

2020

Political Spectacle and Twitter Usage by 2016 U.S. Presidential Candidates: A Content Analysis

Robert William Miller
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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Robert William Miller, Jr.

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Political Spectacle and Twitter Usage by 2016 U.S. Presidential Candidates:

A Content Analysis

by

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MA, Florida Atlantic University, 1978

BS, University of Georgia, 1977

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

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Abstract

Political polarization in the United States increased dramatically in the 21st Century and the resulting partisan divisions impeded compromise necessary for effective governance. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to examine whether, and to what extent, Twitter usage by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump contributed to political polarization during the 2016 U.S. Presidential race. Political spectacle, developed by Murray Edelman, served as the conceptual framework. Political spectacle involved the creation of an alternative universe of facts and interpretations to isolate opponents. A qualitative case study research design was employed to explore the Twitter usage by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump during the 2016 Presidential election between January and November 2016. Clinton and Trump used Twitter to divide voters by forcing a choice on a binary issue and tailoring content to create separate universes in which both candidates cannot be correct. Edelman referred to this concept as *bimodal value structuring*. The weapon of choice was personal attacks. One third of Trump's 3,981 Tweets included personal attacks on Clinton's character, often referring to *Crooked Hillary*. One fourth of Clinton's 5,555 Tweets included accusations of racism, sexism, or xenophobia. Twitter exacerbated political polarization by creating *echo chambers* that communicate slogans without context or nuance. Study findings raised consciousness by identifying how politicians use polarization to their benefit and a detriment to the political process and effective governance. Future research is needed on how to use this knowledge to change political rhetoric and reduce polarization.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Thomas Spencer Litter who literally taught me the art of how to win elections with effective communications. We spent fourteen years working together on dozens of campaigns from 1982 until his death in 1996. Not only was he a business partner and a mentor, but he was also my best friend. Not a day goes by when I do not reflect on the question, “what would Tom do?” When I can get the answer to that question, it is usually successful. You are still missed 24 years later.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Online social media networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, enabled individuals and groups to interact person-to-person, discuss and share news and significant events, and take part in political discourse (Yaqub, Chun, Atluri, & Vaidya, 2017). The simultaneous adoption of social media and ubiquitous smart phones have enabled individuals and groups to communicate, without limits, on time or location. Consequently, social media has become a formidable medium for politicians to communicate directly with voters, build political volunteer organizations, and generate political contributions and discourse (Pal, Thawani, Van Der Vlugt, Out, & Chandra, 2018).

The nature of Twitter, wherein an individual follows a person, or a group, differs substantially from typical reciprocal relationships (Yaqub et al., 2017). On social media, a candidate's influence is mediated through the filter of a social media user's network, whose users rely on for credible information (Jacovi et al., 2011). In political campaigns, citizens are contacted through social intermediaries, known as re-Tweets, as a means of public reinforcement. The resulting interaction may individually or collectively establish loyalty directly, or indirectly, through trust of the intermediary Twitter account holder. Twitter's potential to sway opinion lies in the collaboration of like-minded individuals that amplify a leader's message (Yaqub et al., 2017).

This study was an exploration of Twitter usage by Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton during the 2016 U.S. Presidential campaign. Earlier research suggested that Donald Trump's social media strategy was amateurish compared to Hillary Clinton's

more traditional and professional approach (Enli, 2017). While there was a perception that Trump's social media message was less professional, registered voters characterized his social media message as more authentic. Trump promoted a pop-culture persona with a notorious reputation to defy traditional political norms. Trump's approach favored sensationalism and attention-grabbing messages influenced by a lifetime in the entertainment industry. Research suggested Trump's strategy of acting in ways perceived as inappropriate for a politician generated loyal support from those disaffected by the Obama administration (Wells et al., 2016). The study extended social media research regarding the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election to individual issues using a rhetorical framework. The positive social benefit of the study was to advance knowledge on social media messaging, a phenomenon whose impact on public discourse would currently be difficult to over-state (Enli, 2017).

Chapter 1 includes background on social media and characterizes Twitter's user base and influence in the political process. The general problem of political polarization and how the 2016 Presidential campaign exacerbated the issue is reviewed. Murray Edelman's (2013) conceptual framework is introduced and used to frame the research questions. The qualitative case study research design is introduced and how content analysis was used to address the research questions, and the chapter concluded with a summary.

Background

Twitter's social media platform, and easy to use tools, is a low-cost, direct messaging application that enables communication control through dis-intermediation of mainstream media channels (Groshek & Koc-Michalska, 2017). Twitter's success, with

more than 126 million active monthly U.S. users, as of 2019, created an entirely new means of *e-campaigning* used by politicians to speak directly to supporters rather than relying on biased, and sometimes ill informed, print, internet, and broadcast news sources (Schweitzer, 2012; Zamora-Medina & Zurutuza-Muñoz, 2014). Consequently, political campaigns determined content, tone, theme, and word choice delivery with the aim of defining the daily narrative, creating viral messages, and directing mainstream media coverage (Bode & Dalrymple, 2016). Research for this study attempted to understand this increased use in the context of the 2016 presidential election. Based on a review of the literature, a gap in the literature emerged relating to how Donald Trump's use of Twitter was distinct from Hillary's, and what effect that had on political discourse.

Another critical element Twitter's platform enables is collaboration (Groshek & Koc-Michalska, 2017). Collaboration enables strategically pre-planned events, or pseudo-events, to manage the narrative, or detract from an opponent's narrative. Political campaigns employed a range of social media network dynamics to create citizen engagement. Collaborative action online is critical to a populist strategy, particularly when the mainstream media is positioned as antagonistic to a politician. By reaching out directly to supporters and disintermediating the mainstream media, the collaborative action of citizens retweeting messages reinforces the politician's claim to populist hero status (Wells et al., 2016). Collaborative message dissemination online relies first on the individual's Twitter network, then on a layer of core supporters and campaign operatives, to amplify and captivate the citizenry. Controlling the narrative relies on the network effect to mobilize cooperative efforts.

The Twitter platform is structured as asymmetrical information sharing, where an individual non-reciprocally follows someone (interest relationship), rather than being mutually connected (Groshek & Koc-Michalska, 2017). In interest relationships, individuals trust certain figures for news and information and forward that data into their familiarity relationships (Jacovi et al., 2011). Political campaigns reach the citizenry through social networks that forward the narrative along with the associated credibility of the re-Tweeter. The Tweet then becomes a space for continued social discourse where the messengers themselves can individually or collaboratively affirm loyalty to the politician or policy. Spaces of social discourse are valuable sources of feedback to the campaign because politicians rarely rely on a single form of messaging but are constantly tweaking their message to see what creates news for consumption.

Former U.S. President Barack Obama introduced social media in politics during the 2012 Presidential campaign, using Facebook and Twitter to reach constituents (Bode & Dalrymple, 2016). Obama combined door-to-door campaigning with social media campaigning using it as the virtual alternative of a handshake. Since the Obama presidency, many studies have spearheaded the use of these strategies, advising political experts on how to manage their political yield.

Social media tools, such as Twitter and Facebook as a form of *e-campaigning* enabled politicians to disintermediate traditional print, broadcast, and online media outlets (Pal et al., 2018). Political actors became the source of information and controlled the tone, theme, and content for the narrative spread virally by followers, or through the mainstream media's coverage of the politician's social media feed (Bode & Dalrymple, 2016). The character of the messages ranged from small formal press releases to informal

criticism, often using humor and sarcasm. The short tweet helps promote an impulsive, simplistic, and uncivil format (Ott, 2017). Politicians' Twitter antagonistic styles evolved based on constituents' preferences characterized by abusive and condescending rhetoric (Edelman, 2013; Ott, 2017; Tromble, 2018).

Problem Statement

Political polarization in the United States dramatically increased in the 21st Century, and the resulting partisan divisions impede compromise necessary for effective governance (Bail et al., 2018). Americans are deeply divided regarding controversial issues such as inequality, gun control, and immigration, and those divisions increasingly aligned with partisan political identities. Partisan identification significantly predicts preferences on social policy issues nearly three times as well as any other demographic factor—such as education or age (Dimock, 2014). Social media applications, such as Twitter, exacerbate political polarization by creating *echo chambers* that prevent people from being exposed to information that contradicts partisan rhetoric (Bail et al., 2018). What is not known is whether, and to what extent, Twitter usage by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump contributed to political polarization during the 2016 U.S. Presidential race.

Daily social media use by Americans increased dramatically in the run up to the 2016 Presidential Election resulting in 126 million Twitter daily users, and 210 million Facebook daily users in the United States (Wojcik & Hughes, 2019; Zaccaria, Del Vicario, Quattrociocchi, Scala, & Pietronero, 2019). Social media dramatically increased as a tool for Presidential candidates to communicate with potential constituencies (Yaqub et al., 2017). Social media platforms provided massive user bases to share messages in

real time, cheaply, and without depending on favorable treatment from mainstream media outlets (Statista, 2018; Yaqub et al., 2017). Disintermediation of the mainstream media enabled Donald Trump to communicate directly with his populist voter base, which some believe accounted for his victory. It is therefore not surprising that Twitter played a very notable role in the spread of information regarding diverse policy points for both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump in the U.S. Presidential Election of 2016 (Stolee & Caton, 2018). Social media platforms, such as Twitter, enabled candidates to engage the media, donors, volunteers, and voters on a one-to-one basis, and develop a more personalized relationship with stakeholders than through the traditional indirect channels of television, radio, newspapers, or direct mail.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to examine whether, and to what extent, Twitter usage by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump contributed to political polarization during the 2016 U.S. Presidential race. The use of multiple realities to create political narratives by Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton during the 2016 Presidential campaign might have contributed to an already polarized electorate (Bail et al., 2018). Polarized political rhetoric promotes a *carnivalistic* political environment that promotes problematic ridicule, abuse, or debasement of oppositional voices (Ott, 2017; Udupa, 2018). Social media creates echo chambers with mutually exclusive alternative realities that may promote polarized perspectives. This trend has the potential for serious negative social consequences and yearns for addition research to describe and address the phenomenon (Bail et al., 2018).

Research Questions

The following research questions served to form the basis for this study:

RQ1. How did Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump differ in their use of Twitter during the 2016 U.S. Presidential race between November and January 2016?

RQ2. How did Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump use of Twitter contribute to political polarization during the 2016 U.S. Presidential race?

Conceptual Framework for the Study

The work of political scientist Murray Edelman served as the conceptual framework for the study. Edelman suggested that *political spectacle* involves the intentional creation of *alternative realities* using rhetorical techniques (Edelman, 2013). The political speaker formulates a set of circumstances within an alternative reality, through a process known as *making worlds*, using rhetorical methods to convince listeners of a point of view inconsistent with objective facts (Goodman, 1978). Alternative realities are accepted because it is the language about events rather than the actual events themselves that members of society experience (Edelman, 2013). Edelman suggested that political rhetoric, compounded by sympathetic media outlets, socialize the public to certain accept alternate realities. Each political party uses language, thought, and action shape to shape one another into competing realities. Competing political parties describe the same event using diametrically opposed versions of reality relying on *unprovable* premises for which there is always *evidence*.

A frequently employed technique to create an alternative reality is the creation of a pseudo-event (Boorstin, 2012). Pseudo-events are fabrications by political actors to create a narrative, which is then used as a prism for evaluating an opponent's behaviors

and actions (Boorstin, 2012). A politician's repeated claims of their opponents' character, or political identity, becomes truth over time to his or her audience, whether truthful or not. A pseudo-event is not necessarily an *actual* event but may be a representation of one. For example, a military airstrike is not a pseudo-event; however, the specter of an airstrike, continually repeated to the public, would make for one (Edelman, 2013). The pseudo-event may be characterized as a *crisis* that imbues politicians with the right to take extraordinary action to deal with a situation, the subtleties of which are beyond the capability of ordinary citizens to comprehend.

The ascent of pseudo-events has been attributed to social media's growth for several reasons. Social media enabled and amplified pseudo-events, reaching a crescendo of alternative facts during the 2016 Presidential election (Gonawela et al., 2018), particularly on Facebook and Twitter. Facebook or Twitter posts lack fact-checking or confirmation, and with the rapid velocity of the news cycle, drew broadcast media into the fracas (Stolee & Caton, 2018).

The political spectacle is reinforced by pseudo-events and political actors repeating pejorative, dehumanizing labels created and attributed by their leader (Gonawela et al., 2018). Whether it was Hillary Clinton coining the term *deplorables*, or Trump's moniker of *Crooked Hillary*, the coarseness of political rhetoric was amplified by social media platforms. Edelman and Edelman (2001) presented the idea of the *political enemy*, where an opponent is framed as immoral and possessing debatable integrity. These negative qualities are directed at the person rather than at their political position. Therefore, use of the political enemy is an attempt to characterize a political

battle as a moral one, allowing the actor to symbolize righteousness while characterizing his or her opponent as epitomizing the wrong in society (Gonawela et al., 2018).

Nature of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to examine whether, and to what extent, Twitter usage by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump contributed to political polarization during the 2016 U.S. Presidential race. Qualitative inquiry involves the exploration of social processes in context to understand how individuals derive meaning from social interactions and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Yin, 2018). Qualitative research involves interpretive, naturalistic, and inductive processes to study phenomena in their natural settings while attempting to make sense of and interpret meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Content analysis was employed to develop richly textured descriptions and analyses of the complex social phenomenon of political discourse. Qualitative case studies enable exploration of meaning individuals or groups give to a social or human interaction. A qualitative research design was chosen because the problem statement, research questions, and purpose require analysis of unstructured Twitter posts using content analysis and coding techniques consistent with qualitative inquiry.

Twitter posts by Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) and Hillary Clinton (@HillaryClinton) were collected and analyzed for the period of January 2016, which was just prior to the first primary, through November 7th, 2016. This period reflects Twitter posts for the entire 2016 Presidential campaign and contains approximately 3,981 Tweets from Donald J. Trump and 4,200 Tweets from Hillary Clinton. Content analysis, an iterative process of coding recurring ideas, phrases, and themes, were employed

address the research questions. The specific objective of this study was to uncover themes and patterns that emerged in Twitter usage during the 2016 Presidential election. The qualitative research involved the broad collection of richly textured information from which general themes are inductively identified and ultimately interpretation of meaning created (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Definitions

Fake news. Fake news is defined as false stories circulated largely through social media (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

Junk news. Junk news generally comes from doubtful sources, who publish deliberately misleading news stories or articles with deceptive intent, an ideological slant, and incorrect or misleading information (Narayanan et al., 2018).

Political base. Political base refers to the hyper-partisan of followers who will support their candidate with little regard for new information (Stolee & Caton, 2018).

Political spectacle. Political spectacle refers the formulation a set of circumstances within an alternate reality, through a process known as *making worlds*, using rhetorical methods to convince listeners of a point of view inconsistent with some or many objective facts (Goodman, 1978).

Pseudo-events. A pseudo-event is an activity conducted for the purpose of media or publicity, including events covered in the mass media (Boorstin, 2012)

Social media. Social media refers to websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking, including but not limited to Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, and Snap (Narayanan et al., 2018).

Assumptions

The primary assumption for the qualitative study was the veracity and availability of Donald Trump's and Hillary Clinton's Tweets for the defined research period. Since Twitter post data is collected and made available by Twitter itself, and the volume of information is far too large to check reliability, it is assumed that all of the data were retained and that the detail of each tweet was accurately captured and stored (Leedy, Ormrod, & Johnson, 2019). While the Twitter databases examined for this study claimed to have captured all deleted Tweets prior to their deletion, there was no practical method for auditing that claim.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study is the approximately 3,981 Tweets from Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) and 4,200 Tweets from Hillary Clinton (@HillaryClinton) published between November and January 2016, in the run-up to the 2016 November Presidential election. Content analysis were employed to characterize and synthesize both candidates' narratives as a means of identifying recurring themes and their impact of political rhetoric.

The study data collection period was delimited to January 2016 through November 7th, 2016 and included approximately 3,981 Tweets from Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump). There were 4,200 Tweets from Hillary Clinton (@HillaryClinton) included. No data from Facebook posts, blogs, news outlets, or opinion formats were included, for practical resource reasons.

Limitations

Qualitative inquiry, by its nature, limits generalizability of study findings due to the narrow but deep data collection methods. Delimiting data collection to only Tweets for the one year prior to the election introduces the possibility that an unidentified confounding variable may account for study findings attributable to the candidates' Twitter rhetoric. Excluding all non-Twitter sources of data, such as political speeches, interviews, first 100-day plans, statements, policy briefs, etc., creates substantial potential that unmeasured confounding variables might change study findings.

Significance

Research for this study explored how Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton used Twitter to further their 2016 Presidential campaigns. There was a gap in the peer-reviewed literature on the impact of Twitter on Presidential elections. There are numerous academic publications on Twitter as a communications tool, but there is not an agreed upon methodology as to the effective use of Twitter as a campaign technique. Research from this study contributed to understanding the impact of Twitter upon Presidential elections. By the 2012 U.S. Presidential election campaign, every candidate supported a Twitter presence, yet there is not a formula or methodology as to what constitutes effective political Twitter communications. The practical application for political candidates, consultants, and those who study them could be significant.

The American voter is believed to benefit the most from dialogue and social change. Improving dialogue between voters and political campaigns is good for democracy. Among the pundit's biggest complaints is that a low information voter is problematic. Research for this study sought to find a new medium for creating high

information voters who can help improve society. One area the study examined is the extent to which candidates desire informed voters and donors. Given the 280-character limitation of Twitter, the medium is ideally suited to sound-bite persuasion. By examining whether candidates are using sound bites or links to more extensive messages showed what candidates think is most effective in Twitter messaging. While there is a tendency on the part of many to categorize Twitter as a *sound bite* medium, with the ability to link to websites, blogs, YouTube videos, and other social media platforms, Twitter is able to convey more information than is commonly perceived.

Social media in general, and Twitter specifically, plays a critical role in Presidential electoral campaigns (Yaqub et al., 2017). Real-time dissemination of information using Twitter enables politicians to broadcast their message and control the narrative without the influence of mainstream media *spin*. For nearly every event, more than one version of an event (*truth*) is constantly available for voter consumption, one for each politician and repeated by their sympathetic media outlets. The result has been polarization of the populace, each knowing they can produce a media story to validate their world view. The aim of the study was to identify recurring themes and patterns that emerged in Twitter usage during the 2016 Presidential campaign using content analysis.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to examine whether, and to what extent, Twitter usage by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump contributed to political polarization during the 2016 U.S. Presidential race. Twitter enables politicians and campaign organizations to interact directly with constituents to share news and significant events and take part in political discourse without the mainstream media

acting as an intermediary (Yaqub et al., 2017). Edelman and Edelman's conceptual framework of political spectacle served as the framework for the study. Social media tools, such as Twitter, are a form of *e-campaigning* that enabled politicians to disintermediate traditional print, broadcast, and online media outlets (Pal et al., 2018). The study involved analysis of all Tweets by Donald J. Trump and Hillary Clinton between January 1, 2016 and election day, November 8, 2016. Chapter 2 includes a review of recent literature regarding the use of social media by national politicians to shape the narrative and influence voters. Chapter 3 describes the research design and rationale, methodology, procedure, and trustworthiness issues. Chapter 4 describes study findings organized by research question, and Chapter 5 includes a discussion, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to examine whether, and to what extent, Twitter usage by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump contributed to political polarization during the 2016 U.S. Presidential race. Daily social media use increased dramatically leading up to the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, with users reaching 126 million people via Twitter and 210 million on Facebook (Wojcik & Hughes, 2019; Zaccaria et al., 2019). Researchers noted that social media was increasingly used in politics for messaging by politicians and for users to get their news (Enli, 2017; Groshek & Koc-Michalska, 2017; McKinnon, Semmens, Moon, Amarasekara, & Bolliet, 2016; Wells et al., 2016). Research for this study attempted to understand this increased use of Twitter in the context of the 2016 presidential election. Based on a review of the literature, a gap emerged relating to how Donald Trump's use of Twitter was distinct from Hillary's, and what effect that had on political discourse. Some studies hinted at Trump using Twitter in a distinct fashion, but no comprehensive study into all the ways Trump distinguished his usage was conducted. This study was designed to fill in that gap. Chapter 2 is structured in the following manner. First, a review of the literature search strategy used for this research, and a review of the theoretical foundation is presented. Second, a review of the relevant literature in both current and seminal frameworks. Third, a critique of the literature. Finally, a summary of the chapter is presented.

Literature Search Strategy

The following online databases were searched: Google Scholar, PLOS, Research Gate, Sage Publications, Semantic Scholar, and Springer Link. Data for the study was

drawn from theses, dissertations, and peer-reviewed journal articles. Identifying a full list of keyword search words was an iterative process of reading articles and using that content to identify new keywords, and so on. The final keywords and key search phrases included: *social media*, *social media networks*, *social media use*, *political messaging*, *social media and politics*, *social media and elections*, *social media and 2016 election*, *Twitter and political campaigns*, *Donald Trump and social media*, and *Hillary Clinton and social media*. Most of the literature selected for the study was written in the previous five years. Approximately one third of the cited sources involved quantitative research, one third was qualitative, and one third provided background, context, and theory.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study consists of the work of Edelman and Edelman (2001), who indicated that the creation of political spectacle was a purposeful use of rhetorical techniques. Such spectacle was used to create a perceived alternative reality using rhetoric to convince audiences to invest in a specific point of view (Goodman, 1978). Those who use such techniques rely on the pseudo-event to convince the public that there is a potential crisis that only the speaker would be capable of responding (Boorstin, 2012). Pseudo-events were pointed to as potentially potent in the context of Twitter, where such events could be created and amplified through a speaker's extensive following (Gonawela et al., 2018). The 2016 U.S. Presidential election exemplified the potential for social media to amplify alternative facts by repeating unverified information and contributing to an alternative reality, as suggested by Edelman and Edelman (2001).

Political spectacle allows for a reinforcement of pseudo-events and alternative realities based on alternative facts, given that a receptive audience responds to the words of the speaker and adopts their rhetoric (Gonawela et al., 2018). Key, to the creation of these realities, is the creation of a political adversary that helps to frame the speaker's argument. This adversary embodies a lack of integrity and is personally attacked, rather than having their political positions attacked, by the speaker. As such, the use of an adversary is key to framing political battles, instead of a battle of morals that might position the speaker as the embodiment of the good of society, and the adversary as the embodiment of the ills of society (Gonawela et al., 2018).

Literature Review Related to Key Constructs

This section describes and synthesizes extant research regarding the structure of social media with respect to political campaigns in general and the 2016 presidential campaign in particular. Based on the research questions, Twitter serves as the focus, but Facebook and relation social media platforms are discussed.

Social Media Networks

Social media networks have become one of the most dominant forms of communication and information sharing in the world (Bahner et al., 2012). In definition, social media is characterized as any form of online media that facilitates communication between individuals (Bahner et al., 2012). These online media channels are not typified by unidirectional delivery of information. Rather, individuals engage with the media, share it, and connect with others in a discussion of a specific piece of news or information. Social media revolves around the concept of discussion. Individuals on social networks are expected to discuss and provide feedback on postings. As such, social

media is characterized not by a one-way delivery of information, but rather by a two-way interaction with the candidate.

Social media characteristics were used to define what social media is, though attempts were also made to systemize its definition. Carr and Hayes (2015) noted that people held perceptions about what constituted social media based on perceptions of technology. Researchers suggested that social media needed a robust definition drawn from public relations, information technology, and management scholarship, since social media evolved to encompass each of these areas. Researchers also noted that social media was uniquely positioned to test how human communications occurred, both directly with one another and, via a digital medium.

Facebook. Facebook is a specific kind of social media network. Facebook allows users to create a personal profile that can be made available to a select few, or to many people across the Internet (Caers et al., 2013; Faris, 2008). Therefore, access to a person's profile is varied. Using the network, Facebook users can connect with multiple other likeminded individuals and create a web of friends. These friends can be messaged and can correspond by writing on one another's profiles.

Beyond posting text messages on other profiles, people can post videos and pictures, allowing for different types of media to rapidly spread across the Facebook network (Caers et al., 2013). Finally, Facebook is characterized by degrees of connection. Some connections in a web of friends are closer than others and can lead to conditions in which certain messages from specific friends are prioritized regarding how they appear in a user's message feed. A systematic literature review indicated that Facebook holds considerable influence as a global platform (Caers et al., 2013). As of 2012, Facebook

serviced one billion monthly active users, in various languages, across 70 nations around the world. Given its size, Facebook possesses a significant momentum within the social media sphere, granting it remarkable influence.

Twitter. Twitter is similar, but distinct from Facebook. Twitter, as originally conceived, was positioned as a micro-blogging service (Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010). As of 2019, Twitter serviced approximately 68 million active accounts in the U.S. Unlike Facebook, Twitter limited the size of messages that could be published in each post. Despite the limitations on posting size, Twitter facilitates approximately 1.47 billion social interactions annually and between 68 million members, as of December 2019.

Trending topics are specifically highlighted by the service as being highly discussed, and that others may wish to participate in, suggesting the role of the service as a curator of information and topic discussions (Kwak et al., 2010). Twitter itself highlights certain features that help distinguish it as a service. Retweets allow users to share a person's message with their own followers (Kwak et al., 2010). When a person posts, all their followers receive the post, allowing for a retweeted message to be sent to multiple users. Like Facebook, users can also post photos and videos.

One of the distinguishing features of Twitter is the use of the hashtag symbol (#). Hashtags help users locate prior conversations about politics and other previously tweeted topics (Small, 2011). Within a posted message, the # symbol before a word marks that word as the subject of the post. All users searching for a conversation using that word find posts marked with that hashtag.

A post marked *#politics*, for example, would come up in any search on Twitter regarding the topic of politics (Small, 2011). This ability to use hashtags can be of

specific usefulness to politicians, who can tag their posts about specific topics of national concern. However, the ability to address political topics can be used by anyone. Anyone can craft a message and use a hashtag to submit their post to the larger dialogue occurring about that topic, which has helped democratize media by increasing the number of people who can participate in news discussions or submit their own topics for discussion. Twitter is also advantageous because it allows for topics in real time. When an event occurs, Twitter users can share their thoughts and comment on others' posts in response to that event by using a related hashtag to mark their messages.

Social media networks are quite influential. Between the billions of social relations cultivated by Twitter (Kwak et al., 2010), and the many connections created using Facebook (Caers et al., 2013), the potential to amplify a message exists due to the millions of interactions possible on social media networks. Therefore, social networks have become one of the most dominant forms of communication in the world (Bahner et al., 2012).

User Interactions on Social Media

Researchers have previously pointed to user interactions on social media as a means of raising brand awareness and purchase intention. Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt, and Fuller (2013) noted that an organization's brand could be elevated through social media activities. Specifically, when Facebook users engaged with an organization's fan page, it created positive effects on general brand awareness and raised purchase intentions. This study was not specific to politics but did indicate how public awareness and loyalty could be cultivated using a Facebook page. Researchers noted that the effect of social media engagement on increasing brand perceptions was cross-national (Hudson, Huang, Roth,

& Madden, 2016). Researchers noted that companies across the globe were attempting to increase their brand, and research in the UK, France, and the U.S., all seemed to indicate that cultural differences did impact the effect of social media on branding, but there was generally improved brand relationships when such engagement was promoted (Hudson et al., 2016). Research by both Hutter et al. (2013) and Hudson et al. (2016) indicated the positive impact for organizations when they engaged with the public.

Regarding raising brand awareness, researchers noted that the age group being targeted was responding in different ways (Rohm, Kaltcheva, & Milne, 2013). Brand image was positively promoted through increased social media engagement (Rohm et al., 2013). However, there were often differentiated effects between individuals engaging with social media. Women responded more strongly to a brand when promotional efforts were made by an organization. Younger people were more likely to engage with Twitter for political information, but older individuals were more likely to engage with Facebook pages to stay current with information. Findings indicate there may be certain parts of the population predisposed to information seeking and are a more receptive audience for various messaging (Rohm et al., 2013).

Researchers indicated that when people interact with an organization online, the individual also potentially engages with the larger community. Dessart, Veloutsou, and Morgan-Thomas (2015) indicated that the Online Brand Community is a source of community participation for many of those engaging with a brand online. Researchers indicated that for any organization attempting to increase engagement with another organization, it is important for individuals to have positive attitudes toward the community surrounding the brand. As such, brands wanting to cultivate positive attitudes

about increasing participation with the surrounding community needed to maximize the positive impact of being engaged online.

In the areas of business, the use of social media was likened to developing strategies for customer management. Specifically, social media aligned with new concepts of customer management that emphasized creating close connections and facilitating collaborative experiences that encouraged dialogue among those customers (Heller-Baird & Parasnis, 2011). As such, social media emerged as a means of managing customers by creating a better understanding of what customers value. Researchers indicated that social media was primarily about engaging with friends and family rather than brands (Heller-Baird & Parasnis, 2011). This was not inconsistent with the research by Turcotte, York, Irving, Scholl, and Pingree (2015), who noted that most people were more likely to believe a news story on social media when it was recommended by someone they trusted, such as a close friend. The findings of Turcotte et al. (2015) and Heller-Baird and Parasnis (2011) highlighted the importance of existing social ties to amplifying social media messaging. As such, research indicated that organizations that used messaging must consider the impact of social ties to building trust. This was also inconsistent with the notion of the importance of communities to creating engagement with a brand or organization (Dessart et al., 2015).

Online communities may be of importance among younger people. Researchers noted that while social interactions were important, they were increasingly important to younger people, who were replacing real-life social relationships with online relationships (Decieux, Heinen, & Willems, 2019). Social interactions conducted online on social media were particularly important among young people, essentially changing

traditional friendship patterns. Online social relationships complemented, and partially replaced, real-life relationships, suggesting the importance of online interactions to young people (Decieux et al., 2019).

The general findings in this section of the literature were not specific to politics but did highlight social interactions online, and how people engaged with online communities. Organizations stand to benefit from engaging with social media users online, since doing so helps to promote their image and create positive awareness of the organization (Hudson et al., 2016; Hutter et al., 2013). However, organizations hoping to increase positive sentiment had to partly rely on social interactions between users. Communities oriented around an organization were important to fostering positive sentiment and engagement toward the organization (Dessart et al., 2015). Organizations also needed to consider that these positive communities may be important since trust in a message partly relied on that message being communicated by trusted friends (Turcotte et al., 2015).

2016 Candidates' Use of Social Media

During the 2016 Presidential Campaign, Donald Trump's use of social media was contrasted by Hillary Clinton's use regarding professionalism and authenticity (Wells et al., 2016). Researchers indicated that Hillary Clinton's use of social media was far more traditional and professional in nature (Enli, 2017). In contrast, Trump's use of social media was far more amateurish. However, though there was a perception that Trump's use of social media was less professional, there was a simultaneous belief that his use of social media was more authentic. As such, amateurism was not necessarily a negative for Trump, who benefitted from the perception that he was more authentic. Researchers

indicated that Trump embodied a powerful contrast to the traditional distinction between politics and entertainment (Wells et al., 2016). Trump embodied a pop-culture persona, a brand name, and a notorious reputation in a single individual who defied traditional political norms. His approach to campaigning, while considered amateurish and unprofessional from conventional political perspectives, was made to generate attention, and cultivated from a lifetime of entertaining the public. For Trump, constantly generating attention, even if some considered it inappropriate for a politician, was key to maintaining electoral support.

Favorable impressions of Trump indicated a desire among supporters for authentically human, even amateurish, messaging as opposed to hackneyed vapid political messaging (Enli, 2017). The 2016 election made it clear that traditional distinctions in political discussions had partially broken down (Persily, 2017). Whereas there had previously been a group of political insiders and outsiders, the new relationship between politicians and the public, facilitated by social media services, broke these distinctions down. This breakdown in traditional political distinctions was partly manifested in Trump himself and his willingness to break established political norms (Persily, 2017). Trump's success was partly a result of a breakdown in the influence of traditional institutions, ongoing for some time prior to the 2016 election (Persily, 2017).

In the opinion of Grinberg, Joseph, Friedland, Swire-Thompson, and Lazer (2019), Donald Trump was more likely than Hillary Clinton to have benefitted from fake news on social media, and specifically Twitter, due to the characteristics of those most likely to share fake news stories (Grinberg et al., 2019). Older or conservative leaning individuals who were highly engaged in political news were the most likely to engage

with fake news sources (Grinberg et al., 2019). However, this engagement was exceedingly concentrated, “Only 1% of individuals accounted for 80% of fake news source exposures, and 0.1% accounted for nearly 80% of fake news sources shared” (Grinberg et al., 2019, p. 374). Given Trump’s appeal to this specific part of the population as a Republican candidate, he was consequently more likely to be the beneficiary of stories being shared. Such findings were consistent with the research by Allcott and Gentzkow (2017), who indicated that fake news stories were far more likely to be damaging to Hillary Clinton.

Research continued to indicate the powerful role that social media played in supporting the Trump campaign. Narayanan et al. (2018) noted the fact that during the 2016 election there was a significant amount of junk news circulated over social media. Examination of these junk news stories indicated that there were consistently common sources of multiple junk news stories. Further, Twitter acted as a particularly powerful amplifier of junk news that specifically benefited Trump. The researchers identified a consistent network of Trump supporters who continuously circulated more junk news than any other group of junk news spreaders combined (Narayanan et al., 2018). Similar findings were identified on Facebook, where extremely hard right leaning pages spread the most junk news possible. However, between the two social media networks, there was a wider audience for junk news on Twitter.

The 2016 election provided researchers with an opportunity to better understand how political candidates’ use of social media impacted voter intentions. Specifically, researchers indicated it was possible for candidates to increase the perception that they would win the election by using social media as a messaging vehicle (Macafee,

McLaughlin, & Rodriguez, 2019). As individuals followed candidates over social media, they increasingly believed that their candidate would win. However, the impact was limited between political candidates and their supporters. In contrast, even if politically engaged users were following the opposition candidate, they did not come to believe that the opposition candidate would win. As such, findings suggested the value of politicians cultivating an online following would increase beliefs that a specific candidate would win (Macafee et al., 2019).

The 2016 U.S. presidential election was an illustration of conflicting styles between candidates, but also a demonstration of the disparity in how candidates benefited from the use of social media. Hillary Clinton relied heavily on the spread of fake and junk news, which was supported by a committed network of Clinton supporters who spread damaging messages about Donald Trump (Grinberg et al., 2019; Narayanan et al., 2018). Trump also benefited from being able to embrace a persona that seemed outside of the norms of traditional political figures, relying on notoriety to create a powerful image that remained authentic among his supporters (Enli, 2017; Persily, 2017; Wells et al., 2016). Such findings therefore illustrated that the difference in 2016 was partly one of personality and presentation but also one of difference in support networks.

Twitter for Political Messaging

Twitter is an important source for messaging on various political issues, and this was also the case in 2016. Researchers used coverage of climate change as a case study highlighting Twitter's importance in this regard (McKinnon et al., 2016). The study was designed around the idea that Twitter had become a hotbed of activity and political discussion. Twitter's increasingly prominent role as a source of political debate was

emphasized between 2013 and 2016 during the Australian federal election campaign, of which climate change discussion was a major part. When compared to traditional media, social media was found to be a far more likely source of positive sentiment toward reducing climate change. Researchers concluded that Twitter needed to be used by policymakers to a far greater degree to engage with the public on various issues, particularly given the gap between the positive sentiment toward issues that were not mirrored in the traditional media (McKinnon et al., 2016).

There is value in politicians becoming more highly engaged with Twitter. The most highly politically engaged members of the public are those most likely to use Twitter to reach out to politicians (Vaccari et al., 2015). Researchers noted that there were two levels of engagement, including low-threshold and high-threshold political engagement. Drawing on a survey of Italians discussing the 2013 Italian election, researchers found that as the level of political information users received from social media increased, the more likely these users were to express themselves politically using social media (Vaccari et al., 2015). These users were more likely to reach out to candidates using social media but also attend offline events. As such, there existed the potential for political candidates to draw on Twitter to leverage a highly engaged, supportive user-base in their favor (Larsson, 2017). Review of Twitter interactions among these Parliamentarians indicated that communications were often internally directed toward other party members, though there was also messaging directed toward political opponents. However, the general findings of both Vaccari et al. (2015) and Larsson (2017) suggested that Twitter was a source for political leaders to maintain firm communication among their own supporters. Determined formidable resolute

Bots are an important part of messaging on Twitter. Narayanan et al. (2018) noted that political bots were influential to advocating for policy issues and spreading information about political topics and election statuses. During the 2016 U.S. presidential election, political bot activity reached an all-time high (Bessi & Ferrara, 2016). The ratio of bots favoring the Trump campaign, specifically on Twitter, reached 4:1; therefore, suggesting that Clinton was widely outpaced in terms of both support (Narayanan et al., 2018). Bots, despite their automated nature, were not randomly supporting the Trump campaign. Rather, their deployment was strategic and timed to produce content favoring Trump and hurting Clinton using strategic management of messaging that shaped public perceptions. As such, no discussion of using Twitter for political messaging can be done without referencing the importance of bots to that effort. Researchers noted that the use of social media as manifested in bots took on different characteristics from past manifestations. Marx (2017) noted that social media had increasingly become an avenue for attacking other candidates rather than a simple avenue for messaging political supporters.

The combined findings of Howard, Kollanyi, and Woolley (2016) and Marx (2017) indicated that Twitter's very nature had shifted by the time of the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Rather than act as a messaging tool, Twitter became an attack tool and was amplified extensively by automated bots. Such findings indicated the significant changes in the platform from previous days when it had acted as a simple messaging platform.

Researchers noted that the study of political messaging on Twitter included several difficulties, including capturing the nuances inherent to political communication

using traditional quantitative analytical approaches. Researchers indicated that increasing the collection of qualitative data may help to improve understanding the nature of various types of political communication. The use of qualitative methodologies, including interpretive analysis of qualitative data, could help to better characterize how politicians communicated with others over Twitter.

Twitter has been highlighted as a source of political messaging. It has become an increasingly concentrated source of political discussion (McKinnon et al., 2016). This social network has become an avenue for the most politically engaged individuals to reach out directly to politicians (Vaccari et al., 2015), and Twitter has also been a communication channel among party leaders, party members, and supporters (Larsson, 2017). Knowing the potential for political messaging, bots have become an increasingly important part of Twitter communication, spreading misinformation as a means of swaying political opinion (Howard et al., 2016). As such, Twitter has become an attack vehicle for politicians and their supporters (Marx, 2017). However, understanding the subtleties of political communication required a focus on qualitative, small data analytics that help capture the nuance of political communications.

Social Media and Political Messaging

By 2016, social media took on a more active role in the political sphere than previously. Kreiss and McGregor (2017) noted that Facebook and Twitter were two of the social media networks that most actively pursued a more significant role. However, they were accompanied by tech companies, such as Microsoft and Google, each of whom were attempting to lure advertisement buys from political operatives. Technology firms were driven to take a more prominent role because of the potential advertising revenue as

well as the relationships these companies stood to build with various existing political organizations. As such, the very relationship that existed between tech companies and politics changed within the 2016 political campaign.

One of the ways that social media has demonstrated its greatest impact was through its amplification of messaging. Individuals who would otherwise not have an ability to message political followers became capable of messaging almost as many people as traditional media outlets, from newspapers to cable news networks (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Social media was a powerful amplifier for the 2016 election cycle because 62% of the U.S. adult population received their news through social media during 2016.

The percentage of people receiving their news through social media revealed its importance to political messaging (Williams, 2017). In May 2016, candidates, on average, posted five to seven times per day on Facebook and up to 12 times per day on their Twitter accounts (Williams, 2017). During the same 2016 campaign, 24% of people received their information about the campaigns from only the Trump and Clinton campaigns, suggesting the degree to which people relied on social media for political messaging. This simultaneously revealed the outsized impact some specific candidates had on social media messaging.

How different social media is used to promote political messages varies largely based on the platform's own architecture. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat are each composed of their own digital architecture that impacts how messaging occurs (Bossetta, 2018). Digital architecture is characterized by the platform's protocols that shape how people can act within the virtual space created by that platform.

Searchability is an important concept to digital architecture and refers to the ability of a platform to facilitate searches for other users and specific connections (Bossetta, 2018). Functionality refers to how these platforms function, often in the form of the interface that users use. Each platform was also characterized by how they sorted data and quantified the behavior of individuals using the platform. Researchers noted that Facebook and Twitter were particularly useful because of their searchability. Each of these platforms allowed users to connect to similar users and desired information easily in comparison to Instagram and Snapchat. They allowed people to see each page's position and stances without going in-depth, which helped users quickly identify pages they might enjoy.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, researchers found that elections use Facebook and Twitter to communicate in different ways (Stier, Bleier, Lietz, & Strohmaier, 2018). Researchers focused on the 2013 German federal election campaigns and found that politicians more commonly used Twitter to respond to unfolding events, giving it a more real-time usefulness. However, Twitter was also more likely to be used for broader purposes, with Twitter posts only having campaign topics in 26.1% of posts versus Facebook posts, which held campaigning topics in 42.3% of posts (Stier et al., 2018). Finally, politicians and their audiences were more often in-sync with one another on Twitter than on Facebook. The combined findings of Bossetta (2018) and Stier et al. (2018) indicated that each social media platform had distinct uses, but that politicians were more likely to adopt Twitter to broadly speak on a number of issues, responding to real-time events, and while speaking to an audience that was more likely to be receptive to the message.

The effect to which Facebook can influence political engagement and protests should not be underestimated. Chan (2016) noted that Facebook produced both a direct and indirect effect on political engagement. As a person's network size increased and their connections to political actors grew, there was a corresponding likelihood for political participation and expression. The research indicated the importance of network size to creating increased engagement. News that was presented on Facebook also had an impact on users. As such, the findings were in alignment with other findings regarding the importance of political engagement. Researchers in a separate study noted the importance of news engagement to creating political engagement, though in separate research, there were warnings that this increased engagement could lead to increased perceptions of disagreement and conflict (Barnidge, 2015; Barnidge, 2018). The findings of Chan (2016) were also consistent with findings regarding social media usage patterns and political engagement.

A person's own sensitivity to disagreement may shape political expression among younger individuals when they express themselves on Facebook. Vraga, Thorson, Kligler-Vilenchik, and Gee (2015) noted that Facebook has become increasingly powerful as a means of shaping youth engagement with politics; however, interviews with young adults indicated that their own personal dispositions impacted their behavior. While individuals may want to engage politically online, their aversion to conflict impacts how they engage. A willingness to post about politics was largely shaped by that aversion. As such, the research indicated that there were not equal opportunities for political engagement among all Facebook users (Vraga et al., 2015).

In the instance of the 2017 U.K. General Election campaign, the existing data suggested that the type of advertising occurring on Facebook was no more negative than any other kind of campaigning (Anstead, Magalhaes, Stupart, & Tambini, 2018). Researchers drew upon 783 Facebook political advertisements and found that within those advertisements the negativity did not raise above the level of traditional media. There was also evidence that messages crafted for online dissemination mirrored closely with the messages that were broadcast in the more general national campaigns, indicating that at least in the instance of this election, the differences between traditional national campaigns and social media campaigns did not notably differ.

Changes in measuring data metrics have led to the development of new methods by which individual's political tendencies can be gauged based on their activity. David, Zhitomirsky-Geffet, Koppel, and Uzan (2016) noted that social network sites had increasingly been adopted by politicians and that user access of politician Facebook pages may be useful for predicting user political orientation. Such a tactic would be useful for identifying parts of the electorate to target with political ads. Using a political tendency classifier trained to read user behavior, using such software on political texts may make it possible to identify classifiers. These classifiers could be applied to the non-political personal pages of users, who could then be targeted with political ads in the future. Consequently, there was significant reason to believe that Facebook could be leveraged even further to help politicians reach out to the public.

Facebook, like Twitter, has become an important source of political messaging. Facebook helps to increase political engagement, particularly as a person's network expands and further connection to other politically active individuals increase (Chan,

2016). However, participation in the political process may be impacted by factors other than social network size, such as sensitivity to disagreement (Vraga et al., 2015).

Politicians have the potential to capture political leanings of people who visit their pages using data analytics (David et al., 2016). Despite the many attack campaigns noted on Twitter (Marx, 2017), researchers indicated that there was not necessarily evidence that Facebook was a source of increased attack ads versus traditional media channels.

Social media and fake news. In 2016, references to *fake news* became much more abundant. Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) noted that the use of social media made it possible for individuals with little credibility to amplify their messages to as many people as traditional news outlets. This also allowed for the dissemination of news that was not vetted and could be easily disproven. Referencing the fact that 62% of the population consumed their news through social media, Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) noted that it was fake news stories that were more likely to be shared on Facebook. This contrasted social media with traditional news outlets, which vetted their stories to a greater degree and were less likely to spread fake news stories. Given the reach of social media, the implication of such findings indicated that people were likely to be exposed to false news stories, which itself was of concern given that many people who saw fake news stories were likely to believe them.

Many people believe fake news was further complicated by the fact that fake news messaging was amplified using social media bots. Bessi and Ferrara (2016) noted that social media bots became prominent in 2010, a period when social bots began to support or harm candidates using tweets that directed the public to fake news stories.

Over the next few years, this interjection of fake news into the public political discourse began to increase significantly (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

Researchers noted that source codes for social media bots could be readily found online and used to develop bots that might support a specific politician (Bessi & Ferrara, 2016). Certain bots could search Twitter for keywords, retweet relevant stories, and amplify messages using Twitter's retweeting and following functions. This made bots a potentially powerful source for amplifying fake news. Shao, Ciampaglia, Varol, Flammini, and Menczer (2017) also noted that fake news was partly as effective at influencing public perceptions because of its amplification through social media bots. Shao et al., (2017) examined 14 million messages and 400 thousand claims made on Twitter during and after the 2016 U.S. presidential election, with the findings suggesting that there was active and widespread dissemination of fake news using social media bots. Automated accounts were particularly effective at spreading false claims and did so by targeting influential social media users who could themselves also amplify the message following initial exposure to the fake news.

The problem that bots posed was a concern to the future of election law and administration of elections. Howard, Woolley, and Calo (2018) noted that bots could be designed with automated scripts to function in ways that inherently undermined democratic elections. Researchers noted that perceived favoritism for a specific candidate could be slanted using bots. posing as humans. These bots were sophisticated enough to pose as humans and voice support for Trump. Such bots could post using preprogrammed scripts. Bots serve multiple purposes beyond spreading connecting users to fake news.

Bots may help improve perception of a political candidate by driving up follower numbers (Howard et al., 2016). Some of the same bots making up these follower lists can be mobilized into smear campaigns directed against political opponents. As such, there is a role for higher numbers of bots in a political campaign, and politicians are increasingly including bots in their messaging strategy. This inclusion of bots may lead to necessary changes in campaign laws that address the use of such bots. The ability for bots to have a significant influence on campaigns was noted as particularly problematic on Twitter during the 2016 U.S. presidential election, during a time when bots spread fake news. The spread of fake news was largely concentrated among a small group who could amplify the message of each fake news story to a significant degree (Grinberg et al., 2019). The findings of Howard et al. (2016) and Grinberg et al. (2019) therefore suggested that bots may be extremely influential, swaying political fortunes in one candidate's favor and therefore perhaps necessitating new campaign laws that regulate their use in campaigning.

Echo chambers. One of the issues that arose as people began to consume political news largely using online news was the creation of filters that insulated individuals from contrary perspectives. Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) noted that social media restructured the way that people consumed news, even in contrast to prior online news consumption. Groshek and Koc-Michalska (2017) also noted the fact that social media use had contributed to the creation of news filters, had a particularly strong effect on the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

It should be noted that the data regarding echo chambers was not always consistent, with some studies suggesting that echo chambers did not always emerge from

political discussions. Arlt, Rauchfleisch, and Schafer (2018) indicated that an examination of the 2016 Swiss referendum on the Nuclear Withdrawal Initiative did not suggest the emergence of echo chambers. Instead, researchers suggested that the groups discussing the referendum fell into several distinct groups rather than two distinct, opposing groups. As such, the traditionally associated echo chambers did not emerge. Rather, far more nuanced discussions emerged among the seven distinct online communities who had varying degrees of overlap and distinction. These findings suggested that echo chambers may only emerge in specific political discussions and environments.

One of the most cited reasons for the success of Donald Trump was the creation of ideological filters which shield individuals from conflicting information and confirm their own biases (Groshek & Koc-Michalska, 2017). Filters shield individuals from messages inconsistent with belief, intensified existing partisan feelings, brought together individuals with specific psychological profiles that were likely to be susceptible to fake news, and finally impacted voting patterns. Ideological bubbles persist because people sometimes intentionally chose to expose themselves to only certain news while in other cases, ideological bubbles persisted because an existing information flow was in place that automated the presentation of news stories that confirmed a person's biases.

One of the downsides to political messaging over social media was the likelihood of increased political disagreement. Barnidge (2018) noted that politically engaged individuals who discussed politics on social media were more likely to perceive that there were significant political disagreements than those who did not use social media for political discussions. Further, these same individuals were more likely to perceive that

disagreements occurred over social media than in other communication settings. Further, when individuals received a significant portion of their news from social media, they were more likely to perceive high levels of disagreement in political discussions. As such, while social media was notable for the degree to which it could be used for political messaging, there was also significant potential for it to create increased disagreement among the politically engaged (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). There existed other indications that political disagreement on social media were partly fueled by pseudo-events (Barnidge, 2018). Researchers agreed that heavy social media use was associated with increased social disagreement versus those with only light social media use. The relationship between social media use and disagreement occurred because of news use, which acted as the link between more general social media use and increased disagreement. This relationship was mediated by a person's own level of political engagement.

Existing research regarding social media-based conflict is complex and mixed. First, researchers distinguished between low- and high-threshold users (Vaccari et al., 2015). High-threshold users were more likely to be politically engaged versus low-threshold users. Among the heaviest users, Barnidge (2018) indicated that there as more likely voice conflicting political opinions on social media. Barnidge (2015, 2018) indicated that getting news over social media was associated with increased disagreement. Increased use of social media, paired with news engagement for political purposes, predicted increased disagreement (Barnidge, 2018).

Politically active people on social media also experienced a significant degree of stress. Hisam et al. (2017) attempted to better understand how political activism on a

social networking site was associated with increased psychological stress. Hisam et al. examined 23 participants and generated data using a survey. The researchers noted that 38.4% of those assessed indicated that they were stressed with a disproportionate amount being politically active. In fact, 65.2% of all those who were politically active indicated that they were stressed out. The researchers concluded that political activism in a social media context was associated with increased stress. Politically active social media users indicated that they perceived higher rates of conflict (Barnidge, 2015, 2016), the findings of Hisam et al. (2017) aligned and indicated that there was also increased stress among such users.

Researchers noted that care needs to be taken to remember that Twitter and Facebook, despite their popularity among the largest social networks in the world, still do not necessarily represent the larger general population. Mellon and Prosser (2017) examined the political attitudes of people living in Britain and assessed how social media use and political views overlapped. Researchers noted that within the British population, users of Twitter and Facebook substantially differed from the general population on various measures of political dimensions. These differences included likelihood to vote, who these people chose to vote for, and the more general demographics that characterized social media users versus the general population. As such, it may be of value to politicians to understand whether the demographics they are appealing to are likely to turn out to vote. Social media users were less likely to vote, and as such, those parties whose supporters were more likely to be social media users may have to invest more effort into driving voter turnout.

Researchers continued to examine disagreements among social media users. Barnidge (2016) found that individuals were likely to rate face-to-face social contacts as more positive interactions than were social media connections. This finding suggested that there were some inherent aspects of social media interactions that predisposed individuals to consider them more negatively, rather than being anything about politics specifically that made such interactions negative in the perceptions of users. However, there was also agreement that political discussions online led to conflict. The findings were consistent with that of Barnidge (2015, 2018) that online political discussions were more likely to be associated with conflict. Barnidge (2018) found that online disagreements were partly related to whether individuals assessed the other person as having mis-matched characteristics, such as party affiliation, socio-economic status, or age.

The use of social media for political purposes may have occurred partly because of a transition away from trust in traditional media. Turcotte et al. (2015) indicated that polls showed a continuing decline in trust of traditional news outlets, which occurred simultaneous to the rise of social media. Researchers investigated what happened when a news story appeared to be posted by a user's Facebook friend who was also a real-life friend, revealing that when friends recommended a story, a person was more likely to trust the story (Turcotte et al., 2015). These same users were more likely to follow news from that story's source due to it being recommended by a friend. Turcotte et al. (2015), therefore suggested that friend recommendations generated increased trust that helped elevate the trustfulness of a story.

There is an abundance of research into the relationship between social media and political campaigns. Social media companies became increasingly invested in collaborating with political operatives to influence elections (Kreiss & McGregor, 2017). This was unsurprising, given that an increasing amount of people were receiving their news through social media (2017). Politicians, in turn, have adopted various social media channels to message the public in different ways (Stier et al., 2018). Individuals have responded to the distribution of news online by creating echo chambers where their own biases are confirmed, and contradictory news dismissed (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Such findings therefore indicated that social media was increasingly important to messaging a concentrated group of followers who may already be predisposed to being receptive to a certain candidate's messaging (Stolee & Caton, 2018). A core group of followers who support their candidate with little regard for new information is referred to as the political *base* (Stolee & Caton, 2018).

Social Media and Presidential Elections

The work conducted by Groshek and Koc-Michalska (2017) suggested that people created ideological bubbles that allowed them to filter news such that they would receive only news that conforms to their ideological bias. When considering this fact alongside the work of Allcott and Gentzkow (2017), who indicated that fake news was primarily oriented toward harming Donald Trump, the combined findings implied that people likely spread fake news about Trump, filtered out messages that undermined that fake news, and filtered in messages that confirmed that news (Groshek & Koc-Michalska, 2017).

Summary and Conclusions

The literature on social media and its use in messaging, including political messaging, is robust. Social media networks facilitate online interactions between individuals (Bahner et al., 2012). However, they have also become a platform between organizations and individual users (Hutter et al., 2013; Rohm et al., 2013). Organizations have discovered that they can raise awareness of their brand and positive feelings toward them using social media. Politicians have adopted social media in a similar fashion, using it to message the public and draw support on specific issues as well as support for themselves (David et al., 2016; McKinnon et al., 2016; Stier et al., 2018).

In the 2016 U.S. presidential election, Donald Trump may have benefited from Twitter posts by creating an aura of authenticity (Enli, 2017; Wells et al., 2016). He also benefited from damaging stories spread through supportive networks underpinned by automated bots (Grinberg et al., 2019; Narayanan et al., 2018). The vast amount of research on these topics required qualitative investigation to understand the nuances within social media messaging, though there was also significant amounts of quantitative data generated from investigation into the personality types of different social media users and the number of junk news articles and the methods by which they spread.

Following a review of the literature, a gap in the literature emerged detailing the various means by which Donald Trump's use of Twitter was distinct from others, primarily Hillary Clinton's campaign. Some studies hinted at Trump using Twitter in distinct fashion, but no comprehensive study into all the ways Trump distinguished his usage was conducted. This study was designed to fill in that gap. Chapter 3 Methodology describes the research design, sampling, data analysis, and general methodology for the

study. Data were drawn from investigation into tweets created by Donald Trump and content assessment of those same tweets.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to examine whether, and to what extent, Twitter usage by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump contributed to political polarization during the 2016 U.S. Presidential race. This chapter includes a description of, and rationale for, the choice of an exploratory case study research design and methodology. Sample size, sampling techniques, data collection, and analysis procedures for Donald Trump and Hillary Clintons Tweets preceding the 2016 election are described. The critical role of the researcher in case study qualitative research designs is addressed, as well as findings trustworthiness. Research for the study utilized secondary data and did not involve human participants; however, data included a discussion of ethics, data handling, storage procedures, and a chapter summary.

Research Design and Rationale

The following research questions, derived from a literature review of social media and political campaigns served to focus this study:

RQ1. How did Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump differ in their use of Twitter during the 2016 U.S. Presidential race between November and January 2016?

RQ2. How did Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump each use pseudo-events to create political narratives during the 2016 U.S. Presidential race?

A qualitative case study research design was employed to explore the Twitter usage by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump prior to the 2016 Presidential election to create political spectacle (Edelman & Edelman, 2001). Both candidates' Twitter activity for the 360-day period prior to November 7, 2016 was reviewed using content analysis to

reveal differences between candidates and how each candidate used Twitter to create political spectacle. Political spectacle involves the use of pseudo-events and alternative facts receptive to the candidate's base audience and repeated by the audience and amplified via Twitter (Gonawela et al., 2018). The process involves framing one's opponent as an adversary that lacks integrity and is unworthy of the office, rather than a rigorous debate in the arena of ideas and substance (Cornfield, 2017). The aim is to frame political battles in terms of morality that refers to the speaker as the embodiment of the good of society, and the adversary as immoral, corrupt, and associated with society's ills (Gonawela et al., 2018).

Qualitative case studies involve an exploration of social processes in-situ to advance knowledge on how meaning is derived from experiences and social interactions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Yin, 2018). The goal of qualitative inquiry is to collect richly textured, detailed information in the words of individuals experiencing the phenomenon of interest (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Qualitative inquiry involves the examination of personal communication between individuals and listening to how individuals communicate their stories (Yin, 2018). The aim of the study was to identify recurring themes and patterns that emerged in Twitter usage during the 2016 Presidential campaign using content analysis.

Qualitative case study data collection are bounded by time and activity and involve subjective and abstract qualities, rather than objective or empirical inquiry (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Qualitative data collection methods include interviews, surveys, observation, archival unstructured data, such as Tweets. A case study research approach was an appropriate research design choice based on the research problem,

which includes complex social communication of abstractions, the research questions, and the study's purpose.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher, in a qualitative case study, acts as the primary data collection instrument and aims to objectively analyze data to understand reality from the viewpoint of the observed. Smith and Osborn (2007) stated that “participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world” (p. 53). The researcher sought to minimize personal bias and act as impartial observer. The researcher must set aside preconceived notions, personal bias, ill-conceived experiences, and in this case political opinions or leanings (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). While there is little opportunity in the study for bias in the data collection process, data analysis was subjective and required constant vigilance to avoid introducing personal opinions. The researcher used a journaling technique to promote introspection throughout the data collection and analysis processes. Journaling, which means taking contemporaneous notes regarding personal observations, can help the researcher identify thoughts and emotions regarding participants' responses with the potential to introduce bias (Yin, 2018).

Methodology

The United States had 67.5 million monthly active users (MAU) of Twitter at the time of the 2016 Presidential election, and 330 million MAUs worldwide (Statista, 2018). At the same time, Facebook reported 230 million MAUs, making the impact of social media on political discourse difficult to overstate (Statista, 2018). Twitter's large U.S. user base, nature of short messages, significance to the Presidential campaign, and the

capacity of social media to shape public opinion, made Twitter data an ideal source for analyzing political discourse during the 2016 U.S. Presidential campaign (Yaqub et al., 2017). The logic for selecting Tweets by Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton's and the data collection methodology are discussed below.

Participant Selection Logic

Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton's Twitter accounts were selected because they were the Republican Party and Democratic Party's nominee for 2016 Presidential campaign, respectively. Third party candidates Jill Stein and Gary Johnson were considered but excluded because taken together the vote count in the general election was less than 3% of the popular vote and none of the Electoral College vote (Federal Election Commission [FEC], 2017). The data collection period is January 1, 2016 through November 7, 2016, to reflect political discourse through the entire 2016 Presidential campaign, including the primaries. For the data collection period, Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) had 3,981 Tweets during the campaign and 33,593,682 followers on election day, simultaneously Hillary Clinton (@HillaryClinton) had 4,117 Tweets and 16,750,031 followers (Twitter, 2019). Comments and responses to Tweets were excluded because: (a) followers' reactions are beyond the scope of the study, and (b) responses in the millions exceed the capability of tools available in qualitative analyses.

Instrumentation

Only secondary data were collected and analyzed for the study. Data were collected from the Twitter database, which is available to the public for both candidates (Twitter, 2019). Other researchers analyzed Twitter activity of U.S. Congress members during their election campaigns (Bode & Dalrymple, 2016). Those researchers relied on

the Twitter database for data collection. The one data issue that could not be overcome was that Tweets deleted by candidates are not currently available in the database. Tweet deletion are relatively rare and are not expected to have any effect on the study. Data for all Tweets by Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) and Hillary Clinton (@HillaryClinton) were downloaded from the Twitter database into a spreadsheet and reviewed for incomplete or mislabeled data (Twitter, 2019). Incomplete data is defined as a Tweet header without the underlying content. Mislabeled data refers to Tweets mis-categorized, or insufficiently categorized, by the data source. For instance, a Tweet characterized as relating to legislation might also refer to fake news, or Hillary Clinton.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Data for all Tweets from January 1, 2016 to November 8, 2016 by Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) and Hillary Clinton (@HillaryClinton) were downloaded from the Twitter database into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and reviewed for incomplete or mislabeled data (Twitter, 2019). Tweets follow these format rules: (a) “Tweets that are not original and are retweeted by the user contain a [retweet] (RT) string at the beginning of the message while original tweets do not contain this string; (b) hashtags (#) make user tweets searchable, enabling them to become part of Twitter trends; (c) when a user tweets directly to another twitter user, the message begins with “@” character, therefore tweets beginning without “@” are broadcast intended for all audiences while tweets starting with “@” are direct messages” (Yaqub et al., 2017, p. 616).

Data Analysis Plan

Content analysis was employed to analyze Twitter data and address research questions (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Content analysis includes three distinct approaches to derive from unstructured data: conventional, directed, or summative. In conventional content analysis, coding themes and sub-themes derive directly from the data. A directed approach begins with a theory to guide initial codes. Summative content analysis involves counting and comparing recurring words or phrases. The study includes conventional, directed, or summative content analysis techniques and uses Edelman's conceptual framework for initial coding (Edelman, 2013).

Content analysis is an iterative line-by-line process of reading and sorting content into common words, phrases, or ideas until themes emerge (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Categories are created that reflect and summarize content groups and evolve as new content is added to a category (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The coding process promotes theme comparison within and across categories and create insights to report in the findings. Content analyses are iterative processes of theme development that evolve over time into meaning. NVivo 11 ® software was used for summative content analysis. NVivo assists qualitative data analysis for working with large unstructured databases, such as thousands of Tweets. NVivo automates counting and coding processes, makes suggestions for categories based on word counts, and includes visualization tools. Visualization tools graphically present connections between groups of content and depicts overlaps between categories. Initial themes based on Edelman's conceptual framework included the following categories: *authoritarianism*, *economy*, *fake*

narratives, fake news, feuds, global warming, immigration, patriotism, political correctness, profanity, retaliation, tax policy, trade deals, and women.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness involves credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Anney, 2014). Credibility is defined as one's confidence that study findings accurately reflect the underlying data. Transferability is defined as the degree to which study findings apply to other populations geographies, or ethnicities. Dependability is defined as the degree to which study findings are stable over time, referred to as reliability in quantitative studies. Confirmability is defined as the extent to which the methodology can be corroborated by other researchers. Study credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were enhanced using NVIVO software to identify patterns and themes difficult to identify using manual coding.

The researcher employed a journaling technique to self-monitor for potential bias (Merriam, 2009). Journaling involves recording one's observation and reflecting on those thoughts, which enables researchers to identify the potential for personal biases, assumptions, preconceived notions, expectations, and prior experience to affect data collection and analysis. Journaling mitigates the potential for researcher bias (Merriam, 2009).

Ethical Procedures

The use of secondary data obviates the need for informed consent, risks to participants, and the need for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Study data and findings will be kept in password protected files on a removable storage media. All study materials and interim draft, and NVIVO output will be kept for five years after

completion. The researcher will maintain a daily journal to capture potential biases and inform data collection and management (Merriam, 2009). The Twitter archives of Hillary Clinton and President Donald Trump are publicly available at <http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com/archive/account/hillaryclinton> and <http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com/>, respectively. No license or permission from Twitter is required.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to examine whether, and to what extent, Twitter usage by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump contributed to political polarization during the 2016 U.S. Presidential race. Data for all Tweets by Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) and Hillary Clinton (@HillaryClinton) were downloaded from the Twitter database for review and analysis. The data collection period is January 1, 2016 through November 8, 2016 to reflect the entire campaign political discourse and approximately 3,981 Tweets from Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) and 4,200 Tweets from Hillary Clinton (@HillaryClinton) were included.

Content analysis was employed to analyze Twitter data and address research questions (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Content analysis includes three distinct approaches to derive from unstructured data: conventional, directed, or summative. In conventional content analysis, coding themes and sub-themes derive directly from the data. A directed approach begins with a theory to guide initial codes. Summative content analysis involves counting and comparing recurring words or phrases. The study includes all three content analysis techniques and uses Edelman's conceptual framework for initial coding (Edelman & Edelman, 2001). Content analysis, which is an iterative line-by-line process

of coding recurring words, phrases or ideas until themes emerge, were employed to analyze Twitter data and address the research questions (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Study credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were enhanced using NVIVO software to repeating words and Phrases difficult to identify using manual coding. Chapter 4 characterizes Twitter user demographics, and reports study findings organized by research question.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to examine whether, and to what extent, Twitter usage by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump contributed to political polarization during the 2016 U.S. Presidential race. Edelman's (1985) construct of political spectacle served as the conceptual framework for data collection and analysis. polarization (Bail et al., 2018). Polarized political rhetoric including ridicule, abuse, or debasement of oppositional voices was employed by both political parties impeded compromise necessary for effective governance (Bail et al., 2018; Ott, 2017; Udupa, 2018). Americans were further divided on controversial issues such as inequality, gun control, and immigration and aligned with partisan political narratives. Partisan identification predicted social policy preferences three times greater than age, education or income (Dimrock, 2014). Social media served as an echo chamber, supported by fake profiles that amplified mutually exclusive alternative realities with fairly predictable results, further polarization (Bail et al., 2018). The following research questions were developed to guide the study:

RQ1. How did Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump differ in their use of Twitter during the 2016 U.S. Presidential race between November and January 2016?

RQ2. How did Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump use of Twitter contribute to political polarization during the 2016 U.S. Presidential race?

This chapter includes a description of the demographics of Twitter users as of the end of 2016. Data collection and analysis are described within the context of coding drawn from Murray Edelman's political spectacle. Results are presented by research

question and the entire chapter is summarized. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of findings, implications for political discourse, and recommendations for future research.

Demographics

Twitter's social media platform offered Donald Trump and Hillary a low-cost, direct messaging platform that enabled messaging control by communicating directly to supporters and disintermediating traditional mainstream media sources (Groshek & Koc-Michalska, 2017). In evaluating differences in how these candidates used Twitter during the 2016 Presidential campaign, it is important to understand Twitter user demographics. Twenty-two percent of all U.S. adults used Twitter at least once per month in 2016 (Pew, 2019). Twitter users were significantly younger than average U.S. adult registered voter, more likely hold a college degree, and enjoyed higher annual income. The median age of adult Twitter users was 40 years compared to age 47 for all registered voters, 42% of Twitter users held at least a bachelor's degree versus 31% for all registered voters, and earned a median income of \$75,000 versus \$67,000 for all registered voters (Pew, 2019). Twitter users were more likely to self-identify as Democrat (36% vs. 30%), and less likely to self-identify as Republican (21% versus 33%). Twitter users also differ from the overall registered voter population on social issues. A larger share of Twitter users believe that blacks are treated less fairly than whites (64% of Twitter users vs. 54% of all registered voters); more likely to believe that immigrants strengthen the U.S. (66% of Twitter users vs. 57% of all registered voters); and more likely to believe barriers exist that make it harder for women to succeed in business (62% of Twitter users vs. 56% of all registered voters). Finally, the median user tweets twice each month, and just 10% of users create 80% of all tweets published in the U.S. users (Pew, 2019).

Data Collection

Secondary data was collected for this study. Twitter archives, Pew Research, and government voting records for the 2016 Presidential election were reviewed. Twitter posts by Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) and Hillary Clinton (@HillaryClinton) were collected for the period of January 1, 2016, which was just prior to the first primary, through November 8th, 2016. This period reflects Twitter posts for the entire 2016 Presidential campaign and contained 3,981 Tweets from Donald J. Trump and 5,555 Tweets from Hillary Clinton. Tweets included in the study were either sent directly from the candidates' account, or retweeted. Retweets were included because Twitter followers receive content approved by the candidates' staff and targeted to amplify existing positions. While the underlying content was not created by the candidate's staff, retweets require specific approval of the campaign staff and have the force of campaign created content.

Data Analysis

A brief discussion of Edelman's (1985) *bimodal value structuring* construct is helpful to understand categories used for categorizing Tweets. For Edelman, political rhetoric's potency is less derived from discrete information delivered by the politician than by the needs and emotions in the listener. In subtle and obvious ways, cultures shape words and meaning in symbols and verbal cues. Individuals who belong to the same interest group respond in common fashion to particular symbols and verbal cues. Specify an interest group and a political speech, and one can easily specify a response with a high measure of confidence. For instance, the response of a labor union officer to a politician's declaration that a living wage means raising the minimum wage is positive because the

gap between skilled and unskilled labor is a sharp negotiating tool. “Meaning and response, then, are not the same for everyone, but a function of group interest or mutual role-taking” (Edelman, 1985, p. 187).

The public has neither the time nor the interest to study and analyze detailed data about regarding complex financial, social, or governmental issues (Edelman, 1985). The public typically ignores the details and sorts issues, political actions, and rhetoric into two categories: symbolically threatening or reassuring based on verbal cues, group interests, and group norms. Public responses depend on whether values with respect to the issue are “heavily concentrated (unimodal), polarized into two clearly defined adversary foci (bimodal), or dispersed rather widely along a scale (multi modal)” (Edelman, 1985, p. 178).

On issues that arouse strong emotions, *bimodal value structuring* evokes threat and insecurity and those who hold the other value become the enemy. Under these circumstances’ symbolism and rigidity dominate social interaction it becomes relatively easy to manipulate the masses by cloaking less threatening issues into *bimodal value structured* content. More simply, politicians promote division and use the energy from that division to color the opposing candidate. Dividing people into groups that vote based on a single issue eliminate the need to persuade them of the righteousness of one’s position on other issues. In the context of the 2016 Presidential election, if Hillary Clinton can convince voters that Donald J. Trump is a racist, sexist, bigot, that hates all classes of minorities, it obviates the need for serious debate on the issues. Conversely, Donald J. Trump must only convince voters that Hillary Clinton is a crooked, swamp

creature, that used the Clinton Foundation to solicit pay-for-play contributions while Secretary of State, and no debate on the issues is required.

Tweets were initially coded using Edelman's bimodal value structuring construct in support of the research question. The NVivo 10 data coding tool was initially employed to code Tweets based on recurring words or phrases but failed to create useful output for sorting Tweets based on meaningful categories created to reflect Edelman's (1985) political spectacle categories described below. Instead, word and phrase frequency data were collected using keyword searches and recorded in spreadsheets and Tweet coding was completed manually using spreadsheets. Development of meaningful grouping categories was an iterative process that blended Edelman's *bimodal value structuring* construct and Tweet coding schemes developed by Evans, Cordova, and Sipole (2014), and Evans, Brown, & Wimberly (2018). Tweets that did not meet any of the specified were reviewed for creation of additional categories but were ultimately not reported. Based on the foregoing, each Tweet was coded for content type based on the following categories.

Personal attack. Personal attack Tweets involved statements by either Trump or Clinton that impugn the integrity, character, or managerial and leadership capabilities considered important for competently discharging the responsibility of the Office of the President. An example of a personal attack Tweet by Trump occurred on July 16, "Crooked Hillary, who embarrassed herself and the country with her e-mail lies, has been a DISASTER on foreign policy. Look what's happening!" An example of a personal attack Tweet by Clinton occurred on September 13, "Trump and Pence's courting of white supremacists isn't a game: It's normalizing racism. And it's deplorable".

Attack government. Attack government tweets involved Trump Tweets or retweeted negative statements regarding federal, state, or local government institutions. The goal of such communication is to divide voters into groups favorable and unfavorable to government intervention. No examples of Hillary attacking government institutions were identified. For example, Trump used the hashtag #DrainTheSwamp frequently to criticize the government and separate voters into two groups. On October 19, he tweeted “This is what we can expect from #CrookedHillary. More Taxes. More Spending. #BigLeageTruth. This is considered an Attack Government tweet because he suggested that Hillary Clinton was a big government tax and spend Liberal.

Attack media. Attack media Tweets involved Clinton or Trump statements describing the media as either incompetent or acting as propagandist for the opposing party. On August 6, Donald Trump tweeted “I am not just running against Crooked Hillary Clinton, I am running against the very dishonest and totally biased media - but I will win! This is considered an Attack Media tweet since he suggested that the media was dishonest and biased.

Attack opposing party. These tweets were those where the candidate said negative things about Republicans or the Republican Party or Democrats or the Democratic Party, respectively. On September 14, Hillary Clinton tweeted “When Republican candidates demonize Muslim Americans, it’s wrong, counterproductive, and dangerous”. This is considered an Attack Republican tweet because she criticized Republicans.

Policy related. These tweets were about important policy issues, such as manufacturing jobs, taxes, immigration, and foreign policy. For example, on October 11

Hillary Clinton Tweeted "The clean energy superpower of the 21st Century is probably going to be Germany, China, or us—and I want it to be us." This is considered Policy Related because it does not qualify for any other category and takes a policy position on clean energy.

Results

RQ1. How did Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump differ in their use of Twitter during the 2016 U.S. Presidential race between November and January 2016?

As shown in Table 1, Clinton Tweeted, or retweeted, 40% more often than Trump between January 1, 2016 and November 8th, 2016. Clinton's Tweets emphasized campaign-related information followed by attack tweets. Trump focused on personal, media, opposing party, and government attacks, using twice as many attack-style Tweets as other-related Tweets. While personal attacks against Hillary Clinton accounted for the largest proportion of Donald Trump's Tweets (34%), Trump trailed Hillary Clinton in the absolute number or personal attack Tweets (1,500 vs. 1,354). Hillary Clinton Tweeted 2.6 times as often as Donald Trump on policy related issues (1,389 vs. 518). Sixty percent of all Donald Trump's Tweets were attack-type statements compared to Hillary's 39%. The other category included campaign stop announcements, personal notes, or unrelated to the campaign.

Table 1

Category Frequency and Proportion by Candidate

	Hillary Clinton	Donald J. Trump
Personal attack	1,500 (27%)	1,354 (34%)
Attack government	-- 0%	239 (6%)
Attack media	111 (2%)	318 (8%)
Attack opposing party	444 (8%)	478 (12%)
Policy related	1,389 (25%)	518 (13%)
Other	2,111 (38%)	1,075 (27%)
	5,555 (100%)	3,981 (100%)

Table 2 presents actual phrases and frequency of use on Twitter by used by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump from January 2016 to November 2016. Both candidates used profane, scurrilous, and abusive language to describe the other. In any arena other than political rhetoric, such language would be libelous and likely to involve fisticuffs. Somehow after years of a “race to the bottom” in political discourse, the accusations summarized in Table 2 are commonplace. Once one believes one side or the others’ rhetoric, it’s a small leap to conclude their followers are enemies. Powerful language stirs one’s emotions and hardens positions in ways that make voters more malleable on other issues (Edelman, 1985).

Table 2

Examples of Personal Attack Language by Candidate

	Used by Hillary Clinton	Used by Donald Trump
Racist/racism	87	--
Hate	87	--
Muslim/African American specific racism	76	--
LGBT/homophobia	62	--
Discrimination	27	--
KKK/Klan	19	--
Bigot	12	--
White supremacist	8	--
Crooked	--	279
Swamp (creature)	--	81
Email scandal (liar)	--	40
Lyin' Hillary	--	33
Clinton Foundation (fraud)	--	10
Total	378	443

RQ2. How did Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump use of Twitter contribute to political polarization during the 2016 U.S. Presidential race?

Clinton and Trump used Twitter to divide voters by forcing binary choices on critical issues and tailoring content to create mutually exclusive alternative universes in which both candidates cannot be correct. Abortion, gun rights, immigration, taxation, and character were binary issues that tended to divide voters along party lines, but character consumed a disproportionate share of all Tweets. For Trump, the binary character narrative involved whether Hillary's email and related scandals were sufficient to disqualify Hillary from office. For Hillary, the binary character narrative involved whether racism, sexism, and xenophobia, and were sufficient to disqualify Donald from office. Americans were already deeply divided on abortion, income inequality, gun control, and immigration with divisions largely drawn along party lines. Clinton and

Trump employed personal and party attack language in Tweets more often than any other coded category during the 2016 campaign. Attacks differed in terms of content but both Clinton and Trump ferociously attacked their opponent's veracity and character. Clinton and Trump focused the attention of groups based on shared interests. For Clinton, attacks were made by issues of shared interest such as hate and racism. Trump, in contrast, attacked on the basis of corruption. Regardless of the nature of their attacks, both appealed to common concerns held by their supporters in order to win ongoing support.

Such lines of attack can become cues to groups that invoke a sort of shared threat (Edelman, 1985). Perceived group threats can motivate emotional responses and disproportionate responses. As such, both Clinton and Trump both stoked strong emotions around binary issues. Given the emotionality and calls to action involved, it can be said both Trump and Clinton added to the existing polarized political landscape. As such, while both Trump and Clinton attacked using different types of content, both were involved in the increasing polarization of the political landscape.

The use of a single binary issue to divide voters along party lines was supported by the literature. Partisan identification predicts voting preference three times more than any other factor (Dimock, 2014). The potency in political rhetoric derives not from the spoken words but from the needs and emotions in listeners (Edelman, 1985). Political rhetoric shapes culture in subtle and obvious ways, and those with shared interests tend to respond in similar ways to verbal cues. Voters who share the same role (interest group) learn to respond in common fashion to specific verbal cues. Specify an interest group and a political speech, and one can specify the response of the interest group with confidence. Politicians aim to reduce rational thought and analysis to make the voting decision a

function of group interest rather than individual choice. Twitter is the perfect platform for short messages endlessly repeated without context, nuance, or perspective.

Social media applications, such as Twitter, exacerbate political polarization by creating *echo chambers* that prevent people from being exposed to information that contradicts their candidate's rhetoric (Bail et al., 2018). Twitter algorithms amplify the echo chamber by favoring Tweets in users feed consistent with implicit or explicit political preferences. As such, conservatives feed over-weights content consistent with conservative themes, and vice versa. Any statement told frequently enough becomes the truth. Tweets can placate, mollify, or arouse (Edelman, 1985). Nearly meaningless abstractions that reassured voters around binary issues included *public interest* or the *national security* or *national health and safety* are being protected. Since these phrases mean different specific things to different groups, individuals project their hopes dreams and desires onto their preferred candidate, making these phrases particularly efficacious.

Summary

The current research included content analysis of the Tweet messaging of both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump during the 2016 election. The study findings indicated that the two included different kinds of content. However, regardless of the content in their messaging, both parties used attack messaging against their opponents. These findings indicated that both parties contributed to the ongoing polarization of the political landscape and that Twitter served as the vehicle through which this occurred. Clinton and Trump attacked using different lines of attack and to cover different content, but attacked nonetheless. The implications of these findings and respective recommendations are made in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to examine whether, and to what extent, Twitter usage by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump contributed to political polarization during the 2016 U.S. Presidential race. Previous research indicated that Donald Trump's social media strategy was amateurish compared to Hillary Clinton's more traditional and professional approach (Enli, 2017). However, despite this amateurish strategy, Trump achieved success in his strategy and eventually became president.

Research suggested that Trump's strategy of acting in ways perceived as inappropriate for a politician was actually useful for Trump among his targeted audience (Wells et al., 2016). Trump's strategy generated loyal support from those disaffected by the Obama administration. Trump's success may be partly explained by political polarization that was only accelerated during the 2016 election. Researchers have previously noted that political polarization in the United States dramatically increased over the course of the 21st Century, culminating in increased partisan division that obstructed compromise in politics (Bail et al., 2018). The 2016 presidential campaign may have blended the ongoing prominence of social media with this increased polarization.

By the time of the campaign, social media platforms had generated numerically significant massive user bases (Statista, 2018; Yaqub et al., 2017). These massive user bases allowed users to share messages in real time at low cost without the need for more traditional media outlets. Unsurprisingly, Twitter was heavily relied upon by both Clinton

and Trump as a messaging platform (Stolee & Caton, 2018). As such, the statements made by both parties over Twitter may have contributed to ongoing polarization.

Interpretation of the Findings

Analysis Overview

In order to analyze the statements by both Clinton and Trump, content analysis was employed. Content analysis allows for the researcher to examine the content of documents and identify data that addresses a researcher's research questions (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The coding process promotes theme comparison within and across categories and create insights to report in the findings.

Categories are created that reflect and summarize content groups and evolve as new content is add to a category (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Content analysis involves the use of an iterative line-by-line process of reading and sorting content into common words, phrases, or ideas until themes emerge (Smith & Osborn, 2007). During content analysis, there are three phases of work that include conventional, directed, and summative analysis. These forms of analysis allow for the assessment of unstructured data, which is aided by the application of codes, themes, and sub-themes that describe the data.

The current study used a direct approach that began with the development of theory that led to the creation of initial codes. During content analysis, summative content analysis as used, which included the counting and comparing recurring words or phrases. The current study was supported through the use of Edeleman's conceptual framework to guide the development of initial codes (Edelman, 2013). The coding that was performed was similar to the kinds of thematic analysis that is often conducted in

other forms of qualitative research with the major caveat that the analysis was far more inward focused and centered on looking at differences within the messaging of specific candidates under study. As such, there was less emphasis on identifying common themes between the two candidates and more focus on identifying the commonalities of the messaging within a candidate's own tweets.

Based on Following the content analysis approach, the researcher was able to identify multiple types of personal attack language used by each candidate. These findings are described in greater detail below.

Findings of the Research Questions

The results of the current research indicated that Clinton and Trump used Twitter in vastly different ways. Clinton's use of Twitter was characterized by a higher volume, with tweeting and retweeting done 40% more often than Trump. Clinton's tweets followed a typical pattern of focusing primarily on campaign work with a secondary emphasis on attacking Trump as a candidate.

Personal attacks against Hillary Clinton accounted for 34% of Trump's Tweets (34%) compared to 27% by Clinton against Donald Trump, however total number of attack Tweets by Clinton exceeded Trumps (,500 vs. 1,354) because Clinton's total number of Tweets exceeded Trump by 40%. Trump attacked not only Clinton personally, but the government as a whole, the media, and the Democratic party entirely. Despite the many number of targets that Trump targeted, Clinton remained the primary target through all of these attacks. Despite the fact that Trump proportionally focused more heavily on attack tweets, Clinton led in the absolute number of attack ads that were conducted. Both

Clinton and Trump engaged in personal attack, attacks on the media, attacks on the opposing party, and attacks on policy.

The nature of each kind of attack differed between candidates. Clinton focused on issues such as racism and homophobia. Trump, in contrast, focused on corruption. Regardless, though the degree to which each candidate attacked these different targets differed, they engaged in these different kinds of attacks regardless. Consequently, the data that arose from the research indicated that both candidates took actions and used Twitter in ways that may add to an already polarized political landscape.

The second major finding of the research indicated that the behaviors of both Clinton and Twitter were consistent with actions that would generate increased polarization. Edelman (1985) noted that language could be used as a cue to signal groups. Such cues directed individuals and groups to action regardless of their otherwise existing reasoning or ability to analyze a situation. Furthermore, cuing groups as a whole using specific statements and phrases generated a perceived threat to the group as a whole (Edelman, 1985). Such group threats could result in responses that were disproportionate to the perceived threat or cue.

The disproportionate response indicated in the data suggested that literature was demonstrated in the messaging that candidates used on Twitter. The most significant of these disproportionate responses was demonstrated in Trump's tweet asking Russian or other individuals to provide details regarding Clinton's alleged deleted emails. This action acted as a cue to provoke a disproportionate frenzy of individuals seeking to prosecute Clinton on the basis of the emails, highlighting the power of words to move groups to action when the group perceives a threat or call to action.

Consequently, the results of the findings indicated that the actions of both candidates were consistent with those that might increase polarization. Edelman (1985) indicated that words could act as cues that served as calls to action or warned groups of threats. In response, groups may disproportionately respond. The findings of the current study indicated that both candidates used the same language specified by Edelman that could serve as group threats or calls to action. It can be concluded, therefore, that the Twitter messaging of both Trump and Clinton during the 2016 election contributed to the ongoing polarization of the political landscape.

Limitations of the Study

Qualitative inquiry is inherently limited in its generalizability due to its nature. Although qualitative investigation allows for deep analysis of data, there remain limits due to the narrow scope of data that is drawn. Researchers have previously noted that there are significant limitations in various elements of content analysis related to trustworthiness (Elo et al., 2014). Content analysis requires the use of interpretive actions and deliberate choices on the part of the researcher that may have a direct influence on the study outcomes.

Such limitations can be overcome by drawing upon appropriate data relevant to the research question, achieving data saturation, and using a precise method for data collection that can be verified by outside researchers. The verification of a researcher's process in qualitative investigation is therefore important to overcoming the inherent generalizability limitations of a qualitative content analysis. Consequently, the researcher attempted to address the limitations of the study to the greatest degree possible.

The researcher made several delimiting decisions to limit the scope of the current investigation that directly acted as limitations on the study generalizability. One of the major delimitations included the decision to limit data collection to only Tweets made during the single year prior to the election. Due to the fact that the data was limited to this one-year period, there arose the chance that unidentified confounding variables may have influenced the study. Confounding variables are often of particular concern as a researcher examines longer and longer periods, as this exposes the timeframe under study to the risk that there will be other factors that impact the study phenomenon during that period. As such, factors that the researcher did not account for may have influenced the study findings rather than the candidates' rhetoric itself. The choice to exclude all non-Twitter sources of data, ranging from political speeches to policy briefs, creating the potential for unmeasured confounding variables to change the study findings.

Recommendations

The current recommendations of the current study are practical in nature and dependent on whether there is any strong desire in the current political environment to reduce the polarization of the political landscape. The research findings revealed that the language of both Trump and Clinton were attack oriented in nature. Though each used the service in different ways, they both used the service to wage attacks and signal their supporters in ways that could provoke increased polarization.

As such, the first practical recommendation is for politicians to willingly disengage from this kind of language on Twitter. The researcher admits that the likeliness of this occurring is low. Consequently, the second practical recommendation of the researcher is for Twitter to censor the words of political candidates. However, it is once

again admitted that the likeliness of Twitter censoring the words of politicians is low. Not only would this potentially raise protests on the basis of the First Amendment, but it would lead to undesirable accusations of bias against political groups. As such, there is little chance of there being voluntary restrictions on political attacks made online. The third option and practical recommendation is for both parties to recognition that political spectacle increases polarization and diminishes political discourse. This would require cooperation from both parties to deescalate political polarization and seems unlikely at this point.

The major research recommendation that could be taken from this study would be to expand the amount of content analysis conducted. Such a move would have to include analysis of the Twitter content not only of singular candidates, but multiple candidates in multiple contexts. Such a qualitative undertaking would be necessarily quite large in scope. However, such a study may reveal that the practices of Clinton and Trump on Twitter were emblematic of larger, polarizing messaging conducted by political parties over the course of the 21st Century.

Social Change Implications

The implications of the current findings are that Twitter can serve as a vehicle for political polarization and that this did occur during the 2016 election. It would be difficult to directly associate a politician's words with specific objective outcomes. However, previous research has suggested the role that worlds can play in signaling political supporters to take action (Edelman, 1985). Such action may often be disproportionate to the original trigger.

There are implications for politicians hoping to use Twitter in a way that helps get their message across while not contributing to the already occurring political polarization found in the political landscape. While Twitter can be used to message people, messaging must also be directed in such a way that it does not attack if the candidate hopes to reduce the amount of political polarization occurs. On the other hand, the same findings imply that if politicians want to induce high emotionality and disproportionate responses from followers, Twitter can serve as a vehicle for this. There are consequently both positive and negative implications for political behavior that can be taken from the study.

The single biggest implication of this study is that political messaging can be polarizing and that extends to Twitter as a messaging platform. Both presidential candidates during the 2016 election messaged in ways that were aggressive toward the other. Future political campaigns may therefore be at risk of involving similar attacking lines of messaging over Twitter that continue the trend of political polarization.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to examine whether, and to what extent, Twitter usage by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump contributed to political polarization during the 2016 U.S. To better understand this phenomenon, content analysis was employed. Content analysis was useful in understanding the differences and similarities in the messaging used by both parties during the 2016 campaign with Twitter serving as the messaging vehicle.

Following content analysis, two major conclusions were reached. First, Clinton and Trump used Twitter in very different ways. They used the service in different amounts and to wage different kinds of attacks. However, both did wage attacks.

Edelman (1985) previously indicated that words served as threats and calls to action during which groups disproportionately respond to the perceived threat. Trump and Clinton both engaged in the same sort of messaging that could produce such results.

The study findings were consistent with past research that indicated language could be polarizing (Edelman, 1985). Consequently, the current study positively affirmed the fact that both Trump and Clinton contributed to political polarization. The implications for this research suggested that political messaging using Twitter could act as a polarizing force.

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