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A review of scientific literature: pertaining the relationship between social media, political disinformation, and political polarization in the United States.

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Abstract:

This thesis contends that, despite the rise of social media, political polarization has steadily increased since the 1960s, however that social media facilitates various types of "perfect environments" for intensifying polarization, such as the spread of disinformation and the commercialized design of social media platforms focus on stipulating user addiction through strong emotions of moral outrage. The proliferation of disinformation on social media has produced a phenomenon that may make meaningful discussions and communication about important political issues difficult. Simultaneously, we are witnessing an information technology that is producing a power struggle between many groups of society, all of whom are striving to control the public realm through this technology. Echo chambers, or isolated ideological bubbles that prevent people from hearing the opposite side of a story, aren't as prevalent on social media as one might imagine, and the majority of people don't reside in them. If there are significant echo chambers, building forums to express other views on both sides is a simple answer. However, the research is divided on whether cross-cultural exposure to different points of view led de-escalation of polarization. On the other hand, most studies found that cross-cultural contact did not reduce political polarization, but rather increased it. Even though social media echo chambers are restricted online, the "big sort" theory predicts that individuals have migrated into physical ideological echo chambers. Since the 1960s, people have geographically separated themselves from multicultural communities to ideological isolated communities that breeds the well-known phenomena known as "risky shift." Subsequently, interparty bias has risen as social identities have been more strongly connected to political ideology. As a result, since the 1960s, interpersonal political animosity has increased. Americans are increasingly seeing supporters of the opposition party as ideologically extremist and personally flawed. Democrats and Republicans alike are coming to distrust, if not outright despise, their political adversaries. Party signals and elite cues are important factors of why political division occurs. Party signals are also important aspects of people's willingness to listen to politicians uncritically and further restricting peoples own political reflection.

Acknowledgement:

The master's thesis is complete, and my time at NTNU has come to a conclusion after two years.

First and foremost, the journey has been long and difficult, with several adjustments. Writing my thesis has proven to be more difficult than anticipated. The fall of 2021 began with a great deal of uncertainty, as I struggled to identify whether I could conduct my own empirical work. However, the theme of this thesis relates to a topic that is complex and Arthur Mason guided me in the right direction. Subsequently I believe that this literature review has provided a valid representation of a given reality.

I would like to express my deepest thanks to Arthur Mason who has had faith in me all the way and helped me convey my interests into substance. The journey has been challenging but your personal and professional guidance has taught me a lot about scientific research and the analytical framework that is required.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In a Vox interview of President Obama in 2015, he was asked what he thought was the reasons behind him being the most polarizing president since the beginning of polling – further irritating that the record was prior to him beaten by George W Bush, Bill Clinton as well as others. He said: *“Well, there are a couple of things that in my mind, at least, contribute to our politics being more polarized than people actually are. The balkanization of the media means that we just don't have a common place where we get common facts and a common worldview the way we did 20, 30 years ago. And that just keeps on accelerating”*. (Vox, 2015, 0:13 – 0:36). To put it another way, Obama feels that the present media environment is so fragmented, that the current information flow to American citizens is split and disparate that they no longer share a single set of common facts, and consequently a collective world view. As a result, Obama believes that this is one of the primary causes for America's political polarization, both in his case and in general. He further postulates that *“technology which brings the world to us also allows us to narrow our point of view”* (Vox, 2015,0:37-0:39). In other words, although technology innovation has made it simpler for us to get information, it has also made it easier for us to obtain information that narrows our point of view.

Donald Trump was elected president in 2016 after Barack Obama served as president for eight years. During Trumps presidential campaign, new terminology, and phrases such as "post-truth period" and "fake news" emerged. These concepts are difficult to define, but they provide a broad overview of the political situation at the period. In compared to other presidents, the president's relationship with truth, science, and news was unusual. Through his rhetoric employing such phrases he questioned the credibility of journalists, news outlets, and science, frequently in the direction of liberal sources. In parallel, Trump often relied on information that many consider incredible sources, disputing conspiracy theories such as former president Obama being a Muslim and not born in the United States.

Academics argue that conspiracy theories operate in a perfect environment on the internet, since everyone can generate information on the web through social media, and in turn produce disinformation for whatever reasons (Brady, Kelly & Stein, 2017).

The internet scene has changed dramatically the three decades or so. One could categorize the internet revolution of the news media fully developing at the beginning of the 1990s. One could argue that new political media platforms swiftly evolved from Bill Clinton's presidential campaigns in 1992 where simple "brochureware" website was created, in which included interactive elements, such as online forums where people could discuss politics and do blogging as well as creating online fundraising platforms (Owen, 2018). In other words, the general population got more active in the creation and dissemination of political information. People also became part of recording and posting videos that could potentially go viral and influence the public and presidential campaign. Political commentators and academics postulated that the emergence of internet and interconnectedness would engage alienated voters and enable "average people" to play a more active part in political debate. New media held the promise of improving people's access to political information, facilitating broader political dialogue as well as encouraging engagement. However, research shows that it also has a counter altitudinal effect in which users have banned material or dropped out of their social media networks because of social media conversation becoming too hostile (Owen, 2018).

The internet evolved rapidly over time, and by the 2000s, it had established itself as a critical forum for political campaigning and discussion. Myspace (social media platform) was founded in 2003, and it was a significant breakthrough in terms of its structure of being able to create an internet community where people could develop their own personal profiles with pictures, interests, and information about oneself, a place where people could add friends and communicate with one another on a more personal level. Myspace, on the other hand, was quickly replaced by Facebook, a comparable platform that gained popularity in the mid-2000s because of its more stable structure, improved design, and enhanced technology. (Press, 2020). Facebook had over 100 million members in 2008, and it now has over 2.9 billion users throughout the world. Diana Owen – Professor of Political Science at Georgetown University postulates that this era marked the revolution of social media as it became a platform that was widely used by many and in parallel became a crucial part of politics and public sphere. According to a Pew Research Center poll from 2018, 68 percent of American people get news via social media at least occasionally, and 20 percent rely on it on a regular basis (Owen, 2018).

In the 2008 presidential election, Democratic candidate Barack Obama's revolutionary digital campaign approach epitomized the rise of new media. Obama and his team believed that in order to win the election they had to use new methods to reach the American public. Thus, Obama was the first president to revolutionize the use of social media in which his campaign used modern digital media elements to develop a political movement through the use of social media's networking, cooperation, and community-building possibilities. The Obama campaign's website served as a digital center that was shared across many social media platforms such as Facebook, allowing voters to participate more directly and not just get information, but see and distribute campaign ads, buy campaign logo items, watch, and share video, write comments, and blog (Owen, 2018). They were the first to employ "digital targeted marketing" in their campaign, which utilized strategies that had never been used before. Obama's campaign was able to collect information on people's interests, political beliefs, and consumer values via the internet. As a result, they used data from social media users to construct voter profiles to target these specific groups with personalized messaging. Diana Owen argues that the new media revolution that occurred during Barack Obama's 2008 campaign has now spread to the realms of government and politics in general. To put it another way, social media has become a widespread force in public discourse and politics, altering the communication dynamics between politicians, journalists, and the public (Owen, 2018).

The new media phenomena online are becoming increasingly important to traditional media firms. The increased competition from a snowballing number of news sources online has all contributed to newspaper financial troubles. As news on social media has overtaken conventional news outlets, it has consequently reduced their advertising earnings (Owen, 2018). Conventional newsrooms in the United States have lost roughly 20,000 jobs in the last two decades, and traditional newsrooms throughout the world have similarly declined (Owen, 2018). These innovations have had a significant influence on the quality and kind of news produced, as well as the conventions and practices employed by journalists while reporting on politics. Now, the news that is covered is frequently centered on what gets the greatest attention in the context of what is discussed on social media platforms and what goes viral. This has changed the way journalists operate since conventional news outlets can no longer afford to pursue fact-checking and investigative journalism standards due to new media competitors. Social media and analytics editors have taken their place, with the sole goal of attracting users to material regardless of its news value. Thus, Diana Owen claims that we

live in a world where people now must work hard to separate reality from fiction, as well as what is important from what is unimportant (Owen, 2018).

Thesis statement:

What kind of "environments" does social media produce that may exacerbate political polarization? What other elements should be considered to comprehend the development of political polarization in the United States?

Research objective:

My objective is to examine the socio-cultural, and political aspects of social media usage in context of the spread of misinformation and how it may or may not intensify political polarization in the United States. I also seek to examine historical established theories on why political polarization occurs in the United States.

Research questions:

The following questions are investigated to meet the objectives of this research:

Why is there a steady rise of political division in the United States?

What type of "environments" does social media create that intensify political polarization and enables misinformation?

How does misinformation and political polarization potentially effect democracy?

Identifying key concepts:

Political polarization: It may be defined as a fight over ideologically organized political viewpoints. In terms of American politics, this can be summarized as the split of the political spectrum into conservative and liberal camps (Prior, 2013).

Affective polarization: The predisposition of persons classifying as Republicans or Democrats to understand opposing partisans unfavorably and co-partisans favorably. (Lyengar & Westwood, 2021).

Personal data: In the context of social media, personal data refers to information gathered from the items you publish, like, accept, or search for on your social media devices. Virtual reality (Marwick & Lewis, 2017).

Echo chambers: The term "echo chamber" refers to a setting in which information, thoughts, or impressions are magnified by frequent communication and repetition within a small group. (Geschke, Lorenz & Holtz, 2019).

Filter bubbles: A filter bubble is an effect that can emerge when users utilize websites that offer specifically tailored content to filter and categorize information on the internet. (Geschke, Lorenz & Holtz, 2019).

Virtual reality: Virtual reality, often known as digital reality, is a computer technology that allows users to control and be controlled by a computer-generated world that closely resembles reality (Flew & Iosfidis, 2022).

Summary of theories and concepts

In the United States, political polarization has accelerated substantially since the 1960s (DeSilver,2022). The philanthropic community has argued whether social media and the internet are contributing to the continuous rise of political divide in the United States, since the digital era began (DeSilver, 2022). In terms of broad trends and key factors, research on political polarization misinformation is complex (DeSilver,2022). According to recent survey conducted by Pew Research Republicans and Democrats are becoming increasingly ideologically split, with antagonism between the two parties running deeper and wider than in the previous two decades. Various trends may be seen in a variety of settings, including politics and everyday life (DeSilver, 2022).

Political scientist Hilmar Mjelde, with a doctorate in comparative politics postulates that there has been a steady radicalization among regular people in the United States. It happens on both sides of the political spectrum on the left as well, but mainly among Republican supporters (Jakobsen, 2021). This observation is supported up by the Pew Research Center in the United States, which concludes that Republicans have moved more to the right than Democrats have moved to the left, based on comprehensive surveys and opinion polls (Doherty, Kiley & Asheer 2019). Certain philosophies, ethnicities, and religious identities have been more associated with the two major political parties. For example, Republicans are now more religious than Democrats, while Democrats are more secular (Doherty, Kiley Asheer, 2019) Subsequently republicans and democrats have become more divided on issues like same sex marriage, role of the government, abortion laws and civil rights (Jakobsen, 2021).

In parallel according to a study done by the American Academy of Sciences in November 2020, an alarming percentage of Republicans have anti-democratic views (Jakobsen,2021). Fifty-one percent of Republicans think that resorting to force and violence may be required to

maintain the American way of life. Subsequently, forty-one percent believe that there will come a day when patriotic Americans must take the law into their own hands. Seventy-one percent feel it is difficult to trust election results (Jakobsen, 2021).

In relation to the statistics above many academics have postulated that the reason for recent increase of political polarization can be factors such the internet and social media (Geschke, Lorenz & Holtz, 2019). Many academics believe that the internet revolution, which was followed by the development of social medias, has made it impossible for people to engage in productive online dialogues. One of the reasons is that it is a place where people can be anonymous and hide from the real world, expressing provocative things they would not say in person (Geschke, Lorenz & Holtz, 2019). Thus, we live in a world where we may say whatever we want while hiding behind our computers and there are no repercussions. Consequently, we create a world where our virtual reality and actual reality are muddled, leading to hostile online community interactions and a lack of meaningful conversation about vital issues like politics (Geschke, Lorenz & Holtz, 2019).

Filter bubbles and echo chambers are online phenomena and theories that are being explored in regard to political division in the United States. Among academic scholars, these concepts are not usually well understood. Echo chambers, filter bubbles, and polarization are terms that are often employed in public and political discourse, but not always in ways that are consistent with or based on scientific research (Geschke, Lorenz & Holtz, 2019). However, the term "echo chamber" or "filter bubble" is used by social scientists to describe a virtual situation in which people who use the internet/social media can find themselves as a result of media supply, distribution, and/or their own demand from retrieved personal data in a world of attitude and value consistent information (Geschke, Lorenz & Holtz, 2019). In other words, this represents a reality in which you search solely through your digital infrastructure for material that confirms your pre-existing beliefs, isolating yourself from cross-cutting exposure. Furthermore, it becomes an issue when those on the right side of the political spectrum do not encounter centrist or left-wing opinions that question their pre-existing beliefs. The warped reality is repeated and repeated in multiple groups, forums, and channels, to the point where the readers are overwhelmed by it. The risk increases, according to Dr. Federman, chair of Saybrook University, Department of Transformative Social Change, argues that when we choose to despise individuals who do not fit into this "bubble." In a democracy, bringing people together toward a society where we share certain basic ideas and

to solve problems via contact are critical. *"As a result, we need to be able to see outside our bubbles"* (Pinto, 2020, p. 3). The echo chamber and the filter bubble theories are two of the theories on which I plan to include in the literature review. I will explore whether filter bubbles and echo chambers contribute to isolation and are associated with tribalistic behavior, which could lead to political polarization in the US.

Misinformation and conspiracy theories have been present in public debate as to whether the internet and social media have become great environments for misinformation and conspiracy theories to spread and expose the public. The debate has pertained around recent phenomena of what is known as the “post truth” era. The “post truth” era started with the 2016 presidential election of Donald Trump – in which he continually used rhetoric of terms like “fake news” often in relation to arguments and “information” that he did not agree with. As the post truth phenomena developed over time, information that is not consistent with science have become present on social media and many scholars, journalists, and pundits are concerned to what extent people are exposed to information such as conspiracy theories online and how it may contribute to skewed world reality (Sonnemaker, 2020). One could argue that the post truth era has altered the way some people perceive and understand science and whether it contributes to skewing the masses away. The digitalization of the world, as well as people's entrepreneurial ability to spread false information, spread rumors, and deny scientific consensus, can make it difficult for democratic societies to thrive, as it may influence the population, causing us to no longer be able to agree on facts and thus have productive political debates. Before social media became a part of our daily life's, most citizens received most of their news from various radio programs, cable television, and print newspapers. For financial reasons, the content was often intended to cover a wide audience, which led to people basing their opinions on a broader factual basis (Sonnemaker, 2020, p. 8).

This phenomenon is explained in context by Russell Muirhead, Professor of Political Science at Dartmouth University. He postulates that “big tech” social media platforms have created an *"information flow that fits our preferences quite precisely"*. This phenomenon has created *"conspiracy entrepreneurs"* (Sonnemaker, 2020, p. 8). According to Professor Muirhead, the background is that Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have made it possible for creators to make money by attracting people / users to their page or channel, even if they offer ideas or products that are controversial. Muirhead exemplifies this by saying; *"If people can sell*

QAnon to a fairly narrow audience, they can make money doing so" (Sonnemaker, 2020, p. 8).

According to Pew Research, a comprehensive study conducted in 2014 postulates that social media has made it difficult for people to look outside of their bubbles and draws parallels between social media and opinion polls that point to a growing polarized tribalistic society, where former common core values are now being challenged. The United States is offered as an example, with one-third of Republicans believing that Democrats pose a major threat to the country and vice versa (Dimock, Doherty, Kiley & Oates, 2014; Hughes & Stocking, 2018).

Following that, it has been debated if social media filter bubbles have contributed in the propagation of conspiracies and propaganda, which are typically directed towards certain individuals, cultures, and events. For example, Trump and his administration formerly believed that "climate change" was a Chinese government-created "hoax." As a result, he defied international scientific consensus, and the US is now the only government in the world to withdraw from the Paris Agreement (Pinto, 2020). In general, alternative information, propaganda, and conspiracy theories have been more available, thus this observation suggests that the user has become more exposed, and as a result, the content of offensive, hostile, and inaccurate information has risen since the advent of social media (Hughes & Stocking, 2018; Jones, Stocking, Barthel & Van Kessel, 2019). According to Facebook's own study, 64% of those who joined extremist and radical organizations on the site did so because the content was recommended by Facebook's algorithms. Former Facebook workers have stated that the platform's architecture was meant to maximize Facebook's profitability by increasing user engagement and reliance (Doss, 2020, p. 2). In other words, what types of environments does social media create that may intensify political polarization and the spread of misinformation?

Chapter 2: Methodology

Qualitative literature review: of the relationship between social media usage disinformation and political polarization.

My literature analysis begins with a case study of a recent incident that has been widely regarded as a worrying scenario in terms of the American government's democratic qualities. This occurrence brings a lot of attention to the public discussion over whether social media use, disinformation, and political division are all linked. The case study will be a brief overview to provide some perspective for the significance of the research.

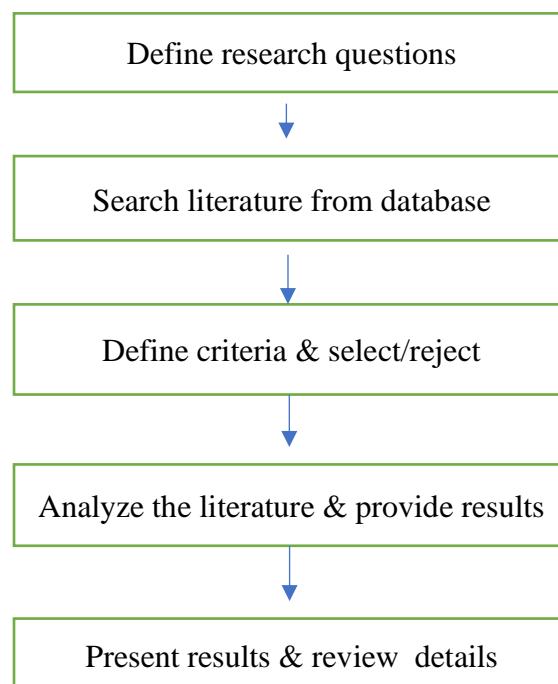
In this qualitative literature review, I will conduct an analysis of both theoretical and empirical research on the link between social media usage and online misinformation in the context of growing polarization in the United States. I will concentrate my effort on contemporary social science research and established theories that have a direct influence on the probable linkages between social media use and online misinformation in the historical context of political polarization in the United States.

I have decided to present a thorough assessment of the scientific literature on the link between three major elements that may be eroding democracy's quality: social media use, political polarization, and the presence of "disinformation" online. First, I gathered and analyzed many publications that looked at the links between producers of disinformation and political factors such as political polarization. Further acknowledging the producers of disinformation, I wanted to look at the theories and empirical studies done regarding the relationship between online content and political polarization. Subsequently, I examined empirical research regarding whether echo chambers theory correlates to political polarization. In addition, I used the overarching findings from the publications I read to further build a transparent representation of essential variables that I believed were necessary to include to convey a coherent picture of the phenomenon I was researching.

The first step in my literature study was to pick some of the most significant ideas and empirical investigations related to my research topic. Subsequently I utilized NTNU's search engine, Oria, to discover relevant studies. Oria is an online library that houses all the literature and databases that the Norwegian University of Science and Technology has access

to. When searching for relevant publications I included relevant terms like echo chambers, filter bubble, political polarization, the United States of America, and disinformation, misinformation, and conspiracy theories. I used the advanced research button to complement my analytical framework within the search engine – enabling myself to make sure I read publications that was relevant for my research questions. The sources I used represent peer-reviewed, well-established empirical and theoretical works. I chose key studies that have been well established as holding footing in the scientific community. In parallel I read critical reviews and assessments of the relevant studies I decided to choose from as I delved deeper into the study. Thus, the rationale for selecting sources was based on critical evaluation of academics, as well as the integrity and degree of the institutions or universities from where the study originated. I also evaluated the integrity of empirical methods that were used and whether it was peer reviewed. I also used criteria’s such as the evaluation of how current the source was sited, what credentials do the author obtain and whether the source align with the authors research questions. See figure 1 below explaining methodical process.

Figure 1:

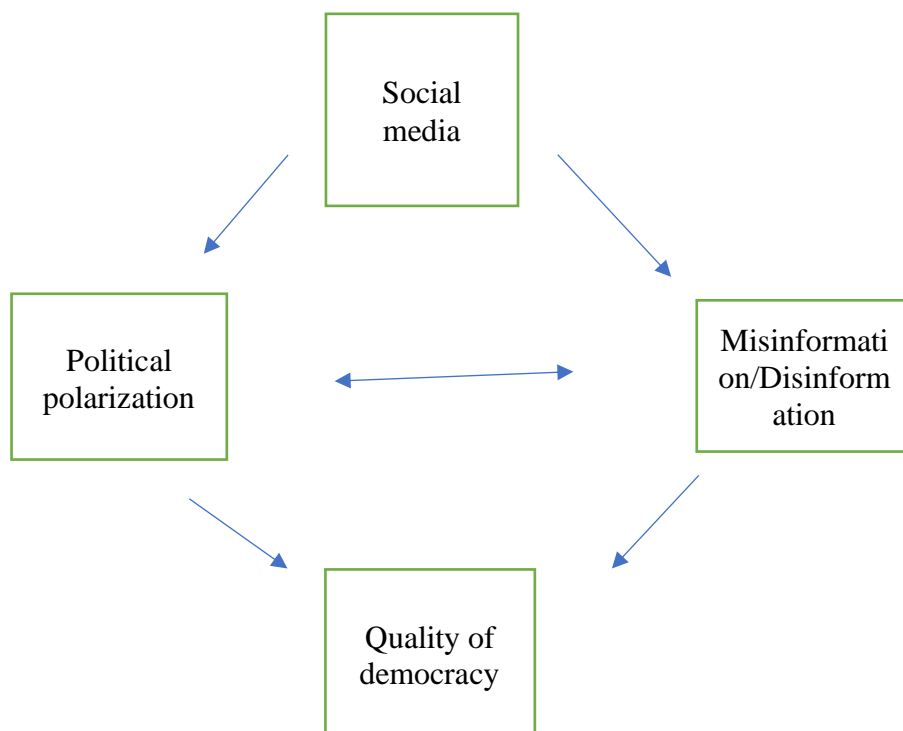


The majority of the information in my case study came from well-known news outlets, with only one scholarly article. This is because I couldn't identify any other scholarly publications about the phenomenon, which is likely due to its novelty. I also used to google scholar to

avoid the possible occurrence of missing out on important sources. In other words, I used google scholar as a starting point to ensure a more thorough investigation of existing literature. As google scholar do not have a peer review notification, I search the source in Oria to confirm whether it was or not peer reviewed – in which every source I collected on Google scholar was also present in the Oria database.

As I extended my perspective during my review, from data and conclusions from publications I subsequently used these findings to go deeper into additional studies that could offer a clearer picture of the elements affecting my study themes. The data collected from the first phase of my review indicates that more studies are to be done outside of social media perspective. However, searching online for solid and proven research that provided me with an overall framework and a critical straightforward perspective of the phenomena I was attempting to comprehend proved challenging. As a result, I went to the university library and scheduled an appointment with a subject librarian of who could direct me to critically praised books on my field. This was quite beneficial, since I was able to identify five socio-anthropological and political science books related to my topic. I ended up including three of the works, and my decision was based on the factors listed above, such as institutional integrity and critical praise from academics and through investigation of content veracity. See figure 2 down below, where you can see how my analytical framework is designed.

Figure 2:



Ethics, limitations, and challenges:

Reviews of literature are commonly acknowledged and read in cases where my product may have an impact on educational policy and practice. To put it another way, ethical considerations in relation to the theories and empirical studies are critical to recognize. In other words, I tried to pay close attention to how authors' and empirical methods are consistent with the findings. I also tried to be aware of viewpoints that may be reflected in the original studies that may influence the data, in which could possibly indicate any gaps or missing perspectives. The review of literature needs a careful examination of how various publication and search biases may impact results. It's also crucial to stay aware and be critical throughout the review process about how my own subjective positioning influences, as well as being impacted. I utilized critical reflexivity, in which I, as the researcher, am aware of my own biases and subjectivity that pertain to the process this study. For example, I believed that echo chambers and filter bubbles were responsible for significant political division in the United States. I was subsequently aware of my predetermined opinions and biases, thus did not correlate to my findings, in which I evaluated my findings using the criteria listed above, regardless of my ideas and sentiments.

Motivation and relevance:

One of the reasons I chose to look at the United States is because I consider it as a country with a substantial influence over the world, in which we can argue that current trends have significant influence throughout the world. The United States is a hegemony that wields enormous political and cultural power (Norrlöf, 2010). Political polarization tendencies in the United States are therefore crucial to comprehend because they may have transfer value to other nations throughout the world. The causes of political division are vital to examine since they are linked to the health of democracies, in which define political polarization as something that fosters tribalism and may jeopardize society's future progress (Kydd, 2021).

Misinformation and false news are concepts that need to be investigated because they have the potential to alter public opinion to the point where we no longer share a collective perspective of the world. One could argue that propagation of disinformation can lead to a distorted view of the world, obstructing progress toward our long-term development goals. I postulate that misinformation and fake news are becoming increasingly common, and thus can lead to conflicts and misunderstanding, affecting our impression of science. To put it another way, if society can no longer agree on science, it may exacerbate differences, making it difficult for society to work together to accomplish fundamental reforms like the Sustainable Development Goals. President Donald Trump, for example, frequently used sources of false information to justify his decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement (Pinto, 2020).

Without a question, the most powerful tool with the biggest influence in today's ongoing endeavor to globalize is social media. Social media has become a dominant information technology that have altered the way we receive and interpret knowledge as well the interaction between human beings (Kydd, 2021). Social media's presence is inevitable; thus I seek to explore in the light of "post truth" how this service encourages or enables the transmission of disinformation, which is present and utilized as a basis in political arguments and to subsequently avoid and delegitimize scientific consensus. The phenomena of "post truth" reveals the present attitude of a polarizing public sphere, and it is vital that we study the causes for its current presence and evolution in order for society to prosper in the future.

Chapter 2: Case study state capitol.

On January 6, 2021, a swarm of supporters of Republican President Donald J. Trump stormed the United States Capitol. The event occurred during a joint session of Congress summoned to certify the results of Trump's loss to the Democratic candidate Joe Biden in the 2020 presidential election. The incident was classified as an insurgency or attempted coup d'état since the purpose was to prevent a legitimate president-elect from entering office. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and other law-enforcement agencies labeled it a

domestic terrorism incident as well. Prior to the attack, Trump gave a speech in which he urged a large crowd of his supporters near the White House to march to the Capitol and physically protest Congress's actions and Bidens win (Kydd, 2021).

To fully comprehend what transpired, we must begin at the beginning. Prior to this, the United States of America held an election in November, during which Joe Biden was elected President of the United States of America. Trump and his team, on the other hand, made serious claims of voter fraud in many battleground states on the election night. As a result, several members of Trump's team were dispatched to ensure that the ballots were counted correctly and that there was no evidence of voter fraud. Even though no tangible evidence of such conduct could be found, the claims persisted, and many Americans remain persuaded that the election was rigged. There are some differences in the data from each poll, but when compared, most of them conclude that roughly 35% of the US public believe Joe Biden was not legitimately elected (Swann, 2022).

Trump spent a lot of time promoting his narrative of claims towards the end, using rhetoric such as "the election is stolen from us" and began to rally people up; often using the platform Twitter, saying/tweeting statements that many considered controversial and perhaps dangerous since he represented a democratic institution. Skipping further towards the insurgence we witness on January 1st, 2021 (10:58 pm eastern time) that President Trump tweets: "*The BIG Protest Rally in Washington, D.C. will take place at 11:00 A.M. on January 6th. Locational details to follow. StopTheSteal!*" (BBC, 2022, pp. 2).

The day was likely not chosen by accident because it was the day when the representatives of the electoral votes from the different states was to confirm Biden as president. Following the next week on January 6th (8:17pm eastern time) Trump tweeted before the rally: "*States want to correct their votes, which they now know based on irregularities and fraud, plus corrupt process never received legislative approval. All Mike Pence (vice president) has to do is send them back to the sates; AND WE WIN. Do it Mike, this is time for extreme courage!*"

Suggesting as the first president in democratic history that Mike Pence was obligated toward stop the process of counting the electoral votes – the bureaucratic tradition of confirming and acknowledging that Biden is elected by the people and for the people to become President (BBC, 2022, pp. 3).

On his rally the rhetoric fluxed and continued – the election was stolen, and the freedom of the American people was in jeopardy. About fifteen minutes into his speech, he urged his supporters to peacefully march over to the Capitol building to patriotically make their voices heard. However, as the temperature of the atmosphere raised so did his rhetoric and at the end of his speech, he yells: *"We fight. We fight like hell and if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore. So, let's walk down Pennsylvania Avenue."* (BBC,2022, pp. 4).

The protest grew into a march, and then a mob broke into the capitol to physically prevent the congress from proceeding with the electoral votes. Approximately 140 officers were injured in the incident, with many of them being assaulted by rioters using pepper spray, metal bars, and clubs (Kydd,2021). Among the casualties were brain injuries and spinal fractures. Five persons died because of the incident or shortly afterwards. Capitol police shot and killed a protester -Ashli Babbitt, and more than \$1 million in damage was done to the Capitol (Kydd, 2021).

After the attack Trump persisted on Twitter throughout as the insurgence was going on that Mike Pence did not *"have the courage to do what should have been done to protect our country and our constitution, giving States a chance to certify a corrected set of facts not the fraudulent or inaccurate ones which they were asked to previously certify"*. Ending it with *"USA demands the truth!"* (BCC, 2022, pp.5).

The growth of armed right-wing organizations, as well as the continued rise of political and media division, as well as the advent of social media and the mainstreaming of conspiracy theories, have all had a part in this event. In addition, the Republican Party has embraced politicians like Trump and believes that extreme measures are essential to avert decline and defeat the Democratic Party that is in their point of view destroying America. Subsequently republicans have concluded that violence may be necessary to safeguard their way of life. One could also argue that Donald Trump exacerbated and exploited these issues to rally his followers to keep him in government (Kydd, 2021).

However, this phenomenon did not explode overnight – by looking at the four years of Trumps presidency to the attack on state capitol we get a more thorough understanding for why the attack took place. President Trumps cadency was for many pundits and journalists around the world labeled as the *"post truth"* era (Kydd, 2021). We got to observe how this

phenomenon has been completely entrenched as a practice and world view to some. However, when we look at the photos from that day, we find flags and banners that have a contentious connotation for many (Cowan, 2022). Several QAnon conspiracy theorists were present during the storming of Congress. Trump, according to Qanon adherents, is a reassurance of the American social state (Cowan, 2022). Many people think he was charged with saving the United States from a government of satanic, pedophile network comprised of prominent social figures, such as Joe Biden and Hillary Clinton, both Democrats (Cowan, 2022).

QAnon is a network of people that promotes different right wing ideologies that revolves around anti-Semitic beliefs. One of their theories is that Jews are responsible for kidnapping and torture children for ceremonial purposes and that Jewish elites covertly rule the globe (Wendling, 2021). According to a survey conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute, QAnon believers climbed from 14 percent in March 2021 to 17 percent in September 2021 (Smith, 2022). In other words, the conspiracy beliefs, which have traditionally been used to justify murder and genocide are present in around 15-20 percent of the US population (Smith, 2022).

Professor Cathrine Thorleifsson, a researcher at the Center for Extremism at the University of Oslo postulates through her research that QAnon has become more active. At the same time, the message's substance is shifting. She believes that this is how it spreads to larger groups: by broadening its message and principles to appeal to a larger audience. For example, she claims that in the context of the epidemic, antisemitic and anti-Chinese conspiracy theories have become linked (Jakobsen, 2021). Through her research on the speech and rhetoric used by Qanon supporters, she discovered that they believe the epidemic is a biological weapon launched by Jews or Chinese to gain world control which has led to discussion about vaccine resistance. The phenomenon indicates a growing skepticism in the various institutions that make up democracy, and it is gaining popularity among new groups. QAnon has grown over the world effortlessly on internet and social media, and the network of people believing in conspiracy theories such as QAnon has spread around the world (Jakobsen, 2021).

Chapter 3: Producers of disinformation

Social media and the digitalization of the world has made it possible for people to create their own news stations giving an alternative platform of news consumption than mainstream media. We may say that voters are no longer being shaped by news, but news is being shaped by voters (Marwick & Lewis, 2017).

The producers of disinformation, “fake news” and conspiracy theories come from many different creators, for example foreign governments, websites, trolls, bots’ politicians, partisan media outlets and mainstream media. The different creators often overlap and compete in taking control and amplifying the production of disinformation in the media/internet ecosystem. Many different disciplines have conducted research on the motivations and roles of these individuals in the development and dissemination of false news (Marwick & Lewis, 2017).

The role of trolls:

The term trolls are a term used to that have been present on the internet for a long time. Trolls are automated computers that purposefully attract or bait others on the internet with provocative statements with the purpose elicit an emotional response from people, with many online trolls distributing false and misleading material to provoke such emotions. (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). According to research, news sites occasionally take up submitted trolls’ content, in which are not always fact checked. Trolls, on the other hand, are sometimes motivated by personal amusement and other times by political motivation (Marwick & Lewis 2017; Starbird, 2019).

Trolls are said to engage in in making chaos in the political specter according to some scholars. For example, though blogs and forums devoted to white supremacy and sexism. In other words, they use such techniques to draw attention to their issues to such issues

(Marwick & Lewis, 2017). Their motive is often to engage in divisive behavior in order to create discord and cause emotional distress. In other words, this may exacerbate division by disseminating racist or sexist content to upset the political debate (Starbird, 2019).

However, there is a type of troll that is recruited by for example companies, politicians or political parties, to post and comment on public forums with misleading material are known as hired trolls. According to Gerber & Zavisca (2016) reports, that Russian "troll farms" exist, where employees are given specific tasks on spreading information or content to influence debates in America on both regional, national, and global issues. For example, there is proof of the Russian government utilizing trolls to affect public opinion in its favor and against the US and its NATO (Gerber & Zavisca, 2016).

Fake news website's:

When content becomes viral it produces revenue from advertising because every time a user visits the original site where the information initially appeared. This means that people can be motivated and encourage a wide spectrum of innovative individuals to enter the false news industry because of its monetary benefits. In other words, because advertising funds and drives social media, people who spread fake news and misinformation may be motivated profit (Marwick & Lewis, 2017).

Over 100 sites spreading bogus news during the 2016 US presidential campaign were operated by a group of youngsters from a small hamlet in North Macedonia, according to a journalistic investigation. They constructed fake websites with the purpose of spreading contentious news in order to make it go viral and thus generate money. For example, they spread false information about Hillary Clinton, claiming that she would be imprisoned for offenses related to her emails. They made tens of thousands of dollars by fabricating stories that backed both Trump and Clinton (Marwick & Lewis, 2017; Tucker, Guess, Barberá, Vaccari, Siegel & Sanovich & Nyhan, 2018). These actors profess to only be motivated by revenue and profit and during the 2016 election they said that when they were distributing pro-Trump news, they generated more advertising money than producing pro-Clinton information (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). However, business isn't the sole factor driving the

creation of fake websites. The Romanian who owns endingthefed.com, for example, claims that he started the website exclusively to help Donald Trump's campaign (Townsend, 2016). Some right-wing fake news site writers pose as Democrats, but their objective was to shame people on the right by exposing that the right-wing community is recklessly sharing incorrect and ludicrous material. Whether ideology has a part or not, the costs of joining the market and manufacturing fake news on social media are quite cheap. As a result, small-scale, short-term techniques used by false news producers might be quite profitable (Marwick & Lewis, 2017).

In an empirical study done by Allcot and Gentzkow (2017) they found out that fake news was extensively circulated and significantly biased in favor of Donald Trump throughout the 2016 campaign season. During the election month, a list of fake news websites had 159 million visitors, with slightly over half of the news seeming to be fake or fraudulent. The typical American adult viewed and recalled 1.14 bogus articles based on web surfing statistics and an online poll. These fake news websites' have been proven to have a key role in fostering political division, with user's 15 percent more likely to accept ideologically aligned headlines. This impact is substantially bigger for users in homogenous social media networks than for those who utilize them in a more diverse way (Allcot & Grentzkow, 2017; Tucker et al. 2018).

Conspiracy theorists' express fears of losing power or prestige, and they are motivated by the conviction that a strong organization is influencing the public. These allegations vary from anti-Semitic conspiracy theories about Jews to alternative explanations for events such as the 9/11 attacks or that the earth is flat. In other words, a new business of conspiracy theories has evolved. For example, a man named Alex Jones, who controls the Infowars multimedia brand, has built his empire and fortune on spreading fake news and conspiracy theories. (Tucker, Guess & Barberá & Vaccari & Siegel & Sanovich & Nyhan, 2018). According to survey statistics, at least one in two Americans supports at least one conspiracy theory, and which conspiracy you believe in is often related to the ideology you pretrain (Oliver & Wood, 2014).

Hyper partisan news is considerably more likely to be spread on Facebook than on other platforms, according to a comprehensive empirical study done by Harvard University. In addition to that the data concluded that today's highly skewed media is the primary breeder and disseminator of misinformation. Sites like the Daily Caller, The Gateway Pundit, the

Washington Examiner, Infowars, Conservative Treehouse, and Truthfeed are among the new hyper political news sites dominating the landscape of misinformation (Faris, Roberts & Etling & Bourassa & Zuckerman & Benkler, 2017). In other words, these sites and actors are supporting an alternate reality to the public, in which they are producing a deceptive vision of the world that adds to party polarization since the information/misinformation is generated with the goal of advancing partisan ideology (Marwick & Lewis, 2017; Faris et al., 2017).

Daily Newsbin, Bipartisan Report, and Occupy Democrats are all hyper-partisan news sites on the far left. These blogs, however, do not have much influence because leftists prefer to get their news from the mainstream media. According to a Harvard University study, far-right fake news is a network that is generally disconnected from other media sources, but far-left false news is frequently absorbed into mainstream media discourse (Faris et al., 2017).

Politicians may not be the most prolific misinformation spreaders, but they are among the most powerful. Politicians may attract attention, popularity, and support by presenting facts in favor of their viewpoints (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). Accounts from politicians with many followers, may significantly improve the reach of information on social media, and their tweets are often covered in the mainstream media and reach millions of people. Journalistic investigations conclude that politicians are not the largest spreaders of disinformation but are very influential. Politicians may not openly contribute to the spread of misinformation, however they use other techniques behind the scenes, such as the hiring trolls and or the use of “bots” (Marwick & Lewis, 2017).

The role of bots:

Bots are programmed to perform a specific task automatically, regularly and on its own, without human help. Regarding the spread of misinformation there are evidence of intentional distribution of incorrect or misleading information over social media networks using bots (Bessi & Ferrara, 2016). According to Bessi and Ferrara (2016), bots were responsible for roughly one-fifth of tweets on the US election. Bots were used for a variety of political reasons. Throughout the presidential debates and election, bots were particularly

active in creating pro-Trump, but also to some extent pro-Clinton, news (Bessi & Ferrara, 2016)

Bots were used to help politicians to get more "likes" and "followers" on their social media platforms, assault their counterpart and spread misinformation. Thus, influence and manipulate the political debate and societal environment of division and hatred in online political debates (Bessi & Ferrara, 2016).

There is also evidence of governments participating in spreading disinformation. For example, the Russian government has a history of utilizing misinformation to sway public opinion in the West. Because of the dispersion of the present media environment, Western channels are at risk of unknowingly presenting narratives promoted by state-run media entities such as Russia Today. In other words, the digital globalization of the world has made it easier for people, entities, intuitions, people, and governments to manipulate public opinion and develop the public discourse towards their liking. The information flow around the world is limitless and whether something is fake or real can be difficult to conclude (Badawy, 2019).

Chapter 3.5: Online content, misinformation, news outlets and political polarization.

Many people believed that when social media first became available, it would involve the whole world in a global democracy process. Many people in recent years, from academics to the media, civil society, the philanthropic community, and even politicians, have expressed concern that social media is shaping public/political discourse in ways that exacerbate partisan polarization, increase distrust in institutions, and undermine democracy (Flew & Iosfidis, 2020).

Climate change discourse online:

To investigate how misinformation may be viewed as an ideological struggle under hegemony and elites, we must choose a platform that is relevant in regard to a cyberspatiality context. An empirical study done by university of Uppsala selected Facebook as its platform being the biggest social media platform the past decade (Jaques, Islar & Lord, 2019). Facebook is the most used platform in the worlds, thus this the most likely location for verifying or rejecting the occurrence of ideological conflict in internet discourse. The study is a qualitative examination of discussions around socioenvironmental issues in Facebook's comment area from people that was citizens of the United States. In order to find relevant data to assess they searched for the top ten most engaged-with news stories, in which were measured by how many likes, comments, and shares the different posts had. They did the search by using the phrase “climate change” on the BuzzSumo market research platform (Jaques et al., 2019).

In the study they examined 3 different posts/articles from Facebook, the first one was a video by National geographic showing a malnutral polar bear dying, the second one was posted by Washington post, in which presented extreme weather conditions on the eastern coast of the United States. The last article was linked to USA and their withdrawal out of the Paris agreement. To analyze the work, they used a critical discourse analysis, in which entails the analysis of social practice, discourse practice and the analysis of text (Jaques, et al., 2019).

The first article about the dying polar bear consisted of comments and statement of mostly emotional concern such as suffering, hart breaking, sad and “starving.” The second post regarding extreme weather conditions had comments in relation to topics like Trump, weather, and climate, however with the word “hoax” often used as an argumentized form of a reaction. The third article/post about USA leaving the Paris agreement consisted of words like climate, embarrassing, billions and pay in which the discussion often pertained around it being too costly to be part of the agreement. According to their statistical data we clearly see pattern of commentators bringing up topics that is not discussed in the different articles. Even though he is not mentioned in the piece, Donald Trump is brought up. Data from the third article yields a similar result, with an emphasis on 'paying, 'millions,' 'billions,' and “money” in the top 50 terms, despite the absence of economic cost from the text. Subsequently the

study goes further through three patterns in depth because of their prominence in the statistics and linkages to ideological conflict. The patterns consist of widespread rejection of established authority, a struggle for scientific validity, and a fight to combat climate denialism (Jaques et al., 2019). Through its investigation the study captured that there were four central patterns regarding climate change. First one being that climate change is real, second one being that climate change “may or may not be real but may not be responsible for the events in the article”, the third one being climate change is not real and the last one being climate change is real, but humans are not the cause. The different categories mentioned above were chosen through analyzing the frequency in the comments and were delimited when the commenter either openly stated their view on climate change or logically resulted from their remark (Jaques et al., 2019).

The data from the different responses and comments on Facebook revealed topics that were causes for the polarity in climate change. In all the different datasets a certain theme became prevalent – being “anti-elitism”. The commentators from category 1 showed significant distrust in institutions, especially climate sceptics showed little sympathy for the media in which they described as distributing misinformation/fake news and being corrupt with the intention of scaring the public and generating profits. Regarding the comments from the second article, they shared similar opinions regarding anti-elitism as well as commenting that extreme weather were common (Jaques et al., 2019). The third article included no mention of the media. Sceptics instead utilized other nations to declare the Paris Agreement worthless and void. Attempts were also made to delegitimize "liberals" and "democrats," who were talked about as ignorant and uneducated. Climate change international action was rejected in favor of America-first policies. The dominant rhetorical strategy was to portray the accord as economically imprudent. In each of the articles the skepticism of authority and elites were present and delegitimization strategies were used to reframe the meaning of the articles (Jaques et al., 2019).

Another theme that was prevalent was the discussion about good science versus bad science. For example, many questioned and exploited scientific authority to delegitimize opposing viewpoints and to legitimate their own perspective on whether climate change exists. There was a contrast established between "good" science and "bad science" in all groups, and allusions to "agenda" or "corruption" among scientists were prevalent. It was also prevalent that commentators were angry and emotional in the way they discussed with other people or

directly towards the writers or the content of the article (Jaques, Islar & Lord, 2019). Thus, the discussion of science was handled in a shallow, emotional, and unsubstantiated manner and often with counterexamples in the form of stories and statements based on non-credible sources (Jaques et al., 2019).

The battle of delegitimization and legitimization between the polarized parties became very prevalent in the climate change debate. The communication between the individuals online pertaining climate change was very emotional, unproductive, and unsustainable (Jaques et al., 2019). The most prevalent delegitimizing tactics in the study was creating a negative picture of the “others”, for example through moral judgement statements and angry appeals. With its broad specter it varied from threatening people with assault and even death to calling people "dumb" and retarded. If people did not agree with each other— dehumanizing tactics became very common resulting in a conversation that seeks only negative outcomes and thoughts about one another (Jaques et al., 2019).

Party signals:

It has been demonstrated that "party signals," or the use of identification in political discourse and political news coverage to connect with the audience, leads to polarization by emphasizing partisan sentiments. According to Levendusky (2013), political media makes listeners' political identity increasingly prominent by portraying politics as a fight between irredeemably opposing parties. Thus, he argues that such phenomena are leading to both cognitive and emotional polarization – often creating a “us and them” mentality referring to tribalistic tendencies that operate in the evolutionary mindset of human beings (Levendusky, 2013). A recent empirical study from Stanford and Princeton University supports this observation (Lyengar & Westwood, 2021). The research looked at the extent to which individuals are prepared to contribute or risk money that they would otherwise receive to co-partisans while withholding money from opposing partisans that one was inclined to (Lyengar & Westwood, 2021). Party signals have a significant impact on nonpolitical judgements and actions, according to the empirical study. Partisans discriminate against their opponents to a greater extent than prejudice based on race, gender, religion, or other types of

identity. The study concludes that party signals are necessary for affective/emotional polarization, while ideological polarization is less severe. It went on further to conclude that because of their political identities, the participants were pushed to engage in conflict rather than collaboration (Lyengar & Westwood, 2021).

On both a cognitive and emotional level, polarization is defined by unfavorable opinions of groups (Rathje, Van Bavel, & Van Der Linden, 2021). Negative attitudes against some groups may lead to a greater belief in false information about these groups. When politicians and the media give people the notion that they are distinct and unique, negative labeling is easy to do since there is little risk in assigning any bad characteristics to them. The National Academy of Sciences conducted a recent empirical study to see if out-group hatred was effective at engaging users on these two platforms (Rathje, et al., 2021). They looked at postings from news media accounts and members of the US Congress and observed that posts concerning the political out-group were made, shared, and retweeted twice as often as ones about the in-group. The probability of a social media message being shared increased by 67 percent for each twitter user who included phrases alluding to political opponents. Out-group language was shown to be the most consistent predictor of shares and retweets (Rathje, et al., 2021).

Between December 2018 and January 2019, researchers from Aarhus University's Political Science Department in Denmark employed the YouGov survey firm to recruit 2,300 American Twitter users for their empirical study. The study's goal was to conduct a survey that documented the participants' psychological and political characteristics. Questions on political party identification and positive and negative attitudes toward Republicans and Democrats were included in the poll, as well as tests of political knowledge and the capacity to think logically rather than instinctively. They conducted a meta-analysis to collect both participants' tweets and then correlate this data to the survey responses. They extracted 2.7 million tweets, which were compared against extensive databases of news sources known to publish genuine or fake news pieces. The study discovered that spreading incorrect information had less to do with ignorance and more to do with political party allegiance as well as the information accessible to supporters for use in discrediting their opponents (Osmundsen, Bor, Vahlstrup, & Bechmann & Petersen, 2021). Although conservatives are more likely than democrats to spread falsehoods and disinformation, both sides exchange such material. The news sources accessible to partisans on both sides of the political split

differ, but both republicans and democrats are compelled to seek out radical false news to reinforce beliefs that are increasingly out of step with science and mainstream media due to hostile exchanges on social media. In addition, the survey found that both Democrats and Republicans use the internet to find extreme and untrustworthy content to demonize their political opponents (Osmundsen et al., 2021).

The exposure of disinformation over time seem to make it more trustworthy (Swire, Berinsky, Lewandowsky & Ecker, 2017). Because repeated exposure to content promotes cognitive fluency, which is subsequently used as a bias to assume correctness. In parallel the study discovered that political bias from exposure to politicians' rhetoric is a significant factor in encouragement of belief in rumors and misinformation. The findings imply that individuals utilize political figures as a heuristic for judging what is true or untrue, and that they do not require truthfulness as a condition for supporting various politicians (Swire et al., 2017).

According to Mason (2018) as a result, the news media may strengthen partisan groups' readiness to accept inaccurate information about out-group members by constantly reminding participants of their political group. In other words, identity politics play a significant role in unfavorable political sentiments and allow manipulation in seemingly unrelated areas. The Republican Party is the less socially complicated of the two parties, and it frequently reminds people of their social identities, such as being White and Christian, to strengthen partisan identification (Mason & Wronski, 2018). Democratic leaders are more likely to remind their constituents of their accomplishments on behalf of a variety of groups. Both political groupings, on the other hand, are motivated to depict the other as social foreigners, making the in-party more appealing and further dividing the population (Mason & Wronski, 2018).

Arcenaux and Johnson (2015) argue in a review of the literature that mainstream media reports tend to focus on which parties take stances on political issues. In other words, if political viewpoints were sharply divided across parties, the media sought to reflect this, regardless of whether the news outlet providing it was partisan or mainstream. Politicians themselves and party signals therefore holds a large share of the guilt for the country's polarization because they often just echo signals from parties and politicians. In other words, the mainstream and partisan news media both act as repeating loudspeakers rather than motivators of partisan divide (Arcenaux & Johnson, 2015; Tucker et al., 2018).

However, according to a comprehensive literature analysis and an empirical study conducted by the University of Michigan and the University of Santa Barbara, partisan news often tend to include their own opinions about the opposing candidate rather than the ideas of the supported candidate (Hasell & Weeks, 2016). Furthermore, exposure to partisan news was found to have a considerable impact on general unfavourable audiences' emotional reactions toward members of opposition parties. The data showed that people that consume pro-attitude political news are angrier with their political opponents. They also discovered that people had significant emotional reactions to partisan content, and that people are more willing to share content related to such emotions on social media. Most significantly rage and anger tended to aggravate a narrow focus and in parallel foster divisiveness and the spread of misinformation. Thus, people's emotions were shown to have an important role in increasing the message's integrity and if the person behind the computer were experiencing anger and rage from watching partisan media, they tended to share content and narratives on social media that clearly disgusted them about the opposing party (Hasell & Weeks, 2016).

Stanford, Aarhus, and Northwestern universities performed an experiment in which participants were exposed to several forms of arguments, including both extremely powerful and very weak arguments (Druckman, Peterson & Slothuus, 2013). The researchers discovered that when participants were not told that the party and politicians were polarized, their evaluations of the stronger argument changed. Furthermore, after respondents learned that the political elite was deeply divided on the issue, they subsequently modified their minds in favor of what the party they supported argued or asserted. They did so regardless of whether the argument was weak or strong, and even if they were confronted with a stronger counterargument. In other words, they followed what the party said regardless of the quality of the different arguments. The study concluded that severe party competition degrades the quality of people's opinions and their motivation to reflect about politics (Druckman et al. 2013).

Chapter 4: Digitalization of the world and big tech algorithms

The word "globalization," which encompasses a wide variety of various political, economic, and cultural tendencies, remains crucial to modern political and scholarly discussion.

Globalization was first used to refer to the phenomenon of the pursuit of a free market global economy, which can be understood as the burgeoning superiority of Western cultural, economic, and political life; the westernization of the world, a global political order based on free trade and liberal perceptions of international law (Scheuerman, 2018).

In more recent globalization discourse, we refer to globalization as the exchange of cultural life or something that connects the world as a global citizen in one huge community – global integration. This includes the internet revolution who has become a place where one can virtually meet, converse, and share information with everybody. Globalization is an issue that has received a lot of attention from politicians, who have used language centered on nationalism and populism to argue that globalization is destroying domestic homogeneity and national identity. However, according to scholars the concept globalization can also be broadly defined as fundamental changes in the geographical and temporal dimensions of social life (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

Scholars have suggested that the digitalization of the world has created a global communication network that has helped us connect towards a more unified homogeneous global culture, using the internet and social media as platforms. For example, the new forms of interconnectedness have helped us shape and transform media, politics, and culture. The internet has helped us communicate with one another across territorial boundaries with such ease that it has connected people with shared interest to form groups and alliances online, and even mobilize people towards common goals. This phenomenon is often defined as “the logic of connective action” in which various persons discuss contemporary issues such as economic fairness and environment change, and through the online community further coordinated into political action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). However, rather than seeing globalization as something that just enables homogeneity and global culture, social media

has also created new areas for disinformation, identity politics, hate speech, and conflict in recent years.

Based on contemporary discussions about identity and globalization, we may argue that globalization allows for the pluralization of cultures and identities via media and communication flows, large-scale migration, and the development of transnational identities. As globalization and identity are somehow intertwined, it is suggested that globalization has aided in the increase of cultural relevance as it is appreciated by others around the world (Tomlinson, 2007). However, Tomlinson (2007), also addresses that the traditional links that exist among national cultures and geographical location is weakening – losing its place. In that regard he postulates that many individuals have gained a pluri-national concept of “self,” and that the links between national culture and identity has weakened. He goes on to say that as nationhood deteriorates, we are witnessing the emergence of non-territorial identities. (Tomlinson, 2007). As human beings are evolutionary tribalistic we must display a certain identity and bond to a group of individuals. New movements of race, gender, and sexuality have evolved as transnational identities have emerged within nation states. People have been able to develop these forms of identities across geographical lines to a substantial extent because the internet revolution, which has allowed them to network and mobilize against injustices and agendas (Tomilson, 2007; Flew & Iosfidis, 2020).

However, as globalization has become prominent and nationhood are weakening, we can in correlation detect a rise of populism especially in the US and Europe (Flew & Iosfidis, 2020). As more and more people are moving across borders and bringing their own customs, cultures, and identities – people fear that their national identity and their way of life is being altered. This is one of the numerous reasons why populist parties are gaining popularity in the West. In a time when anti-globalization versus globalization has become a divisive issue, it's vital to remember that this phenomenon is not new and occurred long before the internet and social media (Flew & Iosfidis, 2020).

However, as cultural heterogeneity and new identity movements emerge in countries around the world, we now have a single location where everyone can virtually converse and access information. Thus, the intersection of globalization and identity politics is a fascinating phenomenon to study. The internet or more specifically social media can be understood as an interactive and collaborative web by providing an opportunity for virtual networking involvement in communities of interest. This level of engagement has never been seen before

in the world, with the web attracting a significantly greater audience than traditional media. Social media enable more interactivity and communication on a global scale and have to some degree altered the democratic process and the nature of the public sphere (Flew & Iosfidis, 2020). Politics is one critical area where global digitization has had a significant influence, since changing forms of networked politics have permitted new kinds of political mobilization, frequently in opposition to the existing elite and institutions. For example, we've seen cases where the internet and social media have become such a potent tool of mobilization that they've been able to spark revolutions, such as the Arab Spring or the attack on the US state capitol (Howard and Hussain, 2013). The Arab spring was a consequence of increased connectedness experienced by social media users in which activated and strengthened links during the upheavals. Thus, the digitalization of the world and the subsequent ability to build networks and coordinate political dissent and revolt, has changed both the democratic process and the structure of the public sphere (Flew & Iosfidis, 2020). The new public sphere, on the other hand, is built on networked technology and is impacted by a wide range of actors, including politicians, bots, foreign governments, and so on. It's crucial to note this because there are a variety of motivations for changing public opinion. Underneath this interconnection and social platforms, however, is significant technology that must be addressed to gain a better understanding of the stakes at hand.

One important aspect is that Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms are not produced in regard to usefulness and security. Social media platforms are primarily motivated by profit, and they optimize, develop, and produce their systems in terms of monetary metrics. The value of Twitter's shares, for example, is determined by the number of users it has. In the case of Twitter, there is little to no effort in removing bots and trolls who are disseminating propaganda and disinformation (Stenvik, 2020). Former Facebook employees have also claimed that the platform's architecture was designed to increase user engagement and reliance to increase Facebook's profitability (Doss, 2020, p. 2).

According to a survey from 2019 done by Pew Research Center, around 57% percent of the US population report that they get most of their news from a mobile device (Feezell, Wagner & Conroy, 2021). In the younger generation this is even more prominent as over 72% percent of adolescents from 18 to 19 years old receive their news and information on social media platforms. In other words, most people get their news online, and this trend is expected to increase over time. However, the political consequences of getting one's news online, notably

the impact of algorithms in online news production, have yet to be investigated. Online news sources, such as YouTube, Google, and Twitter, are frequently driven by complex algorithms, needing deeper investigation into their design and ramifications (Feezell et al., 2021).

Online media algorithms take into account time, content, age, location, knowledge about a user's online history, cognitive qualities, users' social attributes, users' social networks, and the platform's aims. The algorithms are so advanced that is difficult to understand for someone that is not directly involved in creating these systems. For example, the algorithms match your personal data with that of other similar users, calculating what content like-minded people are consuming and then promoting you farther into that world of information and forums. As stated by Feezell et al., 2021: *“A user’s social attributes and network are often a key factor for modern social media that drive these algorithms to filter information through a fundamentally social process.”* (Feezell, Wagner & Conroy, 2021, p.2).

Platforms such as Facebook use their technological algorithm to retrieve and measure detailed data from profiles, and then they measure and calculate what kind of content they think will entice or be of interest to a particular user. Then they will consistently calibrate and adjust the user's feed so that the platform can maximize dependence and engagement, resulting in more time being spent on their platform (Doss, 2020). Thus, what is shown in the "feed" is shaped to a much greater extent by automated selection of content, based on the algorithms' assessment of who we are and what engage us.

In relation to political behaviour a recent study from Yale university concludes that people who get their news from algorithm-based platforms are significantly more politically active (Crockett, 2017). Subsequently individuals that receive their news from user-driven algorithms are more likely to be engaged because of the attention seeking emotional driven algorithm. Thus, individuals are more likely to perpetuate unfavourable feelings toward the political environment. The modern form of social media started with a succession of design upgrades in 2008, and the current version of social media was born (Crockett, 2017). Content algorithmizing, retweet buttons and the like created a platform of moral outrage. Thus, we may say that the only goal of social media's design is to keep us engaged, because its economic model is dependent on advertising money. Because social media platforms make money from advertising, they have an incentive to provide us with content that will entice us, keep us engaged, and encourage us to return and spend more time with them (Crockett,

2017). The collecting of personal data by social media sites has revealed that what keeps individuals interested and engaged are emotional triggers, notably sentiments of indignation. Thus, these platforms' algorithms choose material that is likely to elicit strong emotions such as outrage and fury. To put it another way, one of the most fundamental characteristics of social media is the way it is designed to agitate and addict individuals (Crockett, 2017).

The development of echo chambers:

The way journalists make news has been significantly influenced by social media and accompanying algorithmics. Prior to the digitization of news and media, journalists served as gatekeepers between complex realities and what news was deemed appropriate for public discussion. In today's world, however, algorithms and users are the dominant players in the gatekeeping process, with access to all forms of unfiltered data. Thus, there has been substantial change regarding journalists' framework of norms and practices, as journalists are now much more concerned about marketing their news to their consumers (Feezell, Wagner & Conroy, 2021). According to previous research, news outlets tend to disseminate news and stories that elicit strong emotional reactions, frequently on the negative side of the emotional spectrum, because they are more likely to go viral. In other words, an angry, polarized emotional public can be understood as profitable for news producers as it correlates to greater attentions, thus consumption (Bolsen & Leeper, 2013; Leung, 2013; Smith & Searles, 2014).

As concluded, user driven algorithmics are created with its primarily focus of growing user attention and subsequently profit. In relation to political behaviour, recent studies show that people who get their news from algorithm-based platforms are significantly more politically active (Feezell, Wagner & Conroy, 2021, p.2). Subsequently, individuals that receive their news from user-driven algorithms are more likely to be engaged because of the attention seeking emotional driven algorithm. Thus, individuals are more likely to perpetuate unfavourable feelings toward the political environment. As user-driven algorithms have no motive other than profit, there is no reason to provide users with information that are counter attitudinal, if the user is not clearly requesting it themselves. Subsequently, social media algorithms-based news might be blamed for driving their users to greater extremes because

they are more likely to distribute material that aligns with the user's preferences. According to some research on the algorithmics of YouTube and Facebook, the acquisition of personal data is can create communities of strong ideology-based identities, where people are placed in virtual forums that are continually reinforcing your already existing beliefs to further extravagances – creating both a one dimension point of view but also a strong sense of us and them mentality (Cho, Ahmed, Hilbert, Liu, & Luu, 2020). In other words, these findings can be understood based on theories grounded in sociopsychology and sociology, suggesting that that people who are constantly exposed to selective information from any mediums including social media news and content experience increases ideological and partisan polarization (Cho et al., 2020). Certain elements of social media platforms, according to the research, make it easier for people to engage in intense identity-based ideology construction and debate. While government control of information and communication technology is not new, social media platforms have several features that make them particularly prone to being used as weapons of war and identity struggle (Cho et al., 2020).

However, there is recent research that tackles the same issues regarding the echo chambers theory and whether algorithmically personalization of news and content affects political polarization. A study exploring the effects of algorithm-driven news sources on political behavior and polarization found that algorithmically generated news is a strong predictor of higher rates of online political engagement (both user-driven and socially driven). In contrast, neither non-algorithmic news nor the two concepts of algorithmic news studied predicted increased party polarization (Feezell et al., 2021). The study shows that other well-known phenomena are more likely to cause affective polarization or general political extremism. To put it another way, while media platforms, particularly social media platforms, may encourage phenomena such as hate or bad partisanship, they may not be the exclusive source of divided beliefs. The main reasons why people end themselves in echo chambers are because of pre-existing established viewpoints. On the other hand, the study predicted that algorithmically generated news is a strong predictor of increased levels of online political activity. Thus, people who receive algorithmically generated news are more likely to participate in politics online. As a result, algorithmically generated news sources are anticipated to grow in popularity in the future, leading to higher rates of online interaction but not necessarily political divide, according to the study (Feezell et al., 2021).

According to a comprehensive study conducted by scientists at Oxford University, most Americans no longer live in echo chambers, implying that the filter bubble/echo chambers notion is not as dramatic as formerly assumed (Arguedas, Robertson, Fletcher & Nielsen, 2022). In other words, the risk regarding only receiving value consistent news, not challenged of other views, is not necessarily causing overall political polarization. The findings also suggests that algorithmics work in a way in which can be incidental. Incidental in the sense that people who find themselves using algorithmic search engines can at times find information that was not intended, such as when they click on content by accident and the algorithmic assumes it is of interest, causing it to be registered as presumably interesting and thus displaying more of the same content. In other words, this can lead to slightly more diverse news for the social media user (Arguedas et al., 2022).

During the 2016 US election, a Pew research center study generated data that contradicted the echo chamber and filter bubble theories: people self-reporting seeing a diversity of ideas on their social networks, both pro Trump and pro Clinton (Duggan & Smith, 2016). However, the survey also found that individuals were unsatisfied with the amount of cross-connection online among political sides. They were tired of being exposed to varied points of view and tried to purposely disengage from information with opposing opinions – but couldn't. In other words, there is evidence of interconnection between political groups in terms of political interest suggesting that the algorithmicizing of news does not expose one to only confirming viewpoints (Duggan & Smith, 2016).

An analysis of both twitter data and related surveys undertaken by researchers at New York University revealed that users who followed more polarized news sites lost cross-ideology social contacts at a faster rate than the general population (Eady, Nagler, Guess, Zilinsky & Tucker, 2019). This implies that individuals are self-sorting into more ideologically homogeneous social networks, showing that they are not only being driven by algorithmics but also by their own will to find material (Eady et al., 2019).

The problem, according to a comprehensive literature review conducted by scientist at Oxford University, is not that there are hyper partisan echo chambers and filter bubbles, but rather that there are hyper partisan radical groups that essentially deny and actively oppose any conventional societal and democratic consensus (Argueda, Robertson, Fletcher & Nielsen 2022). This is not because they're trapped in echo chambers or filter bubbles, but because

they genuinely believe it is what they should be doing; in other words, the issue is political polarization, not technological fragmentation.

A recent study conducted by researchers at Princeton university indicates that, while most individuals do not necessarily find themselves in echo chambers on social media, political influence from friends, co-workers, politicians, and elites is evident (Guess, 2021). To put it another way, other people have an impact on other people. People who live in echo chambers of radical ideology wield a great deal of power over the public sphere, with "ordinary individuals" sharing their radical content with others. Thus, echo chambers exist online and are the reality for a tiny number of people, but the study discovered that those who find themselves in echo chambers have a disproportionate power and influence of others (Guess, 2021).

Many of the studies explored, however, have in common the existence of pre-existing societal culture structures relating to the phenomena of disinformation and political polarization. I'll explain the established theories and the historical backdrop of political division and disinformation in my next chapter.

Chapter 5: The war on science and the history of political polarization in the context of postmodernism.

When we look at the United States specifically, we can see that both the democrats and the republicans have become increasingly strong on ideology-based identities. The rhetoric often used by the different parties tend to consist of emotions of hostility towards the opposing party. In a climate of divisiveness and animosity toward competing parties, we can see that lawmaker in the Congress and the Senate have utilized their veto powers more than ever before to stymie legislative progress (Putnam, 2020). It's become a trend to do so because it makes the other party seem bad by demonstrating that they can't keep their commitments by enacting laws. As a result, legislative progress is nearly thwarted due to a lack of policies reaching the general population. We know that the post-truth phenomenon after Trump's administration has changed the political landscape, and we can see how knowledge and

research has become a subjective aspect of political and economic rewards in the setting of social media (Putnam, 2020).

Misinformation on the internet has always existed, but information/disinformation has been more accessible since the internet revolution, as well as more prominent during the post-truth period. Disinformation or misinformation is a slang phrase that does not always accurately represent the facts of the situation. Professor Otto Shawn postulates in his book that the post-truth phenomenon and the disinformation that has followed has become influenced by political benefits (Otto, 2016). He describes the current climate of disinformation as a “war against science”. He further postulates that the delegitimization of science that is taking place is to promote or justify a certain economic and political ideology. As previously stated in this thesis paper, we have evidence of politicians, foreign governments, and hired bots spreading so-called subjective science material on the internet. As a result, the Internet has made it much easier for people to become acquainted with such subjective science than when we just had venues such as newspapers, television news, and strong-led governmental institutions (Otto, 2016).

User-driven algorithms have become increasingly focused on providing information and material that aims to capture the user's attention, with identity politics that are consistent both digitally and physically. People are provided with information and content that is relevant to their interests, which helps to shape their identity. In that order, Otto (2016) postulates that identity politics has become a crucial part of science. He connects how science is regarded in the political sphere today to what we saw around 100 years ago during postmodernism. Postmodernism, for example, claimed that truth was something that existed only in the human mind and that we made up with our language. Being “objective” were similar to myths intended to maintain or acquire authority, much like religious claims. If truth existed, it might be discovered not in religion, science, or absolutist statements, but in the language context of a claim, as well as the cultural identity and subjective perspective of the person making the claim. Scholars that adhere to postmodernism claims that science is subjective to whom it may concern, and that there are multiple possible truths for each identity in the world; for example, interpreted in the light of ethnicity, gender, social position, education, sexual orientation, and so on. One could argue that misinformation is subjective science to one person and truth to another. Thus, the content of the scientific assertions claimed by a person will be embedded in the context of his own cultural identity (Otto, 2016). In this view,

postmodernism explains science as authoritative, with elites using words like “objectivity” to justify continued political and cultural growth for their own gain, frequently referred to as the voice of white western culture. However, he also argues that while it is a reasonable point that science must be understood in the context of critical reflection and that science can be subjective, when subjectivity becomes the emphasis of science discourse, we naturally mistrust science and its objectives. Thus, the most damaging contribution of postmodernism was the idea that science is nothing more than a metanarrative of the dominant culture, utilized by the elite to retain power. Beginning in the 1960s, new age postmodernists viewed science as a sort of elite public relations. Ironically, by resisting and condemning science, they were setting the groundwork for today's anti-science movements, which are engaged in ongoing cultural and intellectual warfare for political benefit, further dividing the masses (Otto, 2016).

Today science is obviously painting clearer pictures of how to solve many of our issues, yet policymakers are becoming increasingly hesitant to embrace scientific evidence's recommendations. Instead, many either disregard the science or deny that the issues exist. According to Otto (2016) vast disciplines of scientific knowledge, as well as the people who work in them, are constantly under attack in a global war on science. The advancement of science in public health, biology, and the environment is being fought or reversed. Further, political, and religious organizations are opposing science and reason in ways that endanger social and economic stability (Otto, 2016). According to Julian Zelizer a Princeton University professor of political history, the left and right are fighting a war against science. According to Zelizer, the right tends to be more concerned with religious beliefs, and it has always been more dismissive of science, claiming that it opposes its principles and truth. The right, on the other hand, has considerably more money and resources to spread lies and question and weaken science. An example is the attempt to rationalize and disseminate false information about fossil fuels and their unsustainable business practices (Zelizer, 2010). claims that people on the left unwittingly aid the right's efforts by arguing that truth is relative and subjective in the framework of postmodernism, thereby finding reasons to support earlier ideas Instead of looking to scientific evidence, left progressives seek arguments that support preexisting beliefs, such as identity politics or the noblest of concerns, rather than using the critical-thinking and argumentation tools liberals once used to defend modern society against authoritarian attackers.

According to Zelizer (2010) we can clearly see that postmodernism and the assault on science are trending on both political spectrums to disregard science for political gain/votes. Research that does not align with one's own interests, ideologies, or identity is frequently dismissed as a hoax, unimportant, or discriminating (Zelizer, 2010). As previously stated, what makes the most money is often the highest priority in mainstream media, in which journalists have been indoctrinated to believe that objectivity does not exist, rendering otherwise intelligent people incapable of distinguishing between objective facts and passionate opinion (Otto, 2016). In other words, on a cumulative basis, public-relations activities have affected newspaper editors significantly.

In December 2015, an NGO called Media Matters conducted an analysis of opinion pieces that mentioned Paris climate talks and appeared in the ten largest-circulation newspapers in the United States. What they discovered was quite alarming as climate-science denial was present in nine of the publications, accounting for 17% of the total. However, when compared to scientists around the world only 3% of climate experts disagree with human-caused disturbance of the Earth's climate system (Putnam, 2020). When the media engages in such deceit, it deprives the public of the reliable information essential for self-governance (Puntam, 2020).

People think of science as a way of knowing, and religion as an alternative perspective of knowing or framing, according to Matthew Nisbet, a professor of Communications and Public Policy at Northeastern University, USA. He claims that the current social, cultural, and economic system forces people to choose between the two frameworks, and that this conflict tends to reduce people's scientific understanding because they choose emotional, religious, and political frames over logical ones. Such phenomena, according to Nisbet, establish strong ideology-based identities, which contribute to greater polarization (Nisbet, 2010).

In the western world identity politics has played a significant political role in the rights movement of oppressed and marginalized people. However, when so many people who share the same society goals become opponents, parts of the social dispute may solidify into a misleading picture of themselves. It is argued that social media algorithmics exacerbates this by attempting to elicit an emotional response as well as painting a picture of us and them in which we strive to identify with a specific set of people and certain adversaries. In parallel we can understand echo chambers as a virtual reality in which we are meeting people that have

the same opinions and values, further plausibly pushing us towards extremes and political polarization. However, there is literature that extends on this though, suggesting it is more complex (Tucker et al., 2018).

According to Törnberg, Andersson & Lindgren & Banisch (2021) entire substance of echo chambers argument is transformed into symbols of identity as an overarching result of polarization. In other words, the already existing identity politics present today influence the ability to settle issues since they are based on social status dynamics and intergroup conflict rather than logical deliberation (Törnberg, Andersson, Lindgren & Banisch, 2021). The implication is not that there aren't any valid arguments going to take place, but that the expanding dominance of political identity makes it more difficult to resolve the issues in concern. Examining the impact of digital media on polarization through the lens of social identity literature suggest that these effects are far more damaging than the echo chamber theory alone predicts (Törnberg et al., 2021). According to Törnberg et al., (2021) certain digital ecosystems are in reality characterized by considerable cross-political engagement, which does not appear to be lessening polarization, contrary to predictions.”

The literature on social identification implies that altering the echo chamber orthodoxy to homogeneity enhances social identity, suggested to be feasible remedy. Some digital venues, such as specialized forums or private Facebook groups, allow us to join under the banner of a shared trait, which can subsequently develop into a social identity. Other social media platforms, such as Twitter or Facebook, may encourage engagement between opposing groups, but according to Törnberg et al., (2021) this is unlikely to help de-escalate identity polarization.

In other words, Törnberg et al. (2021) concludes that digitalization of the world and new information technology has plausibly accelerated polarization by “*facilitating the social psychological processes that form and strengthen social identity*” (Törnberg et al., 2021, pp.12). These social identities, on the other hand, have existed for a long time, and social media provides the ideal atmosphere for polarization. However, one may argue that polarization is caused by a collection of factors rather than a single factor.

Another perspective to add to this topic is that polarization occurs when a nation loses its identity, and polarization is at an all-time high right now in the United States (Putnam, 2020). Robert D Putnam, a Harvard University political scientist, uses Gallup polls to display that

political polarization was at an all-time low in the 1960s and 1970s, while congressional collaboration was at an all-time high. Today, or more precisely in 2020, the reverse is true, with political polarization at an all-time high and legislative cooperation at an all-time low – since the first opinion surveys were conducted in the late 1800s (Putnam, 2020).

Robert Putnam explains in his new book “The Upswing” (2021) how polarization has been increasing over the years and how it effects democracy. According to Putnam, it all started with David Broder, a liberal commentator, criticizing the absence of party division in American politics in 1972. He said: “*What this country needs is some unvarnished political partisanship*” (Putnam, 2021, pp.180). The polarization that happened in the late 1960s was mostly motivated by civil rights movements involving race as the two parties became more distinct and internally homogeneous. Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard M. Nixon were the twin architects of the divide, with Johnson enacting the Civil Rights Acts and Nixon pursuing a racially motivated "Southern strategy" that cost the Democrats their conservative, Southern flank. The polarization that began with civil rights swiftly expanded to a wide range of subjects, as the parties took opposing positions on matters that were not previously politicized, thereby expanding and deepening the core polarization. Another factor contributing to the fall in congressional collaboration was the question of what role the government should play in the lives of citizens. Republicans like Eisenhower supported high taxes as an essential price to be paid for greater government services throughout the postwar years (Putnam, 2020). By the 1990s, Democrats led by Bill Clinton had begun to follow Republicans on issues like welfare and privatization, but they were not catching up fast enough. Ronald Reagan declared in his inaugural address in 1981 that “*government is not the answer to our issue; government is the problem.*” (Putnam, 2020, pp.182). Left-wing Democrats, such as Jesse Jackson, objected to the establishment of Democrats’ shift to the center in 1995, in which he said: “*What we got now is one party with two names*”. Through this statement he was suggesting that democrats had to move further to the left. Thus, Putnam (2020) argues that the expanding ideological divide quickly became the major component of polarization (Putnam, 2021, pp. 183).

“Big sort” theory:

Between 1976 and 1980, less than a quarter of Americans lived in cities where the presidential election was won by a large margin. Nearly half of all voters lived in landslide counties in 2004. It turns out that, beginning in the mid-1960s, Americans began forming tribes unintentionally (Bishop, 2020). Bishop (2008) describes how, over the last three decades, Americans have sorted themselves into homogeneous groups – not at the regional or red-state/blue-state level, but at the city and neighborhood level. Before the “big sort” Americans decided to stay close to home whether they lived in Los Angeles, California, or Fargo, North Dakota, or anywhere else in the United States – for financial and personal security. People had a diverse range of neighbors, some conservative and others liberal; yet, Bishop claims, based on actual investigations, that the people with whom we shared our lives, regardless of identity or political affiliation, were the people we trusted, relied on, and respected (Bishop, 2008). Regardless of political affiliation, people trusted one another and knew that if the going got tough, they could count on one another. In other words, before "the big sort," societies were organized spatially. Because people were in the same place, different groups of Americans discussed things like where they got their information and whether they were on the same political side (Bishop, 2008).

In 1964 the daily newspaper was the most common source of information for 80% of the households (Bishop,2008) If you didn't read the newspaper, you probably received your news and information from television, where you had around 3-4 channels to choose from – meaning most people were exposed to the same information. Another crucial aspect of this, according to Bishop, is that when political polarization was at its lowest, Americans were more likely to participate in civic organizations such as the garden club, bridge club, or bowling league. These were small groups inside communities that didn't care what you believed about politics, and it was not a critical part of our identity (Bishop, 2008).

The different variables mentioned above may explain why people of different types of ideologies managed to coexist before the “the big sort” – whether you were catholic or

Lutheran, liberal, or conservative people went to the same local church, were exposed the same type of medias, and engaged in different social organizations (Bishop, 2008).

According to Bishop (2008), the "big sort" began in the mid-1960s, with the fundamental change being that economic success provided people with so many more options. People became more mobile, and they no longer had to stay in the community, so they ventured out to find other places to live. Bishop highlights this by stating that if you were a conservative, you might have loved Dallas TX because of the importance of football and hunting, as well as the large number of churches. If you were a liberal, you might have adored Austin, Texas since art and music were so important to you. People from all around the United States were making the same decisions, which were driven more by personal preferences and tastes rather than by political thought (Bishop, 2008).

However, after some time conservative-leaning towns, on the other hand, were beginning to seem more conservative, while liberal-leaning communities were growing more liberal. For example, in the late 1960s, membership in broad-based cross-class civic groups plummeted, and civic life was abruptly and fundamentally reorganized (Bishop, 2008). Geographically based clubs, such as bowling leagues, gave way to ideology-based groups with an agenda, and churches split over ideology, with people choosing a church based on whether it was on their side of the political divide or not. As a result, our once-connected geographical communities became isolated islands (Bishop, 2008).

The suggested consequence of this social reorganization can be supported by comparing Pew Research Center opinion surveys to current social dynamics. According to the study, almost 75% of Americans reported no political conflicts among their immediate circle of friends in 2016, up from around 65% in 2000 (Putnam, 2020). Thus, evidence of tribalism forming quickly over the course of twenty years may be demonstrated.

Bishop (2008) goes on to say that the Internet allows us to find our people, no matter how small the different groups are, and enjoy a pleasant bubble bath of agreement. Our technological advances meet with tribalism on the Internet, just as we read different novels and listen to different radio stations. Bishop writes in his book the "Big Sort" that ; *"We're now living in a giant feedback loop, with our own thoughts about what's right and wrong bounced back to us by the television shows we watched, the newspapers and books we read, the blogs we visit online, the sermons we hear, and the neighborhoods we live in, with all the*

choices that modern society had brought us, we began choosing the comfort of agreement” (Bishop, 2008, pp.85). Social psychologists have studied like-minded groups for almost a century, predicting how people who worship in homogeneous groups would react as their views were mirrored and magnified. Studies have shown that when called upon to make a group decision, a group of like-minded people will make a riskier decision than any individual in that group would make alone. This is known as the "risky shift phenomena". For example, if presented real proof indicating their perspective is incorrect, these groups will simply disregard that data. People simply do not trust what they see or hear if it contradicts their strongly held ideas (Putnam, 2020).

However, according to Bishop (2008) it turns out that the big sort is an old problem. Back in the early days of the American democracy, republican legislators would travel from all over the country and ultimately end up living in the same boarding houses in Washington, DC. President Thomas Jefferson remarked that people came to work in a spirit of pretended misunderstanding without the least desire to agree, concluding that this system of administration was radical and dangerous since it fosters the risky shift phenomenon. Thomas Jefferson, on the other hand, solved the problem of block voting in boarding houses by doing something simple: he invited legislators and small groups to dinner in the White House, where he seated them around a round table and served them good food and drinks to promote communication and communion (Bishop, 2008). Similarly, Martin Luther king famously talked about the importance of communication, by postulating: *“I am convinced that men hate each other because they fear each other. They fear each other because they don't know each other, and they don't know each other because they don't communicate with each other, and they don't communicate with each other because they are separated from each other.”* (Cornell, nd” pp.1)

According to Putnam (2020), as social identities have been more closely associated with partisan commitments, interparty prejudice and even rage have grown. Thus, interpersonal political animosity has since the 1960 been increasing. American voters increasingly regard followers of the other party as ideologically extremist and personally defective. Both Democrats and Republicans are growing to resent, if not outright despise, their opponents. Out-party prejudice in judging Americans' "intelligence" increased from 6% in 1960 to 48% in 2008; out-party bias in judging Americans' "selfishness" increased from 21% to 47%. Further, over the course of nearly two decades (1994–2016), the rate of "very negative"

opinions held by our political opponents progressively increased from less than 20% to over 56% (Putnam, 2020, pp. 208-209).

The most important reason to be concerned by polarization is that it could eventually lead to democratic breakdown. In their best-selling book *How Democracies Die*, political scientists Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt clearly summarize the situation: “*When societies grow so deeply divided that parties become wedded to incompatible worldviews, and especially when their members are so socially segregated that they rarely interact, stable partisan rivalries eventually give way to perceptions of mutual threat. As mutual toleration disappears, politicians grow tempted to abandon forbearance and try to win at all costs. This may encourage the rise of antisystem groups that reject democracy’s rules altogether. When that happens, democracy is in trouble*” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, pp 198). One might argue that the postmodernism theory and the "big sort" theory are related as two combining components. As the political environment of the 1960s and 1970s transformed, so did the scientific community. Parallel to this debate, we see a fundamental shift in the public space, with people believing that identity and ideology are inextricably linked, and that tribalism is a byproduct of this.

Chapter 6: Discussion, research gaps and further research.

There is little question that the Internet, and subsequently social media, have altered the fundamental fabric of society in ways that have significant implications for the functioning of groups and societies.

Tribalism is a broad topic that seem to be one of the causes of the United States' growing political polarization. It's fair to say that our tribal instincts don't perform well on social media. To work with our tribal proclivities, democracy requires a delicate balancing act in which we need enough dynamism and discussion to create progress, but not too much, or we will fall apart: Too much polarization has proven to have disastrous consequences throughout history, for example, civil war is a biproduct of political polarization (Otto, 2016). Social media arrived in a society that was already split. However, the modern form of social media began in 2008, when a series of design improvements poured gasoline to the fire. The “like”

and retweet buttons, as well as content algorithmizing are examples of such amplifiers. One might think of social media as an indignation machine (Crockett, 2017). The economic model of social media is based on advertising revenue, and the sole purpose of its design is to keep us interested. Because social media platforms profit from advertising revenue, they have an incentive to offer us material that will most likely pull us in, keep us interested, and keep us returning and spending more time on them. The algorithms built into social media platforms derive from the collection of personal data of what keeps people interested and engaged. Further, they are selected to trigger strong emotions like outrage and anger, particularly moral emotions like moral outrage (Crockett, 2017).

In other words, one of the most important aspects of social media is its design. In terms of political division and democratic quality, social media can be interpreted as a machine that promotes emotional behavior and/or supports our tribal instincts (Crockett, 2017). Trolls and bots are also hired and developed to spread misinformation, make offensive statements, and promote political division on the internet in order to agitate and annoy the general public. Bots, for example, were responsible for around one-fifth of all tweets about the US election, which were frequently used to sway public opinion, engage in divisive conduct, and cause emotional anguish (Bessi & Ferrera, 2016). We may say that people who use social media live in a symbiotic world in which our virtual reality does not correspond to our physical reality. The consequences of a populace addicted to rage are bad for a democracy because we lose our ability to focus on any problem long enough to solve it, and little infractions divert our attention away from more fundamental changes.

In my literature research, one of the ideas or "hypotheses" I investigated was if polarization is caused by echo chambers, or isolated ideological bubbles that prevent exposure to the opposing viewpoint. Echo chambers, on the other hand, are not as common on social media as one might imagine, and most people do not find themselves in them. However, echo chambers are representative, and this suggest a simple remedy; establishing platforms to convey alternative ideas on each side. However, the studies I reviewed were conflicting regarding cross culture exposure of different viewpoints related to increased polarization. Some indicated an increase of polarization, however, all of them concluded that it did not help to deescalate polarization (Arguedas et al., 2022; Feezell et al., 2021; Törnberg, Andersson, Lindgren & Banisch, 2021).

Other studies suggests that it is more about what type of content or information one is subjected to that matters in regard to political polarization (Crockett, 2017). However, even though the echo chambers are limited on social media, the big sort theory predicts that people have moved into physical echo chambers of ideology (Bishop, 2008). People have since the 1960s geographically segregated themselves with like-minded people, causing ideological segregation that breeds a well-known phenomenon called “risky shift” (Bishop, 2008).

Misinformation, disinformation, and conspiracy theories are very prevalent on social media, in which people deliberately and even are hired to spread misinformation to sway public opinion. This poses a great threat to democracy as knowledge has become biased and potentially uncredible to the point that we live in a fragmented world of opinion (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). Information/misinformation online represents a picture in which one’s subjective reality can always be confirmed through the massive available content that is not consistent with science. As Otto (2016) postulates, postmodernism has emerged, in which we are now witnessing a war against science. Whereby identity and information/science are intertwined, resulting in a subjective reality that can threaten the phenomena of objectivity and the possibility to agree on fundamental things like science. Parallel to this, we live in a postmodern era where we may encounter a highly fragmented reality of opinion and knowledge, because of the individual power to search for material online that matches their identity and narrative. In combination, social media is addictive through the stimuli of moral outrage (Crockett, 2017). Moral outrage is well documented on social media, and correlates to the empirical study on twitter data and behavior, in which Osmundsen et al., (2021) concludes that due to heated discussions on social media, both republicans and democrats are pushed to seek out radical fake news to support opinions that are increasingly out of line with science and mainstream media. Furthermore, both Democrats and Republicans utilize the internet to discover extremist and untrustworthy information to demonize their political opponents (Osmundsen et al., 2021). This phenomenon can make it particularly challenging to conduct good debates and communication regarding key political matters, since we are more likely to encounter trivial disagreements, in which is obstructing our ability to operate productively and focus on important areas of society, such as climate change. As Otto (2016) postulates, people like Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin formed the United States because science and enlightenment were important to them, in which science is what democracy is built upon and how we have evolved as a society. However, we are currently witnessing an information technology that is causing a power struggle between

many segments of society, in which are attempting to influence and control the public sphere through this technology (Otto, 2016).

Before the revolution of internet, we were able to believe and rely on what news anchors told us on television, because it represented a socially accepted reality. Traditional newspapers have struggled to fully adapt their business models and newsrooms to this new media landscape, and thousands of reporters and editors have been laid off in the last decade, greatly reducing independent newspapers' ability to consistently cover their communities, do fact checking, and objective journalism, which are not cowed by social media (Owen, 2018). Previously, news affected and shaped public opinion, such as that of voters; however, commercialized social media business models have caused traditional media to run their practices in accordance with the public interest, in other words, news is being shaped by the people rather than the other way around, resulting in its loss of integrity (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). One of my primary findings is that the internet and social media have altered journalism's methods, causing it to become commercialized as it competes with so many other media networks. Personal data is collected by platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, which is then used by multiple media sites to shape the news. One of the concerns with the commercialized component is that news is now dependent on what gets the most attention and "clicks," and in an increasingly competitive world of news, some of the studies show that stories based on strong emotional reactions like rage garner a lot of attention (Marwick & Lewis, 2017; Crockett, 2017). News is fashioned by what enrages people online – the more controversial, the better, because it attracts more attention and consequently more profit. Thus, people are utilizing social media to promote controversial misinformation to gain money, and monetary measurements are reasons for producing misinformation or disinformation (Marwick & Lewis, 2017; Crockett, 2017). Joining the market and fabricating fake news on social media is rather inexpensive. As a result, misleading news producers' small-scale, short-term strategies could be extremely successful (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). To put it another way, modern technological advancements in how we receive information have opened a window for commercializing news to the greatest detail, with the media focusing on presenting news that garners the most attention on social media, rather than the news' worth and value of information.

Another recurrent theme in this review is that social media and the internet is being used and abused for a variety of reasons. In terms of politics, there is evidence that powerful “bad” actors are taking advantage of the internet's openness and creating opportunities to deceive people, whether by creating fake news or bots to spread fake news (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). As a result, people are confused because they don't know if the information, they're receiving is real, if the videos they're watching are real, or if the voices and audio they're listening to have been doctored. Yet again, these factors make it hard to maintain an open dialogue around elections and politics.

Party signals or cues play an important role in encouraging partisanship and discouraging political thinking. People are more likely to believe whatever their political party says, regardless of its quality. When participants were not informed that the party and leaders were polarized, their assessments of the stronger argument shifted. Furthermore, after learning that the political elite was profoundly split on the topic, respondents changed their opinions in favor of the arguments or assertions made by the party they supported (Druckman & Peterson & Slothuus, 2013). They did so regardless of how powerful or weak the argument was, and even when challenged with a stronger counterargument. In other words, regardless of the validity of the various arguments, they followed what the parties claimed. According to the findings, intense political rivalry lowers the quality of people's ideas and their drive to reflect about politics (Druckman et al., 2013). One may thus claim that if politicians, such as the president, employ disinformation in their speeches, the public would most likely believe it, thereby creating a misleading political image.

The study conducted by Arguedas et al., (2021) concluded that users who follow more polarized news outlets subsequently lost cross-ideology social relationships at a faster pace than the general population. This phenomenon occurred on the bases that people are self-sorting into more ideologically homogeneous social networks regardless of algorithmics. (Arguedas et al., 2021) .This phenomenon suggests that people are already predisposed to values that contend them to seek out content that confirms their polarized views. It suggests that twitter data are consistent with the physical phenomena of political polarization that Bishop (2008), Putnam (2020) and Otto (2016) claims.

Regarding the” big sort” theory, much of the analysis is limited to Bishop (2008) own observations and reflections. His qualitative research has resulted in a comprehensive hypothesis on spatial political classification that is devoid of strong empirical backing. Thus,

resolving issues involving geographical movement will necessitate a much more thorough investigation. Residential polarization is likely to necessitate data at smaller scale to be thoroughly investigated. However, Cambridge University studied microgeographic party registration and presidential vote data in California. Their purpose was to see if there was a rise in party geographic segregation in the United States. They discovered that Bishop (2008) claims is backed up by substantial evidence in California. Sussell (2013) calculated statewide segregation statistics after the presidential election, with mixed results but generally supportive of the "big sort" hypothesis. The party registration data showed that when estimated at the threshold of block groups and sections within the state, the party registration measure increased by 9.3% and 7.4%, respectively, from 1992 to 2010 (Sussell, 2013). It's also worth noting that party registration data only go back to 1992, whereas Bishop (2008) hypothesized that the phenomenon of geographical displacement occurred roughly 20 years before party registration data could be recorded. In other words, if Bishop is accurate, the growth projections will significantly underestimate the total increase in partisan sorting (Sussell, 2013).

Research gaps and further research:

For a more comprehensive understanding we need access to Facebook's data and analytics if we were to comprehend the spread of misinformation and political divisiveness on social media. However, Facebook's present data structures are not fully shared due to strong privacy concerns. Also, in the philanthropic community there is a general limited understanding of how the algorithmics work and function. For those who are not directly involved in the construction of these computers, the complexity of the technology makes it difficult to comprehend the mechanism. Platforms like Twitter and Facebook, on the other hand, are hesitant to share this information with the public for a variety of reasons; but, if we could gain access to more information about its design, we could learn a lot more about many of the issues discussed in this study.

One could argue that a comprehensive study combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies is required to have a better understanding of how people consume news on

social media sites. During my literature analysis, I observed that accurate and reliable assessments of online information consumption and cross-platform communication are lacking. There are examples of self-reporting in which people are reporting in what they experience on the internet (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Cho et al., 2020; Feezell et al., 2021; Duggan & Smith, 2016). However, when basing data on self-reporting it is difficult to tell whether individuals absorbed and, as a result, comprehended the information to that they read and consumed.

Countries in the European Union have taken steps to restrict the content that can be posted on social media, including banning hate speech and misinformation and fining firms and individuals that spread it (Pamment, 2020). However, we are faced with a conundrum; what is the best way to achieve a compromise between freedom of expression and preventing the spread of false information? (Tucker et al., 2018) We've lately seen new privately held sites develop as alternatives to networks like Twitter and Facebook, after Twitter's decision to ban Donald Trump from the website. Donald Trump, on the other hand, has launched "TRUTH Social", his own social media network (Chen, 2022). In other words, it is difficult to foresee the long-term consequences of measures like restrictions or censorship of content prevailing on social medias. Are we simply creating more places for people to sequester themselves in quiet, thereby speeding up the "risky shift" phenomenon? There is conflicting research on this phenomenon, with some scholars believing that free speech must be maintained at all costs because of the fear groups isolating in other forums, thus we inept important communication with such groups, while others fear that doing so will expose people to hate speech and misinformation, furthering affective and ideological polarization. (Everett, 2018; Tucker et al., 2018)

Social media and how people operate and communicate over the internet is however very difficult to analyze as it is metaphysical or virtual. For example, one study by Jaques, et al., (2019). show that we can understand the emotional responses through its textual form on the computer. However, such data provides us with a limited understanding of what is actually happening in between people in "the real world. To put it another way, we need more qualitative research that can assist us comprehend human virtual reality in relation to how it manifests in people's physical reality.

In my review I experienced research gaps regarding information of how prevalent disinformation or fake news is on user driven algorithmics. Because there is very little studies

done on platforms other than Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook, the approach utilized to discover that user-driven algorithmics produce polarization is limited. For example, there is little to no study on content analysis of new emerging platforms like TikTok, which has recently become one of the most popular social media platforms in the world, with over 800 million monthly users worldwide, with nearly a third of them under the age of 30 (Montag, Yang & Elhai, 2021). Because TikTok is a video-based cross-cultural platform where individuals connect more through video than text, it's particularly intriguing to study how video compares to text in terms of disinformation consumption and communication. As social media is always one step ahead in their technological advancement, we can never really be sure of how new technology is affecting human beings and society at present time. thus, one could argue that the platforms themselves should be held accountable and take steps to provide academia or other critical voices greater access to their systems (Montag, Yang & Elhai, 2021).

Because the echo chamber idea is typically studied from a political standpoint, it would be fascinating to see if echo chambers work in the same way when it comes to science issues as they do when it comes to more traditional political issues. There is also a scarcity of data on how people with various socio-demographic characteristics interpret, use, and consume information and material on the internet (Arguedas et al., 2022). What categories of people are exposed to what, and how may different types of information be viewed differently depending on who the consumer is?

When it comes to political division and misinformation or disinformation online, research have not come far regarding important possible consequences of such. After the post-truth age, research on the relationship between being exposed to misinformation/disinformation online and the impact of misinformation on voter turnout and party/candidate choice is extremely important. One would also argue that we need to learn more about what consequences misinformation exposure have on people's political perspectives, such as whether it impacts one's confidence in political institutions and the media (Tucker et al., 2018). Future research might follow behavioral data that measures both media usage and information sharing, thus conceivably test for the possibility that partisan news use and emotions build a reinforcing cycle, in order to better understand this link.

In other words, there are research gaps and a need of further research to understand the complexities of the themes that have just discussed. However, I believe that this literature review has provided a valid representation of a given reality.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The two partisan camps have purposefully become significantly ideologically polarized in which people are forced to make a choice between two camps in which partisan ideology become significant social identity (Putnam, 2020). Social media possibly reinforce this tendency through various forms of perfect environments that can intensify hostile and unsustainable communication as well altering the information flow in which fits our partisan ideology to the greatest detail. Given the preponderance of available studies, current polarization is better understood as the effect of partisanship establishing itself as a significant social identity. Through this lens, politics has become a question of opposing social groups rather than substantive issues. In other words, today's identity politics have an impact on the ability to resolve issues since they are focused on social status dynamics and intergroup conflict rather than rational discussion (Putnam, 2020).

The ideology of the parties are more split than they have ever been. As a result, political polarization," or affinity with one party and hostility against the opposite party, has increased (Iyengar et al., 2019). The opposition side is increasingly seen as untrustworthy, disloyal, and aggressive by partisans. Parties are identity groups or "tribes", and not just mediums for achieving certain policy goals. Because of the significant party separation there is higher stakes of serious divergence, and each conflict has the potential to be a death sentence for democracy (Iyengar et al., 2019; Tucker et al., 2018).

More research is needed to fully comprehend the phenomenon of social media; it is still a relatively new type of technology that has incorporated and become an important part of human life. Social media is an entirely new manner of human interaction in which our civilization has never experienced. Its virtual components of human interaction are difficult to analyze and forecast because we don't really have a complete overview. However, social media are showing traits of environments that are troublesome in context of a primitive

human interaction. Social medias design makes people more vulnerable to become addictive through emotional outrage (Crockett, 2017). Cross-platform interaction, on the other hand, might exacerbate political division since the virtual reality lacks the fundamentals of physical human interaction (Osmundsen et al., 2021). However, we can see how the "big sort" theory might limit our knowledge of human nature and how physical multicultural communities under the same conditions can be great, because it is something close and personal (Bishop, 2008). What one had in the past is to a degree gone with the introduction of social media as it alters how society communicate and interact. As a prominent example one can look at our growingly polarized political discourse in modern times, in which one can acknowledge that we've already have started to see the symptoms of a very binary interpretation of human interaction.

The United States is perhaps the most influential country in the world; the world has looked to the United States as a precursor of core political principles as well as amusement through television, movies, and other forms of media throughout history. The United States has been a hegemony for many decades, and it is still undeniably powerful (Norrlof, 2010). As a result, one can argue that my research of the United States has transfer value, and that it is likely analogous to present trends in other parts of the globe. One may argue that expecting American tendencies to not spread to other nations, as they have in the past, is naive. Because of the transnational network of social media and increasing spatial mobility, such changes, one could argue, will have a substantial influence on other nations, particularly at this juncture in human history (Flew & Iosfidis, 2020).

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