
Did they know? Did they care?

Did political posts on Facebook newsfeeds influence people to vote, abstain, or switch allegiance in an election?

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2023

A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Communications Studies 2022 School of Communication Studies

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of high learning.

Anna Williams

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Justin Matthews, my supervisor, I cannot thank you enough. There are so many words of gratitude that I could write, but in essence; thanks for saying yes to me and taking a gamble that rambled around for many long months (years actually), and finally ended right here. Thanks for tolerating work crises, holidays, major illness, and so much more whilst giving me the confidence that it could be done. Your patience, sense of humour, motivation, and sense of calm all inspired me to keep going. Thanks for answering ALL my questions (even the really dumb ones), coping with my complete lack of tech savviness, not rolling your eyes when I asked yet another 'how many words'. Mostly though, thanks for never questioning my why but just continuing to go at my pace. Your energy was inspiring in the classroom, but it was your passion that really got me through this thesis journey.

Thanks also to my wonderful family. Inspired by two master's degrees already in the house, I needed to get this finished. I am incredibly grateful for all the support, for the lack of doubt that I would get there, for all the proof reading (including the wows and the clickety clacks) and for not thinking I was dumb for a minute to have started, let alone completed, this story.

ABSTRACT

In the weeks leading up to the 2016 US presidential election, the global expectation was the victory of Hillary Clinton. However, the shocking result saw Donald Trump and the Republican party emerge as winners. This unexpected outcome sparked speculation about the influence of microtargeting on social media on the election. This study investigates political behavioural targeting (PBT) in the election, specifically on Facebook, and the extent of public awareness and concern about PBT. It also reviews the history and origins of PBT. An initial collection of 1000 advertisements was broken into themes for analysis, and then a visual rhetorical analysis was applied to a subset of 50 advertisements. The results reveal that PBT was extensively used, with significant Russian involvement. The findings suggest that PBT, delivered via Facebook as a trusted platform, effectively persuaded and influenced voters, often without their knowledge. The impact of PBT on the 2016 US election outcome underscores its potential power and covert role in shaping election results.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In the week preceding the 2016 US presidential election, consumer polls suggested a 98% chance that Hillary Clinton would win the election. Not only was this wrong, but the United States of America recorded its highest voter turnout ever. In the months following the election and as the world grappled with the concept of a Donald Trump presidency, questions started to be asked around several voting anomalies. People voted who had not voted for years, if ever. Others, with a proactive voting record, abstained from voting. Stories emerged of the ability of Facebook to directly influence the public vote by giving firms access to user data. This concept was vehemently denied by CEO Mark Zuckerberg, who continued to make assurances that people 'have complete control' over who sees their content, a statement denied by interviews with 50 former Facebook employees (McLean & Kelly, 2018). In April 2018, Facebook admitted that the political consulting firm, Cambridge Analytica, may have been able to harvest up to 87 million users without their knowledge (Egan, 2018).

Whilst this American-based story was unfolding, questions were also raised about whether the same was true of other 'surprise' outcomes elsewhere in the world. Examples included the Brexit vote, the 2015 UK general election, other general elections in Europe (Moore, 2016; Bodo et al., 2017; Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2018), the accelerated path of Scott Morrison to Australian Prime Minister, and even potential involvement in New Zealand politics (Murphy, 2020). What began to emerge was the concept of a complex machine sitting behind democratic election processes that appeared to be having a big impact on voting outcomes. The ability of this machine to sway outcomes seemed to be magnified through a lack of transparency afforded through social media, the main vehicle used by different players for reaching and influencing the voter. This is significant as it appears that the results undermine the entire democratic process which has been critical to western politics and the mindset of the voter since the inception of democratic elections.

As a Facebook user and having previously studied both journalism and politics, there was a growing fascination with how people could be targeted to a micro level without raising any suspicion. A common discussion point amongst friends was how accurately advertisements had been targeted on individual Facebook feeds often leading to laughter as to whether Facebook could listen into conversations through cell phones. The concept of political behaviour targeting (PBT) was explored and at first it seemed to be associated with traditional media spaces such as print and television advertising and letter drops, but on further research it appeared to have the power, through social digital spaces, to get closer to individuals than ever before.

Advertising on social media platforms had become prolific, and so it seemed feasible that these platforms could act as vehicles for PBT in election campaigns. The focus on Facebook was that both the technical platform and the affordances used provided the best technology for political advertising. What piqued the interest for this research was the nature of how the advertisements worked on Facebook during the campaign period. They appeared to be clandestine, untraceable, and prolific. How could one person be targeted so granularly whilst their next-door neighbour could be targeted differently or not at all.

There was a desire to understand the use of PBT during the election process in terms of both persuasion and influence. Could advertisements on a social media site make such a difference to an electoral process to the point of even changing an outcome? With the worldwide shock of a Trump presidency, questions started to form as to whether this targeting phenomenon could possibly be linked to something as fundamental as the freedom to vote. These scenarios and the factors leading to them led to the research question:

‘How do political advertisements on Facebook persuade and influence voters?’

This thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter One introduces the research question putting context around the thesis. Chapter Two includes a literary review that looks in depth at Political Behavioural Targeting (PBT) and its predecessors, discusses how PBT is used, the development of social media and PBT working together, US politics (setting the scene for the 2016 election), and the use of fake news during this period. Chapter Three expands on the dark post period from 2015 to 2017, gives examples of advertisements, and a definition of what persuasion is and how important this is to the research question. Chapter Four focuses on the definition and use of rhetorical analysis including why it was chosen as the method for this research, and the design of the study. Chapter Five is the results chapter taking each theme separately and discussing the results being immigration, policing and crime, guns, race, and events. In Chapter Six, the discussion chapter, the research question is broken into three areas: the use of PBT; PBT, social posts, and persuasion; and influence. Chapter Seven draws a conclusion to the research.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 THE HISTORY BEHIND PBT

Political campaign managers worldwide have always been able to reach out and amass data to assist them in their campaigns. With the advent of digital technologies over the past 20 years, however, the focus is no longer on the gathering of the data but rather on how the data is then used. An extensive amount of data can be collected on any individual, which in recent years has become the backbone of creating, sorting, and targeting political messages. It has been suggested, as far back as 2005, that political campaigning using digital technologies had already become a science, able to predict the outcome of electoral campaigns (Howard, 2005). Political Behavioural Targeting (PBT) is a phrase which has become increasingly popular in recent years. Whilst it appears to be a recent phenomenon, in fact, there is evidence that it has existed, albeit with different names for at least 20 years. Many authors have used this concept without defining it, although there are several different definitions of what PBT is.

Evidence of the real difference that digital technologies were already making to political campaigns can be found in the early years of the 2000s. An immense amount of commercial political information was freely available from a variety of sources, including named individuals and their households, street addresses, postal codes, and electoral districts (Howard, 2005). Coined as a phrase in the 1960s for the purposes of television advertising, ‘narrowcasting’ described the ability to segment an audience. The business of political narrowcasting was to take a specific message and segment it to a particular portion of the public as a way of increasing the share of the votes rather than broadcasting all political messages to all voters (Howard, 2005). This behaviour closely followed corporate marketing where the notion of behavioural tracking was already well established. Behavioural Tracking was a phenomenon that provided digital data which could be used to tailor advertising, offers, and prices to match an individual shopper’s behavioural characteristics (Aldreck & Settle, 2007). Direct marketing, a tool which came straight from the commercial retail industry could be used “as a powerful electoral and fundraising tool, identifying voters and matching their preferences with the issues most likely to be of concern, be it rising crime, unemployment or education” (Wills & Reeves, 2009, p. 265).

Behavioural Targeting was synonymous with Behavioural Tracking; both concepts track the online behaviour of consumers to subsequently reach them with targeted advertising (Zuiderveen Borgesuis, 2016). An example would be an advertising network that tracks all the sites of an individual user online. Using this information, the advertising network could display individually

targeted advertisements back to this user. Extensive amounts of data could be collected about hundreds of millions of people solely for this purpose.

Microtargeting was used in the 2010s, a phenomenon which involved finding and combining information about a consumer's preferences and habits (Kruikemeier et al., 2016). Individuals could be targeted with messages designed to appeal specifically to them. It follows logically then that microtargeting could have been developed into a political tool, with companies building the digital capacity to both find and combine a vast amount of information about an individual's consumer habits and political preferences (Kruikemeier et al., 2016).

In 2016, Zuiderveen Borgesius used the definition of 'targeted online marketing' as the basis for his behavioural targeting research. In 2017, Dobber et al. gave a political context to this term, calling the phenomenon PBT. They acknowledged that at this point in time campaigns had started using digital technology to improve their knowledge about voters individually and the wider electorates. Technology was thus used to collect, process, analyse, and pass on information about voters. The findings by Dobber et al. (2017) note that this technology ensures more effective campaigning with the capability now available to target specific groups with tailored political messages. The digital director of the Donald Trump campaign is quoted as saying there is little difference between terminology be it behavioural targeting or online political microtargeting, "it's the same shit we use in commercials, just has fancier names" (Green & Issenberg, 2016, para. 29).

Again in 2018, Zuiderveen Borgesius et al. use the new terminology of political microtargeting. This is the business of collecting consumer information and then using it to show individuals targeted, personalised political advertisements. Ortega (2020) expands and refines this definition inferring that the technique of PBT means that data that is collected and segmented for the purpose of obtaining a specific political outcome. Possibly the most succinct interpretation of PBT is that of Dobber et al. (2017), when they state, "PBT is the means of using a campaign's resources as efficiently as possible to ensure parties do not spend effort and money on voters who will vote for another party anyway or on those who won't vote at all" (p.4).

Regardless of which term is used, the concept of PBT represents a sharply defined shift in the way that campaigners can segment and choose who gets to hear what messaging during an election process, potentially influencing how they vote. As stated in the introduction, from this point this research will refer to PBT which includes all aspects of the definitions above and how they affect the political arena. To be clear, this research does not rest on the definition of the phenomenon of PBT but rather on whether it is "a tool with such destructive potential that it requires close societal control or whether it's "just" a new phenomenon with currently unknown capacities, but which can ultimately be incorporated into our political processes" (Bodo et al., 2017, p. 1).

PBT is not just about persuading voters through the targeting of tailored political messages to specific individuals; it is also about the manipulation of outcomes through targeted persuasion of certain people to vote whilst dissuading others. It could be looked at in other ways such as have the elections such as the surprise results of the 2016 US presidential election, the UK 'Brexit' vote, and many other high-profile elections been shaped by ongoing changes to social media? If the answer to either of these questions is yes what might come next? Maybe something more manipulative? More to the point, do people really care?

PBT reached a turning point during the 2016 US presidential election. The voting public became aware of the business of targeting voters in an extremely granular way as well as the very public fallout from the Cambridge Analytica scandal. There was a very public unveiling of the processes

surrounding PBT which meant that the public became better informed of the techniques and how they might be targeted. However, it is uncertain whether PBT was subsequently stopped. In a world where technologies are constantly evolving, it would be unreasonable to believe that digital technologies and their continual development halted at this point in history and that technical gurus and companies alike simply stopped developing the science of PBT. It is more likely that PBT has gone quietly underground, and will resurface at some later date, more sophisticated and refined than before.

2.2 HOW PBT IS USED

Digital media strategies have played a part in political campaigns globally, but still many people do not understand the ability of these strategies to influence the outcome of campaigns and elections without the knowledge of voters. “Political victories have often been won or lost by the quality and quantity of information that campaigns have access to” (Howard, 2005, p. 154).

In the early days of the internet, before it had reached its current worldwide usage, the cost of using behavioural targeting for political purposes could only be absorbed by big, well-financed, national campaigns (Howard, 2005). For companies that could afford to, investments were made in both the technical infrastructure and consulting services. This allowed relational databases such as post codes and voting preferences to work together to meet more specifically targeted political goals. This was an expensive campaign tool, and the information amassed was not always that recent or even accurate (anecdotally, a little like relying on a printed copy of the Encyclopaedia Britannica that was only updated on an annual basis). In the present day, where most people in the developed world use ‘online’ as part of their daily life, anyone can buy information from a complex database that will match together names, addresses, credit card purchases, locations, and internet activities, all in real time (Howard, 2005). This has become a highly commercialised activity, with companies that exist purely to amass online information and trends on individuals (Chester & Montgomery, 2017). These companies then sell this information to customers who wish to influence behaviour for political or commercial purposes (Howard, 2005). Whilst each individual data point can appear meaningless (such as a name and a postcode), combining sources of information on a person can give a highly accurate and detailed picture of a person and their personal interests (Rubenstein, 2014; Howard, 2005; Chester & Montgomery 2017). This is important when considered in the context of the above on how easily data on a person’s online activities can be amassed. This amount of relational information is ‘gold’, not only in the consumer context but also for voter persuasion. The more information that can be gathered and stored on an individual voter, the more precise predictive politics becomes. A shopping history of birth control pills, vast amounts of pharmaceuticals, cigarettes, or guns will give researchers enough detailed information to, in turn, target a voter based on an outcome (Howard, 2005).

While we still see public surveys asking questions about clear political topics, the past twenty years have seen a notable increase in the amount of indirect inference in the questioning used in public policy polling and surveys. “With new media tools, political campaigns can amass data from so many sources that complex relational databases can be used to extrapolate political information without ever directly contacting a respondent” (Howard, 2005, p. 157).

With the birth of digital media, tactics arose such as ‘narrowcasting’, which involved not just broadcasting the political message of a party on an issue but using specific data and narrowing it right down to get specific political messaging to particular people at the right time, all with the aim of securing a vote. This mirrors behavioural targeting, widely used by marketing firms, the goal of

which is “to use data to deliver the right ad to the right person at the right time” (Zuiderveen Borgesius, 2016, p. 268).

Whilst customising commercial and now political messages has always been possible, the narrow precision that comes about from the degree of tailoring possible, in this digital age, can quickly change whose hand the power sits in as is evidenced in the 2016 US presidential election. Not only were voters persuaded by very granular targeting, ‘new’ voters were also identified (Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2018). This can be seen in the sharp increase in voter turnout of US citizens who had not voted in recent years or in fact ever voted. However, there is also evidence that some voters were dissuaded from voting – the method of highlighting issues to some individuals and not others, in turn, lost some votes, a point which is discussed later in this review. Facebook’s former mobile-ads chief Andrew Bosworth stated, “Trump got elected because he ran the single best digital ad campaign I’ve ever seen from any advertiser. Period” (Hutchison, 2020, para. 3).

The question of how political parties and candidates process and analyse personal data on individual voters has persisted in the US since the early 2000s as digital technologies continue to evolve. The messaging is often as simple as stated by Bennett (2016):

Modern political campaigns need to be ‘data driven’ to consolidate existing support and to find potential new voters and to raise funds. There is little to no evidence of this really being questioned. Instead, ‘the capture and consolidation of data permits the construction of detailed profiles on individual voters and the ‘microtargeting’ of increasingly precise messages to increasingly refined segments of the electorate especially in marginal constituencies. (Bennett, 2016, p. 261)

This level of data collection appears to have a tolerance level in the US, and indeed in other countries such as the UK. In order to understand the extent of PBT, firstly one should understand the immense amount of information that is available. Political databases in the US hold records on almost all eligible American voters – that is, more than 200 million people. Each of those individual records will have hundreds or even thousands of fields populated with information from places such as consumer data, voter registrations, donor funding data, campaign web data, etc. All these data are combined with a number of small pieces of information, which in turn give a highly detailed political picture of voters, one by one. This task is facilitated by cheap data storage, fast internet connections, computers, and advanced resources, both technological and financial. Using personal identifiers, campaigns can link and integrate each of the many datasets to create very granular information. In turn, sophisticated techniques can turn this into highly strategic and cost-effective analysis and targeting (Rubenstein, 2014). Additionally, it is now technologically possible not just to collect the data periodically but to constantly update it, sometimes daily, which ensures the quality and integrity of the data. These data sets are likely to be “the largest concentration of unregulated personal data in the US today” (Rubinstein, 2014, p. 881).

2.3 THE RISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AND PBT

Since Facebook’s launch in 2004, it has been a powerful vehicle for amassing information on individuals in a cost-efficient and far-reaching way. Facebook was first used for substantial political gain in the 2008 US presidential election when Barack Obama employed Chris Hughes, one of the original founders of Facebook, to his campaign strategy team (Moore, 2016). By the 2012 US

presidential election digital media was central to the campaign, with the Democratic party employing 100 full-time data scientists compared to 12 in 2008 (Moore, 2016). This was not just an American problem. In the UK 2015 general election, the Conservative party spent 1.2 million pounds on Facebook in their campaign (Moore, 2016). Traditional television and billboard advertising was severely diminished, with parties choosing instead to engage the services of Facebook, which offered a tool that would allow a party to target specific voters in marginal constituencies with tailored messages. The ability to target on such a micro level allowed political parties to be more cost-efficient with their advertising budgets (Moore, 2016). A notable result of this was pointed out by Nick Clegg, the leader of the Liberal Democrats at the time, when he told journalist Tim Ross:

We didn't see any canvassers out on the streets. We would send out teams of canvassers, in the old 'shoe-leather' way. And you just wouldn't see (the Tories), which is why in some significant parts it did completely blindside us.... we couldn't see how the communication with the voters was happening. (Moore, 2016, p. 424)

A party's traditional spend on advertising reduced whilst their social media spend steadily increased. But outside of the dollar amount, there was no visible sign of the expenditure. Targeting via social media was an invisible phenomenon, unlike a billboard on a highway or an advertisement following the television news. Direct targeting had almost become invisible; the only sign was an increase in Facebook expenditure. Targeted communication was now going directly to the recipient, but it could not be seen, and therefore could not be challenged by others. Even now, several years on, there is no evidence of who was targeted with what (Moore, 2016). Advertisements that were reportedly used no longer exist, and whilst Facebook has a publicly available archive of advertisements, the earliest advertisements in this archive library only date back to after the 2016 US election. Other than the hard evidence of voter turnout, campaign spend on Facebook rather than traditional forms of advertising, the engagement of a consultancy firm (Cambridge Analytica), and the persistence of some researchers, there is little to show that PBT influenced a US presidential election. PBT is not documented in any political manifesto, and it is not to be found on party websites or any other election paraphernalia. In many ways, the invisibility of what was happening was compounded by the general trust that the average person had in Facebook, with a growing percentage of the population avid users of the channel fully conversant with likes and shares. The US was not unique when it came to PBT. Moore (2016) comments that the overwhelming difference between the UK Conservative campaigns of 2010 and 2015 was best shown by the contrast in the party's increased spending on Facebook. What we are left with from each campaign is the knowledge that Facebook has played a part in the outcome of more than one general election worldwide so far. Facebook through its readily available microtargeting mechanisms had the ability to target specific undecided voters in marginal seats. However, it remains unknown what it cost to target each constituency or state, and more importantly what was communicated to which individual voters as the messaging was "opaque to all but the recipient" (Moore, 2016, p. 428).

When PBT is used specifically through Facebook there are no records of who or what was targeted. It is a closed and non-transparent system that is not suitable or able in any way to be reasonably interrogated. Other than financial spending records of political parties, there are no records or advertising copies available that could show how granular the targeting was (Moore 2016). Moore (2016) also suggests that the extensive use of PBT through social media in campaigns leading up to and including the 2016 US election may have compromised a basic democratic principle of the western world: the openness of election communications. It is difficult to see how anything could be challenged when individual communications could not be seen.

PBT, a catch phrase that had become popular by the 2016 US presidential election, is not, as can be seen from the above examination of it, a new phenomenon. Campaigns have become increasingly more sophisticated, and the rise of social media gave campaign managers a new and highly effective tool. However, PBT has also coincided with other fast-paced and possibly disruptive developments. It would be a mistake to think that it is only about voter persuasion.

It can also be used to (dis)encourage political participation, including election turnout. It can (dis)encourage donations and contributions to candidates and campaigns. It can be employed to create energy and interest in a campaign, election and candidate, but it can also be used to create disinterest and apathy. (Bodo et al., 2017, p. 2)

The capability of PBT reached a peak with the 2016 US presidential election. Both the opportunity and the threat inherent in PBT and the power of the Facebook social media graph and its advertising ecosystem collided, allowing 'political actors' to reach any individual or group in an electorate with tailored and targeted messages, that no one else could see. The election highlighted the threat of manipulation specifically through the digital Facebook campaign run by the Republicans. Politicians could use PBT to manipulate how a voter voted or whether they voted at all.

With the amount of data available online, PBT has become incredibly refined. It can send specific messages to voters to ensure their vote and it can reach politically uninterested voters and mobilise them to become involved and interested in politics. Neither of these things are automatically unethical and they help campaigns to run cheaply (in comparison to traditional advertising) and efficiently. However, the threat of manipulation brings a different element into play. There are claims that the 2016 Trump campaign specifically targeted African American voters to suppress their vote, through advertisements which played on remarks made by Hillary Clinton calling African American males 'super predators' (Sabbagh, 2020; Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2018). As only people who are targeted can see the advertisements, these posts can remain hidden from all other Facebook users emphasising the manipulation of PBT on the platform through 'dark posts' (Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2018).

There are many risks associated with the method of targeting individuals to determine an outcome. In particular, selective information exposure where voters only see what the sender wants them to see, can lead to the potential manipulation of the outcome. This control of voters can also lead to a loss of power depending on how it is used.

Social targeting via social media made tracking the actual messaging that the campaigns were paying for impossible to track. On Facebook, the campaigns could show ads only to the people they targeted. From the outside it was a technical impossibility to know what ads were running on Facebook. (Madrigal, 2017, p. 7)

In simple terms, the biggest opportunity of PBT is also its biggest threat. Increasingly complex and evolving technologies mean that anyone can reach any voter in an electorate with any message. If you can pay, you can have this access, regardless of the wider issues, which include a level political playing field, voter fraud, a competitive marketplace, political advertising transparency, and fairness in the electoral system.

2.4 US POLITICS

Typically, the political cultures of Northern American countries, particularly the US, have been more tolerant of election practices including monitoring and profiling the electorate and using direct marketing techniques. The aim in the US is to 'get-out-the-vote' (Bennett, 2016). The American Constitution provides the backbone of US politics. Anyone trying to gain an understanding of the political culture need look no further than the influence of the First Amendment on freedom of speech, particularly the communication of political speech.

It is well-documented publicly, and noted through campaign records, that Barack Obama's team used advancing technologies and new tools such as PBT and voter databases to drive voters during the 2008 and 2012 US presidential elections (Moore, 2016). The landscape changed, however, with the 2016 presidential election. Over the preceding ten years or so, both the Republicans and the Democrats had developed and modified large, sophisticated sets of data and digital operations adopting many techniques and tools from the commercial sector (Kreiss & McGregor, 2017). The big difference in the 2016 election, however, was that the commercial and political digital operations of both parties appeared to take place below the radar rather than in the public space. Generally, members of the public were unaware of what was happening behind the scenes leading to a lack of understanding of how PBT was playing such a big part in the electioneering (Chester & Montgomery, 2017).

In the media world...there is a sharp discontinuity in the timeline: before the 2016 and after. Things we thought we understood - narrative, data, software, news events - have had to be reinterpreted in light of Donald Trump's surprising win as well as the continuing questions about the role that misinformation and disinformation played in his election. (Madrighal, 2017, p. 1)

In the five years preceding 2016, attention was called to Facebook and how it might be used to decide an election without anyone ever finding out. Examples included suggesting that Facebook could have been the reason for a large increase in youth voter participation in the 2012 general election (Rosen, 2014); the possibility of Facebook selectively depressing voter turnout to influence an outcome (Zittrain, 2014); and even using direct Facebook intervention to lower non-college graduate turnout (Meyer, 2016). Examples began to surface of Facebook advertisements being used in political campaigns with the result of unexpected outcomes. A spokesperson from Facebook was quoted as saying "we as a company are neutral – we have not and will not use our products in a way that attempts to influence how people vote" (Madrighal, 2017 p. 4).

By 2016, the technology available for PBT was at its most powerful and the primary vehicle for PBT was Facebook. When people signed up for a Facebook account, they tended to use their real name. Facebook used this to enable political campaigns to access more than 162 million adult US users who could then be targeted individually by age, gender, voting district, and interests (Chester & Montgomery, 2017). With so much data available, not only was the Trump campaign able to identify individual voters in marginal states, but it was also able to identify voters who did not support Trump. Facebook was able to identify this group with psychographic messaging designed to discourage voting.

We have three major voter suppression operations under way, says a senior official. They're aimed at three groups Clinton needs to win overwhelmingly: idealistic white liberals, young women, and African Americans. (Green & Issenberg, 2016, para. 17)

Both Facebook and Google played crucial roles in the 2016 election, and more widely in political operations. They offered a full spectrum of commercial digital marketing tools and techniques, along with specialised advertisement ‘products’ designed for political use. Seven key techniques were used to enhance this new era of digital political marketing systems where campaigns could “identify, reach and interact with individual voters” (Chester & Montgomery, 2017, p. 4).

Table 2-1 – Marketing Tools and Techniques on Facebook

Cross-Device Targeting	Voter files were uploaded, enabling the campaigns to pinpoint targets on mobile devices at specific times when they could be more receptive to a message. This tiny detailing enabled more tailored advertising resulting in very specific messaging to an individual.
Programmatic Advertising	A customer could be found and targeted wherever they were through an advertisement in a specific context in real time.
Lookalike Modelling	Where marketers can acquire information about individuals, using big data through cloning, without directly observing their behaviour or obtaining consent. Facebook offered a range of modelling tools through its lookalike audiences advertising platform, a tool that could expand the number of people the campaign could target.
Geolocation Targeting	Using a phone’s GPS, Wi-Fi, and Bluetooth to find out an individual’s location, sending relevant advertisements in real time based on location and buying behaviour.
Online Video Advertising	Google’s YouTube became a key platform for this with the company claiming that ‘voters make their political decisions not in living rooms in front of a television but in ‘micro moments’ on their phones’. Content producers on YouTube were able to seize on election micro moments to influence the political opinions of potential voters between 18 and 49 (Chester & Montgomery, 2017 p. 6).
Targeted Television Advertising	Advancing technologies could micro target individual voters by using demographic and cross-platform data to build up a picture of a viewer.
Psychographic, Neuromarketing, and Emotion-based Targeting	A growing field, promoted by Google, of emotion analytics that takes advantage of new types of data and new tracking methods to help advertisers understand the impact of campaigns and their individual assets on an emotional level

(Source: Chester & Montgomery, 2017, p. 4-7)

As noted by Chester and Montgomery (2017) whether these techniques were used alone or together, each one was integral to the force behind the success of Trump’s campaign.

As election day dawned on the 8th of November 2016, it was commonly accepted worldwide that Hilary Clinton, the Democratic nominee for US president, would be moving into the White House. The Huffington Post’s data team had Clinton’s election probability at 98.3 per cent (Madrigal, 2017, p.10). It was clear well before midnight, however, that Republican candidate Donald Trump had pulled an upset victory. It appeared that this could be in some way attributed to the contributions of a little-known company, Cambridge Analytica, which appeared to have played a big role in Trump’s success (Ward, 2018).

Trump’s 2016 campaign had three components: the Republican’s in-house digital team; Giles-Parscale, a marketing agency; and Cambridge Analytica, a microtargeting firm (Persily, 2017). Whilst this was the first US presidential campaign that Cambridge Analytica had worked on, it had worked on the Brexit campaign and the primary campaign of Senator Ted Cruz (Persily, 2017). According to Cambridge Analytica, the Trump campaign targeted 13.5 million persuadable voters in sixteen

battleground states, discovering the hidden Trump voters, especially in the Midwest, whom the polls had ignored (Persily, 2017). They also infamously targeted Clinton supporters, especially 'white liberals, young women, and African Americans'; with communications designed to reduce turnout among those groups. The company used 'OCEAN', a psychographic-profiling method which 'scraped' Facebook profiles to develop unique cross-targeting models. Much attention and criticism focused on the method post-election (Persily, 2017).

The problem of PBT had now become an issue because of its ability to hide. In his book 'The Filter Bubble', Eli Pariser asked:

How does a (political) campaign know what its opponent is saying if ads are only targeted to white Jewish men between 28 and 34 who have expressed a fondness for U2 on Facebook, and who donated to Barack Obama's campaign? (Madrigal, 2017, p. 6)

In fact, nobody knew that it was technically impossible to know from the outside, what advertisements were being run on Facebook. Facebook had become a complex dominant social network, that no one person could fully comprehend, even Facebook employees themselves. It had altered the information and persuasion environment of the election beyond recognition while taking "a very big chunk of the estimated \$1.4 US billion worth of digital advertising purchased during the elections" (Madrigal, 2017, p. 15). Most of the 2016 story revolves around fake news, propaganda, and dark posts that came from both inside and outside of the US. Fake news can be described as "actual hoaxes or lies perpetuated by a variety of actors" (Madrigal, 2017, p. 7).

Fake news can originate from anywhere, from both official and unofficial circles, but in the age of social media it is a wide-reaching and complex issue. It is difficult to even find the starting point of something that moves on and offline, on and offshore, that goes quiet and resurfaces, and it is even harder to pinpoint the facts (if any) behind it. At the heart of it, propaganda in voting terms can be perceived as using misinformation deliberately as a way of influencing attitudes on issues or indeed toward a candidate (Persily, 2017).

The power (if any) of fake news is determined by the virality of the lie that it propagates, by the speed with which it is disseminated without timely contradiction, and consequently by how many people receive and believe the falsehood. (Persily, 2017, p. 70)

PBT was used in the lead-up to the 2016 election, not only by the campaigning parties but by foreign states, non-governmental organisations, and entrepreneurial individuals, all with their own reasons for taking advantage of the electoral process (Kim et al., 2018; Madrigal, 2017; Penzenstadler et al., 2018). Famously now, a group of Balkan teenagers discovered that publishing pro-Trump and anti-Clinton stories could prove to be a profitable venture. This group published stories on up to 100 websites worldwide (Madrigal, 2017). As the stories grew more outrageous, they would attract more visitors, who in turn would click through the advertisements appearing on the page. Each click generated income with claims that fake news purveyors were earning \$30,000 monthly with fake stories such as Tom Hanks endorsing Donald Trump, or that an FBI agent had been killed after leaking Clinton's emails (Persily, 2017). Such was the appeal of this fake news that in the final three months before the November election the highest-performing fake election news stories on Facebook outperformed the top news stories in terms of engagement (Silverman, 2016). The impersonal algorithmic machines could find and target a voter with no regard to whatever advertisements were selling or where they were being placed. Without any sort of filter during the

2016 election campaign, the Wall Street Journal noted that many companies found their advertisements were placed where they would not have condoned including sites which featured pornography, pirated content, fake news, videos supporting terrorists, and more (Chester & Montgomery, 2017).

The gift of anonymity and the lack of accountability afforded commercially by social media sites to their advertisers are representative of the power of the internet. Not only were campaigners able, through the power of social media, to reach out to voters at granular levels with all the information they had amassed, so too were foreign powers able to intervene secretly in the 2016 election, allowing online trolls to commit racial and sexual harassment (Persily, 2017). The lack of transparency of PBT makes it near impossible to detect activities, both good and bad. In acting commercially and taking a large chunk of the estimated \$1.4 billion of digital advertising purchased during the election, Facebook was able to alter the election through the information and persuasion it pushed out.

There were hundreds of millions of dollars of dark ads doing their work. Fake news all over the place. Macedonian teens campaigning for Trump. Ragingly partisan media infospheres serving up only the news you wanted to hear. Who could believe anything? What room was there for policy positions when all this stuff was eating up News Feed space? Who the hell knew what was going on? (Madrighal, 2017, p. 15)

However, more important to this research are the dark posts that beleaguered the 2016 election.

The term 'dark post' or 'dark ad' became common place referring to targeted advertisements on Facebook that are unpublished (not found on the advertiser's feed), just showing up on the feeds of targeted customers but not on the feeds of their followers (Gollin, 2018, p. 1).

There is the ability to control these posts, such as the number of times and which audiences can see certain posts. They simply exist for the targeted users that see them, with the advertiser being in total control of where the messaging goes. These were in the form of non-public paid posts shown only to Facebook users that Trump's team chose using personalised negative messages (Green & Issenberg, 2016). Throughout the 2016 election, the Russian Government also used social media advertising with the aim of disrupting and undermining faith in US democracy. During the election period, more than 3,000 advertisements were linked to Russia as part of a disinformation campaign (Madrighal, 2017). Despite this being a relatively small number of advertisements, Russian operatives created more than 80,000 posts on Facebook and another 120,000 on Instagram reaching roughly 146 million Americans between the two platforms (Nast, 2018). Three states were heavily targeted in the Russian campaign; Maryland, Missouri, and New York (Jenkins, 2018). Jonathan Albright, Research Director of the Tow Centre for Digital Journalism at Columbia University, pulled data on six publicly known Russia-linked Facebook pages. Posts here had been shared 340 million times. This was only six of the 470 pages that Facebook eventually linked to Russian operatives. "There were likely to be billions of shares, with who knows how many views and with what kind of specific targeting" (Madrighal, 2017, p. 14).

This was one of the clearest demonstrations of Russia's financial investment in disrupting American politics. It was proven, post-election through official investigations, that the Russian Government used the Internet Research Agency, a Saint Petersburg based troll farm with hundreds of employees,

to create and place the advertisements with the purpose of “inflaming passions on a range of divisive issues” (Vargo & Hopp, 2020, p. 2). Advertisements were placed on the newsfeeds of specific audiences based on race, sexual identity, and political affiliation. It appears that the only purpose of these advertisements was to divide Americans, not to elect or damage a candidate or party. The common aim of the advertisements created by the Internet Research Agency appeared to be to provoke people to engage in social issues such as gun regulation, immigration, LGBT rights, and police brutality. Each of these social issues is seen as polarising with people generally taking a strong stance for or against rather than sitting on the fence, thus giving the Internet Research Agency the ability to cause maximum disruption.

The use of PBT through social media channels changed the political landscape. The quantity of information was assured by the uptake of social media worldwide, but more important to this process was the quality of the information. Whilst an individual might do something today, they may not do it tomorrow. As technology became more advanced, a growing number of speciality firms emerged such as Adobe, Oracle, Salesforce, Nielsen, and IBM, developing data clouds with the purpose of selling political data alongside a comprehensive amount of detailed consumer information for each potential target. This could include information such as age, gender, credit card use, personal interests, consumer habits, and even television viewing patterns. Companies publicly advertised this service with i-360.com (one of many) stating that they held 1,800 unique data points on every individual American citizen, offering to create the most comprehensive profile of a target voter. In technical terms, the same company claimed their ability to source thousands of pieces of individual information. This information was compiled from many consumer data scrapers, constantly refreshing and updating voter registration information (i360, 2023). However, the biggest opportunity of PBT can also be perceived as a threat, enabling the advent of sophisticated technologies which allowed “anyone to reach any individual or group in an electorate with any message” (Bodo et al., 2017, p. 3).

At the core of this was not only very sophisticated technology, but also a flourishing commercial model driving increased profits. Databases are sold to the highest bidder, arguably without much importance given to social conscience or value. It is also debatable whether something that could collect such high revenues would have much regard for issues such as voter fraud, transparency, an informed population, diversity of thought, balance of ideas, or even political parties on a level playing field (Bodo et al., 2017). One of the most notable players in the 2016 US election was Cambridge Analytica, a company that made no secret of its ability to amass information on voters. In one presentation, the Chief Executive of the company, Alexander Nix, showed the audience an interactive map of the state of Iowa. Nix was able to select and deselect all citizens according to their partisanship, age, gender, interest, personality, address, and social media profiles (Ortega, 2020). Where this might have provided a wakeup call to the public and elected officials, instead it was seen as part of a sales pitch of the commercial abilities of the firm. If the media had caught onto this and taken it further, the brakes might have been applied in the lead up to the election.

Of course, although PBT can appear creepy and discriminatory, it can also provide benefits to the user such as streamlining and efficiency, which can make it hard to ignore (Waldman, 2016). Suddenly, by using PBT, a campaign manager had a more refined and almost scientific method to apply in a campaign that could lead to a desired result. Additionally, there was a plethora of companies offering a service at a greatly reduced rate to the traditionally expensive billboard and television advertising which was an instant sell to the campaign in terms of budget alone. These components combined to form a ‘perfect storm’. By engaging simply with their own membership, Facebook could offer to correctly predict what a person would like, comment on, or share and what

could be the harm in this? Layer over the fact that in 2016, 68 per cent of all American adults had a Facebook account (Greenwood et al., 2016), and that by the time of the 2016 election Facebook had collected more than 300 petabytes of information on their US population (Waldman, 2016) and indeed such a storm was clearly in the making.

The popularity of using Facebook amongst US campaigners can be seen very clearly in their digital spend; the biggest difference between the 2012 and the 2016 campaigns for both major parties was the amount spent on social media (Moore, 2016). This went in tandem with Cambridge Analytica who boasted of their capability to predict how most people would vote. At the time of the 2016 election, Cambridge Analytica had more than 5,000 pieces of data about every US adult combined with hundreds of thousands of personalities and behavioural surveys to identify millions of voters who are open to persuasion to support Trump (Elliott, 2014). “Each campaign is an amalgamation of all campaign practices available at that time” (Magin, et al., 2016, p. 1701).

Despite all this knowledge, the full impact of PBT didn’t become obvious until after the 2016 election, making this point a pivotal dividing line in history – before the 2016 election versus post. Madrigal (2017) notes that post-election, things needed to be reinterpreted in a different light, however, the same methods appear to have been used in both the Brexit referendum and in the UK 2015 general election as well as some less high-profile elections in other democracies.

2.5 FAKE NEWS

There are many definitions of fake news including “the deliberate use of misinformation to influence attitudes on an issue or toward a candidate” (Persily, 2017, p. 68); “propaganda entertainment” (Khaldarova & Pantti, 2016, p. 893); content that “blurs lines between nonfiction and fiction” (Berkowitz & Schwartz, 2015, p. 4), “using satire to discuss public affairs” (Marchi, 2012, p. 253), and “either wholly false or containing deliberately misleading elements incorporated within its content or context”, (Bakir & McStay, 2017, p.154). However fake news is interpreted, the central issue is the ability of fake news to circulate quickly and broadly online. When trying to understand the phenomenon of fake news it should be acknowledged that in an age of online dominance, the pace at which any news can spread is a big factor in its efficacy. How far a fake piece of news can go depends on many factors but often its entertainment value or its novelty factor can have it spread worldwide in a very short space of time. This final component means that there are almost no boundaries to control the spread of fake news. Fake news has led to three distinct issues: the creation of a pool of misinformed citizens, these citizens are likely to stay misinformed as they are siloed into ‘bubbles’, and finally the nature of fake news is often provocative and allows it to emotionally antagonise or outrage citizens who believe it to be real (Bakir & McStay, 2017).

Fake news as propaganda can originate from anywhere, including official campaigns, unofficial allied interest groups, media organisations friendly or otherwise, websites, foreign actors, or even political candidates themselves. The origin of fake news is often impossible to pinpoint geographically due to the viral nature of the internet. Fake news takes the form of a ‘Chinese whisper’, bouncing from group to group, moving on and offline and being retweeted and reposted. It can be hard to pinpoint the source of the news quickly as it effectively creates a blanket of fog obscuring any real information that campaigns are trying to communicate (Persily, 2017).

Whilst fake news is a term that has been used for some years, the 2016 US presidential election turned it into a very high profile and heavily politicised campaigning weapon. The 2016 election fuelled fake news creating high levels of engagement worldwide. Bizarre and often ridiculous stories

that might have been disregarded before suddenly became widely believed and shared, in many cases because of the personalities involved in the presidential race (in particular, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton). A random website posting aggregated news about the election is unlikely to receive much traffic, certainly not enough to raise any eyebrows. But that same random website announcing that the Pope had endorsed Donald Trump was an entirely different matter. This type of fake news, during the election campaign itself, generated engagement which spread far and wide, well beyond the domestic US borders. One of the crucial things about the fake news during this time, and in fact as a phenomenon in general, is that it goes undetected. Madrigal (2017) cites Guardian reporter Peter Pomeroy, who found a Russian military handbook describing how fake news might work. 'The book suggests that the deployment of information weapons, 'acts like an invisible radiation' upon its targets: "The population doesn't even feel it is being acted upon. So the state doesn't switch on its self-defense mechanisms" (Madrigal, 2017, p. 14).

Whilst the US Government may not have had self-defence mechanisms in place for this sort of infiltration, it would not have made much difference anyway as no one appeared to notice the influence campaign that happened on Facebook (Madrigal, 2017).

The 2016 election highlighted the ability of the Russian Government (or any hostile external party) to sow discord and ultimately undermine faith in democracy by using social media advertising (predominantly Facebook). The lack of federal regulation as well as Facebook's own insufficient self-regulation gave the Russian Government a unique opportunity to meddle in the US democratic process with their advertisements going largely unnoticed. The Internet Research Agency, also known as Glavset, engaged in online influence operations on behalf of Russian business and political interests placing advertisements on the newsfeeds of specifically targeted audiences. Unlike the negative advertising that had gone before, these new advertisements sought simply to divide Americans rather than to elect or damage a candidate.

Whilst only 3,517 advertisements have been attributed to the Internet Research Agency during the 2016 election, the number of advertisements was not the pressing issue (Madrigal, 2017). The Agency were able to create pages which were then shared potentially billions of times. They also were able to create actual events and manipulate who attended those events, often having two polarising groups at the same location for two totally different reasons.

Jonathan Albright, Research Director of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University, analysed data from six known Russian-linked Facebook pages. Through this analysis he proved that the posts on these six pages had been shared up to 340 million times (Madrigal, 2017). Whilst that seems a number that could create havoc, really it was just the tip of the iceberg. Facebook ultimately linked 470 pages to Russian operatives leading to billions of shares and views, all of which had been designed with specific targeting in mind (Madrigal, 2017). The election was no longer about which party would win, or that the Republicans had beaten the Democrats. The much more fundamental problem was that the very foundation of the electoral system; the news that people see, the events that they think happen, and the information they amass and digest had been destabilised.

The lack of transparency around PBT makes it impossible to detect or assess in terms of what is being said to whom and by whom. It is not necessarily just an election phenomenon aligned with the interests of society. There is evidence, not just in the 2016 election, that PBT has been used by foreign states, independent organisations and individuals to take advantage of the election process but with differing outcomes (Bodo et al., 2017). As aforementioned, there is the previous example of the group of Balkan teens, as well as examples of Russians meddling through the Internet Research Agency and fake news. Increasingly sophisticated technologies of PBT allow access to anyone and

cause them to be open to manipulation and threat meddling, etc. It would be hard to describe today's politics as being carried out on a level playing field (Bodo et al., 2017).

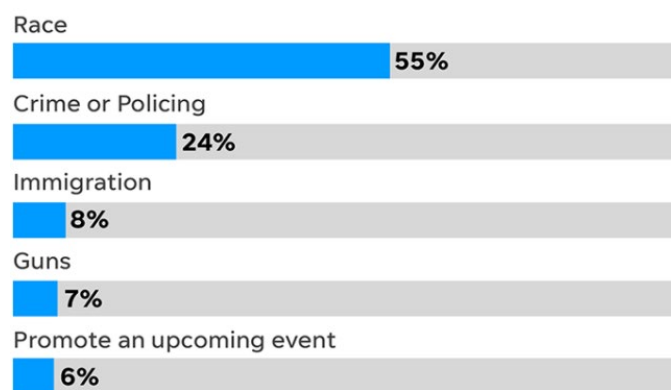
CHAPTER THREE

3.1 THE DARK POST PERIOD (2015 – 2017)

In order to show the breadth, depth, and complexity of PBT during the 2016 US presidential election, this chapter provides visual images of a small percentage of the advertisements used by the Russian Government-backed Internet Research Agency to disrupt the political process in the US. These advertisements caused divide throughout the population, and in some cases increased voter numbers whilst in other places, suppressed votes. The fake news and PBT campaigning through social media was overwhelmingly focussed on the issue of race, leveraging the historical divisiveness of the issue in the US. Some advertisements dealt with race directly, whilst others dealt with issues that were filled with underlying racial and religious connotations such as protests on policing, the debate over the border between the US and Mexico, and relationships with the Muslim community. Advertisements also covered gun laws, Black Lives Matter, and gay rights. An analysis of the themes of the advertisements was carried out by USA Today:

Top 5 election issues targeted with Facebook ads by Internet Research Agency

(as percentage of all 3,517 ads)



Impressions from June 2015 to August 2017; ads can be in multiple categories
SOURCE USA TODAY Network analysis of House Permanent Select Committee
on Intelligence release of Facebook ads
George Petras/USA TODAY

Figure 3-1
(Source: Penzenstadler et al., 2018, p. 2)

To put context behind the raft of advertisements that were used, some understanding of the background behind the Internet Research Agency and how they operated is needed. Special Counsel Robert Mueller released a report on Russian interference in the 2016 US election which gives a detailed look at how the Internet Research Agency managed to operate in the US (Broderick, 2019). The Internet Research Agency was a Russian troll farm based in St Petersburg backed by the Russian Government. The main job of the employees was to sow disinformation on the internet (Calamur, 2018). Formed in 2014, members of this group posed as Americans, creating fake American personas and then operating social media pages and groups intending to either attract or disengage US audiences in the political arena. The Internet Research Agency was linked to the campaign of online disinformation on Facebook which included hundreds of fake political pages on Facebook (Broderick, 2019). These, on the face of it, looked like they belonged to everyday Americans, focussing on

divisive issues that were part of the political campaigns. The Internet Research Agency didn't just use social media. In 2014 employees of the Internet Research Agency travelled to the US on intelligence gathering missions (Broderick, 2019). Through these methods, the Internet Research Agency was able to reach millions of Americans with the purpose of interfering in the US political system, which included the 2016 presidential campaign. "The disinformation campaign was aimed at boosting Donald Trump, undermining Hillary Clinton, and sowing general 'political discord' in the US by supporting radical causes on both sides" (Chen, 2018, p. 1).

The campaigns run by the Internet Research Agency became so effective at reaching American voters, that unwitting politicians, media personalities, and celebrities interacted with the Internet Research Agency with no knowledge that it was Russian-backed (Broderick, 2019). US businesses began paying them to run promotional material, believing they were dealing with a US business. Special Counsel Robert Mueller's report on Russian interference in the 2016 election indicates that neither the Trump nor Clinton campaigns had any idea they were dealing with Russian operatives (Broderick, 2019). By the 2016 election, the Internet Research Agency had used the readily available analytical tools and the built-in network-like effect of large social media platforms to create artificial grassroots political organisations that were aggressively targeting both Republicans and Democrats.

Research carried out by Young Mie Kim found that voters in Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Wisconsin, all states with tight races, were the most targeted by Internet Research Agency advertising (Nast, 2018). Specifically, voters in Wisconsin were targeted with gun advertisements about 72 per cent more often than the national average. Kim also found that white voters received 87 per cent of all immigration-based advertisements (Nast, 2018).

While hostile actors used many of the available social media channels, Facebook appeared to be particularly popular. By the time these fake accounts were deactivated by Facebook in 2017, The Russian-controlled group 'United Muslims of America' had over 300,000 followers, the 'Don't Shoot Us' group had over 250,000 followers, the 'Being Patriotic' group had over 200,000 followers, and the 'Secured Borders' Facebook group had over 130,000 followers (Broderick, 2019). In total, the Internet Research Agency-backed Facebook accounts made more than 80,000 posts reaching at least 29 million Americans, and probably up to an estimated 126 million people (Broderick, 2019).

Derogatory information was posted about a number of candidates in the lead up to the elections, however, by early 2016 it became clear that the Internet Research Agency appeared to be supporting the Trump campaign and disparaging Hillary Clinton (Broderick, 2019). Members were able to buy political advertisements on social media in the names of American people or entities. They also staged political rallies inside the US. There is evidence to suggest that the Internet Research Agency engaged with individuals associated with the Trump campaign as well as other political activists to seek co-ordination of political activities without revealing their true identities or their Russian association (Broderick, 2019). Many of the advertisements did not appear to be overly supportive of Trump, rather they were engaging Americans in broadly political posts that were encouraging association and engagement with polarising political issues. According to the Intelligence Community Assessment which came out of a joint directive from the Department of Homeland Security and National Intelligence. "Russian President Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the US presidential election. Russia's goals were to undermine public faith in the US democratic process, denigrate Secretary Clinton and harm her electability and potential presidency" (U.S. House of Representatives, n.d.).

That Russia was outrightly supporting Trump has been disputed, however, it is indisputable that Russia did actively try to meddle with the election process and undermine the western democratic process.

The 3,517 Facebook advertisements made publicly available from 2015 through until early 2017 show just how complex the manipulation was on Facebook (and other social media channels) (Romm, 2018). With the help of Facebook's readily available targeting tools, the Internet Research Agency attempted to provoke social, cultural, and political unrest by delivering their disinformation to a number of narrow categories of users such as black or gay individuals and anti-gun law voters, through to fans of a news station or a pop star (Romm, 2018). As well as advertising they also tried to fuel rallies and protests. American voters, targeted by these advertisements, were tempted into clicking 'like' or following other Russian created Facebook pages and profiles which published organic content and 'like' status updates, videos, and other posts which would ultimately then appear in a user's news feed. Interestingly, the advertisements often took multiple sides of an issue. In one example, in March 2016 the United Muslims of America Facebook account urged people in New York to stop Islamophobia and the fear of Muslims (Lapowsky, 2018a). That very same account in the same week, published an open letter in a different advertisement, accusing Clinton of failing to support Muslims before the election (Romm, 2018). Other accounts linked to the Internet Research Agency at the same time sought to target Muslims including one which labelled President Obama a traitor, suggesting he was being controlled by Arabian sheikhs (Romm, 2018).

Facebook features such as its microtargeting tools, were readily available to members of the public, and enabled the Russian Government, amongst others, to target specific categories of users. Separate advertisements, launched at the same time, would stoke suspicion about police treatment of black people, whilst another would encourage support for pro-police groups (Stewart, 2018). As an example, a Russian-backed account posted an advertisement about white supremacy in January 2016 specifically to users whose interests included the HuffPost's "black voices" section (Romm, 2018). Members of the Internet Research Agency also sought to influence Facebook user's activities offline. One advertisement from the Russian aligned page Black Matters promoted a March 2016 rally against confederate heritage whilst another by Heart of Texas urged viewers to honour their ancestors and join a rally for the state (Romm, 2018). In February 2016 a Facebook post sought to target people believed to be police officers, firefighters, and military officers, urging them to appear at a protest of the singer Beyoncé, outside the NFL headquarters. At the same time, an account targeting black users directed their viewers to a pro- Beyoncé protest at the same location (Romm, 2018). This is just one of hundreds of examples where the Internet Research Agency attempted to exploit both sides of major national debates.

Initially the Russian-backed advertisements were somewhat trivial such as business promotion or referencing American pop culture such as Pokemon or Spongebob Squarepants, black media and culture, or art and design. They appeared to target nonwhite voters with benign messages promoting racial identity, community, and affinity (Kim, 2018). This served the purpose of building support for legitimate looking connections. In the run up to the 2016 election, advertisements began to focus on inflaming race related tensions. They mixed issues such as policing and mixed race, with many copying Black lives matter activists. As the Russians targeted extreme views, they then produced negative messaging that might convert voters, but might also suppress voter turnout which then undermined the whole democratic process. The Internet Research Agency operation exposed more than 11.4 million Americans to their Facebook advertisements (Stewart, 2018).

What follows below is a series of examples of advertisements used for PBT purposes.

3.2 EXAMPLES OF ADVERTISEMENTS USED (2015-2017 Grouped into Themes)

RELIGIOUS POSTS (Figures 3-2 to 3-5)



Figure 3-2

Figure 3-3

Figure 3-4



Figure 3-5

GUN LAWS POSTS (Figures 3-6 to 3-11)



2nd amendment americafirst
buildthewall donaldtrump
presidenttrump trump
stopterrorism noislam
illegalimmigration nojihad
immigrationreform maga tcot
deport illegal illegalimmigration
liberals democrat liberallogic
liberal conservative constitution
resist stupidliberals
stupiddemocrats donaldtrump
trump2016 patriot trump guns

Figure 3-6



That's interesting. americafirst
buildthewall donaldtrump
presidenttrump trump
stopterrorism noislam
illegalimmigration nojihad
immigrationreform maga tcot
deport illegal illegalimmigration
liberals republican democrat
liberallogic liberal conservative
constitution resist stupidliberals
stupiddemocrats donaldtrump
trump2016 patriot trump guns

Figure 3-7



Gun control equals elevated
crime rates. americafirst
buildthewall donaldtrump
presidenttrump trump
stopterrorism noislam
illegalimmigration nojihad
immigrationreform maga tcot
deport illegal illegalimmigration
liberals republican democrat
liberallogic liberal conservative
constitution resist stupidliberals
stupiddemocrats donaldtrump
trump2016 patriot trump guns

Figure 3-8



Figure 3-9

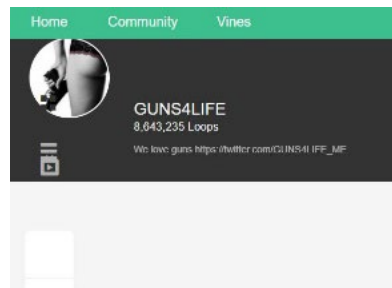


Figure 3-10

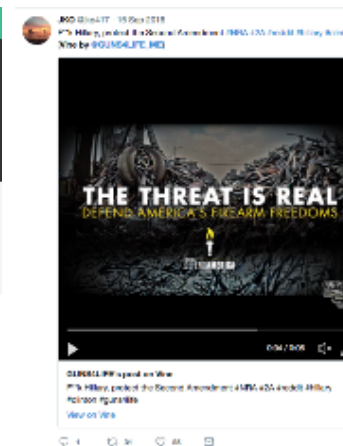


Figure 3-11

IMMIGRATION (Figures 3-12 to 3-20)



There's a difference.
americafirst buildthewall
donaldrump presidenttrump
trump stopterrorism noislam
illegalimmigration nojihad
immigrationreform maga tcot
deport illegal illegalimmigration
liberals republican democrat
liberallogic liberal conservative
constitution resist stupidliberals
stupiddemocrats donaldrump
trump2016 patriot trump guns

Figure 3-12



That's a fact. americafirst
buildthewall donaldrump
presidenttrump trump
stopterrorism noislam
illegalimmigration nojihad
immigrationreform maga tcot
deport illegal illegalimmigration
liberals republican democrat
liberallogic liberal conservative
constitution resist stupidliberals
stupiddemocrats donaldrump
trump2016 patriot trump guns

Figure 3-13



I see some correlation here.
americafirst buildthewall
donaldrump presidenttrump
trump stopterrorism noislam
illegalimmigration nojihad
immigrationreform maga tcot
deport illegal illegalimmigration
liberals republican democrat
liberallogic liberal conservative
constitution resist stupidliberals
stupiddemocrats donaldrump
trump2016 patriot trump guns

Figure 3-14



Figure 3-15



Figure 3-16



Figure 3-17



For more conservative news
check out @mericanfury
mericanfury stupidliberals
secondamendment trump
donaldrump conservative hillno
feelthebern Bernie killary hillary
hillaryclinton murica merica
america military guns patriot
politics gop republican
democrat nobama obama
MAGA calexit potus
politicallyincorrect humor

Figure 3-18

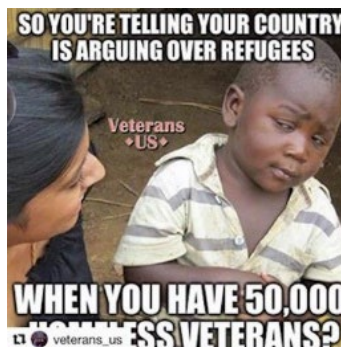


Figure 3-19



Don't forget, who stands for all
of us! americafirst buildthewall
donaldrump presidenttrump
trump stopterrorism noislam
illegalimmigration nojihad
immigrationreform maga tcot
deport illegal illegalimmigration
liberals republican democrat
liberallogic liberal conservative
constitution resist stupidliberals
stupiddemocrats donaldrump
trump2016 patriot trump guns

Figure 3-20

RACISM (Figures 3-21- to 3-23)



Figure 3-21



Figure 3-22



Figure 3-23

BLACK LIVES / WHITE SUPREMACY (Figures 3-24 to 3-28)



Figure 3-24



Figure 3-25



Figure 3-26



Figure 3-27



Figure 3-28

PATRIOTISM, AMERICA FIRST (Figures 3-29 to 3-32)



Figure 3-29



Figure 3-30



Figure 3-31



Figure 3-32

POLITICAL MESSAGING (Figures 3-33 to 3-44)



Figure 3-33



Figure 3-34



Figure 3-35



We are!!! americafirst
buildthewall donaldtrump
presidenttrump trump
stopterrorism noislam
illegalimmigration nojihad
immigrationreform

Figure 3-36



Figure 3-37



Figure 3-38



Figure 3-39



Figure 3-40

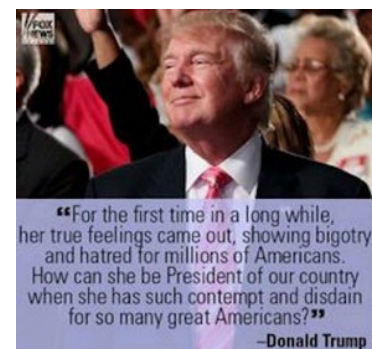
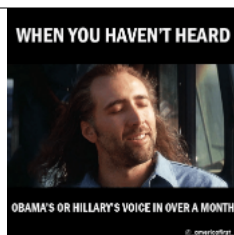


Figure 3-41



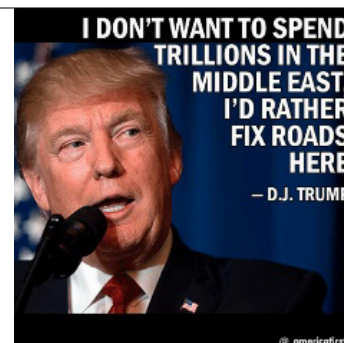
A peace of mind. americafirst
buildthewall donaldtrump
presidenttrump trump
stopterrorism noislam
illegalimmigration nojihad
immigrationreform maga toot
deport illegal illegalimmigration
liberals republican democrat
liberallogic liberal conservative
constitution resist stupidliberals
stupiddemocrats donaldtrump
trump2016 patriot trump guns

Figure 3-42



stupiddemocrats
illegalimmigrants patriotsgirl
conservativeparty
donaldtrumphair illegalaliens
nojihad fakenews

Figure 3-43



Patriotplace patriotsplace
illegalmemes republicanpride
conservativemovement
draintheswamp msm

Figure 3-44

3.3 PBT AND PERSUASION

Persuasion is at the very core of PBT. A voter can be targeted in many ways but if that targeting doesn't result in an action (i.e., doing something) it has been a wasted effort. What then is persuasion, and why is it so important to PBT?

Aristotle, one of the first scholars to analyse persuasion, defined it as 'techne' meaning art. 'Ology' means the study of, thus persuasion from the rhetorical perspective is the original technology (Pullman, 2013, p. xvii). Whilst the technologies of persuasion continually change and are reimagined, the basic concept of persuasion has not changed since it was first recorded in the fourth century (before the common era) by Roman scholars. Persuasion can be defined as "any process that creates a new belief or changes your level of commitment to an existing one" (Pullman, 2013, p. xx). The pertinent thing about persuasion is that it may not be factual or even believable. The act of persuasion might come about through intimidation or bullying. Conversely it might be factually based but it may not be a long-lasting belief. What is important is that in simple terms an act of persuasion is "any act that generates or modifies a belief" (Pullman, 2013, p. xx).

A simple example of an act of persuasion would be persuading a friend to eat an apple even if they believe that apples taste bad. Convincing them to try the apple can occur in many ways including using text, image, humour, facts etc. Regardless of how they are persuaded to take that first bite, when they do the instigator has succeeded in the act of persuasion. The outcome of that bite will differ between individuals: some may like the apple and start eating apples, some may decide that the apple does indeed taste bad and never try one again. Others again may find the apple palatable but may instead go on to find fruit they like better. What is important is that they were persuaded to try the apple.

Persuasion has many layers to it and each layer can contribute to the effectiveness of the persuasive message. These layers can include the source, the content, and who the audience is. All of these are relevant to this research particularly when pulled together under the umbrella of PBT. Who is doing the persuading is often more important than the message they are wanting to convey. People are more likely to be persuaded by sources that they perceive as credible and trustworthy (Hovland, Janis & Kelley, 1953). Because of this, to be persuasive you should appear trustworthy. Obviously, this is easier if you actually are trustworthy (Pullman, 2013). When this trust factor is translated

through to social media, you might like or comment on something just because you have seen that your friend has liked it. That credibility will often serve as a validation (Pullman, 2013).

Facebook is based on a circle of trust and even uses words such as friends and likes. If your Facebook friend likes a post, then you may well like it too without even giving it too much thought, as in your mind your friend has credibility. Not only are people persuaded more easily by those they trust, but they are also more likely to be persuaded by sources they see as being like themselves. Broaden this out and people often follow the actions of those they admire (thus they have credibility), or they will follow the actions of what others around them are doing. You may not be able to persuade someone to do something, but by liking a post on Facebook, this may lead them to liking it too which in terms of PBT pushes them from persuasion to influence (Pullman, 2013).

Message content can also influence persuasion with how the message is framed affecting how effectively it is received. If the perceived benefit of the message is framed positively (in a gain-framed manner) this can be more effective than if it is perceived negatively, i.e., what the negative consequence might be of the message known as a loss-framed manner (Rothman & Salovey, 1997). One should also take notice of the imagery, actions, colours, text, and the emotions that the post appeals to. As an example, evoking fear can be effective in persuading people to take action to avoid a negative outcome (Witte & Allen, 2000). Emotions such as elation, or happiness can also persuade people to adopt certain behaviours (Fredrickson, 2001).

No matter how persuasive a message might be, how it is received depends on the audience. Every person has pre-existing attitudes and beliefs (Hovland & Weiss, 1951) and if the messaging doesn't align with these then the act of persuasion becomes more difficult or ineffective. If a viewer has no interest in fruit at all in the example given above, they may choose not to interact at all, bypassing this to go on to something they are interested in, or have a belief in. This is where the opinions and actions of others in their social network can play a part in the persuasion process.

Another factor to consider in persuasion is that people may agree to something in private (e.g., liking something on their Facebook feed) that they would not accept in public because of peer pressure or conventional standards of decency sometimes known as political correctness (Pullman, 2013).

In this research the use of Facebook as a vehicle for PBT was common sense. It gave access to more than 162 million adult US users (Chester & Montgomery, 2017), and it is based on the concepts of friends which automatically suggests a circle of trust. With this at the heart of the campaign, persuasion and influence were made infinitely easier.

The word persuasion in the field of politics means the ability of a message to influence a person's political beliefs, attitudes, or values (Franz & Ridout, 2007). In terms of this research, at the heart of persuasion is the number of people who can be made to change sides, to start to vote, or to abstain from voting. "Politics is about turning the minorities of today into majorities of tomorrows, and to do that persuasion is an integral part of the political process. It is literally the stuff of politics" (Mutz et al., 1996, p.1).

Democratic political campaigns rely on the art of persuasion. Persuasion of the masses can be carried out via traditional mass media such as television and radio, but increasingly through social media (Pullman, 2013). It is achieved both through the skilful use of language and through the careful selection of images and the juxtaposition of both images and text to convey a powerful message (Partington & Taylor, 2017).

Political language can be inspirational and galvanising, such as in the 1776 Declaration of Independence but at its worst, George Orwell reminds us “political language... is (often) designed to make lies sound truthful or murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind” (Partington & Taylor, 2017, p. xvii).

As discussed previously, there is evidence that political advertising on social media is aided by citizens leaving behind a footprint of their online behaviours. In terms of PBT, this certainly informed the strategy of political parties with millions of advertisements targeted at people based on age, gender, specific interests, locations, and more. There were no limitations on who could use PBT. The fact that the Internet Research Agency were able to target people not only through these methods but also through the Facebook posts they liked or shared or groups they followed, shows how much manipulation was taking place leading up to the election by many different players. However, just targeting people was not enough. For an individual voter to be influenced over a period of time, every post needed to persuade them to do something, whether it was to get out and vote, attend an event, or simply like or share an image. The true art in the power of PBT is the ability to persuade and influence to such a granular level that that two neighbours may never see the same advertisements (Pullman, 2013). One person can see a post which persuades them to like, a different tailored post can be sent to someone else, and they will also be persuaded to like it. With the data available, the possibility of manipulation of the masses is a real thing. The difficult thing about persuading others is to know the mind of the person one is trying to persuade and to be able to fit one’s words to it. As rhetoric or persuasion can be used to manipulate and control people, it is realistic to assume that the Internet Research Agency (and others) had access to the same methods, along with the financial backing of the Russian Government (Pullman, 2013).

During any political campaign period, the public would expect to see an increase in political advertising. In the past, this would have been in the form of newspaper advertisements, billboards, or television campaigns. The use of advertising on social media at election time is a much newer concept, and the public’s understanding of their exposure to such tactics is severely lacking. If not questioned, it is relatively easy for an advertiser in a post to direct an individual to like or share. However, if there is any cynicism the advertisement will need to work much harder to persuade. If people thought they were being manipulated, being pushed to vote or to change their vote, they would be more difficult to persuade (Pullman, 2013). In this way many images were posted about election issues, taking different sides and different viewpoints, all with an underlying desire for the audience to take a simple action (as has been illustrated via the above provided examples). What the audience did not generally know was the amount of targeting that had happened for a specific person to see that advertisement. This lack of knowledge or ignorance can lead to vulnerable audiences. If voters do not know that an advertisement may have an ulterior motive, or that it may be misleading, they may accept it as being the truth, and let it inform their decision to act, which may over time change how they cast their vote. Many of the Facebook posts created by the Internet Research Agency focussed on simple themes, issues, and policies that were common to any election such as race, crime, or immigration. This meant the Internet Research Agency could target both sides, as both parties would have been focussed on many of the same issues.

Persuasion was simply the second step in the process after PBT. If several advertisements directly targeted at one individual could make them take the action of ‘liking’ or ‘sharing’, they would move into the influencing stage. Once here the voter could be targeted more specifically through a number of very targeted posts with a desired outcome in place.

CHAPTER FOUR– METHODS & METHODOLOGY

4.1 RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

The word ‘rhetoric’ is commonly used in politics today but has had a long tradition as an academic discipline and a type of critical analysis (Leach, 2000). The use of rhetoric in analysis can be traced back centuries, originally appearing in the works of the Greek philosophers Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero. The art of rhetorical analysis is to arrive methodically at insights into the performance of an event (in this case a post on social media) through analysing and investigating all the features of that event. It is a well-researched approach used to describe how a particular communication landed with a particular audience in a particular instance (Zachary, 2009).

Using rhetoric analysis as a way of understanding the Facebook posts in this study helps to capture the essence of the messaging used to persuade American voters in different ways during the 2016 US election. As a word, ‘rhetoric’ has many uses and it requires a working definition or clarification of how it will be used to justify it as a method of analysis for this study. There are three definitions that both help to define the word and aid understanding of the complexity of the concept: the act of persuasion, the analysis of acts of persuasion, and a worldview about the persuasive power of discourse (Leach, 2000).

1. The Act of Persuasion

“Politicians commonly perform acts of persuasion or acts of rhetoric” (Leach, 2000, p.210). Their messaging is often organised in such a way as to be persuasive, or to create an action getting the recipient to do something. In the advertisements analysed in this work, the creators of the posts (in most cases either the political parties or the Internet Research Agency) perform acts of persuasion or rhetoric through their messaging. The chosen images and words are designed to persuade or encourage the audience to do something or to act in some way. This may be as simple as liking a post showing agreement with a policy, a debate, or even an image right through to attending an event or casting a vote. The acts of persuasion are achieved in this study through the medium of social media, specifically Facebook.

2. The Analysis of Acts of Persuasion

Academics who study political rhetoric take the acts of persuasion and deconstruct them, attempting to better understand every type of symbolic action and to find out why and how these acts are persuasive. Like the act of taking a broken-down car apart and analysing all the pieces to find the problem, researchers can deconstruct an act of persuasion into pieces, and then fit them together again having found the purpose and meaning behind an argument. “The result of the analysis is a much better understanding of the message and an appreciation for the ways in which language and symbols can be manipulated for persuasive purposes” (Selzer, 2004, p.281).

Written evidence for rhetorical analysis dates to classical antiquity where scholars analysed discourses, both written and spoken, trying to understand why they were persuasive. Plato (c.428 - c. 348 BCE), Aristotle (384 - 322 BCE) and Cicero (106 - 43 BCE), were all interested in rhetorical analysis, and over time a range of terms for persuasive discourse was developed. Plato had formed a view that rhetoric was tainted, suggesting that it was somehow different to the truth. These ancient

thinkers felt a need to distinguish between good and bad rhetoric and formed rules for creating 'good' rhetoric so as not to taint themselves in any way with a bad perception of the art. The classic argument of good versus bad can be found in much of Plato's work and is still very relevant to the subject today where there is a fair amount of scepticism when politicians try to persuade us one way or another as to what their actual intention is. Plato also believed that people could not be taught rhetoric. He related good rhetoric to a person's virtue with the view that if a person was not virtuous, they could not be taught rhetoric, and therefore their analysis would not amount to anything of importance (Leach, 2000).

From the Greeks to the Romans, interest in persuasive discourse endured as well as the interest in teaching rhetoric. The Romans including rhetorician Quintilian (35 AD - 95 AD) created complex schemes for rhetorical strategies. They were interested in the learnings that grammatical patterns, aesthetic matters, and figures of speech could make a text persuasive. In the 14th and 15th centuries, rhetoric became a core discipline in the European classroom however by the 17th century both the practice and the discipline of rhetoric had come into question. Sir Francis Bacon was instrumental in moving away from the practice of rhetoric, wanting science to be 'unrhetorical'. His motto was, 'nullius in verba' or nothing in words. The practice didn't stop however, and rhetorical analysis has continued to be used in both theology and humanities disciplines with rhetorical analysts developing their own terms to better understand rhetoric. In summary, as a discipline, rhetoric has been around for more than 2,500 years and has been refined and diversified over the centuries (Leach, 2000).

In this research, each post can be deconstructed and analysed with the purpose of exploring why it was persuasive and why it made the audience 'do' something. Whilst there are thousands of posts from 2016 in the run up to the election alone, when broken down themes, similarities, and structures become apparent. These factors lead to many posts sharing a common purpose, such as building the credibility of a Facebook group, organising events with conflicting parties attending, stopping people from casting a vote, and many other similarities.

3. A World View About the Persuasive Power of Discourse

Lastly, there is a historical belief that the power of language and discourse provides the foundation of our thinking and our perception of the world around us including our systems of representation.

If rhetoric can be defined as the art of communicating effectively to an audience, usually with the intention to persuade, then rhetorical analysis looks at how effectively an argument is communicated to an audience. "The power of rhetorical analysis is its immediacy, its ability to talk about the particular and the possible, not the universal and the probable" (Leach, 2000, p. 213).

This leads to the very essence of this study, whether PBT operates as a way of persuasion. By targeting an individual with a specific advertisement, what was its persuasive power?

To better define rhetorical analysis, classical rhetoricians developed five canons of rhetoric which described actions from start to finish. They include *inventio* (creating information for acts of persuasion), *dispositio* (arrangement), *elocutio* (style), *memoria* (recollection of rhetorical resources that one might call upon), and *pronuntiatio* (delivery). Each helped to formulate different terms that were useful for rhetorical analysis (Selzer, 2004, p. 284). Aristotle's rhetorical triangle pictured below, is associated with the first term, invention. Ethos, pathos, and logos each provide the foundation for a solid argument and are very useful in the visual rhetorical analysis of images. Ethos relates to credibility (who is the publisher, are they credible, is the source trustworthy, is it

believable?). Pathos relates to emotions (how the advertisement appeals to the audiences' emotions in terms of characters, colours, text, and more). Logos relates to logic (what claims does the image make and how are these claims supported). Identifying these three parts helps to form the foundation of the rhetorical analysis of how an image can persuade a person to act in a specific way (Leach, 2000).

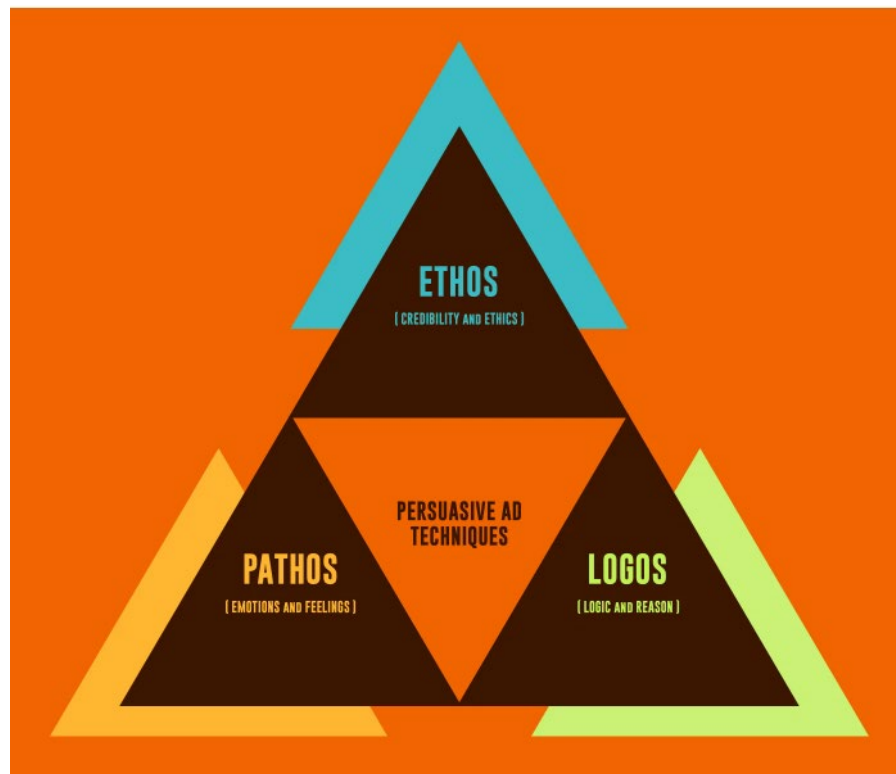


Figure 4-1 Image of Aristotle's Rhetorical Triangle (Source: Detisch, 2020)

Two other elements formulated by Aristotle should also be detailed here, although not forming part of the rhetorical triangle used for this analysis: kairos and phronesis. Loosely translated, kairos is the 'timeliness of a persuasive text' i.e., is it relevant and do people care? Phronesis means the appropriateness of a particular persuasive text. Considering both words can help to link not only the image, the text, and the context but also the audience together (Leach, 2000; Palmer, 2020).

Using rhetorical analysis, how then can an image or in this case a post on social media persuade a person to act in a specific way? Rhetoric is not just verbal. Pictures and images are full of meanings and can be used to influence and persuade us in different ways. Visual rhetoric relates to how information or an argument is presented in images. In very simple terms, visual rhetoric is the use of visual images to communicate a message, argument, or meaning. Each post that is examined in this study has been put together with a purpose and the starting point is always to assume that nothing has been left to chance.

Delivery considers visual impact, gestures, and expressions, and style considers irony, hyperbole, and metaphor as a way of helping analysts to better understand the tactics visible in each specific instance of rhetoric (Selzer, 2004). If certain effects, colours, symbols, or words are used, it has

probably been done this way to achieve a certain effect. Simplistically four steps were used to analyse the visual rhetoric of each post in this study:

- 1) Detailing everything that could be seen in the post noting every colour used, every object, every detail. The main thing here was to remember that every single composite part of the post would have had a purpose and so to leave nothing out, no matter how inconsequential it seemed.
- 2) Once everything was detailed, the next stage was to understand the importance of each detail, continually asking why this part of the post was done in this way.
- 3) Next, the purpose of the post was considered with the question of whether it was placed to inspire people to action; to stop them from acting or to sell or persuade them with a concept. Once there is an idea of the reason, it must be checked if everything in the post relates back to that reason.
- 4) Finally, there is the consideration of the intended audience - determining who these posts were made for and why. Knowledge of the audience will have informed what was put in the post. People respond in different ways, and it is likely that this knowledge has been thought through in the composition of the post depending on its purpose.

In this study, a series of questions were developed for each of the posts. These questions were used to identify the rhetorical appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos (see Appendix One: Rhetorical Analysis Questions). The elements used by the creator in each image are questioned highlighting acts of persuasion or rhetoric. As a form of communication, visual rhetoric uses images to create meaning or to make an argument. Consideration is made of the audience (who is being targeted), any background or contextual information that may help the analysis of an image (in the case of the US election who are the players, what are the key issues, what will make people vote), and the purpose of the advertisement (the overall goal for creating the advertisement including the persuasive situation and how this is shown through tone, colour, font, arrangement, and more). Visual rhetoric is first and foremost about what people interpret and analyse in what they see (Pack Sheffield, n.d).

4.2 DESIGN OF THE STUDY

This research uses all three definitions of rhetorical analysis to study images used in the 2016 US presidential election campaigns. Initially, 1,000 advertisements were collected from a variety of web pages and categorised into themes which included religion, gun laws, immigration, racism, black lives matter, white supremacy, patriotism, and political messaging. This was then narrowed down to the top five issues targeted with Facebook posts by the Internet Research Agency (Penzstadler et al., 2018). The five issues are: immigration, guns, crime and policing, race, and conflicting events. Between 11 and 19 advertisements were studied in each of these sections using the methods of rhetorical analysis.

Once several similarities within the overall themes became apparent, the research was then narrowed down to three examples in each category (four in events). These were analysed in depth using the method of visual rhetorical analysis with a particular emphasis on ethos, pathos, and logos. The same 37 questions were asked of each image which allowed detailing of everything that could be seen in a post, ensuring that nothing was left out. The emphasis here was to look at an advertisement in minute detail and then in its entirety. This identified the acts of persuasion but also helped with the analysis of each advertisement. Through this process, the importance of minute details became apparent and helped inform the purpose of the post: where it was placed, what was the call to action, and what was the relationship to one another. The final test for each post was the

consideration of the audience. Using PBT, each post would be targeted sometimes at a minute section of the population, and at other times a much larger generic segment, but again every post had a purpose. Through visual rhetoric analysis, themes stood out as did the use of specific visual aids such as icons, colour, font, arrangement, etc.

Once each of the advertisements within a theme had been analysed individually and compared to each other, the findings were then compared holistically with the initial larger group of collected advertisements to see if they stood up against a larger number of examples. In every case the findings through visual rhetorical analysis were confirmed when used against the larger subset looking at both the images and the media text.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 RESULTS

Sixty-seven advertisements were initially chosen from the pool and a high-level analysis of each was carried out, searching for similarities or differences. Three advertisements from each theme (four for the events theme) were analysed in depth with each one individually assessed using 37 standardised questions. These included detailing everything that could be observed and questioning the importance of each component to determine a picture of the overall goal of the message. The analysis included the audience, the purpose and topic, what the creator was appealing to and whether they were trying to inspire or prevent, the genre, and the overall effectiveness and persuasiveness of the message. Once each of the 16 advertisements had been analysed in detail the results were compared holistically against the 67 advertisements from the reduced pool, and again against the original 1,000 advertisements. In each case the findings of the small group could be seen in the larger sets of advertisements.

Most arguments use different types of rhetoric to convince the audience. Aristotle depicted these three types in a triangle, with the reasoning that in a good argument there should be a balance of all three parts, being ethos, pathos, and logos. In this study, credibility was examined looking at the language and tone, whether the post appeared overtly manipulative and whether it came across as knowledgeable, believable, or authoritative. Signs of emotional appeal included questions on whether the subject matter was relatable to the audience, how well it was narrated, any attention-grabbing details, and visual appeals to the emotions of the projected audience. Appeal to logic included analysing how well the information was organised and if it was backed by data or evidence rather than opinion. A study of tone, arrangement, placements, relative size, text, font and colour helped to paint a picture about the image.

It was important to understand that every image potentially used different strategies to fit the purpose, the audience, and the context of the advertisement. As an example, in many cases there was only an image with no text in the post. Could it be presumed that the image used was perceived to be so compelling that no text was required to make it more persuasive? Overall, the effectiveness of each post was considered after analysing all the component parts, the sum of which communicated their intended message and/or argument to an audience.

Colour can be cleverly used as a persuasive tool to either stand out or evoke a particular emotion. Posts around police and police brutality are often many shades of blue with examples such as Figures 5-4, 5-5, and 5-12. Immigration posts are brightly coloured, often with red as the dominant colour when they are about Mexican immigrants such as Figures 5-2 and 5-10. However, when they are aimed at Islamic immigrants, they are more often muted shades, with Figure 5-1 being a good example. Colour is also used when targeted at the Muslim vote, such as in Figure 5-16 where the use of both an icon and colour work to engage with this religious sector.

For a detailed list of questions used in each analysis please see Appendix One: Rhetorical Analysis Questions.

In many cases the advertisements took multiple sides of the same issue. The group United Muslims of America did one advertisement in March 2016 to stop Islamophobia and the fear of Muslims, and in another crafted an open letter accusing Clinton of failing to support Muslims before the election (Romm, 2018). Each advertisement had a purpose, some of them clearer than others, ranging from a simple 'like' right through to a call to action such as attending an event.

The findings of the analysis of the posts within each category were summarised and then used as a comparative template to analyse the larger sample of posts from each of the five groups with the intent of drawing conclusions around the overall goals of the persuasive messages in each of the five categories.

DETAILED ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS FOLLOWS BELOW



5.2 THEME ONE: IMMIGRATION

Table 5-1 – Immigration Analysis for Figure 5-1

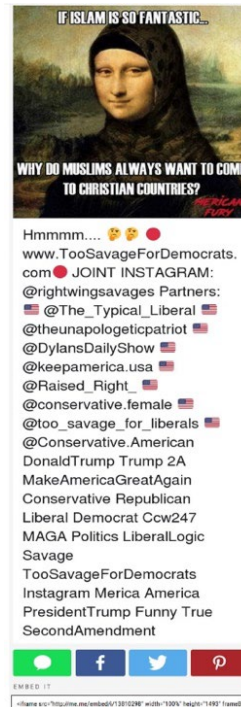


Figure 5-1 (Source: UsHadrons, 2018a)

ETHOS	PATHOS	LOGOS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of world-renowned iconic painting. • Question establishes the concept of them and us inferring credibility for Mexicans. • Sheer number of Facebook followers for Merican Fury. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well renowned icon appeals to the sense of safety and comfort. • Eyes are drawn to the smile but the intention of the words and doctoring of the image is to engage with non-Muslims. • Outrage at the modification of an important piece of art. • Use of recognised symbols including famous art and the hijab. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear simple imagery, use of Islamic symbols, (tacit that many Islamic people have immigrated to America and many terrorist acts have originated from Islamic groups). • Unemotional objective question making a logical point, 'if this, then this' contrasting differences between Islamic and Mexican. • Formatting reflects the natural direction of the eye with each piece independent, but linking to the next, moving logically from top to bottom and left to right.

Representing the Mona Lisa as a Muslim is designed to mock an icon of the western world. This disregard appears to be a call to action for American citizens, living in a predominantly Christian world where there is a perception that terrorist activity in recent years might have been caused by people of the Islamic faith. The call to action would be voting-related, drawing attention to current (Democratic) immigration policies which have allegedly allowed Islamic immigration.

Table 5-2 – Immigration Analysis for Figure 5-2



Figure 5-2 (Source: UsHadrons, 2020)

ETHOS	PATHOS	LOGOS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of financial information and the word 'taxpayers'. • Sheer number of Facebook followers for Secured Borders. • Authoritative words in the call to action. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American flag in the background appealing to patriotism. • Portrayal of Hispanic woman (with child, slang, demanding). • Manipulation of images to infer they relate when they do not. • 'Free shit' is attention-grabbing; Used derogatorily by a 'non-American'. • Use of financial information as an emotional appeal (taxes being particularly emotive). • Directive language designed to manipulate. • Effective use of colours: red depicting Republicans, yellow drawing eyes in, brightly worded posters, and black to emphasise each component. • Placement of the images breaks up words giving the eye time to absorb the overall messaging. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flag builds on them and us theme. • Financial evidence confirms logic. • Authoritative and demanding tone, 'did you know this, look at this, do this', adds to the logic. • Capital letters, short sentences, and a call to action. • Information is broken into small chunks making it digestible and logical.

The post serves to highlight the differences between them (Mexicans who are taking advantage of American social policy) and us (Americans who pay their taxes which in turn help support Mexican immigrants who are often depicted as freeloaders).

Table 5-3 – Immigration Analysis for Figure 5-3

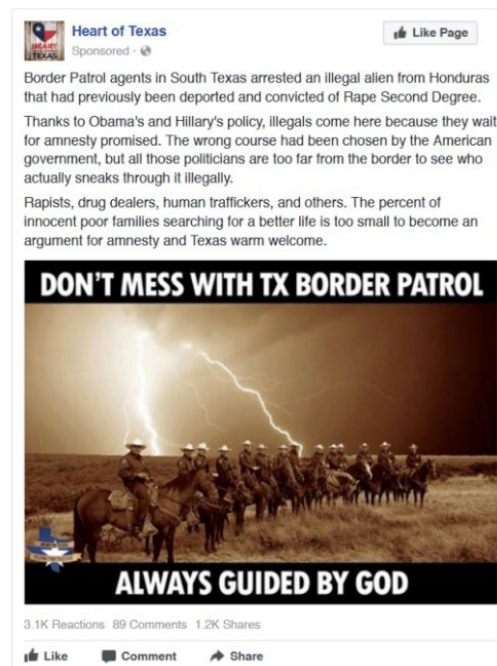


Figure 5-3 (Source: Abbruzzese, 2017)

ETHOS	PATHOS	LOGOS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailing of crime and the nationality of the immigrant who committed it. • Christian imagery. • Specific naming of politicians – Obama and Hilary. • Using ‘border patrol agents’ to describe men on horseback. • Sheer number of Facebook followers for Heart of Texas. • Implication that as Texas is far away from political eyes, it is credible for Texans to protect themselves. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of ‘illegal alien’ rather than immigrant depicting a creature. • Contrast of alien with poor families who want a better life. • Facts used in small print, providing context. • Banners used to attract the viewer. • Use of a narrative based on facts, imagery, and emotive language. • Persuasive and manipulative tone, allowing Christian citizens the right to defend their homeland against criminals. • Visual appeals to enforce messaging include sepia tones, naming Rape Second Degree (use of capitals), symbol of lightning bolts, and last statement ‘always guided by God’. • Use of capital letters and white on a black background lends authority to the post. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three separate paragraphs using a factual tone highlighting: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) illegal immigrant committing crime. 2) democratic policy that has led to Texans doing their duty and capturing this criminal. 3) arousing fear by listing bad crimes and contrasting them with poor families looking for a better life.

This post uses the ‘fear factor’ to attract a following of Christian people opposed to the immigration of other religions. The symbol of lightning appears throughout Christianity, and the banner suggests that these border control officers are law-abiding, God-fearing citizens who will protect Americans against ‘aliens’.

5.2.1 Immigration – Findings Analysis

Immigration is a popular theme with the US historically attracting citizens from all over the world to the 'land of plenty'. Many of the immigration posts in the 2016 election focussed on two subsets of immigrants, Muslims and Mexicans. There were many common themes running through the bigger sample of 15 immigration posts.

Most placed an emphasis on icons to draw the audience in, including patriotic American symbols such as the flag and the proposed Mexico-US border, or well-known art or symbols. In the examples above there is also the use of Islamic icons including the hijab and the burka, and Christian icons such as the bolt of lightning. In visual rhetorical analysis, ethos can also be seen through celebrity endorsements, with examples such as a young Donald Trump and Bill Murray, asking the viewer to act in some way. It was not known whether these people knew their faces were appearing in this way, but it is a highly effective method of making something appear credible. Immigration posts appear to rely heavily on pressure points and people's own prejudices in appealing to emotions in a bid to get them to act in some way. In the case of the above posts, the use of the hijab represents the Islamic faith which, in the minds of certain demographics, is inextricably linked with terrorists and foreigners. In Figure 5-1, representing the Mona Lisa as a Muslim is designed to mock an icon of the western world, and this disrespect appears to be a call to action for American citizens living in a predominantly Christian country. Almost all the posts have a 'them and us' message relating to religious differences, taxpaying issues or crime – all very emotive issues.

In visual rhetorical analysis, pathos is used to appeal to our emotions. Many of the posts rely on pathos to affect people using colour, facts, humour, language, and images that pull at emotions. Generally, the posts in this theme tended to fall into two 'colour' categories, being either very colourful (usually with a strong emphasis on blue and red, the patriotic colours of the US), or more chaotically coloured to represent Mexicans. Secondly, posts appear in very muted, sepia shades depicting God, the forefathers, history, or a foreign influence. Many of the religious and immigration themed posts were muted, symbolising God or a foreign influence such as Islam. However, anything relating to Mexicans appears bright, with the colour red being particularly prevalent.

Baffling the audience with 'facts', particularly about money, was a common ploy in immigration posts. Portrayed in a credible and factual way, many highlight the money people pay in taxes or the image that immigrants don't pay taxes. The purpose of the advertisements was usually to educate or perhaps baffle the viewer. This is aimed at Americans who are aggrieved by the taxes they pay, suggesting they were financing immigrants.

'Language' is an important part of posts when it is used. 'Illegals' or 'aliens' are commonly used words when referring to Mexicans, adding to the 'them and us' mentality but also when referring to crime. With Trump's election promise of 'building a wall', this likely appealed to people who agreed that Mexicans should be kept out. The use of the word 'invasion' or invaders is emotive, referring to the number of Muslims who have immigrated to the US. By naming the crime, the creator is adding credibility to it and relying on the emotions of the audience to be spurred into action.

Posts focussing on border issues are either pictorial (the wall, or groups of mothers and babies hanging near the wall) or include words and icons such as border control and security. Fear was sometimes also apparent in these posts – with the risk factor highlighting the need for safety against aliens. Fear is also used in the Islamic examples with an emphasis on the clandestine nature of the hijab or burka. The emphasis was to show how different these foreigners were from white Americans.

Most advertisements had a direct finger-pointing call to action – to pull a person in and then to make them do something whilst invested in the image.

As is evidenced in these first examples, the Internet Research Agency sought to harness very real American frustrations and anger over sensitive political matters as a way of influencing American thinking, voting, and behaviour (Romm, 2018).

5.3 THEME TWO: POLICING / CRIME

Table 5-4 – Crime/Policing Analysis for Figure 5-4

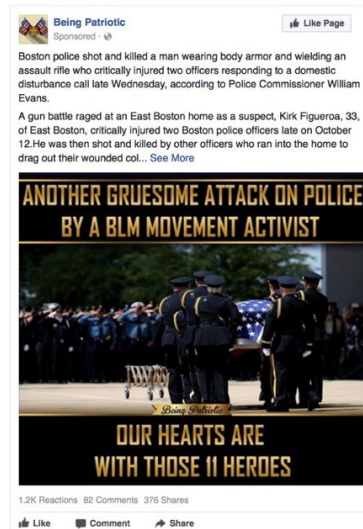
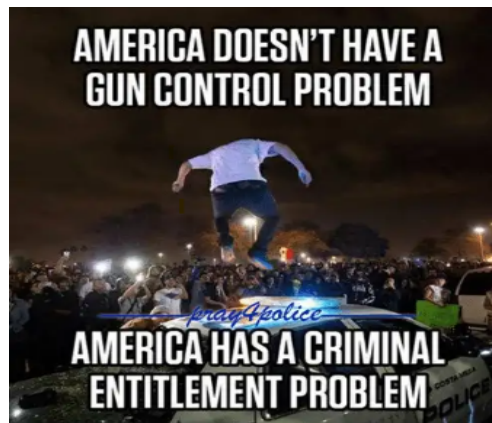


Figure 5-4 (Source: UsHadrons, 2018b)

ETHOS	PATHOS	LOGOS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent and logical. Commentary on a real funeral. • Narrative and the image are one, a gruesome attack leading to the death of police officers, the gunman then killed by police, the dead police honoured at a state funeral. • Use of authority (state funeral) to give credibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exaggerated language including 'gruesome attack', 'our hearts are with those 11 heroes', 'a gun battle raged'. • Tone subjectively leans in favour of the police, weighted against the attacker. • Implication of early death with the image of a state funeral with the coffin trolley to one side. • Gold lettering stresses the importance of the event. • Emotional use of images including police in dress uniform, the comfort of the US flag, officers saluting, the solemnity of the moment. • Sombre, respectful, emotional, and hard-hitting tone. • Powerful image of coffin; the text is powerful in its simplicity and font size. • Discreet images with the trolley and flag standing out more than the coffin. • Appeal to our emotions (our hearts), contrasting heroes with an activist. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facts with a sombre photo emphasise hero versus activist. • Narrative used to build the story justifying outcome: that happened, so this happened.

This advertisement pulls on the emotion that surrounds a funeral. It serves to justify the actions of the police, blaming the violence on criminals with the police acting in self-defence. The image of a state police funeral would attract viewers just by its authoritative message alone. It is a statement filled with the racial connotations of 'look at what these criminals (aka black people) are doing to us'.

Table 5-5 – Crime/Policing Analysis for Figure 5-5



This is so true! It is not a gun that kill people. it is a thug that use it. Like if you agree.
 Comment if you don't. police
 cop cops thinblueline
 lawenforcement
 policelivesmatter
 supportourtroops
 BlueLivesMatter AllLivesMatter
 brotherinblue bluefamily tbl
 thinbluelinefamily sheriff
 policeofficer backtheblue

Figure 5-5 (Source: UsHadrns, 2018g)

ETHOS	PATHOS	LOGOS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Banners consistent with the image, with an objective statement: see for yourself. No manipulation allowing the audience to form their own opinion. Portrayal that the issue is not what you think, but something very different. Downplaying the possibility of police brutality, focused instead on a well-dressed man aggravating police by jumping on their car. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crowd gathered in the darkness. Action shot grabs attention. Discreet image that attracts but takes time to work out. Use of police colours with white shirt reflecting in the blue light. No names, no explanations, just the focus on the man jumping. The power is in the image and the text. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unexaggerated use of text which stands out as much as the images– see for yourself.

In contrast to Figure 5-4, this figure shows a white man (rather than black) aggravating police. The argument is the same thought with the message that trouble is not started by the police but by others. The police are blameless. This advertisement would have been used for a different segment of voters than Figure 5-4, but with the same purpose – to support the police, and to look at current policies around crime as a voting issue.

Table 5-6 – Crime/Policing Analysis for Figure 5-6



Figure 5-6 (Source: Moneywatch, 2018)

ETHOS	PATHOS	LOGOS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collection of real snapshots adds to the reliability of the overall image. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eyes are centred by the biggest photo in the centre with a large man in a white t-shirt. 'Boy next door' photos are both emotionally appealing and heart-breaking. Use of photos suggests underlying message that the audience could be next. Lack of names and explanations appeals to a sense of injustice relying on the images to portray the message. Smaller photos around a bigger image are eye-catching and help narrate the story. This post is based more on emotion than logic. Text is powerful by the simplicity and the size of the font. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Photos of happy people, with a simple headline cutting across informing you they are victims who are dead.

Conversely, this advertisement from BM (Black matters) shows several photos of black people portrayed as the kid next door. It suggests these people are just like you and me and that it is the police who are violent. Each one of the people portrayed in this post has been killed by police.

5.3.1 Crime/Policing – Findings Analysis

The theme of policing or crime appeared in 24 per cent of the posts analysed from the 3,517 Internet Research Agency posts released to the Senate committee (Penzenstadler et al., 2018.) These posts centred on issues involving crime and policing, often with a racial connotation. They were often focussed on issues fraught with racial baggage, such as protests over policing. Separate posts, launched at the same time would fuel suspicion about how police treat black people in one post, whilst encouraging support for pro-police groups in another (Penzenstadler et al., 2018).

Policing posts all had the strong dominant colour of blue, synonymous with police as evidenced in Figures 5-4 and 5-5. In most cases the blue of the police uniforms and the American flag overshadow everything else. The converse of this were posts about police treating black people badly, and these were often colourful and snap-like as if portraying the boy next door, 'one of us' rather than someone official (Figure 5-6). The ordinary nature of these posts was an attraction.

Posts in this category used justification in accompanying text, using visually persuasive posts that would justify the use of force or violence against criminals or black people. The police posts are patriotic, often with a hero theme and intimating that the police were just doing their duty, and it is the others who were at fault or who caused the problem (See Figure 5-4). Many of the policing posts appear to be gathering supporters rather than calling people to any other sort of action and many of these groups such as Being Patriotic or BM had growing numbers of supporters. Behind the photos was also the more subtle messaging of "we need more police; we need more guns".

Other posts used simple images of everyday people sending the message 'don't condone this' such as in Figure 5-6. Some of these posts would have been likely targeted at cities where the Republicans needed more votes. The underlying message is that these people were defenceless and that under the Republican gun policies they could have defended themselves. The creator is appealing to family values and the innocence of people. It is an attack on the current government showing images of innocent lives that have been lost.

5.4 THEME THREE: GUNS

Table 5-7 – Guns Analysis for Figure 5-7



That's interesting. americafirst
 buildthewall donaldtrump
 presidenttrump trump
 stopterrorism noislam
 illegalimmigration nojihad
 immigrationreform maga tcot
 deport illegal illegalimmigration
 liberals republican democrat
 liberallogic liberal conservative
 constitution resist stupidliberals
 stupiddemocrats donaldtrump
 trump2016 patriot trump guns

Figure 5-7 (Source: UsHadrons, 2018a)

ETHOS	PATHOS	LOGOS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facts combined with a simple image suggesting a trend not a one-off problem. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using humour to make fun of west coasters which deflects from the subject. Relatable messaging: an ordinary man with ordinary people at a mall. Normality of the scene with casual dress. Number of people milling around stresses the easiness of gun sales. Use of one bright colour (red) which draws the eyes in. Red is symbolically Republican and a patriotic American colour. Tone is laidback, casual, and simple. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Image supports the logical argument that gun buying is easy even without any knowledge. Text clearly explains the photo suggesting credibility, not some nutter. Facts not emotion as a reason for action: There have been more mass killings therefore you should have a gun. Focus is on one man, but the juxtaposition of gun size to others on the wall downplays the act of owning a gun.

This post focuses on a very specific segment - west coasters, or white educated liberals, who have a lower percentage of gun ownership. It uses recent mass shootings as a fear factor highlighting how easy it is to buy a gun. It is encouraging people to vote for Republicans who support the second amendment and the right to defend oneself.

Table 5-8 – Guns Analysis for Figure 5-8



Figure 5-8 (Source: UsHadrons, 2018c)

ETHOS	PATHOS	LOGOS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of historic image combined with second amendment banner. • Challenge through the phrase, 'we plan to keep both'. The narrative of history sets the scene and suggests leave it to us, we are credible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Old photo in muted tones; white text stands out but doesn't detract. • Historical analogy and traditional arrangement of people stress confidence and patriotism convincing the audience to take their side. • Words such as symbol, granted, founding fathers, tyranny, and oppression appeal to emotion. • The tone is passionate, and the messaging is 'let us progress'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depicts that there is no choice to be made; you can have a gun and freedom. • The traditional arrangement adds to the historical concept, with the eyes being pulled to the top of the triangle. • A more traditional, old fashioned typeface is aiming to date this back in history, making it both logical and credible.

This post establishes that defending oneself goes way back to confederate times. This authority is steeped in history and nothing has changed. The second amendment gives Americans the right to keep their freedom. There is no obvious link with gun laws, however, the right to defend oneself is implicit in this 'war' image.

Table 5-9– Guns Analysis for Figure 5-9

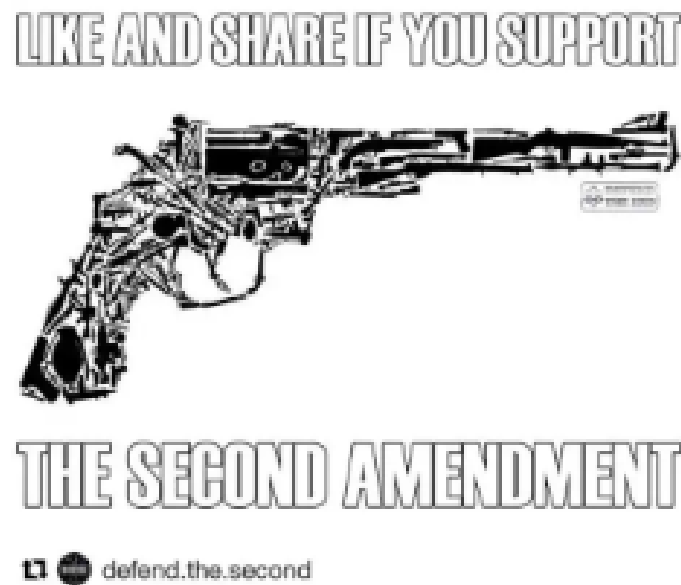


Figure 5-9 (Source: UsHadrons, 2022)

ETHOS	PATHOS	LOGOS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detailed sketch emphasises the complexity of a gun suggesting the weight of authority behind it. Use of directive language to enforce credibility: if you like this picture, like it and share it. Black and white depicts authority. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directive tone. Use of a simple black and white sketch (signifying something technical). This intricate design could appeal to any gun enthusiast. Citing the second amendment which isn't specifically about the right to carry guns, but about the right to freedom. Aiming to attract likeminded people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Despite no obvious link, the words at the bottom logically link to the gun.

This gun post is aimed at the gun enthusiast or at people who enjoy art and design, linking the right to have a gun with the second amendment. It uses form and design rather than violence or fighting to showcase that a gun is an art form rather than a weapon. This would be designed to attract people who abhor violence associated with guns by repackaging the message to applaud freedom, not violence.

5.4.1 Guns – Findings Analysis

Gun posts appeared very different to the other categories. They tended to fall into two distinct groups, firstly the right to defend given to the Americans in the Constitution under the Second Amendment, and secondly, glorifying the gun in terms of the gun itself, or the coolness or fun or silliness of some of the images suggesting that anyone can and should have a gun. There are many images of grannies pretending to fire, of sexily dressed females, and of games all with the purpose of seemingly glorifying arms.

A lot of the messaging proclaimed that guns are for everyone, that they are commonplace, and that Americans need a gun to defend themselves. There is a strong theme that it is a right to carry a gun

and that it exists because our forefathers fought for that right. Confederates are glorified, war and violence are glorified, or alternatively made to look sexy. Much of the messaging is clearly about defence but is twisted to include freedom, a much bigger topic that will have a far greater reach across the voting public. There were different ways of reminding people about the rights of the second amendment but all glorifying the gun in some way, even as in Figure 5-9 as an art form, with an intricate sketch of the inner workings of the gun likely to appeal to both gun enthusiasts and non-gun defenders alike.

Gun posts tended to be more varied than other themes with the need to appeal to a vast number of subsets. Where immigration was often Mexicans versus Muslims, in the case of guns it was broken into women, sexual connotations, the elderly, gun enthusiasts, technology enthusiasts, gangs, and so on. Gun posts needed to stretch from white Democratic voting liberals all the way through to rural Republicans, and everything in between. A photo of a sexy woman with a gun may not appeal to a liberal west coaster, but the gun as an art form might.

5.5 THEME FOUR: RACE

Table 5-10– Race Analysis for Figure 5-10



Figure 5-10 (Source: Romm, 2018)

ETHOS	PATHOS	LOGOS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Well-known childhood rhyme - simple messaging both objective and factual.Use of flag as an icon.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Simple sentence structure with a simple rhyme appealing to all age groups.Reference to Mexican food which is very popular in America.Handwritten placard, which is colourful, yet childish.Creativeness of the flag and its portrayal of patriotism.Stars and stripes are iconic symbols of America endorsing the post and suggesting safety.Friendly and amusing tone, which at the end packs a punch.Bright colours add to the fun, making it almost parade-like.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Use of the rhyme feels logical.

This post is full of symbols and images designed to get Americans on side with Mexicans. It shows that Mexicans are part of the American culture with the use of the deconstructed American flag, the reference to tacos which have morphed into American food culture and the use of a childhood rhyme to emphasise that not all Mexicans are unemployable. It suggests that Mexicans are not the problem, that others are.

Table 5-11 – Race Analysis for Figure 5-11

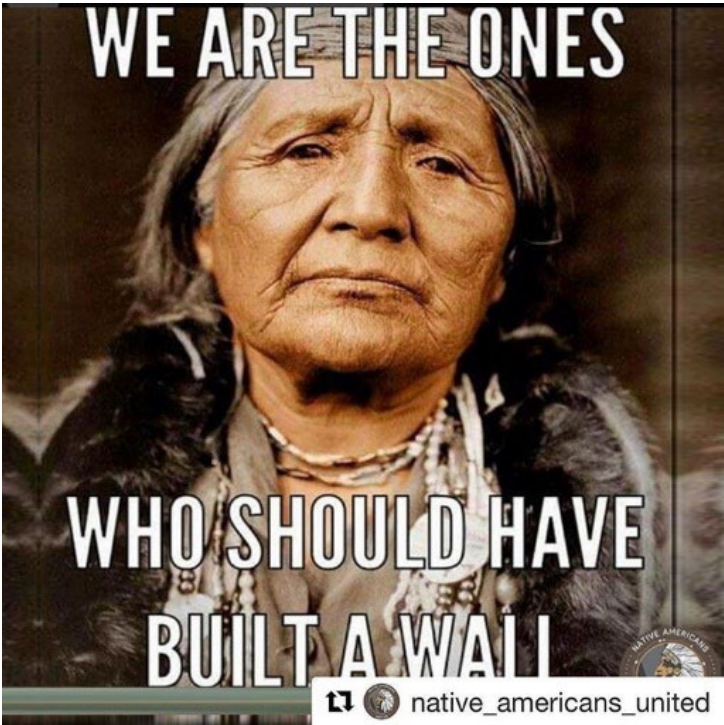


Figure 5-11 (Source: UsHadrons, 2018e)

ETHOS	PATHOS	LOGOS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use of an aging native American woman as an icon of wisdom.• Use of objective statement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use of words that are simple, large, and clear, creating a serious divide in the statement that nothing has changed. The large capital letters stand out more than the image.• Subdued muted tones add to the authenticity of the message.• No evidence of patriotism in the colours used.• Use of stature and wise words. Woman is authentic, serious, wise, and assertive. Used as the focal point of the post.• A humorous statement delivered with a directive tone.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The text combines with an image conveying wisdom to make a logical statement.

This post uses authority through an image of age and wisdom and points out that Republicans are as bad as Mexicans. It appeals to voters who are interested in Native American issues and makes fun of Trump’s election bid that a wall will be built to keep Mexicans out.

Table 5-12 – Race Analysis for Figure 5-12



Figure 5-12 (Source: UsHadrons, 2018f)

ETHOS	PATHOS	LOGOS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portrayal of the US flag and the use of red, white, and blue. • Policeman's uniform and gun suggest authority and credibility contrasted with the child and chocolate bar. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very visual image with lots of contrast. • Chocolate bar versus gun; black versus white; hoodie versus uniform; hood versus headpiece. • Child portrays innocence and trust. • Policeman through Ku Klux Klan imagery portrays elitism and brutality. • Contrasting elements are attention grabbing through the narrative of the different images. • Imagery is iconic and historical. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No text, making it difficult to decipher an obvious logical message except in the contrasting icons.

This post is full of juxtapositions around the themes of brutality and innocence, white and black, police and violence, elitism, and social injustice. It is aimed to get the attention of voters unhappy with current policing policies and brutality.

5.5.1 Race – Findings Analysis

The Internet Research Agency relied on Facebook features to target specific categories of users. More than half of the released posts made express reference to race. These alone accounted for 25 million ad impressions which was a measure of how many times the post was pulled from a server for transmission to a device (Penzenstadler et al., 2018).

Again, there was a varied range of posts, but common themes included American Indians, the Ku Klux Klan, and Mexicans. Some humour appears in this category, particularly when combined with an image of an Indian American, Figure 5-11 being a typical example. This post aims to inject some humour into an otherwise fraught topic. Race was a particularly complex issue in this election and cut across many different sections of the community, the most prevalent being Mexicans, Blacks, and Indians. Many of the Mexican-inspired advertisements are colourful (Figure 5-10 is bright and colourful). Icons are used, often deconstructed in some way, as well as words to appeal to the widest pool of people possible. The use of a childhood poem also ensures that the reach of this will go far and wide. During the 2016 election there was much disinformation about Mexicans, as it was one of Trump's key platforms in his voting pledges.

Figure 5-11 is also anti-Republican, making fun of Americans who the Indians should have kept out in the first place. It is a call to the educated that history is repeating itself. Finally, Figure 5-12 goes to the heart of the race issue in America, but as a role reversal. This portrays white supremacists as bad and a little black boy as innocent and good. They have the same pose, similar clothing, and the boy's chocolate bar is the symbol of the gun, making this a parody. The intention is to depict what is wrong in society, which is an underlying theme through all the racial posts. It stresses the innocence and trust of youth versus the hidden nature of authority and would have appealed to a wide cross-section of the community. There is no persuasion, rather a stark contrast between two races.

5.6 THEME FIVE: EVENTS

Table 5-13 – Events Analysis for Figure 5-13



Figure 5-13 (Source: Romm, 2018)

ETHOS	PATHOS	LOGOS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actual event that was well covered in the media. Image of the Superbowl with banner linking it to Beyoncé. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patriotism is clear. Game of football, something simple and pleasurable that risks getting caught up in the argument of racism. Statement against using sport as a platform for any issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Logical appeal: that happened so then this. Recent media coverage supports the validity of the event. Relates specifically to the Super Bowl and the desire for sport to be unaffected by politics. Times, locations, and the nature of the rally. Unlikely that a viewer would see more than one post as they are targeted at different demographics.

The post is designed to appeal to middle-class Americans who just want to safely watch a football game with no politics or violence surrounding it. Media had a field day with Beyoncé's performance at the recent Superbowl and this post aims to incite people (predominantly male and family oriented) by suggesting that the game was spoilt by a political agenda attacking the very people who protect the public.

Table 5-14 – Events Analysis for Figure 5-14



Figure 5-14 (Source: Romm, 2018)

ETHOS	PATHOS	LOGOS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear message to women of all colours, also relates to the actual event. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appeals to feminine emotions. • Stark black and white photo softened using pink. • Modern font. • Women are in motion depicting urgency, direction, and purpose. • Image depicting black and white women. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logical: lets stand up for something that we feel is not right. • Clever text and the main points are the times, locations, and the nature of the rally. • Unlikely that a viewer would see more than one post as they are targeted as different demographics.

In contrast to Figure 5-13, this advertisement is appealing to females, standing up for the right of all women to be confident and to do what they believe in. It portrays black and white, side by side with no room for differences. The contrast between the two is designed in a way so that they hit completely different target audiences.

Table 5-15 – Events Analysis for Figure 5-15



Figure 5-15(Source: Abbruzzese, 2017)

ETHOS	PATHOS	LOGOS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posted by the large Facebook group – Stop Islamization of Texas. • Non-threatening messaging, just factual details of the event. • Placement is well supported and consistent with the group. • No reason to suggest that the events are not real. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arouses passion with its decree, stop islamisation of Texas. • Appears authoritative and objective to a strident passionate group. • Uses language, colour, and imagery to grab attention. • The cross on the Islamic flag depicts an emotion of not wanting these people, and a call to action. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logical layout with an image depicting the purpose of the event. • Date, times, and location are clearly laid out ensuring that people will turn up at the right place. • The reason for the event is clearly stated with a clear call to action. • Appeals to Texans’ emotional ties to their homeland. • Text is chosen for the audience, as are the colours and the photo of an actual building.

Post is designed to attract Texans who think that (specifically) Islamic immigrants are taking over their state. It appeals to the passion of these people through the imagery of a well-known public building, and the use of orange and the symbol of Islam to get its message across.

Table 5-16– Events Analysis for Figure 5-16



Figure 5-16 (Source: Allbright, 2017)

ETHOS	PATHOS	LOGOS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Posted by the large well-known Facebook group United Muslims of America. Non-threatening messaging. Placement is credible and well supported, consistent with recent events. No reason to suggest that the events are not real. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No use of emotional language. Appears authoritative and objective, appealing to a passionate and zealous group. A silhouette portrays knowledge, safety, and power. Non-American and non-threatening, increasing emotional appeal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Logical layout with an image depicting the purpose of the event. The dates, times, and location are clearly laid out ensuring that people will turn up at the right place. Reason for the event is clearly stated with a clear call to action. Appeals to learning about and knowledge of Muslims. Text is chosen for the audience, as are the colours. A silhouette highlighting a mosque drawing in the religious element of knowledge. Very understated in terms of colour

This post conversely is designed to attract a Muslim audience, appealing to learned Muslims through the imagery of a simple design of a mosque and the colours used. There is no suggestion of violence, more a suggestion that their learning and knowledge could be under threat, that they should protect what is theirs.

5.6.1 Events – Findings Analysis

The Internet Research Agency became very good at organising political rallies, often in conflict with each other or just to provoke different subsets of people into some form of action. They would use fake accounts such as the ones above to announce the event, then privately message the event to real users, asking if they could attend. Often, they would get one of these ‘real’ people to be the event coordinator, with the Russian organiser obviously not attending the event. In addition, the people recruited were usually very popular on social media (Broderick, 2019). Of the 234 unique events, 205 targeted non-white liberals or likely-Clinton voters. Just 29 targeted whites, conservatives, or likely Trump voters (Kim, 2018).

The anti-Beyoncé and pro-Beyoncé rallies (Figures 5-13 and 5-14) were organised after an incident at the Super Bowl. Beyoncé had performed her new single at the final which referenced both the Black Lives Matter Movement and the Black Panthers. There was outrage by some that she was using the Super Bowl platform to attack police officers, the very people who protect the public. Subsequently, the Internet Research Agency created two politically opposed events planned at the same venue at the same time. The purpose was to exploit both sides of the major political debates in 2016 including football players who knelt during the national anthem to bring attention to issues of racism. Figure 5-13 sought to target people who were believed to be predominantly police officers, firefighters, and military officers, urging them to appear at a protest of Beyoncé outside the NFL headquarters. Another account, Sincerely Black, targeting black users, directed viewers to a pro-Beyoncé protest at the same location (Figure 5-14). Whilst neither post gained much traction, it showed the extent of manipulation in the posts, exploiting both sides of major national debates (Romm, 2019). The posts were circulated on social media and were indistinguishable from content generated by friends and family (Fanning & Rice, 2018). Whilst these two advertisements didn’t get much traction, they show the extent the Internet Research Agency worked to generate general social unrest (Fanning & Rice, 2018).

The use of colours in many of the event posts was important depending on whom it was aimed at. It was unlikely that a person would see both sides of the coin, such was the targeting. In the first examples above there is a very clear line between a colourful and ‘live’ game that will evoke memories of those that attended the game a week before. The focus is just on the game itself, nothing else. In contrast Figure 5-14 is in shades of black and white, with pink writing clearly targeting black users and more widely all females, supporters of the singer who are less likely to be as passionate about a football game.

Colour is also important depending on the target market. Here the use of green and orange points towards the Muslim community also using the icons of the flag, an important state building, and the shadow of a mosque. These are important as Texas is an intensely patriotic state, and both posts were aimed at evoking an emotion that would make the audience attend the event. Heart of Texas ads leaned into an image of the state as a land of guns and barbecue and had hundreds of thousands of followers (Allbright, 2017). United Muslims of America, a Russian sponsored group, also appeared highly credible with many followers on Facebook. The purpose of each event is clear, as are the location and details, and it is unlikely that people would have seen both posts. The result of the latter event (Figures 5-15 and 5-16) was two groups showing up in downtown Houston with interactions between the two groups eventually escalating into confrontation and verbal attacks (Allbright, 2017).

Logos in visual rhetorical analysis is an appeal to our logic and reasoning. The very factual nature of the events posts helped with engaging people. The most important elements in almost all event

posts were simple imagery that would relate to the people being targeted; and the specifics of the rally – where, when, what time and why which made the whole post very logical. Whilst many of these conflicting events did not pull big crowds, they received high engagement on Facebook in terms of interest and shares.

CHAPTER SIX - DISCUSSION

This chapter is a discussion of the results of the research based on the findings discussed in the previous chapter and how they answer the research question. The chapter is divided into sections elaborating on PBT, persuasion, and influence (the three key elements of the research), as well as how each has a part to play in collaboration with Facebook in directly influencing voters in an election process.

Section 6.1 discusses how the use of PBT, via this analysis, operates as an enabler, amassing thousands of data points on every individual, with the ability to then cut and dice that information into very specifically targeted groups of the population. Data points have been created through basic facts such as name, age, and address, as well as an individual's own actions or choices. They enable PBT tools to microtarget a wide number of different profile types as per the analysis of the images collected from the 2016 US election and the review of the established literature around this domain. Section 6.2 discusses the use of persuasion tools on Facebook advertisements which motivate or persuade a viewer to take one simple action such as a 'click' or a 'like'. The use of these tools enables this second step which ultimately leads the unsuspecting viewer through to the final stage of the process - the influencing stage. Section 6.3 looks at how voters, over a sustained period, could be influenced by the Facebook groups' posts. In this final stage, the viewer is led through a series of simple choices such as liking, sharing, or following through to deciding who to vote for or whether to vote at all.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the continual development of digital technologies in the 21st century has had a notable impact on political elections worldwide. Amassing amounts of data at an individual level has opened the gates to persuasion, influence, and manipulation of voters and the voting outcome. For this research the 2016 US presidential election has been used as a case study to answer the question:

How do political advertisements on Facebook persuade and influence voters?

The use of PBT, employed alongside persuasion and influence has far-reaching effects on the overall outcome of an election and the subsequent government of the day. In the analysis of the 67 advertisements used in the lead up to the 2016 US election, the processes whereby outcomes were manipulated using PBT, persuasion, and influence were highlighted.

6.1 USING POLITICAL BEHAVIOURAL TARGETING

In any of the thousands of political targeting campaigns via social media, regardless of the instigator, used in the 2016 US presidential election, there were three distinct steps. The first, using PBT, was to create specific cohorts of people using the immense real-time databases available on the American voting public (Persily, 2017; Hutchison, 2020; Ward, 2018; Winston, 2016; Wozniak, 2017). There was public and official ignorance or naivety, with a widespread lack of knowledge as to the existence of such a sophisticated system that could be used to successfully target individuals on such a micro level (Ghosh & Scott, 2018; Kruike-meier et al., 2016; Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2018).

Digital technology has allowed databases to grow dramatically, holding tens of thousands of data points on individual voters (Rubenstein, 2014). These points provide an in-depth set of facts on every voter. They are then used to build individual profiles, enabling political organisations to target specific individuals at a micro level, matching individual preferences to specific voting issues. Howard (2005), notes that outcomes can often be determined by the quality and quantity of the information.

By 2016 the quantity of information on each voter was vast, and so too was the quality of the information which had progressed from databases of age, address, and gender to a much more sophisticated inventory of shopping history, environmental preferences, religious beliefs, etc. This new information could help in correctly assuming voter outcomes. Considering the quality and quantity of information available alongside the exponential growth in social media in the 21st century, it is unsurprising that there was the ability to target two people living next door to each other, who possibly socialised with one another, with very different advertisements on their Facebook feeds. Whilst this was just the first step to influencing how people voted, it was a critical step helping to identify potential voters into more narrowly defined categories where they could then be led through a persuasion and influence campaign (Ross, 2015; Bodo et al., 2017; Madrigal, 2017; Kim et al., 2018). Facebook, working commercially in tandem with a third party, could therefore conceivably direct an election outcome (Rosen, 2014; Zittain, 2014; Meyer, 2016). Profiling did not just pick up people living on the same roads in a suburb but could put together people living on opposite sides of the country with the same shopping or religious preferences. Data suggests that whilst the Russian Government initially targeted Americans in a somewhat random fashion, they did turn their focus to swing states like Florida in the lead up to the election (Jenkins, 2018). There was also heavy targeting in Maryland, Missouri, and New York, and substantially more advertising in California than in Pennsylvania (Jenkins, 2018). Targeting was so scientifically specific that just a click of a mouse opened the door to both persuasion and influence, two key factors working alongside PBT, affecting the motivation behind an individual's vote.

PBT has the sole purpose of obtaining a specific political outcome (Otega, 2020) and has been used not only in the US but worldwide. There is evidence of it working to shape or influence the 'surprise' outcomes of the UK Brexit vote, the election of Scott Morrison in Australia (Murphy, 2020), and other high-profile elections. PBT can be used to both dissuade or persuade people to vote on an issue, on a party, or to take simple actions such as 'liking' or 'sharing' a post (Bodo et al., 2017). Likened to the traditional concept of subliminal advertising, the use of PBT directly influences the outcome of consumer choice. It has been labelled a gamechanger, evidenced in the 2016 US election where Donald Trump's presidential bid was deemed unlikely even the day before the election (Ward, 2018) with every poll projecting that Clinton would win the presidency by significant margins (Jenkins, 2018). Of concern is that PBT was used in the 2016 US presidential election not only by political parties but by teens based in the Balkans, as a money-making venture, and by the Russian-backed Internet Research Agency, as a way of retaining voter allegiance, finding new voters, or suppressing voters as proof that the American political system could be influenced and muddled with. With groups able to engage people in polarising social issues and the Russian Government able to directly sow seeds of discord, the democratic election process could no longer be described as a level playing field (Bodo et al., 2017).

PBT has been exacerbated by social media through the widespread growth of sites such as Facebook and Instagram and their popularity with millions of people worldwide. At the time of the election, Facebook had access to more than 162 million adult US users who could be targeted on a micro level. It didn't take the company long to realise the commercial potential of offering a service to target users with politically influenced posts, that could be spread far and wide, with no transparency or accountability. The attraction of this process or product was that if the posts couldn't be seen after the event, they couldn't be challenged (Howard, 2005). Facebook has made an archive publicly available of political advertisements dating back to May 2018 but no advertisements can be found, despite extensive internet searches, pre-dating May 2018 (Kaplan, 2019) with Facebook continually refusing to release any 'negative' presidential advertisement that it ran (Winston, 2016). The only evidence of political posts still available on the Internet from this

period are some of the ones produced by the Internet Research Agency released by the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. One day before the Senate Intelligence Committee hearing on foreign interference on social media, Facebook removed 32 pages and accounts (Kim, 2018). Whilst there are no archives publicly available of political party posts on Facebook during the 2016 campaigning period, what is on public record is the amount of Facebook spend by political parties in the US election. This proves that the use of social media, namely Facebook, was an important component, when compared to traditional print or television advertising, of the election campaigning (Moore, 2016).

Despite there being no easy way to obtain images used in the election, through exhaustive internet searching and a key storage website of the Russian-backed Internet Research Agency advertisements, this research was able to analyse a selection of Facebook advertisements used in the lead up to the 2016 US presidential election. In these, it is evident that PBT had reached a peak with a vast number of posts being used to selectively target different groups, ages, genders, and social demographics on a massive range of issues. It is on record that there were at least three voter suppression operations underway in some states, focussed specifically on white liberals, young women, and African Americans, all votes needed by Clinton to win the election (Green & Issenberg, 2016). Zuiderveen Borgesius (2016) also notes the specific targeting of the African American voter. Facebook has repeatedly denied granular targeting, stating that most of its advertisements were targeted across the US. On closer analysis of the Russian advertisements, there is wide evidence of specific targeting of cities with a history of headlines about racial unrest and police brutality, such as Baltimore, Maryland and Ferguson, Missouri. Advertisements also targeted interests, one example being targeting users aged 18 to 45 who were interested in BlackNews.com, the colour black, or HuffPost Black Voices that were not Hispanic or Asian American (Lapowsky, 2018b). PBT allowed this detail of specific advertising.

Some posts asked the viewer for a like or a share, others were more obvious in wanting backing for a specific party or event, but most hardly resembled overt political advertising at all, which helped create more deception. Many had no immediate call to action but were subsequently followed by more posts on the same theme. The primary advantage of PBT was that the targeted Facebook posts could be almost never-ending, with a flow of different themes and emotional appeals as a way of finding the hook that would move an individual through to the persuasion stage. Take for example two advertisements wanting to influence the 'gun' vote (see Figures 6-1 and 6-2 pulled from the wider set of analysed images).



Figure 6-1 (Source: Rath, 2019)



Figure 6-2 (Source: Rath, 2019)

The motive behind the above advertisements is the same, persuading viewers to support the second amendment of the Declaration of Independence, allowing people the right to keep and bear arms. The audiences, however, differ in their targeting. Issue campaigns concerning guns would be concentrated in rural areas in Wisconsin, whilst campaigns promoting racial conflict would be concentrated in Milwaukee. Wisconsin individuals interested in guns, with high levels of insecurity, would be targeted with fear appeals whilst those who were family-oriented would receive messages like “guns protect your loved ones” (Kim et al., 2018). As can be seen in the examples above, Figure 6-1 preys on people’s fears. If someone provokes an attack on you, your house, or belongings it invokes fear and thoughts of self-defence. This even extends to the perceived right to defend oneself against a corrupt government. The messaging here is you need a gun to defend yourself because it is not safe to be without one. Figure 6-2, however, is about quality time that can be had by a father and son out in the wild on a shooting adventure and how a parent shouldn’t want to lose this freedom. What stands out is that they are totally different messages aimed at one vote – the vote that supports the gun laws, or in this case, the Republican party with Donald Trump as the presidential candidate. Either advertisement simply wanted one action – to click, like, or share.

Stoking fear about immigrants was central to the Trump 2016 campaign, with the first advertisement of that election campaign focusing on ‘radical Islamic terrorism’ in the wake of a mass shooting in California. Trump painted a picture of an America overwhelmed by immigrants pouring over the border (Kaplan, 2019). There is a wide variety of immigration themed advertisements that were used (immigration being another emotive election issue), depending on the demographic that was being targeted. A Facebook user might see a number of these posts and depending on their individual makeup one would ultimately persuade them to take the next step in the targeting campaign. Figures 6-3, 6-4, and 6-5 are overtly aimed at anti-Islamic views, pulling in the differences such as the hijab (enforced anonymity of terrorists) and terrorism with the twin tower images. Whilst a voter might not have any interest in Clinton backing Muslims, they may feel very differently when targeted with an image of the twin towers. This voter might live in New York, work in the city, may have known a person killed in the event, or might be a parent wanting their children to grow up in a safe world. There are several persuasion triggers that can be deployed to get a person to click if you had access to the data and knowledge that was available.



Figure 6-3



Figure 6-4



Figure 6-5

Figures 6-6 and 6-7 directly target the financial aspects of illegal immigration. If you had Mexican neighbours 6-6 might not work, 6-7 however might. Some people, particularly those living on the west coast, felt strongly about the number of Mexicans entering the country illegally. An image of a wall in 6-8 might be the simple trigger to like a post. Figure 6-9 might evoke a traditionalist to click, where 6-10 was aimed at invoking patriotic emotions about people who died defending the country.



Figure 6-6

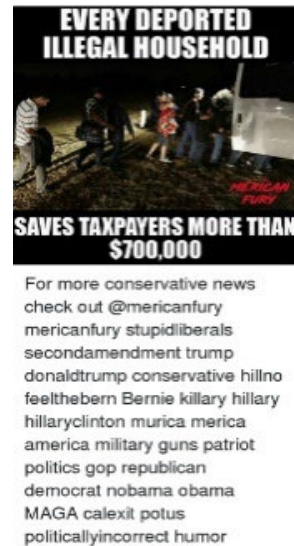


Figure 6-7



Figure 6-8



Figure 6-9



Figure 6-10

Two things stand out in the analysis of how PBT was used. Every post, no matter how basic in its messaging or imagery, was carefully put together with the singular purpose of acting as a hook to the viewer, with the hook designed to persuade action from that viewer. This simple action would move them along to the next 'bucket'.

Secondly, social media enabled a far greater, freer use of imagery than what had been possible with print or television advertising. The old proverb "a picture is worth a thousand words" (Barnard, 1921), stands true with the image rather than the text often provoking the action and appealing to human emotions as a main driver in the desired outcomes.

6.2 PBT, SOCIAL POSTS, AND PERSUASION

The second step, once a voter had been initially targeted, was persuasion. Persuasion, as a form of communication, typically motivates an action, often in the spur of the moment. It can be defined as "human communication that is designed to influence others by modifying their beliefs, values, or attitudes" (Simons, 1976, p.21).

Persuasion does not rely on trust, but rather on causing an action or a decision without earning buy-in. In terms of social media, liking and sharing are both spur of the moment decisions. "Whilst in the moment, persuasion is neither accidental nor coercive but inherently communicational" (Dainton & Zelley, 2004, p.104).

Over time, the aim of this simple action was to make it an influencing factor on an individual's electoral vote. As an example, on one day leading up to the election, Trump's campaign published advertisements aimed at Facebook users that led to 100,000 different web pages, each microtargeted at a different segment of voters (Winston 2016). This highlights the sheer scale of the persuasion campaign that would then lead Facebook users onto the influence stage.

In this research, evidence of persuasion was found in every advertisement that was viewed. Every post had a singular purpose, to persuade someone to do something. In politics, this translates to influencing a person's political beliefs, attitudes, or values (Franz & Ridout, 2007). People identified and targeted using PBT were persuaded to take a simple action and then influenced over time to take a final predetermined action. The drawcard of Facebook is its ability to give you what you want. The content you see is designed to provoke an emotion. It might make you curious, elated, excited, sad, or angry. Any of these emotions could make you like or share, which in turn increases exposure (Ghosh & Scott, 2018).

Any like, share, follow, or comment on Facebook transferred the targeted individual into another bucket as seen in Figure 6-11. If you like a page, you will get more posts from that group; if you like a story, you will get similar stories; if you interact with a person, you will see more of their updates (Madrigal, 2017). The result of the simple persuasive action was to move a viewer to a new bucket where they could then be influenced through a specifically tailored content campaign with the end goal of a specific voter action such as voting, abstaining, or switching allegiances. This demonstrates how the simple approach of using PBT to persuade and influence ultimately influenced the long-term behaviour of targeted social media users on Facebook and led to a role in determining the outcome of the election.

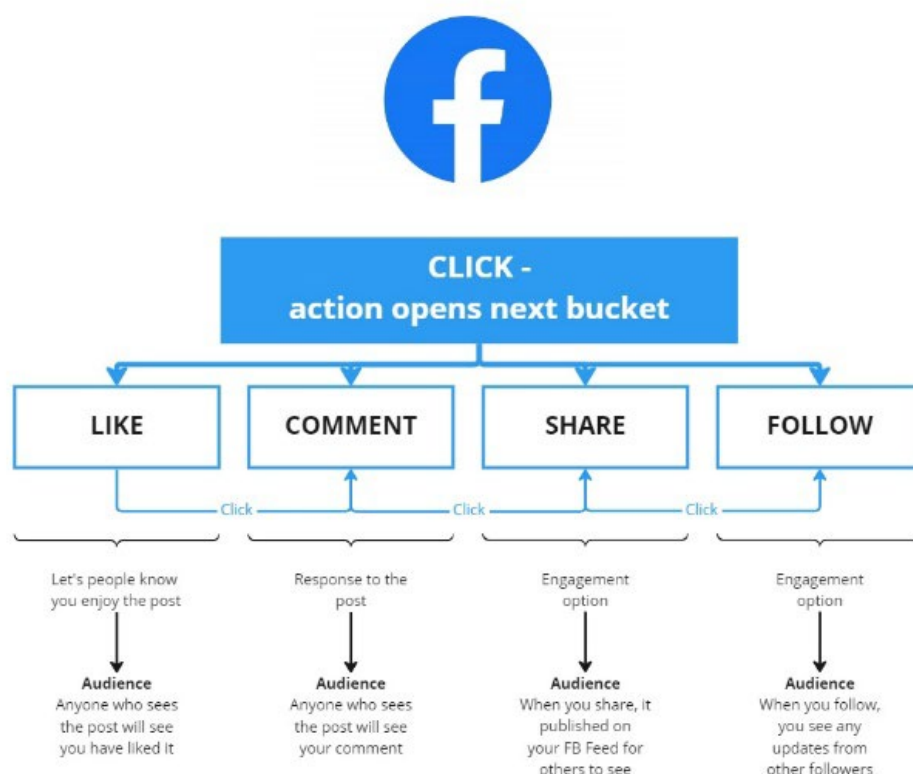


Figure 6-11 Facebook Targeting Dynamics
(Source: Author)

The advertisements used in this analysis provide a clear understanding of both PBT and the construction of each advertisement could persuade an individual to like or share a post or to follow a Facebook group. Each of these actions is just one click of a mouse (see Figure 6-11). Political advertisements on Facebook influenced these actions using elements including icons, colour and tone, facts, emotional appeal, font size, or language. Each of these was a well thought out but simple means of persuasion. Factored into this was the knowledge that every voter had a different profile, necessitating the production of thousands of different advertisements all with the common theme of getting a voter hooked enough that they could be passed onto the influencing stage. As an example, from the data analysis, many of the selected posts use icons as a form of persuasion. This might take the form of a hajib as per Figure 5-1, a bolt of lightning (5-3), a funeral (5-4), patriotic colours (5-8) and symbols of the stars and stripes (5-10), or the Ku Klux Klan (5-12). All these icons provide the impetus required for a click, if the receiver has been targeted accurately enough due to understanding the aspect of persuasion that works to influence their behaviour. Consider someone who fears terrorism, or a patriotic American, or a Christian strong in their beliefs, or even just a family-oriented individual. Each image has made careful use of an icon to pull the viewer in, ensuring the simple action of a click which then takes them to a longer campaign to further persuade the user.

As another example, Figure 5-2 relies on financial facts aimed at the American taxpayer as its persuading power. A taxpayer reading in black and white the cost of an illegal immigrant is likely to feel an emotion that will cause them to click not wanting their taxes to fund these 'foreigners'.

A standout in the analysis is the creativity used in the gun themed posts. The right to own a gun is fiercely defended in the US, and rather than stating the obvious, posts were created to attract those not in favour of gun laws. These were varied in style and design with the aim of reaching far and wide across the American public. Each one was aimed at a very specific, often small, target group. The gun focused post of Figure 5-7 is directed at Californians, often portrayed as laid back and generically anti-violence. It uses recent shootings in California to invoke an emotion reinforced by the messaging that there is now a reason to buy a gun. Hitting a very different note, Figure 5-9 is aimed at both gun enthusiasts who are impressed by the complexity of the gun itself, but also at creative types who would enjoy the black and white etching in its simplicity, drawing away from the reality that a gun is used to kill. Other images studied as part of the wider examination in the rhetorical analysis often link guns to sexuality (women in skimpy clothing holding a gun) or humour (such as a grandmother holding a gun next to her washing on the line).

Political advertisements come in all shapes and sizes and allow the ability to target different people with different advertisements depending on their individual makeups (determined through the cutting and dicing of data used in PBT). Where one advertisement might only influence the decision of a small percentage of people who see it, ten different advertisements all with the same targeting objectives raise that percentage tenfold. The ability to both create different profiles and to then target those profiles in different ways is the power that lies behind the use of PBT on Facebook and its ability to provide long-term influence on something as powerful as the outcome of a general election.

The use of Christian imagery and motifs such as God and the use of the bible in Figure 5-3 work effectively in connecting with and 'hooking' those with Christian beliefs and so acting in a persuasive manner for the messages used in such political advertisements. Political language and historical references could be used to persuade amateur historians, or conversely, people with no knowledge of American history, but gullible in their belief in everything they read. The use of political language such as the American Declaration of Independence can galvanise or motivate, but at worst it can be designed to make lies sound truthful, or murder respectable (Partington & Taylor, 2017). Posts aimed at historical facts or events such as Figure 5-8 are usually faded or muted in tone, depicting age or a historical moment, adding credibility to the post. The use of triangular imagery in this post equally targets traditionalists.

The unsubtle use of grief to get the 'emotional' click is evident in posts such as Figure 5-4 aimed at good citizens feeling a sense of right and wrong, and for whom a funeral has an emotive pull. This type of emotive imagery was also used extensively by the black Facebook groups, depicting the innocence of black people killed by the police, often the boy next door such as in Figure 5-6.

Some posts such as Figure 5-13 keep things very basic and to the point, in this case, aimed at those who resent politics getting in the way of a good game of football. Action shots are also a way of pulling an individual in, such as Figure 5-14 directed at the liberal female going places, and Figure 5-5 where a man is jumping on a car, or even Figure 5-7 depicting a man in a shooting stance.

Other tactics can include age and wisdom often combined with humour as in Figure 5-11 or the use of children to take away from the seriousness of the post as in Figure 5-10 using a well-known childhood rhyme, and Figure 5-12 which downplays the actual story of a policeman aiming a gun at a black child.

Text is also a useful tool of persuasiveness. An image when combined with specific text can powerfully hit a very targeted group of people. Examples of the power of text include Figure 5-2,

showing a clear juxtaposition between upright taxpaying citizens and freeloading Mexicans, Figure 5-3 with the banner 'always guided by God', Figure 5-10 with a take on a childhood rhyme (roses are red), and the use of a joke in Figure 5-11 ('we are the ones who should have built a wall'). Text also can be used to direct an action with Figures 5-2 and 5-5 stating 'like if you agree', Figure 5-9 stating 'like and share if you support', or in the case of Figures 5-13 to 5-16 'come to this event to show your support'.

Each of these different elements of persuasion, when used in tandem with the voter knowledge available through PBT, allowed very direct and targeted campaigns. Moreover, what one person saw on their Facebook feed may have been very different to that of their workmate, their neighbour, or even another family member. This individualised targeted advertisement often left no room for doubt. It was direct, simple, and very easy to get just a click which would then open the door to a targeted influencing campaign, particularly in minority states or in states where voter turnout was low. The evidence suggests that both major political parties were using these tactics, but also other players such as the Russian-backed Internet Research Agency. Persuasion was the first step of targeting individuals that might change sides, start to vote, or abstain from voting, all thought out and manoeuvred from a computer programme, often thousands of miles away. This shift in voter behaviour after being exposed to the PBT reinforces the fact that voters are influenced by advertisements targeted to them on social media.

Political advertisements on Facebook persuaded voters through their very granular nature. Each individual post, of the many thousands that were produced, focussed on just one element. In conjunction with PBT this was all it would take to persuade a voter, and if one advertisement didn't work, such as Figure 5-7 where the aim was to catch a conservative Californian, another one such as Figure 5-9 might appeal to a design enthusiast in a second round of posts. The efficacy of this campaign meant that a voter could be targeted in a range of ways, over days, weeks, or months, until a point of persuasion made them take one simple action. There weren't just a few pieces of information on an individual, but thousands of data points that could be manipulated in many ways by sophisticated algorithms. This meant that advertisements could continually be produced, widely varied in their design so that an individual would not necessarily pick up the microtargeting that was happening behind the scenes. The sophistication of this method was how it could sustain long-term influence on targeted voters.

6.3 INFLUENCE

In this research, influencing has been described as having a vision of an outcome and then, without force or coercion, earning the buy-in necessary to achieve that outcome (de Falco, 2019). Converting a vote includes targeting and persuading an individual through social media, to like, share, or follow. Then trust needs to be built up to ensure the desired outcome which in this case is a decision on how to cast one's vote. Whilst persuasion requires communication, influence works silently behind the scenes earning trust over time. This third step is just as important as the first two, as it is here in collaboration with the use of PBT and persuasion, that voters might change sides, voting for something different, starting to vote or abstaining from voting altogether.

In the analysis of the posts, the use of themes grouped advertisements together that on the face of it were very different but promoted the same messaging or targeted the same outcome. When referring to the initial group of 1,000 advertisements that were collected for research, it became apparent that each Facebook group promoted different issues. If a person liked or shared a post such as Figure 5-3, they would be targeted by the Heart of Texas Facebook group (whether they

joined it was immaterial as they could still be targeted and influenced more accurately by this group in their newsfeed). Comparing the Heart of Texas posts side by side there are some obvious common themes, such as illegal immigration, defending the Second Amendment, and keeping the South white. They also, based on the high number of references to Christianity, had a high number of Christian supporters. These different elements could then form part of a subsequent influencing campaign. If you were targeted and subsequently liked a post by Heart of Texas there was every chance that you were anti-immigration, anti-Islamic, pro-gun ownership, and so on. Once you liked a post, you would then start to see more posts on a similar theme. This might cause you to start following the group and over time work as an influencer in how you voted. If there was no reaction (because maybe you had no interest in guns, but you just thought a post was funny), then you might start to see posts that were anti-immigration and these might be of interest to you, demonstrated by more likes, comments, or sharing the posts to friends. If you happened to be in a minority state where your vote could be critical, these types of posts would continue to build as the election got closer. Liking a post was the simple connector to the influence campaign that might be run by a political party, or a foreign government, or even just commercially savvy teens.

Comparing the group Being Patriotic with posts of Black Matters (BM) the contrast is obvious. The Being Patriotic group supported the police who killed the black activists, whilst the BM group supported the black activists that were killed by police. The contrasting nature of these two groups provided a quick way to segment voters and to narrow the options of targeted advertisements, succinctly refining the focus point of a targeted campaign on a group of individuals who could then be influenced at a slower more thought-out pace.

The Internet Research Agency advertisements often staked out both sides of the same issue but where their advertisements were so deceptive is that they rarely looked like traditional political party advertisements. Most don't mention a candidate or the election at all, instead tearing at the parts of the American social fabric that were already worn thin, stoking outrage about police brutality, or the removal of confederate statues (Lapowsky, 2018b).

Bret Schafer of the German Marshall Fund's Alliance for Securing Democracy described social media as "an effective way to target wedge issues because of the ability to microtarget advertisements, sending messages to confederate flag supporters at the same time as Black Lives Matter sympathisers to stoke divisions" (Penzenstadler et al., 2018, p. 4). The use of persuasion and influence in collaboration with PBT and using social media as the medium had become an incredibly effective way to target wedge issues.

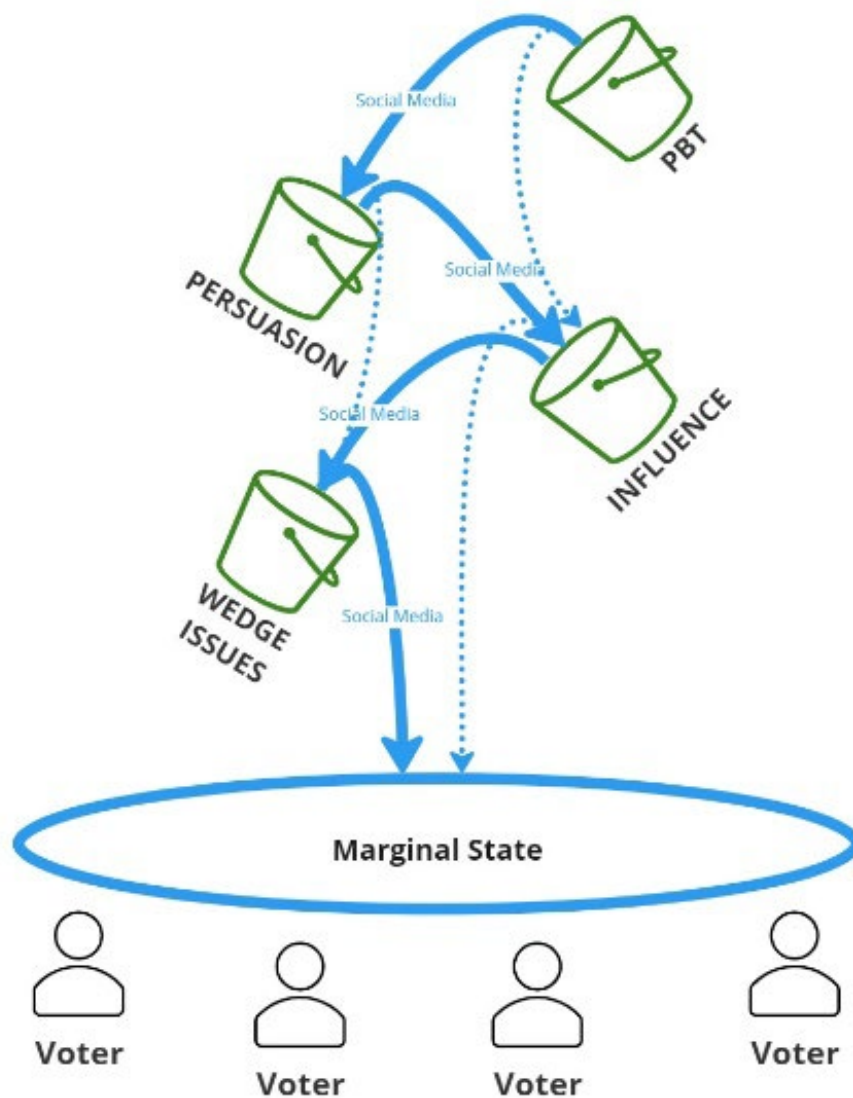


Figure 6-12: PBT + Microtargeting in social media
(Source: Author)

Certainly, the Internet Research Agency used PBT as an initial tool in the overall influencing campaign to turn a potential voter into a 'live' vote, often posting material through different accounts that were diametrically opposed to each other in ideological content (Jenkins, 2018). Focussed on an overall influencing campaign using PBT, persuasion and influence, the Russians were able, through repeated targeting, to cause disruption to the political system (see Figure 6-12). Divisive issue campaigns clearly targeted battleground states including Pennsylvania and Wisconsin where traditional democratic strongholds supported Trump by a razor thin margin (Kim et al., 2018).

PBT used in conjunction with persuasion and influence, with an enabler such as Facebook, allowed politically focused campaigns, with both divisive and conflicting issues, to be carried out in the 2016 US presidential election. Personal data could be used to, "divide up classes of the American population like barn animals, then feed us highly personalised messages designed to push our particular buttons so well that we share them, and they go viral" (Ghosh & Scott, 2018, p. 5).

Facebook had the trust of the people and condoned (and made money from) this practice without disclosing (or in fact knowing) the source, who was being targeted or where (Kim, 2018). With a network of friends and acquaintances, a post seen on this medium was more likely to be acted on because of appearing to be more credible or authentic than that seen in traditional media.

Facebook's microtargeting tool was so well developed that it offered anyone who paid for it an array of options for targeting based on users' demographics, media consumption patterns, political profiles, issue interests, hobbies, friends' networks, and Facebook engagement through likes, shares, and comments (Kim et al., 2018). Facebook advertising in the 2016 election, regardless of who created the content, ultimately influenced Trump's core supporters to turn out and vote on election day. With Clinton relying more on traditional media there was a negative effect on the turnout amongst liberal voters, her supporters. The Trump campaign, using social media as a primary channel, influenced and swayed the moderate and less informed voters as well as influencing the suppression of the black vote (Liberini et al., 2020). In short, political advertisements on Facebook in the months leading up to the 2016 US presidential election played an important part in the outcome of the election using PBT to target people, and persuasion and influence to change or endorse their actions.

Had PBT not been used, the outcome of the election may have been a different government following a different path, as was predicted by several polls even in the week preceding the election (Mercer et al., 2016). This alone shows how invisible, yet powerful, PBT is to the voting public and the outcome of a democratic process. A critique of a traditional poll is that whilst it should pick up an active voter's intentions in an upcoming election, it can miss out on people who don't respond to surveys, on people who are not honest when they answer polls, and even on people that are not identified as voters (Mercer et al., 2016). This combined with the deeper activities that were on-going via the use of PBT, all helped lead to inaccurate forecasting). On the day of the election, not only did people vote who hadn't voted before but there was also evidence of voters changing allegiance or not casting their vote at all, (Sabbagh, 2020; Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2018; Green & Issenberg; Persily, 2017; Liberini et al., 2020). If the polls had been able to pick up the extent PBT was being used, they may have predicted the Trump win. Who knows what the following four years may have looked without the use of PBT. Instead, the invisibility of PBT allowed the persuasion and influencing campaign to develop sight unseen leading to the shock Trump presidency.

CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSION

This research explored the question: How do political advertisements on Facebook persuade and influence?

This thesis was a way to explore the concept of PBT, and how it was used in an election process. It is centred on the 2016 US presidential election, a peak period of microtargeting through social media. To better understand the concept of targeting people so directly and accurately through their digital footprint, a thorough internet search was carried out to find examples of the advertisements used in that election. This uncovered the fact that all PBT used during the 2016 election had been deleted by Facebook, with archives only going back as far as 2017. Although the initial focus of the research was on the two major parties, Republican and Democrat, both of whom reportedly used PBT, due to the limited number of visuals available, the analysis extended to the advertisements used by the Russian-backed Internet Research Agency. The 3,517 posts attributed to them and released by the US Senate Committee, were used with one purpose in mind; to muddle the outcome of the 2016 US presidential election. Initially, 1,000 of these advertisements were chosen and grouped into themes. The research was narrowed down to the five most common themes (race, immigration, crime/policing, events, and guns) and the number of advertisements in each category was narrowed to allow a more detailed analysis. Three were chosen from each theme (four for the Events theme), to analyse indepth using the visual rhetorical analysis method with 37 set questions asked of each post. These questions served to break the posts down into single components, making clear the different ways in which they were being used as part of a campaign to steer the direction and outcome of the election.

7.1 WHAT WAS DISCOVERED

What this research found was that voters were persuaded in the 2016 US presidential election, through the potent combination of PBT, persuasion and influence. What was immediately evident in the research was that every advertisement, no matter where it originated from, had one simple goal – to entice the viewer to take just one action. This was clearly the persuasion stage of the campaign. Once the receiver had responded once through a click or a like, they moved on to a second stage where they were targeted with a more precise influencing campaign, based on the action they took. If PBT was used to its full advantage (i.e., using all the information that was available on every individual American voter) with several advertisements aimed at election issues sent to a viewer based on that data, then the chances of buy-in through a persuasion and influence campaign (particularly given the simple actions required of the viewer) were extremely high. Using Facebook as the vehicle to reach the voter, external parties were able to use to their advantage the credibility and trustworthiness of the social media site where users are connected to their own social circles and friends (thus the trust already existed) and base their campaigns on this. Not only were individuals targeted and able to make their own choices about liking and sharing, but they were also able to see posts shared by friends and colleagues. This ‘safety’ angle was an important element in the persuasion and influence campaign.

This was a clever and simple strategy. People did not question where posts came from, nor did they perceive any form of political targeting. In 2016, having a Facebook page was an acceptable practice for 68 per cent of all American adults, with it almost accepted as part of the social fabric. This matters because the combination of the sheer numbers of Facebook users and the sophistication of PBT behind the scenes from an array of external parties with differing motives meant that a candidate not using PBT to increase their vote was going to be left out of the race. There is much written on breach of trust, privacy issues, and the use of data, but the real underlying issue that

matters to this research was the ability to use a digital footprint to influence or change a person's action without any knowledge on their part. What was important in the findings too was that there was a three pronged approach woven into the use of PBT. It was used to identify people who hadn't voted before, to target some voters in swing states to change their allegiance, as well as suppressing the vote in other areas. Each of these approaches was an important strategy in the overall 2016 campaign.

7.2 – IMPLICATIONS

Whilst the use of PBT came to a head during and after the 2016 election with companies closing, advertisements disappearing, outcry from the public, and select committees being formed to investigate further, the fact remains that PBT (which has been around in some format for more than 25 years) could continue to be used to direct or interfere with a democratic process. There is no law against targeting and as social media continues to expand and technologies develop there are an increasing number of ways in which people can be targeted. There is both the knowledge and hard evidence that PBT has been used outside the US in other important democratic votes such as the Brexit vote in the UK (Bodo et al., 2017, Moore, 2016). What matters is that forms of PBT are likely to keep appearing, possibly in different guises, in future democratic processes. Technologies only tend to get archived when they are updated or reimagined. With the history of PBT and its development over the past 25 years added to its commerciality, it would be fair to expect it to be used in some format in future elections, worldwide. What is likely is that it has gone underground whilst the noise about it runs its course. All eyes will certainly be on Facebook and its PBT offerings in future elections. The social media giant may still be the vehicle for targeting voters, but that will depend on the landscape at the time. PBT is just as likely to reappear in a different guise on the favoured social site of the time, such as Instagram or TikTok rather than Facebook with the latter likely to face intense scrutiny from the public. An educated guess is that whilst Facebook may not be used as its conduit, another social site will run with it, essentially achieving the same outcome. Knowledge doesn't disappear – it is used to provide the foundation for future development. PBT will resurface in the future more sophisticated than ever as people become more technologically savvy. When combined with the key strategies of persuasion and influence which people are susceptible to, it can only be more powerful tool (or in the wrong hands, weapon).

7.3 LIMITATIONS

It is noted that most of the advertisements used on Facebook during the 2016 campaign are inaccessible, or lost, through the actions of Facebook. This study was only able to work with advertisements that could be found from different Internet sites or found in publications. The vast majority of advertisements that can be found were used in the Russian campaigns.

Rhetorical analysis gave a clarity to the themes used in this research. Focus Groups or direct conversations with voters were outside the parameters of this study.

7.4 WHAT NEXT?

Closer to home in the New Zealand and Australian context, we know that PBT has been used already in a much smaller way. The question which should be asked, with a general election looming in New Zealand in 2023, is whether we want to live in a country where our democratic right is compromised in a way that we have no knowledge of, but which can make us change our decision-making ability in something as important as who governs our country. Because of this, there should be further study and exposure to ensure the transparency of the democratic election process.

Worldwide with the complexity of campaigns only growing in each election cycle , and with every day adding more data points on the preferences of every individual, the power of PBT and its ability to change the direction of a democratic process should not be taken lightly. This is not about the how it will be used, but more what the implications are of its use, and how this can be limited or made transparent enough that the public can know when they are being targeted, and how that might influence their own actions. Until the majority of people understand what PBT is, how invisible it is, and how powerful the use of it can be, PBT continues to be a major threat in any democratic election process. 2016 showed the world that social media has reached a point of sophistication whereby not only political parties but also foreign governments, individuals, and groups with nebulous intent can all muddle with the democratic process. Seven years on this monster has only become more lethal in its possible use.

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APPENDIX ONE – RHETORICAL ANALYSIS QUESTIONS

Each of the sixteen posts was initially analysed with the following criteria:

1. Write down everything you see – colours, objects etc.
2. Does this list change if you take a closer look?
3. Determine the importance of each thing.
4. Consider the message – what is the overall goal or function of the message?
5. What is the genre (is it a painting, photo, comic, sketch, or something else)?
6. Determine the audience that the image would appeal to.
7. Who have been or might have been secondary audiences?
8. Who is the speaker?
9. What prompted the creation of the post?
10. What is the issue or topic of the post?
11. What values do the audience hold that the creator appeals to?
12. Is the creator wanting to attack or defend this issue?
13. Is the creator looking to delight or to persuade?
14. Is there one image or a series of images?
15. If a series, how are these arranged and how do they convey the author's message?
16. How do the shapes, colours, size, and other elements of the design convey the message, or don't they?
17. Does the image have any text?
18. Does the text relate to the image or detract from it?
19. What is the overall effectiveness of the image – what is the combined effect of all the separate elements that have been found in the deconstruction of the image?
20. What is the focal point or emphasis of the image?
21. How does the design convey the message?
22. What is the overall effectiveness of the message?

Ethos or credibility

23. Does the writer come across as reliable?
24. Is viewpoint logically consistent?
25. Is there exaggerated language?
26. Is there an even and objective tone?
27. Does it appear subversive or manipulative?
28. Does it come across as authoritative and knowledgeable?
29. Are concepts and ideas explained?

Pathos or emotional appeal

30. Does the writer try to engage or connect with the audience by making the subject matter relatable in some way?
31. Is it in the form of a narrative or storytelling?
32. Are there descriptive or attention-grabbing details?
33. Are there hypothetical examples to help the audience?
34. Are there visual appeals to emotions?

Logos or logical appeal

35. Does the writer organise information clearly?
36. Does the writer use sources, data, or evidence to back-up claims rather than basing the argument purely on emotion or opinion?

37. What do the tone, arrangement (location and scale), placements and relative size, text, font size and type, and colour tell us about the image?

In breaking down each image using the above questions, not only are we looking to find how the image persuades the viewer, but we are also looking to uncover any tacit knowledge we may have when viewing the image.

APPENDIX TWO: ADVERTISEMENTS ANALYSED IN DETAIL: SOURCE

PBT Advert A



UsHadrons. (2018d, February 1). *This space is a repository for content from the Russian social media account 'MericanFury'.* Medium. <https://ushadrons.medium.com/this-space-is-a-repository-for-content-from-the-russian-social-media-group-mericanfury-7066546c96b>

PBT Advert B



UsHadrons. (2020, July 11). *This space is a repository for content from the Russian social media account 'Secured borders'.* Medium. <https://ushadrons.medium.com/this-space-is-a-repository-for-ads-from-the-russian-social-media-group-secured-borders-a62acfb7726>

PBT Advert C



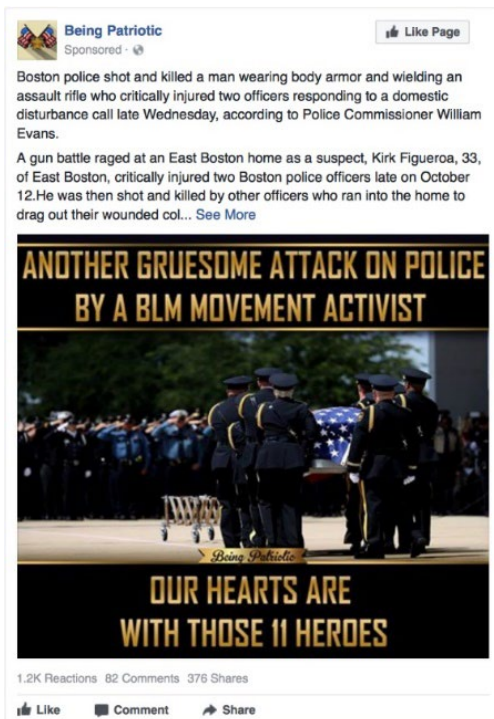
Abbruzzese, J. (2017, November 1). *These are the ads that Russia promoted on Facebook to fuel division during the 2016 election.*

Mashable. <https://mashable.com/article/facebook-ads-russian>

UsHadrns. (2018c, January 31). *This space is a repository for content from the Russian social media account 'Heart of Texas'.*

Medium. <https://ushadrns.medium.com/this-space-is-a-repository-for-ads-from-the-russian-social-media-group-heart-of-texas-8a3902a5259a>

PBT Advert D



UsHadrns. (2018b, January 31). *This space is a repository for content from the Russian social media account 'Being patriotic'.*

Medium. <https://ushadrns.medium.com/this-space-is-a-repository-for-ads-from-the-russian-social-media-group-being-patriotic-4e823cad0a02>

PBT Advert E



This is so true! It is not a gun that kill people. it is a thug that use it. Like if you agree. Comment if you don't. police cop cops thinblueline lawenforcement policelivesmatter supportourtroops BlueLivesMatter AllLivesMatter brotherinblue bluefamily tbl thinbluelinefamily sheriff policeofficer backtheblue

UsHadrons. (2018g, February 1). *This space is a repository for content from the Russian social media account 'Pray 4 police'.*

Medium. <https://ushadrons.medium.com/this-space-is-a-repository-for-content-from-the-russian-social-media-group-pray-4-police-fcb1d9a277f4>

PBT Advert F



Moneywatch. (2018, May 10). *Russian ads on Facebook: A sample gallery.* CBS News - Breaking news, 24/7 live streaming news and top stories. <https://www.cbsnews.com/media/russian-ads-on-facebook-a-gallery/>

PBT Advert G



That's interesting. americafirst
buildthewall donaldtrump
presidenttrump trump
stopterrorism noislam
illegalimmigration nojihad
immigrationreform maga toot
deport illegal illegalimmigration
liberals republican democrat
liberalallogic liberal conservative
constitution resist stupidliberals
stupiddemocrats donaldtrump
trump2016 patriot trump guns

UsHadrns. (2018a, March 17). *This space is a repository for content from the Russian social media account '_AmericaFirst_'.*

Medium. <https://ushadrns.medium.com/this-space-is-a-repository-for-content-from-the-russian-social-media-account-americafirst-a4081efeb761>

PBT Advert H



Second amendment is a symbol of freedom that was granted to us by the founding fathers, so we would forever be free from any tyranny and government's oppression.
So don't tell me about deer hunting, as long as I'm a free man, I'll keep my guns!



UsHadrns. (2018c, January 31). *This space is a repository for content from the Russian social media account 'Heart of Texas'.*

Medium. <https://ushadrns.medium.com/this-space-is-a-repository-for-ads-from-the-russian-social-media-group-heart-of-texas-8a3902a5259a>

PBT Advert I

LIKE AND SHARE IF YOU SUPPORT



THE SECOND AMENDMENT

 defend.the.second

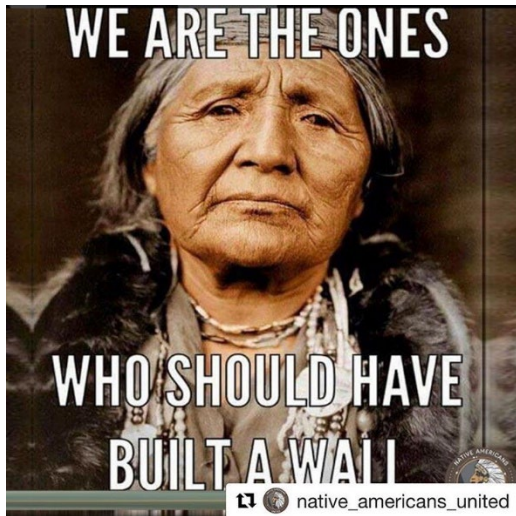
UsHadrons. (2022, June 4). *This space is a repository for content from the Russian internet research agency's Instagram 'Defend the Second'.* Medium. <https://ushadrons.medium.com/this-space-is-a-repository-for-ads-from-the-russian-social-media-group-defend-the-second-70cb1a6b150f>

PBT Advert J



Romm, T. (2018, May 10). The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2018/05/10/here-are-the-3400-facebook-ads-purchased-by-russias-online-trolls-during-the-2016-election/>

PBT Advert K



UsHadrns. (2018e, January 30). *This space is a repository for content from the Russian social media account 'Native_Americans_United'.* Medium. <https://ushadrns.medium.com/this-space-is-a-repository-for-content-from-the-russian-social-media-group-native-americans-united-8c133e7f55db>

PBT Advert L



blackexcellence blackbeauty
blackbusiness africanamerican
blackcommunity melanin
blackpride blackout america
usa blackscience education
diversity blackpride
blackandproud blackpower



UsHadrns. (2018f, January 13). *This space is a repository for content from the Russian social media account 'Nefertiti_Community'.* Medium. <https://ushadrns.medium.com/this-space-is-a-repository-for-content-from-the-russian-social-media-group-nefertiti-community-e1b55d78fb78>

PBT Advert M



Romm, T. (2018, May 10). The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2018/05/10/here-are-the-3400-facebook-ads-purchased-by-russias-online-trolls-during-the-2016-election/>

PBT Advert N



Romm, T. (2018, May 10). The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2018/05/10/here-are-the-3400-facebook-ads-purchased-by-russias-online-trolls-during-the-2016-election/>

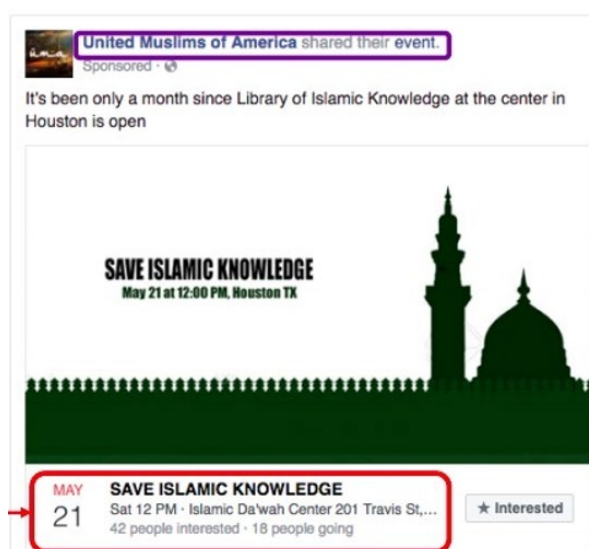
PBT Advert O



Abbruzzese, J. (2017, November 1). *These are the ads that Russia promoted on Facebook to fuel division during the 2016 election.*

Mashable. <https://mashable.com/article/facebook-ads-russian>

PBT Advert P



Allbright, C. (2017, November 1). *A Russian Facebook page organised a protest in Texas. A different Russian page launched the counterprotest. The Texas Tribune.* <https://www.texastribune.org/2017/11/01/russian-facebook-page-organized-protest-texas-different-russian-page-l/>

APPENDIX THREE: ADVERTISEMENTS ANALYSED IN THE WIDER STUDY BY THEME

A3.1 CRIME/POLICING ADVERTISEMENTS

A3.1.1



Repost @back the badge with @repostapp Much respect, appreciation, and support to our Law Enforcement officers all around the globe. It was excellent news when I heard the blue lives matter bill was passed. Our government has an obligation to stand up for those who uphold and enforce the law and this is a step in the right direction. Stay safe and stay vigilant. There are people out there that want to kill you just because you stand in the way of their selfish and criminal intent. stay police support the police police cop hero thin blue line law enforcement America police lives matter support the police support our troops thin blue line boys in blue sheepdogs police thank a cop safety day thank a cop thank emergency services hug a cop blue lives matter blue family #tccops lew k9 back the blue

A3.1.3



I see some correlation here. america first build the wall donald trump president trump trump stop terrorism no islam illegal immigration no jihad immigration reform maga toot deport illegal illegal immigration liberals republican democrat liberal logic liberal conservative constitution resist stupid liberals stupid democrats donald trump trump 2016 patriot trump guns

A3.1.4



Gun control equals elevated crime rates. america first build the wall donald trump president trump trump stop terrorism no islam illegal immigration no jihad immigration reform maga toot deport illegal illegal immigration liberals republican democrat liberal logic liberal conservative constitution resist stupid liberals stupid democrats donald trump trump 2016 patriot trump guns

A3.1.5



Repost from @_anonymous_news_ Perfect argument. Legalize it. cop block cop police Stop Police brutality police brutality police violence black lives matter USA America cop news politics police state acab war on drugs kkk racism racist watch the police cops fuck the police police reform law enforcement film the police stop killing us no justice no peace police terrorism

A3.1.6



A3.1.7



A3.1.8



A3.1.9



A3.1.10



Repost from @watch.the.police Devious cops. cop block cop police Stop Police brutality police brutality police violence black lives matter USA America cop news politics police state acab war on drugs kkk racism racist watch the police cops fuck the police police reform law enforcement film the police stop killing us no justice no peace police terrorism

A3.1.11



A3.1.12



God Bless our police and everyone praying for them! pray4police p4p support the police police cop hero thin blue line law enforcement America police lives matter support our troops Blue Lives Matter sheepdogs police thank a cop safety day thank a cop hug a cop Support Law Enforcement

A3.1.13



repost from @back.the.badge The one-year anniversary of the execution deaths of five Dallas police officers is just weeks away but the state of Texas has already responded by making it a hate crime to kill officers. The new law also applies to crimes against judges. The signing of the law by Texas Governor Greg Abbott comes just weeks after the passage of the Thin Blue Line Act by the U.S. House. A person who causes serious bodily injury to a peace officer or a judge while that person was in the discharge of their official duties would be guilty of a felony of the first degree if convicted. A felony of the first degree is punishable by 99 years to life in state prison but the sentence may not be less than five years. The person convicted can also be fined up to \$10,000. The new law makes a terroristic threat made against a peace or judicial officer a crime punishable as a state jail felony if the person threatens to commit any offense involving violence with intent to place the officer in fear of imminent serious bodily injury. The offense was previously a Class A misdemeanor. The possible confinement now is not more than two years or less than 180 days. The possible fine remains \$10,000. Only one Texas legislator voted against the bill – Democrat Jarvis D. Johnson, a freshman Texas House representative from Houston. WAY TO GO TEXAS. GOD BLESS YOU!

A3.2 IMMIGRATION ADVERTISEMENTS

A3.2.1



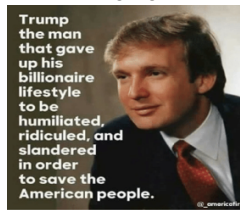
Don't forget, who stands for all of us! americafirst buildthewall donaldtrump presidenttrump trump stopterrorism noislam illegalimmigration nojihad immigrationreform maga tcot deport illegal illegalimmigration liberals republican democrat liberallogic liberal conservative constitution resist stupidliberals stupiddemocrats donaldtrump trump2016 patriot trump guns

A3.2.2



There's a difference. americafirst buildthewall donaldtrump presidenttrump trump stopterrorism noislam illegalimmigration nojihad immigrationreform maga tcot deport illegal illegalimmigration liberals republican democrat liberallogic liberal conservative constitution resist stupidliberals stupiddemocrats donaldtrump trump2016 patriot trump guns

A3.2.3



That's a fact. americafirst buildthewall donaldtrump presidenttrump trump stopterrorism noislam illegalimmigration nojihad immigrationreform maga tcot deport illegal illegalimmigration liberals republican democrat liberallogic liberal conservative constitution resist stupidliberals stupiddemocrats donaldtrump trump2016 patriot trump guns

A3.2.4



Forget Gun Control, We Need Illegal Immigrant Control! Do you agree with Malkin? stopallinvaders stopimmigration noillegals stopterrorism nojihad immigrationreform illegalimmigration America USA securetheborder buildthewall Trump Trump2016 noExcuses

A3.2.5



How about we let no men of fighting age in? Just women and children who have been vetted. Any signs of radicalism, they get flung back to where they came. Do not grant them the same rights as an American citizen, because they're not. They can go through the LEGAL immigration system to become a citizen. Keep them under surveillance. That too harsh? Don't think so. If that's too much, just fuck off all together 🍌 refugees syria sikeniggayouthought refugeeswelcome lethem in liberals libbys democrats liberallogic liberal ccw247 conservative constitution presidenttrump resist stupidliberals merica america stupiddemocrats donaldtrump trump2016 patriot trump yeeeee presidentdonaldtrump draintheswamp makeamericagreatagain trumptrain maga Add me on Snapchat and get to know me. Don't be a stranger: thetypicallibby Partners: @theunapologeticpatriot 🇺🇸 @too savage for democrats 🍌 @thelastgreatstand 🇺🇸 @always.right 🇺🇸 @keepamerica.usa 🇺🇸 @republicangirlapparel 🇺🇸 TURN ON POST NOTIFICATIONS! Make sure to check out our joint Facebook - Right Wing Savages Joint Instagram - @rightwingsavages Joint Twitter - @wethreesavages

A3.2.6



Liberals like to call these people illegal immigrants, but there is no such thing. There is term illegal alien, which is used to describe a foreigner, who crossed our border illegally, so that is the only right way to call all those people. Illegals are not immigrants, they are criminals who broke the law to get here, so they should be punished, not rewarded with benefits! It's not racist, it's the law! stopallinvaders stopimmigration noillegals stopterrorism nojihad immigrationreform illegalimmigration America USA securetheborder buildthewall Trump Trump2016

A3.2.7



Illegal aliens are a huge burden on the American taxpayer, starting with crime and ending with countless benefits and entitlements. According to the research, the annual costs of illegal immigration at the federal, state and local level is approximately \$113 billion. Why do we still allow them to stay? Deporting them would cost a lot less than keeping them in America, so let's start deporting all these freeloaders! stopallinvaders stopimmigration noillegals stopterrorism nojihad immigrationreform illegalimmigration America USA securetheborder buildthewall Trump Trump2016

A3.2.8



For more conservative news check out @mericanfury mericanfury stupidliberals secondamendment trump donaldtrump conservative hillno feelthebern Bernie killary hillary hillaryclinton murica merica america military guns patriot politics gop republican democrat nobama obama MAGA calexit potus politicallyincorrect humor

A3.2.9

Suggested Page

Secured Borders
Sponsored

Every man should stand for our borders! Join!



Secured Borders
News & Media Website
134,843 people like this.

Like Page

A3.2.10

Suggested Page

Secured Borders
Sponsored

Secured borders are a national priority. America is at risk now more than ever.



Secured Borders
News & Media Website
135,521 people like this.

Like Page

A3.2.11

Suggested Page

Stop A.I.
Sponsored

This page is dedicated to protection against illegal immigrants! Like to join!



Stop A.I.
Community
150,812 people like this.

Like Page

A3.2.12

Stop A.I.
Sponsored

This page is dedicated to protection against illegal immigrants! Like to join!

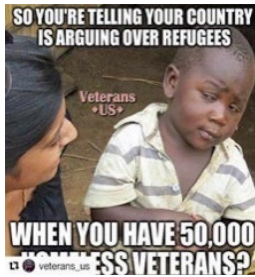


Stop A.I.
Community
150,812 people like this.

Like Page

A3.2.12

SO YOU'RE TELLING YOUR COUNTRY IS ARGUING OVER REFUGEES



WHEN YOU HAVE 50,000 HOMELESS VETERANS?

veterans_us

A3.2.13

JUST TO REMIND YOU ALL "ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS"



IS A CRIMINAL STATUS NOT BASED ON WHERE YOU'RE FROM... BUT HOW YOU GOT HERE!

TRUTH!

A3.2.14

STOP A.I.
Sponsored

"Religious" face coverings are putting American people at huge risk! We must not sacrifice national security to satisfy the demands of minorities. All face covering should be banned in every state across America!



DO YOU WANT THIS TO BE BANNED IN AMERICA?

9K Comments 4.2K Shares

A3.2.15

STOP A.I.
Sponsored

Who is behind this mask? A man? A woman? A terrorist? Burqa is a security risk and it should be banned on U.S soil!



LIKE AND SHARE IF YOU WANT BURQA BANNED IN AMERICA

STOP ALL INVADERS

1.1K Comments 55K Shares

A3.3 EVENTS ADVERTISEMENTS

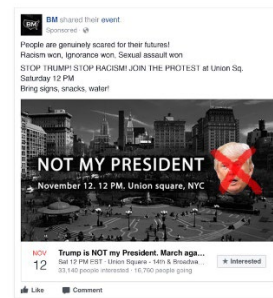
A3.3.1



A3.3.2



A3.3.3



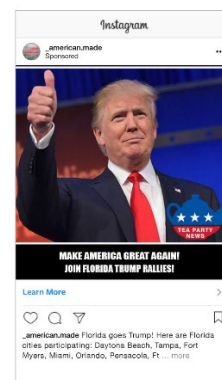
A3.3.4



A3.3.5



A3.3.6



A3.4 RACE ADVERTISEMENTS

A3.4.1



A3.4.2



A3.4.3



A3.4.4



A3.4.5



Repost @_black_business
Repost from
@nefertiti_community They'll do anything to put down the spirit of the Black man.
blackinventors blackscientist
blackgenius
WeKnowWhereWeCameFrom
trustyourknowledgetoNoOne
Kemet StolenLegacy
KnowThySelf Ancient
negropeans Africa hotep
Ancestors Maat Pharoah
blackkings blackheroes
blackpower blacklegends
handsomenessoverload

A3.4.6



A3.4.7



A3.4.8



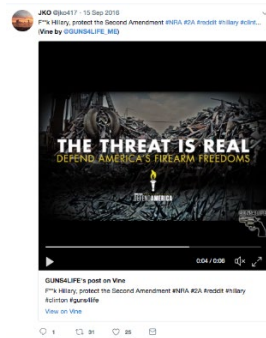
A3.5 GUNS ADVERTISEMENTS

A3.5.1



2nd amendment americafirst
buildthewall donaldtrump
presidenttrump trump
stopterrorism noislam
illegalimmigration nojihad
immigrationreform maga toot
deport illegal illegalimmigration
liberals democrat liberallogic
liberal conservative constitution
resist stupidliberals
stupiddemocrats donaldtrump
trump2016 patriot trump guns

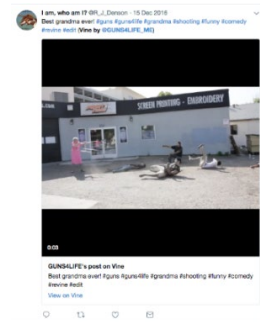
A3.5.2



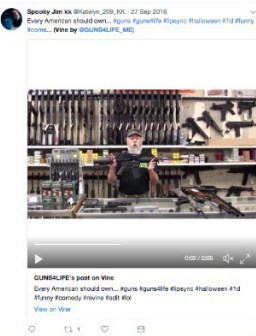
A3.5.3



A3.5.4



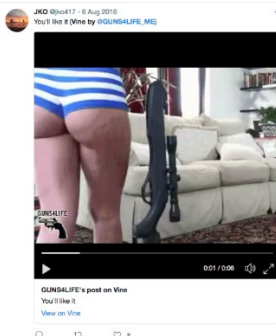
A3.5.5



A3.5.6



A3.5.7



A3.5.8



A3.5.9



A3.5.10



A3.5.11



A3.5.12

