

# Micro-targeting in political campaigns and democracy

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## **Introduction:**

The race to big data mining in political marketing is engaged in many Western countries: in November 2014, the YouGov website launched "YouGov Profiles" in Britain. This ultra-precise segmentation tool collects in real-time more than 120 000 data variables to illustrate with great precision audiences that correspond to each public or political figure drawn from a comprehensive list (YouGov, 2014). Far from being ignored, issues related to these strategies are strongly disputed: in October 2014, Twitter has filed a lawsuit against the US government to impose restrictions on the disclosure of the use of personal data of users the government for surveillance (Nakashima, 2014).

In Canada, several researchers have conducted studies to shed light on how political parties have appropriated these microtargeting techniques (Flanagan, 2011, Marland, 2012). Political parties in Canada are also trying to identify what issues matter more to different communities in order to win votes. But political and legal factors influencing microtargeting are different from Europe and North America. André Turcotte identifies and explains the elements of the Canadian legal framework that governs the use of information on voters (Turcotte, 2012). And, according to Tom Flanagan (2011), the Conservative Party strategists have targeted certain ethnic and religious communities in Canada to ensure victory in particular ridings. *Winning in Power* (2014), by Tom Flanagan is based on years of experience managing political campaigns to inform readers about what is happening behind the scenes and estimate the practices that worked for the party and those who have been unsuccessful. Among other things, these studies allow us to know that CIMS is the tool used by the Conservative Party to manage its database. This literature also outlines the use of this system by the Conservative Party. However, it is clear that most studies focus on the two largest parties in Canada, the Conservative Party and the Liberal party. However, several researchers indicate that it is now possible for third parties to practice

microtargeting despite the significant costs (Cameron et al. 2013). If this literature outlines the use of microtargeting by a major party, several studies show that critical issues are related to the details of the practice of microtargeting (Tüfekçi, 2013; McKelvey, 2016).

### **Microtargeting and citizen discrimination:**

Microtargeting can lead to an electorate increasingly fragmented (Pariser, 2011; Sustain, 2009). Some researchers explain the fragmentation of the electorate by showing that the division into groups, joined the exclusion of groups whose support is considered unpromising for the final vote (Hillygus and Shields, 2008). This is also the phenomenon Howard (2005) calls "political red-lining". Indeed, the study by Pariser (2011) shows that during the 2008 presidential elections in the United States, it is no longer target the "swing states" but "swing people". Applicants can now avoid hearings that are not favorable. Other researchers have shown that there are risks that the hearings avoided in a previous election have even less likely to vote in the upcoming elections. So it is a phenomenon of discrimination in that part of the hearing is discarded (Hillygus and Shields, 2008). Data mining allows among others to target particular individuals who might be swayed, floating voters who have not really made their choice. Gandy (2001) sees this practice as destructive of the social fabric, trained him damage through the use of personal databases to microtargeting purposes are of great magnitude.

"Indeed, as I hope to Demonstrate, the impact of this technology on the social environment in the long run as May Be as destructive strip mining" Gandy (2007).

The danger lies in profiling based on the use of personal databases (Guzik, 2009). According to Gandy (2007) and Guzik (2009), this practice is discriminatory sorting. Indeed, political parties are able to distinguish between citizens based on their ethnicity and treat them differently. According to him, the consequences of these practices have spread throughout society and influence the daily life of citizens who are discriminated against without their knowledge. Literature Researchers are worried not just racial discrimination that takes place through the practice of microtargeting. They are also concerned about the social consequences that can result from a decision-making system that frequently prevents members of certain groups or segments

of the population to acquire the information resources that are critical to their individual development and collective participation in the public sphere . Gandy (2006) believes that data mining is a form of discriminatory technology which results determined by the interests of the country, groups of voters who will have access to the information they need to make sense of the political environment and those who will be free.

Henman (2004) reports an event discrimination caused by microtargeting and database usage. According to him, the personal database usage facilitates discrimination of the population in the government and political parties. In Australia, personal databases are shared with the parties by the government. Henman (2004) reports that the use of these databases sometimes aims to distinguish certain ethnic groups of the population and even treat discriminate when it comes to pay for public services.

Researchers literature also present several cases of religious discrimination directly related to the practice of microtargeting (Albertson, 2006; Fournier et al., 2006; Barreto et al, 2010). For example, in 2008 Barack Obama's campaign team had created 80 custom stickers and web banners for different groups such as "Latinos for Obama", "Jews for Obama", "Greens for Obama," "NASCAR dads for Obama" . But size segments as one made by Muslim Americans, with more than 7 million voters, have not been targeted by Democrats and Republican campaigns in 2008 (Razack, 2008). Activities "Get Out The Vote" that lead voters to the polls have not been applied to this segment of voters (Bergan et al., 2004). And this phenomenon of discrimination applies to other religious and ethnic minorities such as the Latino immigrants in Arizona (McDaniel and Ellison, 2008; Lee and Pachon, 2007)

However Gardner et al. (2005: 180) believe that the practice of microtargeting can achieve underrepresented groups through a more complex segmentation of the population. These researchers recommend that political parties are moving away from a simplistic segmentation and tend towards a more detailed analysis of the population to vote. As part of the study conducted by these researchers, the idea is that it is necessary to distinguish between the various

sub-groups within minority groups to give them a voice speaking to them in a relevant way and engaging in the campaign.

The fact that the practice of microtargeting and use of personal databases facilitate discrimination of the electorate by political parties is not the only point that generates theoretical and normative debates within the literature. The implications of these practices on the democratic process are indeed a whole part of the thinking that drives the researchers of this literature.

### **Microtargeting, competitiveness and democratic representation:**

The change in the nature of the campaign is influenced by the practice of microtargeting (Wattal et al, 2010; Issenberg, 2012 Mosk, 2008).

"The media industry, political consultants, candidates, and Voters Will need to Log adjust Their Behaviors to leverage this new competitive environment. These technologies can change the kind of competition in politics (Wattal et al, 2010: 43) ”.

“Politics, and particularly elections, have become big business. This is seen prominently in most countries such as the United States, more than \$ 2.1 Where trillion Was Spent on the 2008 presidential campaign (Mosk, 2008)".

The practice of microtargeting negatively affects the competitiveness and democratic mechanisms of political representation. As suggested by Howard and Kreiss (2010), political parties set their own rules on access of candidates for access to policy data. That is to say that the decision to provide candidates the opportunity to practice microtargeting using collected database back to the elite of political parties. The candidates of the major parties to whom such access is not granted are left with a significant competitive disadvantage. As the practice of microtargeting is very expensive, candidates from minor political parties that do not have access to these resources find themselves virtually ousted from the electoral race. The practice of microtargeting accentuates the differences in representation between candidates supported by the

major political parties, non-supported candidates and party candidates from smaller financial scale.

When political parties do not involve consultants and external firms to collect and process the data they rely on the government as is the case in Australia. The personal database use provided by the Government is involved in consolidating the position of cartels parties. The operation of the offices of Australian political parties and the financing of their campaigns based on the resources provided by Parliament to its members. The two major political parties in Australia have developed relatively common databases to individual MPs. The use of state resources to maintain the dominance of the major parties is symptomatic of what Blyth and Katz (2005) call the "cartel party". The cartel parties involved as intermediaries between civil society and the state, but these parties have interests different from those of the electorate (Mair, 1997: 101). Cartel parties are integrated into the state apparatus and are in league with the supposedly competing parties to maintain vis-à-vis the electorate and strategically exclude new parties (Mair, 1997: 107- 8). The implications for representative democracy are not negligible and configuration of party representation and competitiveness is greatly influenced.

### **Microtargeting and the democratic debate:**

Indeed, competition standards change, but Howard and Kreiss (2010) consider that beyond the change in the competitive election campaign, it is the balance of power between the voter and the candidate who is corrupt. They observe an asymmetry of information between politicians and voters, which facilitates the ability of party strategists to manipulate the electorate. For example, candidates, consultants and strategists know a lot more about the people they are trying to target than citizens know their subjects. Political parties shall endeavor to adapt their political discourse based on what the voters want to hear, but do not engage in a dialogue with them as (Bennett and Manheim, 2006). In fact, this form of political communication personalized to the extreme can be perceived as a transactional and manipulative communication. This allows candidates to present only certain aspects of their political preferences to certain groups of voters (Nielsen,

2012). Several researchers in literature are of the opinion that the quality of public debate, the quality of the interaction between the candidate and voters suffering from the practice of microtargeting (Budge et al, 2007: 325; Foster, 2010: 30). Political parties tend to use operating technology databases to send information to voters rather than interact with them. Other researchers argue that the increased use of market research to adjust the communication simply reveals the extent to which some political parties have completely abandoned the "educator mission" that is an essential part of their role in a healthy democracy (Gandy , 2002). For Lees-Marshment (2001) the fact that political parties are relying more and more on the practice of microtargeting and market analysis shows that public debate is found increasingly devoid of ideological content (Bennett, 2013; and Abrahamsen al., 2009; Kirchheimer, 1966). Instead of a healthy public debate Issenberg (2012) observed practices that resemble laboratory experiments: "Armed with research from behavioral psychology and randomized experiments That Voters treat as unwitting guinea pigs, the smartest campaigns now believe they know who you will vote for even before you do" (Issenberg, 2012).

The practice of microtargeting contributes to political interaction much more manipulative voter from the candidate. Wring (2005) notes that in this context, it is now against-productive to have a fixed principle position. The criticism focuses on the techniques used to focus the energy of the campaign on certain types of voters - some voters undecided for example - leaving swathes of the electorate away. Campaigns involving the use of personal databases and the practice of microtargeting are perceived by researchers of literature as statistical campaigns rather than ideas campaigns (Henneberg, 2004; Wring, 2005: 179; Sanders, 2009: 67). Another reason why the practice of microtargeting is perceived as detrimental to the quality of public debate is the unequal distribution of information resulting directly from this practice. Indeed, as we saw in the first question microtargeting requires a very fine segmentation and also involves the division of the electorate, but Gandy (2001) suggests that intensive segmentation can have a deleterious effect on the process democratic. Indeed, these practices create and aggravate inequalities that can distort public debate and fragmenting the public sphere (Gandy, 2001). If the information on public policy is more accessible to a group of citizens than the other, the quality of dialogue

between citizens and the candidates will certainly be affected. In addition, microtargeting system is designed to help political parties to guide policy communication and sometimes the policy formulation process, to the positions of a number of smaller and smaller constituents. This means that one of the disadvantages of the practice of microtargeting is that campaigns are increasingly based on the battle for the vote of a number of increasingly low voter (Onselen and Errington, 2004; Sawyer and Zappala 2001 5).

Howard (2006) also points out that the practice of microtargeting is conducted without the knowledge of citizens and this has implications on the democratic process and the quality of public debate. Howard (2006) noted that political communication in times of election campaigns based on the extraction and processing of data. The development of profiles of voters using their personal data, demographic and psychographic contributes to what Howard calls the "shadow data". Unbeknownst to the public and only based on profiles developed, lobbyists, politicians and interest groups make decisions and choose communication strategies. But they lose sight that this is only a reflection designed by data mining techniques, voter support and the positions which campaign strategists are not discussing the support and the actual position of targeted citizen. Political parties and strategists therefore interact with a reflection of the citizen consists of data and algorithms, but is not in any of the real opinion of citizens. Howard (2006) critique this disturbing practice, suggesting that representation of citizens more political rather than the real person impact that is concerned with the issues of the campaign and lives with the consequences of decisions taken on public policy. Onselen and Errington (2004) also question the consequences of these campaign practices for the functioning of democracy. They consider that there is little doubt to have the potential of microtargeting to help parties and governments to manipulate the electorate, raising the prospect of representative democracy is reversed, increasing the power of the rulers on the governed, and marks at the same time the rise of a cartelized party system (Mair, 1997: 115). The use of databases contributes to the marginalization of a large number of voters. Is the practice of microtargeting contributes to skew public policy to the interests of a tiny minority of the electorate? Is the practice of microtargeting



turning the majority of the electorate in "disillusioned spectators" of public policy? These issues are directly related to the founding principles of representative democracy (Johnson, 2001).

### **Microtargeting and the public debate during elections:**

Another aspect of the deterioration of the public debate is the presence of increasingly large gaps issues in the electoral discourse. That is to say that there is a redefinition of the broad spectrum of the debate in force focus communication on specific topics. Focus on topics that divide opinion can help get the public debate of a cooperative scheme combative scheme (Gandy 2001: 145). Breaches of the issues are primarily questions or issues that divide public opinion. These are issues that make the controversy and rarely provide for the exercise of negotiation or compromise. Reviews of the breaches of stakes are very marked. Hillygus and Shields (2008: 7) have devoted their efforts to study how politicians in the United States use these gaps challenges to persuade voters. They showed that the manipulation of breaches issues goes with microtargeting. That is to say, microtargeting allows politicians to know the positions of their hearings on these issues and they direct their communications on these wedge issues because they represent direct avenues to reach voters (Barocas, 2012). Nielsen (2012: 140) in his ethnographic portrait of the race for the Democratic Congress in 2008 reported an example files used in the campaign call center in Connecticut: boxes indicating the positions of voters on issues clearly appear on this file. It is possible for campaign marketers to present to households and individuals candidates and messages almost "created" for them. For example, the database operation allows the campaign team to predict that a particular home should lean toward a candidate if he is aware of three of his positions on specific issues, but is no not informed of the positions of the candidate on four issues (Turow et al., 2012). Exploring databases can target floating voters. But voters may agree with the position of a candidate on immigration, and disagree with his position on health policy. So it is possible to do without some issues when their positions do not match those of the candidate and communicate the positions of the candidate who align with their other public issues.

### **Microtargeting and the erosion of confidence among the electorate:**

The literature reports that microtargeting can contribute to a loss of voter confidence in candidates. Researchers have devoted their efforts in a national study on the perception of microtargeting by US citizens. The results show that 77% of Americans say if they knew that a site captured their information for the purposes of microtargeting, they would stop to visit (Turow et al., 2012). In addition, 64% of Americans say they would not vote for a candidate they support if they learned that the candidate buys their personal information for the purposes of microtargeting (Turow et al., 2012). Bennett (2013) suggests that monitoring of voters and the use of personal databases are practices that strengthen the distrust towards the democratic system and elections. In response to these concerns, political campaign managers are likely to point out that microtargeting and personalization of political communication that Americans say they do not enjoy nonetheless manage to effectively convince voters during election campaigns, so its usefulness outweighs the public unease. But this thinking is short-lived. In the long term the effect of the practice of microtargeting in the countryside could be eroding the confidence of citizens. These will then be in a position to wonder if they are honest public actions program from candidates. The practice of microtargeting can be corrosive and may end up undermine the credibility of politicians before and after their campaigns (Turow et al., 2012). There is indeed a fundamental principle of the confidentiality of personal data; personal data must be used only for the purposes for which it was collected, unless explicit authorization is given. If this is not respected, public confidence is shaken found. One consequence is that response rates to census surveys tend to fall. The confidentiality of personal data is the basis for effective companies (Howard and Kreiss, 2010; Heithusen et al., 2005).

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