

“Take Back Control. Make America Great Again.”

How the Vote Leave and the Trump 2016 campaigns persuaded voters.

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Abstract

In 2016, news about a British data marketing firm called Cambridge Analytica started to surface in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The firm was accused of covertly harvesting Facebook users' data and crafting special advertisements that would appeal to those users during political campaigns. The news cycle, at the time, started to decrease as the politician that was linked to the news and the firm, Ted Cruz, has failed to win the Republican Party's nomination for the US presidential election in 2016.

In 2018, the Cambridge Analytica name made a strong comeback to the news after Chris Wylie, Cambridge Analytica's director of research, -as he describes his role in the firm, and the scandal's whistle-blower accused his firm of manipulating millions of voters in the UK during the Brexit referendum and the U.S. during the presidential elections in 2016. This manipulation, according to Wylie, was done by creating targeted ads that helped the Vote Leave and the Trump 2016 campaigns to maliciously, gain political victory by deceiving voters in these two countries. This act of deceiving was done by the ads containing, according to Wylie, fake news. While this might seem as a since-fictional claim, this claim goes in line with the claim Cambridge Analytica made about itself, as a company that is able to alter audience behavior.

This study is an attempt to analyze and provide an account of the persuasion techniques that these ads contained. By underscoring these techniques, readers would be better able to identify such sophisticated ads and/or news.

This is a comparative study that relied on existing research and literature in different disciplines and linked the components that were known about these types of ads, political communication, populism and online disinformation. The combination these elements have provided a clear guide to explore this understudied area. Moreover, this study was conducted by using qualitative research methods through the triangulation of multi-modal rhetorical and thematic analysis to investigate 50 Facebook ads/posters, and 20 television ads used by the Vote Leave Campaign in the UK and the Trump 2016 Presidential Campaign in the U.S., and compared the results of the persuasion techniques of both campaigns.

The results suggest that both campaigns used highly similar persuasion techniques and strategies in crafting their ads, however, this similarity was also highly contextual.

Keywords: *Cambridge Analytica, Brexit, Trump, fake news, persuasion techniques.*

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1 Introduction

Beware of false knowledge; it is more dangerous than ignorance. (George Bernard Shaw 1856-1950).

In Western democracies, the use of *disinformation* on social media networks in political campaigns by populist politicians has triggered (political) communication scholars, governmental and non-governmental bodies to investigate this phenomenon, especially after the United Kingdom (UK) voted *Leave* during the Brexit referendum in 2016, and Donald J. Trump becoming the 45th president of the United States (U.S.) in the same year. While disinformation is not a new strategy in political communication and campaigning (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017 as cited in Zhou and Zafarani, 2018), observers and scholars gave it special attention due to the short and long term devastating effects it has on democracy, particularly, after accusing the two campaigns of using citizens' (voters') data on social media to predict their political tendencies (Scott, 2018), and thus, made it easier for both campaigns to appeal to what concerns voters the most (Cadwalladr, 2017).

Disinformation, or what is commonly, yet erroneously, referred to as 'fake news', seemed to strongly serve populist politicians in reaching their goals in terms of gaining political power in some countries, while it did not have the same effect in others (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). The varying effectiveness of disinformation is due to its reliance on several factors. Factors such as historical developments (e.g., the recent immigration crisis in Europe and the fears of a religious, cultural or ethnic transformation that might follow), fluctuating economic performance, growing unemployment rates, etc. seemed to be more concerning to the people in some countries, but also some generations within these countries were more concerned about these issues (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). A very prominent demonstration of the difference in effectiveness of the disinformation strategies can be found in the victory of the two aforementioned campaigns in the UK and the US, but its failure, as of the moment this research was done, in other Western democracies like the Netherlands and France. More illustrations will follow in the following section.

Historically, military coups, or other forms of use of force, were the key cause for subverting democracies worldwide. Nowadays, however, it is elected officials, namely populists, with intentions of subverting "the very process that brought them to power" (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p.4) that possess real threat to democracies, i.e., through the

ballot box. This may lead to severe consequences, causing democracies to *fail* due to populist politicians not respecting the, back then, unwritten, yet widely consented values of democratic practices and conventional wisdom (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018; Norris and Inglehart, 2019). For example, deceiving voters (disinformation, and employing social networks to spread it). This objective with the intention to hold power in a country starts as early as the political campaign of the politician (candidate) or the political party (Norris and Inglehart, 2019).

Populist politicians, such as Donald Trump in the US, and Boris Johnson, the current Prime Minister of the UK and leader of the Vote Leave Campaign in the Brexit referendum, tended to heavily rely on sensationalist and false news to achieve their political endeavors (Rose, 2017; Norris and Inglehart, 2019). In 2016, both Johnson and Trump, adopted a clear anti-establishment rhetoric by channeling their focus on criticizing the entire political system in their own countries and by attacking other countries and blaming them for hurting their own countries', among others, economic performance (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). The term system here refers not only to the political establishment, but also to the internal economic, cultural, and social establishment, and the country's external relationships with other countries and bigger political and economic bodies (such as the United Nations, the European Union, The World Trade Organization, etc.). This anti-establishment rhetoric was encapsulated in the Vote Leave Campaign's slogan "Let's Take Back Control" (Virdee and McGeever, 2017 p. 1804) that implied a lack of sovereignty. Moreover, this anti-establishment rhetoric adopted by pro-Brexit politicians had a significant consequence on the effectiveness of the Vote Leave Campaign and led to the electoral victories not only in the Brexit case, but also put the European political establishment/s at stake (Hobolt, 2016; Norris and Inglehart, 2019). Similarly, one of the Trump Campaign 2016 slogans #DrainTheSwamp was focused on attacking the political and economic system in the country's Capital, Washington D.C., and the economic capital, Wall Street. Draining the swamp Trump was referring to is the corruption that he accused lobbyists of in order to define an enemy he constantly attacked during his campaign. (Lahitou, 2016).

After the UK voted to *leave* the EU and, parallelly, Trump being elected president of the US, allegations discrediting the practices of the two campaigns started to surface. Accusations of relying heavily on sensational news and disinformation led the British Parliament

(https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/culture-media-and-sport/Fake_news_evidence/Vote-Leave-50-Million-Ads.pdf) and the US Senet

(https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Report_Volume2.pdf) to

launch formal inquiries to investigate both the Vote Leave Campaign and the Trump 2016 campaign for creating political ads that contain false, and out-of-context news and/or information to persuade their voters and gain political victory (Cadwalladr & Glendinning, 2018); readers in this paper is used interchangeably with the terms voters, audience and citizens. This use of disinformation was considered to be an outrageous abuse of new technologies in democratic societies, even if these practices were not at the time, regulated or restricted (Norris and Inglehart, 2019).

As a general rule, rhetoric and rhetorical techniques do not only signify a campaign's and/or a political movement's political tendencies, but also are some of the main factors that determine its success or failure depending on how it will resonate with the people (voters) (Fallis, 2017). Although readers (voters) are usually critical about the information they receive from media and their voting behavior is a more complex process which is not only determined by the quality of the political campaign, rhetoric can. Resilient emotional appeals, for example, are in some cases capable of changing readers' minds about controversial issues (Fallis, 2017).

The analysis of the rhetorical appeals in political advertisements, especially during political campaigns, may not be as strait forward as it may seem. The complexity of decoding the political messages, in political ads, by different people, is derived from the accumulation of many layers of personal knowledge, beliefs, cultural or ethnic background etc. that shape the audience (readers) understanding. Accordingly, the interpretation of a media message decoded in the content a reader consumes, remains, disproportionately, individualistic on its own right. Therefore, one way or another, the targeted audience of the political ads play a role in the creation of these ads, as the content creators aim at producing advertisements that would resonate with and influence their voting decisions.

Taking online disinformation into account, the two analyzed cases in this thesis are of high significance due to them both being the first campaigns known to target voters on social media networks by using their own information and mobilize them. This significance is also derived from the allegations of covertly hiring a firm - Cambridge Analytica, to collect Facebook users' data (voters), analyze it, and designing advertisements that appeal to them most based on predefined voter's segments that resulted from the analysis of the collected data (Cadwalladr & Glendinning, 2018; Scott, 2018). This heavy use of false news (disinformation) by both campaigns played a pivotal role in mobilizing people to vote for the two campaigns and was an integral part of their rhetoric in the two campaigns (Rose, 2017). Disinformation in this project, as will be revisited in the next chapter, refers to false

information (news) that intends to cause harm and/or personal gain for the creator's own benefit.

One of the other significances of the two campaigns, is that their leaders had strong ideological ties and similarities. One of the similarities between the two campaigns in terms of ideology, the Vote Leave, as part of the bigger Leave movement that included several other campaigns, and the Trump 2016 Campaign, Wilson (2017) signifies these similarities as follows: it was common between both campaigns to refute and underestimate experts' opinions on important matters (e.g., the human effect on global issues such as global warming); both campaigns were xenophobic and promised to reduce immigration from other countries, especially Muslim countries; both campaigns were hostile towards international bodies (the EU in the UK case, and the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the Trump 2016 case); finally, both campaigns put enormous effort in the nationalistic appeals (the UK once more a global power outside the EU, and "Make America Great Again").

In 2016, Barack Obama, the former president of the U.S. was on a visit to the UK, and while he was in press conference with the UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, and Obama urged the British people to vote *remain* in the EU, describing that the EU as a source that magnifies the British global power (Wilson, 2017). Similarly, Nigel Farage, the back then leader of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), member of the European Parliament and leader of the Leave.eu organization went to the U.S. to support Trump in his rallies (Wilson, 2017), signifying the struggle between two wings in the two countries, one fighting to keep the global and national political-establishment, and the other fighting to change it.

In 2015, Donald Trump was awarded the Lie of the Year Award by Politifact, an online factchecking platform (Wilson, 2017). Trump's claims that were described by the platform as false news (disinformation) or inaccurate includes: Muslim Americans were cheering during the collapse of the Twin Towers on September 11th 2001; the majority of white Americans were murdered by African Americans; and, that the Mexican government encouraged its citizens with criminal backgrounds to enter the U.S. (Wilson, 2017). Similar false and racial allegations were made by the Vote Leave Campaign before the Brexit event (Wilson, 2017).

Intrigued by the similarities between both campaigns in terms of being led by right-wing populist politicians, sharing many ideological values, and, most importantly, being

accused of employing disinformation as a tool to persuade voters on social media, the following research question was developed:

In their political communication advertisements, how similar were the persuasion techniques between the Vote Leave Campaign advertisements in the United Kingdom with the Trump Presidential Campaign in the United States in 2016?

This research question was broken down into four sub-questions. This was due to my decision to analyze not only Facebook advertisements of both campaigns, but I decided to include television commercials, assuming that it will enrich the outcome of this thesis by examining a different type of advertisements.

To answer the sub-questions, I had to form four groups in which Facebook advertisements and TV commercials would fall in to represent a campaign (Vote Leave or Trump 2016). The groups I formulated contained two groups to represent the Vote Leave campaign, and two groups to represent the Trump 2016 Campaign.

The four sub-questions are as follows:

- 1- *What were the persuasive techniques of the Vote Leave Facebook advertisements during the Brexit Vote Leave Campaign in 2016?* (Group-one).
- 2- *What were the persuasive techniques of the Trump campaign Facebook advertisements during the U.S. presidential campaign in 2016?* (Group-two)
- 3- *What were the persuasive techniques of the Brexit Vote Leave Campaign TV commercials in 2016?* (Group three)
- 4- *What were the persuasive techniques of the Trump campaign national TV commercials during the U.S. presidential elections 2016?* (Group four)

The main focus of this thesis, as will be more elaborated, was on *persuasive techniques* and not only on the rhetorical appeals, which was one out of several other dimensions of the analyses conducted.

1.1 Social and scientific relevance

The use of disinformation news in political campaigns to triumph elections or referenda may not be a new phenomenon, the use of new communication technologies in spreading disinformation, however, is. The threat of employing disinformation in political campaigns extends beyond subverting democracies. One of its characteristics that it, inherently, and to various degrees, feeds political polarization among citizens in a given

democracy (Tucker et al., 2018), which may severely harm a democracy on the long term (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018).

Schmidt (2017) also considered phenomena such as Trump and Brexit to possess serious threat to democracy and democratic political establishments, not only in the countries where these events took place, but also to other countries, namely in Western societies that might take the same path. While many political science scholars consider the Brexit case to be an *outlier* in Europe and EU countries (Hobolt, 2016) i.e., likely will not be replicated; others, however, forewarned of other possible negative scenarios that may happen in other democracies due to the use of disinformation on social media networks (Schmidt, 2017).

Noticeably, a gap in the study of rhetorical and persuasion techniques related to social media disinformation, populism, and the Brexit and Trump campaigns 2016 exists. When it comes to studies of rhetoric in the events of Brexit and Trump 2016, most studies I found focused more on one event, or compared Trump against Hillary Clinton -former Secretary of State, and Trump's opponent in the American presidential elections in 2016 (see Savoy, 2018); or a content analysis of the Twitter supporters of Trump and Brexit (see Leidig, 2019); or just conducted a rhetorical analysis of Trump's presidential speeches (see Lahti, 2018). Additionally, due to what new communication technologies offer in terms of data collection about users (Cadwalladr & Glendinning, 2018), and how politicians may hire such companies to covertly provide analyses about voter-political-tendencies based on the big-data they collect about users in a given country, the study of rhetorical and persuasion techniques of these events may provide an account, and potentially be useful to scholars studying populist rhetoric and/or developing online automated disinformation and/or populist speech detection on social media networks. Moreover, after what is known as the *Cambridge Analytica* scandal, and the EU regulated data collection, social media platforms constantly develop 'legal' ways to continue collecting users' data.

Advertisements crafted in relation to the Cambridge Analytica scandal are known to journalists as *dark ads* (Cadwalladr, 2017). The dark ads were the Vote Leave Campaign advertisements that were crafted by psychologists related to *Cambridge Analytica* and targeted voters in the UK based on what they thought would appeal to the readers most, with the intention of persuading them to 'vote leave' out of the EU (Cadwalladr, 2017). On the other hand, the British Parliament final report on the scandal refuted the term 'fake news,' and named these ads as disinformation ads (House of Commons, 2018).

Similarly, the Trump presidential campaign 2016 was accused of using corresponding techniques to urge voters to vote for Trump (Rose, 2017; Cadwalladr, 2017). Therefore, this

study aimed at analyzing the persuasion techniques that were implemented in these ads that were described as a sort of disinformation advertisements designed to deceive voters to gain political victory by the two campaigns during the two events of Brexit and the US presidential elections in 2016.

Due to the lack of research on these two cases in terms of analyzing the persuasion techniques used during the two campaigns, this research is exploratory in nature. By exploratory it is meant that the aim of this research is to learn more about the persuasion techniques that were used by the two campaigns in their disinformation advertisements as this, at the time, was a completely a new phenomenon that is still not fully understood.

This research is socially relevant for detailing how online disinformation became widely used in political campaigns, namely, political campaigns related to the far-right and populist movements or politicians (Schmidt, 2017). Additionally, because people are not able, most of the time to recognize and spot online disinformation (Alphilippe et al., 2019) reading such research may increase their understanding of how content is designed by recognizing the appeals that such groups focus on, even if the content does not have any direct reference to them, especially in times of major political campaigns (e.g., the current Presidential election in the U.S.).

Finally, this research is potentially, professionally relevant to those who work on online disinformation detection and machine learning by providing an account of the used persuasion techniques in the two campaigns. For example, Zhou and Zafarani (2018) called for studying rhetorical appeals in online disinformation. Although their call was initially to study it using quantitative research methods, as mentioned earlier, this study, at least in the English language, remains the first about these two important campaigns.

2 Theoretical framework

Democracy is sustained not only by institutions but by culture. (Author unknown).

The theoretical framework section in this thesis is divided into two main parts. Part one reviews the difference between the two cases -Vote Leave and the Trump Campaign 2016, in terms of the political-cultural differences and historical background, which in turn reflects on how political media messages are crafted. Part two reviews political communication, including the design of political advertisements, with special focus on online disinformation and the populist rhetoric that was used in the creation of the advertisements in two campaigns.

In general, this chapter reviews the main concepts that are related to the research question of this thesis.

2.1 Part one

In this part, I underscore the aims of this comparative study and some of the relevant differences between the UK and the US that played a role in the interpretation of the sample.

2.1.1 Cross-national comparative studies

Conducting cross-national comparative studies has different intentions. In this study, I follow the guidelines set by Livingstone (2003). Livingstone (2003) notes that such studies should mention explicitly their aims such as: to improve the understanding of other countries; to examine a theory in different settings or contexts; “examine transitional processes across different contexts, [...] improve international understanding [...]” (p. 479). Choosing these reasons are justified as follows. Britain leaving the EU, and Trump winning the presidential elections in the US in 2016 has raised concerns of the repetition of the same scenarios in other Western democracies such as France, the Netherlands and Italy in Europe (Schmidt, 2017). Furthermore, Schmidt (2017) observed that populists in the UK and in the US in 2016 have been “Using rhetorical strategies and ‘uncivil’ language in a ‘post-truth’ environment that rejects experts and mainstream media, they [populists in the UK and the US] have reshaped the political landscape by framing the debates in new ways while using new and old media [...]” (p. 249). Thus, the rhetorical analysis, in its multimodal form, of both campaigns can deepen the understanding of the populists’ persuasion techniques in those two unique cases.

Brader (2005) found that emotional appeals in political campaigns' ads have the capacity of changing voters' behavior in different events of democratic nature. This study aimed at analyzing the persuasive techniques in the political ads and commercials before the two studied campaigns and one of the main focuses is the emotional appeals of these political messages. Also, comparative studies have the capacity to safeguard scholars from falling into false conclusions such as generalizing findings from one country in one period of time to other countries with different contexts and at different time periods by rendering the main differences between the countries under study (De Veerse, 2017). On the other hand, cross-national comparative studies have been long criticized because of epistemological assumptions, for example, making a unified methodology and expecting it to fit different contexts leading scholars to fall into a common mistake known as "measurement out of context" (p. 482) by denying every country of its "cultural specificity" (Livingstone, 2003 p.482). In this study, special attention was given to cultural specifics of the two countries studied and shortly, some of the main differences will be underscored. Nevertheless, however, if the conceptualization is too specific that it can only be understood in its own distinctive context, comparison studies become redundant as it becomes impossible to draw conclusions about the studied cases anymore (Livingstone, 2003). Therefore, it is crucial to note the *relevant* differences between the two contexts with special attention for the similarities as well.

2.1.2 The UK vs. the US as different cases

While the US and the UK are two of the oldest democracies that exist in modern history, they have different ways of holding democratic events. For example, the United Kingdom is a direct democracy where the votes of its citizens are counted directly towards whom/what is being voted for/on (Menselshon & Parkin, 2001). Furthermore, the Vote Leave Campaign sample that was analyzed in this project is a campaign for a referendum, which has different campaigning logics from a presidential campaign (LeDuc, 2000). For example -and not limited to- referenda are events where voters vote on a topic, while presidential election voters vote for a person (LeDuc, 2000). Also, it is important to note here that the Brexit event was an unbiding referendum (Siddique, 2016; Norris and Inglehart, 2019), however, the results were respected by British politicians (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). This difference makes the focus in a referendum on convincing voters on ideas or topics in favor of a certain political group, and in a presidential election, the campaigning is mainly focused on convincing voters to vote for their candidate by putting the candidate in a positive and

desirable leader role (LeDuc, 2000). Additionally, the US is a representative democracy, at least in presidential elections, where citizens vote for delegates that would make decisions on their behalf (LeDuc, 2000) through what is known as The Electoral College.

Populist rhetoric in political campaigns, especially in elections, tend to adopt what is known as the personalization of politics. That is, impersonating a populist movement in a person or a leader (Block & Negrine, 2017). As will be reviewed latter, this seemed to be the case in the Trump Campaign by drawing the image of Trump to be the person that will “Make America Great Again”. On the other hand, this is not the case in the Leave Campaign, at least from the sample analyzed, as the focus was to convince the British to ‘vote leave’ out of the EU and the use of personalization was minimal.

Other differences between the two cases were visible after Schmidt (2017) conducted what she called *discursive institutionalism* analysis. That is, an interdisciplinary approach to analyze institutionalized discourse, especially, the political discourse. In a recent study, Schmidt (2017) applied this methodology to analyze the institutionalized discourse in both the British and American cases related to the two main events of the Brexit referendum and the US presidential elections in 2016. Schmidt (2017) found and noted important common and different features in the two events and the general atmosphere surrounding them. To illustrate, building on the notion that neoliberalism is well established in both the US and the UK since the 1980s, she argues that both cases were common in attacking the, back then, current political establishment. And while both countries share, among others, the same economic philosophy, both campaigns took different stances on the effects of neoliberal political and economic policies (Schmidt, 2017). For example, Trump attacking the -back then- current political and economic establishment by attacking neoliberal policies, on the other hand, the Leave Campaign remarkably avoided to capitalize on people’s anger from such policies (Schmidt, 2016 as cited in Schmidt, 2017). Therefore, while both campaigns aligned to a large extent in their ideology, they had their own differences in terms of which agenda-issues to discuss with their voters.

Finally, it is noteworthy that while the differences between the two campaigns are clear in the way they function, these differences did not pose an obstacle for the study aims. First, because of the strong personal and ideological connections between the leaders of both campaigns as mentioned in the introduction, and second, is that the study looked at the phenomenon from its populist, and use of disinformation on social media networks angles. Thus, not only did comparing the two cases deepened the understanding of the recent populist rhetorical techniques, but also the two different types of campaigns resulted in providing a

wider picture of the persuasion techniques used in disinformation on social media networks as a strategy to persuade voters.

2.1.3 Cultural differences between the UK and the US

According to Hall (2013), in order for a culture to exist, members of this culture must, to various degrees, share the same cultural codes, which entails sharing, broadly speaking, the same language. Language here refers not only to the spoken language consisting of words, but also refers to the assemblage of other sorts of transmitting meaning such as sounds, facial gestures and expressions (body language), symbols, color codes (such as in the traffic lights and how every color refers to a distinct meaning), etc. (Hall, 2013). Furthermore, members of the same culture, are able to, roughly speaking, interpret ‘things’ or ‘words’ in the same way, under the assumption that they share the same “conceptual maps” (p. 4) of things or concepts (Hall, 2013). In addition, due to the constant change of the use of language (meaning of things), culture also changes (Hall, 2013). For example, the use of words used to connote only ‘something negative’ in a past era such as ‘wicked’ or ‘sick’ can be used to express approval and admiration of something and that it is ‘beyond limits’ among specific cultural groups (Hall, 2013).

While the cultural differences between the two countries, in a sociological sense, can be useful, because of how it plays a role in shaping discourse, it was out of the scope of this study, and the focus was on the cultural differences that relate more to the political practices in them. This was due to two reasons. First, it was done as an attempt to narrow the focus on how culture might play a role in making political decisions in the two campaigns when examining the sample. Second, it was an attempt to contextualize the audience (voters) in the two countries in order to understand the reasoning behind the appeals that emerged from the sample and understand why they were chosen.

Culture is defined as the way of life, in which a group of people share common practices (norms) and refute others (Mukherjee, 1996). Ahead of pointing out some of the major differences in ‘political culture/s’ in the two countries, it is important to note, briefly, the differences between the two countries in terms of how they were founded as to further contextualize the audience more in the two cases. This was helpful in the interpretation of the appeals that emerged from the data by revealing the segmented audience these appeals were designed to target. For example, when an advertisement made historical references to events and/or historical figures to evoke a sense of nationalism. For example, as will be reviewed in the results section, when Trump used footage of African-Americans when he referred to the

American families, bearing in mind the comments he made on the whites being murdered mainly by black people (Wilson, 2017).

The UK is a sovereign state that consists of four countries (England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland) that were unified through a long and complicated history (Johnson, 2015). This 'structure' of the UK was founded by people that, mainly, already existed in these countries. Therefore, broadly speaking, the existing culture/s in the UK is the result of thousands of years of its indigenous peoples' history. In recent history, the UK is not only known for the industrial revolution, but also for its colonial history where the UK colonized countries from six out of seven continents including parts of what is known today as the United States (Brey, 2019). This legacy of colonialism still plays a role in how a great proportion of people in the West, namely in the way UK see their heritage (Wiener, 2013). As Wiener (2013) explains, the notion of neocolonialism developed over the years after World War II and continues to current days in different forms, is adopted by several segments of the societies in the West extending to be taught in Western universities.

On the other hand, what led to the founding of the US as known today are events that go back to the discovery of the 'New World' by Christopher Columbus in the fifteenth century and the historical events that followed of colonization, slavery, independence (from the British rule), Civil War, prohibiting slavery and movements of civil rights in the recent history (Jenkins, 2017). These historic events played a role in the formation of the American character. Namely, of how the country was built on the idea of people immigrating from all parts of the world to start a new, prosperous life in the 'New World' (Jenkins, 2017). The immigration of people from different countries entailed the existence of different cultures that interacted and generated new 'hybrid-cultures' or what is also known as multiculturalism. Multiculturalism refers to a perspective that acknowledges the cultural differences that exist among members of the society rather than assuming homogeneity of culture (Mukherjee, 1996). Because multiculturalism became a 'norm' in the US, which refers to the culture that is adopted by the majority of the people, historically, far right movements such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) who are white supremacists that believe in the superiority of the White Race were formed as a counterculture. The KKK, refers to two distinct hate organizations in the US that employed terror to ensure the supremacy of the White Race by attempting to reconstruct the racial supremacy map following the freeing of slaves that was the main reason behind the Civil War (KKK Britannica). Countercultures are movements that defy the 'norm' and are founded in the form of movements by people that share the same views (Costello, 1972). The awareness about historical movements that still play a role in the cultural struggle

between different groups in the society, are of high significance to how something as political ads are crafted. To illustrate, when some ads refer to an issue of controversy between readers (e.g., the right to bear arms in the U.S.) that is usually adopted by readers that lean more to the right-wing on the political spectrum. For example, 56% of Republicans (right-wing) see that mass shooting would decrease if more people owned guns, and 64% of Democrats see that these accidents would decrease if less people owned guns (Oliphant, 2017).

In a more rigid attempt to categorize citizens (voters) in both the U.S. and the UK, Norris and Inglehart (2019) assert that people, do indeed, form what they referred to as *tribes*. Tribes, according to Norris and Inglehart (2019), are imaginary communities that are “demarcated by signifiers of us versus them [...]” (p. 7). These tribes hold shared values and traditions that go beyond just sharing race and religion extending to, among other shared traits, the same culture and dialect. Additionally, Norris and Inglehart (2019) theorize that the term ‘tribe’ as a *structure* holds more to it than simply being a loose conception about a group of people, especially in times when these people feel individual and collective danger that threatens their ‘way of life’. Building on this notion, Norris and Inglehart (2019) rationalize that the politics of *fear* is indeed a lead tactic used by populist politicians, especially ones that hold authoritarian values, to gain political power in Western democracies. While this notion might seem to strongly dismiss the audience’s agency in terms of not being critical about the information they consume from media, Norris and Inglehart (2019) argue that this state was a result of Western democracies reaching what they called the ‘tipping point’. As part of the *Cultural back-lash theory*, the ‘tipping point’ according the authors, is a point in the political sphere in a specific country where citizens are negatively charged against the political establishment, and involves high levels of individual and collective frustration that concerns the economy, future, cultural values and norms, and in sometimes the racial supremacy map. Therefore, they argue that populist politicians take advantage of this frustration by channeling their focus on activating and mobilizing these *angry* people by focusing their media messages’ topics that appeal to people’s fears such as economy or income, immigration, cultural or religious values, etc.

The cultural differences between the two countries in which the two events took place also entails the political culture as a general scheme that, to a large extent, guides political practices in a given society. The cultural differences highlighted in this part were used in the analysis. In this section I focus on the main political parties and institutions that represent the right-wing on the UK’s political spectrum as the main driving force behind the Brexit referendum including the Vote Leave campaign. In the UK, current political culture consists,

like other political systems, from the right-wing, the conservatives, and the left-wing, the liberals (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). The right-wing including parties such as UKIP that was one of the leading Eurosceptic parties and was highly interrelated to, and a supporter of Vote Leave during the Brexit event in 2016 (Walker, 2016; Morillas, 2017). This party, alongside with other far-right parties, such as the National Front and British National Party did not only share Euroscepticism, but also adopted, and called for the implementation of xenophobic policies (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). Xenophobic politics are understood in this research as practices in which different races, and immigration are not accepted, attacked, and seen as a threat that justifies discrimination against them (Norris and Inglehart, 2019).

In the US, political culture is different from the UK. The right-wing or the conservatives are represented by the Republican party and has different views from those of the British right-wing shares, however, it is important to note that they do share some ideological values. These differences are apparent in the constitutional rights that allow people and organizations, to bear arms and form militias (“The History Of The Right To Bear Arms”, 2020). The Second Amendment in the US Constitution that gave these rights to the American people is one example of the debate over gun control between conservatives and liberals (“The History Of The Right To Bear Arms”, 2020). In his first presidential debate in 2020, Donald Trump was asked to condemn white supremacists, in particular, the Proud Boys, a group categorized by the Federal Bureau of Investigations as an extremist group (Belam and Gabbatt, 2020), he refused and told them to “stand-back and stand-by” (Smith, Beckett, Singh and Wong, 2020).

Some scholars state that Trump extends from just being a candidate in a presidential election to be a movement on its own right (Lieberman, Mattler, Pepinsky, Roberts and Valelly, 2017). While others that studied American presidents discourse claim that Trump is not an *outlier* in the American political history (Jordan, Sterling, Pennenbaker and Boyd, 2018). The significance that Trump brought to the US political culture is built on the historical movements in the U.S. For example, Trump hat that reads “Make America Great Again” forming the acronym MAGA. This hat did not only represent Trump as a candidate but also signifies the movement that is referred to as Trumpism (“Understanding Trump and Trumpism”, 2020). Moreover, the hat was described by the black fashion critic Robin Givhan as becoming “[...] a symbol of us vs. them, of exclusion and suspension, of garrulous narcissism, of white male privilege, of violence and hate [...]” (as quoted in Tong, 2019). Additionally, the hat was described by the African American rapper Pusha T as “this generation’s Ku Klux hood” (as quoted in Tong, 2019).

From part one it can be concluded that, while both campaigns held similar ideological stances on specific topics (immigration, own country's position on a global scale, and its relationship with bigger bodies, both campaigns have their historical, political, culture and event (referendum vs. elections) specifics that should be accounted for in the interpretation.

2.2 Part two

In this part I review the traditional populist communication model, then, I link it to social media campaigning and online disinformation.

2.2.1 Political communication

Political communication, regardless of its source and/or level, is not only designed to convey information to constituents, but is also “strategic, intentional and purposive” (p. 391) in nature, and, in principle, is designed to *build loyalty* (Jacobs, 2017). Furthermore, in modern purposeful political communication, such as in campaigning, there are two main significant developments, first, political communication, as a process, has become highly sophisticated, and second, due to these constant developments, institutional communication developed a more complex (constantly changing) and effective model of political communication (Jacobs, 2017). This is quite evident in the employment of new communication technologies such as social media in political communication. The Vote Leave Campaign for example, made use of the social media networks as platforms to spread their political messages (advertisements) but also made use of algorithms that identified voters that might be susceptible to their messages (Cadwalladr, 2017).

Additionally, Jacobs (2017) observed that “Institutional-based communications have, under certain circumstances, more enduring and deeper effects, than the personalistic and often time-delimited aspects of situational framing” (p. 392). In other words, it is thought that institutional-based political communication can be more effective towards constituents than messages that are coming from a less organizational discourse even if it is from a political leader that is functioning in a less informal and less organizational environment. The organization that took place during the Brexit event by the Vote Leave Campaign in terms of adopting a uniform rhetoric is one example, considering that Vote Leave was working alongside and deeply connected to other Eurosceptic organizations. Similarly, the Trump Campaign was not only an organization that used its own institutional-communication with voters, but also was connected to other organizations that supported Trump, adopted the same rhetoric and worked on spreading it on different media platforms. For example, The Heritage Foundation, and The Moral Majority. Takens and van Hoof (2011) argue, on the other hand,

that populist politicians make use of political *personalization* to make the focus of the campaign on the leader as one of the strategies of convincing voters. Also, narrowing the issues agenda during a political campaign makes it easier for the voter to follow the campaign's line of reasoning (Takens & van Hoof, 2011). The research question of this thesis aimed at examining the notion of political personalization, and how the issues agenda is constructed as two distinct persuasion techniques.

Political communication has the capacity, under certain circumstances, to affect voter behavior. In other words, make voters, at least on an individual level, change their minds and even change sides during elections. When politicians decide on adopting old or new topics (issues) in relation to a party's political stance (e.g., abortion), Tesler and Zaller (2017) suggest that this adoption of specific topics play a significant role in how a voter reacts to it in terms of voting decisions. To illustrate, they observed that the voter can either change their mind about a topic they had preexisting opinions on, and therefore, align with their original political party, or on the other hand, change sides to vote for the opponent political party. The first case underlines the importance of political communication in its institutional form, the latter, suggests that voters can be critical about information they receive from mass media (Tesler and Zaller, 2017). For the issues-agenda for the two studied campaigns, they adopted, to a large extent, similar issues that they placed their focus on communicating with voters (Norris and Inglehart, 2019).

On the importance of the issues agenda topics, Carsey and Layman (2006) theorize that if the topic is of significance to the voter (e.g., aligns or contradicts with strong religious views) and their political party's view on it is different, the voter is likely to switch to another party that aligns to their views, on the other hand, if the topic is of less importance to the voter, they tend to change their views on it to adopt their original party's position (Tesler & Zaller, 2017). In other words, *party-sponsored communication* can indeed, to various degrees, affect voter behavior (Tesler & Zaller, 2017), and although some of these messages over time "tend to cancel out" (p.79), in some cases, they have the capacity to "swing the outcomes of national elections" (p.79). Moreover, in times where there is a political conflict, data suggests that people who reside with journalist-sponsored messages as opposed to party-sponsored communication tend to be the small minority (Tesler & Zaller, 2017).

2.2.2 Political messages and partisanship

Jarvis (2017) pointed out some of the important roles that the political parties play in a *modern* democracy such as: "gain elected office, control governing processes, mobilize

majorities, structure dissent and opposition, recruit future political leaders, socialize voters, and serve as a connection between campaigns and governance” (p. 133). Consequently, Jarvis (2017) illustrates how parties adopt what he called *rhetorical functions*; moreover, partisan messages that are conveyed either by party organizations and/or their nominees have the capacity to “reveal priorities, highlight objectives, imply political strategies and offer images of the desired brands” (p. 134). As Jarvis (2017) pointed out, this is mainly done by the party’s elites and relying on what he called *party labels*. Party labels are widely used in the political communication process and serve as main cues that influence voting behavior (Jarvis, 2017). Furthermore, these party labels, according to Jarvis (2017) “provide simple, direct, and consequential information in shaping individual perceptions” (p. 136). According to Herrera (1997), labels are understood by citizens (voters) on different levels of political sophistication and regardless of their level of political participation, also, Herrera (1997) argues that there is a “quite remarkable linkage between the mass public and the political elite with regard to political terminology” (As cited in Jarvis, 2017, p. 137). While these labels are taken for granted features in the political communication process, they play a vital role, and of paramount importance to those who use it. Labeling allows political parties to have their own vocabulary that distinguishes them from other parties and can ultimately lead to affecting, proportionately, voting behavior (Jarvis, 2017). These labels were used by both campaigns as an attack method to discredit their opponents (Norris and Inglehart, 2019).

2.2.3 Political advertisements

Political communication studies distinguish political advertisements into three main categories: *advocacy*, that is, ads that focus on why voters should vote for a nominee (ad sponsor) by showing the voters what is perceived to possess positive and desirable features in the society (Lilleker, 2006), what distinguishes what is positive or negative is called *doxa*, that is, the shared knowledge in a society (Van Belle, Gillaerts, Van Gorp, Van De Mierop, & Rutten, 2013); and second, *negative*, that is, ads that focus on opponents rather than the message sponsor (candidate) to show voters why it is ‘not the right thing to do’ (Lilleker, 2006), this type of ads is also called *attack ads* for the attack element it inherently features (Belt, 2017), while others categorize attack ads to be a different type of ads on its own account (Dolan in Schultz, 2004) in this thesis negative ads refers to attack advertisements; and finally, *contrast ads*, that is, advertisements that focus on the positive side of the candidate (sponsor) and the negative side of the opponent (Lilleker, 2006).

It is quite common that the candidates with lower chances of winning are the ones that start using negative ads as an attempt to increase their chances (Belt, 2017). Additionally, because of the negative information that these ads contain, targeted candidates are required to answer to the information these ads provide, thus, forces them to be in a defensive mode as procrastination may be devastating (Belt, 2017). In this thesis, special attention was given to negative ads in the analysis process, looking for different techniques used in crafting negative ads as explained by Belt (2017). First, as Belt (2017) explains, attack ads are strategically used by candidates to aggravate fear, and to raise doubts about the opponent to create public anxiety. Second, special techniques are used in attack ads to make it more appealing to the targeted audience, for example, the use of black-and-white photos to portray candidates under attack while bright colors are used to portray candidates in positive ads (West, 2014 as cited in Belt, 2017). This change of color that may seem of minor importance is a common technique used by experts crafting political advertisements (Belt, 2017) to signify how they portray the candidate or the subject of the advertisement. Also, the use gray imagery and darker skin tones are used to increase anxiety and reinforce negative stereotypes (Belt, 2017).

According to Fallis (2017), audience are active, and the general assumption is that political advertisements work in the same way as all other sorts of political communication, that is, they reinforce preexisting ideas rather than totally changing them. However, Fallis (2017) argues that political ads, on an individual level, can affect voting behavior. Furthermore, Fallis (2017) points to some of the functions and features of political ads in an attempt to illustrate how political ads can affect the voting behavior:

Voter-learning

On the one hand, political ads can expand a voter's knowledge on a specific topic or about a specific candidate due to its informative nature, on the other, it can lead to the spread of inaccurate information i.e., disinformation (Fallis, 2017).

Emotional appeals

Different studies found evidence that the most successful political ads are those characterized by making use of strong emotional appeals and, in some cases, even have the capacity to change voter behavior (Belt, 2017; Fallis, 2017).

Agenda-setting

Scholars have found that political ads do not only have the capacity to make voters think about specific topics, but in some cases, political ads have the capacity to channel how people think about these topic, a process known as second-level agenda-setting (Belt, 2017; Fallis, 2017) or framing (see Entman, 1993).

Finally, Fallis (2017) also stated that some personal traits in combination with political ads can easily cause a change in voter's behavior such as *negativity bias*. For example, people tend to weigh negative experiences more than positive ones. Similarly, negative information has more impact on people (voters) than positive news (Fallis, 2017). This has led that the general assumption about how people will react to political ads is that people are expected to recall the negative news or information about a candidate more than they can recall positive ones, especially, while making decisions (Fallis, 2017). Another type of traits that might play a significantly role is *confirmation bias*. In this type of biases, people tend to pick the information they consume in political ads that serves best their point of view while discarding or dismissing any other opposing information, even if true (Fallis, 2017).

2.2.4 Populism and the populist rhetoric

While there is no unified definition for populism, drawing on their own, among other scholars' work, Block and Negrine (2017) define populism as “an appeal to people [...]; antielitist, antiestablishment ideologies, sentiments, and tactics [...]; a *discourse* characterized by belligerent ethos and plain language that provide a sense of closeness between leaders and their politically disenchanted public [...]” (p. 179). Others such as Lilleker (2006) defined it through the elements by which populism as a communication process functions. To illustrate, Lilleker (2006) characterized populism communication as naturally *propagandist* and *rhetorical* and can make substantial use of *emotionalism* and *authenticity*.

Lilleker (2006) defined propaganda as the “communication that is deliberately designed by one group in society to influence the attitudes and behavior of the others. It often uses *symbolism* and *rhetoric* and appeals to the emotional and irrational aspects of our sensibility” (p. 162), and “has highly negative associations” (p. 163). According to Lilleker (2006), propaganda generally abides by specific rules, propaganda is designed to draw readers to focus on topics that is not only implied in the text, but also to topics that are beyond the text. This according to the author may cause conflicts between readers over these topics (issues) by making them compare between positive and negative scenarios that are related to these topics discussed. For example, issues such as immigration and how readers would take the stance with or against it, causing societal conflicts.

Additionally, populist politicians such as Johnson and Trump, while addressing the masses, they start by ‘setting up the stage’ for the audience by making claims about how

corrupt the ‘system’ is (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). Then, they tend to focus on what is known as the first-order principles, that is, claims concerning who should lead, and intentionally neglect to address second-order principles, that is, a clear plan about what should be done in order to ‘fix the system’ (Norris and Inglehart, 2019).

The use of *rhetoric* in propaganda entails the use of language and symbolism to make sure that the information encoded in propaganda communication is decoded in the intended way. This means that while the main function of any rhetoric is to persuade the readers, it also encourages them to change their behavior in ways that are desired by those who have created it (Lilleker, 2006). Furthermore, in order for a rhetoric to be successful and resonate with readers, the rhetoric must be designed through crucial understanding of the audience complexities, address their fears, and appeal to their norms and values (Lilleker, 2006), through what was referred to earlier as *doxa*. Furthermore, populist rhetoric in political discourse is a communication style that, on the most basic level, is an ideological stance against the existing political establishment and, is a sort of instrumentalization of communication as a means to gain political power (Takens & van Hoof, 2011). Likewise, many scholars coincide in the notion that the elements of the populist rhetoric make “positive reference to “the people”, and criticism of the political elite” (Jager & Walgrave, 2006 in Takens & van Hoof, 2011, p. 332).

Emotionalization refers to the use of emotions in political communication to win the support of the voters; some scholars argue that emotionalization is done by politicians as a response to *public demand* of seeing the electoral process as an emotional experience (Lilleker, 2006). Likewise, studies in sociology support the notion that emotions is a more powerful force in making voting decisions; studies in political communication, however, show otherwise, and that the voter are rational and can make an informed decision based on logic while weighing who can lead the country with the emotional aspect being a secondary element (Lilleker, 2006).

Emotionalization is intrinsically a part of authenticity, that is, a trait by which a politician aims at appearing as ‘real’ and someone that is close to the voters, in order to make it easier for them to identify with the politician (Lilleker, 2006). This is done by building an authentic image, and this can be achieved by the politician sharing their emotional side or experience with the audience (Lilleker, 2006).

2.2.5 Political persuasion techniques

When Aristotle wrote his book *The Art of Rhetoric* (in other translations titled *Treatise on Rhetoric* or *Rhetoric*), he categorized oration into three main types based on intentions (uses) and also the tenses that normally follow in the language structure used by the orator. The first type of speech according to Yunis (2018) was branded by Aristotle as *forensic* (also known as judicial rhetoric), this type of rhetoric is usually in the past tense and is used usually to attack or defend someone in relation to legal settings; the second type is called *epideictic* (also translated to ceremonial speech) which is a demonstrative rhetoric, and is usually used to describe something in the present tense such as in speeches during wedding ceremonies; and finally, *deliberative* rhetoric (in some translations *symbolleutikon* or political), that is, the type of rhetoric that is used seeking to persuade people to do something and/or change a current state, and is usually used in the future tense (e.g., to convince citizens to vote for a specific candidate in an upcoming elections). Furthermore, Yunis (2018) explains how Aristotle rationalizes that in deliberative rhetoric, orators can use three different appeals that will help them persuade their audience to act in a certain way. The first appeal Aristotle defined is *ethos*. This appeal entails the establishment of trust between the audience and the speaker through convincing the audience that the speaker is credible, at least on the topic being discussed. The second appeal is *logos*, that is, reasoning through the use of language, sometimes referred to as the logical appeal. While logic and reasoning may seem as ‘the same thing’, reasoning is more complicated as correct and false logic may be appealing to the audience. And finally, *pathos*, that is, the appeals to emotions that are made by the orator to stimulate or trigger specific emotions that might help the orator achieve a specific goal. These goals, as will be reviewed shortly, may be visible or invisible to the audience.

Additionally, Takens and Van Hoof (2011) theorize that it is not only the quality of rhetoric that determines the persuasion effects of the political messages, but also the topics (issues) being discussed play a significant role in the persuasion process. For example, both campaigns (Trump 2016 and Vote Leave) used “slander, lying and verbal abuse to make their case” (Schmidt, 2017, p. 260). Strategies such as lying was not the only strategy employed by the two campaigns to persuade voters but also strategies such as throwing consequential accusations on opponents to put them in a defensive position (Schmidt, 2017). Other strategies are used to persuade readers such as the use of negative (attack) ads. Negative ads have the capacity to simulate voters to seek information to prove the accuser either correct or

incorrect about their accusations (Borah, 2016). This tactic does not only employ voter-learning as a rhetorical function but also employs agenda-setting as explained by Fallis (2017). This last function (agenda-setting) is one of the main tactics used by both campaigns in 2016 (Norris and Inglehart, 2019).

2.2.6 Political communication in the age of new media

During the two studied events, both campaigns made use of new-media technologies to reach-out more effectively to voters (Cadwalladr, 2017; Cadwalladr & Glendinning, 2018), especially the younger generations. In the Vote Leave Campaign case, they had created a sub-campaign called BeLeave that was designed to target younger liberal progressive voters (The Guardian, Jun 27, 2018). The communication with voters through social media differs from traditional media in both the approach and the outcomes. This is quite evident in three key differences according to Frankel and Hillygus (2017): the first is that social media allows an almost direct interaction channel between the message creator (campaign) and the voter; the second, the interaction between the campaign and voter is not in a one-way direction as in the traditional media case, or at least, it provides each potential voter on social media the means to directly communicate with the campaign of interest and other voters as well, making it a two-way (if not more) communication process; and finally, many of these social media platforms are monolithic in nature (e.g., email, WhatsApp), meaning that it requires different logics in the way messages are designed and presented to the voters.

As illustrated, social media use in campaigning and political communication requires different logics than traditional media sources (e.g., TV, radio and print), at least in some respects. For example, social media allowed for microtargeting on a mass scale and based on clearly defined characteristics (Frankel & Hillygus, 2017), which was something not known in political campaigning even in the early stages of the Internet. Further, Owen (2017) argues that the utilization of new media (social media) has not only led to the creation of a multilayered communication environment between the campaigners and the voters, but also that new media has led to a change in how information is disseminated to the masses. For example, Owen (2017) explains that traditional media such as TV, radio and print were adopting a *broadcasting* approach, that is, to treat the masses as a one body, however, after new media was used in campaigning and in political communication, message creators began to adopt the *narrowcasting* approach “where carefully crafted messages target discrete audience segments” (p. 832), this was due to what social media platforms as a digital form of

technology provided to collect data about the users, which in turn, helped concerned parties to better understand the audience on an individual level, thus, categorizing citizens to be better targeted with political ads.

2.2.7 Online political- campaigning, advertising, and disinformation

As aforementioned, the design of social media platforms and how people use them results in continuous growth user-data, leading to understanding users on an individualized level, leading to creating personalized ads such as the *dark ads* (Cadawalladr, 2017 as cited in Alaphilippe et al., 2019). Facebook for example, designed the *Lookalike audience* tool ("Learn about Lookalike Audiences | Facebook Business Help Centre", 2020) that allows the targeting of the audience to be conducted based on the predefined characteristics and/or demographics that are much more complicated than previous Facebook targeting methods (Alaphilippe et al., 2019). The lookalike audience tool is a service provided by Facebook for customers that want to reach a certain audience based on predefined trends and is restricted to one country per campaign ("Learn about Lookalike Audiences | Facebook Business Help Centre", 2020). To maximize results from this tool, Facebook asks advertisers to provide them with audience examples ranging between 100 and 50000 Facebook accounts ("Learn about Lookalike Audiences | Facebook Business Help Centre", 2020). By analyzing these examples provided by the customers, Facebook is better able to target new 'similar' Facebook users with advertisements on its platform ("Learn about Lookalike Audiences | Facebook Business Help Centre", 2020).

Due to the highly personalized nature of the dark ads, this type of ads had different targeting strategies to be more effective. These dark ads did not only appear to the social media users that fall in the targeted audience segment, but also allowed comprehensive digital feedback for message optimization by analyzing the data generated from how the audience interacted with these ads (Alaphilippe et al., 2019). In order to maximize the audience engagement on Facebook advertisements, the Trump 2016 Campaign, for example, made use of 5.9 million ads "to identify and then promote those variants that generated most Facebook engagement" (Alaphilippe et al., 2019, p. 18). Finally, these dark ads characteristics have "helped advertisers [campaigners] from cultivating a certain image through their organic posts, while at the same time they can promote their hidden messages [...]" (Alaphilippe et al. 2019, p. 18).

Recently, many scholars have called for the adoption of the terms mis-information, dis-information and mal-information, instead of the "ill-defined" (p. 7) term of 'fake news'

(Alaphilippe, 2019). Misinformation refers to factual information (news) that is shared unintentionally, without meaning to cause harm; disinformation, on the other hand, refers to nonfactual information (news) that is deliberately shared to cause harm and/or personal benefit; and finally, malinformation, which refers to factual information (genuine) that was intended to remain private or collected without consent and shared to cause harm (Alaphilippe et al., 2019). For example, pornographic footage that was meant to remain private, hate speech recorded with or without the knowledge of the speaker, or what was considered ‘normal’ back in time but now is considered racist such as images or video footage of politicians in Western countries wearing ‘black face’ during their teenage. While distinguishing between the three main types of information disorder might seem obvious, in real life however, distinguishing between them can be of high sophistication as they have a natural tendency to overlap, especially in political campaigns (Alaphilippe et al., 2019). Therefore, this research adopted the term disinformation instead of fake news defined by the European Parliament’s High Level Expert Group (HLEG) that defined disinformation as follows: “all forms of false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented, and promoted to intentionally cause public harm or profit” (Buning et al. 2018 as cited in Alaphilippe et al. 2019, p. 6).

Online disinformation in the form of false news can be challenging to readers to naturally identify, making the readers susceptible, one way or another, to it (Zhou and Zafarani, 2018). This is not only for how much disinformation campaigns can spread, but also because of how the content creators utilize “propaganda techniques around linguistic, cultural, and national differences, to create new social barriers and divisions, as well as causing financial and personal damages” (Alaphilippe et al., 2019, p. 7). Some studies that looked for persuasion techniques in disinformation campaigns that were used to enhance their message credibility and were able to identify the main techniques that were implemented in those disinformation campaigns (Alaphilippe et al. 2019). These techniques are: ad hominem, that is, to attack the opponent in a personalized and negative manner instead of attacking the argument; ad nauseam, that is, to constantly repeat a phrase or a slogan so that citizens would adopt it and repeat it in their discourse (e.g., Trump’s “chain migration” idea about how people migrate to the US and start to bring in their relatives); cherry picking, that is, to decide to pick specific facts to be presented in an argument while deliberately avoiding other facts to change or distort people’s perceptions of a topic (similar to confirmation bias); appealing to strong emotions such as “fear, anger, or prejudice” (p.8); deception, that is, to mislead the

readers through false presentation of events; and finally, humor, that is used in a negative way against opponents to ridicule them and/or their policies (Alaphilippe et al., 2019).

From part two it can be concluded that populist rhetorical functions are used by populist politicians in their political campaigning advertisements that contain disinformation. These rhetorical functions play a major role in the persuasion process of the reader to convince them to vote for the campaign. The difference between these online ads and the traditional advertisement forms, however, remain in the interactions that occur online between the readers and others. This is due to the role that social media plays in amplifying these sensational media messages.

3 Methodology and research design

3.1 Methodological approach and units of analysis

The research of this project focused, mainly, on the persuasive techniques in the ads of the two campaigns in the UK and the US in 2016. In order to answer the research question, qualitative methods in the form of rhetorical analysis was chosen. Brennen (2017) distinguishes between qualitative and quantitative methods as the former is “interdisciplinary, interpretive, political and theoretical in nature” (p.4). Moreover, one of the features of qualitative methods is that it provides the tools needed to make sense of the constructed reality of a given society (Brennen, 2017), also referred to in the theoretical framework as *doxa* (Van Belle et al., 2013). Assuming the viewpoint that realities are socially constructed (Brennen, 2017), the language used for communication is likely to mirror these realities because of how language is expected to resonate with the audience targeted by it. Accordingly, this understanding can be achieved by the analysis of words, texts, speeches, slang and so forth. In other words, the analysis of the communication texts in a given society or phenomenon may, indeed, reveal information that will allow better understanding of this society or phenomenon. And therefore, the analysis of the language used in the analyzed ads, as identified earlier by Hall (2013) helped in identifying, first, the persuasion techniques by both campaigns, and second, the commonalities and differences among them.

Due to the focus of this thesis, to identify any existing common patterns in populist persuasion techniques in both the UK and the US in 2016 (Vote Leave and the Trump 2016 presidential campaigns), rhetorical analysis was chosen as the chief analysis method. Brennen (2017) describes rhetorical analysis as “particularly appropriate when one is assessing aspects of advertising and public relations, and when persuasion is an integral part of the media text” (p. 216) which justifies the use of this method to conduct this research. For the four cases mentioned by Brennen (2017), advertising, public relations, persuasion, and media texts, they all perfectly apply to the texts analyzed in this research. Starting from the latter, media texts, all the sample units are media texts, either Facebook post ads, or TV ads. For the advertisements and persuasion aspects of the texts, all sample units are political campaign advertisements, and the research question was answered by looking for persuasion techniques in these ads, thus, meeting the conditions mentioned by Brennen (2017). Therefore, rhetorical analysis was considered the best analysis method that would answer the research question.

In doing rhetorical analysis, it is essential to take the “relationship between the text, its author or producer, the intended audience and the relevant context for the production and the reception of the text” (p.216) into account (Brennen, 2017). Further, Zachary (2009) explains that in doing rhetorical analysis, it is quite important to understand the context surrounding the text to be able to identify the Aristotelian proofs (logos, pathos, and ethos), and therefore, be able to infer how people would have reacted to it. This is, for example, achieved, under the assumption that rhetoricians - people who wrote texts or speeches mainly for the purpose of persuasion- were well aware not only of the sought events, but also, understood their audience and knew what they want to hear. Accordingly, a researcher doing rhetorical analysis must be able to identify key aspects and events that may affect the waning of a text. In other words, background knowledge of the context surrounding each campaign is important to have a deeper understanding of the real intention behind the text. Therefore, I relied on journalistic sources that would explain if something referred to in the ads was not clear. For example, ads usually do not contain the full story, such as when Trump accuses Clinton with allegations.

Zachary (2009) identifies three main approaches to rhetorical analysis. The first one, is the *basic* or *traditional* form of analysis, which goes back to the work of individuals such as Aristotle and Cicero until the beginning of the twentieth century. The second approach is called the *new rhetoric*, this approach has emerged due to the complications resulting from the more extensive use of symbolism that created the need for more sophisticated analysis tools. This new type of analysis was referred to by Burke (as cited in Zachary, 2009) as *dramatism*. That is, an analytical approach that “requires to view human actions as theatrical, discernible in a pentad of interrelated elements: act, scene, agent, agency, agency and purpose” (p. 74). As explained by Zachary (2009), this approach developed by Burke, has provided the tools to analyze texts and speeches to understand the deeply rooted ideological beliefs of the audience. This was, according to Burke (as cited in Zachary, 2009), because of how people engaged in a specific rhetoric, since people, metaphorically, filter topics based on what he called terministic screens. This was based on the belief that “language does not correspond to reality, but instead, filters and selects” (p.74). Finally, and most importantly, the *critical-postmodern* approach. This approach is the one used in the analysis of this study for three reasons. First, it acknowledges the role that the audience play in creation of a media message (advertisements). Second, it focuses on topics (issues) that are salient or absent in the text. and finally, this approach provides a more critical account of how audience may interact to a given text.

This approach is the most complicated because it starts from the notion that rhetoric codifies and “perpetuates what counts as real or the truth in society” (Zachary, 2009, p. 75). In other words, the analyst must be able to identify how the different groups in a society may interpret specific events. For example, how a Republican African American vs. a Democrat African American would likely interpret a speech from a Republican or a Democrat politician on an ideological and provocative topic such as *abortion* or *racism*. Therefore, a rhetorical analyst must also, in this approach, identify how groups of interest in the audience may react to the speech or text. Moreover, as explained by Brennen (2017), background knowledge about the context of the text and the audience is vital to maximize the probability of fully understanding the text and the intentions behind it, and thus, inferring how it might resonate with different segments in the audience. Furthermore, scholars that adopt this theoretical approach see human knowledge as probable, in terms of how people are persuaded about specific topics and do not assume homogeneity among all studied society members (Zachary, 2009). Also, the theoretical approach of critical postmodernism “marks a radically different way of thinking about truth and reality from those ideas that had dominated scholarly inquiry throughout much of recorded history” (Zachary, 2009, p.75).

The rhetorical analysis in this study was done looking not only for the rhetorical appeals in the text, but by adding multiple dimensions that served the purpose of answering the research question. For example, in the UK dataset, the Vote Leave Campaign relied on other companies (Cambridge Analytica and its daughter company Aggregate IQ) to design advertisements that, allegedly, be assumed to appeal to voters on an individual level, where in the US case, the corresponding ads were Facebook post that were shared with all Facebook members of the Trump official Facebook group. In this example, in the UK Vote Leave ads relied on a more complex method not only in the designing phase, but also the distribution of whom these ads will appear to, and hence, analysis of these advertainments provided a more precise account of the types of voters the Vote Leave Campaign was appealing to. In the US’s corresponding advertisements, because these ads were shared on a collective level, the analysis of it ushered to the *issues* that were focused on during the Trump 2016 presidential campaign. This difference in the approach to persuade voters in the two cases had varying effects on how the advertisements in both cases were designed and will be illustrated in the results section.

Throughout strategic and persuasive uses of rhetorical strategies, scholars that use the critical- postmodern approach in rhetorical analysis acknowledge that specific topics can be more prominent than its opposite. Therefore, concepts such as *power* are seen as inherent in

some societies more than other, and thus, is present in their use of language (Zachary, 2009). Additionally, Zachary (2009) sees that any component of the human communication is open for rhetorical analysis as some latent meaning is made using different than the traditional communication objects. For example, (facial) gestures and new communication technologies that depend of signifiers (e.g., emojis) that readers make meaning from as described earlier by Hall (2013).

3.2 Sampling

The unit of analysis that composed the sample analyzed in this thesis, consisted of TV and Facebook advertisements/posts that were used by the Vote Leave Campaign and the Trump Campaign in the UK and the U.S. in 2016, respectively. The sampling method that was used to gather the sample was the purposive sampling as described by Babbie (2015). In purposive sampling, the researcher may make judgements about the sample for how it is relevant to answer the research question of the study, and may ignore irrelevant sample units (Babbie, 2015). Besides making judgements about what to include in the sample, this sampling method was used for other reasons. First, because the ads (group one and two) were in two different events and are not identical in the way they were distributed, a uniform sampling approach, in this case, would have not been useful. For example, the Vote Leave dark ads were not visible to all Facebook users (e.g., in a specific Facebook group) and the content of these ads was not publicly known until Facebook revealed them to the British Parliament after the Cambridge Analytica scandal (Cadwalladr & Glendinning, 2018; Lomas, 2018). The corresponding ads from the Trump Campaign (in the form of Facebook posts), on the other hand, were visible to every user that was a member of the Trump official Facebook page. In the case, for example, if certain criteria were pre-set, such as the number of likes on an ad, while this would have been possible in the Trump case, it would have been impossible in the Vote Leave case. Second, data was not provided in terms of how Facebook users interacted with the Vote Leave advertisements. For the TV advertisements however, data was provided in both cases and the selection was based on the availability on the official Vote Leave YouTube channel (only ten ads were found and were used in the sample for group three), and the number of times the TV ads were aired in the Trump case (group four). In the Trump case, the ads found on a website (<https://politicaladarchive.org>) which provided useful information about every advertisement it included. For example, the number of times the ad was aired, where, number of networks that aired the ad, sponsor, an estimate of the number of views, and most importantly, fact checks on the information it contained. Therefore, the

advertisements chosen in group-four to represent the Trump 2016 TV advertisements were based on, in the same order, sponsor (had to be a Trump 2016 Campaign ad), the highest number of ads aired, and whenever present, ads that were fact-checked and contained disinformation. More detailed information is provided for every group as follows.

3.2.1 Group-one

The UK was group-one for Facebook advertisements known as the dark ads. These advertisements were handed by Facebook to the British Parliament after the allegations that followed the Facebook/ Cambridge Analytica scandal in 2018 (Lomas, 2018).

The ads in this group were selected from both the Vote Leave Campaign, and the BeLeave Campaign. The BeLeave Campaign was a sub-campaign run by the same people that were responsible for the Vote Leave Campaign (The Guardian, Jun 27, 2018). Due to the Vote Leave targeted older generations, and BeLeave targeting younger generations (The Guardian, Jun 27, 2018), ads from both campaigns were included in the sample of group-one. Ultimately, group one for UK's Facebook dark ads was represented by fifteen ads from the Vote Leave file, as the main campaign representing the UK populists, and ten ads to represent the BeLeave campaign, that was also designed by the same company, Aggregate IQ (House of Commons, 2018), a Canadian firm, closely tied to Cambridge Analytica and CLS Group. This has allowed to have a wider view on the rhetorical appeals and techniques that were used in both, interrelated, campaigns. The advertisements were in one file sent from Facebook to the British Parliament. An enclosed letter From the Facebook's UK Head of Public Policy, Rebecca Stimson, indicated that these were the ads ran by the Vote Leave and the BeLeave Campaigns before the event of Brexit (House of Commons, 2018). The letter also mentioned that Facebook groups of Vote Leave, BeLeave and other related campaigns were designed and run by Aggregate IQ.

The ads that represented the Vote Leave Campaign were 15 in total and were chosen purposively from the file. I divided the ads according to the issues agenda they discuss (economy and trade, immigration, NHS, sovereignty, etc.) and chose the ads randomly from these groups. I avoided repetition of the ads based on the topic, and the only exception was in the ads that mentioned different countries that fell in the immigration ads group. This was due to the connotations that would follow each country name (e.g., Turkey, a country with a Muslim majority and a high population).

Similarly, 10 advertisements were chosen from the BeLeave advertisements file sent from Facebook to the British Parliament. Complying with the methodological guidelines, the

number of advertisements in group-one was set to be 25 advertisements in total. Therefore, I decided to make the Vote Leave Campaign ads more than the BeLeave ads for three reasons. First, the Vote Leave Campaign was the main Brexit campaign and, the BeLeave Campaign is one of its creations. Second, the ads provided by Facebook to the British Parliament for the Vote Leave Campaign were more than 200 ads, while the BeLeave ads were less than 30. Thus, providing a strong incentive to make the Vote Leave more represented. Finally, and most importantly, the Vote Leave Campaign was the main focus of this research, and the BeLeave Campaign was of less importance in terms of the size and was used just to notice if there was any difference in terms of how both campaigns communicated with their targeted audience.

3.2.2 Group-two

Despite the allegations that the Trump 2016 campaign hired Cambridge Analytica for the same purpose as Vote Leave did -to target voters using dark ads on Facebook (Cadwalladr, 2017), a similar file provided by Facebook to an official body, at the time this research was conducted, could not be found. Therefore, the group two ads were sampled from the Facebook posts that were presented on the official Trump Facebook page. The difference between the two types of ads in group one and two were different in two main aspects. The first is that the group-two ads were, in theory, visible to everyone on the Donald Trump Facebook page, and therefore, did not appear for other Facebook users unless shared by one of the Facebook group members with their friends. Also, the dark ads relied on the Facebook advertising algorithm, the Lookalike audience tool, that helped reach specific people. And while the assumption is that the group-one dark ads were designed to target specific people on Facebook, in terms of having a specific appeal to them, this difference between the two types of ads were assumed not to have a major difference in their creation and the only difference assumed was the effectiveness of the Facebook algorithm. Therefore, the Trump Facebook group posters were chosen to represent the Trump campaign in 2016, especially, that this research was focusing on the populist rhetoric in relation to disinformation, and was aiming at comparing the content of the two campaigns' advertisements, and the Trump Facebook ones were the best available at the time this research was done to represent it.

Similar to the sampling in group-one, the corresponding group-two was sampled using purposive sampling. It is important to note here that I had a different strategy to sample this group at the beginning of this project. After failing to find officially investigated ads, I tried to find paid ads on the Facebook ad library

(https://www.facebook.com/ads/library/?active_status=all&ad_type=political_and_issue_ads&country=NL), which is supposed to contain information on political paid advertisements to help independent researchers. This attempt failed because the search options were not user-friendly and were over complicated. This did not allow me to find the advertisements I was looking for automatically and had to manually go back page-by-page. Additionally, searching for ads based on keywords and timeframes was not possible. Therefore, I drew the ads analyzed in this thesis from the Trump official Facebook page.

Because there was no way to gather all the Facebook post advertisements, I also had to go page-by-page to find relevant advertisements. Advertisements were chosen for the highest number of interactions (likes and comments combined, e.g., 3467 likes + 1435 comments = value), non-repeated advertisement information, and as close as possible to the elections date (November 8th, 2016). This was to ensure that the advertisements represented the campaign in its final stages, which was considered to be the most important.

This group consisted of 25 advertisements in total to match the corresponding group-one, and to comply with the methodological guide lines.

3.2.3 Group-three

For the two remaining groups, groups-three and four, these two groups represented the TV commercials in both campaigns (Vote Leave and Trump 2016 Presidential Campaign). Group three represented the Vote Leave campaign. This group consisted of 10 of the TV ads that were aired on national television in the UK during the Brexit referendum event in 2016. These ads were found on the official Vote Leave Campaign's YouTube channel as a secondary attempt. The first attempt was to find a reliable source that would provide more data about the advertisements (e.g., number of times aired, estimated views, etc.). Therefore, the TV ads that represented Vote Leave (group three) were sampled using purposeful sampling from YouTube. The sampling process was intended to be on the number of views on YouTube as the main aspect to look for, under the assumption that ads with the highest amount of views and interactions are likely to be the ones that most resonated with the people when it was aired on national TV. During the sampling process, however, only 10 advertisements were found on the official Vote Leave YouTube channel. Therefore, all 10 advertisements were included in this group.

3.2.4 Group-four

For group four, that represented the Trump TV ads, this group was sampled from a website that provided fact-checks on the content of the ads (politicalarchive.org). The website

did not only provide the ads that were aired during the Trump Campaign, but also provided some additional information that was previously mentioned.

Because the Trump campaign involved different phases, such as going through the Republican Party elections process to get the party's nomination, the media messages involved were not the same as in the Vote Leave case. This difference between the two campaigns' TV ads airing strategy was due to the difference between the TV industry in both countries. To illustrate, the UK has a national broadcast, allowing advertisers to reach, theoretically, the whole nation. On the other hand, the TV industry in the US is highly privatized, and the federal government in the US does not subsidize a national broadcast. Therefore, to ensure that the groups three and four are as close as possible, ads in group four were chosen based on the closest it was to the election's day. By focusing on the ads made for the final stage of the elections, the ads selected were automatically designed for the whole country, rather than focusing on ads that were designed for state level purposes. For example, an ad made to target a 'red state' such as Texas, will likely be different than one designed to target a 'blue state' such as California, that is a strong hold for the Republican Party. Finally, ads for group three and for were 20 in total complying with the methodological guidelines.

3.3 Operationalization

The operationalization phase consisted of setting a systematic way to measure the concept of persuasion techniques. As reviewed in the theoretical framework, persuasion techniques in the populist communication style are quite clear in some areas. Therefore, some sub-concepts were developed from the theoretical framework to measure the persuasion techniques. What follows sheds light on how persuasion techniques were measured and refers to the authors previously reviewed.

3.3.1 Text motivation

The analysis started off by identifying the text motivation behind the text. In this segment, the sample units were examined for the purpose behind their creation. To ensure that this was conducted in a systematic manner, the outcome of this segment was determined by asking the following questions: who is the producer of this ad? (e.g., the main campaign, or does it refer to a politician such as ads that were signed by Boris Johnson); why was this ad created? (e.g., to set the reader's agenda about an issue such as immigration); where was it used and when?; does the ad appeal to *fear*? as referred to by Norris and Inglehart (2019); does the ad appeal to people's frustration (economy and income, immigration, culture and religious values)? as referred to by Jarvis (2017); does the ad aim at building *authenticity* by

appealing to *emotionalization* as referred to by Lilleker (2006)?. By knowing the text motivation, it was easier to define the targeted audience, thus, determining the rhetorical function of the ad. The question about the intended audience was answered as a part of the following segment.

3.3.2 Advertisement Type

In this segment the answer to which category the ad falls in was determined based on a predefinition that was made to infer how the audience may receive the ads ((Lilleker, 2006; Belt, 2017). The understanding of the type of ads used and categorizing them according to their overall functions, it was easier to identify the campaign's intentions and strategies, which in turn, is an important part of the persuasion process.

This process was done in two attempts. The first was an attempt to divide the audience based on their political affiliation, e.g., in the US case, Republicans, Democrats and Float-voters, which refers to undetermined voters. This attempt was problematic for two reasons. The first, because of how divisive this election in the U.S. was in particular, and that many members of a party decided to vote from a candidate from another party. For example, studies found that 4% of Republicans voted for Clinton, and 5% of Democrats have voted for Trump (PEW research center, 2018). While this percentage seems to be small, it suggests that readers can be critical about the information they receive in political communication and from the media. Second, While Hillary Clinton, Trump's opponent, was an active member of the Democratic Party and held an official title in the federal government, Trump on the other hand, was only a member of the Republican Party, unlike Clinton, with no official political role, making him an 'outsider'. This difference between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton in terms of being involved in the political system, in addition to Trump being a populist candidate, has made the categorization of the audience troubling in terms of the results of this particular part of the analysis.

The UK example illustrates better the logic behind this choice. In the first attempt, the audience were divided based also on their political affiliation to so that the UK dataset would match its counterpart dataset from the U.S. This was also problematic in terms of the outcome of the analysis. The audience at first were divided into Conservatives, members of the Conservative Party; Labors, members of the Labor Party, that forms with the Conservative Party the two main pillars of the UK political system; and, the float-voters, members of other minor Parties and/ or those with no clear political affiliation. This was also problematic learning that both Boris Johnson, the leader of the Vote Leave Campaign was a

Conservative, working against the *Remain* Campaign, that was led by David Cameron the UK Prime Minister at the time, who was also a Conservative. Which suggests that there were two wings inside the Conservative Party that had different visions for the UK's future in the EU. Therefore, similarly, as in the US case, I chose to divide the audience, not based on their political affiliation, but rather, to their individual take on the Brexit referendum. This resulted in categorizing the audience in the UK into Brexiteers, people that are strongly in favor of the UK leaving the EU, also described as Eurosceptics (Hobolt, 2016); non-Brexiteers, people that are not in favor of the UK leaving the EU and want it to *Remain*; and finally, float-voters, those who do not have strong opinions about Brexit and were still making their decision about what to vote.

The following of this second categorization logic, - I found, has led to a more useful account of how people in both countries would receive the ads, and thus, allowed to infer in a more reliable manner what the ads creators were intending during the creation of the ads from it. This was particularly useful while analyzing advertisements when the attacks launched were indirect, at least to one or more of the described audience categories. For example, the Vote Leave ads that mentioned other countries names claiming that they will join the EU, and making comparisons between the annual wages in the UK and these countries, to a Brexiteer, this ad is likely to be considered an advocacy ad because of how the attack is left for the reader to infer based on their personal background.

The ads fell in one out of three categorize as defined by Lilleker (2006). The following questions determined which category the ads fell into. Who the subject of the ad? (Sponsor/ opponent/ both). In the case of the ad focusing on the sponsor, the ad is marked as an advocacy ad; if the ad is focused on the opponent, the ad is marked as a negative ad; in the case where the ads focuses on both and in making comparisons, the ad is coded as a contrast ad.

3.3.3 Text analysis

The next stage was to conduct the text analysis. In this stage, the text content of the Facebook ads and the TV ads were analyzed for their rhetorical appeals as a means to persuading readers. This analysis was conducted in a theoretically informed manner. For example, the text would be analyzed by looking for the three rhetorical proofs of logos, ethos, and pathos as mentioned by Yunis (2018). To illustrate, the analysis was conducted by looking in every sentence for a rhetorical appeal. To make the analysis as systematic as possible, a set of questions were answered, and the answers determined the latent or manifest

rhetorical appeals. This was particularly useful in the cases where the rhetorical appeals were not clear. For example, in some cases, it was not clear enough if the author -agent- was appealing to emotions (pathos) or reasoning (logos) from the first round of coding, and the guiding question helped determine which appeal was more salient.

Table 1: *How to measure rhetorical appeals*

Rhetorical appeal	Questions	Example
Ethos	Does the agent appeal to speaker credibility? (Yes/No), If yes, how?	
	Does the agent appeal to speaker authority? (Yes/No), If yes, what?	
	Does the agent provide important information?	To accuse the opponent in passed events.
Pathos	Does the agent appeal to emotions?	
	What emotions does the agent appeal to?	Nationalism: the use of words that imply inclusion such as: we, us, let's, etc.
Logos	Does the agent appeal to reasoning?	
	What idea/s the agent is conveying to the reader?	

Initially, I tried Atlas.ti software to conduct the analysis of the sample. Due to that I was not able to categorize the measured sub-concepts during the analysis, I started to upload the Facebook advertisements on Word Office and made a table to include the concepts. This was a better solution; however, it was still insufficient in terms of including all the concepts in one table. Therefore, I used Office Excel. Then, I assigned a code for every advertisement that corresponds to its group and sequence. For example, advertisement number 2.14, the first number (2) indicates that the advertisement falls in group-two (Trump Facebook advertisements), and the second number (14) indicates the advertisement's sequence in its group.

3.3.4 Visual analysis

The next analysis method was the visual analysis, that together with the text analysis, forms the multimodal analysis for the Facebook ads in group one and two. Due to the size of this thesis, this was not conducted in groups three and four, unless something significant needed to be added. The visual analysis examined the images that complimented the text present in the Facebook ads. The analysis started by looking first at what is in focus in the

image, then looked at the background that might be blurred but still have some meaning, for example, a blurred American flag or the EU flag. The combination of the rhetorical analysis of the text and the visual analysis resulted in identifying the presented appeals in these ads. In some cases, the focus was on one rhetorical appeal, this was especially present in the ads that had a strong nationalistic appeal (pathos), e.g., an American flag behind Trump.

3.3.5 Rhetorical strategies

The next step was to identify the salient rhetorical strategies in the text. These rhetorical strategies are part of the persuasion techniques used with readers. This was done by weighing and identifying the types of arguments present in the text to determine its logic. This helped in identifying the seven rhetorical strategies that are usually present in online disinformation campaigns as identified by Alphillipie et al. (2018). The first form of arguments is the deductive argument. This type of arguments is structured in a way where if the premises are true, the conclusion must be true (Goel, Gold, Kapur & Houle, 1997). For example, if $A=B$, and $B=C$, therefore, $A=C$. This is the simplest form of a deductive argument. Deductive arguments can be valid or invalid arguments. A valid argument is a sort of deductive arguments where the correctness of the premises determines the correctness of the conclusion of the argument. For example, Tom is a man. All men are mortal. Therefore, Tom is mortal. This argument is valid because the premises used are true. On the other hand, invalid arguments are the ones that have the structure of a deductive argument, however, contain false reasoning because the premises are not true. For example, all those who like fishing are alive. Mark is alive. Therefore, Mark likes fishing. In this argument the premises are correct, however, the conclusion does not fall logically from the argument, therefore, the argument is invalid. Further, a deductive argument can be a sound or an unsound argument (Fohr, 1979). For a deductive argument to be sound, all premises of the argument must be true, and the argument is valid (Fohr, 1979). For example, Rotterdam is in the Netherlands. Sarah is in Rotterdam. Therefore, Sarah is in the Netherlands. This argument is a sound argument because the premises are true and valid. An argument can be valid but unsound, for example, Rotterdam is in Belgium. Sarah is in Rotterdam. Therefore, Sarah is in Belgium. This argument is valid because the conclusion falls logically from the premises. However, the first premise is not true that Rotterdam is in Belgium. Therefore, the argument is not sound. Another type of arguments is the inductive arguments. Inductive arguments are the ones built on the notion that the strength of the premises increases the likelihood of having a correct conclusion (Fohr, 1979). For example, eleven apples out of twelve in the bag are red apples.

Tom will pick an apple at random from the bag. Therefore, Tom will pick a red apple. This is an example of an inductive argument that is also a strong argument. However, the strength of an argument is relative from a person to another and is determined according to prior beliefs (Fohr, 1979). Furthermore, inductive arguments, including to being strong or weak arguments, they can be cogent or non-cogent arguments. For an argument to be cogent, it has to have true premises and the premises must be strong (Fohr, 1979). For example, most people in the Netherlands like eating fries. Rotterdam is in the Netherlands. Therefore, a randomly chosen person in Rotterdam will like fries. The use of the word most indicates that not all people in the Netherlands like fries, thus, not making an absolute generalization. Also, the argument is built in a way to convince the interpreter that there is a high *probability* due to that *most* of the people in the Netherlands like fries. Therefore, increasing the chance of convincing the interpreter with the argument by increasing the likelihood of the premises. Therefore, this argument is strong and cogent.

By identifying the type of arguments used in the advertisements, I was able to identify some of the rhetorical strategies in the advertisements. Lying, is a common rhetorical strategy in online disinformation (Alphillipie et al, 2019). By identifying type of argument and then identifying the correctness of the premises, it was easier to identify rhetorical strategies such as lying. While most ads were categorized as disinformation in the two studied cases, this form of analysis helped identify other rhetorical strategies that were interwoven with lying (e.g., cherry picking and ad hominem).

3.3.6 General tone

For the general tone used in the ads, this was determined according to the choice of words, and/or tone. For example, does the text address the readers in a formal manner? This was determined by the language used in the text. For example, does the advertisement address the readers collectively? (if the answer is yes, the ad would be coded as using a formal tone). Also, the general tone determined by the tone voice that was used in terms of the first/second or third person. Finally, does the agent speak using words that imply inclusion such as we, us, our, and own? and so on and so forth. Identifying the general tone helped in supporting the rhetorical appeals analysis of the text. For example, the use of the formal tone sometimes indicated the use of (knowledge) authority appeals (ethos).

3.3.7 Counterevidence

Next, was the look for counter evidence in both the texts and the visuals. The main focus was to find if any component of the ad may imply a different interpretation or appeal differently than the one that is most salient, and therefore, was labeled to the text or visual as counterevidence.

3.3.8 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is one of the qualitative research methods that allows finding patterns and meanings in texts that would otherwise be invisible (Boeije, 2010). Furthermore, it allows to capture explicit and implicit themes in a text (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Boeije, 2010). I decided to add thematic analysis as a second analysis method to support the results for the rhetorical analysis when applicable and was conducted for the Facebook ads only (groups one and two). This was due to the size of this project and to the large size of the TV ads analyzed.

Thematic analysis in this research was conducted by applying the Grounded Theory approach. That is, to drive the analysis from what emerges from the data rather than existing literature (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In other words, the analysis was done in an inductive manner in which the codes emerge from the data. Unlike the rhetorical analysis where the analysis is conducted in a deductive way by looking for the specific features of the persuasion proofs (ethos, logos, and pathos) or techniques that are theoretically informed. The combination of the two methods, rhetorical analysis and thematic analysis, was chosen for the purpose of comparing the analysis outcome, a process known as triangulation (Silverman, 2011). This according to Silverman (2011) may increase the credibility of the research results.

Open coding

The thematic analysis started in its first phase by capturing the main theme, if present, in every sentence of the text (Boeije, 2010). Furthermore, open coding of the text “is the process of ‘breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data’” (Strauss & Corbin, 2007 as cited in Boeije, 2010, p. 96). This phase started by reading the text to start the emerging process within the data (Boeije, 2010). This helped me getting familiar with the data being analyzed and therefore, be more aware of it. Next, the text was reread while paying attention to every theme present in, if any, in every sentence (Boeije,

2010). This phase resulted in open codes that represent the main themes/ ideas that were present either explicitly or implicitly in the data (Boeije, 2010).

Axial coding

This is the second phase of the analysis. Boeije (2010) rationalizes the axial coding by acknowledging that “the primary purpose of axial coding is to determine which elements in the research are dominant ones and which are less important ones” (p. 109). This phase has allowed not only to eliminate the redundant open codes that may have emerged in the first round of coding, but also allowed to find common themes that together start defining thematic patterns in the data. This phase resulted in thematic categories that were constructed from the open codes that were found to be relevant in answering the research question.

Selective coding

The third and final phase is known as selective coding. This phase aims at defining any present relationships between the dominant themes that were previously identified and any possible concepts or main themes. This, Boeije (2010) argues, is achieved by identifying repetitive themes, the main messages present in the data, and how they relate to each other.

The coding process was done on all four predefined groups separately, and the results of every group was compared the corresponding group. This helped define the shared themes that were present in the four groups. By doing so, I was able to compare what each campaign focused on in their messages. In turn, this revealed the general topics that shaped the major media strategy of each campaign.

3.4 Reliability, validity and credibility

3.4.1 Credibility

Under the title “Critics of scientific credibility” (p. 353), Silverman (2011) weighted the arguments made against the credibility of qualitative research. For example, critics argue, according to Silverman (2011), that due to that scholars getting involved in a personal and intensive manner in the analysis process of qualitative data, which in turn, ultimately affects the credibility of the scholar’s work. Silverman (2011) concluded that this claim is paradoxical and refuted it because this personal and intensive involvement also applies to quantitative research, regardless of the methodology, and if to be taken to be true, makes the notion of research, redundant.

In this thesis, I was heavily overwhelmed with the sample for several reasons. First, coming from the Middle East, and not being in the countries where the two events happened,

I was only receiving information from media outlets. Because media outlets have editorial policies that reflected on the content they produced, this entailed that my understanding of the events was in a way or another affected by these media outlets' opinions expressed by their commentators. In other words, my personal construction of events, may relatively been affected by the construction of others related to the two campaigns. Therefore, I do indeed believe that this might have had an effect where I was, subconsciously and unintentionally, biased against the two campaigns. I have adopted some ethical guidelines developed by Scott (1967) that I assumed will, in a systematic way, lower the chances of personal bias to reflect negatively on the analysis of the sample. These guidelines will be presented shortly. Secondly, the lack of knowledge is relative, and when present, might easily distort the outcome of the analysis. What is problematic about the lack of knowledge is that a researcher is likely not be aware of it when it happens. The aforementioned ethical guideline had helped me overcome, I assume, many of the times where things were not clear, because I had to look for outside sources (journalistic) to eliminate as much as I can the lack of knowledge. More illustration on this point will follow.

3.4.2 Validity

Validity refers to the extent to which the measurement of the data is accurate (Silverman, 2011). In other words, how accurate is the analysis process accurate in measuring the data in the way it was intended to. Furthermore, Silverman (2011) assessed the notion of qualitative research validity and concluded that due to the interpretive nature of the data in qualitative research, including quantitative research, validity in qualitative research is, to various degrees, achievable. Moreover, the use of triangulation in the form of combining both rhetorical and thematic analysis provided a more structural approach and deeper insight during the analysis.

Finally, it is important to note here, that Silverman (2011) pointed out, among other things, to the role that the researcher's personal values play in the process of interpreting data. Given the nature of the datasets of this research being connected to populist groups from the UK and the US that are known for being hostile, in their discourse, against people that come from certain regions (e.g., South America, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, etc.), ethnicities (e.g., Black or Brown), religious groups (e.g., Muslims and Jews), it was clear to myself that personal bias might reflect consciously or unconsciously on the interpretation of the sample.

Populist politicians, especially those that hold authoritarian values such as Donald Trump, tend to gain political power over their opponents by agitating the masses against the political establishment in a country (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). My personal view on democracy extends beyond people's vote to the unwritten social contracts of mutual living. I adopt the definition of democracy by Norris and Inglehart (2019) where these unwritten social agreements in a democratic society includes mutual tolerance, culture of acceptance, and is a society that is constantly keen to protect itself from extremist culture/s. Also, I see democracy as a system in which ethnic and religious minorities are protected and are empowered to live a 'normal' life including, among other things, the participation in the political system. This entails that the society, as I see it, should reject populist movements that holds authoritarian values (e.g., xenophobia) that constantly focus their hate speech on specific groups in order to gain political power.

During the analysis of the sample, I indeed encountered some ads that used, what I consider, hate speech against others. I tried as much as I could to be aware of this, and not making my personal views on democracy affect the interpretation of the sample.

3.4.3 Reliability

"Reliability refers to the degree to which the findings of a study are independent of accidental circumstances of their production" (Kirk & Miller, 1986 as cited in Silverman, 2011, p. 360). In other words, reliability in qualitative research is related to both the measurements used in the analysis, and therefore, to what extent the study is replicable; and the circumstances that may affect the interpretation. For example, a scale that gives the same measurement for the same person every time is a reliable scale. Assuming no other changes in the person's weight, and that the scale is correct, or, valid. And because qualitative research is different than scales, according to Moisander and Valtonen (2006) as cited in Silverman (2011), a qualitative researcher should be transparent about the analysis process so the reader of the research report would be able to judge how reliable the findings of the research are. Furthermore, a researcher should make explicit their theoretical stance on topics that emerge during the analysis by paying attention to the used theoretical framework. Therefore, I have relied on the guidelines developed by Scott (1967) in his thesis, *rhetoric as epistemic*, to remedy any personal biases, lack of knowledge or other inside or outside factors that might risk the integrity and reliability of the interpretation of the sample.

3.4.4 Rhetoric-as-epistemic

Such concerns discussed in the reliability section were also at the center of Scott's (1967) essay titled '*On viewing rhetoric as epistemic*'. As just mentioned, I relayed on the guidelines developed by Scott (1967) that, realistically, if applied, safeguards, to a large extent, the reliability of a research that rhetorical analysis is its main analysis method. Scott (1967) argued that knowledge is never certain and, absolute certainty is not achievable due to different factors. For example, he stated facts such as that knowledge can be limited, partial and changing. Also, he pointed that rhetoric is usually involved in debates that is naturally involved in struggle, conflict and disagreement. Therefore, Scott (1967) concluded that rhetoric is contingent and thus, no matter how systematic the analysis of the text is, it will contain flaws. Accordingly, Scott (1967) defined a set of ethical guidelines that will improve the rhetorical analysis of a studied text. The ethical guidelines provided by Scott (1967) are as follows: *toleration*, that is, to be open for the best possible interpretation in favor of the author of the text, he explains "on the other hand, uncertainty, taking truth as a toehold to climb into the yet-to-be-created rather than is a program to unfold regardless of the circumstances, demands toleration" (p.16). The next guideline is *will*, that is the intention one has to learn and act, or as Scott (1967) puts it "if one cannot be certain, however, then one must either withdraw from conflicts of life or find some way to act in the face of these conflicts" (p. 16). Finally, *responsibility*, that is, that one must be responsible to "make his acts the best possible" (p. 17) in the case of working in uncertain situations. These ethical guidelines were implemented during the analysis of the texts to ensure, on the most basic level, avoiding personal bias as much as possible.

5 Results

In this section, I underscore the rhetorical techniques and functions, including the rhetorical appeals, used by each campaign in the sample. Then, I review the results of the thematic analysis that answer the main research question of this thesis. First, it is important to note that the majority of the ads analyzed have been fact-checked by independent and/or official bodies and were categorized as containing disinformation news.

5.1 Group 1

Rhetorical techniques

Rhetorical functions

Group one consisted of the dark ads on Facebook from both the Vote Leave Campaign and the BeLeave Campaign analyzed to answer the sub-question: What were the rhetorical techniques used by the Vote Leave Campaign during the Brexit referendum in the UK in 2016 in their Facebook advertisements?

The answer to this question was determined by several factors that took place during the analysis phases. The rhetorical functions of the ads in this group centered around setting the reader's agenda about how harmful the EU was to the UK. This was done in the attempt to persuade the reader that the EU is a 'corrupt system' that is severely harming the UK on many levels. The final conclusion about this group is that the Vote Leave Campaign relied heavily on rhetorical techniques that provided short and focused information that stroke certain cords. The main rhetorical technique was the *emotionalization* of the reader's experience (nationalism and anger) to *mobilize* the public opinion in the UK against the EU, mainly by feeding people's anger in terms of controversial topics. By doing so, the Vote Leave Campaign was likely aiming at 1) establishing trust with the readers by showing themselves as caring for and on the same side as the voters, thus providing reason why the voters should trust the campaign and that the UK should leave the EU; and 2) shaping the reader's perception that the EU is a burden on the UK in the form of deregulating immigration, restricting the UK's sovereignty, draining its economy and diminishing its younger generations' future opportunities.

The advertisements were also focused on feeding the reader's negativity bias and appealed to certain strong emotions. The short and focused information that discussed topics of high sophistication such as immigration that entails ideology, culture and economy were deliberately discussed in a superficial and an abstract style. The feeding of the negativity bias

was linked to the immense use of first-order principles in the advertisements and during the absence of reliable information about second-order principles.

Figure 1: example of the multimodal analysis (kindly zoom in to be able to read content)

The main text implies that the EU has full control over the UK and is causing harm to the whole country and its trade. This argument is valid because it follows the structure of a valid argument (the EU is blocking control)									
Number	Group	Country	Text motivation	Type of ad	Agent: message interpreter (AMI)	Text analysis	Visual analysis	Rhetorical appeal (according to strength)	Salient rhetoric
1	1	UK	This ad was one of the ads designed by AggregateIQ for the Vote Leave campaign and was posted on Facebook for the purpose of the Brexit referendum in 2016.	Attack ad against the EU	Agent: Vote Leave campaign. Message: The EU is blocking the British sovereignty over the country and its trade and therefore, should leave the EU. Interpreter: the UK citizens (Brexiters) who are not Brexiters and float-voters. Note to self (the interpreter) here are UK citizens only because they were the main focus of persuasion for the Vote Leave campaign in the first place, people from other countries came as a secondary importance in this case, thus, not really spoken to in these ads.	1- "Let's take back control over our economy and trade" implies the absence of British sovereignty over their "economy and trade, thus, gives a sense of lost control over their country. Therefore, appealing to nationalist emotions and values (pathos). 2- "Vote leave" is not only the name of the campaign with "Take control" is the campaign's slogan. It also appeals to emotions and values of nationalism because it implies taking action for the sake of the country (pathos). 3- "Stop the EU now" implies that there is something undesirable coming from the EU, and that the voter has the power to stop it. It urges the audience to take leadership and "protect" their country against the EU, thus, appealing to nationalist emotions and values (pathos).	1- The ad shows Brits walking proudly in their country. 2- A sunny background to imply cheerfulness. 3- The Brits walking together in their country to convey a feeling of unity. Therefore, appealing to emotions of unity, in this context, the values of nationalism (pathos).	Pathos	The main tax control over to the whole argument is structure of blocking control is harming beneficial for the EU, because it is therefore it deception back control that is used out of the EU
2	1	UK	This ad was one of the ads designed by AggregateIQ for the Vote Leave campaign and was posted on Facebook for the purpose of the Brexit referendum in 2016.	Brexiters: positive ad. Non-Brexiters: attack ad against the EU. Float voters: likely to be seen as attack ad against the EU.	Agent: Vote Leave campaign. Message: The money sent to the EU on weekly basis (£350 million) should be spent on British priorities such as the NHS to improve the general conditions of the hospitals in the UK. Interpreter: the UK citizens.	"Let's give the NHS the £350 million we hand over to the EU every week". Implies that the UK does not benefit from its EU membership, and that the NHS should have priority for spending the country's resources. Moreover, the amount projected (£350 million) is a very large amount of money, when adding to the information that it is spent on weekly basis it is likely to be faced with rejection from the owners (UK citizens). Finally, the speaker providing a figure (£350 million) gives the speaker credibility for knowing what they are talking about (ethos) and overall, the UK citizens should benefit from this money by triggering nationalist emotions (pathos).	1- A doctor that might be English, but is not Caucasian that has strict face impressions, two muslim females that work as receptionists wearing hijab. In the background the hospital seems a bit crowded. Therefore, giving "arguably" a negative vibe about the back then- current NHS hospitals conditions under the membership in the EU. Thus, appealing to nationalistic emotions (pathos), and by providing an image of how the agent perceives the condition of the NHS hospitals is because of the membership of the EU is appealing to the interpreter's reasoning (logos). 2- What seems to be an English medical doctor (caucasian) is at the reception looking into a computer, thus, implying that the receptionists are not doing their job and conveying a feeling of messiness, thus, appealing to the interpreter's reasoning (logos).	(Pathos, logos, and ethos).	The argument does not cover "Vote leave, 1 slogan of the rhetorical story
3	1	UK	This ad was one of the ads designed by AggregateIQ for the Vote Leave campaign and was posted on Facebook for the purpose of the Brexit referendum in 2016.	Brexiters: positive ad. Non-Brexiters: attack ad against the EU. Float voters: likely to be seen as attack ad against the EU.	Agent: Vote Leave campaign. Message: UK money should not be spent on other EU nations, and should be spent on UK citizens instead. Interpreter: the UK citizens.	1- "Stop sending £350 million to the EU every single week". The text is being said using a commanding tone, consequently, the next sentence "Spend it on our priorities instead" combined with the previous one appeals to nationalistic emotions as the speaker's message is that (we are one and our money should be spent on us), thus, appealing to emotions (pathos). 2- The use of the figure £350 million is appealing to knowledge authority (logos).	The word "stop" is written in an all capital letters. And is put in a red rectangle, thus, seeming as a stop-sign. Stop-signs are usually put by a higher authority to stop one from hurting oneself or others, thus, conveying an underlying sense of fear (pathos).	(pathos and logos)	The argument does not cover "Vote leave, 1 slogan of the rhetorical story
4	1	UK	This ad was one of the ads designed by AggregateIQ for the Vote Leave campaign and was posted on Facebook for the purpose of the Brexit referendum in 2016.	Brexiters: positive ad. Non-Brexiters: attack ad against the EU. Float voters: likely to be seen as attack ad against the EU.	Agent: Vote Leave. Message: UK money should not be spent on other EU nations, and should be spent on UK citizens instead. Interpreter: the UK citizens.	1- "Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey are joining the EU". What is common in these mentioned countries that they are poor countries, have Muslim majorities or both. Consequently, the word "seriously" has a sarcastic tone, which is used in a derogatory way this should be something undesired and should be prevented. Combining the two texts together appeals to nationalistic emotions (pathos). The underlying tone of nationalism aims at making the interpreter question what will happen in the case of the aforementioned countries join the EU and what the future of the NHS will look like, thus, appealing to nationalist emotions (pathos).	A female doctor looking disappointed while mentioning the names of the aforementioned countries that the agent perceives and projects in a negative manner. Thus, conveying the emotion of disappointment (pathos). 2- The countries names are a black background and the black color refers to darkness, thus conveying the emotion of fear (pathos). 3- The word "seriously" is in a red background which is not only the theme color for the Vote Leave campaign, but also conveys the feeling of alertness and appealing to the emotion of fear (pathos).	(pathos and logos)	The argument i countries are EU and might sound because to speculate remains in the join, thus app emotions (pat is correcting deception. It also used as

Type of advertisements

To non-Brexiters and float-voters, the ads were remarkably negative (attack) advertisements. The use of negative ads was linked to the first aim of establishing trust with the reader by ushering the reader to the negative impacts of the EU on the UK in a direct or indirect way. Negative ads in group-one seemed to focus the attacks related to economy and UK taxpayers' money on three different levels. The first level was to attack the integrity of the EU by targeting the integrity of the very people that compose the EU itself (officials and bureaucrats). The aim of the attacks launched on this level were likely to create and/or feed the UK citizens' *anger* on economic grounds which entailed the extensive use of appeals to reasoning (logos), and the strong emotions of anger, fear, and prejudice (pathos). For example, ads 1.14 and 1.15.

Figure 2: *ad 1.14*



Figure 3: *ad 1.15*



The second level was to target the EU also based on economy and tax money; however, the attacks were in an indirect way. The aim of these ads was apparently to create public anger against the EU like on the first level but added a layer of sophistication by

adding the immigration topic to it. By adding the immigration topic to these ads, the agent (content creator) was likely aiming at feeding the reader's negativity bias, fear and prejudice. The main rhetorical appeals were reasoning (logos), explicitly, and emotions (pathos) of fear and anger, implicitly. For example, in ads 1.6, 1.7 and 1.8.

Figure 4: ad 1.6

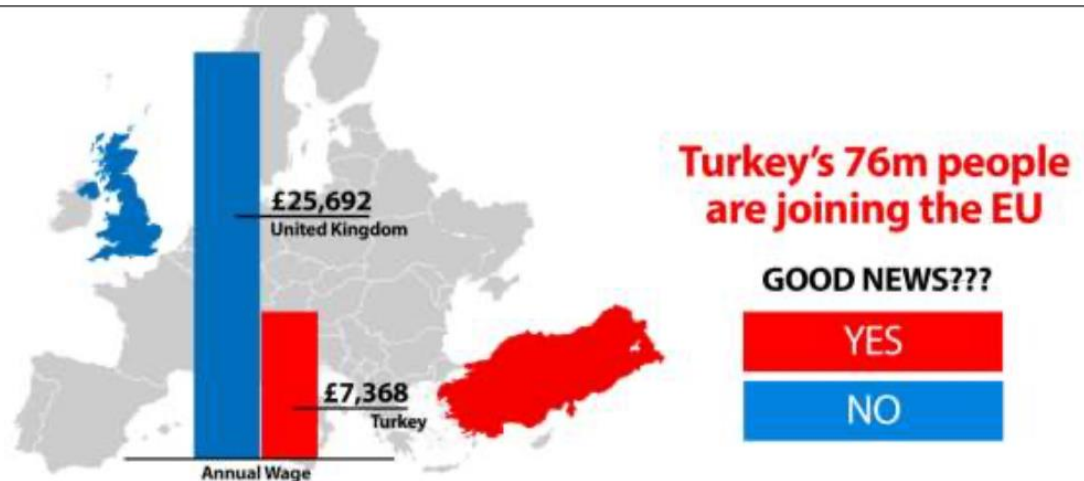


Figure 5: ad 1.7

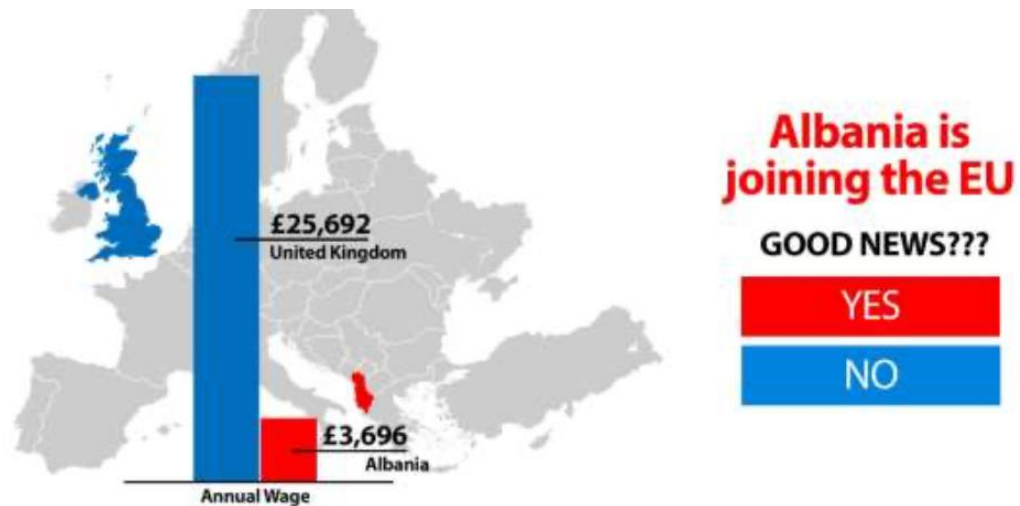
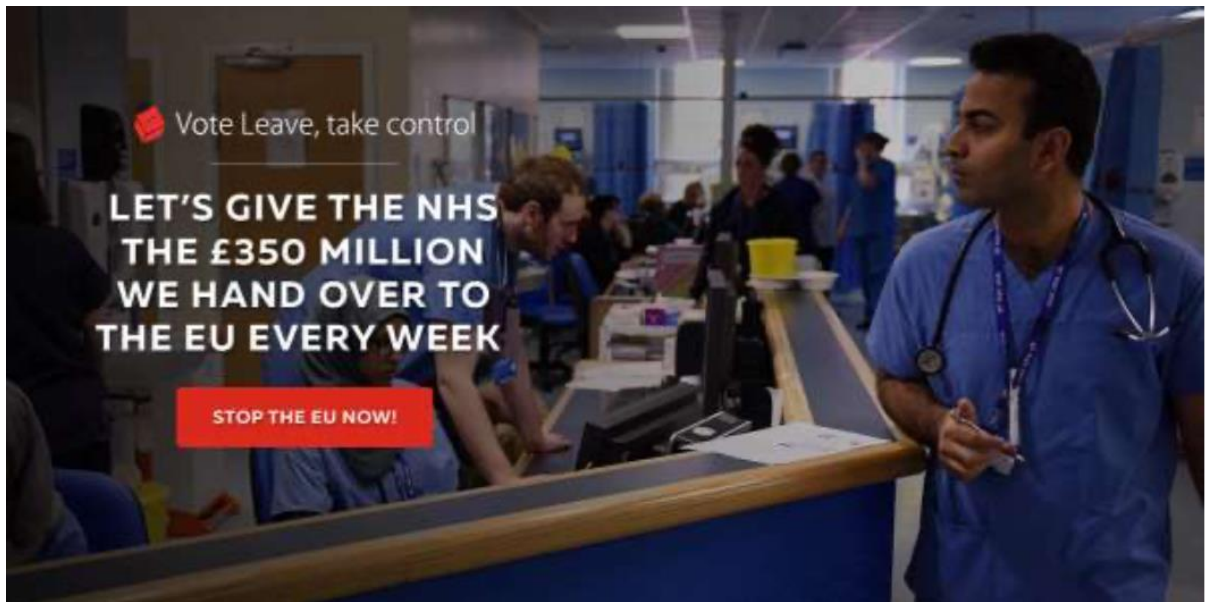


Figure 6: ad 1.8



The third level were also indirect attack ads on the EU that asked the UK citizens to stop sending the UK money to the EU or potential EU countries, and that this is achieved by the UK leaving the EU which will allow the UK government to spend their money on the UK citizens instead. The aim of this set of ads was to appeal to the UK citizen's reasoning (logos) by contrasting their own interest against the interest of the people of EU member states or yet-to-be member states. In this level, the appeal to nationalism and anger (pathos) were the most salient, parallelly, was the appeal to reasoning (logos). For example, in ad 1.2 "LET'S GIVE THE NHS THE £350 MILLION WE HAND OVER TO THE EU EVERY WEEK [in the background a crowded hospital with a doctor that seems to be from a Middle Eastern decent, looking in charge while what seems to be a Caucasian British doctor with a stethoscope is at the counter doing administrative work which gives the reader a sense of chaos in the British health system (NHS) due to its membership in the EU. A faded image of the administrative workers that appear to be two Muslim females wearing Hijab to appeal to anger against immigration in the UK due to the membership of the EU]".

Figure 7: ad 1.2



Also, in ad 1.3 the agent is both appealing to knowledge authority (ethos) by mentioning figures, and to reasoning (logos) by providing alternative solutions to what they portray as problems in the face of the UK “STOP sending £350 million to the EU every single week. **Spend it on our priorities instead.** [The EU flag faded in the background]”.

Figure 8: ad 1.3



Similarly, in one of the BeLeave Campaign ads (1.25) “We send £10 billion to the EU every year. Let’s spend it on out priorities instead. [In the background an image that seems to be taken from the iconic London Bridge looking over the London Eye, Big Ben and other historical buildings of London such as the British Parliament, in an attempt to appeal to nationalism (pathos)]”.

Figure 9: ad 1.25



Rhetorical appeals

Here I review the results of the multimodal analysis of the texts and visuals of the ads analyzed.

It is important to note here that the appeal to credibility (ethos) was intertwined and was always used in combination with other appeals. The appeal to speaker credibility (ethos) was not repeated in the ads as much as the other two appeal (logos and pathos), however, due to the inherent rhetorical function of the ads serving as enthymemes, the light use of knowledge authority (ethos) was considerably focused and perhaps, effective. Enthymeme is understood here as the absence of a premise in the argument that the agent assumes the reader is aware of regardless of their agreement or disagreement on the topics discussed and, is a form of deductive reasoning with the reader that allows the agent to make unsupported claims (Yunis, 2018). Therefore, the appeals to speaker credibility (ethos), especially in the form of appealing to knowledge authority was, despite of the limited use, an effective way to communicate with Brexiteers on one side, and float-voters on the other. The effectiveness of knowledge authority on Brexiteers was for the rhetorical function of feeding confirmation bias, because of the information it provided, and on float-voters by attempting to shape their perceptions about how reliable the Vote Leave Campaign politicians are from one side, and their perceptions on the topics discussed on the other. In other words, the agent used the credibility appeals (ethos) in a propagandist manner to create social barriers between UK voters on the aforementioned main topics (economy, immigration and UK's future in the EU) between the three categories of voters.

For the ads that appealed to fear about the future were mainly the ads made by the BeLeave Campaign that were set to target the younger voters. The use of fear appeals, however, was not straightforward, especially when combining the texts with the background images on the ads. In these ads, the agent used negative texts in combination with positive background images, which was confusing in the multimodal analysis phase (e.g., ad 1.17). The appeal to emotions (based on topics) were complemented with appeals to reasoning (logos). It was common among the BeLeave Campaign ads that it did not contain any direct slogans or instructions that urged the reader's to 'vote leave'. These ads were likely designed as a window to draw the readers' attention to specific topic (agenda-setting). Markable in these ads is how they also were used for voter-learning. For example, in ad 1.16 "We should make our laws, not far away, unelected bureaucrats. [click link to] LEARN MORE [in the background a large leg wearing the Union Jack flag kicking a small sized man holding the EU flag in his hands]". The use of words such as (we and our) were used to give the reader a sense of collectivity and appeals to nationalism.

Figure 10: 1.16



Also, in ad 1.17 "*We need an immigration system that ensures British young people more jobs [click the link] I AGREE [in the background a young brown British female that looks from a different origin smiling while being in a metro train]*" (own emphasis). Similarly, ad 1.22 "The EU is restricting *us* from unleashing the kind of innovation which creates jobs and grows *our* economy [a man looking like a businessman holding a briefcase

while chained to an iron ball that has the EU flag]” (own emphasis). Besides the light emotionalization function of these ads, the main function appeared to be agenda setting and voter-learning.

Figure 11: ad 1.17



The deference of the language used between the Vote Leave Campaign advertisements and the BeLeave Campaign advertisements is that the latter were attempting to reason with the younger generations more than directing them -even if it contained disinformation- while the former were more instructive for the older generations to leave the EU. This deference in the language used marked the different political strategies employed to communicate with the different generations of voters, thus, marking the different approaches of ad design. In other words, the BeLeave Campaign ads were more advocacy ads than negative ads due to the type of audience they were appealing to. Moreover, the BeLeave ads seemed to be more effective in voter-learning because it functioned on two levels. The first is the visible ad with the information it conveyed; the second was the button containing the hyperlink (e.g., “LEARN MORE”) which allowed the reader to move to another webpage that contained more information about the topic discussed in the original ad. On the other hand, while the Vote Leave ads also contained hyperlink buttons, they were mostly corresponding to the information provided in the ads itself (e.g., “JOIN ME, VOTE LEAVE” or “STOP THE EU NOW!”), thus, the agent seemed to assume that the reader is already in agreement with the information provided on the ads of the Vote Leave Campaign ads, thus, seemed to assume the reader was in consent with the information provided.

Finally, while Both Vote Leave and BeLeave campaigns were related and led by the same people, it was clear from the advertisements in group-one that the Vote Leave Campaign ads were much more negative (attack) ads than the BeLeave ones.

Thematic analysis

The thematic analysis of Facebook advertisements in group-one revealed the main messages the Vote Leave Campaign and its sub-campaign BeLeave focused on during their campaigning through the Brexit event. These topics were categorized under the selective codes *national threats* and *UK's future*. The two selective themes correspond to the results of the multimodal rhetorical analysis of this group on how the ads were used to set the reader's agenda around specific topics in order to *mobilize* the public opinion in the UK against the EU. The prioritizing of these topics reinforces the notion that the Vote Leave Campaign aimed at emotionalizing the reader's experience to win them on their side, and thus, gain political support despite that the initial codes of this group at first sight revealed the strong reasoning aspect of the ads.

National threats

Ads in group-one suggest that the EU possesses national threats to the UK and its own sovereignty. These threats pointed to by the Vote Leave Campaign were in the form of unregulated immigration, EU restrictions on various levels, and the lack of control over laws imposed by the European Parliament set by "unelected bureaucrats" (ad. 1.16).

By framing the EU as a threat, the Vote Leave Campaign framed the EU as negative, harmful and is in conflict with the UK's interest. This anti-European sentiment that likely sought to scotomize the Brexiteers and float-voters against the non-Brexiteers not only by emotionalizing the reader's experience but also by *blocking* information about the benefits the UK gets in return of its membership in the EU.

The emotionalization of the readers were identified based on the topics the ads discussed. This emotionalization was mainly on two levels. The first was nationalistic in nature. For example, *regaining control* which was one of the highly repeated themes and was not only repeated in the Vote Leave Campaign's slogan "Vote Leave, Take Control" or "Vote Leave, Take Back Control", but also in the content of the ads. In ad 1.12 "Immigration must be controlled by those who the public elect and not the EU! On the 23 June they will get their chance to take back control". This ad also provides a good example of how the topics discussed in the ads were multidimensional as the ad discussed immigration, lack of control on laws, and regaining control. Also, the same ad encapsulates how first-order principles were used.

The second level of emotionalization was framing the EU as a source of constant threat. For example, in ad 1.6, 1.7, 1.8 and 1.9 that aimed to raise the readers' levels of anxiety and fear.

Table 2: Thematic analysis codes

Selective theme	Axial code	Initial codes	Selective theme	Axial code	Initial code
National threats	Sovereignty	Recovering control	UK's Future	Economic future	Economy and trade
		EU threat			Tax money abuse
		Immigration control			Spending priorities
		EU restrictions			Economic priorities
		British international relations			
Selective Theme	Axial code	Initial code			
UK's future	People's future	British youth future			
		Personal growth			
		Young Immigrants			

UK's future

The second selective theme that emerged from the data was suggested by the immense focus on how the UK would look like outside of the EU. The campaign -especially the BeLeave Campaign ads, focused of showing a bright image of the UK outside of the EU. This was attributed to the targeted audience of this sub-campaign in the first place. This theme was mainly used in the ads that seemed more positive to the Brexiteers, while slightly seemed to be attack ads for the non-Brexiteers and float-voters.

The emotionalization of the readers through framing a bright UK's future outside the EU was of high frequency in the BeLeave ads, which was also attributed to the age segment that this campaign targeted.

5.2 Group two

Rhetorical techniques

Group two consisted of the Facebook's post advertisements that were available on the official Donald Trump Facebook Page. These ads were analyzed to answer the sub-question: what were the rhetorical techniques used by the Trump presidential campaign during the United States Presidential Elections in 2016 in their Facebook posts advertisements?

Rhetorical functions

The rhetorical functions of these ads centered also around setting the readers agenda about certain topics and, feeding both negativity and confirmation bias. The agenda-setting technique was used to persuade the readers that Donald Trump is credible enough -by appealing to knowledge authority (ethos)- to become president of the U.S. and 'bring back the American glory'; the other side of the agenda-setting was done by focusing the ads, sometimes specified and the others more general and abstract, on issues with Hillary Clinton in terms of *personal ability* and *integrity*. Voter-learning was an essential part of the ads that attacked Clintons ability and integrity, at least in the ads that contained more specified information. By doing so, the Trump 2016 Campaign was likely aiming at: 1) shaping the reader's perception about Clinton as an 'insider politician' that is corrupt and lacks ability to perform the presidential tasks; and simultaneously 2) build the credibility of Trump as a trustworthy candidate that would be able to perform the presidential tasks.

It is important to note here that in this group, the rhetorical functions (voter-learning, emotional appeals, and agenda-setting) were highly interwoven, and were all employed in the negative (attack) ads that will be reviewed shortly.

The final conclusion about this group is that: 1) the Trump campaign weaponized these ads to launch strong personal attacks on Hillary Clinton on several levels from one side; and 2) to build Trump's image as a trustworthy candidate from the other.

Type of advertisements

More than half of the ads were explicit attack ads to all readers' categories (pro-Trump, pro-Hillary, and float-voters). Unlike the attack on an official body in group-one

(EU), the attacks in group-two were personalized against Clinton on many levels. The first level was the attack on Clinton's personal ability to hold office. This was in the attempt to persuade the reader that Clinton is not able to perform the tasks the presidential office entails. For example, ad 2.4 "HILLARY'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS AT THE STATE DEPARTMENT[:]
WEAK Iran Deal [,] FAILED Russia Reset [,] FAILED Libya Intervention [,] FAILED Iraq Strategy [,] FAILED Pivot to Asia [,] SHADY Contracts [,] LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY [,] CONFLICTS of Interest [,] NO TRANSPARENCY".

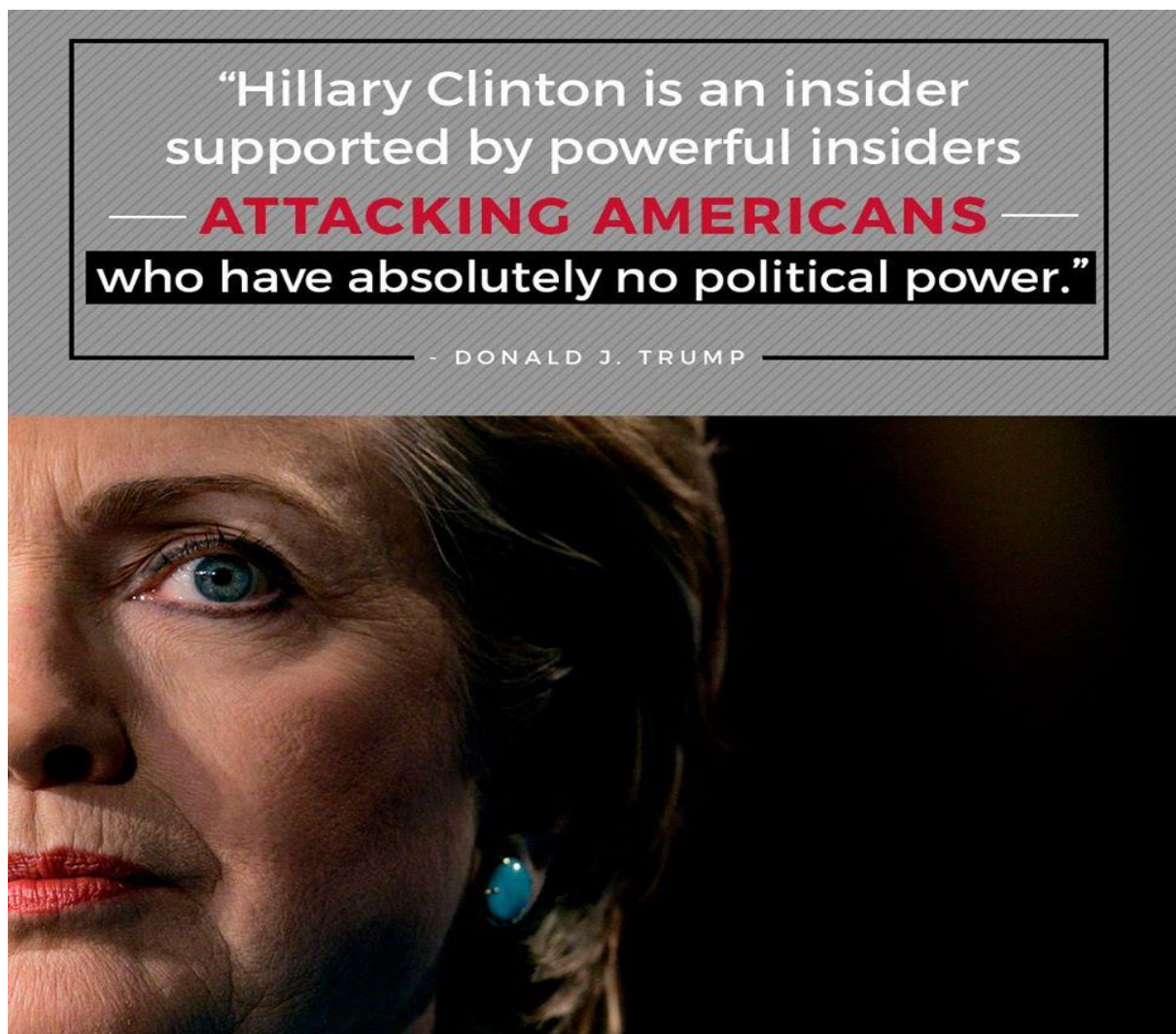
Figure 12: ad 2.4



The second level was to attack Hillary Clinton's integrity. This level was likely aiming at discrediting Clinton, and therefore, directing the reader to question if Clinton is the right choice to become the president of the U.S. Also, these ads were likely designed in this way for two reasons. First, to shape the *reader's perception* about Clinton as a corrupt and selfish politician. Such as in the last ad (2.4) that also attacked Clinton's personal integrity. Second, as Donald Trump was, back then, new to politics with no official office experience, he was discrediting Clinton by focusing on what he thought is true about her abuse of power for personal gains. For example, in ad 2.10 "Hillary Clinton is an *insider* supported by powerful insiders ---**ATTACKING AMERICANS**--- who have absolutely no political power [signed] -DONALD J. TRUMP [the complementary visual is a cropped image of Hillary's face having strange gestures]" (own emphasis). Additionally, "**ATTACING AMERICANS**" appeals to fear (pathos) and by putting all Americans in the face of *danger*,

the Trump campaign is *socializing* the readers to act as a ‘tribe’ in the face of that danger as explained by Norris and Inglehart (2019). Also, in ad 2.20 “**GRANTED IMMUNITY: THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE EMAIL SCANDAL**[.] PAUL COMBETTA [.] CHERYL MILLS [.] BRYAN PAGLIANO [.] HEATHER SAMUELSON [.] JOHN BENTEL [.] **WHAT ARE THEY HIDING?** #CrookedHillaryStandard [in the visual, small sized photos of the mentioned persons and a larger picture of Hillary Clinton in black-and-white laughing to appeal to fear and anxiety]”.

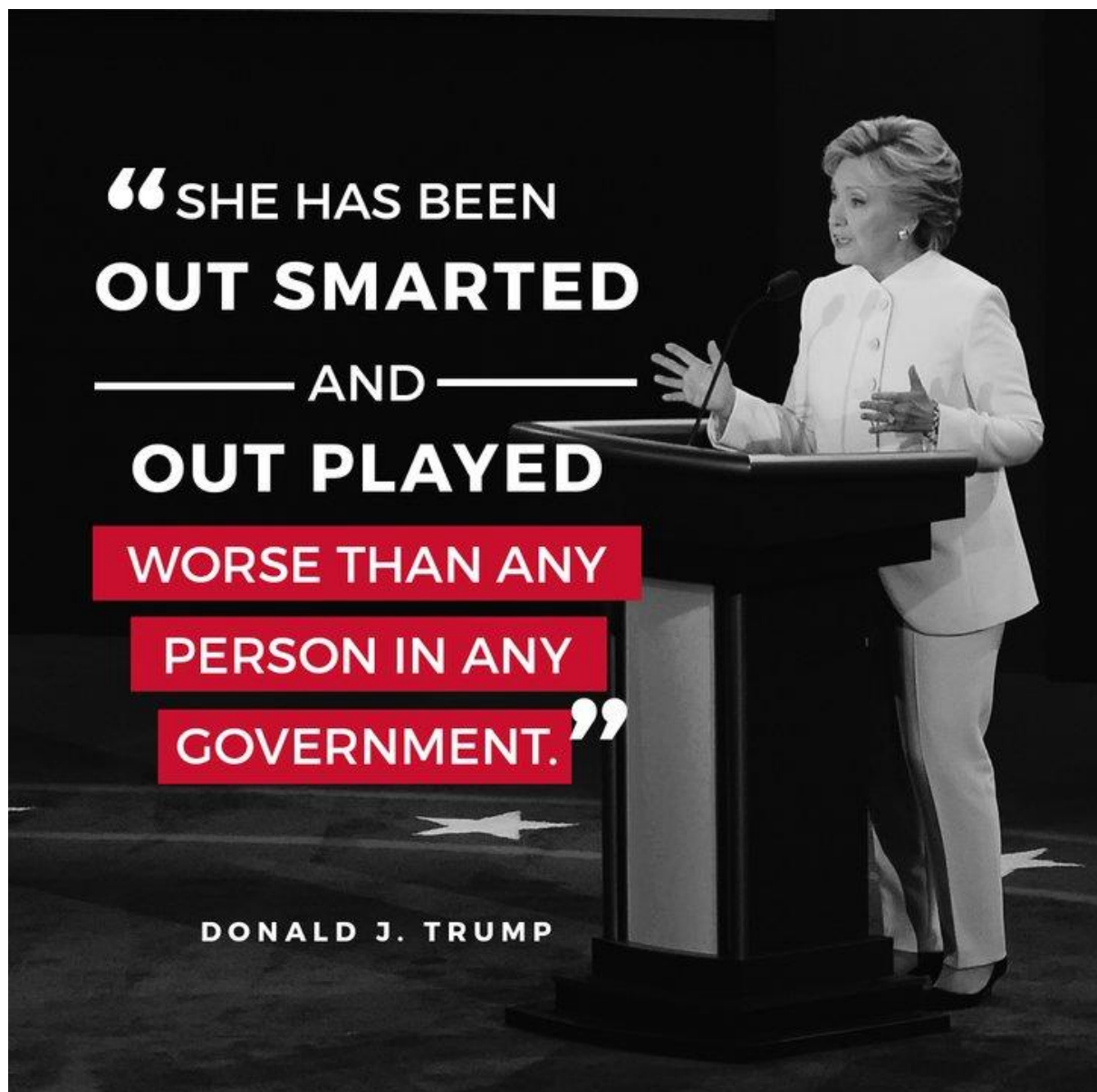
Figure 13: ad 2.10



Similarly, ad 2.23 “CLINTON AIDE WHO SET UP SECRET SERVER: PLEADS THE 5TH AMENDMENT [.] RESUSES TO ANSWER QUESTIONS 125 TIMES [.] REFUSES TO COMPLY WITH CONGRESSIONAL SUBPOENA[.] WHAT’S HILLARY HIDING?”. Markable, except for one ad, all ads that contained an image of Hillary Clinton were either black-and-white, or grey imagery to appeal to fear and anxiety aligning with Belt (2017).

The third level of attacks were used to ridicule and denounce Clinton and were also used to *structure the opposition* (Clinton) as ‘not fit for office’. This aligned with the accusations against right-winged politicians as being *misogynistic* in their discourse (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). By doing so, the agent (Trump 2016 Campaign) was appealing to knowledge authority (ethos). For example, ad 2.1 “SHE HAS BEEN **OUT SMARTED** ----- AND----- **OUT PLAYED** WORSE THAN ANY PERSON IN ANY GOVERNMENT [signed] DONALD J. TRUMP [in the background an image of Hillary Clinton, in black-and-white, leaning on the lectern to show her in a weak state, referring to her health issues as described by Donald Trump on several occasions]”.

Figure 14: ad 2.1



Also, in ad 2.2 “**You talk but you don’t get anything done.** [signed] Donald J. Trump [the background is a grey image of Hillary Clinton laughing in the bottom right corner of the ad to appeal to fear and anxiety]”.

Advocacy ads focused on what Trump has to offer to the American people. For example, in ad 2.13 “*Together we can save American Jobs, American Lives, and American futures.* [signed] Donald J. Trump.” (own emphasis). The repeated use of the word American underscores the extensive appeal to nationalism and fear. Other ads focused on personal or national security such as ad 2.14 “in the 20th Century, the United States defeated Fascism, Nazism, and Communism. *We will* defeat radical Islamic terrorism. [signed] Donald J. Trump”. Likewise, ad 2.3 “A NATION WITHOUT BORDERS IS NO A NATION AT ALL. *** WE MUST HAVE A WALL. THE RULE OF LAW MATTERS [signed] DONALD J. TRUMP [an image of Trump standing confident in front of a lectern giving a speech, behind him is the American flag]” (own emphasis). The last two ads did not only appeal to nationalism, but also appealed and assumed the existence of the ‘tribe’ notion referred to earlier by Norris and Inglehart (2019), mainly because of the appeal to fear and collectivity by using words such as together, we, we will, and defeat.

Rhetorical appeals

The most used appeals were the appeal to credibility (ethos). This appeal, however, was usually used indirectly. As explained earlier, by attacking Clinton, especially on a personal level, the agent (Trump) was appealing to knowledge authority. In other words, instead of the agent stating that the candidate, Donald Trump, is credible for the X and Y reasons, the agent would describe the opponent, Hillary Clinton, as untrustworthy by often putting the veracity of her statements and actions into question. Due to the agent attacking the opponent, it is likely to be inferred by the reader that the agent is appealing to credibility in a reversed manner. For example, in the aforementioned ads (2.1, 2.2 and 2.4).

On the other hand, Trump used the positive ads to build his own credibility in a direct way by appealing, to knowledge authority and leadership respectively. For example, ad 2.7 “DONALD TRUMP IS TAKING THE STAGE FOR *YOU* [an image of Trump looking confidently towards the camera (audience’s eye) and behind him are his aids, including Steve Bannon, to appeal to power, getting ready for a presidential debate or a presidential rally. The use of the colors red, white and blue that are the colors of the American flag are used to signify and appeal to nationalism]. Also, ads 2.13 and 2.14.

Figure 15: ad 2.7



Parallely, the most used rhetorical appeal was the appeal to emotions (pathos). These appeals were fear, anxiety, and anger, respectively. For example, ad 2.5 “we will protect and save our beautiful 2nd amendment. [signed] Donald J. Trump,” the agent in this ad is referring to a long history of debate that rises to the surface every time a mass shooting accident happens in the US. This debate involves one of the rigid rights of bearing arms. The Democrats, including Clinton are in favor of changing the 2nd amendment, while the Republicans fiercely object to it and consider it a matter of national pride. And therefore, the agent, Donald Trump is appealing to nationalistic emotions (pathos). Or in ad 2.6 “Hillary Clinton would create the most liberal Supreme Court in the history of the United States,” the agent in this ad is addressing non-liberals. In other words, addressing conservatives, and thus,

appealing to ideological (nationalistic) beliefs. Therefore, the agent is appealing to emotions (pathos).

The ads that only appealed to reasoning (logos) were the least used and were added in combination to other appeals such as in ad 2.1 “she has been out smarted and out played worse than any person in any government. [signed] Donald J. Trump” the agent, besides denouncing the opponent, he is also providing reasons not to vote for her, therefore, appealing to reason (logos) that she is not fit for the position.

Thematic analysis

The thematic analysis of the ads of this group revealed the main overarching themes that corresponded to a large extent to the multimodal rhetorical analysis. The final themes that resulted from the analysis were *risk America* and *save America*. These two main themes corresponded to the results of the multimodal rhetorical analysis and were linked to the rhetorical strategies of 1) shaping the readers’ perception about how it would be harmful for the people and the country to vote for Clinton (risk America); on the other hand, 2) build perceptions about how beneficial it would be to vote for Trump (save America) through the extensive use of emotionalization.

Risk America

This main theme emerged mainly from negative (attack) ads. It focused on persuading the readers that Clinton, through her long years of service on different places, mainly Secretary of State, was a corrupt politician and is untrustworthy. In ad 2.8 “Clinton’s Message to Coal County: “We’re Going To Put **A LOT** Of Coal Miners and Coal Companies **OUT OF BUSINESS.**” showing her as a careless politician that would risk American’s jobs. Also, in ad 2.11 “Obama-Clinton Foreign Policy [:] Dangerous nuclear deal **WITH NUBER ONE STATE SPONSOR OF TERRORISM.** Paying Iran a **SECRET \$400 MILLION RANSOM. COMPROMISE THE SECURITY OF THE UNITED STATES.**”, and in ad 2.15 “[Putin whispering in Clinton’s ear while both smiling (agreeing to the content of the conversation) and the image is colored in a reddish tone to appeal to an evil conversation] **BIG FAN OF THE WAY YOU TRY TO RIG ELECTIONS** [signed Putin] **DEFEAT CROOKED HILLARY** [with handcuffs replacing the double o in the word crooked]”.

By showing Clinton as a corrupt and untrustworthy politician to the reader, Trump was not only denouncing her, but also setting the stage for the readers on the following theme.

Save America

This theme was mainly visible in the advocacy and the contrast ads available in this group and, was highly dependent on construction on the previous main theme (risk America). As mentioned in the rhetorical analysis, Trump aimed at constructing an image of him as a trustworthy leader to persuade the voters to vote for him. In ad 2.16 for example, “I AM ASKING FOR THE SUPPORT OF ALL AMERICANS WHO WANT MORE OPPORTUNITY, HIGHER WAGES, SAFER COMMUNITIES, COMPETENT LEADERSHIP, AND HONEST GOVERNMENT [signed] DONALD J. TRUMP” the agent is constructing his image as the leader that will save the American people by doing the things he promises to do in this ad. Similarly, in the contrast ad 2.24 “The Choice in November IS A CHOICE BETWEEN A CLINTON AGENDA THAT PUTS DONERS FIRST -OR- a New Agenda That Puts America First. [signed] DONALD J. TRUMP”. In this ad, the main theme was to portray Clinton as a risky choice for the American people, while painting Trump as the man that will put American interest first. And finally, in the advocacy ad 2.22 “[an American soldier on duty in what seems to be Iraq with the U.S. Army pledge on top] I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies”. In this last ad, next to that the agent is appealing to nationalism and national pride (country’s army), the agent is also showing to the reader that protecting the army and the American power is one of his top priorities, therefore, showing the reader one way that by choosing him is a way to save America.

5.3 Group Three

This group consisted of the TV ads produced by the Vote Leave Campaign and were aired on national television not too long before the referendum day. Due to the lack of information on how many times the ads were aired or viewed from a reliable source, the ads were chosen based on the number of interactions on YouTube. This was under the assumption that the ads that would most resonate with people on YouTube would be also the one that were aired on national TV. This group was formed to answer the sub-question: what were the rhetorical techniques used by the Vote Leave Campaign during the Brexit referendum in the UK in 2016 in their television advertisements?

Rhetorical techniques

Rhetorical functions

Similar to group-one, the rhetorical functions of the ads in this group centered around setting the reader's agenda about how harmful the EU was to the UK. This was done in the attempt to persuade the reader that the EU is a 'corrupt system' that is severely harming the UK on many levels. The final conclusion about this group is that the Vote Leave Campaign relied heavily on rhetorical techniques that provided focused information that stroke the same cords as in their dark ads. The main rhetorical technique was the *emotionalization* of the reader's experience (nationalism, anger and fear) to *mobilize* the public opinion in the UK against the EU, mainly by feeding people's anger by setting their agenda on controversial topics. What was different in this group, however, is that in their TV ads the campaign used politicians such as David Cameron's and others' own words against them and employed these words in insulting them (insult politics). By doing so, the Vote Leave Campaign was likely aiming at 1) establishing trust with the readers by showing themselves as caring for and on the same side with the voters, thus providing reason why the voters should trust the campaign and that the UK should leave the EU; and 2) shaping the reader's perception that the EU is a burden on the UK in the form of encouraging immigration, restricting the UK's sovereignty, draining its economy and diminishing its younger generations' future opportunities; 3) discrediting politicians that support the *Remain* Campaign, and therefore, charge people against them and 'vote leave'.

Type of advertisement

Except for two advertisements, all ads in this group were negative (attack) ads on the EU and the politicians that supported the *Remain* Campaign. One other ad was a contrast ad comparing the NHS in the case the UK was a member of the EU vs. outside of the EU.

The ads in this group were weaponized not only to launch general attacks on the EU, but also were used to discredit and even ridicule politicians that supported the Remain Campaign. This difference was attributed to what TV ads provides in terms of containing more information and features than the dark ads. Moreover, the ads were remarkably to contain first-order principles and had no sign of what their plan after would be leaving the EU.

The sample suggests that these negative (attack) ads were aiming at raising readers' doubts in the, back then, current political establishment in the UK represented by these politicians supporting *Remain*, urging those readers to Vote Leave. By doing so, the campaign was likely aiming at mobilizing the readers against the remain politicians, and

therefore, make readers lose faith in the EU that they signify. This was mainly done by emotionalizing the reader's experience and by setting their agenda around the aforementioned topics (issues agenda).

In the attempt of emotionalizing the readers' experiences, the campaign was likely doing so by employing advertising techniques that would raise the reader's fear and anxiety towards politicians such as David Cameron. In ad 3.2 "[narrator:] David Cameron cannot be trusted on Turkey, [David Cameron:] If your vote in this referendum is being influenced by considerations about Turkish membership of the EU, don't think about it. It's not remotely on the cards, it's not an issue in this referendum and it shouldn't be." The next scene in the ad displays members of the Turkish Parliament engaged in a physical fight to shape the reader's perceptions about Turkish politicians, that are supposedly elites that care more than normal people about their public image, thus, implying that normal Turkish people may be worse to live with. "[Narrator:] David Cameron now claims Turkey won't join the EU but that's not what he said before. [David Cameron]: This is something I feel very strongly about, very passionately about. Together, I want us to pave the road from Ankara to Brussels." Finally, the narrator reads the content of the dark ad 1.8 that claims that the UK is paying £2 billion for "Macedonia, Serbia, Albania, Montenegro and Turkey to join the EU" and concludes that "you can't trust David Cameron on Turkey. If you want to save the NHS, Vote Leave".

Rhetorical appeals

The most used rhetorical appeal in group-three was the appeal strong emotions (pathos) that often appeared as an appeal to reasoning (logos) at first sight. For example, in ad 3.1 that was a review of what politicians said about the EU and at the same time displaying outside proof of the opposite such as in ad 1 "[there is no question for any erosion of essential national sovereignty. Edward Heath, Prime Minister 1970- 1974. [narrator] for over 40 years we've been told lots of things about the EU, but were they true? [...]". The agent was appealing to reason with the interpreter to convince them that what they were being told about the relationship between the UK and the EU is not true. Thus, providing reasons to assess this relationship differently (logos). However, the construction of the ad was done in a way that charges the readers negatively from the politicians that support the UK membership in the EU, especially with strong emotions such as *anger*. Also, in ad 3.4 titled "Our money. Our priorities." This ad was also attacking the EU through the yet-to-become member states countries "[narrator] every week we send £ 350 million to Brussels. Money that's wasted. That's enough to build a new hospital every week. It will get worse. Imagine what will happen to public services when Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and

Turkey join the EU”. In this ad, the agent is giving hypothetical situations where the UK’s money is spent on people from other countries and charging the readers with anger against the EU that is driven from the act of wasting the UK’s financial resources.

Finally, the appeal to credibility (ethos). This appeal was also highly interwoven with the other appeals, however, due to the repetition of the same information that projected knowledge authority in the form of exhibiting financial losses to the UK, this appeal was the least effective in terms of use.

5.4 Group-four

This group was formed from the TV ads that were used by Donald Trump in his campaign (2016) to answer the sub-question: what were the persuasive techniques of the Trump campaign national TV commercials during the US presidential elections 2016?

Rhetorical techniques

Rhetorical functions

The rhetorical functions used in the ads in this group suggested the campaign’s focus on an issues-agenda similar to the Facebook ads in group-one. Agenda-setting and voter-learning were highly interwoven due to the extensive use of attacks that were launched on Clinton during the campaign. By focusing on those rhetorical techniques, the campaign was likely aiming at 1) portraying Clinton as a failed, corrupt and risky politician, thus, a dangerous choice to vote for, and simultaneously, 2) portray Trump as the leader that will “flip Washington up-side-down” to “Make America Great Again”.

The advertisements also focused on feeding the reader’s negativity bias and appealed to certain strong emotions. The feeding of the reader’s negativity bias was done in a similar way as in the Facebook ads, however, was in sophistication. For example, more topics were added to the TV ads such as those that are related to the economy. In ad 4.5, that was an advocacy ad titled “what does electing Donald Trump mean for you?”, the agent focused on topics that appeal to the working class, the middle class in particular, and provided more information about actual money figures that helped structure the reader’s expectations about the benefits that would follow the election of Trump. In this ad answering the question mentioned in the title, “Families making \$60,000 a year, you get a 20% tax reduction. Working moms, you get paid maternity leave and up to \$5,000 childcare tax reduction. Business owners, your taxes get cut from 35 to 15% so you can expand and create more jobs.”

The feeding of the negativity bias was linked to the immense use of first-order principles in the advertisements and during the absence of reliable information about second-order principles.

Trump used the *ad nauseam* and *lying* and the main rhetorical strategies. The ad nauseam strategy was repeatedly used across the ads. Statements such as “It’s more of the same but worse”, “she failed us as Secretary of State, don’t let her fail us again” and “Hillary failed” to refer to Clinton, and “change that will make America great again” to refer to Trump were unified and in many times repeated not only in several ads, but repeated several times within the same ad.

Types of ads

Most of the ads found in this group were contrast and negative (attack) ads. Only two ads were advocacy ads. The analysis revealed a single form that all contrast ads followed in their construction. The contrast ads contained of two main parts. The first part was used to launch personal attacks on Clinton and in one case on her family. This part was mainly ‘dark’ and started with dark images, imagery, and narration. For example, ad 4.3 “In Hillary’s America, the middle class gets crushed, spending goes up, taxes go up, hundreds of thousands of jobs disappear. It’s more of the same but worse.” In this ad, the agent stroke chords that concern the American economy and the life of the middle class. This example of setting the reader’s agenda about the economy and their will being was visible across most of the contrast and negative ads.

The attacks launched by the Trump 2016 campaign on Clinton in both the contrast and negative (attack) ads were on three levels. The first level was the attack on Clinton’s poor performance in the Department of State. This was done through mentioning information about topics such as the Iran nuclear program, the Russian reset that led to the seizing of the Crimean Peninsula in Ukraine, the formation of terrorist groups such as ISIS (ad 4.10). The second level was to show Clinton as physically unfit to take office and perform the presidential tasks. This was done through a series of images of Clinton coughing, passing out, and being held and put in her car by her security details that implied her lack of fitness (ad 4.6) that mentions “[...] Hillary Clinton doesn’t have the fortitude not the stamina to lead the world [...]”. Although the images were not part of the analysis for group Three and Four, important highlights were mentioned when needed. Finally, the third level was to attack Clinton’s financial integrity (ad 4.7) that described Clinton as “filthy rich”.

The sample suggests that the main aim form the negative (attack) and the parts used in the contrast ads that attacked Hillary Clinton was that these ads were crafted for the purpose

of raising fear, anger, and anxiety towards the situation where Clinton would be elected president. The use of dark and grey imagery complimented with suspenseful music were a common strategy in these ads.

The advocacy and the contrast ads used to shed positive light on Trump provided mainly first-order principles. Remarkably, the campaign used the advocacy ads to answer some of the accusations that Trump was xenophobic, racist, and misogynistic. It was also used to shape the reader's perceptions about the candidate. For example, Trump used footage of African-Americans to resemble the American family, or when he referred to the 'American dream' such as in ads (4.2 and 4.3). The campaign showed promises of Trump's support for women (usually appealed to Caucasian women with the absence of black or any other races), especially, the working women. In ad 4.5, the ad was narrated by Ivanka Trump, Trump's daughter and an entrepreneur. In the ad "[...] Donald Trump understands the needs of a modern workforce. *My father will change outdated labor-laws so that they support women, and American families [...]*" (own emphasis). The use of "my father" was seen as an attempt to appeal to women who see themselves like Ivanka Trump or have an admiration for her. Moreover, the use of a soft tone with uplifting music was to give the ad a positive vibe and gain the reader's trust.

Rhetorical appeals

The main rhetorical appeal salient in this group was the appeal to emotions (pathos) such as fear, anger and anxiety. By focusing on these appeals, the campaign was likely aiming at shaping, with strong emotions, the reader's perceptions about Clinton and their issues-agenda. The appeal to emotions, however, was highly intertwined with the appeals to credibility (ethos), and reasoning (logos).

For the appeal to credibility (ethos), it usually complemented the appeal to emotions, especially in the contrast ads. As mentioned earlier, the contrast ads started by focusing negatively on Clinton, which the appeal to emotions (pathos) was the most salient. Next, in the part that focuses positively on Trump, the appeals were mainly to build his credibility (ethos) as a trustworthy contender. By combining both credibility (ethos) and positive emotions (pathos), the ads, indirectly, appealed to reasoning (logos) because of how the reader, in case they accept the information of the ad would think of Trump as 'the right choice'.

6 Discussion

This research investigated the persuasion techniques that were present in advertisements of the Vote Leave Campaign in the UK before the event of Brexit, and the advertisements of the Trump 2016 campaign before the U.S. presidential elections that contained disinformation, commonly known as ‘fake news’. The existing studies on disinformation, especially in its persuasion techniques remains limited. This research relied on existing literature and research on political communication, disinformation, and the populist rhetorical techniques.

6.1 Main conclusions

For the advertisements in the two campaigns, the results suggest that both campaigns adopted similar persuasion strategies. The only difference was in the implementation which was attributed to the different logics that rule the two different events (referendum vs. elections), and to the political-cultural differences that shape the political sphere in both countries. The two campaigns focused, proportionately, on the same issues-agenda - immigration, economy and trade, sovereignty and international relations (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). The only difference is that the Trump campaign also focused on more issues that are related to the political-cultural conflict around the 2nd Amendment and the right to bear arms, which is not of importance in the British context (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). Also, this focus varied in the display on the ads according to each campaign’s own objectives. Thus, marking the importance of the different contexts in the two countries, and how this affects the choice of the ad content.

The use of disinformation in both campaigns, if Alaphilippe et al. (2019) is true about amplifying political messages, seemed to serve both campaigns in terms of not only persuasion, but also had other important functions. The rhetorical functions in both campaigns included the main techniques used by populists in their political communication. *Voter-leaning* was used as a tool to shape readers’ perceptions about how corrupt the EU is. Similarly, the Trump Campaign used the same tactic to persuade the U.S. readers that Hillary Clinton is corrupt and unfit for presidential tasks. Agenda-setting was also a common technique in the ads in both campaigns. This technique, in both campaigns was mostly found in combination with voter-learning and/or strong emotions

Propaganda techniques were also visible in the analyzed ads. Strong emotional appeals to emotions such as *fear, anger and anxiety* were used to persuade readers in both

countries by both campaigns to build a base of supporters to from what was referred to earlier as *tribes* to reach political polarization that plays a role in not only building the social barriers between people, but also play a role in building *loyalty* . Also, strong emotional appeals (pathos) were employed to further scotomize those that lean more towards anti-European and anti-immigration sentiments in the UK, likewise, was used in the U.S. for the purpose of building social barriers, by focusing on ideological and controversial issues to divide readers.

The negative (attack) ads were highly similar in both groups in the way they were crafted, but also due to the differences in the two campaign types, the Trump attacks were more insulting and personal than the ones used in the Vote Leave ads including the ads crafted by the BeLeave campaign.

Both campaigns relied heavily on first-order principles (Norris and Inglehart, 2019) and did not provide any useful information to the reader about what could be done in order to fix these issues.

The thematic analysis revealed corresponding selective themes for Facebook ads/posts. Each campaign had two selective themes, one shapes the opponent negatively, the other shapes the future without the opponent positively. Group-one ads suggest that the Vote Leave Campaign promoted to the reader that the EU possesses a *national threat* to the UK. Similarly, the Trump Campaign ads suggested that the campaign promoted that it would be a *risk* for America in the case where Clinton is elected president. Moreover, Vote Leave ads suggested the selective theme *UK's future* that includes both positive and negative scenarios about the future of the UK, in or outside the EU. The Trump campaign ads suggested the selective theme *save America* where the agent was urging the readers to save their beloved country by extensively appealing to nationalism.

Therefore, both campaigns were using the highly similar persuasion techniques, however, this similarity was also contextual.

6.2 Socio-theoretical implications and study limitations

In general, the ads of both campaigns were of high sophistication due to several factors. First, a number of ads (dark ads) were designed by psychologists to appeal to specific readers' segments more than others which was something new at the time. Second, due to the cultural conflicts in the two countries where the two campaigns existed, the ads creation contained references to ideological issues that require the awareness of these conflicts and the different stance-points that exist on the issues. Finally, the ads containing disinformation,

adds a layer of sophistication in terms of distracting the reader's ideas about the content of the ad.

While this study was an exploratory attempt to clarify persuasion techniques in ads that contained disinformation, this study had its limitations. Due to that studying persuasion techniques in disinformation ads/campaigns is relatively a new discipline, the absence of research on this topic may have had, an unnoticeable, negative effect on this study. Moreover, the absence of studies on the effectiveness of specific rhetorical strategies have restricted my understanding of their intentions as strategies, and therefore, may have played a role in wrongly concluding the aims of the ads in terms of persuasion purposes. Also, the short texts on the Facebook ads has played a role in shortening the thematic analysis of these ads. It would have been more beneficial to analyze the TV advertisements for that purpose, but as aforementioned, this was not possible due to the size of this study.

As for future research on the topic, the combination of *deception* and *ad nauseam* as main rhetorical strategies added to the complexity and, perhaps, the effectiveness of these ads in the persuasion process. Due to the nature of this study, it was not possible to measure its effects in terms on persuading readers. Therefore, further studies on these two rhetorical strategies may indeed enrich scholarly understanding of the effective persuasion strategies. Also, further research on the persuasion techniques in disinformation ads/campaigns, in several contexts, is useful to understand its strengths and weaknesses.

One of the main results in this study is that it confirmed the intensive use of first-order principles in the ads to address readers. While it should be self-evident to the reader that the agent in the ad is just criticizing their opponent and not providing any solutions, it would be beneficial to further investigate if adding a layer of deception through disinformation would play a role in persuading the reader more easily than if ads did not contain any false news/information. Finally, while there are studies that researched *insult politics*, the role these insults play in persuading readers remains under studied and would be beneficial to be added to the scholarly work.

For the societal implications of the study, this study possesses historical and societal value to those concerned with democracy transformations in Western societies, and the role media may play in that transformation. The reader's ability to spot the appeals and techniques that orators or agents employ in their political communication, may indeed help the reader better decide their aims. Additionally, by realizing the intentions behind these types of ads, the reader will be more critical about the news/ information they receive from these types of ads or campaigns, making them better able to spot *disinformation*.

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