

MEDIA FRAMING AND SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE: A POSITIONING  
ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE PRESENT ON FACEBOOK

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Media Framing and Social Media Discourse: a Positioning Analysis of Political  
Discourse Present on Facebook

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **MEDIA FRAMING AND SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE: A POSITIONING ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE PRESENT ON FACEBOOK**

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George Mason University and University of Malta, 2017

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Recognizing the fact that shifts in communications technologies can fundamentally restructure the way in which members of society relate with one another, this study is focused on the analysis of the interactional patterns taking place on social media and Facebook specifically. By focusing on political discourse centered around a central topic (immigration) taking place on a variety of news media pages spanning the political spectrum this study also makes a connection between discourse taking place on the part of consumers and the framing provided by the media organizations themselves in order to determine the strength of media framing on consumer behavior and attitudes. In general the findings of this study are that consumers tend to follow the pages which support their beliefs and attitudes and will defend the framing against those who disagree. Additionally it was found that although all of the pages showed some degree of cross cutting interaction, the more liberal pages were more inundated with users disagreeing with their positioning than the more conservative pages.

## **CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION**

Pondered across the eons, a central question for theologians and philosophers alike is: what is the nature of Man? Is He shaped by internal or external forces, or as psychologists may refer to it “nature” or “nurture?” What kind of impact does the environment have in shaping His behaviors and attitudes? These are all questions far too big for this study, but they do provide an important backdrop for it as the interest in conducting this study was an interest in understanding change. Whether the individual is shaped more or less by their environment is up for psychologists and social scientists to debate, but most agree that the environment does play an important role nonetheless. With this understanding, it is then important to understand the way in which the environment is changing. Of specific interest to this study is the change of communicational patterns. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries technology has developed at an incredible rate and each wave of inventions helped to change the way that people communicated with one another. With inventions such as the telegraph and telephone allowing for instantaneous information to be spread across great distances and mass media technologies such as the radio and television allowing for dissemination to the masses communication on the societal level changed drastically. Monumental as these shifts were however, they are only steps in the ongoing progression of communication. For more than 20 years the internet has altered communication and with the advent of

Web 2.0 and social media its alteration has only continued. Unlike prior shifts though however, these more recent Internet based shifts have allowed for a new direction in communication to form, from the consumer back to the producer.

Given that past shifts in technology have correlated to shifts in society it behooves the modern researcher to pick up the task of analyzing this new field of communication. However, in what way should this new communicational mode be studied? For past researchers much was done in analyzing the framing of the news and then measuring societal attitudes in the hopes of drawing some kind of relationship. This model was effective for the unidirectional pattern of information dissemination (from the media producers and governments to the consumer), but is it the best method for measuring a multidirectional configuration such as what social media affords? In the eyes of this researcher it is not, rather a methodology that takes into account interaction is necessary. This is because it is not only the media organization that can be communicated with, it is fellow consumers. Between the consumers of media information the negotiation of meaning truly takes place and social media allows this negotiation to occur across vast time and space with otherwise disconnected users, some directly participating and others passively observing, all being affected by the interchange however. An ideal candidate for providing the framework with which to analyze the discourse present on social media and Facebook specifically is Positioning Theory as developed by Rom Harré among others.

Positioning Theory is ideal for this study precisely because it takes into account change as a constant. No interaction is static, but instead every one is dynamic, allowing

for each participant to accept or reject the trajectory of the interaction and change it accordingly. In this way Positioning Theory affords the researcher a more comprehensive look at the process of media effects than the traditional mode of analysis as it can analyze the actual processing of information provided by media outlets. It can do this because it is based on the notion that the individual is developed not outside of but through interactions with others, it is a learning experience and it is also a behavioral training exercise. In this way the framing inherent in the posts that the media chooses to share can be studied at a much deeper level to determine its impact on the individual. It is also an ideal tool for studying conflict in the digital space because it focuses solely on language as the vehicle for change and exchange and the digital space is entirely dependent on discreet messages. In these discreet messages one can analyze purely linguistic interaction development and track easily the development and competition of storylines. For this reason it also lends itself well to the study of conflict development and mediation as it focuses squarely on the contributions of the individual to develop a shared reality in which they may build cooperative or competitive and conflict driven patterns of interaction. In terms of furthering the pursuit of not just analyzing conflict, it may offer those interested in conflict resolution important information as to what types of development are occurring through micro interactions in the digital space, which may then be an indication of greater societal conflict. In this understanding may come the potential for finding mechanisms for change.

As will be detailed later in the chapter on methodology, this study will follow a sequential exploratory methodology meaning that it will be a mixed methodology

employing both qualitative and quantitative features, one after the other respectively. The purpose of analyzing the data in this way is that it will allow the detailed narrow analysis first speak for itself followed by quantitative data to locate it within a larger context. In doing so trends may become emergent that can be useful in giving direction the quantitative portion of the study. As such the structure of this study will be as follows: following the introduction and purpose statement/research question will come a review of literature, followed then by an overview of the theoretical framework, methodology, qualitative data analysis, quantitative data analysis, and conclusion. Within the literature review pertinent issues such as polarization, commodification, power and more will be discussed as they relate to political discourse present on social media. The theoretical framework will provide an introduction to Positioning Theory as well as connect it so as to underline its use in this study. Within the qualitative analysis, four discreet interactions chosen from four different news media organizations' Facebook pages will be analyzed in depth for both the framing given by the outlets themselves as well as the resultant positioning that takes place within the comment feeds. Following the qualitative analysis will come the quantitative analysis in which all of the posts shared regarding immigration over the entire month of August 2017 by the four respective pages will be reported upon and analyzed for overarching trends. Finally, the conclusion will elaborate and synthesize the information gleaned through qualitative and quantitative analysis as well as discuss potential directions for future study.

## **Purpose Statement and Research Question**

### *Purpose Statement*

The purpose of this study is to understand the nature of the workings of political discourse present on Facebook. Operating from an understanding that as communication patterns shift, consequences reverberate into broader societal functioning. Although this study cannot alone draw direct linkages between discourse present on Facebook to events taking place in the tangible world, it seeks to submit a piece of the puzzle in offering a glimpse of how discourse unfolds in different contexts present on different Facebook pages. The intent of this observation of political discourse on Facebook lies in its connection to conflict and hopefully its resolution. In many ways conflict can be understood as an issue of differences: the more of them there are the wider the gulf between the parties involved is and with fewer it shrinks. In this frame discourse can be understood much the same way; how are differences mitigated or how might they be strengthened? Although here unable to draw the connection between virtual relations to actual events unfolding in the physical world, the principal area this research seeks to provide information for future research is the connection between violent rhetoric and violent action. In building an understanding of the construction and deconstruction of violent rhetoric online through natural processes, this study seeks to provide working knowledge that can be used to assist conflict analysts of all disciplines in developing strategies aimed at resolution. By studying the patterns that evolve in different contexts on social media, this study seeks to provide the field with more usable information

regarding media frames and their effect on interactional patterns (specifically patterns of conflict) taking place in a developing and less studied sphere.

*Research Question*

To what extent does the framing utilized by news-media pages on Facebook play a role in the development of positions taken through political discourse on Facebook? What form do positions tend to take: collaborative or combative?

## CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

As Facebook continues its impressive growth into new markets and demographics, social scientists are scrambling to understand it and other social media processes and their effects on the greater societies in which they inhabit. This should come as no surprise given that every generation of social scientists have sought to do the same with each new technological advance in communications technology. Famously, though incorrectly, Marconi touted his invention of the radio as advancement that would “make war impossible, because it will make war ridiculous,” he was sadly very wrong and World War I broke out only two years later (Stalder, 2012). Clearly work needed to be done to understand why Marconi was woefully wrong. Few centuries have seen so much advancement so quickly though and as a result the radio’s position as the penultimate tool for disseminating information and entertainment to the masses was short-lived: although the first broadcast television stations were opened relatively quickly after the first radio stations, the adoption by the masses took more time. Indeed, a classic example for social scientists studying the varying effects of differing media is the 1960 United States presidential election in which John F. Kennedy ran against Richard M. Nixon. What set this election aside from those prior is that for the first time the presidential debates were broadcast on live TV and there were enough Americans with television sets for this broadcast to make great effect. Of great interest in particular to this election was that the



Americans who listened to the debate by radio rather than watched it perceived Nixon to be the winner due to his clear handle of domestic/foreign policy, while television viewers saw Kennedy as the winner due to Nixon's nervous and sweaty appearance (though not definitively the cause Kennedy went on to win the election); much like the 80s classic Buggles song, it seemed that "video killed the radio star" (Esbaugh-Soha, 2015).

Although the switch from radio to television as the primary medium in which Americans consume information seems relatively archaic by today's standards, the same need to understand technology's advancement applies today; many new questions arise today that echo the past's. Rather than asking about how the television has changed consumption patterns and interpretations, it is now necessary to ask the following: how has the shift from television and newspaper to web-based media altered the political landscape? How has the advent of social media altered the way in which news media is interpreted and discussed? How has social media altered the way in which the general public interacts with each other? All of these questions and more need analysis as society continues its advance into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. As will be discussed further, much work has already been done to understand these processes.

### **Polarization?**

With the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine of 1949 in 1987, an FCC act which mandated that a multitude of viewpoints were expressed, a number of politically oriented talk radio shows proliferated in the 1990s, primarily of a conservative leaning (most notably Rush Limbaugh leading the cause), to combat a perceived liberal bias in the

mainstream media. As time went on, liberal radio shows were created to combat this trend (a notable example being the *Al Franken Show*), as well as new networks created to spread news media with partisan commentary (Fox News being a notable example in this regard).

This trend is not something relegated to history however, with new modes of communication such as that the Internet affords it has jumped technologies again. Fox News, as well as all of the other media present on TV and radio, has a presence online; so do a multitude of new voices through blogs, video services such as YouTube, and not least, social media. Drawing causation from this is indeed the work of another study, but given the work<sup>1</sup> that has already been done to track political polarization it does seem to correlate well to the rise of partisan media.

An important component to consider is the role of perception. In Westfall's expansive study, the primary aim was to explore the US public's perception of political polarization and to analyze how it compared to actual political polarization. Drawing on 30 years of data collection<sup>2</sup>, his team found that consistently the perception of polarization exceeded the actual polarization within the country, and always by around an entire standard deviation (2015). That being said, the actual polarization did correspond to the perceived polarization, though the perceived polarization showed itself to be much

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<sup>1</sup> Political Polarization in the American Public [WWW Document], 2014. . Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. URL <http://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/> (accessed 7.31.17).

<sup>2</sup> The years for this study were 1968-2008

more temperamental; while the actual polarization tended to show more smooth trend lines, the perceived polarization tended to be much more dramatic. Westfall found that the perception of polarization depended on three variables:

(a) the categorization of people into distinct partisan groups of Democrats and Republicans that define “our side” and the “opposing side,” with the opposing political group seen as more polarized than one’s own; (b) the strength with which people identify as a Democrat or Republican, which heightens tendencies to differentiate Democrats from Republicans; and (c) the extremity of people’s own attitudes on partisan issues, which causes people to project more extreme attitudes onto both Democrats and Republicans. (2015)

In short, these variables come down to the categorization of one another into differing groups, the veracity with which one identifies into either republican or democratic groupings, as well as the extremity to which certain beliefs/opinions are held. Logically speaking, these variables each build on one another: extreme partisan attitudes depend on the extent to which it is perceived that parties represent those issues, which in its most primal state is dependent on delineating between the “in group” and the “out group.” Everything depends on how one positions his/herself versus another; as Westfall notes, people will “embrace their group as an extension of themselves, and they perceive their group in ways that affirm their group’s distinctiveness from, and superiority over, opposing groups... [and] people often affirm the distinctiveness of their group by exaggerating differences between “our group” and the “opposing group” (2015). Perhaps elementary, a principle finding of the Westfall study was that the people who perceive the most polarization are themselves the most polarized. Utilizing the framework they laid out to measure perceived polarization this makes sense: polarized people will have strong opinions about issues, which galvanizes their perceptions

regarding the difference between their party and their opponents,' which in turn strengthens their own identity. Following this logic, another finding of the study was that "people perceive greater political polarization on those issues where their attitudes more closely correspond with their partisan identification than on those issues where their attitudes correspond less closely" (Westfall, 2015). Thus, Republicans will perceive greater polarization with issues that they closely identify as conservative and less for where the conservative/liberal divide is not as strong, with the opposite being true for the Democrats. Attitudinally it is understood that polarized people hold ideas that are incongruent with one another, however an important question after acknowledging that as a given is: "what does this mean in actionable terms?" Westfall had two conclusions. Polarized people are more likely to take action, they will volunteer, donate, and vote in higher numbers and with more veracity than non-polarized people. Furthermore, through their actions and a rise in polarization it is more possible for more extreme party leaders to be nominated and elected as they will be seen more favorably as protecting their party from the extremely different opposing party.

Fantastic though it is in its breadth of study and general overview of perceived polarization, a principle drawback for Westfall's analysis lies in the fact that it was analyzing a time period in which social media had not yet become so mainstream. How will the trend of polarization play out in this new theater? Coffey et al. found that there were two theories at conflict with one another for the correct prognostication of social media's role on polarization: on one hand it could be that "a more participatory environment should reduce the influence of the campaign industry and promote a more

open discussion of political issues than the restricted set of voices that appears on the cable talk shows,” but on the other “social media may exacerbate differences and inhibit constructive debate” through the manipulation of elites who utilize social media to create “partisan echo chambers”<sup>3</sup> (2015). For Coffey and his team, the measuring stick for polarization is “civility” (or perhaps rather the lack thereof) in society. They defined civility as: “as a tone or display of respect and (or) courtesy toward other participants in public discourse” (Coffey et al., 2015). As they argue, civility must not be confused with mere lack of disagreement, indeed they acknowledge that disagreement is integral to a functioning democracy. The disagreement must *merely* be expressed in a way which encourages mutual respect and alternatives to be honestly sought after; a simple prescription for treatment, but incredibly complicated to achieve.

Like Westfall, a significant cause for polarization in Coffey’s model (drawing on Abramowitz’ 2011 study) is the conflation of self-identity with group identity, the dichotomy between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and a result is that “threats to self-identity, provoked by new opportunities for interactions between citizens with different political views, should be expected to produce more hostile and less civil communication” (2015). How does this translate within social media processes though? There has already been plenty of research done that indicates that by removing the physical cues from communication, there is a growth of hostility (or as Coffey may put it incivility) within the discourse (Byron, 2008). This comes down to largely the miscommunication of emotion between

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<sup>3</sup> Should Westfall’s work hold through into this new era, it very well may be that the latter is the correct analysis as he found that even outside of social media people tend to gravitate toward those with similar views and ‘echo chambers’ occur even in the non-virtual world.

participants; even when a positive message is sent, it may come across as neutral or negative to the recipient. Along this same vein, Byron found that the information that contained non-emotional information was more likely to be correctly interpreted. That being said, it was found that emphatic writing, including the use of emoji (or emoticons) did improve the communication of emotionally charged messages. In the end though the conclusion of Byron's study was that written communication alone tends to more hostile exchanges than other forms incorporating more humanness.

When dealing with online commenting within social media specifically though, the lack of civility seems to be more exacerbated- as with Westfall's notion that those who perceive more polarization are themselves polarized, Chmiel and his team found that comment sections tend to be dominated by a relatively few amount of commenters: the polarized (2008). Furthermore as Anderson discovered in her study, even when the original post dealt with apolitical issues the commenters tended to draw their own meanings and still yet polarize the resultant discussion (2014). As Coffey alludes to though in his work, this comes as no surprise:

“Citizens may seek participation in order to express different viewpoints, without an interest in compromise or reasoned deliberation; this is especially the case in an environment in which public attitudes are highly polarized. Indeed, some research indicates that individuals tend to seek disagreement and that the experience of encountering different views is psychologically rewarding... (2015)

Naturally a principle problem with this phenomenon is that if this is the case, there is no hope for the honest search for alternatives as described above, rather it indicates that the communicational patterns are doomed by pre-held intentions on the part of the participants. Furthermore, the problem with partisans (those already polarized), particularly those with more than average understandings of the issues, tend to be better

equipped to ignore new information if it is found inconsistent with their prior understanding (Gaines et al., 2007). The problem then it seems is not that there is a shortage of information to rely upon, but rather that there is too much, or perhaps rather more specifically too much that is at odds with other sides. Coffey touches upon this fact in his discussion regarding media effects: he sees elite commentary being disseminated through more traditional means such as newspapers, radio, and TV being spread to consumers like intellectual contagions to consumers who then take this elite commentary into online fora and then inject their own scaled up emotions, which in the end leads to greater incivility in the discourse.

Should Coffey's theory of intellectual contagions spread from the elite sources in news media down through informal discussion boards be correct, the outlook for social media's role in affecting political discourse positively seems rather grim for in that case the only element necessary to change would be the behavior of the elites themselves. However, as Bennett and Iyengar point out, with the growth of new communication technologies facilitated through the internet the stage is set for a shakeup of the theoretical foundations of media effects. Indeed, with the growth of multiple new sources to choose from as well as consumers' ability to interact with news media, they argue society may be moving into a new news consumption/interpretation paradigm. To set the stage for their study, they look to history for examples; particularly the aforementioned shift to high consumption of news facilitated by the television in the 1960s. In that "pre-mass communication era" scholars tended to support what they referred to as "minimal effects" of media; that is, the news media did not have a strong, direct impact on the

opinions and attitudes of the people, rather the information would go through a two-step process in which the information was first distributed by the media outlets and then interpreted/negotiated by tight-knit social structures such as churches, political parties, unions, and service organizations. With the rise of mass communication however, a different paradigm arose based on the strong influence of the media in agenda setting in which “a new consensus seemed to emerge that the news does tell people both what to think about and also how to think about it” (Bennett and Iyengar, 2008). All that being said however, as mentioned the premise of their study is that both paradigms are indeed outdated and need rethinking to match technological advances and changing patterns of communication patterns. Whereas in the 1960s when advertisers could reach 80% of a target market on three networks during prime-time viewing hours, it is now estimated that they would need to utilize over a hundred channels to reach the same amount of people (Bennett and Iyengar, 2008). Furthermore, newer generations seem to feel significant revulsion against what they see as contrived, staged government/media performances and have grown to have higher distrust of the government in general.

While Bennett and Iyengar are extremely interested in changes in political communication and polarization due to technological advances, they tend to discuss it only in generalities. Peter John Chen’s focus is much clearer, he is interested in the role that social media plays specifically altering the political communication landscape. For him, social media plays the significant role of opening space for counter discourses to emerge and become normalized through greater exposure, as well as limiting the ability of any one specific sub-group to control the narrative. Although he does acknowledge



that he cannot draw a direct link between the coarsening of public political discourse and social media processes, he has noted that traditional news media seems to more often be “blending opinion with journalistic reporting” and “in empowering the public to engage with reportage, online newspapers and other mainstream and alternative media are filled with increasing amounts of lightly regulated content that tends towards the more informal and offensive” (2013). In his view, the combination of these forces seems to be driving a growth in incivility in public discourse (which of course as Coffey notes is the primary driver to polarization).

Furthermore, he describes the interaction between news media and the public as a ‘spiral of silence’ in which the media outlets help generate “a generally accepted zeitgeist [which], in turn, encourages public discourse with 'popular' (acceptable topics and discourages those views outside of the charmed circle” (2013). However, the news media is responsive to the reactions of the public and will adjust accordingly, which eventually leads to a “narrowing and hardening” of the spiral of “appropriate discursive topics” (2013). As mentioned by essentially all of the above scholars however, the broadening of the range of outlets available, coupled with the advent of social media, allows for the notion of a singular spiral of silence to be challenged. This challenge may take two forms: it may allow for many spirals of silence to occur simultaneously in different contexts, or social media may as he suggests “[open] up spaces for intermediate groups: larger than interpersonal groups, but not as far reaching as mass media” in which the importance of the spiral is greatly diminished (2013). In the end however, although he sees the virtual world opening up more space for rude, uncivil discursive patterns to

become the norm, he argues that the traditional media's agenda setting ability and the self-censorship that he still sees as active within the spiral of silence paradigm has the end result of not allowing discourse to truly escape the "meat-space of the real" and has significant sway in not allowing for the development of a "weightless public sphere" (2013).

As has been thus made clear thus far, it is supremely difficult to attach polarization of the political scene in the United States directly to social media processes; there have been a variety of other influences that have helped create a polarized environment from the advent of more partisan news coverage in traditional media to perhaps simply polarized people bringing the general public perception of polarization higher. A significant question that needs answering is whether social media helps facilitate polarizing processes to occur or whether it simply exposes processes already at work, but not necessarily as obvious. This is a question that Bakshy, in his 2015 study, attempted to answer. In the end his findings were inconclusive, but nonetheless exposed some important information. Most significantly he studied the degree to which liberals and conservatives are connected on Facebook: in the end he found that liberals tend to have 20% of their friends made up of conservative (measured through self-reporting), while conservatives tend to have 18% (2015). That being said however, conservatives tend to be exposed to more crosscutting articles than are liberals: while liberals are exposed to conservative content 24% of the time, conservatives are exposed to liberal content 35% of the time rather than conservative. Regardless of the affiliation however of the user, he found that the likelihood of clicking on cross cutting content was only 7%,

indicating that the ultimate responsibility of perhaps facilitating the development of an echo chamber lies with the user rather than the algorithms.

### **Power?**

Much has been discussed about the technological shift allowing for communication patterns to evolve through social media (and the Internet in general), but how might power relations between the masses and the ‘elite’ be affected? There tend to be two views, equally polar in their prognosis: the dystopian view that the internet will allow for greater control and surveillance of the masses than ever before and the utopian vision that the internet and social media will “**perhaps represent the ultimate end in the long progress of democracy**” (Stalder, 2012; Weis, 2013). Which view is correct? Must it be either or, or can it be both? To answer these questions, one must first understand the arguments on both sides.

Beginning with the argument that it is playing a dystopian role, the primary antagonist to the story is that of the ‘elites’ and their ability to manipulate and control the unwitting masses. Typically there is not a distinction made between who comprise this group of elites, but it is generally assumed to be government and business leaders are the general composition. As mentioned in the previous section on polarization, Coffey asserts that the primary mode in which the elites are able to steer us toward this dystopian future is through their ability to manipulate public discourse and opinion through their ability of agenda setting in traditional media. In his model, although social media for many holds

the promise to break the chains of the elites' domination of narratives and discourse<sup>4</sup>, it in the end merely supports it (2015). Building upon this idea, Tkacheva discusses in her work the need for government officials to use media in order to project their power: "mainstream media serves as a conduit of such political messages to the public... News originates from the administration and passes down to an inner circle of the elite who share it with the mainstream media, which disseminates the news further to the general public" (2013). However, her findings were that the role of social media (and the internet in general) depended on the context in which it operates: while these technological modes of communication may bring more plurality and thus less control from the elites, in more oppressive regimes this is not the case. Indeed a challenge that those in oppressive regimes face is that they must self-censor and therefore avoid discussing sensitive issues online entirely (2013). However, she goes on to concede that it can open up space for activists to mobilize, though they may need to augment their lexicon (as they shifted from saying "protest" in China and instead replaced it with the word "stroll") or use unofficial or illegal networks such as VPNs to side-step the controlled virtual space.

On the other hand, it has been argued that social media opens up spaces for otherwise unheard voices to infiltrate and influence political discourse in unprecedented ways. To this end Innocent Chiluwa in many ways picks up where Tkacheva leaves off by illustrating the development of an online virtual community following liberalizing legislation being passed in Nigeria. Under the military dictatorship any kind of

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<sup>4</sup> Peter John Chen explores this idea, though his prognostication/observation is slightly more chaotic, rather than arguing for this process as a democratizing (and therefore positive) shift, he instead argues only that the elites have a reduced ability to control the narrative as well as less ability to control how it is consumed

oppositional language was strictly forbidden, but as those laws were amended a burgeoning political community arose to fill the new space afforded through Internet connectivity. Specifically, one aspect of change that social media has afforded activists in Nigeria (specifically against the Igbo community) is the resurrection of the goal of reestablishing the defunct state of Biafra, a goal by nature at odds with the dominant elite vested in maintaining the current state of Nigeria (2012). Similarly, Baker in analyzing the role that social media has played in the United Kingdom has found that an incredibly important function to understand about social media is that it allows for users to become content creators rather than solely consumers. Like the counter government movement for Biafra in Nigeria, the use of Twitter and Facebook was seen as a principle factor in causing the Tottenham riots of 2011 (as a result of the killing of Mark Duggan by police officers). Building upon this idea, Weis in her 2013 study discusses how social media affords social movements to build up and form what Rheingold calls “smart mobs... [which] help people coordinate actions with others around the world—and, perhaps more importantly, with people nearby. Groups of people using these tools will gain new forms of social power, new ways to organize their interactions just in time and just in place.” Challenging critics of this vision of new social organization, she concedes that there cannot be any direct causal linkage from social media to social change, but that such an argument “places too high a threshold for any form of political activism. By introducing such a standard, claims that the printing press helped to advance democracy and promote the spread of liberal ideas could be dismissed by the fact that the print media did not help topple every closed regime in which they were introduced” and can thus be an “important

tool in the oppositional arsenal” (2013). Importantly, in her vision the democratizing forces of social media do not lie only within countries but actually transcend international boundaries and cites Egyptian protesters supporting workers in Wisconsin as an example, while protesters in Wisconsin flew Egyptian flags. Her vision is thus a bit more radical than most, as she goes on to argue that social media and the Internet may “represent the ultimate end in the long progress of democracy” (2013).

Bridging these two opposing viewpoints, Felix Stalder argues that social media processes are bringing both the dystopian elite controlled world and the more utopian, democratic world about simultaneously by arguing that there is both a “front end” and “back end” to the social web (2012). The front end is the web that everybody sees: it represents the honest communication between mutually interested parties creating a natural discourse. The back end on the other hand represents the elite working to manipulate this new forum of social interaction to their own benefit. One way this is done is through the posing as an unaffiliated user: “What appears to be authentic, user-generated content often turns out to be part of a (viral) marketing campaign, a public-relations strategy, or other organized efforts by *hidden persuaders* (italics original)” (Stalder, 2012). For Stalder, this is what the back-end consists of: a profit driven corporate elite. Their primary mode of monetizing the internet lies in their use of targeted advertising, which can only occur through the heavy use of surveillance of individual users’ browsing preferences and practices. The end result as Stalder contends is that “the enormous amounts of personal and community data generated, will empower the actors with access to the back-end considerably more [power] than those at the frontend, thus

tipping the balance not in favor of the lightly organized groups but, rather, the densely organized groups,” i.e. the corporate elites (2012). With the growth of this surveillance capability, Stalder worries that this new resource may be tapped by government agencies in the interests of national security or law enforcement to prevent rather than solve crime leading to “contribute to the expansion of old-style, state-centered, big-brother surveillance capacities” (2012). All said and done, he sees these two forces, a liberalizing front end and centralizing back end, working within their own spheres for now, but potentially coming to a conflict in which the back end, where comptrollers have the more tangible power, muscling out the liberalizing effects of the front end leading not to a “semiotic but a managed democracy” (2012).

### **Commodification and the Spiral of Echoes**

With the understanding of back end social media processes that Stalder has laid out; that is, that the back end is dominated by market forces intent on utilizing users’ information for targeted advertising and thus creating profit, Tim Jordan explores this commodification of information aggregated by the multitudes in his 2015 book *Information Politics*. It is in social exchanges that information is passed between users that the controllers of the platform are able to collect the data and store it, making it property of the network. One of the primary vectors by which this data becomes valuable to the advertising companies and thus the network is the function of ‘likes.’ Likes are valuable when they are enjoined with others, as Jordan elaborates: “My individual ‘like’ may be of little value in itself but joined with everyone else’s likes it takes on a new

value” (2015). It is through this mechanism that demographics can be created, analyzed, and targeted. However, how are they targeted? Jordan contends that they are by use of algorithms that are responsive to these collectivized likes which will then show more content that is similar to each collective. A natural byproduct of this targeting of specific demographics is that users (or perhaps more fittingly here described as consumers) are grouped together with likeminded others who then may be stuck in the aforementioned echo-chambers, a concerning prospect for those interested in social media being used for the facilitation of creating respectful dialogue between incongruent users. Nonetheless, with the market driven nature of social media this phenomenon is unlikely to go away anytime soon and must be accounted for when analyzing the efficacy of social media as a mitigating tool in conflict.

### **Public vs. Privacy**

When discussing the role of shifting communication patterns as facilitated by the internet and social media specifically, an inevitable and indeed invaluable component must be mentioned and taken into account: the role of private vs. public lives. This discussion necessitates the exploration of identity a component of individual psychology as well as that of sociology through its connection to group dynamics facilitated in the digital space. The question of public vs. private identity inevitably folds into a discussion of ethics and government: can a more public life erode the foundations of a society grounded in privacy?



Taking on the issue of individual's psychology being affected, Tim Jordan begins a valuable analysis of the concept of privacy as an extension of an inner self and protecting it. Many, such as Nathaniel Swigger, have asserted that the dynamics present on Facebook are not consequential, but are rather intended. Elaborating on the prior discussion on commodification of user generated data (i.e. information about themselves, what they like and believe etc.) he explains: "social media sites are specifically designed to encourage users to publish photos, personal information, and comments about their lives - information which would have been shared with only family or a few close friends a decade ago" (2013). A pattern he contends lends itself to the erosion the concept of an inner self. In his eyes this is not a shift without consequences, rather its effect will reverberate through the fabric of our society, perhaps shaking the very understanding of democracy. The mode through which these consequences may be realized lies in a fundamental connection between the notion of privacy and the formation of identity. As mentioned, what was once shared only with close friends or family is now shared to a wide community which can then provide feedback. In the universe of Facebook, this means that a community to whom before one is not directly exposed is open now available for direct interactions, bringing conflicting beliefs, attitudes, and opinions to clash/collude and give shape to one another, as well as shaping interaction patterns and identity group formation. A central finding as a result of this shift is that people are valuing the right to free expression more, and privacy less; although more so for younger

demographics whose identities are more largely shaped on social media<sup>5</sup> (Swigger, 2013). As Swigger acknowledges however, direct correlations between behavioral patterns cannot yet be drawn, though he does advocate that there will be shifts nonetheless that will reverberate throughout generally held conceptions, not least including the conception of what a democracy is.

Although creative authors of past dystopian scenarios such as *1984*'s George Orwell envisioned a world in which oppressive regimes would coercively extract details about citizens' private lives, it is not necessarily the government that is stripping privacy, but rather society at large. For example, for whatever users post, thought should be given to analyze what effect it may have on their professional life; will it hamper their chances for a new job or perhaps even their continued employment with their current job<sup>6</sup>? Rather than advancing self-expression, a new emphasis on the self-control over one's attitudes, behaviors, and opinions must be applied. In this model, users are not free to share perhaps what they feel more personally, but rather what they perceive will be accepted by the wider society. As Chen elaborates, this feeling of surveillance and resultant self-censorship results in an "internalization... [which] interpellates young people into a narrow range of subjective desires (school tracking to employment), validate particular self-representation (largely focused on specific types of acceptable consumption; Best,

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<sup>5</sup> Though with growing numbers of older segments of the population plugging into Facebook and social media, it is reasonable to assume that their group identity (and the values embodied therein) may shift as well to lesser extents

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, with the phenomenon known as 'doxxing,' or the practice of identifying users with unacceptable views (such as what happened to attendees of the Unite the Right protest event in Charlottesville, Virginia who social media users perceived to be racists), the private life exposed on social media does have concrete consequences in the real world

2009), while suppressing ‘deviant’ behavior” (2013). In his eyes this reflects the Foucauldian notion of panopticism, that is, the State (or in this case Society) can and does observe every behavior and action taken by an individual. Should this be the case, Swigger’s assertion that profound effects upon the development of the individual and resultantly the fundamental relational nature of society may very well come to fruition and as he further asserts disrupt the current concept of democracy itself.

However, this bombastic effect of social media is not necessarily sure; as Jordan has emphasized in his work, Facebook still allows for users to share in a way consistent with their desires. A user can choose to have a public (searchable and readable by disconnected persons) or a private profile (with varying levels of privacy available) and can furthermore regulate the posts that they share for different privacy settings, perhaps excluding some persons. The inner self still has a clearly defined boundary, the user is still “the author of their public-private divide,” but the boundary may be shifting. A tangible shift that some are concerned about is the way in which Facebook updates its privacy agreement<sup>7</sup> as it removes some of this ability to control the public private divide. Unfortunately only time will tell regarding the nature of this shift, but there is fortunately one area that allows for tangible research to be done and that is regarding public posts. While personal profiles may be controlled by the user to a certain extent, the posts that they make on public pages is beyond their control<sup>8</sup> and enter the public arena to be scrutinized. In this way the inner self becomes more connected to the wider world

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<sup>7</sup> Constine, J., 2013. Facebook Removing Option to be Unsearchable by Name Highlighting Lack of Universal Privacy Controls. TechCrunch.

<sup>8</sup> That is unless they delete the post

allowing itself to be scrutinized and challenged in spaces before reserved for a few. This process could lead to greater conflict as core identity becomes challenged and is therefore an important area for study. The way in which it can be studied is through focused discourse analysis of these public exchanges.

### **CHAPTER THREE – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Although initially developed as a marketing theory describing the placement of certain goods in relation to one another, “positioning theory” began to take on new meaning in the 1980s with the work of Wendy Hollway as she reapportioned the language of positioning theory to describe instead the discursive patterns in which gender related positions are taken up in conversation (Harré and Lagenhove, 1999). Building on this new interpretation of what positioning theory represents, psychological social theorists of all stripes began to reimagine the processes underlying the formation of positions as a critical component of human communication. Notable among these early theorists are Jonathan Potter, Margaret Wetherell, Bronwyn Davies, but arguably most prolific on the topic is Rom Harré. With the infusion of new minds taking up Hollway’s variant of positioning the theory gradually became more generalized and less focused on gendered issues (although as positioning takes into consideration all levels of identity, gender is still a crucial mechanism of analysis).

As mentioned, positioning theory deals with the concept of discursal patterns determining social positions. Being discursal, this is naturally done through conversation, but how do conversational patterns have such power in determining roles and therefore perhaps hierarchy? According to these theorists, this is done as partakers place themselves and each other, though even those not party to the conversation may

also be placed. This process is accomplished through many different means, but most importantly by telling stories in which the speaker places him/herself as well as others (Davies and Harre, 1990). Thus, for ease of understanding, the speaker shapes each participant into a character in the story they tell. These characters may fall into archetypes such as “judge” or “nurse” which contain within them specific expected behaviors and responsibilities (Davies and Harré, 1990; Tirado and Galvez, 2007). Through the development of positioning theory, these expected behaviors have come to be understood as “rights” and “duties” and have been established through “taken-for-granted practices,” meaning they are to be argued for as societal norms that members must adhere to (Harré, 2010). Indicative of the name, rights refer to the privilege that each position enjoys, whereas duties refer to the limitations of action and required actions placed upon involved actors through the positioning process. Understanding these rights and duties therefore is paramount to understanding the position that each participant has been assigned and how/why the position has been challenged or accepted.

Where positioning theory gets really interesting however, is the way in which it allows these positions/roles (and therefore stories!) to be contested. By nature conversation requires feedback from parties involved and it is in this feedback process that a person may argue against their assigned role and attempt to build a new story through which the conversation will progress. Clearly this process leads to an important component of positioning theory: it is not static (Tirado and Gálvez, 2007). This is an important component to note, as in Harré and others’ view a significant problem that plagues earlier conceptualizations of what constitutes positions is that they were static:

they had an “understanding [of] people ... socialized into roles” which indicates that individual positions are monochromatic and do not change from conversation to conversation, or at all really (Peters and Appel, 1996). Positioning theory contends the opposite, in the course of a singular episode one’s own position, and those of others, evolve. For this reason, Davies and Harré have described positioning as an “immanent” theory as opposed to a “transcendental” one, meaning that rather than calling on roles which transcend episodes, positions develop and emerge over the course of immanent exchanges and are thus negotiated and changing (Davies and Harré, 1990).

In a very significant way, this shift in thought is indicative of trends throughout the social sciences, black and white descriptions of human interaction and therefore identity have been greyed. Whereas before humans were described with a few manageable variables that made simulations easy to run (though therefore unreliable), their attributes are now understood to be much more complex. Although it is not directly important to this study, an important under-girder to evolutions that have taken place in identity theory, which people possess not just one, but rather many identities that coexist concurrently with one another. Tying back to positioning theory, these multiple identities give shape to the stories told which evolve over the course of an interaction. Rather than referring to these different perceptions of identity as identities, Harré uses the language of “self;” to him, each individual is imbued with multiple selves. These selves take different shapes: the embodied self, the autobiographical self, and the social self (Harré, 2004).

The embodied self describes a continuous, unified<sup>9</sup> vision, which incorporates all actions, and points of view a person might have; this is the self as would be traditionally understood. However, undergirding this unified, “embodied” self lay the other selves. The autobiographical self facilitates the placing of one in a story, usually as the hero or heroine. As each story is different, the autobiographical self necessarily adapts to fit its new role. The social self, like the autobiographical self, adapts itself to its environment. However, unlike the autobiographical self, rather than casting itself as a hero/heroine in a given narrative, it is responsive instead to the people around it at that given moment.

As a discursive process, not only is change implied over the course of exchanges, so too are different types of interaction. As such, Harré suggests different types of positionings that can occur to match the type of exchange: “ceremonial (electing the pope), characterological (appointing a chief executive or assigning tasks at a picnic), biographical (choosing a presidential candidate by reference to voting records), or historical (family recriminations over who let the cat out)” (Harré, 2010). These different types of positioning can occur simultaneously as one another, but each helps establish participants’ position amongst one another. All of these are anticipated to be evident in this study, omitting perhaps the first as it deals with more formal settings, although it may become evident that a certain level of emergent ceremonial practices have become common on Facebook.

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<sup>9</sup> That is not to say however that the embodied self does not include within it contradictions; indeed, as positions (the embodiment of points of view, attitudes, behaviors, and the connected rights and duties) evolve over the course of many different discrete, immanent episodes, the positions develop and change along with each of them. The embodied self merely folds all of these (perhaps) conflicting positions into one person (Davies and Harré, 1990).



These different types of exchanges and their subsequent positionings have their roots in a forerunner to Harré's work, a man named Lev Vygotsky who worked on developing social psychology in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Soviet Union. The principle theory behind his connection to Harré is what has been come to known as "Vygotsky's Principle" which describes the formation of "higher order mental processes;" in his view they are shaped twice: at the social level and later at the individual level (Harré, 2004). What this then implies is that human development is as dependent on interchange of information/opinions from others as it is on the maturation of the individual. Furthermore, by connecting Vygotsky's Principle to positioning theory one is able to better grasp the concept of 'rights and duties.' In each of the above categorizations, be it ceremonial, historical, or biographical, it makes no difference, the position each participant takes will be informed by patterns realized in the past, through the observation of more senior members and subsequently imitating them. It is these observed social interactions that perpetuate the assumption of rights and duties on the parts of all parties involved, both the assigner and the assigned. This translates not only in the attitude/behavior that is due the situation, but can also perhaps include specific verbiage that is allowable or perhaps even necessary. For example, in a situation where one person is grieving the loss of their spouse (referred to as "Person A" henceforward) and they meet a friend ("Person B"), both will have different rights and duties. In this example, Person A possesses the majority of the rights while Person B the majority of the duties. Person B will be obliged to check on and comfort Person A, and having observed others in a similar position may feel obliged to in some way use the common phrase "my

condolences.” Person A on the other hand will be given much leeway (right) in how they behave as it is person B’s duty to recognize the emotional trauma through which A is going.

How is it that this interaction unfolds the way it has? How is it that both actors know their positions’ duties? It is here that Vygotsky’s contribution to positioning theory is evident: the actors are familiar through the learning from more senior members of the society who have passed these scripts down. Connecting this to a more Wittgensteinian tradition, White develops a sense of the need for competence in these scripts:

Competence in conversation, by extension, can be seen as the ability of individuals mutually to co-ordinate their talk based on a certain convergence in discursive practices: to make interventions which others can respond to, and to carry on from what others say, so as to achieve some level of ordered and sustained interaction. (2009)

Thus, without this competence, the entire ability to relate with one another conversationally breaks down. Interestingly however, this competence is so entrenched within the individual that very often, they are not actively aware that any positioning is taking place (Davies and Harré, 1990). Similar to grammar, most users are not aware of its presence as they use it, but it is the only factor that allows meaning to be conveyed. However, also like grammar it can be studied, broken down, better understood and therefore better utilized by knowledgeable participants.

Positioning theory makes itself available in this regard by laying out the framework for what is referred to as the “Positioning Triangle.” The three vertices to this triangle are “positions,” “storyline,” and “speech acts” (Langenhove & Harré, 1999). Positions are bound by rights and duties and thus “set the boundaries of socially possible actions within a conversation” (Zelle, 2009). The storyline is the context which provides

the positions information from which they determine the appropriateness of any given act in the interaction. Speech acts are then the acts that give meaning to the interaction. It is these three forces, working together that give shape to the interaction and any change in one will result in change in the others and therefore also the interactions dynamics themselves. If the storyline shifts positions may become unavailable or the pool of appropriate acts for those positions may change. Furthermore, the absence of a position in itself may alter a storyline, as a speech act may also re-determine a position's boundaries and so forth. As is mentioned beforehand however, this is a dynamic process; every participant may challenge any one of these vertices and alter the interaction.

Although a valuable contribution to understanding all interaction, this is especially a valuable tool to understand interaction in a virtual space due to it being a space entirely dependent on discourse and furthermore recognizes the mechanism of change (Tirado & Galvez, 2007). It is also for those selfsame reasons an ideal tool to measure conflict in the virtual space; it recognizes that every actor has the ability to change the positioning taking place and provides the means to analyze these changes or rejections. Indeed as Tirado and Galvez point out, "all conflict is a situated process" and can both be located in a virtual space as well as a symbolic space in which "is represented by the episode and the positioning in which the conflict is drawn" and "is no more than an interactive sequence, an interchange of positions and re-positions" (2007). Although perhaps unpleasant, conflict is a natural phenomenon in social space and therefore also online social space. Thus in the examination of the digital sphere it is vital to analyze this component of it. According to Tirado and Galvez "conflict defines audiences, and

therefore winds different agents and actors into its outcome,” meaning therefore that conflict is not just a component of online social behavior, but a central fixture to its very dynamic. It may lock actors into positions, but it also allows for them to break themselves out as well as position others, subsequently widening the space over which the conflict occurs.

## CHAPTER FOUR – METHODOLOGY

As a project centered around discourse analysis and positioning theory specifically, its natural design is qualitative. To analyze exchanges between people requires every mode of context to be considered: is sarcasm being employed, who is the speaker, on what page is the interaction taking place, what do their intentions seem to be? All of these and more are questions to be considered and accounted for as they arise through the natural rhythm of positioning and discursive development. Through the analysis of many exchanges taking place on a variety of pages the hope however is that the qualitative data can be put into some kind of coherent context. In order to understand this coherence depends on the emergence of patterns however, and to recognize them this research cannot be wholly qualitative, it must have some component that is quantitative as well. As such it will use a mixed methodology outlined by John Creswell named a *sequential exploratory strategy*.

The basic outline of this methodology is that it begins by collecting and analyzing a qualitative data set, before moving on to “a second phase of quantitative data collection and analysis that *builds* on the results of the first qualitative phase [emphasis original]” (Cresswell, 2009). The heart of this methodology lies in the analysis of qualitative data; the quantitative analysis is done to further understand and contextualize the initial qualitative data. For the purposes of this study, that will mean that the top comments on

selected news-media Facebook pages' posts and their resultant responses will be what constitutes the beginning qualitative data for detailed analysis, while the continuing thread will be what constitutes the contextualizing quantitative data set for study.

### **About the Sequential Exploratory Strategy**

As mentioned above, the sequential exploratory strategy hinges first on a qualitative component before moving on to a quantitative portion to assist in the interpretation of the qualitative data. Thus, the emphasis of the study in the end is qualitative data and subsequently findings. To run this methodology, Cresswell lays out the following basic guidelines: “using a three-phase approach, the researcher first gathers qualitative data and analyzes it (Phase 1), and uses the analysis to develop an instrument (Phase 2) that is subsequently administered to a sample of a population (Phase 3)” (Cresswell, 2009). While Phase 1 is straightforward enough<sup>10</sup>, what about Phase 2; what is the instrument? For the purposes of this study it will lie in the codes that emerge from the data<sup>11</sup> which will then be used to provide greater contextual information to understand the qualitative data of phase 1 through the implementation of Phase 3 (which for the purposes of this study, “population” refers to the following respondents responses in the comment feeds). With this in mind, the first qualitative stage will help determine the way

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<sup>10</sup> And is detailed in the following sections *Data Selection*, *Data Analysis*, *Utilizing Positioning Theory for Qualitative Data Analysis*, and *Utilizing Positioning Theory for Quantitative Data Analysis*

<sup>11</sup> In addition to the codes detailed below that have already been generated to measure basic demographic information and information related to positioning theory

in which the quantitative study will be conducted, after which the analysis of both will be interpreted.

### **Data Selection**

As should be clear by now, the source material for this study will come exclusively through Facebook<sup>12</sup>. The material will be collected only from public pages as the contents displayed thereon are public domain, requiring no consent of the original commenter<sup>13</sup>. Additionally the pages for selection will represent different viewpoints ranging from more conservative to more liberal. In order to ascertain the political positioning of these pages, rather than focusing on the cumulative bias displayed by the organization, this study will instead follow the *Washington Post*'s lead<sup>14</sup> and look at the bias of their respective consumers (as measured by Pew Research Center<sup>15</sup>). Working from left to right across the political spectrum, the pages for analysis will be as follows: *The Huffington Post*, *MSNBC*, *Fox News*, and *Breitbart*. For the sake of consistency across these different outlets, the topic for the posts will remain constant: immigration. The period over which they are collected from is August 1-31, 2017.

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<sup>12</sup> Although the data will be mined from various news media outlets pages, the pages and the discussion are entirely mediated through the Facebook platform

<sup>13</sup> That being said, in order to not share any more information than is required, the names of the users will be obscured in the study

<sup>14</sup> Blake, A., 2014. Ranking the media from liberal to conservative, based on their audiences. *Washington Post*.

<sup>15</sup> Mitchell, A., Gottfried, J., Kiley, J., Matsa, K.E., 2014. Political Polarization & Media Habits. Pew Research Center's Journalism Project.

From each page, one post will be selected for a detailed qualitative analysis, with relatively high reaction from users (as measured by Facebook's 'reactions'<sup>16</sup>) in order to analyze what tends to generate the most response. From these articles, the top comment (as generated by Facebook) will be selected and analyzed as will the following five responses to the comment. This will mean that a total of four original comments will be analyzed, plus twenty sub comments for a grand total of twenty-four comments in detailed analysis. Acknowledging and accounting for this limited data pool for positioning analysis, this study will employ coding of the first fifteen responses to each top comment of every post shared. It is in this way that a quantitative element will enter to give the qualitative detailed analysis context.

Additionally, although the positioning that takes place in comment sections is the primary source of analysis, a fundamental component of this research lies in the connection between discourse undertaken in the comment feeds and the post itself. Questions of what kind of title it has and what picture/video it displays will be given consideration with regard to framing.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of the data collected from these various Facebook pages (and subsequently from the comment threads of articles shared) will be conducted from the standpoint of positioning theory as developed by Rom Harré and others. Per this theory and analogous to the old computer game *Pong*, in which the ball is passed back and forth

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<sup>16</sup> Formerly 'likes,' but currently including the reactions: 'like,' 'love,' 'haha,' 'wow,' 'sad,' and 'angry'



between competitors but always in a new position, a conversation (be it in a physical or virtual context) evolves. As such, rather than looking for specific words or phrases on which to base the study, the positions taken will be the subject of analysis. To make sense of the positions, their component parts will be broken down for analysis and for the purpose of the quantitative portion of the study coded for. Although both the quantitative section and qualitative section will rely on positioning theory to inform their methodologies for analysis, naturally they will have some minor differences.

### **Utilizing Positioning Theory for Qualitative Data Analysis**

As a theory with strong narratological roots, positioning theory places great emphasis on the role of stories. A central component of the theory is that the way in which people understand the world and their placement within it relies on the placement of themselves within a story. Rather than understanding the world through a singular, coherent story however, people understand it according to the position they give themselves at any given moment according to the context. Similarly, over the course of an exchange between people, stories are proffered to give understanding to some kind of shared issue and these stories are either reinforced or challenged by other participants in the exchange. Through this reinforcing/challenging of the story initially given, the story evolves, as do the positions that each participant has.

Although some have utilized positioning theory in conjunction with building complex profiles of the individuals being analyzed, it also works well for the analysis of anonymous persons from whom only the exchange has been recorded; as such, it works

well for the analysis of social media discourse. The reason for its applicability in either case rests upon the fact that it is centered on the idea that the self is constructed in the course of an exchange: there is no permanent self (as embodied by outlook, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors etc.). Instead the self is an embodiment of the current position taken by the individual.

For the sake of deriving a methodology from positioning theory, one must remember the concept of ‘rights’ and ‘duties’ which accompany every position. As such, neither can any methodology basing itself on the theory. With that understanding, following the establishment of the position taken (perhaps in the form of an archetype) the first thing that needs to be done is to establish the rights and duties of each participant. This must be done with every development of an episode, especially including the first order positioning of the initial speaker. It is only through establishing these rights and duties that any of the subsequent exchanges can make sense. In the subsequent responses to the initial speaker, after establishing the rights and duties of each position, the challenges or reinforcements to the prior speakers’ positionings must be considered. How have the positions changed? How have the definitions of subjects changed<sup>17</sup>? Has the object of discussion shifted or remained the same? How has the story of the individual participants evolved? In addition to answering these questions for a qualitative analysis, certain other factors will be considered for both the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the positionings.

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<sup>17</sup> I.e. If the original positioning is that social justice is achieved through protest, and another challenges it as an effective tool

A helpful example of positioning theory being put to use as a tool to analyze online discourse can be found in the work of Tirado and Galvez. Their study focused on the communicational patterns present in an online student forum composed of humanities students and centers around an example of a student recriminating his peers for not taking part in a protest:

Message 1: "Mario the recriminator" [48] The message that begins the episode appears with the title "Pinochet Demonstration." In his letter, Mario defines himself as a champion for the socialpolitical cause and recriminating judge of the lack of commitment and implication in the fight for justice which appears in the forum of which he is a member: "Today I went to the demonstration against Pinochet in Barcelona. And I didn't see any of you." [49] Mario presents and positions his forum companions as people who totally lack commitment and implication in social issues. "The truth is that I am very sad about not having seen any of you, not even one of you. There isn't much of an excuse." [50] Such position creates a lattice of rights and obligations in which Mario is the judge, evaluating what his companions do and should do. As such, he obliges the others, through interpellation, to explain their acts and accept and publicly recognize their guilt. The writer reprimands his forum companions. He seems disappointed by the small number of people at the demonstration and blames his disappointment on his companions, who are no other than the representatives of all those who did not go to the demonstration. (Tirado and Galvez, 2007)

As is clear in this analysis, the authors made use of archetypes (labeling Mario as "recriminator" and "judge") as well as establishing the associated rights and duties to the positions assigned. Following the analysis of the first order positioning of Mario they detailed the response/rebuttal of Agusti:

Message 2: "The resistance of Agustí" [51] Agustí answers Mario, and does it by resisting the position that he has been given. His resistance is sustained on several processes in which the arguments that sustained the position outlined by Mario in the first intervention are refuted, challenged and negotiated. [52] Agustí rejects and retests Mario's position as the evaluating judge and censure him as such. He does it by calling for a standard of cultural conduct, common courtesy and civility according to which it would be inappropriate and immoral to ask others to explain their actions as well as recriminate them. "I think it's a bit inappropriate to throw in people's faces what someone does or doesn't do ... I'm talking about moralist behaviors that amaze me and right now inspire me and infuriate me." [53] Interestingly, his position intensifies and strengthens Mario's initial position. This is because Agustí justifies his individual behavior while at the same time giving an excuse. He explains his absence by appealing to his personal circumstances. The excuse and justification acts as an acceptance of "guilt" and, in consequence, only reinforces Mario's initial position. "... I was talking about work; it's been months since I've been paid given my status as a casual laborer. Maybe you think I

should have gone to the demonstration and go another month without being paid, I don't know." [54] He we observe a double effect. On the one hand Agustí repositions himself, and at the same time, he repositions Mario's initial stand. Such repositioning game is mainly played out through the two movements in which the fundamentals of Mario's initial position are re-signified. They consist of the following: [55] a) A movement re-signifying the "demonstration: A new meaning is assigned to "demonstration," different and opposite to that which appeared in the initial position with which this episode was opened. The re-signification above all has to do with underestimating this act as a mechanism for social protest and its definition as a vacuous and ineffective action. "... I don't really believe in liturgy and for me, demonstrations are no more than liturgy (as are meetings, conferences, debates, protests, social activities ...)" [56] b) A movement re-signifying political implication and the fight for justice: Here, Agustí indicates what it means to carry out acts of political implication which are used to fight for social justice. Acts among which, of course, do not include going to demonstrations. "If it helps, in some way I've gotten involved (I have a direct relationship with the person who reported the presence of Pinocchio in London to Garzon's National High Court) in this affair, but I won't explain in what way nor will I ask anyone else why I haven't ... Sometimes I get more excited about the shots in the back than the rebellious floor at the Corte Inglés department store and for the record, I don't mean anyone in particular ..." [57] (Tirado and Galvez, 2007)

Through this exchange, Tirado and Galvez analyze and describe the ways in which Agustí rejects the positionings of Mario. Rather than allowing Mario to hold the position of recriminator/judge, Agustí responds and remarks that he has no right to position himself this way, a clear questioning of the positioning and rights and duties attached to it. Furthermore, they outline the shift in definitions here (i.e. what constitutes an effective vessel for social change and so forth). As is clear, each response requires unique analysis, which following Cresswell's description of qualitative analysis in general is "presented in descriptive, narrative form rather than as a scientific report. Thick description will be the vehicle for communicating a holistic picture" (2009).

Finally, in order to protect the identity of the commenters the use of pronouns in the detailed analysis will be limited to derivatives of “they” and names will be supplanted with “original commenter” and “user X<sup>18</sup>.”

### **Utilizing Positioning Theory for Quantitative Data Analysis**

Underlying the entire idea of positioning theory is the notion that an evolution within the discourse takes place, both of the story and of the positions that people take for themselves or are assigned by others. Therefore, in both the qualitative and quantitative portions of the study special care and attention to the factor of change. What does this change look like? How long does it take for the original positioning to be challenged? What is the order in which it is challenged? For the sake of connecting positioning to conflict, do subsequent positionings escalate or deescalate the situation? These questions in addition to being useful in written detailed analysis, but can also be useful in quantitative analysis through the use of coding. As is clear from the questions asked here, this coding will not follow the emergent coding typical of social science research, rather it will incorporate some structure for the purpose of developing understand the phenomenon of positioning.

In coding for the abovementioned aspects of positioning theory, each issue requires its own method. A broad concept, change in it of itself cannot easily be coded for. However, the component aspects of it can be. For example, the order in which the

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<sup>18</sup> “X” denoting the order in which the comment appears, thus the first responder to the original commenter will be written as “User 1”

original positions are challenged can be counted (a result may look like “75% of the time the first order positioning is challenged by the second participant”). This coding for the order also answers the question of how long it takes for the positions to be challenged. Relating positioning to conflict, the measure of escalation in discourse is an important factor to consider. How long do it take for escalatory responses to surface? Do they predominate the discussion? To answer these questions, comments will be coded for as either escalatory or not<sup>19</sup> and will then also be coded for. Additionally, shifts in the object of discussion will be tracked and coded for as will shifts in definitions. When referring to either supporting, rejecting, or changing this will indicate whether the respondents stance on the top commenters’ positioning, not the framing of the article or each other. Furthermore, if responses include personal attacks and are not centered around the original positioning of the top comment, they will be coded into the “change” category.

Finally, in situations in which there are insufficient replies to top comments (less than 15), while retaining its information for a total number of posts share it will be excluded from the quantitative analysis.

### **Framing**

With regard to framing, this study will focus particularly on how the issue is presented. Which set of terminology is being used to discuss immigration: are words such as ‘illegal’ or ‘undocumented’ used? In what light is immigration being reported in, positively (being connected to societal contribution) or negatively (being connected to

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<sup>19</sup> For information regarding this process, please refer to *Appendix A: To scale escalation?*

societal detriment)? What is the headline? What kind of imagery is used? Allowing for emergent codes, trends will be drawn to develop an overall picture of the framing taking place on each of the pages. This will be accomplished through a detailed analysis of the framing for each of the qualitative analyses and a short analysis of the framing inherent in the post at a glance for the quantitative analysis. This means that only the post text and the headlines apparent will be taken into account for setting the framing.

## CHAPTER FIVE – QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

### HuffPost

Top Post – “*The petition has amassed more than 15,000 signatures and counting*”

August 31, 2017.

Total Reactions: 26k, 23k ‘like’, 2k ‘love’, 42 ‘haha’, 68 ‘wow’, 29 ‘sad’, 145 ‘angry’<sup>20</sup>

#### **Framing Analysis:**

The story behind this article is a petition that was launched by a group known as *Care2* in order to ask Congress to not fund the President’s proposed border wall with Mexico, but rather use the proposed money allotted for that to give additional funding to Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) so that it can be better equipped to aid in the relief efforts for those affected by Tropical Storm Harvey in the Houston area of Texas. Although the issues are in almost every separate, the linkage has been made due to the proposed 2018 Congressional Budget in which it is reported that FEMA’s funding has been cut by 11% in order to “make more funding available to the military<sup>21</sup>” while the border wall has been allotted \$1.6 Billion. Importantly, this article only gives supporting information to the purposes of the petition rather than the purposes of the border wall,

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<sup>20</sup> All reactions recorded September 4, 2017

<sup>21</sup> Subberwal, K., 2017. Petition Urges Congress To Fund FEMA, Not Trump’s Border Wall | HuffPost [WWW Document]. The Huffington Post. URL [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/petition-fema-funding-border-wall\\_us\\_59a6e5d0e4b084581a14e6d2?utm\\_campaign=hp\\_fb\\_pages&utm\\_source=main\\_fb&utm\\_medium=facebook&ncid=fbklnkushpmg00000063](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/petition-fema-funding-border-wall_us_59a6e5d0e4b084581a14e6d2?utm_campaign=hp_fb_pages&utm_source=main_fb&utm_medium=facebook&ncid=fbklnkushpmg00000063) (accessed 9.4.17).



implying support for the reallocation of funding away from the proposed border wall and instead to FEMA so that it can aid those affected by Harvey specifically.

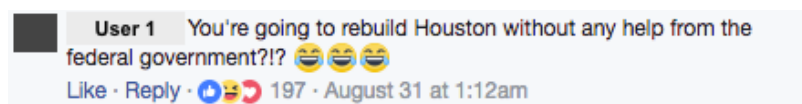
### **Positioning Analysis:**

*Top Comment:*



Rejecting the storyline framed in the article shared with the post, this comment does not accept the need for Federal assistance in recovering from Harvey. Rather, the author of this post positions themselves (and other Houstonians) as self-reliant, able to recover without any external help. Furthermore, FEMA in general is rejected as a necessity and the author of this post therefore is potentially positioning themselves as supporting the budget cuts it may face should the proposed budget be passed. Although unsaid, a potential implication of this is that this writer may also be positioning themselves as a supporter of the proposed border wall. While not necessarily dealing with rights, this comment does remove the duty of the federal government to provide assistance.

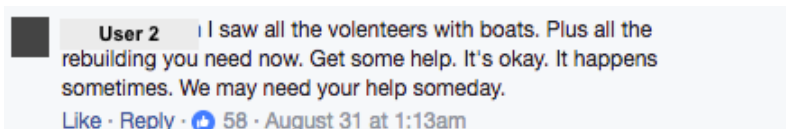
*First Response:*



While the original commenter may have a certain sense of pride in themselves and their community's resolve to solve their problems without outside help, to User 1 this sentiment seems foolhardy. This is conveyed in a couple different ways: first by asking the question "You're going to rebuild Houston without any help from the federal

government?!?” and then including three emoji of the intensely laughing face. Within the question itself there are a couple things to note, the use of “you’re” signifying that it is the original commenter alone who will be rebuilding as well as the punctuation utilized at the end. Rather than employing the standard single question mark for the question, they use a combination of question mark- exclamation point – question mark, a style usage implying incredulousness or disbelief. To finalize their reaction, User 1 then employs the three emoji which are crying so hard so as to cry, indicating that the entire notion (i.e. storyline) proposed by the original commenter is laughable. In so doing, they casually position themselves as (at least in this regard) wiser than the original commenter. They are not behaving angry or upset by the original commenter’s story, rather they position it as not requiring serious consideration in so doing limiting the right of the original commenter to contribute. Beyond the personal positioning taking place in the story, they are also rejecting the original commenter’s positioning of FEMA (and Federal assistance in general) as unnecessary. Instead, they are restoring the original positioning of federal aid programs from the *Huffington Post* article.

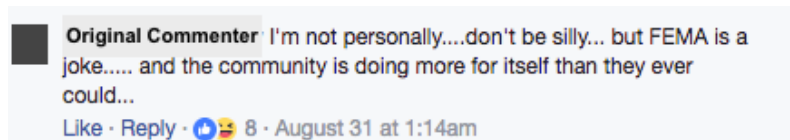
*Second Response:*



Also rejecting the original commenter’s sense of self-sufficiency and their denial of aid, User 2 writes “get some help.” However, rather than continuing the flippancy and casualness of User 1 in disregarding the sentiments of the original commenter, User 2 positions themselves more as a concerned bystander who is more interested in providing

advice than poking fun. In this way, the rights of the original commenter to contribute as a serious member of the discussion have been restored. Furthermore, there have seen “all the volunteers with boats, [plus] all the rebuilding [the original commenter needs] now,” indicating they are fully apprised of the situation and thus they position themselves as not only a concerned bystander, but also a knowledgeable or wise bystander who is invested in the situation. There is also a bit of positioning that takes place at the end of the comment: “it happens sometime...[we] may need your help someday.” In this sentence, the author of this post positions all people everywhere as non-self-sufficient; the implication is that when disaster strikes all people, no matter how strong, need help. Importantly, this commenter does not wade into the political questions regarding FEMA and the border wall, although with the support for gaining help from outsiders they do provide tacit support for FEMA.

*Third Response:*



Responding to User 1, the original commenter reinforces their storyline and positionings with this response. Referring to User 1’s incredulous “you’re going to rebuild...!?,” the original commenter responds “I’m not personally [going to rebuild Houston]... don’t be silly.” With this rebuttal they are showing that although they are not upset with User 1’s incredulity and light tone, but they are reinforcing their seriousness of intent. Furthermore, they reinforce their positioning of FEMA as unnecessary, and indeed if there is something that is laughable it is not the original commenter’s commitment to

self-reliance, but it is “FEMA [that] is a joke.” To this end, they add to the storyline that “the community is doing more for itself than they ever could...” strengthening the sense of self-reliance both of the commenter and of all Houstonians.

*Fourth Response:*



Although using only one sentence, User 3’s response to the original commenter is quite loaded with meaning. Beginning with the actual content, User 3 utilizes the old adage “ignorance is bliss” in order to make a supposition about the original commenter. Indeed, they create a formula of “if/then” to position the original commenter as “blissful fool.” The subtext to this positioning is a rejection of the original commenter’s change to the storyline making FEMA an unnecessary organization for only a “fool” could think so. Indeed, User 3 implies that to think so would make one “the most blissful fool *in the world* (emphasis added)” indicating the error in judgment on the part of the original commenter is not small, but huge. Thus, with this comment User 3 supports User 1’s incredulity and storyline, but shifts the positioning of the original commenter more negatively through direct name calling, though in both User 1 and 3’s positionings the original commenter is not to be taken too seriously resulting in the original commenter’s loss of right to contribute equally.

*Fifth Response:*



Unfortunately for the original commenter, their negative position continues through the reinforcement of Users 1 and 3's positioning by User 4. Not using any text themselves, this is accomplished through the use of gif containing the sentence "I've met bread smarter than you" overlaying an image of a woman disdainfully saying it to another woman. Although not directly name calling, the implication that bread, an inanimate baked good, is more intelligent than the original commenter is clear: like User 3, User 4 sees the original commenter as a "fool" and reinforces the lack of rights of the top commenter to contribute. The positionings of both indicate that both also therefore support FEMA as an effective and necessary agency to handle natural disasters.

***Concluding Remarks***

This short interaction more than the others sampled in this section reflects a dichotomy between a developed storyline (on the part of the top commenter) and a less developed storyline on the part of its detractors centered around defining the original

commenter as idiotic. With this being the case, the dichotomy is centered therefore around the issue of validity of contribution. Despite the original commenters best intention to contribute, the users found their contribution as unsatisfactory and therefore also unworthy of further contribution.

## MSNBC

Top Post – “*Who’s Going To Pay For the Wall? Apparently Taxpayers*” August 24, 2017.

Total Reactions: 3.1k, 632 ‘like’, 24 ‘love’, 582 ‘haha’, 66 ‘wow’, 64 ‘sad’, 1.7k ‘angry’

### **Framing Analysis:**

The overall frame for this post could be summarized by the following sentence: “The President, Donald Trump, lied to the American people repeatedly by promising to have Mexico pay for a border wall when he knew the American people would pay instead.”

This is made clear specifically by the headline italicized above and through an accompanying video<sup>22</sup> which shows him at many different times promising crowds that Mexico would pay for the proposed border wall. The video accomplishes this ad nauseum by showing seven different instances in which he promised his supporters that Mexico would pay for the wall, all contrasting with the first clip shown in the video in which the President did not make any mention of Mexico paying for the wall, but rather referred to “obstructionist democrats” getting in the way of funding, implying that the money would instead come from the American people through taxation. To drive the point home, over top of the video the words: “At his rally in *Arizona* Trump told the crowd that he’d *shut down* the government to pay for the border wall, but on the campaign trail he had *someone else* in mind to *foot the bill*”

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<sup>22</sup> Transcript for said video can be found in *Appendix B – Transcripts*, pg. 106

Injecting the framing analysis of this video with positioning analysis, the opening clip is quite interesting: “Now the *obstructionist democrats* would like *us* not to do it, but believe me: if *we* have to close down *our* government *we’re* building that wall! (emphasis added)” The first point is establishing an Other. A group separate and different from Donald Trump’s group; a group that gets in the way, that *obstructs*. After defining this Other group, he establishes the separation from *them* and establishes cohesion by acknowledging the assembled crowd as with him, becoming an *us*. Furthermore, as the established leader of this group he gives direction to his party through the phrase: “if *we* have to close down *our* government *we’re* building that wall!” He and his compatriots will close down *their* government so that *they* could build the wall, with or without the consent of the Other group.

### Positioning Analysis:

*Top Comment:*



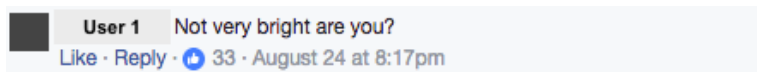
The primary positioning that has taken place with this comment is not so much regarding the author or anyone else in the group, but rather the positions of two famous persons: President Donald Trump and former President Barack Obama. Clearly in the opinion of the author the current President plays a positive role in society as a “patriot”, whereas the unmentioned-by-name former president did not as a “liar.” Furthermore, rather than referring to the former President by name, the author chose to refer to him refer back to



the much discredited accusations that Barack Obama was not American (instead rather, a Kenyan) and that he is a Muslim, neither of which are true<sup>23</sup>.

Although the primary positioning is regarding Donald Trump as opposed to Barack Obama, there is indeed also subtle positioning of the author and the audience that occurs as well. The author positions themselves through their support of Trump and disdain of Obama as most likely a conservative Republican, but at least at any rate as a Trump supporter. The only positioning that occurs of the audience is not ideological as no mention is made to their beliefs, but does regard its composition: it is American. The way in which this is achieved is through the use of “our” before continuing with “Kenyan born Muslim liar” (Obama), ergo “our former President.” Through the ‘reactions’ feature Facebook allows the audience to provide feedback to the original comment. Of the 248 reactions, the most pertinent were: ‘haha’ (123) and ‘angry’ (59). Given the subjective nature of emotional responses, it is impossible to say what exactly the audience felt and for what specifically, but it does seem safe to say that for the most part it was taken as a joke, that is, to not be taken seriously given the high number of ‘haha’ reactions though it is clear that many were angry at the prospect of paying for the wall.

*First Response:*



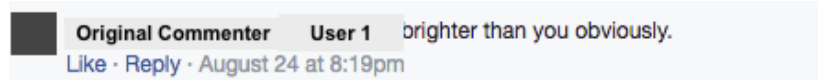
A succinct response, the first person to respond (hereafter known as ‘User 1’) merely asks of the original commenter: “Not very bright are you?” However, the positioning is

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<sup>23</sup> as refuted on the fact checking website *Snopes*: <http://www.snopes.com/politics/obama/muslim.asp>

clear: the original commenter (and those that think like them) is dumb, whereas those that do not support Donald Trump (and do support Barack Obama) are smart. A further potential implied expansion of this may be that all Republicans are dumb and all Democrats (as well as perhaps non Trump supporting Republicans) are smart. Whereas it could be argued that the original comment was unintentionally positioning as they were keeping it very third party, the response of User 1 is clearly intentional and direct, what Harré would refer to as “interactive” positioning (Davies and Harré, 1990). Through this responsive interactive positioning the storyline of the original commenter is challenged at its very root, through attacking their intelligence to make such an evaluation, in itself an assault on their right to contribute.

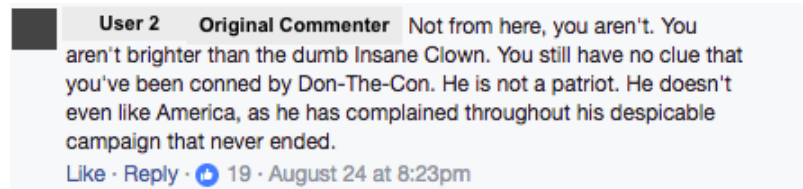
*Second Response:*



The original commenter steps in to respond to their critic to challenge the repositioning through reinforcing the initial comment’s validity. This is accomplished through turning the proposed dumb/intelligent paradigm on its head to now refer to the opposite. Rather than Trump supporters being the dumb party, it is those that are opposing him that are lacking intelligence. In this way the rights lost on the part of the original commenter have now have been restored and through their now positioned stupidity it is User 1 who has lost the right to contribute. Furthermore, the accusations about Obama are reinstated as valid. It should be noted, that while the initial comment referred only to third party individuals, in the course of these two responses the storyline has shifted to refer now to

the intelligence of the participants of the conversation (as well as the broader groups they may represent detailed above), and in this way the source of primary positioning has shifted completely.

*Third Response:*



Here, a new person (User 2) has joined the conversation and supports the positioning of User 1, that Trump supporters are dumb and non-Trump supporters are smart. The intelligence of the original commenter is first directly assaulted again; rather than making a small suggestion that the original commenter is unintelligent as User 1 did, User 2 very clearly makes the judgment that the original commenter is cognitively lacking. They do this first by unequivocally saying “you aren’t” referring the previous comment in which the original commenter responded to User 1 that they were “brighter than” (User 1). Furthermore, they aren’t “brighter than the dumb Insane Clown,” referring to Donald Trump, who is apparently now himself unintelligent as well (an additional layer of positioning to this story). The dumb-ness of the original commenter is finalized through User 2’s accusation: “You still have no clue you’ve been conned by Don-The-Con.” What is implied is that the original commenter is so dumb that they cannot fathom that they’ve been tricked, they are clueless now in addition to dumb. Although the preceding sentence implied that President Trump is also dumb, this sentence establishes a more complex hierarchy than before as he is implied to be at least smarter than the original

commenter; thus, the hierarchy is as follows Users 1 and 2 (as well as others who think like them) are smarter than “dumb Insane Clown” Trump, who is in turn smarter than those that follow him. In all of this, the original commenter has again lost their right to contribute to the exchange, instead as a result of their less than intelligent nature are duty bound to listen to their chastising from the more intelligent on how they and their ideas are unworthy to be heard. Furthermore, although his original characterological positioning is challenged as dumb, it is also challenged profoundly in saying that he is unpatriotic rather than patriotic. The evidence supplied to support this notion is the assertion that he has “complained throughout his... campaign” that he “doesn’t even like America.” Therefore the initial name assigned to him (“patriot”) has been removed and User 2 supplies instead “dumb Insane Clown” and “Don-The-Con,” which are clearly derogatory.

Through this contribution to the exchange, User 2 has refocused and bridged the storylines supplied thus far. They have merged the discussion of intelligence as it relates to supporting Donald Trump with his very character, which initiated the conversation. User 1’s notion of the dumbness of Trump supporters has been reinforced and Trump’s original character assessment has been dismantled. Through the evolving positioning of this exchange, a much more complex storyline has emerged.

*Fourth Response:*

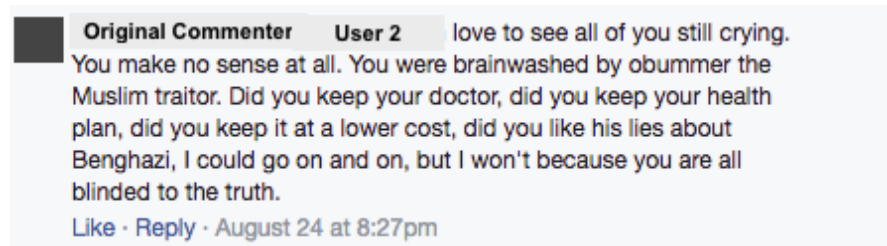
**User 1 Original Commenter** No lady. No reasonable rational person would consider the great fool a "patriot." He all but acknowledged he paid no income tax. His very public history indicated he avoided the draft. And yet you and folks like you flippantly misuse the term "patriot" as if he were. Assuming your swipe at Obama is actually believed and your assertion that Trump is a "patriot" then you self-selected to label yourself as either a fool or an idiot or perhaps both.

Like · Reply · 19 · August 24 at 8:26pm

With this contribution to the exchange, User 1, the original responder steps in to reassert that the original commenter is indeed not bright as well as continuing the developing storyline. First the intelligence component of the storyline is accomplished through the potentially chauvinistic positioning of “No lady. No reasonable ration person would...”; they may not have intended to use the word ‘lady’ as means to place the original comment below what can now be assumed to be ‘him’ rather than a ‘her,’ but it does at any rate imply that what her contributions are not due very much respect and again reasserts the rights and duties from the prior positioning. This is compounded by the following implication that she lacks reason and rationality. After this reassertion, User 1 continues the development of the storyline regarding Donald Trump’s characteristics through the assertion that he has not paid taxes as well as avoided the draft when the United States was at war, both assertions providing support for their direct re-definition of who is indeed a “patriot.” As part of this re-definition the original commenter’s proposed storyline regarding Obama being a “Kenyan born Muslim liar” is casually disregarded through the sentence: “Assuming your swipe at Obama is actually believed and your assertion that Trump is a “patriot” then you self-selected to label yourself as either a fool or an idiot or perhaps both” through the implication that both cases are false. Furthermore, for finality’s sake User 1 reiterates strongly that the original commenter is

indeed not bright and furthermore self labels themselves as “a fool or an idiot or perhaps both.” Furthermore, the positions of the conversants involved have evolved beyond the individual level so that they are now representatives of all Trump and non-Trump supporters and is explicit through the phrase “you and folks like you.”

*Fifth Response:*



For this detailed analysis, the original commenter has had the last say. They have not accepted the storyline of Users 1 and 2, but rather hardened their own. As with the prior response, the individual participants are now representatives of larger camps, a fact made clear when the original commenter states “love to see you all still crying.” Not only are they representatives of a larger group, the division between the groups is so strong that the original commenter takes pleasure from the suffering and unhappiness of those of the opposing party. The storyline continues to harden and Obama gains a new derisive moniker: “obummer” implying strong dissatisfaction with his administration as well as the new attribute as well of being a “traitor.” The theme of being lied to first suggested by User 2 in the third comment is picked but returned in the opposite to User 2 through the original commenter questioning User 2 about the “lies” of Benghazi<sup>24</sup> and benefits of

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<sup>24</sup> Referring to the 2012 attack on the American Embassy in Benghazi, Libya; an incident widely seen by the Right as a failure of the Obama administration and particularly of then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton

Obama's health plan<sup>25</sup> among further lies that the original commenter sees as pointless to elaborate on as "you are all blinded to the truth." Interestingly, rather than continue the explicit positioning that Users 1 and 2 (as well as those they represent) are dumb, they are now described as "blinded to the truth," a continuation of the notion that they have been "brainwashed<sup>26</sup>." This changes the rights and duties of the situation as now they instead of being dumb and therefore unable to learn, they are brainwashed and may be able to return to reality if perhaps properly retaught. In this way the original commenter now has the duty to counter this brainwashed narrative.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

Within this interaction, although a storyline developed significantly, the positions were not necessarily shifted from very much. Instead, the actors accepted the positions of either for or against Trump and went from there to develop their own narrative structures to support their position. In this way, this interaction was reminiscent of Chen's concept of the "spiral of silence" in which the media helps reinforce what is already acceptable and what is not as it also tends to create a dialogue that is both more narrow and hardened (2013). In general the shape of this interaction was as follows: the shift from abstract, disconnected parties to direct attacks on each other, to morphing the involved parties to become representative of larger groups (Trump or non-Trump supporters).

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<sup>25</sup> The Affordable Care Act (2010), popularly referred to as "Obamacare"

<sup>26</sup> That being said, the original commenter has also not rescinded their remarks that they were dumb, although it does represent an important development in the storyline

## Fox News

Top Post – “*Border Patrol agents and law enforcement officers arrested 25 illegal immigrants, including 14 Colombian citizens, during a three-day checkpoint operation in central New Hampshire over the weekend.*”

August 4, 2017

Total Reactions: 54k, 46k ‘like’, 4.8k ‘love’, 545 ‘haha’, 2.7k ‘wow’, 98 ‘sad’, 262 ‘angry’

### **Framing Analysis:**

A very short article, the framing inherent to it follows a general reporting style with little commentary and no analysis. Indeed the information conveyed is summarized totally by the text *Fox News* shared along with the link to the article written above. Therefore, with only subtle cues to guide the reader, the primary analysis must be carried out individually. Before arriving at the logical intended analysis it is important to analyze first the subtlety of the language used. The first cue exposing the bias of the writer is the terminology used to describe the people arrested: “illegal immigrants;” inherent to the name is illegality, that is, the immigrants have come to the United States in a fashion that is against (or breaks) the law. Therefore, immediately with this term the issue is framed in a way to support the need for law enforcement. After that, the article describes the operation used to arrest the “illegal immigrants:” a checkpoint maintained for three days. Being a three-day checkpoint which apprehended 25 people, a reasonable conclusion taken could be that resolving the problem of illegal immigration in the United States is not overwhelmingly difficult, it simply needs to be done. Moreover, regarding the



checkpoint an important component for consideration is its location, central New Hampshire. While New Hampshire does lie alongside a border of the United States, it does not touch the US-Mexico border, but rather the border between the United States and Canada on the other side of the “lower 48<sup>27</sup>.” With the location of the checkpoint in mind, the demographics of the offenders is now important to analyze: “[more] than half of the immigrants taken into custody were from Colombia, but others were citizens of Brazil, Ecuador, and Mexico,” all countries south of the US-Mexico border implying that the entirety of the United States is awash with “illegal” immigrants. Giving shape to the nature of these immigrants the article provides one more detail to their story: from them the US Border Patrol “seized narcotics and drug paraphernalia.” Thus, in addition to breaking the law to come into the United States, these “illegal immigrants” continue to disregard and break further laws upon arrival. All of these factors considered together leads one to a few conclusions: the United States is endangered by an inflow of immigrants who are flagrantly dismissive of its laws and codes of conduct, there is a problem all across America, but all that needs to be done is to supply the proper authorities with the direction and permission to enforce laws already existing and the problem should be largely solved.

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<sup>27</sup> An expression to refer to the contiguous United States, excluding the States of Hawaii and Alaska

## Positioning Analysis:

*Top Comment:*

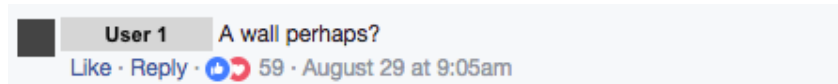
Checkpoints are not how free people in a free society are to be treated by armed agents of the government. There are much better ways to crack down on illegal aliens that don't infringe upon the freedom to travel of citizens.

Like · Reply · 🇺🇸 🇺🇸 🇺🇸 982 · August 29 at 9:04am · Edited

Like the framing inherent in the article, the positioning seen in this comment is subtle. Upon first glance it would seem that no one, be it a third party or those reading the comments are positioned. Rather, it would seem that the author of this comment is merely providing their insight, but it is through this that the first positioning is made clear, they are positioning themselves as a knowledgeable bystander. Furthermore, in claiming that “there are much better ways to crack down on illegal aliens” they position themselves as being in favor of the intent of the border patrol, which is apprehending the “illegal immigrants.” Aside from positioning themselves as a knowledgeable bystander, they challenge and propose an alteration to the storyline provided through the article. Their addition is to make the case that the installment of checkpoints is indeed not an acceptable solution to the problem of illegal immigration because “free people in a free society” should not be treated in this way by “armed agents of the government” as it “[infringes] upon the freedom to travel of citizens.” In this way the primary storyline supplied in which “illegal immigrants” need to be removed from the United States is supported, but the divergence occurs in the solution. To the author of this post any infringement on the rights of citizens by the government is intolerable and the solution must accommodate this need. Neither a solution nor the actor to carry out the solution is provided in this comment. However the commenter asserts that they along with other

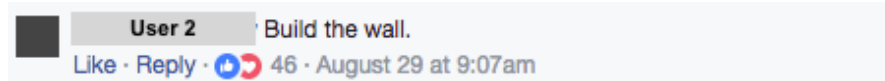
Americans have the right to travel freely without questioning, but the illegal aliens do not. They on the other hand are to be “cracked down” upon by other duty bound people.

*First Response:*



Although the original commenter proposed an alternate storyline in which “illegal immigrants” must go, but Americans’ rights protected, they did not provide a solution to accomplish this. For User 1, the solution is rather obvious<sup>28</sup>: a wall. In providing this solution, User 1 picks up the original commenter’s storyline that there are alternative methods to accomplish the goal of stymieing immigration and supports it. Furthermore, through this they accepted the original commenter’s self positioning as a reasonable authority on the matter. Self-selecting as a member of the top commenter’s group User 1 assigns themself the right to contribute freely and to be heard while respecting the top commenter’s rights.

*Second Response:*



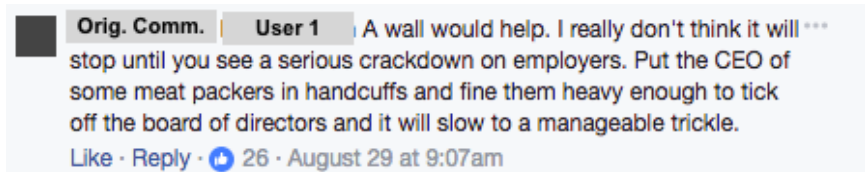
Like User 1, User 2 also sees a simple solution and that is to “build the wall.” With that, they position themself as together with User 1 and the original commenter as all supporting the limitation on immigration and have not challenged the original

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<sup>28</sup> Admittedly, it is impossible to know for sure only from the text in which mindset User 1 wrote the comment, but given President Trump’s central commitment to building a wall between Mexico and the United States it is a strong likelihood that it is obvious to them

commenter's storyline or positioning. Again, like User 1 User 2 assigns themselves all of the rights and privileges of the top commenter as they are all of the same group.

*Third Response:*

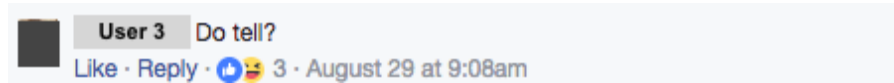


Recognizing the rights of Users 1 and 2 to contribute and make suggestions, the original commenter resumes their self-positioning as a knowledgeable bystander, acknowledging the contribution of User 1 (and therefore also User 2), but also providing a critique of the solution to build a wall. They agree that “a wall would help,” but go on to point to a more fundamental problem of employers hiring the undocumented immigrants. Therefore, the better solution they suggest is to “put the CEO of some meat packers in handcuffs and fine them heavy enough” so that companies will thusly be dissuaded from hiring such people. In so doing they argue that illegal immigration “will slow to a manageable trickle.”

Through this comment, the original commenter has maintained their position as knowledgeable bystander, but has shown that they are willing to take other participants' suggestions into consideration. That being said, they still position themselves as an authority figure who can disregard the suggestions of others. Additionally, a new position has emerged through this comment: that of the domestic facilitator to illegal immigration, the employers who hire illegal aliens for work. With this new position created, the storyline shifts to accommodate it: in dealing with these domestic collaborators the

external threat dissipates. The duty of the participants' group is to solve illegal migration, in itself eliminating all rights of illegal immigrants, who have no rights.

*Fourth Comment:*



Perhaps not observing the interaction between Users 1, 2, and the original commenter, User 3 offers the first bit of resistance to the positionings and storyline supplied by the original commenter. User 3 does not directly attack the original commenter's position or storyline, though they do ask for the proposed storyline to be substantiated indicating a certain level of skepticism. As this response is so short and cryptic many different intentions are possible. Perhaps the writer disagrees with the other participants' assessment that immigration needs better control or perhaps they disagree with the assessment of border checkpoints or perhaps they only wanted further clarification of the original commenter's ideas. It is impossible to say, but in terms of the development of positions and storylines, the resistance to either is very marginal and the author neither positions himself for nor against the others.

*Fifth Response:*



Whereas User 3 may or may not have resisted the positioning and storylines developed, User 4 certainly does. The primary target for User 4 is the original commenter's proposed storyline in which "free people in a free society" should be protected from the infringement of their rights from "armed agents of the government." A primary point of this sentiment is that the government does not have the right to intrude into citizens' lives

without reason. Rejecting this concern, User 4 merely states that “if you’re here legally, it takes two minutes to pass through the check point.” In so doing, they show their lack of concern for the principle that the original commenter stands for and approaches the role of the checkpoints from a practical standpoint. They are not hurting Americans, rather they pose a small inconvenience as they only will take a very short amount of time to get through. Thus the storyline regarding the use of checkpoints has shifted from one based on philosophical principles to one being based on practicality and convenience. The overarching storyline of needing to do something about immigration has not been challenged, only the details. However in challenging the details and the assessment of the original commenter, their position of knowledgeable bystander has been called into question.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

Similar to the response to the positioning occurring on *Breitbart’s* top post’s top comment, the overall positioning was not necessarily challenged over the course of this episode. Instead, merely different solutions were proffered by those interacting with the top commenter maintaining their position of evaluator of different options.

## Breitbart

Top Post – “*Aside from pleasing special interests, does the GOP have any valid excuse not to support this?*” August 4, 2017

Total Reactions: 25k, 22k ‘like’, 2.4k ‘love’, 40 ‘haha’, 231 ‘wow’, 7 ‘sad’, 38 ‘angry’

### **Framing Analysis:**

The nature of this post is a video, but rather than including spoken portions it comprises text written above historical video clips as well as modern news segments complete with underwritten banners. The intended framing for this video is to contextualize the President’s current behavior against historical processes. In so doing, the goal is to normalize his actions as they have historical precedent. Furthermore, it can be interpreted that he is seeking to repair a system that had gotten out of whack to normal operating procedures. To support this notion, it states that “between 1892 and 1954, about **12 million immigrants** entered the United States through **Ellis Island**<sup>2930</sup>” at the beginning of the video and concludes: “[today] the annual inflow of immigrants and temporary **foreign** workers is almost **4 million** people per year.” At first glance it seems that using only simple math, it can be deduced that a conclusion that can be drawn is that currently the United States takes as many immigrants as taken over a 62 year period in only three years, making the case the current model is far too much for the United States to maintain. This is however misleading given that the initial figure of 12 million only applies to immigrants coming through a single processing station compared to total

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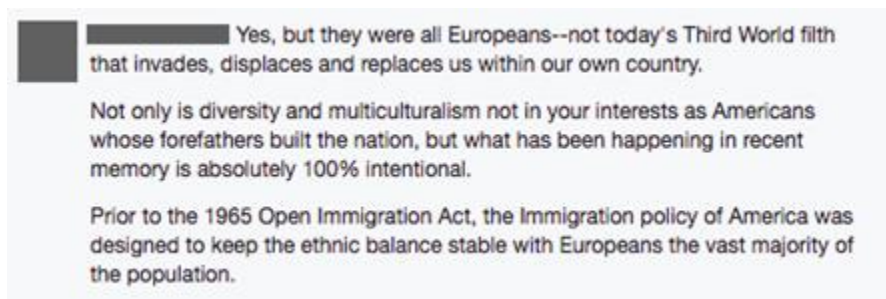
<sup>29</sup> A well known processing center for incoming immigrants to the United States operated between 1892 and 1954

<sup>30</sup> For full transcript, please see *Appendix B- Transcripts*

immigration *as well as* those admitted as temporary foreign workers. To further compare the past with the present it discusses the process of immigration facilitated through Ellis Island, an important note in itself as it represents a model for legal immigration into the United States. To be processed as a legal immigrant into the United States, it states that the incomers were assessed as to whether they would be a financial burden to the US as well as a medical exam to prove that they were healthy; in contrast to today the video implies that the immigrants coming to the United States are only coming so that they “can go on welfare.” Finally, it implies that immigrants into the United States should be required to speak English and “know the Constitution” and that if these factors are not met, immigrants will only be a burden to Americans and specifically the American worker. To ensure the viewer knows, the video claims that Donald Trump wants to “protect the American worker” and has “[done] something about it;” he has unveiled “merit based immigration reform” (a notion implying that the current immigrants into the United States are without merit).

### **Positioning Analysis:**

#### *Top Comment:*





This all changed with the 1965 Act which had been campaigned for for many years by a (((certain minority group))) who desired open borders mass immigration from everywhere to weaken the majority population.

They said with the passing of the Immigration Act in 65 that the demographics wouldn't change.

going to change.

EUROPEANS made America great, NOT the socially constructed dystopia you see today.

Like · Reply · 🗨️👍👎 443 · August 4 at 11:51pm

👉 134 Replies

Within this comment two positionings have taken place: the ascription of the audience as Americans (specifically those of European descent) indicated by “they were all Europeans – not today’s Third World filth that invades, displaces and replaces *us* within *our own country* (emphasis added)” and an ambiguous “they” who is intent to “weaken the majority of the population.” The “us” group comprised of Europeans is positioned as having “made America great<sup>31</sup> and as being under threat both as a people and physically in terms of the society that their forebears built. This other group, comprised of those “Third World filth” that “invades, displaces and replaces,” together with a “(((certain minority group)))” and an ambiguous “they” is positioned as aggressively trying to destroy the first. Hence, the primary positioning taking place within this comment is centered around a positive position of European descended<sup>32</sup> Americans and a negative position of non-European<sup>33</sup> descended Americans. With these positionings, the original commenter’s assessment is that “diversity and multiculturalism” is against the interest of this former group. The original commenter goes on to develop this storyline around the negatively positioned non-European Americans and collaborating ambiguous “they” as

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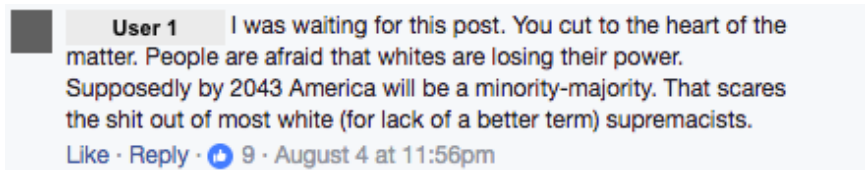
<sup>31</sup> Potentially a reference to President Trump’s well known campaign slogan “Make America Great Again”

<sup>32</sup> could also be read as “white”

<sup>33</sup> could also be read as “non white”

both working historically and in the present day to destroy the America developed by the ancestors of the positively positioned European-descended Americans. According to the story, this can all be traced back to 1965 in which the “Open Immigration Act”<sup>34</sup> was passed which has allowed for the demographics of the United States to shift away from a European orientation. According to this story this was done intentionally to create the “socially constructed dystopia you see today.” Within this narrative the European descended Americans have rights to the United States whereas non-European descended do not. Furthermore, it subtly gives to the European Americans the duty to protect the country “their” forefathers built.

*First Response:*



The positioning that has occurred with this first response is subtle, for the most part the storyline has not been shifted. Indeed, User 1 agrees that the original commenter’s concerns “cut to the heart of the matter.” To that end they provide the supporting information to the original commenter’s storyline in that “by 2043 America will be a minority-majority<sup>35</sup>.” The most obvious positioning in this response comes from the last sentence in which User 1 provides a definition for a category of people frightened at the

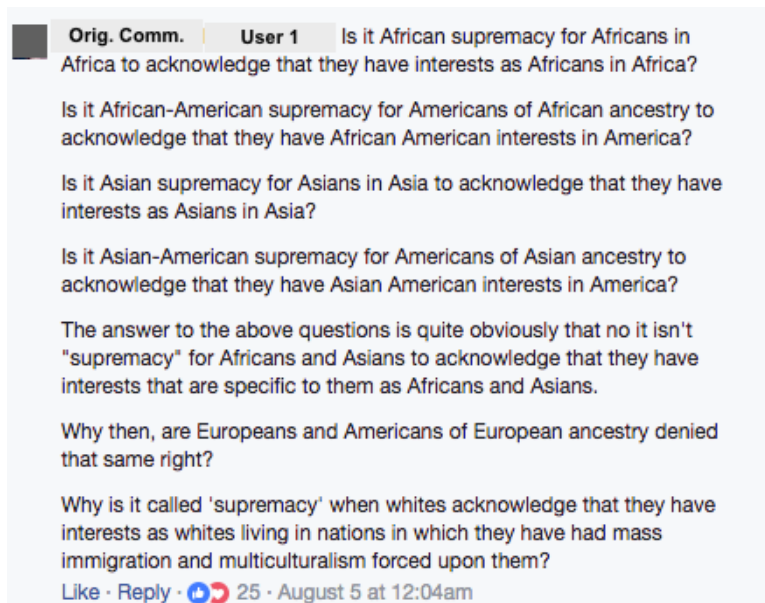
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<sup>34</sup> Likely referring to the *Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965*, an act which did indeed abolish the quota system mentioned in the original *Breitbart* video

<sup>35</sup> Meaning that the cumulative sum of all minority groups in the United States will collectively comprise more than 50% of the American population

prospect of the “minority-majority:” “white...supremacists.” Given the storyline developed in the original comment, this definition can easily be applied to the original commenter and their position has thus evolved. More subtly, User 1 positions themselves as outside this group through speaking about them always in the third person (implying separation). Furthermore, one may be able to interpret impatience or exasperation with this group of (apparent) white supremacists through the first sentence “I was waiting for this post;” the implication is that the original commenter’s analysis is an expected, old, and tired argument. Through this repositioning the rights of the original commenter have been curtailed as they are now deemed a white supremacist, indicating that their words are not to be taken seriously.

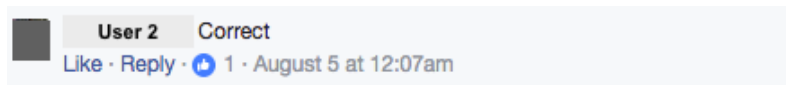
*Second Response:*



The subtle re-positionings of User 1 are totally rejected within this second response from the original commenter. They do not accept the ascription of “white supremacist” either to themselves or others who think like them and they provide an argument to that effect

which can be summarized in the following question: “if minority groups can have concerns regarding their communities, why can ‘Americans of European ancestry’ not? For the original commenter it is unfair to put this description onto their group. Indeed, to the original commenter this reality is self-evident, white people need only “acknowledge that they have interests as whites,” implying those that have not need to wake up. Thus, the storyline of “white supremacists” being fearful has been re-framed as “normal white people should be invested in their community’s prospects.” Furthermore, the storyline that this white community is besieged is supported through the final assertion that “they have had mass immigration and multiculturalism forced upon them.”

*Third Response:*



As can happen over the course of an episode, contributions may be made that do not advance the cycle of positionings nor the storyline, but there is always something that can be taken from them. User 2’s contribution is merely to write “correct,” which shows an explicit agreement to at least one of the comments provided. As it is following the original comment’s response, it may be assumed that User 2 aligns with them, although given that they did not tag anyone, it is impossible to be certain. In any case, *a* storyline has been supported.

*Fourth Response:*

**Orig. Comm.** **User 3** , if you're indeed an actual news media, you're part of this problem.

You apparently don't seem able to comprehend that European people also have rights and specifically a right to exist as Europeans in historically European nations and in nations in which Europeans have founded and built.

That doesn't mean that Europeans and/or Americans of European ancestry have any designs on oppressing others, it simply means that we, as less than 10% of the global population, and with a declining birthrate, do not want to be flooded with the world's majority racial populations.

If this continues then Europeans will cease to exist, it is perfectly normal natural and healthy for whites to oppose that just as it would be for any other group facing the same situation to oppose it.

Leftists and the Third Worlders they support couldn't care less if Europeans are displaced.

Some even ask, "why does it matter?"

Would they ask that question to the Palestinians?

The Tibetans?

Or any other group that was being engineered into a minority?

Would they be ok with the continent of Africa becoming non-African?

If it would be wrong for a population in a country like Nigeria for example to be demographically engineered into a minority, being replaced by Asians or Europeans, then why is it ok for Europeans and European nations to be engineered into a minority under the false deceptive slogans of 'diversity,' 'tolerance' and 'enrichment?'

The fact of the matter is, the huge non-white population that is now in Western nations see themselves as being the rightful heirs to OUR homelands.

They really do believe that we deserve to be dispossessed and that they should inherit what our ancestors created and left for us.

They play on the false narrative of victimhood and the ideologically motivated singling out of whites as being somehow uniquely and inherently evil and therefore deserving of being displaced and disempowered.

They are so confident and brazen now that they openly question the morality of our right to advocate our own interests.

They see the future as being one of their dominance over us. Our growing awareness of and awakening to our interests as a race unsettles them because they don't want whites to come together in the interests of whites.

They are happy to see us divided and wallowing in false guilt and false shame.

Unfortunately, due to either Facebook algorithms filtering out some comments or some may have been deleted, it is apparent that in this post the original commenter is responding to a User 3 whose



They want us all to be self-loathing suicidal fools so that they can brush us aside as they advance into our nations.

The last thing they want, is for whites to embrace the message of people like US and others and so they throw labels like 'white supremacy' and 'white power' into the mix to try and make other whites distance themselves from what we have to say.

Social media gives us a platform not to let our message be heard and our point of view be given fair consideration, but to be attacked as being morally repugnant.

This is how sinister the media operates.

It deviously attempts to manipulate the narrative in whatever direction fits with its own agenda.

Like · Reply · 17 · August 5 at 12:08am

comments are for now unreadable. Nonetheless, what they said can be inferred through the response and furthermore the storyline of this interaction is further developed.

Continuing the storyline developed in the original comment and the second response, the original commenter is defensive over the notion that “European people have... a right to exist” implying that some do not seem to think so. Furthermore, these “Europeans” have the right to exist in “historically European nations and in nations in which Europeans have founded and built<sup>36</sup>.” The author of this comment is quick to assure their readers however that this is not to imply that “Europeans”/“Americans with European ancestry” do not intend to oppress others, it is merely a matter of racial survival. As in the second response, the original commenter positions this desire as perfectly natural and it is only through the antagonistic actions of “Leftists<sup>37</sup> and the Third Worlders they support” that this natural inclination is derided as symptomatic of white supremacy or the white power movement. Not forgetting that they are speaking to and for a wider audience, the original commenter positions themselves alongside with other members of this “European” group

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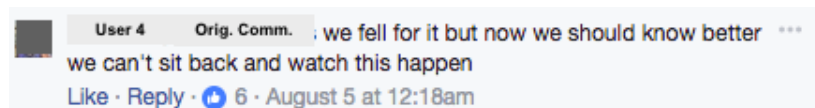
<sup>36</sup> That is, places such as the United States, Canada, Australia, South Africa etc., although this claim could be considered problematic by the indigenous populations of these respective states

<sup>37</sup> Indicating a self-identification as belonging to the Right wing

and speaks using the pronouns “we,” “us,” “and when possessive “our,” while positioning everyone else with a more ambiguous “they” and “them.” In this now much more developed storyline “they” want to establish a future in which they have “dominance over us.” According to this story, this is achieved through the division created between “Europeans” through the use of words like “white supremacists” and “white power” to make “other whites distance themselves from what we have to say,” which results in “us” being “divided and wallowing in false guilt and false shame.” As is clear, the pretense of protecting European identity is dropped, the original commenter has now made it explicitly clear that what is at stake are simply white people. However, through this admission they position this as a growing movement in which white people are becoming more self-aware of their need to protect their identity and assets. Interestingly however, they then leave one final mode on which they are being attacked: social media. According to the original commenter, although “social media gives [them] a platform [to make their message heard],” it is designed so that “[their] message... is attacked as morally repugnant.”

*Fifth Comment:*

Continuing rather



than challenging the original commenter’s proposed storyline, User 4 acknowledges that “we fell for it,” referring to white people buying into the ideas of “multiculturalism” and “diversity,” but now they should “know better,” implying that the message has gotten out and white people are thus aware of their endangered position. Additionally, more than

supporting the storyline originally proposed, User 4 proposes a call to be proactive in reversing the damaging trends enacted by the “Leftists” and “Third Worlders,” when they say “we can’t sit back and watch this happen,” reasserting their duties to protect what “their” forebears built.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

Considering the very controversial nature of this post, it was surprising to see very little resistance to its positionings within it. Instead over the course of the episode there was primarily support for the top commenter’s positioning, excepting the first response, both in terms of responders and positive reactions given on each post. Unlike the interactions taking place on the other pages, the responses for this were particularly long developing a very elaborate storyline. Unlike the other pages as well, this top comment on the top post is very centered around racial issues, particularly what may be interpreted as white supremacy. To that end the most likes occurred on posts supporting the protection of “whiteness”

### **Conclusion**

Between these four top comments from *HuffPost*, *MSNBC*, *Fox News*, and *Breitbart* a few trends became apparent in their close analysis. *HuffPost* and *MSNBC* tended to have more challenges to their top commenters’ positioning than did *Fox News* or *Breitbart* which tended to be more collaborative in their feeds. Furthermore, whereas



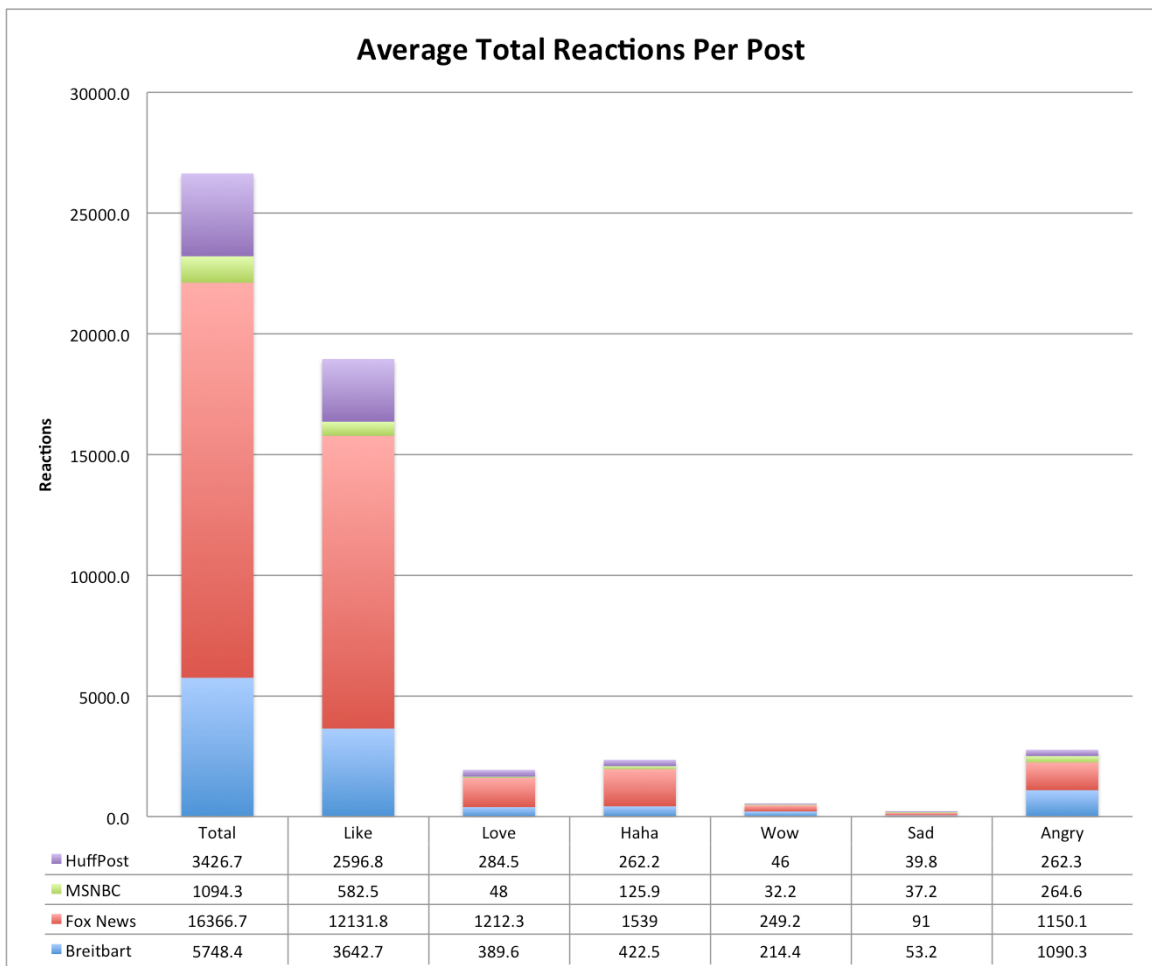
*Fox News* and *Breitbart* had commenters more or less supporting the framing given in the posts, *HuffPost* and *MSNBC* did not, both of these factors perhaps suggesting that the readership of both of these pages is more diverse than is on *Breitbart* or *Fox News*. Additionally the mode of challenging the top commenters disagreeing with the framing of *HuffPost* and *MSNBC* took the form primarily of questioning the top commenters' intelligence, signifying that those who disagree with their established views are less than, and less capable of contributing to their storyline.

## CHAPTER SIX – QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Akin to studying a map, the careful examination presented in the previous Qualitative Analysis provides only a very small, focused picture of the political discursal landscape present on Facebook. In order to locate these episodes in a larger scale and give additional meaning to them, one must zoom out to observe the bigger picture. Unlike the simple zooming out on a map however, placing these episodes in context requires widening the field of analysis and extensive research. This expansion of the field has been accomplished through the analysis of the top comment response feeds for every post shared during the month of August 2017 regarding immigration on the four news media pages chosen for this study. Unlike the detailed analysis of the prior section, rather than analyzing only five responses to each top comment, this more quantitatively based section draws upon the first fifteen responses to each top comment for data in order to analyze the development of positioning taking place in greater depth.

Although this section will detail each news media page individually, there are also lessons to be gleaned in analyzing all of them together. In this most general pursuit the first contours of this greater landscape can take shape. Evident within the simple analysis of the number of articles shared, it becomes clear that the issue of immigration is not necessarily held by each news media outlet as equally important. Indeed, in comparison to *Fox News* and *Breitbart*, *MSNBC* and the *HuffPost* shared very few posts related to

immigration: 27, 34, 16, and 15 respectively. Furthermore, through the analysis of the average number of reactions generated by each post it becomes evident that the Facebook users frequenting the respective pages valued this issue differently; as can be seen on Figure 1 below, on average *Fox News* and *Breitbart* had far more reactions per post than *MSNBC* or the *HuffPost*. These reactions however each took on their own shape



**Figure 1 – Average Total Reactions Per Post Per Page** depending on the pages; although for all pages the more traditional ‘like’<sup>38</sup> was the

<sup>38</sup> Facebook expanded to reactions from only the ‘like’ function in February 2016, roughly a year and a half before the time of this study, a relatively short time. Krug, S., 2016. Reactions Now Available Globally [WWW Document]. Facebook Newsroom. URL <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2016/02/reactions-now-available-globally/> (accessed 9. 13.17).

dominant reaction utilized, the users visiting each page deployed their reactions slightly differently. As can be seen in Figures 2 through 5, all things else being equal *Breitbart* and *MSNBC* users were far more ‘angry’ about the content shared than *Fox News* and *HuffPost* users.

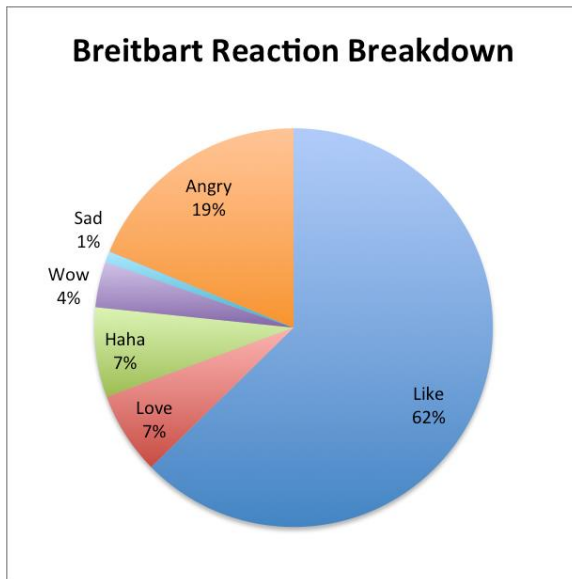


Figure 2 – Breakdown of Reactions on *Breitbart*

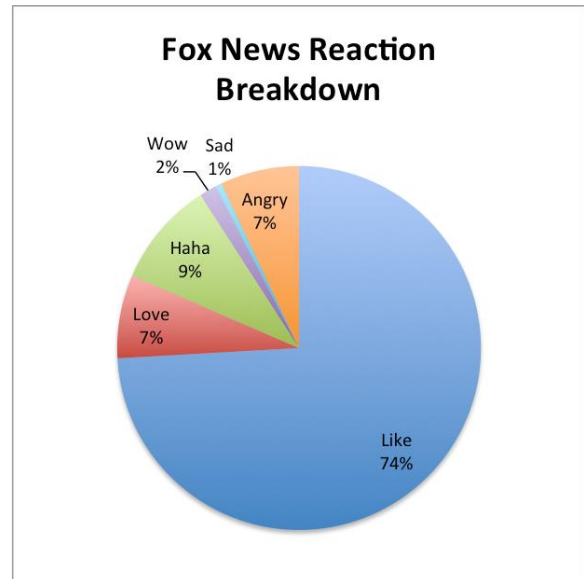
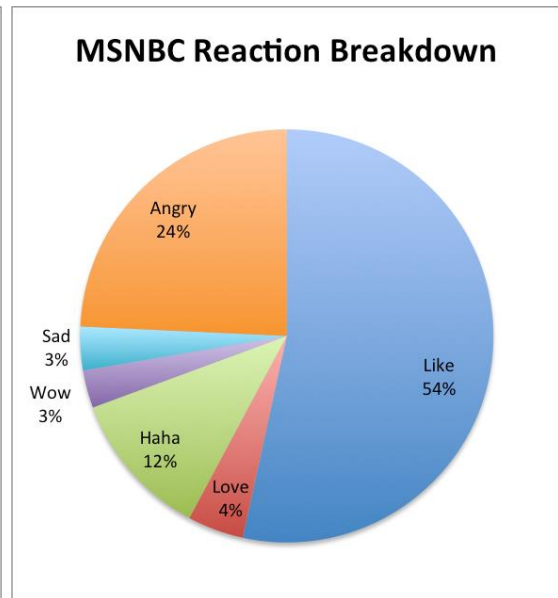
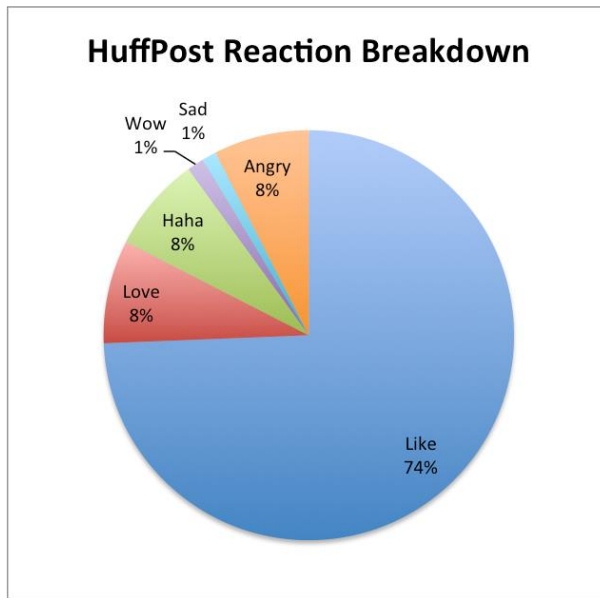


Figure 3 – Breakdown of Reactions on *Fox News*



**Figure 4 – Breakdown of Reactions on *HuffPost***  
 Although certainly a crude sense of

**Figure 5 – Breakdown of Reactions on *MSNBC***

measurement, upon first glance of this phenomenon, it could indicate that *MSNBC* and *Breitbart* are sharing more controversial material, but it could also indicate that they merely have a more diverse readership than do *HuffPost* or *Fox News*. Questions such as these, as well as others will be discussed and delved into, but before they are, it is necessary to now examine each outlet’s page more closely. Similarly to the prior *Qualitative Analysis* section, the framing of the media outlet must first be considered to contextualize the resultant behaviors of the users engaged.

## HuffPost

### **Framing Analysis**

With *HuffPost* sharing the fewest posts regarding immigration over the course of August, one may take that to mean that the company takes immigration as a comparatively lower priority. Whether this is the case or not, it certainly does not indicate that *HuffPost* does not take a stance on the issue. Indeed, when coding the content shared in light of the Trump administration's propositions for immigration reform *HuffPost* repeatedly came out opposed to the propositions: 10 times to be exact, and furthermore came out as neutral five times, never sharing a post that presented them in a positive light. Additionally, the neutral posts shared counted as neutral only in the context of the administration's reform; with regard to presenting the topic of migration as a whole it was always in a more sympathetic light, detailing stories of successful refugees or merely discussing refugees in general. "Refugee" is an important word to consider in itself with regard to framing; the word is full of connotation, all of it sympathetic. Emotionally, the use of the word evokes sympathy due to its inherent meaning that the person for whom the term represents is escaping some kind of extreme hardship. However, the word also has legal implications; when a person is a refugee they are protected by the 1951 Refugee Convention, which was ratified by 145 states and establishes the principle of non-refoulement, that is, that refugees may not be sent back to the dangerous place from which they fled. In addition to using the word "refugee," the choice wording to describe migrants by *HuffPost* was "undocumented" rather than the more inflammatory adjective "illegal," establishing yet another more sympathetic identity for the (im)migrant. The

core difference between the two is subtle but important to remark on: “illegal” implies a sense of intrinsic value to the immigrant that is permanent (they are illegal now and will always be), whereas “undocumented” is less permanent, they may be undocumented for now, but may one day receive proper documentation (if the circumstances shift that way favorably). The only time “illegal” was used by *HuffPost* to describe anything was referring to a tunnel<sup>39</sup> that was being built to quite literally undermine President Trump’s proposed border wall, showing its futility. Whatever the term, the consequence “undocumented” or “illegal” migrants face if caught is deportation. Unlike other media analyzed however, *HuffPost* only mentioned deportation once and did so very sympathetically to those that face it: “It would mean nearly 800,000 people who came forward to the government, paid a fee and passed a background check would be at imminent risk of deportation.”<sup>40</sup> Through this post the migrants are both humanized and depicted as facing an injustice, sentiments that more than anything else are emblematic of the framing present on *HuffPost*. As a whole, *HuffPost* shared five posts regarding the proposed border wall, four regarding refugees, two regarding “sanctuary cities,” two regarding immigration reform, two regarding general immigration, one regarding DACA, and one regarding the economic impact of migrants.

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<sup>39</sup> Post #10 HuffPost- Appendix C

<sup>40</sup> Post #8 HuffPost – Appendix C

## Positioning Analysis

One can think of framing as a preliminary version of positioning, the storyline and positions are merely established first by the media outlet to be taken up and accepted or rejected by the consumers. With this in mind, the storylines available from the posts shared by *HuffPost* were ones which supported a more positive view of immigration. The question is, how was this received by the users who interacted on these posts?

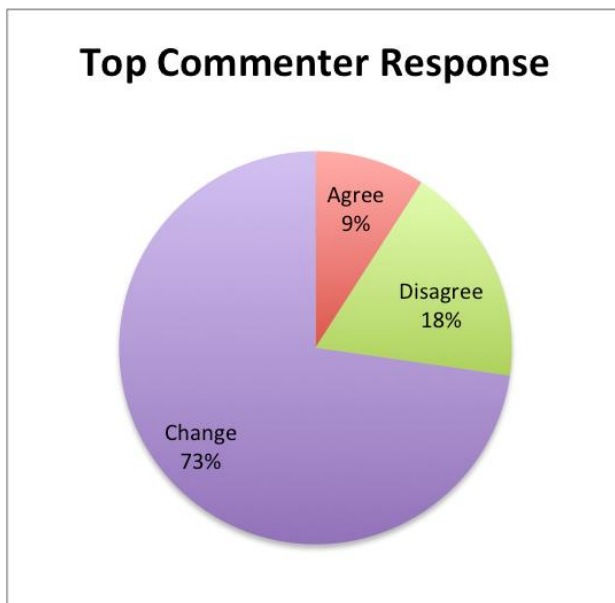


Figure 6 – Breakdown of Reactions on *HuffPost*

the top commenter shifted the frame in a way consistent with the overall framing or not: it was found that exactly half of time it was consistent and the other half of the time inconsistent (36.5% of the time each, resulting in a breakdown of 45.5% in agreement and 54.5% in disagreement). A full breakdown of the top commenters' responses to the framing can be found in *Figure 6*.

Overwhelmingly, the users who wrote the top comments shifted from the positioning and storylines available so much so that it cannot be said that they agreed or disagreed with the framing of the post, one could say they broke the frames. That being said, given the above stated overall framing of *HuffPost* it is possible to judge whether



When considered together, the positions taken by respondents to the top commenter were relatively evenly spread: of the 165 responses 57 were in support of the top commenters' positioning, 45 were against, and 63 instead changed the storylines and positioning entirely. Put another way, on average of the 15 responses per top comment, 5.18 supported the top commenter's positioning, 4.09 were against, and 5.73 would change it entirely. However, this relatively even spread is lost when the responses are grouped according to the top commenters' initial response to the framing. For those responding to the author that agreed with the post's framing 8 supported their positioning, 2 rejected it, and 5 changed it. For those responding to authors who disagreed with the framing 3 on average supported the top commenter's positioning, 8 disagreed, and 4 changed it. Finally, for those responding to a top commenter who changed completely the framing, on average 5.38 supported their positioning, 3.38 rejected it, and 6.25 changed it further. A significant implication that can be drawn from these numbers is that the users interacting on *HuffPost* more or less maintain support for the original framing present in the post throughout the development of interactions taking place in the response feeds; this is clear through the strong support of people agreeing with the top commenter who agreed with the framing and the strong rejection from those responding to a top comment disagreeing with the framing.

In analyzing the shape of the positioning, of principle interest to this study is whether the positioning that is occurring is escalatory or not; will it lead toward or away from conflict? In considering all of the threads together, a total of 50 escalatory responses were made, or an average of 4.55 per post. However, in what way were these escalatory

responses delivered and by whom? Of the 50 total escalatory responses 22 were made when rejecting the top commenters' positionings, 24 were made when it was changed, and only 4 were made when supporting. Taking the top commenters' stance regarding the framing of the post into consideration, the average amounts of escalatory responses per post were: 3 for posts in which the top commenter agreed, 9.5 for when they disagreed, and 3.5 for when the positioning was totally changed. Building upon the previously mentioned potential implication that users who interact on *HuffPost* maintain the support of the original framing, it must be noted that the highest average amount of escalatory responses took place in feeds resulting from disagreeing with the framing, indicating a majority support group rebuking non-supporters.

## MSNBC

### **Framing Analysis**

Like *HuffPost* the framing present on *MSNBC*'s page was totally opposed to the Trump administration's stance on immigration, publishing 14 posts against it, 2 that were neutral, none that were for it. Overall the coverage was focused on current events such as the repeal of the DACA program<sup>41</sup> and the proposed border wall. In discussing DACA's repeal their stance regarding Trump's reforms is made crystal clear: "Gutierrez on Trump Immigration Plan: 'It's going to get worse'"; regarding the wall, the framing focuses on President Trump's broken promise to make Mexico pay for it. Notably, immigrants are only attached to the word illegal once, and this occurs only in the context of those protected by DACA, in that they were "children who were brought to the U.S. illegally"<sup>42</sup> emphasizing both the vulnerability and lack of choice regarding the matter. Instead *MSNBC* preferred to use the phrase "undocumented migrant."

Beyond merely being opposed to the administration's immigration policy, the framing attached to immigration was that those who supported a stricter policy were "anti-immigrant." The two times this phrase was used occurred in relation to Donald Trump specifically<sup>43</sup> and to a specific "Texas' anti-immigrant, 'sanctuary cities' law"<sup>44</sup>. Furthermore, this position of anti-immigrant is attached directly to the issue of race in the August 22 post "[with] racial tensions high after Charlottesville, will Trump return to the

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<sup>41</sup> Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, an immigration policy enacted under the Obama administration in which people who arrived as children would be protected from deportation

<sup>42</sup> Post #12 MSNBC – Appendix D

<sup>43</sup> Post #6 MSNBC – Appendix D

<sup>44</sup> Post #15 MSNBC – Appendix D

anti-immigrant rhetoric that commonly fires up his base”, crystalizing the connection between race and immigration. However, through Rachel Maddow *MSNBC* goes even further to attach the President directly to racism: “If you're shocked by Trump racism, you weren't paying attention.”<sup>45</sup>

### Positioning Analysis

Considering the framing given in each post, the users generating the top comment on the comment feeds of *MSNBC* were divided, although more than not rejected the framing provided. Like the top commenters present on *HuffPost*'s comment feeds, those

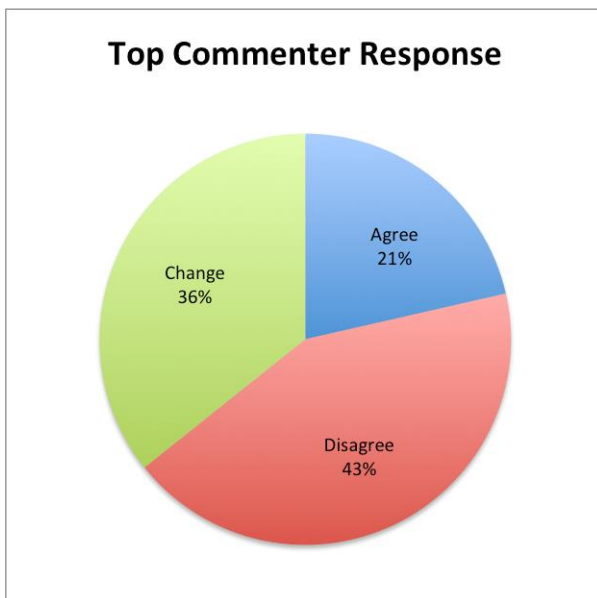


Figure 7 – Breakdown of Reactions on *MSNBC*

that changed the storyline so much from the framing were evenly split between those who supported the overarching framing and those who did not, practically adding 15% more to each “agree” and “disagree,” in which case disagree becomes 58% and agree 36%, a scenario in which it truly is evident that disagreement causes the most action in the comment feed for *MSNBC*.

In terms of how the 15 respondents to the top commenters continued the top commenters’ positioning, the average for all is as follows: 2.07 supporting, 3.5 rejecting, and 9.63 changing, indicating that the interactions were generally less focused on the

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<sup>45</sup>Post #5 *MSNBC* – Appendix D

issue and would rather wander. When broken up based on whether the top commenter agreed, disagreed, or changed the inherent positioning of the post the picture shifts slightly. For the posts on which the top commenter agreed, the average number of responses supporting the top commenter's positioning was 1.67, 1.67 rejecting, and 11.67 changing. For those on which the top commenter disagreed it was 2 supporting, 5.17 rejecting, and 7.67 changing. Finally, when the top commenter changed the framed entirely it was 2.4 in support, 2.6 rejecting, and 10 changing. Although the statistics for the supporters and changers are roughly the same, the outlier comes in the form of the average rejecters to the disagreeers, it is 5.17 while for the other two the average hovers around 2, indicating that the supporters of *MSNBC* may tend to be more active in challenging those that challenge it.

Additionally, as statements that were simply personal attacks were coded as "change" a potential implication of the very high level of changing positioning may indicate a higher level of contention, a significant possibility given the high level of disagreement that takes place with the original framing. Supporting this notion, the average number of escalatory responses to top comments on *MSNBC* was 7.93, a significantly higher number than the 4.55 which appeared on the *HuffPost* page. Broken down into averages per the position taken by the top commenter it changed as follows: 6.67 escalatory responses to those that agreed, 7.5 to those that disagreed, and 9.2 to those that changed the positioning.

## Fox News

### **Framing Analysis**

As a whole *Fox News* has framed the issue of immigration in a way that is in support of the Trump administration's propositions for immigration reform, meaning it supports the strengthening of the United States' border and tightening restrictions on immigration into the United States. Of the 27 posts shared by *Fox News*, 20 were in favor of administration reforms and 7 were rated as neutral. In finding emergent codes from the posts' text, the two most prominent themes for *Fox News* were the proposed border wall and the issue of immigrants' legal status. Unlike *HuffPost* or *MSNBC*, the preferred nomenclature to describe migrants without proper papers was "illegal" rather than "undocumented" which in itself securitizes the issue as one regarding law and order rather than bureaucratic proceduralism. Continuing along this vein, in terms of writing human interest stories, rather than profiling successful immigrants *Fox News* chose to focus on immigrants who have committed crimes, a notable example being the August 23<sup>rd</sup> post with the text: "An illegal immigrant, who has been kicked out of the U.S. 15 times, is now facing charges for a hit-and-run crash that left a 6-year-old critically injured."<sup>46</sup> In this post all of the above described elements are present: the immigrant is framed as "illegal," they have committed a crime (an egregious one), and a wall is potentially necessary as the current security has allowed for the immigrant to illegally cross six times. This focus on immigrants committing crime is also in line with another frame provided over the course of the month: the dividing of immigrants as "high" or

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<sup>46</sup> Post #12 Fox News – Appendix E

“low” skill, essentially a determination of potential benefit that they can bring to the United States. Naturally for immigrants committing crime benefit is not brought, but rather a threat to security is. Regarding immigrants of different skill levels however the primary frame becomes economic as is clear in the August 7 post ““Bringing in low-skilled non-English speaking immigrants depresses wages for American workers here and explodes the welfare state.”” In this example the economy is hurt in two ways, Americans are put out of work and more people become dependent on the government system.<sup>47</sup> Connecting these different themes it becomes clear that the frame *Fox News* has built is one depicting immigrants as a dangerous threat to US society and economy who do not necessarily have a right to reside there. A natural conclusion to this frame is that these immigrants need therefore to be deported. Unlike *HuffPost* on which deportation is seen in a negative light hurting a (migrant) individual, on *Fox News* it is shown instead as necessary tool to solve immigration: “We need the wall and we need better enforcement at the border and we need to be able to deport people rapidly who enter the country illegally.”<sup>48</sup>

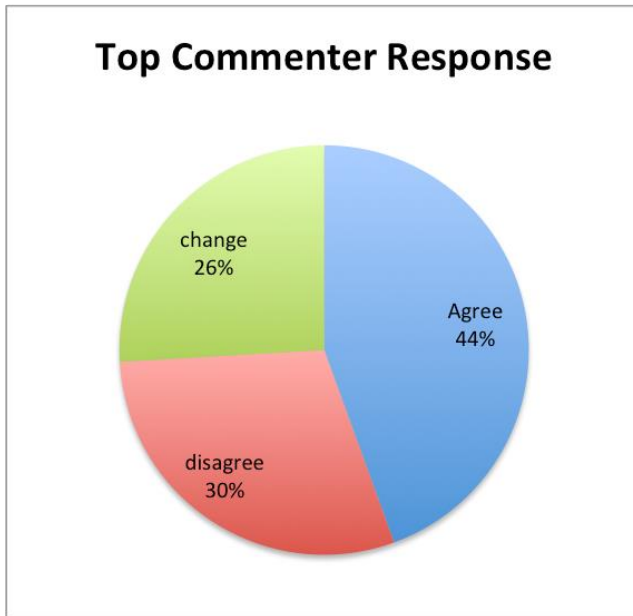
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<sup>47</sup> Interestingly unlike many of the comments, rather than identifying “illegal” immigrants as the beneficiaries of this “welfare state,” this post leaves open the possibility that it may be the American workers on welfare instead

<sup>48</sup> Post #5 Fox News – Appendix E

## Positioning Analysis

In stark contrast to both *HuffPost* and *MSNBC*, the predominant response to the



framing provided by *Fox News* was that of agreement, indicating a higher number of supporters of the provided framing. Furthermore, when coding the articles on which the top commenter changed the positioning specific to the post, they did so overwhelmingly in a way that was in agreement with the overall framing present on *Fox News* strengthening the

Figure 8 – Breakdown of Reactions on *Fox News*

likelihood of there being a more homogenous group supporting the framing present on *Fox News*.

With regard to the respondents to the top commenters, whether the top commenters agreed, disagreed, or changed the framing of the post, on average the shape of the positioning taking place in the response feeds were as follows: 5.52 supported, 4.04 rejected, and 5.44 changed. This relatively even spread adjusts according to the top commenters' initial reaction however: when they agreed 7.75 respondents supported their positioning, 2.83 rejected, and 4.42 changed the positioning entirely. When the top commenter disagreed these numbers shifted to 3.63, 6.13, and 5.25 respectively and while the top commenter changed it they shifted again to 3.86, 3.71, and 7.43



(respectively again). Regarding those that responded to the agreeing top commenter, they continued the agreement with the framing and took up supporting positions to the storyline given. Conversely, when the top commenter disagreed they then tended to reject their positioning, signaling that they behaved more like the users interacting on *HuffPost* than on *MSNBC* in that they supported the framing given.

In this context it is logical that the interactions as a whole contained less escalatory remarks than did *MSNBC*; on average there were 5.96 escalatory responses per 15 to the top comments. Interestingly however, when broken out to represent the feeds resulting from the top commenter's initial positions the escalation did not shift very much from the overall average on any of them: 5.33 responses were escalatory when the top commenter agreed, 6.88 when they disagreed, and 6 when they changed the positioning, showing at least to a small extent however that the escalation may have taken place in order to defend the company's framing.

## Breitbart

### **Framing Analysis**

With 34 posts shared *Breitbart* was undoubtedly the most prolific sharer of content regarding immigration over the month of August, on average sharing slightly more than one post per day. Although extensive, this coverage was very focused in its support of administration policy regarding immigration: of 34 posts shared, every single one was in favor of Trump’s reforms. Regarding the proposed border wall, it reinforced the notion that Mexico would indeed still pay for it one way or another despite the skepticism. In sharing about DACA, the program is very negatively portrayed and attached to the protection of “illegals”<sup>49</sup> as well as stigmatizing people like former President Obama<sup>50</sup> and “low energy Jeb”<sup>51</sup>. Like *Fox News*, *Breitbart* attached the phrase “illegal” to immigrants exclusively, framing these immigrants as criminals that need punishment. To that end *Breitbart* was also notable in framing more than any other company analyzed in profiling instances of crime committed by immigrants, a total of 5 times. Furthermore, the crimes chosen tended to be especially abhorrent, among them: one to slavery<sup>52</sup>, one dealing with child pornography<sup>53</sup>, one regarding an “illegal” impregnating his daughter<sup>54</sup>, and another describing the drunk hit-and-run<sup>55</sup> also

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<sup>49</sup> Post #20 Breitbart – Appendix F

<sup>50</sup> Post #24 Breitbart – Appendix F

<sup>51</sup> Post #30 Breitbart – Appendix F

<sup>52</sup> Post #3 Breitbart – Appendix F

<sup>53</sup> Post #11 Breitbart – Appendix F

<sup>54</sup> Post #8 Breitbart – Appendix F

<sup>55</sup> Post #15 Breitbart – Appendix F

described by *Fox News*. The example of the migrants possessing child pornography is particularly interesting because it also challenges the integrity of the phrase “asylum seeker,” a word akin to “refugee” in that it evokes both emotional and legal response, through its attachment to a generally perceived disgusting crime. This is not the only instance however in which the category of immigration needing to be stymied is expanded, indeed in addition to “illegal” or “undocumented” migrants and asylum seekers, visa holding foreign workers are also depicted to be a threat to the American economy and displacing American workers touching on a larger frame that the American economy is threatened by migration. Additionally, unlike *Fox News*, *Breitbart* connects welfare directly to migrants.<sup>56</sup> The natural end result of this threatening framing is that borders need to be tightened and those already in the United States need to be rounded up and deported.

### **Positioning Analysis**

Very similarly to the response of users interacting on *HuffPost*, the top commenters were primarily coded as having overwhelmingly responded to the framing so as to change the positioning and storyline away from that of the posts'. Beyond that, the story told based on the coding for how true the top comment stayed to the frame of the given post it was commenting on, it would appear that more users disagree with the framing on *Breitbart* than do. This story changes however when the “changes” are then analyzed against the general framing described in the above section. When this is done,

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<sup>56</sup> Post #19 Breitbart – Appendix F

11 articles previously of the change category can shift to the agree category and 5 shift

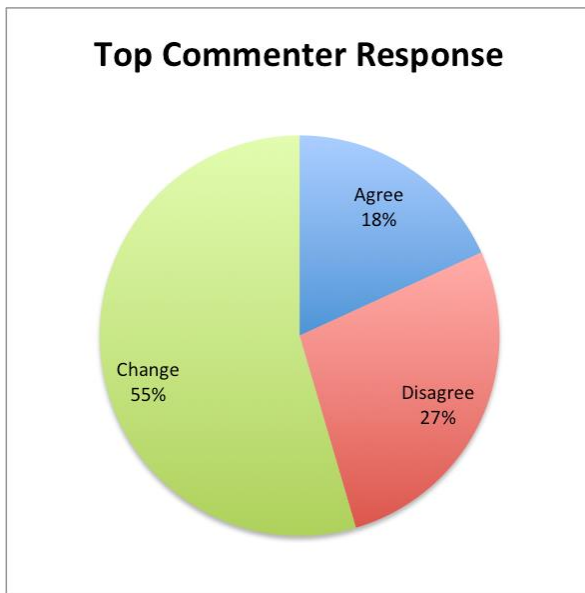


Figure 9 – Breakdown of Reactions on *Breitbart*

with *Breitbart*'s framing predominating, one can see a more cooperative picture emerge with disagreement with the framing falling inferior to agreement.

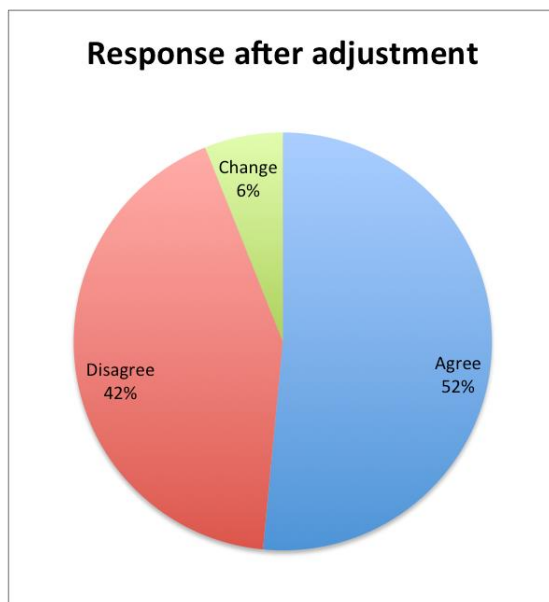


Figure 10 – Breakdown of Reactions on *Breitbart* (after adjustment)

over to the disagree category creating rather a measurement which describes more generally the interaction between the user and the outlet's Facebook page. The result of this changes the depiction of the interaction dramatically between the top commenters and the company's framing, becoming what is depicted in *Figure 10*. In this new picture, rather than disagreement

With this picture in mind respondents' reactions to the top commenters' comments become more understandable. Whereas the average across all categories show a 6.09 of 15 supporting the initial positioning from the top commenter, 4 rejecting, and 4.91 changing, the picture shifts as it is taken into account the top commenters' reaction to the framing. As this is accounted for, those agreeing top commenters elicit on average

8.67 supporters, 1.67 rejecters, and 4.67 who change their positioning, while those disagreeing elicit 2.89, 7.44, and 4.67 respectively, and the changers elicit 7.17, 3.50, and 5.17 respectively. From this it can be drawn that like *Fox News* and *HuffPost*, users interacting on *Breitbart* tend to support and uphold the framing present on its Facebook page both in the face of disagreement or agreement. Overall the average amount of escalatory responses per 15 per top comment was 6.42, which does not deviate much from its breakout into escalatory comments as divided by top commenters' response to framing. The average amount of escalatory responses per top agreeing comments was 5.67, for top disagreeing comments 6.22, and for top changing comments 6.78. While the difference is slight, there is still a small correlation to the most escalation being connected to disagreeing top commenters, perhaps suggesting a higher level there of defending the *Breitbart*'s framing.

### **Conclusion**

In line with the purported conservative/liberal bias of the assembled news media organizations, the overall framing presented in their coverage tended to have *Fox News* and *Breitbart* favoring a harder line on immigration supporting the Trump administration's agenda (a more typical stance for conservatives) and *HuffPost* and *MSNBC* taking a more liberal softer line on immigration, not supporting the Trump administration's efforts. Interestingly however, for both *MSNBC* and *HuffPost* the top commenters tended more to disagree with the framing provided whereas the top commenters on *Breitbart* and *Fox News* tended to agree with the framing. This gives a

preliminary indication that the users of the latter two tend to be more homogenous in their attitudes than are the users of the prior two. Through the analysis as well of the average number of reactions per post, *Breitbart* and *Fox News* far outdid *HuffPost* and *MSNBC* on this issue, indicating that their users may be more passionate on the issue than the users of the latter and when connected to the top commenters' response to framing, may indicate that users of *Breitbart* and *Fox News* may be spilling over into *MSNBC* and *HuffPost*'s comment feeds and dominating them as well.

With regards to the users interacting in response to the top comment they would typically agree with commenters agreeing with the framing and disagree with commenters that disagree with the framing; in both cases scenarios which support the notion that users choose to follow and interact on pages which agree with their own values. A notable exception to this however occurs with *MSNBC*, rather than staying with the others who each have on average more than 7 supporting responses per first 15 when the top commenter agrees, it merely has 1.67, instead the majority of the comments are classified as "change" which includes remarks regarding the participants themselves and are often escalatory. To this end, *MSNBC* across the board had more comments classified as change than any other on average and also the highest average amount of escalatory remarks per interaction. All of these facts point to *MSNBC* having base of users which hold much deeper disagreements on average than the others.

## CHAPTER 7 - CONCLUSION

With regard to framing, each of the articles detailed in the *Qualitative Analysis* section were in line with the overall framing found specific to each news media organization. *HuffPost* and *MSNBC* each showed their negative bias against the Trump administration's policy through detailing Trump's failure to keep his promises and the criticism of his budget (specifically regarding his proposed border wall) respectively. On the other side, *Breitbart* and *Fox News* each highlighted failures of the immigration system, making clear that it needs to be the government's priority to fix the issue, a position in line with the President's.

The top comments analyzed in detail in the *Qualitative Analysis* section fell neatly in line with the findings of the results detailed in the *Quantitative Analysis* section as well. As the top commenter tended to be against the framing of *HuffPost* and *MSNBC*, so were the top commenters analyzed in detail on arguing Trump to be a "patriot" while his predecessor a "Muslim liar" and the other arguing that FEMA (as opposed to what the framing suggests) is unnecessary respectively. Conversely, the top commenters on *Breitbart* and *Fox News* tended to agree with the framing and did so in their examples detailed for the *Qualitative Analysis*. Furthermore those who responded to the top comments detailed in both analyses tended to support the framing of the original post either through attacking a disagreeing commenter or supporting the comments of an

agreeing. As was mentioned in the conclusion of the last section this may indicate that the users with views more in line with *Fox News* and *Breitbart* may be spilling over into the comment sections of *MSNBC* and *HuffPost*. If this is the case, it would fall in line with Coffey's finding that users "may seek participation in order to express different viewpoints, without an interest in compromise or reasoned deliberation," which would indeed be troublesome because in his model this occurs most prominently in situations which are polarized (2015). While the scope of this study is too small to say with certainty, it may be that this more polarized behavior exhibited by *Breitbart* and *Fox News* users may be indicative of a higher level of polarity in both of these bases than in *MSNBC* or *HuffPost*'s. In addition to the possibility that they have gone over to cause controversy in the latter two pages' comment feeds, simply posting about the issue more often (and on different media) indicates a higher level of investment in the issue, which then according to Westfall may also denote a more polar user base. This may also be the result of a more homogenous host comment section in the form of *Breitbart* and *Fox News*; both saw less controversy and instead more agreement in their comment sections than did the other two organizations, which may indicate that more of an echo-chamber phenomenon may be taking place allowing for positions to become more extreme (Jordan, 2015). However, all that being said, while there is the possibility that the user base described is more polar than the user base of *HuffPost* and *MSNBC*, that is not an indication that this latter base is also not polarized. Indeed, when confronted with opposing views, they tended to more viciously defend the framing of their elected companies' pages and saw more escalation on average than did the other group. This is



critical to understand in the context Coffey's framework as a lack of civility is the hallmark of a polarized situation. In sum, it can be argued from this data collected for this study that both proponents for and against immigration are polarized, although a caveat to this news is Chmiel's finding that comment sections tend to be more polarized than other spaces for interaction.

Another interesting finding of this study is that more marginal viewpoints such as was found in the detailed analysis of the exchange occurring in *Breitbart's* top comment feed regarding the European "race" against others, were not marginalized but instead given space and adulation. As was mentioned in the analysis given already about this specific feed, the users interacting with this material tended to give greater support to posts arguing for the protection of the European, white character of the United States and no objections were proffered despite them referring to other races as "savage" and "third world invaders" among other very unflattering descriptors. This may be indicative of Chen's finding that a significant function of the internet and social media specifically is that it opens up the space for marginal groups and ideas to gain prominence and become normalized in the wider society. If this is the case, it may well also then be the precursor to further mobilization of this formerly marginal group as they now have the means to communicate with one another and spread their ideas more easily to the general public. Similar to Chiluwa's example of supporters coming together to reform Biafra, this more racially motivated group may come to demand more representation of their ideals politically.

Considering the behavior of users interacting in the different respective comment sections, that is they were typically in agreement with the framing given, there is an indication that the greater utilization of social media has not necessarily shifted the power away from traditional media to maintain a high level of significance in determining how issues are handled in public discourse; a possibility that coincides with Bennett and Iyengar's finding that "news does tell people both what to think about and also how to think about it" (2008). The question is, if this is the case why is it that the media outlets have allowed for this more polarized environment to form in which issues such as white nationalism are given more space? According to Tim Jordan, it may be as simple as market economics supplying the right conditions and incentives for the discourse to develop this way. Through higher numbers of comments and likes, more money is generated for the media outlet and it is thus encouraged to publish more content which generates high levels of interaction as well and the cycle grows. In addition to the market potentially incentivizing polarization through content, the very model of Facebook and other social media is such so that users are encouraged to share far more information with a wider group of people than in the past, which then also potentially brings more conflicting values to be negotiated in a way that did not happen in the past, potentially with complete strangers who will not be sensitive to one another. Connecting to conflict this is particularly problematic as these shifts in relational behaviors are tied fundamentally to the economic engines of these media companies and it would take a powerful incentive to shift these processes more productively. However, given that there is a connection to be drawn between the framing provided and the consumers' attitudes

there is a possibility for change in either of these categories. If the media is given the proper incentive to frame issues more constructively, users may become less polar. That being said however, one cannot exist without the other. The media outlets are dependent on consumers' attitudes and if they demand more controversial coverage the market will likely provide<sup>57</sup> meaning that a shift must occur in both the content creators and consumers if the atmosphere is to change.

### **Limitations to this Study**

Although covering and analyzing a lot of material, this study was still of limited size and scope. Significantly, this study only analyzed a month's worth of material regarding immigration and the data was therefore very indicative of a short period. While it was valuable to see how the different news media outlets published significantly different amounts of posts regarding immigration a drawback for the data is that for *MSNBC* and *HuffPost* had about half the sample size that both *Breitbart* and *Fox News* did, potentially skewing the data unfavorably. Furthermore, given the huge level of difference between user interaction taking place on these two sets of outlets, it may be that there are other outlets with more interaction for users seeking a more leftward framing.

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<sup>57</sup> Post #7 Breitbart – Appendix F

## **Areas for Future Research**

Given the growing number of users of social media this is a ripe field for study and is indeed critical to study for analysts of all stripes, from analysts of conflict to political scientists and journalists. A beneficial study for the future might entail conducting a similar one to this but over a much longer period of time in order to draw a much stronger correlation between social media user interaction and news media framing. Of special interest as well might be a closer analysis of the interaction taking place on *MSNBC* as it seemed to have the highest level of contention and saw more groups of varying values than the others. Why might this be? Could it be framing its material in a way that is more appealing to users with different values? It would also be worth committing to a longer term study in order to watch if more formerly marginalized groups carve more space out for themselves in the social media landscape and expand their presence in comment feeds too unpopular for them.

## APPENDIX A – CODING ESCALATION

As Edelman noted in his work, “all politics involves group conflict, but not all conflict escalates” (1969). Therefore, in the study of political interaction a central question will be how often does this escalation occur and eventually perhaps, why? An integral process to understanding conflict, escalation occurs as parties move further away from each other through negative processes. Naturally this distance does not refer to physical space, but to an intangible positional space. At its most basic level escalation “amounts... to gains by particular ...allies at the expense of others” (Edelman, 1969). Inherent in this understanding of escalation is an issue of group dynamics, one side must lose for the other side to gain. This process therefore depends on dividing and emphasizing that divide between one another either through individual or group identification. Following Desivilya’s model, this study will look for positioning that “excessively [relies] on stereotypes, selectively perceiving the other and notably attaching disproportionate weight to negative information while discounting positive data about the opponent;” as she notes, this process will entail showing aggressive behavior toward one another “such as derogatory remarks and taunting statements” (2004). With this framework, this study will code statements as escalatory if they include name calling either individually or in labeling a group, using verbs to describe one another negatively, using directly aggressive language, belittling through the use of sarcasm, chastising, or incitement to violence against others. If it meets any of this criteria it will be coded as escalatory.

## APPENDIX B – TRANSCRIPTS

### MSNBC

Top Post: “Who’s Going To Pay For the Wall? Apparently Taxpayers.” August 24, 2017.

Content type: Video

*Transcript:*

Trump: “Now the obstructionist democrats would like us not to do it, but believe me: if we have to close down our government we’re building that wall.” [cutscene] “I will build a great, great wall on our southern border and I will have Mexico pay for that wall. Mark my words.” [cutscene] “The greatest wall you’ve ever seen... See that ceiling up there? Higher!” [cutscene] “Mexico’s gonna pay for the wall... believe me!” [cutscene] “When you have Trump negotiating for you on your behalf... THEY...WILL... PAY!” [cutscene] “WHO?? (crowd in response: MEXICO!)” [cutscene] “The Great Wall of China, built 2000 years ago, is 13,000 miles folks... and they didn’t have Caterpillar tractors. We need 1,000 miles!” [cutscene] “Build that wall! Build that wall! Build that wall! Who’s gonna pay for the wall?? (Crowd: MEXICO!)” [cutscene] “Who’s gonna pay for it? (Crowd: Mexico!) [cutscene] “We’re gonna build a wall...” [cutscene] “AND MEXICO WILL PAY FOR THE WALL! Believe me!” [cutscene] “That wall will go up so fast your head will spin!” [cutscene] “We’re building the wall... in fact it’s gonna start soon, way ahead of schedule!” [cutscene] “Some of the fake news said ‘I don’t think Donald Trump wants to build the wall! He was just had some fun during the campaign on the wall’ ... that wasn’t fun folks. We’re building that wall!”

Additionally, over top of the video were the words: “At his rally in *Arizona* Trump told the crowd that he’d *shut down* the government to pay for the border wall, but on the campaign trail he had *someone else* in mind to *foot the bill*”

## **Breitbart**

Top Post: “*Aside from pleasing special interests, does the GOP have any valid excuse not to support this?*” August 4, 2017

Content type: Video<sup>58</sup>

*Transcript:*

“Between 1892 and 1954, about **12 million immigrants**<sup>59</sup> entered the United States through **Ellis Island** [cutscene] In order to be allowed into the United States immigrants had to pass a **medical exam** and prove that they wouldn’t be a **financial burden** to the country. [cutscene] In order to become a **citizen** you had to know the Constitution and **speak English**. [cutscene] By the **1950s** the United States had a *155,000* quota-immigrants per year. [cutscene] Today the annual inflow of immigrants and temporary **foreign** workers is almost **4 million** people per year.<sup>60</sup> [cutscene] President Trump wants to **protect** the American **worker** and **taxpayers**.<sup>61</sup> [cutscene] He doesn’t think we should

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<sup>58</sup> However, as opposed with a normal spoken word video, all of the text supplied comes from on-screen written text shown above video clips. All of the audio is merely instrumental music.

<sup>59</sup> All of the emphasis is original to the video, however where they used colored text I have used bold as well as italics when a second color is used for emphasis in the video

<sup>60</sup> Embedded in the video during this scene is a clip of an *MSNBC* broadcast with a banner reading: “Saving Jobs? Foreign Workers Facing Uncertainty Under New Exec. Order”

<sup>61</sup> Embedded in the video during this scene is a clip of an *Fox News* broadcast with a banner reading: “Proposal to change immigration system”

let **immigrants** into America so that they can go on *welfare*.<sup>62</sup> He also wants them to speak **English**.<sup>63</sup> [cutscene] And he just did something about it. [cutscene to headline reading “Donald Trump Unveils Merit Based Immigration Reform”]

## **Fox News**

Top Post: “Border Patrol agents and law enforcement officers arrested 25 illegal immigrants, including 14 Colombian citizens, during a three-day checkpoint operation in central New Hampshire over the weekend.” August 29, 2017

Content Type: Article

*Full Text*<sup>64</sup>:

### ***Border Patrol checkpoint in New Hampshire nets arrests of 25 illegal immigrants***

Border Patrol agents and law enforcement officers arrested 25 illegal immigrants, including 14 Colombian citizens, during a three-day checkpoint operation in central New Hampshire over the weekend.

Law enforcement officials set up a checkpoint on Interstate 93 in Lincoln, N.H., from Aug. 25-27 and arrested more than two dozen people without valid immigration documents.

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<sup>62</sup> Embedded in the video during this scene is a clip of a *Local 12* broadcast with a banner reading: “Government Help, Just How Much Can People Receive?”

<sup>63</sup> Embedded in this scene is the text “Basic English Grammar” followed by a slide containing an example of basic English grammar “noun[-] Akbar was a great king”

<sup>64</sup> Giaritelli, A., 2017. Border Patrol checkpoint in New Hampshire nets arrests of 25 illegal immigrants | Fox News [WWW Document]. Fox News. URL <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2017/08/28/border-patrol-checkpoint-in-new-hampshire-nets-arrests-25-illegal-immigrants.html> (accessed 9.4.17).



They also seized narcotics and drug paraphernalia, according to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Monday.

"Checkpoints are just one of the tools we utilize to enforce the immigration and other federal laws of our nation," Swanton Sector Chief Patrol Agent John C. Pfeifer said. "In addition to technology, manpower and intelligence, checkpoints help to deny access to major routes of egress away from the border and into our communities in the interior of the U.S."

More than half of the immigrants taken into custody were from Colombia, but others were citizens of Brazil, Ecuador, and Mexico.

## APPENDIX C – HUFFPOST POSTS

Post #	Date/Time shared:	Post text:	Imbedded headline :	Number of Reactions:	URL
1	8/3/2017 - 12:15 AM	President Donald J. Trump has unveiled plans for a new, points-based immigration system. But will it help working class Americans as he claims, or hurt the economy overall?	n/a	688	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/HuffPost/videos/501819230162229/">https://www.facebook.com/HuffPost/videos/501819230162229/</a>
2	8/3/2017 - 4:15 AM	Briefing Off The Rails   HuffPost Politics President Donald J. Trump's aide Stephen Miller tried to roll out the new immigration bill, but things got weird and he ended up arguing about the Statue of Liberty.	n/a	3100	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/HuffPost/videos/501907383486747/">https://www.facebook.com/HuffPost/videos/501907383486747/</a>
3	8/12/2017 - 12:15 PM	A boat of suspected undocumented immigrants landed on a popular Spanish beach. They were gone before police arrived.	n/a	622	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/HuffPost/videos/506506989693453/">https://www.facebook.com/HuffPost/videos/506506989693453/</a>
4	8/16/2017 - 3:15 AM	Sesame Street and the International Rescue Committee join forces to help refugee children.	n/a	3500	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/HuffPost/videos/508540956156723/">https://www.facebook.com/HuffPost/videos/508540956156723/</a>
5	8/19/2017 - 4:15 PM	Sesame Street and the International Rescue Committee join forces to help refugee children.	n/a	2100	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/HuffPost/videos/vb.18468761129/510097956001023/?type=2&amp;theater">https://www.facebook.com/HuffPost/videos/vb.18468761129/510097956001023/?type=2&amp;theater</a>
6	8/24/2017 - 3:30 PM	Trump is threatening a government shutdown, and Democrats don't appear to be backing down.	Trump's Border Wall Could Cause a Government Shutdown	2000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/scruffy.bumpkiss/posts/109314033138874:87">https://www.facebook.com/scruffy.bumpkiss/posts/109314033138874:87</a>
7	8/24/2017 - 11:45 PM	n/a	103-Year-Old Cambodian Genocide Survivor Just Became A U.S. Citizen	1800	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/HuffPost/posts/10155339444401130">https://www.facebook.com/HuffPost/posts/10155339444401130</a>

8	8/25/2017 - 7:30 PM	It would mean nearly 800,000 people who came forward to the government, paid a fee and passed a background check would be at imminent risk of deportation.	Dreamers Vow To Fight Like Hell To Defend DACA Amid Rumors Trump Will End Program	1200	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/scruffy.bumpkiss/posts/109314033138874:85">https://www.facebook.com/scruffy.bumpkiss/posts/109314033138874:85</a>
9	8/27/2017 - 6:31 PM	"Eventually."	Trump Still Insists Mexico Will Pay For the Wall -- Eventually	2300	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/HuffPost/posts/10155349478826130">https://www.facebook.com/HuffPost/posts/10155349478826130</a>
10	8/28/2017 - 1:00 AM	The tunnel began in a building in Tijuana, Mexico.	30 Detainees Suspected Of Using Underground Tunnel To Illegally Enter U.S.	262	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/scruffy.bumpkiss/posts/109314033138874:83">https://www.facebook.com/scruffy.bumpkiss/posts/109314033138874:83</a>
11	8/28/2017 - 3:00 PM	"This statement is not part of a Mexican negotiating strategy, but rather a principle of national sovereignty and dignity."	Mexico To Trump: No, We're Definitely Not Paying For Your Border Wall	6000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/HuffPost/posts/10155352316521130">https://www.facebook.com/HuffPost/posts/10155352316521130</a>
12	8/29/2017 - 7:30 AM	At age 20, he was forced to join the Russian army and fight Nazi Germany. At age 31, he went to Canada as a refugee with nothing. At 97, he's still creating one-of-a-kind objects every day.	He Came to Canada As A Refugee With Nothing. Now 97, He's Still Creating	767	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/HuffPost/posts/10155354689876130">https://www.facebook.com/HuffPost/posts/10155354689876130</a>
13	8/31/2017 - 1:00 AM	The petition has amassed more than 15,000 signatures and counting.	Petition Urges Congress To Fund FEMA, Not Trump's Border Wall	26000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/HuffPost/posts/10155361818166130">https://www.facebook.com/HuffPost/posts/10155361818166130</a>
14	8/31/2017 - 3:30 AM	An injunction prevents a state law banning so-called sanctuary cities from taking effect.	Judge Blocks Texas Immigration Crackdown	2900	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/scruffy.bumpkiss/posts/109314033138874:79">https://www.facebook.com/scruffy.bumpkiss/posts/109314033138874:79</a>

15	8/31/2017 - 6:15PM	A federal court in Texas has blocked the state's attempt to outlaw so-called sanctuary cities. But the decision is only temporary, and signals more legal wrangling to come.	n/a	459	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/HuffPost/videos/516472495363569/">https://www.facebook.com/HuffPost/videos/516472495363569/</a>
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## APPENDIX D – MSNBC POSTS

Post #	Date/Time shared:	Post text:	Imbedded headline :	Number of Reactions:	URL
1	8/11/2017 - 3:40 AM	Democratic lawmakers are becoming increasingly worried about the possibility that Trump rescinds the DACA program in the coming weeks	Gutierrez on Trump Immigration Plan: 'It's going to get worse'	234	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1682917005137878">https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1682917005137878</a>
2	8/11/2017 - 7:30 PM	Rep. Luis Gutierrez (D-IL) tells Ari Melber that he thinks President Trump will rescind the DACA program before September 5.	Gutierrez on Trump Immigration Plan: 'It's going to get worse'	61	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1683749871721258">https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1683749871721258</a>
3	8/14/2017 - 12:00 AM	Rep. Luis Gutierrez (D-IL) tells Ari Melber that he thinks President Trump will rescind the DACA program before September 5.	Gutierrez on Trump Immigration Plan: 'It's going to get worse'	118	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1686334981462747">https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1686334981462747</a>
4	8/16/2017 - 9:06 PM	LIVE: Atty. Gen. Sessions and acting ICE Director Tom Homan discuss violent crime in sanctuary cities.	n/a	222	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1689765231119722">https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1689765231119722</a>
5	8/18/2017 - 4:20 PM	Rachel Maddow points out that anyone who paid attention during the campaign should not be surprised by Trump's response to the racist rally in Charlottesville.	If you're shocked by Trump racism, you weren't paying attention	2600	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1691810000915245">https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1691810000915245</a>
6	8/22/2017 - 4:00 PM	With racial tensions high after Charlottesville, will Trump return to the anti-immigrant rhetoric that commonly fires up his base?	Will Trump return to his old ways in Phoenix rally?	270	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1696382680457977">https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1696382680457977</a>
7	8/24/2017 - 7:30 PM	NBC correspondent Jacob Rascon talks to Texas ranchers and landowners about why they are hesitant to sell their land to build Pres. Trump's plans to build a wall. Watch.	Landowners in Texas react to Trump's border wall	536	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1699583850137860">https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1699583850137860</a>

8	8/24/2017 - 8:00 PM	Who's going to pay for the wall? ... Apparently taxpayers.	n/a	3100	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/videos/1699594160136829/">https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/videos/1699594160136829/</a>
9	8/25/2017 - 3:30 PM	Lawrence O'Donnell looks at just how much trouble the Trump White House had answering questions about Trump's very simple promise: Mexico will pay to build the border wall.	Lawrence: Trump 'embarrassed' Mexico won't pay for wall	1000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1701022083327370">https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1701022083327370</a>
10	8/25/2017 - 7:30 PM	"It became clearer today we're not getting a check from Mexico for the wall. In fact, the president is threatening his own party with a government shutdown." Brian Williams explains Trump's rationale for attacking members of his own party.	Trump reportedly ditching Hill Republicans to help himself later	1000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1701341453295433">https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1701341453295433</a>
11	8/25/2017 - 8:30 PM	Texas Gov. Greg Abbott says undocumented migrants will not have to show ID to receive Hurricane Harvey relief. "That will not be an issue. What everyone is focused on right now is ensuring that we do all we can to protect life."	n/a	2700	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/videos/1701358719960373/">https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/videos/1701358719960373/</a>
12	8/26/2017 - 12:00 AM	NBC News is reporting that President Trump appears likely to pull the plug on DACA, the Obama-era program that allows children who were brought to the U.S. illegally to remain in the country.	White House likely to end DACA immigration program	1300	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1701685383261040">https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1701685383261040</a>
13	8/27/2017 - 10:00 PM	What are the political, financial, and logistical hurdles the president faces in attempting to build the wall?	Trump threatens government shutdown over border wall	592	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1704416152987963">https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1704416152987963</a>

14	8/29/2017 - 2:01 PM	Trump is setting himself up for a major budget showdown: will Trump veto a budget that includes Hurricane Harvey disaster relief but doesn't fund his wall with Mexico?	Trump may be forced to choose: the wall, or Harvey victims?	1700	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1706829586079953">https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1706829586079953</a>
15	8/31/2017 - 7:01 PM	A federal judge has temporarily blocked Texas' anti-immigrant, "sanctuary cities" law.	Federal judge blocks Texas anti-immigrant sanctuary cities law	1300	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1710251735737738">https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1710251735737738</a>
16	8/31/2017 - 8:30 PM	More than half of Americans disapprove of President Trump's decision to pardon former Arizona sheriff Joe Arpaio, according to a new NBC News SurveyMonkey poll.	Poll: Most Americans oppose Arpaio pardon, booting 'DREAMERS'	776	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1710365205726391">https://www.facebook.com/msnbc/posts/1710365205726391</a>

## APPENDIX E – FOX NEWS POSTS

<b>Post #</b>	<b>Date/Time shared:</b>	<b>Post text:</b>	<b>Imbedded headline :</b>	<b>Number of Reactions:</b>	<b>URL</b>
1	8/1/2017 - 7:24 PM	"Sanctuary cities are doing good economically. Sanctuary cities are actually safer then non-sanctuary cities – and those are facts." - Former DNC Deputy Press Secretary Jose Aristimuno on 'Tucker Carlson Tonight' <a href="http://bit.ly/2uQ94Oy">http://bit.ly/2uQ94Oy</a>	n/a	28000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155755475316336/">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155755475316336/</a>
2	8/2/2017 - 8:00 AM	Greg Gutfeld On Alleged 'Sanctuary Rape' By Illegal Immigrant Read more: <a href="http://bit.ly/2u1OeNs">http://bit.ly/2u1OeNs</a>	n/a	4400	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155757298941336/">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155757298941336/</a>
3	8/2/2017 - 5:39 PM	WATCH: President Donald J. Trump announces support for 'merit-based' legal immigration bill with Senator David Perdue and Senator Tom Cotton. Live Blog: <a href="http://fxn.ws/2hnJCLT">http://fxn.ws/2hnJCLT</a>	n/a	9600	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155759330156336/">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155759330156336/</a>
4	8/3/2017 - 2:42 AM	"Let's let the best and the brightest come to the front of the line." On "The Story," Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach said people who want to enter the United States should be judged on a merit-based system. <a href="http://bit.ly/2ultYS4">http://bit.ly/2ultYS4</a>	n/a	4000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155761495671336/">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155761495671336/</a>



5	8/4/2017 - 7:41 PM	"We need the wall and we need better enforcement at the border and we need to be able to deport people rapidly who enter the country illegally." Attorney General Jeff Sessions sat down with Tucker Carlson during a trip to El Salvador to discuss ways to stop MS-13 gang members from entering the U.S. Watch more from Tucker Carlson Tonight: <a href="http://bit.ly/2v1Py yI">http://bit.ly/2v1Py yI</a>	n/a	39000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155769714341336/">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155769714341336/</a>
6	8/5/2017 - 8:30 AM	"Any time a liberal politician starts fear-mongering, you know you're on to something good." On "Fox & Friends," David Perdue discussed the RAISE Act and dismissed the protests of left-wing leaders like House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi.	n/a	3900	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155764004891336/">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155764004891336/</a>
7	8/6/2017 - 10:50 PM	"It's truly unfortunate that someone like Jim Acosta would want people to come to this country who couldn't speak the language to even read the poem on the Statue of Liberty." On "MediaBuzz," Katrina Pierson slammed Jim Acosta after the CNNreporter's tense back and forth with Stephen Miller over immigration.	n/a	4200	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155779032621336/">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155779032621336/</a>
8	8/7/2017 - 5:00 AM	"Bringing in low-skilled non-English speaking immigrants depresses wages for American workers here and explodes the welfare state." – Jesse Watters	n/a	12000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155779644881336/">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155779644881336/</a>

9	8/16/2017 - 9:04 PM	SANCTUARY CITIES: Attorney General Jeff Sessions makes remarks from Miami. Live Blog: <a href="http://fxn.ws/2wQzX3Z">http://fxn.ws/2wQzX3Z</a>	n/a	6800	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155830207696336/">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155830207696336/</a>
10	8/21/2017 - 7:30 AM	"You have to repeal and replace ObamaCare. You have to build the wall. You have to make sure tax reform gets done." In a far-ranging interview on "FOX & Friends Weekend," Corey Lewandowski talked about the state of the Trump presidency.	n/a	1200	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155851535691336/">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155851535691336/</a>
11	8/22/2017 - 1:15 AM	"Canada is an opening and welcoming society, but let me be clear. We are also a country of laws." Canadian PM Justin Trudeau is concerned about the growing number of mostly Haitian illegal immigrants leaving the U.S. in response to President Donald J. Trump's tough immigration policies.	A Country of Laws': Canada's Trudeau Sounds Alarm About Illegal Immigrants	42000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/scruffy.bumpkiss/posts/109314033138874:13">https://www.facebook.com/scruffy.bumpkiss/posts/109314033138874:13</a>
12	8/23/2017 - 6:00 AM	An illegal immigrant, who has been kicked out of the U.S. 15 times, is now facing charges for a hit-and-run crash that left a 6-year-old critically injured.	Emotional Testimony From Mother of Boy, 6, Critically Hurt in Crash Linked to Man Deported 15 Times	8600	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/posts/10155864506981336">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/posts/10155864506981336</a>
13	8/24/2017 - 2:03 AM	OPINION: "This President, so roundly derided as anti-Mexican and xenophobic, represents the best chance in decades at real, substantive immigration reform – and on 'America First' terms."	OPINION: Trump's Wall and immigration reform - Dreamers, deportations, and a deal?	4600	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/posts/10155869647146336">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/posts/10155869647146336</a>
14	8/24/2017 - 5:20 AM	A federal judge is expected to order the first known deported DREAMer to be allowed to return to the U.S. to make his case about why he should be able to stay in the country.	Immigrant Who Says He Was Wrongly Deported Could Be Brought Back to US for Trial	3400	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/posts/10155869618691336">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/posts/10155869618691336</a>

15	8/24/2017 - 12:00 PM	"I don't think most people want to see a government shutdown, ourselves included," House Speaker Paul Ryan spoke out against President Donald J. Trump's warning of a government shutdown if lawmakers don't pass a bill to pay for the U.S.-Mexico border wall.	Ryan Tamps Down Trump's Talk of Government Shutdown if No Border Wall	2400	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/posts/10155871245661336">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/posts/10155871245661336</a>
16	8/24/2017 - 2:00 PM	"I don't think a government shutdown is necessary, and I don't think most people want to see a government shutdown, ourselves included," House Speaker Paul Ryan said.	Ryan Tamps Down Trump's Talk of Government Shutdown if No Border Wall	1200	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/posts/10155871518521336">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/posts/10155871518521336</a>
17	8/24/2017 - 3:53 PM	"People understand that a sovereign nation needs physical borders." On "Fox & Friends," White House counselor Kellyanne Conway spoke about funding to build the border wall. <a href="http://bit.ly/2v8OjQ4">http://bit.ly/2v8OjQ4</a>	"This country has spent billions of dollars over the years helping other nations protect their own borders. It's high time we do it here" - Kellyanne Conway	39000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/photos/a.184044921335.134777.15704546335/10155871848016336/?type=3&amp;theater">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/photos/a.184044921335.134777.15704546335/10155871848016336/?type=3&amp;theater</a>
18	8/27/2017 - 11:00 AM	"Of course they went after Joe Arpaio, because he was doing the job that the Obama Administration officials in the federal government refused to do." On "Hannity," Michelle Malkin defended President Donald J. Trump's controversial pardon of Sheriff Joe Arpaio.	n/a	19000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155881894046336/">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155881894046336/</a>
19	8/27/2017 - 4:20 PM	Moments ago, President Donald J. Trump tweeted about his proposed wall on the border of the United States and Mexico.	"With Mexico Being One of the Highest crime Nations in the World, we must have THE WALL. Mexico will pay for it through reimbursement/	27000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/photos/a.184044921335.134777.15704546335/10155886947286336/?type=3">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/photos/a.184044921335.134777.15704546335/10155886947286336/?type=3</a>

			other." - @realDonaldTrump		
20	8/27/2017 - 7:07 PM	On "Watters' World," Katie Pavlich defended Sheriff Joe Arpaio's record and President Donald J. Trump's controversial pardon.	"The reason why [Joe Arpaio] had six terms as sheriff in that county is 'cause he was doing something about illegal immigration." - Katie Pavlich	46000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/photos/a.184044921335.134777.15704546335/10155887245686336/?type=3">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/photos/a.184044921335.134777.15704546335/10155887245686336/?type=3</a>
21	8/28/2017 - 8:00 AM	"The reason why [Joe Arpaio] had six terms as sheriff in that county is 'cause he was doing something about illegal immigration." On "Watters' World," Katie Pavlich defended Sheriff Arpaio's record and President Donald J. Trump's pardon.	n/a	16000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155887239616336/">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155887239616336/</a>
22	8/29/2017 - 6:30 AM	"We do not want anybody to be afraid to go to a shelter because they're afraid of being arrested by immigration authorities." A Customs and Border Protection official told reporters Monday that there will not be any "non-routine immigration enforcement" at shelters or evacuation sites for victims of Hurricane Harvey.	n/a	8600	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155894792146336/">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155894792146336/</a>

23	8/29/2017 - 9:00 AM	Border Patrol agents and law enforcement officers arrested 25 illegal immigrants, including 14 Colombian citizens, during a three-day checkpoint operation in central New Hampshire over the weekend.	Border Patrol Checkpoint in New Hampshire nets arrests of 25 illegal immigrants	54000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/posts/10155894596676336">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/posts/10155894596676336</a>
24	8/29/2017 - 9:30 AM	"He's done a great job for the people of Arizona. He is very strong on borders...I thought he was treated unbelievably unfairly." President Donald J. Trump blasted critics of his decision to pardon Sheriff Joe Arpaio, noting President Clinton pardoned or commuted the sentences of Marc Rich and a woman from the left-wing "Weather Underground" militant group. <a href="http://bit.ly/2vmFQsB">http://bit.ly/2vmFQsB</a>	n/a	15000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155894153946336/">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155894153946336/</a>
25	8/30/2017 - 11:51 PM	Protesters march to Trump Tower in support of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). President Donald J. Trump is expected to make a decision soon on the program that, in part, allows for thousands of young illegal immigrants to remain in the country. Read more: <a href="http://fxn.ws/2wTLN">http://fxn.ws/2wTLN</a>	n/a	10000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155904030456336/">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/videos/10155904030456336/</a>
26	8/31/2017 - 3:38 AM	BREAKING NEWS: A federal judge blocked enforcement of much of a "sanctuary cities" law in Texas on Wednesday night, just days before it was set to go into effect.	Federal judge blocks enforcement of Texas' 'Sanctuary Cities' law	10000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/posts/10155905267341336">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/posts/10155905267341336</a>
27	8/31/2017 - 8:02 PM	Breaking News: Fox News has learned President Donald J. Trump will end the "DACA" program as it	n/a	22000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/photos/a.184044921335.134777.1570454633">https://www.facebook.com/FoxNews/photos/a.184044921335.134777.1570454633</a>

		currently exists. <a href="http://fxn.ws/2em1xOw">http://fxn.ws/2em1x Ow</a>			5/101559082709563 36/?type=3
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## APPENDIX F – BREITBART POSTS

<b>Post #</b>	<b>Date/Time shared:</b>	<b>Post text:</b>	<b>Imbedded headline :</b>	<b>Number of Reactions:</b>	<b>URL</b>
1	8/4/2017 - 11:44 PM	Aside from pleasing special interests, does the GOP have any valid excuse not to support this?	n/a	25000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/videos/10159601675990354/">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/videos/10159601675990354/</a>
2	8/9/2017 - 7:07 PM	Could there be hope for some parts of Europe?	n/a	3300	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/videos/10159626513600354/">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/videos/10159626513600354/</a>
3	8/12/2017 - 1:01 PM	Slavery in the UK is rife, the NCA said, as analysts revealed the “migrant crisis” has driven Europe to record world's biggest slavery rise.	Migrant Crisis Drives Record Rise of Slavery in Europe: 'Every Town and City' Affected	844	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159640391175354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159640391175354</a>
4	8/19/2017 - 6:53 AM	A CEO who bailed on President Donald Trump’s now-defunct American Manufacturing Council imported foreign workers to take jobs in the United States.	Intel CEO Who Bailed on Trump Manufacturing Council Sought 8K H1-B Workers for U.S. Jobs	4600	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159675003175354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159675003175354</a>
5	8/19/2017 - 4:56 PM	The vast majority of Germans do not see migrants coming across the Mediterranean as legitimate refugees and want to see them deported.	Study: 70 Percent of Germans Would Send Mediterranean Migrants Back	4400	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159676654095354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159676654095354</a>

6	8/19/2017 - 8:28 PM	Bam.	Donald Trump's Immigration Reform Will Raise Wages, Jobs, Admits Business-Funded Group	5000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159677650035354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159677650035354</a>
7	8/19/2017 - 9:58 PM	BAM.	Exclusive - Kobach: It's Time to Stop Sanctuary Cities and Counties	3900	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159678069240354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159678069240354</a>
8	8/20/2017 - 1:40 AM	The news report rocking the state of Mississippi:	Illegal Alien Gets 40 Years in Prison for Getting His Daughter Pregnant	5300	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159678894610354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159678894610354</a>
9	8/20/2017 - 4:38 AM	President Donald Trump's populist "Hire American" policy is forcing employers to hire more Americans at higher wages, the globalist Wall Street Journal admits...	Winning: Companies Hire Americans Instead of Foreign Visa Workers	8000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159679615170354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159679615170354</a>
10	8/20/2017 - 6:11 AM	George Soros-funded puppet theater:	Soros-Funded Groups AstroTurf DACA Protests at White House	2400	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159679957525354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159679957525354</a>
11	8/20/2017 - 4:12 PM	Multiple asylum seekers crossing the border from the U.S. into Canada have been caught possessing child pornography...	Multiple Migrants Storming Canadian Border Found With Child	4500	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159681429460354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159681429460354</a>



			Pornography		
12	8/20/2017 - 4:59 PM	"There must always" be a flow low-skilled immigration to the United States, no matter its impact on American workers, said NeverTrump Senator Jeff Flake.	Jeff Flake: 'There Must Always' Be Low-Skilled Immigration to U.S.	5000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159681623450354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159681623450354</a>
13	8/22/2017 - 3:19 PM	Police say the incident occurred at the Hütteldorfer Bad swimming pool in the Austrian capital...	Syrian Accused of Sexually Molesting Ten-Year-Old in Vienna Swimming Pool	1000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159691872085354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159691872085354</a>
14	8/23/2017 - 2:41 AM	Moderate/globalist WH aides pushing President Donald Trump toward an immigration deal: make the border wall a "bargaining chip" for more amnesty.	McClatchy : Trump Aides Plot Big Immigration Deal - That Breaks a Campaign Promise	1500	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159694459645354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159694459645354</a>
15	8/24/2017 - 12:01 AM	An unacceptable disgrace.	Illegal Alien Deported 15 Times on Trial for Alleged Drunk Hit-and-Run	1600	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159698962845354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159698962845354</a>
16	8/24/2017 - 4:03 AM	But spending hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars on the costs illegal aliens incur on America isn't?!	Kamala Harris: Trump Border Wall 'Stupid Use of	6500	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159699761320354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159699761320354</a>

			Taxpayer Money'		
17	8/24/2017 - 11:31 PM	“The House already has passed funding including building physical barriers like a wall in the places that are necessary.”	Paul Ryan on Border Wall Funding: 'I Don't Think a Government Shutdown Is Necessary'	1100	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159705958815354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159705958815354</a>
18	8/25/2017 - 8:23 PM	Over and over and over....	Illegal Alien Arrested Three Days after Deportation	2300	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159710677375354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159710677375354</a>
19	8/25/2017 - 9:52 PM	Well, well, well...	Trudeau Rows Back on 'Refugees Welcome' as Quebec Hands Migrants \$2.6 Million a Month in Welfare - Breitbart	15000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159711149865354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159711149865354</a>
20	8/27/2017 - 4:56 AM	President Donald Trump may soon end the controversial DACA amnesty for almost 800,000 illegals...	Report: Donald Trump May End DACA Amnesty	7500	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159718382075354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159718382075354</a>

21	8/27/2017 - 2:36 PM	In between suppressing conservatives, Facebook is doing this:	EXPOSED : Facebook Hosts People Smuggling Ads and Illegal Migration Groups	4700	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159720378235354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159720378235354</a>
22	8/28/2017 - 12:47 AM	A think tank in Chicago, Illinois is pleading for more immigration to fill jobs in the cities hospitality industry while African-American youth in the inner-city remains higher than most other cities.	Chicago Group Pleads for Immigrants to Fill Jobs as Black Youth Remain Out of Work	2000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159723647810354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159723647810354</a>
23	8/28/2017- 7:08 PM	Wrong, Sherrod Brown. Illegal aliens have "no business" breaking the law.	Dem Sen Brown: Government Has 'No Business' Deporting Illegal Immigrants Who Have Been in the US for Years	5600	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159727618720354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159727618720354</a>
24	8/28/2017 - 7:58 PM	Report:	NBC: Donald Trump Likely to End Obama's DACA Amnesty	8700	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159727822450354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159727822450354</a>
25	8/29/2017 - 6:07 AM	Illinois' Republican Governor Bruce Rauner signed legislation shielding the nearly 500,000 illegal aliens from federal immigration law.	Illinois Republican Governor Signs Sanctuary State Law	10000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159730691115354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159730691115354</a>

26	8/29/2017 - 6:07 PM	BOOM.	Donald Trump: Mexico Will Pay for the Wall 'One Way or Another'	4200	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159733061630354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159733061630354</a>
27	8/29/2017 - 7:16 PM	Promise Made, Promise Kept.	Extreme Vetting' Coming Soon for Green Card Seekers	9700	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159733429390354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159733429390354</a>
28	8/31/2017 - 3:26 AM	A majority of Republican voters would support a government shutdown if it could deliver the Trump promise of a southern border wall.	POLL: Republican s Still Want the Wall, Even if it Means a Governme nt Shutdown	9400	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159742295220354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159742295220354</a>
29	8/31/2017 - 6:34 PM	Naming Names. Here are the 6 pro-amnesty Republicans publicly defending DACA:	Only 6 GOP Reps Publicly Defend DACA Amnesty	1500	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159745461745354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159745461745354</a>
30	8/31/2017 - 6:54 PM	Low-energy Jeb! shows signs of passion and vigor...for amnesty.	Jeb Bush Begs Donald Trump: 'Come to DACA's Defense'	2300	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159745544905354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159745544905354</a>
31	8/31/2017 - 10:14 PM	The German Prosecutor's Office claims they have received 1,000 criminal complaints accusing German Chancellor Angela Merkel of high treason.	Prosecuter s Have Rejected 1,000 High Treason Charges Against Merkel For Migrant Crisis Since 2015	2600	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159746544445354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159746544445354</a>

32	8/31/2017 - 10:54 PM	***BREAKING***	Report: Trump to End Obama-Era DACA Program	11000	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159746727590354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159746727590354</a>
33	8/31/2017 - 11:19 PM	On Thursday afternoon U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) announced the first four contractors that will build border wall prototypes in San Diego.	Concrete Border Wall Prototype Contractors Announced - Breitbart	6600	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159746831020354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159746831020354</a>
34	8/31/2017 - 11:50 PM	Want to create 700,000 American jobs in a snap? Here's how:	Zuckerberg Group Admits: 700,000 American Job Openings if DACA Ends	8400	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159746970335354">https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/posts/10159746970335354</a>

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

Born to native Michiganders in Lansing, Michigan, Ian moved with his family quickly down to the Washington DC metropolitan region and spent his formative years in Northern Virginia. Having traveled extensively with his family throughout the United States and Europe, as well as being a bit bookish, Ian has cultivated a profound interest in understanding the way in which varying peoples define themselves and their connections to one another, as well as to the spaces they inhabit. Building upon this profound interest, following his graduation from high school, Ian earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in German from Christopher Newport University and during this time spent a year studying the German language (as well as historical and contemporary issues affecting Central Europe and particularly Austria) in Salzburg, Austria. Never one to sit still, since completing his studies at Christopher Newport University, Ian has lived in worked in Boulder, Colorado, Santiago, Chile, and the Washington DC metro filling a number of roles from managing registration for a large event to teaching English as a foreign language. After a time however, Ian's interest in understanding the stories of peoples' and their interactions with one another led him to undertake and complete a dual Master's degree program earning an MS in Conflict Analysis and Resolution and an MA in Conflict Resolution and Mediterranean Security from George Mason University and the University of Malta respectively.

Looking to continue developing his understanding of more tangible security related issues, upon completion of his Masters' degrees Ian has undertaken an internship at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany to work in cyber security with the Program on Cyber Security Studies (PCSS). Marrying his current work at the Marshall Center to his studies, Ian is particularly interested in further developing his understanding of the role of cyber space as an arena for information warfare, especially as it relates to how conflicting messages are taken up and communicated within and across varying groups/nations.