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2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION: TWITTER TOPICS OF THE PRESIDENTIAL
CANDIDATES

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to find which topics the 2016 presidential candidates are posting about on Twitter that are gaining the highest reaction from their followers. The goal was to find if certain topics receive a higher reaction than others do. As the election is getting closer, this study can help give an insight on what topics the candidate's followers what to hear about. It also aims to find if the use of a hashtag or photo will increase the reaction from the followers. A content analysis was conducted to find the top tweets for four candidates from December 2015 to February 2016. The tweets were coded and analyzed based on the tweet topic and use of hashtag or photo. The tweets were placed into six categories including tweets about the election, tweets about current political issues, personal tweets, tweets about President Obama and tweets about a candidate's opposing candidates. The tweets that didn't fall into the categories listed above were placed in an "other" category. The data found that of the tweets analyzed, the followers are reacting the most to candidate's tweets about the election, political issues and the opposing candidates. The tweets analyzed showed that the use of hashtags or photos did not have a high reaction from the candidate's followers. The results of this study will help advance the understanding of which topics the candidates are discussing that are receiving the highest reaction from Twitter users.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Social media has become a prominent aspect of political presidential campaigning. Social media originated with the Bulletin Board System (BBS). After the creation of BBS, social media grew quickly worldwide (The History of Social Networking, 2014). It was predicted in 2016 that 2.3 billion people use social media worldwide (Number of Worldwide Social Network Users 2018-2018, n.d.).

Social media in presidential campaigns became a common campaigning strategy in 2008 when President Barack Obama began reaching out to the public via social media platforms (Rutledge, 2013). This allowed him to gain voters by having a seemingly personal connection and conversation with them over social media. "Social media changes the way candidates react to situations as well as how Americans can respond, support, and gather information about both candidates" (Johnson, 2012).

Twitter is being used in social media campaigning. Twitter allows users to send quick messages under 140 characters (Johnson, 2012). Twitter also allows the option of linking additional information. If the candidate attached a link to the tweet and the reader is interested in the short message, that reader can click the link to read more about the topic proposed by the candidate. Twitter has played an important role for candidates to send out and receive quick responses (Johnson, 2012). It has also allowed conversations during large events to occur, such as on debate nights and election days. "People take to Twitter to debate along with the politicians. This accomplishes two things. First, it gets the conversation going around certain issues, and second, it gives the politicians a better idea of where their followers stand. This helps them script their message" (Presidential Debates and Twitter: The New Normal, 2016).

This study examines which topics the 2016 presidential candidates are talking about in their most popular tweets over a span of three months. The data will help suggest what their audiences want to hear

based on the tweet weight, the number of favorites and retweets combined, on the candidate's Twitter account.

The 2016 presidential election began just like any other. Some candidates, however, are creating an uproar with their use of social media platforms. For example, Trump has insulted his opponents on Twitter. His insults have become so common that *The New York Times* made a list of 210 people, places and things Donald Trump has insulted on Twitter. This list contains 17 current and former presidential candidates, lawyers, television hosts, the Government of the United States and many more (Lee and Quealy, 2016).

Trump has gained attention from his insulting behavior on Twitter and other social media platforms. For example, Trump recently went on a "Twitter tirade" against Megyn Kelly, a Fox News host. (Zaru, 2015). CNN posted an article stating, "As Fox News host Megyn Kelly returned from vacation, the Republican presidential candidate used Twitter late Monday [August 24, 2015] night to slam her return during the airing of her show, saying that host 'must have had a terrible vacation, she is really off her game'" (Zaru, 2015).

Trump continued to post insulting comments about Kelly on Twitter. He posted "I liked The Kelly File much better without @megynkelly. Perhaps she could take another eleven day unscheduled vacation!" (Zaru, 2015). Trump also retweeted various tweets calling Kelly a bimbo. He was criticized for the way he handled this situation (Zaru, 2015).

Trump is also known for insulting his opposing candidates and their families. He tweeted about Ted Cruz's wife, Heidi (Schliefer, 2016). The tweet states, "Lyin' Ted Cruz just used a picture of Melania from a G.Q. shoot in his ad. Be careful, Lyin' Ted, or I will spill the beans on your wife!" (Schliefer, 2016). This tweet is believed to be referring to an advertisement created by an anti-Trump super PAC. This super PAC is not related to the Cruz campaign (Schliefer, 2016).

Candidates like Trump show that typical social media messages are not the only way to gain attention. Unexpected candidates for this election have stayed at the top of the polls (Leonhardt, 2016).

Trump's fame could be helping him gain the attention most did not think he could gain and keep. An article in *The New York Times* suggests that research has shown that since 2008 more people are claiming they no longer trust the government. This could lead to a candidate who has not formally been involved in politics before to do well during the campaigning season (Leonhardt, 2016).

This topic is becoming more relevant as the candidates continue to campaign before the 2016 election. There is not one clear answer on what topics voters are reacting to more over another on social media. This study was conducted to find if there is one topic that is gaining a higher tweet weight over another in presidential campaigning on Twitter for a three-month time period. Although it will not be clear if a candidate discussing a certain topic will lead to swaying a voter for or against him or her, this information can help suggest what topics voters are reacting to on Twitter.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Evolution of Social Media

Early Platforms

Social media originated with the Bulletin Board System (BBS) (The History of Social Networking, 2014). BBS allowed users to communicate by posting messages and sharing files with other users. Most message boards were kept local due to being accessed over telephone lines. BBS gained popularity through the 1980s and 1990s, around the time that the internet became popular (History of Social Networking, 2014).

Another earlier option of online social communication was a platform called CompuServe (The History of Social Networking, 2014). "CompuServe dial-up service played an early role in the development of online communications" (Shedden, 2014). CompuServe was first offered in 1979. Users could access online news such as *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times*. The service shut down in 1982, but "became a crucial step in the history of online journalism" (Shedden, 2014).

Classmates.com and SixDegrees.com were the first to allow users to connect with people that they knew, to create profiles, organize groups and view other user's profiles. Social media took a large step forward with the launch of Friendster in 2002 (History of Social Networking, 2014). Bringing in over 3 million users, Friendster "promoted the idea that a rich online community can exist only between people who truly have common bonds" (The History of Social Networking, 2014).

In 2003, LinkedIn was introduced as a networking resource for business professionals to network. MySpace launched in 2003 and became a worldwide favorite and attracted a younger adult demographic by tempting them with "music, videos, and a funky, featured-filled environment" (History of Social Networking, 2014). MySpace hit a peak in December of 2008. It attracted 75.9 million visitors monthly (Gillette, 2011).

Facebook

When Facebook was created and released in 2004 at Harvard University, it "remained a campus-oriented site for two full years before finally opening to the general public in 2006" (History of Social Networking, 2014). Mark Zuckerberg, the creator, continued to release innovative features such as built-in applications. Another feature that helped launch Facebook's popularity "was Facebook's ubiquitous 'Like' button which broke free from the bounds of the site and began appearing all over the internet" (The History of Social Networking, 2014). Today, most platforms have some type of button that resembles 'liking' (The History of Social Networking, 2014).

Twitter

Twitter is a social networking website that allows users to read and compose messages of 140 or less characters. The Twitter character limit was set at 140 because the average SMS carrier limit was 160. The creators wanted to allow room for usernames (Milian, 2009). Registered users can post Twitter messages, or tweets, at any time of the day about any topic (How Twitter Was Born, 2009).

Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, Biz Stone and Noah Glass created Twitter in March 2006. The original platform was launched in July 2006. It quickly grew and gained worldwide popularity (How Twitter Was Born, 2009).

"Twitter goes further than Facebook to assure and authenticate individuals in such ways as Twitter itself proactively validates user accounts, particularly those of celebrities and commercial companies, by signifying their authenticity with a blue checkmark" (Myers and Hamilton, 2014). This checkmark allows users to know that replicated accounts are not a valid source of information. It also categorizes the accounts to range from "unimportant viewer to highly important amplifier" (Myers and Hamilton, 2014).

"Twitter is a medium of immediacy, information and interactivity" (Johnson, 2012). "Twitter has changed the way the public receives and responds to media events" (Johnson, 2012). Twitter gives its users the option to decide what accounts they want to follow. This feature allows the users to only see the information they want (Johnson, 2012).

Presidential candidates can use their Twitter account to present why they are most qualified for office (Johnson, 2012). "With tools like Twitter, campaigns may be able to move toward more interaction or dialogue with potential voters. […] When candidates start to understand that they can use this to communicate one-on-one with people, they can really achieve some interesting things" (Towner and Dulio, 2012).

Since a tweet only contains 140 characters, "Twitter can guide readers to a story that has more detail" (Johnson, 2012). Tweets can provide a link to a web site. It allows the candidate to "share video, audio, text and photographs" with his or her followers (Johnson, 2012). This can "create an intimate connection between the candidate and the voter" (Johnson, 2012).

Twitter allows the candidates to connect with his or her supporters in a personal way in a platform that is free of direct media influence. The candidates can reach a large group with a short message in a quick and timely manner.

Google Plus

Google quickly became aware of the power that social media had and released Google+ in 2007. "It differed from Facebook and Twitter in that it wasn't necessarily a full-featured networking site, but rather a social "layer" of the overall Google experience" (History of Social Networking, 2014).

Social media platforms that have launched since Facebook and Twitter, have been targeting a specific group of people or have a specialized kind of interaction. For example, "the sharing of public images (Instagram), the private sharing of images […] (Snapchat), augmented reality (Foursquare), and location-based matchmaking (Tinder)" (History of Social Networking, 2014).

Social networks have evolved greatly over recent years. In a study completed by Myers and Hamilton, they stated, "A historical tradition of examining conflict coupled with the continued relevance of social history suggests that social media such as Facebook and Twitter will become crucial primary sources for historians" (Myers and Hamilton, 2014). Applications like Twitter allow people to have a voice and represent themselves and their perceptions when they would generally be excluded from public discourse. The article also stated that "Humphreys et al. suggests that 'Twitter provide[s] a platform for people who might traditionally be excluded from public discourse to have a choice in representing themselves as well as their perceptions of the world around them'" (Myers and Hamilton, 2014) In their article it also states, "Sigler […] suggests that social media is a 'tool to peek into popular mentality during large events, in particular, societal disturbances" (Myers and Hamilton, 2014). This information suggests that social media is becoming a party of written history. It will be able to help develop insights on major events through history.

Social media plays a large role in today's online world. It allows users to have personal and one-on-one connections with other users. The tool helps keep people connected and allows them to communicate at all times.

History of Social Media Campaigning

Communication has always been essential in political campaigns. "The method [. . .] of communicating with the electorate has changed dramatically since 1828. Handbills have virtually disappeared. Radio became the most popular vehicle in the 1920s and 1930s. After World War II, television emerged as the advertising medium of choice for political candidates" (West, 2013).

In 1952, the presidential campaigns featured television advertisements. "In that year, each party ran television and print advertisements evoking World War II memories. Media campaigning through the 1960s brought television advertisements that showcased the candidates' personal traits" (West, 2013). "The 1964 presidential campaign with Lyndon Johnson and Barry Goldwater was one of the most negative races since the advent of television" (West, 2013). The 1970s and 1980s brought advertisements that took advantage of the public's fear of the economy. Some of the advertisements were used to criticize the economic performance of previous presidents (West, 2013).

The 1990s brought attack advertisements and long "infomercials" to political campaigning (West, 2013). Beginning with the election in 2000, Al Gore and George W. Bush began expanding their campaigning methods to feature "advertising and Internet Web sites that played to undecided voters, each candidate, along with outside groups, ran commercials that challenged the integrity and experience of the other"(West, 2013).

Political communication continues to evolve with each election. Technology has shifted greatly toward social media, mobile phones and the internet. Candidates have changed their outreach strategies to fit the changing aspects of communications and mobile campaigning to appeal to the voters and gain support (Towner and Dulio, 2012).

In an article written by Towner and Dulio, they state:

> "One can look to the great technological innovations during the mid-1900s as a precursor to the changes that are taking place with the Internet today. When campaigns found that they could use the airwaves to spread campaign messages, the electoral landscape was changed forever. First with radio and then television, all of a sudden, a candidate could talk to nearly all of the voters in his or her district in 30 or 60 seconds rather than having to spend all day traveling around town."

These strategies did not create new goals for campaigns, but simply created a more efficient way to accomplish candidates campaigning goals (Towner and Dulio, 2012).

Referring to the 2012 election, "a survey of 800 likely voters across the country by SAY Media found that 'almost half of them aren't using live TV as their primary source of content this cycle.' Increasingly, people are using smartphones and tablets to see content online" (West, 2013).

Beginning in the twenty-first century, to reach the public and influence their voting decisions, there was a rise in social media, mobile technology and geolocation devices. This allowed the campaigning messages to be more personalized (West, 2013). Candidates accomplished this by using highly targeted advertisements on Facebook, Twitter and Google. "The campaigns take advantage not just of television demographics but also recreational decisions, house size and credit card purchases to target electoral messages" (West, 2013).

Social Media in Campaigns

Sixty-four percent of Americans own a smartphone. Americans like convenience, immediacy, and the ability to personalize their communications on their handheld device. This is not just limited to work or personal enjoyment, but to news and political information as well (Smith, 2015).

"Research has shown that social media sharing enhances political persuasion. A randomized analysis of campaign messages sent to 61 million Facebook users during the 2010 elections found that each message directly influences political self-expression, information seeking and real-world voting behavior of millions of people. Furthermore, the messages not only influenced the users who received them but also the users' friends, and friends of friends" (West, 7).

Social media use during presidential campaigning allows the candidates to react quickly to situations. It also allows voters to "respond, support and gather information" on candidates at any time (Johnson, 2012). "When a person learns to communicate a clear, concise, and effective message at the appropriate time and direct that message to a specific audience about a certain situation, that person creates leverage" (Johnson, 2012).

Social media platforms allow the candidates to share and publish their stances on political issues. Candidates can share information with their followers without media control or bias.

President Obama's 2008 and 2012 Social Media Campaigns

President Obama's use of social media in the 2008 and 2012 election periods allowed him to create a rhetorical advantage (Johnson, 2012). President Obama communicated messages effectively via social media platforms while his competition did not have the team to gain

supporters in the same way. This led to President Obama taking the lead in the election (Johnson, 2012).

2008 Campaign

On November 4, 2008, President Obama was named the president of the United States, winning by nearly 8.5 million popular votes and 200 electoral votes (Chang, 2009).

President Obama's team concentrated on his social media and web presence. Competing against Senator John McCain, his team's focus on social media networking paid off. Obama's follower counts far outnumbered McCain's. Throughout the campaigning season, Obama's web presence helped him gain over 5 million followers on social media platforms (Chang, 2009). Obama had over 115,000 followers on Twitter, more than 23 times those of McCain." (Chang, 2009).

While McCain and Obama both had accounts on a variety of platforms, Obama used his platforms more often and created a stronger web presence. "Obama's campaign had posted more than 1,800 videos on their YouTube 'channel' by the end of the campaign, while McCain's had only 330" (Towner and Dulio, 2012).

Obama had approximately 100 staff members working on his social presence in comparison to McCain who had roughly 12 staff members working on his social media presence (Chang, 2012). "A major success factor for Obama's victory was how Obama's campaign used social media and technology as an integral part of its strategy, to raise money, and, more importantly, to develop a groundswell of empowered volunteers who felt they could make a difference" (Chang, 2009).

"Barack Obama pioneered several innovative uses of digital technology. With the help of the internet, he raised $745 million. He made use of social media platforms such as Facebook

and MySpace to identify and communicate with supporters around the country. And through Meetup.com, he launched virtual get-togethers with voters in many different locales simultaneously" (West, 2013).

Obama focused his campaign on targeting voters under the age of 29, whom he won by a 66 percent majority (The Republican Primaries in 140 Characters, 2013). "It was the Obama campaign that exploited and used new media in ways that utilized technology like no one had seen, while John McCain's campaign lagged far behind. The Obama campaign utilized its own Web site, Facebook, YouTube, as well as other tools and it even created its own social network site (SNS), MyBarackObama.com (MyBO)" (Towner and Dulio, 2012). Many researchers believe that Obama changed campaigning in an unimaginable and unexpected way (Chang, 2009). "Obama changed the way elections were run and would be run in the future" (Chang, 2009). Throughout this campaign, he demonstrated to everyone the power that social media holds when used correctly. (Chang, 2009).

Obama's victory is due to "the campaign's proclivity to online advocacy" (Chang, 2009). Traditional campaigns tend to focus on gaining votes and raising funds (Chang, 2009). "The Obama team's grassroots efforts revolved around asking for a third element: time, which meant involvement and engagement" (Chang, 2009).

By establishing Twitter, Facebook, MySpace and other social media platforms as part of his campaign strategy, Barack Obama set the base for every political campaign to follow.

2012 Campaign

In Obama's 2012 campaign, Web use and social media platforms became a powerful tool, even more so than the 2008 election. A Pew Research Center survey found that 83 percent of internet users between the ages of 18 and 29 were actively using social media sites. This

number declines as the age groups grow older (Comart, 2011). The 2011 census found that 10

percent of the voters in the 2008 election were under the age of 24 (Comart, 2011).

Obama faced the challenge of learning how to string together various social media

platforms and communications tools to make one strong campaign presence (Towner and Dulio,

2012). "Done correctly, the various parts of your online outreach will reinforce each other and

the rest of your old-world communications work" (Towner and Dulio, 2012).

The 2012 election became the most tweeted event in United States political history (Ray,

2012). "More than 327,000 tweets were sent per minute at the height of the site's traffic when it

was announced that Obama had won re-election" (Ray, 2012). After the announcement of

Obama's reelection, he tweeted out a photo with a caption stating "Four more years." This tweet

became the most retweeted tweet in Twitter history (Ray, 2012).

Research Questions

RQ 1: Which topics are being discussed the most on Twitter by the presidential candidates for

the 2016 presidential election?

This research seeks to find which topics were discussed the most in the top 15 tweets for

four candidates during the months of December 2015 to February 2016. The top 15 tweets were

determined by finding the tweet weight. The tweet weight is found by adding the number of likes

to the number of retweets for each tweet.

The tweets were placed into six coding categories: *Election, Political Issues, Personal,*

President Obama, Opposing Candidates and *Other.* The research seeks to find if one topic

discussed is significantly higher than the others.

RQ 2: Which political party has the highest number of tweets for the topic categories most discussed by all of the candidates?

  This research question seeks to find, of the most discussed topics from the six categories, which political parties are contributing the most to the specific categories.

RQ 3: Does the use of hashtags help gain a higher tweet weight?

  This research question seeks to find if the use of hashtags has a positive or negative effect on the tweet weight.

RQ 4: Does the use of pictures or videos help gain a higher tweet weight?

  This research question seeks to find if the use of pictures of videos has a positive or negative effect on the tweet weight.

Chapter 3

Methodology

A content analysis was used to determine the topics of tweets on Twitter for four of the candidates running in the 2016 presidential election. The four candidates, Donald Trump, Ted Cruz, Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, were chosen based on polls from December 2015 that predicted those candidates to do well in the upcoming primary elections (CA- 2016 Democratic Presidential Primaries).

Once the candidates were chosen, the top 15 tweets per candidate were found for the months of December 2015, January 2016 and February 2016. The months were chosen based on important events occurring during the three months. This was a time of heavy campaigning, holidays and the beginning of the primary elections.

To find the top 15 tweets for four candidates for December 2015 to February 2016, the number of likes per tweet and retweets per tweet were added together to find the tweet weight. Once the tweet weight was found for each tweet and all the tweets put in descending order, the top 15 with the highest tweet weight were pulled and used for this analysis.

The unit of analysis was a single tweet. Overall, 180 tweets were coded and analyzed for three coding themes: Topic, use of hashtags, and use of photos and videos. The topic code was distributed into six categories: *Election, Political Issues, Personal, President Obama, Opposing Candidates* and *Other*. For a majority of the categories, the tweets were distributed into their category based on word matching. For example, if the tweet contained the word "gun" it was assigned to the *Political Issues* category.

However, three categories contained a variety of topics. The tweets were then placed into subcategories. The *Election* category contains any tweets that discuss *Rallies/State Visits*, *Winning or Losing States* in the primary elections, *Campaign Slogans, Endorsements, Raising Money or Campaign Funding, Polls* and tweets *Relating to being President*.

Secondly, the *Political Issues* category contains any tweet that discusses a current and relevant political issue. These issues include *Terrorism, International, Immigration, Health Care, Gun Control, Budget/Taxes, Discrimination, War, Marijuana, Veterans, LGBT and Planned Parenthood/Abortion.*

Lastly, the *Other* category was recorded into four subcategories: *State of the Union, Debates, Miscellaneous and Media.*

Chapter 4

Results

One hundred and eighty tweets were analyzed and coded over the coding period from

Dec. 1, 2015 to Feb. 29, 2016.

All Candidates

Topics

When finding topics for all four candidates, as shown in Table 1, it was found that 41

tweets were assigned to the *Election* category, 41 tweets were assigned to the *Political Issues*

category, 19 tweets were assigned to the *Personal* category, 15 tweets were assigned to the

President Obama category, 37 tweets were assigned to the *Opposing Candidates* category, and

27 tweets were assigned to the *Other* category.

Table 1: Count of Categories - All Candidates
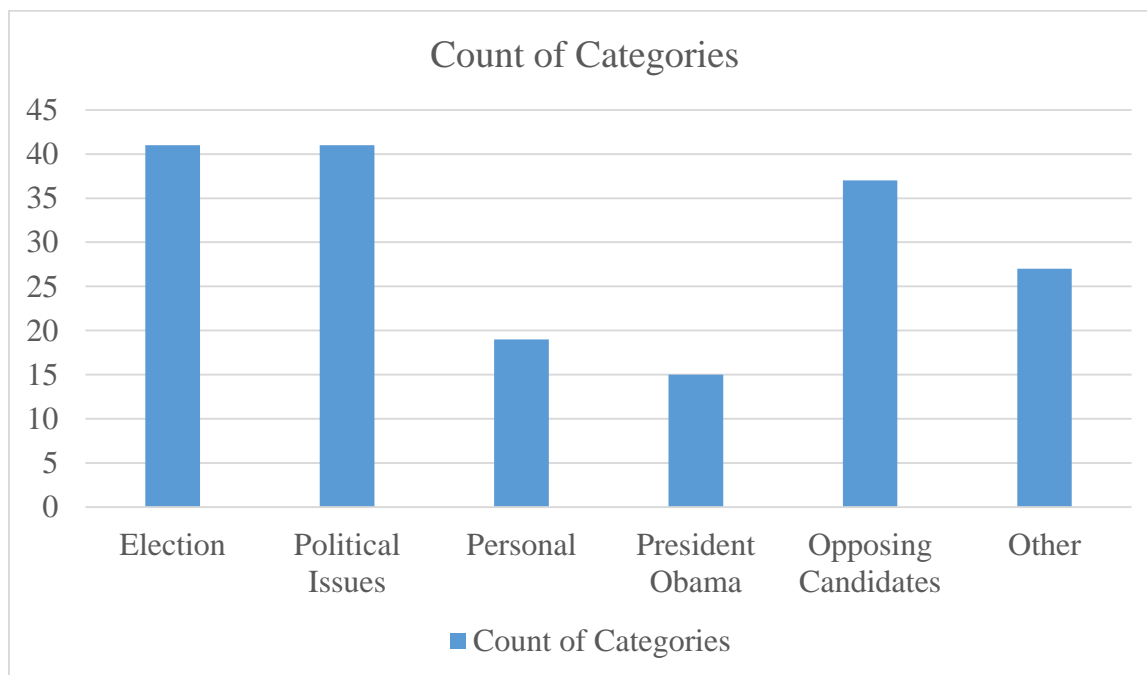
When further breaking down the *Election* category, as shown in Table 2, considering all four candidates, two tweets were assigned to the *Rallies/Visit States* category, nine tweets were assigned to the *Win/Lose a State* category, four tweets were assigned to the *Slogan* category, two tweets were assigned to the *Endorsements* category, four tweets were assigned to the *Raise Money/Funding* category, six tweets were assigned to the *Polls* category and 14 tweets were assigned to the *Related to being President* category.

Table 2: Election Subcategories - All Candidates
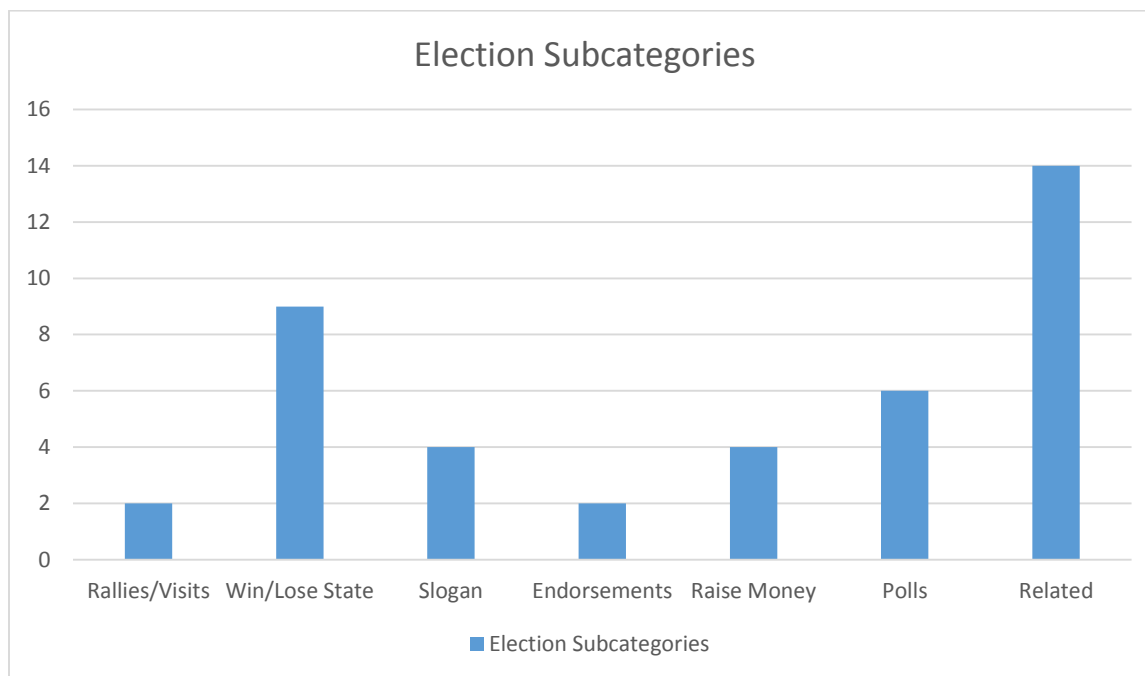
The *Political Issues* category was separated into 12 subcategories with 41 total tweets. The subcategories were determined by what political issues were mentioned in the 180 tweets that were coded and analyzed. The subcategories are: *Terrorism* with eight tweets, *International* with two tweets, *Immigration* with one tweet, *Health Care* with one tweet, *Gun Control* with six tweets, *Budget/Taxes* with three tweets, *Discrimination* with seven tweets, *War* with one tweet,

Marijuana with five tweets, *Veterans* with one tweet, *LGBT* with one tweet and *Planned Parenthood/Abortion* with five tweets.

Table 3: Political Issues Subcategories - All Candidates
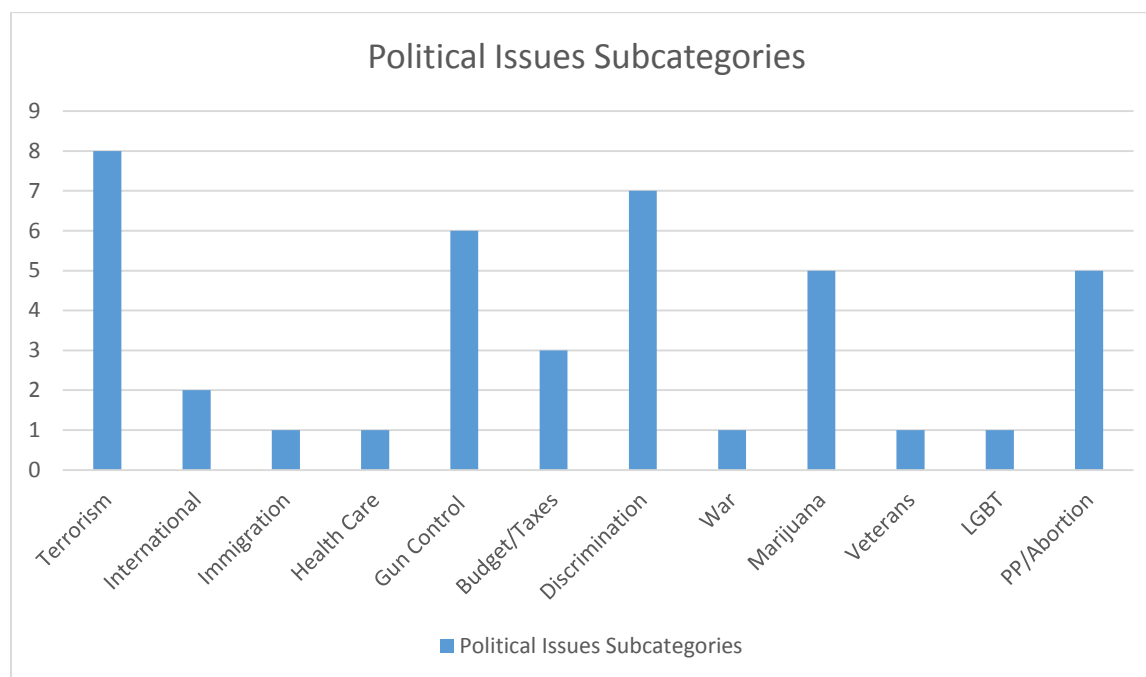
Lastly, the *Other* category contains four subcategories. The *State of the Union* subcategory was assigned seven tweets based on the context in the tweet. If the tweet discussed a political issue that was mentioned during the State of the Union, it was assigned to the *Political Issues* category. However, if the tweet discussed the State of the Union event, it was assigned to the *Other* category and placed in the *State of the Union* subcategory. The *Media* subcategory was assigned seven tweets. The *Debate* subcategory was assigned nine tweets. The tweets in this category directly discuss the event, not necessarily the topics debated during the event or the candidates that participated. The *Miscellaneous* subcategory was assigned four tweets. The four tweets in this subcategory discuss the death of Justice Scalia and the Sandra Bland case.

Other Subcategories

Caption: Table 4: Other Subcategories - All Candidates
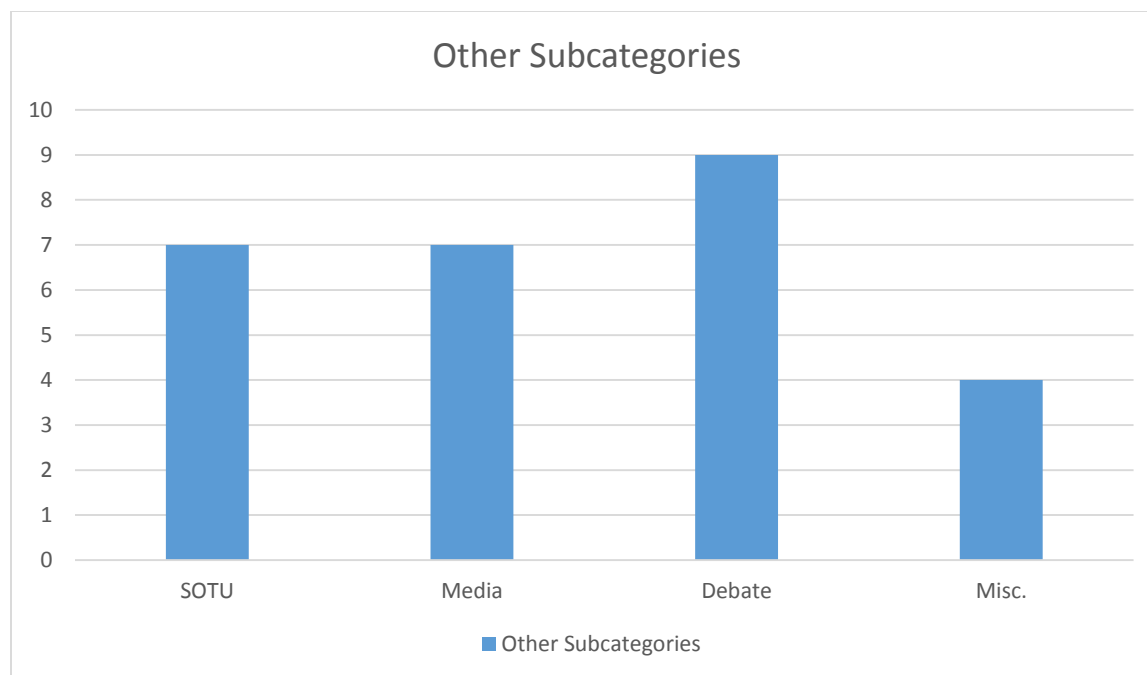
Use of Hashtags

Of all the tweets, as shown in Table 5, only 55 tweets (31%) contained a hashtag.

Table 5: Use of Hashtags - All Candidates

Hashtag	Count of Hashtag	Percent
No	125	69%
Yes	55	31%
Total	180	100%

Use of Photos

Of all the tweets, as shown in Table 2, only 49 (27%) contained a picture, vine or video.

Table 6: Use of Photos - All Candidates

Picture	Count of Picture	Percent
No	131	73%
Yes	49	27%
Total	180	100%

Republican Party

Donald Trump and Ted Cruz represent the Republican Party in this analysis. Their combined 90 tweets contained 17 tweets in the *Election* category, 14 tweets in the *Political Issues* category, 11 tweets in the *Personal* category, nine tweets in the *President Obama* category, 25 tweets in the *Opposing Candidates* category and 14 tweets in the *Other* category.

Table 7: Categories - Republican Party
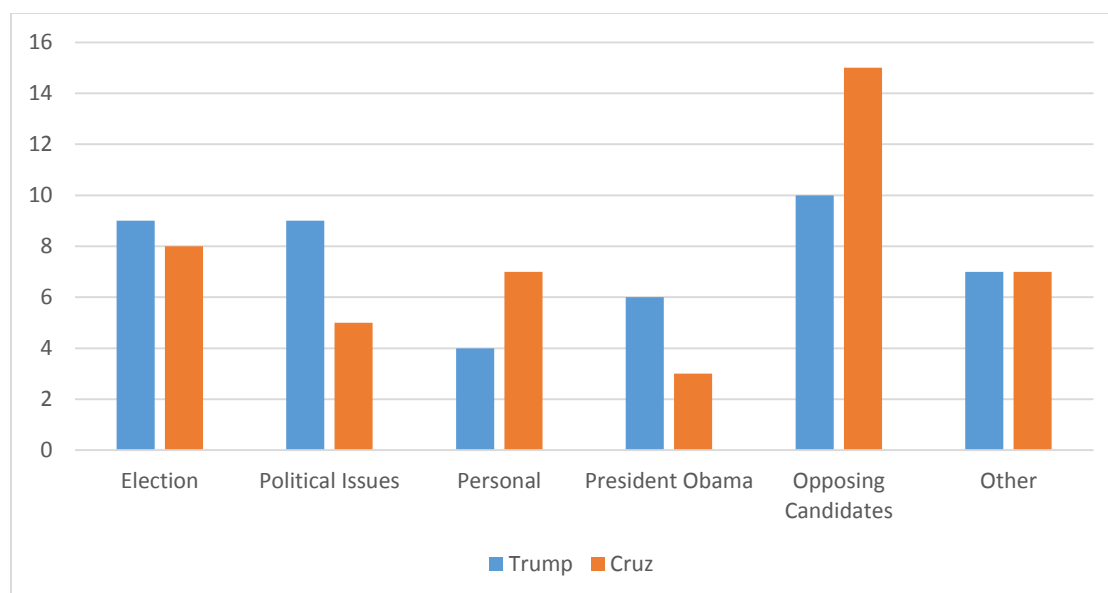
Democratic Party

Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders represent the Democratic Party in this analysis. Together, their combined 90 tweets contained 24 tweets in the *Election* category, 27 tweets in the *Political Issues* category, eight tweets in the *Personal* category, six tweets in the *President Obama* category, 12 tweets in the *Opposing Candidates* category and 13 tweets in the *Other* category.

Table 8: Categories - Democratic Party
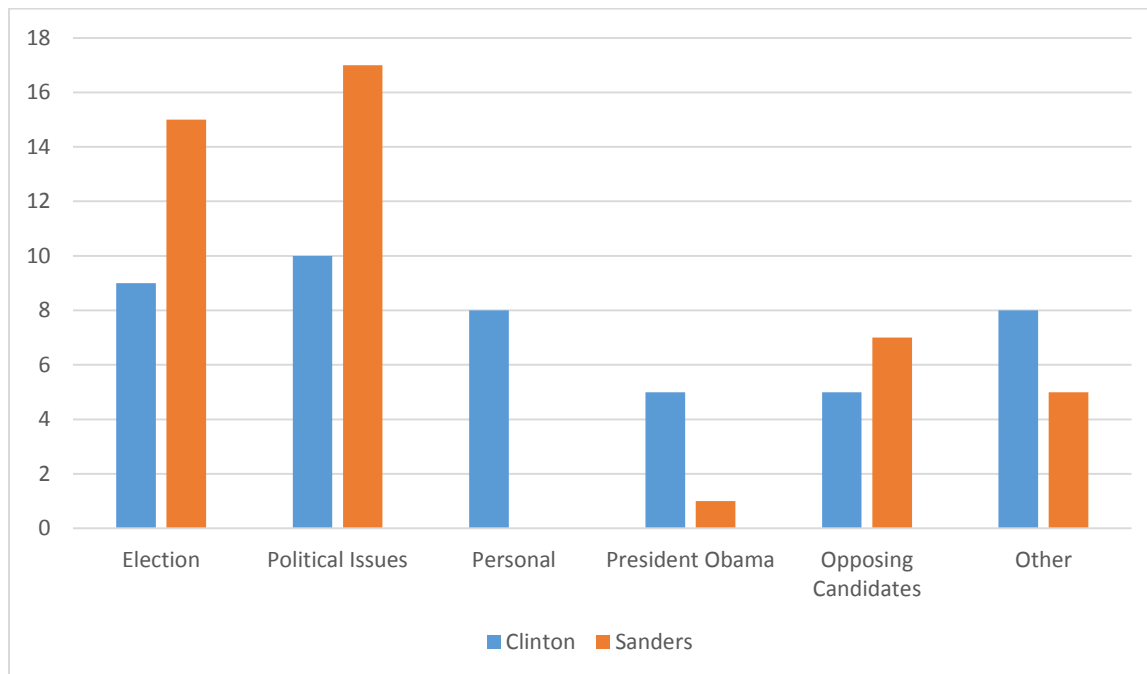
Tweet Weight

For every tweet analyzed and coded for this study, the tweet weight was found. The tweet weight is the number of likes added to the number of retweets. As shown in Table 9, some candidates had a much higher tweet weight and reaction from their followers than the other candidates. Numbers are subject to change. Reactions (likes and retweets) on tweets do not necessarily mean it is a positive reaction from the Twitter user.

Table 9: Tweet Weight - All Candidates

|	Trump			Cruz		
	Likes	Retweets	Tweet Weight	Likes	Retweets	Tweet Weight
Election	60,867	160,040	220,907	12,867	18,753	31,620
Political Issues	87,632	161,063	248,695	10,122	12,194	22,316
Personal	42,095	92,777	134,872	9,027	17,707	26,734
President Obama	52,723	120,247	172,970	3,854	5,007	8,861
Opposing Candidates	79,734	172,778	252,512	40,902	54,429	95,331
Other	74,703	141,527	216,230	17,008	22,709	39,717
Total	**397,754**	**848,432**	**1,246,186**	**93,780**	**130,799**	**224,579**
	Clinton			Sanders		
	Likes	Retweets	Tweet Weight	Likes	Retweets	Tweet Weight
Election	46,464	74,014	120,478	138,894	252,748	391,642
Political Issues	43,018	73,965	116,983	144,690	232,079	376,769
Personal	19,543	55,779	75,322	0	0	0
President Obama	24,868	48,806	73,674	4,413	9,571	13,984
Opposing Candidates	23,442	36,259	59,701	102,044	144,008	246,052
Other	25,478	52,405	77,883	36,293	61,780	98,073
Total	**182,813**	**341,228**	**524,041**	**426,334**	**700,186**	**1,126,520**

Chapter 5

Discussion

This study was conducted to examine what topics are gaining the most reaction on Twitter via combined retweets and likes per tweet, as shown in Table 9 and Table 10. "Twitter is unique as it mostly negates direct media influence to the candidate-supporter relationship" (The Republican Primaries in 140 Characters, 2014). Candidates can use Twitter as a tool to have a more personal and one-on-one connection or conversation with their follower base without media bias.

RQ 1: Which topics are being discussed the most on Twitter by the presidential candidates for the 2016 presidential election?

Research question one addressed topics in presidential campaign tweets. The results led to the conclusions that a majority of the tweets fell under the *Election*, *Political Issues* and *Opposing Candidates* category. The three categories with the highest results also have the most dramatic differences between the two political parties. The *Election* category has a seven number differential, the *Political Issues* category has a 13 number differential and the *Opposing Candidates* category has a 13 number differential. The three other categories had a number differential between one and three.

Table 10: Categories - Republicans vs. Democrats
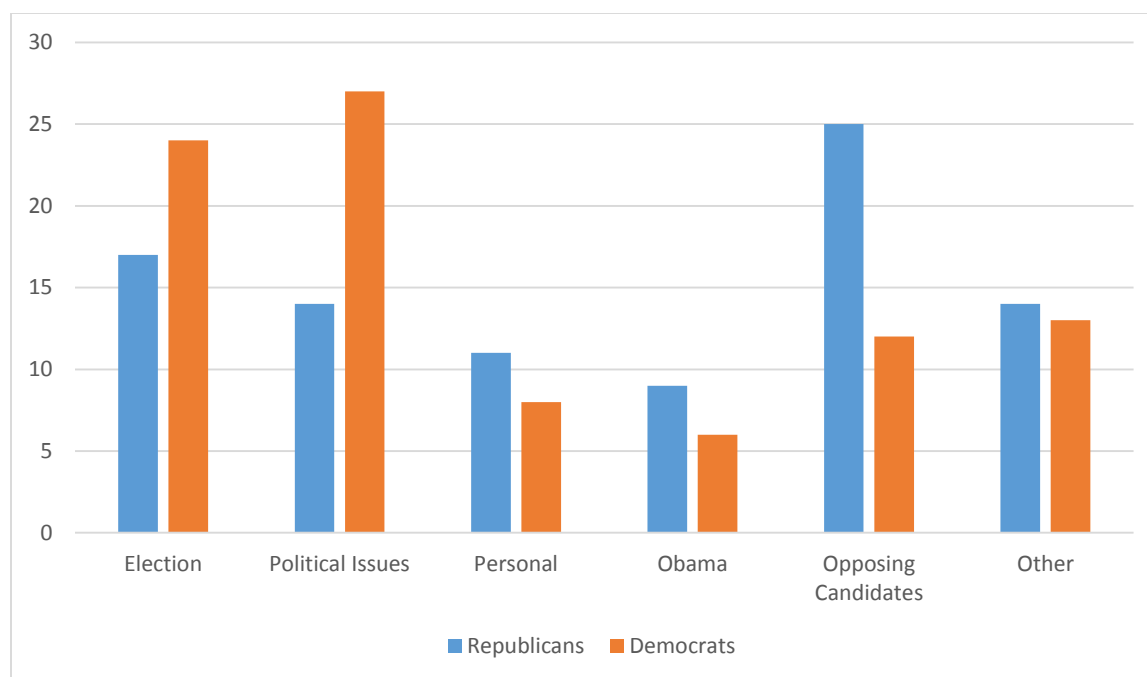
RQ 2: Which political party has the highest number of tweets for the topic categories most discussed by all of the candidates?

Election

The *Election* category was assigned 41 of the total 180 tweets. Due to the broadness of this category, it was broken down into the subcategories of *Rallies/State Visits, Winning/Losing States, Campaign Slogan, Endorsements, Raising Money/Funding, Polls* and *Related to being President*.

The data suggests that the Democratic Party candidates analyzed in this study, Clinton and Sanders, are discussing more of the topics in the *Election* category. However, based on how this analysis was conducted, the Republican Party could also be tweeting about the topics in this

category, but the Democrats are receiving a higher tweet weight and response from their followers, as shown in Table 9.

The highest scoring subcategories for this topic are tweets in the *Related to being President* and *Winning/Losing a State* subcategories. Of the two highest scoring subcategories, Clinton and Sanders tweeted a majority of the tweets.

Political Issues

The data suggests that the Democrats received a higher response and higher tweet rate on their tweets about political issues. There were 41 total tweets assigned to this category. Together, the Democrats tweeted 27 of the 41 total tweets and the Republicans tweeted 14 of the 41 total tweets. Clinton and Sanders, who represent the Democratic Party, both had a high number of tweets in this category. However, the data shows that Sanders had the most out of any candidate with 17 tweets, coming in much higher than the other candidates. Clinton had 10 tweets in this category, Trump had 9 and Cruz had 5 as shown in Table 7 and Table 8.

The data in this category supports the idea that the followers of the Democratic candidates are responding to this topic more than the followers of the Republican candidates based on the number of tweets selected in the top 45 tweets of the candidates over the three month time period, as shown in Table 10.

The tweets owned by Sanders in this category are spread throughout the subcategories with a fairly even distribution. Clinton had 10 tweets in this category with a majority of them being split between *Gun Control, Budget/Taxes* and *Discrimination*. Compared to the Republican candidates, six of Trump's nine tweets in this category fall under *Terrorism*. This suggests that although he is talking about political issues, he is primarily only focused on one, and his followers are only responding to tweets about terrorism.

Opposing Candidates

Of all the tweets, only three tweets were stated in a positive manner toward their

opponent, as shown in Table 9.

Table 11: Positive Opposing Candidates Tweets

Candidate	Tweet
Ted Cruz @TedCruz	Thank you, @marcorubio Appreciate the kind support. We're both Dads of young kids, and it's hard enough on them.
Hillary Clinton @Hillary Clinton	To @BernieSanders, congratulations. To New Hampshire, thank you. And to our volunteers: I'm so grateful for what you built. Now, onward. -H
Ted Cruz @TedCruz	Heidi and I are lifting up in prayer the @RealBenCarson staffers injured in a car accident in Iowa. By His stripes, we are healed. Is. 53:5

However, two of the tweets fell under a different category due to the rest of the content in

the tweet. The tweet by Clinton does address Sanders. However, the primary focus of the tweet

was about losing in the state of New Hampshire and continuing to move forward. These aspects

led to the tweet being assigned to the *Election* category.

The third positive tweet was tweeted by Cruz and states, "Heidi and I are lifting up in

prayer the @RealBenCarson staffers injured in a car accident in Iowa. By His stripes, we are

healed. Is. 53:5." However, due to the tweet not addressing Ben Carson on the topic of

campaigning or the election, it was assigned to the *Personal* category.

All of the other tweets that fall in this category refer to the opposing candidates in a

negative way. For this category, Cruz had 15 of the 41 tweets in this category, Trump had 10,

Clinton had five and Sanders had seven. Although Cruz had the most out of all the candidates, Trumps tone tends to be much harsher than the other candidates.

Cruz, Clinton and Sanders normally use language to disagree with an opinion, campaign strategy or debate strategy of their opponent. Trump's *Opposing Candidates* tweets tend to be more about insulting the other candidates. Although this may seem different from the other candidates, on his opposing candidates tweets, his tweet weight, a combination of likes and retweets, is 252,512, which is the highest of all the candidates, as shown in Table 9.

This data suggests that the Republican candidates are talking about their opponents more than the Democratic candidates. With Trump gaining such a high tweet weight by insulting the other candidates, and not just disagreeing with their opinions and strategies, this suggests a candidate may receive a higher response from their followers by insulting their opponents.

RQ 3: Does the use of hashtags help gain a higher tweet weight?

One of the most surprising aspects of this analysis was the lack of use of hashtags. In the 180 tweets coded and analyzed, only 55 contained a hashtag. As shown in Table 4, Trump used four hashtags in his top tweets, Clinton used 14, Sanders used 15 and Cruz used 22. Because of the dramatic differences in the usage, this suggests that every candidate uses them differently and one party is not using them more or less than the other. The data supports the idea that using a hashtag or not using a hashtag in a tweet does not enhance their campaign significantly or decrease the effectiveness of it.

Two of the four candidates had a campaign slogan in their top tweets for the three months analyzed. Trump's slogan, "Make America Great Again," was used seven times in his 45

analyzed tweets. However, he only used it as a hashtag one time in a tweet about Chris Christie endorsing him, which falls under the *Election* category. Clinton also used her campaign slogan, "I'm With Her," twice throughout her top tweets for the three months analyzed, but used it as a hashtag both times. The tweets that contained this hashtag had a high tweet weight. However, Trump's tweet that solely writes out his slogan, "MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN," received a much higher tweet weight than the tweet where he used it as a hashtag.

Hashtags are generally used to help users engage in conversation. The use of a hashtag in campaigning may be useful for followers to also engage in conversation. However, as the data suggests, it may not be as necessary for the candidate to tweet his or her campaign slogans as a hashtag, or even use a hashtag in their tweets.

Table 12: Candidates use of Hashtags

Candidate	Number of Hashtags
Trump	4
Clinton	14
Sanders	15
Cruz	22

RQ 4: Does the use of pictures or videos help gain a higher tweet weight?

Trump had four total pictures in his top tweets, Clinton had 16, Sanders had 18 and Cruz had 11. Of the 180 tweets analyzed, only 27 percent contained any type of picture, video or vine. Each candidate's followers responded differently to the use of pictures within the tweets. For

Trump, that data suggests his followers were more interested in strictly the written context of the

tweets and what Trump had to say, not visuals. As for Cruz, almost half of his 45 analyzed

tweets contained a photo or video.

The data suggests that tweets with pictures do not receive a higher tweet weight than

tweets without pictures. Therefore, adding a picture to a campaigning tweet should have very

little to no effect on how well the tweet does in terms of how many likes and retweets the tweet

will receive.

Table 13: Candidates Use of Pictures

Candidate	Number of Pictures
Trump	4
Clinton	16
Sanders	19
Cruz	11

Chapter 6

Conclusion and Further Research

Social media plays a large role is today's campaigning techniques. Presidential candidates are using social media platforms to reach out to their followers and provide them with a more personal connection. By doing this, it could help the candidates gain a larger follower base on the platform as well as gain popularity in the polls.

Twitter has become a frequently used social media platform for presidential candidates to use during their campaigning season. Twitter allows the candidates to reach out to users quickly and effectively in less than 140 characters. The candidate can communicate with his or her followers as well as allow the followers to view conversations between the candidates.

In the 2016 election, the candidates have been communicating with each other over social media platforms. The data suggests that Trump, Clinton and Cruz are talking about each other the most and Sanders is not tweeting about his opponents as frequently. For example, when Trump tweets about his opponents, he appears to be rude and degrading. Some of his top tweets about Clinton include comments like, "Hillary Clinton is weak and ineffective – no strength, no stamina" and "Hillary Clinton is a national security risk. Not presidential material!" In the tweets analyzed in this study, Clinton and Cruz, when tweeting about their opponents, generally just disagreed with their opponents and stated how they felt about these issues.

This study examined which topics the candidates were talking about in December 2015 to February 2016 based on the response the tweet got by finding the tweet weight by adding the number of likes and the number of retweets. One hundred and eighty tweets were coded and

analyzed over the three-month period. The tweets were distributed into six categories. The data

suggests that the most common topics from both parties were in the *Election, Political Issues* and

Opposing Candidates categories. From the research conducted, the data suggests that the

Democrats were more likely to tweet about political issues and aspects that associate with the

election. The Republican candidates were more likely to tweet about their opposing candidates.

Campaigning strategies differ between every candidate. With hired social media teams,

one candidate should never have the same social media campaign strategies or techniques as

another candidate. It is important for the candidate to stand out and make himself or herself

known and desired by their followers and supports.

Technology and social media platforms are constantly changing and evolving. The

candidates are keeping up with the changing times and are using social media to efficiently

communicate with their followers, supports and voters and disseminate their campaign content.

Based on the findings of this research, here are a few predictions for where the social

media campaigning is heading. First and foremost, using social media platforms as a

campaigning tool is free advertising. By acting in ways that Trump has demonstrated, he is

gaining attention. In return, news sources, broadcast and online, are spending a lot of airtime

covering Trump over the other candidates. By using social media, candidates can pay less for

advertising campaigns and speak directly to their followers and supporters without any media

bias or control.

Secondly, as social media changes, the candidates will need to adapt with the changes

being made. The candidates will need to find what the followers want to hear and tailor their

messages on social media. It is becoming more common for Americans to access information

from their phone and from social media platforms. When the next election comes, the candidates will need to adapt to the new platforms the voters are using.

This topic is becoming increasingly important as candidates, like Trump, continue to show us that typical social media messages are not the only way to grab voters' attention. With the data collected in this study, there is not one clear topic or category that the candidates are tweeting about that is gaining a higher tweet weight. However, the data does suggest that the users want information about the candidates stances on issues. The users also want to know the candidates on a more personal level and feel that their messages are direct.

The data suggests each candidate is gaining a different reaction from his or her follower base. With how quickly social media and technology is changing, it will become important for candidates to understand what their supporters are looking for the candidate to talk about.

To further this research, it is important to expand the study beyond the top 15 tweets per month. While the top 15 tweets gave a general idea of what topics Twitter users are responding to, it did not give a general idea of all the topics the candidates are posting on their social media platforms to gain a better understanding of their entire web presence. All tweets should be looked at more in-depth and coded from the candidate's announcement until the Election Day and then should be extended to their other social media platforms for a better understanding of their entire web presence. For this study, only four candidates were chosen. For further insight, it would be important to conduct a study on all of the candidates for a better comparison of the Republican Party and the Democratic Party

Furthermore, Donald Trump should be studied individually. His actions on social media stand out from the other candidates in terms of how he interacts with his followers and how he interacts with the other candidates. Coming from a background of non-political fame, it is

necessary to study how this background is affecting him in the polls and how he is gaining the people's votes.

Lastly, it is important to study if the tweets can affect the way someone votes. In order to conduct this study, one would need to complete an extensive study based on the psychological behaviors of being exposed to tweets or not being exposed to the tweets of the candidates and how they are allowing social media aspects of campaigns to affect whom they vote for and support.

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