

# SOCIOLOGY OF POWER RELATIONS. A DISCUSSION UPON ONLINE NETWORKS AND POLITICAL IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF US ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS

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## ABSTRACT

The development of online technology influences people's everyday life. Informal online networks improve the communication between individuals and their access to information or resources, but, in the same time, they may become instruments of transforming identities or manipulating the masses. In the virtual world, the individuals are constructing their identities in contrast to others, especially when people interact within online communities. The individuals are able to create and recreate their identity, to present themselves in a pleasant way for others. Is what Goffman named "the management of impression". New technologies are like artefacts, mediators of individual's behaviour, as Activity Theory emphasizes. In this interaction, between individuals and information systems, the individual's consciousness is embedded by the technology. Social media may change the rules using "prototypes". The Prototype Theory is used by the social networks to attract people to some products or to vote political candidates. Social networks are using the identity of individuals to feed manipulation. They became main instruments of power, tools used for political marketing. Using social media, politicians may influence a community of people through political discourses. This is how we called "identity politics". Identity politics and social networks played an important role for the electoral campaigns, beginning with 2000, 2008, and then in 2012 and 2016. Identity politics became the key message in candidate's discourses and especially in their slogans from social media. Concerning all these, the article focus on how political identity matters in politics and how identity politics changed American election in 2016.

**Keywords:** *virtual world, online networks, identity, political identity, US electoral campaigns.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The article emphasizes the influence of the virtual world upon the identity through a theoretical discussion about virtual world, social networks-power networks and their impact on political campaigns.

How identities are transformed and used in the virtual world? And how the political actors are using the political identities in their discourses to attract voters?

The article will reflect the importance of the social networks and their influence in political campaigns. Virtual world is “socially constructed” (Boellstorff, 2008) and it influences every person’s life. Online technology invaded our everyday life and transformed time and space.

Once with the development of online technology, individuals have discovered another world, a virtual one where they can communicate with others, can expose their ideas and causes. Some individuals may even create another world and another identity, an imitation or different from the real one. Some studies (Sherman and Craig, 2003) mentioned that the “virtual (world) is not merely an incomplete imitation of the real but another register or manifestation of the real” (Shields, 2000, cited by Sherman and Craig, 2003, 46). Others (Wadley, 2008; Turkle, 1995; Boellstorff, 2008) claimed that “virtual realities function as an entirely new world with their own features of social, economic and psychological aspects that are to some extent different from the real material world” (Aas, 2012, 88). Boellstorff (2008) claimed that “virtual worlds are socially constructed”. In spite of their computer generated, artificial, and synthetic constitution, virtual worlds are “*places of human culture*” (Boellstorff, 2008, 17) and are also known as “online virtual social worlds” or “Second Life” (Sherman and Craig, 2003, 34).

Virtual technology may function as a hub of communication where people interact, have common ideas and emotions, they are feeling that they are belonging to a community. Howard Rheingold, the author of the book "Net Smart: How to Thrive Online" describes the power of virtual communities, how they affect individual’s lives and the entire world (Rheingold, 2012). Howard Rheingold underlined that Facebook has developed a social capital dimension. It leads to an increase and cultivation of social capital. Informal online networks allow interactions between individuals at long distances that may exchange informations and ideas. These networks may influence the formation of strong online communities and, finally, the decisions of the individuals.

New technologies developed online communities where people interact online, sharing thoughts and ideas. Online networks have become instruments of social change, new ways of social interaction and access to information. They are vehicles for sharing information and for constructing new communities of ideas

and concerns, but, in the same time, they might become instruments for stealing identities or for manipulating masses.

Online networks have become important tools used in Social Media. James Jasper called the social networks “building blocks of human interaction” (Jasper, 2014, 79). People may use networking tools to “discover other people who share similar problems and concerns, thus developing a collective identity” (Myers, 1994 apud Van Laer, 2010, 409). Regarding the organization and mobilization, the Internet is used in three distinctive ways: “1. to call on mobilization actions; 2. request an action that normally happens offline, but is more effective on the Internet; 3. to appeal for an action that can only be done online” (Vegh, 2003, 74).

#### **HOW IDENTITY IS CONSTRUCTED IN THE VIRTUAL WORLD? SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONS PERSPECTIVE AND ACTIVITY THEORY PERSPECTIVE**

Everard (2000) explains that “states consist of the narratives that are constructed about them. The lines that states are like software programmed to run in the wet ware of the people who subscribe to the identity of the state. Like software, the state exists while it is ‘run’ and maintained. It is a very complex piece of software written in a number of programming languages, such as economics, military, security, environmental discourse and so on. These exist as articulations of a particular mode of defining Self and Other” (Everard, 2000, 5). “It is about sets of relations between those who are included (us) and those who are excluded (them). It is about locating a sense of self and a sense of belonging” (Everard, 2000, 5). If we are talking about the sense of belonging, we are talking about identity.

Brolandi *et al.* (2009) mentioned that there are two perspectives concerning identity:

The first model conceives identity “as the inherent structure in the individual personality” (Brolandi *et al.*, 2009, 359). Parsons structural-functionalism theory defines identity as “structured code” meaning that “it is not itself a set of concrete meanings but a set of patterns for the organizations and canons for the interpretations and articulations of meanings” (Parsons, 1968, 20–21 cited by Brolandi *et al.*, 2009, 359). Transferred at the collective (national) identity level, a similar perspective is that described by the ethnic identity, identity delineated by race, territory, common myths, common history etc. (Smith, 1993).

The second model emphasis identity as “a process that occurs in particular interactions in which the individual is involved” (Borlandi *et al.*, 2009, 359). This perspective is emphasized by Symbolic Interactionism school. Erwin Goffman, a representative member of this school considers that “identity is a construction and an artifact resulting from strategies of identifying rather than a structure anchored in the personality of the subject” (Goffman, [1959], 2003). Identity is formed

through “narrative reconstructions and strategical discourses” (Borlandi et al., 2009, 359).

Concerning collective identity (national identity), the perspective is closer to Barth’s conception. In Barth’s opinion, ethnic identity is shaped by the social frontiers that define a group different from other groups (Barth, 1969). As Borlandi et al. (2009) claimed, sociology is conceiving identity as “a result of a gradual process of socialization” (Borlandi *et al.*, 2009, 358). Berger and Luckmann (2008) related that “identity is formed by social processes. Once crystallized, it is maintained, modified, or even reshaped by social relations” (Berger and Luckmann, 2008, 194). Specific social structures gives specific “identity types” (Berger and Luckmann, 2008, 200). As Berger and Luckmann underlined, “identity types are social products *tout court*, relatively stable elements of objective social reality (the degree of stability being, of course, socially determined in its turn)” (Berger and Luckmann, 2008, 200). Tajfel and Turner (1979) emphasized social identity theory related to virtual world. “People may derive a sense of themselves through the social relationships they form in an online virtual world” (Tajfel and Turner, 1979 apud Sherman, 2011, 32). Being seen from a social perspective, once with the dissolution of the communitarian relations and the loss of the trust in the others and in the institutions, “without external anchors” (Berger, Berger and Kellner, 1973 cited by Borlandi et al., 2009, 359), identity become weaker and uncertain. Following the modern perspective, Wood and Smith (2004, 52) suggest that “an identity is a complex personal and social construct, consisting in part of who we think ourselves to be, how we wish others to perceive us, and how they actually perceive us”. In defining our identity, we focus on “how we wish others to perceive us” (ibidem).

Some authors (Evans, 2016) enhances that there are two psychological perspectives that reflect how self is perceived and emerged from social contexts: Symbolic Interactions and Activity Theory.

Symbolic Interactions perspective considers that “a person is a product of the interaction that occurs in a continual process of evaluation and transformation” (Evans, 2016). The individuals want to make a good impresion. Is what Goffman named “management of impression” (Goffman [1959], 2003, 20). According to Goffman (1963), the social actor develops some strategies to present its self in the most favorable ways. The management of impression is linked with that of the expressiveness, as Goffman argues. Concerning this, the author defines “the paradox of searching”: “the more an individual is concerned about the reality that is not accessible to his perception, the more he must focus his attention on the appearances” (Goffman, [1959], 2003, 20).

Despite Mead, the author considers that the Self is the product of a play. The identity “is more a construct than a structure anchored in the subject’s personality” (Goffman, 1963 apud Borlandi *et al.*, 2009, 360). Reconsidering all these, Goffman

claims that the identity is structured through “narrative reconstructions and discursive strategies” (ibidem).

The individuals are constructing their identities in contrast to others. This happens especially when people interact within online communities. And here we can talk about the dichotomy “self” and “the other”. Interacting within online communities with others, individuals are able to create and recreate their identity, to present themselves in a pleasant way for others. Activity Theory examines “how self arises through activity, through momentary actions and interactions between self, other and artefacts in particular situations and environments, emerges change and hence self-knowledge” (Evans, 2016, 3). Psychologists developed activity theory as a study of the development of individual consciousness. Bonnie Nardi (1996) applied this perspective to information systems.

Activity theory uses the term of *mediation* – “all human experience is shaped by the tools and sign systems we use” (Nardi, 1996, 2). The same author noted that in activity theory there are “artefacts” which constitute “the mediators of human thoughts and behaviours” (Nardi, 1996, 2). In our cases, new technologies are like artefacts, mediators of individual’s behaviour. In this interaction, between individuals and information systems, the individual’s consciousness is embedded by the technology. Activity theory describes a dynamic “by which changes in consciousness are directly related to the material and social conditions current in a person’s situation” (ibidem), but, in the same time, is related to the amount of information from the virtual world.

Some social media experts (Kasteler, 2011) claim that social media marketing (SMM) “throws out the rules” and is a “game-changer.”

Social media may change the rules using “prototypes”. As (Kasteler, 2011) shows, “the extent to which SMM can change the rules depends very much on how thoughtful its practitioners are, and how well they understand the connection between the various ways people associate things and ideas, even at a neurological level”. The author presents “The Prototype Theory” as a method of categorization. As Kasteler (2011) sustains, a categorization is the “method of identifying the typical members of a category based on the most frequently associated terms associated with it”. The implementation of Prototype Theory to Social Media showed that a person’s sensory reaction might be influenced through a “branding program”. As the example with Pepsi Advertising from 1970s demonstrated, a person’s perception concerning a thing may be improved or altered using a branding program. “Coke did a better job of branding itself, so people thought they enjoyed Coke more, even though they preferred Pepsi in blind taste-tests” (Kasteler, 2011).

There are used some stimulus to influence individual’s preferences. As Kasteler (2011) showed, a social media platform uses different techniques “to associate a brand identity with a core set of categories to reinforce the linkage”.

The Prototype Theory is used by social networks to attract people to some products or to vote political candidates. Disseminating the information, social networks are becoming main instruments of power.

#### IDENTITY POLITICS AND THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS FROM THE USA

The analysis of the social networks was developed once with the perspectives concerning structuralism. The anthropologists and the psycho- sociologists (Bavelas, 1950; Leavitt, 1951; Smith, 1950) focused their researches on what was named as “social structure”. The Harvard School emphasizes the analysis of social relations through the study of social structure using mathematical models. An interesting study was that of Granovetter’s regarding the types or connections that are formed in the transmission of the information. He used in his analysis what he called “weak links” or “strong links”. Strong bonds are valid when the individual seeks emotional support. Weak bonds are valid when individuals seek information or various contacts (Katz *et al.*, 2004).

Another method for the analysis of the social networks is that of “clicks” or “sub-groups” that are part of a network. Informal social relations lead to a form of cohesion of subgroups that have their own values, norms, orientations and can work against formal social structures (Scott, 2000, 56). Katz *et al.* (2004) pointed out that we are dealing with two periods of research of small group networks. First period is that from 50–60’s, the time for experimental researchers. Bavelas and Leavitt conducted a series of experiments on small groups, measuring the impact of their functioning (Bavelas, 1950; Bavelas & Barrett, 1951; Leavitt, 1951 apud Katz *et al.*, 2004). The second period was after 1990 when a “resurgence” of social network research took place. For the analysis of the social network, the researchers identify a population, part of a social network and “the nodes” (organizations, actors, events etc.). As Scott (2000) noted, the data are gathered from “all the ties or links of a certain kind among these nodes, for example, transfers of resources, common memberships, interpersonal connections, joint participation in events, etc.” (Scott, 2000 apud Burris, 2012). The data are arranged in matrix “which contains one row and one column for each node within the network and whose cells indicate the presence or absence of links from each node to each other node within the network” (Burris, 2012). All the data and “nodes” are represented through a *sociogram*. Every node is tied with the others. As Burris (2012) claims, “in an actual study of the power structure, links of this kind might represent ties between corporations created when a single individual sits simultaneously on the boards of directors of both companies”. In an interconnected world, there are multiple links and “interlocking directorates” (Burris, 2012) that may serve as

channel communication. All the information are filtered and used to serve the interest of a power elite.

Nowadays, information about each individual is stored and used to manipulate masses of people. Social networks are using the identity of individuals to feed manipulation. Cambridge Analytica was such an example. The Centre from Cambridge, using the technique of personality mapping, developed a system to understand the personality of the individuals according to their preferences from Facebook. Every single “like” a person gave on Facebook was used to construct his personality profile and to use it to manipulate people. The program was used by Cambridge Analytica in electoral campaigns. Personal data collection and personality mapping were used to manipulate electoral campaigns (Goldhill, 2019).

The Social Networks became main instruments of power, tools used for political marketing. The 2008 and 2012 U.S. presidential campaigns used online networks to promote the candidates. In 2008, for Obama campaign it was created a social networking site, My.BarackObama.com (MyBO), and for John McCain campaign, it was used another social networking site, McCainSpace. “Both MyBO and McCainSpace allowed individuals to create their own profiles, interact with others, donate funds, join groups, and arrange events. The Obama campaign took things even further and used the site to target voters and to organize its get-out-the-vote efforts” (Harvey, 2013, 214). Allison Gosman (2016) mentioned that “social media has become a powerful mechanism for political campaigns to strategize their communication plans, hit back at their opponents, and to quickly create viral content that hundreds of thousands if not millions of followers disseminate to their peers” (Gosman, 2016).

Politicians, like Obama in 2016, tried to court the vote of a particular population. Using social media, politicians may influence a community of people having a particular racial, religious, ethnic, social, or cultural identity through political discourses. In a word, they try to influence the masses using “identity politics”.

As Heyes (2016) said, “the laden phrase “identity politics” has come to signify a wide range of political activity and theorizing founded in the shared experiences of injustice of members of certain social groups”.

Merriam Webster Dictionary defines identity politics as “politics in which groups of people having a particular racial, religious, ethnic, social, or cultural identity tend to promote their own specific interests or concerns without regard to the interests or concerns of any larger political group” pagina. The term was used for the first time in 1979 to “refer to activism by people with disabilities to transform both self [identity] and societal [cultural] conceptions of people with disabilities” (Chua, 2018 apud Urban, 2018, 6).

In the 1980’s and 1990’s, Ronald Reagan proposes some conservative initiatives that aided “group consciousness, group identity, and group claims” associated with the oppressed and attempted to break down race, gender, religious,

and even national boundary barriers”(Chua, 2018 apud Urban, 2018, 6). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, “redistribution politics” transformed into “politics of recognition” and created modern identity politics” (ibidem). The term was reset by the Democratic Candidate Barack Obama at the 2004 National Convention when he declared: “There’s not a black America, white America, Latino America, or Asian America, there’s the United States of America” (Chua, 2018 apud Urban, 2018, 7).

The political leaders are using in their discourses the term of identity politics to attract and influence some communities of people with a particular racial, religious, ethnic, social, or cultural identity through social media.

“Who we are influences not just what we want from politics but what we believe is true about politics” (Klein, 2018). This was also the key message of an analysis on “Identity Crisis” made by political scientists John Sides, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck about 2016 elections. They claimed that “in 2016, the important groups were defined by the characteristics that have long divided Americans: race, ethnicity, religion, gender, nationality, and, ultimately, partisanship. What made 2016 election distinctive was how much those identities mattered to voters” (Sides, Tesler, Vavreck, 2018, 2). Group identities mattered in 2016 elections. Obama’s discourses were based on these issues and they mattered.

As Sides, Tesler, Vavreck (2018) claimed, “the power of group identities” depends on how much that group has to gain or to lose, it depends on the context. “Groups become more unified and more likely to develop goals and grievances, which are the components of a politicized group consciousness” (Sides, Tesler, Vavreck, 2018, 3). Political actors constitute another important element. They may reinforce the power of a group, emphasizing the member’s psychological sense of belonging to a group. Political actors may bring to attention the external threats to a group and the sentiment of differentiation from other groups. So, the distinction between “us” and “them” concerning group politics depends on the actions of political actors.

How identity politics changed American election in 2016? Even before 2016, two partisanship groups concerning identity attitudes have been shaped. The group identities and partisanship were politicized. Trump’s running for office was accompanied by a strategy “unusual in American politics: focusing on racially charged issues” (Sides, Tesler, Vavreck, 2018, 5). The racially rhetoric was central in Trump’s discourses. He discredited Obama of not being a Native American citizen. Even after Obama presented his birth certificate, Trump used this issue in his 2016 electoral campaign.

The 2016 election campaign was a race where the two candidates used identity politics in their favor. The two candidates had different approach concerning the use of the social media. “Hillary Clinton (...) didn’t use the public’s



voice on social media during the primary season. Donald Trump, however, “re-tweeted” the general public the majority of the time allowing a direct relationship to the public and branding himself as the more relatable candidate” (Urban, 2018, 34). Trump’s strategy to address directly to the public through social media succeeded. He focused on what Urban (2018) called “silent majority’s”. “In the election of 2016, Trump spoke to the current American identity through social media, not the individual” (Urban, 2018, 33).

Sides, Tesler and Vavreck (2018) consider that dissatisfaction related to economy was a variable that mattered in 2016 elections. As the authors showed, “economic anxieties came to matter more when they were refracted through social identities. The important sentiment under lying Trump’s support was not “I might lose my job” but, in essence, “People in my group are losing jobs to that other group” (Sides, Tesler, Vavreck, 2018, 8). It was all about “racial economy”. But, despite racial economy, identity politics mattered most.

The political scientist Ashley Jardina published a book titled “White Identity Politics”. The author demonstrated the fact that “white identity” was an important variable of voting for Trump. As Jardina said, Trump appealed to “white identifiers and to white consciousness” (Jardina, 2019, 258). As Jardina (2019) remarked: “What sets Trump further apart from the long line of politicians who have used race to win white votes is that he capitalized on more than white voters’ animosity for racial and ethnic minorities” (Jardina, 2019, 232). Trump’s success has been due in part to address to both whites who have been felt disadvantaged and those who haven’t been. As Jardina mentioned, Trump exploited the concerns of whites regarding to their group status, appealing to “white identifiers”. The candidates, especially Trump appealed to categorizations. The method of categorization as we mentioned in the chapter above about The Prototype Theory was used in the electoral process through social media.

The two candidates at the USA presidency in 2016 elections used social media as a political instrument. The Internet became the main instrument of power in political campaigns, a form of “smart politics” (Hollinger, 2018). Pro-Trump pages used the process of “shearability”, resulting in “a pattern designed to target voters in particular regions with the most potential impact” (Hollinger, 2018).

We analysed Trump’s Twitter account “@realDonaldTrump” and Hillary Clinton account (@HillaryClinton) from 2015 until 2017. The data were provided also from Trump Twitter Archive. According to these sources, Donald Trump had 50 tweets about women, 12 about immigrants, 10 about refugees, 6 about Hispanics, 8 about Muslims and 50 tweets containing the word racist. Hillary Clinton registered 357 tweets about women, 34 about immigrants, 7 about refugees, 1 about Hispanics, 28 about Muslims and 11 tweets containing the word racist.

The analysis of the words used in the two candidates tweets shows that Hillary Clinton based her campaign on gender issue (women), while Trump was more concerned about racism issues.

Hillary Clinton emphasized her candidacy on Trump mistreatment of women (Sides, Tesler, Vavreck, 2018). Hillary's tweets appealed to women for getting the votes: "*Women can stop Trump*" (Tweet, 8 November 2016) and "*When women get ahead, America gets ahead*" (tweet, 15 July 2015); also, she declared that she was fighting for women's rights: "*Women's rights are human rights*" (Tweet, 7 November 2016). Trump responded to Hillary, using the same identity issue: "I will do far more for women than Hillary, and I will keep our country safe, something which she will not be able to do (...)" (Tweet, 26 December 2015) but the last candidate supported his winning strategy on other issues.

As Jardina (2019) argued, Trump activated white identity underlying the threats to white's status. He used racial categorization as a threat to Americans identity. In a tweet from 26 August 2014, Trump said: "Sadly, the overwhelming amount of violent crime in our major cities is committed by blacks and Hispanics-a tough subject- must be discussed". He also blamed immigrants and refugees for American identity crisis. "Issues like immigration, racial discrimination, and the integration of Muslims boil down to competing visions of American identity and inclusiveness" (Sides, Tesler, Vavreck, 2018, 25). In a tweet from 17 November, 2015, Trump argued: "Refugees from Syria are now pouring into our great country. Who knows who they are-some could be ISIS. Is our president insane"? In other tweet from 3 December, 2015, he argued: "We will soon be at a point with our incompetent politicians where we will be treating illegal immigrants better than our veterans" (Tweet, 20 July 2015). Trump obtained votes from those concerned about immigration. Sides, Tesler and Vavreck (2018) argued in their book that Trump attracted more voters in states like Michigan and Wisconsin because, as Drutman (2019) said, he was appealing "to their conservative views on issues like immigration".

Debates about ethnic, racial and national identities gave rise to strong emotions that polarized people "in terms of other group identities" (Sides, Tesler, Vavreck, 2018, 26). Sides and Tesler, cited by Bacon (2019) mentioned "that Republican voters who felt a strong sense of white racial identity and believed that whites were being unfairly discriminated against were more likely to back Trump than other GOP voters during the primaries". As Sides, Tesler, Vavreck (2018, 40) mentioned, "the outcome of the 2016 election would depend not only on election-year fundamentals like the economy, but also on how successfully the candidates could navigate these racial dynamics and mobilize a winning coalition".

There were other explanations, as suggested Bacon (2019) for Trump's victory. Peter Enns, cited by Bacon (2019) mentioned that the cause and effect might be backward. Maybe Americans supported Trump not for identity issues, but for other reasons and they ended to sustain Trumps ideas about race and immigration. Some authors (Faerber, 2016) argued that Trump's personality also

was a factor that could influence his victory. The way Trump presented himself on the social media could be an important indicator regarding his victory. It's what we called the "management of impression" or how the candidate presented himself in a most favourable way to the voters. As Faerber (2016) argued, "Trump's personality profile also includes a high level of dominance, which accounts for his chronic combativeness, seeming inability to resist personal attacks (...). Voters view it as an indicator of strong leadership, which is particularly appealing to conservatives, though less so to liberals".

Of course, there were another reasons that led to Trump's winning. An important one was the F.B.I. investigation about Clinton's e-mails that reduced her chances to win the elections. As Mark Murray from NBC News said, "political observers have pointed to various reasons why Hillary Clinton lost and Donald Trump won: FBI Director James Comey's intervention; Russia and WikiLeaks; Clinton's failure to campaign in Wisconsin; African-Americans who didn't turn out as strongly as they did for Obama; and Trump's strong performance among working-class white voters in the Rust Belt" (Murray, 2017). Because of the lack of the space and according to our objectives, we resumed the study on identity politics issues, which resulted to be among the important indicators for Trump's victory.

The using of identity politics in 2016 electoral campaign is not a new thing. It dates from previous elections, especially since 2000, when "Karl Rove showed how a national party could win not by appealing to the centre but by reviving up the base" (Heer, 2015). The Democrats have learned from this lesson in 2008 and 2012. And then the Republicans in 2016. It seems that it becomes a key strategy for electoral elections in America. In the first place, what matters is the electorate. And then, how candidates succeed to use this strategy (of identity politics) in proper ways to win the elections. As Urban (2018) observed, "identity politics is a changing, breathing entity wanting more from election to election" (Urban, 2018, 33). It's interesting to see if this strategy will be used in the next elections.

## CONCLUSIONS

Nowadays, virtual technology becomes of the main instrument for communication and for sharing the information. Through the Internet, people are creating online communities, where they interact, having common ideas and emotions.

Social Networks became main instruments of power, tools that influence individuals. People who interact within online communities are defining and are recreating their identity in a way to be pleasant for others. Symbolic Interactions perspective considers that "a person is a product of the interaction that occurs in a continual process of evaluation and transformation" (Evans, 2016, 3). Social networks are like artefacts, mediators of individual's behaviour. According to Activity Theory, "all human experience is shaped by the tools and sign systems we

use” (Nardi, 1996, 2). Social media is like a mediator that influence and determine individual’s behaviour.

Social Networks are also tools used for political marketing.

Identity politics and social networks played an important role for the electoral campaigns, beginning with 2000, 2008, and then in 2012 and 2016. Identity politics became the key message in candidate’s discourses and especially in their slogans from social media. During 2008 election, Democratic candidate Barack Obama and Republican candidate John McCain have used social media to attract voters. In the spring of 2008, social media activity has experienced a significant increase “since the 2006 midterm elections”, according to a Pew Research Center survey (Smith and Rainie, 2008 apud Urban, 2018, 8). And in 2012, the candidate who gained social media’s success won. Pew Research Center (2012) mentioned: “If presidential campaigns are in part contests over which candidate masters changing communications technology, Barack Obama on the eve of conventions holds a substantial lead over challenger Mitt Romney” (Pew Research Center 2012). Beyond his counter candidate, Obama focused more on identity politics issues that helped him to win.

In 2016 elections, Trump’s strategy to address to “silent majorities” through social media succeeded. Trump’s tweets were based on political issues mentioned in media exit polls. Among other reasons, Trump’s tweets and his messages to “white identity“. “White identity and issues surrounding it can play a big role in electoral outcomes. That helps explain why Trump won” (Lopez, 2017).

Identity politics is an issue that stimulated debates in the past few years, but the national conversations around this term have been going since the country was founded. Nowadays, when social media becomes a part of our lives, the discussions on the “identity politics” becomes more prominent than ever and is frequently used in the political candidate’s programs.

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