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Goodman, Mark; Goodman, John

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Psychographics on Steroids: The Attacks on Democratic Governments

MARK GOODMAN¹ & JOHN GOODMAN²

¹Mississippi State University, USA

²Poetic Systems (Houston), USA

Research originally developed in the 1970s to make television and mass media advertising more effective has involved into a contemporary system of propaganda manipulation. Agents use social media to convince people that fake news is a valid reason for people to act and to vote. While the Russian manipulation of the U.S. presidential election in 2016 has received the most attention, people are being manipulated around the world. These manipulations undermine democratic governments, which require an informed, voting public. This paper outlines the theories behind the manipulation of social media and the conditions under which these efforts are most likely to work.

Keywords: Psychographics, propaganda, democracy, Russian manipulation

Fake news is a direct threat to the 96 democratic national governments in the world because propaganda can be put on steroids when big data is combined with social media use. The threat comes from private and governmental forces that seek to manipulate election results and select leaders by persuading people into voting in a directed way without the voters understanding how they are being manipulated.

Propaganda has been around since people tried to persuade Greeks and Romans to vote for someone or support a cause in the forum. In World War I propaganda became an instrument of governmental policy (Lasswell, 1927, 1971). The British government told stories to the Americans of German soldiers eating babies when “the Huns” invaded Belgium. In World War II, the U.S. Government printed posters showing Japanese leaders as diabolical fiends. Hitler manipulated the Germans into their support for his leadership through propaganda. In the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the countries of NATO threw charges against each other for two generations (Atkinson, 2011; Casey, 2010; Costigliola, 2000; Parry-Giles, 2002, 1994). All of these propaganda efforts were delivered to a mass audience and so the effectiveness of the propaganda, as with any mass communication, was short-lived, might be viewed by only a small portion of the population, and viewed with scepticism by those people who did see it. Only in North Korea where the government controls all media outlets, all public discourse, and educates children have propaganda efforts to persuade a mass number of people been effective (Demick, 2012).

Mass Media

The real potential of mass media was revealed on November 15, 1926, when a signal from NBC Radio Network in New York City reached 22 stations as far west as Kansas City (Hilmes, 2007). Soon a single broadcaster at a station anywhere in the U.S. could reach everyone in

Correspondence to: Mark Goodman, Department of Communication,
Mississippi State University, USA.

the United States with news, entertainment, and programming. National marketing became possible because advertisers could reach the whole nation at one time. However, that was also the problem. Everyone, everywhere. A cereal company paid to reach consumers who hated cereal as well as those that bought corn flakes every week.

Consumer behavior, marketing, and advertising paid for research to find out what worked since paying to reach a mass audience when only two or three people out of a 100/1000/10000/100000 were potentially going to buy an advertiser's product was a waste of money. Effective marketing particularly became an issue as the mass television market of the 1960s evolved into cable television programming. In the 1960s, *Bonanza* attracted about 60% of the American public watching television on a Sunday night. The final episode of *Game of Thrones* in spring 2019 attracted 19.3 million viewers (Elliott, 2019) out of a potential audience of 119.9 million homes totalling 305.4 million people, e.g. 6 percent of the potential audience watched the *Thrones* final episode (Nielsen, 2019).

Wells and Tigert (1971) offered advertisers insight into the buying public based on a profile of the consumers' Attitudes, Interests, and Opinions (AIOs). Arnold Mitchell (1983) divided consumers by their Values, Attitudes, and Lifestyle (VALs). From a communication perspective, these two theories of market segmentation divided the mass audience into groupings of people who shared similar meanings and ideology. Therefore, people in the group were likely to be interested in similar products and making purchases like other people in the group. Put simply, marketing golf clubs, golf shirts, and a new Cadillac to members of the local country club would appeal to their VALs and AIOs. However, these two theories still had limitations because no mass medium reached all members of country clubs, much less just the members looking to buy a new car. Golf Channel and maybe coverage of The Masters' golf tournament were better options than a western genre television show, but cable television could not deliver a narrowly targeted audience.

Internet marketing took psychographics into more promising targeted directions. The formation of meaning communities allows Netflix to build your movie preferences or Amazon to offer you products when you log in. Grocery chains now track your purchases with your loyalty card. If data shows you generally fit into a group with 150 similar people and 25 of them have started buying craft beer, the Kroger chain should offer a coupon for craft beer to all 150 people in that market segment.

In 2016, the Russians took their propaganda efforts and targeted them through market segmentation to very narrow audiences. The big data collected by Facebook about its users provided a way for the Russians to reach millions of people in the small meaning communities to which the Facebook users had self-selected membership. Plus, the Russians ran their market research data collection, i.e., the Internet Research Agency (IRA), which used its Facebook data collection to obtain information on millions of users (see Schwadron, 2018; Korecki, 2019; Romm, 2019; Kranish, 2019). Then the Russians sent out thousands of messages each targeted to a small group of people. The result was that thousands of people were motivated to vote based on who they hated, what they liked, and the ideology they believed in. The effort was not to convince people to choose Trump over Clinton and vote accordingly. The effort told people that they had a personal stake in the outcome of the election and that they should go vote based on who they hated and who shared their ideology.

What makes this market segmentation marriage to social media so dangerous to democracies is that the message creators do not have to tell the truth and they do not have to spend a lot of money on their efforts. They do not even have to be a government. You, me, and a laptop computer could destroy a candidate or attract voters to a candidate over cups of coffee at Starbucks. And, we probably have not broken the law if we do so.

For example. Abraham Lincoln is running for senator from Illinois. We do not like his position on racial equality. We post on Twitter groups that Lincoln supports federal legislation requiring first-degree murder charges be filed every time a police officer shoots a person of Chicano or African-American ethnicity. Then we form a Facebook group called Justice for Police Officers in America, and then we invite members of similar Facebook groups to join ours. Our cost is \$0.00, and Lincoln's campaign has to spend money to refute our lies. What is happening to our elections is dangerous stuff. This paper will give some broad perspective on the problem. Then will come an explanation of how market segmentation works and then what happens when market segmentation is put on the steroids of big data and social media.

The Fakes

The 2016 presidential election in the United States has received probably the most attention of all the efforts to spread fake information through propaganda. A report written by the U.S. Justice Department Special Counsel Robert Mueller concluded that "The Russian government interfered in the 2016 presidential election in a sweeping and systematic way" (Mueller, III, 2019). Later, the Dossier Center, an anti-Putin organization in London, indicated that the Russian efforts were bigger than just the election. The Russian plan was to radicalize African-Americans to create racial tensions in several southern states in the U.S. In the words of NBC reporters, "The plans show that Prigozhin's circle has sought to exploit racial tensions well beyond Russia's social media and misinformation efforts tied to the 2016 election" (Engel, Benyon-Tinker, & Werner, 2019). Yevgeny Prigozhin ran the IRA (Myre, 2019). According to testimony before U.S. Senate subcommittees by Heather A. Conley of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Russians have a plan called the New Generation Warfare. "Therefore, the true challenge lies in understanding the persistent and penetrating nature of the Kremlin's efforts to render a democracy so helpless that it cannot defend its sovereignty or national interests," Conley (2019) told Congress.

China also is seeking to influence American politics, according to a report issued by the Hoover Institute (Diamond & Schell, 2018). China's "coercive and covert activities" are a direct threat to "democratic values and freedoms" of the United States, states the report. The Chinese are motivated to attack American freedoms, according to the report, because those freedoms are a threat by example to one-party rule in China. The Chinese government seeks to spread its influence in the technology sector, the Chinese American community, Chinese language media outlets, business, think tanks, university campuses, and through political interactions with civic groups and politicians. The report notes that Chinese efforts also are occurring in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, the New Zealand, Singapore, and the UK.

A minority report written by the U.S. Senate subcommittee on foreign affairs (2018) outlines Russian interference in several elections. In Ukraine in 2004 Prime Minister Putin of Russia appeared at a political rally. StopFake.org tracks Russian disinformation campaigns in Ukraine. Stop Fake has stories of Russians claiming homes will be demolished without notifying tenants, to reports that the United States is critical of NATO activities in the Black Sea. The subcommittee report describes the creation by Russians of patriotic groups in the country of Georgia to undermine the elected government in Georgia. Similarly, in Montenegro the Russians funded The Democratic Front in an attempt to keep Montenegro out of NATO, as explained in the subcommittee report. Kalinina, Yusupova, and Voevoka (2019) found evidence that the Russian government uses state media to spread disinformation.

"News articles from Russia Today contain a large number of examples of applied speech means of manipulation," they state as they explain their statistics. "Among the analyzed 48 news articles, only seven are without any of the ...manipulative ways of influence on readers" (p. 313).

The U.S. 2018 midterm elections also were targeted by propaganda campaigns. Iran, Russia, and Venezuela used Twitter accounts to send messages out thousands of times (Romm, 2019). Efforts were also made on Facebook and Twitter to discourage people from voting (Romm, 2018). One tweet reported that immigration officers would be stationed at polling locations.

Candidates for the 2020 American presidential election already are being targeted by negative propaganda, according to reporting by Politico (Korecki, 2019). Among those attacked early in the race have been Elizabeth Warren, Kamala Harris, and Beta O'Rourke. "It looks like the 2020 presidential primary is going to be the next battleground to divide and confuse Americans," said Brett Horvath. Horvath is quoted in the Politico story; he is associated with Guardians.ai, a group that seeks to counter disinformation campaigns.

Donald Trump's presidential campaign in 2019 created ads for Facebook featuring A.J. from Texas, Thomas from Washington, and Tracey from Florida (Novak, 2019). Only the images were purchased from iStock.com, and the models were Europeans (Condon, 2019).

In India, five visitors to a village were attacked—one killed—after a WhatsApp post indicated the men were kidnapping children. In little more than four months, 17 people were beaten in India when other fake posts were generated on WhatsApp (BBC News, 2018).

Facebook has found itself on the front lines of the propaganda wars. On January 17, 2019, Facebook removed 300 sites that originated in Russia, according to a Facebook release (Gleicher, 17 January 2019). Owned by a Russian news agency, the accounts on Facebook and Instagram had about 790,000 users in Eastern Europe and Asia. The accounts spread disinformation about NATO (Romm, 2019). On March 26, 2019 Facebook removed more than 2600 pages tied to Iran, Macedonia, Kosovo, and Russia for sending out spam and inauthentic behavior—prohibited under Facebook rules (Reuters, 26 March 2019). On May 6, 2019, Facebook took down Russian accounts attacking Ukraine (Vavra, 2019). Facebook director of cyber policy, Nathaniel Gleicher (6 May, 2019), explained: "The individuals behind this campaign — which was also active on other internet platforms — engaged in a number of deceptive tactics, including the use of fake accounts to join Groups, impersonate other users and to amplify allegations about a public figure working on behalf of intelligence services. They also posted content about local politics including topics like immigration, religious issues and NATO." Iran held 51 fake accounts on Facebook, which were used to "impersonate" 2018 Republican candidates for Congress (Starks, 2019).

Facebook also removed accounts by individuals for spreading hate speech. Those banned from Facebook included Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam, Alex Jones of InfoWars, Paul Nehlen who advocates white racism, and conspiracy advocates Milo Yiannopoulos and Laura Loomer (Dvoskin & Timberg, 2019).

Then there are the social media events driven by private groups. The public voting for a television talent show was rigged when bots were used to increase the support for a 10-year-old singer (Wise, 2019). Parents of autistic children are subscribing to cures on Facebook like bathing the autistic children in bleach and anti-vaccine conspiracy theories thrive on the internet (Zadrozny, 21 May 2019). LinkedIn has been targeted by groups creating fake profiles (Satter, 2019). A fake warning of a nuclear attack was issued in Hawaii in 2018; a 2019 study indicates creating fake alerts is easy (Bode, 2019).

Harwell (2019) reports on the ease of faking videos. The Fact Checker at *The Washington Post* (2019) note that videos can be manipulated in several ways: misrepresentation about the video, videos cut to show content out of context, videos edited to leave out context through omission, splitting together two different videos, doctoring video, using a computer to generate video. Only days after Democratic candidates presented plans to end private health insurance in the U.S., a right-wing organization, One Nation, began running deceptive advertising (Sullivan, 2019).

A poll by the Pew Research Center found that more than half of social media users in Tunisia, Lebanon, Vietnam, Jordan, South Africa, Philippines, Venezuela, Kenya, Colombia, India, and Mexico were targeted for false information (Silver, 2019). According to the European Union (2019), the Russians interfered in elections in Ukraine (2014), a referendum in The Netherlands (2016), the Brexit vote (2016), Catalan independence vote (2017), German elections (2017), French elections (2017), and Italian elections (2018). The Australian Strategic Policy Institute also identified interference in Australia, Brazil, Colombia, the Czech Republic, Finland, Indonesia, Israel, Malta, Norway, Singapore, and Taiwan (Ramasundara, 2019). The 2019 EU elections were targets of bots and fake accounts (Starks, Cerulus, & Scott, 2019). A report written by Symnatec says that the efforts of disinformation were even more sophisticated during the 2019 EU elections for parliament. "Experts following the vote have pointed out that the EU election campaign showed that the sophistication of social media influence networks is increasing, with an increased emphasis on promoting local content and promoting real Twitter users generating their own, often divisive political content," conclude Starks, Cerulus, and Scott (2019).

This is not a comprehensive list of all elections with meddling; the U.S. government has a history of interference in foreign elections (see Robinson, 1992; Levin, 2016; Shane, 2018). However, the problem is worldwide and can occur whenever people vote, whether officially in state elections or just as part of a collective effort to elect a beauty queen.

Presidential Politics 2016

Kathleen Hall Jamieson (2018) explains the possible ramifications on democracies in her analysis of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. election. She notes that 78,000 votes in three states decided the election (p. 66). Jamieson explained the extent of Russian influence efforts:

- (i) Russians posted 1.4 million election tweets that reached 288 million users of Twitter;
- (ii) The Russian Internet Research Agency (IRA) placed 3000 ads on Facebook and Instagram, which were seen by 11.4 million people;
- (iii) The Russians placed 1000 videos on YouTube;
- (iv) Russian bots forwarded Donald Trump tweets 470,000 times;
- (v) Eight Russian Facebook accounts hosted eight election events, which were liked 2 million times;
- (vi) The IRA hosted 129 events, which were seen by 25,800 Facebook accounts;
- (vii) Russian trolls posted 29 million times on Facebook, and they were diffused to 126 million users.

"To harass the fears and enthusiasms of US citizens to their cause, Russians discourse saboteurs crafted and placed ads on US platforms, organized rallies that would showcase cultural divisions, created imposter sites, and strategically messaged to millions on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Tumblr, and Reddit, among others," explains Jamieson (p. 6).

Malcolm Nance (2016) believes the 2016 efforts were part of a larger Russian propaganda effort. He explains "...Russia Today (RT) television is engaged in a strategic propaganda campaign to further Russia's political goals and has been used to co-opt the extreme wings of the American political parties including tacit and open support for neo-Nazis, anti-government extremist libertarians, conspiracy theorists, and the marginalized left such as the Green Party" (p. xvii), a Louisiana chemical plant explosion, an Ebola outbreak in U.S., and Atlanta police shooting an unarmed black woman (p. 108). Russian "trolls" are expected to comment on news stories 50 times a day, tweet 50 times a day from different Twitter accounts, and place posts six times a day on various Facebook accounts (p. 109). To Nance, the Russian efforts are directed by President Vladimir Putin to weaken NATO, weaken democracies, and damage the U.S. economy. The efforts to help Trump would give Putin's efforts a big advantage, explains Nance. "If Trump's acolytes did have real ties to Russia's center of power and if they were successful in electing Trump, they would be in a position to handle a potential president's most intimate secrets," wrote Nance (p. 58). "They would also be able to advance Russia's objectives, desires, and activities—fully in-line with their fortunes—above America's interests, with the full force of the Oval Office."

Psychographics

The key to the success of the Russian efforts in 2016, explains Jamieson, was to strategically message "millions on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Tumblr, and Reddit, among others" (p. 6). Psychographics provides the means to strategically message a group of people with a targeted message.

Abraham Maslow's work (1954) was the precursor to psychographics. Maslow argues that human behavior is motivated by need fulfillment and that the needs are in a hierarchy whereby the lowest needs have to be fulfilled first before the person goes on to the next level need. The needs are physiological (sex, hunger, thirst), safety and security (including health), love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization (a state of creativity and analytical thinking). In terms of advertising, the goal is to tell the customers what need the product fulfills. Advertisers use need fulfillment to target audiences based on their unmet needs and how the consumers would fulfill that need by purchasing the product. Teens may be focused on physiological needs, and so sexual appeals would be a strong motivator; seniors may be worried more about health problems and are targets for prescription drugs.

The ELM Model

Petty and Cacioppo (1981) developed the Elaboration Likelihood (ELM) Model of persuasion. This theory identifies variables that play a role in whether a particular person will respond to a persuasive message. Their central route to persuasion is built on the premise that people hold strong opinions on some matters, which are issues they have studied and that have a high level of personal relevance. Accordingly, following the central route makes it easy to persuade a person to accept a message if that message agrees with the person's current stand on an issue of high importance and is an issue of high ego involvement. Conversely, it is very difficult to use the central route to change a person's mind by offering a position that contradicts the person's existing opinions. It is easy to use the central route to reinforce a person's existing opinions and difficult to convince them to change a highly regarded position. A person who has carefully studied candidates for president and plans to vote for a candidate will agree with messages that tell them they have made a wise choice. A person will reject a message that the choice is a bad one.

Petty and Cacioppo (1981) say that attitude change can be achieved easily through the peripheral route. The peripheral route involves issues that a person has little interest in, have little knowledge of, and ego involvement is low. Grocery shopping involves many peripheral routes. People shop for bananas, soups, and cereals without necessarily caring much what they bring home. Product placement, coupons, or sale prices may convince them one week to buy one product and a different one the next. It is easy to persuade people through the peripheral route. In terms of politics, people may use the central route in picking a president but may use the peripheral route in selecting who to elect as the state insurance commissioner.

To figure out whether to use the central or peripheral route, Petty and Cacioppo (1981) recommend doing attitude research. They describe attitudes as “convenient summaries of our beliefs” (p. 8). The more extreme the attitude and the more polarized the position, the more the attitude is predictive of behavior. “Knowing our attitudes presumably helps others predict the kinds of behaviors we are likely to engage in more accurately than almost anything else we can tell them,” they explain (p. 8). Once an attitude is in the central route, people will generally respond to a new message without spending a lot of time processing the new message; they either accept it or reject quickly. Petty and Cacioppo conclude that it is easier to appeal to an existing attitude than it is to create a new attitude. “The elaboration-likelihood model indicates that it is quite difficult to produce an enduring attitude change by exposing people to persuasive communication,” they write (p. 266). “The recipient of the message must have both the motivation and the ability to process the information contained in the communication, and the information presented must elicit favorable cognitive responses that are rehearsed and stored in long term memory.”

The goal of both VALs and AIOs was to research consumers to find out what their existing beliefs and attitudes were so that new messages could be targeted to people who already held positions consistent with the aim of the new message. The better the creator of a persuasive message understood the recipient, the better the chance that the creator could receive support for the persuasive message. This was a key point in the 2016 presidential elections.

Hillary Clinton became a public figure in American politics in 1992 when husband Bill won the presidential election. By 2016, people had 24 years to form an opinion of Hillary Clinton. According to a Gallup Poll, 51% of Americans had a negative view of her in July 2016 (McCarthy, 2016). The public perception of those with negative opinions of Clinton was that she could not be trusted, was unethical, and dishonest.

From a psychographic perspective, Clinton's negatives provided a rich field for exploitation. These included:

- (i) Since Clinton had a public personae for 24 years, many people held a fixed view of her that the campaigns would have a difficult time changing. Professional women over 60 identified with Clinton's trials and tribulations because their life conflicts were like Clinton's. Her successes reinforced their self-esteem. However, the people with the negative views were not going to change their opinions of her easily, particularly those people who saw her as a threat to their ideological positions. People with negative views of affirmative action, gay rights, immigration, and Muslims saw Clinton as supporting the efforts of these groups to join the American mainstream. Many saw her as the enemy of true Christians, anti-patriotic, and an opponent of the U.S. military and veterans.
- (ii) Advertising dollars and debates were not going to change those opinions of either the supporters or haters through the central route. The viewpoints had previous knowledge supporting ideological positions closely tied to strong, personal identification.

- (iii) Trump could appeal to the negative views of Clinton with the “lock her up” campaign slogan. The Russian social media accounts could easily create advertisements and advertisements that appealed to people who already hated Clinton personally or ideologically.
- (iv) Ideologically, social media already had platforms in place for those with strongly held ideological positions opposing Clinton.

The Social Media

As Singh and Shukla (2016) point out, the media is more pervasive than ever. “Media have increasingly embedded itself so deeply into the web of the human interactions and perceptions in the modern world, thus constantly contributing and reshaping the understanding and perceptions of individuals in a community, towards the community and about the characteristics that make and transform the community,” they write (p. 277). This stands in contrast to past elections when negative television advertisements would have been purchased in select television markets to turn Clinton negatives into Trump voters. Some of those happened in 2016. The big change, however, was the advertising opportunities offered by Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and other social media outlets. As Mark Zuckerberg told Congress (The Switch, 2018), “We think offering an ad-supported service is the most aligned with our mission of trying to help connect everyone in the world because we want to offer a free service that everyone can afford.” As Facebook Business page states (2019), “Stay up-to-date on the latest features and get strategic advice to help make your ads more effective.” Facebook experts and a series of Facebook tutorials on how to maximize advertising dollars would have been available to the IRA or other Russian groups purchasing ads. Twitter offers similar help for those buying ads (2019). YouTube (2019) offers a quality advertising experience: “You don’t need to get your ad in front of everybody – just the people likely to be interested in what you have to offer. Sports fans around the block. Fashionistas around the world. And everyone in between. They’re all on YouTube.”

The Russians wanted to hinder Clinton’s run for president. The electorate that wanted to vote against her was already in place. The social media experts found those negative votes collected together in various meaning communities formed around shared ideology, similar need fulfilment, and high levels of knowledge and ego involvement. The social media experts delivered those communities to the Russians so that the Russians could tailor messages to reach groups with the message most likely to trigger their dislike of Clinton.

The Russian Fakes

The Russians took psychographics into new dimensions by running social media advertisements and spreading fake news stories.¹ They claimed Clinton had health problems, was supported by a world financial conspiracy, and they released her emails (Timberg, 24 November 2016). Then there was the Facebook post that claimed that Clinton was part of a paedophile ring run out of a pizza parlor in Washington, D.C. (Robb, 2017).

The “story” made it to the pages of Info-Wars run by Alex Jones, which is hosted by the “independent journalism” of www.independent.co.uk. The Russian foreign intelligence service started the rumor that Seth Rich was murdered on orders of Hillary Clinton (Iskikoff, 2019).

Advertisements run by the Russians ramped up the ideology. The first example we use shows Satan (red with horns) armwrestling with a Jesus figure (Caucasian, eyes locked, dressed in a robe). The background behind Satan shows the fires of hell while the background behind Jesus shows a waterfall in a sun-lit valley. Over the shoulder of Jesus is an icon for Army of Jesus. The language with the ad states: “Today Americans can elect a president with godly moral principles. Hillary is a Satan, and her crimes and lies had proven just how evil she is. And even though Donald Trump isn’t a saint by any means, he’s at least an honest man, and he cares deeply for this country. My vote goes for him!”²

The U.S. House Intelligence Committee released many of the Russian ads, including Satan vs. Jesus (House Intelligence Committee, 2018; see other ads at Moneywatch, 2018; Hatmaker, 2018; Politico, 2018). This ad was sponsored on Facebook by a Facebook organization, Army of Jesus, which identifies itself as located in Shanghai, China (Army of Jesus, 2018); its slogan is “Die Daily for Jesus Christ.” The ad generated 97 reactions, 15 comments, and 29 shares. Farber and Schallhorn (2018) reported that the ad costs \$1.10 and ran Oct. 19-20, 2016.

By deconstructing the ad, the psychographic elements are revealed. From a Maslow hierarchy of needs perspective, the ad appeals to safety and security (Satan vs Jesus) and belonging through appeals to joining Jesus/Christianity against the threats to safety, Satan/Clinton. The ad also allows Jesus supporters to ideologically join the Army-of-Jesus. According to Chan and Ma (2017), “This ad targeted people who liked Facebook pages linked to religion, Republican politicians, and conservative politicians, such as ‘God,’ ‘Christianity,’ ‘Bible,’ ‘Jesus,’ ‘Ron Paul,’ and ‘Rush Limbaugh.’” In 2016 Trump sought Christian voters by promising to appoint a pro-life justice to the U.S. Supreme Court (Sullivan, 2016). In the election white evangelicals supported Trump 77% to 16% (Pew Research Center, 2018).

For an about one dollar, the ad reached 100 potential voters on Facebook, who had already stated a preference on Facebook for conservative politics, against Clinton, for Trump, and/or strongly Christian. From a psychographic perspective, the ad was cheap, and it reached the intended audience with a strong emotional appeal to their values.

A second ad we analyzed is labeled on Facebook as “Back the Badge.”³ This ad run by IRA was seen by more than 1.3 million people on Facebook (Ng, 2018). “The ad, which was posted on Oct. 19, 2016 — 20 days before the US presidential election — received 1,334,544 views and 73,063 clicks,” wrote Ng. The ad costs about \$1700. Back the Badge was presented on Facebook as an authentic group of people who supported police officers. Ackerman (2018) believes the ad was so successful because of the support on Facebook for the Blue Lives Matter movement.

The ad appeals to safety needs; the red lights of the police car indicates there is a danger. It appeals to belonging, particularly for those identified on Facebook with Blue Lives Matter. The police shield is a widely recognized cultural artefact. The shield appears to be blackened by gunpowder or maybe smoke. The source of the threat is not clear, making it easy for each person who saw the ad to assigned their sense of danger to the context through which they read the ad.

In terms of psychographics, the ad appeals to those who view police as the “brave” people who protect their lives and property from those who would do them harm. By implication, the supporters are not criminals, but people who have enough wealth to need protection. They also people who feel like they cannot protect themselves from the

evil in society. By liking the ad, the people show the support for police without having to make any commitment for higher pay, more officers, or other expenses required to put the police cars on the street.

Matheny and Goodman (2018) note in an analysis of Trump's Republican Convention nomination acceptance speech that Trump put a heavy emphasis on good vs evil. Trump linked his campaign with stability and assigned attributes of chaos to the Clinton campaign, they point out in their analysis. Trump's calls for stability were greeted with "USA, USA, USA" by the convention audience; his identification of Clinton with evil led to chants of "lock her up" (p. 15).

The ideology of the ad fit with themes of the Trump campaign. As the person for stability, Trump-aligned with Back the Badge. Conversely, the Back the Badge people would find Clinton as the source of chaos and a threat to safety if they accepted Trump's view of Clinton. The IRA appealed to these divisions with the ad and connected into the ideology of the pre-existing Blue Lives Matter meaning community.

The Russians in placing the ads were after more than just votes. The subtle ways that Facebook posts were used is a compelling argument that content reached people and subtly pushed them farther away from the political center without the reader knowing they were being manipulated.

Impact

According to Jamieson (2018), 126,000,000 people were exposed to Russian efforts on Facebook and with even more reached through other social media (p. 10-11). Jamieson concludes that these social media efforts mobilized people likely to vote for Trump and discouraged people likely to vote for Hillary Clinton by making her look bad. The social media efforts "tilted the balance of discourse in battleground states against the Democratic party nominee," she writes (p. 7).

Psychographics reinforce existing ideological positions and affirm existing opinions, and content creators can take advantage of this to push people farther away from the political center and create more divisiveness among readers, particularly those opinions held in the central route by the individual. People in the peripheral route may be persuaded to evaluate an issue that has been unimportant to them in the past. In 2016, with opinions so strong for Trump and Clinton before the election, and with the negative views of both candidates high, the percentage of undecided voters by November was down to 5% (Chalabi, 2016). The unknown on election day November 8 was who was going to turn out to vote.

By comparing election totals, it is clear that Trump outperformed recent Republican candidates for president. Trump collected about 63 million votes (46.1%) to Clinton's 65.5 million (48.2%). However, Trump collected 304 electoral votes to 227 for Clinton. In comparison, Democrat Barack Obama received about 66 million votes in 2012, and the Republican Mitt Romney got about 61 million. Comparing votes by Congressional district between 2012 and 2016, Trump improved over Romney significantly in the upper Midwest (Skelley, 2017). According to Wikipedia results for 2012 and 2016, here are results from key Midwestern states. We note the key changes in the election totals.

State	Obama 2012	Clinton 2016	Romney 2012	Trump 2016
Michigan 16 electorals	1,546,167 (52.65%)	2,268,839 (47.24%)	1,320,224 (44.96%)	2,279,543 (47.5%) +959,319
Wisconsin 10 electorals	1,620,985 (52.83%)	1,382,536 (46.45%) -238,449	1,407,966 (45.89%)	1,405,284 (47.22%)
Florida 29 electorals	4,237,756 (50.01%)	4,504,975 (47.82%)	4,163,447 (49.13%)	4,617,886 (49.02%) +454,439
Pennsylvania 20 electorals	2,990,274 (51.97%)	2,926,441 (47.46%) -60,833	2,680,434 (46.59%)	2,970,733 (48.18%) +290,299
Totals	65,915,795	65,853,514 -62,281	60,933,504	62,984,828 +2,051,324

The number of eligible people voting in 2012 was 57.5% compared to 58% in 2016. In those four years the number of eligible voters increased. For some reason, there were more than 2 million more Republican voters in 2016 than in 2012, and about 60,000 fewer people voted Democrat. In 2012, 7,220,399, people voted for a third-party candidate; in 2016 the number was 7,832,634. Most importantly, voters in Michigan, Wisconsin, Florida, and Pennsylvania swung their 75 electoral votes from Obama to the Republican Donald Trump, which was all but 2 of the margin of Trump's win (77) in the electoral college. Ballotpedia (2016) reports changes of voting patterns in only 206 counties across the U.S. To quote its website, "President Donald Trump (R) won 2,626 counties nationwide, while Hillary Clinton (D) won 487 counties. Of the 2,626 counties Trump won, Ballotpedia identified 206 counties that voted for Trump in 2016 after voting for Barack Obama (D) in 2008 and 2012. Collectively, Trump won these Pivot Counties by more than 580,000 votes, and had an average margin of victory of 11.45 per cent."

Pew Research Center identified several psychographic factors that influenced voting behavior in the presidential election. Trump received at least 60% of the vote from white Catholics, born again Christians, and Mormons, according to exit polls (Martinez and Smith, 2016). Those who never attended religious services voted for Clinton by 62%. Tyson and Maniam (2016) reported that whites voted for Trump by 58% and men by 53%; those without college degrees 52%; voters over 65 by 53%. Clinton won black voters (88%), women (54%), college graduates (52%), and voters 18-29 (53%). Krogstad and Lopez (2016) indicate that Clinton got 71% of the Latino vote.

A single factor rarely, if ever, explains why a person votes for a candidate. However, the 2016 U.S. presidential election shows the potential impact for psychographic targeting of voters. Something motivated more than two million people to vote Republican in 2016 than in 2012 while the total number of Democratic voters declined. The electorate divided along the lines of gender, age, race, and education, which were factors used by the Russians in targeting social media groups with their advertising. A logical conclusion is that the Russian efforts may have convinced more Republicans to go vote than ever before or persuaded Obama voters to not vote for Clinton. The new voters likely found ideological agreement with Trump and perhaps held even pre-existing poor opinions of Hillary Clinton, points reinforced in the Russian campaign.

None of the Russian social media advertisements or posts had to be true. The costs were low per voter contact. The ads highlighted ideological agreement and ignored truth. They reached people who had already decided where they stood on issues and candidates. The only question was if those angry people would turn out to vote for Donald Trump. The statistics suggest that two million of those voters did.

Implications for Democracy

The truth is important for a democracy. The first premise of democratic government is that the collective wisdom of the voters will lead to intelligent decisions. How does a populace achieve collective wisdom when the truth is being buried by those trying to manipulate the system for their benefits? The second premise of democracy is called the marketplace of ideas, which is expressed in the U.S. Supreme Court decisions written by Justices Oliver Wendell Holmes and Louis Brandeis. The justices argued that censorship was antithetical to democracy because the only way to find the truth was to hear all ideas. Through this marketplace of ideas and public debate, the best ideas would emerge, and the collective wisdom could be asserted. However, the justices wrote their decisions before 1940 when network radio stations, newspapers and print were the major sources of public information. In an internet and social media world, those people whose opinions are rejected form a private group on Facebook or podcasts their opinions. An idea accepted by 1 in a million people can have 1000 followers on the internet. Then those 1000 people can attack the truth-tellers.

For example, years after 26 people were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School, parents of the dead and injured children sued Alex Jones for defamation after Jones claimed the shooting was fabricated (Romo, 2018). For example, video of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was edited to make her appear drunk or her speech disjointed; those videos were tweeted by President Donald Trump and his lawyer Rudy Giuliani (Harwell, 24 May 2019). Technology makes changes to actual video footage easy to manipulate and to create footage that is difficult to differentiate from the changed video (Harwell, 12 June 2019). For example, the Chinese government pays 448 million people to write posts to web sites and social media (King, Pan, and Roberts, 2017). For example, a claim was posted on WhatsApp that “Madrid Mayor Manuela Carmena planned to set up open “sex zones” for gay people around the city” (Stolton, 2019). Among the web sites that specialize in alternative views of the news are dailycaller.com, dailymail.co.uk, breitbart.com; thelastamericanvagabond.com lists 33 sites for alternative perspectives on the news. Correcting the record is difficult, argue Sellnow, Parrish, and Semenas (2019). “Even after providing evidence refuting the hoax claims, lingering concerns from some of the afflicted organization’s publics can linger,” they explain (p. 125).

The Russians put psychographics on steroids by putting the human and financial resources into their social media efforts to spread a world view consistent with Russian propaganda goals. Fake news, conspiracy theories, Facebook posts, Twitter feeds, and YouTube videos make it easy and cheap for any actors, from the Russians to a single laptop user, to spread information that can disrupt an election. People have picked up their guns and organized mobs to stop evil as it has been identified by someone, somewhere, for whatever reason. While the false stories are cheap to produce, professionals have to develop sophisticated strategies to counter the false information; the truth is expensive to publish when the facts are at war with fake news. We live in a media climate where propaganda can stand toe-to-toe with the truth, and few people can sort out the facts.

Notes

¹As Kohle (2014) points out, the mass audience gave enormous power to the small group of people—“politicians, news agencies, broadcasters, and editors-in-chief”—who controlled the flow of information to the public (p. 175). Without the gatekeepers of the establishment establishing standards, fake news could proliferate unchallenged.

²See ad at <https://nationalpost.com/news/world/hillary-is-a-satan-ten-ads-that-russian-trolls-posted-during-the-2016-u-s-election>

³See ad at <https://www.thedailybeast.com/russians-biggest-facebook-ad-promoted-blue-lives-matter>

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Mark Goodman (Ph.D., University of Missouri, USA, 1993) is a Professor Emeritus, Department of Communication, Mississippi State University, USA. His other research interests include free speech and First Amendment Law.

John Goodman is an independent researcher and a solutions architect for Poetic Systems (poeticsystems.com). Poetic Systems is a Houston (TX) based firm that develops applications and websites for the internet and social media.