

POLITICAL RHETORIC: SOCIAL MEDIA'S IMPACT AMONG
AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS IN THE
2016 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

THESIS

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By

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2017

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By

Anthony Ray Coleman M.A.

Texas Southern University, 2017

Dr. E. Bun Lee, Advisor

The purpose of the current study was to examine the major sources of political information among young African American voters. The second purpose of the study was to explore the role of social media on the political exchange among these young voters. Finally, the project applied selective exposure and cognitive dissonance theory in this 2016 presidential election among these young voters.

This exploratory study formulated three major research questions:

(1) What are the major sources of political information in the 2016 presidential campaign among young African American voters?

(2) Did source media shape or change the views of African American young voters in the 2016 Presidential election?

(3) How did selective exposure and cognitive dissonance theory explain the choice of young African American voters?

The researcher employed a mixed method technique by combining a survey for quantitative data and personal interviews for qualitative information. A total of 120 young African American Students at one of the largest Historically Black Universities and Colleges (HBCUs) in Texas participated in the survey and six students were interviewed for more detailed information.

As expected a majority of the survey participants utilized multiple media outlets. Most popular media channels included cable news such as CNN, and MSNBC, local television stations, and Facebook news feeds. About 21.6% of the sample relied on one media channel. The role of social media turned out to be unclear. Even though half of the subjects exchanged political information through social media its influence on voting behavior could not be determined without precise and reliable tracking of social media use.

At the time of this writing there had been multiple reports on the misinformation and Russians propaganda in the 2016 presidential election through social media. Future study should examine further on the true influence of social media in the 2016 presidential campaign.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The arrival of social media as the new technology has literally transformed the way people and organizations communicate with each other (Li & Bernoff, 2008). The development of the Internet and social media have changed and diversified the media environment profoundly in the political campaigns.

In 2008 and 2012, social media such as Facebook, Twitter, & YouTube entered the presidential and congressional campaign trail with great notice. The 2016 presidential campaign was no different. A Pew Research Center reported similarities and differences in the ways Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders used these relatively new campaign platforms. All three candidates utilized Facebook, in their primary campaigns; however, Trump tweeted and retweeted unlike Clinton and Sanders. Retweeting is a rare activity. While Sanders used more video on Facebook than on Twitter, Clinton appeared in about a quarter of all her social media post, compared with one- in-ten for Trump. Social media was very much a part of the 2016 campaign supplementing the traditional media such as newspaper, radio, and television.

Social media users create virtual groups or communities to share and follow mutual information, ideas and pictures, audio, video, personal and business messages while using the Internet. In 1969, CompuServe (the first major commercial Internet Service Provider (ISP) in the United States) evolved social media by conceiving dial-up technology (Albarran, 2013). Over five million users worldwide were active on the internet by 1993. (adage.com). There were approximately 70 million users by computer linked to the internet and social networking sites by the year 2000. By 2001, the boom ballooned to mobile devices and high-tech gadgets with the capacities of linking the internet and facilitating in electronic communication worldwide. Studies on the African American young voters and their use of traditional media are rare. So far few

studies examined the social media use and influence on young African American voters. Young voters follow political information through open forums of Facebook and Twitter conversations. These open forums on digital platforms offer users expressing themselves at will and without impunity on political views and candidates. These various websites advocate users to directly share, like, and follow their candidates. As a result, the development of social media presence is becoming more critical in promoting political candidates and issues.

In the past, American voters relied only on the traditional media such as newspaper, radio, and television as well as handshaking in political events. The message presented by these sources had clear agendas, so voters exposed to one-sided information that favored their candidate (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1948). Over the subsequent years, electoral reforms weakened the role of parties and made candidates increasingly reliant on news media, especially television. Given the norms of journalism no matter which channels voters tuned in to they encountered the same body of information, according balanced attention to the competing candidates. Therefore, it was relatively difficult to use partisan selectivity in exposure to a campaign, (Mutz & Martin, 2001). The proliferation and diversification of news sources on the Internet and social media enhanced the voter's ability to be selective and partisan in recent elections.

Statement of Problem

The current study relied on the selective exposure theory. The theory suggests that individuals have a tendency to favor information reinforcing their pre-existing views while avoiding contradictory information. Selective exposure can affect the decisions people make as individuals or as groups because they are unwilling to change their views and beliefs either collectively or on their own.

The current study attempted to examine the use of traditional and social media by young African American voters in the 2016 presidential campaign. The dearth of academic research on the topic led to the following research questions.

Research Questions

- (1) What are the major sources of political information in the 2016 presidential campaign among young African American voters?
- (2) Did social media shape or influence the views of young African American voters in the 2016 Presidential election?
- (3) How does selective exposure and cognitive dissonance theory explain the choice of young African American voters?

Theoretical Framework

As discussed earlier selective exposure and cognitive dissonance theory may explain the potential motivations for social media use among young voters in the 2016 presidential election. This theory will help identify why young voters, African American voters in particular, may have voted for a particular candidate and at what rate young voters accessed political communication leading to their decision.

Definition of Term

Blog- a website that displays postings by one or more individuals in chronological order and usually has links to comments on specific postings

Branding- in marketing (political), the use of logos, symbols, or product design to promote consumer awareness of goods and services, a trade name or trademark.

Cognitive-of or pertaining to the mental processes of perception, memory, judgment and reasoning, as contrasted with emotional and volitional processes.

Cognitive Dissonance- In the field of psychology, cognitive dissonance is the mental discomfort (psychological stress) experienced by a person who simultaneously holds two or more contradictory beliefs, ideas, or values. The occurrence of cognitive dissonance is a consequence of a person performing an action that contradicts personal beliefs, ideas, and values; and occurs when confronted with new information that contradicts said beliefs, ideas, and values.

Dissonance- inconsistency between the beliefs one holds or between one's actions and beliefs; conflict.

Egocentric- having or regarding the self or the individual as the center of all thing; having little or no regard for interests, beliefs, or attitudes other than one's own; self-centered.

Facebook- is a social networking website originally designed for college students, but is now open to anyone 13 years of age or older. Facebook users can create and customize their own profile with photos, videos, and information about themselves. Friends can browse the profiles of other friends and write messages on their pages. Each Facebook profile has a wall, where friends can post comments. Since the wall is viewable by all the user's friends, wall postings are a public conversation. Therefore, it is usually best not to write personal messages on your friend's walls. Instead, you can send a person a private message, which will show up in his or her private Inbox, similar to an e-mail message. Facebook allows each user to set privacy settings, with strict default. Facebook provides an easy way for friends to keep in touch and have a presence on the Web without needing to build a website.

Guided Age- a period in American history from about 1870 to 1900, during which rapid industrialization, labor pools swelled by immigration, and minimal governmental regulation allowed the upper classes to accumulate great wealth and enjoy affluent lifestyles.

Hashtags- a keyword or phrase preceded by the hash symbol (#), that people include in their social media posts. Essentially, it makes the content of your post accessible to all people with similar interests, even if they are not your followers or fans.

Hyperlinks- an electronic link providing direct access from one distinctively marked place in a hypermedia document to another place in the same or a different document.

Hypertext- a computer based text retrieval system that enables a user to access particular locations or files in webpages or other electronic documents by clicking on links within specific webpages or documents.

Hypermedia- computer software and hardware that allows users to interact with text, graphics, sound, and video, each of which is accessible from within any of the others.

Memes- is an idea, behavior, or style that spreads from person to person within a culture. A meme or imitated thing acts as a unit for carrying ideas, symbols, or practices that maybe transmitted from one mind to another through writing, speech, gestures, rituals, or other imitable phenomena.

Polarization- a sharp division between a population or group of people, driving them in to opposing factions.

Social Media- the websites and applications considered as collectively constituting a medium by which people share messages, photographs, and other information, especially in online communities or forums based on shared interest or backgrounds.

Trending- shows a list of topics and hashtags that have recently spiked in popularity on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.

Twitter- an online social networking and news service where users post and interact with messages called tweets, restricted to 140 characters. Registered users can post tweets, but those who are unregistered can only read them. Users access Twitter through its network interface.

Tweeting- is simply a post on Twitter. Twitter only allows messages of 140 characters or less likely called a tweet because it resembles the same type of short chirp you might hear from a bird.

Retweet- A retweet is a repost of another user's tweet. To do this, you simply click the double arrow retweet button underneath anyone's tweet to display their tweet and to profile an image and a name to give them full credit. The other way to do it is by manual retweeting, which involves copying and pasting their tweet while adding RT @username at the beginning of it.

Timeline- all posts, photos, videos, list of your friends, favorite activities, interests, and any biographical info you have chosen to share. This is where your friends can leave you a message and where you can update the world with anything you feel like sharing.

YouTube- is a free video sharing website that makes it easy to watch online videos. You can even create and upload your own videos to share with others.

Organization of Thesis

The study is organized into an analysis of five chapters. Following the introduction, chapter two provides a review of the literature that examines the impact of social media on voting practices of young voters. Chapter 3 explains the research methodology, data collection and analysis process. Chapter 4 presents a highlight of findings, and chapter five provides a summary of the study along with discussion, conclusion, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews previous studies done on the role of traditional media such as newspaper, radio, and television in presidential elections. Secondly, studies on the social media as political information platform were examined. Finally, it discusses the theoretical framework of the current study.

Past Presidential Elections and Traditional Mass Media

There is a high level of skepticism as to how much presidential campaigns can actually affect the outcomes of the elections. In many cases, the state of the economy, the political landscape, and other factors elude the candidate and are more significant. In spite of this, campaigns act as a disseminator of information on the candidates and issues.

Historically presidential politics did not have the luxury of Internet and websites. Earning the vote relied on a direct connection with the voter. Handshakes and baby kissing were typical. Lyndon Baines Johnson was one of the most famous whose autobiographer describes the all-enveloping handshake that mesmerized everyone he met (Hall, 2005). The voter still relied on their sense of trust and sensibility to make the right decision. If a politician arrived in town, it was a major event and not simply an opportunity for ridicule, cynicism, or protest. That meant everyone then and now who was able to turn out would turn out to put his or her own eyes on a political candidate. The caliber of the campaign message came first and the judging of the candidate come second.

A candidate could hit several small towns in a day, stand on the platform of an observation deck or private coach, and give a quick summary of his speech. According to Belk (2005), Harry S. Truman and his campaign rhetoric was widely regarded as the final presidential campaign featuring the once popular whistle-stop speech featuring distinct political messages. Newspapers were primarily opinionated arms of the establishment owners, editors, and parties

with a direct interest in special interest. In the decades surrounding the Civil War, sectionalism ran rampant, with multiple factions battling over westward expansion, economic turmoil, and the sanctity of the Union. Every position on the political spectrum usually published its own stand-alone newspaper openly supporting a candidate and slandering its rivals in an outwardly bitter and often inflammatory manner. Presidential newspaper, a form of the political newspapers that dominated mass communications for many decades in nineteenth-century America, played a crucial role in the articulation and promotion of key principles in American political thought and practice, while also promoting the political interests and strategies of their presidential sponsors. These points are illustrated in a study of how the first presidential newspaper, the Washington, D.C., National Intelligencer, was used in 1800-1801 to promote Thomas Jefferson's election and the principles of Jeffersonian Republicanism (Laracey, 2008). It was not until around the turn of the century that Americans began viewing newspapers as the standard of journalistic objectivity.

During the first radio broadcast, no one thought about politics. Radio was just another novelty or attempt with getting politics on the air and the process was slow. The first known incursion of politics into radio was during the 1906 mid-term elections. A few days before the election, the Detroit & Cleveland Navigation Line contracted the Thomas E. Clark Wireless Telegraph and Telephone Company of Detroit to send the election returns to its ships in the Great Lakes. The passengers may have been impressed, but it did not help Clark Wireless, which went bankrupt a few years later. Even though radio was the most advanced form of sharing information for the period the use of it for political news struggled sizably and did not become viable until some years later (Murphy 2013).

The year 1924 is significant considering no one knew what radio would be worth as a weapon on the campaign trail. It was developing slowly and had not elevated to prominence in the political war chest. Hearing the voices of the candidates was unique for millions of listeners. Duplication was not possible in newspapers or silent movies. Individuals in both parties questioned how they could know if there was an audience listening and if their message was

reaching the voters with the inability to gain immediate feedback, unlike social media. Answers to these questions were not available at the end of the campaign. It was clear that radio had improved politics and furthermore politics had improved radio.

The daily news on television gained a greater prominence in the 1960s with unlimited potential. John F. Kennedy (JFK) became president of the United States, thanks in no small part to his charismatic performance in a series of televised debates in 1960 with opponent Richard Nixon. Three years later, news coverage of Kennedy's assassination captivated the country and had become one of the first major tragedies covered by network news. By that time, television gave candidates an unprecedented way to speak directly to millions, face-to-face. Families would gather around the radio and the television during the campaign season and listen attentively to the most current political candidates and political news of the time (Starosta, 2010).

In the case of 2016, the attacks focused on the credibility and qualification for the job as the U.S. commander in chief. The lack of clarity and specific points during the campaign may be the key to determining factor why voters find no differences between the parties in the concept of a political mainframe. According to Downs (1957) and Alesina (1988), candidates from both parties may be aware of the majority of voters' positions on important issues and focus on these exact same issues. This would result in party convergence during campaigns, irrespective of subsequent legislative behavior helping to explain the break in cooperative behavior between parties while members are serving in congress also, following Schattschneider (1942) and Ranney (1954), parties may focus on issues of central importance to the core partisan constituencies, resulting in policy divergence during campaigns. A polarization between participants was evident then and now.

Conveying the meaning of elections is essential both to promote the civic education of our students and to understand better the abstention of non-voters. Political scientists know, for example, that minority voting increases when one but not all of the candidates are a member of the minority group. Overall turnout increases in the face of economic hard times as in 1992 or the

combination of economic problems and war as in 2004. Clearly, people will turn out to vote if they believe there are important issues at stake. The 2004 election showed, however, that even if turnout increases, the demographic makeup of the electorate may not change. It seems that aside from other obstacles to voting, some non-voters were unmoved by the issues (Vanishing Voter, 2004). E. E. Schattschneider pointed out that voluntary abstention follows a circular logic. People do not participate because the issues that excite the electorate do not move them, but non-voters can only change the electoral agenda if they become voters (Just 2005).

In the field of public opinion and electoral behavior, no explanatory variable is more pervasive than party identification. The idea that voters commonly express some form of attachment to parties has become universal. Scholars debate whether party identifications influence on electoral choice has waned since the publication of *The American Voter (1960)*, but few take exceptions to the claim that partisanship remains a powerful predictor of vote choice according to Warren E Miller and J. Merrill Shanks (Dodson, 2010).

Achen (1992) who developed Bayesian models of how voters use political information formulate judgments about the relative abilities of the party to deliver benefits. The type of benefits each political party provides to each group is an assumed benefit set at an unobserved level. Achen described voters as rational and forward looking; therefore, able to use the law of probability to update their prior beliefs about a party.

According to McManinmon (2014), the late 1990s and early 2000s witnessed presidential campaigns moving past traditional media. The 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns were increasingly built on the social media platforms.

The Rise of the Internet and Social Media in Political Campaigns

The Internet allows significantly more interaction, targeted communication, increased reach and better results evaluation, all at a low cost (Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003;Kozinets et al., 2010). New trends, some of which may well become permanent fixtures in the coming elections became obvious (Fionna & Niota-Feillard, 2015).

The process appears obvious in that technology followers are attracted to the interaction of the activity. The actual numbers are uncertain. Social media is unfolding as a key platform for issues to be shared and central points emphasized about the campaign and its focus. Internet-based advertising or public coaxing is continually growing while the traditional advertising through television, radio, magazines and newspaper are losing terrain in front of the Web. Technology and other factors have significantly evolved and positively affected the way consumers' process communication favoring rapid and efficient information exchange and interactivity (Johnson, Bruner and Kumar 2006, Keller, 2009).

Social media such as Facebook and Twitter is becoming target of political information and advertising. The loss of terrain to the Web with traditional advertising methods is cumulative. The market share with magazines and newspapers is shrinking comparable to television and radio. The widespread use of the Internet over the last decade has caught the eye of politicians and business professionals equally catapulting the new technology over traditional word-of-mouth communication. This has led to a wave of social communication with the grassroots epitomizing a sense of genius (Datta et al., 2005).

When setting out to study the adoption and utilization of campaigning tools by political candidates from a cost-benefit perspective, we must acknowledge the fact that the level of uncertainty regarding costs and risks is high only when a tool is new. As time goes by, the information regarding the innovation no longer takes the boldness of a pioneer to accept potentially high risks in reaching for uncertain benefits (Carlson, Djupsund, & Strandberg, 2013).

A blog defines social media as “a regularly updated web site or webpage, typically one run by an individual or small group that is written in an informal or controversial style”. All entries consist of textual, visual display, and shown in reverse chronological order with the most recent being posted at the top of the page. It has interactive features such as hyperlinks directing users to additional webpages, as well as comment sections where the participants can interact

with the candidates and other users (Blood, 2002; Trammell et al. 2006; Williams et al., 2005). By definition, a blog is a regularly updated webpage with posts or entries consisting of textual, visual or audio-visual information, presented in reverse chronological order (Bichard, 2006; Blood, 2002). The user who is active on social media gives political candidates an opportunity to interact with them and supports the gaining of a potentially new following. The Obama campaign in 2012 made substantial use of citizen voices-but only in one area: the “news blog” on its website where that content was completely controlled.

A new study of how the campaigns are using digital tools to talk directly with voters-bypassing the filter of traditional media finds that the Obama campaign posted nearly four times as much content as the Romney campaign in 2012, and was active on nearly twice as many platforms.

Digital technology allows leaders to engage in a new level of “conversation” with voters, transforming campaigning into something more dynamic, more of a dialogue, than it was in the 20th century. For the most part, however, the presidential candidates are using their direct messaging mainly as a way to push their messages out. Citizen content was only minimally present on Romney’s digital channels.

Social media became popular due to advantages in communication such as information sharing between friends, and finding both new and old friends. The highly successful YouTube allows video sharing while Facebook provides a platform for social networking never experienced previously. Twitter allows information and news sharing, while other specialized websites, such as LinkedIn allow networking with a specific purpose (Anderson, 2008; Tuten, 2008). Users are established networks of friends, while others allow sharing with anyone interested (Tuten, 2008) which divides social networks into (1) egocentric (Facebook- social networking) and (2) object centric such as (YouTube – video sharing). Facebook focus on individuals, such as the networks of friends, while YouTube deal with objects such as pictures or video.

A report from the Pew Research Center found that millennial and Generation X voter's outnumbered baby boomers and older generations for the first time ever recorded in the 2016 presidential election. The report marks the latest milestone in a trend that demographers say will keep building for another 20 years. Millennial alone outnumber boomers and includes Gen X voters in its report (Pew, 2013).

The youngest adults Millennial, defined by Pew as people aged 18 to 35 in 2016, have a vastly different political outlook and life experience than even their next-oldest peers known as Gen-Xer's. The oldest among this group come of age after the Internet was developed. The youngest were too young to remember the 9/11 terrorist attacks and they are marked by political gridlock and economic recession. Forty-four percent of them are not white and their numbers continue to rise as immigration adds more to their ranks than any other group, according to Pew Research (Pew, 2013).

"We have these two broad camps in America, one of them is older, whiter and more conservative and the other is younger, browner and more liberal," said Taylor, author of "The Next America," (Pew, 2014) which looked at the widening generation gap and the changes it would bring to American political life. As a group, they are suspicious of institutions -- 26 percent of people aged 18 to 29 reported having no religious affiliation in 2009 compared to 3 percent in 1960, according to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University.

In politics, that independent streak translates to a lack of allegiance to any political party. Forty-four percent of millennial were independents in 2016, compared to 39 percent of Gen-Xer's and tend to lean to being Democratic more than their older counterparts according to Pew (Pew, 2013)

In 2016, 55 percent of millennial identified as Democrats or Democratic-leaning independents, compared to 49 percent of Gen- Xer's, 46 percent of boomers and 43 percent in the silent generation. Millennials take more of a liberal position on social issues, including marijuana

legalization and same-sex marriage. Those statistics would indicate that Democrats already have a vast advantage. The problem is that they do not vote at rates comparable to other generations.

Millennial overtook baby boomers last year as the country's largest generation and caught up to them as a share of the U.S. electorate; however, they cast only 25 percent of the votes in November, Pew has found. The election turnout among millennial is expected to drop by more than half in 2018 (Akin, 2017). The outcome of next year's midterms, and future congressional elections, could depend in large part on whether political organizers can motivate them to turn up, said Kawashima-Ginsberg, the director of CIRCLE at Tufts University. "Especially in congressional elections, there's just not enough attention paid to the importance of mobilizing young people," she said (Akin, 2017).

According to Pew research (2013), 73% of online adults use social networking sites, 71% use Instagram, 21% use Pinterest, and 22% use LinkedIn. Pew emphasizes the growing use of cell phones, putting immediate communication just a tip of the finger away. Over 40% of cell phone owners use a social networking site on their phones, and 28% do so on a typical day. The Nielsen survey in 2011 estimated that nearly 80% of active Internet users visit social media sites like Facebook and Twitter daily (Pew, 2013).

The integration of social media with smartphones technology targeting the young consumers is significant. The advantage of mobile social interactive messaging is enormous. The challenge is everyone is attempting to cash in (Zimmerman & Ng, 2013).

Selective Exposure and Interpretation Theory

Some evidence of political polarization shows that the gulf between Democrats and Republicans associated with their approval or disapproval of the president is growing (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2006). Partisan news viewers and listeners learn different "facts" than nonpartisan news viewers (Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2007) and that the two parties increasingly dislike their opponents (Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012).

The polarization thesis follows from the arguments laid out by fragmentation. It states that public opinion, in a fragmented media world, may lead to audiences that restrict their media diet to a particular ethnic, ideological, political, or religious perspective. These group perspectives may become entrenched and remain unchallenged by contrary information at the level of the individual media consumer. The result, scholars warn, may create an intensification of opposing opinions on political and social issues (Sunstein, 2001).

When decisions in politics tend to avoid the mental processes of perception, memory, judgment and reasoning coupled with conflict or confusion or cognitive dissonance a question may surface. Cognitive is concern with mental process associated with perception, meaning, learning, and memory. Dissonance relates to conflict. Does the 2016 presidential election continue to render a sense of constant conflict between not only the political parties, but numbers of people making up the parties?

According to the cognitive dissonance theory, people tend to select specific aspects of exposed information they have incorporated into their mindsets. This series of selections based on their perspectives, beliefs, attitudes and decisions is interesting. People can mentally dissect the information exposed to them and select favorable evidence, while ignoring the unfavorable. The foundation of this theory is rooted in cognitive dissonance theory (Feininger, 1954) which is a tendency for individuals to seek consistency among their cognitions (i.e., beliefs, opinions).

When there is an inconsistency between attitudes or behavior something must change to eliminate the dissonance or conflict; subsequently, people avoid what indicates that the decision was wrong. The bigger the dissonance, the more we avoid it. The designate cognitive dissonance describes the feelings of discomfort that result from holding two conflicting beliefs.

Does cognitive dissonance theory and selective exposure explain election choice of young African American voters? The current study attempted to find some answers to the question.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

This study adopted a mixed method design intended on answering three major research questions. For quantitative data collection, the researcher utilized the survey technique. For qualitative data collection, the researcher employed the detailed personal interview technique. The study was conducted on the campus of Texas Southern University (TSU) and targeted the young African American student voter.

The second stage involved interviews with six randomly selected TSU student voters and focused on individual use of social media in 2016 presidential campaign.

Survey

During the spring semester of 2017, a total of 120 young African American voters on campus participated in the survey by using a convenience sampling technique. The researcher first obtained the approval of protocol from the institutional review board (IRB). The review board was created by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to protect human participants in research projects.

Texas Southern University (TSU) is one of the largest Historically Black Universities and Colleges (HBCUs) in Texas with a student enrollment near 9,200.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument contained demographic items such as age, ethnic background, gender, marital status, field of study, and residential status. Part two of the survey contained items such as ownership of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube accounts. The amount each person uses each account for political purposes was asked. Other questions included: Does each

person view political information as fact, fiction, or both? Does each person exchange political information with friends? Does the political view of other's shape their political view?

Part three of the survey included items on the political affiliation of the participants. It further asked whether they voted in the 2016 election. In order to find the major sources of political information, the survey asked: Do they spend much time on political news events and how much? Did they follow media coverage of the 2016 presidential election? The choices included cable news, (CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, OAN, etc.), local television stations, (Ch.2, 11, 13, etc.), News Radio, local and national newspaper, (*New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, etc.) and Internet news websites.

The survey instrument further asked about the exchange and sharing of political information through social media by including the following: Are they comfortable communicating politics on-line? Did they follow the Presidential primaries? Did they follow the Presidential debates? Have they voted for candidates due to ethnic background? Was the issue of immigration in the 2016 campaign an issue with them then and now? Does the information change their views of the candidates and how did they vote in the 2016 presidential election?

Did they vote for Hillary Clinton? Did they vote for Donald Trump? Did social media impact your candidate choice? The complete survey questionnaire is attached in Appendix A.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

A total of 120 students participated in the survey. At the completion of the data collection, the researcher developed a codebook as shown in Appendix B. The researcher ran frequency distribution and cross-tabulations using the IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) 23.0 with the survey data.

A random sample of six students answered five questions in the structured interviews.

Personal interview questions included:

1. How has social media changed the way you rationalize politics?
2. Do you find political news on (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) more often than on T.V. or radio?
3. Has social media changed how much you participate in the political process?
4. Has social media changed your view of candidates like Donald Trump?
5. Would you participate in politics without social media?

The following chapter presents results of the survey and interviews in order to answer three research questions for the study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the survey and personal interviews organized around each research question. First, demographic information of the sample is summarized.

Demographic Profile of the Sample

The sample consisted of 57% female and 43% male. Majority of the sample 72% were 18-25 age-group, while 22.5% were 26-35 age-group. As shown in Table 1, fewer than 6% of the participants were older than 35. In terms of marital status, 9% were married, 86% single, and 5% divorced. In terms of academic rank, 20.8% were freshman, 15.0% sophomore, 20.0% junior, 20.8% senior, 19.0% graduate, the rest answered other category.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Variable	Categories	n	%
Gender	Male	52	43.30%
	Female	68	56.70%
	Total	120	100%
Age	18-25	86	72%
	26-35	27	22.50%
	36-44	3	2.50%
	45 or older	4	3.30%
	Total	120	100%
Mar. Status	Married	11	9%
	Single	103	86%
	Divorced	6	5%
	Total	120	100%
Education	Freshman	26	20.80%
	Sophomore	18	15.00%
	Junior	24	20.00%
	Senior	25	20.80%
	Graduate	23	19.20%
	Law	1	0.80%
	Other	3	2.50%
	Total	120	100%
Residential Status	On Campus	34	28.30%
	Off Campus	69	57.50%
	W/Peers	5	4.20%
	W/Family	12	10.00%
	Total	120	100%

Research Question 1: *What are the major sources of political media information in the 2016 presidential campaign among young African American voters?*

As the media environment is changing rapidly, the survey asked participation about their major sources of political information in the 2016 presidential campaign. Majority of the participants utilized multiple sources in order to gather political information. About 78% of the sample indicated that they watch MSNBC, local television stations, and Facebook or a combination of these sources. On the other hand, only 21.6% of the sample responded with one single media channel, mostly MSNBC and Facebook. Exactly half of the students said that they listened to radio for political information and half did not. Only 5% of the students admitted that they are regular newspaper readers.

Research Question 2: *Did source media shape or change the views of young African voters in the 2016 Presidential election?*

Table 2 summarizes the ownership of social networking accounts. As expected 82.5% respondents own Facebook, 69.7% own Twitter, 84.0% have Instagram, and 86.7% use YouTube. The survey data indicated that younger students spent more time on the Internet than older participants. However, the difference did not approach statistical significance ($X^2= 24.26$, $df =15$, $p =.06$).

Table 2: Ownership of Accounts

Variable		n	%
Facebook	Yes	99	82.5%
	No	21	17.5%
		Total 120	Total 100%
Twitter	Yes	83	69.7%
	No	37	30.3%
		Total 120	Total 100%
Instagram	Yes	100	84.0%
	No	20	16.0%
		Total 120	Total 100%
YouTube	Yes	104	86.7%
	No	16	13.3%
		Total 120	Total 100%

About 46.2% of Facebook owners used the account for political information and 53.8% did not. 44.2% of Twitter owners used the account for political information and 55.8% did not. 30.8% of Instagram users used the site for political information and 69.2% did not and 46.7% of YouTube users used the site for political information and 53.3% did not. There was no significant difference by age of the participants ($X^2 = 7.83$, $df = 6$, $p > .05$) and by gender ($X^2 = 7.83$, $df = 6$, $p > .05$) in the online exchange of political information through social media.

There was no statistical difference by age ($X^2 = 7.83$, $df = 6$, $p > .05$) and by gender on the perceived influence of others on these young voters.

Table 3: Social Media Use for Political Information

Variable		n	%
Facebook for Political Information	Yes	55	46.20%
	No	65	53.80%
		Total 120	Total 100%
Twitter for Political Information	Yes	53	44.20%
	No		55.80%
		Total 120	Total 100%
Instagram for Political Information	Yes	37	30.80%
	No	83	69.20%
		Total 120	Total 100%
YouTube for Political Information	Yes	56	46.70%
	No	64	53.30%
		Total 120	Total 100%

About 69.2% of the respondents voted in the 2016 election and 31% did not. However, whether social media participation and exchange influenced these African American voters was not clear-cut. About 56% of the respondents said that political news and information changed their opinion while 44% said the opposite.

Table 4: Voter Participation in the 2016 Presidential Election

Variable		n	%
Voted In 2016 Election	Yes	83	69.20%
	No	37	30.80%
		Total 120	Total 100%

As shown in Tables 5 and 6, nearly half of the respondents exchanged and shared political information with their peers and friends. Also, half of these students admitted the influence of others in the 2016 presidential election. Nevertheless, our data relied only on the self-reporting of the participants and did not measure the possible changes of candidate selection or direction of certain issues.

Table 5: Exchanging of Political Information with Peers

Variable		n	%
Exchanged Political Information with Peers	Yes	63	52.50%
	No	57	47.50%
		Total 120	Total 100%

Table 6: Did you allow views of others to shape your own personal view?

Variable		n	%
Others View Shapes Own Personal View	Yes	62	51.30%
	No	58	48.30%
		Total 120	Total 100%

To begin with 76 % of the participants are Democrats and 2.5% are Republican. 13.3% are Independent and 8.5% are other. This indicated that the majority of the sample registered and identified with the Democratic Party and supported policies of the party.

Table 7: Political Affiliation

Variable	Category	n	%
Political Affiliation	Democrat	91	75.80%
	Republican	3	2.50%
	Independent	16	13.30%
	Other	10	8.50%
		Total 120	Total 100%

Research Question 3: *How does selective exposure and cognitive dissonance theory explain the choice of young African American voters?*

Selective exposure theory suggests that individual has a tendency to favor information that reinforces their pre-existing views while avoiding contradictory information. This drives people toward pieces of information that are coherent with their own expectations or opinions. The researcher carried out personal interviews in order to explore the application of the theory as well as the role of social media in the 2016 presidential election. The researcher transcribed responses from the first interviewee who echoed the rest of the interviewees.

Personal Interview with young voters

From Personal Interviewee 1

Coleman: Interviewee 1 is a law student here at Texas Southern University; dealing with political rhetoric, social media, and its impact on African-American students here at Texas Southern University. How has social media changed how you've rationalized politics?

Interviewee 1: For me on a personal level, I rationalize politics not on social media simply because social media isn't a true form of media. For one it's... anyone can say anything at any given time with no basis of facts, merit or questioning to a certain extent. And when it comes to politics, politics is something that is important in today's society or in any society, especially given that we live in a democracy. So if social media has a negative stigma, which it usually does in many cases or many areas of study, I don't usually take anything said on social media, unless its officially coming from a candidate or someone in that candidate's party or someone who is officially apart of that person's campaign.

Coleman: So it has to be a quote from the candidate or the campaign to be valid with you?

Interviewee 1: Yes!

Coleman: So I guess that leads to the next question, do you look to find political news on Facebook and Twitter, more often than say television or radio?

Interviewee 1: I can find it, I personally do find it, but I follow CNN, I follow MSNBC, I follow Don Lemon. But personally I prefer to get my information via TV or the web prior to social media, simply because, I personally feel that as young people, young people as a whole, but African Americans in particular, we spend a little too much time on social media. And if we use more time to venture out from social media, so as to say research a book or look at television, or an actual radio other than your current playlist on your iPod or Samsung device. I believe it would broaden your horizons to say don't always just look at, to a certain extent, party affiliations, look at the plans set forth by those parties, then make an informed decision when you go to the polls. This interview shows a belief and attitude developed before social media and unchanged due to social media. The respondent goes on to elaborate on personal view of social media:

Coleman: Okay now a final question, just five questions. Do you think you would participate in as you've pretty much already answered but being specific... are you participating in politics simply because of social media or is television and radio completely sufficient for you?

Interviewee 1: Well you know personally for me, television and radio is sufficient for me, but am participating more on social media since social media is a means to get more people out to vote. I use my social media platform to more or less inform those who are uninformed. Meaning I don't necessarily need social media to get my information but using social media helps me draw more people in, I use social media for that purpose. Via Facebook post, via Twitter post, via you know Tumblr photos you know things of that nature.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This exploratory study was conducted to examine the role of social media in the 2016 presidential campaign among African American voters. A total of 120 African American college students participated in the survey.

About 78% of the sample indicated that they utilized multiple media platforms including cable news such as CNN and MSNBC, local television stations, and Facebook or a combination of these sources. Since majority of the survey participants were democrats, they watched more left-leaning media outlets and avoid right-leaning sources such as Fox News.

As expected 82.5% respondents had Facebook account, 69.7% Twitter, 84.0% Instagram, and 86.7% accessed YouTube. The survey data indicated that younger students spent more time on the Internet than older participants. However, the age difference did not approach statistical significance.

Our data suggested that 70% of the sample voted in the 2016 presidential election. About half of the respondents exchanged and shared political news information with their peers. The role of social media is unclear. However, the current study does not offer clear-cut answers to the role of social media yet.

Conclusion and Discussion

The researcher discovered that social media use among young voters is considerable. In past campaigns, American voters relied only on traditional media such as newspaper, radio, and television for political coverage. Social media adds an entire new dynamic to the reality of running for political office. Millennial are predisposed to massive amounts of this new phenomenon called social media. There is no dissimilarity with age and gender. In taking a look

at (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.), for all practical purposes the respondents reflect a mixed results and the findings are unclear as to the current impact. The promise of further research is impending and in terms of the communication social media is at the forefront of future research.

One study “Getting Personal? The Impact of Social Media on Preferential Voting” reflects on the theoretical view that a direct effect of the number of follows a candidate has and a statistical interaction effect suggest that a higher number of followers only yields more votes when the candidate actively uses social media. The study goes on to state that in order to carry out a firm analysis of the effects a unique dataset must be utilized combining data not only on social media usage combined with actual data on the candidates themselves (such as position on the list, being well known, exposure to the old media, gender, ethnicity, and incumbency), but broader samples have to be utilized (Spierings & Jacobs, 2014).

2016 did not focus on active use of social media other than Mr. Trump, Hillary and Bernie both used it in some capacity or another. It is unclear whether social media contributed to Trump being elected with all of the Russians involvement. Few studies have been conducted on the African American young voter and it is clear that additional research must be done. Social media has a place in politics. Campaigns have established that fact following Obama both in 2008 and 2012. The technology is effective in reaching masses of potential voters at an alarming rate. Stay tuned for next super election result tied to social media.

Limitations of the Study

The on-going investigation suggests that misinformation and propaganda reached 126 million Facebook users from 2015 (*New York Times*, October 30, 2017; *Washington Post*, October 31, 2017). In addition, more than 131,000 messages posted on Twitter and over 1,000 videos uploaded on YouTube. Those posts were then liked, shared, and followed by American voters.

These claims cloud any discussion on the role of social media in the 2016 election. It may be too early to discuss the role of social media in the 2016 presidential campaign. Therefore, future research should involve larger sample of African American voters in different geographical areas and examine their media use in the next election cycle. The current findings cannot be generalized to all African American voters.

Recommendations

The topic is important for communication researchers as medial environment is rapidly changing and evolving. Future study should examine the selective exposure to partisan media and African American voters. Do these media coverage bring about opinion changes and voting behaviors?

APPENDIX A
SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Social Media & 2016 Presidential Campaign

We are conducting a survey on social media and student's social media usage.

We do not need to know your name. So please answer all questions
as honestly as possible. Thank you for your time and cooperation!

Part I. Demographics

1. What is your age? 18-25 ____, 26-35 ____, 36- 44 ____, 45 or over ____
2. What is your ethnic background? _____
3. What is your gender? Male ____ Female ____
4. Are you married, single, divorced, or separated? _____
5. What is your major field of study? _____
6. What is your academic rank? Fr. ____ So. ____ Jr. ____ Sr. ____ Grad. ____ Law ____ Other ____
7. Do you live: On Campus ____, Off Campus ____, W/ Peers ____, W/ Family ____.

Part II. Social Media Activity, Friends and Politics

8. Do you have a Facebook account? Yes ____, No ____.
Do you or have you used for political information? Yes ____ No ____
9. Do you have a Twitter account? Yes ____, No ____.
Do you or have you used for political information? Yes ____ No ____
10. Do you have an Instagram account? Yes ____, No ____.
Do you or have you used for political information? Yes ____ No ____
11. Do you use YouTube for information? Yes ____, No ____.
Do you or have you used for political information? Yes ____ No ____
12. How often do you view Facebook each day? None ____ Once ____ (2-3) times ____ (4-6) times ____ (7-10) times ____ more than 10 times ____
13. How often do you view Twitter each day? None ____ Once ____ (2-3) times ____ (4-6) times ____ (7-10) times ____ more than 10 times ____

14. How often do you view Instagram each day? None ___ Once ___ (2-3) times ___ (4-6) times ___ (7-10) times ___ more than 10 times ___
15. How often do you view politics on the Internet each day? None ___ (1) hour ___ (2 to 4) hours ___ (4 to 6) hours ___ (6 to 8) hours ___ more than 8 hours ___.
16. How many friends do you have on Facebook? _____.
17. What is your (daily) text message count from (1 to 100)? _____.
18. Do you view social media information as fact or fiction? Fact ___ Fiction ___ Both ___
19. Do you exchange political information with friends on social media? Yes ___ No ___
20. Do other's political views help to shape or alter your political views? Yes ___ No ___

Part III. Political Affiliation & Activities

21. What is your political affiliation (Party)? Democratic ___ Republican ___ Independent ___ Other ___
22. Have you voted in previous presidential elections? Yes ___ No ___
23. Did you vote on November 7th? Yes ___ No ___
24. Do you spend much time focused on recent news and media events? Yes ___ No ___
How much actual time? _____
25. Did you follow media coverage of the presidential campaign? Yes ___ No ___
26. When it comes to political news on the presidential candidates and the presidency, which network do you rely on for most of your political information?

Please circle one OR more

1. Cable news- (CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, OAN, etc.)
 2. Local TV news networks (Ch. 2, 11, 13)
 3. News on the radio (NPR, CNN, Breaking News, ABC, etc.)
 4. Local newspaper- Houston Chronicle.
 5. National news- (New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal)
 6. Internet- News websites
 7. Other (specify) _____
27. Are you comfortable communicating politics online? Yes ___ No ___

28. Did you follow the Presidential primaries? Yes ____ No ____
29. Did you follow the Presidential debates? Yes ____ No ____
30. Have you voted for a candidate due to ethnic background? Yes ____ No ____
31. Have you (not) voted due to ethnic background? Yes ____ No ____
32. Was the issue of Immigration in the 2016 campaign an issue with you.....then and now?
Yes ____ No ____

Part IV. Social Media & Political News

33. How do you access daily information on political news events? T.V. ____ Phone ____
34. How many times does political news come to your email? _____
35. Do you read a newspaper daily? Yes ____ No ____ Sometimes ____ Never ____
On line ____ Hardcopy ____
36. Do you gain political information by radio? Yes ____ No ____ Never ____
37. Do you feel the information changes your view of a potential candidate and how you voted in November? Yes ____ No ____
38. Did you vote for Hillary? Yes ____ No ____
39. Did you vote for Trump? Yes ____ No ____
40. Did social media impact your choice? Yes ____ No ____

APPENDIX B
CODEBOOK

Codebook**Social Media & the 2016 Presidential Campaign****Column**

Part I

- A Age: 18-25 = 1, 26-35 = 2, 36-44 = 3, 45 or Over = 4
- B Ethnic Background: African American = 1, Other = 2
- C Gender: Male = 1, Female = 2
- D Marital Status: Married = 1, Single = 2, Divorced = 3, Separated = 4
- E Field of Study: Communication = 1, Liberal Arts & Behavioral Sciences = 2, College of Education = 3, Business = 4, College of Pharmacy & Health Sciences = 5, Law = 6, Science & Technology = 7, College of Science, Engineering & Technology = 8
- F Academic Rank: Freshman = 1, sophomore = 2, Junior = 3, Senior = 4, Graduate = 5, Law = 6, other = 7
- G Residential Status: On campus = 1, off campus = 2, W/peers = 3, W/family = 4

Part II

- H Facebook account: Yes = 1, No = 2
- I Use for political Info: Yes = 1, No = 2
- J Twitter account: Yes = 1, No = 2
- K Use for political Info: Yes = 1, No = 2
- L Instagram account: Yes = 1, No = 2
- M Use for political Info: Yes = 1, No = 2
- N YouTube account: Yes = 1, No = 2
- O Use for political Info: Yes = 1, No = 2
- P How often log-in Facebook: None = 1, Once = 2, (2-3) Times = 3, (4-6) Times = 4, (7-10) Times = 5, More than 10 Times = 6

- Q How often log-in Twitter: None = 1, Once = 2, (2-3) Times = 3, (4-6) Times = 4, (7-10) Times = 5, More than 10 Times = 6
- R How often log-on Instagram: None = 1, Once = 2, (2-3) Time = 3, (4-6) Times = 4, (7-10) Times = 5, More than 10 Times = 6
- S How often on Internet: None = 1, (1) Hour = 2, (2-4) Hour = 3, (4-6) Hours = 4, (6-8) Hours = 5, More than (8) Hours = 6
- T Number of friends on Facebook: None = 1, (1-100) = 2, (101-250) = 3, (251-500) = 4, (501-750) = 5, (751-1000) = 6, More than 1000 = 7
- U Daily text message count: None = 1, (1-100) = 2, (101-250) = 3, (251-500) = 4, (501-750) = 5, (751-1000) = 6, More than 1000 = 7
- V How do you view Social Media info: Fact = 1, Fiction = 2, both = 3
- W Do you exchange political Info on Social Media w/ friends: Yes = 1, No = 2
- X Does the view of others help shape your own political view: Yes = 1, No = 2

Part III

- Y Political affiliation: Democrat = 1, Republican = 2, Independent = 3, other = 4
- Z Have you voted in previous elections: Yes = 1, No = 2
- AA Did you vote on November 7th: Yes = 1, No = 2
- AB Do you spend much time focused on News & Media: Yes = 1, No = 2
- AC How much actual time: None = 1, (1) Hour = 2, (2-4) Hours = 3, More than (5) Hours = 4
- AD Did you follow media coverage on the Presidential Campaign: Yes = 1, No = 2
- AE Stations relied on for political campaign news: Cable news: (CNN, Fox News, MSNBC) = 1, Local TV news: (Ch. 2, 11, 13) = 2, News on radio: (NPR, CNN, Breaking News, ABC, etc.) = 3, Local newspaper: (Houston Chronicle) = 4, National news: (N.Y. Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal) = 5, Internet: News websites = 6, other = 7
- AF Comfortable communicating politics on-line: Yes = 1, No = 2
- AG Followed presidential primaries: Yes = 1, No = 2

- AH Followed presidential debates: Yes = 1, No = 2
- AI Ever vote due to ethnic background: Yes = 1, No = 2
- AJ Ever (not) vote due to ethnic background: Yes = 1, No = 2
- AK Issue of Immigration in the 2016 campaign ever an issue with you: Yes = 1, No = 2

Part IV

- AL How are you accessing political news information: TV = 1, Phone (SM) = 2
- AM How often you are receiving political information on e-mail: None = 1, (1-50) times = 2, (51-100) times = 3, (101-200) times = 4
- AN Are you a daily newspaper reader: Yes = 1, No = 2, Sometimes = 3, Never = 4, On-line = 5, Hardcopy = 6
- AO Do you gain political information by radio; Yes = 1, No = 2
- AP Does the information change your view of the candidate and effect how you voted: Yes = 1, No = 2
- AQ Did you vote for Hillary: Yes = 1, No = 2
- AR Did you vote for Trump: Yes = 1, No = 2
- AS Did social media impact your choice: Yes = 1, No = 2

APPENDIX C
PESONAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The Personal Interview

Social Media and 2016 Presidential Campaign

These are the major interview questions:

- 1) How has social media changed the way you rationalize politics?
- 2) Do you find political news on (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) more often than on T.V. or radio?
- 3) Has social media changed how much you participate in the political process?
- 4) Has social media changed your view of candidates like Donald Trump?
- 5) Would you participate in politics without social media?

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