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The Art of the Tweet: How to Change Political Rhetoric in 140 Characters or Less

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The Art of the Tweet:
How to Change Political Rhetoric in 140 Characters or Less

An Honors Thesis
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I. Statement of Purpose and Literature Review

The Internet age has seen a huge shift in the way that candidates communicate their political rhetoric, because there has been a huge shift in how voters consume that rhetoric. Twitter and Facebook are now some of the vehicles by which voters consume political rhetoric. Twitter and Facebook are home to lots of non-political content, but many members of the politically engaged community have flocked to both social networking sites to create politically engaged social networks. The emergence of social media as an important information source within the electorate has fundamentally changed not only the way that candidates communicate, but the very rhetoric that they are communicating. The importance of modern social networks as sources of political information, combined with kind of demotic rhetoric popularized by Donald Trump, has fundamentally changed the way that users consume political rhetoric.

Throughout the research process, a number of sources relating to the impact of social media networks on political rhetoric were uncovered. Straus, Glassman, Shogan, and Smelcer's research examines the use of Twitter as a specific electronic communication medium between members of Congress and their constituents. They argue that such electronic mediums have enhanced members' options for communication. Using original data, they present two models that predict the probability of a member of Congress adopting Twitter based on political, personal, and district-level variables.

Gerodimos, Roman, and Justinussen's research examines the role of social media in the 2012 presidential election. Their analysis focused on Obama's Facebook

campaign specifically and found that the Obama campaign used Facebook as a top-down promotional tool. They also found that followers engaged with campaign messages and interacted with posts that were policy oriented rather than promotional.

Gersbach's research examines the relationship between campaign expenditures, candidates' positions, and electoral outcomes. He argues that with unrestricted financing of political campaigns, many interest groups emerge in support of the leftist or rightist candidate. His research also demonstrates that donors may support a candidate whose position is not close to their own positions in order to draw the position of the winning candidate towards their own ideal point.

Hopp, Toby, and Vargo's research discusses the effect of social media platforms on American political engagement. Their research also explores the rise in "incivility" on these platforms. The goal of the study was to explore the relationship between political advertising factors and online behavior during the 2012 election.

Lehn's paper explores the recirculation of Jacqueline Kennedy's "Campaign Wife" columns, which were published from September to November 1960. These seven columns were recirculated and repurposed as part of the JFK Library's efforts to commemorate the anniversary of the 1960 presidential campaign. Twitter accounts under the handle Kennedy1960 and JBK1960 were created to trace Kennedy's path to the White House. The project was designed to re-create his thousand days in office. Lehn argues that the creation of the JBK1960 Twitter account revises our understanding of Jackie's rhetorical contributions to the 1960 campaign. Additionally, by recirculating her words over new media, it reveals how her columns were intended to provide a "glimpse into the daily life" of the wife of a

young presidential candidate – much like the Twitter accounts of political spouses do today.

Greyes' article discusses the potential use of social media for political campaigns in the United States in March 2011. It says that many political campaigns failed to appreciate the inherently dynamic ability of the media to foster interaction with voters, which can open two-way lines of communication with non-targeted voters. According to the author, campaigns that can tap the full potential of social networking platforms can expect the help of an ad-hoc network of online volunteers. The number of U.S. citizens accessing social media platforms is also discussed.

The study conducted by Williams and Girish looked at early adoption habits and the dissemination of emerging technology tools in campaigns to analyze which candidates were most likely to adopt and use Facebook 2008 elections to the US House of Representatives.

Megan Dorsch's article discusses social media as a campaign tool. It notes the adaptation of Twitter by the Republicans after the success of the campaign of U.S. President Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential election. The National Conference of State Legislatures predicted that candidates of the 2012 election will be dependent on Facebook and Twitter for financial contributions. Chris McCroskey, co-founder of the Tweet Congress, believes that candidates should not focus on social media tools alone.

Meghan Casserly's article reports on the newest form of social media confirmed by the presidential campaign of U.S. President Barack Obama. It states that the new account is serving up the First Family on Pinterest, the social networking equivalent of the local beauty shop. Features of the account are

discussed. A campaign spokesperson said that Pinterest is designed to reach Obama supporters throughout the country.

Michael Scherer's article discusses the political campaign of U.S. President Barack Obama, which led to his reelection in November 2012, with a focus on the voter turnout of young voters. Topics include efforts by the Obama campaign to engage young people through social media channels such as Facebook; the development of a political application for Facebook which allows political groups access to friend lists; and the connection between online social networks and voting behavior.

Rachel Ehrenberg's article explores an event four days before the 2010 special election in Massachusetts to fill Ted Kennedy's Senate seat, where an anonymous source delivered a blast of political spam. The smear campaign launched against Democratic candidate Martha Coakley quickly infiltrated the rest of the election-related chatter on the social networking service Twitter. Detonating over just 138 minutes, the "Twitter bomb" and the rancorous claims it brought with it eventually reached tens of thousands of people.

Debbie Chachra's research on how Twitter's crowd-driven, discussion and engagement-based platform inherently incubates a culture of harassment helped support the current research by supporting the exploration that Trump's political rhetoric is demotic, and that the Twitter platform drove his rhetoric based on its design.

According to an article by Mark Barabak, "Trump has transformed the bully pulpit — the president's ability to rally the country in pursuit of his goals — into a sort of vanity project, staging events not to advance any substantive agenda but to

vent and, as aides admit, bask in the adulation of supportive audiences.” This thesis includes direct quotes from his research and a subsequent piece in the *Los Angeles Times* as they directly support this thesis. He explores the psychology behind Trump’s rhetoric and delivery, and explores the idea of a 24/7 campaigning president. Barabak’s argument that Trump has used the office of the presidency to practice the act of campaigning, rather than the act of governing, helps support this thesis that his political rhetoric is unlike any that we have seen in modern times.

Mitchell Stephens, in a 2017 *Politico Magazine* feature, proposed that non-partisan journalism was a thing of the past, and that it was a good thing. This thesis includes direct quotes from his piece to support its research, including pieces of his research that explored how partisan outlets have skewed the way the electorate perceives political rhetoric – which is partly what has driven voters online, to consume this rhetoric directly from the candidate themselves.

Gabrielle Grow and Janelle Ward’s 2013 research concerning the role of authenticity in electoral social media campaigns was particularly relevant to the current research. Various direct quotes from their paper were used to support and defend main arguments in this thesis concerning the authenticity that social media platform afford to candidates. Their argument that “social media have become a primary means for electoral campaigns to communicate with citizens,” is a central part of this thesis as well, so their further research into social media platforms’ impact on campaigning and rhetoric was particularly supportive to the current research.

Blumler and Kavanagh’s article identifies key changes in society and the media that have shaped political communication in many democracies over the

postwar period. Three distinct ages are described. In the first, much political communication was subordinate to relatively strong and stable political institutions and beliefs. In the second, faced with a more mobile electorate, the parties increasingly "professionalized" and adapted their communications to the news values and formats of limited-channel television. In the third (still emerging) age of media abundance, political communication may be reshaped by five trends: intensified professionalizing imperatives, increased competitive pressures, anti-elitist populism, a process of "centrifugal diversification," and changes in how people receive politics. This system is full of tensions, sets new research priorities, and reopens long-standing issues of democratic theory.

Kushin and Yamamoto's study examined college students' use of online media for political purposes in the 2008 election. Social media attention, online expression, and traditional Internet attention were assessed in relation to political self-efficacy and situational political involvement. Data from a Web survey of college students showed significant positive relationships between attention to traditional Internet sources and political self-efficacy and situational political involvement. Attention to social media was not significantly related to political self-efficacy or involvement. Online expression was significantly related to situational political involvement but not political self-efficacy. Implications are discussed for political use of online media for young adults.

Sue Reynold's article for *Business Insider* explored how Facebook can develop a network of people that "know you," in a sense, to build trust and credibility among constituents while campaigning. Her argument that a strong social media campaign is a complement to a strong in-person campaign, supports parts of this thesis

exploring how Trump's rhetoric carried over straight from the Twitter feed to the rally stage with no problem.

Aaron Smith's research for The Pew Research Center explored the Internet's role in the 2008 presidential campaign. This thesis does not aim to provide a history of the Internet's impact on political campaigns, but would be remiss to not include a background on the beginnings of the shift in the way rhetoric is delivered by a politician and the way it is consumed by the electorate. His research supports this thesis by showing the beginnings, the shift, and the ultimate aggregation of the electorate looking online to consume political rhetoric and information. Smith's research also shows how the online audience has grown, which reflects the importance of a candidate needing to develop a strong online campaign. This supports the current research's argument that politicians have been forced to develop Internet and social network specific rhetoric that is designed to be consumed in a way that the electorate will understand, based on the platform they are receiving it on. His statistics also explore the types of political activities that the electorate performed when they engaged with political content on social media sites. This supports this thesis' argument that social media sites are important not only for the delivery of political rhetoric, but for the sharing and engagement of it by the electorate.

MtoM Consulting's article, "The Lifespan of a Social Media Post," provides research and statistics regarding the engagement peaks and valleys for a Twitter post. They highlight a few key facts, including the correlation between frequent postings and higher engagements with followers. Additionally, their findings were

useful to support a brief introduction of what Twitter is and why it is a significant social media platform.

Frank Newport, writing for Gallup, in “Democrats, Republicans Agree on Four Top Issues for Campaign,” highlighted four main issues for the 2016 Campaign. His article was particularly relevant because the four top issues he describes relate to top ideas and keywords that Donald Trump tweets about. His findings are based on a January 2016 Gallup survey that broke down percentages per issue between Republican-leaning poll participants and Democratic-leaning poll participants. Newport goes into analysis of the statistics provided and includes a full breakdown of issues that were of high importance to one party but not as much to the other. This was helpful to determine the topics that Trump was discussing via Twitter and whether they were relevant to the entire electorate or solely just to his base supporters.

Jessica Estepa’s article for *USA Today*, published in November of 2017, provides a preliminary analysis of his Twitter use, which was a year to that date. While time has passed since publication, it is still a relevant exploration of his Twitter habits and serves as a basis for predicting how his habits may evolve in the future. Her research provides insight into the topics he has tweeted about, huge announcements he has made, and even feuds he has gotten into on the social media platform. Estepa breaks down each category by using a selection of tweets from Trump, and then provides analysis on a trend that she finds emerging from the content. Her findings were incredibly helpful to this thesis in particular, largely because it helped to narrow down the categories and subjects of Trump tweets that this thesis explores.

Hannah Fingerhut's findings for the Pew Research Center, titled "What voters want in a president today, and how their views have changed," was particularly relevant to the category of "I Have" tweets from Donald Trump. The statistics found by the Pew study helped to develop and support a key argument that most voters, when polled, almost completely switched their positions on the importance of the amount of experience a presidential candidate has. This was a particularly important category because the tweets used within it helped to clearly illustrate how the electorate consumes Trump's tweets.

A July 2016 paper from the Pew Research Center titled "Economy and terrorism are top issues for voters in 2016" provided key information that supported many claims made throughout the research. The statistics from the polls conducted supported various coding sheets. The full report, "Top Voting Issues in 2016 Election," provided a more in-depth analysis of the information found by the poll. Pew broke the findings into various categories, including explanations of findings from specific questions and also aggregated overall findings into the top issues across all participants. As opposed to other Pew Research Center sources and statistics used in this thesis, this source was a much more broad and comprehensive analysis. This source included many more issues and explored their statistical relevancy.

Oren Tsur and David Lazer, writing for Politico Magazine, "I. You. Great. Trump,*" provided a refreshing infographic detailing the topics that Trump tweeted about most during the months of May and June 2016. Their five-slide article included research findings on Trump's favorite words, phrases, catchphrases, countries he has talked about, loves and hates. A particularly interesting chart

aggregates Trump's twitter history from May 2009 to April 2016, which is a visual representation of the huge uptick in his tweeting. Their research also included statistics concerning top issues among users that mentioned Donald Trump himself. Additionally, Tsur and Lazer provided statistics on the number of mentions, likes, and retweets by users on Twitter and how those engagements have grown over time. Their findings helped provide a basis for statistically significant topics that this thesis explores, such as catchphrases and issues, as well as increase and frequency of engagements.

Ron Elving's 2015 article for NPR, "Five Things You Should Know About Donald Trump" serves as a useful primer for Trump's background. Elving's research briefly lists topics such as his billionaire status, his background in politics, his career, and his personal life. This was useful to determine key facts about Trump's background and provide them as analysis within the coding sheets, to explain the meaning behind the sample tweets. Since the article itself was brief, it was not used for much substantive analysis, but preliminary research.

A 2017 BBC News report titled "Donald Trump's life story: from hotel developer to president," was helpful in the same vein as Ron Elving's NPR article. The research from NPR primarily provided more research and factual evidence about Trump's early career and personal life. It goes into more detail than Elving's article and it included more information about the 2016 election. This helped to provide a stronger background for the textual analysis provided with the example tweets.

UrbanDictionary.com was used solely to provide the colloquial definition of the term "fake news."

Stephen Battaglio's January 2017 article in the *LA Times*, "Trump's inauguration is watched by 30.6 million viewers – 7 million fewer than Obama's first ceremony" served to provide statistics for the "fake news" analysis portion of this thesis. Battaglio's research supported the content analysis and provided background for the example tweets themselves.

II. Methodology

Primarily, this thesis will use traditional research methods to find evidence from other researchers to support the thesis. Textual analysis of repeated words and phrases will be interspersed throughout to aid in understanding and explanation as needed. This thesis will also employ content analysis on specific tweets in regards to the themes that emerge from the coding sheets.

Coding sheets to identify specific words and phrases used in Trump's campaign rhetoric will help identify patterns and demonstrate how it is a departure from traditional campaign rhetoric. Additionally, this will help demonstrate themes based on the usage of specific, repeated words and phrases compared to that of other candidates. The coding sheets were developed by looking at different categories, based on certain keywords, of Trump's tweets. The website trumptwitterarchive.com has served as an important resource and aggregator of all Trump tweets. Within certain sections of this thesis, certain coding sheets will be included to support the researcher's argument and textual analysis of specific words and phrases will be used as well.

Visual aids will be employed as needed to effectively demonstrate how much of Trump's political rhetoric is consumed by a certain idea, phrase, or word. Breaking down his rhetoric into a visual figure will support the thesis that Trump's rhetoric has unknowingly and proactively changed how social media users consume campaign rhetoric.

III. Results

Ferris Bueller once said, “Life moves pretty fast ...” While Ferris was talking about taking time to enjoy yourself, the same can be applied to political rhetoric. Since June 15, 2015 when Donald Trump announced from Trump Tower that he would be in the running for the 2016 Presidential Election, there was not one single voter who did not have an opinion about how Trump ran his campaign. Whether it was his hair, his personality, his experience, or his Twitter feed – everybody had something to say. This thesis will focus specifically on his use of Twitter, both as a candidate and as President of the United States. It will examine, through content, textual, and literary analysis, the ways in which his rhetoric was developed, packaged, and received by the electorate. While most of the tweets are from 2015-present, a few examples of his tweets from years prior to 2015 will be included to support the development or recurrence of certain ideas and phrases. Overall, this thesis will explore the ways in which Donald Trump’s use of Twitter has changed how the electorate receives political information.

The year 2008 is the year that social media made an impact on political campaigns and elections, according to The Pew Research Center. In certain studies, they found that “over the course of the entire (2008) election, more than half (52%) of online social network users used these sites for political information or to take part in some aspect of the campaign.”¹ While that percentage only represents 14% of

¹ Aaron Smith, “Online Politics in 2008.” Pew Research Center: The Internet’s Role in Campaign 2008, 2009, accessed November 6, 2017, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2009/04/15/online-politics-in-2008/>.

all adults, that is still a large percentage of voters that turned to social networks for political information.

When studying specifically the role of the Internet in the 2008 campaign cycle, Pew found that “compared with other online political users, Twitter users were much more likely to sign up online for updates about the election (26% did this, vs. 14% of non-users).” This means that there was a measurable shift towards users getting their political information from Twitter rather than traditional sources of political news.² Aaron Smith, writing for Pew, goes on to argue that “users of various social media applications...were interested in obtaining timely customized information.”³ Social media allows users to enjoy a high degree of customization, meaning you only see what you want to see, from who you want at the present time.

This translates directly into the political sphere: users only see the political information they want to see, having customized their feed to show the views of like-minded users. Only want to see information from conservative pundits, congressmen, and outlets? Only follow those accounts. Twitter makes it incredibly easy for users to voluntarily “tune out” what they simply do not agree with. Twitter is uniquely suited for the sharing of political information. During the election and for a majority of 2017, users were limited to a total of 140 characters per tweet – meaning there was no complicated wording, nothing hidden between long paragraphs.⁴ There is simply limited real estate for ideas, forcing candidates to plainly present their

² Pew Research Center “Online Politics in 2008

³ Pew Research Center, “Online Politics in 2008.”

⁴ Newton, Casey. "Twitter just doubled the character limit for tweets to 280," The Verge, September 26, 2017, accessed December 11, 2017, <https://www.theverge.com/2017/9/26/16363912/twitter-character-limit-increase-280-test>.

rhetoric. Per research done by MtoM Consulting, the “lifespan” of a single tweet is brief, only 18-24 minutes.⁵ This formula – short, blunt, and fleeting – creates a frenzy of engagement. One does not need to study a formal statement or speech made by the president – they simply need look to his Twitter feed to understand what he is saying.

If you were alive during the 2016 Presidential campaign cycle and subsequent election, then you probably read, retweeted, liked, posted, or clicked on something about Donald Trump’s use of Twitter. Trump has 37 thousand tweets on his personal account alone and tweets multiple times per day, giving him a huge degree of accessibility that no other President of the United States has willingly shouldered before. USA Today puts it into perspective: “Since the election on Nov. 8, 2016, the president has tweeted 2,461 times as of November 7, 2017 (including retweets and deleted tweets). That adds up to, on average, about six to seven tweets per day.”¹² In this, Trump has truly trumped the traditional news media, taking control of his coverage by choosing to tweet everything from policy positions to insults in his own words. A generic google news query for “trump tweets” comes back with over 11,200,000 unique hits just on those two terms alone. This is an unprecedented

⁵ "The Lifespan of a Social Media Post." MtoM Consulting. July 20, 2016, accessed December 11, 2017. <https://mtomconsulting.com/lifespan-social-media-post/>.

¹² Jessica Estepa, “Trump has tweeted 2,461 times since the election. Here's a breakdown of his Twitter use,” USA Today, last modified November 7, 2017, accessed November 8, 2017, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2017/11/07/trump-has-tweeted-2-461-times-since-election-heres-breakdown-his-twitter-use/822312001/>.

amount of news coverage generated from the president's rhetoric on a single social networking site. While it is not usual for political information to be shared across social networking sites, what is remarkable is the sheer volume of information shares and the mass number of users now turning to sites like Twitter to receive political rhetoric.

Within the cacophony created by the endless number of Internet news sources, you can find research at either end of the spectrum that adores or abhors Trump's use of Twitter in the 2016 campaign cycle. A cursory look at simply what he tweets about, thanks to research done by *Politico Magazine*, shows that his favorite keywords are "I," "you," and "Trump." These are followed by "he," his own twitter handle (@realDonaldTrump), and "we."¹³ A clever reader would assume that he enjoys tweeting about himself first and foremost, followed by "you" and "we," suggesting that he attempts to include his supporters by telling them what he is going to do for them, as a side note to the much larger self-aggrandizement that is taking place.

The question that many users are beginning to face is, "with so much information out there, how does one know what to believe?" This is where the beauty of social networks can shine, if used correctly. At the core, candidates are representatives of themselves on these platforms. In 2008, the Obama campaign effectively tapped into a way to utilize social networks to disseminate large amounts

¹³ David Lazer and Oren Tsur, "I. You. Great. Trump,*" *Politico Magazine*, last modified June 2016, accessed November 7, 2017, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/gallery/2016/04/donald-trump-twitter-account-history-social-media-campaign-000631?slide=1>.

of political information from all kinds of sources to a wide range of users. Through a strategy known as “targeted sharing,” the Obama communications team developed a Facebook application that requested access to a Facebook user’s friends list – effectively using one person to connect the campaign with hundreds of potential voters.⁶ Michael Scherer, writing for *Time Magazine* in 2012, reported that “Early tests of the system found statistically significant changes in voter behavior. People whose friends sent them requests to vote early and register to vote, for example, were more likely to do so than similar potential voters who were not contacted.”⁷ Obama’s social media strategists tapped into this power in the home stretch of the campaign, while Facebook’s potential as a “get out the vote tool” was essentially in its infancy. They were just beginning to understand the campaign change and rhetoric revolution that had been set in motion. Their strategy was founded, it seems, out of a no-brainer philosophy: people are going to be more willing to do something if they are asked by someone they know, no matter if that connection is through a computer screen or face to face. This lends an online account the perceived reputation, trustworthiness, and likeability that the living, breathing candidate enjoys. Whether the accounts are run by the candidates themselves or a team of staffers, users perceive messages as coming from the candidate, congressman, politico, or president.

Gabrielle Grow and Janet Ward touched on this phenomenon in their research on the role of authenticity in electoral social media campaigns. They argued

⁶ Michael Scherer, "Friend Request," *Time* 180, no. 23 (December 3, 2012): 20.

⁷ Scherer, "Friend Request," 20.

that social networking platforms “...allow[s] candidates and office holders to interact with voters, allowing for transparent communication, and for arguing against opponents.”⁸ A candidate’s presence on a social networking site serves to “humanize” them to a certain extent. Thinking of yourself as a Facebook friend of Barack Obama or Mitt Romney in 2008 may have fostered the perception of a personal connection between the user and the candidate – a perception that could not have been achieved through phone calls, television interviews, or traditional campaign rallies. Grow and Ward cite that this perceived connection that comes from the “candidate’s image on social media is probably authentic because the information on social media can be verified off–line.”⁹

Grow and Ward’s study brings up an interesting idea of authenticity. There are, of course, two sides to the authenticity factor. Voters are naturally more inclined to believe in what a candidate, politico, or congressman is saying because they can turn to Google, CSPAN, Fox and Friends, or the *Washington Post* to verify this person’s very existence and beliefs. However, since they can verify their information, they are also more inclined to believe what that person is saying. Figure 1 below is a selection of example tweets from Donald Trump on the topic of “dishonesty.”

⁸ Gabrielle Grow and Janelle Ward, “The Role of Authenticity in Electoral Social Media Campaigns.” *First Monday*, 18, no. 4, (April 2013), accessed October 18, 2017, <http://journals.uic.edu/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/4269/3425>.

⁹ Grow and Ward, “The Role of Authenticity in Electoral Social Media Campaigns.”

Figure 1: Coding Sheet 1 – Topic: Dishonesty¹⁰

1. Nov 11, 2012 08:53:49 AM I am a very calm person but love tweeting about both scum and positive subjects. Whenever I tweet, some call it a tirade..totally **dishonest!**
2. Mar 7, 2016 08:10:22 AM I will be using Facebook and Twitter to expose **dishonest** lightweight Senator Marco Rubio. A record no-show in Senate, he is scamming Florida
3. Jul 10, 2016 01:42:32 PM The media is so **dishonest**. If I make a statement, they twist it and turn it to make it sound bad or foolish.They think the public is stupid!
4. Aug 14, 2016 11:55:07 AM I am not only fighting Crooked Hillary, I am fighting the **dishonest and corrupt media** and her government protection process. People get it!
5. Aug 14, 2016 06:57:37 PM I have always been the same person-remain true to self.The media wants me to change but it would be **very dishonest** to supporters to do so!
6. Nov 27, 2017 09:04:51 AM We should have a contest as to which of the Networks, plus CNN and not including Fox, is the **most dishonest**, corrupt and/or distorted in its political coverage of your favorite President (me). They are all bad. Winner to receive the FAKE NEWS TROPHY!
7. Aug 17, 2017 05:32:11 AM The public is learning (even more so) how **dishonest** the Fake News is. They totally misrepresent what I say about hate, bigotry etc. Shame!
8. Dec 30, 2017 05:36:41 PM I use Social Media not because I like to, but because it is the only way to fight a **VERY dishonest** and unfair “press,” now often referred to as Fake News Media. Phony and non-existent “sources” are being used more often than ever. Many stories & reports a pure fiction!

¹⁰ <http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com/archive/dishonest>

9. Jan 17, 2018 08:05:46 PM Despite some **very corrupt and dishonest media** coverage, there are many great reporters I respect and lots of GOOD NEWS for the American people to be proud of!
 10. Sep 22, 2017 05:44:47 AM The Russia hoax continues, now it's ads on Facebook. What about the **totally biased and dishonest** Media coverage in favor of Crooked Hillary?
-

As far back as November 2012, Donald Trump has been tweeting about dishonesty as it relates to his rhetoric. In example tweet 1, he directly says “I am a very calm person but love tweeting about both scum and positive subjects... .” While this tweet was perhaps not aimed at voters, it was an assurance to followers that he is a calm individual that enjoys tweeting about a plethora of topics. Trump then goes on to refute the idea of his tweets being “tirades” or long, angry and sometimes frenzied thoughts. Actively engaging and dismissing the criticism as “totally dishonest,” Trump is directly telling his followers that his rhetoric on the social media platform is in fact, calm thoughts from a busy mind.

Example tweet three contains somewhat of a more relevant use of Trump’s doctrine on dishonesty. He begins with a plain claim “the media is so dishonest,” follows with a criticism of their coverage “...they twist it to make it sound so bad or foolish,” and then ends with a very broad claim what the media thinks - that the “public is stupid.” To anyone reading the tweet in its entirety, they can reasonably assume that the media is dishonest because they spin what Trump is saying, because they believe they can fool the uneducated public. Here, Trump appears to be reasonably defending himself and pointing a finger to (his) presumed root of the problem.

Example tweet six is an interesting example of Trump's twitter rhetoric because it showcases his flair for drama, the idea of dishonest media, and personal aggrandizement. In it, he proposes a contest between news networks (excluding ones with favorable coverage) that he deems dishonest, distorted and/or corrupt. The winner will receive a "fake news trophy." Surely, this tweet seems to be influenced by his reality television background and penchant for theatrics in his public image. He refers to himself as "your favorite president" and even further clarifies that statement by adding (me) into the body of the tweet. Tweeting this in November of 2017, as President, this kind of language is worth noting for a couple of reasons. It appears very off the cuff – there is no obvious crafting, tweaking, or polishing from a communications staff. He references a thread that he continually strings throughout other tweets – that of dishonesty and corruption in the media. Tweets of this caliber do very little to make his claims that he is a "calm person" who is not prone to tirades when this appears very much like a tirade. To his base, it was most likely perceived as a tweet in jest of the media's treatment of their favorite president (him). To the electorate it was most likely perceived with mixed signals. The President probably is not serious about awarding a trophy to the fakest of news agencies, but he probably is serious about the dishonesty he perceives within them.

Other example tweets in Figure 1 broadly support the specific analysis above. They are examples of Trump using this idea of "dishonesty" in a myriad of ways. Tweets in this category illustrate how he can take negative coverage from the media and spin it (essentially playing and sometimes beating them at their own game) into something that favors him. This is the dark side of the authenticity Grow and Ward's

research explores. When it comes from the Twitter handle of the President, surely it must be true.

In the spirit of dishonesty, the following Figure 2 will explore the idea of “fake news,” focusing on the specific month of January. This month was chosen because it encompasses a transition time – both pre-and post-inauguration. In other words, we can look at Trump conversely tweeting as the nominee and then as the president to study if there was any kind of shift in his political rhetoric.

Figure 2: Coding Sheet 2 – Topic: Fake News¹⁰

1. Jan 10, 2017 08:19:23 PM **FAKE NEWS** - A TOTAL POLITICAL WITCH HUNT!
2. Jan 10, 2017 09:00:11 PM 'BuzzFeed Runs Unverifiable Trump-Russia Claims' #**FakeNews** <https://t.co/d6daCFZHNh>
3. Jan 11, 2017 07:44:05 AM I win an election easily, a great "movement" is verified, and crooked opponents try to belittle our victory with **FAKE NEWS**. A sorry state!
4. Jan 11, 2017 07:48:52 AM Intelligence agencies should never have allowed this **fake news** to "leak" into the public. One last shot at me.Are we living in Nazi Germany?
5. Jan 11, 2017 11:01:38 PM We had a great News Conference at Trump Tower today. A couple of **FAKE NEWS** organizations were there but the people truly get what's going on
6. Jan 12, 2017 09:22:21 AM .@CNN is in a total meltdown with their **FAKE NEWS** because their ratings are tanking since election and their credibility will soon be gone!

¹⁰ <http://www.latimes.com/business/hollywood/la-fi-ct-inauguration-ratings-20170119-story.html>

7. Jan 13, 2017 06:11:13 AM Totally made up facts by sleazebag political operatives, both Democrats and Republicans - **FAKE NEWS!** Russia says nothing exists. Probably...
 8. Jan 24, 2017 09:16:19 PM Congratulations to @FoxNews for being number one in inauguration ratings. They were many times higher than **FAKE NEWS** @CNN - public is smart!
 9. Jan 28, 2017 08:04:58 AM The failing @nytimes has been wrong about me from the very beginning. Said I would lose the primaries, then the general election. **FAKE NEWS**
 10. Jan 29, 2017 08:00:32 AM Somebody with aptitude and conviction should buy the **FAKE NEWS** and failing @nytimes and either run it correctly or let it fold with dignity!
-

For a voter, this is probably an all too familiar category of example Trump tweets. The term “fake news” has entered the lexicon in full force. According to the popular website Urban Dictionary, whose purpose is to define popular slang words and provide reference for them via the Internet. The first three definitions for “fake news” are:

- 1) Normally typed in ALL CAPS, it is the only type of news that Mr. Trump loves.
- 2) A term formerly useful for describing websites consisting entirely of intentionally fabricated news stories, but now used to describe virtually anything that does not mesh with one's own views.
- 3) Used to defend an illogical position, or a way to avoid using critical thinking skills when a news source does not match a personal or ideological bias.¹¹

The common thread in all three definitions is that “fake news” is usually a type of news that runs contrary to an individual’s personal ideals. The last Urban

¹¹ <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=fake+news>

Dictionary definition defines it in terms of its use in action – to call something “fake news” is to succinctly defend against something you believe is false, whether it is political information or not. This term may be one of Donald Trump’s largest contributions to American culture. “Fake news” has taken the American news media by storm.

Example tweet one encapsulates the entirety of the first Urban Dictionary definition discussed above. In all caps, Trump declares that a total political witch hunt is happening and all associated media coverage is “fake news.” To anyone familiar with online language, emphasis on all capital letters is typically perceived as shouting. To voters, Trump is shouting across Twitter – emphatically getting his point across in what is atypical rhetoric for a president-elect.

Focusing on example tweets five and six Trump further attacks the traditional news media for their coverage of his activities. He alleges that “fake news organizations” may have been at his Trump tower press conference, but “the people truly get what’s going on.” Here, his faith in the American people and their ability to “get what’s going on,” despite the “fake news” inundating them shines through. In example tweet six, he directly calls out CNN on Twitter and accuses them of being in a “total meltdown” caused by “tanking ratings” since the election. CNN, perceived by many to be a left leaning news agency, is often the target of “fake news” attacks from Trump. Voters who read tweets of this kind may be less likely to watch or read CNN’s coverage of politics, simply because Trump tweets about them with overwhelming negativity. In addition to attacking CNN, Trump also attacks the *New York Times* and dubs it as “failing” in example tweets nine and ten.

Example tweet seven is interesting because he calls out both Republicans and Democrats for “totally made up facts by sleazeball political operatives.” Trump seldom tweets about both Republicans and Democrats in the same context, let alone tweets negatively about his own party. Criticisms are often reserved for news media outlets, individual opponents, and broader issues or criticisms of his behaviors, actions, or policies. This tweet also directly references the Russia/Putin scandal that has embroiled both his campaign and his administration for some time. However, the significance does not lie in the foreign intrigue – it lies with the anomaly that he calls out both Republicans and Democrats for engaging in fake news, further stratifying himself from other politicians.

Finally, example tweet ten is a positive spin on fake news. In it, Trump congratulates Fox News for having “being number one in inauguration ratings” (meaning having the highest ratings for television news during the inauguration out of all television news agencies) as compared to “fake news CNN.” Forty percent of Trump voters turned to Fox News to watch the inauguration and it did enjoy the highest number of viewers overall with 8.4 million.¹¹ This is an example of how he is taking control of his own coverage in a roundabout way – he is congratulating a favorable news agency for their success while still reminding the public that CNN is fake news enemy number one and praising them for their “smarts” in turning to “his” news agency of choice.

¹¹ <http://www.latimes.com/business/hollywood/la-fi-ct-inauguration-ratings-20170119-story.html>

Trump has practically mastered the art of a punchy, to-the-point 140-character Tweet, having coined the phrase “Sad!” as his personal catchphrase. The same *Politico Magazine* research from June 2016 found that he used that catchphrase (or a variation of it) over 159 unique times since 2009. If “Sad!” does not get the point across that he feels some sort of disdain towards something, then a well-written speech certainly will not. The following Figure 3 looks at Trump’s tweets beginning with the phrase “I Have.”

Figure 3: Coding Sheet 3 – Topic: “I Have”¹⁴

1. Mar 22 2016 8:32 AM I have proven to be far more correct about terrorism than anybody- and it’s not even close. Hopefully AZ and UT will be voting for me today!
2. Jun 6 2016 5:56 AM Just like I have been able to spend far less money than others on the campaign and finish #1, so too should our country. We can be great!
3. May 31 2016 4:42 AM I have raised/given a tremendous amount of money to our great VETERANS, and have got nothing but bad publicity for doing so. Watch!
4. Mar 29 2016 7:16 AM I have millions more votes/hundreds more dels than Cruz or Kasich, and yet am not being treated properly by the Republican Party or the RNC.
5. Mar 3 2016 3:30 AM I have brought millions of people into the Republican Party, while the Dems are going down. Establishment wants to kill this movement!
6. 1:00 PM - 19 Feb 2016 I have built so many great & complicated projects– creating tens of thousands of jobs- (link to Facebook video)
7. Dec 29 2015 6:39 AM So, I have spent almost nothing on my run for president and am in 1st place. Jeb Bush has spent \$59 million & done. Run country my way!

¹⁴ Trump Twitter Archive, <http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com/#list-have>

8. Dec 13 2015 9:55 PM Why doesn't [@FoxNews](#) quote the new Iowa [@CNN](#) Poll where **I have** a 33% to 20% lead over Ted Cruz and all others. Think about it!
 9. Jan 14 2013 7:38 AM Wow, **I have** just exceeded 2 million followers--and in such a short time!
 10. Aug 21 2016 4:35 PM **I have** been drawing very big and enthusiastic crowds, but the media refuses to show or discuss them. Something very big is happening!
-

In just ten short examples, it is interesting to note the kinds of things Trump is telling us that he has. By using the statement “I have,” he is showing us what he physically has, things he has done, or things he has been right about in the past. In example Tweet 1, he asserts that he has been “far more correct about terrorism than anybody,” during the campaign season. This tells voters that Trump, the ultimate outsider, was “right” when it came to a complex and dangerous topic such as terrorism. Playing into the role of authenticity explored earlier, voters are more likely to believe that he is indeed “right” on issues of such high importance because he says so. After all, why would anyone tell you they were wrong about something like terrorism, especially when they are asking for your vote, as he is doing in the second half of example Tweet 1? In a July article from the Pew Research Center, terrorism was ranked as the second most important issue for voters during that election cycle, second to the economy.¹⁵ For the majority voters who regard terrorism as an important electoral issue, hearing Trump say that he has been right when the other candidates have been wrong is (to steal a catchphrase from the man himself) huge.

¹⁵ Pew Research Center, “4 Top Voting Issues in 2016 Election”, http://www.people-press.org/2016/07/07/4-top-voting-issues-in-2016-election/4_1-2/

Looking at example Tweet 7, we can see that Trump is talking about the amount of money he has spent on his campaign alone as compared to that of his competitor, Jeb Bush. By pitting the values against each other (almost nothing versus upwards of \$59 million) Trump is showcasing that he can stick to a tight budget. Per the same Pew research referenced above, the economy was the first most important issue for voters in 2016.¹⁶ Voters care about how their tax dollars are going to be spent, and Trump's direct call to "run country my way!" tells voters that he can run America on a budget. By highlighting Jeb Bush's perceived overspending, he shows that Jeb was perhaps irresponsible with his expenditures and therefore unfit for the presidency.

In the same vein, Mark Barabak of the *Los Angeles Times* concluded that "Trump has transformed the president's ability to rally the country in pursuit of his goals" into "a sort of vanity project, staging events not to advance any substantive agenda but to vent and, as aides admit, bask in the adulation of supportive audiences."¹⁷ Trump's campaign events often created electric atmospheres, charged with the energy of the attendees that resulted from the energy of the candidate. Trump, however, did not have the energy of a man with a plan for America – he had the energy of a candidate whose rhetoric largely played on the emotions of the electorate. He knew what he was saying, and he knew how to say it to elicit the biggest reaction. Barabak quotes Julian Zelizer of Princeton University as saying "...it's not connected to some bigger agenda or ideological worldview that he's espousing. It's about the act of campaigning, which gives him juice."

¹⁶ Pew Research Center, "4 Top Voting Issues in 2016 Election"

¹⁷ Mark Barabak, "Again breaking ground, Trump takes the permanent campaign to new heights," *The Los Angeles Times*, last modified August 23, 2017, accessed November 7, 2017, <http://beta.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-trump-permanent-campaign-20170823-story.html>

Zelizer is no doubt referring to Trump’s rhetoric here, meaning that his words do not have much to do with a concrete plan for the country, but he’s getting voters fired up about them nonetheless. Twitter’s bite-size format serves this well; users can rapidly share small amounts of direct information. This information, because it must be pointed, is easier to understand – lowering the knowledge barrier for potential supporters. The easier it is to understand your message, the easier it is to support it. The more people that a user knows that are excited about a candidate’s message, the more likely that user is to also get excited and share the message.

Speaking of voters getting excited about a candidate’s message, it certainly seemed that Trump had the most zealous and enthused supporters of all the candidates. Sporting hats emblazoned with his motto, “Make American Great Again,” Trump supporters were unmistakable and easy to spot. Figure 4 shows how he coined and implemented the “MAGA” slogan.

Figure 4: Coding Sheet 4 – Topic: “Make America Great Again”¹⁸

1. Nov 7, 2012 02:03:40 PM We have to **make America great again!**
2. Sep 26, 2014 05:52:39 PM I wonder if I run for PRESIDENT, will the haters and losers vote for me knowing that I will **MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN?** I say they will!
3. Apr 2, 2015 03:57:13 PM Politicians are all talk and no action. Washington can only be fixed by an outsider. Let’s **make America great again!**

¹⁸ Trump Twitter Archive, http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com/archive/%23maga%20%7C%7C%20make%20america/ttff/1-19-2017_

4. May 4, 2015 02:09:54 PM If elected, I will undo all of Obama's executive orders. I will deliver. **Let's Make America Great Again!**
 5. May 22, 2015 11:05:21 AM A strong America creates opportunity and growth. We just need to change Washington. **Let's Make America Great Again!**
 6. Jun 24, 2015 09:16:38 PM My message, **MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN**, is beginning to take hold. Bring back our jobs, strengthen our military and borders, help our VETS!
 7. Jul 3, 2015 01:48:17 PM We need jobs & we need them fast. I am a job creator. None of the pols can or will. **Let's Make America Great Again!**
 8. Jul 24, 2015 01:18:28 PM It is time to send someone from the outside to fix DC from the inside. **Let's Make America Great Again!**
 9. Oct 8, 2015 11:46:37 AM Washington (D.C.) is such a mess - nothing works! I will **MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!** It's not going to happen with anyone else.
 10. Mar 28, 2016 08:07:23 PM We need to secure our borders ASAP. No games, we must be smart, tough and vigilant. **MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN** & **MAKE AMERICA STRONG AGAIN!**
-

The “Make America Great Again” slogan was central to Trump’s campaign rhetoric as well as his platform. By simply declaring that he wanted to “MAGA,” voters could reasonably conclude that his policies would be in line with this slogan. After all, if you were running on that as a central theme, it would be ill-advised to have policies that were not going to help make America great again. Interestingly, the “MAGA” slogan does not appear to have come from a staffer brainstorm – as early as November 2012 he tweeted simply, “We have to make American great again!” as one can see in example Tweet 1. That is almost four years prior to his presidential run. If one was particularly invested in Trump’s political beliefs, it appears that making America great again is something he wholeheartedly believes in (or has, for at least four years.) This is also an excellent example of how Trump could communicate his message highly effectively

given a restrained word count. The ability to condense his slogan to something as small as #MAGA allowed him to tag tweets with this specific piece of rhetoric. By making his slogan such a succinct hashtag, it was easily trackable across Twitter's platform and even served as an aggregate locator for all posts concerning #MAGA. However, the real beauty lies in how he employs the full "Make America great again" slogan in his tweets concerning his campaign and policy stances.

In yet another article from the Pew Research Center, Hannah Fingerhut states that in March 2015, "voters valued a hypothetical candidate with 'experience and a proven record' (50%) than one who had 'new ideas and a different approach' (43%)." But what happened a mere six months later, after Trump declared his candidacy for the 2016 presidential race? Those numbers almost flipped. Per Fingerhut, "55% said it was more important for a candidate to have new ideas, while 37% valued experience and a proven record."¹⁹ This shift certainly appears to correlate with Trump's candidacy, meaning voters suddenly put more weight behind fresh leadership than they did a long resume. Trump continually, and willingly, cast himself in the role of the "Washington outsider," which worked hugely to his advantage.

As we can see in example Tweets 3, 8, and 9, he embraces the outsider image enthusiastically. Statements like "It's not going to happen with anyone else," "It's time to send someone from the outside to fix D.C.," and "Washington can only be fixed by an outsider," all tell voters that none of the other establishment candidates in the field can "fix" the problems on Capitol Hill. Trump, the only candidate visibly far enough from

¹⁹ Pew Research Center, "What Voters Want In A President Today and How Their Views Have Changed," <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/02/12/what-voters-want-in-a-president-today-and-how-their-views-have-changed/>

politics than his competitors, is the only one that can fix the government. Additionally, by constantly referring to the need to “fix” Washington, Trump communicates the idea that the government itself is broken. It is common for politicians and pundits to call Washington and Congress “broken.” With such a direct and visceral connotation, voters perceive that the government is no longer in working order.

Something Trump does well is articulating his policy stances clearly and succinctly within individual tweets. While voters may not know the intricate details or fine print of his platforms, they know what he is for and what he is against. There is power in a simple, strong message, and Trump could deliver that time and time again. In example Tweet 4, he directly says “I will undo all of Obama’s executive orders. I will deliver.” Voters do not care how he is going to do this, they care that he is promising to do it. There is power in Trump’s direct rhetoric. In example Tweet 6, he specifically says that bringing back jobs, strengthening both the military and border security, and helping veterans is part of what his MAGA message is all about. Trump clearly supported job creation and national security, which were two of the most important issues to Republican voters during the 2016 Election.²⁰

Let us explore how Trump as presented himself as the only suitable candidate to run the country. Or, as trumptwitterarchive.com put it, the “key to solving issues.”

²⁰ Gallup, “Democrats, Republicans Agree on Four Top Issues for Campaign,” <http://news.gallup.com/poll/188918/democrats-republicans-agree-four-top-issues-campaign.aspx>

Figure 5: Coding Sheet 5 – Topic: Key to solving issues²¹

1. May 3, 2015 1:34 PM The economy is bad and getting worse-almost ZERO growth this quarter. **Nobody can beat me on the economy (and jobs).** MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN
 2. May 3, 2015 1:34 PM **I am the only one that knows how to build cities** - pols are all talk and no action. Our cities need help, and fast. They are crumbling!
 3. May 23, 2015 8:05 PM **Nobody understands politicians like I do** - all talk and no action. They will never get our country where it needs to be, truly great again!
 4. Jul 3, 2015 3:12 PM Our Southern border is unsecure. **I am the only one that can fix it**, nobody else has the guts to even talk about it.
 5. Mar 24, 2016 7:46 AM Hillary Clinton has been working on solving the terrorism problem for years. TIME FOR A CHANGE, **I WILL SOLVE - AND FAST!**
 6. Oct 2, 2016 4:22 AM **I know our complex tax laws better than anyone** who has ever run for president and am the only one who can fix them. [#failing@nytimes](#)
 7. Mar 26, 2016 12:20 PM **Nobody will protect our Nation like Donald J. Trump.** Our military will be greatly strengthened and our borders will be strong. Illegals out!
 8. Mar 7, 2016 1:23 PM It was great being in Michigan. Remember, **I am the only presidential candidate who will bring jobs back to the U.S.and protect car industry!**
 9. May 7, 2015 8:15 AM If I run, I will be in all the primary debates and you will see why **I am the only one who can Make America Great Again!**
-

²¹ <http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com/#list-alone>

A few things stand out about the tweets in this sample. For one, Trump is presenting himself as the only person in America who can do things like protect the car industry, bring back jobs, and secure the southern border. That is a bit of a stretch – every other presidential candidate in the 2016 race probably thought they were the only ones capable of doing those things, too. Example tweet nine literally says that he is the only one who can make America great again. This tells voters two things – one, nobody else but Donald Trump can do it. Two, if you watch the primary debates, you will see that he is the clear choice. Nobody else even comes close. Voters reading example tweets one and two can reasonably understand that Trump cannot be beat on the economy and jobs. He is literally telling them that he “is the only one that knows how to build cities.” Out of the other candidates in the running, this may be true – he certainly has more experience in private sector real estate. However, it takes a complex understanding of industries, infrastructure, demographics, and geography to build cities. Voters scrolling through their Twitter feeds are not thinking about those complexities, and they take what he is saying at face value. This plays into Grow and Ward’s study on authenticity referenced earlier. If he is saying it, it must be true.

Perhaps the most interesting tweet in this selection is example tweet three. Trump declares “Nobody understands politicians like I do,” and accuses this broad base of “politicians” as being “all talk and no action.” For someone who had painted himself as the ultimate Washington outsider, a normal guy who eats McDonalds, a straight-talking New Yorker – he claims to understand politicians better than anyone else.

To the contrary, there is some truth to the statement that Trump understands the behavior of politicians in a way most “regular folks” may not. A 2016 NPR article reminds us that “he has made highly publicized forays into national politics on occasion

over the past two decades,” with a somewhat-serious campaign in 2000 seeking the Reform Party nomination. He withdrew from that race after some time and toyed with the idea of running for the Republican nomination in both 2008 and 2012 during the Obama Administration.²² While Trump may not be a stranger to the national political stage and has surely enjoyed relationships with other politicians, such a broad statement and criticism misleads and misinforms voters.

Even the structure of example tweet three is interesting. He begins with a personal statement of what he does better than anyone else, follows with a criticism of the contenders, and then raises an issue with a sense of urgency. This creates alarm in the mind of a voter reading this tweet – saying American cities are “crumbling” and that they need “help, fast!” is a broad generalization of localized problems that pressures voters to choose a candidate, fast, because of this perceived problem. Sue Reynolds of *Business Insider* recognized that social networks can be an important tool to tap into user-customized networks of people that “trust” each other’s political opinions, while also performing basic functions like driving traffic to a candidate’s website and engaging conversation around relevant issues.¹

With all of the emphasis on Twitter as a vehicle for political communication, it should be noted that candidates, congressmen, pundits, and politicians have not entirely abandoned the traditional sources of sharing political information. Conventional journalism adapted too, appearing in all manner of interesting “flavors,” according to a recent *Politico* article. No longer is it “just Fox News Channel and MSNBC, but

²² <https://www.npr.org/sections/itsallpolitics/2015/06/16/414609787/5-things-you-should-know-about-donald-trump>

the *Drudge Report*, Andrew Sullivan, the *Daily Kos*, *Talking Points Memo*, *BuzzFeed*, *POLITICO*, *Breitbart*, *Vox.com*, the *Intercept*, etc.”²

As Twitter’s user count rose, so too did the number of politically oriented information sites. Mitchell Stevens, the author of the *Politico* piece, argues that “our legacy journalism organizations—including NBC, CBS, ABC, CNN, NPR, PBS, the Associated Press and most daily newspapers—were slow to recognize the new order and find their voices in the din.”³ There is no doubt about this “din” he references – Americans are inundated with political information on the Internet. Twitter’s prevalence has only added to the din, while raising some important questions about the veracity of the information that appears on social networking sites and independent, openly partisan sites.

² Mitchell Stephens, “Goodbye Nonpartisan Journalism. And Good Riddance.” *Politico Magazine*, 2017, accessed November 6, 2017, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/06/26/goodbye-nonpartisan-journalism-and-good-riddance-215305>.

³ *Politico Magazine*, “Goodbye Nonpartisan Journalism. And Good Riddance.”

IV. Conclusion

Are American voters, Twitter users, and your Facebook friends any better off thanks to this change in campaign rhetoric?

Presumably, we are better off because social networks like Twitter have significantly expanded the political conversation to hundreds of thousands of users. But those users can customize the information they receive, effectively isolating themselves to either pole of their political ideology. Politicians like Trump do not make it any easier to discern fact from fiction, sensationalism from plain view. Our seemingly unlimited supply of news media outlets, exacerbated by social networking platforms, encourages the “robust, contentious style of journalism” with which the American public has become familiar.⁴ The number of candidates and elected officials posting and engaging on social media networks will only increase, with the 2016 election signaling the beginning of a much larger change to political campaign rhetoric. Whatever Trump’s strategy was – if there even was one – seemed to work.

Moving forward, it will be imperative for voters, politicians, and even the least politically engaged citizens to take note of how political information is being disseminated. Will the use of Twitter dwindle, as a passing fad? Will a newer, more powerful social media network take its place? These are very important questions that future researchers will have the fortunate hindsight to answer with. For now, there is no denying the impact his Twitter habits had on American politics and political communication.

⁴ Politico Magazine, “Goodbye Nonpartisan Journalism. And Good Riddance.”

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