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Threatening Democracy in 140 Characters: A Rhetorical Analysis of Donald Trump's  
Presidential Use of Twitter

by

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## Abstract

Over one year into Donald Trump's presidency, Twitter continues to dominate as his medium of choice for regular tantrums and tirades. Through a content analysis of 1,014 tweets and a rhetorical analysis of 38 tweets ranging from January 20, 2017, until November 20, 2017, this honours thesis sought to identify how Trump's use Twitter diverges from established conventions of presidential rhetoric and *ethos*. Despite the potential for various readings of tweets, the results of my analysis confirm that Trump consistently fails to align with the components of intrinsic *ethos* – wisdom, goodwill, and virtue – and instead, uses Twitter to launch relentless attacks on individuals and institutions.

At 580 tweets (57.2%), over half of the analyzed sample directly challenged conventions of presidential rhetoric by making deliberate attacks on individuals, groups, countries, or institutions. Attacks on groups was the largest subcategory, representing nearly 20% of the sample with 199 tweets. While 434 tweets (42.8%) fell under positive subcategories, much of the rhetoric, including the 112 tweets dedicated to self-praise, were also found to negatively affect Trump's character. Due to Trump's extreme departures from acceptable presidential rhetoric, both my content analysis and rhetorical analysis demonstrate catastrophic consequences for Trump's presidential *ethos*. In addition to revealing the individual repercussions, this research recognizes that Trump's drastic changes in content, tone, and delivery of political communication made possible by the new genre of Twitter has shaped the nature of presidential rhetoric, resulting in devastating threats to the safety of American citizens and the future of both the institution of the presidency and democracy.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

*Just heard Foreign Minister of North Korea speak at U.N. If he echoes thoughts of Little Rocket Man, they won't be around much longer! – Tweet by Donald Trump, September 23, 2017*

Amid an already heated exchange, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un took this tweet published by President Donald Trump on September 23, 2017, as a declaration of war. The original disagreement between North Korean and American leadership quickly transitioned into combative rhetoric as Trump escalated the situation through an array of increasingly hostile tweets. During the United Nations General Assembly annual ministerial meeting in September, Edith Lederer (2017) of TIME magazine noted that Ri Yong Ho, North Korean Foreign Minister, told reporters although North Korea did not want to act on this war of words, by continually insulting North Korea's leadership, Trump is calling for an inevitable nuclear attack on the United States, endangering the lives of millions of American citizens.

The unlimited reach and instantaneous nature of Twitter has attracted a diverse range of uses aside from social interactions, which recently expanded to include political communication. During the 2016 American presidential race, celebrity businessman and reality television star Donald Trump capitalized on Twitter's advantages, transforming the social media site into a powerful political tool to side-step traditional news media. As opposed to operating through conventional media channels like his predecessors, through the year-long campaign period and first 10 months of his presidency, Trump selected Twitter as his medium of choice to disseminate often highly controversial, impulsive tirades.

Although Twitter is typically considered personal communication and may seem to have little authority in the political realm, former White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer asserted that Trump's tweets are deemed official statements from the President of the United States and

should therefore be considered equally as significant as comments directly from his press office (Landers, 2017).

Over one year into his presidency, it seems Trump has turned Twitter into a powerful, indispensable weapon which he uses to launch constant attacks on individuals and institutions. Although Trump's Twitter tirades are often aggressive, petty, and mean-spirited, his tweets continue to dominate the news cycle, earning international attention while changing the face of political communication. Trump's reliance on Twitter, which he refers to as "modern-day presidential" (Buncombe, 2018, para. 7), marks the latest development in political communication and the future of presidential rhetoric. Understanding how Trump's use of Twitter diverges from established conventions of presidential rhetoric and *ethos* is necessary to determine the implications for the United States, including the future of democracy and the institution of the presidency.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

This chapter situates my study within an established body of academic literature regarding presidential rhetoric while identifying the significance of Trump's use of Twitter in the political realm. While this literature offers a basis on the standards of presidential rhetoric and explores political uses of Twitter, there is currently no research on Trump's use of Twitter from a rhetorical perspective. By conducting both a content analysis and rhetorical analysis of tweets posted throughout the first ten months of Trump's presidency, my research will determine the implications his presidential use of Twitter poses for American citizens and the future of democracy.

### **Presidential rhetoric**

With the institution of the President of the United States of America originating over two centuries ago, there is a considerable body of literature dedicated to the importance of presidential rhetoric. A common notion recognizes that presidential rhetoric constructs the identity of the institution of the presidency. In an examination of typical genres of presidential discourse, Campbell and Jamieson (2008) argue that the rhetoric employed by presidents over the course of generations establishes the conventions, behaviours, and objectives expected of current and future presidents. They argue that transitions in communication technologies have only increased the power of presidential rhetoric: "presidential rhetoric is one source of executive power, enhanced in the modern presidency by the ability of presidents to speak when, where, and on whatever topic they choose and to reach a national audience through coverage by electronic media" (Campbell & Jamieson, 2008, p. 6). Jamieson and Kenski (2017) support this notion when they assert that changes in the structure, content, and delivery of political communication shape the structure of politics. Renowned for their work on political

communication, Campbell and Jamieson (2008) and Jamieson and Kenski (2017) effectively highlight the role of presidential rhetoric and how modern communication developments have contributed to shaping the presidency.

With the powerful role of presidential rhetoric in democratic societies, Aune and Medhurst (2008) argue that presidents are obligated to meet basic ethical standards such as “respect for democratic values, human rights, the exercise of prudence, and ensuring that just policies will prevail” (p. 331). They suggest that fundamental ideals used to inform presidential rhetoric must be based on three key values: prudence, honesty, and the spirit of compromise and conciliation. Regarding prudence, Aune and Medhurst assert that presidential rhetoric must display disciplined reason; a president must never make false or questionable claims that lack compelling evidence. To maintain public trust, the president must practice rhetorical integrity, meaning they have a duty to tell the truth. According to the authors, deceiving the public through lies, distortions of the truth, misrepresentations of facts, or inconsistencies in language typically results in diminished public trust and cynicism. Finally, with a growing divide between Republican and Democratic states, the president holds an obligation to unite citizens through compromise, reconciliation, and healing (Aune & Medhurst, 2008). These values outlined by Aune and Medhurst define the ethical standards expected of presidents that persist across generations.

Several scholars have also recognized the range of purposes presidential rhetoric typically serves. Beasley (2004) asserts that most presidential rhetoric promotes nationalism and aims to unite citizens by focusing on shared beliefs. Similarly, Aune and Medhurst (2008) offer a list of eight recommendations for presidential rhetoric which outlines the principal purposes it should serve within democratic nations. Namely, they argue that presidential rhetoric must

uphold the Constitution and democracy by promoting a free flow of information, defending citizens' rights to fair and accurate knowledge, refraining from derogatory statements regarding people, agencies, or institutions, and supporting freedom of the press. McChesney and Pickard (2017) also recognize the importance of freedom of the press within democratic nations. They argue that free press directly correlates with democracy. Likewise, Graber (2017) emphasizes that the ability to control political news allows for the destruction of sovereignty in democratic nations. Essentially, liberty is dependent upon unconstrained freedom of the press (Graber, 2017). Thus, to maintain democracy, presidential rhetoric must support uncensored news media.

The literature recognizes that to adequately support democracy, presidential rhetoric should follow established standards of tone, style, and content. Campbell and Jamieson (2008) state that there are certain rhetorical boundaries placed on presidents. They contend that once a president is inaugurated, all rhetoric enacted, whether in personal life or in public, represents the presidency as an institution. Rhetoric that is acceptable during campaign periods or in personal situations becomes inappropriate (Campbell & Jamieson, 2008). Similarly, Jamieson, Volinsky, Weitz, and Kenski (2017) argue that civility is a social norm and standard of behaviour based on widely held beliefs that determine appropriate actions and rhetoric. Although they acknowledge that civility fluctuates depending on cultural contexts and situations, in general, "civility connotes a discourse that does not silence or derogate alternative views but instead evinces respect" (Jamieson et al., 2017, p. 206). According to Jamieson et al., civility promotes democracy by working to increase freedom, equality, and happiness. Using a broad range of examples, they stress that civility holds democratic nations together, thus making it a central component of presidential rhetoric. In comparison, they define incivility as "disrespect for the collective traditions of democracy" (p. 206). The authors stress that incivility serves a range of

undemocratic purposes including differentiating certain groups as outsiders, silencing or subjugating marginalized groups, and wrongfully attacking others.

The literature on presidential rhetoric denotes the importance of presidential rhetoric in preserving democracy. The authors outline key characteristics expected of presidential rhetoric including meeting ethical standards, upholding the Constitution, and maintaining civility. Together, this scholarship illustrates the qualities and *ethos* expected of presidential rhetoric.

### **Twitter in politics**

As Twitter is a relatively new development, first launching in 2006 and recently gaining prominence in the political sphere following Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, literature regarding Twitter as a political tool is sparse. There is a growing body of literature pertaining to gendered political tweets (Cotton & Schulz, 2015; Cunha, Gabriel, Gonclves, Cambraia & Almeida, 2014; Evans & Hayes, 2016; Lee & Lim, 2016; McGregor & Mourao, 2016) and much of the available scholarship focuses on the influence of citizens' online political participation (Bekafigo & McBride, 2013; Fox & Ramos, 2012; Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014; Park, 2013; Richardson, 2017). As Twitter has become an increasingly common political tool, several scholars have also explored Twitter's role in electoral campaigns (Conway, Kenski & Wang, 2013; Enli & Skogerbo, 2013; Evans, Cordova & Sipole, 2014; Hendricks & Kaid, 2011; Richard, Holtz-Bach & Just, 2017). As this literature focuses primarily on campaign usage and citizen participation, it does not adequately explain the implications that transitioning from traditional media to social media has on presidential rhetoric. The literature pertaining to Twitter as a new genre of political communication can help elucidate the affordances it provides to political leaders, including the ability to diverge from traditional media and conventional

rhetoric. Literature regarding Obama's use of Twitter during the 2012 campaign details the first presidential use of Twitter and provides the only basis of comparison.

Gainous and Wagner (2013) examine how social media platforms alter political processes. As they point out, news coverage in traditional media formats includes two-sided communication, meaning the breadth of information covered on a single channel made it impossible for individuals to avoid contrary perspectives unless avoiding news altogether. Comparatively, social media deviates from the traditional model, changing the flow of information by removing mediators. For the first time in political communication, audiences can individually select and avoid content, shaping their personal communication networks, which allows them to avoid disagreeable perspectives. From their analysis, Gainous and Wagner identified that audiences typically choose to seek out information that reinforces their cognitive predispositions while avoiding exposure to conflicting perspectives to reduce cognitive dissonance. The increasing reliance on political information through the one-sided information flow characteristic of Twitter results in extreme attitudes and divided opinions, potentially creating an ill-informed public (Gainous & Wagner, 2013).

Parmalee and Bichard (2011) build off this approach and stress that the ability of audiences to select which content to view or avoid has negative implications for democracy. Their research revealed that individuals with strong right-wing or left-wing ideological views consistently avoid content challenging their beliefs, choosing to expose themselves only to content affirming their ideological stance. Since society is becoming increasingly reliant on the Internet as a primary source of news, a larger portion of the population can engage in this self-selection. Together, these findings indicate that Twitter use contributes to political polarization, posing challenges to the democratic process. Although Gainous and Wagner and Parmalee and

Bichard both focus on audience action rather than the rhetors' content, recognizing that the public tends to avoid opinions they disagree with may help explain how using Twitter allows politicians to deviate from conventions and divide citizens through controversial messaging.

The literature points to Twitter as a significant development for the future of politics as social media networks exist independently of traditional media, giving politicians unique power to shape content the audience receives directly without mediation or censorship (Gainous & Wagner, 2013). Parmalee and Bichard (2011) take a theoretical approach, providing the first comprehensive examination of how Twitter is used politically. They ascertained that while tweets serve a variety of functions for politicians, the driving purpose is to communicate directly with a mass audience without alteration or mediation from traditional outlets. For politicians who receive less news coverage, Twitter provides an alternative, ensuring messages are communicated, often leading to sharing and discussion among followers. While most scholars recognize Twitter allows the rhetor to communicate directly without mediation or censorship, Aharony (2012) claims Twitter usage may eventually replace traditional channels of communication between political leaders and the public altogether.

By analyzing political leaders' Twitter usage, Aharony also highlights that Twitter enables deviation from conventional presidential rhetoric. In Obama's case, Aharony notes the language in tweets is more informal than typical presidential rhetoric; Obama incorporates independent opinions on topics ranging from policy to personal life and uses the platform to engage in dialogue with the public. Obama's behaviors, including two-way communication, diverse content, and communicating personality, are key factors in successful political use of Twitter (Parmalee & Bichard, 2011). However, Parmalee and Bichard stress that while Twitter enables the rhetor to better connect to followers through quick, personal communication, it

simultaneously permits the dissemination of inappropriate, misleading, or factually incorrect content. For political leaders, these types of tweets can lead to severe repercussions like security risks, forced resignation, and public unrest (Parmalee & Bichard, 2011). These findings explain how unlike previous technologies, Twitter affords the possibility to mass distribute inappropriate or false content uncharacteristic of traditional presidential rhetoric.

The literature also suggests that while using Twitter allows the circumvention of traditional media, it can simultaneously increase media coverage. When constructed strategically, tweets may be considered newsworthy, resulting in press coverage (Parmalee & Bichard, 2011). In this way, social media performs new political functions, acting as a “cross-over medium” by offering sound-bites for traditional media to cover (Gross & Johnson, 2016, p. 749). In an assessment of the 2012 presidential campaigns, Kreiss (2014) states Obama’s campaign used Twitter strategically to shape journalists’ perceptions, thus influencing the type of coverage the campaign received. Similar to Gross and Johnson’s (2016) claim, Kreiss (2014) argues that political campaigns shifted focus in a temporal sense; rather than attempting to dominate the traditional 24-hour news cycle, campaigns focused on securing brief periods of popularity on Twitter because “campaigns perceive Twitter to have ‘spillover’ effects onto other platforms and mediums, as journalists increasingly write multiple versions of stories for different and larger audiences across multiple platforms” (Kreiss, 2014, p. 1482). While Kreiss (2014) effectively explains how Obama’s use of Twitter marked a shift in political communication, it is important to recognize that Obama’s tweets were developed by digital teams to align with strategic objectives in a complex, multi-faceted campaign. However, Parmalee and Bichard (2011), Kreiss (2014), and Gross and Johnson (2016) do acknowledge the speed of social media news and the ability to influence media coverage.

Although prior to Trump's appearance in the political arena, scholarship on the use of Twitter in politics explains implications of transitioning from traditional media to social media. Perhaps most significantly, this literature acknowledges the unique ability Twitter provides politicians to skirt or even replace traditional media, communicating unfiltered content directly to the public.

### **Donald Trump's use of Twitter during the 2016 presidential campaign**

With the controversial nature of the 2016 presidential campaign, there is a growing body of literature regarding Trump's use of Twitter. A key finding identifies Trump's use of Twitter as highly negative when compared to that of his opponents. In an analysis on tweet negativity during the 2016 presidential campaign, Gross and Johnson (2016) stated that prior to the campaign period, only 45 of 454 politicians' tweets reflected negativity. Gross and Johnson identify that during the campaign, tweet frequency and negativity skyrocketed, intensifying as the candidate pool narrowed. Typically, negative tweets take aim at strong opponents viewed as threats – attacking low-ranked candidates is a rare occurrence. However, Trump was involved in over two-thirds of negative tweets analyzed and exhibited deviant behaviours, choosing to attack both high- and low-polling candidates regularly.

Trump's negativity during the 2016 presidential campaign is also evident in Lee and Lim's (2016) analysis. The authors reported 25% of Trump's tweets involved negativity in the form of criticisms or attacks. Of this percentage, attacks on other candidates accounted for 16.9% of tweets with 10.5% of tweets also including uncivil language. In comparison, negativity and attacks were excluded as categories in the analysis of Clinton's tweets as usage was too sparse to calculate. Consistent with Gross and Johnson's (2016) study, Lee and Lim provide additional statistical evidence showcasing that Trump's use of Twitter is disproportionately negative when

compared with that of his opponents. Combining this scholarship reveals a pattern of negativity in Trump's tweets throughout the 2016 campaign. Although this research focuses on campaign rhetoric as opposed to presidential rhetoric, demonstrating that Trump uses language deemed uncivilized while publicly attacking others offers insight on how his use of Twitter deviates from conventional presidential rhetoric.

Much of the literature centers on Trump's self-presentation on Twitter as an authentic outsider. Lee and Lim (2016) draw attention to the role supporters play, arguing third-party tweets contribute to Trump's perceived credibility. While Clinton's tweets were usually original content, 47.5% of Trump's campaign tweets consisted of retweets from citizen supporters. Lee and Lim view this as a tactic and argue that "rather than using his own words to frame himself in a favorable way, he utilized available citizen sources to demonstrate and reinforce his qualification" (p. 853). They assert that Trump's engagement in two-way communication with the public and writing spontaneous tweets also aids in his image as an authentic figure and differentiates him from traditional political candidates.

Consistent with Lee and Lim's claims, Enli (2017) reports a sizable portion of Trump's tweets are retweets of supporters' content, which demonstrates willingness to engage with the public. Trump's campaign is described as having a "more amateurish yet authentic style in social media" (p. 54). Enli argues that while Obama's campaign increased professionalism of Twitter campaigns, Trump represents a counter-trend. Trump positions himself as a genuine outsider on Twitter by choosing to tweet from his personal account and often writing his own tweets, establishing a distinct voice recognizable to followers (Enli, 2017). Through a content analysis, Enli determined that only 38% of Trump's tweets aligned with established standards for politicians while 55% were considered unconventional. Over one-third of tweets included

authenticity markers in the form of impoliteness, political incorrectness, and inappropriate capital letters, factors which emphasize authenticity and contribute to Trump's image as a political outsider.

In a study on Trump's communication style, Ahmadian, Azarshahi and Paulhus (2016) describe similar findings. From analyzing both the content and style of candidate communication, Ahmadian et al. found Trump ranked highest in several categories including grandiosity, first-person use of pronouns, informality, and pitch variability. Although this data was gathered from both speech and tweet analyses, the findings support the notion that Trump's communication style deviates from the carefully articulated, strategic format traditional of contemporary politicians. This scholarship details how Trump used Twitter to position himself as an authentic, political outsider throughout the 2016 campaign.

Although strictly focused on the 2016 campaign, the literature on Trump's use of Twitter provides insight on the affordances Twitter offers political communication. The scholarship demonstrates how features of Twitter enable Trump to diverge from established political standards of social media by engaging in direct, unmediated, public attacks, and countering stylistic standards to appear authentic.

### **Donald Trump's presidential rhetoric**

Although Trump took office recently in January 2017, several scholars have already conducted studies regarding the implications his presidency has for American citizens and democratic nations worldwide. Fenster (2017) notes that society's desire for transparency from political leaders has increased throughout recent decades. According to Fenster, transparency has two key meanings: technocratic and moralistic. While he describes technocratic transparency as the government disclosing information and making it publicly accessible, moralistic transparency is

a subjective term relating to authenticity and honesty. Trump promises moral transparency by criticizing existing political institutions for being distant and invisible to the public eye, vowing to replace them with more ethical ones. Fenster argues that Trump's self-presentation also invokes the meaning of moralistic transparency. Although Trump often lies, his direct communication through Twitter, informal style, and willingness to use offensive, politically incorrect rhetoric suggests he hides nothing, creating the illusion of honesty (Fenster, 2017). Shafer (2017) bolsters this claim, arguing that Trump's political incorrectness is commonly perceived as honesty.

However, Sayer (2017) takes a different approach and argues that rather than duping the American public into believing he is moralistically transparent, Trump's election represents the rise of post-factual politics. Sayer defines post-factual politics as "a political culture in which debate is framed largely by appeals to emotion disconnected from the details of policy, and by the repeated assertion of talking points to which factual rebuttals are ignored" (p. 92). He argues that there is a newfound willingness to ignore facts, or in the case of Trump, to view blatant lies as merely "alternative facts." A primary concern Sayer expresses is that when politicians abuse the truth, they threaten the future of democracy by denying citizens the ability to be an informed electorate. Regardless of which approach is most accurate, Sayer (2017), Fenster (2017), and Shafer (2017) acknowledge that Trump poses a serious threat to democratic processes by challenging the notions of truth and honesty with false claims.

The literature also recognizes that racism is a principal component of Trump's presidential rhetoric both in interpersonal exchanges and in social media contexts. Sayer (2017) acknowledges that misogynistic, racist, and xenophobic statements are common in Trump's language. By comparing Brexit and Trump's election, Sayer argues that economic suffering and

the rise of xenophobia and racism are interrelated. His research suggests that in times of economic crisis, society becomes more receptive to scapegoating. After analyzing voter demographics in the United Kingdom and the United States, Sayer asserts that rather than exemplifying class struggles, both Brexit and Trump are products of white nationalism:

The fight of today is the fight to defend the real victims of this vicious agenda—who today are not the white working class, but immigrants, refugees, Muslims, and members of racial and sexual minorities, and tomorrow may be anyone who dares to challenge the brave new world of alternative facts – against the clear and present danger of born-again fascism. (p. 102)

Sayer cautions that failing to recognize Trump's election represents the rise of fascism legitimates the largest threat to democracy and to human rights since Hitler.

Saul (2017) supports Sayer's claims in her discussion of 'racial figleaves'. Saul defines racial figleaves as "additional utterances that provide just enough cover to give reassurance to voters who are racially resentful but don't wish to see themselves as racist" (p. 1). Saul differentiates figleaves from dogwhistles, stating that while dogwhistles appeal to pre-existing racial attitudes, figleaves shift societal norms about what constitutes racism and allow for overtly racist expressions to be directed towards specific groups. To exemplify this, Saul draws upon Trump's proposal to establish a Muslim ban, noting that dogwhistles do not allow for such obviously racist proposals. While Saul acknowledges her theory has several limitations, she argues that it is essential to recognize that figleaves give Trump power to corrupt political discourse and culture by hiding the racism contained in policies, speeches, and acts.

Shafer (2017) similarly highlights the problematic normalization of racist expressions. Using Goffman's theory of dramaturgy, Shafer (2017) points to Trump's political incorrectness,

disguised as honesty, as a key factor “allowing for backstage, or overt, racist sentiments to become steadily normalized as logical in the public frontstage of political discourse and social media” (p. 1). Shafer contends that as xenophobia and white nationalism touted by Trump both on and offline are increasingly accepted and even celebrated in the public ‘frontstage’, racial minorities and marginalized groups are at a higher risk of violence and hate crimes. Likewise, Giroux (2017) suggests that Trump’s presidency represents the rise of a counter-revolution with a culture of war, fuelled by white supremacy. He cautions that Trump’s authoritarian discourse and neo-fascist politics will result in increasing violence, especially for marginalized groups including Muslims, immigrants, and minorities. Together, the literature presented by Sayer (2017), Saul (2017), Shafer (2017), and Giroux (2017) highlight consequences of Trump’s overt racism in online and offline environments, including serious threats to human rights and the rise of white nationalist violence.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the scholarship on Trump’s presidential rhetoric indicates that he poses a threat to the future of democracy in the United States by challenging presidential standards through false claims, politically incorrect rhetoric, and overtly racist statements, giving rise to white nationalism and increasing violence. However, as Trump’s presidency is relatively new, to my knowledge no research takes a strictly rhetorical approach to assess how Trump’s presidential use of Twitter deviates from established presidential conventions or the implications his use of Twitter as a primary method of direct mass communication has for democracy. By conducting a rhetorical analysis of Trump’s tweets over the first ten months of his presidency, I aim to fill this gap in the literature and determine the potential consequences of political uses of Twitter as well as the threat Trump’s use of Twitter poses for the future of democracy and American citizens.

## Chapter Three: Theory

This chapter describes the theoretical framework used to analyze Donald Trump's *ethos* in tweets constructed over the first ten months of his presidency. Drawing on the work of Aristotle, Isocrates, and Vatz, the key concepts of *rhetoric*, *ethos*, *intrinsic ethos*, *extrinsic ethos*, and *rhetorical situation* are defined and explained. Genre theory is briefly introduced to describe how Twitter operates as a new genre of presidential communication, allowing for new rhetorical situations to arise. Together, the fundamental components of rhetorical theory and genre theory make conducting a rhetorical analysis of Trump's tweets the most effective method for my research. Analyzing Trump's presidential *ethos* as communicated through tweets affords the opportunity to determine how his rhetoric on Twitter constructs rhetorical situations that deviate from presidential conventions.

### Rhetoric

Aristotle defined rhetoric as discovering all available means of persuasion. This classic definition asserts that the fundamental goal for rhetors is to successfully persuade the audience to adhere to certain beliefs through rhetorical action. Today, rhetoric more commonly refers to the art of persuasion through effective speaking and writing (Silva Rhetoricae, 2007c). A basic premise of rhetoric asserts that "*how* one says something conveys meaning as much as *what* one says" (Silva Rhetoricae, 2007c, n.p.).

To fully examine the effectiveness of language and potential for persuasion, rhetoric can be divided into the three fundamental appeals: *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* (Aristotle, c. 350/2009). *Ethos* refers to persuasion through character, *pathos* is the appeal to audience emotions, and

*logos* focuses on reasoned argument (Aristotle, c. 350/2009). Together these three appeals establish strategies for persuasion.

While *ethos* can be analyzed separately, it is necessary to recognize the inextricable links between all three modes of persuasion. As Aristotle's *ethos* is based on character, using logical reasoning (*logos*) to support an argument may increase the rhetor's credibility, thus demonstrating how other appeals may reflect positively on the rhetor's *ethos*. However, inappropriate uses of *pathos* and *logos* can have the opposite effect. Choosing to manipulate audience emotions or failing to utilize sound logic may damage the rhetor's credibility. When conducting a rhetorical analysis, it is vital to recognize the influence and interconnection of all three appeals.

### ***Ethos***

Defined by Aristotle (c. 350/2009), *ethos* is the persuasive appeal of one's character. He argues that a rhetor's "character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses" (Rh. 1.2, c. 350/2009). This is largely because an audience is more willing to be persuaded by a rhetor who presents a strong moral character; "we believe good men more fully and more readily than others" (Rh. 1.2, c. 350/2009). Therefore, in Aristotle's view, *ethos* is a central component of persuasion. As a powerful appeal based on the character of the rhetor, communicating an ethical *ethos* is vital for political leaders to maintain favor with the public.

### ***Intrinsic Ethos***

Intrinsic *ethos* refers to the rhetor's character presented during a rhetorical act (Aristotle, c. 350/2009). For Aristotle, intrinsic *ethos* is of greater significance. He believes that "persuasion, ... should be achieved by what the speaker says, not by what people think of this character

before he begins to speak” (Rh. 1.2, c. 350/2009). In Aristotle’s view, instead of formulating judgements based on prior knowledge and the reputation of the rhetor, the audience should approach the rhetor objectively, basing opinions solely upon what is said without being influenced by pre-existing biases.

Aristotle (c. 350/2009) asserts that intrinsic *ethos* consists of three primary categories: wisdom (*phronesis*), virtue (*arete*), and goodwill towards the audience (*eunoia*). He argues that if rhetors demonstrate wisdom through logical reasoning and use of reliable examples, actions derived from *logos*, the audience will be more inclined to accept their judgements. Similarly, he asserts that showcasing virtue demonstrates the rhetors’ morality and encourages the audience to trust the rhetors to act in line with ethical considerations. Lastly, showing goodwill towards the audience relies on rhetors demonstrating they are not attempting to deceive the audience but rather have their best intentions in mind; this can be achieved through downplaying one’s own accomplishments (Aristotle, c. 350/2009). Focusing on the key components of intrinsic *ethos* when analyzing the rhetoric within Trump’s tweets will assist in determining how his rhetoric affects his presidential *ethos* as well as how his use of Twitter deviates from the established conventions of presidential *ethos*.

### **Extrinsic *Ethos***

Comparatively, extrinsic *ethos* incorporates prior knowledge the audience has regarding the rhetor. Deemed one of the most influential Greek rhetoricians of his time, Isocrates elected to focus on extrinsic *ethos*. Unlike Aristotle, according to Isocrates, while the rhetor’s character in speech is important, his/her prior reputation is essential for audience persuasion (Too, 2008). This is because strong moral character and honourable reputation are factors that enhance the rhetor’s credibility, making the audience more willing to be persuaded (Too, 2008). According to

Benoit (1990), for Isocrates, extrinsic *ethos* “is the most important mode of persuasion because it lends weight to all of the words of the speaker” (p. 258).

While Aristotle focused on establishing credibility through the rhetorical act, Isocrates argued that the speaker must strive to earn a positive reputation prior to attempting to persuade the audience: “the more ardently someone wants to persuade his audience, the more he will strive...to have a good reputation among his citizens” (Too, 2008, p.77). Overall, from Isocrates’ perspective, regardless of the persuasiveness of the rhetoric, as reputation directly affects perceived credibility, a rhetor with poor repute will be unsuccessful. These views on extrinsic *ethos* will be particularly useful when considering Trump’s background as a businessman and celebrity as well as his political reputation established during the campaign period and first ten months of presidency. Acknowledging Trump’s extrinsic *ethos* will assist in recognizing the influence his reputation has on his presidential *ethos*.

### ***Ethos and Style***

How the rhetor describes himself/herself impacts *ethos*. Aristotle asserts that arrogance and selfishness reflect negatively on the rhetor’s character: “Talking incessantly about yourself, making loud professions, and appropriating the merits of others; for this is due to boastfulness. The same is true of the actions due to any of the other forms of badness of moral character, of the tokens of such badness: they are all disgraceful and shameless” (Rh. 2.6, c. 350/2009).

Conversely, in Aristotle’s view, being modest and showing kindness, especially to those in need, are acts that present good moral character, thus having a positive effect on the rhetor’s *ethos*.

Although not strictly related to *ethos*, other stylistic devices influence the rhetor’s credibility and relationship with the audience. Rhetorical exaggeration, known as *hyperbole* (Silva Rhetoricae, 2007b), and *bomphiloigia*, an exaggeration that aims to increase the rhetor’s

own power or importance (Silva Rhetoricae, 2007a), are two figures of speech that can shape the audience's perception of the rhetor's *ethos*.

Other rhetorical choices also affect *ethos*. According to Frank Luntz (2007), author of *Words that Work* and expert political consultant known for constructing Republican campaigns and key messaging, the most effective communication uses “unadorned, unpretentious...no-nonsense, matter-of-fact, bottom-line language” (p. xv). As a key advisor in American political rhetoric, Luntz argues that successful communication follows ten essential rules. Luntz argues that using simple words, keeping sentences short, repeating phrases, and using catchy, memorable language are primary ways to ensure Americans understand and retain the message presented.

To further capture the public's attention, Luntz suggests offering novelty that shocks or surprises the audience, using language to create a visualization that people can connect with, or asking questions as strong strategies to improve communication. He asserts that in politics, aspirational messages like Martin Luther King Jr.'s “I have a dream” humanize and personalize the message, establishing a deep emotional connection with the audience that they are unlikely to forget. Lastly, he asserts that politicians must contextualize the problem they are addressing, explain how it is relevant to American people, and follow through on their commitments to generate a credible reputation. While not directly linked to rhetorical theory, basing communication off Luntz's ten rules increases the likelihood of audience cognition and remembrance while simultaneously influencing the audience's perception of the rhetor.

Aside from his ten rules, Luntz also highlights the role of authenticity in effective communication. In Luntz's view, politicians who appear authentic and reveal their personality are typically more accepted by the public because they seem to be open and honest. Since

politicians are constantly under public scrutiny, Luntz argues that those who stay true to their own character, share their honest beliefs and ideas, and ultimately be their true self for better or worse tend to be more readily accepted by the public, contributing to their credibility and *ethos*.

Understanding how these various rhetorical figures and stylistic choices affect the rhetor's credibility is essential to conduct an effective rhetorical analysis of Trump's presidential tweets. The outlined components of style provide a broad theoretical basis, making it possible to determine how Trump's rhetoric deviates from presidential conventions and what the greater implications are for his *ethos*.

### **Rhetorical Situation**

Rhetorical situation refers to the context of a rhetorical act and includes the rhetor, an issue known as the exigence, a medium, and an audience (Bitzer, 1968). Bitzer (1968) argues that the rhetorical situation shapes the rhetoric. He states that "although rhetorical situation invites response, it obviously does not invite just any response... [the rhetorical situation] invites a fitting response, a response that fits the situation" (Bitzer, 1968, p. 13). Building upon this claim, Bitzer further stresses that for a rhetorical response to fit the situation, it must meet pre-established requirements of purpose, theme, matter, and style. Therefore, in Bitzer's view, the situation constrains rhetoric and dictates what type of response is suitable. With regards to presidential rhetoric, Bitzer asserts that to appropriately respond to rhetorical situations and avoid public criticism, presidents are typically required to maintain dignity.

Vatz (1973) opposes Bitzer's notion and asserts that rather than being dictated by the situation, the rhetoric employed by the rhetor creates the rhetorical situation. For Vatz, the rhetorical situation is dependent on choices made by the rhetor such as which facts to focus on and what language to use. Vatz stresses that rhetorical situations like political events "are largely

creations of the language used to describe them” (p. 157). Essentially, Vatz views rhetoric as a creative act where the rhetor has the power to shape meaning.

Although oppositional, Bitzer and Vatz’s models of the rhetorical situation offer key insights to better understand how Trump’s rhetoric in tweets relates to the rhetorical situation. Conventional presidential rhetoric tends to align with Bitzer’s definition because the situation determines how presidents should respond to provide fitting rhetoric accepted by the public. Comparatively, Vatz’s understanding of the rhetorical situation can be applied to Trump’s rhetoric in tweets. Recognizing that the rhetoric employed plays a role in creating the rhetorical situation helps explain how Trump’s rhetoric deviates from that of previous presidents, producing rhetorical situations that challenge established notions of *ethos*.

### **Communication genres and Twitter**

Communication developments lead to the creation of distinct genres, allowing for new rhetorical situations to arise. Freedman and Medway (1994) note that, traditionally, genre refers to unique and recognizable conventions of form and content. Each genre has a distinct purpose with its own set of limitations (Freedman & Medway, 1994). Lombarg (2011) uses a similar definition, emphasizing that genre denotes a group of texts with common communicative logics or functions. While genre is an age-old concept, Bawarshi and Reiff (2010) argue that digital communication has resulted in an evolution of genres. They stress that online communication alters access to genres, reconfigures constraints (primarily time constraints), and brings about new forms of collaboration. Similarly, Giltrow and Stein (2009) state that the Internet has allowed for the reconfiguration of traditional communication settings. To illustrate their claim, Giltrow and Stein explain how blogs are a separate genre native to the Internet because they cannot exist independently in any other medium. They assert that the affordances allowed by the

Internet are configured in a specific way, differentiating blogs from other mediums both online and offline. Although much of their work focuses specifically on blogs, Giltrow and Stein detail how the affordances of the Internet allow for the creation of new genres.

Lomborg (2011) uses the notion of communicative genres to conceptualize social media. She argues that considering social media as a genre helps recognize how users rely on different social media to accomplish different things. Lomborg classifies social media as a dynamic type of genre with conventions that are constantly being shaped and negotiated by the large number of regular users. She identifies three distinct characteristics that separate platforms like Twitter from other forms of mass communication: 1) social media offers immediate, direct, unmediated, two-way symmetrical communication, 2) social media sites are de-professionalized spaces because with the vast amount of free software, ordinary users have equal opportunity to produce and distribute content, and 3) social media texts are destabilized; they are constantly evolving and shifting as users revise, remix, and edit.

Dixon (2012) discusses the unique features and limitations of tweets that characterize them as a communication genre. Twitter is classified as a microblogging platform that limits messages, referred to as tweets, to 140 characters including spaces and punctuation<sup>1</sup> (Dixon, 2012). Tweets enable users to post updates from anywhere, at anytime, to be read by anybody (Dixon, 2012). Dixon identifies several components within tweets that contribute to the formation of their genre. Mentions, which involve typing the '@' symbol before someone's username, create a link to the user's Twitter profile (Dixon, 2012). Dixon states that the @username shortcut is powerful because it enables users to post information about other Twitter users and engage in public conversations:

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<sup>1</sup>During this study, the maximum tweet character limit was increased to 280 characters.

Using this @username mention code is more powerful than just sending a direct message to [an] email address because other people can see what was posted and respond to or add to that message. This feature moves a conversation from a one-on-one exchange to a public interchange with many participants. (p. 42)

Another shorthand feature commonly used in tweets is the '#' symbol, known as the hashtag (Dixon, 2012). Dixon notes that hashtags can be used to identify keywords or topics in tweets. Hashtags creates links, connecting all tweets containing the same hashtag for users to view (Dixon, 2012). The last component that distinguishes tweets as a genre are retweets. Dixon states that users can click the "retweet" button on Twitter to forward an existing message to their own followers while giving credit to the original author. "This is a standard practice on Twitter and is denoted with an "RT" at the beginning of the new post" (p. 43).

In addition to the unique features of tweets, Twitter itself has several features that further define tweets as a genre. Users on Twitter can build relationships, interact, and stay up to date by following other users and sharing information with their own followers (Dixon, 2012). Users can also limit who can access their profile by blocking users (Dixon, 2012). When searching for specific content or information, users can employ the search function to find specific people, keywords, places, or topics (Dixon, 2012). Dixon claims that Twitter is often a source of breaking news as users can post instantaneously about current events as they happen and share their reactions. Lastly, Twitter users can explore trending topics which are the ten topics most mentioned on Twitter in any given period (Dixon, 2012). Dixon notes that trending topics often spark further conversations among the Twitter community.

Westman and Freund (2010) explained the main uses of Twitter and the activities carried out on the platform. Through a coding analysis of tweets, Westman and Freund found that due to

the unique network structure of Twitter, there are three main purposes of tweets: information sharing, conversation, and information seeking. Based on their full analysis, they identified five common genres of tweets including directed dialogue (personal conversations addressed to individual users), real-time sharing (posting current news/links), business broadcasting (posting business information/updates) and information seeking (requests for information). These genres structure and shape the communication that occurs through the microblogging platform of Twitter (Westman & Freund, 2010).

This literature on Twitter explains the key characteristics that define the genre while illustrating how genres have shifted with the rise of the Internet, enabling new rhetorical situations and responses to arise. More importantly, this literature on Twitter and communication genres demonstrates how the affordances of the Internet enable social media communication such as tweets to function as new genres with distinct communication capabilities. Viewing tweets as a new genre of presidential communication is essential to conduct a rhetorical analysis of Trump's tweets and to determine how features of Twitter allow for the materialization of rhetorical situations deemed unconventional of presidential rhetoric.

## **Conclusion**

Using a rhetorical framework with a focus on *ethos* to analyze the rhetoric of Trump's tweets during the first ten months of his presidency can shed light on how his rhetoric deviates from that of previous presidents. More importantly, a rhetorical approach combined with genre theory allows us to carefully consider the genre of tweets and its role within the rhetorical situations that Trump responds to and creates. Ultimately, this analysis offers insight into Trump's presidential rhetoric and its profound consequences for American citizens and democratic nations worldwide.

## Chapter Four: Methodology

To determine the impacts of Trump's use of Twitter I analyzed a sample of 1,014 of Trump's tweets from January 20, 2017 to November 20, 2017 using both a content analysis and a rhetorical analysis. For tweet selection I employed a quantitative method, analyzing tweets through a random sampling approach to reduce bias. Afterwards, I applied a qualitative method where representative tweets of each category in the coding scheme were analyzed through a rhetorical lens. This combined methodology allowed for a better understanding of the effects Trump's use of Twitter has on his presidential *ethos* as well as the greater implications for presidential rhetoric.

### Data collection

A sample totalling 1,014 tweets from @realDonaldTrump was collected for this analysis. Tweets ranged over a 10-month period, spanning from the inauguration date of January 20, 2017 until November 20, 2017. All tweets were gathered from a complete Trump twitter archive (<https://github.com/bpb27/trump-tweet-archive>) established by Brendan Brown (2017).

Following Trump's election in 2016, Brown programmed a server to record all Trump tweets as they are posted to the @realDonaldTrump Twitter page. Accounts are synced every half hour, providing the most comprehensive list of Trump tweets, including tweets that have since been deleted or modified.

First, master data was downloaded from the Trump Twitter Archive. Afterwards, the file was converted from a JSON format into a CSV format using <http://www.convertcsv.com/json-to-csv.htm>. Converting to CSV made the data compatible with Microsoft Excel. Tweets were downloaded on December 11, 2017. Data gathered on tweets includes the source, individual tweet id number, text, date and time of creation, retweet count, in reply to, favorite count, and is

or is not a retweet. The original sample size totalled 2,335 tweets from January 1, 2017 until the time of download on December 11, 2017. A systematic process was used to narrow the sample down to the desired total of 1,000 tweets. This total was selected strategically as it provides a large enough data set to base claims regarding Trump's use of Twitter yet is manageable enough for the constraints of an undergraduate research project.

First, tweets prior to the inauguration date of January 20, 2017 were eliminated as they are not considered official presidential tweets. To limit the sample to an exact 10-month period, tweets from November 21, 2017 to December 11, 2017 were removed. Next, all retweets and replies were removed from the sample, ensuring content being analyzed was not reposted material written by other Twitter users.

The last step to achieve the desired sample size was filtering tweets based on popularity, which was determined by number of retweets and number of favorites. This ensures that the tweet sample contains content the public cares about and chooses to engage with, whether due to controversy or approval. Using an "if/then" formula in Excel, the sample was narrowed incrementally, beginning with only tweets with over 10,000 retweets and over 30,000 favorites. The process was repeated until arriving as close to the desired sample size of 1,000 as possible with a total of 1,014 tweets with more than 15,500 retweets and over 65,000 favorites.

### **Content analysis coding scheme**

A content analysis method was selected for the initial analysis of the complete data set. According to Wilkinson (2011), a "content analysis produces a relatively systematic and comprehensive summary or overview of the data set as a whole" (p. 169). Wilkinson notes that a content analysis allows for methodical identification of recurring instances or themes across the data set based on a coding scheme, adding a quantitative element to the research.

An initial coding scheme was created to categorize tweets prior to beginning the analysis. Categories were based on common themes found in Trump's rhetoric and conventions of presidential rhetoric as discussed in the literature review chapter in this thesis. When necessary, additional categories were added to the content analysis codes to ensure tweets were classified as accurately as possible. The full coding scheme used for this analysis is located in Appendix A.

From the content analysis, tweets generally belong to two overarching categories: positive and negative. The main distinction between positive and negative tweets is that negative tweets contain explicit, direct attacks on others while positive tweets do not. As suggested by Wilkinson, categorizing tweets into predominant themes established a clear framework for the coding scheme and provided a consistent lens through which to code every text within the data set. Within the positive category, three subcategories were established: celebratory/congratulatory, self-praise, and policy/information. Subcategories were also color coded and further broken down using a number scheme. For example, three types of tweets make up the self-praise category: 1) individual economic accomplishments, 2) administration accomplishments, and 3) other individual accomplishments. All categories are composed of multiple sub-sections in a comparable manner. The negative category contains five subcategories: race discrimination, attacks on media, attacks on individuals, attacks on other countries/country leaders, and attacks on groups. Within both the positive and negative categories, each of these subcategories contained several distinct types of tweets that were classified using a number scheme.

### **Analytical procedure**

Using a systematic approach to reduce bias, tweets were randomly selected for analysis. Every fourth tweet was selected and categorized according to the most appropriate label in the coding scheme, totalling 254 tweets. When required, additional categories were created for the coding

scheme to adequately represent all tweets analyzed. This process was repeated three times until the full sample of 1,014 tweets were coded.

If it was unclear which category a tweet belonged to, a Google search was conducted to better contextualize the content. Additionally, if a tweet appeared to belong to more than one category, a search was conducted to contextualize the information and then the most representative category was selected, or a new category was created to avoid double counting tweets. For example, one of the analyzed tweets states, “Don’t let the fake media tell you that I have changed my position on the WALL. It will get built and help stop drugs, human trafficking.” Although Trump includes reference to the “fake media,” which is considered an attack on media, this tweet was classified as race discrimination since the main idea revolves around the need to build a wall to protect the United States from Mexican people. Associating Mexican people with the danger of drugs and human trafficking indicates inaccurate generalizations of an entire country’s population, strongly suggesting discrimination in the form of racism. All tweets belonging to more than one category were handled similarly.

Lastly, while coding, representative samples of each category were identified using an asterisk symbol. In total, 38 tweets were selected as representative samples and were analyzed using a rhetorical analysis. When performing the rhetorical analysis, tweets were mainly analyzed according to aspects of intrinsic *ethos* but were supported through aspects of *ethos* discussed in the theory chapter under the extrinsic *ethos* and style sub-headings. Representative samples were also analyzed according to the common themes of presidential rhetoric identified in the literature review chapter including upholding ethical standards, supporting the Constitution and freedom of the press, and maintaining civility. To provide a balanced rhetorical analysis, both positive and negative tweets were selected to fairly represent the findings.

## Chapter Five: Findings and Discussion

To fully understand the impact Trump's use of Twitter has for his presidential *ethos*, I analyzed my entire tweet sample of 1,014 tweets dating from January 20, 2017 to November 20, 2017. I communicated my findings using both qualitative and quantitative means to best capture the results of my combined methodology. The content analysis is expressed qualitatively through the total number of tweets belonging to content analysis categories and statistical representations. To provide a deeper examination of key findings, the rhetorical analysis focuses on a select group of representative tweets, exploring the effects Trump's rhetoric has on *ethos* through comparisons with conventions of presidential rhetoric and rhetorical theory. This comprehensive approach elucidates the implications Trump's rhetoric has for his presidential *ethos* as well as potential consequences for American citizens, democratic nations, and the institution of the presidency.

### Content analysis

The results of the content analysis demonstrate that when comparing the two overarching categories for tweets, positive and negative, the majority of tweets belong to negative subcategories. With a total of 434 tweets, 42.8% of tweets fell under the positive category. The remaining 580 tweets accounting for 57.2% of the total sample, belong to the negative category and consist of direct attacks on individuals, groups, countries, or institutions.

The largest subcategory of positive tweets was policy and information with 182 tweets, representing 41.9% of all positive tweets, followed by celebratory/congratulatory with 140 tweets (32.3%), and self-praise with 112 tweets (25.8%). These findings are represented visually in Figure 1.

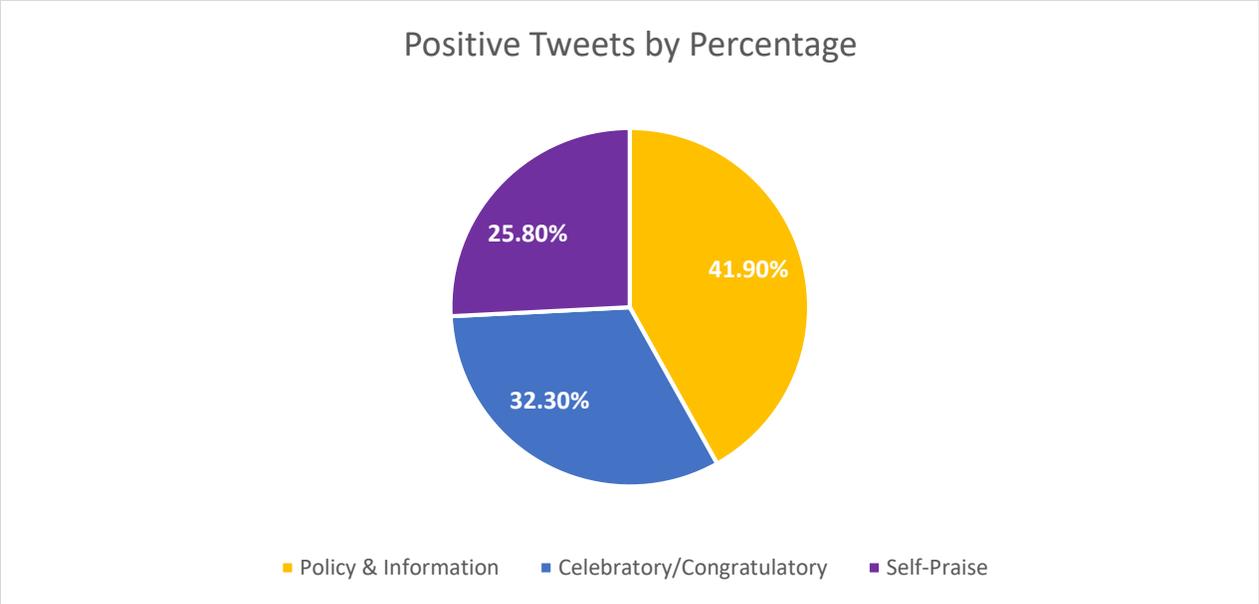


Figure 1. Positive tweets by percentage.

Within policy and information, 87 tweets (47.8%) referenced Trump’s campaign slogan “Make America Great Again.” Only 6 tweets (3.3%) were entirely neutral policy or plan updates. The remaining tweets were split between information and updates with 60 tweets (32.9%) and sympathy/condolences with 28 tweets (15.4%).

The policy and information subcategory appears to present few problems for Trump’s *ethos*. Providing information regarding policy and administrative plans aligns well with the conventional purposes of presidential rhetoric outlined in the literature review. By updating the American public, Trump seems to uphold central tenets of democracy such as promoting free flow of information to maintain an informed electorate (Aune & Medhurst, 2008). Additionally, Trump’s slogan “Make America Great Again” can be easily interpreted as a desire to unite American citizens and encourage reconciliation, another key component of conventional presidential rhetoric identified by Beasley (2004) and Aune and Medhurst (2008). Together, this category reflects positively on Trump’s *ethos* by showing a use of good sense as president and demonstrating goodwill towards the audience.

Under the celebratory/congratulatory subcategory, the category contained 46 tweets (32.9%) celebrating holidays or events. Expressing gratitude and supporting others were relatively even at 34 tweets (24.3%) and 30 tweets (21.4%) respectively. While over a fifth of tweets in the subcategory supported other people, only 7 tweets (5%) were dedicated to supporting other nations or countries. The final 23 tweets (16.4%) expressed congratulations.

As with the policy and information subcategory, the celebratory/congratulatory tweets seem to have a positive effect on Trump's presidential *ethos*. Tweets in this category tend to express well wishes to the nation or specific individuals, showcasing goodwill towards others while maintaining a presidential level of civility, a requirement of appropriate rhetoric defined by Jamieson et al. (2017). As with policy and information, encouraging the public to celebrate national holidays or institutions promotes nationalistic attitudes. These tweets align with conventions of presidential rhetoric by attempting to unite Americans through a shared identity and beliefs (Beasley, 2004), positively impacting Trump's *ethos*.

The last subcategory, self-praise, highlights a disproportionate number of tweets focusing on Trump's individual accomplishments while few acknowledge the administration's efforts. At 54 tweets (48.2%), nearly half were individual economic accomplishments with an additional 40 tweets (35.7%) devoted to other individual accomplishments since taking office. In comparison, only 18 tweets (16.1%) recognized accomplishments of the entire administration.

This is the only positive subcategory with an obvious negative effect on Trump's *ethos*. Failing to acknowledge the administration's role in the many achievements Trump boasts about demonstrates clear use of *bomphiloigia* (exaggeration used to increase the rhetor's importance and power) and *hyperbole*. Consistent with Ahmadian et al.'s (2016) findings, Trump's rhetoric exhibits extreme grandiosity; by claiming the vast majority of work done by the White House

can be attributed to him alone, Trump grossly exaggerates his own power as president and attempts to increase his importance in the eyes of Americans. It is possible that depending on the audience's interpretation, these factors may enhance Trump's *ethos* by making him appear to be an effective leader. However, the results of this category demonstrate a lack of modesty, which according to Aristotle's rhetorical theory, reflects negatively on the rhetor's character (Rh. 2.6, c.350/2009). Should the public conceive of Trump's claims as dishonest or exaggerated, constantly tweeting about himself and taking credit for the administration's contributions would contradict the values of presidential rhetoric including rhetorical integrity and honesty (Aune & Medhurst, 2008). At the very least, focusing on individual accomplishments would be considered boastful, which Aristotle identifies as a form of poor moral character with negative repercussions on *ethos*.

Comparatively, as shown in Figure 2, under the negative category, attacks on groups had the largest number of tweets with 199, representing 34.3% of all negative tweets and nearly 20% of all tweets analyzed in both positive and negative categories. With 124 tweets (21.4%) and 118 tweets (20.3%), attacks on media and individual attacks were also significant categories, each representing over 10% of the total tweets analyzed. Although racism and attacks/threats towards other countries and their leaders took up a smaller portion of the negative category with 94 tweets (16.2%) and 45 tweets (7.8%), as they are communicated by the president, an individual responsible for supporting democratic values such as peace and equality (Aune & Medhurst, 2008), these percentages are still significant findings.

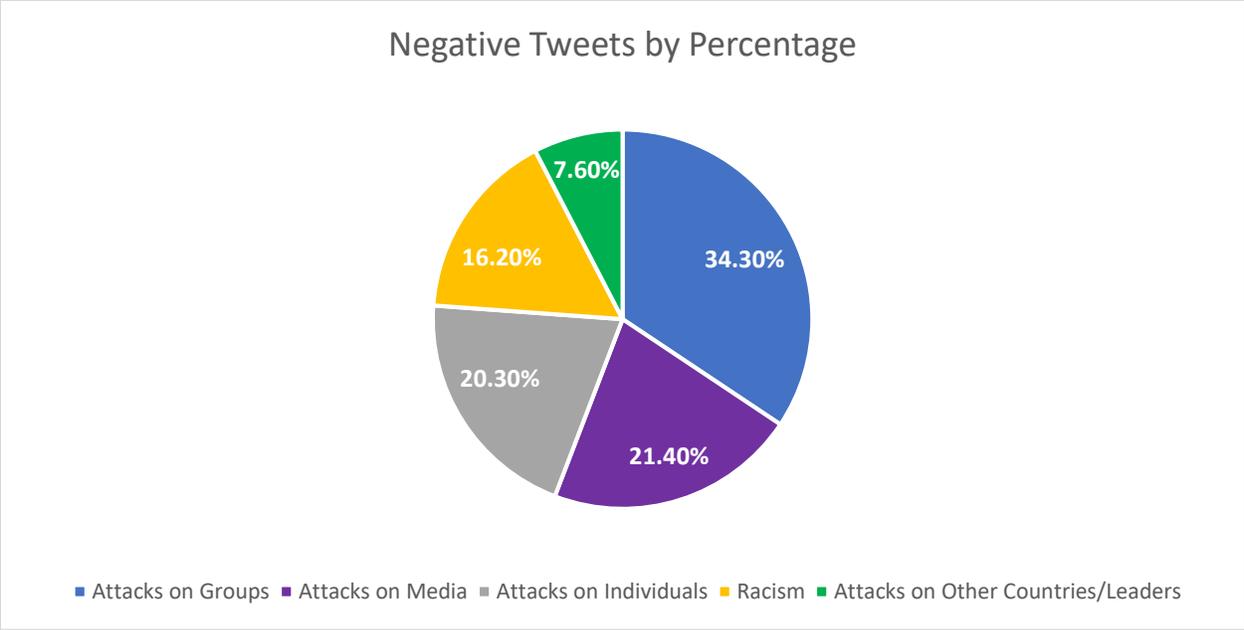


Figure 2. Negative tweets by percentage.

In the attacks on groups subcategory, eight codes were established with seven identifiable groups and an additional category which was used to classify uncommon groups not needing a code of their own or when a combination of groups were simultaneously attacked. Notably, 99 of 199 tweets (49.7%) were attacks directed towards Democrats with 63 tweets (31.7%) criticizing the current Democratic party and 36 tweets (18.1%) attacking the previous administration. Most tweets belonging to the other groups and FBI categories, with a combined total of 52 tweets (26.1%), offered clear criticisms regarding the special counsel investigation led by Mueller. Following the NFL #TakeAKnee protest, 28 tweets (14.1%) actively condemned the NFL and NFL teams for failing to “support democracy.”

Overall, this category shows a major discrepancy from conventional presidential rhetoric with poor repercussions for Trump’s *ethos*. By dedicating a significant portion of tweets to attacking the Democratic party, rather than inspiring reconciliation and compromise between the Republicans and Democrats as is expected of presidential rhetoric (Aune & Medhurst, 2008),

Trump's rhetoric seeks to widen the growing divide. Additionally, as all tweets in this subcategory include derogatory statements directed towards American agencies, or institutions, the rhetoric clearly lacks civility, a fundamental component of presidential rhetoric necessary to preserve democratic nations (Jamieson et al., 2008).

Similarly, the second largest negative subcategory, attacks on media, showed particularly disturbing results. With 89 tweets, 71.2% of the category directly attacked mass media by referring to outlets in general as "fake news" or "dishonest media." Furthermore, the remaining tweets were only coded separately as they demonstrated repeated patterns of attacks on specific news outlets. The *New York Times*, referred to as "the failing New York Times" in Trump's tweets, earned 14 tweets while *NBC* and *CNN* were both directly attacked in 10 tweets each.

This category of tweets, attacks on media, also proves problematic for Trump's presidential *ethos*. Not only does the rhetoric include incivility through blatant attacks on American media outlets, but it also challenges the Constitution by opposing freedom of the press. As outlined by both McChesney and Pickard (2017) and Graber (2017), democracy is contingent upon a free press. According to Graber, restricting freedom of the press reduces the public's ability to access fair and accurate knowledge, threatening liberty while showing stark similarities with dictatorships. By launching continual attacks and questioning the credibility of the media, Trump's rhetoric strays from conventions of presidential rhetoric and jeopardizes the rights of American citizens.

Under the individual attack subcategory, 13 codes were created to adequately capture the many individuals attacked in the sample analyzed. However, after tallying the results, nine categories had five or less tweets, making them less significant in comparison to the larger codes. The "other individuals" code was created to represent individuals who were only attacked once

as well as to account for instances when Trump attacked more than one individual in the same tweet. With 39 tweets representing 33.1% of the subcategory, this category was the largest. In comparison, the largest category where a specific individual was identified was dedicated to Hillary Clinton, who was attacked individually in 25 tweets (21.2%). However, Hillary Clinton was also included in many tweets where numerous individuals were attacked simultaneously. The only other codes under individual attacks worth noting are Obama, with 13 tweets (11%) and James Comey, previous FBI director, with 10 tweets (8.5%).

Consistent with findings from the other negative categories, the individual attack subcategory appears to directly challenge democratic values and expectations of presidential rhetoric. As with group attacks, the inappropriate rhetoric throughout the individual attacks subcategory clearly indicates incivility, which according to Jamieson et al. (2017) poses a threat to democratic values. Furthermore, tweets in this category challenge the established presidential norm of encouraging unity by striving to divide citizens (Beasley, 2004), showcasing a lack of both goodwill and good character.

Although representing a smaller proportion of the total negative category, the racism subcategory indicated troublesome findings. Of the total 94 tweets, most tweets (53 tweets or 56.4%) were overtly negative towards minority groups, referring to them as dangerous for Americans and establishing entire ethnicities and populations as outsiders. In addition, 12 tweets (12.8%) contained anti-Muslim messaging, 10 tweets (10.6%) were anti-Mexican, 2 tweets (2.1%) were anti-immigrant, and five tweets (5.3%) urged for stronger borders. Together, these combined groups represent an additional 30.8% of the category that either directly or indirectly implies that minority groups and immigrants pose dangers.

The rhetoric in this subcategory fails to comply with basic ethical standards expected of presidential rhetoric, resulting in negative consequences for Trump's presidential *ethos*. Rather than showing signs of establishing reconciliation and unity, tweets in this subcategory actively promote division amongst citizens based on ethnicity and race. Whether explicitly or implicitly worded, all tweets aim to condemn specific groups of the population, demonstrating a non-presidential use of incivility to discriminate against minority groups while portraying them as "outsiders," dangerous for American society. Some may potentially view these types of racist tweets as an attempt to protect Americans, thus showing goodwill towards certain audience groups. However, as the United States is composed of individuals from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds, the consistent use of derogatory language to make negative generalizations fails to show goodwill towards Americans as a whole and lacks respect for democratic values of equality and inclusion outlined in the Constitution. Overall, Trump's rhetoric focuses on demonizing and othering already marginalized groups, factors which demonstrate a lack of virtue, challenge democratic values, and fail to meet presidential standards, leading to a poor presidential *ethos*.

The last subcategory of the coding scheme contains tweets with attacks or threats directed towards other countries or country leaders. At 45 tweets, the category is the smallest in the coding scheme. However, following increasing tensions between Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, 26 tweets (57.8%) overtly attacked North Korea, often including personal insults directed towards Kim Jong Un. The remaining tweets were dispersed amongst a variety of countries including China, Mexico, Puerto Rico and Iran.

Although many of the tweets could be interpreted as prioritizing Americans and fighting for American rights in an international setting, the escalating rivalry between Trump and Kim Jong Un has resulted in serious threats of nuclear war. While this subcategory directs focus

towards North Korea, these tweets simultaneously create rhetorical situations that pose serious danger to American citizens, failing to show goodwill towards Trump's American audience. As with the previous negative categories, Trump tends to use abrasive, often derogatory language when attacking other countries and their leaders, rhetorical decisions that further weaken his presidential *ethos* by showcasing poor character and a lack of good sense.

While I found most tweets damaging for Trump's presidential *ethos*, possible motivations for his aggressive rhetoric may include appealing to core supporters. For example, Trump may be using attacks on other people, groups and institutions as a means of encouraging identification with his core supporters or to portray himself as an honest, transparent, straight-talker. As Fenster (2017) argues, demonstrating moralistic transparency by seeming to hide nothing, even politically incorrect views, could enhance Trump's presidential *ethos* by giving the illusion of honesty. Shafer (2017) similarly asserts that expressing ideas deemed politically incorrect differentiates Trump from typical politicians, giving him an air of credibility. Furthermore, as Luntz (2007) asserts, these honest admissions showcase Trump's authenticity and convey his personality, enhancing *ethos* for some groups by seeming transparent.

Although there may be several potential readings of tweets depending on the audience's background and existing schemata, the overwhelming majority of Trump's tweets contain obvious markers associated with non-presidential behavior. Choosing to attack other individuals, groups, institutions, and countries while shamelessly bragging about individual feats demonstrates a range of rhetorical choices that ultimately construct an *ethos* unsuitable for the president.

## 1. Rhetorical analysis

From the literature review, key themes were established to generate a comprehensive understanding of conventional presidential rhetoric. Major themes include practicing rhetorical integrity and honesty, creating just policies, encouraging unity through reconciliation and compromise, upholding the Constitution, maintaining civility, supporting freedom of the press, respecting human rights and promoting democratic values. Together, these values construct the expected *ethos* of whoever holds the office of the president. To further emphasize the relationship between conventional presidential rhetoric and *ethos*, the rhetorical analysis is divided into Aristotle's three characteristics of intrinsic *ethos* – wisdom, goodwill, and virtue – with the attributes of presidential rhetoric interwoven throughout.

### 1. Wisdom

Referred to as *phronesis* by Aristotle, wisdom encompasses rhetoric that demonstrates use of logical reasoning based on factual evidence. Primary themes of presidential rhetoric that align with wisdom include the development of just policies, governing with prudence and providing democratic solutions to issues. From the sample, these values are most clearly reflected in tweets related to policy, enhancing Trump's *ethos*. Conversely, categories that contradict these fundamental values, including self-praise and attacks on other countries, negatively impact the audience's perception of Trump's wisdom, creating problems for his presidential *ethos*.

Tweets falling under the information and update code of the policy and information subcategory appear to include rhetorical markers that indicate good wisdom according to theories on *ethos* as well as the expectations of presidential rhetoric. For example, on November 18, 2017 Trump tweeted, "Put big game trophy decision on hold until such time as I review all conservation facts. Under study for years. Will update soon with Secretary Zinke. Thank you!"

In accordance with the values of presidential rhetoric described by Aune and Medhurst (2008), this tweet highlights Trump as a president capable of governing by reason, exercising patience, and reviewing pertinent facts to make an informed decision rather than acting impulsively, rhetorical choices that create an appearance of wisdom. By providing American citizens with a brief update on current affairs, Trump demonstrates openness and honesty towards the public, further enhancing his perceived credibility. The tone and content of the tweet also benefit Trump's *ethos* by aligning with expectations of appropriateness (Campbell & Jamieson, 2008); policy is a suitable topic for the president to discuss and paired with the professional tone, use of civility, and intent to cooperate, this nature of tweet supports Trump's *ethos*.

Similarly, on October 28 Trump announced plans to release the long-confidential JFK files: "After strict consultation with General Kelly, the CIA and other Agencies, I will be releasing ALL #JFKFiles other than the names." Like the previous example, the rhetoric in this tweet indicates that Trump is informing the public of a well-thought out decision based on evidence, demonstrating his ability to make informed choices and his desire to be transparent about upcoming plans. By citing experts in national security who presumably extended support for Trump's proposal, Trump demonstrates use of logical reasoning to establish an image of good sense.

Coded under individual accomplishments, on June 23 Trump tweeted, "Today, it was a tremendous honor for me to sign the #VAaccountability Act into law, delivering my campaign promise." Again, this tweet demonstrates alignment with factors of presidential rhetoric including the promotion of just policies and transparency (Aune & Medhurst, 2008). By including mention of his campaign promise, Trump fosters recognition for his reliability and encourages his audience to view him as a man of his word. Most policy and information tweets

follow a similar model, quoting articles or individuals, offering updates on presidential activities or general information related to policy. Together these factors enhance Trump's *ethos* by following conventions of presidential rhetoric such as governing with reason, promoting just policies, and maintaining an informed public through heightened transparency.

While tweets celebrating economic accomplishments would seem to emphasize good sense in a leader, these tweets may both support and damage Trump's *ethos* as his tweets regarding the economy are typically forms of self-praise. For example, on November 4 Trump wrote, "Unemployment is down to 4.1%, lowest in 17 years. 1.5 million new jobs created since I took office. Highest stock Market ever, up \$5.4 trill." Similarly, on October 16 Trump tweeted, "Since Election Day on November 8, the Stock Market is up more than 25%, unemployment is at a 17 year low & companies are coming back to U.S." This type of tweet may help construct a positive presidential *ethos* as they indicate successful leadership, a factor which is bolstered by Trump's reputation as a wealthy businessman. As suggested by Isocrates (Too, 2008), Trump's extrinsic *ethos* enhances his credibility; the audience recognizes Trump as a successful businessman, giving his claims about economic success a more persuasive appeal. However, while the numbers Trump cites may be truthful, crediting his own policies as the reason for economic success without supporting evidence makes his claims questionable and exhibits grandiosity. According to Aune and Medhurst (2008), failing to provide compelling evidence to substantiate all claims, especially those that may appear doubtful, neglects the presidential requirement of using disciplined reason and practicing rhetorical integrity, damaging *ethos*.

Other categories also prove problematic for Trump's construction of a knowledgeable character. In particular, attacks on other countries and leaders demonstrate a distinct lack of common sense, casting doubt over Trump's suitability as president. Over the course of several

months Trump posted a series of increasingly aggressive tweets directed towards North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, creating rhetorical situations with clear danger for American citizens. On September 22 Trump tweeted, “Kim Jong Un of North Korea, who is obviously a madman who doesn't mind starving or killing his people, will be tested like never before!” Later, on November 12 Trump continued launching public insults: “Why would Kim Jong-un insult me by calling me "old," when I would NEVER call him "short and fat?" Oh well, I try so hard to be his friend - and maybe someday that will happen!”

Viewed through a strictly logical lens, these tweets raise serious doubts about Trump’s wisdom as president. Rather than attempting to reconcile differences and inspire unity as recommended by conventions of presidential rhetoric (Aune & Medhurst, 2008), Trump elects to make personal insults in the midst of an increasingly volatile exchange. Referencing Kim as a “madman” and using offensive descriptions like “short and fat” highlight a clear use of incivility through inappropriate phrasing and disrespectful attacks on an individual, acts unbecoming of presidential rhetoric (Jamieson et al., 2017). More importantly, instead of seeking compromise, Trump’s childish insults fuel ongoing international tension and heighten fears of nuclear war. By putting American citizens in danger in exchange for getting the final word, Trump’s wisdom and ability to govern out of logical reasoning are called into serious doubt, significantly damaging his presidential *ethos*.

## **2. Goodwill**

Known as *eunoia*, the second component of intrinsic *ethos* according to Aristotle focuses on the rhetor’s ability to demonstrate goodwill towards the audience, a factor that can augment audience persuasion. Key aspects of conventional presidential rhetoric that correlate with goodwill include civility, honesty/transparency, respecting democratic values, and encouraging unity and

nationalism. In the analyzed sample, tweets that most strongly relate to these expectations and showcase goodwill towards American citizens, thus enhancing Trump's *ethos*, include the celebratory/congratulatory subcategory and the Make America Great Again and sympathy/condolences codes of the policy and information subcategory. Conversely, negative tweets such as the transgender code of the group attack subcategory and the racism subcategory appear to contradict values of presidential rhetoric and fail to show goodwill towards members of the audience, negatively affecting Trump's presidential *ethos*.

The congratulatory/celebratory subcategory appears to align most closely with expectations of presidential rhetoric while showing goodwill towards Americans. Recognition of the American armed forces was a recurring theme among tweets coded as congratulatory, celebratory, and gratitude. As the armed forces are a central component of American identity, as suggested by Beasley (2004), these tweets seek to unite citizens through celebrations of nationalism, a key pursuit of presidential rhetoric. For example, on May 29 Trump encouraged a national celebration of Memorial Day by tweeting, "Honoring the men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in service to America. Home of the free, because of the brave. #MemorialDay." Likewise, Trump demonstrated support for the US Navy while highlighting his own role as Commander-in-Chief on October 13: "I have no greater privilege than to serve as your Commander-in-Chief. HAPPY BIRTHDAY to the incredible men and women @USNavy! #242NavyBday." Each of these tweets focuses on establishing a sense of shared, collective identity among American people while showing respect for long-standing American institutions. By maintaining civility (Jamieson et al., 2017) and appropriate tone, content and style (Campbell & Jamieson, 2008), Trump evinces goodwill towards the audience and upholds expectations of presidential behavior.

Other tweets within the celebratory/congratulatory subcategory also aid Trump's *ethos* and appearance of goodwill by promoting democratic values and inspiring unity. For example, on January 22 Trump demonstrated respect for democratic practices and the exercise of free speech when tweeting, "Peaceful protests are a hallmark of our democracy. Even if I don't always agree, I recognize the rights of people to express their views." Even when congratulating specific individuals, Trump often uses inclusive rhetoric to identify the benefits for the entire country, continuing to unite the public through nationalistic ideals. For example, on April 10 Trump tweeted, "Congratulations to Justice Neil Gorsuch on his elevation to the United States Supreme Court. A great day for America #MAGA." By continually focusing on shared beliefs, upholding the Constitution, and showing support for other individuals and institutions, tweets in this category benefit Trump's *ethos* by effectively reflecting the values of presidential rhetoric and showing goodwill towards American citizens.

Tweets from the sympathy/condolences and Make America Great Again codes of the policy and information subcategory also benefit Trump's presidential *ethos* by uniting citizens through a shared identity. While expressing sympathy in times of tragedy, Trump focuses on religious ideals. This is evident in tweets from August 22 and October 31 where Trump tweeted, "We pray for our fallen heroes who died while serving our country in the @USNavy aboard the #USSJohnSMcCain, and their families," and "My thoughts, condolences and prayers to the victims and families of the New York City terrorist attack. God and your country are with you!" Using phrasing such as "we pray" and "God...[is] with you" directly appeals to religious values, highlighting a central aspect of American identity. In addition to using appropriate language to suit the devastating situations Trump is addressing, in both instances Trump invokes nationalism

by referencing a united country; on August 22 he acknowledged heroes who served “our country” while on October 31 he showed support by stating “your country” is with you.

Similarly, the inherent message of all Make America Great Again tweets is one of nationalism and unity. On numerous occasions – February 4, March 3, June 2 and 24, July 9 and 15, and August 6 and 23 – Trump tweeted his campaign phrase in capital letters followed by an exclamation point. Aside from promoting nationalism by highlighting his strict focus on prioritizing America’s prosperity, regularly tweeting this catch phrase also follows Luntz’s (2007) recommendations for effective rhetoric. Concepts employed include repetition, catchy phrases, short sentences, and simple words (Luntz, 2007). More importantly, as Luntz recommends, Trump’s slogan inspires a visualization of a better America, encouraging American citizens to develop an emotional connection with the phrase while increasing the perception of Trump’s goodwill. This aspirational view of the future is exemplified in tweets from January 21 and June 9: “THANK YOU for another wonderful evening in Washington, D.C. TOGETHER, we will MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN” and “It is time to rebuild OUR country, to bring back OUR jobs, to restore OUR dreams, & yes, to put #AmericaFirst! TY Ohio! #InfrastructureWeek.” Both of these tweets highlight a vision of cooperation and unity where American citizens band together to achieve collective success. Striving to unite citizens by drawing upon collective values fosters *ethos* by aligning with presidential expectations and emphasizing goodwill.

However, there are potential negative readings of “Make America Great Again” tweets where Trump’s rhetoric is viewed as malevolence towards certain groups. Trump continually expresses a desire to revert to America’s past, a time he deems as great, causing many individuals elect to view the tweets as marginalizing. As highlighted by Giroux (2017) and Sayer

(2017), reminiscing about a previous era where gender and racial inequality were societal norms, Trump's rhetoric can be interpreted as an exclusion of minorities and marginalized groups. Should the audience interpret Trump's slogan through this lens, these tweets fail to meet basic criteria of presidential rhetoric such as inclusiveness and support for equality, ultimately damaging Trump's *ethos* through a lack of goodwill.

Many racist tweets and tweets attacking transgender rights can have a dual reading depending on the audience's existing beliefs. On February 3 and 4, Trump expressed a desire to strengthen borders, tweeting, "We must keep 'evil' out of our country!" and "Because the ban was lifted by a judge, many very bad and dangerous people may be pouring into our country. A terrible decision." It is possible for each of these tweets to be recognized as a demonstration of goodwill towards Americans as Trump expresses a desire to protect the public from danger. While this type of reading would positively affect *ethos*, it is also possible to interpret these tweets as discrimination against minority groups. As Trump makes sweeping generalizations in regard to entire countries and ethnicities in the first two examples, it is likely that many Americans, especially racial minorities, would view these derogatory statements as clear expressions of incivility.

On June 26, Trump posted a series of three tweets related to transgender serving in the military:

After consultation with my Generals and military experts, please be advised that the United States Government will not accept or allow transgender individuals to serve in any capacity in the U.S. Military. Our military must be focused on decisive and overwhelming victory and cannot be burdened with the tremendous medical costs and disruption that transgender in the military would entail. Thank you.

As with racist tweets, there were extremely negative readings of these tweets regarding transgender individuals the military. Shortly after announcing his desire to ban transgender individuals from serving, Trump faced nationwide protests (Editorial Board, 2017; Sampathkumar, 2017), which resulted in strong legal challenges and the reversal of his decision in 2018 (Jennings, 2018; Moreau, 2018; Perez, 2018). The strong resistance to Trump's transgender ban indicates that a sizeable portion of the American public viewed the tweets as derogatory, discriminatory statements unacceptable of the president rather than an attempt to enhance safety. Overall, failing to embrace democratic values of diversity and equality through racist or discriminatory remarks shows a lack of presidential behaviour, negatively impacting *ethos* and failing to demonstrate goodwill.

### **3. Virtue**

The final component of intrinsic *ethos*, *arete*, relates to the rhetor's virtuous character. By showing dedication to strong moral values, the rhetor persuades the audience to trust that he/she will act in accordance with ethical considerations (Aristotle, c. 350/2009). Virtue aligns with most core components of conventional presidential rhetoric including maintaining civility, practicing honesty, encouraging unity, preserving national identity, supporting freedom of the press, and respecting democratic values within the Constitution such as equality, freedom, and the pursuit of happiness. From the sample, tweets in the congratulatory/celebratory subcategory and the sympathy/condolences code of the policy and information subcategory most clearly relate to these expectations and help create an image of virtuous character, enhancing Trump's *ethos*. Comparatively, all five negative tweet subcategories and the self-praise subcategory of positive tweets present problems for Trump's *ethos* by directly challenging values of presidential rhetoric and failing to demonstrate virtuous character.

Signs of virtue can be found in tweets extending support for other people and countries which are typically coded under the congratulatory/celebratory subcategory or the sympathy/condolences code. Examples include tweets from May 7 and August 17 where Trump tweeted, “Congratulations to Emmanuel Macron on his big win today as the next President of France. I look very much forward to working with him!” and “The United States condemns the terror attack in Barcelona, Spain, and will do whatever is necessary to help. Be tough & strong, we love you!” Both of these representative tweets showcase indications of virtue by aligning with established ethical and moral standards. The first example highlights an intent to increase international cooperation while the second tweet extends support towards Spain and actively condemns terrorism. Although these tweets do exemplify rhetoric that positively impacts Trump’s *ethos* by conveying a sense of morality, empathy, and respect, as demonstrated in the content analysis, this type of tweet represents a minuscule proportion of the full sample. Tweets containing blatant attacks directed towards people, countries, groups and institutions far outnumber positive tweets, ultimately ruining any opportunity for Trump’s character to be construed as virtuous.

Also highlighted in the content analysis, even positive tweets regarding administrative successes are used as opportunities to brag about individual accomplishments, thus damaging virtue. Whether related to the economy or policy, Trump consistently ignores the efforts of the entire administration, instead focusing on increasing his own importance. For example, in a tweet on February 25, Trump attributed economic success entirely to his leadership: “The media has not reported that the National Debt in my first month went down by \$12 billion vs a \$200 billion increase in Obama [sic]<sup>2</sup> first mo.” In later tweets from June 23 and October 8 respectively,

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<sup>2</sup> All tweets are quoted verbatim, complete with any editorial errors.

Trump continued to brag about his personal victories in international relations and policy: “Nobody could have done what I’ve done for #PuertoRico with so little appreciation. So much work!” and “I’ve helped pass and signed 38 Legislative Bills, mostly with no Democratic support, and gotten rid of massive amounts of regulations. Nice!” This rhetoric demonstrates clear use of *bomphioigia* and *hyperbole*, negatively affecting *ethos*. In each tweet, Trump asserts that he alone overcame enormous obstacles to achieve success. Whether or not the information presented is accurate, failing to acknowledge the contributions of the administration and instead electing to take full credit indicates arrogance, boastfulness, and selfishness, signs of poor moral character that damage *ethos* (Aristotle, Rh. 2.6, c. 350/2009).

Tweets in the negative subcategories comprised of attacks directed towards groups, individuals and countries more clearly demonstrate Trump’s lack of virtue, presenting significant challenges to his presidential *ethos*. Rather than abiding by presidential expectations of civility, whether referencing individuals, groups, or countries, Trump uses abrasive language and insults to disparage others. A common theme includes Trump’s relentless attacks on Hillary Clinton as exemplified in a tweet from November 18, over a year after the election: “Crooked Hillary Clinton is the worst (and biggest) loser of all time. She just can’t stop, which is so good for the Republican Party. Hillary, get on with your life and give it another try in three years!” Rather than evincing respect as prescribed by presidential expectations (Jamieson et al., 2017), Trump uses phrases like “crooked Hillary” and “loser” to demean his competitor, rhetorical acts completely unacceptable for a president, thus damaging his *ethos*.

Although the sample included numerous attacks on Clinton, Trump commonly attacks several groups simultaneously as demonstrated on November 3: “Pocahontas just stated that the Democrats, lead by the legendary Crooked Hillary Clinton, rigged the Primaries! Lets go FBI &

Justice Dept.” Not only does this tweet criticize four individuals/groups, showing clear use of incivility and a lack of support for democratic institutions and processes, but Trump also references an Aboriginal woman as Pocahontas, a rhetorical choice that can at the very least be described as denigrating and racist, factors with serious implications for Trump’s *ethos*.

Racist sentiments are not only interwoven amongst group attacks but are also made more overtly. On various occasions Trump employs racist rhetoric, associating entire populations, ethnicities and countries with danger and crime to encourage extreme nationalistic attitudes and enhance fears regarding minority groups. Prime examples include Trump’s tweets from April 25 and June 22 regarding the border wall intended to separate the United States and Mexico: “Don't let the fake media tell you that I have changed my position on the WALL. It will get built and help stop drugs, human trafficking etc.” and “Mexico was just ranked the second deadliest country in the world, after only Syria. Drug trade is largely the cause. We will BUILD THE WALL!” By associating the population of an entire country with drugs and human trafficking, promoting the need for a physical wall to protect Americans, and using fear-mongering terms like “deadliest country,” Trump’s rhetoric marginalizes Mexicans while overtly encouraging racially intolerant attitudes.

Similar findings are evident in tweets related to the proposed travel ban which aims to cease travel from seven predominantly Muslim countries. For example, tweets from June 6 and November 1 showcase Trump’s fear-inciting language and racist expressions directed at populations from targeted countries: “That’s right, we need a TRAVEL BAN for certain DANGEROUS countries, not some politically correct term that won't help us protect our people!” and “CHAIN MIGRATION must end now! Some people come in, and they bring their whole family with them, who can be truly evil. NOT ACCEPTABLE!” It is possible for this type

of racist tweet to appeal to Trump's base due to its frank and straightforward expression. By openly challenging the notion of political correctness, Trump maintains his "political outsider" persona and may appear more authentic. According to Luntz (2007), Fenster (2017), and Shafer (2017), this enhances credibility and is perceived as honesty, a factor which may support Trump's virtue. However, these tweets highlight racist attitudes towards Muslim countries through generalizations about entire countries deemed "dangerous" and "evil." Consistent with findings from Sayer (2017), by referring to immigrant groups as "evil" and asserting their danger, Trump scapegoats minorities, blaming societal problems on outsiders while encouraging white supremacist attitudes.

The rhetoric employed clearly challenges democratic values expected of presidential rhetoric, including equality, in favor of enacting marginalizing, derogatory language meant to invoke fear and hatred towards Mexican and Muslim groups. Such a lack of moral consideration and obvious intent to divide individuals based on race and ethnicity highlights a complete absence of virtue, ultimately reflecting negatively on Trump's presidential *ethos*.

A vast proportion of Trump's criticism focuses on the previous administration, former President Obama, and the Democratic party. Key examples of such tweets date from July 25 and November 9: "ObamaCare is torturing the American People. The Democrats have fooled the people long enough. Repeal or Repeal & Replace! I have pen in hand," and "I don't blame China, I blame the incompetence of past Admins for allowing China to take advantage of the U.S. on trade leading up to a point where the U.S. is losing \$100's of billions. How can you blame China for taking advantage of people that had no clue? I would've done same!" The first tweet exemplifies *hyperbole*, grossly exaggerating the faults of ObamaCare to liken the well-intentioned healthcare program with torture. While the second tweet criticizes Democrats in an

equally obvious manner by describing the party as incompetent, rather than portraying himself as a savior capable of fixing the existing issue, Trump declares that if presented the opportunity, he would also take advantage of unsuspecting others. This declaration reveals immoral character traits such as deceptiveness and selfishness. Together these tweets demonstrate that rather than striving to meet presidential expectations of uniting Republican and Democratic parties, Trump actively works to tarnish the Democratic reputation, portraying the party as incompetent and evil. These undemocratic professions challenge expectations of the president, harming Trump's *ethos*.

Aside from attacking individuals and groups, Trump extends his aggressive behavior towards the media, directly defying central tenets of the Constitution. Specific networks which have openly criticized Trump, most commonly the *New York Times*, *NBC*, and *CNN*, are frequently derided in tweets, illustrated through examples from February 6 and October 11: "The failing @nytimes writes total fiction concerning me. They have gotten it wrong for two years, and now are making up stories & sources," and "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!" As noted by McChesney and Pickard (2017), Aune and Medhurst (2008), and Graber (2017), freedom of the press is a fundamental component necessary to preserve liberty in democratic nations. Not only does Trump challenge this convention by openly criticizing the media through derogatory nicknames like "the failing *New York Times*," and indicating they are publishing "fake news" and "total fiction," but he goes as far as to suggest a need to revoke media rights to operate entirely. Repeatedly attacking media outlets and striving to obstruct their ability to function properly indicates a drastic departure from the presidential convention of promoting, or at least respecting, private news media.

Rather than supporting the media as a necessary institution to properly inform the public, Trump further claims that the media pose a direct threat to democracy through false reporting. Tweets of this nature include posts from July 16 and October 12: “With all of its phony unnamed sources & highly slanted & even fraudulent reporting, #Fake News is DISTORTING DEMOCRACY in our country!” and “Network news has become so partisan, distorted and fake that licenses must be challenged and, if appropriate, revoked. Not fair to public!” While it is possible for the audience to view these tweets as honestly representing Trump’s opinion, a factor which may positively impact their perceptions of Trump’s character, these tweets are based in incivility and showcase inappropriate choices of content, tone and style for the president. Rather than promoting democracy by striving to preserve the integrity of news media, Trump actively seeks to thwart the media’s ability to function by claiming they are “distorting democracy” whilst simultaneously attacking their integrity through insulting terms such as “fake,” “distorted,” and “fraudulent.” Representing a significant portion of the analyzed sample, tweets blatantly attacking the media directly oppose presidential conventions by using derogatory statements and disrupting Americans’ rights to fair, free-flowing knowledge, presenting severe consequences for Trump’s presidential *ethos*.

## **Conclusion**

Findings from both the content analysis and rhetorical analysis demonstrate an alarming discrepancy between the rhetoric of Trump’s presidential tweets and the established conventions of presidential rhetoric. Despite the potential for differential readings, with the majority of tweets exhibiting explicit attacks directed towards individuals, groups, and institutions, Trump’s use of Twitter has obvious negative implications for his presidential *ethos*. More importantly, the

results of this research emphasize that Trump's tweets pose serious threats to American citizens, the institution of the president, and the future of democracy in America.

## Chapter Six: Implications and Conclusion

To my knowledge, this research project is the first study to combine a content analysis and a rhetorical analysis of Donald Trump's presidential tweets. By selecting 1,014 tweets spanning over a ten-month period from January 20, 2017 until November 20, 2017, this approach enabled a deep analysis of the impacts Trump's use of Twitter has on his presidential *ethos*. Despite the potential for various readings of tweets, the results of my analysis confirm that Trump consistently fails to align with the components of intrinsic *ethos* – wisdom, goodwill, and virtue. Due to Trump's extreme departures from acceptable presidential rhetoric, both my content analysis and rhetorical analysis demonstrated catastrophic consequences for Trump's presidential *ethos*.

In addition to revealing the individual repercussions Trump's use of Twitter has, this analysis also exposed the larger implications for the United States, including threatening the safety of American citizens and challenging the future of both the institution of the presidency and democracy. While Trump's tweets are primarily directed towards American citizens, as Twitter is an international platform and tweets are considered official statements, Trump's rhetoric is viewed globally. Through his constant diversions from appropriate rhetoric and childish attacks directed towards other individuals or countries and their leaders, Trump's tweets demean the institution of the presidency, resulting in a diminished international reputation amongst enemies and allies alike. In addition to lessening global respect for the United States, Trump's insults towards Kim Jong Un have destabilized international relations, resulting in the most serious threat of nuclear attack since the Cold War.

Although potentially less obvious, an equally alarming threat arising from Trump's use of Twitter includes implications for democracy. Constantly employing incivility and derogatory

remarks by attacking other people and institutions actively divides American citizens, diminishing the possibility for a unified, stabilized nation while showing stark similarities with fascist dictatorships.

Consistent with findings presented by Saul (2017), Shafter (2017), Sayer (2017) and Giroux (2017), Trump's rhetoric exemplifies overt racism and white nationalism, disturbingly similar to Hitler's fascist rhetoric during WWII. As suggested by Saul (2017), Trump's racist remarks regarding the need for a wall and a travel ban are examples of racial figleaves, expressions that shift societal norms about what constitutes racism while allowing overtly racist proposals to be expressed publicly. By scapegoating minority groups (Sayer, 2017) and disguising white supremacist rhetoric as admissions of honesty and authenticity to appeal to his core followers, Trump contributes to the normalization and acceptance of racist expressions (Shafer, 2017). Together, these rhetorical acts increase the risk of violence for minority groups and facilitate the rise of war culture in the United States (Giroux, 2017).

Trump's use of Twitter also challenges central components of the Constitution by seeking to undermine the credibility of the free press. By refusing to cooperate with traditional media and instead electing to primarily communicate to the masses through Twitter, Trump essentially controls political news. According to Graber (2017), possessing the power to control political news in this way correlates directly with markers of dictatorships while threatening the liberty of citizens by obstructing their ability to be an informed public with access to accurate information.

Overall, as emphasized by Campbell and Jamieson (2008) and Jamieson and Kenski (2017), modern communication developments have enhanced the power of presidential rhetoric, enabling presidents to speak whenever, wherever, and however they choose. Trump's drastic changes in content, tone, and delivery of political communication made possible by the new genre

of Twitter have shaped the institution of the presidency, allowing him to radically diverge from conventions of presidential rhetoric to launch impulsive, malicious, marginalizing attacks throughout the globe. Ultimately, this research recognizes the devastating threats Trump's use of Twitter has for the United States and insists upon further research as a vital step in preserving the institution of the presidency and the future of democracy.

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## Appendix A: Content Analysis Coding Scheme & Findings

CATEGORY 1: POSITIVE		CATEGORY 2: NEGATIVE	
<b>Celebratory/Congratulatory</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>Attack on Media</b>	<b>124</b>
1 - Expressing congratulations	23	1 - NY Times	14
2 - Celebratory (event/holiday etc.)	46	2 - Fake News/dishonest media	89
3 - Support for other nations/countries	7	3 - NBC	10
4 - support for other people	30	4 - CNN	10
5 - expressing gratitude	34	5 - Washington Post	1
<b>Self-Praise</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>Individual Attacks</b>	<b>118</b>
1 - individual economy accomplishments	54	1 - Crooked Hillary	25
2 - administration accomplishments	18	2 - Obama	13
3 - other individual accomplishments	40	3 - Other Individual Attacks/Several individuals	39
		4 - Bernie Sanders	1
		5 - James Comey	10
		6 - John McCain	5
		7 - Blumenthal	5
		8 - Mitch McConnell	4
		9 - Chuck Schumer	4
		10 - Bob Corker	2
		11 - Congresswoman Wilson	4
		12 - John Podesta	2
		13 - Jeff Flake	3
		<b>Attack/Threat Other Countries/Country Leaders</b>	<b>45</b>
		1 - North Korea	26
		2 - China	4
		3 - Other	9
		4 - Mexico	2
		5 - Iran	4
		<b>Attack on Groups</b>	<b>199</b>
		1 - Other Groups/Combination of groups	39
		2 - Democratic Party	63
		3 - Republican Party	14
		4 - previous administration	36
		5 - haters/fools/low-lives	3
		6 - NFL/NFL Teams	28
		7 - FBI	13
		8 - Transgender	3
		<b>Racism</b>	<b>94</b>
		1 - Anti-immigrant	2
		2 - Anti-Muslim	12
		3 - Anti-Mexican (border wall, drugs, crime)	10
		4 - Reference to danger of minority groups	53
		5 - Other	12
		6 - "strong borders"	5

Figure 3. Content analysis and coding scheme with total number of tweets.