TRICKSTER POLITICS ON SOCIAL MEDIA: FROM POLITICAL TRICKS TO POLITICAL SYMBOLS

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The simulacrum is never what hides the truth - it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true.

Donald Trump

ABSTRACT

With the recent presidential elections in the US, and the win of Donald Trump, the concept of trickster figure got wider attention among the scholars in political and social sciences in an attempt to categorize and explain the phenomenon of Trump’s political success and Trump as a political leader. This paper finds social media to be an important, or maybe even a key factor, that can play a role in rise of trickster politics and trickster leaders today. Donald Trump, as a passionate user of social media platforms, and, arguably, the most powerful political trickster in the political scene at the moment, is chosen for empirical scrutiny. This research is going to focus on communicative affordances of social media and characteristics of online political communication in regards to a trickster politician. The purpose of this study is to comprehend how trickster politicians use social media to gain power and what happens with their content’s narrative in an online communication. The concepts of affordances, trickster leader type, and liminality have been acknowledged as central for identifying and depicting the activities of political trickster on social media. Therefore, this paper will present some illustrative examples of Donald Trump’s social media content, and analyze communicative possibilities and limitations within the context. This paper argues that social media and its affordances can serve as a powerful tool to trickster politicians, as political content can get a certain communicative momentum when its narrative is being simultaneously and continuously shaped and reshaped, distributed and redistributed in cyberspace, eventually transformed and formed into a certain form of political simulacrum. The concept of liminality is proposed for better understanding of processes of change, transformation and transition of political content in an online environment, where the communication is permanently out of the ordinary.

Keywords: Trickster, Social Media, Liminality, Political Communication, affordances, Donald Trump, simulacrum
INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM FORMULATION

For a while now, new, social media is a key term in Media and Communication studies. It plays an important role in shaping the dynamics of the public discourse, and it provides a whole new realm for political communication, changing the existing media as well (Ott, 2017, p. 59). The structure and affordances of social media platforms provide tools for politicians which they can use to communicate with public in a much more comprehensive way, and to maintain that communication continuously, easier than ever before. For certain politicians, trickster a-like politicians, social media presents a political stage, where they have a great opportunity to gain political power using all sorts of tricks and ambivalence in discourse and rhetoric. The notion of political trickster was introduced by political anthropology studies, as the term which describes political leaders as “tricksters”, “demonic clowns”, who trick their way into power, often during the times of transitions. The term is derived from the features of a peculiar figure in folktales and mythologies, where the trickster represents an eternal joker and outsider, but yet a culture hero. Political tricksters are seen by anthropologists as dangerous; they do not possess real political competence and solutions to crisis, they only pretend; they will use the trust that people invest in them for their own personal, selfish agenda, and moreover, their real interests lie in such conditions of confusion and ambivalence.

The goal of this research is to find out what social media affords to political tricksters in order to practice their trickery; if the new realm and dimensions of media and communication serve as a tool to political trickster, which he can use to stir up the crisis and to create ambivalence in political and social discourse, much better than the “older” versions of media communication. Also, the aim will be to pin down the political trickster on social media, interpret his activities and analyze the characteristics of the discourse that is built upon, and around political trickster. Moreover, the aim is to present an example of how the symbols that trickster leaves in an online environment, can be further shaped and reshaped, become a powerful simulacrum with no real politics behind it; at first seemingly ridiculous gags and memes, but actually “trickerish” which can win elections.

This research will try to look at the social media, and online communication through the paradigm of liminality. Since it was first introduced as the term which denotes the middle stage of a ritual, the meaning of the liminality was expended and transformed into a concept which can be used to analyze situations, periods of transition and change in time and space. Social
media exists in an online environment, sort of hyperreal space and time, overwhelmed with simulacra used to construct and deconstruct meaning and communication. The communication that occurs in an online environment only involves symbols, images and words that represent real people. It is an “out of the ordinary” communication, taking place in an unreal setting, a natural environment for liminality and ekstasis (Waskul, 2005, p. 47). This kind of liminal communicative environment is fruitful for political trickster and his trickery.

The findings will hopefully shed more light on the certain type of politicians who use tricks and gags on social media to gain power and reverse values, and who pretend, simulate to be a hero. Also, the idea is to present some new communicative mechanisms which can happen in a liminal place like the internet, which trickster politician can use to even win the elections. Hence, the purpose of this research is to make the voters aware of political tricksters` existence and activities, and the confusion they can bring into political discourse that is taking place in the social media sphere. Voters who can recognize the political trickster and the trickery will not be easily influenced and confused, and will have a clearer judgement during the election time. Furthermore, it can guide the way for other researchers to explore and analyze political communication in the realm of social media which can be looked at as a liminal communicative space, where tricksters can emerge and live.

Within this liminal, hyperreal space, we can look at the archetype of trickster, and what he leaves behind, much easier. Donald Trump will be looked at as a contemporary political trickster, at first marginalized as a politician and public persona, but later recognized as the hero who will get the U.S. out of the crisis. Social media played an important part in his presidential campaign, a (Wells et al., 2016, p. 675). The overall aim is to identify, and depict these communicative mechanisms and its momentum and the dynamics which puts the content in permanent motion. To do that, a several illustrative examples from Donald Trump`s campaign and presidency will be used and presented. The analysis will try to follow the transformation of the Trump`s narratives and discourse which take place in the realm of digital culture and social media. At first marginalized, Trump was not even considered to be a real politician, but rather he was presented as a business man, public persona, his campaign had the imperatives of a celebrity culture: mediation, visibility and attention (Wells et. al, 2016, p. 669). That was a starting point for him, and he ended up having one of the most powerful political positions in the world- as the president of the U.S.

Today, popular and all mainstream media exists in tandem with social media platforms (Enli, 2017, p. 52), so it was crucial for presidential candidates to implement social media strategy
into their campaign. Trump chose to use a quite loose, authentic style which positioned him as an outsider and representative of the people who are not part of the establishment (Kreis, 2017, p. 615). Trump was everything but conventional and reserved; he was willing to engage more into direct communication with the public and with the content he did not have a full control of; he used social media more than his opponents; his style was described as “amateurish”, and yet, he was several times more likely to be quoted in the mainstream news media (Enli, 2017, p. 55).

But social media is not just a one-way street. Digital, interconnected society affords to all of its users active political participation (Ross & Rivers, 2017, p. 11). The public, voters, supports, commentators, also have the communicative affordances to participate in political discourse and spread their view and message, try to influence others and to play an active role during the election campaigns trying to bring their own political result (ibid). The analysis will try to show how and why is the role of the public user important for the constant dynamics of the social media communication, and how that reflects in political communication.

Social media and its communicative affordances changed political campaigning and political discourse. These new communicative arenas bring the notion of permanent liminality and an ongoing crisis, and that may be the reason of the current emergence and success of Trump, type of a trickster leader who just pretends to have the answer to this crisis, and actually wants to gain power for his personal interests. The public social media users need to be aware of the power they have, and they should be aware of the types of leaders that can emerge in this kind of medium, a medium of many possibilities, but where the communication can only remain at the symbolic level (Waskul, 2005, p. 48). In this world of symbols and simulacra, we can notice a current re-emergence of the myth of Hermes, a yesterday marginalized “bad guy” defying established norms of communication, but for many becoming a today’s hero (Blanco-Gracia, 2018, p. 17). If we can locate the trickster politician on social media, and answer to a question of how he uses it, recognize the dynamics of their discourse and pseudo-politics, then we will hardly ever going to be tricked and duped.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND MAIN CONCEPTS

THE “TRICKSTER” PROBLEM

The problem of the Trickster is one of the most perplexing problems; a problem stirring much of the contemporary discussion in various fields, such as studies of mythology, folklore, literary studies, anthropology, religion, psychology and nowadays political studies. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the first use of the term “trickster” appeared in the eighteenth century, although not as an anthropological category, but only to denote morally one who deceives or cheats, and later on, in the 20th century, “trickster” was the technical term for figures from literature, mostly from European literature, and from non-European ethnological phenomena, particularly in North America and Africa (Doty & Hynes, 1993, p. 14). In the nineteenth century, Benjamin Disraeli, two times Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, used the term to describe lying political opponents within the Whig party (ibid), but the trickster figure found its way to political science at the end of the twentieth century, when Agnes Horvath proposed the application of the trickster figure for the analysis of political leadership (Thomassen, 2012, p. 695). But still, the term “trickster” was not much invoked in the political context, not until quite recent rapid rise of Donald Trump; after the election, Donald Trump sat into one of the most powerful political positions in the world, and was quite quickly linked with the trickster phenomenon, so the term got wider attention in political and social analysis (Armbrust, 2017, p. 225; Szakolczai & Thomassen, 2019, n.a.). There is no one classical model of the trickster figure, but rather we have a cluster of interpretive possibilities, a multiple manifestations and complexity portrayed by various trickster figures (Doty & Hynes, 1993, p. 25). We can find “trickster”, as a character and a narrative, across all modern cultures and in antiquity, for example; Hermes and Dionysus were tricksters in Greek mythology; West African spider-shaped folk character is a trickster; in the Middle Eastern mythology there are trickster characters such as Juha and Nasreddin Hoja; Loki is a trickster in Norse mythology; Pink Panther, Dr. Who, Joker and Bart Simpson are just some of the examples of tricksters in modern western culture (Armbrust, 2017, p. 225).
The most influential work on the analysis of trickster myths was Paul Radin’s much reprinted book *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (1955), which brings the trickster phenomena into the awareness of the literate public (Doty & Hynes, 1993, p. 15). Radin spent years meticulously working on Winnebago, and devoted over half of the book to Winnebago trickster Wakdjunkaga. His work is exceptionally rich in detail, as he was assimilated into the tribe and quickly learned their language (Szakolczai & Thomassen, 2019, n.a.). Even though, following his extensive work, Radin’s book contains a lot of narrative material, his commentary and analysis of the trickster figure is rather scarce (Doty & Hynes, 1993, p. 16). Radin recognizes that the trickster myth has an important role in the past, as one of the “oldest expressions of mankind” (1956, p. ix), which can be found in the simplest aboriginal tribes, but also among the more complex ones, and that the myth is present from the very beginnings of the civilization (ibid). Although, in mythology and folklore, trickster is often identified or connected with specific animals, supernatural beings, monsters and gods, Radin sees trickster as a figure with no fixed or well-defined form, but rather as “an incohoate being of undetermined proportions, a figure foreshadowing the shape of a man” (1956, p. x); the creator and the destroyer with no moral or social values; the one who dupes others, but it is also duped himself; a figure that knows neither good nor evil, but it is responsible for both; acting at the mercy of his passions and appetites (ibid, p.ix). Trickster is a dominant actor in archaic folklore and mythology, and Radin recognizes trickster as a fundamental figure for the dynamics of the world history, but his work argues that the role of the trickster is also relevant for contemporary form of religiosity, and even applied to classical German philosophy (Szakolczai & Thomassen, 2019, n.a.), moreover, essays in Radin (1956) discuss about trickster phenomena, as an archetypical figure, a characteristic of human psyche which progresses developmentally within various cultures (Doty & Hynes, 1993, p. 15). Jung denotes trickster as an archetypical psychic structure- “undifferentiated human consciousness” that has hardly left the animal level, but it is not only a historical motif from mythology and traces of folklore, but rather trickster archetype can be found in a modern man (Jung, 1956, p. 200, 202). Besides essays in Radin, one of the more commonly used depictions of the Trickster role comes from William Hynes and William Doty (Salinas, 2013, p. 146), who offer a six-point typology that suggests, without categorically defining, Trickster’s common characteristics, and these are: “(1) the fundamentally ambiguous and anomalous personality of the trickster; and following from this, there are such other features as (2) deceiver/trick player, (3) shape-shifter, (4) situation-inverter, (5) messenger/imitator of the gods, and (6) sacred/lewd bricoleur” (Doty & Hynes, 1993, p. 34).
THE “TRICKS” ARE NOT ENOUGH

It is difficult to conceptualize the trickster figure with full clarity, especially in a work such as this, a master thesis, and there will always be a definitional problem with generations of scholars to come (Maurone, 2002, p. 230), and maybe Trickster would want us to define him just by his name, as the one who just does tricks, but that is not enough. Tricks are not enough for one to be a trickster. Trickster as a myth, myth as well-known scholar of mythology Karl Kerenyi described, does not have a solid structure, just repeating, recognizable patterns, but he is mobile and always in movement (Horvath, 1997, p. 14). But myths are a psychic phenomenon (ibid), so the trickster figure should not be restricted just to the realms of literature and mythology (Salinas, 2013, p. 152). Taking a lead from Carl Jung, we can take the next step on the discovery of the objectivity of the myth, and recognize the trickster as a behavioral pattern- an archetype (ibid, p. 15). Jung asks: if the trickster figure would be just a myth which belongs to the archaic period, why can we still see his strong influence on the highest level of modern civilization? (1983, p. 201). For Jung, the phantom of the trickster is an archetype that has hardly left the animal level, a collective shadow figure which is a reflection of an extremely primitive state of consciousness (Jung, 1983, 204). Trickster can be creative, but also destructive, a cultural hero in a way, but also malicious when attempting to settle his appetites and impulses which dominate his behavior (Maurone, 2002, p. 255). Sometimes the term “trickster” is applied for figures like clowns or shamans, as they are “trickerish” (Doty & Hynes, 1993, p. 24), but archetypical tricksters are figures who play tricks guided by their desire to satisfy their unreasonable, animalistic needs driven by the raw instinctual energy (Horvath, 1997, p. 17). Thus, the trickster becomes a figure of disorder and marginality, and therefore hostile to every modern society (Horvath, 2013a, p. 70), where he can often be responsible for both, good or bad, creating ambiguity and ambivalence, blurring the social and cultural boundaries (Hyde in Maurone, 2002, p. 231). Creating this ambivalent, liminal environment, trickster can destabilize dominant social boundaries and gain power (Salinas, 2013, p. 150). The elimination of such boundaries creates uncertain, liminal situations, situations of crisis and chaos (Horvath, 2013b, p. 83), and trickster is at home, being in those kinds of situations- being in liminality (Armbrust, 2017, p. 225).
LIMINALITY OF SPACE AND TIME

The concept of liminality was developed in the field of anthropology by Arnold van Gennep in 1909, to denote a middle stage in ritual passages (Thomassen, 2009, p. 5). And for a long time, the mention of it in the literature was quite scarce, however, today, the concept is experiencing a revival (ibid, p. 7), and it is now more and more used in social sciences and it has a potential to become a master concept (Szakolczai, 2017, p. 232). In Arnold van Gennep’s book Rites of Passage, the term had a very narrow, specific meaning, representing middle stage in concretely staged out ritual passages (Thomassen, 2014, p. 2). Some would expect that the book became an instant classic, considering that anthropological claims are usually not universal, but rather explore and demonstrate differences and variations among societies (ibid, p. 5). But in contrary to that, van Gennep recognized a pattern of ritual form, rites of passages, that all societies use to make transitions; a liminal spaces and moments which are the key for social and personal development anywhere in the world, universally (ibid, p. 38). This discovery shed light on the importance of such ritual transitions for social groups and individuals, thus the very nature of life, but his classification of ritual passages and their structures were neglected (ibid, p. 3). Because of the almost total lack of recognition, the concept of liminality was entirely absent from literature until it was later re-discovered by well-known anthropologist Victor Turner (ibid, p. 72). Turner started to popularize the concept again. He understood the importance of in-between periods, and the importance of human reactions to those kinds of liminal experiences and the way in which liminality shapes personality (Thomassen, 2009, p. 14). But, Turner’s approach had two major flaws (Horvath, 2013a, p. 2). He limited the use of term to just a small-scale “tribal” society, and claimed that bigger, more advanced societies have liminal-like, or “liminod” situations, a term which Turner coined himself (ibid). Liminod experiences represent an optional break from normality, a playful as-if experience, and not a personal crisis or change of status, nor any sort of transition which is a crucial feature of liminality (Thomassen, 2009, p. 15). Despite these shortcomings, Turner’s work played a vital role in turning the focus on the concept of liminality and its significance for anthropology, but another field as well (Horvath, 2013a, p. 2). On top of Victor Turner’s studies, the concept was brought into the other fields of social sciences in general, but mainly in the fields od sociology and political science, when the scholars realized that the term is applicable far more than what Turner suggested; liminality allows us to better understand how situation of crisis and uncertainty emerge, and how and why are these liminal situations artificially created and
provoked; what other concepts can be related to it, and which figures, such as trickster, can play an important role in creating or living betwixt, in-between (Szakolczai, 2017, p. 232).

Liminality is a concept closely connected with the experiences and the processes of change, transformation and transition that individuals or societies undergo as a part of that experience; it is applicable to both, situations and objects; larger groups or individuals; it refers to “betwixt and between”; a threshold in space or time; a period of transition where things hang over nothingness on their way to novelty, construction and deconstruction (Thomassen, 2014, p. 18). Liminality is capable of intensively breaking down the whole into its composite elements and produce crisis, an endpoint that must be resolved directly (Horvath, 2013a, p. 39).

We can differentiate two different types of liminality according to the way they occurred: liminal periods can simply spontaneously happen, in the form of natural disasters, or they can be artificially evoked, for example with rituals (Thomassen, 2009, p. 17). Analytical distinctions of different dimensions and types of liminality are somewhat vague and arbitrary in recent literature, and in some liminal situations the feature of transition rite, as studied by van Gennep, does not exist, but Thomassen gives a good overview of “subjecthood”, “temporal” and “spatial” dimensions of liminality (2014, p. 90).

There are three different types of subjecthood dimensions:

1. single individuals
2. social groups (e.g. cohorts, minorities)
3. whole societies, entire populations, “civilizations” (ibid),

and three different types of temporal dimensions:

1. moments (sudden events)
2. periods (weeks, months, years)
3. epochs (decades, generations, arguably even centuries) (ibid).

Going beyond studies of van Gennep, Thomassen also introduces the “spatial” dimension of liminality, as specific spatial thresholds can be liminal places, for example borders between...
countries, cities or villages, or any other kinds of border-like areas, but also places where a human being can feel betwixt in some other ways, like prisons or sea resorts (Ibid, p. 91).

These are the three main dimensions of *spatial* liminality recognized by Thomassen:

“1. *specific places, thresholds* (a doorway in a house, a line that separates holy from sacred in a ritual, specific objects, in-between items in a classificatory scheme, parts or openings of the human body);
2. *areas, zones and ‘closed institutions’* (border areas between nations, monasteries, prisons, sea resorts, airports);
3. *countries or larger regions, continents* (mesopotamia, mediterranean; Ancient Palestine, in between Mesopotamia and Egypt; Ionia in Ancient Greece, in between the Near East and Europe).” (2014, p. 91).

Temporal and subjecthood dimension can intertwine in many different combinations:
Table 1. Types of Liminal Experiences: Temporal Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Society</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moment</strong></td>
<td>Sudden event affecting one’s life (death, divorce, illness) or individualized ritual passage (baptism, ritual passage to womanhood, as for example among the Ndembu)</td>
<td>Ritual passage to manhood (almost always in cohorts); graduation ceremonies, etc. Ritualized passage within a cosmological event calendar, such as New Year, Harvest, Solstice.</td>
<td>A whole society facing a sudden event (sudden invasion, natural disaster, a plague) where social distinctions and normal hierarchy disappear. Carnivals Revolutionary moments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Period</strong></td>
<td>Critical life-stages Puberty or teenage</td>
<td>Ritual passage to manhood, which may extend into weeks or months in some societies Group travels.</td>
<td>Wars Revolutionary periods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Epoch (or lifespan duration)</strong></td>
<td>Individuals standing outside society, by choice or designated Monkhood. In some tribal societies, individuals remain ‘dangerous’ because of a failed ritual passage Twins are permanently liminal in some societies</td>
<td>Religious Fraternities, Ethnic minorities, Social minorities, Transgender Immigrant groups betwixt and between old and new culture Groups that live at the edge of ‘normal structures’, often perceived as both dangerous and ‘holy’</td>
<td>Prolonged wars, enduring political instability, prolonged intellectual confusion (example: the Thirty Years’ War) Incorporation and reproduction of liminality into social and political structures Modernity as “permanent liminality”?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**AGENT OF LIMINALITY**

Victor Turner, a forerunner on the concept of liminality, already recognized the trickster as “liminal”, the one who temporarily breaks down and shakes social categories to cause anomalies (Doty and Hynes, 1993, 20). Nowadays the trickster figure is also quite often related to the concept of liminality, and most of the contemporary scholars find these two concepts to be complementary, as both help to illuminate each other (Szakolczai, 2017, 233). Trickster
often appears in liminal situations, using and abusing the ambiguity and the confusion, so he can more easily penetrate into the collapsed social and cultural boundaries and practice, perform his trickeries and manipulations (Salinas, 2013, p. 144). As a matter of fact, trickster constantly wants to be in liminality, to maintain liminal periods and ambiguity, so he can gain influence over his opponents, as a constant, fixed figure, an outsider, during those times of ambivalence and distress (Szakolczai, 2017, p. 234). In some liminal periods, there is a figure, a savior who can get people out of the crisis, anthropologists call him the “master of ceremonies”, but these are the situations when trickster can also present himself as a cultural hero, as the one who offers a solution and guidance out of the liminality, back to the normal order, or even better than that (Thomassen, 2014, p. 103). The figure of trickster takes the exterior position towards the normal social conditions and liminal, out of the ordinary stages of reality; he is fixed, not in the move like everybody else (Horvath, 2013b. p. 6), and from there he only pretends to be the master of ceremonies, the one competent and capable enough to overcome and end liminal periods and guide people into the brighter future, moreover, he does quite the contrary, his tricks serve to liminality; the trickster is responsible for instrumentalization of liminality (Horvath, 2013a, p. 84) even though he himself is not in liminality. Hence, trickster needs liminal periods, and liminal periods are characterized with trickster figure. We can look at the trickster as the embodiment of liminality, and vice versa, as the symbol of liminal state (Pelton in Doty & Hynes, 1993, p. 20).

THE HERO WE DON`T DESERVE AND DON`T NEED

After the rise of Donald Trump in the political scene, scholars recognized the potential of the trickster concept and realized that, besides the cultural significance, the term is highly relevant to politics (Armbrust, 2017, p. 225). The studies of Agnes Horvath on communist leaders brought the attention to the analysis on political leaders with the ambivalent trickster features (Thomassen, 2012, p. 695). Political tricksters can emerge especially during the periods of liminal situations and distress, gaining people`s trust by making jokes and telling tales, at first seemingly ridiculous, but also very dangerous (Thomassen, 2012, p. 697). The politicians are the ones who most often have to find a solution in liminal situations, so the extension of the concepts of liminality and trickster figure to social and political events is expected, and it can provide new insights and solutions for the theoretical problems of contemporary politics and
political communication (Horvath, 2013b, p. 83). Like the mythological, folktale trickster, political tricksters can often be ridiculed, but in liminality they are at home, they can be powerful and dangerous because they can more easily gain public`s trust ridiculously playing with words and images (Thomassen, 2012, p. 696). Donald Trump is definitely not the only school-like example of the trickster archetype, but for sure it fits almost perfectly into the category (Forlenza & Thomassen, 2016, p. n.a.). From the very beginnings of Trump`s presidential campaign, everything around it had the notion of crisis and distress- everything was about the crisis: in the economy, security, immigration, international relations etc., and the crisis continued after the elections (Armbrust, 2017, p. 227). As the U.S. president, Donald Trump gained enormous power, but he kept repeating his own essence, creation of crisis and ambiguity, maintaining the liminality politics as trickster politician (Horvath, 2013a, p. 74). Trump`s discourse is populistic, loud, ambivalent, often rude and aggressive, almost entirely contradictory. His entire political work created a chaotic socio-political environment, and he himself, as a central figure, “demonic clown”, is still successfully duping the audience, performing tricks and gags, but actually not practicing politics per se (Davison, 2016, p. n.a.). According to Max Weber, politicians with charismatic authority often appear during the times of social transformations, and they often promise change, and we can distinguish them from usual bureaucratic, formal forms of authority, but Donald Trump is nothing like that, rather he is a politician who gained the authority as a trickster figure (Forlenza & Thomassen, 2016, p. n.a.). Hence, instead of a master of ceremonies, a charismatic leader who will guide them out of the crisis, U.S. got a trickster for a president, a narcissist politician driven by his animal needs and his id (Fertel, 2018, p. 351). Donald Trump, as a presidential candidate, was foolish and ridiculous, with often bad rhetoric (Forlenza & Thomassen, 2016, p. n.a.), but to the public he appeared as something new, different than the usual candidate, a “breath of fresh air” (Martin & Krause-Jensen, 2017, p. 7). The voters were confused, and Trump thrived from the confusion, crisis and ambivalence (ibid, p. 8). In such conditions of confusion, it was easy for Trump, as trickster politician, to blur the societal and political boundaries, and in that way maintain the ideal liminal situation, a situation of paradoxical state, which trickster politician uses to take the power and to trick the entire country into the idea that he will be the one who will resolve the crisis (Horvath & Thomassen, 2008, p. 17).
A PLACE OF PERMANENT LIMINALITY AND POWER-SHIFTING INFRASTRUCTURE

The internet provides a natural environment for liminality and peculiar communicative dynamics which is rooted in the liminal characteristics of the internet structure itself (Waskul, 2005, p. 47). The complex communication of the internet does not occur between people, but only between images, symbols and words that represent them- the content is always symbolic and communicative (ibid, p. 48). The content on the internet tends to change, shape and reshape, it is always in transition, but it will always exclude real, present people, places and things, and it will only consist out of the symbolic representation of the “real” (ibid). We are looking at the information, and computer-mediated communication that will permanently stay out of the ordinary, with the sense of “unreality”; we are looking at the abstract place of the internet that will keep the liminal conditions permanently (Szakolczai, 2017, 233). Who can gain the most out of the permanent suspension of normal, everyday? Probably the figure who will find a permanent home in a place which represents a matrix of an expansive communicative possibilities (Waskul, 2005, p. 48)- a trickster.

The internet can potentially provide a public sphere in Habermas` terms, an online place where society can be engaged in a critical public debate, a social media that is open to all (Fuchs, 2014, p. 89). The public sphere and political communication shifted to the realm of digital communication, because new media facilitate easy access to producing and using communication and information; more people have faster access to more communication, which is produced by more sources than ever before, and no one has the absolute control over the communicative processes and information, because it both became available for all to see and engage with (Gulbrandsen & Just, 2016, p. 21, 22). Digital communication infrastructure is not controlled or determined by a single actor, and producer does not have a full control over the content, thus the understanding and conceptualization of communication is constantly “in-the-making” (ibid), The boundaries between the distinct roles of the sender and the receiver of communication are vague, and the disruption of formerly stable and stabilized roles in communication creates a situation in which power constantly shifts (ibid), so the information lives in liminal transition and uncertainty. We cannot easily find words to describe computer-mediated environment, nor we can use the same words that describe physical geographic
locations, every day spaces, or places, as socio-cultural definitions of the situations (Waskul, 2005, p. 54). What we have is a “cyberspace” or whatever it is called, where “space” dislocates from “place”, an environment where the information is composed out of electronic words and images that represent real geographic places, people, groups and organization (ibid).

SOCIAL MEDIA POLITICS

Social media has become a very important setting for political communication, and contemporary politicians are using it more than ever before, during the campaign, but also for communication with the public on regular basis (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 223). Political parties started to emphasize their communication on social media to reach as many potential voters as possible, especially to reach the ones who are less likely to watch TV debates, read newspapers or attend rallies, and to make them aware of the party politics, or even better, to engage them to participate (Gulbrandsen & Just, 2016, p. 209). Social media outlets, such as Twitter, have opened up more informal methods of communicating with voters and the mainstream media, and politicians can use it without many constraints, any time of the day or night (Ahmadian & Azarshahi & Paulhus, 2016, p. 50). That was an expected adjustment in political campaigning and communication, considering how many people use social media to get information and get their news. A famous research by Pew Research Center brought some interesting results, showing that the majority, 62%, of the U.S. adults get their news on social media (Gottfried & Shearer in Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 223). The rise of social media did not mark the disappearance of older media like television, but it did transform it, by spreading the communication over multiple platforms, making the political communication a cross-platform communication, adding another dimension to it (Ott, 2017, p. 59). Even though political communication became more complex with the appearance of the internet and new, social media, information processing behaviors changed and became more simple and “shallow”, characterized by the rapid attention shifting and the simplicity of the content, so at the end of the day, the audience does not spend much time to think about the issues and the content which they find there in a more complex way (ibid, p. 61). Hence, a big part of political communication is now based on the content which is simpler, sometimes blur, or even fake. Fake news, articles that contain intentionally and verifiably false news and stories, spread out easier via social media; researchers detected more than one hundred pro-Donald Trump fake stories that
were shared about 30 million times only on Facebook during the U.S. election campaign in 2016 (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 212). Some commentators have stated that Trump would not be elected if there was no influence of fake news during the campaign, and that fake news on social media might be the pivotal factor which marked the 2016 presidential elections (ibid), thus we can say that the social media has played and is still playing a crucial role for Trump as a politician and public persona.

AFFORDANCES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The concept of affordances was first introduced by psychologist James J. Gibson to explain how humans and animals perceive the environment they live in and interact with. It represents the perception of what the environment affords, a complementarity of the animal and the environment (Gibson, 1979, p. 119). The notion of the term is fairly complex, and it is still considered poorly defined by ecological psychologists (Scarantino, 2002, p. 3). But we can say that affordances are all the properties in the environment that a person can interact with, but also just a precondition or a possibility for interaction, which may, or may not occur (Greeno, 1994, p. 340). In a sense, affordances are all the perceivable possibilities of activities, offerings of the environment, for both, animals and humans, and unlike values or meaning, they are relative to real and physical objects. Gibson in his writings uses a characteristic linguistic construct to denote affordances of certain things, a “[verb phrase]-able” (Scarantino, 2002, p. 4), which can help to better explain what can be an affordance of certain things in the physical surroundings. For example, affordance of an apple is eat-able, or affordance of an object such as stone is throw-able (Gibson in Scarantino, 2002, p. 4). Affordances are always related to a specific class, organism or a bearer, because cook-with-able is the affordance of a fire only relative to humans, since humans are the only organism that can perceive the possibility of such activity and interact with fire in such a manner. Gibson’s ideas are still highly influential in various scientific fields, and the theory of affordances served as a good starting point for later efforts to develop a general theoretical knowledge about the notion of activity, interactions of agents with systems in the environment (Greeno, 1994, p. 341). Even though there is no mutual consensus on understanding of the concept, the theory of affordances was conceptualized and used in the studies of psychology, technology, sociology, design, communication and media studies (Bucher and Helmond, 2017, p. 3).
On social media platforms, social interactions are determined and shaped by the technology behind it. Since the social relations and social structures are defined by the given technology, scholars recognized the notion of social affordances that refer to the possibilities for activities which technology affords to sociality (Bucher and Helmond, 2017, p. 9). Social affordances not only refer to the offerings of technology, but also to the affordances which people provide for other people, simply by moving, behaving or existing in the environment (ibid). Social media is a mix of both, affordances relative to other people, and mostly affordances provided by the technology of social media platform, an emerging possibilities for communicative action-communicative affordances (Hutchby in Bucher and Helmond, 2017, p. 10). New dynamics and communicative practices that emerged with the appearance of social media encouraged a more in-depth analysis of the affordances concept, because “older” notions of it cannot fairly address the complexity of cognitive and emotional processes that occur in such sorts of new social settings. The theory of affordances has an important role in the research of social media, it can help us to capture a relationship between the materiality and the human agency (Bucher and Helmond, 2017, p. 11), a man-machine relationship; it can explain the possibilities technology affords to users, but also what users afford to other users. A good overview of some of the affordances recognized by scholars in social media studies:
Table 2. Social media affordances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affordance</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reviewability</strong></td>
<td>Viewing and managing the content of front and back narratives over time; reviewing a range of ideas; reviewing the full range of contributions from a single individual</td>
<td>Faraj et al. (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visibility</strong></td>
<td>Ability to make behaviors, knowledge, preferences, and communication network connections visible</td>
<td>Treem and Leonardi (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Persistance</strong></td>
<td>Communication remains accessible in the same form as the original display after the actor finished his or her presentation; expressions are automatically recorded and archived</td>
<td>Treem and Leonardi (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scalability</strong></td>
<td>Visibility is great</td>
<td>Boyd (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Searchability</strong></td>
<td>Content can be accessed through search</td>
<td>Boyd (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recombinability</strong></td>
<td>Borrowing of and building in each other’s contributions</td>
<td>McAfee (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Replicability</strong></td>
<td>Content can be duplicated</td>
<td>Faraj et al. (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experimentation</strong></td>
<td>Try out novel ideas</td>
<td>Boyd (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Editability</strong></td>
<td>Ability to craft and re-craft a communicative act before it is viewed by others; ability of an individual to modify or revise content they have already communicated</td>
<td>Faraj et al. (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Association</strong></td>
<td>Established connections between individuals, between individuals and content, or between an actor and a presentation; enable users to make visible their social networks</td>
<td>Treem and Leonardi (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tagging</strong></td>
<td>Ability to categorize content by attaching simple, one-word descriptions</td>
<td>Treem and Leonardi (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Links</strong></td>
<td>Ability to provide connection from one web page to another, citations take the form of links</td>
<td>McAfee (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Authoring</strong></td>
<td>Generating content and putting it online for a broad audience; authoring can take many forms (an insight, a fact, an experience, a link, an edit) and include various types of media (written status updates, photos, videos, etc.)</td>
<td>McAfee (2009)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the scope of this research, the concept of affordances is brought up to explain the main communicative differences between older media outlets and new social media platforms. The communicative affordances that emerged in digital, viral environment changed political communication, and, arguably, can be the key factor in explaining how trickster politics can become relevant, appealing, and even win elections. Social media offers a whole new set of affordances for the politician to communicate and try to influence the public, but the public users, the voters, are now afforded with much more active role, and they can be politically engaged more than ever before. Among politicians, mostly the right-wing populists quickly learned the advantages of new communicative and technological affordances and they use them to mobilize more active followers and reach larger audiences (Kreis, 2017, p. 610). Trump was an avid user of social media even before declaring his candidacy, and he soon enough became the most dominant politician when it comes to taking advantage of the affordances of social media platform Twitter (ibid, p. 608).

**PARTICIPATORY MEDIA: INTERNET MEMES**

Media memes are popular culture artifacts of participatory digital culture, an idea, behavior or style that spreads from person to person via different social media platforms (Gulbrandsen & Just, 2016, p. 211). Thousands of digital artifacts are crated and distributed daily across the internet to visualize messages about a wide variety of topics, from ordinary life, sports and work, to art, academia and politics, and messages can be quite silly and ridiculous, but also serious and sublime (Ballard, 2018, p. 1) The term has evolved within many networks of mediated participation and is still an understudied phenomenon (Milner, 2012, p. 9). Ballard offers a definition that might be used for studying similar artifacts rhetorically, through close reading or discourse analysis: “Meme (n.): A group of intertextual artifacts that explicitly or implicitly refer to each other through the sharing of:

* alphanumeric, visual, or audio content
  * genre(s) or form(s)
  * and/or an acknowledgment of a social phenomenon.” (2018, p. 129)
Meme, as used on the internet, are usually multimodal artifacts, a combination of image and text, integrated to tell a joke, make a parody or an observation, or an advantage in an argument (ibid). Most commonly it is in a shape of an image, but it can also be in form of a phrase, video, GIF files, hashtag, hyperlinks or even just one word, for example an intentionally misspelled word (Gulbrandsen & Just, 2016, p. 211; Ross & Rivers, 2017, p. 2). Even though, a social text like meme can seem as a mere joke, a silly little diversion, memes are raw material important for the construction of societal and political discourses (Milnar, 2012, p. 15). Meme is “a form of cultural capital, as a realization of speech act force, as a mode of naturalizing and familiarizing social realities, as an instrument of authority, and as the medium (and the measure) of political debate” (Hanks, 1989 in Milner, 2012, p. 16). Due to the ease of adaptation and understanding, image memes are memes which circulate across the internet the most, quicker and on a bigger scale than any other forms of memes, but its success depends on various factors (Ross & Rivers, 2017, p. 2). The meme phenomenon is part of the internet, social media participatory culture, a culture where individuals can express their feelings and opinions more openly and freely, with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement (ibid). In relation to politics, social media affords a much higher degree of political participation with great ease, and internet memes are added to the list of tools for political participation (ibid).

Public users created a great deal of memes during the 2016 U.S. presidential elections period, mostly focusing upon acts of delegitimization of the candidates’ credentials or suitability for the office of the president of the United States and on their personal affairs, physical appearance and persona (ibid). Donald Trump was a subject of many memes during the time, and still is, and many social media users started to use the cartoon frog Pepe in reference to their support of Trump, but also to mock him (Ballard, 2018, p. 81). As it happens with most memes, the association between Trump and the cartoon frog gained spontaneous momentum and more social media users started to create and distribute images of the frog with a clear reference to Trump and his campaign (ibid). Even Donald Trump himself used a similar meme when the 2016 presidential elections had narrowed down to four real contenders, and he was one of them (ibid). Memes will be an important example in the analysis part, example of how the public users used the affordances of social media, participated in the political discourse, and helped to build a narrative around Trump and his campaign.
For this study, Donald Trump, as the exemplar of trickster politician on social media, has been used to describe the communicative mechanisms that occur on various social media platforms, and their impact on political discourse. The analysis will be done on instances of Trump’s social media activities which took place after he declared his presidential candidacy, and started with his serious political involvement and campaigning, until the point of writing this research paper, because he continued to employ the same right-wing populist discourse (Kreis, 2017, p. 616). In the meantime, he managed to win and become the president of the U.S. His victory surprised many, and for many, the picture of Donald Trump seating in the U.S. presidential chair was an unimaginable horror, so the outcome of the election provoked a widespread debate; in his home country, but globally as well (Martin & Krause-Jensen, 2017, p. 5). Trump was immediately recognized as right-wing populist, but what was important for this research, is that he was depicted as the trickster politician by many commentators and scholars (Forlenza & Thomassen, 2016; Davison, 2016; Armbrust, 2017; Martin & Krause Jensen, 2017; Fertel, 2018; Blanco-Garcia, 2018). But Trump is not just a politician, he is a pop-culture brand, a businessman and an entertainer, a public persona who has the imperative of dominating the news media, repeatedly entering and re-entering it, usually with stories told on his terms (Wells et. al, 2016, p. 670). Trump was not the first politician with the appeal of the de-professionalized and authentic campaign style, but he is the one who almost entirely replaced professional social media communication with more of a gut-feeling, bare-knuckle authenticity (Enli, 2017, p. 55). His image as a politician, since he entered the presidential run, was largely formed and based on his social media activities (ibid, p. 56), so it is the coverage of his campaign in leading print news outlets, online blog posts and legacy media (Wells et. al, 2016, p. 675). Since Trump announced that he is going to run for the president of the United States in 2015, he has constantly used social media outlets, Tweeter the most, to communicate with the public about his political agenda, and he continued to do that even later as a president, using his private Tweeter account over press conferences as a venue of communication (Keith 2016 in Kreis, 2017, p. 608). Therefore, Donald Trump’s activities and image on social media, and what he
leaves behind in the real, of digital communication, will be analyzed to identify the social media communicative mechanisms that play an important role for trickster politicians.

The first aim of the analysis will be to place Donald Trump as a trickster politician on social media, and to identify the main communicative affordances in relation to him, and his audience. After that, three examples of Trump’s social media content will be analyzed to illustrate the communicative dynamics around Trump on social media, and conclusions will be drawn based on that analysis. The most significant instances of Trump’s politics on social media were chosen: Trump’s campaign slogan “Make America Great Again”, Trump’s promise to build a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border, and the notion of fake news. The slogan “Make America Great Again” was a huge success on social media, in terms of distribution and attention that it received from the public users (Wang et al, 2016, p. 722), as well as his plan to build a wall on the border to prevent immigrants from entering the U.S. which was his most dominant campaign promise that made a big impact on social media (Ross & Rivers, 2017, p. 2). Fake news marked the U.S. 2016 presidential elections as they appeared in large number on social media, and were heavily shared on various online media platforms, and most of them were in favor of Donald Trump over his candidate opponents (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 212).

DEDUCTIVE APPROACH

This project will follow a deductive approach for its development, thus the research will be guided by the theory which precedes it, and after identifying general trends, through a logical argumentation, it will be possible to come to specific conclusions (Walliman, 2006b, p. 5). The research will be based on what is already known about Donald Trump, and his social media activities, to formulate hypothesis that will then be subjected to empirical questioning. In the case of this study, Donald Trump is identified as a political trickster on social media, in order to explore new communicative affordances and its relation to his content. However, it is better to consider the link between the theory and this research as “general orientation” (Bryman, 2012, p. 25). Based on this logic, it can be argued that the new digital media, social media, played an important, arguably crucial, role for Donald Trump’s political success, and that the reason for that are the new communicative affordances which emerged on this kind of media outlets. The complexity of the research question requires that more concepts should be involved
and translated into researchable entities, as Bryman suggests (ibid). Accordingly, the concepts of liminality, trickster politics and social media affordances are presented as theoretical framework to better understand and explain the possibilities of how trickster politician could be researched and looked at in the realm of the social media. During the process of the analysis, an inductive approach can be used occasionally to better depict the communicative mechanism, content momentum, which occurs in the scope of the research example of Donald Trump`s political activities on social media, because, although a deductive approach is initially adopted, the research process will remain open for inductive inputs as generalizable conclusions will be drawn out of observations, thus the deduction can have the elements of induction (ibid, p. 26).

**THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM**

This study is placed within the social constructionism theory. The internet culture and social media communication will be seen as an emerging reality in a continuous state of construction and reconstruction. The notion of affordances, that will be looked at as a key factor of social media communicative mechanisms for trickster politician, is not a pre-given feature of the digital environment, it is only a possibility, a pre-condition for an activity in relation to human beings, therefore, the study of it will take the ontological position of constructionism and look at this social phenomena and its categories as reality which is continuously accomplished by social actors (Bryman, 2012, p. 33). The communication on social media will be looked as a social phenomenon, a product of social interaction, and how it changes and shifts while being in constant movement, in constant state of revision (ibid). However, this study will not push the constructionists’ argument to the extreme, and will admit to the pre-existence of the reality which is constructed by the internet, but the study will stress and focus on the ways in which social reality is an ongoing accomplishment of social actors, rather than something external to them and that it fully constructs them (ibid, p. 34). Therefore, the reality of the studied phenomena lies within the perceptions and social interactions of particular people which are involved in a specific context, so the active role of people in the construction of social reality of political communication on social media is recognized (ibid). Hence, our findings will present a certain version of the social reality, and what is it constructed of, and of which kind of social interactions between actors who are involved acknowledging their social constructs in the specific context.
The terms social constructionism and constructivism are often used interchangeably and usually placed under the general term “constructivism” (Andrews, 2012, p. 39), but there is a difference between those two concepts, as constructivism focuses on the cognitive processes of individual’s creation of their own reality, whereas, social constructionism refers to social aspects, rather than the individual (Young, & Colin, 2004, p. 376). This research will try to identify and analyze social aspects of the trickster politician’s communication on social media, and focus on understanding of how the social reality and the meaning of it is constructed in the specific context.

DESCRIPTION AND EXPLANATION

Research design will be quite flexible, evolving during data collection. Flexible designs are usually associated with qualitative approaches, but some quantitative data may be collected (Walliman, 2006b, p. 6). The objective of this research is to describe and explain the mediation mechanisms on social media that circulate around political trickster and trickster politics. It will take a form of a combination between descriptive and explanatory type of research, in order to study complex social issues, moving beyond the “just getting the facts” point, in attempt to explain, depict and uncover the meaning behind certain social, political and cultural contextual elements (Walliman, 2006a, p. 4). The case of Donald Trump, and his political activities, is chosen for examination, although, this is not a case study per se, because Donald Trump and his political career are not in the main focus in its own right, neither the goal is to intensively observe his case in depth (Bryman, 2012, p. 68), but rather just the instances of his activities that dominated mainstream and social media during his campaign, and after he became the president of the United States. In attempt to describe and explain how social media affordances play a role in shaping the narrative and the discourse of trickster politicians, this study will rely on the method of observation of collected data. Depending on type of the information sought, observation can take many forms, but most importantly, the data and the findings have to be presented in a clear and systematic way, so that the analysis can give valid and accurate conclusions (Walliman, 2006a, p 3.). To describe and explain the nature of the existing conditions, the analysis will seek to identify the relationship between the theory and collected data, which will be limited by two major factors: the scope of the study of interest, and its complexity. As already mentioned, Donald Trump fits the research case the best, as currently
the most powerful political trickster who regularly uses social media, and who uses social media as the mean of his political communication more than other, conventional media. Two increasing trends were noticed: 1) more and more scholars and commentators depicted Donald Trump as a trickster politician, or a leader who is a lot like the figure of Hermes; 2) researchers and data suggest that Donald Trump emphasizes social media in order to communicate with the public and promote his political agenda, moreover, data indicate that his social media activity had an important, even crucial role for his election win. This research will frame his political content and his activities as social constructions that are linked to a particular physical, psychological, social and cultural context within which they are formed. The surrounding conditions are dependent on the construction of the actors on social media, and on the technological limitations of the contemporary digital medium of communication.

This case and examples are chosen based on the research of literature, media, and current political discourse in the United States in the specific context. Furthermore, it seemed natural to use the new communicative affordances of social media to research the new communicative affordances of social media; to make an overview of Trump’s activities in a digital network public sphere and online sociality, given tools of reviewability, scalability and searchability will be used. These tools will allow viewing the content of front and back narratives over time, reviewing a full range of ideas and contribution from Donald Trump, which can easily be searched and viewed (Table 1).

**DATA COLLECTION**

To a large extent this study will use secondary data- data that is collected by some researchers and later used by others (Bryman, 2012, p. 13). There are many important benefits of using secondary data over primary data, such as the low cost and fact access (Hox & Boeije, 2005, p. 594). This research uses this advantage, because it would be hard to conduct a meaningful survey and focus group interviews for independent researchers, or to do an online fieldwork, therefore, secondary data was highly useful for conducting this study. The data will be gathered from academic outputs, academic articles, journals and newspapers, mass media outlets, digital drawings and illustrations. Primary data was already processed by other researchers, and their findings, conclusions and interpretations are used here to create new ones, in order to the overall
research goals. A few examples of memes, popular digital artifacts were retrieved as primary data, in order to better illustrate the analyzed content.

Quantitative and qualitative data will be used. Quantitative data will provide a better insight into Trump’s general use of social media, as well as the engagement of the public users with his social media activities. General data, provided by Pew research center, about how 62% of the U.S. adult citizens get their news from social media is presented (Allcot & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 223) to stress the importance of social media for the U.S. 2016 presidential elections. All the quantitative data about Donald Trump is related to his political career since he engaged in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections. The data shows Trump’s some general parameters of usage of social media during that time, but also parameters of engagements of the public users with Trump’s social media profiles or his content. Pew research center found out that Trump engaged the most with the public on Tweeter, 78% of his retweets were written by other, ordinary users (Enli, 2017, p. 54). This justifies that Trump’s social media activities are a good study case since he interacts with publics users in large manner. A study by Wang et. al presented the most preferred Trump topics in news media (“great”, “America”, “again”, “makeamericagreatagain” …) (Wang et. al, 2016, p. 722). That is why Trump’s “make America Great Again” slogan is chosen as the important instance of Trump’s campaigning on social media. Fake news had widely spread during the recent U.S. presidential elections. Allcott and Gentzkow made a database of 156 election-related news stories that were categorized as false by leading fact-checking websites in the three months before the election (2017, p. 212). The data presented showed that most of the fake news were in favor of Donald Trump over Hilary Clinton, and that the most popular fake news stories were widely shared, even more than most popular mainstream news stories (ibid).

Data from qualitative studies were used to describe and interprete overall questions of the research, in combination with previously mentioned quantitative data. Ballard identified important meme character (Pepe the frog) which became one of the symbolic meme characters to refer to Donald Trump on social media (2018, p. 82). Examples will be presented in form of image, to visually present how internet memes with reference to Trump look like, and are important for the analysis of social media communicative mechanisms. Data and arguments from established newspapers and journals, such as The Washington Post, CNN, New York
Times, The Guardian, were used to improve and strengthen the arguments of the analysis of this research. If the used newspapers could not make claims about the representativeness of the opinion polls or other findings they report about Donald Trump and his political campaign, then the findings would be considered as less significant (Bryman, 2012, p. 12). Usually, these sources are considered to be secondary to published literature, but for this research they were very useful, because relatively recent events were studied, and it takes some time for academic articles to be published so newspapers were the only source of information for some facets of the study (ibid, p. 115).

LIMITATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES

As it is already mentioned, this study is mostly using secondary data to carry out its own research analysis. There are several challenges with the use of primary data. Primarily, the timeframe for carrying out the research is limited so the extensive data gathering, such as doing surveys on large number of examinees is off the table. It would be highly helpful to collaborate with major social media platform, for instance Tweete, which Donald Trump uses the most, to gather more quantitative data on the content which Trump produces, and how, and to what extent the public users interact with it. Working together with such big companies, which poses first-hand data and technology, could be an enormous contribution to a study of social media affordances and its relation to political communication, but those resources are not available to this research.

Another limitation is that the studied topics are related to very recent events, so the available literature is not numerous. The research question and the interests of this study should be looked from the perspective of various fields, for example such as political anthropology and sociology, communication or psychology, to achieve more comprehensive, holistic insight into the new ways of political mediation in digital environment.

Despite the above-mentioned limitations, crucial insights for this study were taken from the current literature and current analysis on Donald Trump by established newspapers and commentators, which was enough to draw conclusions and make valid arguments about
Trump`s trickster-alike usage of social media communication. Even if this research serves just as a guidance, a pointing sign towards the topics that were recognized and brought to light by this research, it will be considered as a success. Maybe the internet is difficult to characterize as the field of study and it is hard to conduct a straightforward and simple research (Bryman, 2012, p. 654), but everything that is put on social media remains visible and reachable for a long time, and the access to the discourse and narratives could be looked at easier than ever before, thus there is a plethora of possibilities to study communication on social media and focus on specific things or people. Donald Trump is just doing that, predominantly using internet and social media for his private and official communication, which gives the opportunity to the scholars to follow almost his entire political career through social media.

RECAPITULATION

Based on the initial literature and insights from relevant newspapers and journals, following just a thought process, Donald Trump seemed like a perfect fit into the category of trickster leaders, since the very start of his presidential campaign. Besides, everything about him on social media seemed like a gag, and many scholars and commentators pointed out that social media was a huge factor for his win in 2016. presidential elections, and still is in shaping the narrative and image of his policies and political agenda. Thus, the deductive approach was chosen, to examine what actually is going on, on social media, in relation to Donald Trump as a political and public persona, based on the theoretical framework that is presented above.

The secondary data was gathered, a combination of quantitative findings and qualitative arguments to depict Trump as a trickster politician, place him in the liminal space and time, and lastly analyze the communicative mechanisms which brought Trump the presidential title and the trust of supporters, moreover, how Trump and his policies became symbols of right-wing politics in the U.S. Attempt will be made to interchangeably use qualitative and quantitative data, find connections and meaning on the intersection and draw conclusions.

The first task is to present the affordances of social media in relation to Donald Trump as a trickster politician who tends to use it as a communication tool. Theoretical concept of
affordance will be used to highlight the ones which Trump uses the most, which are recognized as the most important. Also, the idea is to present how Donald Trump uses social media in general, how is social media incorporated into his campaign, what kind of strategy he uses, and what stands out.

Further on, the idea is to present three illustrative examples of important policies and issues which were covered in news and social media the most since Trump declared his presidential candidacy. Analysis will try to follow and describe what happened with the narrative when it entered the realm of social media, if and how is it transformed with social media mechanisms, what happened with the meaning of it, and how does it reflect of Donald Trump and his politics. By doing that, hopefully communicative mechanisms and social media momentum will be identified and described.

**ANALYSIS**

The analysis will start with a general overview of social media usage during the 2016 United States presidential elections, with the focus on Donald Trump. The goal is to give insight into general novelties in political communication which are offered by the new digital medium of communication, and how political discourse shifted to social media during the recent U.S. election period. Further on, Donald Trump will be placed in the liminal realm of social media, and it will be analyzed which affordances are there in relation to him and how he uses them as a trickster politician, and is he successful at it. Trump maybe did not have a communication strategy for social media as a politician, but he had a plan as a trickster. Following that premise, the analysis will try to look at what was Trump’s agenda on social media as a trickster politician, and how he used it to initiate and maintain crisis with his political discourse which was often aggressive, insulting and controversial. Trump’s activities on social media were also important for his coverage in mainstream news, therefore, for his win in the election. Analysis will try to see how and to what degree did social media help Trump to receive so much attention from the news media worldwide, and how the perception of him change, from just a public, celebrity persona, he was started to receive recognition as a politician.
Based on how important they were for Trump’s political career so far, three illustrative examples of his discourses were chosen for more detailed analysis through framework and paradigm this study has set. The paradigm is that, that the social media had a crucial role for Donald Trump to even get acknowledgement as a politician, to win the 2016 U.S. presidential elections, and to set up a meaningful narrative around his political agenda, even if there were no any- to create symbols out of his ideals and policies. The discourse around these examples were dominating social, but also mainstream media, in the U.S. but globally as well. The first example is Trump’s campaign slogan “Make America Great Again” which he even trademarked. The slogan was important for his campaign as Trump and his team build an image around it, and many Americans could relate to that image. The analysis will try to describe and explain how social media played a huge role for creating and strengthening this image. At the very beginning of his campaign Trump promised to build a wall on the border between United States and Mexico to hold off immigrants from south. This promise was very controversial, but also dominant in news media and that’s why it will be a second example to discuss. This idea about building a wall perfectly fit into Trump’s right-winged conservative image and politics. The wall promise quickly became popular on social media, for some as a relevant, meaningful policy, and for some as an object of mockery and parody, but either way, it became a symbol of Trump and right-wing ideals. The third example that is going to be analyzed is the notion of fake news which was mentioned more than ever before during the 2016 U.S. presidential elections, and after, the polemics about fake news marked Trump’s political career so far. There were a lot of news stories that turned out to be false. These stories circulated social media and in other online media outlets, like blogs and website that were create specifically to produce fake news stories. Trump was accusing a lot of media companies for producing and sharing fake news about him or his campaign, and studies showed that there really was a lot of manipulation and fake stories about Trump, but it turns out, most of those stories were in his favor. Some even claim that fake news was even the prevailing factor during the elections, and that Trump would not become the president of the U.S. without the influence of fake news and misleading stories. Taking from there, the analysis will try to investigate why is the notion of fake news such an important factor for Trump, not the fake news stories itself, but the ambivalence it created during the elections.
THE MECHANISMS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Since 2008, social media has become a more prominent communication channel for US political campaigns, particularly in relation to campaign websites (Enli, 2017, p. 52). Political campaigns primarily use social media as a broadcasting channel, a channel for political marketing (Enli, 2017, p. 53). Hilary Clinton even declared her presidential campaign using Twitter (and Youtube) by tweeting: “I’m running for president. Everyday Americans need a champion, and I want to be that champion.

– H” (tweet, 12 April 2015), rather than organizing a press conference and using the mainstream media to share the news (ibid). Campaigns of US politicians do not prioritize dialogue and interactivity; politicians tend to not engage in dialogue, so they simply replicate one-way communication, trying to mobilize the public in the service of the campaign, but trying not getting too close to them (ibid). But, during the 2016 presidential elections, Trump campaign was willing to engage with the general public and took more risk sharing content it did not control much more than Clinton campaign, which was more careful and focused on total control over the message (ibid, p. 54). Even before he declared his candidacy for presidential elections, Donald Trump was a passionate Twitter user, and later on, during his campaign, social media played a major role as a powerful counterpart to his press attention (Wells et al., 2016, p. 670). He used social media as a tool for political promotion, distraction, score-settling, attacks, and as a channel for his incendiary remarks on his political opponents (ibid). Also, for Trump, social media is a platform where he critiques the mainstream media, presenting them as biased and untrustworthy, but at the same time, his social media profiles also became a mass media, mainstream channel (Enli, 2017, p. 53). Now, we can notice, that Trump also has the power which the mainstream media and journalists have, and that is an access to the means of production and distribution of communication and information, moreover, social media offers another dimension to it- interactivity (ibid). There is an opportunity to interact with the public, and the public can interact with the content Trump leaves behind. There is a whole cluster of possibilities, affordances social media offers for the public in relation to the content Trump produces on social media, and that will be explained, analyzed and discussed later in this paper as the key factor that helped Trump, as a trickster politician, to gain power and present himself as a hero in the time of political crisis.
On social media, mostly on Twitter, Trump’s political communication was determined by the three key features of social media outlets like Twitter: simplicity, impulsivity and incivility (Ott, 2017, p. 60). Twitter contains out of simple communication due to the character limitation, so Trump was not able to write extensively about his policies and his political agenda, rather it was a platform for him to send impulsive, charged and often incivil, impolite and insulting messages. Those are the characteristics of Donald Trump as a politician, but also the characteristics of Twitter and similar social media as a mode of communication (ibid). Complementarity between the two was the reason why Trump managed to dominate social media during the election, and besides just being a politician, he turned out to be an entertainer, a pop-culture persona, and after all, a populist hero (Wells et al., 2016, p. 669). His political competence and experience did not win him the elections, but his values and policies did (Grišinas, 2018, p. 156). Trump campaign was more amateurish and authentic in the way social media was used, it was guided by the “gut-felling”, more than by the formal familiar patterns politicians usually use, in comparison to Clinton campaign during the same elections (Enli, 2017, p. 55). The content (his values and policies) Trump left on social media felt more authentic, and it was there for public users to pick it up, shape it and reshape it, and with the flow of the internet, it did much more of an impact than content coming from older forms of media, like newspapers and TV.

SOCIAL MEDIA IN HANDS OF A TRICKSTER

Even though, one can say that it is quite obvious, researchers have concluded that Donald Trump outdistanced his political opponents in social media usage, specifically on Twitter (Ahmadian & Azarshahi & Paulhus, 2016, p. 52). Donald Trump was the one who used social media more in comparison to Hilary Clinton, he retweeted more frequently (about a quarter of his tweets were retweets) and he engaged much more with the general public (78% of the retweets were written by ordinary users) (Enli, 2017, p. 54). His strategy is described as amateurism; his social media campaign looked nothing like the other professionalized campaigns run by the Democratic party (ibid, p. 55). But that does not mean that Trump used social media randomly, without any strategy or competence, because he knew how to use social media to engage the public, spark the crisis, and at the end of the day gets more attention in the mainstream media. His strategy was clearly to become a celebrity politician on social media,
because those politicians are more likely to be the most quoted ones in the mainstream news and get the most coverage, just on the basis of their social media activity (ibid). The image of Donald Trump as a persona, as the politician, a presidential candidate, and later a president of the United States, is mostly formed by his activities on social media and based on the content he produced using this new digital communicative tool (Enli, 2017, 56). A tool perfect for a political trickster, which Trump used quite successfully in comparison to his election opponents (Ahmadian & Azarshahi & Paulhus, 2016, p. 52).

When he declared his 2016 presidential campaign, Donald Trump was just a well-known celebrity, a business persona who often appeared in TV shows and movies, but as a politician, he was an outsider (Kreis, 2017, p. 611). At the very start of his presidential campaign, Trump used social media heavily, employing right-wing populist discourses. Using the informal, quite loose conversational language in his social media posts, Trump continuously drove attention to himself with controversial statements about his political opponents, but also about current political questions, women, immigrants, and the disabled, among many other topics (ibid). He used the same communication style and strategy throughout the whole campaign, and he succeeded in his intention to get closer to the voters, presenting himself as the hero who will offer simple solutions to the problems US has in the time of an ongoing political crisis (ibid). His discourse was mostly focused on ambivalent socio-political questions and situations concerning national security, immigration, international relations, war on middle east etc. Almost everything Trump posted online was controversial, and that way he managed to create confusion and ambiguity, maintaining and intensifying liminality; liminality which was inevitable because presidential elections in one of the most powerful countries in the world is a highly liminal situation by itself, and Trump, as the pretending hero, emerged out of nowhere.

Forlenza and Thomassen clearly showed that Donald Trump is definitely not a Weberian charismatic leader (2016, n.a.). He does not possess exceptional leadership qualities, nor any other specific powers or qualities, and his oratorical skills are mediocre, or even worse than that (ibid). Also, before the presidential candidacy, Trump was just a businessman, a showman. So, how does one, without political competence, and without any characteristic of a charismatic leader, becomes so powerful? The answer possibly lies in the new dimensions of communication offered by the new media, social media. Trump would not be able to gain so
much media power by just using the older media outlets, for example just using newspapers, televisions, billboards or similar. Social media offers a lot more. Social media offers a cluster of new communicative affordances, which Trump used continuously. We can notice many affordances which Trump used and implemented in his social media strategy from the list of social media affordances recognized by various scholars (Figure 2.). Trump was able to become the creator and the distributor of the content, at any time, and at any pace. He was afforded to author, to directly produce the content and post it online for a broad audience. The affordance of authoring removes the mediator, the journalist, mainstream media, and gives the politician the role of an author. This way, Trump was able to get a lot closer to the audience, directly communicating with potential voters. But not only that, the affordance of recombinability offers a possibility to use and build upon each other’s content, the audience was able to share and link Trump’s content. The more impulsive, and emotionally charged, the message was, it was more retweeted and shared (Ott, 2017, p. 61). These affordances create new ones, a domino effect; an affordance of categorizing content via tagging (Trump and the public users used tags to point out the message, to place the message in certain narrative) made the content more persistent and visible, creating a whole new, personalized communication network on social media for Donald Trump. The Trump campaign engaged the most with the general public, using the affordance of sharing and redistributing content more frequently than any other presidential candidate before (Enli, 2016, p. 54). At first, politicians used social media as a simple marketing tool (ibid, p. 59), but Trump was the first politician who used social media affordances in such an extensive and intensive way (Kreis, 2017, p. 608). For Trump, social media become a powerful arena, a place of permanent liminality, where he used various new communicative affordances to create ambivalent narratives, maintain crisis and ambiguity. His image, and impact on social media, was so powerful, that he created a personalized mass media outlet, where he is the creator, but also the destroyer; he presented himself as the hero, who will solve the immigration crisis, by creating a wall which will save Americans from immigrants, but he was also the destroyer of international relationships and opportunities; for some, he was the creator, a hero, but for others, he was the destroyer, but in reality, he is neither of those things. Trump is a trickster politician who profited in times when American voters “perceive that the moral order is falling apart, and that the country is losing its coherence and cohesiveness” (Haidt in Edsall, 2016, p. n.a.), without any political experience, policy specifics, or any real cooperation with political structures, and without real intentions to put his words into action (Axelrod, 2016, n.a.).
Most of the Trump`s social media posts are not about politics per se, about the specific policies and political agenda, campaign goals and promises, but rather his content has the connotation of gags and tricksterism, it is a “a toxic mix of fun and anger” (Florenza & Thomassen, 2016, n.a.). Since Trump declared his presidential candidacy, he used social media to insult, degrade and disrespect more than 550 people, places or things (Lee & Quealy, 2018, n.a.). To be fair, Trump is not the first, or only trickster politician out there acting like that, there are many of them around us, but people do not always listen to them, and they don`t always manage to get so much attention from the public, but Trump did (Armbrust, 2017, 233). And the reason for that is the timing (and the place)- Trump appeared in the time of liminal crisis and liminal politics, in a place of permanent liminality, digital social media, and his trickish was effective in these circumstances, making Trump a trickster par excellence (ibid). All publicity worked in his favor. Trump`s posts on social media are a significant predictor of news stories and blog posts (Wells et al, 2016, p. 672). The sharing of his online posts is a key factor in explaining his coverage in leading mass media outlets (ibid, p. 675). And even though he was, more often than not, mocked and ridiculed, he managed to thrive from the controversial image of himself, which was created using social media, an image of celebrity politician whose social media content got a huge and wide attention from the mainstream mass media, and at the end, arguably, won him the elections.

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES

Social media also offer an affordance of reviewability, which gives us the possibility to review, back and forth, a full range of narratives, contributions, ideas, and overall content which Donald Trump left on his online profiles (Figure 2.). To better explain and illustrate the mechanisms which helped Trump, as a political trickster, to gain such media power, we can look at the few specific examples of how some of his, at first ridiculous thoughts and ideas, became a symbol of his presidential campaign and later on, the symbol of Trump`s policy. Moreover, some became symbols of Trumps heroism- symbols that presented a way out of liminality, returning back to normal.
MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN

“Make America Great Again” is a campaign slogan which Donald Trump popularized during his presidential campaign, but the slogan was already used in American politics before, and that quite successfully. Both Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton used the slogan at some point during their presidential campaigns, but Trump was the one who, with the help of his lawyers, trademarked it (Mather, 2018, n.a.). After Mitt Romney lost the 2012 elections to Barack Obama, Trump, according to his interview for The Washington Post, came up with the slogan “We will make America great”, but then quickly modified it to today’s version “Make America Great Again” (MAGA), as he wanted to point out that America was previously great (Tumulty, 2017, n.a.).

“I felt that jobs were hurting, I looked at the many types of illness our country had, and whether it’s at the border, whether it’s security, whether it’s law and order or lack of law and order. Then, of course, you get to trade, and I said to myself, ‘What would be good?’ I was sitting at my desk, where I am right now, and I said, ‘Make America Great Again.’” Donald Trump (ibid)

For Trump, the MAGA slogan referred to jobs, borders, security, law and order, and trades. And these are the exactly all the areas that had an appeal of crisis during Trump’s campaign, and his discourse kept maintaining crisis around it until the elections were over (Armbrust, 2017, p. 227). 2016 US presidential elections had the notion of liminality just because of the fact that the country will definitely get a new president, which means a transition to a new face, new persona that runs and represents one of the most powerful countries in the world, but Trump, as a candidate, even though not a real politician, managed to expand and intensify liminal crisis, and perpetuate ambivalence and schismogenesis. The MAGA slogan is ambiguous by itself. For Trump, and his supporters, the slogan means that the America is in crisis, that the strongest pillars of their society are shaken up, weakened. And in that time, Trump offers himself to become a hero who will bring all that is lost back; the hero will make everything “great”- “again”.

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“It actually inspired me,” Trump said, “because to me, it meant jobs. It meant industry, and meant military strength. It meant taking care of our veterans. It meant so much.” [MAGA slogan] (Tumulty, 2017, n.a.)

It is not new that politicians play that card, a card of sentiment, trying to evoke the reminiscence and nostalgia about “better” times, times when there was more and better jobs, strong industry and military, moreover, times when everything was great. But, Trump`s MAGA slogan is more comprehensive than that, it is an exit out of liminality, it represents a way back to normality for him and for his supporters (Armbrust, 2017, p. 235). According to the notion of the MAGA slogan, and the discourse around it, the country is threatened, endangered and ill, and Trump offers a cure for it, he offers to be the creator of the “great” America. But, at the same time, for some people he is also a destroyer. He is a destroyer for people for whom the country was never great, for instance, for immigrants from Latin America who are heavily affected by Trump`s immigration policies (Robinson, 2018).

Trump made the right choice to take the MAGA slogan into the vastness of the internet and social media realm. Trump had and used the affordance of authoring, he repeatedly posted the MAGA slogan on his social media platforms, but moreover, he built a narrative around it. According to RiteTag, the estimated hourly statistics for the MAGA slogan on Twitter alone include 1304 unique tweets, 5,820,000 hashtag exposure, and 3424 retweets with 14% of “#maga” tweets including images, 55% including links, and 51% including mentions (RiteTag, 2017, n.a.). The affordance of tagging helped him to distribute his slogan much more, and more frequently, communicating and interacting directly with his audience, without the mediator in-between. On mainstream media platforms his discourse is just repeated, carried forward from Trump himself or other sources, he is not the author of the final content, and he is not able to shape, formulate or appoint it in the way he wants it, or categorize it. On the other hand, on social media he can do all that, he has all the communicative power, which is afforded, but also limited by social media affordances. Still, that is not the only key factor which played the crucial role in the mechanism which carried the MAGA slogan to the that extent where it managed to make such an impact on the public and the voters. Other social media users were the ones who had the affordance to share the content, built upon the narrative, also tag the content and create direct connections by linking to it. Unlike older media outlets, contemporary social media
affords a lot of interactive affordances for the audience as well. Trump’s presidential campaign on social media was quite different comparing to other candidates, and it maybe received a lot of criticism, but it was effective, it was recognized by the audience as something new and fresh, entertaining (Bulman, 2016, n.a.). Even Trump characterized his social media activities as “modern day presidential”:

“My use of social media is not Presidential - it’s MODERN DAY PRESIDENTIAL. Make America Great Again!” (1 July 2017, Tweet A).

What really brought the Trump’s MAGA slogan to a new dimension, were the modern-day voters. The words “Trump”, “America”, “great”, “again”, “make”, and “make America great again” were one of the most preferred words by Trump’s audience on social media (Wang et al, 2016, p. 722). The MAGA slogan was shared, categorized, edited, and connected with various narratives created by Trump’s supporters. But not only the supporters were the ones who contributed to the distribution and branding of the slogan. The “anti-Trump” audience also helped to strengthen the image and the symbol of MAGA slogan, and also the politics which it represents by creating parodies and by mocking with it (Spodak, 2017, n.a.). Without any real strategy or marketing expertise, the MAGA slogan was put on a hat, and soon enough it became the symbol of Trump’s campaign (ibid). Hundreds of thousands of the hats were sold during the presidential campaign (Flanagan, 2018, n.a.). The MAGA hat was widely worn, but it also made a significant impact on social media as its image is being replicated numerous times. Globally famous musician and designer Kanye West posted a photograph on social media of himself wearing the MAGA hat, which received tens thousand of reactions from other users within minutes, and then the news about it echoed on various viral media and news outlets (Abramson, 2018, n.a.). The voters on social media used affordances to promote the hat, Trump’s campaign symbol, but also to mock it and make parodies on the account of Trump’s persona and the MAGA slogan. During the presidential elections, The Washington Post made an online “hat generator” which afforded its users to produce images of hats with various text, so it became a social media trend to produce and share images of hats with parodic MAGA signs (Bump, 2015, n.a.). The most famous MAGA slogan parody originated on social media platform 4chan, where its users started to produce various images of the cartoon frog Pepe featuring MAGA hat (Figure 3.) (Ballard, 2018, p. 81).
Trump supporters also used the image of modified Trump variations of Pepe the frog as a symbol of their xenophobia-fueled rightwing rhetoric, and in time, the Pepe meme was connected with conservative politics often associated with white nationalists and sexist’s rhetoric (ibid).

The internet, social and news media platforms, is shaping and reshaping Trump’s MAGA slogan continuously. The user, American voters, the global public, has the affordance to take the slogan and give more meaning to it, in any direction he wants. Some users shaped the slogan as the symbol of the pursuit for the restored American dream. Others mocked and ridiculed the slogan and made it the symbol for chauvinistic, nationalist politics. All that Trump had to do is, is to plant a seed into the vast, liminal communicative realm of hyperreal space where the boundaries are blurred and ambiguous, and wait for the slogan to become iconic, a representative for various narratives and ideals. For Trump, as a political trickster, it doesn’t matter if the reactions are positive or negative, if the MAGA slogan is being praised or ridiculed, as long as any kind of meaning is building upon it, because if we look at it closely, the slogan originally does not have much meaning, and it is quite trivial, mediocre political slogan at best.
Donald Trump wants to make America great by keeping the Mexicans out of the U.S. and forbidding Muslims from coming in, actually by eliminating threat from all the foreign forces, which, for him, are the cause of the current social, economic and political issues (Grišinas, 2018, p. 156). But, instead of pushing the boundaries and seeking progressive political solutions, he proposed the opposite, he promised to build a wall along U.S.-Mexico border. It was a perfect solution from a trickster politician, a quite ambivalent and controversial promise for an ongoing immigration crisis, where he appears as the creator of the strong threshold- the wall; a giver of security and safety for American people, but at the same time, he is the negator and the destroyer of possibilities for foreigners and the destroyer of progression, better international relations with the state of Mexico and other nations (Armbrust, 2017, p. 237). For some, the wall meant greatness, and for others it was an example of Trumps incompetence and ridiculousness, but Trump`s elections promise to build a great big wall was a great marketing success as it was his most dominant content that circulated through mainstream media (Ross & Rivers, 2017, p. 2). The story of Trump`s wall became so popular in mainstream media, because it received a wide attention on Twitter, a tool which Trump used the most to communicate with the public, and where he continuously drew attention to himself with aggressive, provocative and controversial statements about immigration, women, security, political opponents and many other issues (Kreis, 2017, p. 611). The idea of building a wall in such an extent, and to compel the state of Mexico to pay for it, sounds quite unrealistic and pompous, as many practical questions arise (BBC, 2017, n.a.), but despite that, the wall became one of the symbols of Trump`s presidential campaign, and later on, the symbol of Trump`s and nationalist politics. Moreover, some scholars noticed the contradiction between the Trump`s walled-in and Trump`s, yet again, great America, because the America in its golden, great days, which Trump wants to recreate, was quite inclusive and appealing to a broad foreign influence, but the wall is still framed under the idea of a “great” America (Grišinas, 2018, p. 157). People around the world strongly disagree with Donald Trump`s policies, but the policy about plans to build a U.S.-Mexico border wall is the most unpopular one according to a Pew research survey conducted between 37 countries (Fetterolf, 2017, n.a.).
At first, to most people, the wall policy seemed ridiculous, unrealistic and chauvinistic, as most of the Trump’s rhetoric which is surrounded with controversy and ambiguity, but eventually, the idea of the wall became a symbol of Trump’s vision of the great America, it perfectly fit into the narrative of his MAGA slogan— it represents the greatness (Grišinas, 2018, p. 157). Most importantly, it represents a solution for the ongoing liminal crisis, a structure that will fix the chaos and protect the U.S. nation from external threats like immigrants from Mexico, Islamic countries, global economic outreach and so on (ibid). Of all the presidential candidates, Trump has been the one whose discourse was focused the most on rhetoric to keep the “outsiders” out of the U.S., such as Muslims and illegal immigrants from Latin America (Major & Blodorn & Blascovich, 2018, p. 938). White Americans were reminded and made aware of a racial shift which significantly increased, thus Trump’s policies and political agenda were highly appealing to White Americans who were concerned about the declining position of Whites in American society (ibid). Generally, there is nothing unusual to make walls to separate pieces of territory, but to build a wall on U.S.-Mexico border is still considered a bad and silly idea for many reasons (Yglesias, 2019, n.a.).

The social media mechanism yet again helped Trump’s campaign to create a set of images and symbols of Trump’s trickster politics, and most of it was based on the tricks and gags with the Trump wall plan that spread over the various social media platforms (BBC, 2016, n.a.).

**Figure 2. Examples of Trump wall memes**

*Source: Ross & Rivers, 2017, p. 6*
Even the public users of the social media recognized Trump and his policies as narcissistic and his trickster-like politics. With just a photograph of Trump and a text over it, these simple memes depicted the core of Donald Trump, as a trickster politician and opportunistic public persona. The memes suggest that if Trump would win the presidency, his focus would be to push his own personal agenda, re-branding the country with his own name (Ross & Rivers, 2017, p. 5) and with no legitimate political reason, he would be duping and tricking others, like the state of Mexico and its people, just to practice the power he has as the president of such a powerful nation. So there, we have Donald Trump and his personal trickster agenda, recognized, exposed by the anonymous author, user of social media, who has all the new sets of communicative affordances to engage and take part in political communication (ibid, p. 10).

It is important to notice the flow, the momentum of social media mechanism; precisely how social media users use the affordance of building up on each other’s content and contributions. This flow, usually pretty spontaneous, can have a quite an impact on the content which is then shaped and reshaped, transformed into symbols, in this case, symbols of Donald Trump.

**Figure 3. A reference to Trump’s proposed wall along the Mexican border**
Figure 5. shows how already popular set of images used for making memes about Donald Trump and his policies, Trump’s hair, and Pepe the frog, are re-used to build a further reference to Trump’s plan to make a wall. Pepe, with Trump’s hair, holds a campaign token symbolizing the campaign’s promise to keep illegal Mexican immigrants out of the U.S. border, while a Mexican family is standing outside of the border which Trump presumably erected as promised during his presidential campaign. The association between Pepe and Trump gained momentum, as more and more social media users started to create images of Pepe with clear Trump references, following the development of Trump’s campaign and later on, of Trump’s presidency, continuously building on each other’s content (Ballard, 2018, p. 81).

Pepe the frog was ensured to be one of the main memes for Donald Trump and his campaign when Trump posted a Pepe meme in Tweet on October 13th, 2015 (Figure 6.), and after that, even the Trump supporters started to use the meme as the symbol of Trump’s campaign and conservative, rightwing politics they support (ibid, p. 82). Trump, as any other social media user, had the affordance to edit, reshape and produce new content, using the communicative artifacts created on social media.
Trump did not want to make a parody, or to primarily produce a funny content, but rather his intentions were to intensify the social media momentum, and to provoke further digital production of images and symbols associated with him and his campaign, using the culture of memes. Memes are digital, communicative artifacts with highly dynamic rhetorical features, perfect for trickster social media users, as they are ambiguous in its own nature (ibid, p. 1).

These examples propose a question; would it be possible for Trump to create these strong narratives, images and feelings about his campaign and policies if it weren’t for new, social media?! Before the presidential candidacy, Trump was not a politician, so he could not have serious, think-alike supporters, but many became his political followers when they could easily

*Figure 4. Donald Trump tweets an image of himself as Pepe the frog at a podium with the president’s seal*
identify themselves with the narrative of Trump’s vision of “making America white again” (Armbrust, 2017, p. 235). Social media is nothing like the old media. It is not just a one-way communicative platform, where most of the time, the politician does not have a full control of the content which is produced and distributed to the public. Trump had a whole set of new communicative affordances on social media, a direct means of production and distribution (Enli, 2017, p. 53). His out of the ordinary social media strategy gained results. His policies, at first ridiculous with no or little meaning, gained wide attention, they became important, symbolic, and they evoked feelings. Maybe controversial, ambivalent, but strong feelings with people who support him, and with people who strongly disagree, but both groups of people engaged in political communication. Social media represents a participatory digital culture. The public users, as well, had the means of production and opportunity to influence others, more comprehensively than ever before (Ross and Rivers, 2017, p. 11). Public users can use social media to share their view and spread the message, and they can do that for the politician they support (ibid), and if the message is strong enough, and shared enough, it will end up in mainstream media, and it will become relevant, even election-winning relevant. Arguably, without the social media communicative mechanism, Trump’s MAGA slogan, and the election promise about building a U.S.-Mexico wall, would not become so significant and meaningful to the voters and the general, global public. If there was no social media, and its communicative momentum, the narrative would not be so extensively constructed, and the distribution of the content would not happen on such a big, national and global scale, with such an intensive persistence throughout the whole Trump’s presidential campaign. The MAGA slogan would just stay a mediocre, ambiguous political slogan, about making a country somewhat “great” again, whatever the meaning of that is; a simple tone of sentiment. The plan to build a wall along the Mexican border would just become an ambivalent nonsense, coming from an unexperienced highly right-winged politician, without any practical, useful purpose to it. But in the realm of increasingly virtual society, place of permanent liminal communication, these two quite trivial ideas became a set of images and narratives of a pseudo-ideals, pseudo-politics, and a large portion of supports and voters emerged who could identify with what Trump’s campaign had to offer (Grišinas, 2018, p. 157), or with what they thought Trump is offering.
THE FAKE FAKE NEWS

The controversy of fake news was yet another ambivalent, burning subject that marked the recent U.S. presidential elections, and still is one of the important topics Trump addresses to from time to time when he fights his political opponents and the mainstream media criticism. He was pointing finger at a lot of news stories, accusing media of fake reporting, and his opponents of producing fake news (Wemple, 2018, n.a.), but ironically, the most discussed fake news tended to favor Trump over Hilary Clinton, and many believe that those fake stories prevailed in the election outcome (Allcot & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 212).

“I just cannot state strongly enough how totally dishonest much of the Media is. Truth doesn’t matter to them, they only have their hatred & agenda. This includes fake books, which come out about me all the time, always anonymous sources, and are pure fiction. Enemy of the People!”. (Trump, 30th of August, 2018, Tweet B)

Research on 115 pro-Trump fake news that were shared on Facebook alone around 30 million times, showed that around 760 million instances of a user clicked through and read a fake news story in favor of Donald Trump, which demonstrates the importance of social media and its affordances for fake news providers (ibid). The mess was created, an ambiguous knot of fake stories, fake news websites and accusations coming from everywhere, and the voters have been heavily duped and tricked. About 75% of the time, an American adult will find a fake story “somewhat” or very “accurate” (Silverman & Singer-Wine, 2016, n.a.). Things got out of control in the last months of the U.S. presidential campaign, when the top five performing elections news stories on Facebook generated more user engagement (8,711,000 shares, reactions and comments) than the top stories from the major established mainstream media outlets such as New York Times, The Washington Post, Huffington Post, NBC News and others (7,367,000 shares, reactions and comments) (Silverman, 2016, n.a.).
Donald Trump depicted a lot of mainstream media as “enemy of the people” on social media, regularly tweeting and calling out “fake news” (Johnson, 2018, n.a.), other users, voters widely spread those fake news stories and the discourse about it, some of them, yet again, were more engaged, they edited, shared, added the narrative by commenting, or made memes about it (Figure 7.). On social media, the content is mostly relayed with no fact-checking or filtering by a third party, or without any editorial judgement (Allcot & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 211). Such and ambiguous, dimly media environment went in favor of Trump. As the trickster politician, it was easier for him to use this ambiguity and uncertainty in maintaining the liminal crisis and coming out as an outsider hero, and for many he became one, as he gained a lot of supporters based on the whole “fake news” issue that hit the social media and rapidly gained a lot of communicative momentum.

Social media is in many ways ideal communicative environment for populist political tricksters, because many supporters of populist parties strongly distrust mainstream media (Kreis, 2017, 610). By attacking many mainstream media and accusing them for fake news stories, Trump created a sort of polarity between mainstream news and news he was posting; us against them
rivalry. Therefore, his supporters, mainly supporters of right-wing populist parties, were far less likely to trust mainstream media sources than the other typical public users (Bartlett, 2014 in Kreis, 2017, p. 610).

DISCUSSION AND SUBCONCLUSIONS

The analysis identified various factors which form the communicative mechanism of social media that serves well for trickster politician. Donald Trump used it quite well, arguably, better than any other politician at this level so far, and he gained political and communicative power using the new social media. This research identified social media affordances to be one of the key reasons for that, because the first question that needs to be answered is what are the offerings of this new communicative tool and why was Trump so successful at it. The second question is fairly more complex. What happened on social media with the meaning of Trump`s MAGA slogan, the wall promise, and the confusion about fake news; How did the meaning transform; And how did the meaning gain power!? Lastly, this research wants to use the concept of liminality to depict and explain Trump`s political rise and the circumstances under which Trump, as a pretending master of ceremonies, managed to mobilize voters and create his presidential career.

TWO-WAY COMMUNICATIVE AFFORDANCES

Social media undoubtably changed political communication with the matrix of new communicative possibilities. For the most part, political communication was never a two-way street, and for the most part, there was always a mediator between the politician and the public, political communication was mediated by journalist and media outlets which were not in politician`s direct control. Social media removed those boundaries and brought the politicians closer to the public, face to face, at least images of their faces. And this is where the trickster can play his tricks the best.
Even though Donald Trump did not have a meaningful, structured campaign strategy that could be outlined, it seemed that he did rely on social media and its affordances a lot since the beginning of his presidential campaign. The analysis of illustrative examples identified many from the list of social media affordances that were already recognized by other scholars (Figure 2).

Authoring

Trump had the direct means of communication production. He, or occasionally someone from his team, was the original author of the content that was posted via his social media profiles. With the ability to author the content that will directly communicate with the audience, Trump had a chance to create stronger, much more comprehensive narrative around his political agenda. The MAGA slogan is connected with most of Trump’s content that he posts; he writes and comments whenever he wants about the U.S.-Mexico wall policy and the fake news issue. Those messages are delivered to the public in an intact form, as they are produced, and he posts these messages whenever he wants. But what adds another dimension to political communication is that social media affords other user, he public users, to create and author political content in their attempt to influence others and state their opinions. The public users engaged with Trump on social media, they commented and they posted content about Trump and his campaign. Trump used the affordance of authoring to appear more authentic, and that has got him closer to the U.S. voter.

Recombinability

The affordance of recombinability is another form of authoring on social media. It refers to taking each other’s content and building on top of that content. This kind of communicative connection between politicians and the public was not possible before, at least not to this extent. Trump’s supporters used his content, built content on top of it and shared it with intention to influence others, and to contribute to Trump’s presidential campaign and his political career, but there were also others, who used the same content to produce parodies and gags. All the
presented examples were, and still are, one of the most dominant contents about Trump on social media. One of the reasons for that is, is that the public users became co-authors of the political content, they took it and reshaped it, and then placed it back on the social media. Narrative created around MAGA slogan, the wall promise or the fake news issue is built together, on social media, by Trump, his supports, but also others who for some reasons wanted to engage and contribute.

Tagging and Linking

Tagging and linking are the affordances that give structure to the content on social media. Again, both Trump and the public users had an affordance to categorize content by tagging it under the same name. All the narratives that fitted into the category of the great America were tagged under the MAGA slogan category. As showed above, this category was the most popular during the election time. The slogan became symbolic because the public users added the narratives as well, under the MAGA category. With the affordance of linking, Trump and other users had the ability to provide a connection in for of citations to other pages, websites, blogs, news stories etc. Trunmps content was already circulating the networked environment, but tagging and linking is what makes this communication networked and cohesive. These affordances were important for the distribution of Trump’s political ideals and campaign agenda.

Visibility and Scalability

Donald Trump has public social media profiles, thus all the content, and all his activities are visible to the public. By using most of the communicative affordance, all that is visible on a much bigger scale. What made Trump’s communication network to become visible to so many people, is that people engaged with his content and distributed it by sharing, linking and tagging. As mentioned, Trump himself shared other people`s content more than any other presidential candidate, and he posted more often. By posting and sharing more frequently, Trump engaged more people, and that led to great visibility of his activities and his content.
Persistence

Political propaganda on social media is not ephemeral, like some older methods are, for example political campaign pamphlets, posters or ads in newspapers or on billboards. Eventually all that goes away, but on social media the content remains accessible at all times as it was originally displayed. Moreover, if the content is picked up by other users, and it gets the communicative momentum, so the content is re-shaped and used again, then it may remain present for a lot longer period of time. In Trump’s case, his campaign slogan and promises became symbols, representatives of his politics and his career.

Association

Social media users are afforded to establish connections between themselves and between the content by enabling other users to see their content and interact with it. Trump successfully managed to make these connections with the public users, by using other affordances for interactivity. Because Trump was such an avid social media user, especially Twitter user, these connections feel almost tangible. Trump interacted with a lot of other public users and celebrities, shared other people’s content, and the public users made a significant, active connections with his content. Affordances of social media placed people a lot closer to political discourse, and vice versa, Trump had the opportunity to connect directly with the voters, and to provide his original content to them with no third party or medium involved. While other presidential candidates used social media more conservatively and cautiously, they just used their social media channel for political marketing, Trump used it to associate with the public and with other users (Enli, 2017, p. 54).

These affordances, possibilities for communicative action on social media, are offered both, to the politicians, and to the public users. That is what creates a communicative momentum, powers communicative mechanisms which can make the communication and the narrative dynamic, transformative and vivid. Due to the limitations of this research, it is hard to say to
what degree, but Trump’s image as a politician and his political ideals and agenda were shaped on social media. If we take a look at the three presented examples in the analysis, all of them show a quite deal of communicative dynamics due to the affordances social media affords to its users, neither of the contents from the examples stands still. Every communication technology has its main physical, psychological and social features that are relatively distinct and fixed, and those features shape and constrain how users of that medium process information and make sense of the world (Ott, 2017, p. 60). Ott argues that these technological features, thus communicative affordances of social media, trains people to devaluate others, cultivating mean and malicious discourse (ibid). Trump’s social media usage definitely resembles that. His discourse tone on social media is impulsive, aggressive and impolite (Merril, 2015 in Ott, 2017, p. 63), in many cases insulting for his political opponents and many others who oppose Trump in any way. But for Trump, that is a natural style of speaking; Trump’s rhetoric is simplistic, incivil and repetitious (ibid), thus the communication in the realm of social media suits him perfectly. This research argues that one of the reasons for Trump’s success at gaining so much power using the social media is its media ecology; social media affordances and its physical, psychological and social features which can be a useful mode of communication for political tricksters. Politicians like Donald Trump, populists right-wing political tricksters, quickly learned to use the advantages of the communicative and technological affordances of digital and social media to reach larger audiences, mobilize followers and gain media advantage and political power (Casero-Ripollés, Feenstra, and Tormey 2016; Nilsson and Carlsson 2014; Bartlett 2014 in Kreis, 2017, p. 610). Even when the public users engaged and picked up Trump’s narrative, a lot of the discourse turned into gags, parodies, mockery and impulsiveness. For millions of American voters, their primary political involvement during the 2016 U.S. presidential elections, was mainly focused on posting and sharing sarcastic anti-Trump or anti-Clinton memes to like-minded individuals (i.e. “followers”), or tagging and linking to other content on social media which reflected their political leanings (Ott, 2017, p. 65). Fake news stories created confusion and obscurity. Social media was ideal for a trickster to practice its trickerish and thrive in that kind of communicative environment, because it is exactly described with similar key features: simplicity, impulsivity and incivility, and it fosters farce and contempt, infecting the public discourse and destroying the dialogue (ibid, p. 60).
HOW DID TRUMP’S POLITICS BECAME… POLITICS?

Donald Trump was just a business magnate, a TV celebrity, when he first announced his presidential candidacy for 2016 U.S. elections. His image as a presidential candidate, more so, his image as a politician, is largely based on his social media activity, which was often quoted and debated in the mainstream media (Enli, 2017, 56). And is there a better place to create an image about yourself, than in the world of images and symbolic communication!? For political trickster, who often finds liminal places to play with words and images to trick the audience (Thomassen, 2012, p. 696)- probably not. Donald Trump did not have a comprehensive, meaningful and recognizable political agenda before he started his presidential run, and arguably, neither does he have it now, but what Trump does have is a set of very powerful images and symbols that were created on social media which apparently represent something, because he did manage to get a lot of supporters and followers, and he did eventually win the presidential elections.

Trump’s campaign slogan is basic, trivial the least. It is very common for politicians to promise a great future for a country, city, or county when they are trying to compete for the political power, and they often try to evoke sentiment and remembrance talking about country’s great past. What does it even mean to promise a “great” future for the country!? There are certainly not many politicians who are campaigning with promises about “average”, or “good” things. Thus, there is nothing symbolic, idealistic or powerful about MAGA slogan in the first place. The slogan could be used for any other country if the name would be replaced, and it would seem appropriate. If the train of thought is translated to the next example, an election promise about building an overpriced border wall on the U.S.-Mexico border, and even going further promising that Mexico will be forced to finance the construction, the analysis tells us pretty much the same, Trump’s most significant election promise seems ridiculous and hardly possible, just a bad idea. It seemed like a political satire. Next to that, Trump created rivalry between him, news media that support him, and mainstream mass media channels. He presented himself as an authentic, genuine politician who is being constantly under the criticism which was based on fake news stories and misinformation that the most powerful media, the “enemy of the people” is producing. People were people, he was the people, and everybody else, who was not on his side, were enemies, producing and sharing false stories about him and his
campaign. The analysis presented the irony; most of the fake news, and news outlets which were producing fake stories and information, were actually prone to Trump, and opposed to his, later on, main opponent Hilary Clinton. Either way, confusion and uncertainty were created. Fake news stories were widely popular, at moments, even more than legitimate stories from established media outlets, which was, arguably, a prevailing factor in Trump`s win.

Many would say, and did say, that Donald Trump would be far less likely to win the presidential elections than his experienced opponents, and even consider him as a politician. Trump did and said many shocking things, some being examples of this research among others, that would have been a political suicide for any other politicians who would definitely loose voters and support, but quite the contrary happened in Trump`s case (Azarian, 2016, n.a.). Starting from the first premise of this research, Donald Trump showed he is an excellent trickster politician, and he managed to use social media to create an image of a political hero to his supporters. As a hero, Trump can say and do anything, and it turns out that it is in the best interest of America; it fits the narrative of a MAGA slogan just fine.

“I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody, and I wouldn't lose any voters, OK? It's, like, incredible.” (Trump in Azarian, 2016, n.a.)

Despite little to no meaning of the analyzed examples of Trump`s policies and campaigning, and despite Trump`s lack of political and rhetorical skills, he managed to promote himself, from celebrity businessman to politician, a president even. This study argues that the transformation mostly occurred in the liminal communicative environment of social media. Trump used social media communicative mechanisms to get to the mainstream media, and to encourage people to participate in political discourse using new communicative affordances. Trump`s politics and the significance of his policies gained power on social media. Like a mythical, folktale trickster, Trump was transformed into a trickster animal, Pepe the frog, his tricks and gags became policies after the narrative around it was constantly built upon in the public sphere of social media. By dominating the new social media, Trump dominated the mass mainstream media as well. His content and rhetoric were in constant motion, in constant upgrade, by himself, but other actors as well. The MAGA slogan became symbolic for White Americans, it represents a
set of Trump’s policies and ideals, but it also represents everything that they added themselves to it on social media. The wall promise, as much as unrealistic and silly it is, became a symbol of fight against the enemies of America, immigrants from south, immigrants from Islamic countries, or everything foreign that is threatening American safety and economy. Even Trump’s animosity towards mainstream media became a symbolic fight between “them” and “us”, between the elites and the alternative, which are honest and hard-working ordinary citizens, real Americans, exactly those who Trump represents.

Trump’s image as a politician, and the image of his campaign, is produced and reproduced on social media out of copies, and copies of copies, of his original political agenda. However, as mentioned before, Trump’s politics has very little, negligible significance behind it, thus what was created on social media is merely a trickster’s simulation of politics, simulation of political competence and heroism. If the original politics barely exist, and if Trump cannot be considered to be a politician per se, but just a pretender, trickster, then we are facing a sort of simulacrum, a political meaning that is not exchanged for the original, but it is exchanged for itself (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 4). If Donald Trump is just a trickster who, with the mask of politics, wants to gain such power to satisfy his animalistic passions and appetites, then there is no real politics behind him, and there are no real political ideals that drives him; there is no real politician, just a trickster pretender. Thus, these presented sets of political ideals and images makes a peculiar digital simulacrum. The internet and the social media are overwhelmed with copies of copies of copies, of the content referred to Trump’s MAGA slogan and, wall policy and the discourse on fake news (and with fake news itself, referring to Trump).

TURN OFF THE INTERNET, STOP THE LIMINALITY

During his candidacy, and later on, his presidency, these copies started to represent something that in the first place did not represent anything at all, his discourse did not represent much at all, at least anything politically significant. Trump’s political significance developed in the liminal environment of the internet, environment where things are permanently out of the ordinary, and where the content is always in the move, in the transition to something new, different than the old. Paradoxically, Donald Trump was not a real politician, and his policies and pseudo-political agenda were not real, but in this communicative environment, on the
internet, where everything has the notion of “unreality”, Trump and his campaign became sort of real, real for some voters, and soon enough he gained real power as the president of the U.S. The computer mediated communication and its affordances served as a perfect tool for a trickster like Trump, to continuously seek liminality and crisis, where he can easily thrive with the right “push”, the right “nudge” of the social media communicative momentum. And Trump did thrive, because for millions of Americans, their primary involvement was focused on creating, sharing and posting political content related to the presidential elections and Trump, and further on, the U.S. media consistently treated this content as news (Ott, 2016, p. 65). The internet, and its communicative platforms, were the most fruitful environment for Trump to practice his trickeries, to implement the role of the agent of liminality, the pretending master of ceremonies who offers solutions for the crisis that will never end.

Internet and social media changed the political communication, it made it more intense and perplexed. There are now more actors who author the political discourse, and the content is more diverse and dynamic. People now play an active role in generating content, thus rather than just passively consuming content created by others, the users of social media actively participate in the contextualization of the content and new stories about Donald Trump and his politics (Gulbrandsen & Just, 2016, p. 21). That resulted in decadency, in gradually dumbed-down discourse which is now more vulgarized, brutalized, more and more resembling popular culture (Bakshian, 2018, n.a.). As a marginalized politician and public persona, Trump managed to fit in well, and as a trickster, he appeared in both dimensions of liminality; both in liminal space and during the liminal times. There is a lack of direct interpersonal communication, thus Trump and his discourse are represented by set of images, symbols and textual narratives in an already a place of permanent liminality. The election period and the times of many burning political issues brought up the notion of crisis. It did not matter if Trump was a real, competent politician, or if his slogan and policies were a real meaningful solution to that crisis, all he had to do is, is to stand still, stick to his personal agenda, and wait for the internet to rise him up as a real winner. At first, he was ridiculed and laughed at, but later turned into a likeable politician (Greenslade, 2018, p. n.a.).

Like on any other digital medium, people, places and things will never be directly encountered during the communication on internet (Waskul, 2005, p. 48). Thus, the public is only served with the symbols, created images and constructed digital words that represent Donald Trump (ibid). If we take a closer look to the illustrative examples analyzed above, we can see that the
narrative of it is in constant motion, in transition; the meaning is constantly being shaped and reshaped in metaphorical world, in a world of mediated with more and more information, but less meaning to it. Baudrillard described that phenomenon as an implosion of the meaning in electronic media; when information dissolves the meaning and the social (1994, p. 52).

The concept of Liminality is important for empirical scrutiny of Donald Trump phenomenon and the success of his politics. As a leader that falls in the category of a trickster, liminal periods, situations and environment will mark his career, and shape the U.S. for that period of time. Everything concerning his political appearance; candidacy, campaigning, communication, political ideals and agenda, is created in, and lives in many layers of liminality. U.S. presidential elections were a liminal period, where he appeared as an outsider, intensifying crisis and ambiguity. U.S. citizens knew that with the departure of Barack Obama, political climate will change, and that they are transitioning to something new. For Trump, presidential elections were also a sort of a ritual passage, a liminal period in which he transitioned to a politician from just a TV public persona. The appearance of Trump, and his rise on the political scene, brought uncertainty and crisis for many minorities, for example immigrants and foreign citizens. At first, it seemed that Trump will just mark the 2016 presidential elections, but then he won, and the U.S. is stuck in liminality for the time he is being a president, but it may even happen that the whole generation will be characterized by the notion of liminality and an ongoing crisis which span all over the U.S. institutions, country, continent, and even the rest of the world since the U.S. is such a powerful actor on the global political scene. For example, by announcing the withdrawal of U.S. from the Paris agreement, Trump destabilized the fight with climate change.

Trump’s political accomplishments happened throughout many dimensions of spatial, temporal and subjecthood types of liminality. Moreover, this research tends to conclude that the most of the Trump’s political success is based on his activities on social media, where it is easy for a trickster to maintain liminality and foster an ongoing ambiguity and uncertainty, due to the characteristics and affordances of digital communicative environment which itself is considered to be a place, a “cyberspace” where conditions are permanently liminal. It may be that Trump will bring United States to an endpoint, deconstruct all its values and other pillars of society, but that can be a good thing for the United States. Žižek believes Trump will bring chaos to the
establishment, shake up the system and status quo, thus bring the urgency and stimulate the reconstruction of political scene in the U.S. (Al Jazeera News, 2016, n.a.).

CONCLUSION

This paper wanted to deal with the emergence of a peculiar type of a leader which brings decadency, ambiguity and schismogenesis to the political and to the public life of the society-leader with a set of archetypical features of mythical and folktale figure trickster. The research specifically focused on the affordances of social media which trickster politician can use to gain political and communicative power. To identify those communicative affordances and mechanisms, and how they changed political communication for trickster politics, this research went on a task to analyze Donald Trump and his political campaign and communication on social media since he declared his candidacy for 2016. U.S. presidential elections, until the point of conducting this research when he has gained the political power as the president of one of the most powerful countries on the global scene. In order to do that, the analysis focused on a few examples of relevant issues which were important for Trump`s political success and his politics. Those issues were, and still are, very popular on social media and among the mainstream mass media outlets, and Trump basically built his politics around it. Focusing on these examples, the analysis made an attempt to recognize, describe and explain Trump`s communication on social media, and how the communicative affordances play an important role in building up, shaping and reshaping a narrative of political content, and how, in Trump`s case, these communicative mechanisms led to political success and power. The concept of liminality was brought into this research as sort of a meta concept, that will be important for explaining why Donald Trump as a trickster politician was so successful in using new, digital means of communication in an online environment. This paper recognized that this concept is important in order to explain the in-between periods, such as the U.S. 2016 presidential elections, and the period of transition and change which Trump used as a trickster to present himself as the politician who offers solution for the nationwide critical issues. Moreover, the discourse and the content that this paper was set to analyze, was happening in an online environment, cyberspace, a place of permanent presence of liminal experiences and communication, where things always hang over nothingness and metaphorical meaning. The analysis and the discussion brought some interesting insights which seem to paint the picture
of how social media affordances can create useful communicative mechanisms for trickster politician who can fool the public and get their trust without a real and meaningful politics.

Based on the theoretical reflections on the trickster phenomenon, and the general overview of how Donald Trump used and implemented social media in his campaigning, Trump’s trickster-like strategy and communication on social media was depicted so the further analysis of his content can be done accordingly. The overview, and further analysis, of this research confirmed that Donald Trump undoubtedly represents an exemplar of a trickster leader type, and that the way he communicated and engaged with the public was more trickster-ish than political. His rhetoric was vulgar and aggressive, yet authentic and appealing to his supporters. Eventually he gained more and more supporters on social media, thus the voters during the election period; there were more and more public users who engaged with him or his content on social media. Trump’s image as a politician significantly grew on social media, but also the ambiguity, controversy and ambivalence around every political and social issue he touched upon and shared on his profiles. His activities and popularity on social media got him a lot of attention and coverage in mainstream mass media, nationally, but globally as well. Arguably, Donald Trump became a successful politician and won the presidential elections mostly on the account of his social media communication and image that was created there.

The analysis further focuses on the three main examples taken from Trump’s campaign and career so far; his campaign MAGA slogan, which became the symbol of Trump’s politics in general; his election promise to build a wall on U.S.-Mexico border, which was the most talked about promise during the last U.S. presidential elections, and still is at the time of writing this paper; and the fake news problem that marked the media landscape, again, during the elections, and still is a burning issue in the media. The analysis recognized various communicative affordances which Trump actively and constantly used to produce, distribute, but also mobilize other users to engage with him and his content. Social media platforms offer a matrix of affordances which Trump extensively uses, more than his political opponents. But at the same time, the public users are afforded with same possibilities for communicative action, thus for participation in political discourse. Public users quickly accepted their new, more active role in political communication, and Trump’s image and narrative was soon in the making, and still is. The narrative around MAGA slogan soon started to get bigger, and more complex, it was not
just a simple ephemeral campaign slogan, rather it got features of a political symbol that represent a set of values and ideals, in this case the ones of right-winged populist politics in the U.S. Trump’s idea to build a great big wall on the U.S. border with Mexico was at first mostly laughed at. Even on social media, it was also often made into parodies via various types of memes. But on the other hand, despite being such an ambivalent and hardly doable, the wall promise picked up a lot of support with the idea that Trump’s politics will protect the U.S. from foreign threats. The spread of fake news and the polemics about it created ambiguity during the election period. The analysis shows that Trump was actually the one who gained the most out of fake news stories, even though he was the one who was openly accusing established media for fake reporting, and thus presented himself as the hero who will bring the truth to the people.

When the conclusions were drawn from the analysis of the illustrative examples, new possibilities and dimensions of media communication, which social media afforded to Trump, were identified. Those possibilities helped him to build a narrative around his campaign and his policies more effectively, to mobilize the people and engage them in political participation, and to foster liminality, where trickster figure constantly wants to be. Via social media, trickster politician can communicate with the audience directly, without the mediator, produce and distribute his content much easier and effective. The content, which he authors himself, can easily gain a sort of communicative momentum, which this research denotes as social media mechanism. Social media mechanism refers to a process which puts the content and its narrative into communicative motion. Trump’s content was constantly on the move, constantly upgraded, shaped and reshaped, shared and linked to; back and forth, by him and other actors on social media. This way Trump and his campaign got wider attention, but more importantly, Trump and his politics were given more meaning and significance, despite the lack of it originally. Social media became an important medium for political communication, so politicians can use it to get to the mainstream mass media. Trump’s popularity on social media is what gave him so much attention in the mainstream mass media, and his content, from social media platforms, transferred more easily to popular news media where his policies and agenda dominated over his opponents’. Unlike with older means of production, where the politicians used mostly one-way, more passive, and ephemeral communicative mediums, social media affords a flow of communication and the content which is more dynamic, and involves any other actor that wants to participate. The course of development is not linear; the narrative is being shaped and reshaped, back and forth, arbitrarily distributed and categorized by various users, thus the flow
of it remains unpredictable, yet with a great potential to become powerful and persistent, if the politician succeeds to create the momentum, set the mechanism in motion. This kind of political medium suits well to a trick player, deceiver, shape-shifter, situation-inverter, a politician who is less likely to be interested in presenting meaningful politics, and is more likely to use social media to blur political, social and cultural boundaries to create an ambivalent and hectic environment. It is only then, when a trickster can be perceived as a hero, a solution-maker for the crisis he himself is creating or maintaining.

What a trickster politician is creating and maintaining on a bigger scope, by using social media, is liminality. Trickster figure is already a symbol of liminal periods, a figure that can prosper from the crisis and the uncertainty, but on social media he can be the one who can create liminality and foster it more easily. The surrounding of digital communication is permanently out of the ordinary. Communication on social media, as a non-interpersonal medium, is happening between digital information that only represents real people, thus the ambiguity and ambivalence can easily be created due to the binary nature of cyberspace. Donald Trump successfully created the ones and zeros, a schismogenesis; people against, and people for; users who supported and users who mocked on social media. By using the affordances of an online communication, the political content of a trickster politician is being upgraded and duplicated simultaneously and continuously. But what is in creation with the mechanism of social media is not politics, but rather just a simulacrum, trickster politics which does not have political significance in its original form. In conclusion, social media and political communication in an online environment affords tricksters to create political simulacrum, a set of symbol and images that can gain communicative and political power, give meaning to trickster politician’s campaign, and win elections, but in reality, there is no relation to real politics, to a real politician.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


