Promoting a President: Tone in Presidential Candidate Correspondence via Twitter

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to provide insight into the changes of integrated marketing communications in a political environment and the impact of different tones in a presidential campaign. Using the Twitter correspondence of the Republican and Democratic nominees, a content analysis was used to discover positive tones, negative tones, and themes during the 2016 presidential election. Data was collected from the end of the primary elections to election day in November 2016. This research also builds on previous studies focused on the growing impact of social media in political communications. The findings from this study include: (1) Hillary Clinton tweeted at Donald Trump more frequently then he tweeted at her. (2) Hillary Clinton had mostly neutral twitter correspondence towards Donald Trump, who in return used a more negative tone towards her. (3) The theme of Clinton's tweets where in reference to the character and qualifications of Donald Trump, while the majority of Trump's tweets toward Clinton referenced her character. (4) The majority of the candidates' tweets that reference each other's character and qualifications were negative.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Political Communication Strategy

Nowadays it is impossible not to incorporate any type of marketing strategy into the campaign for the White House. Politics is heavily influenced by marketing and products from corporate America that are used to influence voters. It is crucial to rely on effective marketing not only to successfully win an election, but also to effectively lead the United States (Newman 2010,1981; Sabato 1981; Nimmo & Rivers 1981; Altschuler 1982; Greenfield 1982; Mauser 1983; Goldenberg & Traugott 1984; Alexander 1984; Graber 1984a; Nieburg 1984; Polsby & Wildavsky 1984; Diamond & Bates 1984; Newman & Sheth 1985a, 1985b, 1986; Luntz, 1988; Jamieson 1992; Wring 1999; and Butler & Collins 1999; Perloff 1999). Therefore, in the context of politics, politicians are marketers trying to communicate and influence the voters, who are the consumers. Politicians work hard in order to meet the expectations of voters and influence the voter's decision in their direction before election day. It is crucial to understand the role of the voters in campaign strategy and how they are influenced in order to market effectively (Newman, 1988).

A reoccurring theme in research on political communications and campaigns is various attempts to model the changing campaign practices across time. Most authors have concluded with three phases of election campaigns. Norris (2000) as well as Plasser and Plasser (2002), have constructed the three phases: Premodern, Modern and Postmodern. A previous approach by Farrell (1996) is the Premodern, Television revolution and Telecommunications revolution stages. Between the two approaches, Farrell and Webb (2000) labeled the phases Stage 1, Stage 2 and Stage 3. Although the names and descriptions may differ slightly, the concept is still very similar across all three platforms (Strömbäck and Kiousis, 2014).

Strömbäck and Kiousis (2014) have organized the three stages (see Table 2), along with partial modifications adapted from Plasser and Plasser (2002). The table provides a solid representation of the phases and trends identified by other scholars as well (Farrell 1996; Farrell and Webb 2000; Negrine 2008; Norris 2000; Strömbäck 2007).

Tab. 2: Typology of changing campaign practices.

	Stage 1 ("Premodern")	Stage 2 ("Modern")	Stage 3 ("Postmodern")
Mode of political communication system	Party-dominated	Television-centered	Multiple channels and multi-media
Dominant style of political communication	Messages along party lines	Sound bites, image and impression management	Narrow-casted, targeted micro-messages
Dominant media	Partisan press, posters, newspaper adverts, radio broadcasts	Television broadcasts through main evening news	Television narrow-casting, targeted direct mail and email-campaigns
Dominant advertising media	Print advertisements, posters, leaflets, radio speeches and mass rallies	Nationwide television advertisements, colorful posters and magazine adverts, mass direct mailings	Targeted television advertisements, e-mail campaigns and tele-marketing, web-based advertisements
Campaign coordination	Party leaders and leading party staff	Party campaign managers and external media, advertising and survey experts	Special party campaign units and more specialized political consultants
Dominant campaign paradigm	Party-logic	Media logic	Marketing logic
Campaign preparation	Short-term, ad-hoc	Longer-term campaign	Permanent campaign
Campaign expenditures	Low	Increasing	Spiraling up

Source: Adapted from Strömbäck and Kiousis (2014)

As political campaigns continuously adapt to changes in their environment, they adapt to changes in societal structures, communication technologies, and to changes in the political attitudes and behaviors of voters. They adapt either for one of two reasons; either they feel pressure to adapt or because they see strategic advantages in adapting. Both reasons are relevant for an obtaining an understanding of why and how election communication strategies have changed over time (Strömbäck and Kiousis, 2014).

Social Media and the Most-modern Era

In the past few years alone, social media has grown rapidly (Wigand et al. 2010; McAfee 2006). For example, Facebook has gained the membership of more than 800 million people worldwide while Twitter has obtained over 200 million accounts (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2012; Facebook, 2011; HuffPost Tech, 2011). This shift towards the adoption of social media applications has changed the physics of information diffusion and introduced a new era of communication. The growing importance in communication through social media has

sparked change in the relevance of traditional media outlets that were once reserved for the social elite such as, actors, politicians, corporations, and journalists (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013; Chadwick 2006). This circumstance is currently being observed across the different perspectives of various disciplines such as sociology, information communication studies, information systems, political science, and linguistics, making it a common goal to gain a better understanding of communication within social media (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013).

The tremendous growth of social media within Twitter and Facebook alone has recently made its way into the political environment. Social media is now being used as a weighted communication outlet by both citizens and political institutions. It is practically essential to the success of a political campaign to actively participate in the political communication within social media (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013). Social media has now become the medium used to build community support for candidates running election campaigns for political positions, as well as gain an understanding of public opinion on policy (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013; Zeng et al. 2010). The most prominent example can be seen within the election campaign of Barack Obama, who was able to effectively utilize social media within his 2008 campaign for president (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013; Wattal et al. 2010). Social media networks have also increased political participation and discussion among citizens since it is an ideal platform to not only spread information but also gain political opinions (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013; Zeng et al. 2010; Kavanaugh et al. 2011; Paris and Wan 2011; Stieglitz et al. 2012).

Recently, previous studies have specifically focused on social networking sites such as Facebook and have analyzed their use by politicians; it has been found that the number of Facebook supporters can be a valid indication of election success (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013; Williams and Gulati, 2007, 2009). Like Twitter, Facebook can also be seen as a legitimate location for discussion of political issues (Kushin and Kitchener, 2009). However, in contrast, it has been concluded that

while social networking sites are recognized by the youth as a news source, the types of news gathered probably do little to inform. Also, in spite of the credit websites like Facebook hold for building political interest and participation among youth, it has been discovered that users are no more motivated to become involved in politics than users involved in other media platforms (Baumgartner and Morris 2010; Vitak et al., 2011). It remains unclear whether voter's political involvement on social networking sites such as Facebook contributes significantly to the overall decision in the form of votes. Although social networks contribute to civic engagement, interpersonal discussion ultimately brings both civic participation as well as political activity (Robertson et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2010).

Overall, social media bridges the connection between social networks, personal information channels, and the mass media. Social media data in the form of user-generated content continues to offer many new opportunities and challenges to both producers and consumers of information. Despite the vast quantity of data available, the actual challenge is to be able to analyze the large volumes of user-generated content and create links between users in order to gain insight into the processing of information, opinions and sentiments as well as upcoming issues and trends (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013; Leskovec 2011; Agrawal et al. 2011; Nagarajan et al. 2011).

Research Questions

Within every presidential campaign, there is a strategy set in place to effectively market the candidate towards voters. Since the beginning of presidential campaigning, the effective utilization of evolving technology has led to each president's success. During the 2016 presidential election, each candidate has made use of Twitter, a social media outlet, as a means of communication with the voters and each other over the course of the entire campaign. These new behaviors and strategies within political campaigns have marked a new era of political communication.

The goal is to examine the tone and theme of then-presidential nominees Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. Both candidates at

the time of their campaign implemented the strategy of marketing towards their intended audience through social media. Through extensive background research and analysis of previous research, the following questions were proposed:

- **RQ1: What was the tone and theme of each candidate's correspondence on Twitter?**
- **RQ2: How did the overall tone and theme of each candidate's correspondence compare and contrast?**

During his 2016 presidential campaign, Republican nominee Donald Trump used Twitter in a significant way in order to communicate with voters and other famous political figures including his opponent and Democratic nominee, Hillary Clinton. Clinton also utilized Twitter to communicate with voters and promote herself as a potential President. It is because of the growing impact of Twitter and the lack of research involving this medium that it was used as a prominent and beneficial area to analyze the tone and theme of each candidate.

METHOD
Data
Results were gathered through a content analysis of the Twitter correspondence between Republican and Democrat nominees Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. Both candidates were chosen for their most recent campaign in the 2016 election and their frequent use of the medium Twitter. The tweets analyzed were those between the dates of June 14th and November 9th, which marked the beginning and end of the primary election. This was also a period of time when both candidates were no longer in competition within their own political party.

The tweets during this time period were narrowed down by selecting only the tweets that mentioned the other candidate. In order for a tweet to be analyzed, it needed to contain the twitter name of the opposing candidate or the opposing candidates first and last name together or independently. Also, the tweet needed to be referring to the opposing candidate. An online

archive developed by Brendan Brown allowed for the opportunity to separate the tweets of both candidates in accordance with the specific constraints. The constraints allowed for an analysis of how each candidate was portraying each other and removed others that may have been mentioned during the time period. It is also important to mention that any external media such as photos, gifs, or links to other websites were not included, only the words of each tweet were included in the coding and analysis.

Coding
The instrument for the content analysis was developed using the approach of two main authors which guided the construction of the codebook for this study. Marianne Eisemann (2012) proposed a standard for calculating tone and sediment within traditional media that presented a reliable approach to transfer over to the analysis of tweets. Eisemann mentions a latent content analysis, which was used in this study to determine the tone. In this study, a latent analysis determines tone through an overall determination of exactly what each candidate was saying, as opposed to only looking at individual words (known as a manifest analysis).

Procedures on a qualitative content analysis approach were described in detail by Phillip Mayring (2000). Mayring's article describes a systematic and rule-guided approach to a qualitative content analysis while preserving some of the strengths from a quantitative content analysis. Due to the lack of previous studies involving an analysis of tone and theme within tweets, the combination of both Mayring's description of a qualitative approach to a quantitative analysis and Eisemann's procedures created a pathway for approaching this study in a reliable way.

Codebook
The codebook was used to identify the multiple parts of the questions at issue, which included tone and theme. In order to determine the tone of each tweet, a coding agenda was constructed to identify the constraints of each term and to keep consistency when assigning each term. From there, each qualified tweet was entered into an Excel workbook as a separate

piece of data along with the date each tweet was constructed by the candidate. The tone was determined using a coding agenda that defined the terms positive, neutral and negative. When coded, tweets that were deemed negative were given a 1, neutral tweets were recorded as 2 and positive tweets were recorded as 0. When coding for the theme, each tweet that related to the character of the opposing candidate was given a 1. Tweets relating to the qualifications of an opposing candidate were coded as 2. If the tweet did not fit into the category of character or qualifications, it was recorded as a 0. A coding guide for tone and theme, along with their definitions, an example of tweets in each category from each candidate, rules for coding, and corresponding number related to each category are represented in Figures 1 and 2 below.

Figure 1: Coding Agenda for Tone

TONE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLES	CODING RULES	INPUT
Negative	Content leaves the reader less likely to support the other presidential candidate. Content includes complaints, expresses disagreement and uses words of rejection. Criticism is deconstructive (i.e. sarcasm).	"Donald Trump has a problem looking at someone different from himself and actually seeing them." "Crooked Hillary Clinton has destroyed jobs and manufacturing in Pennsylvania. Against steelworkers and miners. Husband signed NAFTA."	Content contains no "positive" tone aspects. Content contains aspects that point to "negative" tone. If content is a statement of fact code as "neutral" tone.	1
Neutral	Content is impartial and contains no sentiment at all. Reports the facts without any additional commentary. Typically, in the form of a statement of affirmation or a question.	"It's time for Trump to answer serious questions about his ties to Russia." "Hillary Clinton is the only candidate on stage who voted for the Iraq War. #Debates2016 #MAGA"	Content contains no positive or negative aspects. Content is just facts regardless of what the fact is.	2
Positive	Content as a whole leaves the reader more likely to support the other presidential candidate. Content contains words of affirmation or agreement with other candidate Content is constructive in intention.	"Donald Trump wants to compare his last 30 years with Hillary's. Let's do that." "If you like Donald Trump, you're going to love his choice for vice president."	Content contains aspects that point to "positive" tone. No aspects of the content point to "negative" tone. If content has no positive or negative aspects record as "neutral"	3

Figure 2: Coding Agenda for Theme

THEME	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE	CODING RULES	INPUT
Other	Content does not fit into any of the defined themes.	"It's time for Trump to answer serious questions about his ties to Russia." "Donald Trump wants to compare his last 30 years with Hillary's. Let's do that."	Content must not fit into any other themes.	0
Character	Content is related to the attributes, morals, and traits of a candidate.	"Donald Trump told lie after lie last night because it's all he has to offer the American people." It doesn't matter that." "Crooked Hillary has experience, look at all of the bad decisions she has made. Bernie said she has bad judgment!"	Content of tweet must fit within and relate clearly to the definition.	1
Qualifications	Content is related to the candidate's eligibility and suitability to serve as president.	"A vote for Clinton-Kaine is a vote for TPP, NAFTA, high taxes, radical regulation, and massive influx of refugees." "Donald Trump's speech last night took it to a whole new level. He offered a lot of anger and fear and resentment—but no solutions."	Content of tweet must fit within and relate clearly to the definition.	2

Intercoder Reliability

In order to establish reliability, the data used was coded by two trained coders using a pre-developed codebook. In order to determine the themes for the codebook, 60% of the data was coded by one primary coder who kept a list of reoccurring themes. The top two themes were used in the codebook. Once the codebook was completed with a coding agenda to identify tone and theme, 20% of the data was given to a second coder to test for 80% agreement. When the first attempt at intercoder reliability was unsuccessful, each coder was retrained and another 20% of data was distributed. Once in agreement above 80%, the second coder continued to code the remaining 30% of uncoded data. Data that was not in agreement after the first reliability check was agreed on by both coders together to utilize the opportunity to improve the accuracy of the coder's second approach towards reliability. Data that was not in agreement after the second approach at reliability was thrown out.

Analytic Strategy

Once the coding was complete, the data was analyzed for any typos or misspellings, as any mistakes would create an inaccuracy when running the analysis. Once reviewed for human error, the data was counted and entered into SPSS to conduct Pearson's chi-square test in order to understand the relationship between the tone (negative, neutral, or positive) and theme (character, qualifications, or other) of each candidate separately. A follow-up chi-square test is conducted in order to represent the correlation between the tone and theme of the tweets from each candidate.

RESULTS

In total, 653 tweets were collected and analyzed. Figure 3 displays the statistics of the chi-square test for the tone in relation to each candidate. The results show that out of the total 381 tweets posted by Hillary Clinton, 40.7% were coded as negative, 57.5% were coded as neutral, leaving 1.8% coded as positive. Out of the 272 tweets posted by Donald Trump 80.1% was coded as negative, 18.8% was coded as neutral, leaving 1.1% coded as positive. The results comparing each candidate show that Trump's tweets were mostly negative (80.1%) compared to Clinton's tweets, which were mostly neutral (57.5%). Positive tweets did not account for more than 2% of the total tweets from each candidate.

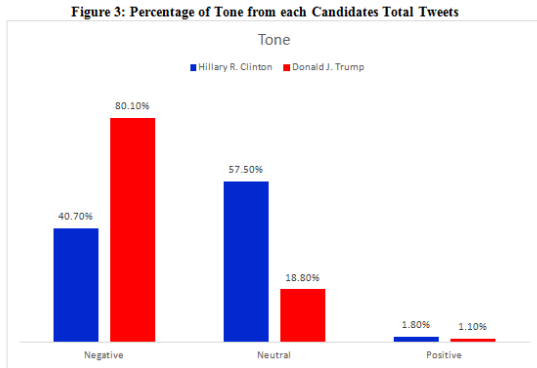Figure 3: Percentage of Tone from each Candidates Total Tweets

Figure 4 displays theme as it relates to each candidate's reference of the theme categories. The results comparing each candidate correspondence show that Trump referenced Hillary's character (56.6%) more than her qualifications (27.6%), while Hillary also referenced Trumps character (38.8) slightly more (7.8%) than his qualifications (31%).

Figure 4: Percentage of Theme from each Candidates Total Tweets
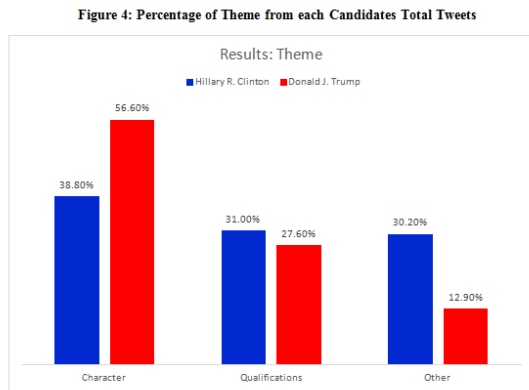
Tables 1 and 2 display the statistical data from a follow-up Pearson's chi-square test that measures the interaction between the tone (negative, neutral, or positive) of the tweets of each candidate in relation to the corresponding theme (character, qualifications, or other). In order to locate the source of the interaction comparing both of the chi-square tests revealed that the interaction resulted from differences in the proportion of negative tweets on character vs. qualifications themes. Both candidates had significantly fewer negative tweets about "other" themes than "character" and "qualifications" themes; 7% of "other" tweets were negative for Clinton and 20% were

negative for Trump. For Clinton, "character" and "qualifications" were equally negative; 55.4% of the "character" tweets and 55.1% of the "qualifications" tweets were negative. In contrast, Trump's tweets about "character" were significantly more negative for character themes than for qualification themes; 95.7% of the "character" tweets and 74.7% of the "qualification" tweets were negative.

Table 1: Negative vs. Neutral/Positive * Theme Interaction

		Negative			Neutral/Positive		
	N	Other	Character	Qualifications	Other	Character	Qualifications
Hillary Clinton	381	7.0%	55.4%	55.1%	93.0%	44.6%	44.9%
Donald Trump	272	20.0%	95.7%	74.7%	80.0%	4.3%	25.3%

Table 2: Significance and Effect Size of Tone and Theme

		Chi-Square Test			Symmetric Measures	
	N	Chi-Square Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Crammer's V Value	Approximate Significance
Hillary Clinton	381	77.641[b]	2	.000	.451	.000
Donald Trump	272	105.554[b]	2	.000	.623	.000

Pearson's Chi-Square Test shows a significant difference for both candidates. Clinton shows a medium effect size (.3 ≤ V > .5) while Trump shows a large effect size (V ≥ .5).

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to present tone in presidential candidate correspondence before the 2016 general election. There has been a progression of social media making an impact on the perspective of voters since the 2008 election in which President Barack Obama secured the presidency through his effective utilization of Facebook (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013; Williams and Gulati, 2007, 2009). Since then, Twitter has also been used as a source of information by social media users and has had a substantial impact on the perspective of voters (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013; Williams and Gulati, 2007, 2009).

After the primary elections, using the correspondence between Republican nominee Donald J. Trump and Democrat nominee Hillary R. Clinton in the months leading to election day, the first question frames the tone of communication between the two candidates. Results following the initial research question show that both candidates produced more negative tweets over positive tweets. However,

when compared to each other, Trump produced more negative tweets (80.1%) than Clinton (40.7%). Results for neutral tweets showed that Clinton produced more neutral tweets (57.5%) than Trump (18.8%). Both candidates produced positive tweets below 2%. Overall, results from the initial research question suggest that the tone of Trump's presidential campaign was mostly negative via his twitter correspondence toward Clinton.

The second research question aimed to discover the theme of correspondence between the two candidates and gain insight into what was being critiqued or mentioned. Results show that the majority of Trump's tweets towards Clinton directed readers toward her character (totaling at 56.6% of his overall tweets). Similar results show for Clinton, as 38.8% of her tweets toward Trump were about his character. Clinton's tweets that directed readers towards Trump's qualifications to serve as president were close to the number of her tweets on his "character," but were still leading over Trump at 31.0%. Overall, an analysis of the results from the second research question shows that while Clinton also mentioned the character of Trump more often than his qualifications, they were more evenly distributed among the three categories (character, qualifications, and other). Trump's correspondence toward Clinton focused significantly more on her character more than anything else.

In conclusion, this study has shown that while the tone of Trump's twitter correspondence toward Clinton was more negative than Clinton's correspondence toward Trump, both nominees produced more negative content than positive/neutral content. The majority of the tweets produced by both nominees were themed as "character;" however, Clinton produced more qualification themed tweets toward Trump than Trump produced toward Clinton.

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE STUDIES

This study is limited to the tweets of the republican and democratic nominees after the primary elections leading into the night before the general election results. The tweets used for this study were generated through a third party online database and only included tweets which mentioned the other nominee directly. Tweets that directed towards the other candidate through the use of anything beyond their name or twitter handle were not included in this study.

In order to gain a better understanding of the tone of each candidate's campaign correspondence, the use of other names that clearly direct the reader towards the other nominee should be included (i.e. crooked Hillary). Adding additional themes would also be beneficial to gaining an understanding of what each candidate was communicating towards the other. Other suggestions for future studies would be to use only tweets that are a fact and not based on false allegations or promoted for the sake of negative correspondence towards the other candidate or expand the time period of the correspondence. While this study sets a basic foundation and provides insight, future research is necessary to gain a better understanding.

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