

Straight to the people

Donald Trump's rhetorical style on Twitter in the 2016 U.S. presidential election

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Research has shown that Donald Trump's rhetorical style on Twitter differs significantly during the time he was a citizen, a presidential candidate and a president (Ott and Dickinson 2019). The aim of the current study is to characterize his rhetorical style on Twitter during the 2016 presidential race, in light of its potential to influence future campaigns in the U.S. and outside, and its implications on political and public discourse. The study presents a comprehensive analysis of Trump's Twitter habits, using statistical analyses and a content analysis of all tweets posted on Trump's Twitter account from the date he announced his presidential candidacy until he won the election. Analysing the results using framing theory reveals Trump's main campaigning strategies on Twitter: (a) negative campaigning against his rivals and the establishment; (b) bypassing the traditional media; and (c) self-promotion. Trump used his Twitter far less frequently to express his vision or future plans.

Keywords: Donald Trump, Twitter, political campaign, content analysis

1. Introduction

After Donald Trump won the 2016 presidential election, attempts have been made to make sense of his phenomenal success. Several post-election analyses argued that Trump's use of social media was a key factor in his surprising victory (e.g., Alang 2016; Brookey and Ott 2019; Gainor 2016; Khan 2016; Ott and Dickinson 2019; Yu 2016). But while many point to the role of social media in Trump's victory, it is still far from being clear what exactly made Trump's use of social media during the presidential campaign so successful.

Evans, Brown, and Wimberly (2017) compared the way Trump and his Democratic rival Hillary Clinton used Twitter during their campaign, using a content

analysis and a keyword search. They showed that although Clinton used Twitter more often than Trump, she posted more tweets regarding policies and positions and about women's issues. Surprisingly, she even issued almost double the percentage of attack tweets against Trump than he posted about her. However, as the authors conclude, traditional media did not focus on Clinton's Twitter activity. A similar conclusion is reported in Francia (2017), who shows that although Clinton had enormous advantages in fundraising and television advertisements, Trump received much more exposure in news coverage and on social media. He too concluded that "Trump's innovative use of social media and his ability to generate free media from it could have far-reaching consequences in transforming the way future candidates wage presidential campaigns" (Francia 2017, 2).

Still the question persists: Which rhetorical strategies did Trump use on social media, and Twitter in particular, that made his use unique, innovative and target to enormous news coverage? This will be the goal of the current study which focuses on Trump's use of Twitter during the 2016 campaign (both the Republican primaries' campaign and the presidential campaign). By using both a hand-coded content analysis and some statistical descriptive analysis of all the tweets posted by Trump during the campaign, the study aims at revealing his prominent rhetorical strategies on Twitter. Such examination offers both a comprehensive analysis of Trump's rhetorical campaigning strategies on Twitter and a perspective on his phenomenal success from the Twitter prism.

Previous research examining Trump's rhetoric during the 2016 presidential primary campaign shows that the language he used was significantly simpler than that of his fellow candidates in both parties (Kayam 2017). Examining readability level¹ of the language used by each candidate in both parties, show that Trump's language was on a fourth-to-fifth grade level (9–11 year olds) on average, while the other candidates scored a calculated average of eighth-to-ninth grade level (13–15 year olds) (Kayam 2017). Furthermore, the study shows that the words and sentences Trump used were significantly shorter than those of any other candidate. A later study by Kayam (2018) reveals Trump's prominent rhetorical strategies during the 2016 U.S. presidential primary campaign and shows how each one of them, including negativity, simplicity, repetition and hyperbole, were used by Trump to build the depiction of his character as anti-politician or anti-political establishment candidate. Ott (2016) uses Trump as an example for showing how Twitter's defining features, such as its character limitation, affect public discourse by privileging simple, impulsive and uncivil discourse.

Focusing on Trump's rhetorical style during the 2016 presidential race is important for two central reasons. First, Trump's tweets during the campaign

1. The readability level is the level of education required to fully comprehend the candidate's speech.

were unique and shifted in important ways after he became president. During the time he was a citizen Trump used Twitter mainly for self-promotion and self-branding. When he became a presidential candidate, he mainly used Twitter to repeat messages disrupting political norms and issuing attacks on his Republican challengers and Hillary Clinton. After being elected his Twitter habits turned into distraction from harmful news against him, attacks on mainstream news and promoting his agenda (Ott and Dickinson 2019). Therefore, any attempt to characterize Trump's rhetorical style on social media needs to take into account these different periods. Exploring his messages on social media during the campaign will reveal his campaigning strategies, which evidently turned successful.

Second, as a candidate who won the election of the United States an examination of Trump's rhetorical style during his campaign is crucially important. When a tweet, a post on Facebook, a speech or an interview comes from an American presidential candidate it reaches not only the citizens of the U.S. but citizens of different countries in the world. It affects voters, politicians and leaders worldwide, and can have consequences in reality, in politics, not just in the U.S but also in different parts of the world.

2. Research method

This study focuses on all the tweets posted on Trump's Twitter account from June 16, 2015 – the day he announced he was running for president, until November 8, 2016 – the day he won the election. The study includes both a statistical analysis and a comprehensive content analysis of a total of 7,627 tweets. I am aware of the fact that not all the tweets were written or posted by Trump himself, and that some might have been posted on his behalf by people from his staff. However, since all the tweets appear on his personal page, for the purposes of the current study I assume that they were written by Trump or at least approved by him.

2.1 Statistical analysis

A statistical descriptive analysis of the total of the tweets posted on Trump's personal Twitter page during the time frame defined for the research, is aimed to characterize his use habits on Twitter. They were examined according to the following questions:

- a. How often did Trump use Twitter during his campaign? (daily average)
- b. How many of his tweets include hyperlinks?
- c. How many of his tweets were retweets?

- d. How many times did he use the first person pronoun “I”?
- e. How many times did he use an exclamation mark (!)?

2.2 Content analysis

The content analysis aims at shedding light on the statistical results, by giving context and additional data regarding the way Trump used Twitter in terms of framing his message. Each tweet of the total of 7,627 was read and coded separately by three research assistants, who were not familiar with the research. The final results presented in the Results Section, are an average of the results of the three research assistants.

In order to obtain an initial general idea of the content of Trump’s tweets, and to determine which categories should be taken into account when conducting a content analysis of the tweets, we first compiled a random sample of 500 tweets out of Trump’s 7,626 tweets during his campaign. The random sample was chosen by an SPSS software function. Each tweet in the sample was examined in order to decide upon its character, its main content or its purpose. The initial process yielded 12 categories, some inspired by Golbeck, Grimes, and Rogers (2010). An additional category titled “Uncategorized” was added to the list for cases in which the tweet did not fit any of the other categories.

The assistants were given the tweets along with the list of categories and their definitions (mentioned below). They were asked to read and code each tweet into the appropriate category or categories. It is important to note that many of the tweets apply to more than one category. Therefore, the percentage of the classification is more than 100%. Since I was interested in the different functions Trump employed on Twitter and their magnitude, this posed no problem for the study.

Moreover, the majority of tweets include links. Because not all links could be traced, I instructed the analysts to ignore them unless they were crucial to the understanding of the tweet. For example, in cases where the tweet included only a link or a link and a few words that were not sufficient to decide upon the content of the tweet, the analysts were requested to open the link and classify the tweet accordingly.

The following list includes a definition of each category and an example of a tweet that was coded in that category:

1. **Information/Location/Activity** – a message that provides a fact or resource. A message reporting an activity or a location, a news conference, an election rally, an interview etc.
 - (1) I will be on Face The Nation this morning at various times across the U.S.
@CBSNews Enjoy! (Trump’s Twitter, 24 January, 2016)

2. **Anti-political rivals** – a message that is directed against political rivals, whether from the Republican Party during the primaries, or against the Democratic Party or the Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton during the presidential campaign.
 - (2) Jeb Bush just got contact lenses and got rid of the glasses. He wants to look cool, but it's far too late. 1% in Nevada!
(Trump's Twitter, 17 February, 2016)
3. **Anti-media** – a message that contains negative assertions against the established media, or against certain news channels or newspapers, including personal attacks against specific journalists, reporters, commentators, news anchors, television hosts, editors, etc.
 - (3) So sad that @CNN and many others refused to show the massive crowd at the arena yesterday in Oklahoma. Dishonest reporting!
(Trump's Twitter, 21 January, 2016)
4. **Anti-establishment** – a message that is directed against general politics, political style, political correctness, political institutions such as the GOP, the government (including President Barack Obama), or the Democratic Party, and generally against the political establishment.
 - (4) Being politically correct takes too much time. We have too much to get done! #Trump2016
(Trump's Twitter, 28 January, 2016)
5. **Defense** – a message in which Trump responds to an attack or criticism against him.
 - (5) @CarlyFiorina I only said I was on @60Minutes four weeks ago with Putin – never said I was in Green Room. Separate pieces – great ratings!
6. **Vision/Future plans/Policy** – a message that includes Trump's plans for the future (after being elected), such as a vision, policy, or ideology.
 - (6) The New Hampshire drug epidemic must stop. If elected POTUS – I will create borders and the drugs will stop pouring in.
(Trump's Twitter, 6 February, 2016)
7. **Self-glorification** – tweets that contain self-praise.
 - (7) I started my business with very little and built it into a great company, with some of the best real estate assets in the World. Amazing!
(Trump's Twitter, 27 February, 2016)

8. **Calling for action** – messages in which followers are requested to take a certain action, such as voting, attending a rally, watching an interview, or reading an article.
 - (8) Still time to #VoteTrump! #iVoted #ElectionNighthttp://t.co/UZtYAY1Bag
(Trump's Twitter, 8 November, 2016)
9. **Thanks** – a message in which Trump expresses thanks to followers, supporters, people who endorsed him, etc.
 - (9) First candidate in Virginia with over 16,000 validated signatures for the ballot. An honor – thank you! #Trump2016 #MakeAmericaGreatAgain
(Trump's Twitter, 12 November, 2015)
10. **Personal message** – holiday greetings, expressing condolences, etc.
 - (10) Happy Birthday to the great @BillyGraham. He's done so many wonderful things, not the least of which is his fantastic family. I love Billy!
(Trump's Twitter, 6 November, 2015)
11. **Containing a slogan** – messages that contain one of the following slogans Trump used during his campaign:
 - Make America Great Again (or its abbreviation MAGA)
 - Make America Strong Again
 - Make America Safe Again
 - Make America Work Again
 - America First
 - Vote Trump
 - Wake Up America
 - Crooked Hillary
 - Lyin' Ted / Lying Ted
 - Never Cruz
 - I'm with You
 - This is a Movement
12. **Retweet** – messages that are written by someone else and appear on Trump's personal Twitter account because he retweeted (shared/posted) them. Since retweets are not written by Trump himself, we did not consider their content and did not code them into additional categories. However, in the discussion section we do refer to his frequency of retweeting.
13. **Uncategorized** – messages that cannot be coded into any of the above categories.
 - (11) Great news! I hear @EWErickson of Red State was fired like a dog. If you read his tweets, you'll understand why. Just doesn't have IT!
(Trump's Twitter, 8 October, 2015)

3. Theoretical background

3.1 Political campaigns on Twitter

Social networking sites (SNSs), such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, give valuable power to political candidates by increasing their exposure at low or even no cost, and provide lesser-known candidates with an outlet for spreading their message, raising funds, and recruiting volunteers online (Gueorguieva 2007). Initial academic interest in politicians' use of SNSs began when U.S. president Barack Obama incorporated Twitter in his presidential campaign in 2008 (Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez 2011; Lilleker and Jackson 2014). Since then a large body of research has explored the ways in which social media is used by political actors. The main conclusions regarding Twitter are that it is primarily used by political actors to spread information regarding campaign activities and links to news articles about themselves, as well as to their blog posts or personal websites (Aharony 2012; Evans, Cordova, and Sipole 2014; Golbeck, Grimes, and Rogers 2010; Graham, Jackson, and Broersma 2014; Macnamara and Kenning 2011; Small 2011). In this sense, as Golbeck, Grimes, and Rogers (2010) argue, Twitter is mainly used by political actors as a vehicle for self-promotion. Discussions of policy, as well as call-for-action posts (such as "get out and vote") seem to be minor reasons (Graham, Broersma, Hazelhoff, and Haar 2013; Graham, Jackson, and Broersma 2014).

Furthermore, Twitter is also used by political candidates to "feed the media" (Bennett 2012; Graham, Jackson, and Broersma 2014; Jackson and Lilleker 2011; Jungherr 2015) or to influence the coverage of campaigns by traditional media (Kreiss 2014). Before the incorporation of SNSs in political campaigns, political actors used websites or blogs to gain public and media attention. Today they use Twitter and Facebook, which enable them to control their messages and to communicate with the public directly. In the era of SNSs, shaping political reality is no longer solely in the hands of editors, broadcasters, owners, etc. Conway, Kenski, and Wang (2013), for example, found a positive correlation between issue rank in news coverage and issue rank in Twitter feeds. As Gainous and Wagner (2014) argue, SNSs have caused two major changes in the flow of information: "The first is a removal of the gatekeeping function normally practiced by the traditional media. The second is allowing the political actors to not only contribute to the flow of information but also to shape and direct it" (Gainous and Wagner 2014, 49). Political campaigns on SNSs "give politicians more control over the content of their message as well as over its pace and time of distribution" (Graham, Jackson, and Broersma 2014, 783). So instead of being at the mercy of the media's coverage, which can be either supportive or hostile, political candidates can use SNSs to create the news by themselves and make the traditional media follow their lead.

3.2 Twitter and “dialogism”

According to Bakhtin (1986), every language act is a dialogue. In other words, the listener or reader is never to be considered passive: “When the listener perceives and understands the meaning (the language meaning) of speech, he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude toward it. He either agrees or disagrees with it (completely or partially), augments it, applies it, prepares for its execution and so on” (Bakhtin 1986, 68). An important aspect of Bakhtin’s “dialogism” is the concepts *addressivity* and *responsive understanding*. Claiming that in any discourse, including written discourse, “a dialogue with an addressee exists, and thus the discourse is shaped in accordance with the way the addresser perceives the addressee” (Livnat 2012, 11). Weigand’s concept of “Language as dialogue” also contributes to this view of discourse. Weigand (2009) assumes that since language is primarily used as a form of communication, it is by nature dialogic. When we speak, or make any other speech act, such as tweeting in our case, we have a communicative purpose which determines our linguistic action, and is therefore a partial aspect of dialogic phenomenon (Weigand 2009, 34).

Following this line of thought, Reisigl (2008) argues that political speech should never be considered “monological”. Political speech, whether a formal speech, a press conference, an interview and in our days, a post or a tweet, especially during political campaigns, is directed towards an addressee by its persuasive nature: “The crucial aims of political actors doing politics are to assert themselves against opponents, to gain followers and to persuade addressees to adopt a promoted political opinion” (Reisigl 2008, 98).

Considering that Trump was running in the Republican Party presidential primaries and then for presidency, it is more than reasonable to assume that whenever he posted a tweet he had persuasive goals in his mind. In other words, when Trump formed and framed his messages on Twitter he kept in mind the ears and eyes on the other side. To use Bakhtin’s words, he formed his message on Twitter according to how he perceived the addressee. At the time of the 2016 campaign, the addressee, i.e. the American public, was swept by global trends of discontent with traditional politics and the political establishment, and Trump adhered his rhetorical style to this atmosphere (Kayam 2018).

Therefore, it is not surprising that Trump favored the use of Twitter during his campaign. SNSs are often regarded as more interactive, dialogic, authentic, and credible (Schultz, Utz, and Göritz 2011). One of Twitter’s most appealing features for political actors is that it enables them to circumvent traditional media and communicate directly, freely and unrestrictedly with their audience. In this sense, unlike traditional media, SNSs provide a relatively new platform for online dialogic communication between candidates and constituents (Taylor, Kent, and White 2001). Twitter provides political actors an effective tool to communicate

directly with their constituents and even share their personal or private perspectives in order to strengthen the bond with the people and influence potential voters. In this sense, the era of SNSs is characterized as being more candidate-centered (Vergeer, Hermans, and Sams 2011) and by a widespread mistrust of the mass media (Khan 2016).

After establishing that Twitter is used by political actors, especially during political campaigns, in a dialogic manner which takes into account the receiver by means of persuasion, it is now important to examine how Trump constructed his message on Twitter during the 2016 presidential race. More specifically, I will focus on the following questions:

- a. What were the characteristics of Trump's activity on Twitter during his presidential campaign?
- b. How did Trump use Twitter during his presidential campaign to attract more support?
- c. What rhetorical strategies did he use? What functions did his tweets serve?

Framing analysis (Goffman, 1974) will help me interpret the final results and put them in a larger context by classifying the categorized tweets into three major categories. Frames are mental schemas that help people make sense of their experiences, and organize them by classifying, labeling, and interpreting them. Framing refers to the selection of certain aspects in order to make them more salient, so as to influence the way audiences interpret and act on information (Entman 1993; Pan and Kosicki 1993; Tewksbury and Scheufele 2007). Frames filter our perception of the world by selection, emphasis, and exclusion of information (Entman 1993). Therefore, the results will be interpreted in light of the following questions:

- a. **Selection:** On which issues did Trump focus his message on Twitter, measured by magnitude?
- b. **Emphasis:** Which issues were emphasized by Trump in his tweets, examined by linguistic devices such as exclamation marks and use of pronouns and by his use of retweets, hyperlinks and slogans.
- c. **Exclusion:** Which issues were discussed the least on Trump's Twitter, measured by magnitude?

4. Results

4.1 Statistical analysis

During the 2016 campaign Trump made extensive use of Twitter: he posted a total of 7,627 tweets during the 512 campaign days, which is an average of 14.89 tweets a

day (including retweets) or 10.04 unique tweets a day (original tweets, not including retweets); 2,619 (34%) of Trump's tweets included hyperlinks/links to other websites, articles, videos, etc. As can be seen in Figure 1, 32.5% of Trump's tweets were retweets. Interestingly, as Trump's campaign progressed, he started to write his own tweets more and more, and the percentage of retweets decreased. For example, from June 16, 2015 to October 29, 2015, 53.8% of Trump's tweets were retweets. In comparison, from March 22, 2016 to November 8, 2016, only 11.4% of his tweets were retweets.

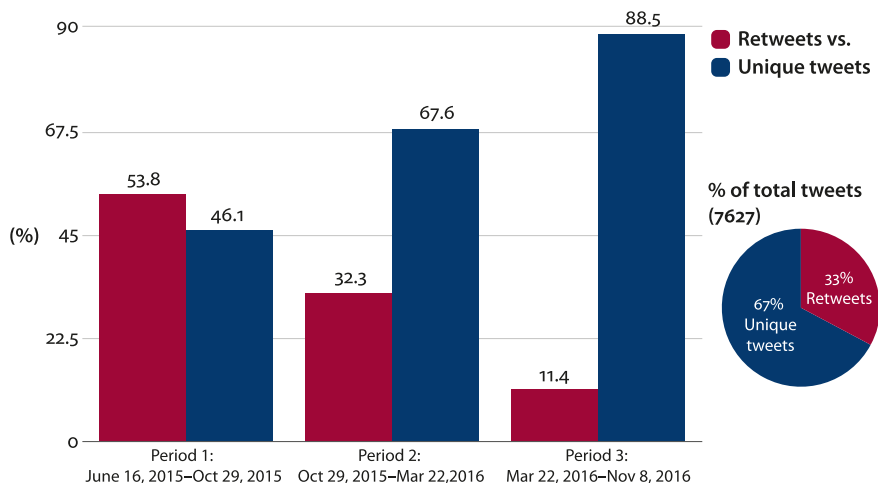


Figure 1. Trump's retweets vs. unique tweets

The growth of Trump's Twitter followers during his campaign was significant. According to Trackalytics (Social Media Monitoring and Analytics), when Trump announced his presidential candidacy on June 16, 2015 he had 2,958,315 Twitter followers. Five months later, on November 28, 2015, he had more than five million followers. On May 26, 2016, the date he won the Republican nomination, he already had 8,419,448 followers. On Election Day, November 8, 2016, Trump had 13,293,987 followers.

Other characteristics were examined in order to provide a further understanding of Trump's tweets. For example, Trump used the first person singular pronoun "I" in 1,731 different tweets, that is, in 22% of his total tweets. In 4,236 (55.5%) of Trump's tweets there were also exclamation marks, while only 401 (0.5%) of the tweets included a question mark.

4.2 Content analysis

The content analysis of Trump’s tweets yielded the following results, as can be seen in Table 1 and Figure 2: Out of 5,144 of Trump’s unique tweets, 22.8% were directed against his political rivals (during the primaries or general election). A similar percentage (22.7%) of his tweets contained slogans such as “Make America Great Again” or “America First”. In 17.3% of Trump’s tweets he thanked other people, and 17.2% of his tweets included information about rally locations, interviews, or other campaign events and activities. 12.5% of the tweets were directed against the establishment. Such tweets included messages against politicians in general, against the Democratic and Republican parties, against Obama’s administration, against political correctness, or against politics and politicians in general. A similar amount of tweets (12.1%) contained anti-media messages; most of them were against TV news channels, the press, websites, or specific TV hosts or reporters who were accused by Trump of being negative towards him, “dishonest,” or “biased.”

Table 1. Classification of Donald Trump’s tweets during his Presidential Campaign

	Total tweets	Total unique tweets	Retweets	Anti-rivals	Contains slogan	Contains thanks	Contains information or rally location	
No. of tweets	7627	5144	2483	1173	1169	890	889	
% of total tweets	100%	67.4%	32.5%	15.3%	15.3%	11.6%	11.6%	
% of unique tweets				22.8%	22.7%	17.3%	17.2%	

	Anti-establishment	Anti-media or press	Self-glorification	Calling for action	Defensive	Vision or future plans	Personal messages or condolences	Other/uncategorized
No. of tweets	646	623	508	479	326	264	194	148
% of total tweets	8.4%	8.1%	6.6%	6.2%	4.2%	3.4%	2.5%	1.9%
% of unique tweets	12.5%	12.1%	9.8%	9.3%	6.3%	5.1%	3.7%	2.8%

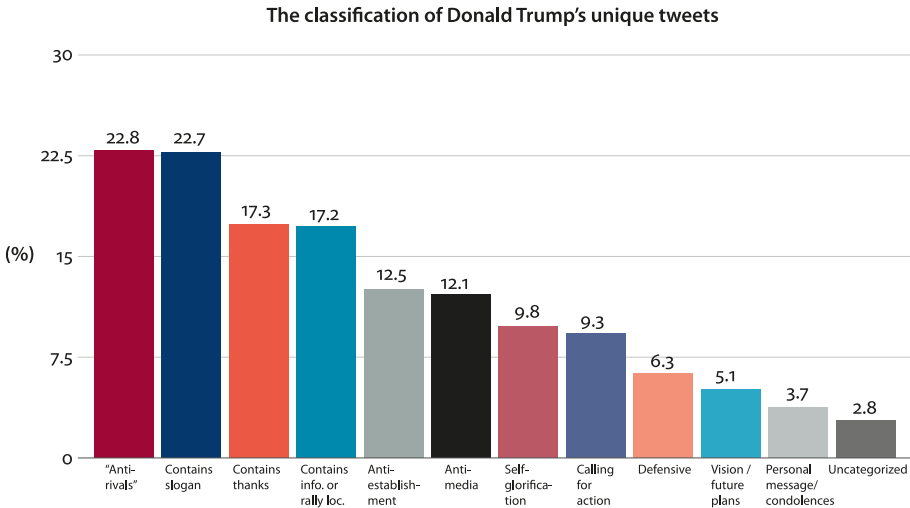


Figure 2. The classification of Donald Trump's unique tweets

Almost half (47.4%) of Trump's unique tweets were negative, containing a message against someone or something – from the establishment to Trump's political rivals. 9.8% of Trump's tweets contained self-glorification, usually indicating Trump's achievements or that he is the “only one” who is able to do things that other candidates cannot. 9.3% of the tweets were classified as a “Call for Action”, in which Trump encouraged his audience to take an action – from coming to a rally, watching an interview, or buying his book, to actual voting. 6.3% of Trump's tweets were coded as defensive, meaning tweets in which he responded to an attack against him. Only 5.1% of Trump's tweets contained vision, policy, or future plans. 3.7% of the tweets were coded as personal messages, which included holiday greetings or condolences, and 2.8% of the tweets were unclassified, since they did not fit into any of the above categories.

5. Discussion

Trump used Twitter for various purposes and strategic persuasive means: as a tool for taunting his political rivals or for criticizing the establishment, Obama's administration, or the traditional media; as a tool for spreading information and news regarding his campaign activities; as a tool for self-promotion and personal-branding; as a tool for defending himself from various attacks against him; as a tool for thanking or flattering his supporters; and, as a tool for conveying his vision and calling people to action. The following subsections discuss the results in light of three terms from framing theory: selection, emphasis and exclusion.

5.1 Selection

5.1.1 *Negativity*

The most prominent result of the content analysis shows that Trump's campaign on Twitter was mainly negative and offensive. Almost half of his unique tweets (47.4%) were against someone or something, including tweets against political rivals (22.8%), against the establishment (12.5%), and against the media (12.1%). Trump chose to focus his campaign, at least on Twitter, on the faults and failures (from his point of view) of his political rivals, Obama's administration, the establishment, and the media. His negative/offensive rhetoric usually expressed a sense of revulsion against the current situation, administration, media, President Obama, politicians in general, political correctness, Hillary Clinton, etc. (Kayam 2018). By constantly attacking his opponents, he emphasized their weaknesses in order to increase his own desirability. The negative campaigning strategy was also a strategic way for Trump to gain wide media coverage, and therefore reach far more people than those following tweeter (Graham, Broersma, Hazelhoff and Haar 2013). In his 1987 book "The Art of the Deal", Trump wrote:

One thing I've learned about the press is that they're always hungry for a good story, and the more sensational the better. It's in the nature of the job, and I understand that. The point is that if you are a little different, or a little outrageous, or if you do things that are bold or controversial, the press is going to write about you.
(Trump and Schwartz 2017, 56)

Trump's focus on negative campaigning also shifted the discourse from his actual factual talk or plans to the disadvantages of his rivals. As Davis and Ferrantino (1996) argue, candidates run less risk of being caught in a lie if their campaign is negative. Furthermore, negative campaigning also uses emotional appeals, such as fear and anger. By appealing to citizens' fears, for example, Trump evoked emotions of insecurity and anger. These emotions resulted in the understanding that voting for anyone other than Trump could result in a huge risk for America (Bonaccini 2016).

Furthermore, Trump's negative strategy was used on the one hand, as Reisigl (2008) argue, for two purposes – inclusion and exclusion. On the one hand, they formed solidarity, consent and identification among voters who wanted change and on the other hand, "they mobilized addressees to social exclusion against those excluded and denigrated by the orator" (Reisigl 2008, 251), or in this case, the establishment, the media, Obama's administration.

Compared to negative campaigning, only 6.3% of Trump's unique tweets were coded as defensive, as can be seen in Figure 3. Moreover, many of the tweets in which he responded to an attack against him were offensive, meaning the way he

chose to respond to an attack was by attacking, as can be seen in the following example:

- (12) Crooked Hillary Clinton made up facts about me, and “forgot” to mention the many problems of our country, in her very average scream!
(Trump’s Twitter, 29 July, 2016)

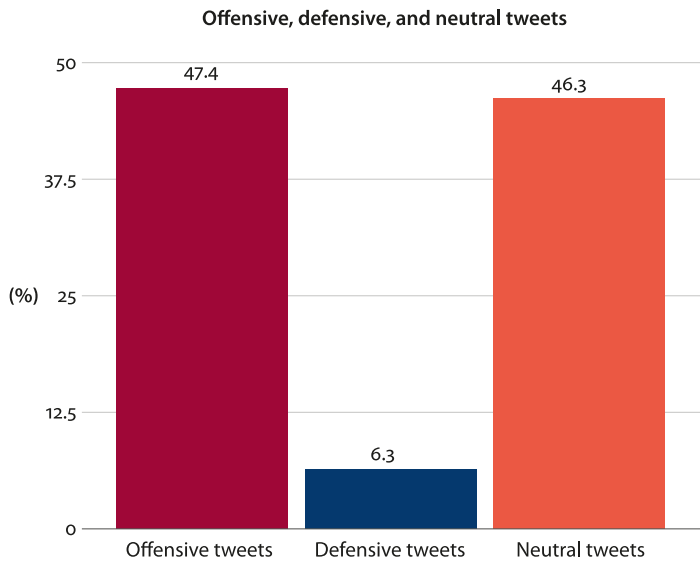


Figure 3. Offensive, defensive, and neutral tweets

Trump’s negative tweets against the media were also aimed at bypassing the institutionalized media. During the 2016 campaign Trump tweeted: “If the press would cover me accurately and honorably, I would have far less reason to ‘tweet’. Sadly, I don’t know if that will ever happen!” (Trump’s Twitter, December 5, 2016). On January 20, 2017, the day Trump was inaugurated as the 45th president of the United States, he remarked at one of the inaugural balls: “Let me ask you, should I keep the Twitter going or not? Keep it going? I think so. I think so. You know, the enemies keep saying oh, that’s terrible, but you know, it’s a way of bypassing dishonest media, right?” (Baragona 2017).

Trump used Twitter as a vehicle to bypass the media in two main aspects: First, he used Twitter as a platform to convey his message straight to the people, with no need for mediation by the mass media. Second, he used Twitter to directly criticize the mass media. The relatively high percentage of tweets that were coded as “Anti-Media” (12.1%, more than one out of every ten of his tweets) included tweets against anyone specific who criticized Trump on the media, against the

media as a whole, or against specific channels, such as Fox News or CNN, as the following exemplify:

- (13) Why does @FoxNews give @KarlRove so much airtime. He (and other Fox pundits) is so biased. Still thinks Romney won. Unfair coverage of Trump
(Trump's Twitter, 23 December, 2015)
- (14) Polls close, but can you believe I lost large numbers of women voters based on made up events THAT NEVER HAPPENED. Media rigging election!
(Trump's Twitter, 16 October, 2016)

5.1.2 *Self-promotion*

Another conclusion we can draw from the results is that one of Trump's main uses of Twitter during his campaign was as a tool for self-promotion or self-praise. 17.2% of Trump's tweets were coded as "self-glorification", meaning tweets in which Trump focused on his achievements, his advantages, and his own personal success.

Furthermore, the fact that 34% of his unique tweets included links leads to the same conclusion, since most links directed followers to articles supporting Trump. Even the large percentage of retweets (32.5%) suggests that Trump mainly used Twitter for self-promotion, since most retweets were meant to repeat users' messages saying how much they adore Trump or support him.

Moreover, 17.2% of his unique tweets were coded as "Information/Location/Activity". The fact that many of his tweets contained information regarding his activities, rallies, or interviews is in accordance with previous findings mentioned above, that the main use of Twitter by politicians is informational and Location/Activity. This is a way to use Twitter as a tool for self-promotion.

5.1.3 *Direct communication*

Second to the "Anti-Rivals" tweets were tweets coded as "Thanks" (17.3%). The fact that a large percentage of Trump's tweets were coded as "Thanks" – meaning messages in which Trump expressed his gratitude to his supporters; to people who endorsed him; to political partners, reporters, or commentators who covered him positively; or, to the public in places where he attended rallies, etc., reflects a very developed business skill. Trump knew he had to maintain a close and good relationship with whoever helped him, and also to balance his negative rhetoric with positiveness and appreciation, showing gratitude, and showing he cares, appreciates, remembers, and pays attention to others.

The results also indicate that Trump used Twitter as an effective tool to enhance his relationship and direct communication with the public/potential voters. The fact that 33% of his tweets are retweets suggests the importance of inter-

activity. He read users messages and retweeted them. Furthermore, the fact that in many of his tweets he chose to thank supporters shows that he realized the importance of keeping in personal touch with the public, as well as the importance of being grateful.

5.2 Emphasis

5.2.1 *“One man show”*

In 22% of Trump’s tweets, he used the first person singular pronoun “I”. This means that Trump did not speak on behalf of the Republican Party or as a representative of a certain ideology or political thought. He spoke mainly on behalf of himself, shifting the focus to his own abilities and successes. His extensive use of the first person singular pronoun emphasized that he was running for president on his own and that this was a “one man show”. He emphasized that he stood on his own, funded himself, and owed nothing to no one. Moreover, he substituted political discourse for business discourse, emphasizing his personal success in business, and the narrative that he built his business on his own and became a billionaire by himself. This was another way to persuade voters that he could do it – he could become a successful president just like he became a successful businessman, manager, employer etc. Furthermore, by emphasizing his background, he also meant to differentiate himself from the typical politician. He was not an ordinary politician – he came from a different (and more “practical”) world where he had already proven his skills. Now he was offering his skills to the world of politics.

5.2.2 *Slogans*

22.7% of Trump’s tweets included slogans; some of them were positive and some, which referred to different political rivals, were negative. As Smith (2016) argues, during Trump’s campaign he used negative branding to a “devastating effect” by regularly slandering his opponents (LyingTed, NeverCruz, Crooked Hillary, etc.). “These labels seemed to stick as each of his opponents fell by the wayside” (Smith 2016, 55). His positive branding, as Smith refers to it, included familiar slogans such as “Make America Great Again” or “America First”. The word “again” contains an admission that America has lost its power, and evokes a sense of nostalgia (Smith 2016). In other words, Trump gave Americans hope that they could restore what they had lost. Aside from being catchy, the two slogans contain a patriotic essence, which increases the sense of nationalism and belonging. They also promote a subtext suggesting that for Trump, America’s interests are top pri-

ority, ahead of those of the rest of the world, a belief that is compatible with many of his declarations regarding foreign policy.

Taylor (2004, 113) relates to repetitions as an effective feature of brainwashing, stating that “the more frequent or intense an incoming signal is to some neurons, the stronger the connections between those neurons will become. This is why repetition is a central feature of brainwashing techniques”. Trump manipulated language to implant his messages in the voters’ brains, just like in brainwashing. As the cognitive linguist George Lakoff explains:

Trump for 50 years has learned how to use people’s brains against them (...) Repetition is a way of changing people’s brains. What Trump was doing all through the nomination campaign was that every day he managed to get on TV, and he would repeat different things that activated the same moral framework, and it really worked. In addition you have particular frames that were repeated: “Crooked Hillary,” “Crooked Hillary,” “Crooked Hillary,” over and over. There wasn’t anything Hillary did that was crooked. But he kept saying it until people believed it. And they believed it because it was heard enough times to strengthen the neural circuitry in their brains. It wasn’t just stupidity. It’s simply the way brains work. (in Rozenberg 2017)

Trump also made extensive use of the exclamation mark in his tweets. 55.5% of Trump’s tweets contained at least one exclamation mark, while only 0.5% of the tweets included a question mark. Using exclamation marks is common in slogans and ads, and adds a sense of excitement, determination, and self-confidence. According to Cowell (2017), Trump’s excessive use of exclamation marks was meant to arouse emotions and convey a sense of urgency and calling for action, but also fear and the need for security.

5.3 Exclusion

Only 5.1% of Trump’s unique tweets were classified as “Vision/Future Plans/Policy”. These tweets were intended to convey Trump’s ideas, solutions, vision, or policy. In other words, his campaign on Twitter was much less ideological or visionary. While mentioning plans or vision, Trump kept them vague and gave only a basic idea of his future plans, such as “we will create jobs” or “we will keep our borders safe”. While his critics argued that this lack of detailed vision hinted at his lack of a real plan, his vagueness might have also stemmed from the business-oriented and slogan/advertisement nature of the campaign, with Trump being a skilled and experienced businessman who maintains a certain level of secrecy.

Another piece of data that supports this conclusion is the fact that 22.7% of Trump’s tweets contained slogans, as mentioned before, that were central to

his campaign. Typically, slogans are meant to be catchy or memorable persuasive phrases, which rarely include specific or detailed solutions or ideas. This piece of data, together with those mentioned above, also suggest that Trump rarely used Twitter to express and convey his ideas, vision, or plans for the future. “Trump performed machismo, bravado, and charisma, but he put forth few detailed arguments about how those traits would inflect his approach to governing” (Steudeman and Parry-Giles 2016, 571).

6. Conclusion

The current study found negative campaigning and self-glorification to be key players of Trump’s campaign strategy on Twitter. Among the different categories, “Anti-Political Rivals” came in first, meaning that attacking was the most common rhetorical strategy Trump used on Twitter.

The study also shows that Trump framed his message by using the following strategies: Trump’s negative campaign on Twitter was not directed only against political rivals, but also against the establishment and against the institutionalized media. These strategies were aimed at: (i) bypassing the media and delivering Trump’s message straight to the people, without being edited or censored; (ii) presenting the media as a fake, biased supplier of news, with Twitter, on the other hand, as a reliable source of information; (iii) distinguishing Trump from other candidates and from politics as a whole, by presenting him as a new type of politician who denounces old politics and its rules. Twitter was also used by Trump to promote himself, to inform people about his campaigning activities, and to shape the public’s opinion of him in the way he wanted. Furthermore, Trump used Twitter to establish a more personal relationship with his followers and to maintain interactivity and direct communication with them, in order to recruit more supporters.

In accordance with previous studies that explored politicians’ use of Twitter, Trump only occasionally used Twitter to express his ideas, vision, future plans, or solutions to different issues. In this sense, his campaign was also much more anti than pro, much more negative than positive, and much more offensive than visionary or ideological.

These results of the current study have important implications for future research on the use of SNSs by political actors, and on the most effective ways to use SNSs, especially during political campaigns. Along the line of thought originated in Bakhtin we can assume that since speech is always “filled to overflowing with other people’s words” (Bakhtin 1986, 337) and since “each utterance refutes, affirms, supplements, and relies on the others, presupposes them to be known,

and somehow takes them into account” (Bakhtin 1986, 91), Trump’s discourse on Twitter will have implications on other people’s speech, both in the general public discourse and in the political discourse.

A limitation of the current study is that it explores only one presidential candidate’s campaign. Critics can argue that these findings might stem from Trump’s character, and that they do not necessarily indicate a change in political campaigns. Although Trump’s campaign was obviously successful (he was elected president) and therefore merits research, it would be useful to explore additional campaigns on Twitter by different political candidates in the U.S. and in different countries where SNSs use is popular, in order to enrich the body of research in the field and its application to political campaigning in the Web 2.0 generation.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to express her deepest gratitude to Prof. Brian Ott for insightful remarks, suggestions and comments during the last stages of the manuscript.

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