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Social Media and Politics: An Empirical Analysis
of Trump’s Tweets During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Social media e politica: un’analisi empirica
dei tweet di Trump durante la pandemia COVID-19

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ABSTRACT (ITALIAN)

Grazie alla rivoluzione digitale, i social media sono diventati il centro di ogni comunicazione e persino i partiti politici li utilizzano come mezzo per pubblicizzarsi. Per promuovere l'immagine e mantenere una comunicazione interattiva e in tempo reale con i sostenitori o potenziali elettori, è necessaria la presenza costante di politici e di partiti politici su piattaforme social. Con l'aumento della popolarità e dell'utilizzo dei social media, lo scopo della presente tesi è quello di identificare le caratteristiche della comunicazione dell'ex presidente degli Stati Uniti d'America, Donald Trump, nel corso della pandemia di COVID-19. Poiché si è trattato di un evento significativo, è necessaria una strategia di comunicazione politica efficace. Di conseguenza, studiare la comunicazione di Donald Trump come leader e attore politico potrebbe svelare quali sono le caratteristiche chiave di una comunicazione social efficace e potrebbe costituire un modello importante per gli studi sui media e sulla comunicazione. Dopo aver mostrato dove le persone prendono le notizie e dopo una breve revisione della letteratura sulla propaganda, l'obiettivo della presente tesi è di studiare quale sia il ruolo della comunicazione e, nello specifico, la diffusione di notizie sui social. I tweet di Trump dell'anno 2020 sono stati raccolti manualmente e analizzati grazie a RStudio, un linguaggio di programmazione utilizzato per il calcolo statistico. L'analisi dimostra che Trump ha affermato che la pandemia sia stata causata dalla Cina e ha incolpato i media di area democratica per la reazione che il COVID-19 ha causato negli Stati Uniti e nel

mondo. Inoltre, ha utilizzato la pandemia come strumento per raggiungere i suoi obiettivi politici attaccando il partito democratico, ma continuando ad elogiare se stesso.

ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)

In the present era of digital revolution when social media has become the focus of all communication even political parties use social media for their communication and marketing purposes. Politicians and political parties need to be present on these platforms to promote their image and maintain interactive, real-time communication with their supporters and potential voters. With the increase in popularity and growth in the use of social media, the purpose of this thesis is to identify the characteristics of Donald Trump's communication in regard to the COVID-19 epidemic when he was the President of the United States of America. The pandemic was an unprecedented event that should require an effective political communication strategy. As a result, the decision to study Donald Trump's communication as a leader and political actor will contribute key findings, that may be important for Media and Communication studies. After explaining how people find, watch and discuss the news and after providing a literature review on propaganda, the thesis wants to study which is the role of communication – specifically – news production by social media in the exercise of power. This goal is achieved by a rigorous empirical analysis carried out with text analysis. The data

consists of tweets manually collected from Trump's personal account across the year 2020 and analyzed thanks to RStudio, an integrated development environment used for statistical computing. The analysis demonstrates that he faulted China for its role in the spread of the disease and he blamed the left leaning media for the reaction of people to COVID-19 across the U.S. and the world. Furthermore, he was using the pandemic as a tool for reaching his political goals, thus attacking his opponents – the Democratic party – while praising himself.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to identify the characteristics of Donald Trump's communication in regard to the COVID-19 epidemic as ex-President of the United States of America.

Twitter and other social networking sites are platforms where users may post, share, and discuss topics with other interested users. The algorithms of Social Networking sites expand users' social circles as well as increase the frequency of interpersonal contact. As social media usage has become more widespread, users have formed close-knit relationships with specific groups. Given the strengths of these relationship, Social Networking has become a very powerful tool for expressing opinions, views and it has also transformed the traditional information dissemination that previously relied on central mass media (like newspaper and television), which means that today news are shared through social media platforms. This shift from central media to social media allowed internet users to create content, so they are no longer passive recipients of information and they can use the medium to create news based on their opinions. As a consequence, traditional forms of media still exist, but they are bound to give way to a more customized form of communication. Thus, social media provides both citizens and political actors a platform to take part in political deliberations and privately or publicly share any political content. It is undeniable that, from the perspective of

discourse rhetoric, the study of the process of political communication on social media is also very important. For the modern political movement, the Internet has become the latest media used by presidential candidates, and Donald Trump is the politician who reshaped presidency through Twitter.

Chapter 1 illustrates the evolution of mass media in order to understand the context of social media. Indeed, with the development of science and technology, political communication is not only through television, radio and other traditional media in 21st century: political communication through the Internet – the fastest growing digital media – become inevitable. In this chapter it is worth noting that Twitter has become a popular tool people refer to in order to get the news and, as a consequence, politicians like Trump understand its importance to spread a belief. Therefore, Twitter platform uses functions like the hashtag to create debates, campaigns, and larger discourse. Hashtag-driven political discourse is often constructed by Twitter influencers like politicians. The transformation has implications for political communication, specifically by reducing the role of journalism in mediating the relationship between citizens and politicians.

In Chapter 2 the role of propaganda was taken into consideration. The aim of this chapter is to give a more accurate understanding of the role of communication in the exercise of power through propaganda studies. The propaganda literature review I made aims to highlight the origin of the name, the propaganda techniques, its

importance in persuasive communication and its adaptation of social media as a tool of modern propaganda.

Chapter 3 sets up the empirical analysis through which I examine Trump's Twitter discourse. This chapter uses RStudio, an integrated development environment, to analyze his communication. President Trump may be the most well-known example of social media influencer and impact, as he used Twitter as his major means of communication and dissemination of his views. Until he was banned in January 2021, he communicated through his own Twitter account (@realDonaldTrump), preferring Twitter to press conferences. The analysis looks at all tweets between January 2020 and January 2021 and performs three distinct types of text analysis: the word cloud analysis, the sentiment analysis, and the trigram analysis. The tone of voice and the key themes of his tweets were also taken into account.

CHAPTER 1: EVOLUTION OF MASS MEDIA

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF MASS MEDIA

1.1 Mass Media And Modern Society

Mass media has served as a medium for propaganda to be spread quickly and to as many people as possible. The first forms of mass media were books, newspapers, and flyers which then expanded to the short wave radio, into broadcast television, and finally into today's world where we use all these methods and the internet. "To access and control the media literally means access to and potential control of public opinion". (Jowett & O'Donnell 2018, p. 325)

In the article regarding "post-truth propaganda" written by Stamatis Poulakidakos, Anastasia Veneti, and Christos Fangonikolopoulos, they touched on the importance mass media plays in society and how political influencers like Donald Trump have utilized these mediums. According to them mass media has been a major actor in the formation of social reality, moreover, they stated that people don't see reality the way it is, but the way they are communicated through the languages. The languages are the media. In this sense the media created the content of our culture. (Poulakidakos et al. 2018, p. 372) In 2016, the term *post truth* became more closely associated with political figures such as, Donald Trump, Nigel Farage, Recep

Erdogan and Vladimir Putin. The Oxford Dictionary¹ defines *post truth* as an “adjective relating to, or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief”. Post truth statements, in the list of political influencers, have a United States President in the same category as dictators, far right party members, and totalitarian presidents. Their post truth statements have gotten the reputation as people who will skip the facts and say what they think will help them in the long run with the help of mass media to get their message across.

A research study conducted by Pérez-Curie and Naharro, detailed the relationship between Donald Trump’s personal twitter account and front page news from USA Today, The Boston Globe, The Wall Street Journal, and The New York Times. They conducted this study by quantifying the public's response based on digital prosumer metrics, “likes, retweets, and comments.” They concluded their study with confirming that Trump’s empowerment on Twitter is both a main source of news and as a political influencers in regards to media and citizenry. (Pérez-Curiel & Naharro, 2019)

It is clear that Trump had a great influence on his audience and he was able to spread his believes through a new mean of communication. At this point it is important to specify that the aim of the thesis does not focus on understand the credibility or the

¹ <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/post-truth>

veracity of his tweets but it will analyze his rhetoric to understand what are the key of an efficient communication through social media. However, before the analysis it is necessary to give a brief description of the evolution of mass media and understand why among all digital platform I chose to study Twitter as a source of news.

2. THE HISTORY OF MEDIA

The growth of communications technology allows people today to find more information more easily than any previous generation. Mass media can be print, radio, television, or Internet news. They can be local, national, or international and they can be broad or limited in their focus.

2.1 Print Media

In earlier times, news was presented to local populations through the printed press. While several colonies had printers and occasional newspapers, high literacy rates combined with the desire for self-government made Boston a perfect location for the creation of a newspaper, and the first continuous press was started there in 1704. (Pobst, 2005) During the American Revolution, newspapers aim to inform citizens of perceived British misconducts. Readership across the colonies increased and

daily papers sprang up in large cities. (Fonte, 2011) The divisions that occurred during the United States' early history created a change and moved the nation into the party press era, in which partisanship and political party loyalty dominated the choice of editorial content. It was too expensive so subscriptions and advertising did not fully cover printing costs and political parties stepped in to support newspapers that aided their parties and their policies. Papers began printing party propaganda and messages, even publicly attacking political leaders. Despite the antagonism of the press, Washington and several other founders felt that freedom of the press was important for creating an informed electorate. The consequence was that freedom of the press was established in the Bill of Rights in the first amendment. (Campbell, 2018)

Between 1830 and 1860, machines and manufacturing made the production of newspapers faster and less expensive. Benjamin Day's paper, the *New York Sun*, used technology like the linotype machine to mass-produce papers. Roads and waterways were developed, decreasing the transport costs of printed materials to subscribers and new newspapers appeared.

William Randolph Hearst, publisher of the *New York Journal*, and his arch-rival, Joseph Pulitzer, publisher of the *New York World*, created the *yellow journalism*, a late 1800s phenomenon. The tabloid-style paper included editorial pages, cartoons, and pictures, while the front-page news was sensational and scandalous.

As the New York World's circulation increased, other papers copied Pulitzer's style in an effort to sell papers. (Ferguson, 2009)

In 1896, as the papers of William Randolph Hearst and Pulitzer were battling for attention and circulation, Adolph Ochs purchased the *New York Times* with the goal of creating a dignified newspaper that would provide readers with important news about the economy, politics, and the world rather than gossip and comics. The *New York Times* brought back the informational model, which exhibits impartiality and accuracy and promotes transparency in government and politics. (Ritchie, 1998)

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the media began the writing and publishing of news coverage that exposed corrupt business and government practices. Investigative work like Upton Sinclair's serialized novel *The Jungle*² led to changes in the way industrial workers were treated and local political machines were run. As a consequence, the Pure Food and Drug Act and other laws were passed to protect consumers and employees from unsafe food processing practices. Also local and state government officials who participated in bribery and corruption were exposed. Some investigative journalism still appears today, and the digitalization and the quicker movement of information may suggest an environment for yet more investigative work. However, the scarcity of journalists

² Upton Sinclair wrote *The Jungle* to expose the appalling working conditions in the meat-packaging industry. His description of diseased rotten, and contaminated meat shocked the public and led to the new federal food safety laws. (The New York Times, 2016)

and the lack of time to dig for details in a 24-hour, profit-oriented news model led to the decline of investigative journalism in the digital age. (Willnat & Weaver, 2014)

In the twenty-first century, given the countless alternate forms of news, many of which are free, newspaper subscriptions have fallen. Many newspapers now maintain both a print and an Internet presence in order to compete for readers. The rise of free news blogs, such as the Huffington Post, have made it difficult for newspapers to force readers to purchase online subscriptions to access material they place behind a digital paywall. Some local newspapers, in an effort to stay visible and profitable, have turned to social media, like Facebook and Twitter. Stories can be posted and retweeted, allowing readers to comment and forward material. (Pew Research Center, 2015)

2.2 Radio

Radio news made its appearance in the 1920s. The National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) began running sponsored news programs and radio dramas. The spread of the radio with news and entertainment programs brought communication also to rural America, not just in the city. Therefore, as radio listenership grew, politicians realized that the medium offered a way to reach the public in a personal manner.

Figure 1. President Franklin D. Roosevelt Delivers a Fireside Chat



Source: FDR Library

Franklin D. Roosevelt became famous for harnessing the political power of radio: on entering office in March 1933, President Roosevelt needed to quiet public fears about the economy and prevent people from removing their money from the banks so he did his first radio speech eight days after assuming the presidency. (American Rhetoric, 2015) Roosevelt explained his ideas and actions directly to the people on a regular basis, confident that he could convince voters of their value. (History.com Editors 2019) Roosevelt's speeches were known as "fireside chats" (Figure 1) and

his combination of persuasive rhetoric and the media allowed him to expand both the government and the presidency beyond their traditional roles. (Stuckey, 2012) With the increase in television usage, radio's importance for distributing news declined, but it remained popular for listening to music, educational talk shows, and sports broadcasting. Talk stations began to gain ground in the 1980s on both AM and FM frequencies, restoring radio's importance in politics. By the 1990s, talk shows had gone national, showcasing broadcasters like Rush Limbaugh and Don Imus.

In the twenty-first century, due to technological advantages, radio broadcasting shifted from digital radio to digital satellite service such as *Sirius Satellite Radio* to online streaming services. Additionally, streaming to listeners made it possible for stations to both allow their listeners to listen anywhere both nationally and internationally, regardless of location. Satellite radio has greatly increased programming with many specialized offerings, including channels dedicated to particular political points of view. (Merskin, 2019)

2.3 Television

Television combined the best attributes of radio and pictures and changed media forever. It was initially dominated by quiz shows and games, but when Edward R.

Murrow appeared in television in 1951 with his news show See It Now, he paved the way to television journalism. (Figure 2)

Figure 2. CBS News Broadcaster Edward R. Murrow on a CBS Set



Source: <https://www.poynter.org/newsletters/2015/today-in-media-history-edward-r-murrow-examined-joe-mccarthys-methods-on-see-it-now/>

As television programming expanded, more channels were added. Networks such as ABC, CBS, and NBC began nightly newscasts, followed by local stations and affiliates. Even more than radio, television allows politicians to reach out and connect with citizens and voters in deeper ways. Before television, few voters were able to see a president or candidate speak or answer questions in an interview. With

television everyone could decode body language and tone to decide whether candidates or politicians are sincere.

The first television advertisements, run by presidential candidates Dwight D. Eisenhower and Adlai Stevenson in the early 1950s, were mainly radio jingles with animation or short question-and-answer sessions. In 1960, John F. Kennedy's campaign used a Hollywood-style approach to promote his image as young and vibrant. In addition to television ads, the 1960 election³ also featured the first televised presidential debate. Kennedy's careful grooming and practiced body language allowed viewers to focus on his appearance. While Nixon's substantive answers and debate skills made a favorable impression on radio listeners, viewers' reaction to his sweaty appearance (was still recovering from a severe case of the flu) and obvious discomfort demonstrated that live television has the unique potential to make or break a candidate. (Iyengar & McGrady, 2007)

Between the 1960s and the 1990s, presidents often used television to reach citizens and gain support for policies and with few independent local stations available, a viewer had little alternative but to watch. During this *Golden Age of Presidential Television*, presidents had a strong command of the media. (Baum & Kernell, 1999)

³ American presidential election held on November 8, 1960, in which Democrat John F. Kennedy defeated Republican Vice Pres. Richard M. Nixon. Kennedy thus became the first Roman Catholic and the youngest person ever elected president.. (Levy, 2021)

2.4 Social Media

Social media is a consequence of the technological advancement. It is defined by Kaplan and Haenlein as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated-content [also known as UGC]” (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, p. 60). When trying to define social media in relation to communication, researchers have come to describe it as “alternative platforms of public communication” (Poell & Borra 2011, p. 696). Other researchers have stated that this mass self-communication actually makes each individual a media outlet in themselves, and that such methods have led to the diminishing of journalism as a profession (Poell & Borra, 2011).

An important shift in technological advancement was with the invention of cable in the 1980s and the expansion of the Internet in the 2000s that offered more options for media consumers than ever before. Viewers can watch nearly anything with just the click of a button, bypass commercials, and record programs of interest. (Merskin, 2019) This also changes the president’s ability to reach out to citizens. For example, viewership of the president’s annual State of the Union address has decreased over the years, from sixty-seven million viewers in 1993 to thirty-two million in 2015. (Stoll, 2021) Indeed, citizens who want to watch reality television and movies can easily avoid the news, leaving presidents with no sure way to communicate with the public. (Baum & Kernell, 1999) The availability of the

Internet and social media has moved some control of the message back into the presidents' and candidates' hands. Politicians can now connect to the people directly, bypassing journalists. When Barack Obama's minister, the Reverend Jeremiah Wright, was seen to give inflammatory racial sermons, Obama used YouTube to respond to charges that he shared Wright's beliefs. He was considered to be the first social media candidate indeed, while John McCain, the 2008 Republican presidential candidate, focused on traditional media to run his campaign, Obama did not. One of Obama's campaign advisors was Chris Hughes, a cofounder of Facebook. (Iyengar & McGrady, 2007) To reach out to supporters and voters, the White House maintains a YouTube channel and a Facebook site. The ex-President Donald Trump was a heavy user of Twitter during the 2016 campaign, and he created his "Making America Great Again" site⁴ at USA.gov. Social media, like Facebook, also placed journalism in the hands of citizens: *citizen journalism* occurs when people use their personal recording devices and cell phones to capture events and post them on the Internet. In 2012⁵, citizen journalists caught both presidential candidates by surprise. Mitt Romney was taped by a bartender's personal camera saying that 47 percent of Americans would vote for Obama because they were dependent on the government. (Corn, 2013) Obama was

⁴ <https://www.greatagain.gov>

⁵ American voters went to the polls on November 6, 2012, to determine for the 57th time their country's president for the next four years. For the Republican Party, Mitt Romney was nominated, however, Democratic President Barack Obama was reelected (Munro, 2021)

recorded by a Huffington Post volunteer saying that some Midwesterners “cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren’t like them” due to their frustration with the economy. (Pilkington, 2008) These statements became nightmares for the campaigns. Another shift in the new media occurred with the popularity of The Daily Show and The Colbert Report that demonstrated that news, even political news, were enjoyed especially by members of generation X and millennials, if delivered with humor. (Smith, 2016) They may view opposing party candidates more favorably because the low-partisan, friendly interview styles allow politicians to relax and be conversational rather than defensive, thus increased their awareness regarding their political events and foreign policy crises. (Baum, 2003)

Like news, social media has become an integral modern method of communicating with one another (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012). Thus, it could be argued that social media itself is a form of broadcasting news, although a particularly technologically advanced one (Poell & Borra, 2011) given the ever-developing platforms and tools that users are able to employ. On television news⁶, presenters will often end a speech on a particular subject by reading out certain comments obtained from Twitter from viewers. In newspapers, readers will be encouraged to offer their comments through a certain social media channel on certain hot topics, with such comments appearing as part of another days news story. And online, many news

⁶ In United States many television news end with a tweet, examples could be find in CBS, CNN, NBC, Fox News, etc.

articles have links and logos to share stories on a particular social network site, as well as a box to comment on the story above.

Kaplan and Haenlein consider social media to be made up of: collaborative projects such as Wikipedia, blogs and micro-blogs (like Twitter), content communities (like Youtube), social networking sites (like Facebook), virtual game worlds and virtual social worlds. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012) Each of these is a platform that allows said creation and sharing of UGC. With the onset of social media there has been a shift towards its use as the powerful alternative platform of public communication (Poell & Borra, 2011). Essentially, theorists believe, there has been a shift away from news existing to provide information, to the ability for everybody to have an opinion on news, with certain theorists even arguing that the profession of journalism as we know it is in decline (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012).

3. RATIONALE FOR SELECTING TRUMP'S COMMUNICATION ON TWITTER

The new technologies have definitely affected the news media and this, in turn, affects the way the institutions operate and the content of the messages they transmit. Most importantly, the new technology has increased the speed with which the news is gathered and dispersed, thus reducing the cost. Due to the revolutionary nature of the telecom industry, we witnessed a proliferation of global news media

all over the world. Indeed, the media can be reached by audiences all over the world (especially through the web-based services).

3.1 Trump Reshaped Presidency Through Twitter

Donald Trump's use of social media attracted attention worldwide since he joined Twitter in May 2009. When Trump entered office, Twitter was a political tool that had helped get him elected. In the years since, he has fully integrated Twitter into the very fabric of his administration, reshaping the nature of the presidency and presidential power.

A study that analyzed the contents of more than 6,000 tweets from Congress members found that members treated Twitter as a vehicle for self-promotion, using the platform to share information like news stories on them, daily activities, and their blogs rather than to interact with constituents. (Golbeck et al., 2010) Social media does have the potential to influence power relations in political parties as they allow individual candidates to campaign more independently of the central party through participatory communication. (Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016). With the appearance of Donald Trump on the political scene, Twitter has been elevated to a central role in global politics. Trump has posted around 49,000 tweets as of February 2020. To date, research has focused primarily on the content of Donald Trump's tweets. (Enli 2017) Since Donald Trump's rise to power, scholarly

exploration of Twitter as a political tool has increased because his personal account is not only a window into his thoughts, but also a tool to influence members of the public and shape public and social policies.

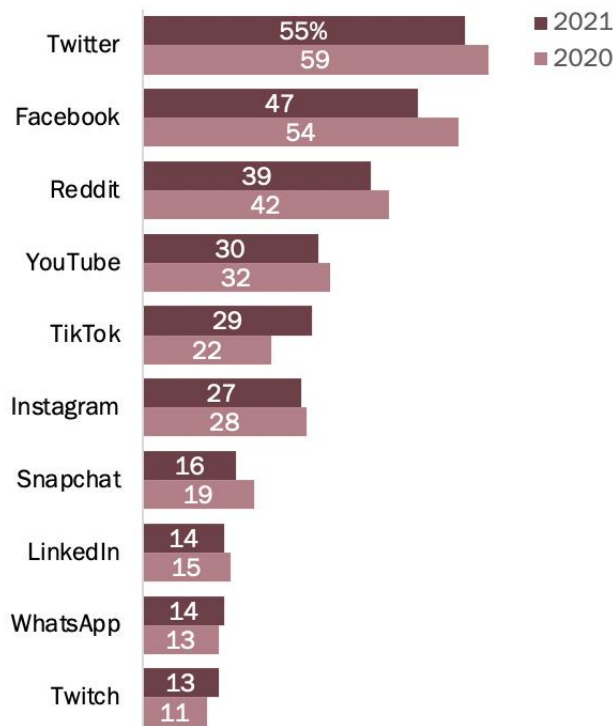
In the 2016 presidential campaign, Twitter was used by both candidates, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, the difference was that Trump's tweets came directly from him, unmediated by advisers and other campaign staff (Enli, 2017). While the Clinton campaign's strategy only occasionally used elements of "real talk" to underline her authenticity, the Trump campaign's more authentic style in social media was seen as a countertrend in political communication (Enli, 2017). Thanks to his communication through social media, he obtained extremely strong holds on certain parts of the voter base.

As a consequence, over time, Mr. Trump has turned Twitter into a means of presidential communication as vital as a statement from the White House press secretary or an Oval Office address. He preferred to communicate his activity through Twitter rather than the decades-long ritual messaging through a daily on-camera press briefing. So it can be said that Trump was the first president who run his presidency on a social media.

3.2 The Role of News on Twitter in the United States

The percentage of Americans who get news regularly from these sites has remained largely unchanged since 2020, though the share who regularly get news on Facebook has declined slightly (36% in 2020 vs. 31% in 2021). When looking at the proportion of each social media site’s users who regularly get news there, some sites stand out as being more “newsy” even if their total audience is relatively small.

Figure 3. Twitter Users who use it regularly to get News



Source: Pew Research Center (2021)

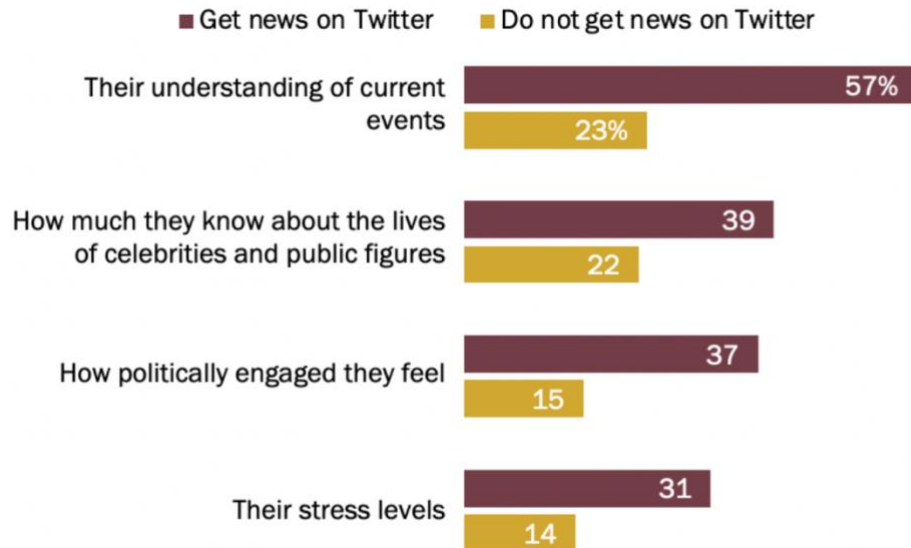
Twitter is used by 23% of U.S. adults, but more than half of those users (55%) get news on the site regularly, as the graph shows. The percentage of users of each site in 2020 was higher because it was the year that included both a presidential election and the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. (Walker & Matsa 2021)

However, the result is that news plays a prominent role on Twitter. Overall, 69% of American Twitter users say they get news on the site, according to a new Pew Research Center study that surveyed 2,548 Twitter users from May 17 to 31, 2021. (Walker & Matsa 2021) For most of these Twitter news consumers, the site is an important way they keep up with the news. However, it is important to clarify that just 8% of Twitter users who get news on the site say it is the most important way they get news, while an additional 59% say it is important but not paramount. One fundamental area of news people rely on Twitter for is breaking news, indeed fully 70% of Twitter news consumers say they have used Twitter to follow live news events, up from 59% who said this in 2015.

Twitter news consumers have generally positive opinions of the accuracy and amount of news they see on the site. Although only 7% of Twitter news consumers say they are a little skeptical for what it concerns trust in the accuracy of information on Twitter, two-thirds say they have at least some trust in it. This is far higher than the share of Americans (27%) who say they have at least some trust in the information they find on social media in general. In addition, two-thirds of Twitter

users who get news there say they like the amount of news they see on the site, versus 32% who say they are worn out by the amount of news there. (Shearer & Mitchell, 2021) This appears to come with both benefits and drawbacks. Just over half of Americans who get news on Twitter (57%) say using Twitter has increased their understanding of current events, compared with 23% of other Twitter users. Twitter news consumers also are more likely than other Twitter users to say that using the site has increased how politically engaged they feel (37% vs. 15%, respectively).

Figure 4. Percentage of Americans who get the news on Twitter



Source: Pew Research Center (2021)

However, some also report that it has increased their stress levels: 31% of Twitter news consumers say this, along with just 14% of other Twitter users. (Shearer & Mitchell, 2021)

Therefore, Twitter is considered a great source of breaking news because people feel more motivated to search news on their own and choose where to find the information they need. For this reason I considered Twitter and Trump's rhetoric in this platform as a great example to take in consideration in order to analyze an efficient way to communicate through social.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ON PROPAGANDA AND SOCIAL MEDIA

1. DEFINITION OF PROPAGANDA

To understand the key of an effective social media communication, it is important to analyze the concept of propaganda and how it has been used for political communication on social media platforms.

1.1 What is Propaganda?

The term propaganda originates from the Latin *propagare*, meaning ‘to propagate’. It first appeared in 1622 as the name of a Roman Catholic congregation (that is College of Propaganda) which aimed to spread the Christian faith and overseeing Christian missions abroad. (Baines et al., 2019) Propaganda carried neutral connotations until the 19th and 20th century, but then, with colonialism, World War I and totalitarian states it was associated with negative undertones.

In 1939, the Institute for Propaganda Analysis outlined and defined seven techniques used in propaganda: bandwagon, plain folks, testimonial, glittering generalities, name calling, transfer, and card stacking (Lee & Lee, 1939). This was

the first attempt to categorize propaganda, and these techniques are still being cited in recent mass communication texts. (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2018)

1. The bandwagon technique is based on the idea that everyone else is doing it, and so should you (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2018; Lee & Lee, 1939). In effect it uses peer pressure, although it is possibly imaginary. The technique plays to an individual's desire to belong and fit in. this technique is often found in advertising, wartime and government promotions.
2. The plain folks technique is another propaganda technique based on fitting in. Plain folks promotions attempt to convince the audience that a product or personality is just like them. It is of the people. This technique is most prevalent in political campaigns. (Lee & Lee, 1939)
3. The testimonial technique occurs when some propagandists chose not to promote that everyone is doing it, but that one influential person is doing it. Testimonial can go both ways, either endorsing or condemning a product. Its potential success is based on the reputation of the testifier. This can be a very honest and straightforward approach when an appropriate source is cited. Misrepresentation can occur when a source with no background or expertise is used (Lee & Lee, 1939).
4. The glittering generalities technique attempts to make the audience accept the message without concern for any supporting evidence. The term glittering generalities refers to the virtue words used to describe the object

of propaganda. The words can have strong emotional effect on people (Lee & Lee, 1939). Glittering generalities may be used in naming of products, as well as in politics and business.

5. The name calling technique is the opposite of glittering generalities. In this case, the object of propaganda is aligned with words having negative connotations. Like glittering generalities, this technique relies on a strong emotional response from the audience (Lee & Lee, 1939).
6. The transfer technique occurs when the propagandist uses a symbol of something held in high regard by the audience. The purpose is to shift the positive feelings associated with the symbol to the object of propaganda (Lee & Lee, 1939) Advertisements and certain background music selections are common uses of transfer.
7. The card stacking technique is the final one and it was considered by Lee and Lee (1939) as a monopoly of propaganda. Card stacking can support or reject the propaganda object. Jowett and O'Donnell (2018) described the technique as a collection of arguments supporting the propagandist's cause, while ignoring any arguments that do not. Examples of card stacking were some television commercials, historical cases and control of the news.

Although propaganda has been an object of study for more than 100 years, the term remains confused. Propaganda is generally understood to involve the dissemination

of political ideas to promote political action. (Baines et al., 2019) Because the principle aim of propaganda is for political purpose, it has long been associated with conflicts to justify military interventions (Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010). But propaganda does not need to only be a mechanism for war: with the evolving political communication environment, the term has also been extended to describe the communication through mass media (Chomsky & Herman, 2014), and advertising practices used in political campaigns, which involve slandering opponents with the aim of reducing voter turnout. (Baines et al., 2019)

Propaganda studies generally point to three central elements when defining propaganda:

1. Propaganda is directed and sponsored by a group, organization, or institution;
2. Propaganda relies on manipulation through emotive persuasion rather than rational appeals;
3. Propaganda provokes political action that supports the goals of its sponsoring organization.

(Sproule, 1994) While this definition is a helpful starting place for conceptualizing propaganda, it has two problems. The first is that the framing of “sponsored by a group, organization, or institution” is too broad because it may include civil society organizations, political campaigning by officials running for office, or even commercial marketing. The shift in propaganda from something a political actor

pushes, to propaganda as an overall social practice, is the result of critical scholarship that emerged in the 1970s by scholars such as Jacques Ellul (1973) who used propaganda to explain how to spread an ideology in a technologically mediated society. These ideas were developed by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (2014) with their critique of the commercial “propaganda model” used in mass media as a threat to a well-functioning democracy. However, these studies stressed the shift in political communication and the role of propaganda as the information flow between the citizen and the state.

Second, when describing “emotional persuasion rather than rational appeals” scholars often highlight the role of deception as an important element of propaganda. The tendency is to consider propaganda on a spectrum of black and white, where “black” propaganda is covert and disguised and “white” propaganda is overt and undisguised. (Jowette & O’Donnell, 2018) However, distinctions between the truthfulness of the source and the truthfulness of the message and deception through half-truths or truthful information used in a harmful way are not the object of this thesis, which aims to analyze the keys of communication in an objective way.

Throughout my thesis, I need to analyze the term ‘propaganda’ because it is a way to spread political ideas, therefore is used by Trump to promote his role, political goal, action, or outcome that is in line with his goals. And it is thanks to propaganda that Trump was able to reach a large audience. Therefore, in this thesis propaganda

is intended as marketing, political campaigning, or activism, whose communication techniques might look similar (i.e. persuasion that leads to action). I aim to analyze the structure behind the outcomes of an effective communication which is able to influence people's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors for the purpose of a political outcome.

1.2 The Problem with the Propaganda Model of Herman and Chomsky

The propaganda model is a conceptual model in political economy advanced by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky to explain how propaganda worked in corporate mass media. As an essential new media, the internet may also play a significant role in delivering messages involving diverse parties. Indeed, originally one-way (unidirectional communication), the delivery of messages has been able to transform into a two-way (bidirectional) and currently assumed many directions (multidirectional). Therefore, it is important to note that the propaganda Model offered by Herman and Chomsky presented some issues because it did not acknowledge the presence as well as the power of the internet. However, in their *Manufacturing Consent* published in the year 2002, Herman and Chomsky stated that the introduction of the internet has been able to remove the numerous barriers in journalism and consequently allow for interactive media that was initially unexpected (Herman & Chomsky, 2002). Herman and Chomsky also acknowledge

the fact that the use of the internet can enhance not only the efficiency but also the scope of both individuals as well as group networks. Indeed, the internet usage helped produce significant global publicity and heightened attention that had greater consequences. Although, according to Herman and Chomsky, even if it is an important technological tool, the internet still has its limitations. In its early days, for instance, the internet was not a communication tool for everyone. Herman and Chomsky stress that only business organizations could afford to use the internet. Herman and Chomsky's perception of the growth of new communication technology is significantly dominant within the political economy perspective, which contends that economics cannot be separated from politics. (Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Chomsky & Herman, 2014). Consequently, the issue of internet technology being a propaganda tool for those with significant influence is also considered as simply an economic issue.

The next issue that needs to be highlighted is the fact that Herman and Chomsky intentionally ignored and undervalued the emergence of internet technology as an important alternative to battling power because they focused on the way mass media created an inherent conflict of interest and therefore acted as propaganda for anti-democratic elements.. On the contrary, Holmes noted that the digital era, the internet age, or the era of interactivity formed important periods that distinguished from the earlier time. (Holmes, 2005) Another important aspect that Herman and Chomsky did not consider was the ability of the internet to support one-to-many

message delivery patterns, few-to-many, many-to-many, as well as one-to-one. This demonstrated that internet technology could support different patterns of message delivery depending on the interests of various users. (Fuchs, 2007)

To sum up, internet technology has its uniqueness and superiority over mass communication media and it can be effectively employed in facilitating political communication. This factor implies that the internet, and so social media, can effectively support the political propaganda that will be the object of this thesis.

2. SOCIAL NETWORK, PROPAGANDA AND FAKE NEWS

2.1 Propaganda in Social Media Era

The adaptation of social media as a tool of modern propaganda should not be surprising. Internet technology evolved to meet the needs of information-age warfare around 2006 with the dawn of Web 2.0, which allowed internet users to create content instead of just consuming online material. Thanks to this, individuals could not only decide what was important and read only that, but they could also use the medium to create news based on their opinions. As a consequence, traditional forms of media were bound to give way to a more customized form of communication. United States were quick to find ways to exploit the openness of the internet, eventually developing techniques to employ social media networks as

a tool to spread propaganda. Currently, 72% of Americans get digital news primarily from a mobile device, and people now prefer online news sources to print sources by a two-to-one ratio. (Matsa & Lu, 2016) The news consumer now selects from an abundance of options besides a local newspaper, based on how the consumer perceives the credibility of the resource. As social media usage has become more widespread, users have become ensconced within specific, self-selected groups, which means that news and views are shared nearly exclusively with like-minded users. In network terminology, this group phenomenon is called homophily. More colloquially, it reflects the concept that “birds of a feather flock together.” Homophily within social media creates an aura of expertise and trustworthiness where those factors would not normally exist. Along the lines of social networking and propaganda, people are more willing to believe things that fit into their worldview. Once source credibility is established, there is a tendency to accept that source as an expert on other issues as well, even if the issue is unrelated to the area of originally perceived expertise. (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2018)

To understand this, it is important to examine the concept of the social media trend and look briefly into the fundamentals of propaganda. So, while the previous chapter has shown social media’s growing impact on people, communication, and society, now the aim is to analyze how does social communication create such a strong impact. Thus, it is important to understand the spread of news on social

media, specifically, the spread of “fake news” and how propaganda penetrates mainstream media outlets.

2.2 Propaganda Creates Heuristics

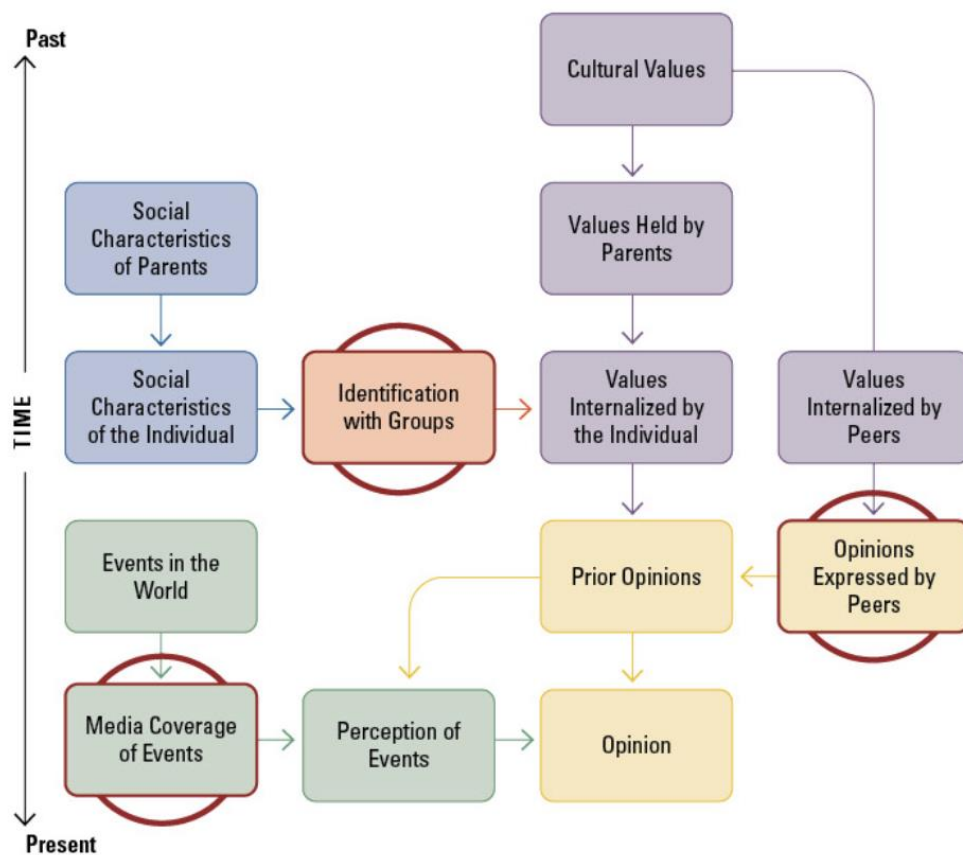
Propaganda intended as messaging designed to influence behavior has been around for centuries but became easier with social mass communication. With the rise of mass media and its presence in daily life, French philosopher Jacques Ellul noted the simplicity of propaganda, according to him, “Propaganda ceases where simple dialogue begins.” (Ellul 1973, p. 6) Moreover, it is worth noting that Eric Hoffer commented that “propaganda on its own cannot force its way into unwilling minds, neither can it inculcate something wholly new.” (Hoffer 1951, p. 105) For propaganda to function, it needs a previously existing narrative to build upon, as well as a network of true believers who already buy into the underlying theme. (Rubin, 2017) Social media helps the propagandist spread the message through an established network. A person is inclined to believe information on social media because the people he chooses to follow share things that fit his existing beliefs. That person, in turn, is likely to share the information with others in his network, to others who are like-minded, and those predisposed to the message. With enough shares, a particular social network accepts the propaganda storyline as fact. However, in this sense the effects are relatively localized. The most effective

propaganda campaigns are not confined just to those predisposed to the message. Essentially, propaganda includes everyday experiences, and the individual targeted with a massive media blitz will never fully understand that the ideas he has are not entirely his own. In short, propaganda is simpler to be understood if everyone around a person seems to share the same emotions on a particular subject. Even a general discussion among the crowd can provide the illusion that propaganda is information. (Ellul, 1973) In other words, propaganda creates *heuristics*⁷ which is a way the mind simplifies problem solving by relying on quickly accessible data. The availability heuristic weighs the amount and frequency of information received, as well as recentness of the information, as more informative than the source or accuracy of the information. (Kahneman, 2011) Essentially, the mind creates a shortcut based on the information available, simply because it can be remembered easily. Often, the availability heuristic manifests itself in information received through media coverage. The availability heuristic is important to understanding

⁷ Heuristics is a mental shortcuts and play important roles in both problem-solving and decision-making, as we often turn to these mental shortcuts when we need a quick solution. The heuristic-systematic model attempts to explain how people receive and process persuasive messages. A number of different persuasion heuristics can be used to form opinions: (1) when using the consensus heuristic, attitudes are simply based on the opinions that the majority of other people hold (if everybody believes something, then all those people must be right); (2) in the expert heuristic attitudes are based on the opinions or recommendations of trusted and knowledgeable experts (experts are usually right); (3) the length of the message itself can be used as a rule of thumb for persuasion: the message length heuristic suggests that longer messages, which seem to contain a lot of arguments, are more convincing because people infer that the length of the message implies it is strong or correct. (Chen & Chaiken 1999)

individual opinion formation introduced by Prier (2017) and how propaganda can exploit the shortcuts our minds make to form opinions. (Prier, 2017)

Figure 5. Model of Individual Opinion



Source: Prier (2017)

The lines in Figure 5 shows formation of opinions temporally, with bold arrows influencing a final opinion more than light arrows. The circled containers indicate a key point for propaganda exploitation. To sum up, mass media enables rapid

spread of propaganda, which feeds the availability heuristic. The internet makes it possible to flood the average person's daily intake of information, which aids the spread of propaganda.

One of the fundamental aspect of propaganda is that the message must be understood by the target, in this way, the bias is confirmed and the propaganda is accepted. If it is outside of an individual's network, they may initially reject the story, but the volume of information may create an availability heuristic in their mind. Over time, the propaganda becomes normalized. It is confirmed when a fake news story is reported by the main-stream media, which has become reliant on social media for spreading and receiving news. (Prier, 2017)

2.3 Trend Setter on Twitter to reach More Visibility when Spreading a Message

A trending topic transcends networks and becomes the mechanism for the spread of information across social clusters. Here the focus is primarily on Twitter, a "microblogging" site where each post is limited to 140 characters. Facebook also has a trends list, but it is less visible than the Twitter trends list, and the two applications serve different purposes. Facebook maintains a function of bringing friends and families together. On Facebook, your connections are typically more intimate connections than you would expect on Twitter, which focuses less on bringing people together and more on bringing ideas together. As a microblog,

Twitter's core notion is to share your thoughts and feelings about the world around you with a group of people who share similar interests. The individuals who follow each other may not be friends but could be a team of like-minded academics, journalists, sports fans, or politicians. When a person tweets, that tweet can be viewed by anyone who follows that person, or anyone who searches for that topic using Twitter's search tool. Additionally, anyone can "retweet" someone else's tweet, which broadcasts the original to a new audience. Twitter makes real-time idea and event sharing possible on a global scale. Another method for quick referencing on Twitter is using a "hashtag." The tweet would then be visible to anyone who clicked on the link along with all of the other tweets using the same hashtag. (Prier, 2017)

Twitter, like other large social media platforms, uses algorithms to organize and show content to users. Algorithms analyze words, phrases, or hashtags which then show users content they may like. In the instance of Twitter, algorithms also organize into user feeds popular topics trending on the platform. This is what is called the "trends list". (Prier, 2017) A trends list helps Twitter users to have conversations about popular trending topics. Users can simply see what is popular on Twitter through the interface's trends list. The list is created via what algorithms designate are trending on the platform; anything can be put on the trends list as long as it is popular.

Researchers have shown that the trends list feature on Twitter, a key function that makes the platform unique, is subject to manipulation by authoritarian states,

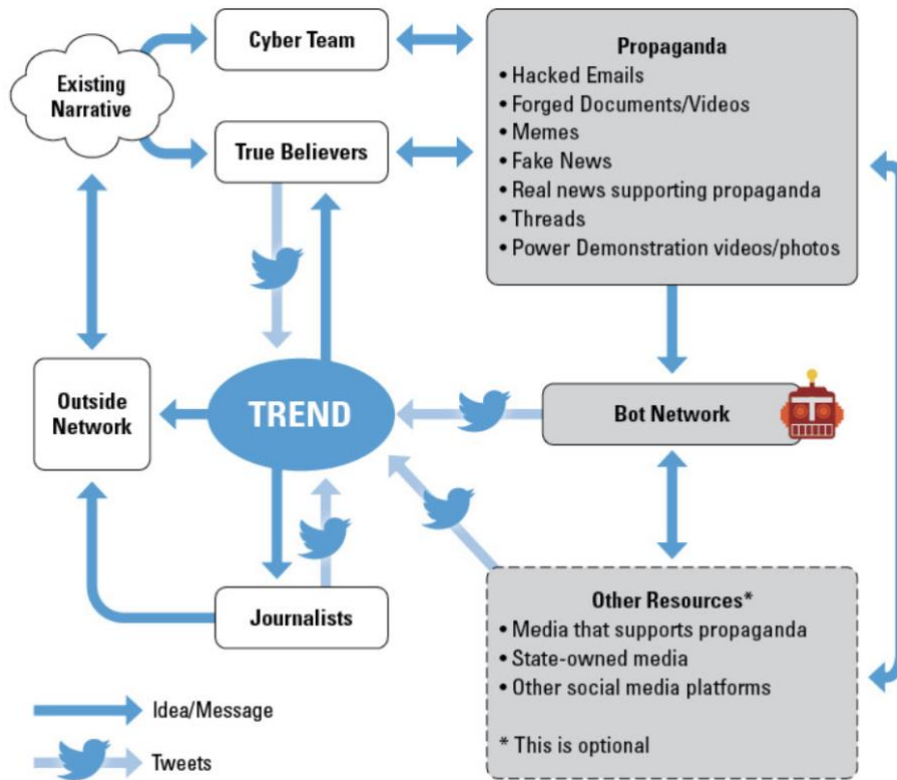
however. According to a 2011 study, “the fact that a small set of topics become part of the trending set means that they will capture the attention of a large audience for a short time, thus contributing in some measure to the public agenda.” (Asur et al. 2011, p1) Agenda setting through Twitter’s algorithms, then, provides an indirect opportunity to influence the political conversation of states. Furthermore, the data shows that “31% of tweets of trending topics are retweets.” (Asur,et al. 2011, p10) Thus, influencing the trends list can establish a trend.

2.4 How to Influence the Trends List on Twitter

Jarred Prier’s article on social media influencing via Twitter, “Commanding the Trend: Social Media as Information Warfare,” offers thoughts on this question. He affirmed, “for malicious actors seeking to influence a population through trends on social media, the best way to establish trends is to build a network of bot accounts programmed to tweet at various intervals, response to certain words, or retweet when directed by a master account.” (Prier 2017, p. 54) The strategy he outlined is simple: design a system of around-the-clock ‘Tweeters’ that constantly tweet. However, having an organized network or ‘Tweeters’ is only the first step. Remember, algorithms are designed to show users what it believes human users want to see.

Prier presents two other actors who assist, without their explicit knowledge, the trend-setting campaigns of bots. The first actor to assist bots is what Prier calls the “true believer.” (Prier 2017, p. 54) True believers are human users who retweet bot messages from their accounts, acting as the gateway for bots to influence true believers networks. Essentially, true believers are the mules who push propaganda to human accounts. This is why the narrative bots create, and true believers reshare, must be somewhat realistic. The objective for social bots is to “penetrate the network of true believers.” (Prier 2017, p. 52) There are also ‘lone-wolf’ actors who may follow social bots or true believers. They may not tweet or retweet content at as high of a rate as either bots or true believers, lowering the opportunity for bots to move produced content from fake accounts to real ones, but there is the fact that ‘lone wolf’ accounts are interested in the content bots create. The likelihood is not as high as a true believer’s account, however. Figure 6 shows the relationship between social bots, true believers, and ‘lone-wolf’ accounts. As one can see from Figure 6, there is a capability to influence the Twitter trends list when the networks and bots work in tandem to push a certain narrative.

Figure 6. Process Map of how Propaganda Spreads via the Trend



Source: Prier (2017)

Command of the trend enables the contemporary propaganda model, to create a “firehose of information” that permits the insertion of false narratives over time and at all times. (Paul & Matthews, 2016) Trending items produce the illusion of reality, in some cases even being reported by journalists. Because untruths can spread so quickly now, the internet has created “both deliberate and unwitting propaganda” since the early 1990s through the proliferation of rumors passed as legitimate news.

Jowett & O'Donnel, 2018) The normalization of these types of rumors over time, combined with the rapidity and volume of new false narratives over social media, opened the door for "fake news."

The availability heuristic and the firehose of disinformation can slowly alter opinions as propaganda crosses networks by way of the trend, but the amount of influence will likely be minimal unless it comes from a source that a nonbeliever finds trustworthy. An individual may see the propaganda and believe the message is popular because it is trending but still not buy into the message itself. Instead, the individual will likely turn to a trusted source of news to test the validity of the propaganda. Therefore, we must now analyze modern journalism to determine how command of the trend can transform propaganda from fake news to real news.

2.5 Trends may Disseminate "Fake News"

Social media facilitates self-reinforcing networks of like-minded users, however a propaganda message is able to traverse different networks. This link between networks is only based on that trending single topic and can be easily severed. Thus, to employ social media effectively as a tool of propaganda it is necessary to exploit the trending topics list. Trends are visible to everyone. Regardless of who follows whom on a given social media platform, all users see the topics algorithmically generated by the platform as being the most popular topics at that particular

moment. Given this universal and unavoidable visibility, “popular topics contribute to the collective awareness of what is trending and at times can also affect the public agenda of the community.” (Asur et al. 2011, p. 1) In this manner, a trending topic can bridge the gap between clusters of social networks. A malicious actor can quickly spread propaganda by injecting a narrative onto the trend list.

The combination of networking on social media, propaganda, and reliance on unverifiable online news sources introduces the possibility of completely falsified news stories entering the mainstream of public consciousness. This phenomenon, commonly called *fake news*, has generated significant criticism from both sides of the American political spectrum, with some labeling any contrary viewpoints fake. In reality, fake news consists of more than just bad headlines or poorly sourced stories. (Prier, 2017) Fake news is a particular form of propaganda composed of a false story disguised as news. On social media, this becomes particularly dangerous because of the viral spread of sensationalized fake news stories. Thus, it is important to recognize that with social media like Twitter lots of people are exposed to those fake news stories. In some cases, people may just see the story in the Twitter feed; in many cases, people may actively look for news from selected sources, which may be fiction. Over time, those selected fake news sources may become trusted sources for some people and, consequently, news outlets become less trust-worthy. (Prier, 2017) When news is tailorable to one’s taste and new stories are popping up around the world every second, mainstream journalists have to change their methods to

compete with other sources of news. Therefore, if social media is becoming a source for spreading news and information, journalists will try to keep up by using social media to spread their stories and to acquire information first. According to an Indiana University School of Journalism study, the most common use of social media for journalists is to check for breaking news. (Peterson, 2014) As a result, mainstream journalists tend to use tweets as a legitimate source, especially when there is a lack of more valid or confirmed sources. (Weimann, 2015) However, overreliance on social media for breaking news can become problematic because if a fake news source takes control of a trend on Twitter, the trend is likely to be noticed by mainstream media journalists who may provide legitimacy to a false story. This is the initial setup for how social media became extremely influential via an adversary's propaganda.

CHAPTER 3: EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Today Political Communication

In the contextualization between propaganda and social media, it is very interesting to discuss the role of social media in terms of information dissemination. One thing that must be agreed upon is that social media is very effective for information dissemination and engagement with the public.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the United States ex-president Donald J. Trump tweets in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic to examine the implications of his tweets and messages about the virus, as well as what ideologies his discourse reinforced.

Even before the pandemic, the Pew Research Center found that social media has now surpassed print media as a primary news source (Shearere, 2018). Indeed, many if not most politicians in Western societies are now using digital and social media to disseminate their ideologies and attract the attention of larger audiences (Bartlett, 2014) as these new media have gained in importance. Social media like Facebook and Twitter are widely used among the population (Greenwood et al. 2016) and, as KhosraviNik and Unger point out, “a large proportion of day-to-day verbal and visual communication has migrated to various participatory web

platforms”, which has in turn impacted the way politics is done (KhosraviNik & Unger 2016, p. 231) . Right-wing populist politicians seem to have been particularly successful in adopting social media for campaign purposes and have used them as a strategic communication tool and as an instrument of power politics as they provide an effective, low-cost tool through which politicians can quickly share messages, directly interact with their followers, self-promote, and criticize the establishment (Van Kessel & Castelein, 2016).

The year 2020 began with an outbreak of a new virus, named COVID-19, which led to the World Health Organization (WHO) declaring it a global pandemic on the 12th of March. It has brought many challenges to both society and governments, putting the world at a halt. Not only did the pandemic affect the world's economy, society, and many political factors, but it has also evoked different forms of communication. Twitter utilization for communication in times of crisis has increased over recent years and, during natural disasters and crises, it has continued to rise. With a large number of Americans accessing some of their news on Twitter, it can also be said that they were able to follow political news on the site. This fact alone emphasizes the need to understand how politicians, and mainstream ones at that, utilize Twitter and what are the implications of the messages they disseminate to the public.

Trump might represent the most prevalent example when it comes to taking advantage of the affordances of Twitter, as he has used the platform as a major form of communication and tool to disseminate his ideologies. Since he announced to run for President of the United States in 2015, he has continuously used Twitter to communicate his political agenda, and even as President he has frequently tweeted from his private Twitter account (@realDonaldTrump). He has a relatively large audience on Twitter, and his particular direct and informal communication style has proven successful, as the election results suggest. His image as a candidate was “largely formed by his widely circulated tweets, which were often quoted and debated in the mainstream media” (Enli 2017, p. 56). As President, Trump has employed right-wing populist discourses as an instrument of power politics since the beginning of his candidacy and he was able to spread his ideology because the media has often treated his tweets as news and thus allow him to benefit from an unmediated dissemination of his messages to reach a wider audience. Thus, this chapter explores how the ex-President Trump employed Twitter as a strategic instrument of power politics. By using an informal and conversational language style in his tweets, he has been successful in reaching large audiences and appearing closer to the people. As President, he has continued to tweet in his particular communication style and has employed Twitter as an instrument of power politics.

2. THE YEAR 2020: PANDEMIC CRISIS AND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

2.1 Covid-19

The year 2020 started with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This socio-economic crisis has led to changes in our society as several restrictions were demanded, such as self-quarantining, wearing face masks and social distancing to limit the spread of the Coronavirus. This resulted in a high need for online communication. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all countries, but not in identical measures. One of the most influential countries in the world, that is still facing major pandemic-related issues, is the United States of America. The U.S. has the highest death rate (WHO, 2020a) worldwide in terms of the Coronavirus, therefore, this chapter will focus on the leader of the country, Donald Trump, and analyze the key characteristics in his communication around the pandemic.

2.2 Presidential Election

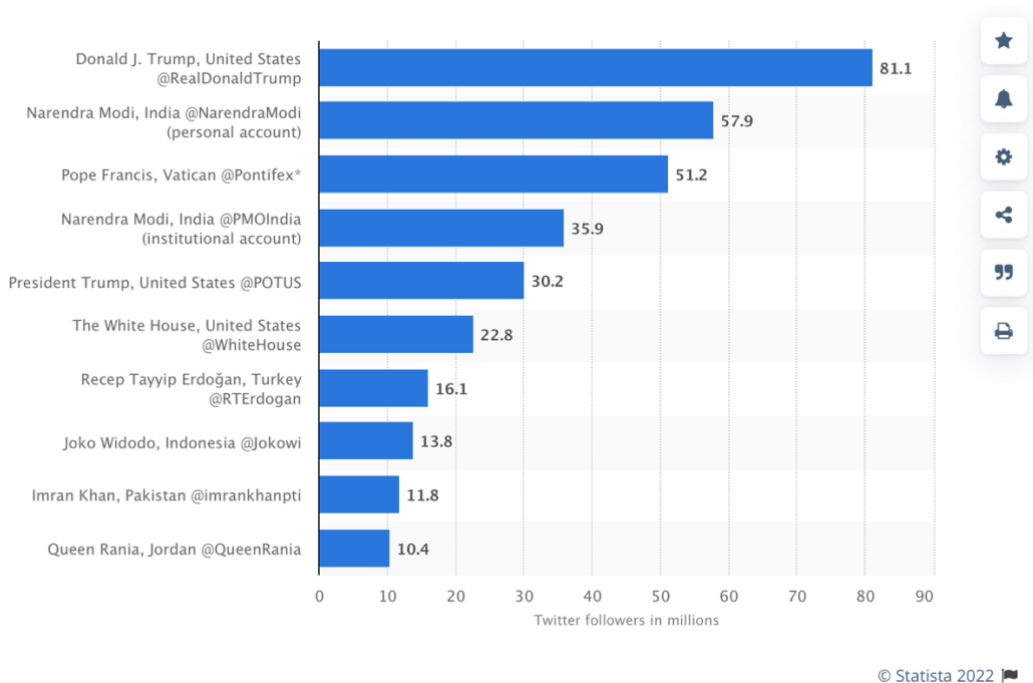
It is important for the analysis to highlight that the period I took into consideration included the 59th quadrennial presidential election, held on November 3, 2020. Donald Trump was a candidate in 2020 US Presidential Election. Not only did Donald Trump need to control the health crisis, but he also needed to meet pressing

political and economic issues. The role of the leader during such an international socio-economic crisis can ultimately have a huge influence on the election's outcome. It is not a surprise that he used the pandemic as a tool for his election campaign. That also explained that he self-generated content with a simple tone and usage of words, with very little professional or political language presented. Thus making his content easy to read and interpret, which can be a great attribute in reaching large audiences

2.3 Donald Trump and Twitter

Twitter is a microblogging platform, where Twitter users post short messages, also known as tweets, on a timeline with maximum of 280 characters. Tweets can also use tags, such as “mentions” and “hashtags”.

Figure 7. World Leaders with the most Twitter Followers as of June 2020



Source: Statista (2020)

Before he was banned, Donald Trump led his Twitter account with 81.1 million followers that is a large audience to be communicating with. In 2020, according to Figure 7 from Statista⁸, he had the most followers from all the world’s leaders, indicating that people chose to follow his content specifically (Statista, 2020).

⁸ According to Statista, the ranking as of March 2021 saw Barack Obama as first with 129.78 million followers, followed by Justin Bieber, Katy Perry, Rihanna, Cristiano Ronaldo, Taylor Swift, Lady Gaga, Ariana Grande, TheEllenShow and YouTube. (Statista, 2021) In the text I took into consideration the year 2020 because then, Trump was banned from Twitter.

Therefore, it can be argued that as one of the world's leaders, Trump had a high probability of influence over his follower base.

As a president, Donald Trump used Twitter more frequently than his predecessors. For example, despite Barack Obama having a bigger social following than Donald Trump, he did not apply the same communication methods or style on his account that would allow him to reach the same engagement as Trump (Miles & Haider-Markel, 2020). Although Trump tended to express himself differently by using much simpler language, he used Twitter for the same purposes as all the previous precedents have used it: reach a large audience to communicate his political message.

2.4 Tweets' Source and Criteria

This chapter sampled selected tweets from his personal account Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) that were originally posted on the social media site Twitter. Considering Donald Trump was banned from Twitter on January 8th, 2021, all of his former tweets were no longer accessible on Twitter itself. For the purposes of this study, the website "Trump Twitter Archive" (www.thetrumparchive.com) resulted very useful to gather tweets the ex-President Trump had formerly posted. When Trump was still on Twitter, the site constantly checked his Twitter account every 60 seconds and recorded every tweet he had sent into a database. The website

started in 2016 and recorded every single one of his tweets up until he was banned. I manually collected all tweets regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, excluding retweets, between the dates of January 1st, 2020 and January 9th, 2021. I did not record retweets and tweets with only links in order to concentrate on the rhetoric written by Trump himself, so I considered them not relevant for my analysis. Moreover, due to Trump's constant tweeting and retweeting practices, the pool would have been exceptionally larger if retweets were included. I preferred to make a manual collection of tweets rather than using the keywords "COVID", "virus", "coronavirus", and "pandemic" because I thought it would have been more accurate. I selected all those tweets that as main topic had the "coronavirus", "vaccines", "health" and "drugs". On many tweets words like Coronavirus, COVID-19, Virus are not mentioned but they talk about the pandemic, so a manual selection was more accurate for the purpose of the analysis. Finally, the data collection resulted in 676 tweets.

To date, the first officially confirmed case of Covid-19 was detected in the United States on January 21st, 2020, and Donald Trump mentioned the coronavirus in a tweet for the first time on January 24th, 2020.

3. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

3.1 Data and Research

After COVID-19 was determined as the area of concentration in regard to Trump's tweets, I went through each of the 676 tweets and certain themes became apparent. For example, Trump consistently used recurring keywords and phrases. For this reason to conduct my analysis I asked myself questions like: what are the most used words and why? Is the Trump's way of communication mostly positive or negative? What are the characteristics of Donald Trump's communication on Twitter in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and, more broadly, to US policies and politics? After collecting and coding the trump's tweets, I organized this information in a dataset that in the following will be referenced as "Trump dataset". In this analysis, I used RStudio, which is an integrated development environment (IDE) for R. It includes a console, syntax-highlighting editor that supports direct code execution, as well as tools for plotting, history, debugging and workspace management. Thanks to this tool I was able to perform the word cloud analysis, the trigram analysis and the sentiment analysis of tweets by Donald Trump during the early spread of the Covid-19 pandemic across the United States, making it the worst-hit country in the world.

3.2 Wordcloud

Word clouds are easy to read, quick to produce and simple to understand, so I decided to elaborate a word cloud through RStudio to see what are the most frequent words in Trump's tweets. A word cloud is a collection or cluster of words depicted in different sizes. The bigger and bolder the word appears, the higher the frequency of that word. While preparing the Trump dataset, I had to clean some variable fields of the dataset (punctuation, capital letters, numbers, etc.): this is an essential step to take before conducting quantitative analysis. In addition, I removed common words like the pronouns and articles such as "I" or "the", in order to produce meaningful results and avoid them to appear in the word cloud.

Figure 8. Trump's Tweets Regarding COVID-19 Pandemic Word cloud



Source: our elaboration on the Trump dataset

Figure 8 shows a word cloud analysis of Trump’s tweets. The relative sizes and colors of each word represent their weighting or importance in the context of the text considered. The color list I chose to reflect frequency ranges from grey for the most important word to dark green for words he used less: specifically the order is grey, brown, yellow, light-green, violet, dark purple, orange and green. The most frequent words, as resulted in the word cloud, are “great”, “China”, “coronavirus”, “virus”, “people”, “testing”, “state”, “fake”, “news”. Donald Trump tweeted a lot about how great something is. In fact, “great” is Trump’s most used word ever.

3.3 Sentiment Analysis

Sentiment analysis is a text analysis technique that allows companies to make sense of qualitative data. Once the sentences or word tokens from the Trump dataset have been collected into a vector and cleaned (as in the word cloud), the different sentiments will be assessed. This package adopts the *bag-of-words*⁹ approach, where the sentiment is determined on the basis of the individual words occurring in the text, neglecting the role of syntax and grammar. The words appearing in the text are compared against one or more lexicons where positive and negative words are listed and typically associated with a degree of intensity (of positiveness or negativeness). The package¹⁰ I used has *syuzhet*, *bing*, *afinn* and *nrc* lexicons¹¹. I

⁹ A bag-of-words model, or BoW for short, is a way of extracting features from text for use in modeling, such as with machine learning algorithms. The approach is very simple and flexible, and can be used in a myriad of ways for extracting features from documents. A bag-of-words is a representation of text that describes the occurrence of words within a document. It involves two things: 1) A vocabulary of known words. 2) A measure of the presence of known words. It is called a “bag” of words, because any information about the order or structure of words in the document is discarded. The model is only concerned with whether known words occur in the document, not where in the document. (Brownlee, 2017)

¹⁰ <https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/syuzhet/vignettes/syuzhet-vignette.html>

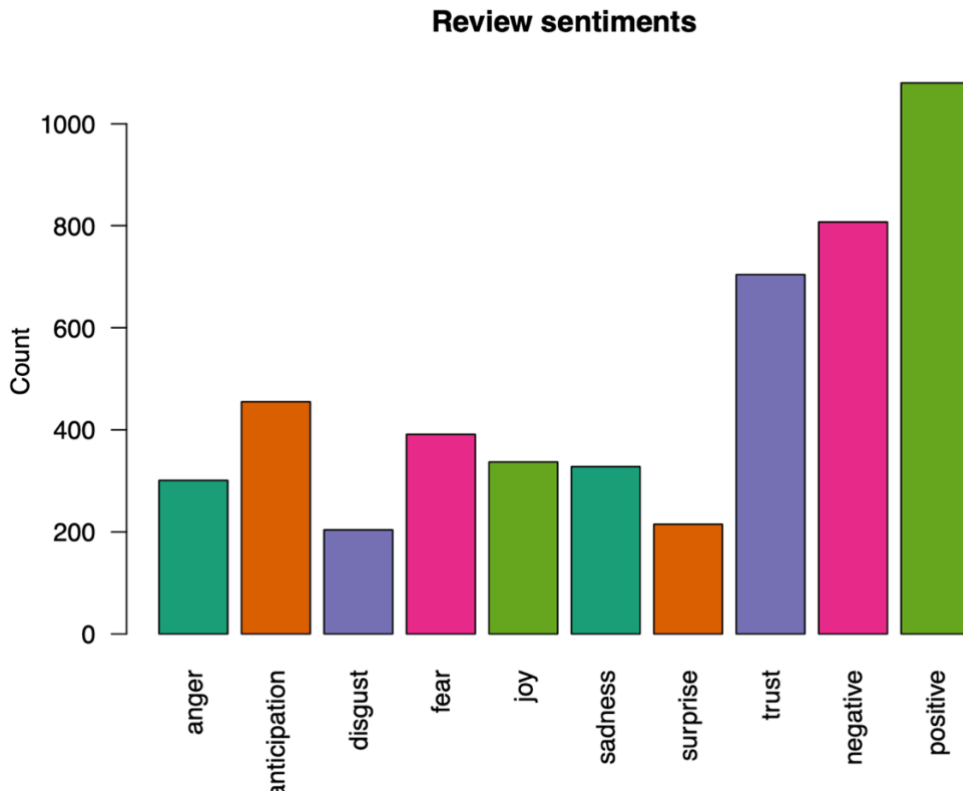
¹¹ Sentiments can be classified as positive, neutral or negative. They can also be represented on a numeric scale, to better express the degree of positive or negative strength of the sentiment contained in a body of text. I used the *Syuzhet package* for generating sentiment scores, which has four sentiment dictionaries and offers a method for accessing the sentiment extraction tool developed in the NLP group at Stanford (programmers and students who work together on algorithms). The functions of the package accepts two arguments: a character vector (of sentences or words) and a method. The selected method determines which of the four available sentiment extraction methods will be used. The four methods are *syuzhet* (this is the default), *bing*, *afinn* and *nrc*. Each method uses a different scale and hence returns slightly different results. The outcome of

chose to use the last one because the others are just concerned with polarity (i.e. reporting positive or negative words), while it assigns a sentiment type, using also the following 8 additional categories: anger, anticipation, disgust, fear, joy, sadness; surprise; trust. The *nrc*¹² lexicon comprises 13889 words, distributed among the different categories (Anger 1247, Anticipation 839, Disgust 1058, Fear 1476, Joy 689, Sadness 1191, Surprise 534, Trust 1231, Positive 2312 and Negative 3324). (Naldi, 2019) The y-axis labeled “Count” represents absolute value.

nrc method is more than just a numeric score, requires additional interpretations and it result to be useful for my analysis.

¹² Emotion classification is built on the NRC Word-Emotion Association Lexicon. The definition of “NRC Emotion Lexicon”, sourced from <http://saifmohammad.com/WebPages/NRC-Emotion-Lexicon.htm> is “The NRC Emotion Lexicon is a list of English words and their associations with eight basic emotions (anger, fear, anticipation, trust, surprise, sadness, joy, and disgust) and two sentiments (negative and positive). To understand this, the *nrc.sent* function returns a data frame with each row representing a sentence from the original file. The data frame has ten columns (one column for each of the eight emotions, one column for positive sentiment valence and one for negative sentiment valence). The data in the columns (anger, anticipation, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, surprise, trust, negative, positive) can be accessed individually or in sets. The definition of *nrc_sent* has been sourced from: <https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/syuzhet/vignettes/syuzhet-vignette.html>.

Figure 9. Sentiment Analysis performed with Nrc Lexicon



Source: our elaboration on the Trump dataset

As resulted from the sentiment analysis, he used mostly words that reflect positivity therefore, as a leader, Donald Trump showed support to hospitals, health care workers and people in need by sharing updates about testing, medicine and medical equipment, such as ventilators. This can be observed in March, April and May.

[1]. *HYDROXYCHLOROQUINE and AZITHROMYCIN taken together have a real chance to be one of the biggest game changers in the history of medicine. The FDA has moved mountains - Thank You! Hopefully they will BOTH (H works better with A, International Journal of Antimicrobial Agents)..... @realDonaldTrump on March 21st*

Trump also showed empathy and respect towards the workers in the U.S. In many of the appreciation posts, he genuinely shows that he is grateful for their hard work, however, he uses the word ‘our’ instead of *America*’ or the *country’s* often in these posts:

[2]. *I want to thank all of our Great Government officials on the CoronaVirus Task Force who are working around the clock in response to the CoronaVirus. @realDonaldTrump on March 11th*

When results and statistics were discouraging, as U.S. was the leading country with most coronavirus cases, Trump tended to evade numbers or percentages of death toll, infected people or cured cases. As Figure 9 shows, he kept a positive outlook with the usage of a simple language, and, for example, by emphasizing that testing and precautionary actions have significantly improved the situation in the U.S. Thus

making the signs of respect and appreciation as a political tool, and pointing to a direction where there is a positive sentiment. In total, there are only 5 tweets, where Trump shares the actual death rate in the U.S.

[3]. *With approximately 100,000 CoronaVirus cases worldwide, and 3,280 deaths, the United States, because of quick action on closing our borders, has, as of now, only 129 cases (40 Americans brought in) and 11 deaths. We are working very hard to keep these numbers as low as possible! @realDonaldTrump on March 5th*

[4]. *So last year 37,000 Americans died from the common Flu. It averages between 27,000 and 70,000 per year. Nothing is shut down, life & the economy go on. At this moment there are 546 confirmed cases of CoronaVirus, with 22 deaths. Think about that! @realDonaldTrump on March 9th*

[5]. *To this point, and because we have had a very strong border policy, we have had 40 deaths related to CoronaVirus. If we had weak or open borders, that number would be many times higher! @realDonaldTrump on March 13th*

[6]. *We have just reached a very sad milestone with the coronavirus pandemic deaths reaching 100,000. To all of the families & friends of those who have passed, I want to extend my heartfelt sympathy & love for everything that these great people stood for & represent. God be with you! @realDonaldTrump on May 28th*

[7]. *Deaths from the China Virus are down 39%, while our great testing program continues to lead the World, by FAR! Why isn't the Fake News reporting that Deaths are way down? It is only because they are, indeed, FAKE NEWS! @realDonaldTrump on July 6th*

The rest of the instances have general information or update on testing and mortality, showing no clear data as presented in the example below:

[8]. *Cases, numbers and deaths are going down all over the Country! @realDonaldTrump on May 24th*

[9]. *The number of ChinaVirus cases goes up because of GREAT TESTING while the number of deaths (mortality rate) goes way down. The Fake News doesn't like telling you that! @realDonaldTrump on June 25th*

Now a problem arises: if Trump opted for a positive outlook when talking about himself and the COVID-19 pandemic, why is the negative column in the sentiment analysis the second highest one?

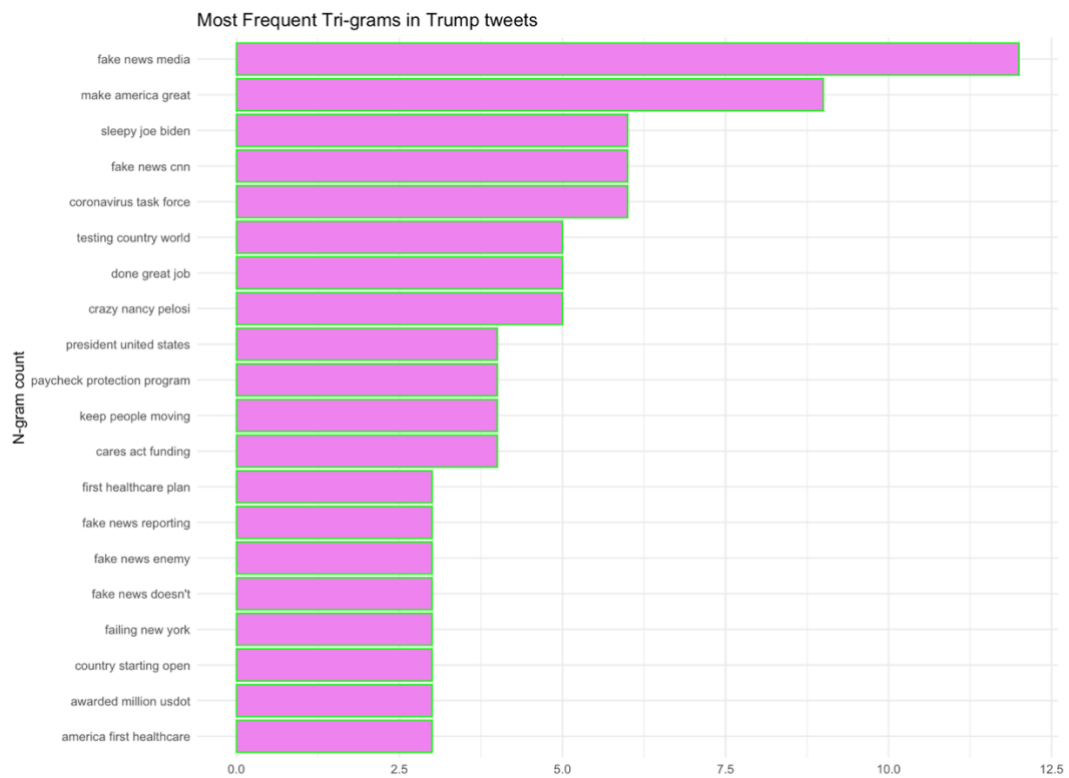
Trump used many of his tweets to argue, attack and blame while failing to provide enough information or space for engagement on the topic of the virus. In order to better explain his negative attitude and provide context in the sentiment analysis, I have decided to perform also the trigram analysis. The aim was to understand in which context Trump used negative words. So far the above analysis has considered words as individual units, and considered their relationships to sentiments. It simply counted the appearance of words linked to positive, negative, trust, anticipation, fear..., according to a reference lexicon. One of the problems with this approach is the difficulty to understand a word's context. Consecutive words might capture structure and may provide context that makes tokens more understandable.

3.4 Trigram

I was interested in trigram analysis, which are consecutive sequences of 3 words because it provides context in sentiment analysis. To perform the following graph I used the cleaned Trump dataset that I previously used to obtain the word cloud and the sentiment analysis, then thanks to corpus package and ggplot2 package, I

obtained the trigram in Figure 10 in RStudio. The y-axis labeled “N-gram count” represents absolute value.

Figure 10. Trump's Tweets Regarding COVID-19 Pandemic Trigram



Source: our elaboration of the Trump dataset

On one hand the trigram confirms what it has been affirmed above, indeed trigrams such as “make America great”, “done great job”, “paycheck protection program” reflect his positivity and support towards hospitals, health care workers and people in need. On the other hand, he also used negative words as “fake news”, “sleepy

Joe Biden” to describe his opponents in tweets. By going negative, Trump prioritized attacking opponents over positive self-promotion or his own policies. Politicians practice negative campaigning to a certain level because it can decrease the opponent’s approval ratings, thus making this a political tool in Trump’s communication even in times of health crisis. Moreover, he is using negative partisanship even during a difficult time, where citizens are struggling with health issues both mentally and physically. Thus because he is a strong political actor and he was able to use mass self-communication on Twitter to present political content, negative partisanship, self-praising content and go against his opponents, even in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. As an actor on a mass self-communication platform, he can distribute information flow to his needs (Castells, 2007). Not surprisingly, his attitude included politicize content on his Twitter platform regardless of the communication, and evidently, use the pandemic as a tool for his election campaign:

[10]. *Sleepy Joe Biden was in charge of the H1N1 Swine Flu epidemic which killed thousands of people. The response was one of the worst on record. Our response is one of the best, with fast action of border closings & a 78% Approval Rating, the highest on record. His was lowest! @realDonaldTrump on March 12th*

[11]. *The Do Nothing Democrats are spending much of their money on Fake Ads. I never said that the CoronaVirus is a “Hoax”, I said that the Democrats, and the way they lied about it, are a Hoax. Also, it did start with “one person from China”, and then grew, & will be a “Miracle” end! @realDonaldTrump on April 25th*

3.5 Tone of Voice

Since the chapter aims to analyze Donald Trump’s communication on an online mass communication platform, such as Twitter, and ultimately identify his key communication characteristics, it is important to present the findings of his communication style, language and tone of voice. I tried to identify the tone of voice on COVID-19 tweets. It is undoubtful that Donald Trump uses unconventional and simple language (Kayam, 2018) on his social media. For providing general information on the virus, Donald Trump uses a mix of a professional and simple way of presenting the content, along with the offensive tone in relation to the tweets where he attacks his opponents. However, addressing the topic in a simple and casual way is by far the most commonly used approach on this Twitter communication. In contrast to Donald Trump’s language and style, these accounts use a more professional, formal and neutral tone. Maybe it is just this simple and colloquial language that works and let him have a large audience. It seems like

Trump is talking to people that he puts on the same level as him and the switch from positive tweets to those containing strongly negative words gives the idea of transparency of his thoughts. Moreover, Trump has repeatedly dismissed the knowledge and wisdom of experts. Trump repeatedly emphasized following his instincts over any kind of study: Removing the professional public relations consultants from his public interactions opens a window directly into Trump's thinking and the nature of his advisement.

4. MAIN THEMES

After collecting Trump's tweets, three major themes became apparent across his tweeting practices:

- CHINA VIRUS: Trump consistently referred to COVID-19 as the "China" or "Chinese" Virus.
- FAKE NEWS: he often referred to left leaning media outlets as "Fake News".
- DO NOTHING DEMOCRATS: he chose to point responsibility onto others, especially the Democratic party.

What is important to distinguish across these findings is that it was very common for these themes to appear simultaneously in his tweets. For example, it was not uncommon for a single tweet to use the term "China Virus" and "fake news" while

also blaming Democrats. Throughout the analysis, this will become apparent, but it is important to recognize that these themes did not exist separately from each other, but that they occurred quite frequently together.

4.1 China Virus

An interesting relationship is observable in Trump's messages mentioning China with the progress of Covid-19. There has been a drastic change in the tone of Trump's tweets mentioning China and coronavirus together. Initially, his Twitter messages had a positive sentiment toward China when discussing her response to the virus outbreak. His first tweet mentioning coronavirus on January 24th also mentioned China. From the following tweet text, we can observe the extremely positive tone of the message:

[12]. *China has been working very hard to contain the Coronavirus. The United States greatly appreciates their efforts and transparency. It will all work out well. In particular, on behalf of the American People, I want to thank President Xi! @realDonaldTrump on January 24th*

However, as Covid-19 spread across the United States, taking a high toll on the economy and life, the sentiment of his tweets mentioning China and coronavirus also changed to negative. What follows is his last tweet in our dataset mentioning China and the pandemic, posted on June 30:

[13]. *As I watch the Pandemic spread its ugly face all across the world including the tremendous damage it has done to the USA I become more and more angry at China. People can see it and I can feel it!*
@realDonaldTrump on June 30th

The last tweet has strong negative connotation and sentiment. We can observe the dramatic change in Trump's sentiment toward China from these two messages.

On March 16th, 2020 Trump first referred to COVID-19 as the "Chinese virus" in one of his tweets. He said:

[14]. *The United States will be powerfully supporting those industries, like Airlines and others, that are particularly affected by the Chinese Virus. We will be stronger than ever before!* @realDonaldTrump on March 16th

Throughout the pandemic, Trump consistently called it either the “China virus”, “Chinese virus”, or sometimes “China’s Coronavirus”, until he was banned in January of 2021. It is important to note that he did refer to it as its official name, COVID-19 or some version of that more often than he used the negative connotation, but it is important to recognize what it means for a President of the United States of America to call a virus the “Chinese virus” on Twitter. Here are just some examples:

[15]. *For the people that are now out of work because of the important and necessary containment policies, for instance the shutting down of hotels, bars and restaurants, money will soon be coming to you. The onslaught of the Chinese Virus is not your fault! Will be stronger than ever! @realDonaldTrump on March 16th*

[16]. *I always treated the Chinese Virus very seriously, and have done a very good job from the beginning, including my very early decision to close the “borders” from China - against the wishes of almost all. Many lives were saved. The Fake News new narrative is disgraceful & false! @realDonaldTrump on March 18th*

[17]. *Great reviews on our handling of Covid 19, sometimes referred to as the China Virus. Ventilators, Testing, Medical Supply Distribution, we made a lot of Governors look very good - And got no credit for so doing. Most importantly, we helped a lot of great people! @realDonaldTrump on May 25th*

[18]. *\$2000 for our great people, not \$600! They have suffered enough from the China Virus!!! @realDonaldTrump on December 29th*

On the surface, it may not seem problematic to call a virus by where it originated in the world. Up until 2015, it was common to identify a virus by where it originated, e.g. “Spanish” Flu or “Ebola” (ABC News, 2020). However, the World Health Organization has now recommended for scientists to avoid this practice to “minimize unnecessary effects on nations, economies, and peoples” (ABC News, 2020). With this in mind, considering the United States’ history with Asian American discrimination, Trump’s consistent use of the “China/Chinese” virus through Twitter only perpetuated and amplified Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) discrimination. Not only did the hashtag #chinesevirus has increased by nearly ten times after Trump first tweeted it in 2020, but threats and racist attacks against Asian Americans had increased (Salcedo, 2021). From the deadly Atlanta shooting in March 2021 where six Asian women were killed, to a

150% increase in anti-Asian hate crimes in 2020 in metropolitan areas like that of New York City and Los Angeles (Yam, 2021), the effects of such a discourse are dangerous and even deadly to Asian Americans.

In many instances, Trump used terminology around the phrase “Chinese virus” to imply how deadly and or dangerous the virus is, which yes, is true. However, when he uses verbs such as “the onslaught of the Chinese virus is not your fault” (March 16th) like in the tweet above, it insinuates that it is not Americans’ faults, but rather China’s fault, which can have negative effects on how people view the AAPI community in this country. Another strong verb he used was “clobbered”:

[19]. *European Countries are sadly getting clobbered by the China Virus. The Fake News does not like reporting this! @realDonaldTrump on November 16th*

In a tweet from January 1st , 2021, Trump again used particular terminology that has important implications:

[20]. *Our Republican Senate just missed the opportunity to get rid of Section 230, which gives unlimited power to Big Tech companies. Pathetic!!! Now they want to give people ravaged by the China Virus*

\$600, rather than the \$2000 which they so desperately need. Not fair, or smart! @realDonaldTrump on January 1st, 2021

Considering the instances in which the verb “ravaged” is used, particularly natural disasters or even war zones, this particular choice of words creates a very hostile attitude towards specifically China. In another tweet, Trump said:

[21]. *All over the World the CoronaVirus, a very bad “gift” from China, marches on. Not good! @realDonaldTrump on May 28th*

Here, he explicitly states that officials in China sent the coronavirus as a “gift” to create agitation around the world. This claim, especially on behalf of a president on a social media platform can have lots of consequences. This perpetuates the belief that the disease is the fault of the Chinese and normalizes the idea that viruses are racial and not biological.

Similarly, he made another claim around the fact that China is responsible:

[22]. *Some wacko in China just released a statement blaming everybody other than China for the Virus which has now killed hundreds of thousands of people. Please explain to this dope that it was the*

*“incompetence of China”, and nothing else, that did this mass
Worldwide killing! @realDonaldTrump on May 20th*

Here, Trump focused on pointing fingers at where the virus originated. This continued hostile language in his tweets about China, combined with the phrase “China/Chinese virus” could trickle down from just political jabs at Chinese government officials to an even broader population, the entire AAPI community. Probably, the consequence of this harsh language and shifting blame towards China, will be that ideologies and prejudice towards China and Asian and Pacific Islanders at large are going to be reinforced.

4.2 Fake News

The second topic that emerges from Trump’s tweets analysis is “Fake news”. He addressed the word “fake” to left leaning media all throughout the pandemic. Some of the most common phrases Trump used when discussing COVID-19 and the media were the “Radical Left Media”, “Lamestream Media”, “Fake News”, or a combination of all those phrases. Trump’s constant use of “Fake news” aimed to maintain the ideology that the media made the virus appear worse than it actually was. For example:

- [23]. *The Fake News Media and their partner, the Democrat Party, is doing everything within its semi-considerable power (it used to be greater!) to inflame the CoronaVirus situation, far beyond what the facts would warrant. Surgeon General, “The risk is low to the average American.” @realDonaldTrump on March 9th*
- [24]. *Why does the Lamestream Fake News Media REFUSE to say that China Virus deaths are down 39%, and that we now have the lowest Fatality (Mortality) Rate in the World. They just can’t stand that we are doing so well for our Country! @realDonaldTrump on July 6th*
- [25]. *Totally Negative China Virus Reports. Hit it early and hard. Fake News is devastated. They are very bad (and sick!) people! @realDonaldTrump on October 13th*

In these tweets, Trump was urging that the media is partly to blame for the reaction COVID-19 caused across the U.S. and the world. Bittle in his article stated that this was a mindset by many conservative personalities that went out of their way to downplay the severity of the disease: host Jeanine Pirro likened it to the common flu, Republican operative Matt Schlapp said that it was “very, very difficult to contract this virus,” and host Jesse Watters declared that if he got it, he would “beat

it” with the “power of positive thinking.” Even less conservatives have embraced the same don’t-tread-on-me mentality. All these behaviors suggested that world was overreacting (Bittle, 2020). In this sense, he often compared his way to deal with Coronavirus to the previous handling of swine flu, for example:

[26]. *Gallup just gave us the highest rating ever for the way we are handling the CoronaVirus situation. The April 2009-10 Swine Flu, where nearly 13,000 people died in the U.S., was poorly handled. Ask MSDNC & lightweight Washington failure @RonaldKlain, who the President was then? @realDonaldTrump on March 5th*

Sometimes Trump also used the term “China Virus” when calling out the “Fake news” and that news sources were out to make him look bad.

[27]. *With the exception of New York & a few other locations, we’ve done MUCH better than most other Countries in dealing with the China Virus. Many of these countries are now having a major second wave. The Fake News is working overtime to make the USA (& me) look as bad as possible! @realDonaldTrump on August 3rd*

In that tweet specifically, he expressed his anger towards the media for making the U.S. look bad with their response to the virus. He was also urging Americans that the media is not one to be trusted. He mentioned certain news platforms explicitly like The New York Times and the Washington Post:

[28]. *Advertising in the Failing New York Times is WAY down. Washington Post is not much better. I can't say whether this is because they are Fake News sources of information, to a level that few can understand, or the Virus is just plain beating them up. Fake News is bad for America! @realDonaldTrump on April 6th*

[29]. *So now the Fake News @nytimes is tracing the CoronaVirus origins back to Europe, NOT China. This is a first! I wonder what the Failing New York Times got for this one? Are there any NAMED sources? They were recently thrown out of China like dogs, and obviously want back in. Sad! @realDonaldTrump on April 11th*

The New York Times and the Washington Post were two examples of specific news sources he called out in his tweets; but he used other times “Fake news” against the media that were critical of him or reported something he did not agree with. I mentioned before how did presidential election have a great influence on Trump’s

tweet during 2020. Indeed, as the 2020 election was nearing, Trump called out the media for only focusing on COVID-19 as a way of getting him out of office, he also prognosticated that “COVID will disappear once the election is over”:

[30]. *We have made tremendous progress with the China Virus, but the Fake News refuses to talk about it this close to the Election. COVID, COVID, COVID is being used by them, in total coordination, in order to change our great early election numbers. Should be an election law violation! @realDonaldTrump on October 26th*

[31]. *The Fake News Media is riding COVID, COVID, COVID, all the way to the Election. Losers! @realDonaldTrump on October 26th*

[32]. *Covid, Covid, Covid is the unified chant of the Fake News Lamestream Media. They will talk about nothing else until November 4th., when the Election will be (hopefully!) over. Then the talk will be how low the death rate is, plenty of hospital rooms, & many tests of young people. @realDonaldTrump on October 28th*

This distrust in the media also translates into a larger distrust of large institutions and the government in general. Creating such sentiments and continuously

reinforcing them, especially from the President, might spread not only distrust, but also fear, anxiety, and skepticism to large amounts of people.

All of these tweets about the media, all in varying contexts, pointed to a much larger ideology that the media is something to inherently distrust. Trump has based his policies and ideas on this ideology. There is no denying that the media structures that exist in the world, and the U.S. specifically, have their issues: Chomsky defined them as institutional filters operate to ensure that the criticisms made generally stay within narrow bounds set by the US political elite (Herring, 2003). However, a President describing specific news sources with “Fake news” creates an overall distrust in media and news outlets that could lead to even more confusion on who is telling the truth.

4.3 Democratic Party

Another tactic Trump utilized during 2020 was a frequent shifting of the blame, while also insulting the members of the Democratic party and his Presidential opponent, Joe Biden. A consequence to this may be the increased political division and polarization that we see in this country. This mindset and polarization has existed before Trump; however, Trump has taken it to new lengths as has become apparent just in his tweets about COVID- 19. It also became clear after analysis that Trump was using COVID-19 to go against his opponents’ ideologies and made

them look as bad as possible, especially in hopes of reelection. He also spoke about Joe Biden's competency with regards to global health epidemics. Take these tweets, for example, where he brought up the H1N1 virus that occurred during the Obama/Biden administration starting in 2009.

[33]. *Sleepy Joe Biden' was acknowledged by his own people to have done a terrible job on a much easier situation, H1N1 Swine Flu. The OBiden Administration failed badly on this, & now he sits back in his basement and criticizes every move we make on the China Virus. DOING GREAT JOB! @realDonaldTrump on September 3rd*

[34]. Joe Biden has no plan for Coronavirus - ALL TALK! He was a disaster in his handling of H1N1 Swine Flu. He didn't have a clue, with his own Chief of Staff so saying. If he were in charge, perhaps 2.2 million people would have died from this much more lethal disease! @realDonaldTrump on October 8th

[35]. *Joe Biden's response to the H1N1 Swine Flu, far less lethal than Covid 19, was one of the weakest and worst in the history of fighting epidemics and pandemics. It was pathetic, those involved have said. Joe didn't have a clue! @realDonaldTrump on October 23rd*

[36]. *Biden did a very POOR job of handling H1N1 Swine Flu, yet all he talks about is Covid, Covid, Covid, like he would actually know what he is doing. He doesn't. Plus, he would be TERRIBLE with the Economy!* @realDonaldTrump on November 1st

The dates on these tweets line up with the months and even days leading up to Election Day on November 4th. It is clear that he compared coronavirus with how Obama and Biden handled the H1N1 virus. It has to be considered that a major election was looming, however, this type of negative discourse that occurred on Twitter is something we do not typically see in politicians campaign strategies. Sure, politicians will create discourse around their opponent to undermine them or make themselves look better; but in the case of COVID-19 in 2020, there was no logical link with an epidemic of the past without addressing how the current administration is dealing with the current pandemic. Another phrase he used against the opponent party is “Do Nothing Democrats”:

[37]. *I never said the pandemic was a Hoax! Who would say such a thing? I said that the Do Nothing Democrats, together with their Mainstream Media partners, are the Hoax. They have been called*

out & embarrassed on this, even admitting they were wrong, but continue to spread the lie! @realDonaldTrump on April 25th

In this particular tweet, Trump created a distrust in the opponent political party together with their news outlets that could lead to confusion on who is telling the truth. He blamed Democrats for lying about something he said, but he also reiterates their association with “Fake news”. This tweet is also an example of how multiple ideologies appeared in single tweets.

5. OTHER THEMES

Aside from the three main theme mentioned above, in Trump’s tweets there are other recurring subject.

5.1 Testing

In other tweets, Trump insisted that numbers are high because of “great testing”:

[38]. *“The only reason the U.S. has reported one million cases of CoronaVirus is that our Testing is sooo much better than any other country in the World. Other countries are way behind us in Testing,*

and therefore show far fewer cases!” @realDonaldTrump on April 29th

He claimed American testing was “sooo much better than any other country in the world”. Here his positive attitude was evident, while in the following tweets Trump addressed to either the CDC, Obama, Congress, his own intelligence, and China.

[39]. *For decades the @CDCgov looked at, and studied, its testing system, but did nothing about it. It would always be inadequate and slow for a large scale pandemic, but a pandemic would never happen, they hoped. President Obama made changes that only complicated things further..... @realDonaldTrump on March 13th*

[40]. *Great businessman & philanthropist Bernie Marcus, Co-Founder of Home Depot, said that Congress was too distracted by the (phony) Impeachment Witch Hunt when they should have been investigating CoronaVirus when it first appeared in China. Media played a big roll also! @realDonaldTrump on April 12th*

[41]. *Intelligence has just reported to me that I was correct, and that they did NOT bring up the CoronaVirus subject matter until late into*

January, just prior to my banning China from the U.S. Also, they only spoke of the Virus in a very non-threatening, or matter of fact, manner... @realDonaldTrump on May 3rd

[42]. *As I watch the Pandemic spread its ugly face all across the world, including the tremendous damage it has done to the USA, I become more and more angry at China. People can see it, and I can feel it!*
@realDonaldTrump on April 30th

He often blamed Democrats and it was his political strategy. It is not atypical for a politician to call out members of the opposing party; it is almost expected. However, the important thing is that Trump's negativity and name-calling was impactful because of the amount of people he was reaching. Trump has the ability to reach mainstream audiences as well as his own followers. With this capability and constant hostility towards the Democratic party, he reinforced the bipartisan system's polarization and the idea that bipartisan cooperation and compromise is long gone.

5.2 Borders

Another theme that need to be taken in consideration refers to borders. Trump often referenced closing borders during the pandemic. At first, it might be unsurprising or even expected considering the importance of trying to stop a virus from reaching U.S. shores. However, by analyzing each tweet where he discusses border regulation, a nationalistic tone was noticed.

There are two specific tweets that should be shown to highlight his emphasis on border control:

[43]. *Spending the morning speaking to @fema and Military relative to CoronaVirus. Also, spoke to leaders of various countries including Poland, South Korea and Bahrain. Last night had a very gold conversation with the President of Mexico on numerous topics. Border is very strong! @realDonaldTrump on April 18th*

It is interesting that in this tweet Trump started off with discussing his conversations with countries like that of Poland, South Korea and Bahrain, but at the end he chose to say “Border is very strong” after stating his discussion with the President of Mexico.

[44]. *Mexico is sadly experiencing very big CoronaVirus problems, and now California, get this, doesn't want people coming over the Southern Border. A Classic! They are sooo lucky that I am their President. Border is very tight and the Wall is rapidly being built!*
 @realDonaldTrump on May 4th

In both cases, Trump took topic of COVID-19 for tight border control. His plans for the U.S. and Mexico border and restricting immigration was a major part of his campaign that got him elected in 2016. Also in this case the pandemic was useful as a tool for his election campaign: Trump politicized his contents to highlight his ideologies on bringing the United States to a more nationalistic, independent nation.

The above highlighted findings reflect the main themes emerged and in which way Trump talk about them in his messages. What it is worth to note is the way he used to present the different themes:

Table 1. Summary of the Main Messages of the Trump's Tweets

China Virus	Trump attributed China the fault in the spread of COVID-19 pandemic
Fake News	His constant use of "Fake news" aimed to maintain the ideology that the media made the virus appear worse than it actually was.

Democratic Party	Trump used COVID-19 to go against his opponents' ideologies and made them look as bad as possible, especially in hopes of reelection.
Testing	He claimed that the growth in cases in United States was a consequence of the fact that American testing was better than any other country in the world.
Boarders	Trump often mentioned to close borders during the pandemic.

Source: our elaboration

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Propaganda Through Social Media

Social media are becoming an important intermediary for interaction between many actors, from government, individual, and business due to its openness, participation, and sharing (Khan et al., 2014). Moreover, in the social network, information spread occurs quickly that it can cause a real-world impact within minutes for millions of users (Figueira & Oliveira, 2017).

As microblogging gains more significance as a valid news resource, in particular during emergency situations and important events, it becomes critical to provide tools to validate the credibility of online information. (Castillo et al., 2011). As a result, Twitter can be used to propagate certain points of view. For political purposes, Twitter can be used as propaganda to promote the value between two

opponents, in this sense, social media can become a tool to propagate certain points of view. However, social media is vulnerable to this usage because it is convenient to produce, upload, and distribute fake news. In the context of the pandemic, Twitter may represent a powerful tool for world leaders to communicate with citizens during public health crises rapidly. With the tremendous speed of Twitter sharing and distributing information, it is very convenient to promote the political view of some actors. Furthermore, most people are looking for news from social media and powerful Twitter actors that can be trending topics to cover and consume.

This chapter shows that, during the period, Trump used positivity when talking about Coronavirus to create a positive outlook towards his audience. He wanted to show his success in overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic in his country. Moreover, in the campaign period, forming an image as a successful President in a time of crisis is crucial to increasing his chances of winning the Presidential election in 2020. On the other side, the name-calling technique is also used by Trump to discredit the opposing parties and disadvantage them politically. In this sense, it can be stated that social are largely used as a politic strategy, but it cannot be stated that Trump contributed to spread misinformation and false rumors. First, because it is not the purpose of the chapter, since it aims to give an objective analysis. Second, it is very difficult to affirm that a person intentionally spread fake news on social.

6.2 Trump's Propaganda

Donald Trump, as a populist figure, also needs to be considered. Populist figures use social media as a funnel to communicate their ideas and a means of getting people's attention. It is via American populism that, in the US, propaganda emerges outside of public institutions and appears as a commercial brand, a means of self-promotion hostile even to those conventional state-based organs of propaganda upon which it depends; thus, Trump, while singular, was a part of the system that he attacked; he would be nothing without the propaganda on which both public institutions and the private individual rely. (Taveira & Nyerges, 2016)

Whether politicians decide to use social medias to spread their ideas, current propaganda techniques need to be adapted to the media they use. Moreover, propaganda techniques in social media are quite different from mass media.

The spread of the propaganda message is accomplished by tapping into an existing narrative, then amplifying that message with a network of automatic 'bot' accounts to force the social media platform algorithm to recognize that message as a trending topic (Prier, 2017). The strategy Prier outlined consisted in design a system of 'Tweeters' that constantly tweet. In this way, the more someone tweet, the more is the probability the algorithms show the tweets. (Figure 6). And, according to how often Trump wrote on Twitter, this is the strategy that Trump adopted to spread his belief among his "true believers".

The existence of technology has a significant influence on the spread of messages and propaganda techniques. In other words, technology becomes a deterministic factor in disseminating propaganda. Trump has created a break in the lineage of the twentieth-century model of propaganda. To an unprecedented degree for a U.S., Trump has prevented professionals from shaping his propaganda. With Trump it was no longer the professionals who were orchestrating the production of a propagandistic discourse in service of elite exploitation and control. Not only was Trump formulating propagandistic discourse without consulting his professionals, but he often used propaganda to criticize those professionals inside and outside of his administration. So, Trump has not just taken propaganda from the professionals; he has turned it against them. In Trump, the working class saw the kind of reversal they would like to make: an irrational and impulsive subject. Propaganda was formulated to contain the agency of the lower classes precisely because they were thought to be impressionistic, unconsciously driven, emotional, and incapable of intelligent leadership. In the case of Donald Trump, his ability to capture media attention has been honed over decades of business dealings, and it has been widely recognized that his propaganda skills and media savvy are responsible for his success (Wimberly, 2018). When the United States faced a pandemic, Trump tried to communicate that he had successfully brought his country out of the pandemic. Trump's attitude was reflected in the topics he raised. Most of his propaganda messages raised the theme of how he managed the Covid-19 situation. Considering

that Trump was garnering support to win the Presidential election, he wanted to highlight the positive things he does, even though sometimes his policies go against the advice of experts. When things were going well, Donald Trump wanted to take that credit and consider it a success of his administration. Therefore, Trump launched various narratives that his administration successfully tackled Covid-19. Overall, the propaganda carried out by Trump was aimed at giving him a chance to win the Presidential election. Therefore, he continued to produce narratives on Twitter that could influence the mindset of many people by highlighting his policies or attacking those who oppose him. However, the Covid-19 pandemic, which ravaged the economies of many countries, made Trump have to think hard about how to show good performance to smooth his steps to become President.

CONCLUSIONS

The extensive use of social media sites on the internet to disseminate news continues to develop and gain attention as they are quicker and wider than institutions and methods formerly restricted to government-affiliated entities. Moreover, with COVID-19 pandemic, due to lockdowns and social distancing, online communication on digital platforms increased. Social media sites such as Twitter were not initially designed or envisioned as primary news sources. The original mission statement for Twitter stated as follows: “To give everyone the power to create and share ideas and information instantly, without barriers”¹³, so it was first envisioned for communication purposes. However, social media platforms that allow users to like and share information or stories have created an environment where news can spread uncontrollably. This unconventional use of social media sites as primary news sources suggests that the adoption patterns for these information-shaping activities may differ from those for social media usage in general. To achieve a great audience, they need to generate effective information through a rich language and use the media to allow viewers to obtain information, observe, and respond.

This thesis analyzed the use of social media by the US presidential candidate Donald Trump in the year 2020, with reference to Twitter. The analysis was

¹³ <https://hbr.org/2014/11/why-twitters-mission-statement-matters>

conducted among Trump's tweets because he is considered one of the most influential men, moreover studies affirmed that during the year 2020, social media was a great source of news (Walker & Matsa, 2021). Thus, understanding and decoding his communication revealed the strategy he followed to enact an efficient propaganda through the means of social media, while approaching the election deadline. Besides, effective communication can create a great audience so preparing political social media strategy is no different than preparing social media strategies for various brands.

Quantitative data, such as the number of tweets, were collected manually; qualitative contents required reading and analyzing to see how he presented the information. In order to do so, RStudio created graphs and helped the analysis of the tweets.

In Chapter 3 I asked some questions before conducting the analysis: what are the most used words and why? Is the Trump's way of communication mostly positive or negative? What are the characteristics of Donald Trump's communication on Twitter in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and, more broadly, to US policies and politics?

While the word cloud analysis, trigram analysis and the sentiment analysis answered the first two questions, for what it concerns the characteristics of his communication, the tweets showed that his language was simple – hence coherent with the Twitter way of communication – but rich in feelings, both positive and

negative. As resulted from the sentiment analysis, he used mostly words that reflect positivity therefore, as a leader, Donald Trump showed support to hospitals, health care workers and people in need by sharing updates about testing, medicine and medical equipment, such as ventilators. Indeed, he used positive self-presentation to reinforce his position as someone who fights the corrupt elites for the benefit of the American people. Simultaneously, the findings demonstrated how he shifted blame for everything unfavorable linked with himself or his administration to the previous government, his political opponents or the media, which simply portrays it negatively ("fake news").

According to the analysis, three major themes emerged from the tweets concerning China, fake news and the Democratic Party. Trump's messages mentioning China with the progress of Covid-19 reveal an interesting relationship, in fact, the tone of Trump's tweets on China and coronavirus together changed dramatically. When describing China's response to the viral outbreak, his Twitter tweets initially had a positive tone. However, as Covid-19 spread across the United States, hitting the economy and life, the sentiment of his tweets mentioning China and coronavirus turned to a negative stance. For what it concerns the "Fake News" theme, he expressed his anger towards the media for making the U.S. look bad with their response to the virus. He also warned Americans that the news media should not be trusted. The problem is that a President referring to specific news sources as "Fake news" creates an overall distrust in media and news organizations and it may lead

to a general confusion on who is telling the truth. With the third theme, it became evident that Trump was using COVID-19 to go against his opponents' ideologies and made them look as bad as possible, especially in hopes of reelection. He also mentioned Joe Biden's expertise in dealing with global health epidemics (for example when he brought up the H1N1 virus, which began in 2009 during the Obama/Biden administration). Therefore, the findings reveal that technology becomes a deterministic factor in disseminating propaganda and Trump has created a break in the lineage of the twentieth-century model of propaganda. To an unprecedented degree for a U.S., Trump has enacted an explicit professional free propagandistic discourse. Irrespectively from the idea that Trump formulated his propagandistic discourse without consulting his professionals, it is worth to note that he often used propaganda to criticize those professionals inside and outside of his administration.

To conclude, his communication approach, as well as his use of a participatory web platform as a significant means of communication, reflected how he sees himself in connection to the people: as a leader who has given sovereignty to the people while still protecting the nation. I believe Trump had the ability to succeed because he mastered the use of language and persuasive talents. He appealed to the public's patriotic sentiments and strong fighting spirit, arousing a sense of national pride in everyone. Trump's stunning entrance into politics is a triumph of unconventional speech over traditional politics. With his unique communication talent and original

strategy, Trump shaped the unprecedented 'Trump phenomenon' during his presidency.

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Data source:

<http://www.thetrumparchive.com>

APPENDIX

Trump's tweets were manually collected from his personal Twitter archive in an excel file and then analyzed thanks to RStudio.

Here a screenshot from the Excel Sheet where the tweets were gathered, grouped and some of them were selected to support the discussion in chapter 3.

	A	B	C	D	E
	GIORNO	MESE	TWEET	LIKE	
1					
537	7	8	I will be doing a news conference on the ChinaVirus, the just announced very good economic numbers, and the improving economy, at 7pm from Bedminster, New Jersey. Also, the subject of the Beirut, Lebanon catastrophe will be discussed.	121k	CHINA VIRUS
538	11	8	More Testing, which is a good thing (we have the most in the world), equals more Cases, which is Fake News Gold. They use Cases to demean the incredible job being done by the great men & women of the U.S. fighting the China Plague!	119k	CHINA PLAGUE
539	13	8	Drug companies, which are being forced by me to substantially reduce Drug Prices, are taking \$millions in ads saying I want to increase Medicare Premiums. Wrong, just the opposite! These ads show DRUG PRICES ARE GOING DOWN, and they are not happy! False advertising!	150k	
540	14	8	I am ready to send Rental Assistance payments to hardworking Americans that have been hurt by the ChinaVirus. DEMOCRATS ARE HOLDING THIS UP!	140k	CHINA VIRUS
541	15	8	Great work by the Governors of AZ, IA, LA, and NM (@DougDucey @IAGovernor @LouisianaGov & @GovMLG) who responded to my Executive Action and promptly submitted applications, that we APPROVED QUICKLY, to support Americans out of work because of the ChinaVirus. More states to come!	76k	CHINA VIRUS
542	23	8	Chris Wallace "forgot" to ask a very weak and pathetic Schumer puppet, Senator Chrisie Coons, why Biden fought me when I put an extremely early BAN on people coming into our Country from heavily infected China. Biden later admitted I was right! But why no question?	122k	
543	30	8	Everything a Governor asked the Federal Government for with respect to the Pandemic, they got. They all said, on tape, the Federal government did a great job. Governor Cuomo used the word "phenomenal." The Task Force worked well with the States. Feds bailed out many States!	89k	
544	3	9	Governors Andrew Cuomo of New York has the worst record on death and China Virus. 11,000 people alone died in Nursing Homes because of his incompetence!	176k	CHINA VIRUS
545	3	9	Sleepy Joe Biden' was acknowledged by his own people to have done a terrible job on a much easier situation, H1N1 Swine Flu. The Biden Administration failed badly on this, & now he sits back in his basement and criticizes every move we make on the China Virus. DOING GREAT JOB! https://t.co/p2H4dmD75h	64k	CHINA VIRUS
546	3	9	NYGovCuomo should get his puppet New York prosecutors, who have been illegally after me and my family for years, to investigate his incompetent handling of the China Virus, and all of the deaths caused by this incompetence. It is at minimum a Nursing Home Scandal - 11,000 DEAD!	114k	CHINA VIRUS
547	3	9	Crazy Nancy Pelosi said she was "set up" by the beauty parlor owner when she improperly had the salon opened (and didn't wear a MASK). Does anyone want a Speaker of the House who can be so easily SET UP?	185k	
548	3	9	Joe Biden' gets off his airplane, grabs and shakes a rather stunned man's hand (like in the old days), then touches his (Joe's) face and mask with the same hand. No crowd, no enthusiasm for Joe today. Law & Order!	123k	

RStudio

To better understand the R script I used and how to do the analysis I also include the screenshots representing RStudio's console and the codes. RStudio is an integrated development environment for R and Python, with a console, syntax-highlighting editor that supports direct code execution, and tools for plotting, history, debugging and workspace management. It is important to note the differences between R and RStudio. R is a programming language used for statistical computing while RStudio uses the R language to develop statistical

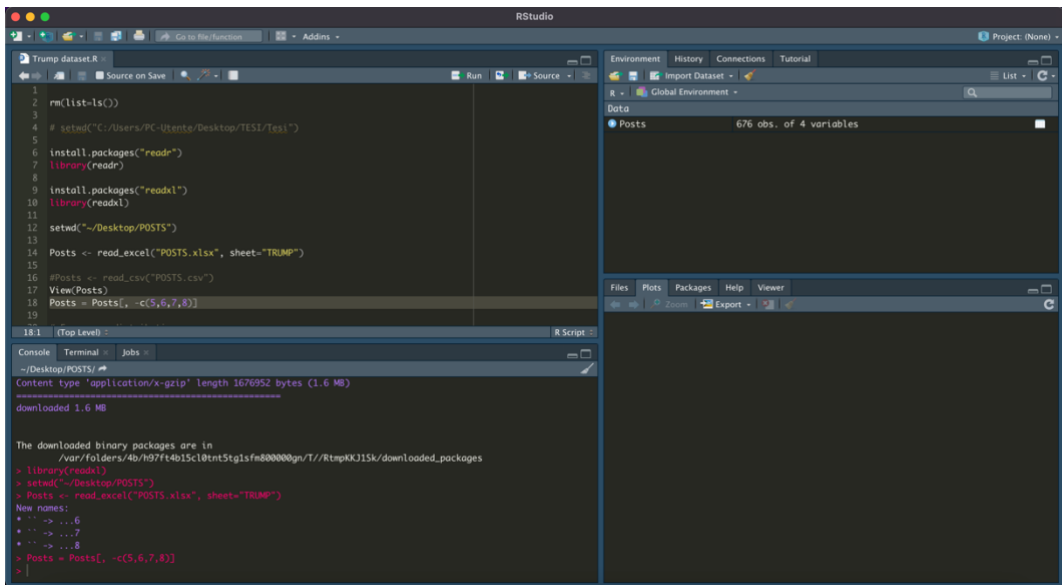
programs. In R, you can write a program and run the code independently of any other computer program. RStudio however, must be used alongside R in order to properly function. Often referred to as an IDE, or integrated development environment, RStudio allows users to develop and edit programs in R by supporting a large number of statistical packages, higher quality graphics, and the ability to manage the workspace. R and RStudio are not separate versions of the same program, and cannot be substituted for one another. R may be used without RStudio, but RStudio may not be used without R.

Packages used	Description
<i>ggplot2</i>	is a system for declaratively creating graphics, based on the book entitled <i>The Grammar of Graphics</i> . You provide the data, tell ggplot2 how to map variables to aesthetics, what graphical primitives to use, and it takes care of the details.
<i>wordcloud</i>	functionality to create pretty word clouds, visualize differences and similarity between documents, and avoid over-plotting in scatter plots with text.
<i>corpus</i>	function for reading data from newline-delimited JSON files, for normalizing and tokenizing text, for searching for term occurrences, and for computing term occurrence frequencies (including n-grams).
<i>tm</i>	a framework for text mining applications with R.
<i>readxl</i>	this package makes it easy to get data out of Excel into R.
<i>SnowballC</i>	an R interface to the C “libstemmer” library that implements Porter’s word stemming algorithm for collapsing words to a common root to aid comparison of

	vocabulary. The languages included are Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish and Swedish.
syuzhet	this package attempts to reveal the latent structure of narrative by means of sentiment analysis. Instead of detecting shifts in the topic or subject matter of the narrative, the syuzhet package reveals the emotional shifts.

RColorBrewer and *readr* are not listed as packages because they are basic Rfunction.

A few examples of the coding and the structure of RStudio are presented in the following screenshots:



RStudio interface showing the preparation of a tweets corpus. The script in the editor includes the following code:

```

39 inspect(tweets_corpus[320])
40
41 inspect(tweets_corpus)
42
43 # Convert the text to lower case
44 tweets_corpus = tm_map(tweets_corpus, content_transformer(tolower))
45 tweets_corpus = tm_map(tweets_corpus, removeNumbers, lazy = T)
46 tweets_corpus = tm_map(tweets_corpus, removeWords, stopwords("english"))
47 tweets_corpus = tm_map(tweets_corpus, removeWords, c("https", "tco"))
48 tweets_corpus = tm_map(tweets_corpus, removeWords, c("doesn't", "don't", "m", "s", "in", "ve", "will",
49 tweets_corpus = tm_map(tweets_corpus, removePunctuation)
50 tweets_corpus = tm_map(tweets_corpus, strip@itespace)
51
52 wordcloud(tweets_corpus)
53
54 display.brewer.all()
55 wordcloud(tweets_corpus, scale=c(3.5,8.25) , min.freq=10, max.words = 400, random.order = FALSE,
56 colors = RColorBrewer::brewer.pal(6,"Accent"))
57

```

The Environment pane shows the following objects:

- Posts: 676 obs. of 4 variables
- tweets_corpus: List of 676

The console shows the execution of the script, including warnings about transformation drops and the successful generation of a word cloud. The word cloud displays prominent terms such as "people", "great", "news", "testing", "china", "fake", "states", "media", "virus", "help", "big", "job", "america", "good", "world", "way", "open", "back", "much", "line", "nothing", "far", "work", "need", "new", "cases", "never", "federal", "spoke", "open", "back", "much", "line", "nothing", "far", "work", "need", "new", "cases", "never", "federal", "spoke", "open", "back", "much", "line", "nothing", "far", "work", "need", "new", "cases", "never".

RStudio interface showing the analysis of trigrams in the tweets corpus. The script in the editor includes the following code:

```

58 #trigram
59
60 install.packages("corpus")
61 library("corpus")
62 d = term_stats(tweets_corpus, ngrams=3)
63 # count is the number of appearances, and support is the number of documents containing the term
64 trigram_freq = d$order(d$count, decreasing = TRUE), -c(3)]
65
66 display.brewer.all(colorblindFriendly = TRUE)
67
68 install.packages("ggplot2")
69 library(ggplot2)
70
71 ggplot(trigram_freq[1:20], aes(x = reorder(term, count), y = count)) +
72   geom_bar(stat="identity", fill="violet", colour="green") + coord_flip() +
73   labs(x = "N-gram count", y = " ", title = "Most Frequent Tri-grams in Trump tweets") +
74   theme_minimal()
75
76

```

The Environment pane shows the following objects:

- d: 18620 obs. of 3 variables
- Posts: 676 obs. of 4 variables
- trigram_freq: 18620 obs. of 2 variables
- tweets_corpus: List of 676

The console shows the installation and loading of the 'corpus' and 'ggplot2' packages, and the execution of the ggplot2 code. The plot displays the most frequent tri-grams in Trump tweets as a horizontal bar chart with violet bars and green outlines. The x-axis represents the N-gram count, and the y-axis represents the count of each tri-gram.

RStudio interface showing the initial R script and environment. The script includes package installation, data loading, and sentiment analysis using the `syuzhet` package. The console shows the execution of the script, including the installation of `syuzhet` and the calculation of sentiment scores for the tweets dataset.

```

78 ## Sentiment analysis
79 install.packages("syuzhet")
80 library(syuzhet)
81
82
83 # Word-emotion association lexicon. A sentiment score is assigned to each line of text
84 # Try different options/dictionaries
85 tweets = Posts$TWEET
86 nrc.sent = get_sentiment(tweets, method="nrc"); head(nrc.sent); summary(nrc.sent)
87 bing.sent = get_sentiment(tweets, method="bing"); head(bing.sent); summary(bing.sent)
88 afinn.sent = get_sentiment(tweets, method="afinn"); head(afinn.sent); summary(afinn.sent)
89
90 # Let's use nrc for review sentiments
91 sent = get_nrc_sentiment(tweets)
92 count.sent = colSums(sent)
93
94 barplot(count.sent, las = 2, names.arg = names(count.sent), main = "Review sentiments",
95         ylab = "Count", col = RColorBrewer::brewer.pal(5, "Set2"))
96
97
98
99

```

The Environment pane shows the following data objects:

- `d`: 10620 obs. of 3 variables
- `Posts`: 676 obs. of 4 variables
- `sent`: 676 obs. of 10 variables
- `trigram.freq`: 10620 obs. of 2 variables
- `tweets_corpus`: List of 676

The Values pane shows the following data:

```

afinn.sent  int [1:676] 5 2 8 1 11 11 3 8 -6 -4 ...
bing.sent   int [1:676] 3 0 3 1 7 2 1 3 -3 0 ...
nrc.sent    num [1:676] 3 2 4 3 4 2 4 4 1 1 ...
tweets     chr [1:676] "China has been working very hard to contain...

```

RStudio interface showing the final R script and environment. The script includes package installation, data loading, and sentiment analysis using the `syuzhet` package. The console shows the execution of the script, including the installation of `syuzhet` and the calculation of sentiment scores for the tweets dataset. The Environment pane shows the updated data objects, and the Plots pane displays a bar chart titled "Review sentiments".

```

79 install.packages("syuzhet")
80 library(syuzhet)
81
82
83 # Word-emotion association lexicon. A sentiment score is assigned to each line of text
84 # Try different options/dictionaries
85 tweets = Posts$TWEET
86 nrc.sent = get_sentiment(tweets, method="nrc"); head(nrc.sent); summary(nrc.sent)
87 bing.sent = get_sentiment(tweets, method="bing"); head(bing.sent); summary(bing.sent)
88 afinn.sent = get_sentiment(tweets, method="afinn"); head(afinn.sent); summary(afinn.sent)
89
90 # Let's use nrc for review sentiments
91 sent = get_nrc_sentiment(tweets)
92 count.sent = colSums(sent)
93
94 barplot(count.sent, las = 2, names.arg = names(count.sent), main = "Review sentiments",
95         ylab = "Count", col = RColorBrewer::brewer.pal(5, "Set2"))
96
97
98
99

```

The Environment pane shows the following data objects:

- `d`: 10620 obs. of 3 variables
- `Posts`: 676 obs. of 4 variables
- `sent`: 676 obs. of 10 variables
- `trigram.freq`: 10620 obs. of 2 variables
- `tweets_corpus`: List of 676

The Values pane shows the following data:

```

afinn.sent  int [1:676] 5 2 8 1 11 11 3 8 -6 -4 ...
bing.sent   int [1:676] 3 0 3 1 7 2 1 3 -3 0 ...
count.sent  Named num [1:10] 348 511 239 455 369 ...
nrc.sent    num [1:676] 3 2 4 3 4 2 4 4 1 1 ...

```

The Plots pane displays a bar chart titled "Review sentiments". The x-axis represents the sentiment categories, and the y-axis represents the count. The bars are colored according to the `Set2` palette.

Sentiment	Count
anger	348
anticipation	511
disgust	239
fear	455
joy	369
sadness	348
surprise	239
trust	455
negative	348
positive	511