POLITICAL COMPETITION IN THE AGE OF SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis has written to illustrate the impact of un-regulated Surveillance Capitalism in liberal democracies. Surveillance Capitalism refers to the business model of technology platforms and social media companies. In this thesis, the Surveillance Capitalism business model in liberal democracies is used to drive implications for politics. In line with the democratic backsliding literature, four casual mechanisms are formulized that potentially deteriorate the qualities of democratic governance in liberal democracies. The mechanisms are quality of competition, foreign interference, disinformation, and political polarization. The mechanisms affect the qualities associated with democratic politics; they are not decisive in triggering democratic backsliding. This thesis used the 2016 U.S. Presidential election and BREXIT as cases to illustrate how foreign and domestic actors use digital platforms for deteriorating the qualities of democratic governance. The findings suggest that unregulated Surveillance Capitalism can trigger a new form of democratic backsliding in liberal democracies by eroding the democratic norms. Also, this thesis is among the few scholarly articles that tie the Surveillance Capitalism framework to democratic backsliding literature. One of the primary contributions of this thesis will be showing the non-state actors role in triggering democratic backsliding, thus covering a vital gap in democratic backsliding literature.

ÖZET

GÖZETIM KAPITALIZMI ÇAĞINDA SIYASI REKABET

ARA EGE ALTINMAN

SİYASET BİLİMİ YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ, TEMMUZ 2022

Tez Danışmanı: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Berk Esen

Bu tez, regüle edilmeyen Gözetim Kapitalizmin liberal demokrasilerde yarattığı etkiyi incelemektedir. Gözetim Kapitalizmi günümüzün teknoloji ve sosyal medya şirketlerinin iş modelleri için kullanılan bir kavram. Bu tez, teknoloji şirketlerinin iş modellerinin liberal demokrasilerde yarattığı siyasi sonuçları incelemektedir. Demokratik gerileme literatürüne bağlı kalarak bu tez dört farklı mekanizma ortaya koymaktadır. Bu mekanizmalar; siyasi rekabetin kalitesinde azalma, dış müdahale, dezenformasyon ve siyasi kutuplaşmadır. Bu mekanizmalar demokrasinin kalitesini düşürmekte ve bu sebepten demokratik gerileme yaratmaktadır. Ortaya konulan mekanizmaları empirik bulgular ile desteklemek için 2016 A.B.D Başkanlık seçimleri ve BREXIT referandumu vaka çalışmaları olarak kullanıldı. Bulgular regüle edilmeyen Gözetim Kapitalizminin, liberal demokrasilerde demokratik gerilemeye yol açabileceği yönündedir. Aynı zamanda, bu tez demokratik gerileme literatürü ve Gözetim Kapitalizmi arasında ilişki kurması ile az sayıdaki çalışma arasındadır. Bu tezin ana katkılarından biri de siyasi olmayan aktörlerin demokratik gerileme yaratabilme potansiyellerini ortaya koyarak, demokratik gerileme literatüründe pek fazla üzerinde durulmayan bir noktaya ışık tutmaktır.

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Lastly, to my father, Ari Altınman, thank you for everything you went through while you were raising me. From you, I learned humility, patience, and durability. It is a great honor and privilege to be your son, and may your soul rest in peace.

Dedicated to
Ari Altınman

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1. INTRODUCTION

"Thank God to the internet, thank god to social media, and thank god to Facebook"-Matteo Salvini, victory speech in 2018 (Stefano 2018).

In the recent decade, social media and the internet have increasingly become a critical environment where voters engage with politics (Kreiss and Mcgregor 2017). Masses have increasingly relied upon to internet to gather information about political issues. Mainstream media, which has been the gatekeeper of campaign discourse, had been losing ground for some time, even before the rise of the internet (Persily 2017). In the U.S, 86 percent of the population turn to their smart-phones, tablets, and computers to engage with the news (Auxier and Anderson 2022). That makes the internet an important environment where public opinion is influenced and formed. Hence, digital platforms are virtual environments where public opinion is formed and shaped. However, this shift towards the digital realm came with consequences because, unlike conventional media, digital platforms are designed to prioritize some content over others because of their business model (Donovan 2021). The outlets prioritized viral news before the internet, but in the digital realm, there is a systematic effort to curate what users are encountering based on their personal data. Hence it is essential to have a broader understanding of technology companies' business models, considering the increase reliability of the masses in this new industry.

Technology companies have increased their influence drastically in recent decades, gaining social and political power. Big data became the oil of this new industry, and this new market is referred as "Surveillance Capitalism" (Zuboff 2015). It is a new market logic that depends on accumulating massive amounts of private information about the users. Eventually, big data transformed socio-economic order and commercialized people's private experiences for economic and political benefits (Constantiou and Kallinikos 2015). It started as a commercial practice, but this new phenomenon integrated into politics over time. This academic work investigates the impact of unregulated Surveillance Capitalism in liberal democracies and ties these

implications to the democratic backsliding literature.

The field is still new and developing; therefore, few articles explicitly focus on linking the dynamics of Surveillance Capitalism to the mechanism of democratic backsliding. Hence, the primary motivation behind this thesis is to fill that gap by contributing to the developing field.

This thesis focuses on liberal democracies, to be more precise, the United Kingdom and the United States. The causal mechanisms provided below show how the business model of Surveillance Capitalism can cause democratic backsliding in liberal democracies. Other academically written articles focus on the interaction between Surveillance Capitalism and politics. Still, there aren't many concentrating on connecting the business model to the democratic backsliding literature in liberal democracies.

Therefore contributing to the literature on democratic backsliding by using the Surveillance Capitalism framework is the primary motivation behind this work.

Four mechanisms potentially deteriorate the qualities of democratic politics due to Surveillance Capitalism; the quality of competition, foreign interference in domestic politics, disinformation, and polarization. The mechanisms affect the qualities associated with democratic politics; they are not decisive in triggering democratic backsliding. The mechanisms are as follows:

The first one is the decline in the quality of competition. In return for profit, Surveillance Capitalists offer politically manipulative points of their users (Zuboff 2015). Political actors can target potential voters with campaign messages that aren't necessarily factual (Silverman and Alexander 2019). It enables campaigns to zero in on potential voters and target them with messages that most likely resonate with them (Gorton 2016; Silverman and Alexander 2019). This practice is hazardous for electoral integrity due to the menu of manipulation that political actors could use. Moreover, micro-targeted messages potentially deteriorate voters' and institutions' capacity to impose accountability on political actors.

Secondly, foreign interference implies the impact of international actors on domestic politics. One way in which this mechanism deteriorates the democratic quality is by enabling foreign governments to purchase micro-targeted political messages that are manipulative and deepen existing cleavages in society (Nadler, Crain, and Donovan 2018). Put differently, Surveillance Capitalism's profit imperative is selling the maximum amount of micro-targeted advertisement to ad-buyers; this can be exploited by foreign actors eager to meddle with the electoral process. This practice was employed by an authoritarian government (Russia in this case) to interfere with the

electoral process during the 2016 U.S electoral cycle and BREXIT (Vaidhyanathan 2018*a*).

Disinformation is another causal mechanism combusted with Surveillance Capitalism. It implies the negative consequences of data maximization and the pay-per-click feature of internet companies. Consequently, the business model prioritizes content that is designed to hook users' attention to the platform rather than providing factual information. Attention is a scarce resource; therefore, social media platforms prioritize seductive content, conspiracy theories, click-baits, and extremist information, due to the higher engagement it receives (Wu 2018). Eventually, information disorder disrupts the quality of democracy and social cohesion (Schirch 2021) by damaging people's ability to assess politics and exposing users to misleading content (Butcher 2019).

Lastly, political polarization can exacerbate due to the operational principles of social media algorithms. The causal mechanism implies that social media companies' engagement-based algorithms are prioritizing content that polarizes users (Horwitz and Seetharaman 2020) ; eventually, additional polarization can harm democratic governance by incentives voters to support extreme candidates (Svolik 2019) or making compromises among policymakers less likely (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018). This mechanism doesn't suggest that social media algorithms are the primary reason behind political polarization, but algorithms that operate with engagement-based ranking exacerbate political polarization (Barrett, Hendrix, and Sims 2021).

Overall, these mechanisms are combusted due to the business model of Surveillance Capitalism and potentially cause democratic erosion.

1.1 Understanding The Surveillance Capitalism

"Given what we now know, I believe a situation like the present one was inevitable. For decades, a shift occurred in how consumers interacted with companies. The interaction used to be quite simple: Company gives us the product, and we give the company money. It was typically impersonal and arms-length. Then digital marketing came into existence, and new companies arose with a new formula: They give us technological products and services, not in exchange for money, but in exchange for intimate details about ourselves that we are willing to share. It is our photos, thoughts, emotions, and connections. These things become valuable to companies, and they use this information to monetize

us to their actual clients: Advertisers. We became the product" (United States Senate 2018).

The statement above belongs to Dr.Alexander Kogan, one of the architects (Dr. Kogan provided the data) of the famous Cambridge Analytica (Political consultancy firm employed by the 2016 Trump campaign) scandal. According to former Cambridge Analytica employees, the firm harvested 50-90 million users' data in the U.S without their consent, "making it one of the largest data leaks in the social network's history" (The Guardian 2017). Consequently, it led to a massive backlash against Facebook (Vaidhyanathan 2018*b*). Cambridge Analytica allegedly used the data to micro-target the U.S electorate to boost Donald Trump's presidential claim in 2016. In his statement (United States Senate 2018), Dr. Kogan argued that he was unaware of the operations. According to Christopher Wylie (Cambridge Analytica's former chief data scientist and whistleblower), the company harvested Facebook data from millions of people's profiles and build models to "target their inner demons", former chief data scientist refer his former company as "full service propaganda machine" (The Guardian 2017).

On the other hand, Dr. Kogan stated, "In the end, approximately 30 million personality profiles based on this information, plus a limited amount of demographic data and certain likes, were transferred". The number Mr. Kogan stated is disputed. It is estimated that nearly 50-90 million Facebook users' data is transferred without permission (Bump 2018). Cambridge Analytica attempted to identify people's personality traits to predict what kind of message is most likely to persuade people (Zuiderveen Borgesius et al. 2018). In other words, users are targeted by their private experiences, online activities, and preferences. In the following years, allegations against the violation of campaign laws and data privacy were investigated and persecuted (Federal Trade Commission 2019).

However, the whole episode is one of the many outcomes resulting from what Dr.Kogan reveals above, which is the shift that occurred in the interaction of consumers and firms. What Dr.Kogan summarizes above is Surveillance Capitalism in a nutshell.

Surveillance Capitalism is a term that is coined by Harvard Business School Professor. Shoshana Zuboff. According to Zuboff, Surveillance Capitalism is "a rogue mutation of capitalism marked by concentrations of wealth, knowledge, and power unprecedented in human history... It is a new economic order that claims human experience as free raw material for hidden commercial practices of extraction, predic-

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tion, and sales; a parasitic economic logic in which the production and sales depend on a behavioral modification of the users" (Zuboff 2018). Zuboff theorizes contemporary internet companies' profit model as the process of extraction of consumers' data and, through complex algorithms commodifying its user's private experience for commercial purposes. This new logic of accumulation is operationalized to produce targeted advertising (Zuboff 2018); after all, the digitalization of surveillance has drastically altered the nature of advertising (Foster and McChesney 2014). In this new phase of capitalism, the extraction of personal information and behavioral targeting has become the playbook. By 2022, 5 of the 10 largest corporations in the world, Apple, Amazon, Alphabet, Meta, and Microsoft are Surveillance Capitalists; and the essence of Surveillance Capitalism is what made these companies monopolies in capital accumulation (Foster and McChesney 2014) and the wealthiest corporations in the world.

Based on this understanding, the capital is used to extract consumers' data which Zuboff refers to as "behavioral surplus." (Zuboff 2018). Behavioral surplus is the data extracted to improve platform services and analyze users' private experience on the given platform. For example, Facebook's behavioral surplus is "the biographical data, records of interactions with others, the text of their posts, location (through Facebook apps on mobile phones equipped with GPS features), and the "social graph"—a map of the relationships among items on Facebook (photos, videos, news stories, advertisements, groups, pages, and the profiles of its 2.2 billion users) beyond the data that Facebook gathers from its core services (Facebook, Messenger, Instagram, WhatsApp, etc.), it allows other firms to connect to Facebook directly through a service called Open Graph. Open Graph is how the music service Spotify interacts with Facebook, using Facebook user names and passwords to enroll and log in to the service" (Vaidhyanathan 2018*a*). It is a complex web that operates as a surveillance machine to gather vast amounts of data containing intimate user details.

Surveillance Capitalism started with the discovery of behavioral surplus; it is the data extracted by the internet companies not just to improve their services but to analyze it and, through algorithms, predict human behavior (Zuboff 2018). Behavioral surplus consists of users' experience on the internet; it is the search history, likes, comments, group membership, shopping habits, and many more. Machine intelligence harvests behavioral surplus into "prediction products" that forecast the present and future behavior (Zuboff 2018). Finally, prediction products are sold into a new kind of market that trades exclusively in future behavior. Any actor interested in purchasing probabilistic information about users' behavior or influencing future behavior can make the purchase (Zuboff 2018). In other words, prediction products

are the commodity sold to businesses that are eager to invest their advertising budget to the most receptive audience. The profit model of these technology companies depends on the extraction of this surplus. Hence, the model aims to accumulate the maximum amount of data so that the algorithms can predict human behavior more accurately (Zuboff 2015).

Google and Facebook primarily rely on data collection and analysis to generate revenue; however, the entire accumulation of information is portrayed as "developing users experience" (Vaidhyanathan 2018a). However, in Surveillance Capitalism, users are not the customers; hence it is misleading to portray the entire operation as a mission to develop the user experience. Only customers are advertisers(i.e. businesses); thus, digital platforms are adjusting their services to provide the best user experience for advertisers. Hence success depends on platforms' capability to attract their main clients: commercial and political advertisers (Nadler, Crain, and Donovan 2018).

As The Economist suggests, we are entering the age of "data economics," where the data are much more valuable than oil (The Economist 2017). Data is essential for generating micro-targeted advertisements. It is a form of online targeting that uses big data (Zuboff 2018) to find recipients and deliver the deliberately created message to users. In other words, the data from users' private experiences (Zuboff 2018) is analyzed to generate targeted messages that reflects person's preferences (Constantiou and Kallinikos 2015). It is possible because of the developments in artificial intelligence technology and big data that contain private experiences (Matz and Sandra 2019).However, micro-targeting accuracy depends on the amount of data a company possesses. That makes Google and Facebook extremely wealthy by providing this sort of service to businesses. In 2020 Google generated 146$ billion in advertisement revenue while Facebook earned 84$ billion from ads (Donovan 2021).

On the other hand, online political micro-targeting involves accumulating personal information and using that information to expose voters to targeted political advertisements (Zuiderveen Borgesius et al. 2018). This thesis focuses on the political implications of Surveillance Capitalism. Therefore, the main focus is analyzing the use of micro-targeted political advertisements in politics.

1.2 Methodology

This thesis employs process tracing and case study to illustrate the impact of unregulated Surveillance Capitalism in liberal democracies. Since this thesis is motivated by generating theory, it is feasible to employ a comparative case study because these studies are informative and explanatory (Gerring 2004). Comparative case studies cover two or more cases to produce generalizable causal mechanisms by identifying similarities, patterns, and differences across the units (Goodrick 2014). Employing cases representative of the phenomena under investigation helps propose causal mechanisms (Gerring 2004). Therefore, this thesis employed the United States and the United Kingdom as two cases to formalize causal mechanisms that can trigger democratic backsliding.

Also, this thesis employs process tracing to illustrate the negative impacts of unregulated Surveillance Capitalism in liberal democracies. Process tracing is a helpful method for scholars conducting case analysis with qualitative data to propose descriptive causal mechanisms (Collier 2011). Process tracing is beneficial for describing political phenomena and evaluating causal claims (Collier 2011). Process tracing helps assess causal mechanisms for specific cases and peculiar outcomes (Mahoney 2012). Therefore, this thesis employs process tracing with the comparative case study method to illustrate the impact of unregulated Surveillance Capitalism on democratic backsliding. The arguments in this thesis are formulized for U.S and U.K cases.

On the other hand, Surveillance Capitalism has multiple implications across different cases; this academic work only focuses on a limited part because it employs few cases. The causal mechanisms are operationalized in specific cases; hence, the generalizability of the theoretical framework can be problematic (Bennett and Checkel 2015). However, employing process tracing to investigate events and their outcomes within the Surveillance Capitalism and democratic backsliding framework can positively contribute to the causal mechanisms that are proposed in this thesis. Because the process tracing method helps researchers identify causal mechanisms and then make causal inferences from the cases under investigation (Mahoney 2012).

1.3 Case Selection

As already indicated, this thesis investigates the impact of unregulated surveillance capitalism on deteriorating the qualities of democratic politics. This thesis relies on a detailed study of the United States and United Kingdom cases in recent years. In order to illustrate the effect of unregulated surveillance capitalism on democratic politics, this thesis employs the methods of comparative case study and process tracing. First, the cases require justification; even though the field is still new and developing, plenty of cases could have been employed to provide empirical evidence. This thesis used the 2016 U.S Presidential election and BREXIT as cases to illustrate how foreign and domestic actors use digital platforms for political, social, and economic gains (Manirambona 2019). Other cases could have been employed to illustrate the impact of unregulated Surveillance Capitalism on deteriorating the qualities associated with politics.

One such case is India which is referred to as a pioneer in using Surveillance Capitalism with state resources (Khan 2021). The main reason behind this pioneering is India's political economy which heavily invested in information technologies after the 1990s that lay the foundation of better operational capabilities for Surveillance Capitalist platforms. This interaction between the state of India and technology companies is referred to as the "data-state" (Khan 2021), where the political economy is fused with digital capitalism. India offers a rich pile of evidence regarding the impact of Surveillance Capitalism on democratic politics because state resources are allocated to create a double movement with the Western-based technology companies' business model (Khan 2021). However, this thesis focuses on potential democratic backsliding in liberal democracies. Hence it makes India unique among the other cases that are investigated.

Other cases, like China and Russia, show close ties between Surveillance Capitalist platforms and the state. In China, the model is referred to as "surveillance state capitalism" (Lin and Milhaupt 2021), where the surveillance capitalist platforms' business model of data extraction, surveillance, and exposure to political messages are in the service of the Communist Party (Chan and Kwok 2021). This mutated version of Surveillance Capitalism in China dominantly serves as another authoritarian tool to further assure one-party rule. The social credit system of China, which ranks the citizens based on loyalty to the party-state by giving them points, is one such example (Sangiovanni 2019). The ranking initiative has been operationalized by surveilling the citizens on the internet, where the platforms inform users who have opposing views to the Communist Party; in return, technology companies can

avoid regulations and exclusion (Chan and Kwok 2021). Another mutated version of Surveillance Capitalism has been operationalized in Russia, referred to as the "hybrid-version of Surveillance Capitalism" (Østbø 2021). Sber Bank and the Russian government relationship proposed as an example that illustrates a "hybrid-version of Surveillance Capitalism" (Østbø 2021). In this version of Surveillance Capitalism, state resources have been allocated to support actors loyal to Kremlin, and actors are offering technologies to the incumbent that can be used to eliminate opposition further. This service includes generating data, computational means to analyze the data, and prediction of future behavior (Østbø 2021). Eventually, the operation benefits both parties; the authoritarian government arms itself with additional tools that ensure the regime's endurance. In return, Surveillance Capitalist platforms gain profit and access to state resources. However, compared with the Chinese case, Surveillance Capitalists in Russia enjoy more independence from the state. However, the hybrid nature of the business model dictates close relations with the state but is not as integrated in China (Cinnamon 2017). The association appears two-way rather than complete state control over the platform.

This thesis aims to generate theories to illustrate the impact of unregulated Surveillance Capitalism on democratic politics in liberal democracies. Therefore, cases such as China and Russia are beyond the scope of this thesis because neither the version of Surveillance Capitalism in those countries fits this thesis's theoretical framework nor the current regime type. Since this thesis aims to tie the business model of technology companies to democratic backsliding, it requires cases ruled with liberal democratic governance. Neither China nor Russia is a democracy; they are authoritarian regimes. On the other hand, India offers a rich pile of evidence on Surveillance Capitalism and its interaction with politics (Khan 2021). However, the state's resources played a crucial role in India's Surveillance Capitalism business model; it is adopted as a political economy model (Khan 2021). Therefore, state resources' function in integrating Surveillance Capitalism makes India unique, among other cases. Hence the integration of Surveillance Capitalism as a state policy distorts the causal mechanism proposed in this thesis because this thesis approaches technology platforms as independent actors from the state. India's decision to integrate the Surveillance Capitalism business model is beyond the scope of this thesis. Also, this thesis investigates the impact of unregulated Surveillance Capitalism on liberal democracies. Therefore U.S and U.K are examined by this thesis to generate theories on the effects of unregulated Surveillance Capitalism on democratic politics. Even though IDEA's Global State of Democracy 2021 report classified the United States as a backsliding democracy for the first time (Berger 2021), it has a long tradition of being a liberal democracy. Another difference between the two cases is data privacy

laws. In the U.S, there aren't any federal privacy laws regulating technology companies' data extraction operations and micro-targeting features; hence companies could do whatever they like with the citizens' private information (Klosowski 2021). Instead, various privacy laws regulate specific data types, such as credit information or insurance reports (Klosowski 2021).

On the other hand, before BREXIT, the United Kingdom was part of the European Union General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). After the BREXIT, E.U regulation no longer applies to the U.K however, Westminster incorporated EU GDPR into U.K laws (Information Commissioner Office). In other words, data privacy laws of the E.U are kept in the United Kingdom regulatory code, but European Union no longer regulates it. This brings controversy to the U.S case because the U.K has ratified a general data protection law against privacy violations. But this thesis mainly investigates the 2016 U.S Presidential Election and the 2016 BREXIT referendum. It is worth remembering that GDPR was adopted in 2016 but became effective after 2018, technology companies have a two-year time period to prepare for the new regulations (Burgess 2021) Hence, the time this thesis investigates coincides with less effective GDPR imposition on technology platforms.

Additionally, even though GDPR was a huge step forward in protecting citizens' privacy, there is still controversy around the effectiveness of the law due to the difficulty of acting quickly and imposing penalties on big-tech (Burgess 2021) It is worth remembering without the extraction of personal data at a maximum rate; the Surveillance Capitalism business model would fail to operate with precision. Because micro-targeted advertisements would lose their accuracy, and businesses might reallocate their advertisement budget.

Another reason behind these units is the rich pile of evidence generated by academic work, judicial efforts, and investigative journalism. Unfortunately, much of the knowledge about these technology companies(i.e, Surveillance Capitalists) depends on secret recordings, leaked documents, and whistleblowers; hence there aren't many academically written articles that employ statistically measurable methods that illustrate the impact of these companies. However, the business model of Surveillance Capitalism is similar in other countries, especially before 2018, when these companies operated with no regulation (Zuboff 2015). Therefore one could argue that if unregulated Surveillance Capitalism causes democratic erosion in these two advanced democracies where institutions are capable of regulating polity, in less advanced democracies, it could even trigger a democratic breakdown.

Surveillance Capitalists under investigation are dominantly technology companies; Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google, and Microsoft. Amazon, Alibaba, Tencent,

Badiu, and Palantir are also big players; these technology companies, like the others, adopted the extraction of private experience with surveillance assets as a business model to profit (Chan and Kwok 2021). However, these companies don't offer micro-targeting features to advertisers like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Google. The causal mechanisms proposed in this thesis cover the negative effect of micro-targeted advertisements. Therefore, this thesis adopts the companies that are offering micro-targeting advertisement services.

Even though there are numerous other cases where Surveillance Capitalism interacts with politics, this academic work focuses on the United States and the United Kingdom for the reasons stated above. Big tech platforms such as Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, Facebook, Google, and TikTok are operating in other liberal democracies; it is beyond the scope of this peace to investigate other cases. Additionally, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Google are active intermediaries in politics by working closely with political campaigns in the U.S (Kreiss and Mcgregor 2017). Political actors are the 2016 Trump and Clinton Campaigns, BREXIT Leave Campaign, Kremlin-affiliated Internet Research Agency(IRA), Cambridge Analytica, and Aggregate I.Q. (AIQ).

2.   THEORETICAL CHAPTER

2.1 Literature On Surveillance Capitalism

This thesis employs the Surveillance Capitalism framework and ties it to democratic backsliding literature, hence aims to fill in an important gap in the literature. Democratic backsliding is a process of eliminating and deteriorating political institutions that protects democracy by the elected officials (Bermeo 2016). It is a process where democracies become less and less democratic by unlawful acts (Corrales 2020). Politicians with authoritarian leanings exploit the process that brought them to government by assaulting institutions and norms; it is not an imminent breakdown but a gradual erosion (Haggard and Kaufman 2021). In other words, authoritarian-leaning actors are subverting democracy by rallying some portion of their electorate; hence it is unlike the assaults in the past. Since the end of the Cold War, it is no longer men with guns, but civilian politicians are bending the norms and institutions that hold democracy (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2019). In other words, military coups or other imminent breakdowns of regimes are in decline, and elected officials' gradual dismantling of checks and balances are on the rise (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019). Therefore it brings an additional challenge to implement checks and balances for the incumbent. Because it is a gradual process that happens slowly, it is challenging for the opposition to pinpoint an event to call for action. For example, election day fraud was a recurring event that abolished democratic regimes; however, since 1990, electoral manipulation has taken a new form that is hard to "catch and criticize" (Bermeo 2016). One of the new features that experts observe is the manipulation of elections strategically. Strategic electoral manipulation is tilting the electoral playing field to the incumbent's advantage.

Hence it is difficult to establish a general framework to analyze democratic backsliding. One of the most widely accepted definitions comes from David Waldner and Ellen Lust. Scholars argue that: "Backsliding entails a deterioration of quali-

ties associated with democratic governance, in democratic regime it is a decline in the quality of democracy" (Waldner and Lust 2018). Scholars argue that backsliding occurs when accountability, participation, and competition deteriorates due to a discontinuous series of incremental actions, but not a total breakdown. It is a decline in the quality of democratic governance.

On the other hand, Nancy Bermeo measures democratic backsliding by executive aggrandizement, promissory coups, and strategic election manipulation (Bermeo 2016). In summary, it is challenging to come up with a "readily available set of theories that we as a community can uncontroversially adopt, adapt, and apply to the problem of backsliding" (Waldner and Lust 2018).

Nonetheless, most of the democratic backsliding literature focuses on state actors and non-state actors' likely impact on democratic politics left out (Anisin 2022). Hence, one of the contributions of the thesis will be showing the potential effects of Surveillance Capitalists on democratic politics. In other words, the arguments in this thesis are empirical evidence regarding the role of non-state actors in democratic backsliding, thus covering a vital gap in democratic backsliding literature. As influential democratic backsliding scholars (Haggard and Kaufman 2021). emphasized the role of social media as a critical combust on the diffusion of disinformation that triggers backsliding. Scholars argue that "it is important to extend and deepen the debate over how to disincentive the destructive tendencies of large social media companies that profit from circulating disinformation, misinformation and hate speech" (Haggard and Kaufman 2021). However, these remarks were noted in the conclusion section of their article. Nonetheless, it shows the awareness regarding the impact of the business model of social media companies on deteriorating the qualities of democratic politics.

The digitalization of politics attracts a considerable amount of scholarly attention. Because of the digital media, the nature of information flow has changed; with the rise of the Internet, political actors and states have learned that the flow of information online can be shaped (Miller and Vaccari 2020). As online political advertising has grown, the resources that are allocated to digital have increased. These developments are coupled with new communication methods relevant to the online political advertisement (Miller and Vaccari 2020). On the other hand, among democracies, digitalization of politics doesn't necessarily imply relevant outcomes. Humprecht and colleagues conducted one such study; they theorized that the public resilience to disinformation-loaded content depends "on the political environment (specifically, high levels of societal polarization and the success of populist political actors), the media environment (low trust in news, weak public service media,

and high audience fragmentation), and the economic environment (large size of the digital advertising market and high levels of social media use)" (Humprecht, Esser, and Van Aelst 2020). The authors operationalized their theory with cross-national data sets, revealing considerable variation in estimated resilience to disinformation. Therefore, the digitalization of politics, and exposure to political information online, have different consequences across democracies. The use of digital media by coordinated groups to spread extreme messages appears to be another potential threat to democracy. Myanmar is one such case where Facebook played a controversial role in enabling hate speech against Rohingya Muslim minorities (Whitten-Woodring et al. 2020). Even thought Myanmar is an authoritarian regime it shows the destructive consequences of coordinated online propaganda efforts.

In recent years the field started to attract scholarly attention that investigated the Surveillance Capitalism framework by employing different cases to analyze the role of big data, surveillance, and micro-targeting in politics. Russia's Syber Bank is proposed as a company that shows the hybrid nature of Surveillance Capitalism, where the state and non-state actor collaborates to extract and generate data to eliminate opposition further and make an additional profit (Østbø 2021). Another authoritarian country that uses Surveillance Capitalism is China, referred to as "surveillance-state-capitalism" (Lin and Milhaupt 2021). Scholars argue that China's social credit system, a significant data initiative that employs means of Surveillance Capitalism, monitors corporations in the basis of loyalty to the party-state (Lin and Milhaupt 2021). In this case, the surveillance state uses the business model to reward the cronies and punish the actions that aren't in line with the party-state apparatus. Even though, in the Chinese case, Surveillance Capitalist platforms established a collaborative spirit with the party to avoid regulations, political dynamics are complicated due to Beijing's anti-monopoly rules and data security concerns (Chan and Kwok 2021). India is another case that attracted scholarly attention. After 2010 internet increasingly became an environment used to extract users' private data, and India was a pioneer in Surveillance Capitalism (Khan 2021). It was possible due to political economy of India that heavily invested in information technologies after the 1990s, which enabled Surveillance Capitalism to flourish further in the country, which is referred to as the "data-state" (Khan 2021).

With the Covid-19 pandemic, authors recently focused on the EU government's cooperation with Surveillance Capitalists to monitor and quarantine populations by-passing democratic principles and constitutional boundaries (Anisin 2022). The Surveillance Capitalism business model is also argued to be creating an "asymmetrical accumulation of data" (Cinnamon 2017) where the users are increasingly becoming voiceless against corporate practices. Accumulating private information

and algorithmic identification without users' consent is argued to establish a sort of misrecognition and categorization (Cinnamon 2017). Eventually, information asymmetry further alienates users with their personal information which can be sold to political entities that could manipulate the electoral process (Sangiovanni 2019).

Another influential work is done by Anthony Nadler, Matthew Crain, and Joan Donovan, who argue that with the increasing use of surveillance and targeting technologies, there is a threat of weaponization of this technology. They refer to the infrastructure that Surveillance Capitalists create as "Digital Influence Machine" (Nadler, Crain, and Donovan 2018); by monitoring consumers, targeting customized audiences and optimizing messages, scholars argue that political actors can now target vulnerabilities of individuals to strategically influence them.

Extensive work also shows the impact of micro-targeted political advertisements on voter manipulation and the spread of disinformation (Gorton 2016; Zuiderveen Borgesius et al. 2018). These works focus on the rise of digital campaigning methods and extensive use of micro-targeted political advertisements and their role in shaping public opinion.

Christopher Wylie, a whistleblower from Cambridge Analytica, gave an interview to investigative journalist Carole Cadwalladr that shed light on consultant firms' practices that use Surveillance Capitalism's perils; there are extensive journalistic accounts on the role of Cambridge Analytica and Aggregate IQ in the 2016 U.S election and, to some extent, BREXIT (The Guardian 2018).

After the news broke out, there were major parliamentary and judiciary inquiries to investigate the role of internet companies. Inquiries were mostly conducted to analyze data privacy issues, manipulation by online information, and foreign intervention in domestic politics (United States Senate 2018; Manirambona 2019; House of Commons 2019). An extensive amount of academic work, journalistic accounts, and judiciary efforts concentrated on Russia's intervention in the electoral process of the United States and the United Kingdom. Kremlin-affiliated, St. Petersburg-based Internet Research Agency(IRA) used trolls(social media accounts that are created for manipulative ends) and bots (automated accounts) to diffuse disinformation and manipulate political opinion (Badawy et al. 2019). Some studies have been conducted on the role of the IRA's micro-targeted political advertisements (Nadler, Crain, and Donovan 2018; Vaidhyanathan 2018a).

As illustrated above, one of the essential features of Surveillance Capitalism is to extract behavioral surplus. It is a race for users' attention to extract most data(i.e., private experiences on the internet); thus, companies are racing for the users' atten-

tion. Therefore Surveillance Capitalists compete with each other for the users' attention; some refer to this new business model as an "attention economy" (Wu 2018). Another way to boost behavioral surplus is to increase engagement, which means users consume the content at a greater rate, and likes, shares, and comments measure engagement. Engagement-based algorithms are also used to maximize users' time on the platforms, which converts into more time looking at paid advertisements (Barrett, Hendrix, and Sims 2021). Works on this matter focus on the rise of extremist content (Vaidhyanathan 2018a) and mushrooming misinformation, disinformation, and online propaganda (Guess and Lyons 2020). A whistleblower from Facebook delivered further remarks who leaked internal company emails and reports that revealed social media site algorithms' effects on the political polarization among U.S citizens (Haugen 2021).

One of the most influential pieces on the role of technology platforms in U.S politics was done by Kreiss and McGregor. The authors interviewed senior-level digital staffers from both parties and the representative of technology companies (Microsoft, Google, Facebook and Twitter) during the 2016 U.S election cycle. The study revealed that these firms are much more engaged in politics; they involve in elections for advertising gains, marketing opportunities, and relationship building with the current and future political elites (Kreiss and Mcgregor 2017). Lastly, Facebook's operation draws extensive attention from academic scholars regarding its effect on politics. In his book Anti-Social Media (2018), Vaidhyanathan defines Facebook as a "surveillance machine". The author focuses on Facebook's capacity to offer precision targeting, which businesses, pressure groups, and international interest groups can buy with almost no regulation; hence author warns of the destructive consequences to democracy (Vaidhyanathan 2018b).

Even though the field is still new, a considerable amount of work has been done to analyze the impact of technology platforms on politics. This thesis aims to use the Surveillance Capitalism framework and democratic backsliding literature to further contribute to the field. Even though there is an extensive amount of work that has been written on Surveillance Capitalism, there aren't many works that connect the business model to democratic backsliding literature. On the other hand, in democratic backsliding literature, non-state actors are mostly left out of the equation. Therefore, illustrating the impact of non-state actors on deteriorating democratic qualities would be another contribution to the democratic backsliding literature.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This thesis is written to elaborate on the impact of Surveillance Capitalism on democracy. Surveillance Capitalism is the 21st-century version of the capitalist economy, and this thesis argues that the business model of this new form of capitalism has the potential to harm democratic politics. In other words, this thesis is motivated to illustrate how unregulated Surveillance Capitalism in the 21st century can cause democratic backsliding. This thesis proposes four different causal mechanisms and ties these points to democratic backsliding literature.

It is argued by David Waldner and Ellen Lust that: "Backsliding entails a deterioration of qualities associated with democratic governance, in democratic regime it is a decline in the quality of democracy" (Waldner and Lust 2018). Scholars argue that backsliding occurs when accountability, participation, and competition deteriorates due to a discontinuous series of incremental actions, but not a total breakdown. It is a decline in the quality of democratic governance. This thesis investigates democratic backsliding as a deterioration in the qualities of democratic politics. Causal mechanisms are generated by examining the Surveillance Capitalism business model in the United States and the United Kingdom.

The first one is the decline in the quality of competition. Due to micro-targeted advertisement technology, political actors can target potential voters with campaign messages that aren't necessarily factual (Silverman and Alexander 2019). It enables campaigns to zero in on potential voters and target them with messages that most likely resonate with them (Gorton 2016). This practice is dangerous for electoral integrity due to the menu of manipulation that political actors could use. Moreover, micro-targeted messages potentially deteriorate voters' and institutions' capacity to impose accountability on political actors.

Secondly, foreign interference implies the impact of international actors on domestic politics. Surveillance Capitalism's profit model aims to sell the maximum amount of advertisement to ad-buyers; this can be exploited by foreign actors eager to meddle with the electoral process. One way in which this mechanism deteriorates the democratic quality is by enabling foreign governments to purchase micro-targeted political messages to meddle with the electoral process (Nadler, Crain, and Donovan 2018).

Disinformation implies the negative consequences of data maximization and the pay-per-click feature of internet companies. Attention is a scarce resource; therefore, social media platforms prioritize seductive content, conspiracy theories, click-baits,

and extremist information, due to the higher engagement it receives (Wu 2018). Consequently, the business model prioritizes content that is designed to hook users' attention to the platform rather than providing factual information. Eventually, information disorder disrupts the quality of democracy and social cohesion (Schirch 2021) by damaging people's ability to assess politics and exposing users to misleading content (Butcher 2019).

The last causal mechanism that potentially triggers democratic backsliding is an exacerbation of political polarization. Algorithms operating with engagement maximization command promote content appearing on users' screens based on the engagement it is more likely to receive. This additional level of political polarization is due to algorithms promoting content that is polarizing and radicalizing people due to a higher level of engagement (Cho et al. 2020). This strategy is employed to maximize the time spent on the platforms; therefore, more time can be allocated to looking at paid advertisements. Consequently, engagement-based algorithms potentially exacerbate political polarization. This mechanism doesn't suggest that social media algorithms are the primary reason behind political polarization, but algorithms that operate with engagement-based ranking exacerbate political polarization (Barrett, Hendrix, and Sims 2021).

These mechanisms potentially deteriorate the quality of democratic politics due to un-regulated Surveillance Capitalism. Until 2016, these organizations operated without regulation, investigation, or accountability to governments or the public. This lack of regulation was possible due to: i)They were designed to be undetectable ii)very few people understood the market logic of high tech firms, which includes extraction of data beyond improving services iii) tech giants were respected and perceived as pioneers iv) nothing in the history of human history prepared people for these new (Zuboff 2015). Before the 2018 revelations with Cambridge Analytica and Russia, governmental regulations over the technology firms were imprudent and incautious (Vaidhyanathan 2018a).

The following sub-sections explicitly discuss each causal mechanisms that cause democratic backsliding.

2.3 Quality of Competition

One way of measuring democratic backsliding is by observing the decline in the qualities of democracy; these qualities are competitiveness of the electoral process,

participation in political activity, and institutions' capacity to impose accountability on political actors (Waldner and Lust 2018). Scholars focus on incumbents' authoritarian practices when they refer to strategic electoral manipulation; however, in the case of Surveillance Capitalism, non-governmental actors' activity (Anisin 2022) also distorts the competitiveness aspect of elections. On the other hand, political actors can use voters' private information to further disrupt the quality of competition by targeting voters with individually crafted misleading content (Schirch 2021).

Another aspect where distortion occurs is the deterioration of the institutional capacity that provides horizontal accountability in democratic politics. Institutional oversight is vital for the endurance of democracy because they incorporate and exclude political actors (O'Donell 1994). This selective incorporation and exclusion are necessary because it provides an even playing field between political actors. Therefore, institutions must be able to set standards and valid participation criteria in politics where the actors are held accountable for their actions. In the absence of this capacity, polity becomes unstable due to the destabilizing activities of agents interacting within democratic politics (O'Donell 1994).

In other words, institutions are vital for the bounded uncertainty (Schmitter and Karl 1991) aspect of democratic politics, which implies all the actors have a chance to participate in politics. Nonetheless, there are basic standards that actors must comply with and, if necessary, be held accountable for their actions. So the bounded nature of politics prevents democratic erosion by ensuring patterns and practices, even though who will be in government is uncertain. Nonetheless, to ensure the endurance of democracy, institutions must have the capacity to regulate the non-state actors too. As a result of the Surveillance Capitalism business model, non-state actors are damaging the institutional capacity to regulate politics because of micro-targeting technology. After the 2018 period, the United States still lacks legislation and regulation to curb Surveillance Capitalism platforms; there are only two federal tech laws ratified, one concerning children's privacy and other against sex trafficking (Kang 2022). There is still a lack of bi-partisan support to pass laws offering general data privacy regulation. On the other hand, European Union ratified dozens of legislation's to regulate big tech platforms to protect their citizens from the business model of tech giants (Kang 2022). Like the EU, these regulatory strategies can form legislative acts to impose accountability on technology platforms. Hence, institutions arm themselves with the capacity and capability to curb Surveillance Capitalism to some extent.

Surveillance Capitalism behavioral surplus maximization implies that technology platforms possess a vast amount of private information about their users. Most

technology companies' profit depends on successfully harvesting the data they own. Eventually, the business model offers private information of their users that can be used to manipulate voters politically. Also, political actors can target potential voters through campaign messages that aren't necessarily factual. It enables campaigns to zero in on potential voters and target them with individually crafted messages that most likely resonate with them (Gorton 2016; Silverman and Alexander 2019). This practice is hazardous for electoral integrity due to the menu of manipulation that political actors could use. On top of that, most of these micro-targeted political advertisements are personal; messages appear on the private screens of voters; hence they "fly under the radar" (Gorton 2016). Therefore, the nature of political campaigning could change because the public loses the ability to hold policymakers accountable for their remarks, a feature of modern democracy (Schmitter and Karl 1991).

Political advertisements that are generated with personalized messages were present before the rise of social media; however, with the micro-targeting feature; advertisers can profile and target the most sensitive users based on identity orientation; these political advertisements are free from factual checking because the media environment where these messages are traveling do not bound to any institutional oversight nor editorial review (Nadler, Crain, and Donovan 2018). Contrary to past campaigns, behavioral surplus-based political advertising enables politicians to target voters who are receptive and pivotal recipients of personally crafted political messages.

The rise of mobile and platform-oriented media creates new challenges to institutions where a handful of US-centered technology giants are causing a new form of challenge (Nielsen and Fletcher 2020). On social media, the political micro-targeting advertisement feature makes it easier to spread manipulative and misleading content that erodes the accountability and transparency that democratic politics needs Vaidhyanathan (2018a). At the same time, political actors minimize "the risk of political blowback by limiting their visibility to those who might react negatively" (Nadler, Crain, and Donovan 2018). Consequently, institutions and voters are increasingly losing their capacity to hold political actors accountable for the campaign messages they use.

Political campaigns have increasingly adopted political online advertisements in recent years. During the 2016 U.S Presidential election, political online advertising grew approximately by 789% to reach 1.4 billion U.S dollars compared to 2012 (Kreiss and Mcgregor 2017). During the BREXIT referendum, Vote Leave spent 98% of its budget on digital advertising, according to Dominic Cumming, the campaign

director (Cummings 2017) Cummings stated that more than a billion micro-targeted political advertisements were published on Facebook. Because these platforms are a virtual environment where voters engage in politics and form their opinion during the elections (Kreiss and Mcgregor 2017). Hence, the primary battleground shifts toward social media platforms, and internet companies are eager to profit from this trend (Kreiss, Lawrence, and McGregor 2017).

Therefore, an environment where most political messages are traveling without checks before 2018 eventually contributed to a political setting that potentially harmed the qualities of democratic governance where contents with disinformation exceeded factual information (Butcher 2019). This trend toward profiting from a political campaign started around 2014 when Facebook saw the opportunity to financially and politically (have connections with current and future policymakers) benefit from elections in the United States.

> "By 2014, Facebook had decided to move forcefully into the realm of political advertisements. The company had moved much of the lucrative market away from television and radio, where expensive ads had dominated for five decades, driving up the cost of running a major campaign. Facebook did not hide its intentions. The company boasted about its ability to target voters and prepared for the 2016 U.S elections by describing its systems to the few journalists willing to listen. More important, Facebook joined Twitter, Microsoft, and Google in marketing efforts to urge political consultants, parties, and campaigns to work closely with the company" (Vaidhyanathan 2018*a*).

In the case of BREXIT, Aggregate I.Q., a Canadian political consultancy firm that uses data-based political messages actively involved in the process (House of Commons 2019), during the referendum, micro-targeting to persuade potential voters on Facebook is widely used. The chief political manager of the Leave campaign Dominic Cummings wrote on his blog page how their team developed strategies based on the data they harvested (Cummings 2017). The Information Commissioner Office (ICO) in the U.K, Britain's independent authority that reports to the House of Commons and is an authority in information rights, has opened an investigation into political parties after the Cambridge Analytica incident. Inquiry is aimed to investigate the extent of targeting voters via social media, and ICO warns that if political parties in the U.K are sending political messages to citizens based on their data, "they could be breaking the law" (The Guardian 2017). Disinformation and Fake News Final Report by House of Commons find close linkages between Cambridge Analytica and

Aggregate I.Q. The report makes the following remarks:

> "The work of Aggregate I.Q. highlights the fact that data has been and is still being used extensively by private companies to target people, often in a political context, to influence their decision. It is far more common than people think" (House of Commons 2019).

Hence, in both incidents, Surveillance Capitalism provided these political consultancy firms a platform where they could extract users' private information in an unsupervised field and then target voters to influence their votes.

Therefore, an institutional oversight that imposes horizontal accountability must be necessary to regulate these political forces. Horizontal accountability could be imposed upon technology platforms by the judiciary body, to be more precise, by the sub-body that regulates electoral affairs. Electoral sub-bodies serving under the judiciary must be capable of monitoring the contents and ownership of micro-targeted political advertisements. Because the whole incident was revealed after a whistleblower's ethical consideration, only then had institutions such as parliament and judiciary conducted investigations. If institutional capacity is bounded to leaked documents and whistleblowers' personal convictions, the bounded nature of democratic politics would be compromised because institutions lack the capacity to incorporate and exclude political actors. Therefore, qualities associated with democracy, such as accountability and the quality of electoral competition, are potentially corruptable, which can cause democratic erosion in liberal democracies. Because democratic backsliding is triggered when political institutions lose their capacity to impose accountability, this constraint is based on imposing negative consequences for undemocratic actions (Waldner and Lust 2018).

2.4 Disinformation

Surveillance Capitalism became the dominant mode of capitalism when one considers the wealthiest companies in the world. As the previous chapters illustrated, one of the reasons behind this new mode of extraction and production is the power of prediction. Surveillance Capitalists sell their users' future and present behaviors to third parties to enhance their profit (Zuboff 2015). Also, these companies compete with one another to dominate the market. Since micro-targeting is based

on behavioral surplus and companies are selling micro-targeted advertisement, data maximization is essential to sell most accurate micro-targeted advertisement. More data eventually means more accuracy. Hence these companies are competing with one another to extract more behavioral surplus so that they can dominate the sector. The competition to extract surplus eventually lead to attention economy (Wu 2018), where platforms are doing what they could to maximize users engagement with the platform by designing seductive contents on the platforms. More a user spends time on Facebook or Twitter, these companies extract more behavioral surplus and produce much more accurate micro-targeted content. Therefore Surveillance Capitalists also race for the users' attention. Drive to monopolize data extraction battle eventually creates another mechanism that triggers democratic backsliding, which is the widespread diffusion of disinformation that pollutes social media platforms and harms democracy (Nielsen and Fletcher 2020).

In democracies, a deterioration of mutual understanding of facts could harm public discourse, citizens' ability to asses politics declines and further damages democratic politics (Jee, Lueders, and Myrick 2022) Disinformation is one of the perils that harm public discussion and deteriorate mutual understanding. Disinformation is defined as "false information spread in order to deceive people" (Jee, Lueders, and Myrick 2022). Consequently, disinformation can be interpreted as a phenomenon that damages public discourse. It is vitally important because one of the essential features of democracy is to give people the right to choose; hence it requires a well-informed engagement with politics so that the voters can hold politicians accountable based on facts (Butcher 2019). Thus, widespread pollution of disinformation is destructive to public's ability to assess political activity and make informed decisions about their choice to prevent detrimental consequences against the democratic regime. Hence, a free discussion that goes hand to hand with objective facts is vital for a healthy democracy (Sen 1999).

After all, one strategy that is employed by authoritarian governments is capturing free media to skew playing field to their favor (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2019). This tactic employed by authoritarian governments to control mainstream political narrative hides their policies that violate the rule of law by creating a loyal media (Rogenhofer and Panievsky 2020). In other words, authoritarian governments tend to assault facts to skew the playing field to their advantage. In other words, assault on free press is aimed to spread authoritarian incumbents' disinformation campaigns to stop the public's ability to asses politics. Disinformation also raises doubts against political institutions, mainstream media, science, and other critical associations that are vital for a healthy democracy, hence damaging the political system's stability (Jungherr and Schroeder 2021). Overall, disinformation appears to be a negative

phenomenon that damages the quality of democracies, and it doesn't result with an immediate destruction of the regime; however, it damages the quality of governance hence triggers backsliding.

So far, the business model of Surveillance Capitalism prioritizes disinformation-loaded contents that damage political discussion and give a platform for actors who are diffuse non-factual contents at a higher rate. Even the business model of Surveillance Capitalism incentives the actors' willingness to spread disinformation. For example, during the last months of the 2016 U.S election, the top 20 election news on Facebook that are fake, generated more engagement (likes, shares, comments and reactions) than the mainstream news channels such as Washington Post or New York Times (Silverman 2017). These contents were deliberately created to exploit the pay-per-click (more people enter the website brings additional income) option (Hughes and Waismel-Manor 2021) of the Surveillance Capitalism business model. Top circulated fake news contained contents such as Pope Francis expressing his endorsement of Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton allegedly sold weapons to ISIS (Silverman 2017).

These sort of provocative and conspirative contents create significantly more engagement than factual news (Marwick and Lewis 2017), and social media companies' algorithms prioritize fake contents that eventually combust the disinformation ecosystem. In other words, curators of these fake news are motivated to drag people to their pages to sell more advertisements to businesses; more screen time means more advertisement revenue because businesses would be investing their money in sites that have more screen time (Hughes and Waismel-Manor 2021). Eventually, the business model promotes disinformation that corrupts public's discourse and mutual understanding between citizens, the merits that are vital for democracy to survive.

It must be added that, propaganda and disinformation campaigns are nothing new in politics, but with the extensive use of the internet, the frequency and speed of disinformation skyrocketed (Schiffrin 2017). Also, this section does not argue that Surveillance Capitalists are spreading disinformation for their political gains nevertheless, this business model and micro-targeting future enables actors to amplify propaganda on their political ends. The spread of disinformation through social media can combust to democratic backsliding. Hence it is vital to take action to persuade large social media companies whose profit models depend on circulating misinformation and disinformation (Haggard and Kaufman 2021).

To summarize, another mechanism that triggers democratic backsliding in the context of Surveillance Capitalism is the spread of disinformation. Digital companies'

raw material is data, and without it, algorithms fail to predict human behavior (Zuboff 2015); therefore, internet companies become desperate to make their platform much more addictive. As it elaborated by Center for Humane Technologies (a think-tank established by former employees of Google, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and many more), the major concern with the internet companies is their platforms are almost controlled by algorithms. These algorithms are coded to maximize the platform profit. Boosting engagement eventually delivers the most outrageous content, which is converted into disinformation, fake news, and harassment prioritized on social media platforms (Donovan 2021). Thus, users are offered the most addictive, hyped, click-baited, provoked and radical content. In other words, it is the algorithm that decides what users are encountered during their experience (i.e. what is shown in the newsfeed) on the platform. Since data maximization is the primary command, algorithms do not check information provided to the users. On top of that, leaked documents and whistleblowers are also suggesting that (Haugen 2021) contents that pose disinformation and misinformation are in the majority on the internet platforms. Because "conspiracy contents, radical and thought-provoking text update, a photo, graphic, video, link, etc. are much more likely to increase user engagement with the platform" (Vaidhyanathan 2018b). Whatever drags the attention of users is prioritized on Surveillance Capitalisms' platforms. It is the monetary policy of Silicon Valley to make billions of dollars by maximizing users' engagement with the platform (Burkeman 2019), and users are free labor that provides raw material that increases the accuracy of micro-target ads.

Tim Wu refers to this economic model as "attention economy" (Wu 2018). It is a business model that depends on the attention of the users, which makes Google and Facebook the richest companies in the world. In other words, "Social media and largely, the internet as a whole is an attention economy where the most valued content is that which is most likely to attract attention. The overload of information enabled by the internet makes attention an extremely valuable resource . . . and thus increase advertising revenue" (Marwick and Lewis 2017). Attention economy refers to the maximization of behavioral surplus so that algorithms could predict the present and future behavior more accurately hence Surveillance Capitalists could increase their revenue by selling their users' attention to advertisers, who are the real customers. These real customers are companies and other entities that buy advertisements on Facebook, Youtube and Twitter who are eager to see that their money pays off. Real customers are provided with reports that show how much of the advertisements they bought to convert into actual sails. Since Surveillance Capitalists are also competing with each other to attract more customers than others to collect the maximum amount of data, competition amongst them can trigger another

mechanism that is bad for democracy, which is the spread of dis/misinformation due to the data maximization (Nielsen and Fletcher 2020). Because for Surveillance Capitalists, all engagements are positive, rather true or false, but false contents (disinformation loaded) are much more likely to boost data collection due to their higher rate of engagement.

2.5 Foreign Interference

As proposed by Karl and Schmitter, an essential criterion for democracies is that "polity must be self-governing; it must be able to act independently of constraints imposed by some other overarching political system" (Schmitter and Karl 1991). Scholars' contribution is motivated by underlining the importance of sovereign nation-states organizing domestic elections. In other words, it is a violation of democratic principles if actors outside the state borders interfere in the democratic elections of another sovereign state. Scholars suggested this criterion due to Neo-colonial interference in domestic politics and the sphere of influence in alliance systems (Schmitter and Karl 1991). When both academics wrote their influential pieces, internet use was rare as a snowflake in summer. Hence, the interference that they argue is different than this section. What this section argues is that interference by using the Surveillance Capitalism feature potentially deteriorates the qualities of democratic politics by enabling political actors that are outside the state borders to meddle with domestic elections, hence threatening the sovereignty of the people by using their vulnerable and emotional points against them and deepening the existing cleavages. Because to meddle with the 2016 U.S elections and BREXIT referendum, Kremlin-affiliated proxy services used the same Facebook advertisement feature that made the company enormously rich (Vaidhyanathan 2018*a*, 88).

It is argued in the previous chapter that Surveillance Capitalists hold an enormous amount of sensitive information on their users, and with this precious data, internet companies offer a variety of micro-targeting features to third parties. This feature was exploited by Kremlin-affiliated Internet Research Agency (IRA) during the BREXIT and 2016 U.S elections. The Oxford Internet Institute and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence conducted research in a coordinated way to investigate IRA's computational propaganda attack by examining the data that had been provided by the social media companies (House of Commons 2019). The analysis investigates how IRA exploited the tools and platforms of Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. In other words, it reveals how IRA used micro-targeting

to expose the voters in the United States and the United Kingdom to support their agenda. In September 2017, this was revealed to the public when Facebook announced that Russian-affiliated proxy accounts spent approximately $100,000 from June 2015 to May 2017 to circulate 3,000 micro-targeted advertisements to influence the 2016 U.S election (Facebook Newsroom). After the revelation, Robert Mueller, former head of the FBI, was investigated by the inquiry of the House Intelligence Community. Special Council Mueller revealed that:

> "During the U.S presidential campaign, many IRA-purchased advertisements explicitly supported or opposed a presidential candidate or promoted U.S rallies organized by the IRA. As early as March 2016, the IRA purchased advertisements that overtly opposed the Clinton Campaign. For example, on March 18, 2016, the IRA purchased an advertisement depicting candidate Clinton and a caption that read in part, "If one day God lets this liar enter the White House as a president - that day would be a real national tragedy. IRA-purchased advertisements featuring Clinton were, with very few exceptions, negative. IRA-purchased advertisements referencing candidate Trump largely supported his campaign. The first known IRA advertisement explicitly endorsing the Trump Campaign was purchased on April 19, 2016. In subsequent months, the IRA purchased dozens of advertisements supporting the Trump Campaign, predominantly through the Facebook groups" (Mueller 2019)

This practice is empirical evidence showing how the micro-targeting advertisement sector creates new opportunities for anti-democratic foreign governments such as Russia to zero in on weak and vulnerable points of voters and groups to strategically manipulate elections (Nadler, Crain, and Donovan 2018).

This phenomenon of interfering internal affairs of other states has increased with the proliferation of intelligence services, especially in the post-WWII era. It is commonly understood as an activity to influence events in a plausibly deniable manner (Cormac and Aldrich 2018). Throughout the last century, first the Soviet Union, now Russia, demonstrated its remarkable record in executing such interventions towards other sovereign states. Until the widespread use of the internet, these interventions depended on the physical presence of military personnel, secret agents, or even armed assassins. However, since the excessive use of digital technologies around the globe, new forms of influencing other states' internal affairs are widely used by governments. Especially by courtesy of the actions of the Russian government, the West has begun to recognize how disinformation poses an essential danger (Lucas and Pomeranzev 2016). These actions taken by Kremlin have been motivated to ma-

nipulate public opinion on several sensitive topics at home and abroad (Gallacher, Heerdink et al. 2019). Kremlin's effort to inject conspiratorial discourse and usage of disinformation to manipulate the domestic politics of its adversaries (Lucas and Pomeranzev 2016) poses a new form of threat to liberal democracies. Moscow executes these actions from the St. Petersburg-based Internet Research Agency (IRA), a Russian online influence company owned by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a close associate of President Putin, subsequently produces polarized content on social media platforms (House of Commons 2019). According to Special Counsel Mueller's report Mueller (2019): "The likely financier of the so-called Internet Research Agency of professional trolls located in Saint Petersburg is a close ally of Vladimir Putin with ties to Russian intelligence Unit... The company previously supported and executed Russian actions in Ukraine". Ukraine has suffered a great deal of cyber assaults by the IRA (McFaul and Kass 2019). Kremlin is also accused of using trolls (malicious accounts created for manipulation) and bots (automated accounts) to diffuse propaganda and disinformation (Badawy et al. 2019).

In the U.S case, Kremlin affiliated IRA had purchased approximately 3000 advertisements that were paid with Russian currency, that are eventually appeared to almost 126 million Americans (Isaac and Shane 2017). Voters were exposed to IRA propaganda because of Facebook's features which ultimately enabled IRA to target them through the company's basic and default advertising service (Vaidhyanathan 2018a, 80). The most alarming side of the story is that Facebook could have regulated the ad-buying procedures but according to Jordan Lieberman, head of Audience Partners (A influential advertisement firm), monitoring the micro-targeted ads causes "Interruption of revenue flows and it's going to cost them (Facebook) money" (Thomson Reuters 2019). This threat is due to unregulated Surveillance Capitalism, where an overarching political entity can purchase an advertisement to support its policy and amplify its message without any institutional oversight before 2018. Facebook intentionally leaves the advertisement feature uncontrolled where the ad buyers can target Facebook users by categories so that they are clustered hence creating a variety of options to choose from and enabling them to execute propaganda and misinformation tactics (Vaidhyanathan 2018a, 90). It is what IRA did during the 2016 election cycle in the U.S IRA tactics that are adopted are intended to deepen and further polarize existing social cleavages and raise anxiety (Nadler, Crain, and Donovan 2018). IRA especially used social media extensively to trigger sensitive issues and meddle with voters turn out in the United States (Badawy et al. 2019). To sum up, the foreign interference casual mechanism implies that profit imperative of Surveillance Capitalism (i.e. selling the maximum amount of advertisement) potentially enables foreign governments to meddle with

other sovereign nations' elections. The micro-targeting feature can limit nations' capacity to self-govern and possibly restrain polity from acting independently from the constraints of an overarching political system, which shows a decline in democratic quality (Schmitter and Karl 1991). This intervention from overarching political system can take the form of polluting the public debate with polarizing and extremist contents, overall, potentially deteriorating the qualities of democratic politics due to the micro-targeting feature that can be purchased.

2.6 Polarization

After the end of the Cold War, there was and still is a new way that democracies fall: executive takeover by the people elected with a democratic process (Svolik 2019). Scholarly attention has been drawn to this puzzle, which is why voters vote for politicians that subvert democracy and curtail freedoms. One widely accepted proposition is that polarization and partisan interest eventually push voters to trade off their self-interest with democratic governance (Svolik 2019). Polarization increases hostility between voters and eventually creates "us vs. them" politics (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018), therefore incentives voters to accept illiberal policies against opposing camps (Arbatli and Rosenberg 2021). It creates an opportunity for an authoritarian-to-be to take un-democratic actions (Svolik 2019) hence deteriorating the qualities associated with democracy and triggering backsliding. It also results in dysfunctional governments because opposing camps are less inclined to make "compromise, consensus, interactions and tolerance" (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018); hence it endangers democratic governance. In recent years immigration, income inequality, and different value sets among cohorts (Inglehart and Norris 2016) received extensive scholarly attention among academic scholars as factors contributing to polarization.

In addition to these accounts, this section argues another factor can contribute to additional political polarization. Overall high level of political polarization; incentives voters to make a trade-off between their self-interest and democratic qualities; it makes government dysfunctional, decreases the tolerance between citizens, and opens the way for authoritarian practices. Therefore, a high level of political polarization is associated with the deterioration of democratic qualities; hence it's an effect that causes democratic backsliding. Put differently, political polarization divides voters and policymakers into different camps where they are less inclined to share power and compromise, preventing democracy from functioning (Forrest

and Daymude 2022). Therefore, this section's argument is Surveillance Capitalism's effect on polarization, which potentially harms the quality of democratic politics.

As illustrated in the previous chapter, data is essential for precision and accurate targeting. Therefore Surveillance Capitalists are eager to generate more accuracy. Hence it requires the maximum amount of behavioral surplus. It is the behavioral surplus that turns the wheels of this capitalist model. This business model depends; on maintaining and increasing users' engagement within the platform and receiving advertising revenue in return (Donovan 2021). Societies and nations experienced all sorts of polarization before the rise of social media; however, this section illustrates how the business model of a Surveillance Capitalist potentially causing an additional political polarization. As revealed in the previous paragraphs, increased political polarization is foul for democracy.

Maximizing users' engagement with the platform is the primary strategy that Surveillance Capitalists adopt to extract more behavioral surplus. In simple terms, more time spent on Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook eventually converts into more data extraction. To glue people's attention to the platform, these companies are obsessed with maximizing user engagement with the contents, and algorithms are facilitating this relationship (Lazer 2015; Tufekci 2018; Cho et al. 2020). Algorithms organize what users encounter during their experience in the digital environment. In other words, algorithms manage the online information ecosystem, facilitate which information people see, and assist users in efficiently reaching the information they are looking for (Lazer 2015) Algorithms are like newspaper editors that curate what users encounter during their time on the platform; however, each user reads a different newspaper that is independent from factual-based editorial gatekeeping (Tufekci and Wilson 2012).

Algorithms are essential in this process because the more data it has about the users, the more computational power it has. Therefore, personalization of the News Feed (Facebook's main page) or Timeline (Twitter's main page) improves, and so algorithms start to organize the information people encounter (Cho et al. 2020). The algorithms' organization of the information ecosystem is based on the user's private experience on the related platform. To hook users' attention (i.e. maximize engagement), algorithms tend to reinforce users' political, social, and economic preferences, which leads to an environment where users are segregated into filter bubbles (Cho et al. 2020) People occupy these segregated bubbles with similar ideological and political leanings. However, this is a result of users' engagement maximization; this section illustrates how engagement-based algorithms can contribute to an additional polarization. Maximizing users' engagement is essential for the platform's financial

growth (Cho et al. 2020). Scholarly attention had been driven to the role of algorithms in facilitating the public discussion on digital platforms and how algorithmic recommendations could manipulate users (Tufekci 2018). An experiment conducted by academic scholars on YouTube found out that algorithmic recommendations are contributing to polarization; they summarize their findings as follows:

> "Algorithmic recommendations personalized by user behavior data, if unchecked, has the potential to solidify personal political convictions and encourage polarized opinions. If our findings from YouTube can be generalized to search engines and algorithms running on other online platforms, algorithms and big data are responsible, at least in part, for the increasingly divisive political culture in many contemporary democracies. Due to the programmed responsiveness to past user interests and preferences, algorithms serve as a confirmatory communication partner or an echo chamber that reassures and reinforces users' prior beliefs and fosters extremism, as observed in the case of politically homogeneous communication networks. Viewed in this light, algorithms, although helping users navigate a massive amount of information, add to political selectivity that separates people from contradictory views" (Cho et al. 2020).

In 2020 Netflix released a documentary called "The Social Dilemma". The documentary features interviewees who are former executives from the top Silicon Valley companies such as Google, Facebook, Twitter, Uber, LinkedIn, Mozilla Firefox. They discuss the companies' business models and how they used to operate with these models cause negative effects on the social, political, economical and cultural landscape of the society (Netflix 2020). Algorithms' operation system attracts extensive attention from the former executives of Silicon Valley companies because of their role in increasing engagement and extracting more behavioral surplus. They argue that to maximize the users' engagement with the platform, algorithms promote content that is polarizing and radicalizing people due to a higher level of engagement. In other words, former executives of big tech platforms suggest that engagement-based algorithms potentially contribute to additional polarization. This is in line with this section's causal mechanisms, which is the business model of Surveillance Capitalism that uses engagement-based algorithms. The social media algorithms are not the reason behind it but hold the potential of exacerbating it. Because these algorithms prioritize contents that reinforce people's political beliefs and tend to portray other political camps as hostile and evil (Barrett, Hendrix, and Sims 2021). Eventually, this can contribute to additional political polarization. A high level

of political polarization can harm democratic governance by incentivizing voters to support extreme candidates (Svolik 2019), make compromises amongst policymakers less likely (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018) and hence erode democratic norms (Barrett, Hendrix, and Sims 2021). These sorts of outcomes can trigger additional democratic backsliding in liberal democracies by combusting additional political polarization and, at extreme levels, can undermine liberal democracies.

It is suggested that maximizing online engagement is the main combustor behind increasing polarization by whistleblowers (Haugen 2021). Frances Haugen, the most recent whistleblower, repeatedly warns policymakers about the role of engagement-based ranking algorithms promoting divisive content. Leaked internal reports suggest that Facebook executives are aware of the role of algorithms on polarization however, counter strategies to reduce it are perceived as anti-growth (Haugen 2021). This claim is also supported by former executives on the role of algorithms that prioritized engagement increases political polarization (Horwitz and Seetharaman 2020). The main reason behind engagement-based algorithms is to boost the amount of time that people are spending online, which converts into more advertisement revenue (Barrett, Hendrix, and Sims 2021). The amount of time users spend online with commenting, liking, and looking at contents is also the time they spend looking at paid advertisements and providing additional behavioral surplus. Therefore, the contents appearing on user screens aim to keep them on the platforms. So far, social media algorithms are promoting divisive and polarizing content to maximize users' engagement with the platform. This section's causal mechanism argues that this engagement maximization can exacerbate political polarization.

Therefore, unregulated Surveillance Capitalism behavioral surplus extraction and engagement maximization, which is operated by algorithms, potentially contribute to further political polarization, which can further deteriorate the democratic quality.

To summarize, the theory chapter explicitly discussed the casual mechanisms that are proposed by this thesis. The quality of competition, foreign interference, disinformation, and polarization are analyzed in line with the democratic backsliding literature to show how Surveillance Capitalism carries the potential of harming the quality of democratic politics. Next chapter will be providing empirical evidence for each causal mechanisms that are proposed in this chapter.

3.   UNITED STATES AND UNITED KINGDOM

This chapter has four different sections. In each section, the causal mechanisms proposed in the previous chapter are supported by empirical evidence from the United States and the United Kingdom. This thesis employs case study and process tracing to generate theories regarding the effects of Surveillance Capitalism on democratic backsliding in liberal democracies. In this chapter, the theoretical arguments are supported by analyzing the 2016 U.S Presidential election and the BREXIT referendum. The two voting processes show state and non-state actors' effect on democratic backsliding using technology platforms' business model. The two cases illustrate how unregulated Surveillance Capitalism potentially deteriorates the qualities that are associated with a healthy democracy.

3.1 Competition: 2016 U.S Election and BREXIT

This section employs the 2016 U.S presidential election and BREXIT referendum to illustrate the role of micro-targeting advertisement in politics. This new development in politics potentially exacerbate the spread of manipulative and misleading content, which can erode accountability and transparency, phenomenons that democratic politics needs (Vaidhyanathan 2018a). The 2016 Trump campaign and Leave Campaign are the political actors under investigation. Cambridge Analytica and AggregateIQ are political consultancy firms whose business practices harm democratic qualities. Also, technology firms (i.e. Surveillance Capitalists) such as Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter, and YouTube are further empirical evidence of the proposed causal mechanism. Donald Trump was the 2016 Republican candidate for the presidential race. He won the election against Democratic Party candidate Hillary Clinton. On the other hand, Leave Campaign was the largest political platform that successfully campaigned for United Kingdom's exit from the European Union back in 2016.

In the year 2018, when it was revealed to the public that nearly 50 to 90 million U.S citizens' private information were extracted from Facebook without their consent. Consequently, it led to one of the greatest outrages from the public for the use of data and micro-targeting in politics (Persily and Tucker 2020). Cambridge Analytica was at the center of attention after the incident came to light. Cambridge Analytica was a political consultancy firm that used big-data and psychographic methods for providing consultancy to political actors (The Guardian 2017). Cambridge Analytica's business practices received massive scrutiny from the media and general public. It is all revealed after a whistleblower gave an exclusive interview to the media (The Guardian 2017). Also, in a series of secret recordings broadcast on Channel 4 News, Cambridge Analytica CEO Alexander Nix claimed credit for Donald Trump's election. He told an undercover reporter: "We did all the research, all the data, all the analytics, all the targeting. We ran all the digital and television campaigns, and our data informed all the strategies." (The Guardian 2017) Revealing the firm's system of erasing any digital footprint, he said they used a self-destruct email server. He added:

> "No one knows we have it, and secondly we set our ... emails with a self-destruct timer ... So you send them, and after they've been read, two hours later, they disappear. There's no evidence; there's no paper trail, there's nothing."

He was also recorded explaining how Cambridge Analytica set up proxy organizations to feed untraceable social media messages. And he mocked an investigation by the U.S House intelligence committee, to which he gave evidence in 2017. In the footage, he claimed:

"Republican members asked just three questions. After five minutes – done. They're politicians, they're not technical. They don't understand how it works." He claimed that Democrats on the committee were motivated by "sour grapes". Nix added that the election candidates were never told what was going on, agreeing that they were "puppets" in the hands of their campaign teams (Guardian 2018). Mr. Nix's remarks are remarkable indicators showing how an unaccountable political actor operates independently from institutional oversight and damages the bounded nature of democratic politics.

In a presentation at the 2016 Concordia Annual Summit, Alexander Nix discusses the power of big data in global elections. Cambridge Analytica's revolutionary ap-

proach to voter targeting, data modeling, and psychographic profiling has delivered them fame in behavioral micro-targeting for election campaigning worldwide (Concordia 2016). Initially, Cambridge Analytica was employed by Texas Senator Ted Cruz for his candidacy in the 2016 Republican Party nominee for the presidential race (The Guardian 2015). In July, Mr. Cruz's vote share in GOP was just around 5%; after the campaign team hired Cambridge Analytica, Cruz's vote share rose above 35% in August. He finished the race in second place, just behind Donald Trump. Cambridge Analytica allegedly created the OCEAN model for voter targeting. It is an acronym for the Big Five personality traits to predict political attitudes and behavior (Gerber et al. 2011). The acronym stands for:

O= Openness (How open are you to new experiences?), C= Conscientiousness (What are your habits and preferences ?), E= Extraversion (How social are you and enjoy human interactions ?), A= Agreeableness (Where do you put yourself in society ?), N= Neuroticism (How much do you tend to worry and feel anxiety ?). It is a quantitative method to determine the underlying traits showing individuals' personalities and micro-target them with the most persuasive political message (Concordia 2016). Then, through this generated profile, individuals are targeted with manipulative content motivated by changing voting behavior (Persily 2017). This targeting was possible due to the data that Alexander Kogan provided to Cambridge Analytica (The Guardian 2018). Kogan unilaterally uploaded a personality survey quiz on Facebook back in 2013, and approximately 5 to 10 million people filled up the quiz. Through this quiz, Kogan was able to extract detailed characteristics and traits of people who gave their consent to the quiz. However, this extraction didn't stop with participants only. People filling the consent option enabled Kogan to extend this extraction to all of the friends of people who filled up the quiz (The Guardian 2018). In other words, survey participants' personal data and their friends' information extracted from Facebook later to be sold to Cambridge Analytica then to be harvested into micro-targeted political advertisements. Cambridge Analytica used this sample to operate its OCEAN model and micro-targeted potential voters in the United States. However, there is still a dispute over the impact of personality traits and psychographics on voting (Vaidhyanathan 2018a). Put differently, there is still skepticism around the power of psychographics on changing the audience's behavior. However, after the whistleblower's testimony, Federal Trade Commission in the U.S fined Facebook 5 billion dollars which is the largest penalty ever imposed for any sort of violation, for neglecting consumers' privacy rights and violating data security laws (Federal Trade Commission 2019). Cambridge Analytica incident is proposed as empirical evidence illustrating the potential impact of the Surveillance Capitalism business model on deteriorating the quality of the competition. In this

case, a consultancy firm hired by one of the presidential candidates micro-targeted the voters with a sample that breached consumers' privacy rights and data security laws. On the other hand, the political messages that Cambridge Analytica used were untraceable, and hence were far from accountability. In other words, political micro-targeted advertisements that Cambridge Analytica used that appeared on the private screens of the voters potentially damaged the public's ability to hold politicians accountable for their campaigning messages. In democracies keeping political actors accountable for their actions and remarks is vital for the survival of the system (Sen 1999). Therefore Cambridge Analytica's practices are argued to be potentially harming the quality competition due to data extraction and micro-targeting operations it conducted for the Trump campaign in 2016.

For the BREXIT referendum, Aggregate IQ (AIQ), a Canadian data firm, consulted on the online advertising business of "Vote Leave", "Be Leave", "DUP Vote" and "Veterans for Britain" campaigns. On top of that, the legislative investigation showed that there was a close working relationship between Cambridge Analytica, SCL and AIQ (House of Commons 2019). Report by the House of Commons illustrates the following finding:

> "AIQ worked on both the US Presidential primaries and for Brexit-related organisations, including the designated Vote Leave group, during the EU Referendum. The work of AIQ highlights the fact that data has been and is still being used extensively by private companies to target people, often in a political context, in order to influence their decisions. It is far more common than people think" (House of Commons 2019).

In order to extract data, Leave Campaign organized a competition with a prize of £50 Million where participants were challenged to guess the result of every single group stage game in the 2016 European Football Cup. The only condition to participate was filling out the survey, which asked participants' names, addresses, phone numbers, e-mails, whether if they will vote in the referendum and other policy questions regarding the EU (House of Commons 2019). As Mr. Cummings has written on his blog page, " Data flowed in on the ground and was then analyzed by the data science team and integrated with all the other data streaming in" (Cummings 2017). AIQ came into the picture to operate the data extraction and execute micro-targeting. The operation was executed through Facebook Ad-Manager. Through the e-mail adresses and political preferences at it's disposal, AIQ was able to micro-target potential voters with messages flying under the radar

(House of Commons 2019). The most famous examples of political advertisements were the UK allegedly sending £350 million monthly to the EU from NHS and Turkey's being a member of the organization meaning 80 million people migrating to Britain. Although these two advertisements caught the attention of experts, academics and media therefore, were subjected to fact-checking; this was the tip of the iceberg. According to the advertisement data that is provided to MP's by Facebook, an investigation from the committee revealed that 140 advertisements that is paid by Leave Campaign were touched upon controversial, fallacious and misleading contents (BBC 2018). However, an investigation launched after Christopher Wylie from Cambridge Analytica revealed the role of data extraction and micro-targeting in BREXIT and the 2016 U.S Presidential election. This shows the legislators' dependency on whistleblowers because companies such as Facebook were operating with no oversight from governmental institutions on their undercover operations. It is dangerous for democratic stability if institutional capacity is bounded to the personal convictions of ex-company employees. On the other hand, legislators were depended on Facebook's cooperation with the investigation committee. Without Facebook's cooperation, legislators could not have access to advertisements that the Leave Campaign used. This shows the lack of institutional capacity on holding political actors accountable for their actions in the digital realm. In other words, the investigation committee worked with the data that Facebook provided to them therefore, the legislative body had no choice but to count on Facebook's full transparency and cooperation. This dependency on the internet platforms on regulating political activity, can further damage the institutions' capacity to provide horizontal accountability. The institutions' capacity to provide horizontal checks and balances is vital for the survival of democratic regimes (Ruth 2017). In this case, the dependency of Westminster on Facebook regulating political activity can be considered as a decline in the given institutions' capacity to provide horizontal accountability. Considering the result of the investigation, which revealed the use of micro-targeted advertisement on pushing controversial, fallacious, and misleading contents (BBC 2018), the flow of political messages in the shape of micro-targeted advertisements can further damage the quality of liberal democracies.

Cambridge Analytica and AIQ are no Surveillance Capitalists hence their profit from eroding democratic quality comes from the extraction of behavioral surplus and micro-targeting. On top of that, the deployment of behavioral surplus based on political micro-targeting into politics and manipulation of voters with that data has not started with Cambridge Analytica (Nadler, Crain, and Donovan 2018; Vaidhyanathan 2018a). Nevertheless, Cambridge Analytica's practices attracted a massive backlash against Facebook and resulted in a historic penalty against the com-

pany in the U.S In Britain, Information Commissioner Office fined Facebook half a million Sterling for violating data privacy rules, an amount which is the maximum that can be issued for the given crime (Staff 2022).

In the U.S case, technology firms, especially Microsoft, Google, Facebook, and Twitter, are much more active intermediaries in politics than is understood and discussed. All these firms actively offer consultancy to political campaigns motivated by profit and gaining political power and influence (Kreiss and Mcgregor 2017). In terms of political campaigns also allocating massive amounts of resources to online advertisements in the U.S, it reaches 1.4 billion US dollars (Williams and Gulati 2018). In the UK, "Vote Leave" spent almost its entire budget on online advertisements (Cummings 2017). Dominic Cummings, head of the campaign, argued that more than a billion micro-targeted political advertisements were published on Facebook. Because these platforms are an essential environment where voters engage in politics and form their opinion during the elections (Kreiss and Mcgregor 2017). However, not all micro-targeted political advertisements are necessarily harming the quality of democratic politics. Nevertheless, online political micro-targeting involves extracting and analyzing a massive amount of sensitive data about the voters. Based on this information, political parties can target a specific type of voters with manipulative content to influence voting preferences (Zuiderveen Borgesius et al. 2018). In other words, politicians can use political micro-targeting to reach voters individually. Hence they can shield some portion of potential voters from political messages that might challenge their beliefs (Gorton 2016). Therefore voters are increasingly losing their ability to hold politicians accountable for their remarks. On the other hand, by shielding potential voters from political messages, politicians can use messages that the portion of their base might not welcome, but with micro-targeting technology, they can avoid blowback within their potential voter base. This new development further damages voters' ability to assess politics and potentially cripples their ability to punish undemocratic actions. In total, Surveillance Capitalism's involvement in politics to profit from political campaigning poses new challenges for a healthy democratic competition.

This trend toward profiting from a political campaign started around 2014 when Facebook saw the opportunity to financially and politically benefit from elections in the United States.

> "By 2014 Facebook had decided to move forcefully into the realm of political advertisements. The company had set out to move much of the lucrative market away from television and radio, where expensive

ads had dominated for five decades, driving up the cost of running a major campaign. Facebook did not hide its intentions. The company boasted about its abilities to target voters and prepared for the 2016 U.S elections by describing its systems to the few journalists who were willing to listen. More important, Facebook joined Twitter, Microsoft, and Google in marketing efforts to urge political consultants, parties, and campaigns to work closely with the company" (Vaidhyanathan 2018a).

On the other hand, Google also saw the opportunity to benefit from political campaigning. An official document published by Google, called "How Political Ads and Video Content Influence Voter Opinion" (Stanford 2016) during the 2016 U.S election cycle, encourages political campaigns to invest their resources to work with Google and YouTube (Both owned by Alphabet Inc). The document mainly revolves around what Google refers to as "micro-moments" (Stanford 2016). It is a window of opportunity when the voters are most receptive to micro-targeting. However, as it is illustrated above, the content is full of dangerously manipulative content. In other words, Google offers micro-moments based on the behavioral surplus extracted from the user's private experience on their platform. It eventually converts into moments where voters' political decisions are put on sale. Evidence shows that an important part of political activity is increasingly moving to an online place. Hence, it becomes much more important to understand the business model of these companies that are eager to engage their technological capabilities in politics in order to profit and gain political influence. This interaction can harm the qualities associated with democracy and potentially triggers democratic backsliding.

Democratic backsliding is triggered when institutions lose their capacity to impose accountability. This constraint is based upon imposing negative consequences for undemocratic actions (Waldner and Lust 2018). Contrary to past campaigns, behavioral surplus-based political advertising enables politicians to target voters who are receptive and pivotal recipients of personally crafted political messages, and at the same time, political actors minimize the consequences of negative campaigning (Nadler, Crain, and Donovan 2018).

In recent years, it is these very technology firms who provide consultancy to political campaigns on how to target potential voters with receptive political messages that are not necessarily factual. Facebook, Twitter, and Google are forming the way of political actors' engagements and interactions with potential voters (Kreiss and Mcgregor 2017). From the side, this service involves forming project groups during the election period, and these groups work closely with campaign officials to guide them on how to use micro-targeting.

Kreiss and McGregor interviewed employees of Google, Facebook, Twitter, and Microsoft. They revealed that these technology firms aided both campaigns in profiling, identifying, tracking, and messaging voters back in the 2016 U.S election cycle. A leaked document from Facebook reviewed by Intercept revealed that the company's data extraction strategy, prediction products, and micro-targeting advertisement method goes parallel with Cambridge Analytica's practices (Biddle 2018). Put differently, the controversial business model of Cambridge Analytica, which caused judicial and parliamentary efforts both in the U.K and the U.S, were "routine elements in the daily elaboration of surveillance capitalism's methods and goals, both at Facebook and within other surveillance capitalist companies" (Zuboff 2018). Cambridge Analytic just incorporated and copied the surveillance capitalist's method to impact political campaigning. Therefore, the business model that caused historic penalties in the United States and the United Kingdom appears to be the daily operations of Facebook. Hence, it implies the necessity of imposing additional regulation on technology companies; on their role in profiling, tracking, identifying, and micro-targeting voters during the electoral cycle. The 2016 Trump Campaign's adoption of Surveillance Capitalism illustrates the potential threat to the quality of political competition.

Brad Parscale, who was the digital director of the 2016 Trump campaign, praised Facebook by referring to them as "Facebook provided a critical role of finding new potential donors and moving them over to our donor database...Facebook was the single most important platform to help grow our fundraising base" (Warzel 2016). Besides using Facebook to raise campaign funds, the Trump campaign also used political micro-targeted messages to combust conflict among Hillary Clinton's voter base. This attempt is referred to as "voter suppression operations" which is revealed to Bloomberg by Trump Digital campaign officers (Green and Issenberg 2016). Trump Digital campaign used Facebooks Ad Manager service to micro-target a portion of African American voters that are sorted as "infrequent voters" and were politically micro-targeted with content on Facebook that amplifies Hillary Clinton's remark on African American men as "superpredators" while promoting the 1994 infamous crime bill. In addition to that, groups of young women were exposed to political ads stating that Hillary Clinton covered the case of Bill Clinton's sexual harassment and assault allegations (Nadler, Crain, and Donovan 2018). Hence the effort is to discourage indecisive voters who are most likely to vote for Hillary Clinton. In this case, which is politically micro-targeting voters with misleading political information, the Trump campaign gained a voting boost that is purchased from Surveillance Capitalists. This boost can potentially trigger a new form of democratic backsliding because it exacerbates political actors' ability to further misleading of

public opinion and target pivotal voters more precisely. Additionally, negative campaigning is not new in politics. However, with political micro-targeting, politicians can zero in on whom they wish to target more precisely, and the messages they use will be less likely to be challenged by the opposing side since they mostly would be unaware of such content and hence misleading content political actors use have less chance of causing blowback. In total, these potentials are argued to be deteriorating the quality of competition, and further usage of this campaigning technique can trigger additional democratic backsliding in liberal democracies. On the other hand, in the U.S case the political messages that the Trump campaign used such as targeting black people with misleading contents, were free from any check. In the U.S case, since the 2002 McCain-Feingold Act pre-requisite political candidates and parties to declare that they approve the advertisement on TV and radios and hence take responsibility for the messages, it seems accountability is a working mechanism. However, The Federal Election Commission does not extend this prerequisite to online-based contents (Vaidhyanathan 2018a). Therefore, the law that is implemented on TV and radio does not instrumentalize on internet. Hence institutions further lose their capacity to regulate political activity, which means the potential of further damaging the democratic quality is in question.

There is a quite parallel story that occurred in the United Kingdom during the 2016 BREXIT referendum. Propaganda mushroomed on social media with the start of the BREXIT campaign, with the Leave campaign leading the micro-targeted political advertisement campaign by targeting specifically clustered voter groups (Ryabtsev 2020). However, this strategy was not unique to the Leave campaign. According to a study conducted by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, both campaigns used extensively dark ads to zero in on voters with messages contacting manipulative information (McClenaghan 2017). What is referred to as "dark ads" is micro-targeted political messages that appeared to a specific group of voters who are discrete and untraceable (Marchal et al. 2019). Bureau of Investigative Journalism were given access to monitor some of these advertisements, and what they found out is this:

> "The data collected so far shows at least 68 different Facebook adverts have been paid for by the three main political parties. They have been seen by social media users in their newsfeeds or advertising sidebars more than 1,400 times. Of those ads, 34 came from the Liberal Democrats, 10 from Tim Farron's official account, 10 from Conservative, and 14 from Labour. The Bureau found the Conservative party consistently attacking Jeremy Corbyn by name in each of the ten ads, with mention of Theresa May as a positive alternative in nine of them. One ad reads: "A leader who supports our armed forces or one who wants to abolish

them? The choice is clear: Corbyn and your security is a too big risk."
(McClenaghan 2017).

When the full extent of the BREXIT campaign method was revealed, European Union felt the urge to regulate micro-targeted political advertisements. According to vice president of the European Commission Věra Jourová: "EU rule book needed to be updated to deal with the online political campaign, new regulations aimed to impose greater responsibility on online platforms for what is published, and reveal who are being targeted and by whom" (The Guardian 2020). One of the most circulated disinformation that is created by the Leave campaign was: "We send the EU £350m a week, let's fund our NHS instead". Jourová also used this message as a reference and added: "What we saw was the fake news of [saying we will] not be paying money to the EU but paying to the national health system...It was proven not to be true and it influenced the will of the people to a large extent, according to many analysts." (The Guardian 2020). Nearly all these micro-targeted political messages were untraceable and thus were free from institutional oversight that held political actors accountable. Some of these contents were loaded with manipulative and misleading messages, which most of these flew under the radar and were designed by the political actors to harm the trust in the institutions that are vital for democracy to work and eventually disrupts democratic deliberation (Vaidhyanathan 2018*a*).

These examples are the strategy and tactic that is adopted by the Trump campaign and the Leave campaign that are independent from Cambridge Analytica scandal. Because Facebook and Google are capable of providing all the services that Cambridge Analytica can offer and with cheaper and more accurate way, however, this sort of strategy was also used by Democrat Party or other political actors during the 2016 election cycle in the United States and had been used in previous cycles (Kreiss, Lawrence, and McGregor 2017).

To summarize this section, empirical evidences show that micro-targeting advertisement feature of Surveillance Capitalism is employed by political actors during the BREXIT and the 2016 U.S Presidential election. This service is referred to as "vote-boosting". This service is based on the private information of the users that can be further instrumentalize the usage of misleading political messages in democracies. Additionally, these messages that the voters are exposed to are untraceable, hence free from any structural regulations. Therefore it damages the bounded-uncertainty nature of democratic politics, because institutions' capacity to regulate political campaigning declines. Eventually, the permanent usage of Surveillance Capitalism

in the UK and the U.S can deteriorate the qualities associated with democracy by changing the nature of competition. On the other hand, institutions that are vital for regulating the quality of competition increasingly depend on technology platforms to implement checks and balances. In these cases, checks and balances indicate holding political actors accountable for their messages and campaigning techniques during the electoral cycle. Lastly, individualization of political campaigning with political micro-targeted advertisements damages voters' ability to asses politics and voters capability to judge their representative's decline because politicians can filter information that voters see.

3.2 Russian Interference into 2016 U.S Presidential Race and BREXIT

This section provides empirical evidences for the foreign intervention causal mechanism that is elaborated in the theory chapter. The 2016 U.S election cycle and BREXIT referendum illustrates how to weaponize the Surveillance Capitalism business model to meddle with a domestic election. The practice is an empirical piece of evidence that shows how the micro-targeted advertisement sector creates new opportunities for anti-democratic foreign governments such as Russia, to zero in on weak and vulnerable points of voters and groups to strategically manipulate elections and promote their own political preference (Nadler, Crain, and Donovan 2018). Election interference can be defined as illegitimate ways of influencing voters' preferences, thereby reducing citizens' capacity to exercise their political rights because votes have to be exercised without deliberately manipulating thoughts and opinions of the citizens (Colomina, Margalef, and Youngs 2021).

Thus Russian involvement in BREXIT and the U.S Presidential election through social media became an essential component of the election results (Isaac and Wakabayashi 2017) To meddle with the 2016 U.S elections, Kremlin-affiliated proxy services used the very Facebook advertisement feature that made the company enormously rich (Vaidhyanathan 2018a, 90). Moscow executed these actions from the St. Petersburg-based Internet Research Agency(IRA), which subsequently produced polarized content on social media platforms (House of Commons 2019). From 2015 to 2017, it reached approximately 126 million users on Facebook, and Twitter users were exposed to 131.000 messages and 1000 videos circulated on YouTube (Isaac and Shane 2017). The Oxford Internet Institute and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence conducted research in a coordinated way to investigate IRA's computational propaganda attack by examining the data that had been provided by the

social media companies (Shane 2017).

The analysis investigates how IRA exploited Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook tools and platforms. In other words, it reveals how IRA used micro-targeting to expose the United States' voters with their messages. The Oxford Internet Institute and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence United States Senate (2018) reveals the following findings:

- Between 2015-2017, over 30 million users shared IRA's Instagram and Facebook post with sharing, liking or commenting.

- Top activities in advertisement and organic activity coincided with the important dates in the United States

- IRA operations were mostly executed to polarize the U.S public by micro-targeting African American voters to boycott the 2016 presidential election and encourage extreme right wing groups to be more confrontational

Voter suppression among leftist voters appears to have been another mission of the IRA's operations. Analysis of the IRA's Facebook advertisements shows three types of voter suppression campaigns on Facebook and Instagram: turnout suppression and election boycotting, promoting the third candidate, and assaulting political elites (United States Senate 2018). All these efforts are explicitly concentrated on Clinton's supporters or non-white voters in the 2016 presidential elections. As a matter of fact, IRA activities peaked during the vital moments of the Clinton campaign; for example, the leaked DNC emails (Howard et al. 2019). The emails show how Democrat Party officials are planning to undermine Bernie Sanders. The overall operation that the IRA conducts reached 126 million U.S citizens with the help of paid advertisement features of social media platforms, which enabled the IRA to promote its divisive content (United States Senate 2018). By exploiting technology companies' business model, Russia intervened in the electoral process of a democratically governed country; to support its political agenda. IRA executed this operation by exploiting the profit imperative of Surveillance Capitalism (i.e. selling the maximum amount of advertisement) which foreign governments can use to meddle with other sovereign nations' elections. The micro-targeting feature can limit nations' capacity to self-govern and possibly restrain polity from acting independently from the constraints of an overarching political system, which shows a decline in democratic quality (Schmitter and Karl 1991). This intervention from the overarching political system can take the form of polluting the public debate with polarizing and extremist content. In the U.S case, most of the IRA advertisements that are "purchased" promote divisive social and political issues such as race, gender, and

ethnicity (Nadler, Crain, and Donovan 2018). Therefore, it carries the potential of further damaging the qualities that are associated with democracy.

After the allegations on Russian interference to the 2016 U.S Presidential race, Robert Mueller, former head of the FBI, was appointed by the House Intelligence Community's inquiry to investigate the issue. Special Counsel Mueller revealed that:

> "During the U.S presidential campaign, many IRA-purchased advertisements explicitly supported or opposed a presidential candidate or promoted U.S rallies organized by the IRA. As early as March 2016, the IRA purchased advertisements that overtly opposed the Clinton Campaign. For example, on March 18, 2016, the IRA purchased an advertisement depicting candidate Clinton and a caption that read in part, "If one day God lets this liar enter the White House as a president - that day would be a real national tragedy. IRA-purchased advertisements featuring Clinton were, with very few exceptions, negative. IRA-purchased advertisements referencing candidate Trump largely supported his campaign. The first known IRA advertisement explicitly endorsing the Trump Campaign was purchased on April 19, 2016. In subsequent months, the IRA purchased dozens of advertisements supporting the Trump Campaign, predominantly through the Facebook groups" (Mueller 2019)

Special Counsel Muller's Report Mueller (2019), also shows that IRA operations targeting to support Trump also involved activities inside the United States. For example, IRA operatives were able to organize and execute a series of coordinated political rallies titled "Florida Goes Trump" using the Facebook group "Being Patriotic", the Twitter account @March_for_Trump, and many other accounts. IRA operatives even communicated with Trump Campaign staff and purchased advertisements to reach wider audiences and bring people to these rallies (United States Senate 2018). These are further empirical evidence about the exploitation of the unregulated Surveillance Capitalism in the United States. Overall, Russian intervention in the election by using technology platforms' business model, enabled an overarching entity to influence a domestic election. The precise impact of this intervention is a puzzle, nevertheless it carries the potential of damaging the quality of democratic politics by empowering an authoritarian government to meddle with a democratic election.

Overall, Kremlin-affiliated IRA advertisements targeted approximately 126 million U.S voters (Isaac and Wakabayashi 2017). Voters were exposed to IRA propaganda because of Facebook's features basic advertising service, where Russian agents were

able to buy micro-targeted advertisements that were paid with Russian currency (Vaidhyanathan 2018*a*, 88-89). Facebook intentionally keep the advertisement feature unregulated because it is a growth-friendly strategy for the company; the ad buyers can target Facebook users as they please by paying the necessary fee. It is what IRA did during the 2016 election cycle in the U.S and BREXIT. IRA especially used social media extensively to trigger sensitive issues in the United States (Badawy et al. 2019). For example, one of the circulated ads that the IRA creates targeted right-leaning voters who are members of a Facebook group called "Being Patriotic". Advertisement's content targets right-leaning voters' sensitive points regarding the police force. Which says:

"This bloody massacre is a vivid example of the fact that the war with police is too far from OVER. It's coming, and the consequences will be destructive if Hillary Clinton, the main hardliner against cops, becomes the United States president." IRA's aim by purchasing this ad was to evoke a sense of an assault against the security forces after all police are held sacred among "Being Patriot" group members, and by micro-targeting them, Kremlin-affiliated proxy accounts combusted polarization across political camps (Nadler, Crain, and Donovan 2018). On the other hand, black Americans were among the most targeted communities by the IRA. Targeting content contained messages such as boycotting the election and combusted mistrust toward law-enforcement forces (Parham 2018). IRA targeted black Americans to discourage them from voting, hence interfering with the electoral process. This operation is conducted using Facebook's basic ad services that sort users into specific categories from age, race, gender, occupation, educational level, and many more.

As the Senate Intelligence Unit Report reveals that:

"The IRA built a wide-ranging information operation designed to complement these other Russian influence activities directed toward interfering with and undermining U.S democracy in 2016. The expanse and depth of this effort would only be understood in the aftermath of that campaign... At the direction of the Kremlin, the IRA sought to influence the 2016 U.S presidential election by harming Hillary Clinton's chances of success and supporting Donald Trump" (United States Senate 2018).

This section's causal mechanism implies that the business model of technology platforms can cause democratic backsliding by enabling foreign governments to meddle with another sovereign nation's democratic process. The pieces of evidence above suggest that technology platforms' strategy to maximize profit empowered the Russian government to interfere in the U.S election in 2016. The growth strategy involves selling the maximum amount of advertisement to buyers without regulating the content and ownership of the paid advertisement. Therefore business model can

further trigger democratic backsliding in the United States by empowering foreign authoritarian governments to support their preferred candidate.

Facebook later admitted that the company identified nearly 3000 different ads stemming from IRA, which is a company affiliated with Russian President Vladimir Putin. On top of that, Elliot Schrage, Facebook's Vice-president, stated that "Most of the ads appear to focus on divisive social and political messages across the ideological spectrum, touching on topics from LGBT matters to race issues to immigration to gun rights". Lastly, Facebook stated that Internet Research Agency had paid Facebook 100.000$ to advertise and promote its message (The Verge 2017). Twitter also identified 3,814 IRA-controlled Twitter accounts and notified approximately 1.4 million individuals who may have been in contact with an IRA-controlled account. On top of that, Russian bots retweeted Donald Trump more than 470,000 times just in the final months of the 2016 election (McFaul and Kass 2019).

In an interview, Joel Kaplan, the U.S Vice President of Facebook for Public Policy, said, "The ads and accounts we found appeared to amplify divisive political issues across the political spectrum" (Isaac and Shane 2017). Topics that IRA prioritized was the "Black Lives Matter" movement, LGBTQ+ rights, gun control, and immigration. For example, on Twitter The LGBT United account amplified: "We speak for all fellow members of LGBT community across the nation. Gender preference does not define you. Your spirit defines you." (Isaac and Shane 2017). This shows another practice that is employed by IRA to deform public discussion in the U.S and further mobilize gender based cleavages. Another tactic that IRA employed involved aimed the physical confrontation of polarized camps by organizing political rallies. An Idaho-based but IRA-controlled group that opposes immigration called "Secured Borders" called the members of the group for action by posting "huge upsurge of violence toward American citizens" meaning the incrimination of Muslim refugees in the area (Shane 2017). It tried to trigger an upsurge and even psychical violence against the Muslim minorities in the region by vilifying them with disinformation-based content. These sort of campaigns are executed by purchasing advertisements on Facebook that cost $100.000 to promote the content that the group share and find out the most receptive audience. Most of these advertisements are focused on these divisive issues to deepen these existing cleavages even further, distorting public discussion and further polarizing the electorate (Shane and Goel 2017).

All these evidences illustrate that during the 2016 U.S election, profit maximization imperative by selling maximum amount of advertisement without any prerequisite or check enabled the Russian government to meddle with the election. Technology firms could have imposed strict regulations on advertisement purchase, such as monitoring

the owner of the advertisement or content circulating on their platform however, they choose to maximize their profit at the expense of deteriorating the qualities of the democratic process. In the United States, the urge to pass laws to regulate the protection of users' data and prevent the abuse of these data against foreign interference in an election has been pointed out to authorities (United States Senate 2018)

There was a parallel effort from the Kremlin regarding the BREXIT vote. During the referendum, IRA used similar tactics which they adopted in the U.S In other words, they used micro-targeting-based political advertisements to influence a domestic vote to promote their political preference. In the case of Britain's exit from the European Union, almost all the advertisements and news contents circulated by Russian-backed agencies were negative and skeptical toward the E.U After the allegations against Russian interference in BREXIT, the House of Commons Intelligence and Security Committee opened an investigation. According to the report, "Russian influence in the U.K is the new normal... the U.K is a target for Russian disinformation campaign" (Ruy 2021).

The report that was prepared by the House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee revealed the following founding:

"There has been clear and proven Russian influence into referendum... Russian state-owned agencies spent $135.000 on advertising to promote their Facebook pages and content...In common with other countries, the U.K is clearly vulnerable to covert digital influence campaigns and the Government should be conducting analysis to understand the extent of the targeting of voters, by foreign players, during past elections. We ask the Government whether current legislation to protect the electoral process from malign influence is sufficient. Legislation should be in line with the latest technological developments, and should be explicit on the illegal influencing of the democratic process by foreign players....The Government should put pressure on social media companies to publicise any instances of disinformation. The Government needs to ensure that social media companies share information they have about foreign interference on their sites— including who has paid for political adverts, who has seen the adverts, and who has clicked on the adverts—with the threat of financial liability if such information is not forthcoming" (House of Commons 2019).

A report by House of Commons House of Commons (2019) also points out the necessity of knowing the origin of political advertisement, especially when the subject matter is forming interference. Thus, the source of the advertisement should be published. In the UK case, Russian state affiliated with IRA used the internet plat-

forms to influence British public (Ajir and Vailliant 2018) in order to persuade them to cast a leave vote in the referendum. Evidences show that Russia employed similar tactics into another sovereign nation's democratic process to promote its own political agenda. This intervention was executed by purchasing paid advertisements to promote content across social media (House of Commons 2019). Nevertheless, the impact of this intervention was estimated to be limited (**?**). It wasn't decisive on the result of the referendum. The causal argument that is suggested in this section doesn't attribute a decisive role to the IRA in influencing the 2016 U.S presidential election and BREXIT referendum. Nevertheless, unregulated Surveillance Capitalism in these two cases empowered an authoritarian government to meddle with a domestic vote. This is suggested as a factor that deteriorates the quality of democratic governance in liberal democracies and potentially harms political stability. Considering the fact that IRA operations were mostly focused on pushing divisive and polarizing issues in foreign soils, constant use of this weaponized information warfare (Ajir and Vailliant 2018) can further erode democratic norms. In the U.S and U.K cases, micro-targeted advertisements were used to divide and polarize public opinion and influence the election. These actions taken by Kremlin have been motivated to manipulate public opinion on foreign soil (Gallacher, Heerdink et al. 2019). Kremlin's effort to inject conspiratorial discourse and use of disinformation, motivated by influencing the domestic politics of its adversaries (Lucas and Pomeranzev 2016), which can trigger a further form of democratic backsliding in liberal democracies. This is a decline in the qualities that are associated with democratic process because evidence shows that by using basic advertisement services of Surveillance Capitalism, an overarching political entity imposes its interest on another state's domestic elections (Schmitter and Karl 1991). In the United Kingdom and the United States, this intervention by an authoritarian government takes the form of voter suppression, combust polarization, mobilizing ethnicity and gender-based cleavages (cleavages (Nadler, Crain, and Donovan 2018). This intervention illustrates a new form of threat against the democratic process. States are exposed to foreign intervention without legislative or judicial regulation regarding the data privacy, even though laws must protect the citizens from exposing foreign governments' propaganda efforts. This protection could be imposed by stricter regulations on advertisement purchase or stipulating the advertisement buyer to disclose its origin and name.

3.3 Disinformation: Macedonia, PizzaGate and Turkey

This section provides empirical evidence on the role of the Surveillance Capitalism business model that incentiezes disinformation on the internet due to advertising revenues. The final months of the 2016 U.S election experienced a wave of disinformation on the internet. There were various intentions behind this pollution; as illustrated above, Trump camping motivated by meddling with the turnout rate among gender-based and racial groups or Kremlin affiliated IRA's effort to support a candidate who had a softer stand against Russia. However, non-state actors also injected speculative and deceptive information on the internet to seek profit from the business model of Surveillance Capitalism (Marwick and Lewis 2017). As proposed in the previous chapter of this thesis' theoretical expectation, democratic backsliding does not necessarily have to be triggered by a state actor, but non-state actors are also can damage democratic quality by exploiting the practices of Surveillance Capitalism. The most notorious example of such an effort was conducted in the small town of Macedonia. Veles, a remote town in Macedonia populated with 55.000 residents, hosted more than 100 pro-Trump new sides that almost all generated misleading and non-factual news about the 2016 U.S election (Subramanian 2020).

One of the most visited webpage was set up by a group of teenagers , USConservativeToday.com posted news that's spread chiefly disinformation on Democrat candidate by "exploiting conservative American's hunger for negative stories about Hillary Clinton" (Silverman and Alexander 2019). News site predominantly circulated fake news, majority of them accused Hillary Clinton with misleading and provocative contents and praised Donald Trump. Because advertising feature of Surveillance Capitalism then rewarded this fake-news generously due to the engagement it created (Subramanian 2020).

As revealed by the teenagers who conducted this operation, it was much more profitable to circulate misleading news about Clinton because it received substantially more engagement and more money (Marwick and Lewis 2017). The evidence suggests that disinformation campaign doesn't always necessarily have to be used by a political actor, but incentivizing a non-state actor to inject misleading information into electoral process also damages the quality of public's discourse.

For instance, one of the teenagers involved in this operation set up a website called Daily Interesting Things. A journalist who interviewed the website's owner Boris, makes the following remarks:

"The first article about Donald Trump that Boris ever published described how, during a campaign rally in North Carolina, the candidate slapped a man in the audience for disagreeing with him. This never happened, of course. Boris had found the article somewhere online, and he needed to feed his web¬site, Daily Interesting Things, so he appropriated the text, down to its last mis¬begotten comma. He posted the link on Facebook, seeding it within various groups devoted to American politics; to his astonish-ment, it was shared around 800 times. That month—February 2016—Boris made more than $150 off the Google ads on his website. Considering this to be the best possible use of his time, he stopped going to high school. . . Between August and November, Boris earned nearly $16,000 off his two pro-Trump websites. The average monthly salary in Macedonia is $371" (Subramanian 2020).

The overall story is the business model of Surveillance Capitalism incentives teenagers in Macedonia to earn pocket money by exploiting the basic features of social media. As a result of this exploitation, voters in the U.S are exposed to a widespread diffusion of disinformation that is polluting social media platforms, therefore, harming democracy (Nielsen and Fletcher 2020). Eventually, that deteriorates the mutual understanding of facts that harm public discourse, and citizens' ability to asses politics declines, and it further damages democratic politics (Jee, Lueders, and Myrick 2022). Contents are deliberately created to be misleading, extreme and provocative because of higher rate of clicks and engagement with the website. Therefore non-state would have inclined to deliberately pollute public discourse with misleading contents so that they can exploit pay-per click option (Hughes and Waismel-Manor 2021). This can deteriorate the quality of democratic politics because it damages citizens capacity to separate facts from deliberately created misleading contents (Butcher 2019).

Another prominent example of the perils of this business model occurred in Washington, resulting in what is known as PizzaGate. After WikiLeaks leaked the emails of John Podesta (Clinton's chief of the campaign), it snowballed into a massive conspiracy theory that allegedly, Hillary Clinton and Democrat Party officials were involved in child trafficking, and their headquarters was located in Washington based Comet Ping Pong pizza. Social media users, dominantly Trump supporters, shared and pushed the blogs on this conspiracy content on Twitter with the hashtag PizzaGate. Eventually, the conspiracy theory resulted in the physical involvement of Edgar Welch, who raided the pizza store with an assault rifle to liberate the children (Aisch, Huang, and Kang 2016). The most important part of the incident was the pages that put forward promoted this conspiracy was created and set up to look like mainstream news outlets. The page owners were motivated by pushing this sen-

sational and unimaginable disinformation to gain advertising revenue by boosting page visits and screen time (Marwick and Lewis 2017). To summarize PizzaGate, a conspiracy content injected to the internet by someone, which is content that is extreme, provoking and radical, in other words it has the potential to receive a higher rate of engagement (Silverman and Alexander 2019). Eventually, the content that has the potential of receiving a high rate of engagement promoted by websites that are designed to look like a mainstream news outlet. Website owners have been incentivized to promote this content due to advertising revenue from Google or Facebook's ad services (Hughes and Waismel-Manor 2021). Consequently, disinformation thrives on the internet due to the business model of Surveillance Capitalism. Expansion of disinformation online possesses the potential to trigger democratic backsliding because disinformation can baffle and mislead voters, which can create distrust in democratic norms and the institutions, and it can even disrupt elections by misrepresenting the results (Colomina, Margalef, and Youngs 2021).

The PizzaGate incident illustrates another example of how non-state actors could deteriorate public discourse for advertising revenue, at the same time, viral engagement with the conspiracy contents further combust behavioral surplus extraction of Surveillance Capitalism. In this example, democratic erosion is not necessarily done by the incumbent or other state actors. However, it led to widespread pollution of disinformation which is detrimental to public's ability to asses political activity, and make informed decisions about their choice to prevent detrimental consequences against the democratic regime since objective facts are vital for a healthy democracy (Sen 1999).

The BREXIT referendum on the other hand, illustrates how political actors can undermine facts by exploiting business principles which prioritize contents that generates most engagement. Misinforming the public is not a new phenomenon in British politics however, the operating principles of the internet and social media skyrocketed the issue to an unprecedented level (Marshall and Drieschova 2018). Three different policy topic were viral during the extensively echoed BREXIT campaign vote. First was the UK sending £350m to EU on a weekly basis. Second was people who migrated to the UK reached 333.000. Lastly, Turkey is about the enter the EU, which will distort the British labor market due to immigration. All three messages have been deliberately generated and created and are misleading and misinforming the public (Marshall and Drieschova 2018). These sorts of misleading messages are deliberately generated by Leave Campaign, and it is coupled with the business model of technology companies where the viral contents that increase the engagement then led to the promotion of fake news and disinformation loaded contents, due to the business model these sort of news, which is prioritized on social media platforms

(Donovan 2021). During the BREXIT referendum, Leave Campaign established its platform based on the policy issues that are not necessarily factual. Contrary to past campaigns, social media platforms' business model contributed to the exacerbation of the non-factual information at a higher level (Marshall and Drieschova 2018). This exacerbation of disinformation possesses the potential of eroding the qualities that are associated with democratic politics. European Parliament in its latest report, emphasizes the danger of disinformation by stating, "'disinformation erodes trust in institutions along with digital and traditional media and harms our democracies by hampering the ability of citizens to take informed decisions... It also further polarize the public and undermines democratic pillars such as the electoral system" Colomina, Margalef, and Youngs (2021). Therefore, disinformation can contribute to the erosion of democratic qualities and carries the potential of triggering democratic backsliding in democratically governed societies. It is not a new phenomenon, but the Surveillance Capitalism business model further exacerbates the spread of disinformation, and this pollution can harm democracy by damaging people's ability to make decisions based on facts. Also, the further pollution of disinformation can erode the public's trust in vital institutions for liberal democracies. In the British case, the internet platforms' business model further promoted the Leave Campaigns' misleading political messages due to the higher engagement it could reach. Consequently, the business model promotes the contents that can mislead public opinion and prevent informed decisions by the voters. Leave aside, whether this campaigning method is successful or not, the causal argument that is proposed in this section argues that disinformation damages democracy by manipulating voters' preferences, opinions, and choices. So far, the social media and internet platforms' profit model exacerbates the amount of disinformation that is circulating online.

Overall, the story reveals the following fact: It is the business model of Surveillance Capitalism that incentives people to spread misleading and provocative content because it is much more profitable. Viral contents that are generated with misleading and provocative intentions eventually attract more attention and hence more engagement, which are later converted into additional income. Overall, public discussion and voters' ability to assess political activity declines, trust in the institutions can further decreases, and overall impact can damage the qualities associated with a healthy democracy.

3.4 Algorithms and Polarization

This section illustrates the role of social media algorithms on their role of combusting political polarization. Empirical evidence proposed are consiting of whistleblowers' testimony, leaked documents, journalistic work, and former employees' accounts. Despite the lack of accessible data, the empirical evidence in this chapter is based on former employees' statements who used to have permission to access the inner company information. Their accounts provide insight because their occupation used to be analyzing the inner company data. Therefore their remarks on algorithms put forwarded as empirical evidence.

Hence this section does not explicitly employs BREXIT and the 2016 U.S election to support the proposed causal mechanism. However, the algorithms that are operating the social media platforms are working with similar commands. Hence the empirical evidence that is provided in this section applies to both cases. Unlike the empirical evidence in the previous sections, the following evidences are independent of an electoral cycle or precise timing. In other words, evidence that is provided in this section illustrates a long-time trend that has constantly been working, which increases political polarization.

Algorithms are designed to sort the contents on social media platforms and determine what contents are being shown to the user (Marchal et al. 2019). Hence the role of algorithms is essential for social media companies to facilitate the relations between the users and platform. Thus algorithms are vital for maximizing users' engagement with the platform (Donovan 2021). Considering the behavioral surplus extraction imperative of Surveillance Capitalism, algorithms are appeared to be an essential combust in political polarization. This account is amplified by a whistle-blower from Facebook, regarding the role of algorithms. Before quitting, France Haugen, a former product manager in the civic information unit, stole vast chunks of internal reports and research materials that show how Facebook chooses "profit over safety" (Slotnik 2021). Thousands of inner company files she gathered from Facebook were investigated by Wall Street Journal's Facebook Files team. Reports revealed that Facebook's executives are aware of the polarizing effect of their algorithms; the company repeatedly reached the conclusion that Instagram is harmful to the majority of teenage girls, combust disinformation regarding Covid-19 and vaccines, spreads hate speech and contributes to religious hatred around the globe (The Wall Street Journal 2021). However, to maintain engagement metrics as they are, the company did not take any action.

In her testimony to U.S Senate, Frances Haugen explicitly warned the policy makers regarding the dangers of algorithms that curate the News Feed of the users with engagement-based ranking (Haugen 2021). The engagement-based ranking is:

> "Facebook and other social media platforms use engagement-based ranking to determine which content they believe is most relevant to users' interests. After taking into account a post's likes, shares, and comments, as well as a user's past interactions with similar content, the algorithms powering someone's Twitter feed or Facebook's news feed will place customized posts in front of that person. This is in contrast to a chronological ranking that simply is based on when content was posted or sent" (Mac 2021).

During her testimony, Haugen came back to the same conclusion repeatedly: Facebook's algorithm promotes and incentivizes fake news, disinformation, hate speech, and ethnic violence in some parts of the world (Haugen 2021). Overall, the algorithms exacerbate political polarization by promoting content that further polarizes existing social tensions. Frances Haugen's remarks support this section's causal mechanisms, which is the business model of Surveillance Capitalism that uses engagement-based algorithms that can contribute to additional political polarization. The algorithms are not suggested as the main reason behind the political polarization however, it influences the tension between the camps (Van Bavel et al. 2021). The main reason of this is algorithms prioritize contents that reinforces people's political beliefs and tend to portray other political camps as hostile and evil (Barrett, Hendrix, and Sims 2021). A high level of political polarization can harm democratic governance by incentivizing voters to support extreme candidates (Svolik 2019) and this makes compromises among policymakers less likely (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018) and eventually erodes democratic norms (Barrett, Hendrix, and Sims 2021). This sort of outcome can trigger additional democratic backsliding in liberal democracies by combusting additional political polarization and at extreme levels, it can undermine liberal democracies.

Before Haugen stepped forward as a whistleblower, a similar warning was declared by Facebook's ex-chief product officer, Chris Cox. In an inner company presentation back in 2016, which Wall Street Journal reviews, there is a similar account. In 2016 Cox gathered a new project group to investigate the effects of boosting user engagement and whether that was combusting political polarization. The project group revealed that there was indeed a correlation and that reducing political polarization would mean decreasing engagement among users (Horwitz and Seetharaman 2020).

Cox's project group came up with various ways to fix this problem, such as re-coding some of the algorithms to decrease political polarization among the users; however, most of the proposed fixes were declined by the top executive because allegedly they were anti-growth (Horwitz and Seetharaman 2020). Put differently, Facebook's governing body refused the proposition to fix their engagement maximizing algorithms that cause exacerbating of political polarization.

A former AI researcher who worked at Facebook repeats a similar discount; he declared that "models that maximize engagement increase polarization" (Hao 2021). Eventually, the overall effect of increasing political polarization triggers additional hostility between voters and eventually creates "us vs. them" politics (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018). This harms the quality of democratic governance. It is even argued that a high level of political polarization incentives voters to make trade-offs between their partisan interests and democratic merits, which can further increase authoritarian practices (Svolik 2019). It is shown by the inner company documents and former employees' remarks, algorithms that operates social media platforms contributes to additional political polarization. This effect is hazardous for democratic politics because it leads to hostility between camps, hence incentives them to prioritize their self-interests at the expense of freedoms. Therefore engagement-maximizing algorithms are combusting political polarization and potentially deteriorating democratic politics.

A 2020 documentary, The Social Dilemma, is an additional resource that provides additional insight into the role of algorithms. Interviewees are former high-rank officers in Silicon Valley companies such as Google, Facebook, Firefox, Snapchat, Instagram and many more. The main point that is repeated by all the interviewees is, social media and technology companies must adjust and modify their business model. Because the business model is summarized as; i) increasing the engagement (maximize usage), ii) keeping the users and inviting more to join, iii) with the first two goals in hand, selling the maximum amount of advertisements to the businesses (Netflix 2020). In the documentary, interviewees also extensively discuss the role of algorithms in combusting political polarization in the U.S and the radicalization of the public at the expense of profiting (Netflix 2020). The algorithms operation system attracts extensive attention from the former executives of Silicon Valley companies because of their role in increasing engagement and extracting more behavioral surplus. They argue that to maximize the users' engagement with the platform, algorithms promote content that is polarizing and radicalizing people due to a higher level of engagement (Netflix 2020). Put differently, users tend to spend more time on the platform when exposed to radical, conspiracy-minded, polarizing, and disinformation-based content, offering an extra behavioral surplus.

Current and former employee remarks are further empirical evidence on the role of algorithms that ignites additional political polarization among users. This design is not a coincidence but a strategy that is employed by technology companies to maximize their profit. Profit maximization is a function of engagement-based metrics; additional engagement gets converted into more behavioral surplus, which is a vital asset in generating micro-targeted advertisements. Eventually, the business model contributes to a higher level of political polarization, which potentially has detrimental consequences upon democracy (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018).

Karen Hao from MIT Technology Review conducted an influential journalistic work by interviewing current and former employees of social media companies. According to the statements from employees of Facebook and Twitter, teams designing the algorithms are obsessed with engagement metrics, which measures with shares, comments and likes, and when models reduce the engagement, they are deleted (Hao 2021). However, according to accounts by the former employees:

> "The machine-learning models that maximize engagement also favor controversy, misinformation, and extremism: put simply, people just like outrageous stuff. Sometimes this inflames existing political tensions. The most devastating example to date is the case of Myanmar, where viral fake news and hate speech about the Rohingya Muslim minority escalated the country's religious conflict into a full-blown genocide. Facebook admitted in 2018, after years of downplaying its role, that it had not done enough to prevent the platform from being used to foment division and incite offline violence... A former Facebook AI researcher who joined in 2018 says he and his team conducted "study after study" confirming the same basic idea: models that maximize engagement increase polarization. They could easily track how strongly users agreed or disagreed on different issues, what content they liked to engage with, and how their stances changed as a result. Regardless of the issue, the models learned to feed users increasingly extreme viewpoints. "Over time they measurably become more polarized" (Hao 2021).

Eventually, the engagement maximizing algorithms contribute to additional political polarization, which divides the people and their representatives into different camps where they are less willing to share power and make compromises, preventing democracy from functioning (Forrest and Daymude 2022). Former employee remarks further supports this section's causal mechanism, which is engagement-based algorithms prioritizing contents that are polarizing the voters. Nevertheless, social media algorithms are less likely to be the prime force behind political polarization (Van Bavel et al. 2021); it is combusting the already increasing political

polarization (Barrett, Hendrix, and Sims 2021). Hence it further exacerbates political polarization by amplifying divisive contents and promoting extreme messages. Consequently, voters are increasingly get exposed to messages that reinforce their political beliefs and at the same time, falsehood messages toward their fellow citizens proliferate (Van Bavel et al. 2021). Overall, citizens can further polarize across the political spectrum, and it can further erode the qualities of democratic governance in liberal democracies. Divisive, extreme, provoking contents are more likely to receive engagement (Van Bavel et al. 2021); because these sorts of messages are more likely to capture users' attention. Social media companies are not motivated by combusting polarization; it is the business model of Surveillance Capitalism that dictates maximizing the users' engagement with the platform. Because the amount of time users spend on the platforms converts into more time allocated to looking at paid advertisements (Van Bavel et al. 2021), which is the prime source of Surveillance Capitalism revenue. Therefore, revenue maximization appears to be exacerbating additional political polarization, and this can further erode the qualities of democratic norms and undermines democracy in liberal democracies (Van Bavel et al. 2021). A high level of political polarization can lead to dysfunctional government, potentially paving the way for authoritarian practices and damaging social harmony.

A randomized field experiment with a sample of 2743 Facebook users conducted prior to the 2018 U.S midterm elections provides further evidence on the causal relations between social media use and political polarization (Allcott et al. 2020). Researchers randomly assigned users to deactivate their Facebooks accounts during the 2018 U.S midterm elections. The experiment revealed that deactivation reduces news knowledge, on the other hand, decreases issue and affective polarization, a decline mainly caused by less exposure to news circulating online (Allcott et al. 2020). Put differently, deactivating Facebook accounts makes voters less informed about political issues and so, in this case, makes people less polarized by some measures. Researchers found out that consuming news on Facebook has some role in the rising political polarization in the U.S, nevertheless, it is not the primary facilitator (Allcott et al. 2020). Evidence from the experiment provides causal evidence that Facebook has some impact on the rising political polarization in the U.S (Van Bavel et al. 2021). However, it is less likely to be the prime reason behind increasing political polarization in the U.S but exacerbating the already existing social tensions.

Empirical evidence in this section suggests that social media algorithms are designed to maximize users' engagement. In order to execute this task, social media companies use engagement-based algorithms rather than chronological ranking algorithms. In other words, algorithms sort the contents that appear on users' screens based on the engagement which are more likely to receive. This strategy is employed to max-

imize the time spent on the platforms; therefore, more time is allocated to looking at paid advertisements. Evidence suggests that to attract users' attention (i.e keep them scrolling), algorithms tend to prioritize contents that reinforces people's political beliefs and at the same time, messages that amplify divisive issues toward fellow citizens are more likely to receive higher engagement. Consequently, engagement-based algorithms potentially exacerbate political polarization. It is not the primary source behind the political polarization but definitely combusting the issue.

This empirical chapter has been written to provide evidence to support the theoretical arguments that were proposed in the previous chapter. First two sections provide detailed accounts during the 2016 U.S election and the BREXIT referendum illustrating how the business model of Surveillance Capitalism can cause a new form of democratic backsliding. Informed with democratic backsliding literature and the business practice of Surveillance Capitalism, this thesis synthesis four causal mechanisms that deteriorates qualities that are associated with democratic governance.

4. CONCLUSION

When the young entrepreneurs of Silicon Valley mushroomed after the millennium, the public was generally excited about the positive impact of their products. The Internet was widely seen as a positive development for democracy (Butcher 2019). Social media's contribution to Arap Spring was praised for giving civil society a platform to organize against authoritarian leaders (Tufekci and Wilson 2012). Social media were hailed as a new platform where civil society could spread their ideas and organize against authoritarian leaders to demand democratic rights (Allcott et al. 2020). In less than a decade, there has been significant controversy against the initial hope and skepticism toward the liberating potential of social media and the Internet. For example, Facebook was used by the Myanmar military to run a campaign against Rohingya Muslims, and the company failed to prevent the spread of hate speech, consequently contributing to the alleged genocide (Mozur 2018). In 2016, Kremlin-affiliated IRA extensively used social media to trigger sensitive issues in the U.S and U.K (Badawy et al. 2019). IRA tactics that are adopted were intended to deepen social cleavages (Nadler, Crain, and Donovan 2018). However, this intervention was possible due to the technology platforms' profit model, where they intentionally leave the advertisement feature open for financial growth (Vaidhyanathan 2018*a*, 90). Overall, these sorts of incidents had shaken the initial hope. One of the fundamental reasons behind vanishing hope appears to be the monetary incentive of technology platforms. This thesis adopts Surveillance Capitalism theoretical framework to formalize the monetary incentive of technology platforms.

Surveillance Capitalism principles differ based on the country and the regime type that the technology platforms are operating. Therefore, it has different implications based on the country under investigation. In China, the business model is extensively used to surveil the population and further consolidate the one-party rule (Lin and Milhaupt 2021). Additionally, compared to their Western partner's technology platforms in, China does not enjoy a similar level of independence from the state (Chan and Kwok 2021). Therefore, analyzing the Chinese case with the Surveillance

Capitalism framework requires different theoretical arguments.

On the other hand, not all authoritarian states are using similar Surveillance Capitalism tools. In Russia, Surveillance Capitalism takes a hybrid form where the allocation of state resources is based on loyalty to the government (Østbø 2021). Nonetheless, compared to China, Russia's technology platforms enjoy somewhat more independence. This thesis employed the Surveillance Capitalism business model in democratically governed countries, where the technology companies are self-governing their operations. However, within the democratically governed countries, there are differences in the business model of technology companies. India offers a unique case on the state's role in developing Surveillance Capitalism (Khan 2021). India illustrates how can state policy can further integrate Surveillance Capitalism into politics. Unlike the Western type of Surveillance Capitalism, India adopts policies that further assist technology platforms' data extraction operations (Khan 2021). This strategy coupled with the complete refusal of the government to improve transparency within the system and adopt data protection laws to protect the citizens.Put differently, India adopted a version of Surveillance Capitalism, where the government deliberately normalize the mass surveillance. To summarize, Surveillance Capitalism takes different forms; therefore, diverse implications can be driven based on the regime type and the country.

In this thesis, the Surveillance Capitalism business model in liberal democracies is used to drive implications for politics. In line with the democratic backsliding literature, four casual mechanisms can deteriorate the qualities of democratic governance in liberal democracies:

The quality of competition potentially deteriorates due to the micro-targeting service that the technology platforms provide to political campaigns in the United States and the United Kingdom. Nonetheless, it does not mean that all targeted political advertisements are deforming the competition. The exploitation of this technology can cause democratic backsliding by exacerbating the capacity of political campaigns to manipulate voters by targeting them with non-factual messages. In the U.S, the 2016 Trump campaign used this technology to discourage Black Americans and feminists from voting by targeting them with non-factual information regarding his opponent Hillary Clinton. On the other hand, Leave Campaign in the U.K used micro-targeting technology to spread misleading information during the BREXIT, such as the weekly cost of being a member or immigrants allegedly entering the country due to E.U policies. Negative campaigning did not start with social media; however, extensive use of micro-targeted advertisements increased the volume of non-factual messages. At the same time, politicians face fewer consequences for

misleading the public by using non-factual messages. Because the environment where these messages travel is less likely to be challenged and fact-checked, it can also weaken the institutions such as the legislature and judiciary on their ability to impose horizontal accountability. As illustrated in chapter two with micro-targeting technology, institutions increasingly depend on technology companies to regulate campaign messages. Put differently, if political campaigns in liberal democracies use micro-targeting advertisements to violate campaign laws, institutions rely on transparency and cooperation of technology platforms. Consequently, institutional capacity can further decline, and bounded uncertainty of democratic politics can further erode.

The Surveillance Capitalism business model led to foreign interference in the electoral process of the United States and the United Kingdom. As illustrated in chapter two, Kremlin affiliated IRA executed such an operation via the micro-targeting advertisement feature of social media companies. To meddle with the 2016 U.S Presidential election and BREXIT referendum, IRA targeted specific voter groups with non-factual political messages using social media platforms. During the 2016 U.S election, IRA used identity-oriented advertisements to aggravate conflict among American voters. For example, political advertisements that are purchased by Being Patriotic (A Facebook group admin by IRA) targeted far-right voters by falsely claiming that Black Lives Matter activists were killing the U.S police (Nadler, Crain, and Donovan 2018). IRA aimed to inflict further social disruption among the U.S electorate. Consequently, an overarching entity promoted its political agenda (In the U.S case, supported Donald Trump) on foreign soil.

The business model of Surveillance Capitalism contributed to the proliferation of non-factual content that is circulating on online platforms. On the other hand, the monetary incentive of technology platforms encourages non-state actors to profit from the advertising feature of internet platforms by spreading hyped, extreme, and provocative content. Eventually, it potentially damaged the U.K and the U.S voters' ability to assess the political campaigns. A group of teenagers in a remote town in Macedonia exploited the click-per-paid option to the limits. During the 2016 U.S election, at least one hundred pro-Trump websites were operated from Macedonia, many motivated by publishing sensational, provocative, and non-factual news (Subramanian 2020). Consequently, the business model of Surveillance Capitalism contributed to the spread of disinformation, damaging the public's ability to assess politics.

The last causal mechanism that potentially triggers democratic backsliding is an exacerbation of political polarization. Algorithms operating with engagement max-

imization command promote content appearing on users' screens based on the engagement it is more likely to receive. This strategy is employed to maximize the time spent on the platforms; therefore, more time can be allocated to looking at paid advertisements. Evidence suggests that algorithms tend to prioritize contents that reinforce people's political beliefs; at the same time, messages that amplify divisive issues toward fellow citizens are prioritized by social media algorithms. Consequently, engagement-based algorithms potentially exacerbate political polarization. It is not the primary source behind the political polarization but combusting the effect.

These mechanisms are put forward by closely examining the Surveillance Capitalism business model to illustrate how this market economy can trigger further democratic backsliding in liberal democracies. This thesis focuses on the interaction of this business model in liberal democracies by investigating two cases. Therefore, the causal mechanisms are applicable to the U.K and U.S Nonetheless, the theoretical argument can be extended to other liberal democracies with the condition of analyzing the domestic regulations against technology platforms.

4.1 Policy Advise and Future Research

This thesis illustrates Surveillance Capitalism's negative impacts on democratic politics, especially when it is unregulated. Therefore, imposing regulations on technology platforms can reduce the damage. The European Union adopted the most recent effort to regulate technology platforms. On 25 March 2022, The European Union reached an agreement on the Digital Markets Act and on 23 April 2022 on the Digital Service Act (EU-Comission 2022). The main goals behind the agreements are "Creating a safer digital space in which the fundamental rights of all users of digital services are protected and establish a level playing field to foster innovation, growth, and competitiveness" (EU-Comission 2022). The legislation gives European Union authority to regulate the illegal contents on the Internet, impose transparent advertising, fight disinformation and protect the users' privacy. With the agreement on the Digital Service Act, national laws will be re-written and standardized (EU-Comission 2022). The new law authorizes The European Union to impose obligations upon technology platforms for violating the data privacy laws. The European Union can impose a duty upon technology platforms to be more transparent with the data they possess and how micro-targeted advertising operates; the accord also authorizes the E.U to require the removal of extreme content on the platform.

The new regulations will be in force after January 2024.

If the law is effective and applicable, then it can reduce the negative impacts of Surveillance Capitalism in democratically governed societies. Shoshana Zuboff praised the new legislation by referring to it: "The Digital Services Act leads a democratic resurgence that challenges the tech giant's vision for our future. The rule of law has been introduced in our digital information space, and not a moment too soon. While the immediate effects are in the E.U, there are seismic implications for the rest of the world" (Vick 2022). With the Digital Services Act, for the first-time independent auditors will have permission to; thoroughly investigate data extraction operations and algorithmic ranking systems and provide institutions with new capabilities to oversight tech platforms (Vick 2022).

So that democratically governed states could impose new regulations to reduce the negative impacts of Surveillance Capitalism. There is still much to learn about the operations of technology platforms; hence reports by independent experts with inner company data could further guide governments on how to regulate Surveillance Capitalism. Turning the reports prepared by scientists into legislative action plans would be a constructive development for regulating Surveillance Capitalism.

Currently, only technology platforms have access to the information that would measure the effects of their operations on political polarization and voting behavior. If scientists and experts could have been granted access to inner company data, then they could better assess the impact of these platforms on political developments, particularly the election results. Access to inner company data would further enrich the future research's on Surveillance Capitalism. Because scientists could measure the effect of micro-targeted political messages. Since the company can provide data on the past political leaning of the users, it can also illustrate the impact of political micro-targeting and measure changes in the present and future. For example, a user's shift in attitude could be observed after exposure to a micro-targeted political message. Changes in voting behavior could be measured by comparing past likes, shares, comments, and membership patterns with the post-micro targeted moment. With a representative sample and time-series analysis, a statistically measurable causal mechanism will support the argument's internal validity. Within this thesis vocabulary, there is still much to learn about the impact of vote-boost on affecting users' political preferences; without inner company data currently, it is not feasible to measure the effect of vote-boost. On the other hand, the field carries the potential of inter-disciplinary collaboration between computer scientist and social scientist.

4.2 Implications

Surveillance Capitalism has various implications, and the business model appears to be changing based on regime types. For example, in China, the model is referred to as "surveillance-state-capitalism" (Lin and Milhaupt 2021), and in Russia, it is referred to as "hybrid surveillance capitalism" (Østbø 2021). Therefore, the Surveillance Capitalism business model appears to be changing based on the regime types. However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to investigate the effect of regime types on Surveillance Capitalism. Studying the impact of the regime type upon the business model of Surveillance Capitalism can further enrich the field.

It is also challenging to formalize general theories covering all liberal democracies because of different domestic regulations imposed upon big-tech. For example, Germany has one of the most robust regulations; the legislature has the authority to impose a financial penalty on social media companies if they fail to remove extremist content within 24 hours (Schirch 2021). On the other hand, French Parliament approved a hate speech law (Avia Law) adopted in 2019, which gives authority to impose a financial penalty if social media companies fail to remove hateful content within 24 hours (EDRI 2020). Therefore, domestic regulations within liberal democracies can change the impact of Surveillance Capitalism on democratic backsliding.

In Turkey, AKP and MHP prepared new legislation to fight disinformation on social media. The government stated that the law has written in line with the recent Digital Services Act of the European Union; however, the opposition argues that the law aims to impose censorship on social media (BBC News Türkçe 2022). Turkey's case illustrates the short-coming of state regulation solutions because, under an authoritarian regime, laws can be used to strengthen the incumbent. President Erdoğan is experiencing a sharp decline in popularity prior to the 2023 elections; therefore, the disinformation bill aims to further disadvantage the opposition by tightening government control over social media (Esen 2022). In other words, the disinformation bill aims to further tilt the playing field in favor of the incumbent by censoring already curtailed media. Therefore, the solution that is adopted in the E.U might be exploited by authoritarian states.

This thesis investigated the negative impacts of Surveillance Capitalism in the United Kingdom and the United States. Nonetheless, few implications can be applied to competitive authoritarian countries. One such implication is illustrated above; competitive authoritarian regimes can use "regulating Surveillance Capitalism" as an excuse to further assault freedom of speech and independent media.

Additionally, political micro-targeting in competitive authoritarian countries can further erode freedoms. Micro-targeting advertisements travel in an environment where they are less likely to be challenged and fact-checked. After all, one of the reasons why authoritarian countries curtail the independent media is to prevent fact-checking and to censor their misdemeanors. Hence, political micro-targeting can further serve this purpose by exacerbating the authoritarian government's propaganda efforts. Consequently, the overall effects could be much more detrimental to the voters living in competitive authoritarian countries because the public attention in the U.S turned to political advertisements after the investigative journalism of the Guardian, which gave whistleblower Christopher Wylie a platform so that he exposed Cambridge Analytica's practices. Then the Russian link is disclosed. Therefore, exposing the undemocratic principles of Surveillance Capitalism in competitive authoritarian regimes where the press is under heavy censorship is much more challenging. Hence, in competitive authoritarian regimes, the Surveillance Capitalism business model can further distort the even playing field (Østbø 2021).

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