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ABSTRACT

This essay offers a retrospective review of three major recent books in the field of digital politics – Andrew Chadwick's *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*, Zizi Papacharissi's *Affective publics: Sentiment, technology, and politics*, and Daniel Kreiss's *Prototype politics: Technology-intensive campaigning and the data of democracy* – in light of Donald J. Trump's surprising 2016 electoral victory. Rather than critiquing these books for failing to predict Trump, the essay asks how the second editions of these books might differ if they were being written post-Trump. The central purpose of the essay is to think through how the research literature is likely to change in light of this major, disjunctive event.

Introduction

Major social events exert a developmental force on Internet politics research in ways both visible and invisible. The Arab Spring, the Occupy Movement, and the movements of the squares that spanned from 2009 to 2011 tilted our collective scholarship both toward analyses of those events in particular and toward the emerging power of political networks in the digital age more generally (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Castells, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012). The 2008 and 2012 Obama campaign created a wave of interest in how communications technologies were reshaping elections. The emergence of WikiLeaks in 2010 became a critical case for scholars interested in the changing boundaries, norms, and institutions that govern the political media system. Our theories of digital politics are molded from a timeline of counter-intuitive social events. The Internet is still evolving – today's social web is, in important ways, *different* from the Internet of 2006 or 1996 (Karpf, 2016) – and this underlying instability and emergent nature of the medium leaves researchers to focus attention on major events as they occur. Our theories are anchored in the cases that we grapple with.

The election of Donald Trump is sure to become just such an anchoring case in the years to come. For those who study American electoral politics, Trump's successful candidacy was a near-impossibility. A celebrity candidate with minimal staff, minimal advertising, and minimal message discipline should not have been able to overcome the structural challenges of a long series of statewide primaries and caucuses (Cohen et al., 2008; Sides & Vavreck, 2013). This *particular* celebrity candidate seemed particularly far-fetched – it was not long ago that the notion of a Trump presidency was a literal punchline on *The Simpsons*. The Hillary Clinton campaign exhibited clear advantages in areas like field staffing, communications, and data. In an election that fundamentals-based models predicted would be close (Campbell, 2016), these traditional campaign advantages should have buoyed the Democratic nominee. Instead, Trump's campaign somehow won while appearing to violate every unwritten rule and established pattern of modern political campaigning.

Internet politics scholars have naturally begun to gravitate towards this surprising, consequential case, to ask what it means for our broader understanding of digital technology, media, and political power. Was Trump's campaign a major breakthrough in social media-infused campaigning? Has it rewritten the rules of modern elections, or was it more of a 'black swan' series of unlikely occurrences? More to the point, how should this election change our existing theories of digital politics? Our theories were forged from observing events like Occupy Wall Street and the Obama campaign. Our theories did not lead many of us to predict Trump's electoral success. How should the research literature change to account for the rise of President Donald J. Trump?

In this review essay, I take up the task of evaluating three major recent works in the field of political communication: Andrew Chadwick's *The hybrid media system* (2013), Zizi Papacharissi's *Affective publics* (2014), and Daniel Kreiss's *Prototype politics* (2016). Social scientists make no claim to predicting the future, so I do not assign blame to any of these authors for failing to foretell the rise of Trump. Instead, I have approached each of these books with a single question: 'how might this book be different if it was written after the 2016 election?'

The result is a type of speculative academic fan fiction. In the pages below, I explore what the second edition of each of these books might look like. For Chadwick, I argue that events surrounding the Trump campaign have both vindicated has work on the 'political information cycle' and called for a reevaluation of WikiLeaks. For Papacharissi, I imagine the Trump campaign would lead to an extended discussion of the darker side of weaponized affect and a theoretical discussion of the ways that political bots and political trolls can warp an affective public. For Kreiss, the campaign highlights both the limited *direct* impacts of technological innovation in political campaigns and the substantive importance of historical contingencies. The surprising Trump presidency will not just alter the course of political scholarship in the years to come, but will also guide the future development of political networks and political technologies. The essay concludes with some reflections on theorizing digital politics in the midst of these unfolding historical contingencies, drawing upon my own recently published book.

Andrew Chadwick's *The hybrid media system*: Is this the future of the political information cycle?

It seems appropriate to begin with the changing media environment. Donald Trump's single greatest asset during the Republican primary campaign was arguably his unique blend of reality television sensibilities and social media outbursts. Trump entered the race in the summer of 2015 with over 3 million Twitter followers. He also began it with a minefield of exploitable twitter gaffes – from his claims that Barack Obama's birth certificate was fake to his claim that Global Warming was a hoax invented by the Chinese government. For a more traditional candidate, these gaffes might have proven disqualifying. Trump, however, managed to use Twitter both to sidestep the mainstream media, communicating directly with his millions of followers, and also to dominate the mainstream media through his endless stream of provocative campaign tweets. Trump went on to completely dominate media coverage throughout the Republican primaries (Patterson, 2016). Trump received approximately six times as much media attention as his closest Republican rival, Ted Cruz, an advantage that was worth an estimated $2 billion in free advertising (Confessore & Yourish, 2016).

Trump's media dominance is completely unprecedented, particularly for an outsider candidate. Though he entered the race with initial polling advantage over the 16 other declared candidates for the Republican presidential nomination, this was due largely to his universal name recognition. His celebrity status, first as a fixture of tabloid gossip columns in the 1980s and 1990s, and later as the star of the reality TV series 'The Apprentice' (and 'The Celebrity Apprentice') helped boost him to an initial polling lead, even as news sites like the *Huffington Post* chose to cover him as part of the 'entertainment' beat. There is indeed substantial precedent for early polling leads for candidates like Trump. In 2012, for instance, candidates like Michele Bachmann and Herman Cain briefly stood atop the polls. But media attention leads to public scrutiny, which eventually gives way to a polling

decline for the non-'serious' candidate. John Sides and Lynn Vavreck refer to this as the 'discovery-scrutiny-decline' cycle (2013). Trump's celebrity-based polling advantage ought to have been as short-lived as his media attention. Instead, and contrary to past election trends, neither the cameras nor the polls ever moved away from him.

Andrew Chadwick's *The hybrid media system* offers a valuable framework for understanding Trump's strategic use of social media. In Chapter 4 of his book, Chadwick describes how the traditional 'news cycle' has been replaced by a 'political information cycle.' 'Originally, "news cycle" simply meant the predictable daily period between the latest and the next issue of a newspaper,' Chadwick tells us,

> Political information cycles possess certain features that distinguish them from 'news cycles.' They are complex assemblages in which the logics – the technologies, genres, norms, behaviors, and organizational forms – of supposedly 'new' online media are hybridized with those of supposedly 'old' broadcast and newspaper media. The hybridization process shapes power relations among actors and ultimately affects the flows and meaning of news. (pp. 62–63)

Trump's dominance of mainstream media seems deeply rooted in the emerging logics of the political information cycle.

Trump rarely was using Twitter in order to *bypass* the mainstream media. Instead, he was using social media in order to set the agenda of the mainstream media. This was not solely a social media strategy; he also used press conferences and rallies for the same purpose. But Trump's dominance of the media coverage was often driven through vitriolic tweets that seized the media spotlight away from his opponents, keeping him at the center of attention. Reporters adjusted their news routines in response to Trump's headline-grabbing behavior.[1] Trump would also keep extend the life cycle of some stories, and decrease the longevity of others, by attacking media coverage on Twitter or by launching entirely different lines of attack. This is hybrid media behavior unlike what we have witnessed from the professional communications operations deployed by past (or concurrent) presidential campaigns. Trump leveraged free digital communications tools to create drama, juggling one controversy after another while the more 'serious' candidates waited for a turn in the spotlight that never materialized.

And the hybrid media logic of Trump's communications strategy was not limited to provocative tweets; it could also be found within analytics-obsessed newsrooms themselves. Trump was demonstrably good television and reliable clickbait. Les Moonves, the chairman of CBS corporation, noted during the primary that Trump's candidacy 'may not be good for America, but it's damn good for CBS (television)' (Collins, 2016). Conservative journalist Ross Douthat likewise noted early in the primaries that Trump is 'such a gift to our industry' because he regularly made news and delivered pageviews (Klein, 2016). But, while it is true that Trump's reality TV instincts proved valuable on the campaign trail, it is also worth noting that today's newsrooms employ digital analytics that make them *much* more aware of which stories are popular and trending than ever before. The increasing reliance on newsroom analytics created a positive feedback loop, in which journalists and their editors became so attuned to Trump's clickworthy campaign that they continually devoted outsized attention to his candidacy, which in turn sustained and supported his polling numbers, which thus gave news media even more reason to provide overwhelming coverage of his campaign. Without the news media's reliance on analytics, Trump arguably would have received far less coverage, and this might have created space for his mainstream Republican opponents to overtake him during the primaries. The story of Trump in the primaries is, at least partially, a story of the continuing evolution of the political information cycle in the hybrid media system. If Chadwick were writing a second edition of his book in the aftermath of Trump's victory, I imagine he would use the case to further illuminate his central theoretical framework.

That being said, I imagine a second edition of Chadwick's book would likely undergo some heavy revisions and extensions to Chapter 5, 'Understanding WikiLeaks.' The WikiLeaks that Chadwick describes is one that is 'steeped in the traditions of libertarian hacker culture and […] influenced

by the technologically enabled transnational leftist movements that were first established during the 1990s by environmentalists, feminists, anarchists, and human rights groups' (p. 92). It is a critical institution of genre-bending media hybridity – an activist organization that is deeply reliant on the press to achieve its goals of radical transparency. Chadwick's description is rich, detailed, accurate, and dated. It is a description that (necessarily) concludes in the year 2012, at a time when WikiLeaks's embattled founder Julian Assange had, incidentally, just been hired by the state-funded Russian television news channel *Russia Today* (p. 111).

Suffice it to say, the role of WikiLeaks in the 2016 Presidential election evinced a different type of hybridity and different fundamental politics and values than the WikiLeaks of 2009–2012 described in Chadwick's book. By 2016, WikiLeaks had migrated from hybrid journalism to hybrid opposition research. The organization partnered with Russian hackers first to release nearly 20,000 emails obtained from the Democratic National Committee (DNC), and later to release thousands of emails from Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta's personal gmail account. It timed the DNC release to coincide with the Democratic National Convention in an attempt to foment dissension between Clinton supporters and Bernie Sanders supporters. It timed the Podesta leaks as an 'October surprise,' meant to divert attention from Donald Trump's gaffe-prone campaign and influence a voting public that, according to polling at the time, was leaning heavily in favor of Clinton (Enten, 2016). WikiLeaks, in other words, went from allying with the mainstream U.S. press to allying with the Kremlin. Its commitment to radical transparency and libertarian hacker values was replaced by a singular focus on attacking and undermining Hillary Clinton. In the aftermath of the election, the organization has continued to support and defend both Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin (odd allies for the cause of radical transparency, to say the least!).

Chadwick's chapter on Understanding WikiLeaks is a valuable benchmark for understanding the complex, fluid entity that WikiLeaks *was* circa 2012. But if he were updating the book post-Trump, I suspect that the years 2013–2016 would take center stage. How did WikiLeaks turn into a twenty-first-century partisan opposition research operation? The complex and controversial organization that broke major news stories in careful partnership with traditional news outlets is no more. WikiLeaks has ceased to be the standard-bearer for modern-day whistleblowers. It appears to be little more than the standard-bearer for Julian Assange and his long list of personal grudges and allegiances. How did this happen, and what can it tell us about the fickle nature of hybridity itself? If Chadwick's book were being updated today, I imagine he would have much to say on this subject.

Zizi Papacharissi's *Affective publics*: What happens when affect is weaponized and automated?

The story of the Trump campaign and Twitter would be astonishingly incomplete if it were to only include the candidate's own Twitter account. Equally noteworthy were the crowds of vocal adherents that assembled on social media to promote candidate Trump and verbally accost who opposed him. Trump's fan base, organized both through the hashtag #MAGA ('Make America Great Again') and through social sites like Reddit.com, exhibited an extraordinary zeal and devotion to their candidate. Parts of that fan base also deployed racist, sexist, and anti-Semitic memes and tropes developed by 'alt-right' white nationalists. They threatened Hillary supporters, #neverTrump Republicans, and political journalists. And a significant segment of Trump's vocal online supporter base comprised political bots and paid political trolls. For students of deliberative democracy, participatory democracy, and civil society, the volatile behavior of this supporter base is new, meaningful, and troubling.

Zizi Papacharissi's *Affective publics: Sentiment, technology, and politics* (Oxford University Press, 2015) provides a strong foundation for anyone grappling with the question 'what should we make of political twitter?' Papacharissi defines affective publics as 'networked public formations that are mobilized and connected or disconnected through expressions of sentiment' (p. 125). The material and technological affordances of Twitter – the hashtags, the retweets, the @accountnames, and uni-directional follower/followed linkages, in particular – allow otherwise isolated individuals to assemble

around affective appeals. Affective publics are something different from the in-person communities of fate that provided the bedrock for previous eras of collective action. They are distinct from formal political organizations or networked social movements. The theory of affective publics is a theory of digitally instantiated crowds: crowds which are both forged through the digital affordances of social media technologies, and reliant upon those same technologies for their continued sustenance.

The cases that Papacharissi draws upon in *Affective publics* include the networked conversations surrounding the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, and twitter's trending topics. While these provide engaging and illustrative examples, they also now appear noteworthy for their *earnestness*. Individuals participated in these hashtagged conversations because they were genuinely motivated to engage. Absent from the book's purview – receiving only one brief reference – is the subject of political trolling through social media. It treats political affect as a genuine expression of shared public will, conceptually distinct from the mischievous, playful work of online trolling communities (Phillips, 2015). This proves both theoretically generative and empirically justifiable for the specific cases covered within the text. But political behavior on Twitter during the 2016 election was not always earnest or genuine. Instead, it seems almost as if Trump's supporters on social media developed a sort of weaponized, automated affective public.

Journalist Adrian Chen documented this development in a *New York Times Magazine* piece titled 'The agency' (Chen, 2015). Chen reported on the 'Internet Research Agency,' a massive 'troll farm' located in St. Petersburg, Russia that employs 'hundreds of Russians to post pro-Kremlin propaganda online under fake identities, including on Twitter, in order to create the illusion of a massive army of supporters.' Chen's original investigation of professional Russian trolling occurred in 2015, well before the U.S. presidential election. But a year later, he noticed that 'this list of Russian trolls […] have turned into conservative accounts, like fake conservatives. I don't know what's going on, but they're all tweeting about Donald Trump and stuff' (Bertrand, 2016). Political satirist Samantha Bee also interviewed two paid Russian trolls for a segment of her television program *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*. At least a portion of the Trump-supporting affective public was deploying partisan affect in order to (in one troll's words, in an interview with Chen), 'spoil [the internet], to create the atmosphere of hate, to make it so stinky that normal people won't want to touch it.'

Meanwhile, the Oxford Internet Institute's Project on Computational Propaganda has gathered data suggesting that a substantial proportion of Twitter traffic surrounding the 2016 election was being produced by automated accounts in the form of 'botnets.' Kollanyi, Howard, and Woolley estimate that 22.9% of Trump-supporting accounts are likely profiles created for a political bot to help distribute computational propaganda online. While they also identified a large number of Clinton-supporting bot accounts, they find that 'the gap between highly automated pro-Trump and pro-Clinton activity widened from 4:1 during the first debate to 5:1 by election day,' and that:

> The use of automated accounts was deliberate and strategic through the election, most clearly with pro-Trump campaigners and programmers who carefully adjusted the timing of content production during the debates, strategically colonized pro-Clinton hashtags, and then disabled activities after Election Day. (2016)

We do not know specifically who is creating these bots, or who is funding their efforts. But there is burgeoning evidence that governments and other powerful actors are investing in computational propaganda that masquerades as citizens participating in an affective public on social media.

The emergence of human and computational trolling on Twitter raises a phenomenological question regarding how we should interpret faceless participation in online publics. As an example, consider the 'Bernie Bros.' Throughout the Democratic primary, a set of white, male Bernie Sanders supporters seemed to be harassing Hillary Clinton supporters and journalists who failed to provide Sanders with flattering coverage. Clinton supporters argued that these 'Bernie Bros' were evidence of an underlying misogyny among many Sanders supporters. Sanders supporters, meanwhile, argued that the 'Bernie Bros' phenomenon was blown massively out of proportion, and accused the Clinton campaign of inventing it. If the affective publics of the 2016 election were earnest, human participants, then this disagreement could be settled through content analysis.

One could sample Twitter and Facebook interactions and estimate the rate of Bernie Bro-related harassment and misogyny. But the existence of trolling and political bots introduces a troubling third scenario: *if* paid trolls and political botnets were directed to strategically produce Bernie Bro-type online interactions, then it is in fact possible that (1) Clinton supporters were constantly harassed by Bernie Bro-type accounts and (2) there were vanishingly few earnest Bernie supporters engaging in such behavior. Indeed, recent reporting from Grim and Cherkis (2017) traces evidence of exactly this trolling, and 'sock puppetry,' driving a 'fake news tsunami' among online Bernie supporters.

If Papacharissi were to write a second edition of *Affective publics*, I imagine these developments from the 2016 campaign would receive a thorough examination and prompt an extension of her theoretical framework. At a minimum, the behavior of online publics during the 2016 election challenges her concluding observation that 'Affective publics typically produce disruptions/interruptions of dominant political narratives by presencing underrepresented viewpoints' (p. 130). Such an observation seems to have been empirically true circa 2011 and 2012. But, much like WikiLeaks, it seems that affective publics have been weaponized in the intervening years, and are now being used by political elites to suppress and disrupt underrepresented viewpoints, rather than the other way around. There is still plenty of earnest affective public activity on Twitter today. But there are important differences between the online publics that form around #oscarssowhite, or simply around #oscars2017 for that matter, and the online publics that add (((three parentheses))) around the names of Jewish public figures so that they can be targeted and harassed by a burgeoning online white nationalist movement … and the network fake/bot accounts it has created (Singal, 2016). These are theoretically complicated and normatively terrible developments that have occurred since the publication of Papacharissi's book. I imagine if she were revising it today, it would be expanded to take them into account.

Daniel Kreiss's *Prototype politics*: Moneyball does not always win

Social media may have been the most visible digital element of the 2016 campaign, but there was also a much larger digital campaign infrastructure that remained largely out of sight. Daniel Kreiss's *Prototype politics: Technology-intensive campaigning and the data of democracy* (2016) is an essential text for bringing the broader architecture of digital electoral campaigning into view. The book is a sequel of sorts to Kreiss's *Taking our country back: The crafting of networked politics from Howard Dean to Barack Obama* (2012). While the first book revealed the individuals, institutions, and networks that created the technical capacities that became so celebrated in Obama's successful 2008 campaign, this new book expands our field of vision to include the parallel story of technological failure and retrenchment that occurred within the Republican party network from 2000 through 2014.

At the end of the 2004 election, the Republican Party had a better data file and better campaign technology than the Democratic Party. Over the next decade, the Republican Party network lost that technological advantage and struggled to catch up with their Democratic counterparts. These technological frustrations culminated in a series of widely publicized but poorly understood pratfalls for the 2012 Romney campaign. 'The Romney campaign,' Kreiss writes, 'was in part the outcome of the history of the Republican Party from 2004 through 2012, which was marked by the comparative lack of investment in the uptake of technology, digital media, data, and analytics in the service of electoral goals' (p. 2). Kreiss's book centrally argues that we should see political campaigns not as extensions of an individual candidate's personal traits, nor as simple plot devices that move an election towards a foregone, structurally ordained conclusion, but rather as the '*outcome* of historical party network processes' (p. 13). Drawing upon the work of organizational sociologists Padgett and Powell (2012), he argues that 'In the short run, actors create relationships; in the long run, relations create actors.' Campaign technology practices in presidential campaigns are coproduced by networks of technically skills individuals, partisan technology firms, and broader interests within the party network. To

understand a campaign's digital infrastructure, one must trace the networks and actors who joined this intra-party competition.

On the one hand, Kreiss's careful history remains unchanged by the surprising events of the 2016 election. As a work of historical scholarship, Trump's victory increases the value of the text. It can be far too easy to misconstrue historical developments to fit a stylized account of events that renders the present inevitable; *Prototype politics* fixes our attention on technology-intensive electoral politics as it was understood in the lead-up to Trump's unexpected candidacy.

But, on the other hand, the book stands as a testament to just how disjunctive the Trump campaign truly was. As Kreiss argues, the Romney campaign was indeed constructed upon (and with) the same tools, networks, and individuals that had been crafting networked politics for past Republican campaigns. The same was true for the 2016 candidacies of Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio, Rand Paul, Ted Cruz, and the other 'mainstream' Republican candidates. We can see these linkages because *the people hired to run technology operations in their campaigns had virtually all been interviewed for Kreiss's book*. Trump, by comparison, was an outsider not just in his personal biography and his campaign rhetoric, but also in the individuals and organizations that he hired to help manage his campaign operation.

Trump's digital director, Brad Parscale, had previously been employed as the developer of low-end real estate websites for the Trump organization. Parscale had no background in electoral campaigns, managing voter files, polling, or digital fundraising. If one wanted to be tremendously charitable, one could say that Trump's reliance on Parscale represented exactly the type of 'unanticipated transpositions' of career skills that the Obama campaign achieved through the hiring of senior tech professionals from Google, Facebook, and Threadless. That seems too charitable of an interpretation, though. Brad Parscale's career kept him within the Trump organization. The Trump organization moved into elections, and brought individuals like Parscale along for the ride.

If Kreiss were writing a second edition of the book, one of the main extensions he would likely provide would be the story of how Republican technology professionals reacted and responded to the candidacy of Donald Trump. A cursory glance reveals that a large number of them were active participants in the #neverTrump network. Mindy Finn, for instance, had previously worked as the Republican National Committee's deputy eCampaign director, and had worked on multiple presidential campaigns while also launching a well-known consulting firm and working at Twitter. In 2016, instead of partnering with the Trump campaign, she joined Republican Evan McMullin's insurgent third-party ticket as its Vice Presidential nominee. Finn's peers, like Patrick Ruffini, were vocal Trump critics on Twitter, and many of them participated in active #neverTrump campaign efforts. This intra-party conflict will likely have longer term implications for Republican technology efforts. One has to assume that Finn and Ruffini's firms will face obstacles when they attempt to sign up new business within the new Trump-led RNC.

History is a fickle thing. Kreiss's entire book tells a story of path dependence and contingencies. The book does not lead the reader to expect a Trump candidacy, but it does lead the reader to conclude that the Trump campaign's success will stretch beyond policy and personality. It also will affect the production of political campaigns for years to come. The firms and individuals who supported Trump will be rewarded with contracts for developing the next wave of Republican technological infrastructure. Will this lead to an influx of new technological talent, or will it simply enrich and entrench individuals who were already associated with the Trump organization and its many brands? I imagine a second edition of Kreiss's book would document these trends by extending the career path dataset he developed using LinkedIn data (pp. 10–13).

Viewed through Kreiss's lens, the result of the 2016 election also serves as a powerful reminder of the limitations of campaign technology. The better technically managed campaign does not necessarily win. Throughout the Obama era, careful researchers have noted that the direct impact of better databases and communications technologies only impact election outcomes at the margins (Hersh, 2015; Kreiss, 2012). The Democratic technology advantage was not enough to change the broad contours of the 2010 or 2014 midterms, but it likely mattered in a few close individual races. Broader

structural factors mattered far more for Barack Obama's 2012 victory than any database or Get Out the Vote program. Yet despite these prefatory comments, Obama's victories have fueled an image of campaign technology as *the* motive force deciding election outcomes. Given the demonstrable weaknesses of the Trump campaign technology architecture, researchers like Kreiss can now more firmly assert what communications technology matters *for*. (Voter databases matter at the margins. A database advantage can have less marginal impact than unexpected interventions from WikiLeaks and FBI Director James Comey, though.)

But campaign technology also matters for how citizens *experience* campaigns. Trump supporters experienced the campaign through rally attendance, through cable news, and through Twitter missives. Clinton supporters experienced the campaign through direct, targeted appeals through multiple channels. In the language of another important scholar of campaign technology, Stromer-Galley (2014), the Clinton campaign featured a higher level of 'controlled interactivity.' (The Trump campaign's interactivity was far more raucous and chaotic. It is worth revisiting whether uncontrolled interactivity is better suited to our democratic ideals.) And campaign technology structures who benefits and who holds power within the party network itself. For, as Kreiss tells us, in the short run, people create networks, but in the long run networks create people.

Conclusion: theory-building in unsettling times

Does the arc of history unfairly color our theories of online political communication? Are we too wedded to momentous events, and does that leave our scholarly work too vulnerable to the next wave of historical contingencies? I think not. Research on digital politics is, by its very nature, an emergent and boundary-crossing field. We study digital phenomena not because they are stable, but because they are still evolving in interesting and surprising ways. The *ceteris paribus* premise (all other things being equal) that undergirds more established social scientific subfields cannot be treated as an established assumption. We theorize around prominent events. We seek to learn from them. And then the next wave of counter-intuitive events forces us to think more deeply and learn even more.

My own work in digital politics has been no less vulnerable to the contingent events of the Trump campaign than any of my peers. I say this as someone with the misfortune to write a book on data analytics, testing, and activism, that was published on 1 December 2016, less than a month after Trump's surprising victory (Karpf, 2016). The world we inhabit today appears, in theoretically important respects, to be quite different than the world we inhabited when I was conducting my research, or the world that I expected my readers would be seeking to understand. Digital activism in the era of Trump will be shaped by different forces than digital activism in the era of Hillary Clinton would have been. The phenomena I describe in the book have not been rendered irrelevant by Trump's victory, but the Trump campaign and Trump Presidency would lead me to emphasize and expand upon different themes. In particular, I advance a 'media theory of movement power' in the book, which stresses that the efficacy of political tactics is found at the intersection of (a) activist resources, (b) the vulnerabilities of targets and opponents, and (c) the affordances of the broader media system. I use this framework to highlight how changes in (c) require activist organizations to establish systems for listening, experimenting, and innovating new political tactics. If I had the opportunity to immediately write a post-Trump edition of the book, I would further discuss how President Trump provides activists with an opponent/target with radically different vulnerabilities than they are used to dealing with. Analytic activism as a process takes on increased importance in the Trump era, even while the specific examples I highlight in the book (petition sites and viral social sharing) seem immediately dated.

The surprising results of the 2016 election should give the entire research community pause. We did not see this coming, and those of us who make predictions certainly did not predict it. But Trump's victory is not a rejection of the established literature. That literature has been constructed upon a series of counter-intuitive, contingent historical events. Actors, networks, technologies, and

institutions continue to interact and evolve, producing further counter-intuitive contingencies. We can use this literature to help us understand both why Trump won and the ways in which his victory matters. But, in doing so, we should also take care to continue expanding upon our theories. Hybrid media, affective publics, and technology-intensive campaigns are still in a state of becoming. The next wave of social science research will both build upon and amend the work that has come before it.

Note

1. Interestingly, the roots of this media strategy can actually be traced back to his 1987 book, *The art of the deal*. In that book, he (and a cowriter) wrote,

> If I take a full-page ad in the New York Times to publicize a project, it might cost $40,000, and in any case, people tend to be skeptical about advertising. But if the New York Times writes even a moderately positive one-column story about one of my deals, it doesn't cost me anything, and it's worth a lot more than $40,000. (Trump & Schwartz, 1987)

While his opponents spent heavily on television advertisements throughout the primaries, Trump instead used social media tools to provoke media coverage, under the (apparently correct) assumption that free media coverage would be worth a lot more than paid political advertising. Trump did not *need* a fundraising apparatus, or early support from major donors or party elites – not because he was a billionaire, but because his initial campaign was comparatively so cheap to run!

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