

# **The Influence Of Social Media On Millennial Voter Decisions: Evidence From The 2016 American Presidential Election**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the influence of Social Media (SM) on Millennial voter decisions in the 2016 American presidential election. While most “experts” who predicted the election outcome were mistaken, reasons have been variously attributed to inaccurate measurement of the non-traditional voters, voting habits, and the lack of understanding of the influence of SM. Millennials comprised an important part those using SM and allow us to gain insight about how they accept, value and act upon the social media information they receive.

This research investigates whether SM information sources followed by Millennial voters influenced their opinions and their votes in a Republican Party supported (“red”) state. It focuses on two research problems that arise from the deficient “expert” predictions: 1) imperfect data analysis, including the analysis that incorporated SM data into the overall election data, and 2) underestimation of the influence of SM data.

This research develops a new model that integrates media richness theory, social influence theory, and TAM2 to examine user attitudes toward participating in SM and to assess the influence of SM on their decisions. The authors reference popular SM platforms (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) to examine how the SM technology influences user decisions, as perceived through media richness, social influence, and community identity as measured by TAM2 constructs. The model is tested using Millennial survey responses by drawing from the timely and relevant context of the 2016 American presidential election.

Results from the new model indicate that all five factors influence and SM community identification, as well as perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use of the SM platform. Perceived social influence has a significant positive relationship with SM community identification. Overall, this research concludes that Millennial decisions are influenced by those who they follow on SM, that SM shapes both their views and their involvement with an issue, and that SM sites enable relationships that form voter decisions.

Key Words: Big Data, Social Media Influence, 2016 Presidential Election, and Millennial Voter Decisions

## **The Influence of Social Media on Millennial Voter Decisions: Evidence from the 2016 American Presidential Election**

### **Introduction**

Social media (SM) facilitates the creation and sharing of information, ideas, news, entertainment, and interests, but it also serves as a natural conduit for personal influence and shared opinions (Valenzuela, 2013). SM affords numerous communication channels embedded in its ample virtual communities, where active discussions can influence a wide range of user attitudes and decisions (Goodrich & De Mooij, 2013), including voter decisions.

Researchers are challenged to measure user attitudes and decisions related to SM discussion platforms, especially given the many, diverse interest groups and market segments. For example, users rely on SM for information to make consumer decisions regarding restaurants, entertainment, technology devices, banking services, cars, and other areas (Pew Research Center, Gottfried, & Barthel, 2015). Additionally, interest in the US presidential elections is broad and cuts across many different groups. However, despite the increasing popularity of SM as a major data source, little research has been done regarding how SM influence shapes political decisions.

Thus far, the only user generation born into the SM domain are the Millennials, likewise called Generation Y (Bolton et al., 2013). Millennials are digital natives who have reached maturity after 2000; they numerically have become the largest generation in the United States, with a population of 79 million individuals, or approximately 30 percent (Boomers & Gen, 2017; Prensky, 2001). Millennials typically are active SM users, where more than 86% engage in discussions on one or more SM sites multiple times each week (Pew Research Center, Gottfried, & Barthel, 2015). Their near-constant activity presents many opportunities to influence and be influenced by their peers (Rohampton, 2017).

We define social information as personal content delivered to users through SM, while social influence is a change in user personal thoughts, feelings, attitudes, or behaviors triggered by information exchanged with others (Lisa Rashotte, 1966). SM exerts its influence through shared social information (Asur & Huberman, 2010; Cheung, Chiu, & Lee, 2011), which reflects a variety of user qualities (Schmitz & Fulk, 1991; Fernando & Campos, 2013). Therefore, this research examines how SM information and its emotive influence may shape Millennial attitudes and decisions.

Gaps exist in the research. First, while many studies have examined the role of SM use and explored the influence of SM sites for political activities (Dimitrova, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Nord, 2014; Groshek & Dimitrova, 2013; Stephens et al., 2016), few studies have investigated SM's influence on Millennial attitudes toward political discussions and the subsequent impact on voting decisions. Second, while earlier work shows that SM discussions can draw large groups of followers willing to share values and express opinions (e.g., political views), especially if the participants belong to or are affiliated with the same social group (Yeoman, 2017), few studies have investigated the impact of such groups on political attitudes or voting decisions. Overall, broad interest in the presidential election presents us with a rich opportunity to close the gap on how SM influences Millennials' political decisions.

Recognizing that Millennials are significant users of SM (Sago, 2010), the purpose of this study is to better understand the impact of SM influence on Millennials' decision making and explore its applicability to many circumstances, groups, and individual users. Our objective is to examine how information conveyed to Millennials through SM affects their decisions, as measured by how they chose between the two presidential candidates. This research aims to fill the aforementioned gaps in the Data Science, Information Systems, and Social Science literature by investigating the mediating role of specific community in the association between perceived social influence and Millennial attitudes toward participating in SM discussion platforms and by exploring the impact of SM on decisions as measured by political decisions.

In this study, the authors selected the 2016 U.S. presidential election as an important event influenced by SM, owing to the prominence and role of SM during the election process. Although the previous 2004 and 2008 Obama campaigns employed SM to considerable media fanfare, in those cases, SM data still only supplemented traditional mass media political advertising (Broder, 2017). Despite being vastly outspent and out-advertised by the Clinton campaign, Trump attributed his relatively parsimonious, but nevertheless successful, effort to SM (Khan, 2016). In truth, both SM camps of supporters, influencers, and surrogates used SM to shape perceptions outside the traditional mass media, trying to serve the best interests of their preferred candidates in selected SM venues (Michaels, 2017). The Trump and Clinton campaigns simply leveraged SM differently (Khan, 2016; McCormick, 2016). On the other hand, most observers agree that the data analysts stunningly failed to predict the election outcome. In addition, analysts vastly underestimated of the role of SM, especially because they wrongly assessed the innovative strategy the Trump campaign employed to economically replace traditional, exceedingly-costly mass media advertising (Fortune News, 2016). Therefore, this research investigates the role of SM influence in Millennial decisions, giving rise to the following research question and its subordinate items:

How did SM data shape the 2016 presidential election?

1. Are Millennials influenced by the people in their SM network?

2. Did SM shape how Millennials processed and were influenced by political information, including
  - how they became willing to participate in political discussions,
  - how they participated in political discourse, and
  - how they managed their political involvement?
3. Did the SM sites that Millennials used influence their voting decisions?

To address these issues, this work develops a new research model that integrates media richness theory, social influence theory, and TAM2 to examine user attitudes toward participating in SM and to assess the influence of SM on their decisions. The authors reference popular SM platforms (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) to examine how the SM technology influences user decisions, as perceived through media richness, social influence, and community identity and as measured by TAM2 constructs. Then, the model is tested using survey responses from Millennial participants in the election.

The next section reviews relevant literature in the areas of SM influence, focusing on political decisions. Using prior work as a foundation, this research presents the research model and hypotheses that embrace Social Influence theory, the Technology Acceptance Model, and Media Richness theory. Next, the authors describe the research methodology, which includes sample and survey method, followed by data analysis and results, discussion, implications, and contributions. The final two sections discuss research limitations and future research directions, and present the research conclusions.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW / THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **1.1 SM sites, applications, and discussion platforms**

SM sites contain “Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p61). These websites include a wide range of online word-of-mouth forums including blogs, company-sponsored discussion boards, moblogs (blogs with multi-media , content), and social networking capabilities (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Such platforms produce huge volumes of data that can be useful in the prediction of future political events.

As a result, SM sites are a potent sources of data, news, and of effortless opinion expression sharing on virtually any topic (Y. Kim et al., 2013) (Valenzuela, 2013). This opportunity attracts large groups of SM users that participate in discussions, such as political events, particularly if participants belong to the same social group (Yeoman, 2017). Further, participating in SM discussions creates a communication channel that influences millennials’ attitudes and decisions (Goodrich & De Mooij, 2013).

## **1.2 Social influence, Media Richness Theories and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM2)**

Research indicates that because users rely on SM sites to interact, share, and obtain political information with others, a SM exercises a direct impact on millions of users, their friends, and friends of friends, on political self-expression, information seeking, and voting behavior (West, 2017). Social influence theory is useful to explain user changes of attitude or behavior attributable to inspiration by other persons or groups (H. C. Kelman, 1961). The theory suggests that three social processes, compliance, identification, and internalization, affect individual attitudes in making voting decisions (H. Kelman, 1972). For example, individuals may react to their followers' opinions in discussion posts on SM sites. Also, individuals can identify their feelings about specific groups or communities that influence their voting decisions and adopt followers' opinions due to the similarity of their own values with those of their followers (Cheung et al., 2011; Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000; Zhou, 2014).

SM networking potential is also explained by the media richness (MR) theory (an extension of information processing theory) which describes a communication medium's ability to reproduce the information sent over it (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Media classifications range from face-to-face interactions to numeric documents (Liu, Liao, & Pratt, 2009). (Dennis & Valacich, 1999), extended the original four dimensions of media richness theory to five dimensions: immediacy of feedback, parallelism, symbol variety, reprocessability, and rehearsability. The resulting approach is referred to as the theory of media synchronicity. SM platforms are important multi-media channels with significant positive impact on decision quality when participants' task-relevant knowledge is high (Power & Phillips-Wren, 2011); (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Researchers have emphasized the effects of social influence on user acceptance of an information technology to understanding the role of social influence in the TAM (Davis, 1989; Malhotra & Galletta, 1999). Individuals frequently use several SM sites concurrently, such as Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Google Plus, or any new SM site, to interact, share, and obtain political information. The usability and ease of use factors influence user decision about how and when they will use such a site (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000).

This research integrates the aforementioned theories within the context of SM use, in the same sense that young adults integrate these same concepts into the fabric of their social lives. As such, media richness contributes desirable interactive features to the environment where users interact and exercise social influence. SM users who identify with an SM community will adjust their perceived social influence to correspond with the community's social norms. TAM2 plays an important role in making the media-rich environment both easy to use and useful, given the multiple platforms and devices where users engage SM.

### 1.3 SM influence and Millennials

SM sites afford important sources of social influence on individuals (Asur & Huberman, 2010; Cheung et al., 2011). Social influence is defined as “change in an individual’s thoughts, feelings, attitudes, or behaviors that results from interaction with another individual or a group” (Lisa Rashotte, 1966). Schmitz & Fulk, 1991, applies this definition to the use of SM sites and calls it social information. Therefore, social information on SM sites is the information that an individual shares and reflects his/her thoughts, feelings, opinions, attitudes or behaviors (Fernando & Campos, 2013). This research focuses on SM influence on attitudes and decisions that result from Millennial participation in SM discussions.

Millennials, who are often termed as the “Next Generation” or “Generation Y”, were born between 1982 and 2000 and represent a significant segment (30 percent) of the population (Yerbury, 2010). It is their early exposure to Internet that distinguishes them from other generational cohorts (Bolton et al., 2013). Millennial were born into an SM environment (Bolton et al., 2013). Millennials are the digital native generation (Prensky, 2001), which has become the largest generation in the United States, with a current population of around 79 million (Boomers & Gen, 2017). More than 86% of the people who use at least one SM site are Millennials (Pew Research Center et al., 2015). Thus, to the extent to which they are involved, SM plays a significant role in their daily lives (Boyd & Ellison, 2007) and shapes their attitudes and decisions based on their discussions with their peers (Rohampton, 2017).

The study of SM influence on Millennials already has been active in several fields, particularly in communication, marketing, and political science. For example, prior research regarding SM information influence on Millennials is outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1: Studies reflecting significant SM influence on attitudes or decisions**

Research Conclusion	Source
SM communication from experienced users influences level and direction of decision of non-experienced users	Sago, 2010
SM communication impacts both personal and managerial decision making in young adults	Goodrich& De Mooij, 2013
SM influences consumer and managerial decisions	Power & Phillips-Wren, 2011
SM product sites influence purchase decisions in younger users	Pinto, Gomes, Cavalcante, Mendes, & Sales, 2015

#### 1.3.1 SM influence on political decisions

The usage of SM in the political field began with the 2008 Presidential Election, which played a significant role both in observing and in affecting voters (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009).

During the election, young adults relied on SM more than on traditional media for sharing information, obtaining campaign news, and expressing political opinions about candidates more than members of other generations (Pew Research Center, 2008; Smith & Rainie, 2008). Others suggest SM is effective for achieving political results and increasing social capital (Y. M. Kim & Geidner, 2008; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010; Utz, 2009; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009; Vitak et al., 2011).

Prior research has examined political SM use and the influence of user participation in specific online political activities, such as joining Facebook groups and visiting candidate profiles; findings indicate a relationship between the use of SM and political activity (Dimitrova et al., 2014). Other work shows that SM allows people to engage psychologically in political processes because of their communication of other users (Dimitrova et al., 2014; Stephens et al., 2016).

Pew Research Center (2008) concluded that whereas political actors used SM more for campaigning, young adults relied on SM sites more for their political information, rather than on traditional media. Also, young and older adults use SM differently: young people pay attention more SM information than traditional media (Holt, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Ljungberg, 2013). In fact, some work suggests that digital media has shifted longstanding patterns of political inequality (Xenos, Vromen, & Loader, 2014). Prior studies observe that SM influenced young voters' thinking and behavior in the 2008 election (Keeter, Horowitz, & Tyson, 2008), while other work shows social capital is predictive of civic and political participatory behaviors, both online and offline (Gil de Zúñiga, 2012).

For example, prior research regarding SM information influence on Millennials is outlined in Table 2.

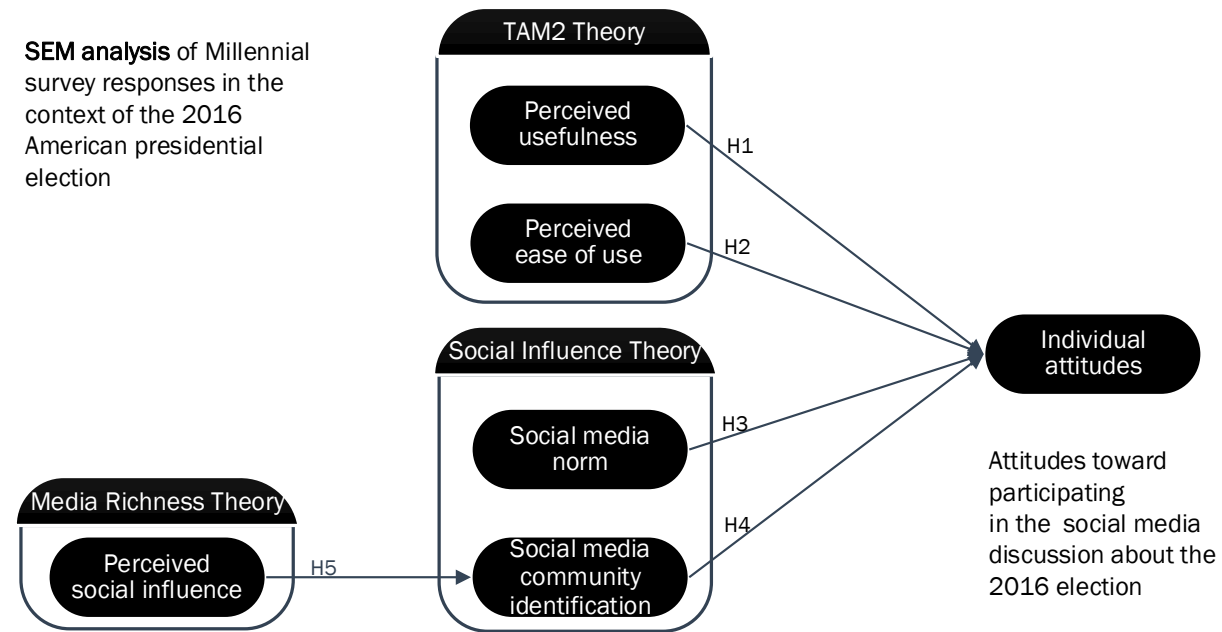
**Table 2: Studies reflecting insignificant SM influence on political attitudes or decisions**

Research Conclusion	Source
SM does not influence behavior and thinking about politics	Ancu & Cozma, 2009; Dimitrova et al., 2014; Gil de Zúñiga, 2012; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013; Yamamoto, Kushin, & Dalisay, 2015; Zafar, Shafiq, Kousar, Yousaf, & Nasi, 2017; Zhang et al., 2010
SM does not influence on political self-efficacy and decisions	(Effing, van Hillegersberg, & Huibers, 2011; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010

## RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

This research aims to provide insight into the unexpected outcome of the 2016 US presidential election, using social influence theory to examine how participation in SM discussions influenced user attitudes and voting decisions (Varnali & Gorgulu, 2015). To that end, we develop and test a new research model for SM platform discussions that examines how social influence and media richness work in conjunction with the technology as measured by TAM to allow for a technology influence. The new model advances a conceptual framework drawn from previous work on social influence, media richness, and SM influence, as shown in Figure 1.





**Figure 1. The SEM SM Election Model**

#### **1.4 The perceived usefulness and ease of use constructs**

Drawing from TAM2, this research adopts the constructs perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use in relation to SM from Porter & Donthu (2006) and from Hsu & Lin (2008). Perceived usefulness is the degree to which an individual believes that using a SM platform influences his or her performance in making decisions, whereas perceived ease of use is the degree to which an individual believes that using an SM platform is free of effort. The more that an individual perceives the SM platform as useful and easy to use, the more favorable that individual's attitude toward using SM discussion platforms (Porter & Donthu, 2006). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: There is a positive relationship between perceived usefulness and individual attitudes.

H2: There is a positive relationship between perceived ease of use and individual attitudes.

#### **1.5 The SM norm (SN) and SM community identification (CI) constructs**

This research draws from social influence theory to adopt the constructs social media norm and individual attitudes, and their relationship (Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, & Davis, 2003). The social norm concept is related to the level at which an individual recognizes that his/her choices and attitudes are endorsed by others, through participation in SM discussions (Hsu & Lin, 2008). This study also adopts the social media community identification construct from (Hsu & Lin, 2008). Community identification in SM sites develops a sense of belonging to a distinct group among members of a SM discussion platform. An individual's attitude toward participating in SM

discussions with the group to which the individual belongs can influence the individual's voting decisions. Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

H3: There is a positive relationship between SM norms and individual attitudes.

H4: There is a positive relationship between community identification and individual attitudes.

### **1.6 The individual attitudes construct**

This study adopts the individual attitudes concept from (Hsu & Lin, 2008). Individual attitude is the preference for participating in SM discussions, which may have influenced the individuals' decisions to vote for a 2016 U.S. president candidate. Use of SM sites in general influenced people's attitudes socially and politically (Moy & Torres, 2005; Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001; Wellman, Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001).

### **1.7 The perceived social influence construct**

Perceived social influence is a construct drawn from media richness theory; it is the change in an individual's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, or behaviors that results from interaction with another individual or a group (Lisa Rashotte, 1966). For this study, we adopt the perceived social influence concept from (Carlson & Zmud, 1999). An individual can be influenced socially by his/her group's posts such as discussions, image, videos, etc., on SM sites. We propose the following hypothesis:

H5: There is a positive relationship between perceived social influence and SM community identification.

## **METHOD**

### **1.8 Participants**

Following the 2016 election, the authors conducted an online survey of college students at a large public university in the southwestern U.S. This study focused on Millennials' use of SM, surveying subjects from a population of undergraduate college students enrolled in business and political science classes. The subject group is considered an appropriate population; research indicates that college students rely much more than older adults on SM as a source of political campaign news (Duggan, Smith, & Page, 2016).

#### **Social desirability bias**

The authors developed a survey instrument by adapting established measures from prior studies. Measures for SM norms and SM community identification were all modeled and adopted from previous research and contextualized for this setting (Hsu & Lin, 2008). TAM2 constructs usefulness and ease of use were operationalized and measured using items adapted from other research and used author contextualization (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). The authors adopted

measures for perceived social influence from Carlson & Zmud (1999) and the measures for attitude from Trevino, Webster, & Stein (2000). For a complete list of measures, please see Appendix A.

After developing the survey from the new model, the authors received approval from the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). To test the survey, the authors obtained cooperation from instructors, who posted a link to the survey on their course websites so that the survey could be administered online. Students in a total of 10 classes were asked to complete the survey. All students were offered extra course credit to encourage participation. Students who could not complete the survey because of voting ineligibility were offered credit for alternative activities. The authors received a total of 1101 responses, giving all individuals an opportunity to earn extra credit; non-voters were given an alternative credit-worthy activity.

After cleaning the data to eliminate the unusable responses, including those that indicated a lack of variance (e.g., from respondents selecting all 1's or all 7's) and incomplete surveys, 450 usable responses remained for further analysis, resulting in a 40% response rate. The sample achieved the main goal of the research, that of targeting Millennials; 68% of the respondents were under the age of 21, while over 90% fit into the Millennial category. Most participating students were male (52%). 55% of the respondents voted for Hillary Clinton, 27% voted for Donald Trump, and 17% for the remaining candidates. Complete survey demographics are provided in Table 5.

**Table 5: Respondent demographics**

Gender			Age			Voting		
Male	232	51.56%	18-21	308	68.44%	Donald Trump	123.00	27.33%
Female	216	48.00%	22-25	85	18.89%	Hillary Clinton	248.00	55.11%
Others	2	0.44%	26-29	27	6.00%	Gary Johnson	32.00	7.11%
Academic Statues			30-33	13	2.89%	Jill Stein	11.00	2.44%
Freshman	118	26.22%	34+	17	3.78%	Other	36.00	8.00%
Sophomore	106	23.56%	Hillary Clinton voters			Donald Trump voters		
Junior	129	28.67%						
Senior	72	16.00%	Female	141	31.33%	Female	42	9.33%
Graduate	25	5.56%	Male	106	23.56%	Male	80	17.78%

### 1.9 Measurement model assessment

SmartPLS version 2.0 was used to assess the model's overall fit and explain the relationships between constructs. The authors tested the model and measured the reliability and validity of the constructs. The results indicate that the model instrument satisfies reliability because Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for each construct exceeds the minimum score of 0.7 for exploratory research (J. C. Nunnally &

Bernstein, 1979; Jum C. Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). In addition, the authors used SmartPLS to run Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). All five constructs exhibited factor loadings exceeding 0.7 on the expected factor (Joseph F Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). The AVEs of the latent variables ranged from 0.6 to 0.7, which exceeds the minimum value of 0.50 (Chin, 1998; Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009), as indicated in Table 6.

**Table 6: Measurement model summary.**

							Factor Correlations					
Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Factor Loading	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Composite Reliability	AVE	SMN	SMCI	PSI	PEU	PU	Att
SMN1	3.317	1.595	0.843	0.773	0.870	0.642	0.829					
SMN2	4.430	1.608	0.897									
SMN3	4.268	1.576	0.746									
SMCI1	4.254	1.614	0.827	0.749	0.841	0.697		0.753				
SMCI2	3.212	1.518	0.794									
SMCI3	2.922	1.179	0.751									
SMCI4	2.672	1.508	0.640									
PSI1	3.059	1.187	0.797	0.855	0.902	0.741			0.834			
PSI2	2.762	1.095	0.832									
PSI3	3.060	1.391	0.848									
PSI4	3.102	1.347	0.860									
PEU1	4.916	1.345	0.837	0.817	0.872	0.733				0.792		
PEU2	1.269	1.418	0.676									
PEU3	2.808	1.133	0.824									
PEU4	3.055	1.225	0.833									
PU1	2.500	1.585	0.904	0.904	0.930	0.609					0.881	
PU2	2.394	1.580	0.905									
PU3	2.590	1.597	0.919									
PU4	1.981	1.735	0.795									
At1	2.209	1.741	0.938	0.932	0.957	0.631						0.938
At2	3.584	1.632	0.944									
At3	3.701	1.701	0.933									

SMN = SM norm, SMCI = SM community identification, PSI = Perceived social influence, PEU = Perceived Ease of use, PU = Perceived usefulness, Atn= Individual attitudes.

### 1.10 Structural model assessment

Furthermore, we analyzed the structural model by calculating path coefficients, t-tests for each path and R-square values using 5,000 bootstraps as recommended by (J F. Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins,

& G. Kuppelwieser, 2014, 134) on the 450 sample data points using SmartPLS (Ringle, Wende, & Will, 2005). All of the hypothesized paths were statistically significant, four at the .05 level, while the fifth path (Perceived social influence) at the 001 level. The constructs perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and SM community identification all demonstrated significant positive relationships with individuals' attitudes. Perceived social influence had a significant positive relationship with SM community identification. Figure 2, Step 1 shows the structural model results, and significant relationships.

In research, Common method bias (CMB) occurs when the survey method distorts the measurement and meaning of the survey responses. With survey questionnaires, research calls for testing whether CMB exists, thus averting erroneous conclusions from variance attributable to the method, rather than the constructs (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). According to Harman's single factor test, common method bias may exist if: 1) a single factor emerges from the un-rotated factor solution or if: 2) a single factor accounts for the majority of the covariance within variables (Podsakoff, Mac Kenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

First, all the 22 items entered the factor analysis and the un-rotated solution results in 6 total factors, which equals the number of latent variables in the proposed model. Second, the 6 factors that emerged from the explanatory factor analysis account for 73.2% of variance in the data. However, the initial extracted factor accounts for less than 36.3% of the total variance. Neither indicators indicate evidence of CMB.

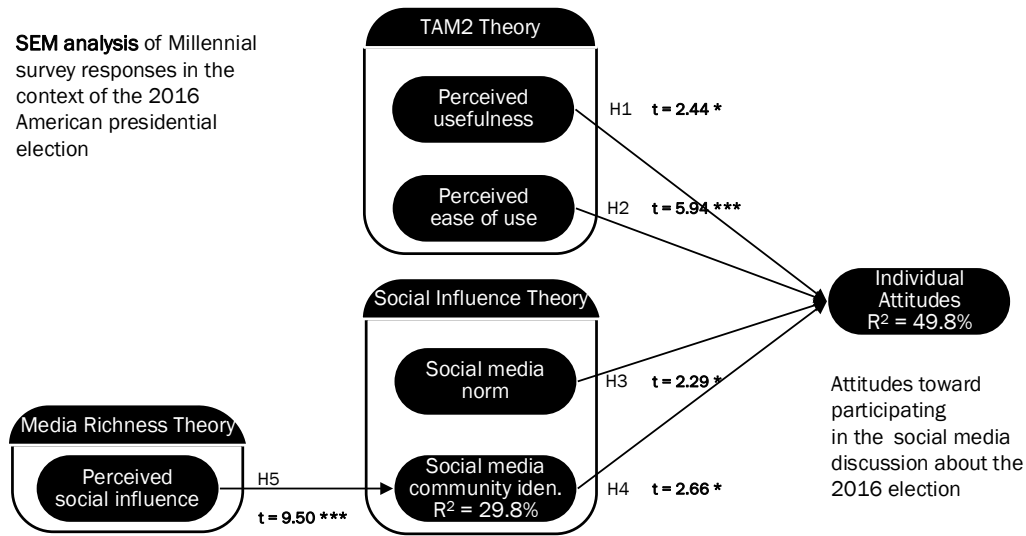
Total Variance Explained						
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	7.996	36.343	36.343	7.996	36.343	36.343
2	2.688	12.219	48.563	2.688	12.219	48.563
3	1.845	8.385	56.948	1.845	8.385	56.948
4	1.489	6.768	63.716	1.489	6.768	63.716
5	1.075	4.886	68.602	1.075	4.886	68.602
6	1.012	4.601	73.203	1.012	4.601	73.203
7	.721	3.276	76.479			
8	.677	3.077	79.556			
9	.578	2.628	82.185			
10	.560	2.546	84.730			
11	.504	2.289	87.019			
12	.463	2.105	89.124			
13	.397	1.804	90.928			
14	.363	1.648	92.575			
15	.289	1.312	93.887			
16	.272	1.234	95.121			
17	.246	1.119	96.240			
18	.193	.876	97.116			
19	.185	.842	97.958			
20	.171	.775	98.734			
21	.141	.641	99.375			
22	.138	.625	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

### 1.11 Chi-square test for differences of attitudes and voting decisions

Finally, the authors used SPSS to calculate the Pearson Chi-Square Tests for independence (Mchugh, 2013), comparing two variables: Candidates (e.g., Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton) and individual attitudes, presented in a contingency table as shown in Table 7, to find out if there was a relationship between individuals attitudes toward participating in SM discussion platforms and toward voting for certain 2016 U.S. presidential candidates. There was a significant relationship between the individuals' attitudes and voting for specific presidential candidate. Figure 2, Step 2 shows the Chi-Square results. Table 4 shows a summary of the Chi-square Test results.

**SEM analysis** of Millennial survey responses in the context of the 2016 American presidential election



\* p <= 0.05, \*\* p <= 0.01, \*\*\* p <= 0.001

**Figure 2. The Fitted SEM SM Election Model**

**Table 7: Cross-tabulation of Candidates by Social Media Influence**

Candidates	Categories	Definitely yes	Probably yes	Might or might not	Probably not	Definitely not	Total
Donald Trump	Count	11	29	23	36	25	124
	Expected Count	28.8	40.6	20.4	20.1	14.1	124.0
	% within Candidates	8.9%	23.4%	18.5%	29.0%	20.2%	100.0%
	% within Individuals' Attitudes Categories	12.8%	24.0%	37.7%	60.0%	59.5%	33.5%
	% of Total	3.0%	7.8%	6.2%	9.7%	6.8%	33.5%
Hillary Clinton	Count	75	92	38	24	17	246
	Expected Count	57.2	80.4	40.6	39.9	27.9	246.0
	% within Candidates	30.5%	37.4%	15.4%	9.8%	6.9%	100.0%
	% within Individuals' Attitudes Categories	87.2%	76.0%	62.3%	40.0%	40.5%	66.5%
	% of Total	20.3%	24.9%	10.3%	6.5%	4.6%	66.5%
Totals	Count	86	121	61	60	42	370
	Expected Count	86.0	121.0	61.0	60.0	42.0	370.0
	% within Candidates	23.2%	32.7%	16.5%	16.2%	11.4%	100.0%
	% within Individuals'	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%



	Attitudes Categories						
	% of Total	23.2%	32.7%	16.5%	16.2%	11.4%	100.0%

**Table 8: Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	53.648 <sup>a</sup>	4	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	54.609	4	0.000
<b>N of Valid Cases</b>	<b>370</b>		

<sup>a</sup> cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 14.08.

## RESULTS

Figure 2 summarizes the experiment results, which details the SEM fitted model. SEM results indicate that all five factors (perceived social influence, usefulness, and ease of use; SM norm and community identification) contribute significantly to individual attitudes toward Millennials participating in political discussions, a construct which explains 49.8% of the attitudinal variance.

The subsequent Chi-Square examination of these attitudes suggest that SM voting attitudes and decision criteria significantly influenced the Trump/Clinton voting decision.

Interestingly, perceived social influence impacts the members of the SM community, explaining 29.8% of the variance. Additionally, individual attitudes toward using SM sites and their platforms indicate formative influence by groups who identified with a SM community (SM community identity) and shared similar views (SM norm).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research examines the role of user attitudes toward participating in SM and to assess the influence of SM on their decisions to vote for specific presidential candidates in the context of the 2016 American presidential election. To that end, this research develops a new model that references popular SM platforms (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) to examine how SM technology influences user decisions, as perceived through media richness, social influence, and community identity and as measured by TAM2 ease of use and usability constructs. While the intent of the research was to examine the influence of social media it was opportune to use the presidential election as the media in which this study was conducted because the 2016 Presidential election was a topic that was universally familiar to the subjects. As a result we develop and test a model that is unique to social media and which provides an opportunity for testing with other social media applications.

### **1.12 Contributions to theory**

The contributions of this research to theory are as follows: 1) it develops a new model that integrates media richness theory, social influence theory, and TAM2 to examine user attitudes toward participating in SM discussions, 2) it tests and validates the model, which yields significant results that provide insight into the surprising outcome of the 2016 presidential election, and 3) it yields insight into the antecedent factors that impact voting motivations and decisions of Millennial SM users.

### **1.13 Contributions to practice**

Contributions to practice are as follows: 1) it provides understanding of Millennial SM users who participate in political discussions on popular SM platforms, 2) it indicates that SM influences individual attitudes and, in the context of this study, voter decisions in choosing between the two presidential candidates. In fact, the importance of the event and the SM activity reported by the subjects leads the authors to conclude the entire sample population was uniformly aware of the event and its importance. 3) The model may be useful as a tool for in a variety of other social media situations.

### **1.14 General contributions and conclusions**

Finally, the model is generalizable to many other venues. Although the data in this study were collected and analyzed from voting students for the 2016 U.S. election process, the authors believe the SM decision model can be generalized to numerous other venues (such as any issue related to domestic and foreign; local, state, national, international policy), or to other types of events (business, charity, entertainment, sports, etc.) where SM sites are a major source of data that has the potential to influence decisions.

Overall, this research concludes that Millennial decisions are influenced by those who they follow on SM, that SM shapes both their views and their involvement with issues of personal interest, and that SM sites enable relationships that form voter decisions. It portends non-traditional factors that will influence and determine the outcomes of future elections, requiring interested parties to adjust the approach to reach potential voters in SM venues.

## **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

There exist a number of limitations in this study, all which lead to opportunities for future research, as follows. 1) This research examined SM user attitudes related to a single—although major—decision event. Future may choose a longitudinal election analysis approach. For example, the model may be employed more frequently over a series of local official, State Representative, or Congressional elections to yield insight into SM influence over many scenarios. 2) This research focused on Millennials who are engaged in their own post-secondary education. Thus, studying the attitudes and decision behaviors of other age groups and occupational activities is appropriate to expand our knowledge of decision behaviors in diverse segments of the population. 3) This

research used subjects who are U.S. citizens and are eligible to vote in presidential elections. Expanding this research to non-U.S. individuals outside our borders would be appropriate to better understand cultural and political effects on the decision process elsewhere. 4) The new research model is applied only to an election venue. The authors believe model use may be expanded to non-election decisions, including many SM discussion-related decisions, such as home, car, and security purchases, or even prediction of business success or crowdsourcing outcomes.

## APPENDIX A:

### CONSTRUCT MEASURES

Construct	Measure
Social norm (SN)	People who are important to me think that I should participate in SM discussions.
	People who influence my behavior encourage me to participate in SM discussions.
	I want to understand the SM opinions and read the posts of people who are important to me.
Community identification (CI)	People participate in SM to share experiences, opinions, and information.
	Participating in SM discussions enhances my opportunity to meet people who share my interests
	People participate in SM to maintain close social ties.
Perceived social influence	My followers share a strong feeling of membership in one particular group.
	My friends participate in SM to communicate.
	My friends believe SM is useful
	People who influence me believe SM is useful.
Perceived Ease of Use	People who influence me participate in SM to communicate.
	My interactions with SM sites are clear and understandable.
	Interacting with the SM sites does not require a lot of mental effort.
	I find SM sites easy to use.
Perceived Usefulness	I find it easy to get SM sites to do what I want them to do.
	Using SM improves my decision performance.
	Using the SM increases my confidence in making decisions.
	Using the SM enhances my decision effectiveness.
	I find the SM useful.
Perceived individuals' attitudes	Using the SM sites enhances my productivity.
	I like participating in SM discussions
	I feel good about participating in SM discussions.
	Overall, my attitude towards SM discussions is favorable

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