Political bias in social media

Digital media is so prominent in day to day life that it is often in your hand or back pocket. It is not often thought how this tool shapes thinking and perception but the fact is, it does. During the past decade, social media has become a very powerful instrument in campaigns and government. With a shift in how information is obtained, there is also gained momentum toward misinformation and bias news. There is a power of many, like-minded individuals are able to come together and leverage their numbers against the influence of powerful lobbyists and other types of affluent groups.

Objective

The role that digital and social media play in politics is as large as ever, especially now that we are closing in on the election year of 2020. Having never voted in an election I'm interested to know the true effects of social media on voter perception and politics in general. Having spent much of my life online I am no stranger to news bias, targeting, and perception changers; as I begin the search for my presidential candidate and vote or the first time I'm curious to know how media will target me and try to sway my opinion.

Read and Watch

The work that politicians and their teams put into media presentation, from targeting to bad-mouthing is fascinating. Kery Murakami's article titled " Smartphone political ads target non-political events to talk directly to voters, one by one" focuses on how political candidates are able to hone in on individuals through technology and present them with political advertisements. This comes as no surprise as technology is at its most advanced, there is the ability to use global positioning or radiofrequency to define a geographic area, then set up triggers to send text and video ads

and alerts to people in the vicinity (Murakami, 2017), this is the newest wave of both political and non-political advertising. Last year's presidential campaigns spent three or four times as much for online ads as previous presidential campaigns (Murakami, 2017), and even more is expected in future elections.

The relevancy of political play on digital and social media to a digital media and society course is obvious. We are aimed at learning the effects of recent technological advances such as the Internet, Twitter, and online News have on the pulse of society. Politics has changed quite a bit in the last couple of decades and the internet has played a large role in that transformation. As advances are made to technology the effects of such will play a larger and larger role in society so it is important that digital media courses continue to grow there curriculum to include that.

Research
The evolution of social media, like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, from platforms facilitating networks among friends to powerful political tools, has been an especially momentous development. The political role of social media in American politics was established during the 2008 presidential election. Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama's social-media strategy revolutionized campaigning by altering the structure of political organizing (Owen, 2017, para. 3).

The fact that 68% of American adults in 2018 got news from social media at least occasionally, and 20% relied often on social media for news (Owen, 2017, para. 13) says a lot to the amount that we rely upon social media. Few

people were active on social media between 2005 and 2008. Even during the 2008 campaign, only 21% of the public was on social media. By 2009, however, the number of people online had spiked to 42% as social media took hold in the political sphere in the run-up to the 2010 midterm elections. The percentage of social media users has leveled off at 70% since the 2016 presidential election (Owen, 2017, para. 13).

Time

To take a larger picture approach to the social media influence on politics today we'll see about how social media truly affects politics and the voters. With access to news around the clock, there is no more waiting for the newspaper or television segment, online news is a 24/7 phenomenon where news, poll results, and rumors can be shared instantly (Satterfield, 2016).

Targeting

It's no secret that targeting is used throughout the advertising industry to make sure that ads and messages reach the right audience. What may have been a secret is that politicians have access to this as well; if a candidate wants to address the concerns of women, college students, retired people, Latinos, or any other group of voters, they can now tailor their messages. Just as advertisers on Facebook are able to use analytics and targeted advertising, so can candidates and politicians. Thus, if you notice that political messages seem to be talking to you personally, this is no accident.

Fake News

Political campaigns but specifically voters are now influenced by every story, whether true or not, that is posted on social media. It's getting more and

more difficult to separate actual news from fake news online. Social media makes this distinction especially confusing. The constant stream of memes, links, and rumors about political leaders and candidates is a mixture of truth, lies, satire, and speculation.

Bias

There is the power to confirmation bias and it is prevalent on social media. It occurs from the direct influence of desire on beliefs, it blurs our vision to ideas that do not fit into our thinking (Satterfield, 2016). Once we have formed a view, we embrace information that confirms that view while ignoring, or rejecting, information that casts doubt on it. Digital and social media has made it easy to stay in a bias bubble of thinking and that can affect political standings if the outside of the bubble is no explored.

Interaction

One of the positive effects that social media has on politics is the opportunity for voters to interact more easily with candidates and elected officials. Traditionally, if you wanted to meet a politician or candidate, you'd have to attend a live event but with modern technology, it is now possible to attend virtual events to interact with politicians and candidates.

Future of Politics

There are sure to be many political changes that come about due to social media. There are now proposals for internet voting, which could lead to more people participating in elections. This could make social media even more influential, as people could literally vote moments after reading the latest comments or links they found on Facebook or Twitter. Other advancements

will also change politics. Polling techniques on social media will become more common and, hopefully, more accurate. More virtual political rallies and town halls will take place. As social media becomes ever more popular, its impact on politics will only increase over time. It will be interesting to observe how this plays out.

Credibility

To evaluate a source whether it is political, medical, or just general information is extremely important. As mentioned above it is easy to enter a confirmation bias bubble so it is vital to read from sources that do not necessarily share your opinion. There are six ways to evaluate websites' credibility, author, date, sources, domain, site design, and writing style (University of Wisconsin, 2019). When an author is willing to put their name on a piece of writing and in some cases their contact information, is one indication of reliable information. By including a date on any research information it lets the reader know if that information is recent enough for their purpose. When sources are provided to other works the author drew information from is just another way to establish credibility. An important thing to be aware of is the domain, domains such as . com, . org, and . net can be purchased and used by any individual. However, the domain . edu is reserved for colleges and universities, and . gov denotes a government website; these two tend to be the most credible. When looking at site design and writing style, look for websites that make it easy to navigate and find the information and importantly, lack spelling and grammar mistakes. After using all these tools know that there may be some reliable websites that do not include all these qualities. If you are unsure whether the site you're using

is credible, it's as easy to verify the information found with another source you know to be reliable.

Taking into consideration the above ways of evaluating website credibility, I believe my sources are such. The article " Smartphone political ads target non-political events to talk directly to voters, one by one" was written by Kery Murakami, a CNHI Washington reporter and published July 9, 2017, by the Meadville Tribune. Taking into consideration the relative unknown of the publisher, there could be some bias so it's important to keep that in mind. The author provides his email at the bottom of the article, adding some reliability to his writing. An article titled " The Past Decade and Future of Political Media: The Ascendance of Social Media," written by Diana Owen of Georgetown University was also used to gather research information. This source seems to be extremely reliable with author contact information, a long list of sources, and charts and graphs all available. The last source I used is titled " How Social Media Affects Politics" and written by Heather Satterfield, a marketing manager, in 2016. The article provides hyperlinks to outside sources in which information was gathered. I believe the article to be unbiased as it was gathered from multiple sources and is straight-forward data of social media and politics.

Conclusion

The future of digital and social media is boundless, a digital revolution is taking the twenty-first century by storm. Over the past decade, the rise in social media as a political tool has changed the relationships between politicians, the press, and the public. The involvement of Donald Trump into

the political media mix has continued the evolution of the media system in some unanticipated directions. As one scholar noted, " The Internet reacted and adapted to the introduction of the Trump campaign like an ecosystem welcoming a new and foreign species. His candidacy triggered new strategies and promoted established Internet forces (Owen, 2017)". Changes will continue to happen as we gain more technology advanced politicians and political teams, and this creates a spark of hope for the future of political media.