

#TrumpStyle: The Political Frames and Twitter Attacks of Donald Trump

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Donald Trump is perhaps the most media savvy politician to ever reside at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. He intuitively understands how to shape public discourse across the media landscape, especially in using instantaneous communication such as Twitter to engage those whom he perceives to be his enemies. This paper seeks to examine the rhetorical and political frames utilized by President Donald J. Trump on the social media platform, Twitter. Framing Theory was used as the guiding methodology to engage in a content analysis of President Trump's Tweets (n=453), found on

<http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com>. While Twitter crosses national boundaries, what this work investigate how Donald Trump strategically utilizes Twitter as a political tool in relation to the U.S. population, namely the use and efficacy of 180 characters to develop allies, engage his opposition, promote his agenda, respond to criticism and define himself.

Keywords: Trump, Twitter, political discourse, framing theory, social media,

On January 20, 2017, Donald J. Trump was inaugurated as the 45th President of the United States. One would be hard pressed to find, in recent memory, a more polarizing political figure. There has been much ink spilled regarding what it means, or should mean, to now live in “Trump’s America.” As of now, it seems that both his supporters and detractors are firmly ensconced in their ideological fortresses, never to venture out onto neutral ground. However, what cannot be disputed is that no U.S. President has so consistently employed social media, primarily Twitter. Whether this is a positive or negative is a partisan issue, which is not to be addressed here today. While Twitter crosses national boundaries, what this work does investigate is how Donald Trump strategically utilizes it as a political tool in relation to the U.S. population and media.

The Internet and the various social media platforms available have been transformative across the world. It has permeated every aspect of our society, helping to spawn social justice movements like Black Lives Matter and political protest in Cairo, Egypt and Kiev, Ukraine. It is tough to overstate the influence and cultural change that social media has brought into our lives, resulting in examination by theorists, essayists and scholars from a variety of disciplines. The use of Twitter during the Trump campaign and throughout his current presidency is unprecedented, bringing new discourse and terms into the daily lexicon. “Tweetstorm,” “Twitter war,” “Liberal tears,” “Deep State,” “Alternative facts” and “Russian Twitter Bots” are just a few of the terms that now have cultural currency and meaning.

However, no other term has become as ubiquitous as “Fake News,” coined by Trump and promoted relentlessly on Twitter. It is here that this paper puts its focus. No so much on the term, but how Donald Trump has weaponized Twitter to attack the U.S. media, the one entity that has historically served to hold U.S. Presidents to account. As a former TV personality and international public figure, Donald Trump is perhaps the most media savvy politician to ever reside at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. He intuitively understands how to shape public discourse across the media landscape, especially in using instantaneous communication such as Twitter to engage those whom he perceives to be his enemies.

This exploration of Trump’s Twitter rhetoric regarding the U.S. media is important in three regards: (1) Twitter is now officially a legitimate and effective political tool; (2) Twitter is now the primary avenue for dissemination of political propaganda and “talking points”; and (3) When weaponized, Twitter can completely fracture the public and tangibly alter the reality/perceptions of a non-discerning public. In addressing these issues and contributing to current scholarship, this paper will utilize framing theory to engage in a content analysis of Trump’s “Fake News” tweets. In doing so, we should gain a better understanding of how Donald Trump uses 180 characters to develop allies, engage his opposition, promote his agenda, respond to criticism and define himself.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Twitter, for all practical and communicative purposes, is arguably still a nascent technology. Nevertheless, there has been a variety of conceptualizations of what Twitter is as well as interpretations of its efficacy. Primarily, Twitter has been investigated within three broad areas: (1) network topology, (2) as a communication tool and (3) social behavior. Clearly, a complete review of previous research is not feasible, however, understanding some germane examples is beneficial.

Networks

Viewed as a “network,” Twitter has been defined as a “bounded system” that enables individuals to construct public or semi-public profiles in order to share connections, view and traverse those connections made by others in the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). In examining datasets on Twitter, researchers have delineated between the “static” (i.e. profile info) and “dynamic” (messages) within the platform (Bastos, Travitzki & Raimundo, 2012). The use of outside programs and networks, such as R and Hadoop to analyze Twitter data has also been addressed (Prajapati, 2013).

The process of data retrieval from Twitter has been examined through the use of GNU/GPL applications like YourTwapperKeeper (Bastos, Travitzki & Puschmann, 2012). Another aspect of network analysis that has been explored is the ranking/classifying of Twitter users. This is often based on datasets revolving around how many followers a user has, who they follow, and retweet rate. Wu, Hoffman, Mason, and Webb (2011) used Twitter List to classify users into Elite users (celebrities, politicians, bloggers, etc.) and Ordinary users. The work of Bastos et al. (2012) and Wu et al. (2011) has also supported the presence of homophily and reciprocity as major aspects of the Twitter network.

Since all kinds of information is shared on Twitter, the issue of information diffusion has also been investigated. There is no agreement on how messages are spread over Twitter, however, studies have attempted to address these questions by studying first-network topology, and by measuring the retweet rate (Suh et al., 2010). As a network, Twitter has also been examined through the conceptualization of the event life cycle, which measures the number of tweets over time relative to the number of users in a network. Several studies have examined the life cycle of hashtags such as #OccupyWallSt, #FreeIran and #Jan25 (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2013).

Network-topology analysis has also been applied to Twitter, examining the hierarchical nature of the platform. Tsur and Rappoport (2012) utilized a hybrid methodology to analyze message content and network-topology by employing a linear-regression model to predict the speed of message propagation. Furthermore, additional work by Ye and Wu (2013) has measured message propagation online by studying the first, second, and third-network topologies. Influence on Twitter has also been investigated in which “centrality measures” were employed (Kumar, Morstatter, & Liu, 2014). This research sought to quantify influence by counting the number of links attached to users and how often these users were retweeted as well as the number of replies to original tweets (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2013).

Twitter has also been investigated through the scientific discipline of machine learning, which explores the construction and study of algorithms that can learn from data. Machine learning has been used to analyze the sentiment of twitter users (Go, Bhayani & Huangm 2009; Johnson, Shukla, & Shukla, 2012; Saif, He, & Alani, 2012). A hybrid method, “The Latent Dirichlet Allocation Model,” in which a topic has probabilities of generating various words as a means to predict future outcomes, as based on Twitter users’ sentiments revealed by their tweets has also been employed (Jahanbakhsh & Moon, 2014).

Communication

Twitter has been argued to be a transformative technology in regards to human communication. Available in 33 languages, Twitter encourages a participatory culture as “users shape the service through their practice of use” (Weller, 2014). It has been stated that the performance of communication has been altered by Twitter, since the platform “forces people to get to the point, be concise, and focus on the message” (Spencer, 2009). Twitter has also been defined as being analogous to the diaries of the 18th and 19th centuries, as they are a means of documenting important events in the family and community. According to Humphreys et al. (2013) both diaries and Twitter are short writings and, “because of their audience, content, narrative style, and limited length, these historical diaries share many characteristics of modern micro-blogs and are thus worthy of closer review” (p.6).

Twitter has also been conceptualized as an “event following tool,” because of its heavy use during elections and disasters (Rogers, 2014). Schmidt (2014) considers Twitter a communicative space that combines technology and relationships and is framed by three structural dimensions: (1) technological affordance, (2) social and textual relationships and (3) shared rules and expectations. However, some theorists have pointed out that Twitter allows us to circumvent real-world connections and instead develop them online based on following others based on similar pursuits or interest. (Pinkston, 2009; Bell & Kuon, 2009) There has also been research discussing information contagion and the speed with which information is shared (Farhi, 2009).

Bruns and Moe (2014) consider public communication on Twitter as a 3-part entity, encompassing a meso-layer (functions that enable following), macro-layer (content, hashtags) and micro-layer (@mentions and @replies). They argue that these levels do not exist in isolation but are interactive as a “topical tweet can be regarded as an intentional move from the macro- to the meso-layer” (p. 21). Although a technology, Twitter communication has been viewed as illustrating meaning as well as communication styles. Pennebaker (2011) states that each tweet “is like a fingerprint,” which can provide relevant information about the tweet author and their communication style as “each person uses words in a unique way” (p. 2).

Social Behavior

In looking at Twitter through the prism of social behavior, the majority of theorists have worked within two major areas: (1) actor characteristics and (2) message characteristics. In an early study of Twitter, actor characteristics were examined by Krishnamuthy et al. (2008). Their research collected information about nearly 100,000 users, including number of accounts followed, number of followers, and frequency of status updates. The authors created a taxonomy of Twitter users, grouping them into *broadcasters*, *acquaintances*, *miscreants*, and *evangelists*. Anonymity on social media, and Twitter in particular, has also been addressed. In studying anonymity, social context has been consistently appreciated as determining whether group or personal identity is salient. As a result, it has been argued that the degree of anonymity and other de-individuating behaviors, will increase or decrease relative to identity salience as practiced online (Spears, Lea, & Postmen, 2007).

Other areas of Twitter social behavior research have looked at the phenomenon of influence. Influence has been described as the amount or size of cascades on a platform caused by a certain “seed” (i.e. an event, or action/intervention by a certain actor). A cascade is a sequence of activations generated by a contagion process in which actors cause other actors to be activated in spreading information (Bakshy et al., 2011). Research has also examined individual information influence among users who are perceived as “similar” (Turner, 1991). While theories of social influence are largely inclined to suggest it stems from rational information processing or conformity pressure, it appears that in regard to emergent behavior on Twitter, this holds little sway. Mehta et al. (2012) have also modeled influence on Twitter using actor characteristics. Their study discusses how Twitter data is used as a corpus for analysis by the application of sentiment analysis and a study of different algorithms and methods that help track influence and impact of a particular user/brand active on the social network.

In researching the second component, message characteristics, social transmission has been front and center. In short, why are some stories and information shared more than others? What drives people to share in the first place? Traditionally, researchers (Hosch-Dayican et al., 2016) have argued that rumors spread in the 3 C’s (conflict, crisis, and catastrophe). However, Berger (2011) argues that social transmission can be driven by positive emotions as well, therefore transmission is driven by arousal (positive or negative). This hypothesis suggest that emotions characterized by high arousal, such as anxiety or amusement, will boost sharing more than emotions characterized by low arousal, such as sadness or contentment.

Naveed et al. (2011) studied Twitter by examining retweets to determine “interestingness” on a global scale in order to ascertain the content characteristics that make messages more likely to be retweeted. They found that general topics (i.e. Christmas) will be retweeted more than narrow, personal topics. Furthermore, the use of hashtags, URLs, emoticons, etc. served to increase the “interestingness” of the tweet, making it more likely to be retweeted. Suh et al. (2010) examined retweeting as a key mechanism of information diffusion. Like others, they confirmed that hashtags and URLs have a strong relationship with retweetability. However, they also found influencing contextual features as well, such as the number of followers and age of the account.

Propagation patterns have also been examined in order to understand how breaking news spreads through Twitter (Ye & Wu, 2010). Results showed that, in general, a tweet is retweeted quickly, a significant portion of messages propagate far from the originator, and the discussions are not restricted to their followers. Lehmann et al. (2012) examined how users respond to an incoming stimulus (i.e. tweet from a friend). Their research showed that the “principle of least effort” combined with limited attention plays a dominant role in retweeting behavior. Specifically, they observed that users retweet information when it is most visible. Furthermore, they found that, due to users limited attention, highly connected individuals are less likely to propagate an arbitrary tweet. Overall, their study indicates that the finite ability to process incoming information and the decay of visibility are the primary barriers to information propagation online and constrains social contagion.

METHOD

Frames/Framing Theory

Framing, or framing theory, comprises a variety of concepts and theoretical perspectives on how individuals, groups and cultures perceive, organize and communicate reality. At its root, framing is all about social construction, namely language influences and shapes the perception of reality by the meaning attributed to words, concepts or phrases. Framing can operate in two primary ways: (1) as a process of thought that consist of mental representations, interpretations and simplification of reality or (2) frames in communication that focuses on the communication of frames between groups or individuals (Druckman, 2001). Therefore, generally, framing is all about schemas of interpretation, anecdotes, stereotypes, etc. that we rely on to understand and respond to events. More specifically to the political or mass-communication arena, frames serve to “package” rhetoric in specific, calculated ways to encourage certain interpretations and discourage others. Framing is effective culturally and communicatively because it is a heuristic mental shortcut that provides a quick and easy way to process information because humans by nature, are “cognitive misers” who prefer to do as little thinking as possible (Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

Framing theory has been utilized across a broad spectrum of scholarship, including, but not limited to - how frames influence behavioral and attitudinal strategies (Vatz,

2012), use by journalists, corporate actors and special interests groups (Weaver, 2007), defining and explaining social problems (Price, Tewksburg, & Powers, 1997), the influence on attributing cause and responsibility (Iyengar, 1991), evaluations and recommendations (Kosicki, 1993), risk/reward decisions and cognition (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981), consumer purchases and satisfaction (Levy & Gaeth, 1988), and the development of social movements and political ideologies (Klandermans, 1997; Snow & Benford, 1988).

Although framing theory has many disciples, if there is a “Godfather” of framing theory, we should look no further than Erving Goffman. Goffman (1974) defines frames as “schemata of interpretation” that allow individuals or groups “to locate, perceive, identify, and label” events and occurrences, thereby helping to render meaning, organizing experience, and guiding actions. Goffman has been instrumental in not only codifying a succinct definition of frames, but also in defining their utility and applications.

As stated earlier, Donald Trump has proven to be a unique political animal. Therefore, we should not close a discussion of frames/framing theory without examining its applications and use in the political realm. The use of frame/framing theory in political rhetoric could fill several volumes and space does not permit a full, complete examination of every aspect in this paper. However, linguist and rhetorical scholar George Lakoff provides some easily digestible conceptualizations that will help guide us. In his 2004 political treatise, *Don't Think of an Elephant!: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*, Lakoff catalogues some specific political applications and utilizations for framing in the political arena:

- 1) The rhetoric of politics uses framing to present the facts surrounding an issue in a way that creates the appearance of a problem that requires a solution.
- 2) Politicians use framing to make their solution to the problem more appropriate than that of the opposition.
- 3) Consistently, repetitively invoking a particular frame effectively controls discussion and perception of an issue.
- 4) By refocusing from a negative frame to a positive one, the agenda of questions and debate can be shaped for the future.
- 5) Frames limit debate by setting the vocabulary and metaphors through which participants can comprehend and discuss an issue.

Framing theory has proven to be a powerful and relevant theoretical construct across a variety of cultural, social and communicative endeavors. Frames are something that humans are naturally drawn to and influenced by, both psychologically and emotionally. They help us to make sense of our world, define experiences and catalogue past experiences for future use. In competent hands, frames are immensely powerful tools to shape cultural/political narratives and discourse. The idea that politicians, in particular, use frames is not new. However, what is novel and important to examine is how Donald Trump, a real-estate businessman and reality TV star, used specific rhetorical frames on Twitter to not only become the 45th President of the United States but to upend the traditional political discourse and norms that we once lived under, and perhaps took for granted. Communication scholars, social media theorists and future political advisors should take note of how Twitter facilitated one of the greatest political upsets in modern history.

DISCUSSION

The Trump Twitter Archive <http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com/> is a comprehensive collection of all of Donald Trump's tweets. It covers, to date, 372 days and is broken down by topic/keywords (Obama, CNN, NFL MAGA, Clinton, etc.) The archive is also cross-listed by President Trump's "mentions" included in his tweets (@foxnews, @erictrump, @seanhannity, @foxandfriends, etc.) as well as themes expressed (personal superlatives, solving issues, global warming, who's laughing at us, media disdain, etc.) In Trump's engagement with the media via Twitter, there are 34 tweets about CNN, 32 about NBC, 37 about the New York Times, 170 about Fox News/Sean Hannity and 180 about "Fake News."

Admittedly, trying to keep up with all of Trump's tweets is like drinking from a firehose. For this study, only media related tweets (newspaper, TV) were examined. Using NVivo 12, all tweets were coded for consistent themes, rhetorical expressions, and frames. Clearly, space does not allow for a reproduction of every tweet, however, there was a substantial amount of material (453 tweets) to establish some clear patterns and rhetorical techniques.

The Twitter Presidency

It is important to understand how Trump himself conceptualizes the use of social media. It serves as a tool for him to not only set the narrative, but to completely circumvent the media all together,

- Dec 30, 2017 05:36:41 PM: I use Social Media not because I like to, but because it is the only way to fight a VERY dishonest and unfair “press,” now often referred to as Fake News Media. Phony and non-existent “sources” are being used more often than ever. Many stories & reports a pure fiction!
- Dec 13, 2017 08:02:52 AM: Wow, more than 90% of Fake News Media coverage of me is negative, with numerous forced retractions of untrue stories. Hence my use of Social Media, the only way to get the truth out. Much of Mainstream Media has become a joke! @foxandfriends.
- Aug 1, 2017 08:55:19 AM: Only the Fake News Media and Trump enemies want me to stop using Social Media (110 million people). Only way for me to get the truth out!
- Jul 1, 2017 05:02:27 PM: The FAKE & FRAUDULENT NEWS MEDIA is working hard to convince Republicans and others that I should not use social media, but remember – I won the 2016 election with interviews, speeches and social media. I had to beat #FakeNews, and did. We will continue to WIN!
- Jun 16, 2017 07:23:08 AM: The Fake News Media hates when I use what has turned out to be my very powerful Social Media - over 100 million people! I can go around them.
- May 28, 2017 07:20:11 PM: The Fake News Media works hard at disparaging & demeaning my use of social media because they don't want America to hear the real story!

Trump’s explanation of his use of Twitter lines up directly with two of Lakoff’s common political frames. First, Trump frames the news media as a “problem” and his use of Twitter is the “solution.” He rhetorically establishes this by stating that he doesn’t like to use social media, but he “has to” because it is “the only way to fight a dishonest and unfair press.” Furthermore, according to Trump, “phony and non-existent sources are being used more and more” – another problem that needs to be solved. Trump also uses questionable quantitative measures in stating that 90% of news coverage is negative, with “numerous forced retractions of untrue stories.” For Trump, Twitter is a tool that he has been forced to use in order to address the “problem” of an unfair media.

A second Lakoff frame is also evident, namely the use of a frame to control the discussion and perception of an issue. Trump places himself in diametric opposition to

the news media, an entity that he “can go around” through his use of Twitter. In essence, he views Twitter use as a competition, evoking “Trump enemies” that want him to “stop using social media.” He also makes a point to cite the number of followers (110 million) of his “very powerful social media” as well as claiming that he “had to beat #FakeNews and I did. We will continue to WIN!”

Trump also controls discussion and perception by rhetorically establishing his Twitter feed as the only repository of truth, stating that it is the “Only way for me to get the truth out!” and claiming that the media’s disdain for his Twitter use is because, “they don’t want America to hear the real story!” Trump, in a rhetorically shrewd move, sets up his Twitter feed as a canonical form of discourse, thereby relegating all information to being irrelevant or fraudulent. For Trump, Twitter is clearly a tool to be weaponized. It allows him to frame the discussion, set the agenda, establish an “us vs. them” mentality, and set himself as the sole purveyor of “truth.” Donald Trump, the first “Twitter President,” clearly understands the power and utility of social media.

Most Powerful Victim in the World

In discussing “Fake News,” Donald Trump consistently, almost daily, portrays himself as the victim of a lying, corrupt and disingenuous U.S. media,

- Nov 25, 2017 06:25:54 PM: Wow, even I didn’t realize we did so much. Wish the Fake News would report! Thank you.
- Oct 12, 2017 07:45:29 AM: The Fake News Is going all out in order to demean and denigrate! Such hatred!
- Oct 4, 2017 06:29:43 AM: Wow, so many Fake News stories today. No matter what I do or say, they will not write or speak truth. The Fake News Media is out of control!
- Sep 27, 2017 08:36:24 AM: Facebook was always anti-Trump. The Networks were always anti-Trump hence Fake News, @nytimes(apologized) & @WaPo were anti-Trump. Collusion?
- Aug 14, 2017 05:29:00 PM: Made additional remarks on Charlottesville and realize once again that the #Fake News Media will never be satisfied...truly bad people!
- Jul 22, 2017 06:35:34 AM: While all agree the U. S. President has the complete power to pardon, why think of that when only crime so far is LEAKS against us. FAKE NEWS
- Jul 7, 2017 02:44:07 AM: I will represent our country well and fight for its interests! FAKE NEWS Media will never cover me accurately but who cares! We will #MAGA!

These tweets are by no means an exhaustive list, but they provide ample evidence of several frames that revolve around what Goffman termed “schematas of experience.” As stated earlier, these frames are used interpretatively, enabling one to “locate, perceive, identify, and label” experiences or occurrences. Most obviously, Trump’s use of “Fake News” is an identifier, one he applies to every news source/outlet besides Fox News. Pushing further, such identification, as Lakoff noted, enables Trump to limit debate by setting the vocabulary and metaphors through which an issue is comprehend.

Trump also “locates” himself as an unappreciated victim. In claiming the “truly bad people” of the media have the sole purpose to “demean and denigrate” him, Trump locates himself as an unfairly maligned rhetorical object. He also gives the media specific, devious agency by stating, “they will never cover me accurately” and “no matter what I do or say, they will not write or speak truth.” This is an important distinction because Trump is not locating himself as simply misunderstood or unappreciated, but as the victim of coordinated and malicious false attacks. His claim that Facebook and news networks, “were always anti-Trump” calls back to Lakoff’s frame of political discourse repetitively invoking a particular frame to control discussion and perception of an issue. Trump simplifies an issue to its most easily understood essence, enabling his supporters to perceive and give meaning to the relationship between Trump and the media – and that meaning is “unfair victim.”

Many of Trump’s tweets encompass multiple frames, managing to touch on a variety of concepts. Below, we see the use of identification, location and labeling,

- Nov 27, 2017 09:04:51 AM: We should have a contest as to which of the Networks, plus CNN and not including Fox, is the most dishonest, corrupt and/or distorted in its political coverage of your favorite President (me). They are all bad. Winner to receive the FAKE NEWS TROPHY!

In identifying all networks, especially CNN, as “dishonest” and “corrupt,” Trump utilizes specific vocabulary to shape perception. Furthermore, by removing Fox News, Trump is locating that particular network as “truthful,” and by extension, an ally of Trump. There is also some very overt labeling, in which Trump makes sure to clarify that he is “your favorite President” as well as promoting a contest in which the “winner” will receive a “fake news trophy.”

Donald Trump's frame of victimhood is especially effective on Twitter, which requires brevity, succinctness and simple language. It is not a platform suited to in-depth commentary or erudite discourse. This makes it a very potent tool to shape perceptions, control the discussion and label his enemies in a manner that becomes linguistic shorthand for his supporters. This is very important to note, as Twitter revolves heavily around re-tweeting, liking, etc. The simplistic, non-nuanced language allows the reader to quickly make a judgment and respond accordingly.

Economic Savant

Donald Trump often touts his business savvy, wealth and deal-making prowess. During his campaign, he consistently portrayed the U.S. economy, under Obama, as an abject failure. He assured the voting public, during his RNC nomination speech, that "I alone can fix it." Therefore, it should be unsurprising that this frame is also a part of his regular Twitter expression,

- Jan 16, 2018 09:19:46 AM: Do you notice the Fake News Mainstream Media never likes covering the great and record setting economic news, but rather talks about anything negative or that can be turned into the negative. The Russian Collusion Hoax is dead, except as it pertains to the Dems. Public gets it!
- Dec 24, 2017 03:35:26 PM: The Tax Cut/Reform Bill, including Massive Alaska Drilling and the Repeal of the highly unpopular Individual Mandate, brought it all together as to what an incredible year we had. Don't let the Fake News convince you otherwise...and our insider Polls are strong!
- Dec 23, 2017 05:44:45 PM: The Stock Market is setting record after record and unemployment is at a 17 year low. So many things accomplished by the Trump Administration, perhaps more than any other President in first year. Sadly, will never be reported correctly by the Fake News Media!
- Dec 20, 2017 09:32:51 AM: The Tax Cuts are so large and so meaningful, and yet the Fake News is working overtime to follow the lead of their friends, the defeated Dems, and only demean. This is truly a case where the results will speak for themselves, starting very soon. Jobs, Jobs, Jobs!
- Dec 10, 2017 08:30:44 AM: Things are going really well for our economy, a subject the Fake News spends as little time as possible discussing! Stock Market hit another RECORD HIGH, unemployment is now at a 17 year low and companies are coming back into the USA. Really good news, and much more to come!
- Oct 21, 2017 08:14:33 AM: Stock Market hits another all time high on Friday. 5.3 trillion dollars up since Election. Fake News doesn't spent much time on this!

- Oct 11, 2017 05:31:18 AM: It would be really nice if the Fake News Media would report the virtually unprecedented Stock Market growth since the election. Need tax cuts

While we should put aside for the moment that the U.S. stock market is not best barometer of economic health, it is a frame that resonates with a large majority of people. Trump's focus on stock market levels echoes Lakhoff's argument that frames limit debate by setting specific vocabulary and metaphors through which issues can be comprehended. The stock market is the rhetorical umbrella that covers all of Trump's economic tweets. However, what are some more specific frames that we can see operating?

First, Trump's consistent use of superlatives in describing the economy is, obviously, strategic labeling. His tweets inform about the "great and record setting" economic news in a year that has been "incredible," buttressed by "virtually unprecedented stock market growth" that is "setting record after record." Such labeling creates a vocabulary that intimately links Trump and the economy - his presence in the White House has caused this massive growth. Second, Trump utilizes the political frame of making his solution more appropriate than his opposition. Below, we see how Trump includes current and historical narratives to give credibility to his solutions,

- Dec 24, 2017 03:35:26 PM: The Tax Cut/Reform Bill, including Massive Alaska Drilling and the Repeal of the highly unpopular Individual Mandate, brought it all together as to what an incredible year we had. Don't let the Fake News convince you otherwise...and our insider Polls are strong!

Trump references the tax cut bill, renewed oil drilling and repeal of the healthcare mandate that "brought it all together" for "an incredible year." This is a clear call to his followers to perceive and identify the "past" as a failure and the "present" as a success. Therefore, past U.S. Presidents were economic yokes around the neck of the country that Trump has removed. In case this frame was too subtle for some, Trump punches it directly in the nose in the following tweet,

- Dec 23, 2017 05:44:45 PM: The Stock Market is setting record after record and unemployment is at a 17 year low. So many things accomplished by the Trump Administration, perhaps more than any other President in first year. Sadly, will never be reported correctly by the Fake News Media!

By claiming "record after record" and quantitatively giving a frame (17 year low) to the unemployment rate, Trump uses "hard data" to give credence to his economic solutions

and actions in comparison to his predecessors. Trump then takes a qualitative turn when comparing his administration to past ones, especially noting that the Trump administration may have done “perhaps more than any other President in first year.” The fact that economics and the stock market are such a big aspect of Trump’s Twitter activity should not be surprising. He ran for president as a “successful businessman” and “deal maker” by rhetorically tying his wealth to his business acumen. Therefore, his consistent discussion on Twitter is a frame that encourages followers to identify him as an economic savant and in doing so, as Lakhoff explained, establishes a particular vocabulary to discuss an issue and helps to set the agenda of debate and questions for the future.

Enemy of the People

Trump’s most aggressive weaponization of Twitter is always aimed at the media. While calling the news “Fake” can be problematic, in general, Trump often frames the media as a pernicious enemy of all Americans,

- Dec 10, 2017 04:18:40 PM: Very little discussion of all the purposely false and defamatory stories put out this week by the Fake News Media. They are out of control - correct reporting means nothing to them. Major lies written, then forced to be withdrawn after they are exposed...a stain on America!
- Oct 11, 2017 08:55:44 AM: With all of the Fake News coming out of NBC and the Networks, at what point is it appropriate to challenge their License? Bad for country!
- Oct 4, 2017 10:18:28 AM: The @NBCNews story has just been totally refuted by Sec. Tillerson and @VP Pence. It is #Fake News They should issue an apology to AMERICA!
- Jul 16, 2017 06:15:10 AM: With all of its phony unnamed sources & highly slanted & even fraudulent reporting, #Fake News is DISTORTING DEMOCRACY in our country!
- May 28, 2017 07:45:16 AM:it is very possible that those sources don't exist but are made up by fake news writers. #Fake News is the enemy!
- Feb 24, 2017 10:09:18 PM: FAKE NEWS media knowingly doesn't tell the truth. A great danger to our country. The failing @nytimes has become a joke. Likewise @CNN. Sad!
- Feb 17, 2017 04:48:22 PM: The FAKE NEWS media (failing @nytimes, @NBCNews, @ABC, @CBS, @CNN) is not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American People!

It is difficult to overstate how undisguised these frames are, yet they operate on a variety of levels and reveal some very specific rhetorical intricacies. In describing the news media as “out of control,” Trump uses the political frame of presenting facts around an issue that creates the appearance of a problem that needs to be solved. Furthermore, he describes

the media as “a stain on America,” a pejorative that provides an easy, dehumanizing identifier for his followers to embrace.

Trump also uses labeling and identifying to create a particular metaphor through which his followers can comprehend an issue. Trump rhetorically makes himself and the country one entity. Therefore, any attack by the “fake media” is an attack on America. This is seen repeatedly through frames such as, “Bad for country!” “They should issue an apology to AMERICA!” and the claims that fake news is “DISTORTING DEMOCRACY in our country,” and is “A great danger to our country.” By creating an equivalency between himself and the country, Trump pulls on the dual threads of nationalism and patriotism. Therefore, when the media *criticizes Trump*, they are *attacking America*. To enhance this enemy narrative further, Trump claims that the New York Times is enabling terrorism against America,

- Jul 22, 2017 05:45:05 AM: The Failing New York Times foiled U.S. attempt to kill the single most wanted terrorist, Al-Baghdadi. Their sick agenda over National Security.

Trump gives the newspaper the most deviant agency possible for his followers to grasp, claiming they “foiled” an attempt to kill the “single most wanted” terrorist in the world because their “sick agenda.” With this tweet, Trump rhetorically frames a major U.S. media outlet as terrorist sympathizers who support and enable those seeking to kill Americans.

Trump also uses frames to help his supporters “locate” themselves, by creating a vocabulary through which they can express their own agency in the battle against the media,

- Feb 17, 2017 04:48:22 PM: The FAKE NEWS media (failing @nytimes, @NBCNews, @ABC, @CBS, @CNN) is not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American People!

This is a very powerful rhetorical frame, as it establishes his supporters as a necessary, oppositional force, by that the media is “not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American people” and “#Fake News is the enemy!” The language is collective also, establishing the media as a threat to not just Trump, but all decent Americans,

- Oct 5, 2017 05:59:40 AM: Why Isn't the Senate Intel Committee looking into the Fake News Networks in OUR country to see why so much of our news is just made up-FAKE!

“OUR country” is frame that helps Trump supporters to see themselves as protectors of America, the brave few standing on the parapets to protect our country. Not just satisfied with creating a collective identity, Trump takes a second step, advocating that his supporters become active participants in the fight against the media,

- Apr 17, 2017 07:17:59 AM: The Fake Media (not Real Media) has gotten even worse since the election. Every story is badly slanted. We have to hold them to the truth!

Trump is quite skillful in using these frames to help his supporters locate and identify themselves. However, it is exceptionally important to note that he seeks to have this location and identification be *within him*. He becomes the vessel for their identity. He becomes their vocabulary and the metaphor by which to comprehend. His wounds are their wounds, his successes are their successes, and most importantly, when he is attacked, they are attacked.

Branding and Ratings

As a real estate mogul and former reality TV star, two things Donald Trump knows to the core of his being are branding and ratings. Twitter, by its nature, is a social media platform that is incredibly effective for this type of discourse. With its cultural currency “moments” and whatever hashtag is currently “trending,” Twitter lends itself circulating ideas, perceptions, concepts and complaints at warp speed. Political advisors and campaign consultants have always stressed the importance of “branding” your opponent and defining them before they can define themselves. However, it seems no other U.S. political figure has ever intuitively understood this as well as Trump, nor employed it more strategically.

When running for the GOP nomination, Trump never missed an opportunity to brand his opposition: “Low Energy” Jeb Bush, “Lyn” Ted Cruz, and “Little” Marco Rubio.....and once his nomination was complete, turning his attention to “Crooked” Hillary Clinton. Trump also consistently embraces the concept of “ratings,” no matter how tangential they may be to the issue. It mirrors his populist rhetoric in which the “wisdom of the crowd” is the hallmark of legitimacy. The cognitive mathematics are

reductively simple: high ratings = good, low ratings = bad. Twitter is the perfect social media platform for someone like Donald Trump, as his branding stretches far more than just calling the news media “fake,”

- Dec 11, 2017 09:17:18 AM: Another false story, this time in the Failing @nytimes, that I watch 4-8 hours of television a day - Wrong! Also, I seldom, if ever, watch CNN or MSNBC, both of which I consider Fake News. I never watch Don Lemon, who I once called the “dumbest man on television!” Bad Reporting.
- Dec 9, 2017 08:02:23 AM: Fake News CNN made a vicious and purposeful mistake yesterday. They were caught red handed, just like lonely Brian Ross at ABC News (who should be immediately fired for his “mistake”). Watch to see if @CNN fires those responsible, or was it just gross incompetence?
- May 9, 2017 7:42 PM: Cryin' Chuck Schumer stated recently, "I do not have confidence in him (James Comey) any longer." Then acts so indignant.
- Jul 1, 2017 08:20:35 AM: Crazy Joe Scarborough and dumb as a rock Mika are not bad people, but their low rated show is dominated by their NBC bosses. Too bad!
- Apr 1, 2017 07:43:32 AM When will Sleepy Eyes Chuck Todd and @NBCNews start talking about the Obama SURVEILLANCE SCANDAL and stop with the Fake Trump/Russia story?
- Oct 10, 2017 07:50:55 AM The Failing @nytimes set Liddle' Bob Corker up by recording his conversation. Was made to sound a fool, and that's what I am dealing with!
- Oct 21, 2017 7:07 AM: I hope the Fake News Media keeps talking about Wacky Congresswoman Wilson in that she, as a representative, is killing the Democrat Party!

Politicians have always insulted each other, but usually have stayed within the bounds of decorum and decency. However, if there is one universal norm to Trump’s Twitter branding, it is that his attacks are always personal, focused on physical appearance or intellect, sometimes both. This type of rhetoric could be easily dismissed, but the question before us, is why does Trump use it? Why has it been so successful?

As a consummate promoter and salesman, Trump understands the importance of simple vocabulary, namely how it creates an efficient, cognitive shortcut to make sense of things. Chuck Schumer “cries,” Joe Scarborough is “crazy,” Bob Corker is “Liddle’,” Brian Ross is “lonely,” Don Lemon is “dumb,” Congresswoman Wilson is “wacky.” This simple vocabulary works hand in glove with the frame of “labeling,” and by extension, controlling discussion and perception of an issue. The main control that Trump exerts is his ability to respond instantaneously and repeatedly through

Twitter. His use of diminutive and belittling nicknames helps establish perception, by placing himself as the “competent adult” who has to deal with childish buffoons, deranged opponents, and mental incompetents.

It is a short walk from branding to discussing “ratings.” Trump’s obsession with ratings should be self-evident as hotels, restaurants, golf courses, products; TV shows etc. all live or die by ratings. It is an ideology he is supremely comfortable with,

- Oct 17, 2017 04:51:34 PM So much Fake News being put in dying magazines and newspapers. Only place worse may be @NBCNews, @CBSNews, @ABC and @CNN. Fiction writers!
- Oct 4, 2017 09:47:53 AM NBC news is #FakeNews and more dishonest than even CNN. They are a disgrace to good reporting. No wonder their news ratings are way down!
- Dec 29, 2017 07:46:23 AM While the Fake News loves to talk about my so-called low approval rating, @foxandfriends just showed that my rating on Dec. 28, 2017, was approximately the same as President Obama on Dec. 28, 2009, which was 47%...and this despite massive negative Trump coverage & Russia hoax!
- Jul 24, 2017 09:28:44 PM So many stories about me in the @washingtonpost are Fake News. They are as bad as ratings challenged @CNN. Lobbyist for Amazon and taxes?
- Jun 30, 2017 07:55:08 AM Watched low rated @Morning_Joe for first time in long time. FAKE NEWS. He called me to stop a National Enquirer article. I said no! Bad show

The only media descriptor Trump might utilize more than “fake” is “failing.” More specifically, any media outlet that criticizes Donald Trump is, by its very nature, “failing,”

- Feb 26, 2017 06:42:39 AM: For first time the failing @nytimes will take an ad (a bad one) to help save its failing reputation. Try reporting accurately & fairly!
- Jan 29, 2017 08:00:32 AM: Somebody with aptitude and conviction should buy the FAKE NEWS and failing @nytimes and either run it correctly or let it fold with dignity!
- Feb 6, 2017 11:32:24 AM: The failing @nytimes writes total fiction concerning me. They have gotten it wrong for two years, and now are making up stories & sources!

The constant use of “failing” helps his followers label the media, especially the New York Times, as incompetent and therefore unworthy of attention or credibility. Not content with discussing “failing” ratings, Trump resurrects an old conspiracy and

basically accuses former Florida congressman and current MSNBC TV host, Joe Scarborough, of murdering intern Lori Klausutis in 2001,

- Nov 29, 2017 09:14:19 AM: So now that Matt Lauer is gone when will the Fake News practitioners at NBC be terminating the contract of Phil Griffin? And will they terminate low ratings Joe Scarborough based on the “unsolved mystery” that took place in Florida years ago? Investigate!

It is one thing to claim your critic has low ratings; it is a whole other matter to publicly accuse them, via Twitter, of a capital crime.

Donald Trump is a master at branding his opponents and critics. He understands the speed of Twitter, the power of trending, and the simplicity of vocabulary necessary for the platform. Trump uses Twitter to give his supporters a quick rush and his detractors a migraine. He is the supreme, 21st century social media politician, clearly living by Oscar Wilde’s adage that, “There is only thing worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about.”

Defining #TrumpStyle

Examining the social media use of Donald Trump is a supremely challenging experience, as it is often an exercise in trying to find a tangible foothold amidst an abundance of haphazard commentary. However, as current President of the United States his rhetorical choices and discourse needs to be examined, especially considering his strategically intense use of Twitter as a primary communicative channel. While we have looked at some of the frames and rhetorical choices that Donald Trump uses on Twitter, what can we ascertain are his most prominent, consistently used themes? As stated earlier, by using Trump Twitter Archive <http://www.trumpltwitterarchive.com> clear, quantitative measures of his 453 media related tweets were available for examination (See Table 1).

CNN	34
NBC	32
NY Times	37
Fox News	170
Fake News	180

Of the 453 that were examined, the majority encompassed multiple themes. For those that had multiple themes/frames (i.e. “victim,” “ratings” and “economics”) the tweet was coded under the theme that was expressed first. Furthermore, Trump’s tweets often include multiple mentions/keywords (i.e. “Fake News” and @CNN). When this occurred, the listing on the archive served as the guide as to what the tweet’s primary topic was. The purpose to limiting and focusing the coding was to enable clear, unambiguous examples of frames and rhetorical expressions used. As a result, there were 128 tweets that were explicit and obvious examples of singular frames utilized on Twitter by Donald Trump, which fell into the following categories: Victim (n=42), Branding/Ratings (n=40), Enemy of the People (n=28), and Economics (n=18).

The frame of “victim” and the use of “branding” opponents were primary, followed by framing the media as an “enemy of the people,” and lastly, “economics,” which is used sparingly. Now, the question is - what are the operative aspects of these frames? To what ultimate purpose is Trump utilizing these?

Trump uses the victim frame as a tool of self-identity and as a means through which his supporters can define and relate to him. This frame helps set a vocabulary and establish metaphors through which people can comprehend or discuss an issue. Showing its efficacy, Trump supporters often respond appropriately to his tweets, claiming the media is “unfair,” and “no one is giving him a chance,” or he could be getting things done, but the “Deep State and Washington elites are out to get him.” In using the schemas of interpretation that identify Trump as a victim and oppressed, there can be no failures. This is exceptionally to note because philosophically and cognitively - every misstep – setback – or failed policy will never *actually exist* but will be the result of an unfair media and “Deep State” thwarting Trump’s attempt to “Make America Great Again.”

For Trump, branding and ratings are two sides of the same rhetorical coin. Both of them speak specifically to external audiences to frame opponents in a pseudo-objective manner. In branding opponents with schoolyard names, Trump seeks to draw attention to what he thinks are physical or mental “defects” that can become a cognitive marker for his followers. To focus on one particular example, during the campaign, Trump employed “Crooked Hillary” relentlessly. Why? First, the connotation of “Crooked” is self-evident. Second, by removing “Clinton” from her identity, Trump avoids any positive connotation

with the Bill Clinton administration which is generally viewed as an era of relative peace and economic/social progress. Thirdly, by using only her first name, Trump diminishes her professional and political identity. Hillary Clinton's resume is rhetorically wiped clean, removed of her roles as a former Senator or Secretary of State. Instead, she's just "Hillary" - a crooked, loudmouth woman. This is a supremely easy vocabulary and framing for Trump supporters to grasp, as seen by popular T-shirts at Trump rallies that stated "Trump the Bitch" or "Life's a Bitch, Don't Vote For One."

The constant reference to the "failing ratings" of his media critics is Trump's attempt to establish pseudo-objective measures that can be divested from him personally. Ratings enable Trump to create a frame to control the discussion and perception of an issue. He is seeking to control the discussion by discrediting the media based on a notion of what I would call "universal, populists appeal." Trump's frame makes the argument that if some something has "high ratings" it is inherently "good" and vice versa. Therefore, Trump shifts the critique of the media from being *only his opinion* to being *the opinion of the masses*.

The perception that Trump creates with his "failing ratings" frame is that the media as diseased and sick, rotting from the inside – which explains their failure. Only moral entities succeed while immoral entities fail. Trump used this frame during his campaign repeatedly referencing his wealth and having the "#1 show on T.V." In setting up "ratings" as a frame by which his supporters can locate/define morality and immorality, he establishes an objective measure that he can reference when discussing his financial success and cultural popularity. Primarily this reference equates morality with success, therefore Trump keeps it simple: wealthy businessmen and reality TV stars can't be bad. Why? Because they're rich.

One of the most dominant frames utilized by Trump is to portray the news media as an actual "enemy of the people." It is designed to engender and stoke true animosity toward another group. This enemy of the people frame attempts to limit the vocabulary and establish a metaphor through which his supporters can easily comprehend the battle between Trump and the media, except for Fox News which he often describes in his tweets as "fair" or "honest." Furthermore, the metaphor is overtly nationalistic, rhetorically defining Trump as the embodiment of America, and by extension, his supporters as "real

Americans.” Furthermore, by evoking the frame of “enemy,” Trump is using a metaphor to help his supporters locate themselves as a group under threat. Furthermore, one fights an “enemy,” so by employing this frame, Trump is also encouraging his supporters to define themselves as warriors in the midst of a cultural battle and encouraging their “fighting back” to protect American ideals.

For a President that, during the campaign, heavily touted their financial success and economic acumen, there are very few economically focused tweets by Trump. Now, admittedly, Twitter is not a platform designed for in-depth economic debate, but with only 18 clear, unambiguous examples, it seems that Trump does not view Twitter as the best medium to get his economic message out. However, like other aspects of #TrumpStyle discussed, there are still some important frames and rhetorical techniques to be examined.

Trump’s Twitter expression in regard to economics embodies some aspect of “ratings,” but it is primarily focused on sloganeering and limiting the “economy” to what the stock market is doing. These frames are designed to control the discussion and perception of an issue. Trump creates discourse focused on repeating the mantra of the “Jobs, Jobs, Jobs!” that are forthcoming and citing his specific rollbacks of policies from the previous administration. These become touchstones for his supporters, talismans of “achievement” that can be held onto as proof that America is making a change for the better. These slogans are frames that control this discussion and keep it simple, thereby avoiding any other discussion regarding outsourcing, trade policy, GDP or the myriad other conditions that influence a nation’s economy.

Trump’s incessant citation of the stock market records is an effective, albeit dangerous frame. A U.S. President who lives by the stock market, dies by the stock market. However, it does enable Trump to note quantifiable, non-partisan data. This is a very powerful frame because it provides legitimacy to Trump’s campaign claims of his economic prowess. This frame helps his supporters identify him as the *sole change agent* for the U.S. economy. This blends nicely with Trump’s other frames of branding and ratings. It is as if the U.S. economy is a reality show, in which Obama and the stock market got “bad ratings,” but ever since Trump was recast as the new lead actor, the ratings have been “record setting” and “unprecedented.”

CONCLUSION

Twitter is still a nascent technology. Its uses, applications and influences on our society are just now starting to be investigated and it will take many years to fully, and fundamentally, understand. Unlike other areas of scholarship, it will always be a moving target, often going far faster and more indiscriminately than we might be able to manage. The goal of this paper was to take some initial steps in examining the political frames utilized by Donald Trump on Twitter. Why is this important? Because Donald Trump is the first U.S. President to use Twitter not as an informative, social or connective platform – but as a strategic weapon against his political opponents.

If you will permit some sport analogies, Michael Jordan was the right basketball player, at the right time, for NBA global expansion and Madison Avenue advertising. Muhammed Ali was the right boxer, at the right time, for the political, racial and social tumult of the 60s. Make no mistake, Donald Trump is the right political figure, at the right time, for the instantaneous, social media driven political discourse of today. One day, the question of Russian influence, or “meddling,” will gain more clarity. Facebook, Twitter and other platforms are mired in dealing with fake accounts, Russian bots, and organized, foreign government-backed propaganda flooding social media. All of this will be a discussion for a later time, for other researchers. We have seen that other political figures such as Luther Strange (AL), Ed Gillespie (VA) and Roy Moore (AL), Scott Walker (WI), Bill Schuette (MI), Dean Heller (NV) and Kris Kobach (KS) and several others who Trump endorsed and campaigned for, have lost their election bids. They all tied themselves heavily to the Trump ethos and #MAGA ideology but were defeated. It is becoming more and more evident that there is something specifically unique about Donald Trump, as a social media personality, that others cannot replicate.

Based on his past as a salesman, real estate promoter and media personality is undoubtedly the first U.S. President to really understand how the media “works.” He knows how to change narratives, instigate, challenge and produce rhetorical/political frames that are easily comprehended by his supporters. The U.S. media has bent themselves into ideological pretzels in discussing how small Trump’s “base” really is, or how his base is “rapidly deserting” him. This was all said before the election also. They constantly cite approval ratings and quantify Trump’s base as around only 30% of the U.S.

population. Fair enough. That means his base is 969,000,00 of the U.S. population, but more importantly, they are inspired and devoted supporters of his message and ideology. 30% with a 100% turnout will always beat 70% with a 40% turnout.

Political advisors and consultants are trying to get a handle on how this one man has managed to use a social media platform to seemingly, at his command, change the warp and weft of political discourse. He portrayed himself an outsider, determined to drain the Washington, D.C. swamp. To be fair, he has lived up to that, at least rhetorically. Donald Trump has exhibited no sensitivities to the traditional political discourse, rules of order, or debate that we have become used to from our political leaders. As a result, Trump may actually be the first true harbinger of a political 3rd party that many in the U.S. have longed for.

The combination of his personality and Twitter finger have served to set him apart from the Washington, D.C. establishment. He has bypassed all media outlets and political advisors. He truly speaks directly, rightly or wrongly, to the people through the platform of Twitter. For other politicians in the wake of his arrival, they are finding out that being a member of the same political party as the resident of the White House is no longer enough. The days of “trickle-down” fealty among voters is gone. GOP Senators and Congress members are awaking to the rude realization that while you can sing the same song as Trump, it does not *sound* the same to his supporters. There is only one #TrumpStyle, but the future will show us what lessons other politicians have tried to take from it.

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