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The Evolution of Political Narratives in the Digital Age in The United States of America

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: The objective of this essay is to demonstrate how political narratives in the United States of America, specifically, Presidential campaign advertisements, have addressed the problem of audience.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: Through historical and critical analysis/research the essay traces the concept of *presence*, i.e. foregrounding information favorable to the candidate without incurring opposition, and, foregrounding information that addresses each voter's specific issues.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: The essay begins by reviewing the origins of the "reasonable man" assumption of audience in contested rituals in a democracy. It then applies that historic standard to modern American Presidential campaigns beginning with the oratorical period (circa 1896) and continuing through the periods dominated by radio (1925-1950) and television (1960-2004). The essay argues that the problem of *presence* was never resolved in these periods.

RESEARCH RESULTS: The essay demonstrates how Big Data and the use of that data for psychographic analysis (in addition to the traditional demographic analysis) solves the problem of *presence* by allowing candidates to micro-target narratives to individuals and their specific interests.

CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS: The essay concludes with a cautionary note about the trend toward "self-assent," and the societal danger its poses for purging political narratives of their "contested" value to a democracy.

→ **KEYWORDS:**   NARRATIVE, POLITICAL, BIG DATA, ADVERTISING, PSYCHOGRAPHICS, TRUMP CAMPAIGN

STRESZCZENIE

Ewolucja narracji politycznych w Stanach Zjednoczonych w erze cyfrowej

CEL NAUKOWY: Celem artykułu jest pokazanie, w jaki sposób narracje polityczne w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki, a konkretnie reklamy kampanii prezydenckich, stawiały czoła problemowi ich odbiorców.

PROBLEMY I METODY BADAWCZE: Dzięki zastosowaniu metody analizy historycznej i krytycznej w artykule prześledzona została koncepcja „obecności" na przykładzie uwypuklania informacji korzystnych dla kandydata bez odnoszenia się do osoby rywala oraz przedstawiania informacji, które dotyczą konkretnych problemów wyborców.

PROCES WYWODU: Artykuł rozpoczyna się od analizy genezy założenia dotyczącego istnienia „rozsądnego człowieka" jako odbiorcy demokratycznych rytuałów wyborczych. Ten historyczny wzorzec zastosowany został następnie do współczesnych amerykańskich kampanii prezydenckich, począwszy od okresu oratorskiego (około 1896), przez okresy zdominowane przez radio (1925-1950) i telewizję (1960-2004). W artykule postawiona została teza, iż problem obecności w tych okresach nie został rozwiązany.

WYNIKI ANALIZY NAUKOWEJ: Esej pokazuje, w jaki sposób Big Data i wykorzystanie tych danych do analizy psychograficznej (uzupełniającej tradycyjną analizę demograficzną) rozwiązuje problem obecności, umożliwiając kandydatom precyzyjne dopasowanie narracji do osób i ich konkretnych zainteresowań.

WNIOSKI, INNOWACJE, REKOMENDACJE: Artykuł kończy się ostrzeżeniem przed tendencją do „samozadowolenia" i zagrożeniem dla demokracji związanym z oczyszczeniem narracji politycznych z ich „rywalizacyjnej" zawartości.

→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: NARRACJE, POLITYKA, BIG DATA, REKLAMA, DANE PSYCHOGRAFICZNE, KAMPANIA TRUMPA**

Narratives stories people tell that present an idea or a set of linked ideas that characterize what someone believes are, or should be, sites of cultural contests. Narratives provide a rich source of information about how people make sense of their lives, about how they construct disparate facts and weave them together cognitively to make sense of reality. All narratives are rhetorical in the sense that the choices the person makes are or should be based upon a universe of facts and opinions that seek, overtly or covertly, to persuade. Narrative analysis is particularly useful, then, in providing insight into the cognitive process and on the role of culture in shaping human universals.

One such narrative is the political narrative. Political narratives provide a rationale for the policies the candidates espouse. This rationale may come from the reputation (*ethos*) of the candidate, his/her philosophy and attitudes (*logos*), and/or the behaviors,

temperament, and motives that the candidate brings to the role of campaigning and by extrapolation to the role of governing (*pathos*). These three modes of proof are often presented in contrast to other political opponents or parties. All of this information is expressed in speeches, debates, and political advertisements through which the public can see and hear the candidates.

Political advertisements are a synecdoche of all political narratives. They have been problematic for the candidates in modern American elections for two reasons: (1) while they address those who support the candidate, and those who are undecided, they also address, inadvertently, those who do not support the candidate, thus becoming the target of opposition advertisements; and (2) they often fail to emphasize the particular reason individual supporters are voting for the candidate whether that be tax policy, education policy, flaws in the opponent, or any number of issues. It is the eternal problem of *presence.* As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca note: "By the very fact of selecting certain elements and presenting them to an audience, their importance and pertinency to the discussion are implied… it is an essential factor in argumentation and one that is far too neglected in rationalistic conceptions of reasoning" (1969, p. 116).

Indeed, *presence* acts directly on our sensibilities. The emergence of Big Data and social media have given candidates the ability to refine their message to assist a specific voter's cognitive process as he/she constructs a voting decision, while not exposing the candidate to opposition from an opponent at the same time. Big Data provides the possibility of micro-targeting voters with narratives that speak directly to each individual voter demographically and psychographically. In America that means 200 million people. This essay briefly reviews the history of political narratives in the United States of America showing how the challenge of *presence* for an audience has been addressed. It then focuses on the new process of Big Data to show how that elusive problem of "audience" has evolved. Finally, the essay presents a cautionary note on this new phenomenon.

The narrative received its most detailed treatment in the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* (1968, pp. 170-171) the oldest Latin text on the subject of rhetoric (circa 80-90 BCE). Once attributed to Cicero but of unknown authorship; in fact, this text contains the building blocks of narrative in both judicial and deliberative rhetoric.

In the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* the *auctor* states that in a speech the narrative, also known as the "statement of facts," usually comes immediately after the introduction, and prior to division, proof, refutation, and conclusion. In political rhetoric (deliberative) this narrative is constructed toward the end of gaining Advantage with the audience. Advantage is divided into two parts: considerations of Security and considerations of Honor. The author continues:

> If we prove that both ends will be served, we shall promise to make this twofold proof in our discourse; if we are going to prove that one of the two will be served, we shall indicate simply the one thing we intend to affirm. If now we say that our aim is Security, we shall use its subdivisions, Might and Strategy… If we say that our counsel aims at the Right [honor], and all four categories of Right apply, we shall use them all. If these categories do not apply, we shall in speaking, set forth as many as do (Ad Herennium, pp. 170-171).

Such was the early theorizing about *presence* in a political narrative. Notice that no specific audience is mentioned. The speaker must assume that he/she is addressing all *reasonable persons*. If he/she applies the topics Security and/or Honor, the audience, it is supposed, will be persuaded. Notice how the *auctor* says that the speaker should only apply those topics that advantage the case. Thus, the narrative is a selection of strategies. The advice in most ancient texts is approximately the same as in the *Ad Herennium*, a generalized account of what constitutes the narrative, and a more or less *a priori* sense of audience as *reasonable* human beings.

Within these broad outlines, the narrative allows the speaker to pick and choose those facts that create a penumbra around the case that operates at the psychological level as certain data is foregrounded. It is the narrator's goal to present those facts that will persuade the audience and that are difficult to refute by an opponent. He/she does this by verbal magic, either with the voice or in written discourse with colors, object placement, or words. In other words, each datum is meant to attract attention; one might say it is the application of reason to the imagination.

It was from these early sources that modern statesmen drew their knowledge. By briefly tracing the evolution of political narratives since the modern American Presidential Campaigns began in 1912, we can see how they have evolved with technology, especially in the mediums of expression. The four periods covered here are the oratorical, radio, television, and the internet.

Until 1896, American Presidential candidates were reluctant to campaign actively for the Presidency. But in that year, the Democrats nominated a renowned orator, William Jennings Bryan, from rural Nebraska. Bryan, who was known as "The great commoner," bragged that he was born an orator. He gave a nomination address at the party convention which became known as "The Cross of Gold" speech. Congress had passed a bill in 1873 establishing gold as the foundation or standard for printing money. That is, the amount of money printed could only be equal to the value of the gold held in the United States Treasury. Bryan proposed a "bimetalism" standard which would allow silver to be added to the Treasury. This inflationary measure would have increased the amount of money in circulation and aided cash-poor and debt-burdened farmers, particularly those in the Midwest United States. In the speech, Bryan decried the standard of the time, gold, concluding the speech with the famous line, "you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold." This line was repeated in the leaflets used by Bryan's campaign.

On the heels of America's economic collapse of 1893, the address catapulted him to the Democratic Party's presidential nomination; it is considered one of the greatest political speeches in American history. But while it was an enormous success at the Democratic convention, it was a bust nationwide, and a disaster as a headline in his leaflets. Bryan had failed to appeal to a national audience. Of those who heard the speech some supported the idea, but others who heard the speech opposed the idea. Because Bryan viewed the convention audience as his primary audience, he chained himself to his text. As Jamieson notes, "The result was a hobbled speech, the oratorical low point of the campaign (1996, p. 17)". Missing from Bryan's thinking was his wider audience,

"the ensemble of those whom the speaker wishes to influence by his argumentation (Perelman, 1969, p. 19)". And especially those who knew Bryan only by his leaflets. As a result, Bryan lost the election to William McKinley.

The advent of radio in the 1920s and early 1930s, changed campaigning dramatically. As a medium used for advertising, radio had the effect of seeming to communicate intimately with the audience compared to the stump oratory which preceded it. Al Smith, the candidate from the Republican Party in the 1928 election noted that,

> Tonight I am not surrounded by thousands of people in a great hall and I am going to take this opportunity to talk immediately to my radio audience alone, as though I were sitting with you in your own home and personally discussing with you the decision that you are to make tomorrow (Jamieson, 1996, p. 21).

During the 1930s, Franklin Delano Roosevelt mastered the art of radio-speak with his intimate Fireside Chats that were listened to by upwards of 60 million voters, and were responsible for his election to the Presidency three times after his initial election in 1932. Where William Jennings Bryan had made a single speech 600 times in 100 days of campaigning in 27 states to 5,000,000 people, Franklin Delano Roosevelt could deliver one radio speech from his parlor and reached twelve times that number (Jamieson, 1996, p. 19-20). Each of Roosevelt's "fireside chats" had a different theme, and in that respect Roosevelt thought that his entire audience would be addressed, perhaps not in one speech, but in the aggregate. While one particular issue was foregrounded in each "chat," he was never able to direct his message to the specific reasons of each voter who supported him. But Roosevelt was successful because he was a "father figure" (*ethos*) and because he was able to provide comfort and stability (*pathos*) to "Americans" in general.

The medium through which politicians have traditionally communicated since the 1950s, television, created its own challenges and drawbacks. As recently as 1996, rhetorical scholar Kathleen Hall Jamieson, could say that,

> Political advertising is now the major means by which candidates for the presidency communicate their messages to voters. As a conduit of this advertising, television attracts both more candidate dollars and more audience attention than radio or print. Unsurprisingly, the spot ad is the most used and most viewed of all available forms of advertising (1996, p. 517).

The "spot" ads were written by political consultants known as "mad men," corporate types from the advertising world hired by the campaigns. They took the form of 30-second or 60-second commercials that accompanied what the candidate was saying in his or her speeches on the campaign trail. These brief narrative spots were segmented by such characteristics as biographical ads, positive and negative ads, and attack and defense ads. In addition, the audience was segmented by demographics, i.e. women, minorities, veterans, young voters, etc.

Biographical ads, gauzy in format, were usually used to kick off a campaign. The candidate was shown with his family or in military garb, while in the background soothing music was played. The candidate and a narrator were used to "tell the candidate's story."

Positive ads were usually done with the candidate on screen and a narrator in voice-
-over. Here is an example of a positive ad by George Bush called *Victory* from the 2004
Presidential race between Bush and John Kerry:

Graphics: from www.bush.com
Bush: I'm George W. Bush and I approve this message.
Narrator: In 1972, there were 40 democracies in the world. Today, 120.
　　Freedom is spreading throughout the world like a sunrise. And this Olympics there will
　　two more free nations. And two fewer terrorist regimes.
Graphics: Flags in Afghanistan and Iraq
Narrator: With strength, resolve, and courage, democracy will triumph over terror.
　　And hope will defeat hatred.
Graphics: Approved by President Bush and paid for by Bush-Cheney, Inc.
　　President Bush: Moving America Forward.

Attack, or negative, ads were done by surrogates such as the national party or a group
that was supporting the candidate. Personal testimony or man-in-the-street ads were
common formats used to intimate what the public thought about an issue. One of most
successful ads, shown in the 2004 campaign, was an attack ad on John Kerry, a Viet-
nam veteran and by his own account a war hero, by his comrades in arms, called "The
Swift Boat Ad." A version of it is reproduced here:

John Edwards: If you have any questions about what John Kerry is made of, just spend
　　3 minutes with the men who served with him.
Al French: I served with John Kerry.
Bob Elder: I served with John Kerry.
George Elliot: John Kerry has not been honest about what happened in Vietnam.
Al French: He is lying about his record.
Louis Letson: I know John Kerry is lying about his record because I treated him for that Injury.
Van Odell: John Kerry lied to get his Bronze Star; I know. I was there. I saw what happened.
Jack Chenoweth: His account of what happened and what actually happened are the diffe-
　　rence between night and day.
Admiral Hoffman: John Kerry has not been honest.
Adrian Lonsdale: And he lacks the capacity to lead.
Larry Thurlow: When the chips were down, you could not count on John Kerry.
Bob Elder: John Kerry is no war hero.
Grant Hibbard: He betrayed his shipmates… He lied before the Senate.
Shelton White: John Kerry betrayed the men he served with in Vietnam.
Joe Ponder: He dishonored his country… He most certainly did.
Bob Hildreth: I served with John Kerry… John Kerry cannot be trusted.
Announcer: Swift Boat Veterans is responsible for the content of the advertisement.

The problem was the same with each one of these ads. None of them segmented
their audience by any quality that could be addressed without other members of the au-
dience finding the ad revolting. The Mad Men used focus groups before they put the ads
on television, and surveys were conducted after the ads were shown to discover how

persuasive they were. Most of the money was spent on television ads in "swing states," (approximately 10 out of 50 states) in order to target that audience most important to winning the election.

Sampling was a problem for the Mad Men. Random sampling of voters was the most commonly used form. But issues of internal and external validity arose such that the generalizability to the American audience was severely constrained. As Kenski noted, "Having a good sampling strategy does not by itself justify claiming that the sample is representative of the population to which we want to generalize" (Jamieson, 2006, p. 49).

The 30-second ad and the 60-second ad became very expensive and campaign funds were put into TV advertising more than any other aspect of the campaign. In 2004, for instance, George Bush and John Kerry spent a combined total of $125 million on television ads (West, 2005, p. 16). Four million ads aired at the national and local levels, (mostly in swing states) by the two candidates. In addition, $130 million was spent by independent organizations such as Planned Parenthood and the National Rifle association. Between the candidates and special interest groups, then, more than a quarter of a billion dollars went into 630,000 television ads in 2004. Since the candidates each had approximately $1.2 billion, advertising was a major expense, about 25% of all funds expended.

What was the effect of these ads? One study reported that only 11% of those surveyed believed that they were influenced by television advertising (West, 2005, p. 11). Television ads occurred in the context of other forces shaping the electorate including speeches, debates, news coverage of the candidates, etc. And methods such as random sampling and segmenting the audience into demographics such as gender, region, age, etc. was too gross a method for aiming at American voters. And swing states are by definition about half Republican and half Democratic, ensuring that the same number of people hated the ad as loved it. Thus, the elusive search for the audience continued.

The Mad Men were unable to find those particular features of the voting public that went beyond the gross and ambiguous details of their identity. As if all women or all African-Americans think alike. This form of advertising changed with the dawning of Big Data. In addition to demographics, the audience was broken down into personality characteristics such as openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, or neurotic tendencies. And hundreds of thousands of ads were sent out each day over the Internet testing language, colors, and issues. But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

The internet became a major factor in 2004. It was initially used for fundraising, mobilizing the public to vote, information about the election, and as a way to give bloggers a chance to make their views known (Jamieson, ed., 2006, p. 3). By 2008, it was the primary means of reaching voters. That year the campaign of Barack Obama exploited it fully. "Were it not for the Internet, Barack Obama would not be president. Were it not for the Internet, Barack Obama would not have been the nominee," said Arianna Huffington, editor in chief of *The Huffington Post*. Mr. Obama's campaign took advantage of YouTube for free advertising. Joe Trippi, Mr. Obama's campaign manager, argued that those videos were more effective than television ads because viewers chose to watch

them or received them from a friend instead of having their television shows interrupted… The campaign's official stuff that they created for YouTube was watched for 14.5 million hours," Mr. Trippi said. "To buy 14.5 million hours on broadcast TV is $47 million (https://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/11/07/how-obamas-internet-campaign-changed-politics)."

Today, political campaigns are no longer only about being able to deliver a grand oration, or to be intimate with the audience, or to put together the most effective 30-second or 60-second commercials, or even about using the Internet for videos and blogs. Today, the Internet is used to reach every single person who might enter a polling place and mark a ballot. Political campaigns have had to reach out to voters where they actually are. And where are they? For many the answer is on their phones, on a social network, or just generally online. As the blog DOZ notes:

> It is little surprise, then, that the modern political campaign is more and more committed to reaching voters via digital means. Whether advertising on search engines and social media, reaching out to email lists with millions of subscribers, analyzing data for trends and voting intentions, or asking – even begging – for political donations, the internet is often where modern political campaigning lives and dies (http://www.doz.com/marketing-resources/three-ways-internet-change political-campaigns).

Doug Hasson reflects on this sea change:

> It wasn't too long ago when a discussion about targeting political direct mail went something like, 'we can drop Democrats who've voted in primaries; drop Republicans because they'll never vote or us; and we'll mail to everyone else.' Fifteen years ago, targeting mail was akin to medieval doctors using blood-letting to cure the common cold. It was crude, messy and rather unscientific. Today, with the dramatic advances in voter files, market research, the near universal use of polling and the resulting targeting data, campaign mail is more like laser surgery. We can now dig deep into our beloved cross-tabulations, cut out the critical subpopulations, and build persuasion direct mail that appeals to key voters instead of the masses (www.winningcampaigns.org/Winning-Campaigns-Archive-Articles/Mass-Mailing--Turns-to-Micro-Targeting.html).

Consider the versatility of the internet and the options that it presents to communicate a political message to a pool of potential voters compared to radio television, or newspapers.

> Want to reach a voter who wants every detail of every policy? Send them to your collection of PDFs. Want to reach a voter who is attracted to visuals? Send them to your Instagram feed, your Facebook photo album, or your YouTube video playlist. Most importantly the voter who wants information tailored for his or her personal political preferences need only click a couple of boxes on a list to ensure they get newsletters personalized in a way that direct mailers can only dream of. The voter who liked the radio ad can be delivered a podcast, the voter who preferred to watch speeches can see them streamed live, and anyone who likes to watch campaign commercials can find them archived on video sharing sites, and sometimes only ever released there. The versatility of the internet is truly a game changer for political campaigns (http://www.doz.com/marketing-resources/three-ways-internet-change-political-campaigns).

Cambridge Analytica is one of the pioneers in using the internet to micro-target individuals in political campaign. In the Republican primary of 2016, they represented Senator Ted Cruz, a longshot for the nomination. By the end of the primary, only two candidates out of seventeen remained: the favorite Donald Trump and the longshot Ted Cruz. Cruz went from no chance to second in the race for the nomination. As Alexander Nix of Cambridge Analytica, a pioneer in psychographics and micro-targeting individual voters, says, "Blanket advertising is dead. Communication today is individualized…" Nix goes on to note that,

> It is now possible for political leaders to capture expressions of all American minds. Ground zero in American campaigns has become the streets and homes of Americans in swing states… By polling people in individual households about their political beliefs and choices and then sending that information back to party headquarters, the campaign can send emails, snail mails, and banners to that individual focusing on just those issues the individual has told the pollster. This is true for supporters of the candidate, as well as for undecideds (The power of big data and psychographics. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CgYvf3Ckdso).

In addition to polling individual households, click technology and the use of micro-targeting voters based upon their clicks has made it possible to direct persuasive narratives to individuals based on personality characteristics: openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, or neurotic tendencies. When these characteristics are added to demographics, the result is a precise ad that the viewer finds persuasive because he/she thinks and speaks that way. That is what Cambridge Analytica did for Senator Cruz, and it opened everyone's eyes to the potential of psychographics when used on the internet.

Political narratives in the postmodern world are comprised of visuals, colors, presence, and focus. The logical, emotional, and ethical element are added to it. The result is a story that has the analytic of facts with a twist on them inclined to bring a tear to the eye, or a quick burst of anger to the brain.

Internet ads such as these (Figure 1) appeared as banner ads for Donald Trump on websites such as Facebook and Twitter. Notice how these ads appears in green, the color most often clicked on by the subset of voters during tests. Viewers who selected another color received the same ads in that color. The ads micro-target voters by the specific issue with which they are concerned, based on surveys conducted house-to-house by campaign workers. The Trump campaign sent out fifty to sixty thousand of these ads per day.

Figure 1. Banner Ads Used in the Trump Campaign, *Used by permission of Brad Parscale.*

We can look at the Trump campaign for the presidency as an example of the use of Big Data to win an election, a feat not imagined by anyone 20 years ago. Brad Parscale, Director of Digital Advertising for the Trump campaign, noted in an interview with 60 Minutes that, "I was focused on competing with the Clinton campaign's huge advantage in money and TV ads." He decided to turn to social media, most importantly to Facebook. "I understood early on that Facebook was how Donald Trump was going to win. Twitter is how he talked to the people. Facebook was going to be how he won, and Facebook IS how he won. I think Facebook was the method – it was the highway on which his car drove." Parscale's job was to send out carefully-tailored, low-cost digital ads by the millions in the form of banners. By using the technology of the internet, and by surveying people with visits to their homes, and then subjecting the results of those interviews to data analysis an audience was identified that could be micro-targeted. Parscale continues:

> Today Facebook offers something precise and sophisticated. For instance, Facebook penetrated the rural vote. Facebook now lets you get to places and places possibly that you would never go with TV ads. Now, I can find 15 people in the Florida Panhandle that I would never buy a TV commercial for (Brad Parscale, 60 minutes interview with Lesley Stahl, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z79DIgG6yuY).

And, the Trump campaign took opportunities that the other side did not. Hillary Clinton ran a campaign that had an estimated $516 million compared to Trump's $201 million did not accept help offered by Facebook. The Trump campaign did, and that made all the difference.

The narrative is the most basic pattern we have for cataloguing experiences and sharing them with others. It answers the basic questions: What happened? What will happen? Narratives are a critical pattern of communication in political rhetoric. The political narrative has been dramatically changed by technology that presents the candidate with specific information on millions of individuals. Big Data allows a candidate to respond to an individual voter's interests in the mindset of that voter. The most persuasive argument is the one that presents an assent to oneself.

When the selection of facts presented in a narrative is so refined that it speaks directly to an individual's demographic and personality characteristics, then the problem of audience is solved as the assent comes from the voice of the individual voter's own cognitive reasoning. As Pascal said, "the best criterion of the truth is your own assent to yourself, and the constant voice of your own reason (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 40)." Thus, the stories that people tell a pollster or that they respond to with a click are told back to that person in political terms and visuals that are seen as the most reasonable. The best deliberation is self-deliberation. The history of the elusive search for the narratives that meet every individual where he/she is making sense of the contest, is the use of Big Data as contrasted with the focus group, the national poll, or some appeal to what the writer or speaker determines him or herself to be the ideas that will persuade others. It is the human tendency to rationalize and to seek information that supports those rationalizations.

But what are the consequences of "assenting to oneself" all the time? Is it not better to have competing voices? Is not a rhetorical world the handmaiden of democracy? Protagoras tells us that, "For every argument there is a competing and equally valid argument." But what if we are no longer exposed to the alternative *presence*? Perhaps the polarization and, some would say narcissism, that has gripped democracies such as the United States of America and that threaten to destroy it is actually the very segmenting of audiences that politicians have been seeking for thousands of years.

And what about the potential loss of privacy as individuals go online with the tacit assumption that every word they utter and photograph they post is being harvested by groups seeking to shape the national narrative? As the saying goes, "Be careful what you wish for."

Postscript: This essay was completed in December, 2017. Much has happened since that time that reinforces its conclusions. Cambridge Analytica is now under investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice and the FBI. The investigation will determine if Cambridge Analytica violated any laws or statutes governing the privacy rights of individuals. According to the Reuters News Service,

> beginning in 2014, Cambridge Analytica obtained data [using the Like icon on Facebook] on 50 million Facebook users via means that deceived both the users and Facebook. The data was harvested using an application developed by a British academic, Aleksandr Kogan. Some 270,000 people downloaded the application and logged in with their Facebook

credentials, according to Facebook. The application gathered their data and data about their friends, and then Kogan passed the data on to Cambridge Analytica, according to both Cambridge Analytica and Facebook. Cambridge Analytica said on Saturday that it did not initially know Kogan violated Facebook's terms, and that it deleted the data once it found out. The data, though, was not deleted, according to the New York Times and the London Observer. Cambridge Analytica said that the allegation was not true. Facebook said it was investigating to verify the accuracy of the claim (https://www.reuters.com/article/us-facebook-cambridge-analytica).

Because of this perceived gross violation of privacy, and the subsequent negative press received by Facebook and Cambridge Analytica, the big data firm lost most of its customers. Alexander Nix, CEO of Cambridge Analytica was fired on March 20, 2018. On May 2, 2018, the Big Data firm ceased operations and filed for bankruptcy.

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