrum certainly found its roots with the professionalization of parties. However, the original "professional" parties still conceptualized problems on a left vs. right basis. Now, in lieu of such a traditional left-right spectrum, political discussions focus on the schisms between positions on any given topic. Such topics include gay marriage, multi-culturalism, and economic issues such as globalization, foreign investment, and immigration. The Economist Intelligence Unit (*2016: 23-4*) describes the schisms in the following manner: "The old left-right political distinctions do not mean that much nowadays; instead the battle lines are being drawn over issues such as globalization versus national sovereignty, cosmopolitanism versus national identity, and open borders versus immigration controls" (*Aeron Davis, 2019*). It is no wonder that political microtargeting on social media platforms is so effective. Firms like Cambridge Analytica are able to develop a clear message about certain topics, or issues, and then target individuals in swing states who are deemed to be perceptible to changing their opinions on these topics. How does political microtargeting fit into the framework of the fourth age of political communication?

Collective movement away from the traditional left-right spectrum and toward a position of bipolarity on any given topic is indicative of the general discontent towards the political and policy-making process. People care much less about traditional party politics, and much more about seeing results. This phenomenon presents a unique landscape on which political microtargeting occurs, but we should distinguish between two concepts here – the medium, and the message.

Political microtargeting on social media is itself the *medium* through which specific messages get delivered, but the *content* of these messages can be whatever the sender desires – in recent times, the content of these messages has been increasingly anti-establishment, or populist in nature. Cambridge Analytica's work on the Trump campaign, in places like Trinidad & Tobago, and the Brexit campaign are but a few examples of the "anti-establishment" messages that have been administered on social media platforms. The results of the campaigns of Trump, Trinidad & Tobago and Brexit tell us that these anti-establishment messages have been effective, which, in turn, provides a starting point for the claim that general populist sentiment is on the rise.

However, I would like to make the claim that the reason microtargeting campaigns have been so successful in promoting anti-establishment support is not only because the *content* of the message is anti-establishment, but rather because the *medium* through which these messages get delivered is "anti-establishment". Communication on social media through specially tailored, individual information packages is an extremely unorthodox method of communication, and it is no surprise that this method is effective against a particular populist, anti-establishment mindset. In order to fully understand the efficacy of political microtargeting, it is fundamental to conceptualize it in the framework of the fourth age of political communication, because the fourth

age presents an analysis of the social conditions within which microtargeting has risen to prominence. As the Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan famously said, "The medium is the message".

Chapter 4 – Conclusion

Summary of Analysis

At the beginning of this paper, I examined the relationship between technology and campaigning. I made the claim that one of the most important developments in the history of campaigning, at least in the US, was the introduction of registered voter data lists. These voter lists enabled politicians to collect information about the voting public and place them into general categories, which aided campaigns in determining where best to spend campaign resources. Voter lists turned out to be an essential component to electioneering, as this data enabled the politicians to begin examining information about the public, where traditionally it was only the public that examined information about politicians.

I then examined ways in which politicians attempted to master the public mind instead of discovering it. This originally took the form of opinion polling, but as technological advancements steadily increased over the decades, the methods for mastering the public mind have become increasingly easy, and much more effective. Today, society is entangled with the virtual reality of social media, where information processing and communication happens almost instantly, across vast distances. Essentially, social media has created a way in which communication, whether political or not, happens instantaneously between groups, or types of people that vary substantially across a number of criteria.

First, new technologies such as social media increased the level of communication in society. This increased communication meant increased information *input*, which invariably altered the amount and quality of information *output*. Information output, in the form of opinions, beliefs and morals about a given subject, is then collected, and turned into psychographic profiles that are utilized by corporations or politicians to understand the public mind, and ultimately *influence* the public mind by tailoring specific information packages that appeal to, or challenge, such sentiments. Thus, in chapter 2, I examined the specific methods with which psychographic data is used to influence the public mind and affect election outcomes.

In order to illustrate the effectiveness of psychographic data in influencing elections, I used the example of Cambridge Analytica and their history in places such as Trinidad & Tobago and the United States. Then, I responded to some common arguments against the Cambridge Analytica hypothesis, and in doing so clarified that the practices of Cambridge Analytica have, in fact, been effective in altering election outcomes regardless of whether this service is legally or morally ambiguous.

Finally, in chapter 3, I analyzed the socio-political environment as it developed over the course of the 20th Century. From the "mass-party", to the "professionalization" of parties, to the so-called fourth age of political communication where the traditional party structure and left-right spectrum have all but disappeared, we are now witnessing a rise in populist and anti-establishment support. I placed the practice of political microtargeting into the framework of the fourth age of political communication, where I made the claim that microtargeting is effective because it is itself an unorthodox, anti-establishment medium of communication. This anti-establishment form of communication has increased the effectiveness of the content of the messages, pushing people

further into their own beliefs and widening the gap between people who sit on opposing sides of various polarizing topics.

Final Remarks

It appears to me that technology is continually pushing the boundaries of human communication and connection. We are almost at the point where our mobile devices collect so much vital data on us, that whoever owns this data understands us better than we understand ourselves. As a result of this capacity, user data is now the most valuable commodity on planet earth. However, the power that is inherent to data can only be realized by those who employ it. In recent times, this data has been increasingly employed by politicians, because this data can unlock the human psyche in ways that allow politicians to achieve social outcomes that would not have been possible without the use of such data.

Thus, I make the claim that where campaigning was traditionally a *reactive* exercise, insofar as voter opinions were uncovered and then campaigns were molded to best suit those opinions, modern technology such as big data, AI and algorithms have enabled the collection of data, the creation of psychographic profiles, and the implementation of political microtargeting to such a degree that campaigning has become a *proactive* exercise, where the discourse, narrative and opinions are molded into that which provides any given candidate with the best chance at success. Political campaigning has, and will continue, to transition from sculpture to sculptor.

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Sintesi della Tesi

In questo lavoro, analizzo il rapporto tra campagna politica e tecnologia. Sostengo che i grandi dati, l'intelligenza artificiale e le nuove forme di media hanno permesso ai politici di rivolgersi in modo proattivo a specifici membri della società, di allocare le risorse della campagna elettorale in modo molto più efficace e di progettare piattaforme politiche su misura per mobilitare il massimo numero di elettori. Negli Stati Uniti, gli elettori sono stati tradizionalmente identificati in base all'affiliazione al partito, ai dati del database degli elettori e ai dati pubblici riguardanti la razza, l'etnia, l'estrazione socioeconomica e la posizione geografica. In questo modo, le campagne sono state sviluppate al fine di massimizzare il consenso e garantire una significativa l'affluenza alle urne.

Tuttavia, le nuove tecnologie, cambiando radicalmente il panorama in cui politici ed il pubblico interagiscono, hanno permesso di gettare nuova luce nei processi decisionali che guidano gli elettori.

Nell'introduzione, inizio delineando brevemente l'evoluzione del concetto di campagna politica, dei media della tecnologia e del loro rapporto. All'inizio del XX secolo in America, gli uffici elettorali locali hanno iniziato a stampare le liste di registrazione degli elettori nel tentativo di raccogliere informazioni importanti. Queste liste elettorali divennero facilmente accessibili ai politici durante le loro campagne elettorali, e permisero il successo ai candidati che erano in grado di raccogliere, interpretare i dati e costruire piattaforme politiche e strategie di campagna elettorale basate su quest'ultimi. La prima raccolta di dati sugli elettori è stata probabilmente l'evento più importante nella storia della campagna politica. Prima di tale raccolta dati, i politici erano, per così dire, all'oscuro dei loro elettori. Io sostengo che l'accesso ai dati grezzi degli elettori ha cambiato

radicalmente il rapporto tra i politici e gli elettori - i dati hanno permesso anche ai politici di valutare il pubblico di massa.

Successivamente, analizzo le forme moderne di tecnologia come i big data, gli algoritmi e i social media e come queste forme moderne di tecnologia differiscono sostanzialmente dalle forme tradizionali, e cosa questo significhi per il panorama in continuo cambiamento della comunicazione politica. Uso l'esempio della trasmissione "La guerra dei mondi" di Orson Welles, per illustrare quanto la radio sia stata efficace nell'influenzare il pubblico americano. Poi, utilizzo l'esempio di come le forme moderne di tecnologia sono state ottimizzate per rivolgersi agli individui. Per esempio, se uno cercasse "video di gatti" su YouTube, e quella persona tornasse su YouTube il giorno dopo, ci sarebbe tutta una serie di video dei gatti consigliati sulla home page. Questo perché YouTube, e altre piattaforme di social media come questa, tracciano i movimenti degli utenti e registrano queste informazioni; un algoritmo poi ordina l'intero catalogo dei video di YouTube e procura un elenco di video di gatti appositamente selezionati che l'utente può trovare interessanti. Tuttavia, l'algoritmo non è relegato alla sola piattaforma YouTube. Se doveste cercare "video di gatti" su YouTube, potreste anche ottenere un'inserzione sul cibo per gatti su un sito web trovato attraverso Google. Ma si va ancora oltre. Se avete una conversazione con qualcuno, ad esempio sul cibo per gatti, non è raro trovare un'inserzione di cibo per gatti nella vostra prossima ricerca su Internet. Questo perché i telefoni, i computer e i tablet monitorano ogni persona così da vicino che ascolta persino le conversazioni in tempo reale. La combinazione della suscettibilità umana, insieme all'influenza che i social media o i media in generale hanno, crea una situazione in cui il pubblico che vota può essere influenzato in modi che possono alterare l'esito di un'elezione.

Continuo poi ad analizzare come le moderne forme di tecnologia vengono impiegate per influenzare le decisioni degli elettori. Comincio osservando come i sondaggi d'opinione siano stati

probabilmente il primo modo in cui i politici hanno utilizzato i dati per modificare l'esito di un'elezione. Nel suo libro "Per il bene dell'argomentazione": Saggi e rapporti di minoranza, Christopher Hitchens scrive di quando incontrò un famoso sondaggista di nome Patrick Caddell. Caddell era stato uno dei sondaggisti di maggior successo degli anni Settanta e Ottanta, e nella sua discussione con Hitchens, Caddell ha ricordato il periodo in cui era stato assunto da Alan Cranston, un senatore democratico della California, per guidare lo sforzo elettorale per la campagna elettorale di Cranston del 1988. Cranston era in corsa contro Ed Zschau, che era moderato, intelligente e giovane. Tutti i sondaggi suggerivano che gli elettori volevano un ragazzo più giovane per vincere, quindi le prospettive per Cranston erano scarse. Tuttavia, c'erano caratteristiche peculiari della demografia degli elettori in quel periodo. Gli elettori erano alienati, non erano fortemente disposti a votare e odiavano la campagna elettorale negativa. Cranston aveva il riconoscimento del suo nome ed era il titolare in carica se i suoi provati e veri elettori si presentavano alle cabine. In altre parole, se meno persone hanno avessero votato, meglio sarebbe stato per Cranston. Così Caddell ha suggerito che la squadra di Cranston gestisse la campagna più negativa possibile. La tattica ha funzionato - la "politica" ha agitato molte persone e le ha allontanate dal voto. Cranston ha prevalso. Dopo essersi reso conto di ciò che aveva fatto, Caddell si ritirò dall'attività il giorno dopo. Questa forma di sondaggi d'opinione, e il suo uso nell'influenzare le elezioni, è stato il primo tentativo dell'establishment politico nel cercare di influenzare la mente pubblica invece di scoprirla. Tuttavia, le piattaforme di social media come Twitter, Instagram e Facebook rappresentano un modo molto più efficiente ed efficace per raccogliere il tipo di dati che possono essere utilizzati per manipolare le elezioni. Nella parte successiva della mia tesi di laurea, studio Cambridge Analytica.

Per illustrare il rapporto tra le moderne forme di tecnologia e la campagna elettorale nel mondo reale, guarderò come Cambridge Analytica ha influenzato le elezioni. Un famoso esempio di come Cambridge Analytica abbia influenzato le elezioni ha a che fare con la loro storia di Trinidad & Tobago. A Trinidad & Tobago l'establishment politico è bipartisan: c'è il partito Afro-Caraibico e il partito Indiano. Cambridge Analytica è stata assunta dal partito indiano per aiutare a vincere le elezioni. Dopo aver analizzato decine di dati importanti, Cambridge si è rivolta al loro cliente e ha insistito per una campagna che si rivolgesse ai giovani, con l'obiettivo di aumentare l'apatia. La campagna doveva essere apolitica perché i ragazzi non erano disposti ad affrontare le questioni politiche, e doveva essere reattiva perché i ragazzi erano pigri. Così Cambridge ha creato un gruppo di movimento giovanile chiamato "Do So", il cui slogan era "Do so, don't vote". Era una sorta di gruppo giovanile radicale, non con l'intenzione di andare contro il governo, ma piuttosto con l'intenzione di incoraggiare i ragazzi ad andare contro la politica in generale, incoraggiando l'astensione dal voto. Era percepita dai ragazzi come una sorta di "banda", i cui membri erano stimati e spesso inseriti in video musicali su YouTube. Con l'aumento della popolarità del gruppo, anche i membri del gruppo hanno cominciato ad aumentare. Tuttavia, la campagna si rivolgeva a tutti i giovani, in modo da non apparire come se si rivolgesse a un gruppo etnico specifico. Questo faceva parte del piano. Cambridge sapeva che quando si trattava di votare, i genitori indiani erano molto più coinvolti nel processo politico e che i ragazzi indiani non avrebbero disobbedito ai loro genitori; nella cultura indiana, la famiglia è una struttura sacra, gerarchica, che non deve mai essere disobbedita anche in tarda età adulta. I bambini afro-caraibici, invece, non hanno una struttura familiare così culturale e spesso disobbediscono ai genitori. Di conseguenza, ai ragazzi indiani è stato detto dai loro genitori di andare a votare, mentre i ragazzi afro-caraibici non lo erano; la strategia di Cambridge Analytica ha funzionato, e l'affluenza alle urne tra i 18 e i 35 anni è stata

influenzata di quasi il 40%, il che ha fatto oscillare le elezioni complessive del 6% - abbastanza per assicurare una vittoria al partito indiano.

Nel capitolo 3, dopo aver stabilito gli aspetti tecnici della tecnologia e della campagna, esaminerò gli aspetti sociologici del loro rapporto. Esaminerò la storia della comunicazione politica dalla Seconda Guerra Mondiale fino all'inizio del XXI secolo, la cosiddetta prima e terza ondata di comunicazione politica. In primo luogo, i modi in cui i partiti sono emersi, sono stati gestiti e comunicati con il pubblico sono cambiati enormemente. I partiti si sono sviluppati in modo tale da rappresentare gli interessi di gruppi specifici. Tali gruppi erano costituiti da lavoratori industriali, religioni, gruppi razziali ed etnici, regioni geografiche e molti altri. Il partito era spesso locale e i finanziamenti provenivano dai suoi membri. La comunicazione era incentrata su questioni locali e su reti di persone che affrontavano problemi che dovevano essere risolti. Il vantaggio di questo stile era che i partiti erano in grado di sviluppare una base ideologica coerente e di attrarre una chiara base di elettori. Molto spesso, molti dei problemi che i politici si sono impegnati a risolvere sono stati oggetto di un'attenzione significativa. Tuttavia, questo nuovo approccio presentava alcuni inconvenienti. Per esempio, i partiti sono diventati troppo orientati verso gli interessi dell'élite e la vittoria delle elezioni, piuttosto che rappresentare gli interessi dei loro sostenitori.

Poi, con il progredire della democrazia nel XX secolo, i partiti si trasformarono prima in "partiti di massa" il cui obiettivo era quello di convincere il maggior numero di elettori. Poi, i partiti si sono trasformati in "partiti elettorali-professionali" il cui metodo per raggiungere il potere politico è diventato meno incentrato su un punto di vista ideologico e più incentrato sul lavoro dei professionisti per progettare piattaforme che potessero portare al successo elettorale.

Questa breve analisi della prima attraverso la terza età della comunicazione politica contestualizza quella che viene definita la "quarta età" della comunicazione politica, concetto che negli ultimi anni ha assunto un ruolo di primo piano. Una caratteristica distintiva della quarta età della comunicazione politica è il movimento collettivo che si allontana dallo spettro tradizionale destra-sinistra e si sposta verso una posizione di bipolarità su un determinato argomento. Inoltre, il sostegno populista e anti-establishment è un fenomeno in rapida crescita durante la quarta era - non solo negli Stati Uniti. Il populismo sta vivendo una grave crescita nella maggior parte del mondo occidentale. La gente ora si preoccupa molto meno delle tradizionali politiche di partito e molto di più di vedere i risultati, e sembra che queste persone credano che il populismo sia il modo più efficace per raggiungere questi risultati. Questo presenta un panorama unico nel suo genere, sul quale si verifica un micro-targeting(i think) politico.

In seguito, collocherò la mia concettualizzazione della tecnologia e della campagna elettorale nel quadro della quarta ondata di comunicazione politica. Qui, sosterrò che la ragione per cui le campagne di micro-targeting hanno avuto tanto successo durante la quarta era della comunicazione politica, non è solo perché il contenuto di questi messaggi è sempre più anti-establishment, ma piuttosto perché il mezzo attraverso il quale questi messaggi vengono consegnati è esso stesso anti-establishment. La comunicazione sui social media attraverso pacchetti informativi personalizzati è un metodo di comunicazione estremamente poco ortodosso, e non sorprende che questo metodo sia efficace contro una particolare mentalità populista e anti-establishment - il tipo di mentalità che i leader come Trump mirano a raggiungere. Nel fare quest'analisi, descrivo il motivo per cui credo che la quarta era della comunicazione politica catturi le condizioni sociali che hanno alimentato la crescita del rapporto tra la tecnologia moderna e la campagna elettorale.

Infine, la tecnologia sta continuamente spingendo i confini della comunicazione e della connessione umana. Siamo quasi al punto in cui i nostri dispositivi mobili raccolgono così tanti dati vitali su di noi, che chi possiede questi dati ci capisce meglio di quanto ci capiamo noi stessi. Come risultato di questa capacità, i dati degli utenti sono ora la merce più preziosa del pianeta terra. Tuttavia, il potere che è insito nei dati può essere realizzato solo da chi li utilizza. Negli ultimi tempi, questi dati sono stati sempre più utilizzati dai politici, perché questi dati possono sbloccare la psiche umana in modi che permettono ai politici di raggiungere risultati sociali che non sarebbero stati possibili senza l'uso di tali dati.

Nella mia conclusione, sostengo che, laddove la campagna elettorale era tradizionalmente un esercizio reattivo, nella misura in cui le opinioni degli elettori venivano scoperte e poi le campagne venivano modellate per soddisfare al meglio tali opinioni, le moderne tecnologie come i big data, l'intelligenza artificiale e gli algoritmi hanno permesso la raccolta di dati, la creazione di profili psicografici e l'implementazione di micro-targeting politici a tal punto che la campagna elettorale è diventata un esercizio proattivo, in cui il discorso, la narrazione e le opinioni vengono modellate in ciò che fornisce a ogni candidato le migliori possibilità di successo. La campagna politica è passata e continuerà a passare dalla scultura allo scultore.