

# Rhetorical Incivility in the Twittersphere: A Comparative Thematic Analysis of Clinton and Trump's Tweets During and After the 2016 Presidential Election

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*I examine political incivility in presidential discourse by comparing the themes emanating from the tweets of both Clinton and Trump during and after the 2016 election. The present study reveals that Clinton's tweets focus on the central theme of attacking Trump, specifically as a liar, racist, sexist, foreign policy disaster, bully, and a danger to working class people. In Trump's tweets, he also engages in attack themes against the mainstream media, specific Republicans, rival nations (such as Iran and North Korea), Hillary Clinton, and the character of Democrats. Trump's tweets also utilize thematic appeals, such as appeals to "Make America Great Again," and fear appeals against Mexicans, Muslims and other groups. Since Twitter use has increased in political communication, understanding its role in political rhetoric is crucial. Additionally, since many believe the 2016 election was one of the most divisive in recent history, an examination into related tweets provides insight into how incivility occurred. Ultimately, I argue that the use of Twitter encourages and emphasizes uncivil rhetoric in presidential politics.*

**Keywords:** rhetorical incivility, Trump, Clinton, Twitter, 2016 election

Many citizens believe the Trump-Clinton election was one of the most divisive in recent history.<sup>1</sup> Various factors contribute to this sense of polarization, including the two unique presidential candidates for the general election, a barrage of opinion pieces by the media, and the overall climate of frustration and distrust from the American electorate. In fact, based on a recent survey,<sup>2</sup> the majority of Americans (75%) believe the last presidential election created massive incivility. The uncivil rhetoric by politicians is seen by most Americans (79%) as triggering even more incivility.<sup>3</sup> Another obvious component was the upsurge of social media use, particularly Twitter, which is why the same survey reports that the majority of Americans (69%) rank social media slightly behind the election as the cause of widespread incivility. Given the rapid spread

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<sup>1</sup> Cummins, Joseph. "This Is the Dirtiest Presidential Race Since '72." *Politico* (February 17, 2016). <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/02/2016-elections-nastiest-presidential-election-since-1972-213644>; Patel, Neil. "10 Things We Can Learn about Social Media from the 2016 Presidential Election." *The Daily Egg* (2016).

<https://www.crazyegg.com/blog/2016-presidential-social-media/>; Soergel, Andrew. "Divided We Stand." *US News* (July 19, 2016). <https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2016-07-19/political-polarization-drives-presidential-race-to-the-bottom>

<sup>2</sup> Weber Shandwick. *Civility in America VII: The State of Civility* (2017). [http://www.webershandwick.com/uploads/news/files/Civility\\_in\\_America\\_the\\_State\\_of\\_Civility.pdf](http://www.webershandwick.com/uploads/news/files/Civility_in_America_the_State_of_Civility.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Weber Shandwick. *Civility in America VII*, p. 9

of information, the truncated messaging, and the heightened emotional tone facilitated by the Twitter platform, candidate use of Twitter during the election begs the question of its potential impact on perceptions of incivility. Since the 2016 election was the first contest when Twitter was used with frequency and specific political messaging, its use during the election by politicians, the media, and the public begs the question of its potential impact on perceptions of incivility. Understanding the political impact of Twitter becomes even more important when we consider that “the landscape is evolving each election cycle even if the political actors themselves are behind the fast-moving curve.”<sup>4</sup> Hence, Twitter will only continue to be more relevant, not less.

In this paper, I use a comparative thematic analysis to explore the intersection between civility and political communication. Specifically, I will highlight examples of political incivility as it occurs in presidential rhetoric – tweets from both general election candidates in the Presidential race as well as tweets from Trump since he took the oath of office. This is extremely important since Americans,

report a severe civility deficit in our nation, one that shows no signs of letting up. The belief that the U.S. has a major civility problem has even reached a record high (69%). Three-quarters of Americans believe that incivility has risen to crisis levels, a rate that has significantly increased since January 2016. The same proportion feels that the U.S. is losing stature as a civil nation (73%). These statistics, consistently high year after year, are a sobering commentary on the state of civility in our country.<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, an examination into related tweets hopefully will provide insight into how incivility occurred in campaign discourse. Ultimately, I argue that the use of Twitter structurally encourages, emphasizes, and promotes uncivil rhetoric concerning presidential politics.

### **Comparative Thematic Analysis and Political Twitter**

Recent political communication research has investigated the content of contemporary political messages as well as explored how Twitter is used as a unique platform for the delivery of political rhetoric. For example, Kreiss utilizes what he calls a “qualitative content analysis” to uncover the ways in which political operatives used messages to influence different audiences in the 2012 presidential election.<sup>6</sup> Part of the analysis includes the different types of messages – or themes – that the presidential campaigns used in their persuasive messages. Parmelee and Bichard introduce us to how messages are influential in what they call, “political Twitter.”<sup>7</sup>

Lee and Young-Shin explore the different public relations strategies of Trump and Clinton during their campaign.<sup>8</sup> Their study revealed “significant differences in many aspects of their or their teams’ tweeting styles” that were largely based on gendered characteristics.<sup>9</sup> By comparing these Twitter strategies, Lee and Young-Shin report that both candidates demonstrate “significant differences in their emphasis on traits and issues, main content of tweet, main source of retweet,

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<sup>4</sup> Gainous, Jason and Kevin M. Wagner. *Tweeting to Power: The Social Media Revolution in American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014): 9.

<sup>5</sup> Weber Shandwick. *Civility in America VII*, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Kreiss, Daniel. “Seizing the Moment: The Presidential Campaigns’ Use of Twitter During the 2012 Electoral Cycle.” *New Media & Society* 18, no. 8(2016): 1473-1490.

<sup>7</sup> Parmelee, John H., and Shannon L. Bichard. *Politics and the Twitter Revolution: How Tweets Influence the Relationship between Political Leaders and the Public* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2012): 102.

<sup>8</sup> Lee, Jayeon, and Lim Young-Shin. “Gendered Campaign Tweets: The Cases of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump.” *Public Relations Review* 42, no. 5(2016): 849-855.

<sup>9</sup> Lee and Young-Shin, “Gendered Campaign Tweets,” 853.

multimedia use, and the level of civility.”<sup>10</sup> As a result, Lee and Young-Shin’s study emphasizes the importance of not only examining the use of Twitter in presidential rhetoric, but also in noting how the comparisons of such tweets can yield important insight into the political discourse. In addition, a recent study by Yaqub et al. use a data analytic approach to examine the behavior of Twitter users during the 2016 campaign, and it does not look at the specific tweets from candidates.<sup>11</sup> However, this present study also demonstrates the value and significance of analyzing the use of Twitter during the 2016 presidential campaign by comparing the messages between Clinton and Trump.

Finally, from an international perspective, Jungherr, Schoen, and Jürgens compare messages during the 2013 German election in terms of their basis in political reality.<sup>12</sup> In a similar study, Alonso-Muñoz, Marcos-García and Casero-Ripollés use a content analysis approach to investigate the comparative differences between the major Spanish politicians’ interaction with the public on Twitter.<sup>13</sup> Both of these approaches reinforce the value of examining Twitter for political communication.

In rhetorical criticism, a critic explores the meaning of a particular text. There are various ways in which a critic can interpret a text. Unlike social scientific research, however, rhetorical criticism typically blends method with theory, or procedure with perspective. Thus, while a critic closely analyzes a text, they also do so through a particular lens. Thematic analysis seeks to uncover specific tactics or strategies within a text by providing a way “to capture emerging themes.”<sup>14</sup> As a method, thematic analysis requires us to “identify the content” of the discourse, “reduce redundancy,” and group related and relevant discourse “into representative categories that articulate or describe a particular social phenomenon.”<sup>15</sup> The goal, of course, with thematic analysis is to “summarize the main themes constituting a piece of text.”<sup>16</sup>

According to Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), themes should be recognizable to the extent that they can be “captured” and “identified,”<sup>17</sup> and if “they appeared to be important.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>10</sup> Lee and Young-Shin, “Gendered Campaign Tweets,” 849.

<sup>11</sup> Yaqub, Ussama, Soon Ae Chun, Vijayalakshmi Atluri, and Jaideep Vaidya. “Analysis of Political Discourse on Twitter in the Context of the 2016 US Presidential Elections.” *Government Information Quarterly* 34 (2017): 613-626.

<sup>12</sup> Jungherr, Andreas, Harald Schoen, and Pascal Jürgens. “The Mediation of Politics through Twitter: An Analysis of Messages Posted During the Campaign for the German Federal Election 2013.” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 21, no. 1(2016): 50-68.

<sup>13</sup> Alonso-Muñoz, Laura, Silvia Marcos-García, and Andreu Casero-Ripollés. “Political Leaders in (Inter)action: Twitter as a Strategic Communication Tool in Electoral Campaigns.” *Trípodos* 39 (2016): 71-90.

<sup>14</sup> Adams, Barry D., Winston Husbands, James Murray, and John Maxwell. “AIDS Optimism, Condom Fatigue, or Self-Esteem? Explaining Unsafe Sex among Gay and Bisexual Men.” *Journal of Sex Research* 42 no. 3 (2005): 239.

<sup>15</sup> Aguinaldo, Jeffrey P. “Qualitative Analysis in Gay Men’s Health Research: Comparing Thematic, Critical Discourse, and Conversation Analysis.” *Journal of Homosexuality* 59 no. 6 (2012): 769.

<sup>16</sup> Attridge-Stirling, Jennifer. “Thematic Networks: An Analytic Tool for Qualitative Research.” *Qualitative Research* 1, no. 3(2001), 386.

<sup>17</sup> Guest, Greg, Arwen Bunce, and Laura Johnson. “How Many Interviews Are Enough? An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability.” *Field Methods* 18, no. 1(2006): 67.

<sup>18</sup> Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, “How Many Interviews,” 73.

a thematic analysis should enable us to identify and then interpret the key patterns and ideas existing in a text.<sup>19</sup> The patterned themes might be discerned by their repetition or by how they support and justify the rhetorical objective of a text.<sup>20</sup>

Because thematic analysis explores how themes emerge from a text, it permits us to examine how discourse occurs within the context of ideology. By comparing the themes that emerge from Clinton and Trump's tweets, we might expect visible ideological differences since the two candidates are rivals. Comparing their Twitter themes, we should be able to identify some of those ideological contrasts. Furthermore, differences in rhetorical strategies in Twitter use should also be apparent. Since thematic analysis aims "to explore the understanding of an issue or the signification of an idea," a comparative thematic analysis should enable us to identify rich and insightful divergences in the candidates' discourse.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, in their study of political tweets relating to the 2013 federal government shutdown, Sagi and Dehghani confirm that the rhetorical positions deployed by political officials mirror the ideological sentiments of their Twitter followers.<sup>22</sup>

Enli (2017) examines and compares the different rhetorical strategies of Clinton and Trump's tweets during the 2016 presidential campaign.<sup>23</sup> She concludes that Clinton generally embraces a strategy of professionalism that utilized poise and political experience, whereas Trump deploys the strategy of authenticity and de-professionalism, since he wants to emphasize his image as a Washington outsider. Additionally, although emphasizing Trump's tweets as signifiers of his right-wing populist rhetoric, Kreis echoes Enli's conclusion that Trump uses Twitter to perpetuate his image as an outsider. Specifically, Kreis argues that her "analysis of President Trump's tweets demonstrates that his language is simple and direct and his messages are succinct and polarizing."<sup>24</sup> And, at the same time, Trump "employs an 'authentic style' which corroborates his constructed position of an outsider and legitimate representative of the people distancing himself from the establishment."<sup>25</sup> These studies reinforce how important Twitter has become in presidential discourse, especially as a platform for deploying particular rhetorical strategies aimed at constructing and maintaining an ideological brand and image.

As many people suggest, Trump used Twitter to construct a voice of "authenticity." The platform inimitably allows Trump to present himself with an authentic voice while simultaneously sounding as if he is also the authentic voice of the people. This unique discursive positioning enables Trump to overcome contestations with facts and truth. This helps explain, at least in part, how

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<sup>19</sup> Braun, Virginia and Victoria Clarke. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2(2006): 77-101.

<sup>20</sup> Braun and Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology"; Braun, Virginia and Victoria Clarke. "(Mis)conceptualising Themes, Thematic Analysis, and Other Problems with Fugard and Potts." *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 19, no. 6(2016): 739-743.

<sup>21</sup> Attride-Stirling, "Thematic Networks," 387.

<sup>22</sup> Sagi, Eyal, and Morteza Dehghani. "Moral Rhetoric in Twitter: A Case Study of the U.S. Federal Shutdown of 2013." *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society* 36 (2004). <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/9sw937kk>

<sup>23</sup> Enli, Gunn. "Twitter as Arena for the Authentic Outsider: Exploring the Social Media Campaigns of Trump and Clinton in the 2016 US Presidential Election." *European Journal of Communication* 32, no. 1(2017): 50-61.

<sup>24</sup> Kreis, Ramona. "The 'Tweet Politics' of President Trump." *Journal of Language and Politics* 16, no. 4(2017): 607-618.

<sup>25</sup> Kreis, "The 'Tweet Politics,'" 615.

Trump won the election. Simply put, “Trump’s campaign discourse rested ultimately upon a simple overriding claim to be a vernacular authentic voice of himself and at one and the same time to be voice of the people.”<sup>26</sup>

While previous studies use a thematic approach to identify patterns and substantive textual elements in discourse and while researchers are probing the communicative qualities of political Twitter, no one really approaches political Twitter use from a thematic lens. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, the current literature fails to examine the role of (in)civility in political tweets, much less the 2016 presidential election. In other words, a comparative study is warranted. A comparative analysis allows us to examine the “cognitive thread between” thematic “differences.”<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, comparative research allows us to view pieces of a text “to compare with other data sources ... to provide comparison” between the candidates.<sup>28</sup> In this way, when coupled with thematic analysis, a comparative approach can contrast the substantive meaning of the tweets from rival candidates.

### The Context of the 2016 Election

Literature examining the role of Twitter in presidential campaigns and in presidential discourse is quite limited. Most studies have examined digital and social media writ large, while only recently looking at the role of Twitter. The precise role Twitter plays in presidential-related discourse is very new and relatively unexplored. However, one recent study examines, among other things, Trump’s use of Twitter to help with his image repair strategy after the release of the “Access Hollywood” video that revealed Trump’s candid remarks about female body parts.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, in their latest edition to their book concerning media in American politics, Graber and Dunaway (2018) claim that Trump’s “successful use of Twitter in 2016 was largely predicated on the manipulation of old media logics. Trump was a master of using well-timed newsworthy tweets to disrupt the news cycle of mainstream media. He effectively used a new media platform to change the narrative of traditional media.”<sup>30</sup> Undoubtedly, Trump’s savvy use of Twitter in this manner was one way he overcame the negative reaction to the “Access Hollywood” video. Similarly, Diane Owen<sup>31</sup> (2017) regards Trump’s tweets as a new political communication tool that enabled him to directly communicate with his supporters; and, now, as President, he claims to directly communicate to all Americans.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, Owen finds that “Early on, Trump discovered that by firing off offensive tweets making unsubstantiated, outrageous claims, he could dominate the news cycle .... People who challenged or questioned him were labeled ‘stupid,’ ‘bad,’ ‘crazy,’

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<sup>26</sup> Montgomery, Martin. “Post-Truth Politics? Authenticity, Populism and the Electoral Discourses of Donald Trump.” *Journal of Language and Politics* 16, no. 4(2017): 636.

<sup>27</sup> Papacharissi, Zizi and Maria de Fatima Oliveira. “News Frames Terrorism: A Comparative Analysis of Frames Employed in Terrorism Coverage in U.S. and U.K. Newspapers.” *Press/Politics* 13, no. 1(2003): 53.

<sup>28</sup> Corti, Louise, Paul Thompson and Janet Fink. “Preserving, Sharing and Reusing Data from Qualitative Research: Methods and Strategies.” In *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research*, 288-300. Edited by Catherine Cassell & Gillian Symon (London: Sage, 2004): 293.

<sup>29</sup> Benoit, William. “Image Repair on the Donald Trump ‘Access Hollywood’ Video: ‘Grab Them by the P\*ssy.’” *Communication Studies* 68, no. 3(2017): 243-259.

<sup>30</sup> Graber, Doris A., and Johanna Dunaway. *Mass Media and American Politics* (10th ed.). (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2018): 112-113.

<sup>31</sup> Owen, Diana. “Twitter Rants, Press Bashing, and Fake News: The Shameful Legacy of Media in the 2016 Election.” In *Trumped: The 2016 Election that Broke All the Rules*, 167-180. Edited by Larry J. Sabato, Kyle Kondik, & Geoffrey Skelley (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

<sup>32</sup> Graber and Dunaway, *Mass Media and American Politics*; Owen, “Twitter Rants.”

‘horrible,’ ‘dumb,’ ‘overrated,’ and worse. He used Twitter to reinforce his catch phrases, such as ‘Build the Wall’ and ‘Lock Her Up.’”<sup>33</sup>

Given Trump’s unique campaign style, the Clinton campaign tried to match Trump’s use of Twitter. By the time Clinton began solidifying support via Twitter, however, Trump had already established his social media brand, including the commonly recognizable slogan of “Make America Great Again.” The result was that online interest in Trump’s candidacy was three times greater than the interest in Clinton.<sup>34</sup> What became clear, however, is that neither campaign could ignore the power of social media. According to Owen:

Over 200 million Americans use Facebook each month, and 40 percent of them regularly get their news from the platform. According to the Pew Research Center, the number of voters who tracked election news through social media (28 percent) and followed candidates (16 percent) during the 2014 midterm campaigns more than doubled from the 2010 elections .... More voters in 2016 got campaign information through social media than in the past. Sixty-five percent of the electorate accessed election news through digital sources.<sup>35</sup>

This means, of course, that social media has become a vital platform for politicians and candidates to communicate with voters, and vice versa.

The cleverness of the Trump Twitter strategy was also demonstrated when he bashed mainstream media. According to Trump, the so-called “lamestream” media, to quote Sarah Palin,<sup>36</sup> were part of the liberal apparatus, which had the mission to decimate his candidacy. As a result, Trump took to social media to communicate to followers in a way that was unfiltered and unspoiled by the traditional press. This also allowed him to berate mainstream outlets, such as the *New York Times* and CNN, for their alleged bias reporting.<sup>37</sup> With his popular catchphrase “fake news,” Trump could quickly respond to and nullify negative reports from the mainstream media. By labeling any story as “fake news,” Trump could delegitimize any press even if it was accurate and impartial. By stacking the deck in his favor, Trump characterized all media that were not avid supporters of him as fake, illegitimate, and untrustworthy. As a result, Owen argues that the “2016 presidential election demarcates the era of post-truth news. It is a treacherous time for journalists and responsible news organizations. The press’s legitimacy is being challenged by an alternative media universe where Twitter rants and fake news hijack the political agenda obscuring the important issues of the day.”<sup>38</sup>

Since social media, particularly Twitter, became so prominent during the 2016 election season, it obviously became the preferred method for many people to communicate about politics. While Trump and Clinton made Twitter part of their core media infrastructure, the average citizen also used social media to discuss their opinions about politics. Because social media is perceived to be quick, trustworthy and a personal connection with candidates, it means, according to Owen, that more “people posted political content to their Facebook feeds and Twitter accounts than in prior

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<sup>33</sup> Owen, “Twitter Rants,” 173.

<sup>34</sup> Toner, Michael E., and Karen E. Trainer. “The \$7 Billion Election: Emerging Campaign Finance Trends and Their Impact on the 2016 Presidential Race and Beyond.” In *Trumped: The 2016 Election that Broke All the Rules*, 181-201. Edited by Larry J. Sabato, Kyle Kondik, & Geoffrey Skelley (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

<sup>35</sup> Owen, “Twitter Rants,” 172.

<sup>36</sup> Barr, Andy. “Palin Trashes ‘Lamestream Media.’” *Politico* (November 18, 2009). <http://www.politico.com/story/2009/11/palin-trashes-lamestream-media-029693>

<sup>37</sup> Owen, “Twitter Rants.”

<sup>38</sup> Owen, “Twitter Rants,” 177.

presidential contests.”<sup>39</sup> Since people self-select what mainstream news sources they receive and since typically like-minded people follow each other on Facebook and Twitter, “... the content that users encounter online tends to reinforce their existing beliefs rather than expose them to opposing viewpoints.”<sup>40</sup> Thus, echo chambers tend to create confirmation bias among users that validate their beliefs and reinforce their ideological positions.<sup>41</sup> This also means social media users become calcified and hardened with such beliefs when engaging in online conversations. The echo chamber functions to support one’s own views, such that even inaccurate or “fake” news sources are instead perceived as legitimate, trustworthy, and fact-certain by the like-minded followers within the echo chamber.<sup>42</sup>

I mention echo chambers and their relationship to so-called “fake news” because these elements of our larger political discourse can create or add to an atmosphere of animosity, tension, and polarization. As we know, “the manner in which most conversations about politics occurs in contemporary America is rife with bitterness, vitriol, and animosity.”<sup>43</sup> The use of Twitter, then, by political figures can add to the constellation of an already toxic environment. As Brian Ott (2017) describes, about 80% of Twitter activity is “trite, vacuous, and insignificant,” but the “danger arises from the other 20% when issues of social, cultural, and political import are filtered through the lens of Twitter, for Twitter infects public discourse like a social cancer.”<sup>44</sup> Of course, at times such tweets can trigger divisiveness that then becomes amplified by mainstream news, online news, blogs, and social media posts. Since our “politics are preoccupied with the demonization of opponents,” countless issues can be polarizing, hence eroding notions of civility.<sup>45</sup> For this study, I review the tweets from Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump beginning with their nominating conventions, with attention toward the presence of uncivil rhetoric. I engage in a close textual analysis, which carefully examines each rhetorical text for latent meanings, implicit patterns, and hidden assumptions and admissions (Fürsich, 2009).<sup>46</sup> This technique of rhetorical criticism sees “form and content ... merge within a pattern of meaning, and the meaning results from the interaction of all the elements – the themes, the images, the syntax and perhaps other things as well.”<sup>47</sup> In other words, it is the simultaneous display of a message’s substance and its manner of delivery that are important for us to ascertain prominent meanings of the text. The number of tweets analyzed from Trump numbered over 3,200 and just over 900 from Hillary Clinton, based on the Nuvi software. The sheer disparity in the number of tweets between the two candidates

<sup>39</sup> Owen, “Twitter Rants,” 172.

<sup>40</sup> Owen, “Twitter Rants,” 172.

<sup>41</sup> Levendusky, Matthew. *How Partisan Media Polarize America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Papacharissi, Zizi A. *A Private Sphere: Democracy in a Digital Age* (New York: Polity, 2010); Sanger, Larry. “What \*Should\* We Be Worried About?” *The Edge* (2013). Available, <http://edge.org/response-detail/23777>; Thomas, Jim. “Beware Bubbles and Echo Chambers.” *The Hastings Center Report* 44, no. 55(2014): 543–545.

<sup>42</sup> DiFonzo, Nicholas. “The Echo-Chamber Effect.” *The New York Times* (April 21, 2011). <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/04/21/barack-obama-and-the-psychology-of-the-birther-myth/the-echo-chamber-effect>; Sharockman, Aaron. “Let’s Fight Back against Fake News.” *Politifact* (November 16, 2016). <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2016/nov/16/lets-fight-backagainst-fake-news/>

<sup>43</sup> Zompetti, Joseph P. *Divisive Discourse: The Extreme Rhetoric of Contemporary American Politics* (San Francisco: Cognella, 2018).

<sup>44</sup> Ott, Brian L. “The Age of Twitter: Donald J. Trump and the Politics of Debasement.” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 34, no. 1(2017): 60.

<sup>45</sup> Bybee, Keith J. *How Civility Works* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016): 1.

<sup>46</sup> Fürsich, Elfriede. “In Defense of Textual Analysis: Restoring a Challenged Method for Journalism and Media Studies.” *Journalism Studies* 10, no. 2(2009): 289-252.

<sup>47</sup> Leff, Michael and Andrew Sachs. “Words the Most Like Things: Iconicity and the Rhetorical Text.” *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54, no. 3(1990): 265.

might suggest more visibility for Trump's messages and more opportunities to engage in incivility, but those questions are beyond the scope of this study. The concept of civility stems from the Weber Shandwick study, which formulates the following definition from qualitative, open-ended suggestions from their respondents: "By civility, we mean polite and respectful conduct and expression."<sup>48</sup> In addition, the study by Lee and Young-Shin coded uncivil political tweets as those that would "mock or criticize other candidates, media, or government" as generally "insulting comments," including comments that used language such as "clowns," "corrupt liar," "disaster" (when referring to a politician's actions or policies), "dumb," "puppets," and "garbage."<sup>49</sup> In my review of Clinton and Trump's tweets, these terms as well as analogues will be considered for their uncivil nature. As such, this analysis purports to examine the use of Twitter as a rhetorical strategy of uncivil discourse, rather than a more philosophical exploration into incivility and the public sphere.

### **Turbulence in the Twittersphere**

When we reflect on the amount of attention Trump received regarding his Twitter activity, it probably comes as no surprise that Donald Trump had more tweets than Hillary Clinton. Furthermore, most of Clinton's tweets were retweets or quotes from other peoples' tweets. Nevertheless, both Clinton and Trump engaged in uncivil Twitter banter. For the most part, Clinton's tweets can be characterized around the following themes: Trump as a liar, fraud, and hypocrite; Trump as encouraging hate, bigotry, and racism; Trump as a misogynist; Trump as anti-Muslim; Trump as anti-immigrant and anti-Mexican; Trump as a disaster for foreign policy and national security (including his ties to Russia); Trump as violent and a bully; Trump as terrible for working class people, including his failure to release his tax records; and general insults.

For Trump, his tweets also follow general themes, such as: Attacks against the mainstream media, especially CNN, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Morning Joe*, and *Saturday Night Live*; attacks against certain Republicans; attacks against Iran, including the Iran nuclear deal; attacks against North Korea; attacks against Clinton's character; comments about race-related matters, including support for law enforcement; comments about the so-called "Muslim travel ban"; messages about foreign policy, including insults toward other countries and leaders; reinforcement of his slogan, "Make America Great Again"; and general insults and uncivil discourse, such as calling Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake "a joke"<sup>50</sup>; insulting MSNBC's Mika Brzezinski as "off the wall, a neurotic and not very bright mess!"<sup>51</sup>; questioning the authenticity and professionalism of key Democrats by stating, "Nancy Pelosi and Fake Tears Chuck Schumer held a rally at the steps of The Supreme Court and mic did not work (a mess)-just like Dem party!"<sup>52</sup>, and then later posting, "The Democrats should be ashamed. This is a disgrace! #DrainTheSwamp."<sup>53</sup> Some of these themes will be examined below.

Obviously, describing over 700 uncivil tweets by both candidates is impossible within the confines of this paper, and since many repeat the same message or sentiment, it is unnecessary to do so. The sheer volume, however, of insulting, disrespectful and impolite tweets is astounding, and,

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<sup>48</sup> Weber Shandwick. *Civility in America VII*, p. 5.

<sup>49</sup> Lee and Young-Shin, "Gendered Campaign Tweets," 852; 853.

<sup>50</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (August 7, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>51</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (August 22, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>52</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (January 13, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>53</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (May 11, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.



by itself, supports the notion that the 2016 presidential race has contributed to the overall climate of incivility in the United States. Still, to really understand the connection between the political use of Twitter and our uncivil political culture, we need to examine the substance of Clinton and Trump's tweets.

## Hillary Clinton

For Hillary Clinton, her Twitter practices mainly entailed a contrast between her and her opponent. Instead of tweeting messages about her policy positions, her areas of expertise and her overall qualifications for president, Clinton instead would generally state comments such as, "Four months from today, our next president will walk into the Oval Office. Help make sure it's not Donald Trump."<sup>54</sup> Like Trump, Clinton also levied general insults at her opponent, such as her retweet of Elizabeth Warren: "Trump's entire campaign is just one more, late-night Trump infomercial"<sup>55</sup>; her characterization of Trump as "He's not really a plans guy, not really a facts guy either"<sup>56</sup>; and her overall framing of Trump's polarizing persona by tweeting, "Trump is harkening back to the most shameful chapters of our history and appealing to the ugliest impulses of our society."<sup>57</sup> Ironically, she would also tweet, "Unlike Donald Trump's, our campaign is about issues, not insults,"<sup>58</sup> or "I've tried to run a campaign based on issues. He's run a campaign based on insults."<sup>59</sup> While Clinton may have focused on policy issues during rallies or her commercials, she almost entirely targeted Trump with her Twitter messages. Furthermore, Clinton would frequently quote or retweet her contrast with Trump from others, repeating campaign stump messages that reinforced her integrity vis-à-vis Trump. For example, she retweeted her Vice Presidential running-mate, Tim Kaine's message: "Hillary Clinton is the exact opposite of Donald Trump. She doesn't insult people. She listens to them."<sup>60</sup> And, she quoted a line from one of her newspaper endorsements, the *Denver Post*, when she posted, "President Hillary Clinton on her worst day would be so superior to a President Donald Trump on any day."<sup>61</sup>

*Strategy One: Point Out the Incivility of Trump.* To support the overall contrast between her and Trump, Clinton would frequently tweet about the incendiary and uncivil comments made by her rival. In response to the Republican National Convention, Clinton tweeted, "Trump's convention message: fear and hate,"<sup>62</sup> and a few days later, she stated, "We heard Donald Trump's answer last week at his convention. He wants to divide us...He wants us to fear the future and fear each other."<sup>63</sup> Additionally, Clinton used Twitter to reinforce her message that Trump represented racism and bigotry. For example, she posted, "Trump's bigoted rhetoric and policy proposals aren't a dog whistle. We hear him loud and clear."<sup>64</sup> Then, she provided a hyperlink to an article from *Fortune* magazine<sup>65</sup> concerning Trump's endorsement of white supremacy; she stated, "Trump

<sup>54</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (September 21, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>55</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (July 26, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>56</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (July 28 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>57</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (August 5, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>58</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (August 11, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>59</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (October 25, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>60</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (July 23, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>61</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (October 8, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>62</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (July 24, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>63</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (July 29, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>64</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (August 25, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>65</sup> Kharakh, Ben and Dan Primack. "Donald Trump's Social Media Ties to White Supremacists." *Fortune* (March 22, 2016). <http://fortune.com/donald-trump-white-supremacist-genocide/>

retweets white supremacists. He took a fringe bigot and spread his message to 11 million people.”<sup>66</sup> Of course, we now know that Trump continued his support for, and lack of condemnation of, white supremacists during the Charlottesville, Virginia, incident. By morally equivocating white supremacists and neo-Nazis with the peaceful protesters, Trump remarked at a press conference that “I think there is blame on both sides ... You had a group on one side that was bad. You had a group on the other side that was also very violent. Nobody wants to say that. I’ll say it right now.”<sup>67</sup> As CNN’s Chris Cillizza explains, “Arguing that ‘both sides do it’ deeply misunderstands the hate and intolerance at the core of this ‘Unite the Right’ rally. These people are bigots. They are hate-filled. This is not just a protest where things, unfortunately, got violent. Violence sits at the heart of their warped belief system.”<sup>68</sup> Thus, Clinton tried to emphasize Trump’s ties to violent and racist factions in a way that was also a harbinger for Trump’s questionable relationships with suspicious groups.

*Strategy Two: Characterizing Trump as Sexist.* Another dimension to Clinton’s attacks against Trump’s campaign discourse concerns sexism. Clinton reminded her Twitter followers of the first debate when Trump referred to a former Miss Universe as “Miss Piggy.” Clinton remarked, “Donald Trump called her ‘Miss Piggy’ and ‘Miss Housekeeping.’ Her name is Alicia Machado.”<sup>69</sup> She followed this with two additional tweets: “Trump on Alicia, 1996: ‘Miss Piggy.’ This morning: ‘She gained a massive amount of weight...it was a real problem’”<sup>70</sup>; and then, “‘She gained about 55 pounds in...9 months. She was like an eating machine.’ Trump, a man who wants to be president.”<sup>71</sup> After the second debate, Clinton followed a similar theme. Referring to the “Access Hollywood” video that had just recently been released, Clinton stated, “Tonight, Trump dismissed his comments about groping women as ‘locker room talk.’ But words matter.”<sup>72</sup> And a week later, immediately following the third debate, Clinton continued this theme with this tweet: “‘Nobody respects women more than me.’ @Donald Trump earlier tonight ‘Such a nasty woman.’ @Donald Trump just now.”<sup>73</sup> Of course, it was this debate when Trump now infamously called Hillary Clinton a “nasty woman.”

*Strategy Three: Turn-the-Tables, or Use Trump’s Rhetoric against Him.* Of course, as these examples demonstrate, Clinton was fond of using Trump’s words against him. Clinton clearly demonstrated this strategy when she stated, “Trump on equal pay: ‘Do as good a job’ as men. Abortion? Should be ‘punished.’ Pregnancy? An ‘inconvenience.’ Wives working? ‘Dangerous.’”<sup>74</sup> After the second debate, she did something similar by quoting Trump: “‘I will be a president for all of the people.’ @Donald Trump\* \*Except women, people of color, LGBT people, Muslims...”<sup>75</sup> And, after the third debate, she reminded her Twitter followers about Trump’s perspective on Mexican immigrants: “Trump called Latinos ‘bad hombres’ on Wednesday. It’s not

<sup>66</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (August 25, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>67</sup> Shear, Michael D. and Maggie Haberman. “Trump Defends Initial Remarks on Charlottesville; Again Blames ‘Both Sides.’” *The New York Times* (August 15, 2017). <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/15/us/politics/trump-press-conference-charlottesville.html?mcubz=0>

<sup>68</sup> Cillizza, Chris. “Donald Trump’s Incredibly Unpresidential Statement on Charlottesville.” *CNN Politics* (August 13, 2017). <http://www.cnn.com/2017/08/12/politics/trump-charlottesville-statement/index.html>

<sup>69</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (September 27, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>70</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (September 27, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>71</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (September 27, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>72</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (October 10, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>73</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (October 20, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>74</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (September 30, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>75</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (October 10, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

even the most insulting thing he said about the community.”<sup>76</sup> Avid followers of Clinton’s Twitter handle will no doubt recall her opinions about Trump’s immigration ideas when she remarked in September, “Donald Trump’s plan on immigration has been clear all along: demonize immigrants, ‘build a wall,’ deport millions.”<sup>77</sup> Similarly, Clinton berated Trump’s so-called “Muslim travel ban” when she posted, “Trump would ban every Muslim around the world -- 1.5 billion men, women, and children -- from entering the U.S. just because of their religion.”<sup>78</sup> Yet, her message can ring hollow since she overstates the impact of Trump’s travel ban, since, at most, depending on the version examined, his proposal would ban travel from up to seven countries. Nevertheless, she summarized Trump’s anti-Muslim position in a manner consistent with the way she also described his policies regarding women, Mexicans, and other people of color: “He thinks we should be afraid of our Muslim brothers and sisters, because he has no idea who they really are.”<sup>79</sup>

*Strategy Four: Personal Attacks.* But, Clinton did not just use Trump’s discourse while tweeting; she also relayed her own concerns about Trump’s ideas and character. For instance, she tweeted at least a dozen times that Trump refused to reveal his taxes to the American people. To explain the significance of this issue, Clinton stated, “Here’s a pretty incredible fact: There is a non-zero chance that Donald Trump isn’t paying \*any\* taxes.”<sup>80</sup> Later the same day, Clinton used the power of suggestion to heighten suspicion that Trump may have been engaging in illegal or unethical behavior: “Many people are saying Trump won’t release his tax returns because he’s hiding something. What do you think it is?”<sup>81</sup> Then, over a month later as the election was drawing closer, she was no longer so subtle: “Trump appears to have broken the law and acted against our nation’s interest, all so he could line his own pockets.”<sup>82</sup> Although Trump frequently portrayed himself as the candidate for the working class, Clinton directly responded with, “He’s spent most of his life trying to stay as far away from working people as he could.”<sup>83</sup> To paint Trump as the antithesis of the working class, Clinton, although not part of the working class either, said this about her opponent: “Donald Trump’s economic plan is rigged so rich people like him get tax cuts at the expense of everybody else.”<sup>84</sup> Finally, to further describe Trump as an elitist, but also an aristocrat at the expense of the working family, Clinton posted, “Reminder: While Trump probably pays no federal taxes, he wants a \$4 billion tax break for his own family.”<sup>85</sup>

*Strategy Five: Trump’s Mendacity.* Another common theme from Clinton’s Twitter messages was that Trump could not be trusted and that he was a blatant liar. This message began early on, immediately after the Republican National Convention. Clinton retweeted her running-mate, Tim Kaine, when she said, “Folks, you cannot believe one word that comes out of Donald Trump’s mouth.”<sup>86</sup> This tweet was an obvious response to Trump’s acceptance speech. A bit later during the campaign, Clinton tweeted, “Donald Trump has spent years peddling lies about President Obama. And that didn’t stop today.”<sup>87</sup> The topic of Obama’s birth certificate appeared frequently

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<sup>76</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (October 21, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>77</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (September 3, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>78</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (August 25, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>79</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (October 20, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>80</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (August 12, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>81</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (August 12, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>82</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (September 29, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>83</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (September 13, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>84</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (August 23, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>85</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (October 2, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>86</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (July 28, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>87</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (September 16, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

in Clinton's Twitter thread, but typically it was associated with Trump's alleged racism. Here, however, Clinton pulls no punches and directly calls him a liar. Then, after the first presidential debate, Clinton told her followers, "Donald Trump lied to the American people at least 58 times during the first presidential debate. (We counted.)"<sup>88</sup> And, continuing this logic, she remarked after the final debate that, "Between the three presidential debates, Trump told roughly one lie for every 50 seconds he spoke."<sup>89</sup> By quantifying the frequency of Trump's mendacity, Clinton uses *logos* to convince her followers that Trump cannot be trusted. This is noteworthy since Trump's Twitter messages were almost entirely premised on *pathos* and *ethos* appeals. Nevertheless, Clinton tried to depict Trump as un-presidential.

*Strategy Six: Trump Not Fit for President.* As a result, Clinton's overall strategy was to characterize Trump as unfit to be president. By discussing his perceived bigotry, misogyny, inexperience, hypocrisy, and lies, Clinton reinforced the overarching argument that Trump was not presidential material. She made this characterization clear in a number of tweets. First, Clinton depicted Trump as emotionally unstable, and, as such, would be a disaster regarding foreign policy. For instance, she posted, "A man you can bait with a tweet is not a man you can trust with nuclear weapons."<sup>90</sup> Given the way Trump seemingly could not handle criticism with his knee-jerk remarks on Twitter, Clinton's point here noted his perceived irresponsible, if not childish, behavior. Even more to the point, Clinton wrote, "The next time Trump throws a tantrum, picture him in the Situation Room making life-or-death decisions for us."<sup>91</sup> And, Clinton capitalized on Trump's inexperience with foreign policy by saying, "Trump says he won't tell anyone what he'll do about ISIS because he wants to keep his plan a 'secret.' Well, the secret is he has no plan."<sup>92</sup> Of course, part of our expectations for our President is to have her or him be a positive ambassador and representative of our nation and our nation's values. Clinton went to the heart of this when she tweeted, "As a candidate, Trump has already embarrassed us on the world stage. Imagine the damage he'd do as president."<sup>93</sup> Clinton blended her criticism of Trump's national security inexperience with his other recognized flaws: "Just imagine Donald Trump in the Oval Office facing a real crisis. We can't afford that kind of risk."<sup>94</sup> Summarizing his lack of temperament, Clinton noted, "Donald Trump can't even handle the rough-and-tumble of a presidential campaign...Imagine him in the Oval Office facing a real crisis."<sup>95</sup> And, then she tweeted this message that repeated several other posts and retweets from her: "There's no doubt about it. Donald Trump is temperamentally unfit and totally unqualified to be president of the United States."<sup>96</sup>

*Strategy Seven: Simply Reject Trump.* Finally, Clinton offered seemingly desperate pleas for citizens to not vote for Trump. This is quite notable because Clinton was not asking for them to vote *for* her, but rather *against* him: "We know all too well who Donald Trump is. Let's make sure he never becomes president."<sup>97</sup> Political scholars can debate about whether or not such a political strategy was a miscalculation for her, but rhetorically the strategy can be powerful if voters are faced with a forced choice. As evidenced by Clinton's strategy with Twitter, the majority of her

<sup>88</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (September 27, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>89</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (October 20, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>90</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (August 15, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>91</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (September 9, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>92</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (August 15, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>93</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (September 2, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>94</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (August 8, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>95</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (September 29, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>96</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (August 15, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>97</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (September 24, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

tweets did not appeal to her own strengths but rather to Trump's weaknesses in character and political aptitude. Arguably, this rhetorical strategy made it easier for voters to easily dismiss both her and Trump. But Clinton's other overarching message – also an anti-Trump message – demands our attention. The majority of her tweets about Trump referred to animosity and disrespect for people of color, people with disabilities, Mexicans, Muslims, women, and so on. Thus, Clinton's overall characterization of Trump can be seen in this tweet: "Trump says he wants to 'make America great again,' but his real message remains 'make America hate again.'"<sup>98</sup>

## Donald Trump

While Trump's Twitter usage dwarfed Clinton's, his posts can also be categorized into several substantial themes. The most important of these themes to be investigated here are: Trump's attacks against mainstream media; his attacks against Hillary Clinton; defensive messages regarding the Miss Universe and the special investigations about his involvement with Russia; his notion of draining the swamp; his positions on Iran, North Korea, and his remarks about the United Kingdom; his Border Wall initiative; his so-called "Muslim travel ban"; his beliefs that the "system" is rigged; and his promises to "make America great again."

*Strategy One: Bash the Media.* Of the over 3,000 Twitter messages, the bulk of them directly or indirectly referred to the mainstream media. Reminiscent of Goebbels' notion of *Lügenpresse* (lying press), Trump often labeled the traditional media as "fake news."<sup>99</sup> In essence, any time Trump felt the media were disagreeing with him or reported something unfavorable, he would immediately label them "fake news." And, Trump was fond of attaching adjectives to particular journalists and to specific news organizations and programs. For instance, Trump described MSNBC's Chuck Todd as "totally one-sided"<sup>100</sup> and "sleepy eyes."<sup>101</sup> He called *Reuters* "totally dishonest" in that their "made up story" was a "hoax."<sup>102</sup> He blamed the *Washington Post* for putting "together a hit job book" on him that was filled with "inaccurate stories. Don't buy, boring!"<sup>103</sup> He labeled NBC Nightly News as "so biased, inaccurate and bad, point after point."<sup>104</sup> Trump also tweeted that, "So many stories about me in the @washingtonpost are Fake News. They are as bad as ratings challenged @CNN."<sup>105</sup> Similar sentiment was expressed about *Saturday Night Live*. Despite Alec Baldwin's recent Emmy award for portraying the President, Trump stated: "Watched Saturday Night Live hit job on me. Time to retire the boring and unfunny show. Alec Baldwin portrayal stinks. Media rigging election!"<sup>106</sup> He also noted that *Saturday Night Live* was a "totally one sided, biased show,"<sup>107</sup> and then he remarked: "Just tried watching Saturday Night Live - unwatchable! Totally biased, not funny and the Baldwin impersonation just can't get any worse.

<sup>98</sup> Clinton, Hillary. *Twitter* (August 25, 2016). @HillaryClinton.

<sup>99</sup> Noack, Rick. "The Ugly History of 'Lügenpresse,' a Nazi Slur Shouted at a Trump Rally." *The Washington Post* (October 24, 2016). [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/10/24/the-ugly-history-of-luegen-presse-a-nazi-slur-shouted-at-a-trump-rally/?utm\\_term=.8a493c446351](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/10/24/the-ugly-history-of-luegen-presse-a-nazi-slur-shouted-at-a-trump-rally/?utm_term=.8a493c446351); Trump Uses 80-Year-Old Playbook to Discredit the Media. *Who. What. Why* (February 19, 2017). <https://whowhatwhy.org/2017/02/19/trump-uses-80-year-old-playbook-discredit-media/>

<sup>100</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (July 4, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>101</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (July 6, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>102</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (August 10, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>103</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (August 23, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>104</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (December 12, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>105</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (July 25, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>106</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (October 16, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>107</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (November 20, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

Sad.”<sup>108</sup> Additionally, Trump frequently referred to the *New York Times* as the “failing @nytimes,”<sup>109</sup> and he would on occasion specifically target *New York Times* reporters, such as Maureen Dowd for whom Trump castigated on Twitter: “Wacky @NYTimesDowd, who hardly knows me, makes up things that I never said for her boring interviews and column. A neurotic dope!”<sup>110</sup> and then later that same day, Trump tweeted, “Crazy Maureen Dowd, the wacky columnist for the failing @nytimes, pretends she knows me well—wrong!”<sup>111</sup> By referring to certain journalists, news organizations and shows directly, Trump openly named his opponents, which then allowed him to subsequently position himself as a victim of their personal attacks.

Perhaps the most discussed and most provocative Twitter thread from Trump concerning a specific news program was when he pursued Joe Scarborough and Mika Brzezinski who co-host MSNBC’s *Morning Joe*. With no apparent reason and seemingly out of nowhere, Trump tweeted one morning the following:

“I heard poorly rated @MorningJoe speaks badly of me (don't watch anymore). Then how come low I.Q. Crazy Mika, along with Psycho Joe, came...” (1/2)

“...to Mar-a-Lago 3 nights in a row around New Year's Eve, and insisted on joining me. She was bleeding badly from a face-lift. I said no!” (2/2)<sup>112</sup>

As President of the United States, Trump’s two tweets flew from the White House, which arguably worsens the uncivil and insulting messages. After all, we do not normally expect the President to berate someone for a botched face-lift. Sarah Huckabee Sanders, who at the time was the Deputy Press Secretary, reasoned that “The President has been attacked mercilessly on personal accounts by members on that program, and I think he's been very clear that when he gets attacked, he's going to hit back ... They do this day after day after day, and then the President responds and defends himself and everybody is appalled and blown away.”<sup>113</sup> Despite Sanders’ justification for her boss’s demeanor, even fellow Republicans were extremely disappointed in the President. Senator Lindsey Graham (2017) of South Carolina tweeted, “Mr. President, your tweet was beneath the office and represents what is wrong with American politics, not the greatness of America,”<sup>114</sup> and Senator Susan Collins of Maine expressed her frustration to CNN’s Anderson Cooper: “It's unworthy of the office of President of the United States ... And I am concerned about how we look in the eyes of the world as well as our own citizens.”<sup>115</sup> Similarly, Mika Brzezinski responded to Trump’s initial “face-lift” tweets by showing concern for the country: ““I’m fine .... My family brought me up really tough. This is absolutely nothing for me personally. But I am very concerned about what this once again reveals about the president of the United States. It’s strange ... It does

<sup>108</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (December 4, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>109</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (September 11, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>110</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (September 17, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>111</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (September 17, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>112</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (June 29, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>113</sup> Qtd. in Collinson, Stephen. “Delegitimizing His Presidency, One Tweet at a Time.” *CNN Politics* (June 30, 2017). <http://www.cnn.com/2017/06/30/politics/trump-presidency-respect/index.html>

<sup>114</sup> Graham, Lindsey. *Twitter* (June 29, 2017). @LindseyGrahamSC.

<sup>115</sup> Qtd. in Collinson, “Delegitimizing His Presidency.”

worry me about the country.”<sup>116</sup> Yet, Trump doubled-down on his position, as he so often does. The next day he posted: “Crazy Joe Scarborough and dumb as a rock Mika are not bad people, but their low rated show is dominated by their NBC bosses. Too bad!”<sup>117</sup> Afterwards, Brzezinski and Scarborough no longer paid attention to Trump’s Twitter-baiting, and the ordeal soon blew over.

Of course, the cornerstone of Trump’s political campaign strategy was to vilify the media, which reinforced the notion that Trump was a Washington outsider, that the media were intent on destroying Trump’s candidacy, and that supporters should follow Trump on Twitter as a way to bypass the mainstream media. In addition, by labeling and characterizing the media as “fake news,” Trump was stacking the deck in his favor. Card stacking, according to Conway, Grabe and Grieves, is when a rhetor selectively chooses the information to which their audience is exposed.<sup>118</sup> Thus, when Trump demonizes the media, he frames the political debate to his advantage. For instance, Trump uses the media onslaught against him as a way to signify his victimhood: “It is being reported by virtually everyone, and is a fact, that the media pile on against me is the worst in American political history!”<sup>119</sup> To intensify the feeling that the media were a formidable opponent, Trump reiterated that he was not just running against Clinton, but also the media industry as a whole: “I am not only fighting Crooked Hillary, I am fighting the dishonest and corrupt media and her government protection process. People get it!”<sup>120</sup> and then a week and a half later he wrote, “I am not just running against Crooked Hillary Clinton, I am running against the very dishonest and totally biased media - but I will win!”<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, Trump used the idea of “fake” media to make his policy ideas more palatable: “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!”<sup>122</sup> Similarly, Trump tweeted, “Anytime you see a story about me or my campaign saying “sources said,” DO NOT believe it. There are no sources, they are just made up lies!”<sup>123</sup> and later that same day, he reiterated this point: “Remember, don’t believe ‘sources said’ by the VERY dishonest media. If they don’t name the sources, the sources don’t exist.”<sup>124</sup> Moreover, Trump emphasized to his followers that, “The Fake News Media has never been so wrong or so dirty. Purposely incorrect stories and phony sources to meet their agenda of hate. Sad!”<sup>125</sup> The impact to all of this so-called dishonest journalism, according to Trump, was that “The Fake News media is officially out of control. They will do or say anything in order to get attention - never been a time like this!”<sup>126</sup> Naturally, when Trump felt attacked by the special investigations into his supposed financial ties to Russia, the news media covered the story in detail, which allowed Trump to continue his characterization of media as opposition: “FAKE NEWS - A TOTAL POLITICAL WITCH HUNT!”<sup>127</sup> Calling the

<sup>116</sup> Qtd. in Freedom du Lac, J. and Jenna Johnson. “Mika Brzezinski Explains What President Trump’s Tweets Reveal about Him.” *The Washington Post* (June 30, 2017). [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2017/06/30/mika-brzezinski-on-trumps-twitter-attack-it-does-worry-me-about-the-country/?utm\\_term=.0005c17a46e1](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2017/06/30/mika-brzezinski-on-trumps-twitter-attack-it-does-worry-me-about-the-country/?utm_term=.0005c17a46e1)

<sup>117</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (July 1, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>118</sup> Conway, Mike, Maria Elizabeth Grabe, and Kevin Grieves. “Villains, Victims and the Virtuous in Bill O’Reilly’s ‘No Spin Zone.’” *Journalism Studies* 8, no. 2(2007): 204.

<sup>119</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (August 23, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>120</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (August 14, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>121</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (August 27, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>122</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (July 10, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>123</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (September 30, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>124</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (September 30, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>125</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (June 13, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>126</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (May 4, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>127</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (January 11, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

media “fake news” occasionally was not sufficient for Trump, as he obviously felt it necessary to post his tweet in all capital letters. In a less harsh tweet that nevertheless still portrayed the media as the villains, he stated, “Fake News is at an all time high. Where is their apology to me for all of the incorrect stories???”<sup>128</sup> Yet, as his opponent, the media underestimated Trump’s communicative power, especially since he could use Twitter to sidestep them altogether: “The Fake News Media hates when I use what has turned out to be my very powerful Social Media - over 100 million people! I can go around them.”<sup>129</sup> Hence, by adopting the simple phrase “fake news,” Donald Trump was able to advance several related and powerful arguments – the media was unfairly attacking him, their reports were inaccurate and dishonest, they were a serious villain to America, and they were being unfair with their stories about him.

The majority of Trump’s responses to the mainstream media were generic, as he painted with a broad brush the idea that the media were engaged in “fake news” *in toto*. However, as we have seen, Trump targeted attacks against news organizations, programs, and even individual journalists. On the flip side, Trump specifically declared Fox News and Bill Hemmer as allies to his candidacy. For example, during the week of the Republican National Convention, Trump lauded Hemmer’s reporting style: “Bill Hemmer of @FoxNews was very nice in explaining the excitement and energy in the arena. More than in past years.”<sup>130</sup> On several occasions, Trump liked to contrast the integrity of Fox News with the dishonest reporting of other news agencies. For instance, Trump tweeted, “Funny, if you listen to @FoxNews, the Democrats did not have a good day. If you listen to the other two, they are fawning. What a difference.”<sup>131</sup> Additionally, Trump posted, “The fake news media is going crazy with their conspiracy theories and blind hatred. @MSNBC & @CNN are unwatchable. @foxandfriends is great!”<sup>132</sup> Finally, Trump pointed out the ratings success of Fox News, which implies to his followers that Fox News was reputable and trustworthy: “Congratulations to @foxandfriends on its unbelievable ratings hike,”<sup>133</sup> and then, “Great reporting by @foxandfriends and so many others. Thank you!”<sup>134</sup> Although Trump bragged about his ability to dodge traditional news sources with his Twitter activity, he also promoted Fox News as a positive alternative to the “fake news” that was dominated by liberal interests.

*Strategy Two: Deflect and Deny.* During the second presidential debate, Clinton mentioned the infamous *Access Hollywood* video where Trump bragged about how his celebrity status attracted women. As he gleefully expressed, “I just start kissing them. When you’re a star, the let you do it ... Grab them by the p—y.”<sup>135</sup> At one point during the debate, Hillary Clinton tried to steer the conversation back to a substantive issue, Social Security, by arguing how her plan was more financially stable than Trump’s, and then he interrupted her by saying, “such a nasty woman.”<sup>136</sup> This personal attack against Clinton prompted her to note how several women alleged that Trump

<sup>128</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (June 13, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>129</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (June 16, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>130</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (July 20, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>131</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (July 26, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>132</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (February 15, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>133</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (May 4, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>134</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (June 9, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>135</sup> Qtd. in Hawkins, Derek and Katie Mettler. “Billy Bush Speaks Out about Trump ‘Access Hollywood’ Tape: ‘I Wish I Had Changed the Topic.’” *The Washington Post* (May 22, 2017). [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/05/21/billy-bush-speaks-out-about-trump-access-hollywood-tape-i-wish-i-had-changed-the-topic/?utm\\_term=.bc52d4a310ef](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/05/21/billy-bush-speaks-out-about-trump-access-hollywood-tape-i-wish-i-had-changed-the-topic/?utm_term=.bc52d4a310ef)

<sup>136</sup> Adameczyk, Alicia. “‘Such a Nasty Woman’ and More Demeaning Rhetoric from Donald Trump.” *Time* (October 19, 2016). <http://time.com/money/4537899/presidential-debate-donald-trump-nasty-woman/>



harassed them. Trump immediately pivoted to the philandering proclivities of Hillary's husband. However, it was Trump's tweets between the second and third debates that are the most revealing about his position on this subject. When referring to how the *New York Times* was covering this issue, Trump posted, "The phony story in the failing @nytimes is a TOTAL FABRICATION. Written by same people as last discredited story on women. WATCH!"<sup>137</sup> A couple of days later, Trump continued with this line of defense: "Nothing ever happened with any of these women. Totally made up nonsense to steal the election. Nobody has more respect for women than me!"<sup>138</sup> Trump emphatically denied these accusations; yet, "In at least three lawsuits reviewed by USA TODAY, women working for Trump companies allege that's exactly what they did: they reported sexual discrimination or harassment and they lost their jobs. In several other cases, women described retaliation for making such complaints."<sup>139</sup> Despite the documented nature of these harassment claims,<sup>140</sup> Trump continued to double-down with his denial as he tweeted, "Can't believe these totally phoney stories, 100% made up by women (many already proven false) and pushed big time by press, have impact!"<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, while Clinton and others steadfastly portrayed Trump as a misogynist, he ultimately painted a different picture of himself: "I have tremendous respect for women and the many roles they serve that are vital to the fabric of our society and our economy."<sup>142</sup>

*Strategy Three: Play the Victim.* Since much of Trump's media attention involved criticism, he often used Twitter to defend his rhetoric and behavior. Couched in language such as, "THE SYSTEM IS RIGGED!"<sup>143</sup> or "Crooked Hillary Clinton is 'guilty as hell' but the system is totally rigged and corrupt! Where are the 33,000 missing e-mails?"<sup>144</sup> Trump's defensive tweets typically framed him as a victim. For instance, in a variant of the childish sandbox argument of "but what about you?!", Trump used Twitter to cry about the Special Prosecutor Robert Mueller's investigation into Trump's campaign and financial links to Russia: "With all of the illegal acts that took place in the Clinton campaign & Obama Administration, there was never a special counsel appointed!"<sup>145</sup> He also labeled the investigation in a tweet as "the single greatest WITCH HUNT in American political history - led by some very bad and conflicted people! #MAGA."<sup>146</sup> Another specific example when this occurred emanated from the first presidential debate. Hillary Clinton offered evidence for how Trump would divide the country and was unfit to be president. She attacked Trump, arguing that, "he called this woman 'Miss Piggy.' Then he called her 'Miss House-keeping,' because she was Latina. Donald, she has a name, her name is Alicia Machado."<sup>147</sup> As I

<sup>137</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (October 13, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>138</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (October 15, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>139</sup> Kelly, John, Nick Penzenstadler, and Steve Reilly. "Trump, Companies Accused of Mistreating Women in at Least 20 Lawsuits." *USA Today* (June, 2016). <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2016/10/09/trumps-lawsuits-include-20-involving-allegations-mistreating-women-president-republican/91832012/>

<sup>140</sup> Gandel, Stephen. "Trump and His Companies Have Been Accused of Sexual Assault 20 Times." *Fortune* (October 9, 2016). <http://fortune.com/2016/10/09/president-debate-trump-sexual-harassment/>

<sup>141</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (October 17, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>142</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (March 8, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>143</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (July 3, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>144</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (July 4, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>145</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (May 18, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>146</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (June 15, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>147</sup> Qtd. in Alba, Monica and Elisha Fieldstadt. "Former Miss Universe Alicia Machado Hopes 'Miss Piggy' Story Will Boost Clinton Support." *NBC News* (September 28, 2016). <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/2016-presidential-debates/former-miss-universe-alicia-machado-hopes-miss-piggy-story-will-n655606>

discussed above, Clinton also tweeted about Trump's conduct with Machado. In response, and in typical Trump fashion, he used Twitter as the venue for his defense. A couple of days after the debate and subsequent to Clinton's tweets, Trump responded with, "Wow, Crooked Hillary was duped and used by my worst Miss U. Hillary floated her as an 'angel' without checking her past, which is terrible!"<sup>148</sup> Of course, Trump did not elaborate on Machado's "past," but instead let his followers presume it was something salacious or indecorous. To further depict Machado as unseemly, Trump sent another tweet on the same day: "Using Alicia M in the debate as a paragon of virtue just shows that Crooked Hillary suffers from BAD JUDGEMENT! Hillary was set up by a con."<sup>149</sup> Trump's improper spelling of "judgement" notwithstanding, he clearly intended for his audience to believe that Machado was not the innocent "angel" that Clinton described.

When Trump labeled the mainstream media as "fake" and when he denied allegations made against him by dismissing them as dishonest, he continued his rhetorical strategy of victimhood. So far, my analysis of Trump's tweets suggests how they buttressed a larger narrative about how he was not a typical politician and, as an outsider, the political system was ganging up against him. As such, I should note that Trump frequently tweeted comments about how the political system was rigged in general, and unfairly slanted against him in particular. One version of this argument occurred when Trump identified how "Crooked" Hillary was benefiting from a corrupt, rigged political system. For example, Trump remarked, "While Hillary profits off the rigged system, I am fighting for you! Remember the simple phrase: #FollowTheMoney."<sup>150</sup> Trump even suggested that Clinton was in some sort of collusion with the mainstream media: "Election is being rigged by the media, in a coordinated effort with the Clinton campaign, by putting stories that never happened into news!"<sup>151</sup> By claiming that the media were Clinton surrogates, Trump framed the situation as a system intent on undermining his candidacy. As he noted a couple of weeks before the election, "This election is being rigged by the media pushing false and unsubstantiated charges, and outright lies, in order to elect Crooked Hillary!"<sup>152</sup> Finally, by referring to Clinton's email scandal and the FBI investigation about the emails, Trump took the opportunity to express how the special treatment Clinton was receiving reinforced his state of victimhood: "Hillary Clinton should have been prosecuted and should be in jail. Instead she is running for president in what looks like a rigged election."<sup>153</sup> A rigged system is a societal framework that is corrupt, dishonest, and unfair. By labeling the American political process as "rigged," Trump rhetorically framed himself as the underdog who was vigilantly fighting for the moral integrity of the nation.

*Strategy Four: Use Slogans to Bash the System.* In a related way, Donald Trump used Twitter to advance his catchy slogan of "drain the swamp." When malaria was a serious problem in the United States, a common practice to reduce the mosquito population was to drain a swamp.<sup>154</sup> As a political metaphor, draining a swamp obviously suggests that a toxic problem must be addressed by means of a large-scale overhauling of the situation. In Trump's case, the phrase "drain the swamp" was an extension of his "rigged" system argument. If the swamp is rigged, then it needs

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<sup>148</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (September 30, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>149</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (September 30, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>150</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (September 29, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>151</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (October 16, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>152</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (October 15, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>153</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (October 15, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>154</sup> Harrington, Rebecca. "Here's What Trump Means When He Says 'Drain the Swamp' – Even Though It's Not an Accurate Metaphor." *Business Insider* (November 11, 2016). <http://www.businessinsider.com/what-does-drain-the-swamp-mean-was-dc-built-on-a-swamp-2016-11>

to be drained; and, Trump is our savior who can drain, or overhaul, this rigged system. For example, in a very simple and straightforward tweet, Trump stated, “I will Make Our Government Honest Again -- believe me. But first, I'm going to have to #DrainTheSwamp in DC.”<sup>155</sup> In a similar fashion as the election was nearing, Trump tweeted, “Time to #DrainTheSwamp in Washington, D.C. and VOTE #TrumpPence16 on 11/8/2016. Together, we will MAKE AMERICA SAFE.”<sup>156</sup> And, later that same day, Trump just simply posted, “It is time to #DrainTheSwamp!”<sup>157</sup> As Trump’s brand and slogans became part of the American voters’ vocabulary, he was able to convert his message into a request for votes. By using the rhetorical strategy of “a call to action,” Trump could use the structure of a Twitter message to blend his claims of victimhood with his notion of uniquely being able to “drain the swamp” into an urgent plea for voters’ support. This rhetorical amalgamation can be seen in this tweet: “In order to #DrainTheSwamp & create a new GOVERNMENT of, by, & for the PEOPLE, I need your VOTE!”<sup>158</sup> A couple of days later, Trump solidified this rhetorical alloy by phrasing it as a covenant, such that the voter now not only knows Trump will change the rigged system, but he is also cementing his pledge in the form of a promise: “My contract with the American voter will restore honesty, accountability & CHANGE to Washington! #DrainTheSwamp.”<sup>159</sup> Even after the election, Trump reminded the American populace of his contract: “Someone incorrectly stated that the phrase ‘DRAIN THE SWAMP’ was no longer being used by me. Actually, we will always be trying to DTS.”<sup>160</sup> Thus, by rhetorically crafting an “us vs. them” relationship between Trump and his followers against a rigged, fake, and dishonest system, Trump framed his candidacy as a form of salvation from the woes experienced by many Americans. The toxic tone of his tweets along with his inflammatory demonization of the media and Clinton enabled Trump to utilize Twitter as a means of efficiently disseminating his campaign messages.

*Strategy Five: Demean Other Countries to Put America First.* Trump’s venomous tweets can also be seen when he addressed foreign policy. In fact, some of Trump’s divisive social media rants occurred during the campaign and once he officially became the President in the form of his remarks concerning international affairs and global leaders. Once Trump took the oath of office, he committed a series of *faux pas* by snubbing traditional American allies, such as when he hung up the phone on Malcolm Turnbull, the Prime Minister of Australia,<sup>161</sup> or when he inappropriately joked about wiretapping German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s phone during a press conference while he officially visited Germany.<sup>162</sup> Trump’s impolite, if not outright uncivil, communication

<sup>155</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (October 18, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>156</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (October 19, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>157</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (October 19, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>158</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (October 22, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>159</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (October 25, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>160</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (December 22, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>161</sup> Miller, Greg, and Philip Rucker. “‘This was the Worst Call by Far’: Trump Badgered, Bragged and Abruptly Ended Phone Call with Australian Leader.” *The Washington Post* (February 2, 2017). [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/nogday-mate-on-call-with-australian-pm-trump-badgers-and-brags/2017/02/01/88a3bfb0-e8bf-11e6-80c230e57e57e05d\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.60017600dc15](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/nogday-mate-on-call-with-australian-pm-trump-badgers-and-brags/2017/02/01/88a3bfb0-e8bf-11e6-80c230e57e57e05d_story.html?utm_term=.60017600dc15); Thrush, Glenn, and Michelle Innis. “U.S.-Australia Rift Is Possible after Trump Ends Call with Prime Minister.” *The New York Times* (February 2, 2017). <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/02/us/politics/us-australia-trump-turnbull.html>

<sup>162</sup> Collinson, Stephen. “Trump Prepares for Critical Week of Diplomacy.” *CNN*

*Politics* (April 3, 2017). <http://www.cnn.com/2017/04/03/politics/trump-foreign-policy/>; Estepa, Jessica. “Awkward: Merkel Asks for a Handshake, Trump Doesn’t Respond.” *USA Today* (March 17, 2017). <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2017/03/17/angela-merkel-donald-trump-handshake/99310398/>

toward American friends also occurred on Twitter. In June 2017, London faced what Prime Minister Theresa May called a “brutal terrorist attack” when coordinated radical Islamic terrorists with fake suicide bombs drove a van into pedestrians on the heavily-frequented London Tower Bridge, resulting in seven fatalities and dozens of injuries.<sup>163</sup> What was Trump’s response? Upon hearing the reports, he almost immediately tweeted, “At least 7 dead and 48 wounded in terror attack and Mayor of London says there is ‘no reason to be alarmed!’”<sup>164</sup> Thus, while the dust had not yet settled, the American President publicly criticized London’s mayor. On the next day, Trump went even further: “Pathetic excuse by London Mayor Sadiq Khan who had to think fast on his ‘no reason to be alarmed’ statement. MSM is working hard to sell it!”<sup>165</sup> Calling a foreign leader – which the mayor of London undoubtedly is – a “pathetic excuse” was not only incivility directed at a long-time friend, but it also demonstrated serious un-Presidential behavior on behalf of Trump.

We should probably not be surprised if Trump showed incivility toward an adversary. Perhaps no other example best exemplifies Trump’s uncivil behavior on Twitter than his messages directed at North Korea. American frustrations with North Korea’s pursuit of nuclear weapons as well as its general rogue state behavior dates back to the Reagan era, but became more acute during Clinton’s presidency, then another upsurge with Obama, and now the Trump administration.<sup>166</sup> Since February of 2017, North Korea has engaged in 15 different long-range missile tests.<sup>167</sup> Given the failed policies of previous administrations and the recent bellicose behavior of North Korea, Trump tweeted, “The U.S. has been talking to North Korea, and paying them extortion money, for 25 years. Talking is not the answer!”<sup>168</sup> and Trump firmly warned his Twitter followers that, “The era of strategic patience with the North Korea regime has failed. That patience is over.”<sup>169</sup> Before committing the U.S. to a military course of action, Trump pressured our allies and China to leverage North Korea. In a Twitter thread, Trump explained:

“North Korea has just launched another missile. Does this guy have anything better to do with his life? Hard to believe that South Korea.....” (1/2)

“....and Japan will put up with this much longer. Perhaps China will put a heavy move on North Korea and end this nonsense once and for all!” (2/2)<sup>170</sup>

After a couple of weeks of relative non-action by others along with North Korea’s continued recalcitrance, Trump posted:

“I am very disappointed in China. Our foolish past leaders have allowed them to make hundreds of billions of dollars a year in trade, yet...” (1/2)

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<sup>163</sup> Schabner, Dean, Tara Fowler, Emily Shapiro, David Caplan, and Julia Jacobo. “7 Killed, 3 Suspects Dead after ‘Brutal Terrorist Attack’ at London Bridge, Borough Market.” *ABC News* (June 5, 2017). <http://abcnews.go.com/International/police-dealing-incident-london-bridge/story?id=47813769>

<sup>164</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (June 4, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>165</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (June 5, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>166</sup> Wit, Joel. *The United States and North Korea*. Brookings Institute Report (March 15, 2001). <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-united-states-and-north-korea/>

<sup>167</sup> Berlinger, Joshua. “North Korea’s Missile Tests: By the Numbers.” *CNN World* (September 17, 2017). <http://www.cnn.com/2017/05/29/asia/north-korea-missile-tests/index.html>

<sup>168</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (August 30, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>169</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (June 30, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>170</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (July 4, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

“...they do NOTHING for us with North Korea, just talk. We will no longer allow this to continue. China could easily solve this problem!” (2/2)<sup>171</sup>

However, eventually the pressure on China began to work. Beijing intensified its trade leverage to Pyongyang. In fact, Trump announced on Twitter in early August that, “The United Nations Security Council just voted 15-0 to sanction North Korea. China and Russia voted with us. Very big financial impact!”<sup>172</sup> Unfortunately, despite the heightened pressure and the added sanctions, Kim Jong-un remained defiant. Trump’s patience with North Korea was waning, and he used Twitter to remind Kim Jong-un – and the world – that the United States could choose a military option: “Military solutions are now fully in place, locked and loaded, should North Korea act unwisely. Hopefully Kim Jong Un will find another path!”<sup>173</sup> Then, in early September, North Korea claimed it exploded a hydrogen bomb – a nuclear weapon that U.S. military officials said most likely detonated under test conditions.<sup>174</sup> Trump instantly used Twitter to put North Korea on notice: “North Korea has conducted a major Nuclear Test. Their words and actions continue to be very hostile and dangerous to the United States.....”<sup>175</sup>

Up to this point, Trump arguably acted reasonably and responsibly with his Twitter messages. But, in the middle of September, he was invited to address the United Nations. In his speech, Trump directly called attention to North Korea and their leader: “The United States has great strength and patience, but if it is forced to defend itself or its allies, we will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea. Rocket Man is on a suicide mission for himself and for his regime. The United States is ready, willing and able, but hopefully this will not be necessary.”<sup>176</sup> While the President calmly noted the unique role the United Nations plays in global affairs and how the U.N. and the U.S. should continue to work collaboratively, he also displayed child-like and un-Presidential behavior by referring to Kim Jong-un as “Rocket Man” as well as threatening to entirely eliminate North Korea from the planet in no uncertain terms. Although Trump deployed this uncivil rhetoric during a public address, he did not waste much time before he took to Twitter, where he posted, “Just heard Foreign Minister of North Korea speak at U.N. If he echoes thoughts of Little Rocket Man, they won't be around much longer!”<sup>177</sup> Ridiculing a foreign leader by calling him a childish name while simultaneously portending to wipe a country off the map exacerbated an already extremely tense situation. Using a platform like Twitter to convey these sorts of messages also reinforced their toxic nature since they were disseminated in curt, truncated soundbites for the sole purpose of creating a spectacle to generate more attention – even if negative – toward Trump.

*Strategy Six: Otherizing to Pump Up the Base.* Except for the claims made against Trump involving sexual harassment and misogyny, perhaps no other issues were quite as polarizing as Trump’s professed “Border Wall” and his so-called “Muslim travel ban.” Both initiatives began as campaign promises, and now, after nine months in office, they function as albatrosses around

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<sup>171</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (July 29, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>172</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (August 5, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>173</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (August 11, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>174</sup> Sanger, David E., and Choe Sang-Hun. “North Korean Nuclear Test Draws U.S. Warning of ‘Massive Military Response.’” *The New York Times* (September 2, 2017). <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/03/world/asia/north-korea-tremor-possible-6th-nuclear-test.html?mcubz=0>

<sup>175</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (September 3, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>176</sup> Trump, Donald J. “Remarks by President Trump to the 72<sup>nd</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly.” The White House Office of the Press Secretary (September 19, 2017). <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/09/19/remarks-president-trump-72nd-session-united-nations-general-assembly>

<sup>177</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (September 3, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

Trump's proverbial neck since neither have come to fruition. In one of the few instances when Trump actually mentioned a policy proposal in positive terms, Trump tweeted about the "Wall": "The Democrats don't want money from budget going to border wall despite the fact that it will stop drugs and very bad MS 13 gang members."<sup>178</sup> With this simple and succinct message, Trump promoted his idea while simultaneously bashing the Democrats. Yet, Trump's harsh sentiments toward immigrants and Mexicans began on the very first day of his candidacy. During his announcement speech, Trump remarked,

When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people. But I speak to border guards and they tell us what we're getting. And it only makes common sense. It only makes common sense. They're sending us not the right people.<sup>179</sup>

But it was this stereotypical, albeit racist, notion of immigrant Mexicans as criminals and racists that boosted Trump's popularity and galvanized support among his base. Beginning with this premise of the menacing, delinquent Mexican immigrant, Trump launched his idea of building a barrier along America's southern border to purposefully restrict access to Mexicans. The so-called "Border Wall" became a lynchpin to Trump's candidacy, as he promised, "We will build the wall and MAKE AMERICA SAFE AGAIN!"<sup>180</sup> Trump took his Border Wall proposal seriously, even tweeting how it would remedy our drug problem:

"The Wall is a very important tool in stopping drugs from pouring into our country and poisoning our youth (and many others)! If" (1/2)

"...the wall is not built, which it will be, the drug situation will NEVER be fixed the way it should be! #BuildTheWall" (2/2)<sup>181</sup>

A couple of days later, Trump declared that the Wall would solve another problem: "Don't let the fake media tell you that I have changed my position on the WALL. It will get built and help stop drugs, human trafficking etc."<sup>182</sup> By claiming the Wall will address human trafficking, Trump appealed to a liberal demographic, as well as attempted to temper his misogynistic image with a new commitment against human sex trafficking. However, drugs and crime were Trump's main focus. As he tweeted in June, "Mexico was just ranked the second deadliest country in the world, after only Syria. Drug trade is largely the cause. We will BUILD THE WALL!"<sup>183</sup> Of course, one the appealing components to Trump's proposal was his claim that Mexico would pay for its construction. While never specifying exactly how he or the government would compel Mexico to fund the project, Trump simply iterated over and over again that Mexico would sponsor the initiative. For example, Trump tweeted, "Eventually, but at a later date so we can get started early, Mexico will

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<sup>178</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (April 23, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>179</sup> Trump, Donald. "Here's Donald Trump's Presidential Announcement Speech." *Time* (June 16, 2015). <http://time.com/3923128/donald-trump-announcement-speech/>

<sup>180</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (July 13, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>181</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (April 24, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>182</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (April 25, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>183</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (June 22, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

be paying, in some form, for the badly needed border wall.”<sup>184</sup> In this way, Trump vilified Mexicans and made them responsible for the financial cost associated with solving the problems they created. Of course, Trump never provided support or proof that Mexico was in reality responsible for any of the problems he articulated, but his mere assertions via Twitter were more than enough to persuade most of his followers that Mexico was the culprit.

Another key Trump proposal was his so-called “Muslim travel ban” (hereafter simply “travel ban”). Trump’s travel ban received widespread attention and condemnation for its perceived targeting of Muslims, whether the Muslims had terrorist connections or not. In other words, Trump’s initiative was a blanket exclusion of individuals from certain countries under the auspices that they might be national security threats simply because of their religious practices. Many critics railed against Trump, calling his idea “racist.”<sup>185</sup> In response, Trump tweeted, “Everybody is arguing whether or not it is a BAN. Call it what you want, it is about keeping bad people (with bad intentions) out of country!”<sup>186</sup> By incorporating the typical extremist rhetorical tactic of “us vs. them” discourse,<sup>187</sup> Trump used Twitter to convey the message that, “We must keep ‘evil’ out of our country!”<sup>188</sup> Although Trump emphatically defended his travel ban as a national security policy, the proposal itself kept facing legal hurdles from federal judges. Trump characterized the judges who opposed the travel ban as “ridiculous,”<sup>189</sup> and he blamed these judges for placing America at risk: “Because the ban was lifted by a judge, many very bad and dangerous people may be pouring into our country. A terrible decision.”<sup>190</sup> Trump also tweeted that he, “Just cannot believe a judge would put our country in such peril. If something happens blame him and court system. People pouring in. Bad!”<sup>191</sup> Furthermore, he used the common rhetorical tactic of the fear appeal when he tweeted, “Interesting that certain Middle-Eastern countries agree with the ban. They know if certain people are allowed in it's death & destruction!”<sup>192</sup> and he posted, “The threat from radical Islamic terrorism is very real, just look at what is happening in Europe and the Middle-East. Courts must act fast!”<sup>193</sup> He even simply just tweeted this: “SEE YOU IN COURT, THE SECURITY OF OUR NATION IS AT STAKE!”<sup>194</sup> Trump also continued his strategy of victimhood by characterizing the federal judges as hamstringing his ability to provide security for Americans: “I have instructed Homeland Security to check people coming into our country VERY CAREFULLY. The courts are making the job very difficult!”<sup>195</sup> Additionally, in rare Trumpian form, he used a *logos* appeal when he tweeted, “Our legal system is broken! ‘77% of refugees allowed into U.S. since travel reprieve hail from seven suspect countries.’ (WT) SO DANGEROUS!”<sup>196</sup> as well as the next day when he stated, “72% of refugees admitted into U.S. (2/3 -2/11) during COURT BREAK-DOWN are from 7 countries: SYRIA, IRAQ, SOMALIA, IRAN, SUDAN, LIBYA &

<sup>184</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (April 23, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>185</sup> Martino, Andy. “Trump’s New Travel Ban Is as Racist as the Last One.” *The Outline* (March 6, 2017). <https://theoutline.com/post/1197/trump-s-new-travel-ban-is-as-racist-as-the-last-one>

<sup>186</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (February 1, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>187</sup> Zompetti, *Divisive Discourse*.

<sup>188</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (February 3, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>189</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (April 26, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>190</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (February 4, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>191</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (February 5, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>192</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (February 4, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>193</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (February 7, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>194</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (February 9, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>195</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (February 5, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>196</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (February 11, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

YEMEN.”<sup>197</sup> Trump also used his travel ban as an opportunity to connect with his base. As most conservatives abhor anything related to political correctness,<sup>198</sup> Trump portrayed opposition to his travel ban as a form of political correctness: “That’s right, we need a TRAVEL BAN for certain DANGEROUS countries, not some politically correct term that won’t help us protect our people!”<sup>199</sup> Naturally, Trump also used the travel ban as an opportunity to castigate Democrats, as he tweeted, “The Obstructionist Democrats make Security for our country very difficult. They use the courts and associated delay at all times. Must stop!”<sup>200</sup> Finally, Trump could characterize his travel ban initiative as a way to protect America from radical Islam in a way that no other President was able to accomplish. Case in point, Trump posted, “Radical Islamic Terrorism must be stopped by whatever means necessary! The courts must give us back our protective rights. Have to be tough!”<sup>201</sup> In this way, Trump incorporated these topics and tactics to appear “tough” in the minds of American voters.

*Strategy Seven: Personal Attacks against Clinton.* Additionally, while we know that Trump mostly tweeted about the dishonest and so-called “fake news,” his second most-tweeted topic between the Republican Convention and his oath of office were anti-Hillary comments. Although Trump covered many topic areas with his anti-Clinton messages, he uniformly connected them with one simple signifier: “Crooked Hillary.” Time and time again – nearly 200 times – Trump used the label “Crooked Hillary” each time he referred to his opponent. Clearly, the moniker “crooked” designated distrust and skepticism that called into question if Clinton was fit for the Presidency of the United States.

*Strategy Eight: Explicit Overtures toward the Base.* Between the Republican National Convention until the fall of 2017, Trump mentioned his slogan of “make America great again” (MAGA) or its variants (i.e., “make America safe again,” etc.) over 90 times, including simple tweets such as, “MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!”<sup>202</sup> And, given the frequent cases of police-involved racial shootings since 2015, it was telling that Trump never mentioned the victims of the shootings, but rather would tweet something like, “My thoughts and prayers are with the two police officers shot in Sebastian County, Arkansas. #LESM,”<sup>203</sup> or he would post, “Great job today by the NYPD in protecting the people and saving the climber.”<sup>204</sup> In other words, Trump went out of his way to applaud law enforcement while he noticeably failed to discuss the victims of racially-involved police altercations.

## Civil Consequences

As the tweets from both Trump and Clinton indicate, the traditional type of political campaign communication – endorsement of policies, critique of opposition policies, and the promotion of expertise and experience – were virtually nowhere to be found in the online messaging from the two 2016 presidential candidates. Instead, we see insults, demeaning inuendos, and inappropriate – even improper – comments about not only the political opposition, but also entire swaths of

<sup>197</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (February 12, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>198</sup> Lalami, Laila. “Why Republicans Cry Political Correctness.” *The Nation* (April 7, 2016). <https://www.thenation.com/article/why-republicans-cry-political-correctness/>

<sup>199</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (June 6, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>200</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (August 18, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>201</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (August 18, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>202</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (June 24, 2017). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>203</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (August 10, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.

<sup>204</sup> Trump, Donald J. *Twitter* (August 11, 2016). @RealDonaldTrump.



people in order to galvanize popular support from other demographic groups. The targeted nature of social media, particularly Twitter, allows politicians to emphasize particular issues for particular audiences.

Thus, while many have claimed that the 2016 presidential contest was uncivil, we now have evidence the supports why people probably feel this way. The use of Twitter by both candidates suggests that their communication about general themes and about each other were highly inflammatory and devoid of general and presidential etiquette. As a result, I fear that others perceive such communication practices as legitimate and therefore acceptable, meaning that Trump and Clinton can be role models to anyone following the communication techniques of presidential candidates, which, unfortunately in this case, means millions of Americans.

Now that we know that Twitter was used by the presidential candidates to advance uncivil, even vitriolic, opinions, we should entertain the possible implications of such debilitating rhetoric. Although a rhetorical analysis like this study does not purport to reveal the effects of such rhetoric on audiences for whom such discourse was intended, we can suggest that the incendiary comments from each candidate obviously appealed to their requisite base. Additionally, we might surmise that their tweets were intended to rattle their opposition. And, we know without a doubt that their social media messages provided fodder for the mainstream media and political pundits. Furthermore, the unique format of the Twitter platform perpetuates arguments by *pathos*, specifically appeals of victimhood and so-called “injustice frames” because “social media such as Twitter now allow them to voice their discontent without an intermediary channel.”<sup>205</sup>

A comparative thematic analysis allows us to not only reveal the degree of incivility in Clinton and Trump’s tweets, but also to recognize how the *form* of the message adds significance to the rhetoric’s overall meaning. In other words, this type of rhetorical criticism provides a way to examine a rhetorical text as a “verbal construction that blends form and content into a concrete whole – a whole that assigns meaning to a region of shared public experience and solicits an audience to embrace the meaning it constructs.”<sup>206</sup> With Twitter, “the form demands that they are greatly simplified; and the repeated production and consumption of simple messages, which endlessly redirect our attention elsewhere via hyperlinks, reshapes human cognition in ways that nurture simple-mindedness and promote short attention-spans.”<sup>207</sup> In presidential discourse, we see that simple tweets are retweeted, then mentioned in mainstream news, then perhaps tweeted again with a link to the story from the news. The message circulates, and it becomes more prominent and then the message becomes louder, and it has more impact, especially since it transmits “ideologies without intervening authorities or competing sources of discursive power.”<sup>208</sup>

Traditional rhetorical criticism analyzes the content of rhetorical arguments. In this study, we see how the form is also important. Furthermore, given our social media culture, this study suggests that looking at a particular medium – Twitter – also has important implications for rhetorical criticism. While analysis of Twitter may typically be conducted by computer-mediated communication (CMC) scholars or media ecologists, the present examination reveals how Twitter can be a ripe area for rhetorical investigations as well.

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<sup>205</sup> van Kessel, Stijn, and Remco Castelein. “Shifting the Blame: Populist Politicians’ Use of Twitter as a Tool of Opposition.” *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 12, no. 2(2016): 597.

<sup>206</sup> Leff, Michael and Andrew Sachs. “Words the Most Like Things: Iconicity and the Rhetorical Text.” *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54, no. 3(1990): 255.

<sup>207</sup> Ott, “The Age of Twitter,” 61.

<sup>208</sup> Schulz, Winfried. “Mediatization and New Media.” In *Mediatization of Politics. Understanding the Transformation of Western Democracies*, 57-69. Edited by Frank Esser & Jesper Strömbäck (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

When we also consider that the form of Twitter encourages truncated and informal messaging, the followers of Clinton and Trump's tweets engage in the conversation. The already uncivil comment by the candidate becomes reinforced with additional impolite discourse. In this way, "Twitter's lack of formality and intimacy undermines the social norms that uphold civility and predisposes users to engage in both divisive and derisive communication."<sup>209</sup> As a result, we can see how these tweets "do not foster reasoned public deliberation among people of diverse backgrounds and experiences; they produce a uniformed, uncritical, and irresponsible electorate."<sup>210</sup> Thus, when Clinton castigates Trump to make her position look better, or when Trump's tweets are overwhelmingly "negative in connotation—and the majority of them are out right insults,"<sup>211</sup> then it should not surprise us that the circulation of these original messages become part of the news cycle and the overall campaign message from the candidates.

The potential hazards of relying too heavily on social media for communication in general, and political communication in particular, do not need to be rehashed here. But, this study certainly adds to the overall conversation about how tweets can add significance to political rhetoric. For politicians and pundits, Twitter is an efficient method of disseminating carefully-packaged messages to large audiences with enormous speed. For the resource-strapped candidate, Twitter is also an extremely cost-effective method of communicating to the electorate. On the other hand, as this study reveals, Twitter can also encourage, if not construct, uncivil messages that perpetuate falsehoods, inaccurate characterizations, and demeaning drivel. It can weaken democratic discourse by emphasizing banal affect instead of meaningful policies and agendas. As a result, studies like this one must continue to note the implications of such rhetoric in political communication.

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<sup>209</sup> Ott, "The Age of Twitter," 62.

<sup>210</sup> Ott, "The Age of Twitter," 65.

<sup>211</sup> Crockett, Zachary. "What I Learned Analyzing 7 Months of Donald Trump's Tweets." *Vox* (May 6, 2016). <https://www.vox.com/2016/5/16/11603854/donald-trump-twitter>