

ENGELSE TAAL EN CULTUUR

Teacher who will receive this document: Frank Mehring

Title of document: The Medium is the Message - How Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump mastered the media of their time

Name of course: B.A. Thesis

Date of submission: 15-06-2017

The work submitted here is the sole responsibility of the undersigned, who has neither committed plagiarism nor colluded in its production.

Signed

Name of student: Tessa Baan

Student number: s4453484

The Medium is the Message

How Ronald Reagan and Donald



Tessa Baan
S4453484
Frank Mehring
B.A. Thesis
15-06-2017

Abstract

How the president is portrayed in the media is extremely important for how the public views him. The press is said to function as conduit between the president and the public, as well as watchdog and agenda-setter, and therefore influence how the president is viewed. Because the news media is a commercial institution, in a 24-hour news environment in which all news agencies want the 'scoop,' and in which entertainment 'sells' well to the public, the quick sound-bites that both Reagan and Trump provided the media with were quickly transformed into headlines. Because of this, Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump challenged the authority of the news media. Prior to their campaigns, they were able to build an image through their appearances in the entertainment industry, which significantly shaped how the public viewed them. The fact that they were elected with this image in the public's mind, further demonstrates the blurring of entertainment and reality. Together this will show that both Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump fit perfectly in the technological and social landscapes of their time, and knew how to use this to their advantage. Using theory on television and digital media, I will map these developments in the media environment and explain its implications, which I will demonstrate with the cases of Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump.

Keywords: Television, Entertainment, Digital Media, Twitter, Image-shaping, Reagan, Trump

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	3
INTRODUCTION	5
1 THE AMERICAN MEDIA ENVIRONMENT: FROM TELEVISION TO TWITTER	8
1.1 THE EMERGENCE OF TELEVISION AND A 24-HOUR NEWS CYCLE	8
1.2 TEXT, VISUALS AND MEANING	12
1.3 CORPORATE CONSOLIDATION: JOURNALISM AS BYPRODUCT OF BUSINESS?	14
1.4 THE SELECTION OF NEWS AND THE VALUE OF ENTERTAINMENT	17
1.5 A NEW FORM OF CITIZEN JOURNALISM: THE INTERNET	18
1.6 SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AND THE RISE OF FAKE NEWS	20
1.6.1 THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF TWITTER	23
2. FROM NEWS TO INFOTAINMENT, FROM ACTOR TO PRESIDENT	25
2.1 IMAGE-CRAFTING THROUGH TELEVISION	25
2.2 THE INESCAPABLE IMAGE OF REAGAN	27
2.3 THE 'TEFLON PRESIDENT' AND THE BLURRING OF FACT AND FICTION	29
2.4 UNDERMINING THE PRESS: THE ISSUE OF THE DAY STRATEGY	31
3 A NEW KIND OF CELEBRITY: FEARLESS BUSINESSMAN DONALD TRUMP	34
3.1 TRUMP AND TELEVISION	35

3.2 TRUMP AND TWITTER: FROM TWEET TO HEADLINE	37
3.3 TRUMP AND THE BLURRING OF FACT AND FICTION	39
CONCLUSION	41

Introduction

According to American presidential historian Gil Troy, we live in a “Reaganized” America:

We see it in the blurring of popular and political culture, as prime-time television shows model themselves on White House life and create a fictional president more popular than the actual incumbent, as stars queue up for political runs to join California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in politics, and as presidents and their wives play the fame game like Hollywood celebrities. (Troy, 2013. p. 6)

Reading this now, in 2017, it is as if he foreshadowed the election of Donald Trump. When this billionaire and Reality TV star entered the 2016 United States presidential election, the press was quick to assess the similarities—as well as the differences—between him and Ronald Reagan (Balz, 2017; Caryl, 2017; "Donald Trump vs. Ronald Reagan", 2016; Stanley, 2016; Vavreck, 2015; Zeitz, 2016). Ten days after the election of Trump, an analysis of the 2016 elections by leading scholars in media and politics was published. Its many mentions of Reagan and his communicational legacy show that the academic world also immediately took notice of how Reagan’s media techniques still echo through the ages. One duplicate it mentions is particularly difficult to ignore: Reagan’s tag line “Let’s Make America Great Again” that Trump made his own during the 2016 election campaign ("US Election Analysis 2016," 2016).

Other scholars have assessed why the messages of Reagan and Trump, appealed to people in the social and economic context in which they emerged, specifically regarding their foreign relations policy and their conservative rhetoric (Smith, 2017; Slater, 2017). Indeed, they both campaigned in the midst of social turmoil, with fears of economic and foreign threats guiding the electorate in their vote. In the Reagan years, the economy was experiencing inflation, and when Trump was elected, the United States was rebuilding the economy after economic recession. Reagan's presidency saw the Iranian Hostage Crisis and fear of the Soviet Union's increasing power, while Trump played on Americans' fears of terrorist attacks, and therefore of immigrants (Troy, 2013; "US Election Analysis," 2016). Because of this social and economic context, they were able to gather support. I will, however, focus on the importance of entertainment and media attention, as it is not just the message that was crucial for their election, but also the medium from which it was spread.

Since the 1970s, with the decline of political parties, the media functioned as a conduit of information between the government and the public, as well as the agenda-setter and selector of information (Denton, 1988). They were therefore crucial for guiding the public in how to view a presidential candidate. Yet, in the cases of Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump, the image-shaping had already begun through their history in the entertainment media. Because of this, I will assess Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump in the context of the news media, as well as the entertainment media in which they emerged. I will do this in order to answer the question: "How is the blurring of entertainment and information and fact and fiction in the United States media arena from the 1950s to the present demonstrated through the election of Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump?"

Firstly, I will map the developments in the media landscape from the emergence of television until the present, and demonstrate how with the emergence of television, and later digital media, entertainment values became increasingly important as people wanted access to

quick information bits and were lured by attractive sound-bites. I chose the rise of broadcasting services as a starting point, and the social medium of Twitter as destination, because television was important in the shaping of the images of both Reagan and Trump, while Twitter is the medium that Trump mastered greatly. This theoretical framework will be based on an overview of changes in the American press (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2009; McPherson, 2006), theory on journalism and news values (Broder, 1975; Deuze, 2005; Nerone, 2013; Wahl-Jorgenson & Hanitzsch, 2009), and media theory (Barker, 2012; Kaul, 2013; Josephi, 2016; Schroeder, 2016).

Through the cases of Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump, these changes will be demonstrated. Specifically, it will be shown how Reagan and Trump were able to shape their image through the entertainment industry. Ronald Reagan forged his image as a man of 'progress,' whose optimism enlightened people in times of social despair. Trump, on the other hand, embodied the fearless businessman, who was not afraid to tell the truth and to take affirmative action. Both these images spoke to the people in times of fear and resentment of the political and journalistic elite. Secondly, it will be shown how they were able to manipulate the news media to cover the topics that they wanted, by providing them ready-made headlines through attractive sound-bites. They were able to do this because of the blurring of entertainment and 'hard' news in the news media, especially television, that I have mapped in my theoretical framework.

1 The American Media Environment: from Television to Twitter

As Barnhurst and Nerone argue, “For many scholars today, history provides an indispensable tool for critiquing professional journalism by showing its contingency and entanglements” (2009:17). The media arena has been influenced by social, technological and economic changes, and therefore it is important to map these changes in order to understand the media environment in which Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump emerged as candidates, and were elected president. The introduction of a new technology is often seen as a turning point in the narrative of developments in the news arena (Barnhurst and Nerone, 2009). The introduction of television signals the beginning of the period that I will map, as it was this new medium that set the stage for Ronald Reagan as an actor, and later as president. This chapter ends with the emergence of the internet, specifically the online social medium of Twitter. The implications of this medium are important, as it was the tool that Donald Trump used in communicating directly with his followers, hereby undermining the authority of the press.

1.1 The Emergence of Television and a 24-Hour News Cycle

According to Tim Raphael, the dimensions of the political stage were altered significantly by “the decay of electoral allegiances,” “the decline of party machines,” and “round-the-clock scrutiny by the mass media” (2009. P. 116). The latter emerged as broadcasting made possible the emergence of a 24-hour news cycle, and increasingly began covering the White House. Because of this, the ability of an administration to influence the

media became more important, as the mass media could be used to shape public opinion, bring positive attention to policies, and enact the political agenda (Raphael, 2009).

According to Hall, in television is implicated “the provision and the selective construction of social knowledge, of social imagery, through which we perceive the ... “lived realities” of others, and imaginarily reconstruct their lives and ours into some intelligible “world-of-the-whole” (in Barker, 2012. p. 325). One of its principal texts is ‘news,’ and therefore it influences public life. Political coverage, in television, reports on government, political parties, and focuses on personalities (Barker, 2012). By the second half of the twentieth century, broadcasting news had become part of society, and a threat to print journalists. Print journalists, however, saw their medium as superior in political coverage, and argued that television news distorted events, lacked depth and evaded controversy (McPherson, 2006). Indeed, Barker also argues that television news is a mediated and selected construction of reality (2012). While this true, for television news was more intertwined with entertainment than print news, television became increasingly important in political coverage.

Further developments in broadcasting increased the tension between style and substance in television. Satellite technology made possible the circulation of a national newspaper, as now pages could be composed in one location and then sent to the printing machines in other locations, from which the papers could easily be distributed. Cable and satellite technology also made possible the emergence of national television channels (McPherson, 2006). In result, news could by presented more quickly and less expensively because it was now easier to transmit information to local stations. This changed news reporting, as now reports could be aired live and on location. It was easier for journalists to report on location because of lighter camera equipment, cell phones and other mobile equipment. This also came with a downside, McPherson argues, as the popular new live coverage gave reporters less time to prepare for in-depth coverage of certain issues (2006).

Also, because this ‘on location’ coverage became popular, editorial staffs were cut and replaced by producers. This led to live coverage of stories for which it was not necessary to be on location (McPherson, 2006). This shows that while the new technologies had many advantages, they also had negative effects on the depth of the news coverage. It also shows the importance of visuals in television news, as the presentation—filming on location—became more important than the information that was to be conveyed.

In this period, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting—a private nonprofit corporation that formed the Public Broadcasting Service and National Public Radio—was also established. It allowed for higher visual quality broadcasting news and a wider circulation of it. National on-screen news programs such as PBS and NPR have been partly funded by this corporation (McPherson, 2006). With the invention of cable and satellite technology also came the Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network, or C-SPAN, which covered the House of Representatives, the Senate and other political bodies (McPherson, 2006). It allowed American citizens to follow what their representative bodies were discussing, which had not been possible before. "C-SPAN brings everything that the candidates are doing into the people's living rooms," argues Phil Roeder, executive director of the Iowa Democratic Party (in Rosenthal, 1987). Rutan, C-SPAN's political director, stated that it forced candidates to be warier of their remarks, as “what they say in a small Iowa town is on the record, just as if they had said it at the National Press Club in Washington" (in Rosenthal, 1987).

With the emergence of a 24-hour news cycle, candidates had to be even more careful of their remarks. In 1980, the first 24-hour national news network was established through Turner Broadcasting's Cable News Network, now widely known as CNN (McPherson, 2006). CNN could provide viewers with breaking news at any time, and therefore was much faster than the printed newspapers in covering so-called “scoops” (McPherson, 2006). Viewers had hoped that the availability of 24-hour news meant more depth of coverage, but were

disappointed. As CNN had enough airtime but not enough resources, stories were often repeated or made more important or sensationalistic (McPherson, 2006). The 24-hour news cycle had an important effect on politicians, as they now would be expected to respond immediately to issues, as their every move was being followed. This meant less time to prepare for a response regarding certain events or issues. Yet, policymakers quickly learned how to use the network to draw attention to the issues they wanted to be covered. Nixon was the first president to establish an office of communications, staffed by professional in PR, advertising, and media (Raphael, 2009).

The fact that there was a “constant deadline cycle” also affected the news media (McPherson, 2006). The production of fast news was competitive, and most newspapers appeared in the morning or afternoon. This meant that they had more time to thoroughly investigate issues before they were published. Within broadcasting news, however, deadlines happened around the clock, and news became more ‘quick and dirty’, as its accuracy and depth was challenged by the battle for the first scoop. (McPherson, 2006).

The second half of the twentieth century saw technological advances in both print and broadcasting, through the invention of the computer. By early 1970s, the Associated Press and United Press International began installing computer terminals in their offices. From late 1970s, videotext was used to deliver content in a computer-like format via cable or phone lines to a television or computer screen (McPherson, 2006). This interactive system allowed journalists to update the content quickly. In the 1980s, the video display terminal—an electronical typewriter attached to a television screen—made its way into newsrooms, changing the speed and flexibility in which text could be produced. In 1981, the IBM personal computer arrived, and was followed by Apple’s Macintosh in 1984. These devices not only quickly made its way into people’s homes, but were also incorporated in the newsrooms to generate graphics, used for example for special effects (McPherson, 2006). The next chapter,

on text, visuals and meaning, further examines the importance of visuals in television.

1.2 Text, Visuals and Meaning

The meanings of television, as Barker argues, are generated by the audience who engages with it (2012). They actively produce meaning from within their cultural context, and therefore watching television is a socially and culturally informed activity. The audience does not simply accept the meaning of a text, but engages with it critically (Barker, 2012). However, meanings are influenced by the ways in which text is structured. For television news depends not only on its stories, but also on visual idioms, it is important to recognize the importance of presentational style in television. Because of the importance of visuals, television has been subject to tension between ‘style’ and ‘substance,’ or ‘information’ and ‘entertainment’ (Barker, 2012). Political coverage was also influenced by this increase in the use of ‘flashy’ visuals, and came to rely on “the staged sound-bite, resonant phrases or telling image” (2012. p. 331).

By the 1980s, news became easier to access and more popular, as it became more visually appealing, more homogenous, more entertaining, and less sensitive and shocking (McPherson, 2006). The line between “news” and “entertainment” became less clear. While the appearance of newspapers was changing, the increasing importance of entertainment values was most clearly visible in broadcasting, a medium on which most Americans relied on for their news consuming. Quick cuts, flashy graphics and dramatic music were added as much to create a “mood” as to convey information. The need to attract an audience with a flashy appearance sometimes influenced the quality of the news product, as often—irrelevant—dramatic aspects were emphasized (McPherson, 2006). Because of fear of “dead air” as the number of channels to choose from was increasing, the so-called “happy talk” was born to stop people from changing the channel. This was friendly, casual talk between

reporters on screen during news items. With “happy talk” emerging, news stories also became more light-hearted, and more local stories were covered than before. These human-interest stories became more popular than hard news. New networks which focused on sports—such as ESPN—or on music—such as MTV—were also added to the range of channel choices (McPherson, 2006). Because light-hearted, ‘soft’ news became increasingly popular, it became increasingly intertwined with ‘hard’ news. According to Dahlgren, this “increased use of faster editing tempos and ‘flashier’ presentational styles,” is the result of a growing commercial competition, which has pushed television to use popular formats (in Barker, 2012. p. 331). These formats, according to him, include “tabloid-style newscasts, the political talk show, the vox-pop audience participation format and the ‘infotainment’ magazine shows” (Dahlgren in Barker, 2012. P. 332). Although these formats draw an audience that traditional formats could not engage, these news stories often fail to provide enough context, and therefore, partially lack ‘substance.’

These developments signal the beginning of the intertwining of entertainment and information. As visuals became more important, and broadcasting services became available 24-hours a day, journalistic notions of accuracy were challenged, and the press was criticized for becoming too sensationalistic. The 24-hour availability of news also had implications for politicians, who now had less time to respond to issues. At the end of the century, almost all daily newspapers had also joined this 24-hour news cycle as they now had an online website providing for news articles. These developments contributed to increasing concerns regarding ‘style-versus-substance’ issues in U.S. broadcasting news. The increasing interest of corporations in media agencies further stimulated newsrooms to become more focused on presentational styles, as will be shown next.

1.3 Corporate Consolidation: Journalism as Byproduct of Business?

Newsrooms were changing due to corporate interests. By the twentieth century, monopolistic aspects had emerged in news production, which was especially visible in metropolitan newspapers and wire services. Because of the emergence of a more monopolistic news environment and the power that came with it, journalism was able to become a more autonomous profession, with its own ethical codes (Barnhurst and Nerone, 2009). Corporate interests also influenced the selection of what was seen as “news” and how it was to be covered. With profits becoming more important, the ethical codes that the profession of journalism embodied were challenged.

During the 1980s, hundreds of companies were bought out by “corporate raiders.” These corporate raiders would often issue “junk bonds”—a high-yielding high-risk security—in order to raise capital quickly to finance such a takeover. After the sale, the company often paid off the debt through the sale of company assets, laying off personnel, and cutting research and development (McPherson, 2006). By early 1990s, a combination of high interest rates and bad investments led to the collapse of several banks, or government having to regulate them. The government bailout that followed cost taxpayers billions of dollars. News on Wall Street and big business affairs became a popular topic for news coverage (McPherson, 2006). By 1985, media magnate Rupert Murdoch had bought the *New York Post*, *Boston Herald*, and *Chicago Sun Times*, and later television stations ABC, CBS, and NBC, while already owning newspaper and television holdings in Australia and England. Critics commented that he influenced his news companies into producing more sensationalistic news, and hereby promoting its “tabloidization” (McPherson, 2006). This shows that corporate interests also influenced the newsroom, and therefore the way in which news is covered, as well as what is selected as news. By the beginning of the decade, fifty corporations controlled most major American media. Networks increasingly found themselves answering to

executives who did not specialize in journalism, but in entertainment. With this increase in corporate consolidation came potential for conflicts of interest and the diminishing of perspectives. Networks faced criticism for having sponsors which were not associated with news, as well as the use of advertorials; advertisements which looked like an editorial (McPherson, 2005).

Corporate consolidation was further enforced with the Telecommunications Act of 1996. Media industries benefited from the passage of this act, as now corporations were allowed to own more types of media outlets. The law spurred media mergers and left larger companies in control of most American news media (McPherson, 2005). In 1987, more than half of American homes had cable, despite the rising rates due to deregulation of the industry. As more cable stations started to pop up, broadcast companies began to increasingly use market research to adapt their programming to potential viewers. Newspapers had already been doing this, but their research became even more precise, and stories therefore more tailored to satisfy their readers. Because of this, stories regarding events in neighborhoods where readership was low, or where there were not many target groups for advertisers, were often not covered (McPherson, 2006). This shows that as business became more important, news was carefully selected to 'sell' to as much people as possible.

There was also an upside to corporate consolidation, as the number of suburban newspaper continued to grow. Also, television and radio news was able to become more fearless in its coverage when the Fairness Doctrine, which required broadcasters to present controversial issues 'honest, equitable, and balanced,' was dissolved in 1987, granting broadcasters the same protection as print journalists had had. Yet, in fear of losing viewers, broadcasters remained hesitant to produce controversial stories (McPherson, 2006). Also, the number of staff members in media agencies declined in this period. CBS, for example, let go 350 people in less than three years during the second half of the 1980s. Because of this,

fewer people did more work in a shorter amount of time, and therefore stories were less well-analyzed. According to McPherson, it almost seemed as if journalism became a “byproduct” of media agencies (2006).

On the other hand, with the professionalization process also came a shared professional ideology and therefore a sense of “wholeness” of the vision of professional journalism. Journalists identified themselves more easily with the profession of journalism than with the company they worked for (Josephi, 2016). They established a shared list of values, which were typified by ideals. These values gave their work a sense of legitimacy and credibility. Such journalistic values are, according to Deuze: “public service,” “objectivity,” “autonomy,” “immediacy,” and “ethics” (2005). The quality press’ reporters defined themselves as “spokespeople on behalf of the public” (Josephi, 2016). In this role they could mediate how the people would view government, and how government would view the will of the people (Josephi, 2016). Employing this “watchdog” function, the press presented itself as “trusted avenues of information,” and therefore essential to the practice of democracy (Josephi, 2016). The populist press, on the other hand, regarded this stance as undemocratic and elitist. These contrasting views of those who prefer the “mediated voice of large sections of society” versus those who strive for an “individual-centered understandings of the democratic process” were typical of this period (Josephi, 2016). According to Nerone, however, the only period in which the U.S. media held an actual monopoly on news services and therefore could be seen as being in such a powerful position, were the 1950s and 60s, or the “high modernism” of journalism (2013). The political consensus and economic security of this period made it possible for the press to be powerful and prosperous, and at the same time the journalist to be autonomous (Josephi, 2016).

1.4 The Selection of News and the Value of Entertainment

As I have argued, with the increase of corporate interests and the rise of new digital technologies came a new focus on selecting news that would draw attention of as much potential viewers as possible. To understand how this leads to an increasing focus on ‘entertainment,’ ‘elite,’ and ‘celebrity,’ one must look at theory on news values.

According to O’Neill and Harcup, scholars have described the production of news as “the passive exercise of routine and highly regulated procedures in the task of selecting from already limited supplies of information” (2009:161). Many scholars have attempted to define the “slippery concept” of “news,” by categorizing “news values”: traits that make a story newsworthy. News values differ in different media, geographical or social contexts, and time, and therefore there is not “one” list of news values. They are passed on from one journalistic generation to the next, but also change along the way (O’Neill and Harcup, 2009). “News,” according to the National Council for the Training of Journalists, “is information—new, relevant to the reader, topical and perhaps out of the ordinary” (O’Neill and Harcup, 2009). Because “news values” are subject to economic, social, and economic changes, O’Neill and Harcup have proposed a new set of values, in which changes in audience and market forces have been taken into consideration. According to them, this includes “the promotion of individualism” and the “rise of celebrity culture” (O’Neill and Harcup, 2009:167). From this list of news values, the following are relevant to my research:

The Power Elite: Stories concerning powerful individuals, organizations or institutions. *Celebrity*: Stories concerning people who are already famous.

Entertainment: Stories concerning sex, show business, human interest, animals, an unfolding drama, or offering opportunities for humorous treatment, entertaining photographs or witty headlines. (O’Neill and Harcup, 2009:168)

News values can help us understand the way in which events or persons are selected to become “news,” and why some events or persons are emphasized while others are excluded (O’Neill and Harcup, 2009). The news values noted above became increasingly important by the 1980s, and help us understand the election of both Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump.

The shifting perceptions of news values made it more difficult to define the role of the press. By the 1980s, the role of the broadcast journalist was also becoming less clearly defined, as elements of news were more often combined with entertainment and sensationalism. Some movies complicated the issue of seeing the difference between fact and fiction even further, as the new “docudramas” did not hesitate to fill in unknown events with fiction (McPherson, 2006). With a new focus on entertainment also came a new definition of “celebrity.” As politics became less popular to read or hear about, politicians were increasingly replaced by a new form of “celebrity,” namely sports heroes, movie stars, singers and television hosts (McPherson, 2006).

By the end of the twentieth century, as I have aimed to demonstrate, previous models of autonomous journalism had been undermined by political, economic, technical and social changes such as the rise of new digital technologies and the rise of corporate interests in the newsroom (Barnhurst and Nerone, 2009). These changes called for a re-evaluation of the role of the press as a new form of citizen journalism was emerging: The Internet.

1.5 A New Form of Citizen Journalism: The Internet

During the 20th century, the new media of radio and television had increased concerns that valuable information would be reduced to sound bites, that charismatic candidates would be preferred over abler, but less charismatic candidates, and that a few large corporations would have control over the whole media arena. In the early 2000s, a new medium was introduced to people’s lives: The Internet. The new digital media age that came into being

accelerated the existing concerns regarding the authority of the press. While much of the social impact of digital journalism is still developing, some of the “gains” and “losses” can already be assessed (Joseph, 2016).

As people began to rely on technology to receive information, an established “truth” in journalism was challenged: that the professional journalist is the one who determines what the public learns about the world (Deuze, 2005). False information became easier to spread, and an excess diversity of available viewpoints would make it easier for people to form political “echo chambers” or “filter bubbles,” from which they were shielded from contrasting views (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017). Also, the dynamics of the profession would change greatly as deadlines became tighter than ever (Kaul, 2013). With the rise in digitalization came the need for new training programs for journalists, devoted to teaching the journalist how to work in the digital media environment (Deuze, 2005). As a result, while entertainment and information became more intertwined, so did fact and fiction.

While traditional media demanded a consumerist attitude, the new digital media enabled a more participatory environment. This new participatory form of journalism had serious implications for the practice of democracy. As a consumer, one can only redirect the intended effects of media creations, but as a producer, one can alter the creations themselves. Therefore, this new model of journalism enabled the people to engage in—global—public affairs actively and therefore democratizes journalistic processes. Now that the “centrality” of democracy is fading, as anyone can participate, the discussion of democratic models—especially the participatory model—has been revived. In 2014, six billion of the world’s estimated seven billion people had access to mobile phones (Joseph, 2016). While this does not necessarily mean that these phones give access to digital networks, it does show a sort of “universal connectivity” (Joseph, 2016. p. 8). Meta-analysis of theories of journalism has shown that terms such as “public sphere” and “citizen journalism” are used more often than

“democracy,” which demonstrates a shift in the perception of theoretical journalism to one that focuses on this universal connectivity and that is therefore less bound to a certain form of government (Joseph, 2016. p. 8).

The sale of newspapers continued to decline throughout the 21st century (Kaul, 2013). From 2009 to 2014, circulation of newspapers fell 10.25 percent in North America (Joseph, 2016). Yet, traditional journalism still has great influence and therefore digital journalism and traditional journalism have to be seen side to side rather than in isolation (Joseph, 2016). The challenges traditional media are facing are summarized by Picard as “mature and saturated markets, loss of audience not highly interested in news, the diminishing effectiveness of the mass media business model, the lingering effects of the economic crisis, and the impact of digital competitors” (2014. p. 273). Finding the balance between generating profits in the new digital environment while keeping the journalistic “ethos” intact became an important issue for journalists (Deuze, 2005). As newspapers began to publish articles online for anyone to access, another issue emerged: Journalism is generally seen as a ‘public good,’ but how is this to be funded? Some online news providers have set-up ‘pay-walls,’ where people have to pay a certain amount to get access to all articles, or make micro-payments for a single article, and others simply ask for donations on their websites.

As I have argued, the new participatory environment that was created through the emergence of the digital sphere, allowed everyone to spread information, and therefore challenged the role of the press. The ultimate ‘blurring of fact and fiction,’ and therefore the ultimate challenge to the press will be addressed next: the rise of ‘fake news.’

1.6 Social Media Platforms and the Rise of Fake News

In the twentieth century, lines were drawn between quality newspapers and tabloids, which were criticized as being too sensationalistic. This reliance on popular

knowledge and recognition, however, makes the tabloid suitable for readers that feel left out by the “elite epistemologies linked to class hierarchies” (Josephi, 2016. p. 5). The digital age has also been described in terms of “drama, sensationalism, affect and emotion” (Josephi, 2016. p. 6). Many people began to prefer attractive headlines, and free and easy access to quick information bits over investigative journalism (McPherson, 2016). News spread via social media is known for carrying these elements. They are spread by people and therefore coincide with their emotions. Because they are spread by people, it is insufficient to state that they do not contribute to people’s lives, as has been often said of tabloids (Josephi, 2016).

There is however a danger to these platforms, on which anyone can place content, and therefore can spread misinformation, or ‘fake news.’ These fake news stories are potentially influential because a majority of adults—62 percent—receive their news on social media (Gottfried and Shearer, 2016). Also, it is shown by a survey by Ipsos for BuzzFeed News, that many American adults are fooled by ‘fake news’ headlines; 83 percent of the time, respondents who cited Facebook as a major news source believed that fake news headlines were accurate (Singer-Vine and Silverman, 2016). The emergence of fake news has multiple negative social outcomes. Firstly, as it becomes more difficult to distinguish legitimate sources from illegitimate ones, people become more skeptical of their news suppliers. United States’ citizens’ trust in mass media is continuously declining since 2005, especially with Republicans. In 2016, there is a notably sharp drop in media trust among Republicans (Alcott and Gentzkow, 2017). Another result of adding fake articles to the news arena, is that the democratic process is undermined, as misinformation may cause a person to select the wrong political candidate. Lastly, a reduced demand for truthful and precise reporting might reduce investments in the resources necessary for such reporting (Josephi, 2016).

Fake news is not a new phenomenon, but in the digital media age it is of growing importance, because it is now easy for anyone to create content on the Internet. It is

no longer necessary to set up a website in order to create content, as social media enables anyone to post on the web. While mainstream media are afraid of reputational damage, less well-known sources are less concerned about this, and more with short-term profits from attracting “clicks” in a certain period. Because of this, individuals or groups without a reputation to uphold are more likely to place fake content on the world wide web than well-known sources of news. Social media are ideal for this purpose. The costs of entering the news market through social media are extremely low, or non-existent. This increases the possible amount of advertisement profits. It also reduces the need to create a long-term positive reputation. The format of social media— “thin slices of information viewed on phones or news feed windows”—can make it difficult to distinguish professional sources from less credible ones (Alcott and Gentzkow, 2017).

Social media are becoming increasingly entrenched in the news arena. In 2016, there were 1.8 billion active Facebook users per month, and 400 million on Twitter (Alcott and Gentzkow, 2017). Fake news articles that go viral on social media therefore can draw high advertisement revenue. This is often the main motivation of those who produce fake news articles. Some, however, produce them for ideological reasons, as they are in favor of certain political candidates. Their stories are often designed to “deliver psychological utility” to readers on either the left or right political spectrum (Alcott and Gentzkow, 2017). Fake news stories are able to travel fast through online shares of people who identify with the ideologies the articles embrace. This is the case because the algorithms of online social news feeds are designed to show news articles that are in line with one and one’s friends preferences. Because friend networks are often ideologically segregated, people are less likely to see news articles that counter their political ideologies appear in their news feeds (Bakshy, Messing and Adamic, 2015).

With fake news increasingly becoming an issue, social media platforms are taking measures against the phenomenon. Facebook and Google are removing websites that produce fake news from their advertising programs. Both are using 3rd party fact checkers to identify and flag fake news publishers. Google's AdSense system is one of the largest major sources of revenue for online publishers, and Google has reported to having banned nearly 200 publishers from using AdSense (Scott, 2017). Facebook has changed its 'trending topic' feature, which shows popular topics that are discussed on Facebook. It will now feature a publisher headline below each topic name, and its system has been improved to select articles that are being covered by multiple news outlets around the world (Cathcart, 2017). The fight against fake news is, however, still in progress as platforms are trying to find out what works best for the enhancement of the credibility of their news feeds. According to Nic Newman, there is an upside to fake news: people begin to realize that the future of journalism is at crisis, and that it is important to invest in professional journalism (Kodjo, 2017).

1.6.1 The Social Implications of Twitter

"If it happened in the world in 2014, it happened on Twitter" the company claimed on its official Twitter account at the end of 2014. In this year, it reported having 284 million active monthly users, who together account for over 500 million tweets per day (Twitter, 2014). It is a "micro-blogging" platform, which allows for messages to consist of a maximum of 140 characters (Ott, 2017).

Many public officials use Twitter to communicate with their followers. The medium enables discussion between them and the people, and hereby allows new voices to join the public debate. Topics are categorized by the insertion of 'hashtags,' which people can search for, and which shows what topics are 'trending' (Josephi, 2016). This makes joining a discussion on a certain topic fairly easy. According to Josephi, Twitter has become an

important platform for breaking news and follow-ups on events. She argues that, while tweets are not journalism per se, they can be regarded as journalistic expressions, as the ability to compress news to the 140-character tabloid format requires some journalistic skill (2016). The idea of a tweet being in ‘tabloid format’ is further enhanced by the fact that much of the content on Twitter is emotionally charged and personal (Josephi, 2016).

Brian L. Ott, scholar from the Department of Communication Studies at Texas Tech University, argues that while Twitter indeed allows for new voices to join the public debate, Twitter promotes public discourse that is “simple, impetuous, and frequently denigrating and dehumanizing” (2017:60). He argues that the three key features of twitter, namely *simplicity*, *impulsivity*, and *incivility* destroy dialogue and deliberation, foster fanaticism and enable insensitive and cruel disregard for others (Ott, 2017). Twitter messages are limited to *simplicity*, because their character limitation does not allow for complex and detailed messages. It promotes *impulsivity*, as publishing a tweet can be done from almost anywhere at any time, from a mobile device or computer, and therefore requires little preparation and forethought. It drives *incivility*, for Twitter is informal and impersonal. Informal, because its 140-character limitation also discourages the use of formal grammar and style. Impersonal, because there is no physical interaction between the writer and reader, or the writer and the person written about. Also, it has been shown that people who use Twitter frequently tend to send messages that are charged with mainly negative emotions and aggressiveness (Ott, 2017). As my third chapter will show, Trump’s public discourse is significantly shaped by the use of Twitter, and therefore also characterized by *simplicity*, *impulsivity* and *incivility*.

In this chapter I have mapped developments in the media environment of the United States, from the second half of the twentieth century until the present. The following chapters will show how Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump perfectly demonstrate the status-quo of the media in the 1980s and 2010s respectively.

2. From News to Infotainment, From Actor to President

The Reagan presidency fitted perfectly in an age in which the people were tired of conflict and distrustful of the existing authorities. Reagan used this societal discomfort by employing a populist rhetoric. Populist rhetoric emphasizes similarities between the president and the people, and focuses voters' attention to "an alternatively defined elite" which the president claims to be fighting (Weiler & Pearce, 2006). As it is described by Troy: "To get people to love him, he had to get them to hate someone else" (2013). The "someone else" in this case, was sometimes "federal bureaucracy," sometimes "Congress," or even "Washington" in general. Reagan depicted himself as the outsider who fought for the public. This rhetoric appealed to traditionally Republican groups, but also to other members of the lower social-economic class. He continuously gained high approval ratings from a broad scale of people (Weiler & Pearce, 2006).

Yet, as it will be argued next, while his rhetoric appealed to people, without the making of his image through entertainment television, Reagan would have "sunk under the weight of his rhetoric" (Troy, 2013. p. 8). This demonstrates the blurring of entertainment and reality, as people came to view Reagan in a certain way through staged appearances. I will then demonstrate the rise of 'infotainment' further, by showing how Reagan influenced his media coverage by providing the media with ready-made headlines that the press then employed, because it worked in a time in which people were attracted to flashy visuals and quick sound-bites.

2.1 Image-crafting through Television

Politics in the United States has always been a performance art. The first nation to be

conceived without historical precedent or pre-existing script, from the outset the task of creating a new nation was intertwined with the process of expressing a persuasive rationale for its existence. (Raphael, 2009. p. 115)

Image-crafting, as Raphael argues, has always been a critical component of political campaigning (2009). Political authorities throughout American history have understood that to enhance their status as social actors, they had to master the theatrics of the stage. They therefore focused on skills regarding rhetoric, oratory, and stagecraft as much as on mastering political science, philosophy, and statecraft (Raphael, 2009). The election of Reagan symbolizes the transmission from the 'stage' to the 'screen' as the most important venue for creating and mediating not only the national identity of the United States, but also his personal image.

The basis for his status as celebrity was acquired earlier, through his role as host on *General Electric Television Theater*, broadcasted on CBS from 1954 to 1962, which gave him a large exposure to a mass audience, and created his familiar persona. The image that he crafted is described by Raphael as "a genial, Midwestern, corn-fed handsome, American everyman" (Raphael, 2009. p. 121). The show was sponsored by General Electric, whose corporate image Reagan embodied. According to Raphael, this shows the increasingly important relationship between corporate interests, popular culture, and the new electronic media (Raphael, 2009). *GE TV Theater* established Reagan as a new kind of celebrity typical of the medium of television: a corporate icon. This type of celebrity reflects television as medium and industry, shaped by corporate capitalism and the performance of the mass-mediated celebrity. Reagan's celebrity potential and later political prominence, therefore was a product of the new electronical mass-medium of television (Raphael, 2009). According to Hertsgaard, "in a country where politics had increasingly become a contest of images rather

than ideas, there was a certain bizarre inevitability about a B-grade movie star finally being elected president” (1989).

General Electric sent Reagan to go on promotional tours throughout the country for eight years, for six to sixteen weeks per year, which gave him experience with audiences and speeches, and therefore prepared him for his entry into politics. He learned to tailor his presentation to his audience, and connect his public to the image of the consumer’s republic. In this period, he made about 14 speeches a day, to over a quarter-of-a-million GE factory workers (Raphael, 2009). He not only gained experience, but also established a visibility and public awareness of his image as ‘a man of progress’ (Raphael, 2009). Therefore, to understand and appreciate Reagan’s popularity, one must recognize the importance of massive media attention.

As I have argued, visuals in news coverage became increasingly important in the 1980s. Imagery is also important to the image-shaping of presidents (Hebel, 2015). Because of this, pictures of Reagan were often staged. The “pseudo-event” or “photo op” were events staged by Reagan’s aides for the press to photograph and publish (McPherson, 2006). As a former actor, Reagan preferred scripted and staged meetings over interactive press conferences, of which he held few. During his first term, the president announced that he would no longer answer press questions during photo moments. By doing this, he undermined the authority of the press and decreased his chances of making remarks that would have a negative influence on his image when published (McPherson, 2006).

2.2 The Inescapable Image of Reagan

As a former entertainer, Reagan was not only an ‘outsider’ from the established institutions, but also a perfect example of the ‘new’ sort of celebrity that gained much attention via television. Reagan believed in making people love him, a knowledge he himself

states he acquired through his experience in show business (in Troy, 2013). Reagan made people love him by promising “maximal salvation” to the people in “modern, media-friendly packages” (Troy, 2013. p. 14). The public, tired of societal discomfort, and “distracted by *Entertainment Tonight*,” was inspired by his optimism and charm (Troy, 2013. p. 14). As James McPherson put it, he “used news cameras rather than movie cameras to play a lead role in helping Americans, tired of societal discord, feel better about themselves—and worse about the press” (2006. p. 81). Because Reagan was able to make complex issues into short, friendly soundbites, his rhetoric appealed to people, and was perfect for coverage on television. As I have argued, the medium of television required such appealing soundbites.

As a president, Reagan expanded the theatric elements of national campaigning and governing, which appealed to the press, especially in television. In 1989, the Center for the Media and Public Affairs reported that George Bush gained only one-third as many evening network news stories focused on his personality as Reagan did (Weiler & Pearce, 2006). Reagan became president in a time in which television had transformed the depiction of Washington. Almost every evening show covered at least one story about the White House, which had not been the case during other presidencies. “Television elects Presidents” was how Michael Deaver, Deputy Chief of Staff at the White House summarized American politics at the time (Hertsgaard, 1989). Raphael also argued that the image of Reagan was inescapable:

As these moving images of Reagan-as-America circulated through the mass communications networks that delivered them to us, their autonomy as images eroded, congealing into one continuous serial broadcast, “America in the Age of Reagan.” (2009. p. 119)

His image was circulated in the form of short sound bites and commercials, as well as longer documentaries (Raphael, 2009). Reagan also made many real-life appearances. As Raphael

puts it: “Spin the dial and there he was on CNN and the network news, performing roles in old movies ... as guest commentator at sporting events or emceeding all-star galas and celebrity roasts” (Raphael, 2009. p. 119). Reagan often benefited from his acting skills, as his appearances on television as well as in real-life were often ‘directed’ and ‘produced’ by Mike Deaver, the White House Deputy Chief of Staff. Reagan was told where to stand and how to deliver his lines, which came naturally to him (Hertsgaard, 1989).

As I have aimed to show, Reagan and his aides knew how to use the medium of television to the administration’s advantage, by using quick soundbites and flashy visuals. This knowledge was extremely important in an age in which television was the “unavoidable intermediary” between the President and the public (Hertsgaard, 1989).

2.3 The ‘Teflon president’ and the Blurring of Fact and Fiction

During late 1970s and early 1980s, people seemed to care less about the difference between fact and fiction, as fiction gave them a manner of ‘escapism’ from conflicts in the real world (McPherson, 2006). Because of this, people cared less about being misinformed or uninformed about, for example, what was happening in the White House. The press responded to this—as well as to the many criticisms it had received—by letting go of their anti-government position and being less critical of their new president (McPherson, 2006).

Like the media, Reagan was often critiqued for preferring style over substance. Yet, no president after Kennedy was treated so mild by the press as Reagan was (McPherson, 2006). This can partly be explained by the fact that Reagan was extremely popular among Americans, while the press was not. Some journalists were also afraid of political or legal threats if they acted too harsh against the president (McPherson, 2006). Others simply favored the president, who was extremely charismatic and therefore coined “The Great Communicator” by scholars (Bush, Ritter & Henry, 1993; Cooper, 2008; Welch, 2015;). In

the first years of the Reagan presidency, the press did more to enhance his image than to damage it (McPherson, 2006). A few weeks into his presidency, Reagan survived an attempted assassination. He stayed positive and courageous in the aftermath, which the public as well as the media loved. Although some of Reagan's closest aides were convicted of legal or ethical misdoings, Reagan was barely deemed responsible. Because problems seemed to 'glide off' him, like he was covered in Teflon, he was sometimes called the "Teflon president" (McPherson, 2006).

Reagan had also learned how to appeal to the patriotism of the public during his time as an actor starring in military training films. Reagan's first significant military act was called "Operation Urgent Fury" (McPherson, 2006). During this operation, the Reagan administration sent troops to overthrow the communist government in Grenada, a small independent island country in the southeastern Caribbean Sea. The catchy title is perfect for the press to use in headlines in a mass-media age, another way to manipulate the press that was picked up by many presidents after Reagan. During the operation, Reagan completely prohibited press coverage on the island until the third day of fighting, when the situation was fairly under control (McPherson, 2006). Two weeks after the event, a staged picture of Reagan saluting a marine who had participated in the operation was released, and soon made it to the front-covers of many newspapers. While Reagan officials lied about the threat of the enemy and civilian casualties, the Cuban news media accurately reported that the enemy had consisted of 750 men, and that there had been civilian casualties. While the press reacted extremely critically and exposed the Reagan administration's cover-up, the public hardly complained (McPherson, 2006). According to Brian McPherson, this shows the extremely low public approval of the media in this period (2006).

Because Reagan's appearances were often staged, he helped blur the line between fact and fiction, as well as information and entertainment. The following chapter will show that this was further enhanced by the Reagan administration's Issue of the Day strategy.

2.4 Undermining the Press: The Issue of the Day Strategy

As Hertsgaard argues, Reagan's aides focused on manipulating news reports to the greatest degree possible. If the media portrayed Reagan's policies in a positive manner, it would be easier to implement those policies without triggering public disapproval. This was especially important because much of Reagan's agenda was much farther to the right than the sentiment of much of the American citizens (1989).

Reagan's most important staffers were extremely able to manipulate the press, mainly through an "issue of the day" strategy. This is a media management strategy with which they attempted to shape the content and tone of coverage by limiting press access to himself, formalizing his relationship with the press, and repeatedly conveying a single message (Covington et al., 1993). In other words, Reagan's messages to the press were formalized, infrequent and homogeneous (Covington et al., 1993). According to James McPherson, the Reagan administration's media management techniques have been "adopted by every successful candidate and president since" (2006). To determine the influence of the Issue of the Day strategy on coverage by the press, Covington et al. have analyzed stories from the *New York Times* and all three national network evening news programs. They found that Reagan's campaign appeared to increasingly control the content of news stories. This effect was largest in television coverage, in which the stories were more positive and avoided criticism around Reagan. They conclude that the strategy of reducing and formalizing contacts with the press was highly successful in reducing the chance that Reagan would make controversial remarks or errors (Covington et al. 783-798).

As a result of the Issue of the Day strategy, the Reagan administration was in charge in the “balance of power” between the press and the White House. As Deaver stated: “They had to take what we were giving them” (Hertsgaard, 1989). As the supplier of these stories, Deaver was “a monopolist operating in a seller’s market” (Hertsgaard, 1989). With the demand for a story about the president being extremely high, the Reagan administration could limit the press’ access to the president and his most direct aides, and therefore make sure that the president would have to appear in front of cameras only under the most careful conditions (Hertsgaard, 1989). As a journalist depends on the credibility of his sources, he was dependent on the people which he was supposed to check. The press in this period often applied the rule that if a source was not a government official or another established informant, it was not a qualified source. This approach allowed the Reagan administration to set the agenda and steer the debate, a function that is known to belong to the press. The result of this “palace court” approach was, according to Mark Hertsgaard; “a distressingly narrow or otherwise distorted range of political coverage” (1989). The ‘Issue of the Day’ that Reagan and his aides crafted, functioned as a sort of caption to the pictures that were created during the day and then, together with the soundbite crafted by the Reagan administration, shown on television at night (Raphael, 2009). This shows that the news media were eager to cover the ‘Issue of the Day,’ together with the image-enhancing pictures of Reagan. By doing this, the agenda-setting function of the media was undermined.

By shaping the messages given to the media, candidates influence the content of its reports. The press’s independence relies on its power to select from among the stories present in a campaign those that it will report, and its power to interpret those stories (Broder, 1975). The Reagan administration, however, provided only one story for the press to cover, taking away that independence. In effect, this resulted in a decline in investigative reporting around the president, because as long as the White House would have a story to sell, the press would

not go *look* for a story themselves. (Hertsgaard, 1989). Reagan's aides recognized that in the modern media age, the government had to repeatedly present its version of reality to the public. By limiting journalists' ability to report politically damaging stories, they sought to neutralize the press. This was "necessary but not sufficient" as the press had to become "a positive instrument of governance" which transmitted what the White House wanted to be transmitted to the public (Hertsgaard, 1989). Larry Speakes, Reagan's deputy press secretary, often handled the daily White House briefings. He later became the administration's main spokesman. After leaving the White House in 1986, he wrote a book called *Speaking Out*, in which he admitted that he had sometimes created quotes that were likely to be used by the press, and passed them off as Reagan's own words (Hertsgaard, 1989).

This chapter has shown that Reagan mastered the medium of television and benefited greatly from his experience as an actor. To avoid negative coverage, Reagan's appearances were often staged, formalized, and the press's access to the president and his aides was limited. To influence coverage on the White House even further, the administration employed an Issue of the Day strategy, in which a certain topic would be repeatedly presented to the press. Because the press was dependent on Reagan's aides to gain access to stories about the president, the Reagan administration was able to take control in the government-press relation. The press, especially television, was therefore fairly mild in covering the president. This led to a further decrease in credibility of the press, which was already extremely low.

3 A New Kind of Celebrity: Fearless Businessman Donald Trump

The rise of corporate interests saw the making of a new form of celebrity. In 1987, New York businessman Donald Trump produced his book *The Art of the Deal*, which quickly became a bestseller. Trump's activities as a "self-promoting businessman" with the image of the "egotistical billionaire" made him a media celebrity (McPherson, 2005). The attention he gained was representative for what happened in the news media arena during the last half of the 1980s. The press became less investigative and more passive as business became more central to news agencies, both as an "external subject" and an "internal concern" (McPherson, 2005). According to Mark Andrejevic, Associate Professor of Media Studies, Trump established his talent for receiving free publicity in the 1980s' "hypercommercialized media environment" in which an actor—Ronald Reagan—was able to become president (2016, p. 654). Trump used this talent in the 2016 election, once again showing that celebrity status acquired in one field, can lead to success in another.

In 2016, Trump was elected president of the United States. Scholars are now analyzing how a billionaire with no political background, who is known for misogynist, sexist, racist, and untrue statements was elected president. It is important to place Trump's election in the context of anxieties over economics, immigration, terrorism, social polarization and global political issues in this period, which made his messages appeal to a large amount of people (Wells et al., 2016). Without a substantial proportion of the electorate supporting his views, Trump would never have been elected president. His support system consists mainly of a part of the population that feels left out by party and media elites (Schroeder, 2016). His

provocative statements and speaking style that are far from “politically correct” enhance some people’s view of him as “a blue-collar billionaire” which attracted voters that were dissatisfied with the political status quo (Wells. Et a., 2016). Without massive media coverage in combination with social media access, however, these messages would not have reached the public. Despite the absence of a unified Republican party response to the candidate of Trump, as well as his campaign’s lack of “expertise and organizational strength”, his messages were widely circulated. Therefore, an important aspect that influenced his election, is the role that the media—conventional as well as new online media—played.

3.1 Trump and Television

By early 1990s Trump was on the verge of bankruptcy as the largest banking scandal in American history cost U.S. citizens about half a trillion dollars (McPherson, 2005). In this period, he also became known as a rich lady’s man and was featured in a *Playboy* interview in 1990. After overcoming his financial problems, he considered to run for president. His celebrity-potential was further demonstrated in 2003, when he became the host of reality show *The Apprentice*, and in 2007, when he received a star on the Walk of Fame. His famous catchphrase “you’re fired” was made famous through the series (McPherson, 2005).

According to Wells et al., “notoriety, a brand name, and pop-culture persona” transformed Trump into a “populist hero” (2016). Therefore, to understand the first possible “reality TV president,” one must look at how Trump’s appearance in *The Apprentice* created this image. Hollywood stars, with Ronald Reagan as the perfect example, have entered the stage as politicians before. While Photo-ops and media events were already used in the age of Reagan, Reality TV even further blended the distinction between entertainment and serious affairs, as well as fiction and reality. Through the series, Trump cultivated his image as “wealthy entrepreneur, pedagogue, ringmaster, and stern judge,” and at the same time drew

attention to his branded wares, with the Trump University—an education company that ran real estate trainings—as the ultimate example (Ouellette, 2016).

According to Andrejevic, the political popularity of Trump can be attributed to the public's enjoyment of the success of the wealthy and famous, and that he is “the latest chapter in the convergence of entertainment and politics” (2016: 651). *The Apprentice* embraced the idea that success in business equaled good leadership, and therefore portrayed Trump as embodying such. According to Laurie Ouelette of the University of Minnesota, the show helped define Trump as “the embodiment of an enterprising subjectivity and a “no nonsense” approach to leadership that draw legitimacy from the market” (2016: 649). Roger Stone, who worked closely with Ronald Reagan as well as Donald Trump stated that *The Apprentice* was “the greatest single asset to [Trump's] presidential campaign” (Breslov, 2016). According to him, the show allowed voters to learn about Trump and become more comfortable with his character (Breslov, 2016). He gained media visibility as well as training in how to present oneself, which worked to his advantage in the 2016 primaries (Ouellette, 2016).

It was not just reality TV that helped bring Donald Trump into the television spotlight during the election campaign. Trump spent much less on television advertising than other major candidates during the election (Confessore and Yourish, 2016). Yet he gained massive media attention through television, and received 1,898 million worth of free media coverage in the first nine months of his campaign. In comparison, his opponent Hillary Clinton received only 746 million in coverage (Confessore and Yourish, 2016). Trump made himself more available to the press than his key opponents, through rallies, press conferences and broadcasted interviews (Wells et al., 2016).

Theories on news values support the idea that Trump was bound to receive massive media attention for his controversial, entertaining and sensational comments and actions. Because Trump did not initially lead in the polls, early coverage is likely to have been guided

by entertainment value. Because sensational stories sell, Trump's commercial value was more important in guiding his press coverage than whether he was a potential serious candidate (Lawrence and Boydston, 2017). Consciously or not, Trump remained interesting because he often changed his stances, and continuously made controversial remarks that were different from the lines he prepared. According to Lawrence and Boydston, scholars in political communication and journalism, the press covered Trump exactly as expected in the contemporary media arena, in which critical investigation of primary party elites has been replaced by "scattershot scrutiny" of candidates through a continuously shifting spotlight (2017). Michael Barone, co-editor of *The Almanac of American Politics* and senior political analyst for the *Washington Examiner*, stated that Trump was able to feed the media's "addiction" to sensationalistic news by tweeting a provocative statement in the morning, and therefore dominate the news cycle throughout the day (Murray, 2017). CBS Chief Executive Leslie Moonves asserted this by stating "Donald Trump may not be good for the country, but he's good for CBS" when it became clear that Trump was leading in the polls (Bond, 2016). Next, it will be shown that through Twitter, Trump indeed was able to manipulate the press into covering the issues he brought through their attention through an aggressive style that was simply too sensational for the press to ignore.

3.2 Trump and Twitter: from Tweet to Headline

Online social media have given a new dimension to news coverage as well as campaigning during elections. As the U.S. media system is driven by a market competition for audiences, the focus in election coverage lies on personal attention to candidates and the "horserace" between them, rather than focusing on parties and policies. Trump's right-wing populism originated online, and acted as a "transmission belt" to coverage in traditional media (Schroeder, 2016). Trump used these social platforms, especially Twitter, to speak directly to

his followers without interference of the press. Because the press picked up his controversial—and therefore newsworthy—statements, and transformed them into headlines for articles and broadcasting newscasts, his views were spread even further. Because of this, he received an enormous amount of attention from the traditional media as well as through online social media. Wells et al. have asserted this by analyzing Trump's attempts to influence media coverage through staged and unscheduled events, as well as social media activity. They have found a significant correlation between his amount of tweets and the amount of media coverage regarding him. They have also found that staged media events as well as scheduled ones drove coverage during the pre-primary period. Because Trump's delegate count did not explain his media attention, it can be assumed that his attention was not the result of his electoral success. Their conclusion therefore is that Trump was largely successful in guiding media coverage (Wells et al., 2016).

According to Ott, who has argued that Twitter's discourse is characterized by *simplicity*, *impulsivity* and *incivility*, Trump's natural style of speaking and Twitter's underlying logic are “wholly homologous” (2017, p. 63). Brad Hayes, from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who has programmed a Twitterbot based on “an artificial intelligence algorithm based on trump's language in hundreds of hours of debate transcripts” to generate Tweets resembling Trump's, shares this view on the part of *simplicity* and *incivility* (in Garfield, 2016). According to Hayes, Trump's rhetoric continuously featured simple language and personally insulted opponents (in Garfield, 2016).

The Twitterbot, called @DeepDrumpf, indeed speaks in simple, short sentences and often insults opponents, especially the Democratic-nominee Hillary Clinton: “[Hillary Clinton] was all talk. I was screaming -- jobs and extremists, not policy. But I won” (2016); “[A Good Result Would Be] Declaring @HillaryClinton the Big Loser of the Night. I Thought It Was Clear, but You Know, I Know What I'm Running” (2016). What is important

to note is that the artificial tweets were generated on the base of Trump's real-life speaking style, not his online messages. This affirms Ott's claim that Trump's speaking style closely resembles his tweets, and therefore is characterized by Twitter's traits of *simplicity*, *impulsivity* and *incivility*. According to Gabler, this resemblance suggests that Trump's popularity is partly due to the fact that "he is a man of his technological moment" (2016). Indeed, it was these traits that made his tweets convertible to headlines in the age of social media. Because of their *simplicity*, his tweets were already in the right format, and because of his *impulsivity* and *incivility*, they were shocking enough to be newsworthy.

3.3 Trump and the Blurring of Fact and Fiction

Especially since the 2016 election, the spread of fake news on social platforms has become an important topic for public discussion. Some have gone so far as to suggest that Donald Trump would not have been elected were it not for the influence of fake news, as most of these stories preferred him over Hillary Clinton (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017). In online databases, Allcott and Gentzkow have found 115 pro-Trump fake stories that were shared on Facebook 30 million times, and merely 41 pro-Clinton fake stories that were shared 7.6 million times in total (2017). This shows that there are likely to be more fake Trump-favoring articles than Clinton-favoring ones, and that the latter are shared less often. This could be due to the fact that a majority of fake news suppliers are pro-Trump, or because the demand in pro-Trump articles is higher. It could also be due to a sharp drop in media trust among Republicans since 2016, which could have increased their demand for news from non-mainstream sources. Also, the mainstream media clearly favored Clinton, as she has received 57 major newspaper endorsements, while Trump received a mere two (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017).

Coverage regarding Donald Trump became increasingly negative further into the campaigning period (Wells et al., 2016). He was, however, partly protected from this by an increasingly low public confidence in the press, which was especially low among right-wing populists (Wells et al., 2016). Trump's critique in the news media only supported his remarks that the media was biased and therefore not to be trusted (Wells et al., 2016). Trump's campaign was characterized by constant attacks on the media. On October 15, 2016, Trump responded to his media critique by stating on Twitter: "This election is being rigged by the media pushing false and unsubstantiated charges, and outright lies, in order to elect Crooked Hillary!" (Trump, 2016). He has also called out certain news media who have criticized him: "Wow, it is unbelievable how distorted, one-sided and biased the media is against us. The failing @nytimes is a joke. @CNN is laughable!" (Trump, 2016). This populist rhetoric shows similarities to that of Ronald Reagan, as it shows an "us" versus "them" rhetoric. "Us" being the people of the United States, and "them" being Washington officials and the news media. His populist rhetoric was widely shared and defended among his online followers (Wells et al., 2016).

It can be argued that Donald Trump poses a threat to the freedom of the press. During his campaign, he has personally threatened reporters, and has threatened to sue media companies that cover him negatively (Alterman, 2016). His threats to the news media continued while he was in office. On 30 March, 2017, Trump tweeted that "the failing @nytimes has disgraced the media world. Gotten me wrong for two solid years. Change libel laws?" (Trump, 2017). He also made statements promising to open up libel laws during his campaign rallies, so that the media can be sued when they "purposely [write] negative and horrible false articles" (Alterman, 2016:69). Trump's Chief of Staff, Reince Priebus, has confirmed that the Trump administration was considering changes to libel laws (Alana, 2017). It would, however, be extremely difficult to change these laws, as firstly, they are state laws,

and secondly, the First Amendment bars such changes in libel law. Since *New York Times v. Sullivan*, the Supreme Court has placed constitutional limits on how state can define libel by requiring public figures to prove that malice had been done ("New York Times Co. v. Sullivan", 1964). These threats come in a time of an extreme decline in newspaper sales, a low public trust in the news media, and the rise of fake news. All these issues combined have spurred discussions about the future of journalism and traditional news media among scholars and journalists, as well as reflections on how the media have treated the Trump phenomenon.

Conclusion

With the emergence of television soon came a 24-hour news environment, in which politicians were under constant scrutiny, and the media had to produce content around the clock. While television presented a mediated version of reality, and focused on visuals and entertainment, rather than in-depth information, the new medium became increasingly important in shaping public opinion. Corporate interests in newsrooms also enhanced the intertwinement of entertainment and information. Although it also helped establish a journalistic ethos, at the same time, it challenged journalistic autonomy by cutting staff, replacing them by producers, and stressing the importance of having the 'scoop' of breaking news. As entertainment and information became more intertwined, entertainment television, in this case *GE TV Theater* and *The Apprentice*, became important modes of image-shaping, which both Reagan and Trump employed and benefited from. The election of Ronald Reagan was the perfect example of the increasing popularity of television stars, while through an increasing interest in business, Donald Trump also gained celebrity potential.

In the twenty-first century, the internet entered the media arena, and further heightened concerns regarding the emergence of entertainment and sensationalism in news production. In the attempt to gain as much 'clicks' as possible, attractive, sensational headlines were used. Conveniently, these were provided through the Twitter feed of Donald Trump, from which he

made extremely controversial remarks. In this manner, Trump was able to influence what the press would cover, and therefore challenged its role as agenda-setter. Reagan did something similar through his 'Issue of the Day' strategy, with which he provided the press with a headline of the topic that he wanted them to cover that day. This shows that Reagan and Trump were not just productions of the media of their time, but also masters of its employment.

In the online media environment, the blurring of fact and fiction is also an increasing concern that challenges the role of the journalist. In an environment in which anyone can produce 'journalistic products,' anyone can spread misinformation as well. This has been coined 'fake news,' and is still a highly debated topic. While measurements have been taken to fight this phenomenon, platforms are still experimenting with how to fully conquer this 'enemy' of the journalistic notion of accuracy. Perhaps there is an upside to the rise of fake news and the election of Trump, for it stirred public debate and caused journalists to reflect on how to practice their profession in a way in which their journalistic ethos is not under pressure. In times in which less people are willing to pay for their news provision, it might enhance the realization that it is important to invest in professional journalism. On June 22, 2017, the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism will unveil its *Digital News: Essential Data on the Future of News* report on the future of journalism. From there, our academic conversation continues.

References

- "2016 General Election Editorial Endorsements by Major Newspapers." (2016, November 6). *The American Presidency Project*. Retrieved May 30, 2017, from <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>
- Abramson, Alana. (2017, April 30). "Reince Priebus on Changing Libel Laws: 'That's Something We've Looked At'." *Fortune.com*. Retrieved June 8, 2017, from: <http://www.fortune.com>
- Allcott, Hunt, and Matthew Gentzkow. (2017). "Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(2), 211-236. Retrieved June 1, 2017, from: <https://web.stanford.edu>
- Alterman, Eric. (2016). "Challenging Media: If His Campaign Is Anything to Go By, President Trump Is Likely to Restrict Freedom of the Press." *Index on Censorship*, 45(4), 68-69. doi:10.1177/0306422016685989a
- Balz, Dan. (2017, February 25). "Analysis | Reagan and Trump and the Swift Transformation of the GOP." *The Washington Post*. WP Company. Retrieved June 9, 2017, from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com>
- Barker, Chris. (2012). *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. London: Sage Publications
- Bakshy, E., S. Messing, and L. A. Adamic. (2015). "Exposure to Ideologically Diverse News and Opinion on Facebook." *Science*, 348.6239, 1130-132. doi:10.1126/science.aaa1160

- Barnhurst, Kevin G., and John Nerone. (2009). "Journalism History." *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*. New York: Routledge
- Bond, Paul. (2016, February 29). "Leslie Moonves on Donald Trump: "It May Not Be Good for America, but It's Damn Good for CBS"." *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved on June 8, 2017, from: <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com>
- Bush, Gregory W., Kurt Ritter, and David Henry. (1993). "Ronald Reagan: The Great Communicator." *The Journal of American History*. 80(1), 352. doi:10.2307/2079854
- Breslov, Jason M. (2016, September 27). "The FRONTLINE Interview: Roger Stone." *FRONTLINE*. Public Broadcasting Service. Retrieved on June 7, 2017 from: <https://pbs.org>
- Broder, D. (1975). "The Presidency and the Press." In C. W. Dunn, ed., *The Future of the American Presidency*. Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press.
- Caryl, Christian. (2017, June 8). "Opinion | The Unbridgeable Difference between Reagan and Trump." *The Washington Post*. WP Company. Retrieved on, June 11, 2017, from: <https://washingtonpost.com>
- Cathcart, Will. (2017, January 25). "Continuing Our Updates to Trending." *Facebook Newsroom*. Facebook. Retrieved on May 29, 2017, from: <https://newsroom.fb.com>
- Confessore, Nicholas and Karen, Yourish. (2016, March 15). "\$2 Billion Worth of Free Media for Donald Trump." *The New York Times*. The New York Times. Retrieved on March 05, 2017 from: <https://nytimes.com>
- Cooper, James. (2008). "The Reagan Years: The Great Communicator as Diarist." *Intelligence and National Security*. 23(6), p. 892-901. doi: 10.1080/02684520802591509
- Covington, Cary R., Kent Kroeger, Glenn Richardson, and J. David Woodard. (1993).

"Shaping a Candidate's Image in the Press: Ronald Reagan and the 1980 Presidential Election." *Political Research Quarterly*, 46(4), 783-798. doi:

10.1177/106591299304600406

DeepDrumpf. (2016, May 26). "[A Good Result Would Be] Declaring @HillaryClinton the Big Loser of the Night. I Thought It Was Clear, but You Know, I Know What I'm Running." *Twitter*. Twitter. Retrieved on June 12, 2017, from: <https://twitter.com>

DeepDrumpf. (2016, September 27). "[Hillary Clinton] Was All Talk. I Was Screaming – Jobs and Extremists, Not Policy. But I Won. @ChadHGriffin @HillaryClinton #debates2016." *Twitter*. Twitter. Retrieved on June 12, 2017 from: <https://twitter.com>

Deuze, Mark. (2005). "What Is Journalism?" *Journalism*, 6(4), 442-464. doi:

10.1177/1464884905056815

"Donald Trump vs. Ronald Reagan." (2016, May 02). *Chicagotribune.com*. Retrieved on June 11, 2017 from: <https://chicagotribune.com>

Gabler, N. (2016, April 29). "Donald Trump, the Emperor of Social Media." *BillMoyers.com*. Moyers & Company. Retrieved on June 12, 2017 from: <https://billmoyers.com>

Gallup, Inc. (2017, January 23). "Trump Sets New Low Point for Inaugural Approval Rating." *Gallup.com*. Retrieved on June, 11, 2017 from: <https://gallup.com>

Garfield, Leanna. (2016, September 27). "3 Things an MIT Scientist Learned about How Donald Trump Speaks by Studying His Debates." *Business Insider*. Business Insider. Retrieved on June 12, 2017, from: <https://businessinsider.com>

Gottfried, Jeffrey, and Elisa Shearer. (2016, May 26). "News Use across Social Media Platforms 2016." Pew Research Center. Retrieved on May 29, 2017, from: <http://www.journalism.org>

Hebel, Udo J. (2015, March 3). "The Journal of Transnational American Studies." *EScholarship*.

- Hertsgaard, Mark. (1989). *On Bended Knee: The Press and the Reagan Presidency*. New York: F.S. Giroux.
- Joseph, B. (2016). Digital journalism and democracy. In *The SAGE Handbook of digital Journalism*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Kaul, Vineet. (2013). "Journalism in the Age of Digital Technology." *Journal of Mass Communication and Journalism*, 3(1), 59-72. Retrieved on May 28, 2017, from: <https://journalofcommunication.ro>
- Kodjo, Emilie. (2017, May 18). "The Future of Journalism Is Not All Doom and Gloom. Here's Why." *Medium*. Global Editors Network. Retrieved on May 31, 2017, from: <https://medium.com>
- McPherson, James Brian (2006). *Journalism at the End of the American Century, 1965-present*. Westport (Conn.): Praeger.
- Murray, Bill. (2017, June 7). "The Media Have Been Played by Trump's Tweets." *RealClearPolitics*. Retrieved on June, 8, 2017, from: <https://realclearpolitics.com>
- Nerone, John. (2013). "The historical roots of the normative model of journalism." *Journalism* 14(4). 446–458. doi: 10.1177/1464884912464177
- "New York Times Co. v. Sullivan." *LII / Legal Information Institute*. Retrieved on June, 8, 2017, from: <https://www.law.cornell.edu>
- Ouellette, L. (2016, June 10). "The Trump Show." *Television & New Media*, 17(7), 648-650. doi: 10.1177/1527476416652695
- Picard, Robert. (2014). "Twilight or new dawn of journalism?", *Digital Journalism*, 2(3), 273–283. doi:0.1080/1461670X.2014.895530
- Raphael, Tim. (2009). "The Body Electric: GE, TV, and the Reagan Brand." *TDR/The Drama Review* 53(2), 113-138. doi:10.1162/dram.2009.53.2.113
- Schroeder, R. (2016). "Rethinking Digital Media and Political Change." *Convergence: The*

International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies, 2-16.

doi:10.1177/1354856516660666

Singer-Vine, Silverman, Craig. (2016, December 7). "Most Americans Who See Fake News Believe It, New Survey Says." *BuzzFeed*. Retrieved on May 24, 2017 from:
<https://buzzfeed.com>

Slater, Adam. (2017). "Trump versus Reagan - the Global Dimension." *Economic Outlook*, 41(2), 19-26. doi:10.1111/1468-0319.12274/
Web.)

Smith, Craig R. (2016). "Ronald Reagan's Rhetorical Re-invention of Conservatism." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 103(1-2), 33-65. doi:10.1080/00335630.2016.1231415

Spencer, Scott. (2017, May 29). "How We Fought Bad Ads, Sites and Scammers in 2016." *Google*. Google. Retrieved on May 29, 2017, from: <https://blog.google.com>

Stanley, Tim. (2016, October 22). "Why Trump Is More Similar to Reagan than You Might Think." *The Telegraph*. Telegraph Media Group. Retrieved on June 10, 2017, from:
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk>

Troy, Gil. (2013). *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980's*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Trump, Donald J. (2017, March 30). "The failing @nytimes Has Disgraced the Media World. Gotten Me Wrong for Two Solid Years. Change Libel Laws?" *Twitter*. Twitter. Retrieved on June 8, 2017, from: <https://twitter.com>

Trump, Donald J. (2016, October 15). "This Election Is Being Rigged by the Media Pushing False and Unsubstantiated Charges, and Outright Lies, in Order to Elect Crooked Hillary!" *Twitter*. Twitter. Retrieved on June 8, 2017, from: <https://twitter.com>

Trump, Donald J. (2016, August 1). "Wow, It Is Unbelievable How Distorted, One-sided and

- Biased the Media Is against Us. The failing @nytimes Is a Joke. @CNN Is Laughable!" *Twitter*. Twitter. Retrieved on June 8, 2017, from: <https://twitter.com>
- Twitter. (2014, December 10). "If It Happened in the World in 2014, It Happened on Twitter. Explore the #YearOnTwitter: [Http://t.co/VoaTy2cENI](http://t.co/VoaTy2cENI)" *Twitter*. Twitter. Retrieved on June 12, 2017, from: <https://twitter.com>
- "US Election Analysis 2016." (2016, November). *US Election Analysis 2016*. Retrieved on June 13, 2017, from: <https://www.electionanalysis2016.us>
- Vavreck, Lynn. (2015, September 16). "Trump's Approach Is More Like Reagan's Than You Might Think." *The New York Times*. The New York Times. Retrieved on June 10, 2017, from: <https://nytimes.com>
- Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin, and Thomas Hanitzsch. (2009). *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*. New York: Routledge.
- Welch, Reed L. (2015). "The Great Communicator." *A Companion to Ronald Reagan*. John Wiley & Sons Inc. doi:10.1002/9781118607770.ch5
- Wells, Chris, Dhavan V. Shah, Jon C. Pevehouse, Junghwan Yang, Ayellet Pelled, Frederick Boehm, Josephine Lukito, Shreenita Ghosh, and Jessica L. Schmidt. (2016). "How Trump Drove Coverage to the Nomination: Hybrid Media Campaigning." *Political Communication*, 33(4), 669-676. doi:10.1080/10584609.2016.1224416
- Zeit, Josh. (2016, March 7). "Is Donald Trump Like Ronald Reagan?" *POLITICO Magazine*. Capitol News Company. Retrieved on June 11, 2017, from: <https://www.politico.com>