

**CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF DONALD TRUMP'S
POLITICAL SPEECH VIA TWITTER**

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Abstract

Although social media was used in the 2008 presidential campaign, it became increasingly important in the 2016 election. Presidents have had to adopt and adapt to new technology in the past as well, and this has had a long-term effect on political discourse. Politicians now have new tools for communicating with the public, thanks to the internet and social media. An important goal of this paper is to examine how political speech has evolved over time, particularly in light of social media's role in political campaigning, and how Donald Trump used social media as a means of political communications. A discourse-historical approach of critical discourse analysis (CDA), has been applied in this study to carry out the analysis that would determine Trump's speech techniques. The results of this study demonstrate how President Trump's used language to influence his audience. Overall, this research paper will focus on Trump's discourse strategies and how he employed them to create positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation.

Keywords: CDA, political discourse, discourse-historical approach, power, Twitter.

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1. Introduction

Donald Trump became more popular with the American population in 2016 (the year of his election). His rallies' key theme was the strategy for success in politics. With all of his controversy, he has remained a powerful leader in USA, no matter how many faults he made in his thinking. He spoke out against a number of Obama's policies, such as immigration, and several other issues which became an integral part of his political discourse.

The 2016 presidential election was essential, but it also came as a surprise because of the way it sowed division and stoked populist wrath in the United States. Additionally, social media was widely used in Trump's campaign. In contrast to carefully constructed political speeches or interviews with traditional print or TV media, Trump chose to communicate via loud emotional outbursts on Twitter.

After Donald Trump's election, this active use of social media as the primary avenue for governing and shaping global opinion has persisted. Since Donald Trump's inauguration as 45th President of the United States in January 2017, the world has been watching closely to see how he and his administration were following through on their campaign promises.

There has also been a lot of focus on Donald Trump's Twitter behavior. The "Trump Effect," a term coined to describe the impact Trump has had on society, the economy, foreign relations, and has

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affected millions of people around the world. From the president's actions and harsh words to government policy, everything was considered as falling under this umbrella. The Trump Effect also contributed to dividing political views not on the basis of political principles, but on Trump's performance. Because, according to (Korostelina 2017), the political situation in the United States and around the world has shifted radically.

The Trump Effect, on the other hand, began long before he was elected. During his presidential campaign, he used frightening words that resonated throughout the political community and the general public. Trump was, thus, a radical departure from prior leaders. Because of his tactic of spreading terror, his vocabulary was thought to be modeled after that of a tyrant (Altman, 2017). His language has been described as that of an 11-year-old (Sandhu, 2016). However, Trump's dominance on social media, particularly Twitter, has been the most important component of the Trump Effect, and it was considered to have contributed significantly to his victory in the 2016 presidential elections. (Johnson, 2016).

The focus of this study will be on Trump's Twitter rhetoric. There is a need to learn how political dialogue has evolved through time and how Donald Trump utilized Twitter as a platform to keep and display his political influence. After discussing Twitter's role as a political communication channel and how it differs from traditional forms of political rhetoric, we shall turn our attention to Trump's discourse methods and how he utilized them to show himself positively while portraying others negatively.

2. *Critical discourse analysis*

Critical discourse analysis aims to identify and unveil the existence of power, domination, and inequality within written or spoken material. It studies how social, political, and historical contexts have a role in ensuring the existence of things and maintaining the identities of people. Additionally, CDA seeks to provide insight into the ways discourse, social behaviors, and social structure are interrelated, although it is difficult for some people to perceive this link (Fowler, 1991). In order to understand how power structures are produced and examined, the CDA looks at the social and political conditions in the environment. It is an implication that it can also be used to convey information such as describing, interpreting, analyzing, and critiquing social life. CDA examines these social and cultural relationships in addition to examining the strategies, texts, and events that are part of these broader structures, interactions, and processes. (Fairclough, 1992). Analyzing Trump's tweets based on their topics or frames is applied in this study.

3. *Literature review*

3.1 *Twitter*

As language is a natural function of human interaction, it is helpful to understand how language is used, especially on a digital platform like Twitter where so much information can be packed into a few characters that are instantly communicated to millions around the world. Twitter has given the opportunity to the president to communicate with masses directly and also lets him to avoid the power of press (Ouyang, 2020). Trump has frequently utilized Twitter as a medium for reinforcing his opinions on different issues. Furthermore, the public nature of Twitter allowed him to send messages not only to the voters, but also to professional media outlets. His use of Twitter diverts attention from news that is politically harmful to him (Lewandowsky, 2020). So, the communicative power of Twitter as a platform is reason enough to analyze Trump's usage of Twitter as a platform to keep and display his political influence and to explore how the combination of language and power impacts the public through analyzing his tweets.

3.2 *The Evolution of New Media in Political Campaigns*

The world of the Internet shifted greatly in the past decade, beginning with a completely centralized experience that meant Internet users could only view information on sites operated by company owners,

moving to a more free-flowing one where Internet users are now able to interact with one another on web pages and blogs. Not only does Internet have services like social media and apps, but it has many ways to communicate on the Internet (TechTarget, 2018). During the Obama campaign, social media tools such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, E-mail, Blogs, and the like were used to great effect (Hendricks et al., 2010: 14).

Obama used a number of social network tools, one of which being Twitter. According to a study done by Frederic I. Solop (2010), Obama's social media usage has two key objectives. Firstly, the study of Obama's Twitter activity discovered that his campaign utilized it to constantly publicize the candidate's location, and secondly, to advertise his website. Keeping his fans linked and directing traffic to his site possibly made his supporters even more dedicated (Solop, 2010: 41, 47). Obama's highly successful online campaign prompted other politicians to join him in social media efforts.

Donald Trump accomplished something that the other candidates were scared to do: using social media to engage with the public, something that Obama used for more traditional campaigning. Nonetheless, previous elections demonstrate that integrating new technologies and communication channels is critical to achieving success. While Hillary Clinton employed a social media team to handle her Twitter account and activity, Trump ran his social media strategy completely on his own, making use of Twitter for personal posts in addition to the official ones. He kept his audience engaged by sharing his unvarnished thoughts on Twitter, and this free exposure in the media attracted a lot of new fans. While there is little doubt that Trump used social media platforms like Twitter to convey his ideas and his message, no one can say that it was Twitter alone that led to his victory. Even Trump's tweets have fans and foes, but his more incendiary posts tended to get both traditional media attention and from the general population (Johnson, 2016: 42, 77, 79).

3.3 Presidential speech history

Formality was demanded by the founders and the American presidents, as it served to represent the principles of the constitution. As a result, two models of presidential speeches developed. First and foremost, they believed that the language of the policies should be crafted for Congress and addressed to them directly. Thus, the speech would be entirely political, and there would be no opportunity for anything else. Even though the speeches to Congress were available to everyone, they were not popular since they were hard to understand and were intended for the members of Congress rather than the general public. The presidential speech was directed to the public, but it was also falling within the parameters of the constitution. The inauguration addresses and proclamations, for instance, served to tell the people about the president's priorities but refrained from analyzing the specific merits of any policy suggestions (Tulis, 1987: 46-47).

Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, early in the 20th century, had an influence on presidential language by bringing it down to a more conversational level. To counteract the imbalance of wealth and avoid class strife, Roosevelt broke with the constitutional tradition of the presidency. But he had no idea the changes would become permanent. Wilson's aim was to build a presidency that would react to the interests and requirements of the whole public (Muirhead, 2017). Constitutional presidencies transformed into rhetorical ones due to those changes. There were many changes in how presidents addressed the public over time, such as increasing focus on oral addresses over written communications, which was also a time when the debate became more "inspirational," "policy-oriented," and "developed" (Tulis, 1987: 138). Early speeches from the 19th century had a few point lists and one sentence arguments, but in the 20th century, speeches had several paragraphs (Tulis, 1987: 138). Wilson helped legitimize the president as a populist figure, thereby paving the way for future administrations to follow this strategy. Reagan controlled television, and Franklin Roosevelt led radio broadcasts (Muirhead, 2017).

3.4 Rhetorical shifts by the American presidents

The tone of presidential speeches has evolved during the nineteenth century as well. The first signs can be found in the speeches of Andrew Johnson and Lyndon Johnson, who were in office at a time when the government needed to step up and be proactive. There has been a shift in presidential discourse since the Civil War from one of authority to one of friendship, as seen by the use of empathetic and expressive language (Lim, 2002: 335, 342-343).

Presidential discourse has taken a more people-focused turn since the 1970s. Historically, each president has his own way of addressing Congress in his State of the Union address. Theodore Roosevelt used “Senate and House of Representatives” in his speech. Woodrow Wilson and Ronald Reagan used “Gentlemen of the Congress” and “Fellow Citizens”, respectively. Bill Clinton addressed the nation in his speeches to “My Fellow Americans”.

Presidential speech has grown more intimate and more casual; the president's statements contain language that emphasizes the distance between him and the public, but does more to develop a bond with the listener. According to Lim (2002), presidential addresses have come to include more anecdotes in recent years. For instance, the speeches of George W. Bush are emblematic of the personal and anecdotal style. The way he entertained the crowd reminded one of a circus performer. In this way, he diverted attention away from the primary issue. His personal connection to his audience made them comfortable, as if they had already known him. His speech style was quite distinct, in comparison to President Obama's, who was more formal in his public addresses in order to paint himself as a master of the issue. According to Reyes (2014), he skipped small talk and would go straight to telling the most important points before backing them up with logic.

The media was astonished to see that Donald Trump's outlandish promises, such as threatening to bring down American democracy, had spread (e.g., building a wall, immigrant deportation, locking up his political opponent). Many people dismissed him as a potential political contender because of his speech during his campaign. A study by Ahmadian et al. (2016) found that the political “platform” of the candidate Trump “may have been trumped” (overcome) by his “populist communication style - grandiosity, dynamism, and informality -.” (Ahmadian et al., 2016: 52). His language and actions made him seem more approachable and welcoming to his listeners. Trump's reliance on social media became particularly apparent in the wake of his election, and it started drawing special attention to the strategy of using it to help spread information.

4. Methodological approach and corpus

A qualitative research approach was used to conduct this study in order to comprehend the text in terms of both its discursive and social practices. Since Trump's Twitter account was blocked by Twitter in January 2021, “The complete List of Trump's Twitter Insults (2015-2021)” published in *The New York Times* (Quealy, 2021) has been used as a source for the corpus to be analyzed. The NYT list registers the verbal attacks Trump posted on Twitter, which ranged from when he announced his candidacy in June 2015 until January 2021, when Twitter blocked him from using their service. The tweets in the NYT list are grouped alphabetically according to topics addressed (e.g. “fake news”, “illegal immigration”, “mail-in voting”), key persons (e.g. Joe Biden, Hilary Clinton, Robert Mueller, congressmen, judges, journalists, comedians, etc.), institutions, organizations or groups of representative institutions (e.g. NASA, The New York Times, the mainstream media), US cities and states, countries (e.g. China, El Salvador, Iran, Mexico, etc.), all those targeted by Trump's insults (Shammari, 2021).

For the purpose of this study, I selected the tweets grouped under the heading “Fake news”. The corpus comprises 62 tweets that were posted on Twitter between 1 July 2017 and 31 January 2019. I chose that particular time period because it comes after the first six months of his presidency. The eighteen-month period produced a sufficient number of tweets for a study of this size. This study seeks answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the main discourse strategies that Trump employs in his tweets?
2. In what ways does Trump promote himself and others to the electorate?

A modified form of CDA's discourse-historical approach (DHA) was used for this study (Reisigl, 2017). I re-read each tweet to have a better understanding of its context, and I also looked into the broader socio-political background of the tweets to see what event each tweet alluded to. After that, I used Reisigl and Wodak's (2000) discursive strategies to identify which techniques appear in Trump's tweets, and then I used the identified strategies to figure out how he represents himself and others. I've used bold to bring emphasis to the tactics utilized in the cases given as examples in what follows. I'll go into detail about specific examples that reflect key tactics in the corpus, but I'll also show how they connect to other tweets that employ the same method.

5. Findings

5.1 Nomenclature choice tactics

Nomination can be defined as the "discursive production of social actors, objects, phenomena, events, processes, and acts" that occurs in society (Reisigl, 2017: 52). Trump employs this tactic to raise his own profile by sullyng the reputation of the opposition party. The most notable example of this phenomenon is Trump's generalization of the term "fake news". This is a term Trump has been using to describe media outlets that criticized him or with which he disagreed. Then he accuses them of spreading rumors. This has been going on since the elections, but I will focus on one specific incidence for the time being. In the first tweet, he uses the term to refute rumors that he and Putin had a "secret supper" that was never made public. As he continues, he mentions that the "press knew," which raises the specter of journalistic malfeasance in spreading fake news. Then he goes on to label several media sites as "fake news." By putting them on a no-fly list, he is sending a message to his fans about his predictions (Tweet example 2 below). This nomination technique gives Trump the opportunity to portray himself as the hero who is exposing the media's deceitful practices.

[Tweet example no. 1] ***Fake News** story of **secret dinner** with Putin is "sick." All G 20 leaders, and spouses, were invited by the Chancellor of Germany. **Press knew!*** (@realDonaldTrump, Jul 18, 2017)

[Tweet example no. 2] *After reading the false reporting and even ferocious anger in some **dying magazines**, it makes me wonder, **WHY?** All I want to do is #MAGA!* (@realDonaldTrump, August 30, 2017)

In Tweet example 3, he embarks on a Twitter rage where he calls the news media "false and fraudulent," adding dishonesty to what he believes are the wrongdoings of the media. He goes on to explain that by winning the election, he was able to defeat the "false news." As a result, he is playing up the media as a greater danger in order to inflate the significance of his victory. With the word "we," he acknowledges that it was possible because of the support of his fans to overcome the apparently hostile and misleading media.

[Tweet example no. 3] *The **FAKE & FRAUDULENT NEWS MEDIA** is working hard to convince Republicans and others I should not use social media - but remember, I won...* (@realDonaldTrump, Jul 1, 2017)

*.... the 2016 election with interviews, speeches and social media. I had to beat #FakeNews, and did. **We** will continue to WIN!* (@RealDonaldTrump, Jul 1, 2017)

The term "fake news" had a narrow definition prior to the Trump presidency and the 2016 elections: "false stories that appear to be news, propagated on the internet or through other media." During the election, Trump began to use the term to characterize news items and networks that he did not agree

with. In Tweet example 1 above, Trump refers to claims that he had a "secret supper" with Putin during the G-20 summit meeting in Hamburg, Germany as a "Fake News narrative." The truth is that it was never referred to as a "secret dinner," but rather as a "private chat" that had not been arranged, which surprised the other guests, who afterwards went to the media with their stories (Kiely, 2017). That is to say, Trump takes a fact-based and moderately expressed news article, changes it to suggest something that was not stated in the original, and the final phase is to call out the now deceptive piece of reporting as fake news without revealing that it is his exaggeration that makes the news untrue. This stripping out of context and reformulation is a discursive approach that can be found throughout the corpus, and it is at the heart of Trump's use of nomination.

As a presidential candidate, Trump was well-known for using a lot of **nicknames** on his opponents. Sen. Ted Cruz, for example, was given the nickname "*Lying Ted*" because he was repeatedly exposed as telling lies during the campaign. He dubbed former Florida Governor Jeb Bush "*Low energy Jeb*" because he lacked vitality and desire. One of the most well-known nicknames is "*Crooked Hillary*," which refers to Hillary Clinton, his loser rival. When someone nominates someone using a nickname, the goal is to remove one item of their name and resumé from the context, twist it into something nasty, and then disseminate it around via repetition. Unfavorable stories about Trump's opponents were being repeated over and over again, which helped to reinforce the negative associations people had with them. Trump has continued to use the nicknames depicted in Tweet example no. 4 even after taking office.

[Tweet example no. 4] *The greatest influence over our elections was the Fake News media "screaming" for **Crooked Hillary Clinton**. Next, she was a bad candidate!* (@realDonaldTrump, Sep. 22, 2017)

5.2 False claims tactics

Trump's arguments were full of logical fallacies designed to portray him as the victim of "Fake News," to compel lawmakers to do his bidding, and to portray him as the president who had, in his words, "restored greatness" to the United States. When he represents America favorably and his accomplishments, like in Tweet example no. 5, he criticizes the "Fake News Media" of failing to cover him. So, he is appealing to his fans' pity by suggesting that, despite his good intentions, the "Fake News" will continue to cover Trump in ways that are at odds with his interpretation of reality, despite the fact that the news is stating facts. Even though the accusation's target is ambiguous, it demonstrates Trump's ongoing discursive strategy of aggressively attacking his opponents without any specific reasons or arguments, but by using strong language that presents him in a positive light and helps create a sense in his target audience that the president is unfairly attacked and thus increases distrust in traditional media institutions.

[Tweet example no. 5] *I will represent our country well and fight for its interests! Fake News Media will never cover me accurately **but who cares!** We will #MAGA [Make America Great Again]!* (@realDonaldTrump, Jul 7, 2017)

He concludes the tweet by declaring that he is unconcerned about "Fake News," despite his recent acts suggesting otherwise. Additionally, he was always tweeting about how the "Fake News Media" was treating him unfairly. Considering how many times he complained about not being noticed by traditional media (a total of 18 in the current corpus), it is clear he was concerned about the impression he was leaving with the public.

[Tweet example no. 6] *More and more people are suggesting that Republicans (and me) should be given Equal Time on T.V. when you look at **the one-sided coverage?*** (@realDonaldTrump, Oct 07, 2017)

In the following tweet (no. 7): He asked whether the "Fake News Media" would report on his accomplishments. The tweet shows how Trump's demand for acclaim is tied to his categorization of established media as Fake News Media.

[Tweet example no. 7] *The Fake News Media barely mentions the fact that the Stock Market just hit another New Record and that business in the U.S. is booming... but the people know! Can you imagine if "O" was president and had these numbers—would be biggest story on earth! **Dow now over 25,000.*** (@realDonaldTrump, Jan 05, 2018)

Trump's continual tweeting about his presidency's accomplishments served to cement the connection between Trump the person and Trump presidency. To illustrate his point, in Tweet example no. 8 he referred to the increase in the number of firms and jobs, stating that they were at "Historic highs", implying that he had put in effort and time to achieve these outcomes. In contrast, he ignored the fact that the economy had been growing steadily for 75 months prior to his inauguration (Kiely, 2017). While in office, President Obama oversaw the transition from a period of recession to one of economic growth. In Trump's tweets, it was clear that he was using the accomplishments of others to boost his own ego.

[Tweet example no. 8] *The Deep State and the Left, and their vehicle, the Fake News Media, are going Crazy--& they don't know what to do. The economy is booming like never before, **Jobs are at Historic Highs. Wow!*** (@realDonaldTrump, Sep.06, 2018)

5.3 Intensification

In Tweet example no. 3, Trump concluded his tirade against "fraudulent news media" by tweeting "#FraudNewsCNN #FNN" and a meme depicting him slapping CNN in the face with a video from his professional wrestling career. It shows his victory against "false news" while also displaying his personal physical strength, displayed in a male ferocity that made him appear invincible. Trump's speech is by now well known as having a history of using this type of intensification.

The President's tweet depicting him slapping CNN sparked indignation among the general public and politicians alike, who stated that sharing a message that condones violence is unacceptable for a President. When confronted with the beating he gets from the news media, Trump's homeland security adviser Tom Bossert told ABC News (2017) that he has every right to reply and that no one should regard it as a threat. More people were of the opinion that his tweeting the image was unpatriotic. "My use of social media is not Presidential, it's MODERN DAY PRESIDENTIAL," Trump said in response to the criticism. Trump purposefully chose the escalating image. (@realDonaldTrump, July 1, 2017) Make America Great Again!

To put it another way, Trump claimed he wanted to reframe presidential speech and the office of the presidency as a whole. This time around, the emphasis was on emotional appeal rather than legal argumentation, and different *intensification tactics* were being used to achieve this. Additionally, to indicate uniqueness, he often used *capitalization*, as in Tweet example no. 9, where he capitalized the adverb "never" to show that his efforts were bearing fruit.

[Tweet example no. 9] *The president has accomplished some absolutely historic things during this past year. Thank you Charlie Kirk of Turning Points USA. Sadly, the Fake News Media will **NEVER** talk about our accomplishments in their end of the year reviews. We are compiling a long & beautiful list.* (@realDonaldTrump, Dec 22, 2017)

6. Concluding remarks

Early in the 20th century, Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson broke away from the communication traditions of previous constitutional presidents, in order to meet the new demands of society and the availability of new communication means, which can be seen as the beginning of the rhetorical presidency. After that, presidents have embraced all of the new technological breakthroughs,

from radio to television, which have improved their ability to speak directly to the public while also appealing to the audience. As a result, as presidents were adapting their language and information choices to match the general public's understanding, their speech adopted a more informal, personal, and direct tone.

The advent of social media and the internet has transformed how politicians run their campaigns and interact with their followers. In 2008, Barack Obama's presidential campaign made extensive use of social media, which allowed him to establish a more personal connection with his supporters. Other candidates followed Obama's lead after he ran a successful internet campaign. With his own personal Twitter account, Donald Trump took the use of social media to a whole new level. In the wake of his divisive Twitter posts, Trump received traditional media attention for his views on women's rights. In addition to his dominance on social media, one aspect of his success was his rhetoric, which altered the way we think about political debate.

As shown in this study of a collection of Trump's tweets, there were several tactics that he employed on a regular basis. It is clear that Trump has employed numerous methods to promote himself in a positive light. He used to criticize media outlets for publishing what he labelled "fake news," and he used disparaging nicknames to suggest negative characteristics about his competitors. The nomination approach was the quickest and most straightforward method of presenting a positive image of himself while portraying a negative image of others. It is clear from Trump's overuse of this tactic that he lacked the ability to criticize his opponents on a more intellectual level, by engaging in debates rather than just attacking their personal characteristics.

False claims against the media were a common tactic used by Trump to gain sympathy from his followers. Furthermore, his arguments were full of inconsistency, as evidenced by the amount of tweets he had posted in which he expressed his displeasure with "fake media" coverage. Politicians who had views different from Trump's were accused of betraying the president and were not given a chance to defend themselves, in order to show that Trump's position was more rational. The corpus studied lacks rational discussion with opponents. Thus, we can consider that Trump was pursuing a worrying strategy that was posing a danger to democracy.

Trump's main rhetorical strategy was one of intensification as well. As shown in the examples above, he was accused of encouraging violence, and in response, he dubbed himself a "modern day president," raising the alarming potential that he aimed to substantively reformulate the meaning of presidency and presidential language.

The analysis of President Trump's tweets shows that what academics have dubbed the "Trump Effect" is in fact visible in this small corpus, which reflects the president's fostering a polarizing political environment in which one's political convictions are secondary to one's attitude toward the president. Using his Twitter account to promote this viewpoint, Trump was posing grave problems for democratic leadership, as well as the future of political debate.

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