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Eastern Kentucky University

The History of the Future: A Creative 26th Century Article on the 2016 Presidential Election

Honors Thesis

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

of the

Requirements of

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Spring 2018

By

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The History of the Future: A Creative 26th Century Article on the 2016 Presidential Election

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Abstract: As technology has grown in recent decades, many fields of study have been affected. This thesis will consider how technology might continue to impact the field of the historian and what historical research and writing might look like in the distant future. This project will attempt to demonstrate the potential sources of a future historian, how those sources might have been stored, how historians might interpret those sources, and what historical writing itself might look like. This thesis will demonstrate these aspects in a creative manner in the form of a future historical scholarly article from the 26th century looking back and analyzing the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election. In this article the future historian will examine how Social Media played a role in the election of Donald Trump, considering Russian interference and Trump's own use of Twitter. This project also includes a rationale where the research of Thesis and decisions regarding the creative articles are explained. The rationale discusses how electronic sources, specifically Social Media, might be used by future historians and how those sources might be stored digitally by examining the current preservation of Social Media, the Internet Archive, and trends in current archives. The rationale also considers how the historical viewpoints of Empiricism and Postmodernism will be used in the future.

Keywords: Social Media, Twitter, Archives, Digital Archives, Internet Archive, Wayback Machine, Donald Trump, 2016 Election, Empiricism, Postmodernism

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Rationale

Over the past several decades, our world's technology, and use of that technology, has grown in an almost exponential manner. Computers have become more and more complex and powerful, while growing small enough to fit in our pockets. The internet has developed into a crucial worldwide system for businesses, news, and daily communication. Touch screens have gone from the pinnacle of technology to the most basics of any handheld device. These, and dozens of other developments, have revolutionized how our society functions in every day life. There have naturally been questions and concerns on how it will continue to impact and change our society. These matters have been well considered in the areas of education, health care, politics, transportation, the sciences, and many other fields. However, one that has received minimal attention in what its future might look like is the field of historians. What little thought on this area that does exist is outdated and does not fully address the future, as will be discussed more later on. History, or how it has been written and researched, has already changed with time. Historians have gone from favoring an empirical approach, that believed the past could be understood and recorded from the sources it left, to a poststructuralist stance, that argues our subjective language and views prevent a complete understanding of sources.¹ How else might our view of history change and how will historians use our society's growing technology in their work? This thesis hopes to address what historical research and writing might look like in the

¹ Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, *The Houses of History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 4.

distant future. This project will attempt to demonstrate the potential sources of a future historian, how those sources might have been stored, how historians might interpret those sources, and what historical writing itself might look like. This thesis will demonstrate these aspects in a creative manner in the form of a future historical scholarly article from the 26th century looking back and analyzing the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election. Through the process of writing this future article, I have come to the conclusion that electronic sources, and in particular Social Media, will become more important to historians; therefore access to past web materials via digital archives will become essential. Additionally, I have also come to believe that historians will use an Empirical methodology while accepting subjectivity from postmodernism but recognizing that not all interpretations are valid.

As was mentioned above, there is very little previous scholarship on the future of historical research. What has been written is often out-of-date and does not fully consider or focus on the future and its possibilities. One such example is “Outward Visions, Inward Glance: Archives History and Professional Identity.”² This article written by Barbara Craig addresses the future of archivists and their profession in the face of the growth of technology and online storage in modern society. She raises valid questions on how archivists should respond to competition from information technologies and the possibilities these new fields raise in her own area of expertise. However, instead of directly answering these inquiries, Craig argues that the answers regarding their future lie “...paradoxically, in studying our past, whose importance hitherto has been over shadowed by a fascination with discerning the possible shape of things to come.” The article suggests that archivists will be more prepared for the future by studying the

² Barbara Craig, “Outward Visions, Inward Glance: Archives History and Professional Identity,” *Archival Issues* 17, no. 2 (1992): 113-124. JSTOR (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41101829>)

past. Craig believes that such an investigation would provide a sense of professional identity and purpose in her field of study and thereby better equip their practitioners to face the possibilities of the future.³ Craig notes that such a study has not been conducted in the past and that any discussion on the history of archiving occurs only minimally in the education of future of archivists, an education which she argues needs reorganization.⁴ Throughout the article, the possibilities of the future are never addressed, only the need to study the past to prepare for the potential coming of these possibilities is addressed. This demonstrates that existing scholarship has not yet fully examined the potential future of the historical field. Furthermore, “Outward Visions, Inward Glance” would be considered outdated by many. While it raises enduring concerns over the relationship between historical studies and the growth of technology, Craig wrote the article over twenty years ago in 1992. Technology has only grown in the last two decades and concerns that Craig would not have been aware of are now reality. This thesis will fully address the possibilities of the future and take into consideration the latest developments of technology.

One of the conclusions that was drawn from the creative article of the 26th Century was that access of electronic sources would be critical to future historians. I particularly believe that Social Media will be one of the vital sources used five-hundred years from now. In order to make this possible, these sources would have to be stored and preserved in some manner just as artifacts of the past are now stored and preserved in archives. I primarily envision archives of the future being electronic/digital. This conclusion was drawn based on how these sources are currently being stored and preserved. A particular focus was made on the leading Social media

³ Craig, “Outward Visions, Inward Glance,” 113-115.

⁴ Ibid., 116-117.

platforms of Facebook and Twitter. Facebook itself has already begun to preserve itself and its profiles through Memorialized Accounts. After the death of a loved one, family and friends can send a request to Facebook that the deceased person's account be memorialized by providing a link to an obituary or uploading other relevant documentation that confirms the person has passed away.⁵ These accounts, and all the content their users had posted, becomes preserved, unable to change or be deleted. The word "Remembering" will be placed next to their name on their profile and they will be removed from public spaces such as groups or friend suggestions. Depending on the settings of the account, other friends may be able to share old posts or comment on them.⁶ The only person who would potentially be able to access a Memorialized Account is the deceased's Legacy Contact. This person, chosen under the settings tab while the deceased was still alive, will be able to pin posts to make announcements and potentially add new friends, depending on their settings. However, they still cannot delete or change previous posts.⁷

In contrast, Twitter has no set guidelines for preserving the materials of a deceased user. If family members can provide proof of death, they can request that the profile be deleted. In all other cases, the account simply remains unused, as if the user was no longer using Twitter.⁸ In theory, any account that was not purposefully deleted, and all its tweets, posts and information, should continue to endure and be available for future generations as long as Twitter itself survives. However, other organizations have begun to archive the social media platform for their

⁵ Facebook, "Memorialization Request," Help Center, Accessed April 2nd, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/help/contact/234739086860192>

⁶ Facebook, "What will happen to my Facebook account if I pass away?" Help Center, Accessed April 2nd, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/help/103897939701143?helpref=faq_content

⁷ Facebook, "What is a Legacy Contact and what can they do?" Help Center, Accessed April 2nd, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/help/1568013990080948?helpref=faq_content

⁸ Alyssa Newcomb, "What Happens to Your Twitter Account After Death," *ABC News*, May 20th, 2016, <http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/twitter-account-death/story?id=39253929>

own research purposes. In 2010, the Library of Congress arranged to receive every tweet ever sent on the site since its creation in 2006 and all future tweets for preservation and potential study. No number was given for the amount of tweets that included, but Twitter is known to process 50 million tweets per day, potentially placing the number at least several billion.⁹

However, seven years later the Library decided to limit its scope, instead choosing to preserve only tweets that it judged to be historically significant. The Library cited several reasons for the change. First, it was becoming increasingly difficult to manage the sheer number of tweets they had and were receiving. No public collection has yet been made available and even permitted researchers struggled to shift through the data, taking days to find a single tweet. Second, the nature of tweets themselves had changed. The Library only received the text of tweets, meaning that as Gifs and images became more popular, more and more material was lost. The collection was still of interest to many researchers as would show how Social media evolved and grew in its first years.¹⁰

It is also worth mentioning recent controversy regarding Trump's use of twitter in his altering and deleting of tweets, as these controversies do have implications for the preservation and future accesses of tweets. Only hours after the president had been sworn in, he may have violated national law by deleting a tweet that stated he was "honored" to serve the American people and replacing it with the correct spelling, and then for some reason deleting the corrected version. Under the Presidential Records Act of 1978 (PRA), the president must keep all

⁹ Matt Raymond and Greg Pass, "Twitter Donates Entire Tweet Archive to Library or Congress," *Library of Congress*, April 15th, 2010, <https://www.loc.gov/item/prn-10-081/>

¹⁰ Jason Daley, "The Library of Congress will stop Archiving Twitter," *Smithsonian.com*, December 27th, 2017, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/library-congress-will-stop-archiving-twitter-180967651/?msource=N2339&mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiWlRlJek9HUmpNVFUyTWpjNSIsInQiOiI5SzMNTblZwVjdENHI5S08wY25tN3ltVEVZVFA3SWV2XC9ibnB5R3NkTGhaVDVxSzZTlYrYTNDV2Q5VzA3TlEzYjV6QW1tTVQrWVNyZ0c0Qkxtc3Nrb1lic2NsN1g3TFISRjZKNGU0RIZVbldmbXJNcElOUGNFZm1WTTBQSHV3TOYifQ%3D%3D

presidential materials through his term and turn them over to the National Archives to eventually be made available to the public. There is a provision for a president to keep his own private materials, such as a diary or personal notes, that do not have to be archived, but some argue that Trump's tweets fall under presidential record.¹¹ Sometime later into his presidency, the National Archives and Records Administration contacted the White House regarding the tweets and confirmed that his administration was keeping all forms of his tweets, even after they are deleted, but have not confirmed how or in what manner this is being done.¹² It is still not irregular for Trump's tweets to be deleted depending on a misspelling or certain situation. Often new sites or private archives will save the tweet regardless but it will no longer appear on the central twitter feed. However, a lawsuit by an activist group has been filed against Trump regarding his deletion of tweets and potential violations of the PRA. Yet even the advocacy groups acknowledge that there are some tweets that Trump has a right to delete. They cited his deletion of a tweet that had supported Luther Jones, a candidate for the Senator of Alabama, until he lost the primaries to Roy Moore. As this does not directly affect the Office of the President but is his opinion on politics, it is fair to delete.¹³ What is officially being done to preserve Trump's tweets is still an ongoing issue and debate.

In relation to the creative article, tweets were some of the hardest material to work with and gather. A major factor in this was specifically finding the tweet one was looking for and going back to the time the tweet came from. Twitter does not have an advanced search options and their current method is rather primitive. For example, if one is searching for a specific tweet

¹¹ Shontavia Johnson, "Donald's Trumps Tweets are Now Presidential Record," *The Conversation*, January 31st, 2017, <https://theconversation.com/donald-trumps-tweets-are-now-presidential-records-71973>

¹² Stephen Braun, "National Archives to White House: Save all Trump Tweets," *AP News*, April 3rd, 2017, <https://apnews.com/60fd5d6a7ad942a083d1e6388b0c7b87>

¹³ Alana Abramson, "President Trump just deleted tweets about Luther Strange. Is he allowed to do that?" *Time*, September 27th, 2017, <http://time.com/4958877/donald-trump-deletes-tweets-legal-implications/>

and types a portion of it in the platform's search bar, it brings up every single person who ever tweeted that combination of words. Even adding the author's name of that particular tweet into the search usually does not guarantee finding the material. The best way to find a specific tweet was to enter the text into a larger search engine (such as google) and let it find the specific tweet and then follow the offered link. The process becomes even more difficult if a researcher does not have a specific tweet in mind but wants to investigate a specific time period. That requires scrolling through the Twitter feed all the way back to the interested period. That can take a considerable amount of time depending on how long ago one is searching. Furthermore, the twitter feed will only let a person go back so far. The amount of time the feed will remain depends usually on how many tweets that person sends. The creative article was also impacted by the deletion of some of Trump's tweets, at least in the research process. I sought to use one of the tweets that had been deleted. It could not be taken straight from the twitter feed as other tweets had been. It was instead taken from a newspaper that had captured the tweet before it was deleted (See footnote 65).

Additional research into the idea of electronic archives of the future involved investigating currently existing digital archives, trends currently taking place in archives now, and the designs of upcoming archives. The majority of this project's research revolved around the oldest and largest archive currently on the web, the Internet Archive (IA). The Internet Archive, by its own description, is a non-profit digital library based on the internet. Their stated goal is provide "Universal Access to All Knowledge." Over the past twenty years they've collected a massive amount of data: 279 billion web pages, 11 million texts, 4 million recordings, 3 million videos, 1 million images, and 100,000 software programs.¹⁴ One particular aspect of IA

¹⁴ "About the Internet Archive," *Internet Archive*, accessed April 2nd, 2018, <https://archive.org/about/>

that might be of interest to historians now and in the future is the Wayback Machine. This program allows users to view archived webpages from as far back as 1996, even if they currently no longer exist on the web. The Wayback Machine functions through the use of Web Crawlers, programs that travel site to site by links and capture copies of the webpage while they are there.¹⁵ I believe this aspect of the IA in particular would be of use to a future historian. The author of the creative article referenced something similar he called “Digital Archeology,” in which websites were recovered and then archived. Theoretically, the future historian could have used this program every time he cited or consulted an online webpage. In terms of actual use, the Wayback Machine was referenced to look at Social Media at a specific date and see how popular a specific person was. (see footnote 69).

However, the Internet Archive and the Wayback Machine itself are not without their limitations. There are considerable gaps in the IA’s collections, particularly in material from the first three years of the web and in sites/materials that have content that do not follow standard programming. The archive also often faces copyright issues, therefore IA limits itself to material that was already public or free. For the Wayback Machine, this means it cannot access most sites that use any form of password protection. Finally, the archive is regularly criticized for its lack of organization, as it does not follow librarian cataloging procedures. In the case of the WayBack Machine this often requires having the exact URL(website address) you are looking for. The Wayback Machine has also received criticism for its collection procedures. The program will collect things randomly off the internet, meaning it can miss important historical events and collect more controversial sites.¹⁶ My own experience with the WayBack Machine noted other

¹⁵ Eli Edwards, “Ephemeral to Enduring: The Internet Archive and Its Role in Preserving Digital Media,” *Information Technology and Libraries* 23, no. 1 (2004): 4. Academic Search Complete (13119040).

¹⁶ Edwards, “Ephemeral to Enduring,” 4-6.

problems. One of the leading issues is the program's interaction with Social Media. As a site protected by a password, it is usually incapable of recording anything from the site. On rare occasions when it does capture something, it is a random snapshot of someone's timeline or feed.

This project also included an investigation into how current archives are working with their collections. This included a visit to the archives at the College of Berea and the University of Eastern Kentucky. The archive in Berea has around 100 terabytes of data. However, that material reflects the interests of the college. It primarily focuses on Appalachian culture, in particular Appalachian music, and the history of Berea and any events that take place on their campus. The archive does not actively collect raw electronic information from society or the web.¹⁷ Eastern Kentucky University's archive does work with some modern materials. The archivists have recently begun an online archive regarding 21st Century Political Memes. The project's goal is to capture political memes that have been used thus far in politics as part of an effort to demonstrate the political attitude of the century. It was begun during the 2016 election and is still an ongoing project. The archive is also active in collecting oral interviews, some of which include recent events such as the inauguration of Trump and the Women's March. This is also an ongoing project and will be available to the public eventually. Select collections from the archives are digitalized, as well as material from the last five years of the university's records, and any record that is requested by the public.¹⁸ Both archives stressed that their projects were ongoing and these were new frontiers in their studies.

¹⁷ Rachel Vagts, Berea College, personal interview by author, November 14th, 2017.

¹⁸ "About," *21st Century Political Memes*, Accessed March 4th, 2018, <http://politicalmemes.omeka.net/about> ; Jackie Couture and Neal Kasiak, University of Eastern Kentucky, April 4th, 2018.

This project also investigated the soon to be released Barack Obama Presidential Library. As was mentioned above, according to the Presidential Records Act, all presidential materials must be preserved and made available to the public. This presidential library is the collection of materials from the Obama administration. However, unlike other presidential libraries, the collection will be entirely electronic. The project is still ongoing and the materials will not be open for research until 2022, following regulations of the PRA that there must be a five year gap after the end of the administration and release of resources. However, when it is made available, it will not be the original copies, but electronic versions.¹⁹ Furthermore, the collection will also include an archive of government websites of the administration. Current plans of this feature make it appear similar to the Wayback Machine and a limited form of an archive of the Whitehouse.gov website already exists. It will also include a collection of the social media accounts of the president, Obama family, and leading members of his staff.²⁰ Unfortunately, none of these materials, including the website itself, will be available until 2022, therefore more concrete information cannot be provided. However, based on the current descriptions of the presidential library, this collection strongly resembles the ideas of a digital archive of the distant (or in this case not so distant) future.

Before moving on, it is necessary to discuss some of the reasoning behind the creative article. To begin with, it should be explained why that specific time period and why the 2016 election itself was chosen to study. The motivations were rather straight forward and followed the lines of basic historical thought and methodology. Questions were asked that a future

¹⁹ "About Us," *Barack Obama Presidential Library*, Accessed March 4th, 2018, <https://www.obamalibrary.gov/about-us>.

²⁰ "Archived White House Websites and Social Media," *Barack Obama Presidential Library*, Accessed March 4th, 2018, <https://www.obamalibrary.gov/research/archived-white-house-websites-and-social-media>

historian, or a historian of anytime period, would have to consider before beginning an investigation. Are there primary sources to study this time period and event? Is this event scholarly significant? The 2016 election answers yes to both questions. The campaigns received extensive media attention and generated much discussion on the social media platforms. These would serve as valuable sources for a researcher investigating this era and it was likely that at least some would survive for future generations. Furthermore, Trump's particular use of Twitter and the Russian influences through social media meant that any historian looking back on this period would have to consider their affect. In regards to scholarly worth, almost any presidential election would be considered a valid area of study.

It should also be explained why the future historian reached the conclusion he did regarding the election. The motivations for this were once again straight forward. The 26th Century scholar's conclusion was based upon studying and understanding of his sources. In this manner, the article followed an empirical approach to its sources and a view of the past. To provide a basic history and outline of an empirical viewpoint, the approach has its origins in the 19th Century when the study of history was becoming a professional field. At this time, Lepold von Ranke was responsible for establishing the standards of historical research and writing. He specifically argued for historians to study primary sources, material that is originally from the time period being evaluated. He believed that these sources should be closely studied and analyzed to reconstruct the narrative of the past. In studying these sources, Ranke stressed the need to remain impartial and judge the period by its own criteria rather than outside structures.²¹ In an empirical methodology therefore, a historian searches for available sources from an era,

²¹ Green and Troup, *The Houses of History*, 13-15.

closely evaluates and analyses those sources, and draw together the sequence of events of the time period.

The author of the future article followed this outline of empirical methodology and thought. Based upon the sources the historian was able to find and then study, he was able to determine the timeline of events and then draw deeper conclusions based upon his analysis of the sources and events. The future historian did not doubt his ability to be unsubjective regarding the past. It is true that this is partly due to the fact that the mind behind the 26th century historian (me/I) lived through the actual events of the 21st century and therefore had less fears about misunderstanding the past (for him actual events) due to language or discourse. He/I could boldly approach his sources and draw conclusions from them. This viewpoint was much easier than alternative approaches for one actually lived through the 21st century. For example, a poststructuralist approach would have required denying the reality that one had seen and actually experienced.

Admittedly, this stance requires some justification on why a 26th Century historian would value an Empirical Methodology given the growing challenge of Postmodernism. Before moving on however, defining postmodernism itself is likely required. This approach came from the rejection of more traditional thoughts, including the empirical thought, and studies of language done by Ferdinand de Saussure and later applied to the historical fields. In these studies, the ultimate conclusion was that language was based on an external reality. When this reasoning was applied to history, the conclusion was that historical study should not be limited to traditional literary texts, but a much wider body of material. These studies also led to the idea that a historical source could be interpreted multiple ways and that its larger truth is relative. This in turn leads to the larger idea that history itself can be written subjectively and there is no certain

historical truth.²² Therefore, in a postmodern approach, because we cannot wholly understand our sources, historical truth is relative and there can be multiple subjective interpretations of the past.

To return to how postmodernism might be viewed in the 26th Century, I argue that in the future, historians will still favor Empirical methods while accepting subjectivity but recognizing that not all interpretations are equally valid. This will be because Empirical methods have been recognized as the most effective means of studying the past and historians have consecutively returned to this methodology in their studies. To begin, it must be noted that Postmodernism does raise valid concerns against traditional historical thought. Its critics have rightly noted it follows patterns of western domination and patriarchy, and that these ideals can cloud its language and discourse. The critique goes on challenge unrealistic models of unitary history, ideological beliefs that cloud leading historical scholarship, and assumptions of complete mastery over various fields of knowledge. However, to refuse to accept any idea of historical truth and ignore most forms of historical discourse pushes the bounds of being realistic. Many scholars justly raise concerns of drifting into literature rather than scholarship with such thoughts.²³ Indeed, in this author's eyes, unfettered subjectivity relates to close to the current problem of 'fake news.' Knowledge or information that is not based on facts or logic, but generalizations and assumptions and often pushes a political agenda. It is hoped that future generations will be able to address this issue and enjoy more reliable information. Therefore, a 26th Century historian will accept subjectivity because it has been recognized that postmodernism does raise valid concerns, but extreme interpretations would not be accepted.

²² Green and Troup, *The Houses of History*, 13-15.

²³ Georg G Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 12-13.

Such interpretations could be limited by reviews from his peers and set professional standards, which some scholars are already calling for.²⁴

Some might raise concerns about the probability of a future historian continuing to use an empirical methodology after accepting some of the aspects of a postmodernism. Yet studies of the past have found that in the last few decades historians continued to rely on a scientific and logical methodological approach even when accepting a new thought process of another or new discipline. In the 1970s and 1980s, historians were influenced by anthropologists in their views of the French Revolution. Instead of favoring studies on class and economic factors, they considered culture, language, and writings as an equal factor in the revolution. However, the historians ultimately relied on empirical findings from archives to support their new interpretations. Even in the ongoing postmodern challenge, a study of the past twenty years has found that historians continue to use logic and an empirical methodology while believing in a historical truth, even if they are now more skeptical of a complete scientific approach and mindset.²⁵

The conclusions I have drawn from the writing of this creative future article are that an Empirical methodology will continued to be used and that electronic sources, specifically Social Media, will become critical to historians; therefore digital archives and their access to past materials will be vital. The ideas and possibility of future electronic archives were based and drawn from current ideas of preservation on social media, pre-existing digital archives, current trends in archives, and the designs of upcoming archives. In the future, Empirical methods will continue while subjectivity is acknowledged but not all interpretations are recognized. It must be

²⁴ Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century*, 12.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

realized, however, that all this is a potential prediction and there can be no set guarantee about what is to come. A sudden technological development or unexpected event can completely change the possibilities of the future. Yet based on current trends and barring a dramatic change in our society, the potential of historians of tomorrow are bright and equal to the developments of any other field of study.

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Creative Article

21st Century Politics and Social Media: The Impact in the 2016 US Presidential Elections

The 21st Century is commonly known as the ‘Technological Revolution’, and rightly so. In its first decades alone, the era witnessed technological growth at a rate that had never before been seen and has not again been achieved in the following five centuries. Many of the most basic technologies used today are based off of innovations that were developed in that time period. 21st Century touch screens, flying drones, and virtual reality are all the basis of modern interactive mainframes, delivery and service droids, and holograms, respectively.²⁶ The path of development of these technologies into their current form is a well-developed and a highly examined area of study. But what is often overlooked, is the impact these advancements had on the society in which they were developed. Just as the progress in the Industrial Revolution caused dramatic societal changes two centuries earlier, these developments were equally momentous in 21st Century society. And no development was perhaps more significant than Social Media.

Social Media was an electronic platform on which anyone could express their opinions, thoughts, or beliefs on any topic with friends, family, or anyone in the world. The first versions, depending on the exact definition of social media, were developed in the 1990s and early 2000s, and included sites such as Blogger and Myspace. The earlier platforms were not successful in the long-term and most were obscure even in their own times. Other versions grew rapidly within a few years and quickly replaced the older models. These were far more successful, well-known,

²⁶ Bell N. Torres, *From Smart Phones to Starships: Technological Evolution since the Technological Revolution* (San Francisco: Academy Press Books, 2407).*

and enduring. The leading networks through the first half of the century were Facebook and Twitter. Facebook was usually considered the ‘original’ social media and by 2012 reported having 835 million users from around the world. Users created a profile to represent them, made ‘friends’ with other users, and could then post almost anything and interact with the posts of other users. Twitter consisted of simply releasing statements of a few hundred words called ‘tweets’ and following the tweets of other users. Twitter was also smaller than Facebook with 500 million users by 2012.²⁷

The platforms originally started out for social and recreational purposes, a means by which friends could connect and communicate with each other. However, as they grew more popular, they expanded into other spheres and began to play more important roles in society. New research has found that the rapid expansion of these platforms and their impacts was noted even in its own time and was the subject of much debate. This was particularly so in politics, where social media completely changed how a campaign was run and how a leader communicated with his constituents. No case demonstrated this more than the 45th President of the United States, Donald Trump, who utterly reshaped the relationship between Social Media and the White House. There is no greater example of the impact of social media in politics than his election to office in 2016. Donald Trump was given advantages by Social Media in the 2016 Election by permitting a foreign power to disrupt the democratic process and sway American opinion. Additionally, Social Media, specifically Twitter, gave Trump an effective and personal platform by which he could connect with potential voters.

²⁷ Jose Van Dijck, *The Culture of Social Media: A Critical History of Social Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 3-4, 44-46, 68-69.

It should naturally be clear that this argument is in sharp contrast to established scholarship already written on the 2016 US Presidential Election. While Social Media has always been recognized as a growing trend in politics during the 21st Century, it is only until recently that we have seen how extensively it was used in campaigns and how groundbreaking it was in its early decades. The view of previous scholarship can be summarized by Dr. Leonard Kirk, a leading political historian of the 23rd Century. In regards to social media in elections he stated “While Social Media did grow in use during the period of these elections, their impact on the outcome of elections was minimal.... The platforms were a new technology and had not yet spread to all parts of the voting population.”²⁸ Kirk himself accredited Donald Trump’s election as part of the brief nationalism movement that rose in many western democracies in the first decades of the era. This is not an argument without reason and without a doubt did play a factor in the 2016 election and was certainly part of a larger trend occurring in the western nations.

However, we believe Kirk and earlier scholars underestimate the role Social Media had in elections. The recent growth of the field of Digital Archaeology has revealed new insights into Social Media during the 21st Century that previous historians could not have known. New research has found that Social Media was far more established in society within its first decades than previously thought. Less than 20 years after its invention, it is estimated more than 85% of the US Population had some form of Social Media. Specific investigation into the 2016 election has found that Social Media was more prevalent throughout society than formerly supposed.²⁹

²⁸ Leonard Kirk, “Trends in Western Democratic Elections through the First Half of the 21st Century,” *Journal of Political History* 512, no. 27 (2137): 21.*

²⁹ Digital Archelogy is a new, but promising, field of study, developed only in the past 10 years. For those unfamiliar with its work, digital coders have been able to recover deleted or decayed websites and online documents. A major breakthrough was regaining access to the original web link of Google, a 21st Century ‘search engine’, a system that allowed users to search the online web quickly. With its recovery, we gained access to thousands of other links (researchers are still sorting through the accessed pages), including full links to Social Media sites. For further reading see:

Furthermore, we believe earlier scholars could not, without the new findings in Digital Archaeology, take into consideration how new the platforms were and how their entry into politics, particularly as used by Trump, were revolutionary and gave him significant advantages, including the ones we argue above.

Before examining the 2016 election itself, it is appropriate to examine how social media had been used in US elections until that point. However, that really only consists of two elections, the Obama Campaigns of 2008 and 2012. Prior to these elections, social media was not used in campaigns. In fact, the Clinton Administration, only two administrations ahead of Trump's, was the first to have to deal with the appearance of internet technology in 1992. The following campaigns gradually accepted internet technology, developing websites and using email to communicate with voters. However, it was not a priority of any of the candidates as the majority of the population did not have regular access to the technology. Furthermore, politicians were not ambitious in their use with such mediums. They only reiterated information constitutes could have received from traditional sources.³⁰

It was in 2008 that both the internet and social media played large roles in the campaign between Barack Obama and John McCain. By that time internet technology was a regular commodity and social media made its swift and dramatic entrance. Additionally, politicians had embraced the technology and changed their strategies in its use. Both Obama and McCain used the new mediums to distribute information, organize events, mobilize supporters, and raise financial support. They took an overall more active online approach than their predecessors.

William Picard, *Google, The King Tut of Internet Archeology: An Explanation of its Recovery and Catalogue of its Findings* (San Francisco: Academy Press Books, 2410).*

³⁰ James E. Katz, Michael Barris, and Anshul Jain, *The Social Media President: Barack Obama and the Politics of Digital Engagement* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macillan, 2013), 20-30.

However, Obama far outstripped McCain in his online activity. His website, My.BarackObama.com, coordinated with social media to organize his followers into highly effective and active grassroots organizations. By the end of the election, the website raised \$30 million and had planned 200,000 physical events. On the actual social media platforms, Obama had 3 million Facebook friends, 123,000 Twitter followers, and 845,000 MySpace (One of the first Social Media sites, it was very quickly was replaced in popularity by newer models but never fully died out) supporters. Four years later, Obama again used these strategies against Mitt Romney and was successful. Romney was more active than McCain online and did try to match Obama's Social Media organization with a complex Smartphone App³¹ that would have allowed even greater grassroots mobilization, but the system crashed carrying too much data. Part of Obama's legacy, in his own time, was being a politician active in Social Media. Political scholars of his day studied his revolutionary tactics and he was well known for his attachment to his Blackberry, a specific type of smartphone.³²

However, it was his successor, Donald Trump, who set an even larger legacy with social media. Trump, before becoming the 45th President of the United States, was a New York businessman and a well-known celebrity. His business, the Trump Organization, originally founded by his father, was a real estate and development company that expanded into several different industries. Though his business was, overall, a success and Trump was generally viewed as a skilled business negotiator, several of his enterprises did end in failure and it was

³¹ Smartphones and Apps (short for "application") were some of the most sophisticated and common technology in the early 21st Century. Smartphones were a mix of a handheld phone and computer, allowing users to communicate and access the internet almost anywhere. Apps were programs installed on Smartphones that were used for either recreation or specific tasks. They majority of Social Media platforms had an app and accessing one's site/profile via an app was one of the most common ways of using social media

Torres, *From Smart Phones to Starships*, 168.*

³² Katz, Barris, and Jain, *The Social Media President*, 30-37.

well known he declared bankruptcy several times to improve his financial situation. As a celebrity, he was most famous for his appearance on *The Apprentice*, a ‘reality show’³³ where contestants competed for positions in his business. Trump announced his run for office in June of 2015 under the campaign slogan “Make American Great Again.” He focused on the issues of immigration, vowing to build a border wall that Mexico would pay for, and economics, promising a platform of “America First”. In the primary campaign he faced off against more than a dozen Republican nominees before winning the nomination.³⁴ His democratic opponent in the General Election was Hilary Rodham Clinton. While Trump was viewed as an outsider in Washington and had never served in a political office, Clinton had an experienced history in politics. She was the First Lady to Bill Clinton, First Lady of Arkansas, Senator of New York, Secretary of State under the Obamas, and had previously ran for office in 2008. However, she struggled with relatability with her constituents and had suffered numerous scandals alongside her husband.³⁵

³³ ‘Reality Shows’ were a genre of television programs that focused on persons who were supposedly not acting and went through unscripted events. They often focused on either competitions or unique individuals living their daily lives. They were outlawed in 2067 by the Second Geneva Convention.

Benjamin Bashir, *Memes, MTV, and Magazines: An Anthropological Survey of 21st Century Culture* (San Francisco: Academy Press Books, 2427), 25-76.*

³⁴ “Donald J. Trump”, The White House.Gov, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/people/donald-j-trump/>; “Donald Trump”, Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_Trump#2016_presidential_campaign

Many outside of historical circles may not be familiar with Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Wikipedia, often simply called Wiki, was an online encyclopedia that was open to the public. Developed at the beginning of the century, it had over five million entries in several languages that covered almost any imaginable topic. While almost anyone could create pages and edit information, Wiki had a system of failsafes and checks to avoid disinformation and enjoyed a reputation of valid information. During the Cyber Wars of the 22nd Century, the main Wiki site was destroyed. Thankfully many pages were saved in Online Archives and Digital Archeologists have been successful in recovering entries. It is commonly used by historians when primary sources cannot be found or when the sequence of events of a period is unclear even with primary sources, as is the case in the 2016 election

Katherine Paris, *A History of the World Wide Web and its Most Important Sites, 2000s-2400s* (San Francisco: Academy Press Books, 2419), 39-43.*

³⁵ “About Hillary”, The Office of Hilary Rodham Clinton, 2018, <https://www.hillaryclinton.com/about/>; Hillary Rodham Clinton, *What Happened* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017).

The campaign itself was a brutal affair for both candidates as they faced numerous scandals and criticisms. Trump confronted several accusations of sexual misconduct, a hot mic where he used sexist and vulgar language, collusion with Russia, and general controversy over his stances and comments.³⁶ The campaign was similarly treacherous for Clinton. She faced a federal investigation into the use of her email and suffered leaked and hacked documents.³⁷ The entire election was further complicated by the appearance of Fake News, both as an actual news story based on facts and as an accusation against a legitimate news station (such accusations usually came from politicians). While Fake News had existed before the campaign, there was a massive increase in its appearance during the election and it began to receive national attention.³⁸ Eventually, election day itself finally came in November with most polls favoring Clinton by a respectable margin. It came then as a surprise to most when Trump was confirmed the winner. The actual circumstances around his victory remain unclear. The Trump administration maintained that the president won both electoral vote and the popular vote by a large majority. However, many other source reports that Trump won only the electoral vote, and that by a narrow margin.³⁹ Regardless, the end results were the same. Donald Trump was elected 45th President of the United States.

One of the specific advantages Social Media gave to Donald Trump in the election, was in permitting a foreign power to interfere in the campaign. This foreign nation was specifically Russia, whose administration specifically worked towards a Trump presidency, believing he would be more willing to work with them and serve their overall interests. Even when the 2016

³⁶ Donald Trump, Wikipedia

³⁷ Clinton, *What Happened*.

³⁸ Miachel Benson, Anne Cizmar, Ginny Whitehouse, presented at Fake News Forum, Eastern Kentucky University, Nov 6, 2017. <https://www.facebook.com/TheEasternProgress/videos/1491748967573467/>

³⁹ "Donald J Trump", White House.Gov; Donald Trump Wikipedia

election was still ongoing, there were reports of Russian intervention before the end of the campaign. This interference had two forms. This study, however, will only be focusing on one of them. The first form, the one outside the scope of this study, was direct collusion between the Trump Campaign and the Russian Government to achieve the election of Donald Trump.⁴⁰ Not long after the inauguration of the President, a special investigation was commissioned to look into the possibility of involvement between Russia and Trump's party.⁴¹ Though the President vehemently denied such accusations on multiple occasions, the investigation still shadowed the early part of his presidency.⁴² In its own time, the Russian investigation was a clouded and confused topic. Unfortunately, it remains equally unclear today as the majority of the records concerning the investigation were some of the first things targeted in the Cyber Wars.⁴³ Although direct collusion seems likely to have occurred, we will not explore it further due to the lack of sources. Intervention in its second form, which shall be focused on in this study, is the Russian use of Social Media to influence American opinion and disrupt the democratic process.

However, before beginning that explanation, it is first necessary to discuss the impacts of social media in a democracy, which is directly related to how Russia influenced the election. As was mentioned above, society during the 21st Century was aware of the changes that were taking place because of social media. While it was hoped that the new technology would allow more

⁴⁰ Mark Mazzetti, Michael S. Schmidt, Scoot Shane, Nina Khrushcheva, " 'An Extraordinary Moment': Explaining the Russia Inquiry," *The New York Times*, Feb 12th, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/12/reader-center/russia-investigation-questions.html>

⁴¹ "Rod Rosenstein's Letter Appointing Muller Special Council," *The New York Times*, May 17th, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/05/17/us/politics/document-Robert-Mueller-Special-Counsel-Russia.html>

⁴²realDonaldTrump, "...Also, there is NO COLLUSION!" Oct 30th, 2017, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump>;realDonaldTrump, "Since the first day I took office, all you hear is the phony Democratic excuse..." Nov 26th, 2017, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump>.

⁴³ Jonathan Mayweather, "Strategies and Targets of the Cyber War," *Journal of 21st Century Warfare* 235, no. 72 (2400): 67.*

people to participate in a democratic government or communicate directly with their leaders, scholars, both now and then, found that social media in the form it actually developed, could have counterproductive effects on democracy.⁴⁴ One of these counterproductive effects was the creation of Echo Chambers. The concept of an Echo Chamber on social media was that users only saw information that reinforced or agreed with their beliefs and interests, political or otherwise. In Facebook, Echo Chambers were created by the algorithms of a News Feed, the stream of information concerning friends and interests that a person saw when on the social media platform. Every time a user ‘Liked’, the way a person expressed their approval of a topic on Facebook that took the form of a blue thumbs-up button, something or clicked on a link, the algorithms noticed it and made subjects that were similar a higher priority in their News Feed. In Twitter, Echo Chambers were created by hashtags (#). By adding a hashtag to their tweet, for example #beach, users could add the message to a larger topic or ongoing discussion, in this case a discussion about a beach. This allowed users to find both interesting conversations and like-minded individuals easily by searching for a specific hashtag.⁴⁵

While Echo Chambers on certain subjects, such as over a book, could be harmless, on other controversial topics they were found to lead to polarization and even violent radicalization. Research found that the more time a group of people spent in an Echo Chamber, only ever receiving confirmation of their beliefs and views, the more racialized they were likely to become in their stances. Such isolation and opposition was not healthy for a democracy. It did not allow for the diversity or compromise that such a government needed to function. Lawmakers were hesitant to seek middle ground on an issue for fear of angering radicalized constituents. Some

⁴⁴ Katz, Barris, and Jain, *The Social Media President*, 3-4.

⁴⁵ Cass R. Sunstein, *#republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), IX-4, 14, 59.

scholars specifically argued that the Echo Chambers of Social Media were a leading factor in the cause of political tension the US faced in the early decades of the 21st century.⁴⁶

It is not known if Russia was aware of this specific phenomena when the intervention began. However, it is clear that that they took advantage of the situation and any interference only inflamed the issue. Russian agents used social media to add their voices to Echo Chambers. Confirming the beliefs of those already in the chamber and contributing to polarization, thus disturbing the democratic process, or presenting information/posts to change American opinions on Trump, in essence moving them closer to entering an Echo Chamber. The whole process began when Russian trolls and bots, the name for hackers who use social media, created fake accounts on both Facebook and twitter. They would pass themselves off as American citizens, often inventing fake lives and families and using other people's pictures. The hackers would then begin posting/tweeting on the social media platform. Their activities on social media usually either took one of two forms. First, the accounts could share a link to news sites, potentially fake and likely conservative/right leaning, that targeted and attacked Hillary Clinton. In this method, a Russian interfeerer might have changed an American opinion, that Trump was the better candidate or Hillary was somehow unsuitable, and potentially moving them toward an Echo Chamber.

⁴⁶ Sunstein, *#republic*, 9-10, 65-71.

It is worth mentioning that there is and was controversy, both in 21st Century and now, over the ideas of Echo Chambers and the 'Post-Fact' society they were often associated with. Examinations of the studies that originally produced the ideas have been criticized for using insufficient data or imprecise experiments that may have produced false results. Later recreations of those studies also found different results than the originals. In regards to Echo Chambers themselves, critics argue that the grouping of like-minded persons occurs just as much electronically as in the real world, thus down playing their impact and power. Unfortunately, no sure conclusions can be drawn as Social Media itself is no longer in use.

Daniel Engberg, "LOL Something Matters," *Slate*, Jan 3rd, 2018, https://slate.com/health-and-science/2018/01/weve-been-told-were-living-in-a-post-truth-age-dont-believe-it.html?msource=N2339&mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiWlRlJek9HUmPnVfUyTWpjNSIsInQiOiI5SzMNTblZwVjdENHI5S08wY25tN3ItVEVZVFA3SWV2XC9ibnB5R3NkTGhaVDVxSzZTTlRyTNDV2Q5VzA3TIEzYjV6QW1tTVQrWVNyZ0c0Qkxtc3Nrb1lic2NsN1g3TFISRjZKNGU0RlZVbldmbXJNcElOUGNFZm1WTTBQSHV3T0YifQ%3D%3D

Second, they could just comment or post an opinion, supporting Trump or attacking Clinton.⁴⁷

This would endorse those who already followed Trump, confirming they were not alone in their belief, and contributed to the polarization in Echo Chambers.

We can provide a specific example of this process, of how posts could contribute to polarization and radicalization within Echo Chambers, using memes as an example. Memes were a type of post and specific aspect of Social Media during the first decades of the 21st Century. They consisted of an image with text overlaid on top of it. The picture and text usually portrayed a situation, taken either from real life or a well-known television program, that was meant to convey an opinion or describe how a person felt.⁴⁸ Some common examples are included below:



Figure 1: iPhone Distracted Boyfriend Meme. Figure 2: Procrastination Distracted Boyfriend Meme. “19 Times the distracted Boyfriend meme was so accurate,” BuzzFeed, https://www.buzzfeed.com/shewbs/19-times-the-distracted-boyfriend-meme-was-so-so-a-356ft?utm_term=.dg8O3Ga3d#.mq4mxROx7.

⁴⁷ Scott Shane, “The Fake Americans Russia Created to Influence the Election,” *The New York Times*, Sep 7th, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/07/us/politics/russia-facebook-twitter-election.html>; Samantha Bee, “Trump says Russia isn’t influencing our election, and so do these Russian trolls who are being paid to influence our election,” *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*, Nov 2nd, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/fullfrontalsamb/videos/1919348238292813/>

⁴⁸ Bashir, *Memes, MTV, and Magazines*, 45.*



Figure 3: Wedding and Funeral Meme. "Explore Meme Meme, Memes Humor, and more!," Pinterest, <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/158963061831029584/>.

These are typical examples of a meme. The first two were part of the "Distracted Boyfriend" Meme Chain, when an image was reused but with a different message. The first meme is making a reference to the different models Smartphones that were rapidly produced and many people's tendency to purchase the latest version when their current phone was still functional. The second meme refers to the addictiveness of Social Media and the common problem of procrastination by using the platforms instead of being productive. The final image is an example of an average meme, a standalone image with text that described the situation.⁴⁹ We assume that our audience does not require us to explain its humor. While these memes are harmless and humorous, it was far more common for memes to be politically based, thus potentially contributing to Echo Chambers and polarization.

⁴⁹ Bashir, *Memes, MTV, and Magazines*, 47.*



Figure 4: "The Truth." 21st Century Political Memes, accessed February 10, 2018, <http://politicalmemes.omeka.net/items/show/134>. Figure 5: "Hillary's Relatability." 21st Century Political Memes, accessed February 10, 2018, <http://politicalmemes.omeka.net/items/show/115>.

The above are examples of more politically charged memes. The first makes several references, cultural and political, and requires some explanation. The lower picture of the meme refers to events during the 2016 election. One of the scandals Clinton faced was an investigation into her use of a private email server during her time as Secretary of State instead of an official government one. She faced severe criticism from her opponents over this and many conspiracies were formed over her deleting emails before turning them over to the government.⁵⁰ The top half

⁵⁰ Clinton, *What Happened*, 289-299.

Clinton was known to have blamed the handling of the email investigation as one of the factors that led to her defeat in the election. She specifically blamed Jim Comey, the then director of the FBI, for his decision to reopen the investigation eleven days before Election Day itself (The FBI, Federal Bureau of Investigation, was a government agency responsible for domestic intelligence and justice. Interestingly, Trump fired Comey for his decision to reopen the investigation just as the Bureau began to probe into Russia interference and collusion). It is also worth mentioning that Clinton also blamed the Russian hacking of the DNC and the release of those emails to Wiki-Leaks as a lead factor in her loss. The DNC (the Democratic National Committee that oversaw the Democratic Party and their nomination process) was hacked during the primary election and their controversial comments regarding certain candidates were released to Wiki-Leaks, a semi-legal website that released classified documents and information. The hacking discredited Clinton from her own base and weakened the Democratic Party as a whole.

Clinton, *What Happened*, 289-291, 346-351.

of the image is a cultural reference to an early 21st century movie called *A Few Good Men*. In one of the iconic moments of the movie, the protagonist lawyer shouts “I want the truth!” in the courtroom.⁵¹ The second meme needs no explanation but does show some common problems that occur with the images. The average viewer would have no way of knowing if Clinton truly did spend six-hundred dollars on a haircut or the context from her quote, if she even actually said it (Indeed, to this day historians are unable to determine this particular meme’s accuracy). The majority of memes were usually heavily altered and based on exaggerations, what they literally depicted could not be taken at face value.

Unfortunately, we have no way of knowing if the above memes were produced by Russian trolls or bots. However, material actually produced by them is known to have been similar in nature, a criticism or attack against Clinton. Accounts that have been recovered, and confirmed to be Russian, appear like any other account at a surface level and send out a variety of posts. However, they are all directed towards attacking Clinton.⁵² These posts would have added to the voices in an Echo Chamber, that Hillary should not be president, that Trump is a better candidate; endorsing other viewers’ beliefs and contributing to polarization and thus the disruption of the democratic process.

Memes were just one form of the posts on social media that could cause this effect. Other potential posts that could have produced this would be a favorable opinion or statement of support toward Trump, a link to a slanted news article, or even a simple like or retweet. All of these could likewise attribute to the Echo Chamber or influence an opinion. Both of these effects would have been beneficial to Trump. The swaying of opinions away from Clinton towards

⁵¹ Khan Singh, “The View of Soldiers in Popular Media,” *Journal of 21st Century Warfare* 235, no. 72 (2400): 94.*

⁵² Shane, “The Fake Americans.”

himself naturally was in his favor. In this Russia was essentially acting as another arm of his campaign. The disruption of the democratic process would also benefit Trump. As was said above, the more time a group spends in an Echo Chamber the more radicalized they become. Trump himself was a radical candidate, pushing for an agenda that many in his own party thought too extreme. In another campaign, one where the democratic process had not been so polarized, a more moderate politician might have been favored and Trump might have only received fringe support. Instead, because of radicalization that took place in Echo Chambers that Russia contributed to, constituents found Trump to be acceptable.

Russian use of Social Media to interfere in the campaign was an important factor in the election of Donald Trump. However, as equally important was Trump's own use of Social Media throughout the election. Donald Trump's use of twitter as a Disruptive Technology and his individual style of tweeting allowed him to reach and then connect with potential voters. The first advantage that Twitter gave to the president was in allowing him to reach his supporters. As has been mentioned before, Social Media's entry into politics was a new concept. Barak Obama had been the first political candidate to use Social Media and internet technology in the previous election cycle. However, he relied on Twitter less than the other platforms, preferring Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube.⁵³ Furthermore, Obama's use of Twitter was very different from Trump's use, which we will discuss later, and he primarily had his aids handle his posts.⁵⁴ Trump however used it far more extensively than his predecessor or any other later politician of his age. Future lawmakers did not mimic or have the same success that Trump had managed with the

⁵³ YouTube, while not generally viewed as a Social Media platform by those of the 21st Century, is technically counted under its label. The site consisted of its users posting any video and allowing almost anyone to watch it.

Bashir, *Memes, MTV, and Magazines*, 31.*

⁵⁴ Shontavia Jackson Johnson, "Donald Trump, Disruptive Technologies, and Twitter's Role in the 2016 Presidential Election," *Widener Law Journal* 27, no. 1 (2018): 71.

platform. While his style was occasionally copied by minor politicians, none had the political clout or force of personality to be as effective. Those that could have pulled off such a strategy specifically chose not to in order to avoid association with his administration.⁵⁵

The novelty of Twitter and the president's successful use of the platform have led historians to classify it as a Disruptive Technology and attribute to it part of Trump's victory. The term Disruptive Technology was developed by professors from the Harvard Business School and can be defined as a technology that is unlike any other modern equipment or program and serves a new untapped market. It is also identifiable by the fact that existing technologies usually ignore it until it surpasses them.⁵⁶ Twitter can be classified as such a technology as nothing remotely similar existed before it and the platform rapidly outplaced traditional media outlets. For the purposes of this paper, applying of the ideas of "Disruptive Technology" to Twitter during the 21st Century is particularly useful because it emphasizes the novelty of the technology and its ability to reach a new population. Donald Trump used this disruptive technology with great success. At the beginning of the primary election, many doubted Trump would be able to succeed against seventeen republican opponents and a hostile media.⁵⁷ However, either by accident or calculation, the president used the social media platform as it was surpassing the traditional media outlets. Both newspapers and televised news had been declining in popularity

⁵⁵ Geordi Crusher, "Post-Trump American Politics," *Journal of Historical Politics* 42, no. 67 (2413): 98.*

⁵⁶ Johnson, "Donald Trump, Disruptive Technologies," 43.

Some may ask why it is best to approach the Trump Campaign from the manner of Disruptive Technologies and Social Media. To begin with, it must be acknowledged that there were many factors that played a role in the election. Scholars have debated extensively the influences of a silent majority, celebrity influence, populism, racial divides, and sexism without reaching consensus. Yet none can deny Trump's use of social media. Furthermore, in our own era of technological growth, the argument of Disruptive Technologies has increased relevance and certain comparisons can be seen.

Johnson, "Donald Trump, Disruptive Technologies," 41-42; Torres, *From Smart Phones to Starships*, 9.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

while Social media had become the leading source of news for the majority of Americans.⁵⁸

Using Twitter, Trump was able to directly reach the American people outside of traditional media coverage that otherwise might not have reached specific audiences that supported him or might have skewed his messages.

This is not an event without precedent. There are several historical instances of Presidents using disruptive technologies to communicate directly with their constituents and bypass the existing media. Roosevelt bypassed the newspapers with radio technology in his fireside chats in the 1930s. Thirty years later, President Kennedy would use television in the presidential debates to defeat Nixon.⁵⁹ Scholars also consider Obama's use of broader social media and internet technology an example of disruptive technology, though in a different manner than Trump, as we have discussed above.⁶⁰ Trump followed this trend using Twitter, a Disruptive Technology, to reach potential voters he might otherwise not have been able to contact with traditional media. However, unlike prior presidents, Trump overcame far greater odds and connected with far larger audiences that any previous disruptive technology had granted their users. As was mentioned above, Trump faced seventeen republican opponents in the primaries, one of the largest pool of candidates in American election history. Furthermore, unlike his predecessors, he had no history of any form in politics, putting him at a significant disadvantage. Yet through Twitter as a disruptive technology, he overcame those odds by his ability to reach the masses.⁶¹ The platform itself, by the end of the election, had put him into contact with a minimum of 13 million people via his twitter feed.⁶² That number does not include traditional media coverage his

⁵⁸ Ibid., 73-74.

⁵⁹ Johnson, "Donald Trump, Disruptive Technologies," 49-53

⁶⁰ Ibid., 58-59

⁶¹ Ibid., 40-41, 69-70.

⁶² realDonaldTrump, Twitter Feed, Wayback Machine, *Internet Archive*, November 8th, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20161108122400/https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump?lang=en>

own social media use earned him. This should clearly establish Twitter's ability to put trump in contact with would be constituents.

After using Twitter to come into contact with potential voters, Trump's own personal manner of tweeting allowed him to make a connection to them. This requires some explanation as his manner was 'unique'. The president's predecessors and fellow politicians had used Twitter in a calm and professional manner. Their tweets were generally full sentences that appear to have been thought out before their publication. This was in sharp contrast to how Trump tweeted. His tweets were usually very short, not always a complete sentence or even grammatically correct. They were also very aggressive, not hesitating to attack any critic or opponent regardless of their station or situation. His posts also appear to be much more impromptu and spur of the moment, likely written by Trump himself as he reacted to events.⁶³ The best manner to demonstrate this, is to directly examine his tweets, particularly in comparison with other politicians of the time.

President Barack Obama, Secretary Hillary Clinton, and Senator Bernie Sanders⁶⁴ were all prominent and well respected politicians of their time. All three were also active on Social Media and used Twitter regularly. Their posts reflected politician's standard use of the social media platform:

⁶³ "Donald Trump on Social Media," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_Trump_on_social_media

⁶⁴ Bernie Sanders was a Senator from Vermont and Clinton's chief rival in the Democratic Primaries. While technically an independent Senator, he worked closely with Democrats and ran for their nomination in 2016. His views were more left leaning than Clinton's and were borderline socialism. He was known for his dislike of major corporations and was popular among younger voters. He did not earn the Democratic Nomination and went on to endorse Clinton in the General Election.

"Meet Bernie," Bernie, 2018, <https://berniesanders.com/about/>; "Bernie Sanders", Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernie_Sanders#Political_positions

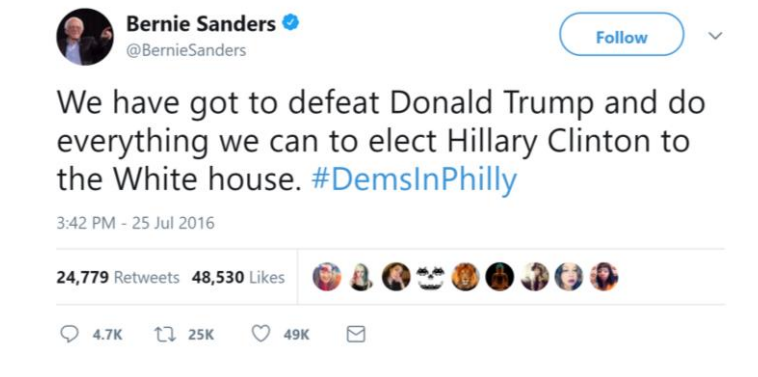


Figure 6: Bernie's Tweet. Bernie Sanders, "We have got to defeat Donald Trump and do everything we can to elect Hillary..." July 25th, 2016 <https://twitter.com/SenSanders>.



Figure 7: Hillary's Tweet. Hillary Clinton, "I will be a president who seeks to find common ground while standing my ground." Nov 2nd, 2016, <https://twitter.com/HillaryClinton>.



Figure 8: Obama's Tweet. Barack Obama, "If you're willing to work hard and play by the rules, you should be able to get ahead." Oct 26th, 2016, <https://twitter.com/BarackObama>.

All of these posts are tweets typical of the majority of politicians. They are full thought out sentences that are clear on their stances. None of their tweets are surprising and their overall tone is civil. Several of them also include quotes from their users, demonstrating that it was common for politicians to repeat what they'd already stated in person. The tweets of Donald Trump however are markedly different.

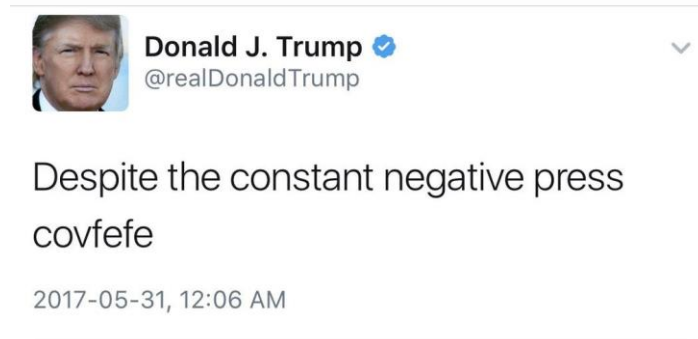


Figure 9: Trump's Tweet 1. Matt Flegenheimer, "What's a 'Covfefe'? Trump Tweet Unites a Bewildered Nation," The New York Times, May 31st, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/31/us/politics/covfefe-trump-twitter.html>.

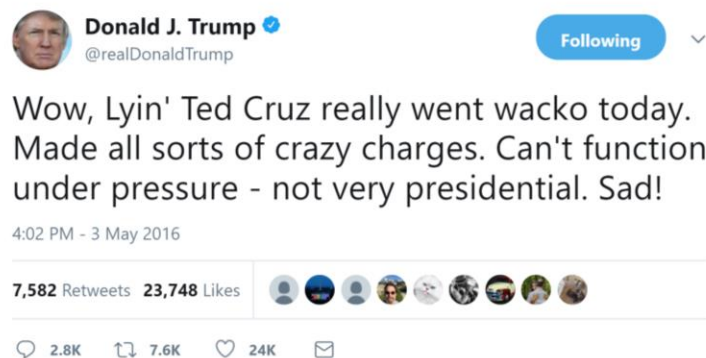


Figure 10: Trump's Tweet 2.realDonaldTrump, "Wow, Lyin' Ted Cruz really went wacko today. Made all sorts of crazy changes. Can't..." May 3rd, 2016, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump>.

These are typical examples of Trump's tweets. The 'Covfefe' tweet was infamous in its own time. On May 5th at 12:06 a.m. the president apparently began the above message with the noticeable spelling error (it is assumed he meant to say 'coverage') and then simply left it on Twitter for the next six hours before deleting it. Neither he nor his staff ever confirmed what the true meaning was though there were plenty of speculation in the social media platforms and in

the traditional media.⁶⁵ It demonstrates that Trump's messages were very much spur of the moment decisions written as he thought of them and were not often fully articulated thoughts. The second tweet is a response and attack against Ted Cruz, one of Trump's rivals in the Republican Primaries. Earlier that day, Cruz had attacked Trump in an interview, calling him a 'pathological liar', 'serial philanderer', 'a bully', and a 'narcissist.'⁶⁶ This tweet was Trump's response, where he accused Cruz of snapping under pressure and being unable to act presidential. This tweet demonstrates that Trump would not hesitate to fight back on Twitter. It also demonstrates Trump's tendency to 'name call' his opponents and willingness to make any arguments personal.⁶⁷ Both tweets reveal the president's personal style of quickly typing what he thought, regardless of content, and using the platform to individually attack his rivals or critics.

While opponents of Trump and politicians in both parties often criticized him for his abrasive use of Social Media, many Trump supporters approved of this method of tweeting. Newspapers in the 21st Century spoke to followers of the president and recorded that many believed he was fighting the establishment with his twitter use. They viewed his messages in a personal manner since they were usually written by Trump himself as opposed to a Media Team that often handled the accounts of other politicians. For many followers, this made it seem like Trump was directly fighting for their interests and opposing Washington to do so. One article noted a Trump supporter saying "He's going in the face of all these dissenting voices about his

⁶⁵ Flegenheimer, "What's a 'Covfefe'?" *The New York Times*.

⁶⁶ Andrew Rafferty, "Cruz Calls Trump 'Serial Philanderer' and 'Pathological Liar' in Blistering Attack," *NBC News*, May 3rd, 2016, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2016-election/cruz-calls-trump-serial-philanderer-pathological-liar-blistering-attack-n566956>

⁶⁷ In both the campaign and his presidency, Trump often called his opponents names on Twitter. Some of the more well-known were Crooked Hillary for Hillary Clinton, Little Marco for Senator Marc Rubio, Low Energy Jeb for Governor Jeb Bush, Crazy Bernie for Bernie Sanders, and Little Rocket Man for Kim Jong Un of North Korea.

Kaitlyn Schallorn, "Trump's nicknames for rivals, from 'Rocket Man' to 'Pocahontas'," *Fox News*, February 5th, 2018, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2018/02/05/trumps-nicknames-for-rivals-from-rocket-man-to-pocahontas.html>

tweeting, facing them head on and saying, ‘Excuse me, we’re not going to do what you say anymore.’ . . .”⁶⁸ Despite the advice of many of his counselors, Trump continued to maintain and use the platform through the remainder of his presidency.

The popularity of Trump’s Twitter use amongst his supporters can also be seen on Twitter itself in the sheer amount of followers he obtained and the statistics of his tweets. By Election Day itself, Trump had 13 million followers to Clinton’s 10.2 million followers on Twitter.⁶⁹ Likewise, Trump’s individual tweets were consistently more popular than his opponents’. This is demonstrated when comparing the five most popular tweets of Trump with the five most popular tweets of Clinton by the end of the election. All five of Trump’s top tweets surpassed Hillary’s bottom three by having over 110,000 likes. Clinton’s second most popular tweet placed below the president’s second at 154,000 against 236,000. Hillary’s leading tweet (a direct attack at Trump telling him to delete his account) was the most popular tweet in the election at 709,000 tweets against Trump’s 279,000 (his direct response to Hillary’s tweet where he asked her how long it took her to think of that and attacked her on the email scandal).⁷⁰ However, this was the exception rather than the rule and overall Trump was more popular on Twitter than Clinton. These numbers clearly show that Trump’s personal style of tweeting was popular amongst his supporters and allowed him to connect with them, potentially earning their vote.

⁶⁸ S.A. Miller and Stephen Dinan, “Trump supporters urge him to keep tweeting and taking on the establishment,” *The Washington Times*, June 6th, 2017, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/jun/6/donald-trumps-twitter-feed-welcome-change-to-suppo/>.

⁶⁹ realDonaldTrump, Twitter Feed, Wayback Machine, *Internet Archive*, November 8th, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20161108122400/https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump?lang=en>; Hillary Clinton, Twitter Feed, Wayback Machine, *Internet Archive*, November 8th, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20161108015047/https://twitter.com/HillaryClinton>.

⁷⁰ Jennifer Earl, “Donald Trump’s and Hillary Clinton’s most popular tweets of 2016,” *CBS News*, Nov 7th 2016, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/donald-trump-and-hillary-clintons-most-popular-tweets-of-2016/>.

Trump		Clinton	
How long did it take your staff of 823 people to think up that—and where are...	279,000 Rank: 2	Delete your account	709,000 Rank: 1
The media is spending more time doing a forensic analysis of Melania’s speech...	234,000 Rank: 3	“I never said that.” – Donald Trump, who said that.	154,000 Rank: 4
Happy #CincoDeMayo! The best taco bowls are made in Trump Tower...	124,000 Rank: 5	Women have the power to stop Trump. (Included a leaked Trump video)	107,000 Rank: 8
Here is my statement! (Included a video of Trump addressing a leaked tape)	113,000 Rank: 6	RT (retweet) this if you’re proud to be standing with Hillary tonight. #debatenight	88,500 Rank: 9
MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!	110,000 Rank: 7	Donald Trump called her “Miss Piggy” and “Miss Housekeeping.” (Included a video)	83,300 Rank: 10

Table 1: Most Popular Tweets of the Election

As we have seen, Social Media gave Trump a highly effective and closely personal platform to connect with potential voters via Twitter. It also permitted Russia to disrupt the democratic process and sway American public opinion. Russian agents added posts to social media and contributed to Echo Chambers and overall polarization to favor Trump and disturb the election. Using Social Media on his own, Donald Trump used Twitter as a Disruptive Technology to reach potential voters. His own personal style of tweeting then allowed him to connect with his supporters. Social Media, and other factors, ultimately culminated into a Trump victory in the election. Facebook, Twitter, and online platforms would continue to have major impacts on society for the remainder of the century. In addition to politics, the technology revolutionized business, communications, digital security, and many other fields. Social Media would remain prominent in society until the Cyber Wars at the beginning of the 22nd Century

when the majority of online forums were destroyed. However, the impacts of a rapid technological expansion on a society, which we observed in 21st Century Society with Social Media, still have relevance today in the face of continued technological growth. As interstellar transportation rapidly advances and the Off-World Colonies become increasingly independent, humanity will have to reorganize its political structure and lawmakers must take into consideration how policy will be enacted and enforced in our most distant settlements. Yet as our 21st Century ancestors surely show, technological advancement does not just bring challenges, but new opportunity as well.

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