

Twitter Bites and Romney: Examining the Rhetorical Situation of the 2012 Presidential Election in 140 Characters

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In 2008, Barack Obama revolutionized the digital campaign with Twitter and blogs. Now, in 2012, Twitter is a powerful venue for politicians, and Republican candidate Mitt Romney has used Twitter in an effort to disseminate effective messages to voters. For this study, I analyzed Romney's tweets. From February 1 to May 31, 2012, his tweets build his credibility (ethos), express his reasoning (logos), and seek to emotionally connect with the audience (pathos), all by adapting to the rhetorical situation. Campaigns can examine and strengthen tweets to build a stronger connection with voters by communicating with them directly. Using Twitter bites rather than sound bites chosen by the media middleman allows politicians to give their readers a firsthand experience that other media cannot accomplish.

Keywords: 2012 presidential campaign, Mitt Romney, new media, political rhetoric, social networks, Twitter

“Rhetoric” is a word that is haphazardly used in political coverage during campaign season. More often than not, when political pundits discuss the rhetoric that a candidate uses, the candidate is perceived as negatively persuading the electorate. Most people, if asked their perceptions of the term “rhetoric,” might describe rhetoric as deceptive, manipulative, and persuasive—all negative modifiers. The word “rhetoric” has a negative connotation, which is unfortunate because few people consider the history behind the rhetoric that humans use every day to create effective messages. In fact, rhetoric is simply persuasion through communication.

With the popularity of new rhetorical media like Twitter, Facebook, and mobile applications, political candidates, who seek to persuade and inform their audiences, must better use rhetorical tools to develop relationships and effectively communicate with the electorate. The use of technologically-based rhetorical media such as Twitter and Facebook in the 2008 U.S. Presidential election changed how campaigns disseminated information and how candidates interacted with voters.¹ Candidate Barack Obama effectively used social networks and his campaign blog to enlist volunteers, communicate with supporters, and gather donations to support his campaign. As a result, President Obama's campaign team for the 2012 presidential election is made up of seasoned social media

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¹ See John Allen Hendricks and Robert E. Denton Jr. *Communicator-in-Chief: How Barack Obama Used New Media Technology to Win the White House*, (New York: Lexington Books, 2010).

campaigners. To compete with Obama's savvy, Governor Mitt Romney's campaign must seize the rhetorical situation from now until November 6, 2012—election day. And Romney is beginning to do so.

This essay addresses how candidate Romney is using rhetorical tools and new media to communicate with, influence, and persuade the electorate. Using rhetorical analysis, this paper explores the rhetorical tools used in the current presidential election to show evidence of Twitter becoming a new and effective media tool for candidates to communicate directly with Americans. As Twitter is becoming an effective tool for rhetoric, tweets are becoming the new “sound bite,” allowing candidates to control more of the coverage of their public images and their campaigns. This analysis illustrates Romney's actions per Twitter, illustrates that tweets are rhetorical tools, and provides suggestions for how he can improve his use of Twitter to parallel Obama's success with blogs in his 2008 campaign for the presidency. This study addresses the following questions:

- Are tweets rhetorical?
- What constraints are created when tweets become the new “sound bite”?
- Are Romney's tweets creating an interactive dialogue with the electorate?
- How is Romney taking advantage of the rhetorical situation through Twitter?

Background

In 2008, Obama employed a team of social networking specialists to create and maintain his online campaign. With that success in his past, President Obama, as the incumbent, is repeating that strategy in the 2012 presidential campaign to persuade the American electorate to reelect him. Therefore, Republican nominee Romney must create a social media campaign that can rival Obama's personable approach and new media use so he can attract young voters, entice new volunteers, encourage donors, and highlight established supporters. Both Obama and Romney need to use the rhetorical tools within this rhetorical medium. In fact, Joseph Tuman explains, “To reach a larger number of voters, modern campaigns must make use of mass media to convey candidate information and issue positions, material about opponents and opposition, and main campaign messages, while also recruiting voters and volunteers and trying to attract campaign contributions.”²

Social media changes the way candidates react to situations as well as how Americans can respond, support, and gather information about both candidates. Both Democratic and Republican candidates must thus learn to use the social media tools that Americans are using. For example, a new political fundraising tactic through Twitter called Chirpify is helping both President Obama and Governor Romney fundraise by having supporters tweet their donations.³ Therefore, campaign staffers and writers need to study the effective use of these rhetorical tools as well as the rhetorical situation because effective rhetoric can create a successful campaign, a lack of effective rhetoric can destroy a campaign, and expertly crafted messages can silence a candidate's most vocal critics. For example, John McCain did not actively tweet while running for U.S. President but decided to actively tweet after the 2008 presidential campaign. According to ABC News, “474 out of

² Joseph S. Tuman, *Political Communication in American Campaigns* (New York: Sage, 2008), 215.

³ Michelle Maltais, “Chirpify puts your political money where your tweets are,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 19, 2012, <http://www.latimes.com/business/technology/la-fi-tn-tweetlection-political-contributions-20120618,0,4592919.story>.

535 Congressional legislators [are] active on Twitter. The Republican Party dominates with 261 tweeting members while Democrats trail with 211 members.”⁴ These numbers show how the 2008 Obama campaign, that actively used Twitter, has influenced the Republican Party to take advantage of their own rhetorical situation in new ways.⁵

Political candidates must learn to use rhetoric in the digital world.⁶ When a person learns to communicate a clear, concise, and effective message at the appropriate time and direct that message to a specific audience about a certain situation, that person creates leverage. By creating “rhetorical leverage,” political candidates communicate messages effectively with the electorate and create an advantage. The candidates can possibly neutralize messages created by their opponents in other traditional media by learning to use virtual rhetoric effectively and take advantage of the rhetorical situation through these new rhetorical media.

Expanding the Sound Bite

The use of social media, especially of social media sites like Twitter, allows the reader to experience firsthand the candidate’s activities. Citizens cannot attend every campaign event. Candidates’ web sites and social media campaigns allow the candidates to publish their stances on the issues as well as to inform readers of the candidates’ daily activities. Instead of allowing the media to control what citizens know about them—such as through selected sound bites from the candidate’s speaking, today’s candidates can control what parts of their public presence are released and thus create richer, more effective rhetoric. In fact, the candidates can now expand the sound bite to create an effective argument to fit the rhetorical context for which the sound bite was originally intended. Kathleen Hall Jamieson addresses this concern when she writes, “Morselized ads and newsbites consist instead of statement alone, a move that invites us to judge the merit of the claim on the ethos of the speaker or the emotional appeals (*pathos*)—enwrapping the claim. In the process, appeal to reason (*logos*) one of Aristotle’s prime means of persuasion—is lost. With it goes some of the audience’s ability to judge.”⁷

In other words, the sound bite has no argument, and the audience loses the logic behind the bite of information because it is typically presented out of context. With technological advances that allow for more immediacy and thus presentation of information closer to the original context, the sound bite becomes more logical with all three proofs—*ethos* (credibility), *logos* (logic), and *pathos* (emotion)—because the candidates can publish more complete and accurate messages and thus “speak” directly to the audience. The candidates who use Twitter, Facebook, and blog can expand sound bites and ensure that the sound bites are accurate presentations of what the candidates want to present. Twitter is a particularly influential tool and campaigns can create their own “Twitter bites.” Since a tweet is brief, Twitter can guide readers to a story that has more detail; the Twitter bite

⁴ Jilian Fama, “Twitter has Become a Favorite of Republicans in Congress, *ABC News*, June 21, 2012, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/republicans-tweet-democrats-congress/story?id=16619963#.T-PfF44yCI4>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ This is a consequence of any change in the media environment. For more on this, see Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Eloquence in an Electronic Age: The Transformation of Political Speechmaking* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁷ Kathleen Hall Jamieson, “Discourse and the Democratic Ideal,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 137, no. 3 (1993): 336.

can link to a Web site or a blog where the candidate can share video, audio, text, and photographs with the audience, which creates a more intimate connection between candidate and voter.

Twitter Bites

Twitter limits the amount of text a “tweet” can contain: a person can send only 140 characters in each message. Through Twitter, newsmakers are creating their own sound bites or what could be called Twitter bites, and within those Twitter bites of 140 characters, they are providing links to expand the included message. The limited characters create a constant stream of information in one’s Twitter feed. Another unique feature of Twitter is that a person can subscribe to another person’s Twitter messages, or tweets, without being “accepted” as a follower or friend, as with Facebook. What friends are to Facebook, followers are to Twitter, but Twitter allows for anyone who is not blocked from an account to access a Twitter feed.

Twitter has definitely changed the concept of how people receive and respond to media events. With an estimated 500 million users, Twitter is a medium of immediacy, information, and interactivity.⁸ Tyler Cowen explains that the Internet is ever present: “Culture is there all the time, and you can receive more of it, pretty much whenever you want.”⁹ Twitter is also ever present, and audience members know that they can consume information at any time, as well as block out any information they do not need.

Many researchers are studying Twitter by measuring tweet sentiments—i.e., the intentions of the individuals who are tweeting.¹⁰ Carnegie Mellon University researchers have found that monitoring Twitter sentiments is an inexpensive and fast way to analyze public opinion.¹¹ In fact, Andranik Tumasjan and colleagues found that Twitter is a valid source for measuring the political landscape offline: “The mere number of tweets reflects voters’ preferences and comes close to traditional election polls, while the sentiment of political Twitter messages closely corresponds to the electorate’s sentiment and evidence from the media coverage of the campaign trail.”¹² Political candidates and policymakers must recognize that Twitter is a powerful tool to which they should pay attention. Neil Savage explains that sometimes the sentiment behind a tweet cannot be measured effectively because words’ double meanings can be either positive or negative, and the writer has not considered the ambiguity to ensure that the message relayed is clear and accurate.¹³ This type of data analysis does not consider the ambiguity of language or allow the campaign to learn to create stronger and more effective messages. Campaign staffers who are creating these bite-sized messages must ensure their messages are accurate and effective and that readers understand the sentiments of the campaign’s tweets. Gina Chen reports that “Twitter is not just virtual noise of people talking at each other, as some critics

⁸ Joann Pan, “Will You be Twitter’s 500 Millionth User?” *Mashable*, February 22, 2012, <http://mashable.com/2012/02/22/twitters-500-million-user/>.

⁹ Tyler Cowen, “Three Tweets for the Web,” *The Wilson Quarterly* 33, no. 4, (2009): 58.

¹⁰ “CMU Researchers Analyze Twitter Sentiments,” *Communications of the ACM* 53, no. 7, (2010): 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Andranik Tumasjan, Timm O. Sprenger, Phillipp G. Sandner and Isabell M. Welp, “Election Forecasts with Twitter: How 140 Characters Reflect the Political Landscape,” *Social Science Computer Review* 29 no. 4, (2010): 414.

¹³ Neil Savage, “Twitter as Medium and Message,” *Communications of the ACM* 54, no. 3, (2011): 18.

contend, but that it is a medium that people actively seek out to gratify a need to connect with others.”¹⁴ Although Twitter is an effective tool to organize and rally people, it is also an effective persuasive tool, and political candidates do not consistently rely on it for this benefit.¹⁵

The Online Rhetorical Situation

As mentioned above, rhetoric is using language to construct clear and effective messages for an audience and a specific situation. When a person is creating a message online, the message is quickly disseminated. For example, 20 years ago when a newsworthy event happened, the media required time to gather coverage, edit the story, and share that story with the public. Television, as immediate as it can be, is still hindered by the time required to set up, to place reporters, and to broadcast. In addition, television is a one-time broadcast, while online publishing creates a record and allows viewers to retrieve and re-experience the story.

For emerging media as part of a political campaign to be a rhetorical medium, the campaign must create effective messages with rich language and use that medium to allow the audience to access the messages, to observe, and to respond. By using rich language to create a dialogical interactive campaign, a candidate must connect on a different level with the electorate. Through emerging media, the audience can read, watch, and listen to a candidate’s message and give feedback to the campaign. The candidate can immediately respond through independent action, which creates a rhetorically interactive community. The interactions between candidate and citizen become persuasive utterances, which allow the candidate to better understand the electorate and the electorate to better understand the candidate.

Candidates’ Twitter accounts are one venue through which candidates can convince voters who is most qualified for office. The candidates post stories and information about their views on their blogs, which helps voters make more informed decisions, and citizens respond and post their support and concerns, which inform candidates. Twitter provides a bite—an immediate and brief message. Twitter can be used to reinforce the candidates’ messages and to link readers to the candidates’ blogs and Web sites, which in contrast to tweets, provide an expanded version of the story. In addition, American citizens who use Twitter can retweet a candidate or criticize the candidate within seconds.

According to Lloyd Bitzer, the rhetorical situation is made up of three elements: exigence, audience, and constraints.¹⁶ The first element, exigence, is sometimes not rhetorical, as in the instance of a natural disaster, but exigence can also exist when a candidate is caught in an indiscretion, as was Democratic presidential hopeful John Edwards in 2008. The Edwards situation stirred discourse not only about how this affected his family but also about the overall image of a political figure who allegedly misused campaign funds, as Edwards did to hide his extramarital affair and resulting child.

¹⁴ Gina Masullo Chen, “Tweet this: A uses and gratifications perspective on how active Twitter use gratifies a need to connect with others.” *Computers in Human Behavior* 27, (2011): 760.

¹⁵ Kyle Leighton and David Taintor, “Hashtags are the new lawn signs: Why Twitter won’t predict political success in the 2012 cycle,” *Neiman Journalism Lab*, March 23, 2012, <http://www.niemanlab.org/2012/03/hashtags-are-the-new-lawn-signs-why-twitter-wont-predict-political-success-in-the-2012-cycle/>.

¹⁶ Lloyd F. Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1, (1968): 6.

The second element, audience, “produces change by influencing the decision and action of persons who function as mediators of change . . . a rhetorical audience consists only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change.”¹⁷ Thus, the audience is anyone who needs or can access the message and can act on that message. During the 2008 campaign, Senator Obama realized that, as a young senator with little exposure running against well known Senators Clinton and McCain, he needed to create an intimate relationship with U.S. citizens: to connect with voters, display his political persona, and rhetorically share his goals for the presidency. Thus, Obama created a social networking Web site that allowed supporters and potential voters to participate in creating content as well as to communicate with the campaign and with each other. Obama’s campaign helped the audience members feel like they produced change by participating in the election. President Obama has continued to involve the audience and empower them to be part of the 2008 election and thus his presidency.

The third element is constraints. According to Bitzer, constraints “have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence.”¹⁸ He describes the standard sources for constraints as beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, and motives.¹⁹ In considering constraints, the candidate must move past those constraints and must formulate an effective communication strategy to address the exigence and thus to persuade and empower (and thus invoke change in) the audience.

Some researchers scrutinize Bitzer’s rhetorical situation as being too simplistic.²⁰ Often, as Richard Vatz explains, “Except for those situations which directly confront our own empirical reality, we learn of facts and events through someone’s communicating them to us.”²¹ Until a situation is presented to the public, that situation has no given meaning.²² However, as soon as the situation is presented to the public; the public defines that situation. As Donna Gorrell argues, “Reality may have a whole new exigence and constraints, and the way both rhetor and audience perceive it changes inexorably too.”²³ In fact, Gorrell observes, “When the audience responds and becomes the rhetor, reality again is changed,”²⁴ which is exactly what may happen on Twitter when someone retweets a message or adds to the original Twitter bite. In social media, a plethora of messages and situations are being communicated. Although this paper’s scope is not to rethink the rhetorical situation within the digital world, it is foreseeable that rhetoricians may want to rethink the rhetorical situational structure of Twitter and other social media messages where messages are repeated, added to, and changed.

While analyzing through Situational Theory, Kathleen Farrell and Marilyn Young say that the theory “allows us to view rhetoric as an organic phenomenon,” and suggest that

¹⁷ Ibid., 8.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ See Barbara A. Biesecker, “Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation from Within the Thematic of *Différance*,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 22, no. 2, (1989): 110-130; Donna Gorrell, “The Rhetorical Situation Again: Linked Components in a Venn Diagram,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 30, no. 4, (1997): 395-412; Richard L. Larson, “Lloyd Bitzer’s ‘Rhetorical Situation’ and the Classification of Discourse: Problems and Implications,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 3, no 3, (1970): 165-168.

²¹ Richard E. Vatz, “The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 6, no. 3, (1973): 156.

²² Ibid.

²³ Gorrell, “Rhetorical Situation Again,” 407.

²⁴ Ibid.

Bitzer's theory may seem mechanistic because the critic may "overlook elements that are not part of the situation."²⁵ Any critic using critical analysis should evaluate the sources from a variety of perspectives. Thus, a political campaign should determine if the tweet will enhance a candidate's credibility, expand understanding of an issue, or create an emotional tie to the audience and then incorporate at least one of the three elements of the rhetorical situation. The more powerful the message created through emerging media, the more a campaign can control the release of information, silence the competition, and influence or silence the media sound bites. In fact, as Joan Leach says, "Once discourse enters a communication arena, it is no longer under full control of those who produced it."²⁶ In other words, especially in campaigns, "rhetoric is more than 'mere rhetoric.'"²⁷

Romney's Rhetorical Situation on Twitter

Romney's 161 tweets from February 1 to May 31, 2012, showed a shift from his fighting for the Republican nomination against Congressmen Santorum and Paul to his competing against Democrat incumbent, President Barack Obama. His tweets began with a focus on the audience and shifted increasingly to constraints as Romney gained the support of Republicans. This study does not address the demographics of the audience, including their political preferences; however, this study assumes Romney's Twitter audience is primarily politically minded, conservative and undecided voters.

In February, Romney tweeted 39 of his 47 tweets in which the rhetorical situation focused on the audience. This number of audience-focused tweets waned in the next 3 months—to only 6 in April and 11 in May. In contrast, Romney's tweets focusing on constraints increased as Romney won primaries—peaking at 23 of 40 in April. The number of tweets that focused on exigence was always low, considering that no unforeseen circumstances in the Romney campaign occurred.

Bitzer may have created a solid foundation for how audiences may respond to certain situations, but, as Kathleen Hall Jamieson suggests, "that perception of the proper response to an unprecedented rhetorical situation grows not merely from the situation but also from the antecedent rhetorical forms."²⁸ Jamieson's observations seem accurate in relation to Romney's use of Twitter because Romney focused mostly on audience and constraints, "which influence the rhetoric and can be brought to bear upon the audience."²⁹ Audience is used more often in February and March because Romney's motivation was to seek votes in the primary and thus to influence the audience. Bitzer explains, "Since rhetorical discourse produces change by influencing the decision and action of person who function as mediators of change, it follows that rhetoric always requires an audience—even in those cases when a person engages himself or ideal mind as audience."³⁰ Of course, as Bitzer notes, "a rhetorical audience consists only of those persons

²⁵ Kathleen Farrell and Marilyn J. Young, "The Rhetorical Situation," in *Rhetorical Criticism: Perspectives in Action*, ed. by Jim A. Kuypers, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 35.

²⁶ Joan Leach, "Rhetorical Analysis," in *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound*, ed. Martin W. Bauer and George Gaskell (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 224.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 225.

²⁸ Kathleen M. Hall Jamieson, "Generic Constraints and the Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 6, no. 3, (1973): 163.

²⁹ Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," 6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change.”³¹ This reason alone is the motivation behind the tweets in which Romney asks questions, thanks supporters, and guides readers to donation pages through hyperlinks within the tweet. For example, on February 1, 2012, Romney tweeted,

Thanks everyone for helping with the #OneTermFund raise over 600k so far. Continue to hold the President accountable onetermfund.com.

This tweet illustrates how the rhetorical situation warranted Romney’s campaign to tweet and to seek to move the audience to action by sharing the link to donate. The Romney campaign’s motivation was to persuade the audience to act—to donate, which is a major reason why most campaigns use Twitter and other social media forums.³²

The constraints increased as Romney moved from the Republican “hopeful” to the Republican candidate. During the 4 months, Romney’s tweets became what Bitzer describes as “persons, events, objects, and relations, which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence.”³³ Romney did exactly this. He started tweeting about more events and more issues that people may want to change. Romney, through his tweets, is trying to guide readers to action and, as a result, to modify the exigence, which is to make President Barack Obama a one-term president. His tweets criticizes Obama’s actions:

@BarackObama is moving us away from our Founders’ vision. Instead of limited government, he is leading us toward limited freedom. (April 13, 2012)

This tweet’s motivation is to remind American citizens of our country’s traditions and to contrast those with Obama’s actions. And, as Jamieson points out, “Establishment and maintenance of definable institutional forms of rhetoric serve to define the institution itself.”³⁴ This tweet is maintaining the patriotic spirit that U.S. citizens have established and doing so by using the artistic proof *pathos* (emotion) as a persuasive tool to help to guide citizens to modify the situation and thus to keep the U.S. as the founders envisioned.

My analysis showed Romney setting his own agenda because “the rhetor is responsible for what he chooses to make salient.”³⁵ The news articles found through the search engine Google during the same time Romney tweeted rarely linked to news events. Instead, the news articles linked to Romney’s online conversation with voters about his vision. The motivation behind a majority of Romney’s tweets was to establish logical connections and to build credibility. Of course, some tweets used emotion to motivate voters to develop a deeper relationship with the audience, such as this May 4, 2012 tweet:

A lot of Americans are having hard times & the unemployment report is not good news. This is not progress; it is very disappointing.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Janet Lynn Johnson, “Blogs and Dialogism in the 2008 United States Presidential Campaign,” (PhD diss, Texas Woman’s University, 2010).

³³ Bitzer, “Rhetorical Situation,” 8.

³⁴ Jamieson, “Generic Constraints,” 165.

³⁵ Vatz, “Myth of the Rhetorical Situation,” 158.

This tweet expresses Romney's sympathy for the job situation, which creates in the audience a motivation to change the exigence—the current situation. When Romney's campaign tweets these sentiments, he is creating the perception that he cares and is aware.

Romney's tweets between February 1 and May 31, 2012 referred to Obama 55 times and tweeted expressions of thanks to the audience 20 times. Most tweets included a link back to the campaign site—MittRomney.com—and to infographics about U.S. citizens, videos, or a written speech or opinion editorial submitted to a national newspaper. The links provided proof—ethos—to Romney's claims in his tweets, which may strengthen Romney's credibility and overall argument that he is the best choice for president.

At some moments, Romney's campaign seeks to engage the audience. These two tweets asked for immediate reaction:

If you agree it's time to stop the spending and pass a permanent ban on earmarks, stand with me and sign the petition mi.tt/yuU5Xk (sent on February 9, 2012).

Welcome to Ohio @BarackObama. I have a simple question for you: Where are the jobs? RT if you agree <http://mi.tt/IApn44> #Mitt2012 (sent on May 4, 2012).

Regarding the second tweet, Twitter reported 50+ retweets and 50+ favorites. People passed on the information and stored the information. This tweet demonstrates that tweets can motivate an audience to act when motivated and asked. Twitter allows several options for a reader to respond by a click to retweet, favor, travel to an external hyperlink, or ignore. With any option, a tweet can motivate an audience into some type of action. These actions are then turned into data for the Romney and Obama campaigns to dissect for public sentiment and, I am assuming, to build stronger tweets.

Romney's tweets show that he shifted from concentrating on winning the Republican nomination to acting as the Republican nominee. His tweets became more topical and driven to remind people how to modify the situation. In 2008, President Obama did this with his blog posts by reminding voters about their current situation to make them modify their situation by voting.³⁶ Bitzer states, "Standard sources of constraint include beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, motives and the like."³⁷ This motivation can be situational, but explains what types of information the audience needs and wants to become motivated, which is why one must go beyond just looking at the situation and look at the motivation, and the rhetor's understanding of their audience. The rhetorical key is that Romney keeps reminding the audience of their situation because in the end, as much as Bitzer wants us to believe in just three ideals to make a situation rhetorically valuable, it is really the audience who has to decide if a situation exists as well as give meaning to it.³⁸

Mary Garret and Xiaosui Xiao argue that "no rhetor can completely break free of the fundamental values and presuppositions of his or her discourse community and tradition."³⁹ Understanding one's audience is key to creating effective messages that promote action, create interest, and show that the rhetor understands the problems the audience

³⁶ Johnson, "Blogs and Dialogism."

³⁷ Bitzer, "Rhetorical Situation," 8.

³⁸ Mary Garret and Xiaosui Xiao, "The Rhetorical Situation Revisited," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 23, no. 2, (1993): 39.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

wants solved. Through situational analysis—content analysis to note any artistic proofs—analyzing tweets can show what the candidate’s agenda really becomes. Because of Twitter’s community building nature, Twitter is situational and rhetorical, and Romney is taking advantage of this nature to compete with his social media savvy opponent, President Obama.

Conclusion

Rhetoricians need to spend more time in social media venues to learn more about how rhetors—including newsmakers and candidates—correspond with the public, particularly in the political realm. Because of 2008 candidate Obama’s use of social media, the 2008 election was a campaign game changer; social media became a politically persuasive rhetorical medium. In the 2012 election, Romney is using Twitter to create and control his own sound bites—Twitter bites. He is using Twitter bites to create a firsthand, immediate experience for the audience that takes out the middleman—the media. Through Twitter, Romney keeps responding and reminding readers of the situation while also guiding his readers to his specific policy plans and stances on social issues. Without the use of social media, the candidates on both sides would have to rely directly on mass media. Both sides are using social media heavily in the 2012 election, and their communication through social media gives voters a firsthand experience of the political process in real time, which television, radio, and print could not accomplish in past elections.

In today’s politics, U.S. citizens do not need the news media—what Thomas Patterson calls the “day-to-day window on the world of politics.”⁴⁰ True, “Audiences filter the news through their personal needs, interests, prejudices, attitudes, and beliefs. Yet the media supply most of the raw material that goes into people’s thinking about their political leaders and institutions.”⁴¹ Now, politics is not a “second hand experience, lived through the stories of journalists.”⁴² Instead, politics are experienced firsthand, and voters can experience politics through the stories of the candidates that come directly from those candidates. The electorate catches glimpses into such tweets as when Romney is watching the Superbowl, or when he acknowledges his wife in many of the tweets. These tweets can create a bond between reader and sender. But the most important aspect of tweets is that the reader can then become the sender and share the message to their social media followers. Campaigns’ social media followers act as informers and the term “word of mouth” evolves into a “retweet.”

According to Andrew Robertson, technology enriches the relationship between the electorate and a candidate as well as the language of politics.⁴³ The intimacy that new media creates allows the electorate access to candidates and allows candidates to directly access voters and communicate with the electorate. However, campaign staffers must post with intention: to take advantage of the rhetorical situation wisely and to remember not only to learn to use the technology, but also to learn to communicate effectively

⁴⁰ Thomas E. Patterson, *The Vanishing Voter: Public Involvement in an Age of Uncertainty* (New York, Vintage, 2003), 65.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Andrew W. Robertson, *The Language of Democracy: Political Rhetoric in the United States and Britain 90-1900*, (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 1995), 69.

through language and to communicate efficiently and clearly to an audience at the appropriate time. They must recognize that tweets are rhetorical. If Romney is consistent with creating effective messages through the changing campaign cycle, his social media usage will benefit the American voter. Thus, the goal of an online campaign is to expand the sound bite so the campaign, not the media, controls the rhetorical situation. Additionally, politicians can use technology to promote democracy and change. And, for effective change to happen, campaigns must learn all facets to the rhetorical emerging media.