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by

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ABSTRACT

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The social media platform Twitter has become President Donald Trump's communication channel of choice, possibly contributing to his unexpected win of the presidency. This research examines the impact of Trump's distinctive tweeting style on the discourse of other U.S. politicians. Specifically, this study examines ten senators' tweets from the Obama era and the Trump era to see if other politicians are currently adopting President Trump's tweeting style. A simple random sample of tweets from the senators were taken from the two eras. The results showed some changes in the types of posts senators made. The results also revealed that Democrats' posts were more likely to mimic the Trump style. This suggests that President Trump has had an effect on political communication through Twitter. Additional findings are presented and implications for political communication discussed.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Twitter has become an important tool for politicians to spread their messages and connect to constituents. The microblogging site allows users to "interact in real-time" and converse with features such as tweets, which are short messages of up to 280 characters (previously 140), retweets, hashtags, polls, and live video (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). As of 2016, 320 million active users have taken to the site, making it one of the most popular social media sites (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). Social media like Twitter have become increasingly embedded in our daily lives, and it only makes sense that it would break out of the realm of leisure and into the professional world. There are many advantages to using social media (including Twitter) in business, specifically "its cost effectiveness, ability to reach targeted audiences quickly and generate more leads/sales" (Ciprian, 2012, p. 94). This is why it has become a crucial part of public relations strategy in every field, including politics.

There are many benefits for politicians who use social media in their public relations strategies. First, it allows them to set their agenda and distribute their message to a wider audience, as well as connect and engage consistently with their constituents (Straus, Glassman, Shogan, & Smelcer. 2013). It also allows "both citizens and politicians to participate in political discussions or to share political content publicly" (Stieglitz, Brockmann, Xuan, 2012, p. 3).

Scholars credit former President Barack Obama as the first politician who cemented social media's role in political communication. As Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner, and Welpe write, "The successful use of social media in the US presidential campaign of Barack Obama has established Twitter . . . and other social media as integral parts of the political campaign toolbox" (2010, p. 178). He laid the social media groundwork for another presidential candidate turned president, Donald Trump.

The election of President Donald Trump was one of the biggest upsets in modern election history. Trump was the epitome of an unconventional candidate. As Ken Fuchsman put it, "Trump "appealed to prejudices and stereotypes, was uninformed on the details of policy, had a wild disregard for facts, and made… statements about most anyone who criticized him" (2017, p. 292). Trump deviated from the norms of presidential candidate behavior, and ran as a political outsider, causing pundits to predict his failure. But he won the election against Hillary Clinton, a seasoned politician, and some of Trump's success could possibly be attributed to his social media use, specifically his Twitter account.

According to Peter L. Francia, "several postelection analyses have pointed to Trump's use of social media as a factor in his surprising victory" (2017, p. 5). He took advantage of "Twitter (140-character social network), [which] was often at the center of [his] ability to generate free media" (2017, p. 2). His tweets were outspoken and without filter, "often deliberately designed to entice journalists with controversial statements intended to provoke conflict with an opponent" (2017, p. 6). In their research, linguists Jack Grieve and Isobelle Cooke further defined what they found to be Trump's style: tweets

expressing opinion, prediction, advice, promotion, and critique. And he has continued tweeting in the same way since entering office.

Francia concludes that President Trump's "innovative use of social media . . . could have far-reaching consequences in transforming the way future candidates wage presidential campaigns" (2017, p. 2). Expanding upon that, a question that could be asked is, did Trump change how politicians in office use Twitter because of his success? This study examines this possibility by studying politicians before and after President Trump's assumption to office.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Internet in Politics

Use of social media in politics cannot be discussed without exploring how the Internet changed communication in political campaigns. According to scholars, the reasons why the Internet worked in political campaigning early on are the same reasons why social media works today. With the Internet, candidates could speak directly to voters, avoid the filter of the press, and do so rather inexpensively (Cornfield, 2005). Additionally, the Internet facilitated two-way communication between the candidate and the public, "allowing members of [the] campaign audience to send back comments, dollars, subscription addresses, and pledges of volunteer time" (Cornfield, 2005). Being able to directly communicate with his supporters and avoid the press are reasons why Trump gravitated toward using Twitter as one of his few sources of communication.

Howard Dean, former Vermont governor and Democratic candidate for president, was one of the first political candidates who used the Internet to his advantage, "shatter[ing] previous fund-raising records, [winning] numerous key endorsements, and [managing] a strong plurality in the polls in the months leading up to the Iowa caucuses" (Hindman, 2005, p. 121). Using websites like Meetup.com (a site used to organize meetings for people with similar interests) and blogs, Dean, strapped for cash, was able to gain a large following online from those who helped fund his 2004 presidential campaign bid (Justice, 2003). Key innovations that scholars took away from the Dean campaign's Internet usage included

"news-pegged fundraising appeals," "net-organized local gatherings," "blogging," "online referenda," and decentralized decision-making" (Cornfield, 2005). Although he was defeated in his race, Dean changed political communication and "cut a permanent path into politics for outsiders" (Justice, 2003). Using unconventional methods of communication also aided Trump, who was widely considered in outsider in his race in 2016.

<u>2.2 The Introduction of Social Media to Presidential Campaigns</u>

Former President Barack Obama, widely known as the "social media president," was the first to solidify social media's presence in political communication. It is important to look at how he leveraged social media, and established it for future presidential candidates like Trump.

In their article "From Networked Nominee to Networked Nation," Derrick L. Cogburn and Atima K. Espinoza-Vasquez researched the Obama campaign's social media efforts and asked some key questions: 1. "What techniques allowed the Obama campaign to translate online activity to on-the-ground activism?" and 2. "Did the Obama campaign facilitate the development of an ongoing social movement that will influence his administration and governance?" (2021, p. 189). They collected and analyzed the data of several of the Obama campaign's social media accounts such as the campaign's Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, as well as the campaign website and iPhone app.

Through their analysis, they found that the campaign translated online activity into "on-the-ground activism" by not only disseminating information through channels like social media, but using them "as a means to capture data about their participants and to build a geographically distributed virtual community" (2012, p. 200). The Obama '08 campaign collected information such as email addresses and zip codes from supporters

which created a "direct line" where the campaign could contact these supporters and organize regional actions and events (2012, p. 200). Another strategy of the Obama '08 campaign was the use of social media to "personalize the candidate and the campaign, to embrace individual supporters using the same technologies, and to make them feel a part of the campaign" (2012, p. 201). They kept supporters updated using "Facebook to organize, Twitter to send news, and YouTube to communicate" (2012, p. 201). Then-candidate Obama was also viewed as adept with social media and technologically savvy, as he used the social media accounts himself and was constantly on his Blackberry (2012). This strategy of personalization of social media and inclusiveness is one we also see reflected in the Trump '16 campaign.

Additionally, Cogburn and Vasquez studied the Obama administration to see if his social media and Web 2.0 strategies carried over into his presidency. They found the administration was taking advantage of the tools that helped them get to the presidency, for example mobilizing activists to start discussions about healthcare in advance of the healthcare debate and the eventual passage of the Affordable Care Act (2012). The administration also kept using social media accounts to have "access to public opinion on national issues" (2012, p. 208). President Trump still uses Twitter in his administration, in much of the same way, by gauging political opinion and connecting to supporters.

President Obama's social media use increased when he ran for reelection in 2012, employing more social media platforms, and posting more. In "How the Presidential Candidates Use the Web and Social Media," the Pew Research Center found that at the time of their research (June 4-17, 2012), Obama's campaign used nine different platforms: Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Google+, Pinterest, Tumblr, Flickr, Spotify and two

accounts on Twitter (@BarackObama and @Obama2012)" (2012). The Romney campaign only used five: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google+, and Flickr. This is a departure from President Trump's social media usage, because he mainly uses one platform.

The Obama campaign also posted on their social media accounts almost four times more than the Romney campaign. The disparity is most apparent when looking at the two campaigns' Twitter usage. The Obama campaign tweeted on average 29 times a day for both Twitter accounts, while the Romney campaign averaged one tweet a day (2012). The Obama campaign also had the advantage of having a large following on social media. Barack Obama's Twitter account had over 21 million followers, while Mitt Romney's account only had about 1.6 million followers.

Obama benefited from the social media infrastructure he built during the 2008 Presidential Campaign, and from the continued use of social media through his presidency. President Trump would later benefit from this framework in the 2016 Presidential Campaign.

<u>2.3 Trump-Style: The 2016 Presidential Campaign</u>

As mentioned before, President Trump's win in 2016 has been attributed by some to his social media usage, specifically Twitter. Before Trump, social media and new technology seemed to be strengths the Democratic Party had, but Trump demonstrated that he was also adept at using the platform to his advantage.

Looking back, one of President Obama's keys to success during the 2012 Presidential Campaign was the volume of social media posts his campaign sent out. Trump seemed to have adopted this strategy in his own social media usage during the 2016 Presidential Campaign. In the period between his win of the Republican Presidential

Nomination (July 20, 2017) and his Inauguration (January 21, 2017), President Trump tweeted 1,837 times, averaging out to about 10 tweets per day (Galucci, 2017). The almost constant tweeting allowed Donald Trump to spread his campaign messages to wider audiences. Another aspect of his Twitter strategy that helped was the authenticity of the content.

While social media has become increasingly professionalized for public figures, a large part of the tweets crafted by Donald Trump and his campaign were not stylized, but seemingly spontaneous and lacking refinement. In "Twitter as Arena for the Authentic Outsider," Gunn Enli defined the characteristics and stylistic elements of President Trump's tweets that made them "Trumpian," such as "using capital letters . . . all-caps and exclamation marks" (2017, p. 58). He also looked for "authenticity markers" or "elements displaying a kind of backstage or a passionate side of the candidate" (2017, p. 58). Enli then analyzed all the tweets issued by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump during the 2016 presidential campaign.

He found that 55% of all of candidate Trump's tweets were "unconventional" and seemingly authentic. Only 13% of Hillary Clinton's tweets could be categorized as unconventional (2017, p. 56). Clinton did tweet "spontaneous tweets" seemingly following Trump's lead, like the "Delete Your Account" tweet, which garnered over 500,000 retweets on Twitter (2017, p. 56). Her action suggests that this is an early example of politicians copying him.

Studies suggest that the public in general looks for authenticity when it analyzes candidates for office. When candidates "are candid and unscripted, [voters] see them more positively, and are more likely to listen and learn from them" (Margaretten & Gaber, 2012,

p. 333). Twitter in its very nature usually brings about authenticity, because it is an environment that provides for content that is usually "not scripted or rehearsed but fresh and spontaneous" (2012, p. 333). Other studies have identified characteristics present in President Trump's Twitter feed that go beyond authenticity.

In "Stylistic Variation in the @realDonaldTrump Twitter Account," Jack Grieve and Isobelle Clarke defined President Trump's tweet style by finding five stylistic dimensions or categories that were recurring themes in President Trump's Twitter: opinion, prediction, advice, promotion, and critique (2017).

The opinion category referred to tweets "contain[ing] overt claims related to the judgments and beliefs of the poster on a wide range of topics, including political and social issues" (2017). An example of a tweet from President Trump scoring positively in this dimension is, "As everybody knows, but the haters & losers refuse to acknowledge, I do not wear a "wig." My hair may not be perfect but it's mine" (2017). The prediction category included tweets expressing "claims about plans, upcoming events, and the future state of the world and Trump's role in it" (2017). An example of a tweet scoring positively in this category is, "They will soon be calling me MR. BREXIT!" (2017). The advice category contained tweets that "[gave] counsel, guidance, or instruction" (2017). An example of an advice tweet from President Trump is "Success tip: See yourself as victorious. This will focus you in the right direction. Apply your skills and talent–and be tenacious" (2017). The promotion category comprised of tweets that "publicise[d] Trump and his campaign" (2017). An example of a promotional tweet from Trump is "Join me live--now in Las Vegas, Nevada! We will MAKE AMERICA SAFE & GREAT AGAIN! #VoteTrumpNV #NevadaCaucus https://t.co/IW9s9noxDT" (2017). The last category Grieve and Cooke

identified was critique, where tweets "contain[ed] criticism of various people and policies" (2017). An example of a tweet that would fall into that category is, "Our GDP has been growing less than 2% for the last 5 years. ObamaCare will slow us down even more. Has to be repealed" (2017). These categories show clear patterns in President Trump's tweeting style.

Since Trump's Twitter strategy proved successful for him, the question that could be posed now is, "Seeing the success of President Donald Trump, are other politicians adopting Trump's tweeting style?" There is a gap in the literature pertaining to that question. This study will respond to that gap.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Questions

This study answers four research questions in order to ascertain whether or not President Trump has had an effect on politicians' tweeting habits, and if there is a difference between parties:

> *RQ 1: Was there an increase in Trump-style tweets overall in the Trump era compared to the Obama era?*
>
> *RQ 2: Was there an increase in Trump-style tweets from Democratic senators in the Trump era compared to the Obama era?*
>
> *RQ 3: Was there an increase in Trump-style tweets from Republican senators in the Trump era compared to the Obama era?*
>
> *RQ 4: Did Democrats or Republicans produce more Trump-style tweets during the Trump era?*

3.2 Selection of Politicians

Five Democrats and five Republicans were chosen for this study. To be selected, the politicians had to meet the criteria below:

- Must have served in the United States Senate from January 20, 2014 to January 20, 2015 (the Obama Era), and from January 20, 2017 to January 20, 2018 (the Trump Era).

- Must have had an active Twitter account from January 20, 2014 to January 20, 2015, and January 20, 2017 to January 20, 2018.

- Their Twitter account clearly identified them (no use of pseudonyms), and served as the official accounts for the senators and their office.

The qualifying senators were separated into political parties, and then numbered. Senators who identified as Independents were grouped with the party they caucused with (Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and Sen. Angus King (I-ME) both caucus with Democrats, so they were put in the list of Democratic senators). Forty-one Democrats and 42 Republicans met the criteria. Using Google's random number generator, five numbers were chosen for each list of Democratic and Republican senators. The corresponding senators were then selected.

The Democrats chosen for this study were Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR), Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), and Sen. Bob Casey (D-PA). The Republicans chosen for this study were Sen. Deb Fischer (R-NE), Sen. Jeff Flake (R-AZ), Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH), Sen. Tim Scott (R-SC), and Sen. John Barrasso (R-WY). The Twitter accounts studied were @SenatorCantwell, @SenBobCasey, @amyklobuchar, @SenWarren, @RonWyden, @SenJohnBarrasso, @SenatorFischer, @JeffFlake, @senrobportman, and @SenatorTimScott.

3.3 Data Collection

This study compared the tweets of each U.S. senator from January 20, 2014 to January 20, 2015, the Obama Era, and January 20, 2017 to January 20, 2018, the Trump Era. The time period constituting the Obama Era in this study was chosen because President Donald Trump had not officially entered politics yet and former President Barack Obama

held the office of the presidency. The time period constituting the Trump Era in this study was chosen because it was the first year President Trump served in the office. The tweets from the Obama Era served as the control for the study.

Because the sheer volume of tweets for each senator was so large, the sample of tweets studied for each senator came from 30 randomly generated dates, the same for each era. The dates selected were January 15th, February 2nd, February 12th, February 22nd, March 19th, April 20th, April 23rd, May 3rd, May 7th, May 8th, May 30th, June 16th, June 25th, July 3rd, July 4th, July 17th, August 9th,, August 11th, August 19th, August 22nd, September 8th, September 28th, October 2nd, October 9th, October 29th, November 10th, November 18th, December 13th, December 18th, and December 23rd. All tweets from each day were analyzed.

3.4 Categorization of Tweets

Using the stylistic dimensions of opinion, prediction, advice, promotion and critique found by Grieve and Cooke (2017) in President Trump's Twitter account, each tweet was categorized based on the criteria they used to define each category:

- Opinion: "...tending to contain overt claims related to the judgments and beliefs of the poster on a wide range of topics, including political and social issues" (2017).

- Prediction: "...tending to contain claims about plans, upcoming events, and the future state of the world and Trump's role in it" (2017). For this dimension, the tweets put in this category will mention the senator's role in "upcoming events and the future state of the world" (2017).

- Advice: "...tending to give counsel, guidance, or instruction" (2017).

- Promotion: "...tending to publicize Trump and his campaign" (2017). For this dimension, the tweets put in this category will publicize the senator and the work he or she does, including public appearances, legislative work, speeches, television appearances, district tours, and town halls with constituents.

- Critique: "...tending to contain criticism of various people and policies" (2017).

Grieve and Cooke used a computer program to determine the dimensions of President Trump's Twitter account and which tweets fell into each dimension. The tweets in this study were categorized manually. An intercoder reliability test was performed by a volunteer to test the categorization method. About 89% of the content categorized by the volunteer matched the categorization in this study.

3.5 Analysis

To compare and determine if the senators were utilizing President Trump's tweeting style, the tweets for each senator during both eras were totaled. The percentage of tweets expressing each dimension was calculated by dividing the number of tweets expressing the dimension by the total number of tweets and multiplying by 100. Additionally, all the tweets expressing one of the dimensions were totaled for each senator, for each party, and for the group as a whole. The tweets were then divided by the number of tweets for both eras then multiplied by 100. The percentages from each era were then compared.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The method used in this study generated 1,340 tweets, 441 in the Obama Era and 899 in the Trump Era. The Democratic senators produced 692 tweets, 190 in the Obama Era and 502 in the Trump Era. The Republican senators produced 648 tweets, 251 in the Obama Era and 387 in the Trump Era. Overall, 252 tweets were classified as opinion, 12 were classified as prediction, 41 were classified as advice, 552 were classified as promotion, and 166 were classified as critique.

RQ 1: Was there an increase in Trump-style tweets overall in the Trump Era compared to the Obama Era?

The Trump Era did experience an increase in tweets falling into any of the five categories in comparison to the Obama Era. Table 4.1 compares the number of tweets fitting into each category (opinion, prediction, advice, promotion, and critique) for each era, and the total number of tweets from each era falling into any of the categories.

Table 4.1: Senators' Tweets Overall

Categories	Obama Era	Trump Era	Total
Opinion	75	177	252
Prediction	2	10	12
Advice	9	32	41
Promotion	204	348	552
Critique	19	148	166
Total	309/441	715/899	1,024/1,340

In the Obama Era, 70.0% of the tweets studied exhibited one of the five characteristics. Promotional tweets were the most prevalent, making 46.3% of all the tweets studied in the era. Opinion tweets were the second most prevalent, constituting 17% of all the tweets studied from that time period. Critical tweets were the third most prevalent, making up 4.3% of all the tweets in the era. Advice tweets were the fourth most prevalent, with 2.0% of all the tweets studied in the era expressing this characteristic. Prediction tweets were the least frequent, only making up .5% of all the tweets studied in the era.

The number of tweets falling into any of the five categories increased to 79.5% in the Trump Era. Promotional tweets once again made up the largest portion of tweets exhibiting one of the five characteristics, making up 38.7% of all the tweets studied from the era. Opinion tweets made up the second largest portion, constituting 19.7% of all tweets studied from the time period. Critical tweets were the third most prevalent, making up 16.5% of the tweets studied. Advice tweets were the fourth most prevalent, constituting 3.6% of all the tweets from the time period. Prediction tweets were again the least prevalent, making up 1.1% of all the tweets studied from the era.

A chi-square test was performed on the overall data to determine if the changes in the proportions of tweets in the five categories had changed significantly. The changes were significant, χ^2 (4, $N = 1023$) = 42.43, $p < .05$.

RQ 2: Was there an increase in Trump-style tweets from Democratic senators in the Trump Era compared to the Obama Era?

The Trump Era did exhibit an overall increase in tweets fitting into the five categories compared to the Obama Era for the Democratic senators. Table 4.2 displays the number of tweets from the Democratic senators studied fitting into each category (opinion,

prediction, advice, promotion, and critique) for each era, and the total number of tweets from each era falling into any of the categories.

Table 4.2 Democratic Senators' Tweets

Categories	Obama Era Tweets	Trump Era Tweets	Total
Opinion	48	90	138
Prediction	1	8	9
Advice	6	19	25
Promotion	69	154	223
Critique	4	136	140
Total	128/190	407/502	535/692

In the Obama Era, the portion of tweets from the Democratic senators falling into any of the categories was 67.4%. Promotional tweets made up the largest portion, constituting 36.3% of the tweets studied. Opinion tweets were the second most frequent, with 25.3% of the tweets studied falling into that category. In a departure from the overall results, advice tweets were the third most frequent, and critical tweets were the fourth most frequent, making up 3.2% and 2.1% of tweets studied, respectively. Prediction tweets once again made up the smallest portion, constituting .5% of the tweets studied.

The percentage of tweets falling into any of the five categories increased to 81.1% in the Trump Era. Promotional tweets once again made up the largest portion, constituting 30.7% of the tweets studied in this era. Straying from the overall results and the results from the Obama Era, critical tweets made up the second largest portion of tweets for the Democratic senators in the Trump Era, with 27.1% of tweets studied. Opinion and advice were the third and fourth most prevalent categories of tweets, making up 17.9% and 3.8% of the tweets studied in that era. Prediction tweets were the least prevalent again, only constituting 1.6% of all the tweets studied.

A chi-square test was performed on the data from the Democratic senators to determine if the changes in the proportions of tweets in the five categories had changed significantly. The changes were significant, χ^2 (4, $N = 535$) = 49.92, $p < .05$.

RQ 3: Was there an increase in Trump-style tweets from Republican senators in the Trump Era compared to the Obama Era?

There was an overall increase in tweets fitting into the categories that characterize President Trump's Twitter, but the increase was not consistent for every category across the two eras. Table 4.3 shows the number of tweets from the Democratic senators studied fitting into each category (opinion, prediction, advice, promotion, and critique) for each era, and the total amount of tweets from each era falling into any of the categories.

Table 4.3 Republican Senators' Tweets

Categories	Obama Era Tweets	Trump Era Tweets	Total
Opinion	27	87	114
Prediction	1	2	3
Advice	3	13	16
Promotion	135	194	329
Critique	15	12	27
Total	181/251	308/397	489/648

In the Obama Era, 72.1% of the tweets fell into one of the categories. Similar to the data overall, promotional tweets and opinion tweets made up the largest and second largest portions of tweets, constituting 53.8% and 10.8% of the tweets, respectively. Critical tweets made up the third largest portion, with 6% of all the tweets for the era. Advice tweets constituted the fourth largest category with 1.2% of the tweets. Prediction tweets were the least frequent only making up.4% of all the tweets studied.

The number of Trump-style tweets increased to 77.6% in the Trump Era for Republicans. Promotional tweets were the largest portion, making up 48.9% of the tweets studied. Opinion tweets were the second-largest, making up 21.9% of the data. Advice tweets made up the third-largest portion, with 3.3% of the data. Critical tweets made up the fourth-largest portion, constituting 3% of the tweets studied. Prediction tweets were the least frequent, similar to the Obama Era, only making up .5% of the tweets studied for the Republicans.

A chi-square test was performed on the overall data to determine if the changes in the proportions of tweets in the five categories had changed significantly. The changes were significant, χ^2 (4, $N = 489$) = 17.26, $p < .05$.

RQ 4: Did Democrats or Republicans produce more Trump-style tweets during the

Trump Era?

Democrats produced more Trump-style tweets than Republicans in the Trump Era. Comparing the raw numbers, Democrats tweeted 407 Trump-style tweets in the Trump Era, while Republicans tweeted 308. Percentage-wise, a larger proportion of tweets from the Democrats followed Trump's style, 81.1%. Republicans only had 77.6% of tweets that followed the Trump style.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The results of the study showed that the senators did increase the number of Trump-style tweets they posted based on the five categories from Grieve and Cooke's study.

The whole group more than doubled the amount of tweets falling into one of the five categories in the Trump Era compared to the Obama Era. Democrats tripled the amount of tweets that fit into the categories, while Republicans tweeted 70.2% more. One could infer that the rise in these tweets is due to President Trump's influence. As mentioned before, part of his success can be credited to his savvy Twitter usage. The senators could have adopted his Twitter habits to achieve their own success, whether it be for publicity or exposure. But there are specific trends in the data that reveal that President Trump's influence might not be the sole reason for the increase.

5.1 Promotional Tweets

The promotion category was the largest category for the senators overall, as well as for the Democratic and Republican senators. These posts publicized the senator and their work, including public appearances, legislative work, speeches, town halls with constituents, and television appearances. The group of senators as a whole posted 70.6% more promotional tweets in the Trump Era than the Obama Era. Democrats doubled their amount of promotional tweets in the Trump Era than the Obama Era. Republicans posted more promotional tweets as well, tweeting 43.7% more. This could mean the senators

were influenced by President Trump's manner of tweeting promotional tweets. But another trend in the data challenges that conclusion.

Something to take into account regarding the promotion category for the group as a whole, and for Democrats and Republicans, is that the category was consistently the largest in the Obama Era as well. About 46% of the tweets in the Obama Era for both parties were promotional: more specifically, 36% of tweets for the Democrats and 54% of tweets for the Republicans.

Incidences of promotional tweets increased in the Trump Era, but that was true for almost every other category in each group. There are a couple of explanations that could be considered, one being that these senators might have been influenced by President Trump. Another could be that the increase is correlated to the rise in popularity of Twitter since the Obama Era. Twitter has grown substantially since 2014, meaning more of the senators' target audience, including their constituents, are using the platform, making Twitter a prime tool to reach their audience. An additional explanation could be that promotional tweets may be easier to tweet. They do not require much knowledge or effort compared to an opinion tweet or critique. This means that the increase in promotional tweets could possibly be a phenomenon not solely rising from President Trump's influence.

5.2 Critical Tweets

The most interesting points in the data come from the critique category. The number of tweets in each dimension increased for the senators as a whole. This is also the same in the data from the Democrats. But Republicans experienced a 20% decrease in critical tweets, the only percentage decrease to occur in all the data. If every other group experienced increases in every category, why did Republicans decrease in this one?

One explanation is the change of the political party in the White House. President Barack Obama, a Democrat, gave Republicans material to criticize because they were of opposite parties. When President Trump, a Republican, entered office, the Republican senators may have decreased their critical tweets because they supported and/or agreed with the president. This is also evident in the increase in critical tweets for the Democrats. The biggest percentage increase in the data set occurred across the critique category for the Democrats. Critical tweets increased by 3300% from the Obama Era to the Trump Era. This could be attributed to the change from a Democratic president in Barack Obama to a Republican one in Donald Trump. Democrats had more to criticize because President Trump has been supporting policies that they disagreed with. The president could have emboldened Democrats to be far more active in posting critical tweets because of the large number of critical tweets he directs towards them.

5.3 Opinion Tweets

Opinion tweets grew consistently across every group studied. Overall, the number of opinion tweets from the senators doubled. Democrats increased their number of opinion tweets by 87.5%. Republicans more than tripled their number. An explanation for this increase could be that these senators were influenced by Trump's manner of tweeting opinionated tweets. As mentioned before, the president is known for being outspoken and without filter in his tweets, which possibly won him the presidency. One might wonder why this category is not the largest category if politicians are copying Trump's style.

5.4 Prediction and Advice Tweets

The raw numbers for these categories show very small incidences of these types of tweets occurring in both the Obama Era and the Trump Era, but the percentage increases

for both the categories are very large across the data. Within the entire group, prediction tweets quintupled, and advice tweets more than tripled. Democrats increased their prediction tweets by 700% and their advice tweets more than tripled. Republicans doubled their prediction tweets and quadrupled their advice tweets. The incidences of these tweets occurring are very low, however, which skews the data. For example, Republicans doubled their prediction tweets, but only because they increased their prediction tweets from one in the Obama Era to two in the Trump Era. This also draws into question President Trump's influence. If he was truly influencing senators to tweet more like him, these categories might have higher numbers in the Trump Era.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Twitter has become a useful resource for politicians to use in their public relations strategies. Reaching your constituents can be as easy as tapping a button. President Donald Trump has taken advantage of the platform, using it in his specific style, which other politicians may be adopting. This study found that politicians were increasingly posting more tweets exhibiting opinion, prediction, advice, promotion, and critique—dimensions that make up Trump's style. This study also found that Democrats, rather than Republicans, were tweeting more like Trump. However, the research is inconclusive because of several factors. The rise in popularity of Twitter may have contributed to the increases recorded in the data. In addition, the change from a Democratic president to a Republican president may also be a reason why the number of tweets exhibiting characteristics like promotion, critique, and opinion have increased. Future studies can apply these methods to further the research to see if President Trump's influence has had a lasting effect on political communication. An example of a possible study that could be performed to test his influence would be to repeat the methods discussed in this paper, but in the era of Trump's Democratic successor. This will allow us to see if the amount of tweets falling into any of the dimensions increases, and if Republicans increase their opinionated and critical tweets. Tests of Trump's influence could also be performed with members of the U.S. House of Representatives.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

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