

ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA OF THE OBAMA AND ROMNEY
CAMPAIGNS IN THE 2012 ELECTION

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the School of Journalism and Communication
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Science

June 2014

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Title: Analysis of the Social Media of the Obama and Romney Campaigns in the 2012 Election

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Degree awarded June 2014

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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June 2014

Title: Analysis of the Social Media of the Obama and Romney Campaigns in the 2012 Election

This study is a quantitative content analysis of the Facebook and Twitter communication of the Obama and Romney campaigns on seven dates within the 30 days prior to the 2012 presidential election. Specific rhetorical techniques are explored for similarities or differences in how these techniques have appeared in political communication in legacy media and how they are expressed in social media. Repetition, collective language, self-reference language and Benoit's functions of attack, acclaim and defend are examined. Additionally, the study identified what topics each candidate emphasized in their social media communication.

Findings show that both candidates used repetition to reinforce key messages. The use of attacks, acclaims and defenses bore some similarities to uses in legacy media. However, the primary focuses by both candidates centered on motivating citizens to show support for the candidate and get out the vote. Few policy issues appeared in the communication of either candidate.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Professor Donna Z. Davis, Ph.D., for her inspiration and guidance throughout graduate school and in the preparation of this manuscript. Her insight and enthusiasm for this project have been invaluable. I'd also like to thank my other esteemed committee members, Kim Sheehan, Ph.D., and Kelli Matthews, for their support and expertise in helping shape this work. I must thank Al Stavitsky, Ph.D., through whom I first learned about the University of Oregon's Strategic Communications master's degree program, and who encouraged me from the start. Deep gratitude goes to my husband, Steve Hillinger, for his consistent support, including proofreading every page I've written throughout graduate school. Appreciation goes to my sister, Bonnie J. Buratti, Ph.D, for her sage advice and lifelong example of embracing the quest for knowledge. Finally, thanks to my daughter, Sierra Hillinger, for her encouragement and with whom I shared the wonderful experience of attending the University of Oregon at the same time.

Dedicated to my late father, Ralph J. Buratti, and my mother, Hildegarde M. Buratti

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Presidents and presidential candidates are motivated and emboldened to use the most current media. From Franklin D. Roosevelt's radio fireside chats in the 1930's and 1940's, to the Kennedy-Nixon debate in 1960, to Obama's pioneering use of Facebook as a campaign tool in 2008 (Vergeer, 2013), the power of the office and those who aspire to it have generated early use of every new media.

The rule of traditional media as the first source of news and information is eroding. By 2012, social media had become a mainstay of American political engagement. A full 60% of adult Americans used Facebook or Twitter. Of those, over 65% did some civic or political activity through social media (Rainie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady & Verba, 2012). Social media has become a vital part of political campaigns, both to reach out to the voter and to help set agendas. Among the 18-29 group 44% liked or promoted political material. More than a third in every age group encouraged others to vote (Rainie et al., 2012). These are the prospective evangelists for a candidate, the citizen army that sparks the exponential growth of a candidate's message with a single click.

Demonstrating the trend, President Obama first officially announced his candidacy for re-election on Facebook (Turnball, 2011). The 2012 election season set new records for tweets surrounding a U.S. political event with 31.7 million political tweets. Election Day 2012 became the most tweeted about event in U.S. political history with over 20 million tweets on November 6, 2012 alone (Finn, 2012). Barack Obama's victory tweet, captioned, "Four more years," was the most retweeted tweet to that point in time with nearly 800,000 retweets by 8:16 PM on Election Day (McIntyre, 2012).

The opinions of family and friends through interpersonal communication now ranks as the most important source for political news (Jaspersen & Yun, 2007), making social media a highly desirable way to interact with potential voters. Individuals who use the Internet for information demonstrate greater interpersonal trust and higher civic engagement (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001) and participation in social networks leads to a lower level of political cynicism (Hanson, Haridakis, Cunningham, Sharma, & Ponder, 2010). Those who use Facebook and Twitter for information purposes are more likely to engage in offline political participation as well as online participation (Zhang, Seltzer & Bichard, 2013).

Democrats and liberals, the more educated, younger and higher income people are more likely to use social media. More women use social media as well, with 75% of women active on social media compared to 63% of men (Rainie et al., 2012). The ability to reach women through Facebook became a vital objective for each campaign in 2012, as women were regarded as swing voters (Seelye, 2012).

The popular press reported extensively both in 2008 and in 2012 on the groundbreaking use of Facebook by the Obama campaign in both election cycles. News reports documented the means by which Obama transformed campaigning with fundraising and voter turnout efforts through massive data capture using the Facebook platform (Scherer, 2012, Timberg & Gardner, 2012).

The study of political communication is an evolutionary field, beginning with the rhetorical analysis of candidate speeches to television commercials to campaign websites to YouTube and social media platforms. Each phase builds upon prior literature and commonalities regardless of platform have been identified. Yet academic research has

only recently turned its attention to content analyses on how candidates execute their messaging through social media (Bronstein, 2013, Groshek & Al-Rawi, 2013, Steffens & Haslam, 2013).

This project entails a quantitative content analysis of the social media communication on Facebook and Twitter of the Obama and Romney campaigns on seven key dates in the 30 days prior to the election when the candidates made their final push to Election Day. The isolation of communication specific to the final weeks of the campaign differentiates the study from other scholarly work which has focused on social media campaign communication by candidates only in the primary election (Adams & McCorkingdale, 2013, Conway, Kenski & Wang, 2013, Hong & Nadler, 2012), or the extended period of the primary season through Election Day (Bronstein, 2013, Groshek and Al-Rawi, 2013).

Collective language, self-reference language and types of rhetorical functions are examined to discover if patterns established for winning and losing candidates in traditional media are also present in social media in the final days before the presidential election. Key words are analyzed to discover how the rhetoric of repetition shaped the messaging of the campaigns. Topics emphasized by each campaign and their level of emphasis in this final countdown period are compared and contrasted.

As the means for communicating to citizens shifts to social media, the study of how presidential campaigns utilize social media is increasingly important. This study contributes to the study of political rhetoric in the rapidly changing landscape of new media platforms.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Rhetoric forms the framework for this research project. The basis of inquiry is grounded in the tools of rhetoric as historically expressed and documented in political communication through legacy communication mediums. Elements of political rhetoric are explored for their presence in the social media communication of the two 2012 presidential candidates.

This research project draws first on the large body of work that has analyzed presidential campaign messaging in traditional media. Strategic campaign messaging, content analysis studies of candidate websites, web videos and speechmaking add to the literary review of projects specific to political campaigning and use of rhetorical tools in social media.

The functions of attack, acclaim and defend, documented by Benoit (1999, 2001) in decades of television advertising, are analyzed for their presence in social media political communication. Collective language in the form of words that refer to a group, and self-reference language that centers on the candidate, is identified for their salience on the candidates' Facebook and Twitter platforms.

This study seeks to identify differences and similarities in how these rhetorical tools were used on Facebook and Twitter by the presidential candidates in the final phase of the 2012 campaign. The analysis will provide additional insight into the question of whether a new type of political communication is developing in social media, or if historical rhetorical strategies from legacy media are simply repeated on these new platforms.

Classical Rhetoric and Political Communication

Political communication is rooted in classical rhetoric as described by Aristotle, who envisioned three distinct segments of rhetoric: ethos, pathos, and logos. These three phases form the basis of effective rhetoric apparent in contemporary discourse.

Ethos describes the ethical and moral center of the speaker and determines how the audience perceives their character and credibility (Gill, 1984). Pathos embodies the emotional style of the communication and how it impacts the audience through emotional appeal (Gill, 1984). Aristotle emphasized the importance of utilizing emotion as a means of persuasion (Yack, 2006), and this key technique is pervasive throughout political rhetoric. Logos represents the logic that is both demonstrative and convincing. In political communication logos appears through the presentation of statistics and facts (Garver, 2009).

Research has identified specific language that appears regularly throughout campaigns. Biblical references, metaphors, folk stories, rhyme and repetition all characterize political communication. References to shared values, a group's cultural and historical identity and the candidate's own personal experience as representative of the national story help create an aura of charisma. Specific words such as sweat, hand, heart, journey, path, dream, see, listen and imagine evoke an emotional response in the listener and contribute to the perception of a charismatic persona (Emrich, Brower, Felman & Garland, 2001).

Inclusive language, reflected in the use of words such as "we," "us" and "our" (Fiol, Harris & House, 1999) further distinguishes charismatic leaders (Emrich et al., 2001). Sensory and image-based words in political speech are more effective than words

that appeal only to the intellect. Short aspirational words and sentences and words that contain an emotional quality such as “freedom,” “fairness” and “opportunity” connect with voters (Luntz, 2007).

The importance of the language of shared identity as a means by which candidates engage with the populace and build social identity was reinforced in a study of the campaign speeches in 43 Australian Federal elections since independence from Britain in 1901 (Steffens & Haslam 2013). In this analysis of campaign speeches, the number of total words in the speech was divided by the number of occurrences of the personal pronouns of “I” or “me” and the collective pronouns of “we” and “us.” Winning candidates used 61% more references to “we” and “us” and used these collective pronouns more frequently than losing candidates. This pattern appeared in 80% of all elections (Steffens & Haslam 2013). Losing candidates used more references to themselves, (Steffens & Haslam 2013) specifically using the nine self-reference words, “I,” “I’d,” “I’ll,” “I’m,” “I’ve,” “me,” “mine,” “my” and “myself” (Lowry & Naser, 2010) with greater frequency.

Use of the second-person pronoun of “you” represents the rhetorical technique of direct-address. Through this technique, the audience is directly called upon (Fahnestock, 2011). Second-person use directly reaches out to the reader or listener, and is frequently used in more informal communication. Second-person pronoun use is common in marketing platforms to move the audience to action (Fahnestock, 2011). In the casual and temporal platforms of social media, political campaigns may have an increased presence of direct-address as part of their communication efforts to create affinity with the candidate.

In structuring persuasive communication, repetition of key words and phrases is a frequent rhetorical tool. Specific forms of repetition include repeating the same words at the beginning of successive sentences, repeating the endings of successive sentences, repeating words both at the beginning and end of sentences and using the same word in the last clause of a sentence and at the beginning of the next (Keith & Lundberg, 2008).

In its simplest form, repeating the same message over time reinforces the perception of the speaker or candidate in the audience's mind, as President George W. Bush demonstrated with his consistent message of winning the war on terror in the 2004 presidential campaign (Lutz, 2007). Terrorism and the war in Iraq consumed nearly half of the content of Bush's campaign speeches (Campbell, 2005). Contemporary presidential campaigns emphasize repetition, selecting themes most likely to benefit the candidate and bind the issue and the candidate together in the voter's perception. Frequency of message is more powerful than how recently the message has been received (Claibourn, 2008).

Political Communication in Traditional Electronic Media

In an analysis of presidential campaign television advertisements from 1952-2000, three themes were identified: acclaiming, attacking and defending (Benoit, 1999, 2001). Attacks contain negative remarks. Acclaims include self-praise or positive remarks, and defenses focus on image repair. Acclaims may put forth policy positions that tout past accomplishments or promise future actions that benefit voters. Emphasizing positive character traits is another form of acclaim positioning. Similarly, attack positions

may include criticism of the opponent's policies, past deeds, or character traits (Benoit, 1999). Defenses respond to an earlier attack on the candidate (Benoit, 1999, 2001).

Benoit (1999) found no significant difference in the spots between winners and losers in the frequency of utilizing attack or acclaim functions. Clear distinctions did appear between incumbents and challengers and between the two dominant parties. Incumbents acclaim more than challengers and challengers attack more than incumbents. Republicans acclaim more than Democrats and conversely, Democrats attack more than Republicans (Benoit, 1999, 2001). Defenses were employed with the least frequency. Only one percent of the advertisements demonstrated this function (Benoit, 1999, 2001), and losers use the defense function more than winners (Benoit, 2001).

Positioning in the race also revealed patterns. In closely contested races, candidates acclaim the most. Candidates who lead in a race also acclaim more. Attacks are utilized most often by the candidate who trails in the race (Benoit, 1999).

One of the most effective tools in the rhetorical arsenal is the use of character to erode or build credibility. When arguments are viewed with similar weight, character can motivate the populace to choose between candidates (Yack, 2006). For example, the Swift Boat campaign in the 2004 election decimated the character and credibility of John Kerry (Reyes, 2006). The campaign drew directly from Aristotle's elements of ethos and pathos.

Though none of the men claiming first-person accounts of events served with Kerry on his Swift Boat (Reyes, 2006) the commercials gained credence in the American public through rhetorical realism. The claims appeared true through the use of personal testimonials, historical photos, and footage of Kerry (Reyes, 2006). The rhetorical

technique of repetition added to the effectiveness of these television spots with the phrase, “I served with John Kerry” (Reyes, 2006).

Repetition was heightened in the extensive number of exposures the American public had to these messages both through paid advertising and editorial commentary surrounding the campaigns (Reyes, 2006).

Creating a negative association for the opponent is just as important as creating a positive one for a candidate. Words chosen for emotional impact and resonance with the voter can effectively attack an opponent. Negative advertising specifically targets the emotion of fear in word selection (Weston, 2007). Content and imagery are associated with threat (Brader, 2005). Moreover, rhetoric that reinforces an alarming outcome can effectively thwart political change by creating a risk-averse populace (Jerit, 2004).

The campaign rhetoric of pathos regularly strives to evoke strong emotions of anxiety and anger in addition to fear. Anger can be fostered by emphasizing to partisans the opposing candidate’s qualifications or policy positions (Jerit, 2004). Negative emotional appeals are memorable. With a citizenry disengaged in ongoing political discourse, fearful appeals draw attention (Jerit, 2004).

Despite the attention on negative advertising, the winning candidate is more likely to deliver a positive message (Luntz, 2007). Election results appear to support this concept, as one shared characteristic of every losing candidate in sixteen presidential elections is greater partisan speech (Hart & Lind, 2011).

In this execution of pathos, a positive view that things are getting better is presented (Brader, 2004). Each of the campaigns of Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama featured positive messages (Weston, 2007).

Reagan's "Morning in America" commercials in 1984 were hopeful and positive, embracing three key words: "broader, "stronger" and "better." The "er" at the end of each word implied superiority over Mondale (Weston, 2007).

Clinton, a skilled debater and an individual of high intellect, relied on a campaign message of hope and service that distinguished his storyline (Weston, 2007). Clinton used inclusive language of "we" to connect emotionally. This language distinguished him from the more formal George H.W. Bush in the debates (Weston, 2007).

Lowry and Naser (2010) analyzed only the words used in 1,227 television commercials using Diction 5.0 lexical analysis software throughout 15 presidential campaigns. Using a framework of promises, attacks and counter-attacks, stark differences between candidates appeared. Winners used significantly more positive language and references to groups as demonstrated by collective speech with words such as community, coalition, country, family, group, and team (Lowry and Naser, 2010). Commonality in language, emphasizing the values of a group, defined Obama's campaign compared to McCain's (Hart & Lind, 2011).

The 2012 Presidential Election's Television Commercials

Even as consumers migrated to other media platforms for news and political information, television captured the greatest political advertising spending in the 2012 presidential election (Poor, 2013). The medium is effective at reaching the undecided and lower-information voter who may not be actively seeking out political discourse (Rutenberg, 2012).

Television commercials in the 2012 presidential race were particularly negative (Fowler & Ridout, 2013). Negativity in television advertising has increased with each presidential election since 2000. In the 2000 Bush/Gore contest, 29% of ads were negative. That rose to 44% in 2004 and 51% in 2008 (Fowler & Ridout, 2013).

In 2012, fully 64% of television ads were purely negative, as defined as only mentioning the opponent. Of the ads that were sponsored by third-parties, 85% were purely negative. Only five percent were positive, and 10% contrasted the two candidates. Ads underwritten by the candidates' parties additionally were more negative with 51.1 % purely negative and only 11.5% purely positive (Fowler & Ridout, 2013).

Anger appeared as the dominant emotion in the 2012 presidential campaign's television commercials, with an appeal to anger present in three of four commercials. The second most prominent emotional appeal was fear, appearing in 34.38% of the advertisements. Enthusiasm followed with 30.88%. An appeal to sadness appeared in 26.55% of the commercials, with pride in just 10.93% of the spots (Fowler & Ridout, 2013).

Messages about the economy dominated pro-Romney television commercials. Nearly three in four between April 11 and Election Day mentioned employment or jobs. In the Obama camp, 41.5% mentioned jobs (Fowler & Ridout, 2013).

After jobs, the two campaigns differed widely in issues. Taxes were mentioned in 43.8% of Obama's ads while the topic appeared in only 23.5% of Romney's. Education appeared in 21.4% of pro-Obama ads but in fewer than one percent of Romney's (Fowler & Ridout, 2013). Pro-Romney advertising emphasized government spending, while the topic was absent in pro-Obama advertising. The issues of women's health and abortion

both played a large role in the Obama campaign but those topics did not appear in pro-Romney messages (Fowler & Ridout, 2013).

Political Communication Online

Political candidates have used campaign websites since the late 1990's (Woolley, Limperos & Oliver, 2010). Early campaign websites in 1996 and 1998 existed as online brochures and public relations tools and avoided direct interaction with citizens (Stomer-Galley, 2002).

The 2004 presidential election year moved political campaigning into a new era when Howard Dean first used a campaign blog. Five other Democratic candidates in the primary followed (Trammel, Williams, Postelnicu, & Landreville, 2006). Researchers (Trammel et al., 2006) studied the Democratic candidates in the 2004 primary, specifically examining interactivity across the official websites and blogs. Fourteen days were selected for analysis. The home pages of the candidate websites and blogs were downloaded manually as close to each date as possible. Coding categories included author, date, title, word count, hyperlink destination, blog topic, political content and appeal and attack strategies (Trammel et al., 2006).

Analyzing appeal strategies drew on the work of Kaid and Davidson (1986). Categories were coded as 1 for present and 0 for absent. Appeal strategies included "calling for change," "inviting participation," "emphasizing hopes for the future," "yearning for the past" and "traditional values." Language that positioned the candidate as "identifying with the experience of others" and "emphasizing political accomplishments" was coded as an appeal strategy (Trammel et al., 2006). Attack

strategies were noted for attacking a competitor's record or personal qualities (Trammel et al., 2006).

Trammel et al. (2006) focused on the use of hyperlinks as the primary benchmark to measure interactivity. Blogs were assumed to generate higher interactivity than websites through the greater use of links and the invitation to comment. Instead, Trammel et al. (2006) found that candidate blogs had fewer links than websites. Engaging text was emphasized to connect with the voter and create the impression of interactivity (Trammel et al., 2006). This "text-based interactivity" (Endres & Warnick, 2004) was achieved through direct-address in the form of first or second-person pronouns, referring to the candidate by his or her first name, and posting material written by the candidate (Trammel et al., 2006). The 2004 election remains historically the first election in which interactivity became an integral part of the campaigns.

While there are similarities in rhetoric, the literature suggests that online political communication differs from political messaging in traditional media in tone (Roberts, 2013). Television is regarded as a "push" medium which allows passivity on the part of the viewer, where online communication is a "pull" medium. Users must consciously select and engage in the content.

Content analysis of the 2004 Bush and Kerry websites illustrated how presidential campaigns began to leverage the online user who visits official campaign websites (Vaccari, 2008). Campaigns segmented users into three categories based on their level of support for the candidate and their propensity to engage in either online or off-line campaign activities. The largest yet most passive of these groups are users who are willing to vote for the candidate but are searching for more information. Engaged voters

make up a second group who are committed to the candidate, visit the site often and are involved in online discussions. The smallest category is comprised of active citizens who want to volunteer time, donate money or support the candidate through other activities. This user visits the site frequently, specifically seeking how they can help the campaign. Both the Bush and Kerry websites focused on the active citizen with a main focus on converting supporters into activists and providing campaign activities for volunteers. This resulted in successfully engaging more volunteers than in prior elections (Vaccari, 2008).

This distinctive relationship with users who must deliberately seek out the campaign's online message dictates that web commercials contain compelling material to capture the user's attention (Roberts, 2013). In this way, online campaign messaging is distinct from traditional messaging. The Internet as a platform demands a more provocative tone (Roberts, 2013). Through the use of humor (Roberts, 2013) and leveraging citizen perception of negative advertising as more "entertaining" (Hill, 1989), campaigns strive to generate viral activity by motivating supporters to share the content (Roberts, 2013).

Web-only commercials can effectively target specific demographics or psychographic groups. For instance, the web commercial by the McCain campaign in 2008, "The One," which mocked candidate Obama as a Messiah figure, (Roberts, 2013) fully demonstrated the ability to use tone, targeting and agenda setting. As with traditional media, web commercials utilize third-party material to bolster the credibility of claims, particularly negative ones. Citizens give greater credence to messages that include third-party attribution (Geer, 2006, Roberts, 2013).

Unencumbered by the fixed lengths of television commercials, and unregulated by the FCC for required disclaimers in the 2008 election year, web commercials allowed candidates to amplify positions and arguments and to target specific issues (Roberts, 2013). Using Benoit's (1999) functional theory of discourse which grouped political communication themes into acclaim, attack or defend, Roberts analyzed 817 presidential campaign web videos from 2004 and 2008.

Roberts found that web-only ads contained significantly more attack themes. A full 72% employed them compared to only 54.2% for TV spots. Television spots contained more acclaim themes (Roberts, 2013). Web-only spots attacked both policy and character. Personal attacks appeared in 60% of the examples and they were more likely to contain only attack themes (Roberts, 2013).

Political Communication on Facebook

Williams and Gulati (2012) analyzed the Facebook efforts of Congressional candidates in 2006 and 2008. Their research tracked and coded the factors that increased the likelihood of candidates actively using the platform. Research questions sought to identify factors internal to the candidate such as party affiliation and adoption of other online technologies, and factors related to the constituency and the opposing candidate.

Results of this study showed a dramatic increase in candidate participation on Facebook between 2006 and 2008. Democrats, campaigns with more funding, and candidates who used other forms of online activity and had peers online were more likely to actively use Facebook in their campaigns (Williams & Gulati, 2012).

Other content analysis studies of Facebook in prior presidential elections have been centered on Facebook groups created by citizens. A study of user-generated Facebook groups during the 2008 presidential election coded both Obama and McCain group sites for positive or negative terms in the group title. For instance, “John McCain for President” earned a positive code, while “Barack Obama wont [sic] salute my flag and has no business being president,” earned a negative coding (Woolley et al., 2010).

Images were similarly coded, with photographs of McCain grimacing coded “negatively valenced,” and a standard campaign photograph coded as “positively valenced.” References to age, religion and race as well as profane language were also coded as positive or negative (Woolley et al., 2010).

New variables were created to denote “candidate focus,” to determine which candidate was the primary concern of the group. The study assigned candidate focus by identifying references to a candidate in the title, profile picture, description and the current news sections of the page (Woolley et al., 2010).

Negative and positive references were similarly coded by analyzing words and images in the same four sections of title, profile picture, description and news section. Further coding tracked whether each incident was a positive or negative reference to Obama or McCain, resulting in descriptions of “Positive McCain,” “Negative McCain,” “Positive Obama” or “Negative Obama” (Woolley et al., 2010). Language and images about race, age or profanity received the same pattern of coding with the descriptors such as “race positive McCain,” or “race positive Obama” (Woolley et al., 2010).

The results of the study showed that user-generated Facebook groups in the 2008 election proved partisan and polarizing. Groups that featured Obama contained more

positive support than McCain. Groups that featured McCain were overwhelmingly negative (Woolley et al., 2010).

In 2008, Facebook users were still concentrated in the younger demographic. Within that age group, Obama earned much higher support than McCain. The findings of this study suggested that in 2008 people used Facebook to gather information, not to share it or to simply have an avenue to publicly express their political views (Woolley et al., 2010).

An analysis of the 2008 presidential primary campaigns' messaging across six message forms: television spots, debates, MySpace/Facebook, candidate's web page, radio spots and announcement speech, demonstrated variations in messaging across media types. Obama focused on policy topics in 62% of his MySpace and Facebook postings yet 58% of his radio advertisements focused on character. Hillary Clinton emphasized the economy and jobs in 44% of her television commercials, but these topics were mentioned only 13% of the time on her website (Benoit, Glantz, Phillips, Rill, Davis, Henson, & Sudbrock, 2011).

Academic studies have only recently focused on in-depth content analyses of communication by the candidate campaigns themselves on Facebook. Bronstein's (2013) content analysis study of the 2012 presidential election reviewed 513 Facebook posts of the Obama and Romney campaigns from August 12, 2012, when Romney selected Paul Ryan as his running mate, to Election Day. Content was analyzed using Aristotle's language of persuasion, coding for the appearance of ethos, pathos or logos (Bronstein, 2013). In addition to identifying the use of rhetorical techniques, the study also sought to

identify what subjects appeared on the candidates' Facebook pages and what other objectives were served by the candidates' Facebook presence (Bronstein, 2013).

In seeking persuasive language, the researcher analyzed the text of the posts within a framework of three themes: the ethical appeal of ethos, the emotional appeal of pathos and the logical appeal of logos. A fourth category of none was also included for those posts that displayed no Aristotelian means of persuasion (Bronstein, 2013).

The rhetoric of pathos persuades citizens by creating fear, sympathy or anger. Vivid language is used to invoke these responses (Bronstein, 2013). Four distinct categories of pathos were created to code the Facebook posts; a positive future image, communicated through offering a positive view of the future due to the candidate's actions or character; creating homophily, a bond between the candidate and audience through strong identification with the candidate; the creation of fear by presenting a dangerous view of the future; and a positive view of the audience by appealing to the identity of the user and addressing their self-interests and common biases (Bronstein, 2013).

Of the three persuasive techniques, pathos was used most frequently by both candidates, though with a wide variation between the two candidates. Obama used pathos 68.29% of the time and Romney 45.6% of the time (Bronstein, 2013). Among the four categories of pathos, both candidates made the greatest use of the strategy of trying to create an association with the audience. Obama's second most frequent approach was to create a positive image of the audience, where Romney's second most frequent avenue was creating fear (Bronstein, 2013).

Topics addressed by each of the candidates on their Facebook pages illustrated issues in common to campaigns as well as those given more importance by one of the candidates. Romney focused on the job market and the economy more than Obama. Women's issues emerged as a major emphasis in Obama's postings. Romney mentioned women's issues less than half as frequently than Obama did, and the postings were in the context of criticizing the president's policies that impact women (Bronstein, 2013). Obama mentioned taxes more often than Romney. Both candidates posted content that addressed health care, the Army and education (Bronstein, 2013).

Bronstein's (2013) findings on the topics present in the digital communication of the campaigns were consistent with other research. A Pew's Research Journalism project conducted in June 2012 to measure digital messaging of the two candidates over a two-week period found that 24% of Romney's posts pertained to the economy compared to 19% of Obama's (Pew, 2012). Compared to the 2008 campaign, several topics had lessened in importance. Veterans' issues, agriculture, Iraq and technology, all issues with high visibility in the prior election, had virtually disappeared from the 2012 campaign messaging (Pew, 2012). Mentions about Afghanistan and illegal immigration were also absent on the Obama and Romney Facebook pages (Bronstein, 2013).

Both candidates leveraged Facebook to a large extent to mobilize citizens by asking for donations, volunteer time, or to help disperse information through the users' own Facebook network. Romney asked for donations in 30.94% of his posts and Obama in 18% of his posts (Bronstein, 2013). Obama encouraged his Facebook fans to help with different tasks in the campaign in 1.62% of his posts and asked supporter to share his views 22.92% of the time (Bronstein, 2013).

The strategy of attacking the opponent, his policies and character appeared on both candidates' Facebook pages. Romney mentioned Obama in 18.89% of his posts while Obama mentioned Romney in 9.75% of his posts (Bronstein, 2013).

Political Communication on Twitter

Micro-blogging sites such as Twitter and Tumblr provide users a means to share real-time news and information (Armentano, Godoy, & Amandi, 2012). In the political realm, citizens believed that Twitter could increase government transparency and launched the TweetCongress initiative that encouraged Congressional representatives to use the platform (Golbeck, Grimes & Rogers, 2010).

With the accelerating use of micro-blogging sites, campaigns have made it a priority to extend their reach on these platforms. Due to the limited number of words contained in these sites, traditional content analysis presents challenges. Most published content analysis studies thus far have been confined to Twitter (Armentano et al., 2012).

Golbeck et al. (2010) performed a content analysis of more than 6,000 Twitter posts from all Congressional representatives in two periods in 2009 to identify the frequency, type and the intent of posts. Congressional office holders primarily tweeted to disperse information by linking to news articles about themselves or to their own blogs (Golbeck et al., 2010). Congress did use Twitter for direct communication with citizens by responding to questions directly via the service (Golbeck et al., 2010).

Researchers created classification groupings for coding that included informational, locations and activities, official business, external communication, internal communication, personal message, request for action and fundraising. Direct

communication through the use of the @ id convention was noted, as well as personal messages such as holiday greetings, information about an official activity and a fact or position on an issue. Further subtopics within several of the categories provided more granular data (Golbeck et al., 2010).

Golbeck et al. (2010) found the majority of Congressional tweets, 54.7%, were informational. The next most common posting type, representing 27% of the content generated, centered on location or activity not associated with official business. Communication to persons outside of Congress was the third most common type at seven percent. Only 5.1% of communication focused on official business (Golbeck et al., 2010).

Of the informational posts, almost all included links, with the posting appearing much like a press release headline. Links lead primarily to mainstream news articles, the official's own blog or website or to the website of a political action committee. Retweeting and the use of hashtags were nearly non-existent among the group (Golbeck et al., 2010).

In a second collection and analysis period in 2009 in which Congress was not in session, the researchers found nearly double the number of tweets associated with location and activities. It became apparent that tweeting topics related directly to the Congressional calendar (Golbeck et al., 2010).

Aharony (2012) built upon Golbeck et al.'s (2010) research by conducting the first academic research of Twitter use by three international political leaders. Aharony (2012) studied the tweets during a non-election period of President Obama, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron.

Aharony (2012) tracked four tweet categories of user intention: daily chatter, conversation, sharing of information and reporting news. Tweets were then divided into themes with categories of language and context. The researcher used an inductive/clustering approach, reading all the tweets manually, and then created additional categories when new topics emerged. Language was coded for formal and informal usage, including slang and abbreviations (Aharony, 2012).

Aharony (2012) showed that the largest theme for each leader was informational, though where Netanyahu and Cameron had well over half of their tweets fall in this category, just over 45% of Obama's were informational. Examples of informational sub-categories identified in the Obama's tweets included video links, the economy and jobs, photos of the day, events, natural disasters, conferences and legal reforms (Aharony, 2012).

Wide variations appeared in content between the three leaders. For instance, Prime Minister Cameron had a subcategory of "thanks and blessings," which included blessings for special religions. Netanyahu's tweets contained a dominant theme of international meetings (Aharony, 2012). The study showed that while the dominant usage was informational, each leader also used the medium for outreach and transparency (Aharony, 2012).

A pioneering study conducted real-time research of the Twitter feeds of the Canadian political parties during a 2008 televised debate in the federal election (Elmer, 2013). With Twitter just two years old, the research sought to identify how early adopters of political communication on micro-blogging platforms attempted to influence

discussion. The study observed how Twitter operated as a venue for real-time commentary (Elmer, 2013).

The researchers viewed the television broadcast side-by-side with the live Twitter feeds to capture the number of tweets, the time of posting and how the content related to the comments by the candidates and analysts on the air. Time stamps on the postings could be compared with the transcripts of the debate which were provided to the researchers on a ten-minute delay (Elmer, 2013). A minute-by-minute graph showed the number of tweets throughout the debate and identified where spikes aligned with specific moments in the debate (Elmer, 2013).

The left-of-center New Democratic Party deployed real-time fact-checking during the debate and posted the greatest number of tweets during the debate. Their strategy allowed them to pre-empt the normal post-debate “spin.” Reflecting the public’s limited knowledge of the medium, some Twitter users thought the candidate himself was posting the tweets during the debate (Elmer, 2013).

Active use by the party on the platform though, did not result in earning it the most attention. Parties and candidates operate in an environment that includes many factors they do not control. This particular debate included the country’s Green Party candidate for the first time and that candidate earned mentions in almost one-third of all the tweets (Elmer, 2013).

In addition, the debate took place on the same night as the U.S. vice presidential debate with Joe Biden and Sarah Palin. That much-anticipated debate held interest for Canadians as well, and Twitter posts revealed the high investment in international politics as users commented on switching between the two debates (Elmer, 2013).

Surprisingly, few tweets by the parties included links. This ran contrary to the usual best practice of directing users to other articles, the candidate website or YouTube videos. Further review of the research and process revealed a pre-debate factor of partisan bickering over appropriate hashtags to use during the debate (Elmer, 2013). Since the ease of remembering and typing a hashtag can have a direct impact on its level of use, the hashtag decision can significantly impact the number of postings and the ability to track the conversation (Elmer, 2013).

Hong and Nadler (2012) analyzed the tweets of seven Republican candidates in the 2012 presidential election's primary season over a 22-day period from December 26, 2011 through January 16, 2012, tracking the volume of tweets and followers by candidate against mentions in major traditional news outlets. They concluded that Twitter activities by the candidates had no significant impact on the number of mentions of them on Twitter. However, mentions of the candidate in mainstream media did increase how many times the politician was mentioned on Twitter (Hong & Nadler, 2012).

The Twitter feeds of Barack Obama, Newt Gingrich, Rick Santorum, Ron Paul, and Mitt Romney were analyzed for the month of February 2012. The study examined what proportion of tweets were original verses retweets, what kinds of links if any were included and what topics appeared in the postings (Adams & McCorkindale, 2013).

Obama posted the greatest number of tweets, 273, in the month of February 2012, and Romney posted the fewest with 47 tweets (Adams & McCorkindale, 2013). The tweets of Romney, Santorum and Gingrich were all written using the word, "I," (Adams & McCorkindale, 2012), utilizing self-reference language.

The economy, encompassing unemployment, the budget and taxes, emerged as one of the top three most frequent topics. Events and other primary activities were the other most commonly mentioned topics. Little mention occurred of other major issues such as health care, foreign policy and social issues (Adams & McCorkindale, 2012). These findings suggested that, rather than using Twitter to present information about policies, the campaigns used the platform during this period to mobilize citizens to attend events and vote in upcoming primaries (Adams & McCorkindale, 2012).

In another content analysis of Twitter feeds by presidential candidates, Conway et al. (2013) studied eight candidates in the 2012 presidential primary period from February 1 through May 2, 2012. Candidates included Republicans Fred Karger, Mitt Romney, Newt Gingrich, Rick Santorum, and Ron Paul, Americans Elect candidate Buddy Roemer, Libertarian candidate Gary Johnson and Democratic candidate Barack Obama. The analysis focused on activity levels and four main content categories of references to issues, campaign-related references, events and calls for action which included calls for donations, volunteering, or voting (Conway et al., 2013).

The majority of these tweets centered on policy issues. Among the references coded by the computer software, Wordstat, 50.5% regarded election issues. Campaign support appeared 25.5% of the time, 12.7% referenced campaign events and candidate appearances, and 11.4% referenced other candidate material (Conway et al., 2013).

Political Communication on Facebook and Twitter

An extensive content analysis of the 2012 presidential election of both Facebook and Twitter was conducted by Groshek and Al-Rawi (2013). This study examined public

sentiment of candidates Obama and Romney through the official Facebook pages and Twitter feeds of the two campaigns. The analysis included all of the comments posted on the official campaign sites plus tweets posted on the non-partisan #election2012 Twitter page. The project included 1,427,207 postings from January 1, 2012 through November 6, 2012, and sought to determine how each candidate was framed and what dominant topics and themes distinguished the online conversation (Groshek & Al-Rawi, 2013).

The 10 most frequent key words tabulated on Obama's Facebook feed were "Obama," "Romney," "President," "vote," "people," "years," "country," "Mitt," "good," and "America." On Romney's Facebook page, the 10 most frequent words were "Obama," "Romney," "Mitt," "people," "vote," "President," "country," "America," "years," and "Ryan." The results showed that topics on Facebook were interrelated while those on Twitter were more diverse (Groshek & Al-Rawi, 2013).

Citizens framed Obama on his official Facebook page with positive descriptors such as "vote," "good," and "love," with strong associations to the word, "Obama." These associations were consistently stronger than similar linkages to "Romney." "Romney," was the word most frequently and strongly linked to highly negative descriptors such as "lies," "liar," and "rich" in comparison to the Romney Facebook page or the #2012election Twitter feed (Groshek & Al-Rawi, 2013).

Obama's framing on Romney's official Facebook page followed a similar pattern. Both candidates' names again were associated with "vote" as well as "President," but a weaker level of endorsement for Romney appeared on his own Facebook page than for Obama on his (Groshek & Al-Rawi, 2013).

“Romney” remained strongly linked to “jobs” as well as “plan,” but these associations were just slightly stronger than those linked to “Obama.” There were fewer critical key words linked with “Obama” on Romney’s Facebook page. Some words such as, “lies” and “debt,” were connected to Obama, but they were weaker, and less clearly aligned with other key words than “Romney” experienced on Obama’s official Facebook page (Groshek & Al-Rawi, 2013).

The findings showed that public sentiment of opposition candidates avoided an overly critical stance. The over one million Facebook and Twitter comments analyzed in this study bore more resemblance to traditional news reporting than the scathing language sometimes present in social media forums (Groshek & Al-Rawi, 2013).

Research Questions

The following questions form the research parameters of this project. Each question is specific to how the Obama and Romney campaigns expressed their communication on Facebook and Twitter on seven key dates within the 30 days prior to the 2012 presidential election. These questions were designed to follow the way in which earlier academic content analysis research studies have been conducted within the field of rhetoric in political communication in traditional media as well as studies that are specific to the Internet and social media.

RQ1 How do political campaigns using Twitter and Facebook adopt key rhetorical tools as used historically in legacy media?

- RQ1a: What recurring key words appearing on the Facebook and Twitter platforms for the Obama and Romney 2012 presidential campaigns exhibited the rhetorical strategy of repetition?
- RQ1b: What similarities or differences existed in these key words between the two platforms for each candidate?
- RQ1c: What similarities or differences appeared in the issues mentioned in the Twitter and Facebook postings of the Obama and Romney 2012 presidential campaigns?
- RQ2 Do political campaigns use Benoit's three themes of attack, acclaim and defend as historically used in legacy media in Twitter and Facebook and if so, how?
- RQ3 In what ways do political campaigns engage in collective or self-reference language across Twitter and Facebook platforms and how does it differ from strategies traditionally seen in campaigns recorded in legacy media?
- RQ3a: Does the pattern established in legacy media of winning candidates exhibiting greater collective language as expressed by the use of the words, community, coalition, country, family, group or team, also appear in Twitter and Facebook postings?

RQ3b: Does the opposing pattern documented in legacy media of losing candidates utilizing more self-reference language as expressed by the use of the words, I, I'd, I'll, I'm, I've, me, my, mine or myself, also appear in Twitter and Facebook postings?

CHAPTER III

METHOD

This study employs a content analysis of the Facebook and Twitter posts for the Obama and Romney campaigns on key dates within the 30 days leading up to Election Day. The 30-day window was selected for analysis for its importance to campaign efforts in targeting undecided voters who begin paying close attention to the race in the month prior to Election Day. Polling increases, with some services conducting as many as 60 polls just in the three weeks prior to the election (Silver, 2012). By limiting the analysis to only this 30-day period, the study seeks to identify the campaigns' communication techniques present on their Facebook pages and Twitter feeds in the crucial final weeks prior to the election.

Samples from each campaign were collected from the home pages of each candidate's official Facebook page and Twitter feed. Only the official pages and feeds are included in this study to focus on how the campaigns themselves conducted their messaging, not how others positioned or responded to the campaigns in other social media forums.

Sampling activity took place daily at approximately 10 p.m. Pacific Time in the month prior to the election. Twitter time stamps date posts at the time they were uploaded in the Eastern Time zone. Facebook dates are additionally tied to the Eastern Time zone, but Facebook does not time stamp by clock time.

This study selected only Facebook and Twitter for analysis due to the dominance of these two platforms in social media communication. A total of 723 posts were retrieved from the official Facebook and Twitter feeds of the two campaigns.

Seven dates were selected for study in this research. Each date was chosen for its association with a key event in the month leading up to the election. The seven dates include Mitt Romney’s major foreign policy speech, the vice presidential debate, the last two presidential debates, the day Hurricane Sandy hit New Jersey, the final Friday leading into the weekend before Election Day and Election Day.

The debate dates and Mitt Romney’s foreign policy speech were selected because vice presidential and presidential debates and major candidate speeches are routinely studied by scholars for language and rhetoric. Examining the social media surrounding the debates is an extension of such work.

The date Hurricane Sandy devastated the New Jersey shore was selected for its importance as the unexpected event in the final weeks prior to the presidential election, sometimes referred to as the “October surprise” (Kurtz, 2012). Exit polls showed that Hurricane Sandy impacted the electorate by demonstrating the need for government services (Benoit, Bostdorff, Carlin, Coe, Holbert, Murphy & Miller, 2013).

The first presidential debate is not included in the analysis because it occurred on October 3, 2012, before the 30-day period.

Dates:

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 1. October 8, 2012 | Romney delivers a major foreign policy speech |
| 2. October 11, 2012 | Vice Presidential debate |
| 3. October 16, 2012 | Presidential debate #2 |
| 4. October 22, 2012 | Presidential debate #3 |
| 5. October 29, 2012 | Hurricane Sandy hits the New Jersey shore |
| 6. November 2, 2012 | The final Friday before the election |

7. November 6, 2012 Election Day

All of the postings collected from the seven selected days underwent content analysis. This represented 238 samples or 33 % of all samples collected in the 30 days. The Obama campaign communicated on Facebook and Twitter to a much greater extent than the Romney campaign. Of the 238 examples, 157 are from the Obama campaign. In the Obama sample, 24 are Facebook postings and 133 are Twitter postings. The Romney analysis is comprised of 81 samples with 32 postings from Facebook and 49 Twitter postings.

Samples were saved as “web page complete” files at the time of retrieval. This archiving method preserves what is visible on screen with some scrolling of materials present at the time of capture. Links remain clickable. For the Twitter platform, which showed a high level of activity on some dates, this methodology limited the number of preserved posts on a given date to a maximum of 20, which did not represent all posts for the Obama campaign on five of the seven dates. Twitter later provided new capabilities to retrieve historical data in its advanced search function. The primary researcher sought out the total number of tweets posted by the Obama campaign on the sample dates to determine what percentage of the campaign’s total Twitter communication appeared in this analysis. The campaign published a total of 201 tweets on the seven dates. In this study, 66% of Obama’s tweets for the seven days and 100% of his Facebook postings underwent analysis. For Romney, 100% of both his Facebook and Twitter communication on the seven dates were included in the study.

This content analysis utilized quantitative methodologies. All 238 samples were transcribed into a word processing document for computer analysis of the text for each

campaign. Retweets were included in the analysis, as the campaigns made a willful choice to include the retweet as part of their communication. All words added to photographs or those appearing in produced graphics and infographics were transcribed and included in the analysis. Words that appeared within photographs such as signs in a crowd or hanging on a wall were regarded as incidental and not included in the analysis. All text that appeared in a tweet's "view summary" feature or as part of a pic.twitter was transcribed and coded. Material on associated links was not transcribed or coded; only content that remained on the Facebook or Twitter sites underwent analysis.

NVivo 10 content analysis software was utilized to complete text searches and word frequency queries for each candidate's Facebook posts and tweets. Stop words included commonly excluded words such as the conjunctions "and," and "but," and the articles, "a" and "the." Feminine pronouns were included in the stop words because both candidates were male. Masculine, first and second person pronouns and their possessive forms were excluded from the stop words as these were material to the study.

Word frequencies were first completed for the top 100 words. This provided results with a weighted percentage of as little as .16 across Obama's communication on Facebook and a frequency of just one occurrence. On Obama's Twitter feed, the top 100 words returned a lowest weighted percentage of .20 and a frequency of four occurrences. For the Romney campaign these parameters returned the lowest weighted percentage of .19 on Twitter with a frequency of two occurrences. On Romney's Facebook pages, the lowest weighted percentage was .31 with a frequency of two occurrences.

In using the word frequencies to address the research questions, a consistent threshold of at or above a weighted percentage of .35 was utilized. This provided word

frequencies of at least three occurrences for both candidates on both platforms. Several words appeared the equivalent number of times and are thereby given the same weighted percentage or ranking. These parameters revealed the words ranked up to the fourteen most frequently used word groupings. The top ten rankings were given greater attention due to the drop-off in frequency after the 10th ranking and the prevalence of several words having the same weighted percentage after the 10th level.

Through this process, key words in both campaigns on each platform were revealed. Similarities or differences in dominant key words between candidates and between platforms emerged. The frequency of key words formed the means by which the rhetoric of basic repetition was examined in this study.

Computerized text searches were employed to discover the presence of collective and self-reference language used by the candidates. For collective language, the texts for each candidate's Facebook, Twitter and combined Facebook and Twitter content were searched for the representative words, "community," "coalition," "country," "family," "group" or "team." Search parameters included the plural forms of these words and allowed any form of "team," as in "teamromney," or "teambarack."

Adopting the methodology of Steffens and Haslam (2013), the combined number of occurrences of any of the six words and their variations returned in each search was then divided by the total word count in each social media text group to arrive at what percentage of all words used were collective words. This provided a representation of the importance of collective language for each candidate on the two platforms as part of the candidate's total communication.

This method accommodated for the variations between the two candidates in the total word count of all their posts and tweets on the seven dates in the study. A wide variation occurred on the campaigns' Twitter feeds, as Obama used the platform more extensively than Romney.

To identify self-reference language, results were drawn from the computerized text search method to provide consistency with the methodology for collective language by expressing the presence of self-reference words as a percentage of the total word counts on each platform by candidate. The NVivo 10 software returned searches with the complete text input with the words in the text search parameters highlighted. Since some self-reference language was used by persons other than the presidential or vice-presidential candidates in retweets or in testimonials, those incidents were identified and excluded from the total count by the primary researcher. This provided a true count of self-reference language as used by the candidates themselves.

To bring more depth to the research, a quantitative analysis was also conducted to study the topics emphasized by the campaigns. This portion utilized manual coding. Three coders comprised the coding group; the primary researcher and two independent coders. For each variable, the method of coding 0 for not present and 1 for present was employed. The variable was counted as present for a post if two of the three coders noted it as present.

Eleven topics were coded in terms of policy issues, drawing upon issues aligned with the parties such as the economy, jobs and health care for Democrats and taxes for Republicans (Benoit et al., 2011) as well as issues associated with the presidential and vice presidential debates.

Consistent with the computer analysis, the samples were organized for coding into four groupings by date: Obama Facebook, Obama Twitter, Romney Facebook and Romney Twitter. By maintaining these groupings, similarities or differences were tracked between candidates and between the two social media platforms for each campaign.

Manual coding was utilized to determine the frequency by candidate and platform of the attack, acclaim and defend functions (Benoit, 1999). Acclaims portrayed the candidate or running mate in a favorable light (Benoit, 1999). Coders were instructed (See Appendices A and B for coding book and coding sheet) to code endorsements as acclaims. Attacks portrayed the opponent negatively. Defenses responded to an earlier attack on the candidate (Benoit, 1999).

A sample of 10 percent of the total sample was first completed with the three coders to determine intercoder reliability. The test sample delivered an average 95.4 percent average pairwise agreement with the final variable of “other” topic having just 75 percent average pairwise agreement. Further training of the coders took place, instructing them to code the presence of an additional topic by noting the presence of distinct key words rather than attempting to extrapolate meaning. In the coding of all 238 samples the average pairwise agreement for the “other” variable rose to 96.08 percent, with an average pairwise agreement for the full project at 98.29 percent. (See Appendix C for complete intercoder reliability results).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This study examines the political communication on Facebook and Twitter by the 2012 presidential candidates in the context of whether rhetorical techniques established in legacy media also occur in social media. The analysis focused on the communication only on seven key dates within the 30 days prior to the election to isolate the candidates' rhetoric in the final countdown to Election Day. Three dates, the vice presidential debate and two presidential debates, aligned with high social media activity. Computerized word frequency searches, computerized text searches and manual coding delivered the data used to analyze the results.

Several of the patterns in Benoit's (1999, 2001) functions of attack, acclaim and defend identified in established legacy media also appeared in the Obama and Romney social media postings on the seven dates analyzed. The incumbent acclaimed more than the challenger and the challenger attacked more than the incumbent. Defenses were employed with the least frequency. Differences compared to traditional media were found in the overall frequency with which any of the functions appeared.

The candidates demonstrated both similarities and differences unique to the two social media platforms in their key words. Variations appeared in the topics selected by each candidate to showcase yet both Obama and Romney chose a limited number of topics to emphasize in the final days of reaching voters.

Variations in the use of self-reference language and collective language only appeared on Twitter. Romney used both significantly more self-reference language (Chi-square=6.03, df=1, $p < .05$) and significantly more collective language (Chi-square=.01, df=1, $p < .05$) than Obama.

The Rhetoric of Repetition

RQ1: How do political campaigns using Twitter and Facebook adopt key rhetorical tools as used historically by legacy media?

RQ1a: What recurring key words appearing on the Facebook and Twitter platforms for the Obama and Romney 2012 presidential campaigns exhibited the rhetorical strategy of repetition?

Repetition on Obama's Twitter Feed and Facebook Page

The top word on the Obama Twitter feed using the threshold of at or above a .35 weighted percentage was “Obama,” with a frequency of 51 and a weighted percentage of 2.52. The second most frequent word was “president,” used 40 times with a weighted percentage of 1.98. Repetition of the title, “President Obama” reinforced incumbency.

Tied for the third most frequent words used were “vote” and “you.” Each appeared 33 times, demonstrating an emphasis on getting out the vote. The strong use of the second-person pronoun of “you” also illustrated the rhetorical use of direct address to persuade citizens to action. These four repeated words, “Obama,” “president,” “vote” and “you,” provided a specific and clear message to vote for Obama. “Romney” was the fourth most common word used, with 26 occurrences. Most of these occurred in the context of attacking Romney, a function discussed in greater depth in research question 2. Reflecting the immediacy of the three debate events, “tonight,” appeared as the sixth most frequent word. “Biden” and “debate” were both ranked seventh.

Another repeated word of note in Obama's Twitter communication was "win." It appeared nine times as one of six words in position as the 12th most frequently used word. "Women" occurred seven times. One phrase stood out on Obama's Twitter feed on Election Day. The hashtag "#stayinline" appeared seven times only on that day, advising voters to remain in line to vote even if the polls had closed.

The first and second most common words on the Obama Facebook page were "Obama," and "president." "Obama" appeared 21 times with a weighted percentage of 3.44. "President" occurred 18 times with a weighted percentage of 2.97. These top two words again emphasized incumbency.

"You," "your" and "vote" were the third, fourth and fifth most commonly used words, emphasizing the consistent message via direct address to vote for Obama. "Share" was the sixth most frequent word with nine occurrences. In the distinctive language of Facebook, the word is used as a command to share content with the user's friends to help disseminate campaign rhetoric. "Biden," along with "America," veterans," "counseling" and "women" all shared a ranking of 9th most frequent with five appearances, appealing to specific voter blocks and a sense of patriotism. "Romney" appeared as one of 11 words ranked as the 10th most common word on the Obama Facebook page but it was only used four times with a weighted percentage of .65.

Repetition on Romney's Twitter Feed and Facebook Page

Romney's most frequent word on Twitter using the same parameters of at or above a .35 weighted percentage of all words contained in his Twitter posts was "years," which appeared 16 times with a weighted percentage of 1.52. The words "America" and

“today” each were used 14 times with a weighted percentage of 1.33. The Twitter handle “@barackobama” and “more” were both used 13 times with a weighted percentage of 1.24. “Four” and “president” each appeared 12 times. The hashtag “#cantafford4more” appeared 10 times, as did “debt,” “Obama,” “our” and “vote.” Each ranked in the fifth most frequently used words as returned by the software.

On the Romney Facebook page, the most frequently used word was “Romney,” which appeared 22 times with a weighted percentage of 3.36. The second most frequent word, “America,” was second in position, as it was on Romney’s Twitter feed. It appeared 16 times with a weighted percentage of 2.44. The next most frequent words were “president,” “today,” “Mitt,” “your,” “Obama” and “Ryan.” “Mitt Romney” was the ninth most common word as ranked by the software. It appeared six times with a weighted percentage of .92. Four additional words, “get,” “more,” “tonight” and “world” were also used six times.

Key Word Similarities and Differences

RQ1b: What similarities or differences existed in these key words between the two platforms for each candidate?

Key Word Similarities and Differences for Obama

Five of the top ten words appearing on the Obama Twitter feed also occurred in the ten most frequently used words on the campaign’s Facebook page. The first and second words, “Obama” and “president” were identical on both platforms.

“You,” “your” and “vote” all were in the top five rankings on both Facebook and Twitter. Repetition of these top key words was used to compel users to take action and vote.

“Debate” was the 7th ranked most frequent word on both platforms. “You’re” also appeared in the 7th ranking on Twitter and in the 8th ranking on Obama’s Facebook page. Two of the words that occurred in the top 10 on Obama’s Facebook communication but not on Twitter were “share” and “friends,” words unique to the Facebook vocabulary.

Within the top ten rankings on each platform, four other words appeared on both platforms: “Biden,” “you’re,” “more” and “our.” See Table 1 for the top-ten rankings of Obama’s most frequently used words on both platforms.

Table 1

Obama Facebook and Twitter Top-ten Ranked Most Frequent Words

Rank	Word	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
1	Obama	72	2.78
2	president	58	2.24
3	you	46	1.77
4	vote	43	1.66
5	your	31	1.20
6	Romney	30	1.16
7	debate	24	0.93
8	tonight	23	0.89
9	Biden	21	0.81
10	more	18	0.69

Obama utilized Twitter to a greater extent than Facebook on each of the seven days of analysis. The total word count for content on the Obama Twitter feed reached 2,716 compared to just 829 on the Obama Facebook page.

Unduplicated words in the top ten rankings in the Obama's campaign's social media communication appeared to be selected specifically for each platform. "Romney," the fourth most frequent word on Obama's Twitter feed with 26 occurrences, appeared only four times on Obama's Facebook page. Ten other words were used with the same frequency. "Team," which shared ranking with two other words as the eighth most frequent word on Obama's Facebook page, did not reach the .35 weighted percentage threshold in its same form on Twitter. Instead the Twitter hashtag, "#teambarack," appeared seven times with the same frequency as the hashtag, "#stayinline."

Below the top 10 ranked words for each platform, other differences were apparent. "Women" and "health" both appeared with a greater weighted percentage of .82 and .65 respectively on Facebook. With Facebook's 2012 users comprised of nearly 60% women (Taylor, 2012), this may have been a planned tactic. On the Obama Twitter feed, "women" earned a weighted percentage of .35, just meeting the threshold for this discussion. "Health" did not even appear in the top 100 words on the Obama Twitter feed.

The phrase "#stayinline" was unique to Obama's Twitter feed and to Election Day. This hashtag leveraged the unique features of how Twitter is used as an immediate communication resource used largely on mobile devices. These examples are evidence that communication strategists may create content in part by how citizens use specific social media platforms.

Key Word Similarities and Differences for Romney

Thirteen of the 16 words in the top-ten ranked most frequent words on Romney’s Facebook page appeared in the top rankings on his Twitter feed. “America,” “president” and “today” populated the top four rankings on both platforms. “Team” ranked ninth on Twitter and 11th on Facebook. “Future” and “debate” were both used just one more time on Twitter than on Facebook.

On both platforms forward-looking and active adjectives appeared. “New” and “higher” appeared in the Twitter posts five to seven times. In Romney’s Facebook posts, “clear,” “stronger” and “better” were each used three to four times. See Table 2 for the top-ten rankings of Romney’s most frequently used words on both platforms.

Table 2

Romney Facebook and Twitter Top-ten Ranked Most Frequent Words

Rank	Word	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
1	America	30	1.76
2	Romney	27	1.59
3	president	25	1.47
3	today	25	1.47
4	years	20	1.18
5	more	19	1.12
6	Obama	18	1.06
7	your	17	1.00
8	four	16	0.94
9	our	14	0.82
9	tonight	14	0.82
10	@barackobama	13	0.76
10	vote	13	0.76
10	world	13	0.76

The frequency of referring to candidate Romney by name varied between the platforms. “Romney” was the most frequent word on Facebook and the ninth was “Mitt Romney.” On Twitter, the candidate’s Twitter handle, “@mittromney,” was the sixth most frequent word, with no other variations of Romney’s name appearing in the top five rankings. The candidate’s full name without the Twitter handle fell to the ninth most frequent ranking, tied with five other words.

One key word with particular significance varied in its usage between the platforms. The word “vote,” appeared 10 times on the Romney Twitter feed, and was ranked fifth in frequency by the software with a weighted percentage of .95. On the Romney Facebook page, “vote” appeared just three times, tied with 21 other words for the 12th ranking with a weighted percentage of .46. All 10 occurrences on Twitter and all three uses on Facebook appeared on Election Day.

Romney’s Twitter feed made use of the unique language conventions of Twitter. Of the most frequent words within the parameters of at or above a weighted percentage of .35, 8.2% of them were Twitter handles or hashtags: “@barackobama,” “#cantafford4more,” “@mittromney” and “#romneyryan2012.”

Issues Expressed

RQ1c: What similarities or differences appeared in the issues mentioned in the Twitter and Facebook postings of the Obama and Romney 2012 presidential campaigns?

Topics emphasized by the candidates on each of the two social media platforms showed significant variations between the campaigns (Chi-square=49.174, df=15, p<.05).

Romney published significantly more material on the economy and taxes (Chi-square=14.0, df=1, $p<.05$) and Obama posted significantly more content on voting (Chi-square=6.04, df=1, $p<.05$). It appeared that each campaign chose a primary and secondary focus for each platform. Only a few topics and issues were emphasized by either candidate.

Fundraising and other means of showing support for the candidate had a strong presence in one or both campaigns. This is consistent with the findings of other research studies that examined topics in the social media communication of the campaigns (Bronstein, 2013, Pew, 2012).

For both candidates on Facebook, the topic of a show of support had the highest prevalence. This took the form of asking users to volunteer in some way, share content or watch or attend an event. Fully 62.5% of the Obama Facebook posts asked for a show of support, the greatest single emphasis from either candidate on both platforms. Of Romney's posts, 43.8% included content that asked for a show of support. With each candidate devoting effort in this area, there was no significant difference in the level of emphasis of this topic between the candidates on Facebook.

The show of support topic also had a strong presence on Twitter. For Obama, it was the first most common topic, appearing in 31.6% of his tweets. Romney emphasized show of support on Twitter as well. It was the second most frequent topic with 20% of Romney's posts containing a request for a show of support. The differences between the level of emphasis between the two candidates on this topic on Twitter was not significant.

The topic of the economy, which included any content related to jobs, job creation or economic policy, was Romney's first most frequent topic on Twitter. Mentions of the

economy appeared in 38.8% of the Romney tweets. On Facebook, 18.8% of his posts contained material related to the economy. In contrast, the economy was mentioned on only 12% of Obama's tweets and 12.5% of his Facebook posts.

When combined with the topic of taxes, Romney's greater emphasis on these two topics showed a significant difference from Obama's communication on Twitter (Chi-square=16.88, df=1, $p<.05$), but on Facebook the differences between the candidates were not significant.

Candidates differed in their approach to fundraising through social media. Romney showed greater activity with this topic, with Facebook the preferred place of contact. Over 28% of his Facebook posts included fundraising content but only 4.1% of the Romney Twitter posts asked for donations. Obama had no Facebook posts with fundraising as a topic and only .8% of his Twitter posts asked for a donation. Romney's efforts on fundraising on the two social media platforms combined showed a significantly greater emphasis on attracting donations than in Obama's combined social media communication (Chi-square=18.65, df=1, $p<.05$).

Obama was consistent between his two platforms on two primary topics of emphasis. Show of support ranked as the number one topic on both Facebook and Twitter. Of Obama's Facebook posts, 62.5% asked for a show of support and 31.6% of his Twitter posts included the topic. Voting was the second most frequent topic for Obama on both Twitter and Facebook. Over 41% of Obama's Facebook posts included content about registering to vote, encouraging others to vote, vote early or vote on Election Day. On Twitter, 29.3% of the tweets included a mention of voting.

Romney had less emphasis on voting as a topic. On the Romney Twitter feed, 18.4% of the posts included content surrounding voting. Only 12.5% of the Romney Facebook posts mentioned voting. Across both combined platforms, Obama's focus on the topic of voting was significantly greater than Romney's (Chi-square=6.04, df=1, $p<.05$)

Both candidates communicated material regarding foreign policy. On Romney's Twitter feed, 14.3% of his tweets contained the topic. Of the posts on Romney's Facebook page, 9.4% mentioned the topic. Obama mentioned foreign policy in 10.5% of his tweets and 4.2% of his Facebook posts. The emphasis on this topic across both of the social media platforms showed no significant difference between the two campaigns.

A related topic, the military, appeared on Romney's Twitter feed with 4.1% of the tweets containing the topic, but the candidate made no mentions on Facebook. Content regarding the military appeared in 8.3% of both Obama's tweets and Facebook posts. These two topics combined, foreign policy and the military, showed no significant difference in emphasis across both platforms between the two campaigns.

Several topics had little or no presence. Neither candidate had a single post that mentioned Social Security or Medicare. Obama made no mention of energy while the topic appeared in only 2.0% of Romney's Twitter posts and 3.1% of his Facebook posts. Romney made no mention of women's issues. The topic earned mentions in 12.5% of Obama's Facebook posts but only 2.3% of his Twitter posts.

With all the controversy surrounding the Affordable Health Care Act, commonly known as Obamacare, health care did not emerge as a major topic. It had its greatest presence on Obama's Facebook page, with 16.7% of the posts containing the topic. It

appeared in only 3.0% of the Obama Twitter posts. Romney had no Facebook posts or tweets that included the topic. Content on these four domestic issues combined on both of the candidate's Twitter and Facebook feeds showed no significant difference between the levels of emphasis the candidates gave to these issues.

The category of "other" topics as noted by the coders included education and leadership. A handful of posts contained no topic that could be identified, such as a tweet from Obama on November 2 (Obama, 2012), as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Tweet of undetermined topic. From [Twitter.com/barackobama](https://twitter.com/barackobama) by B.Obama, 2012. Retrieved November 2, 2012 from <https://Twitter.com/barackobama>

More than one topic could be present in a single post. Coders were instructed to code positive for all topics that appeared in a post, leading to total percentages of over 100. See Table 3 for percentages by topic, candidate and platform.

Table 3

Topics by Percent on Obama and Romney Twitter Feeds and Facebook Pages

Topic	Romney Twitter	Romney Facebook	Obama Twitter	Obama Facebook
Economy	38.8	18.8	12.0	12.5
Taxes	2.0	3.1	0.8	0
Foreign Policy	14.3	9.4	10.5	4.2
Energy	2.0	3.1	0.0	0.0
Military	4.1	0.0	8.3	8.3
Health Care	2.0	0.0	3.0	16.7
Women	0.0	0.0	2.3	12.5
Soc. Sec./Medicare	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Voting	18.4	12.5	29.3	41.7
Fundraising	4.1	28.1	0.8	0.0
Show of support	20.0	43.8	31.6	62.5
Other	0.0	0.0	5.3	4.2
None	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0
Total	105.7	118.9	103.9	162.6
	^a n=49	^b n=32	^c n=133	^d n=24

*p<.05

Attack, Acclaim and Defend Functions

RQ2 Do political campaigns use Benoit's three themes of attack, acclaim and defend as historically used in legacy media in Twitter and Facebook and if so, how?

Several of the same patterns of attack, acclaim and defend functions that Benoit (1999, 2001) has identified over several decades of television advertising appeared in the social media of Obama and Romney.

The pattern in television political advertising of the incumbent acclaiming more and the challenger attacking more appeared on both Facebook and Twitter. Of the three functions, the attack function was used most frequently by Romney, the challenger, across all his social media communication and the differences between the candidates' use of the attack function on both platforms was significant (Chi-square=20.54, df=1, $p<.05$).

Within Romney's tweets, 40.8% contained an attack message. On Facebook, 18.8% of his posts included attack content. Attacks on Twitter reflected the reactive posts related to the three debate dates in the study, such as this attack tweet on October 16, the night of the second presidential debate (Romney, 2012) as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Attack function example. From Twitter.com/mittromney by M.Romney, 2012. Retrieved October 16, 2012 from <https://Twitter.com/mittromney>

Obama emphasized acclaims on both Facebook and Twitter. The difference in how often the two candidates used the acclaim function in their combined social media communication was significant (Chi-square=13.17, df=1, $p<.05$). On Facebook, 50% of Obama's posts contained an acclaim, and 40.6% of Obama's tweets included an acclaim

message. An Obama Facebook post from October 8, 2012, the same date as Romney’s major foreign policy address, contained an acclaim which included an interactive call to action (Obama, 2012), as shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Acclaim function example. From facebook.com/barackobama by B.Obama, 2012. Retrieved November 8, 2012 from <https://facebook.com/barackobama>

The pattern of the losing candidate utilizing the defense function occurred in social media. Only Romney used this function on both his Facebook page and Twitter feed. The percentage of times the defense function appeared was low, however, just as observed in legacy media. Romney’s use represented just one incident on each platform.

Romney's second brief defense post occurred on Twitter and appeared on October 22, 2012, following the final presidential debate (Romney, 2012), as seen in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Defense function example. From Twitter.com/mittromney by M.Romney, 2012. Retrieved October 22, 2012 from <https://Twitter.com/mittromney>

Benoit's (1999, 2001) findings that the trailing candidate in a close contest attacks at a higher rate in television advertisements also appeared in this social media sample. On October 9, 2012 Obama was just 2.2 points ahead in an average of polls in the swing states (Silver, 2012). In the final days before the November 6 election the polls reflected a tight race with Romney behind Obama in almost every poll (Silver, 2012), providing incentive for Romney to attack.

The pattern of Republicans acclaiming more and Democrats attacking more was not present. The stronger link occurred between incumbent and challenger.

Where presidential advertising on television routinely employs one of the three functions (Benoit, 1999, 2001), from nearly one-third to two-thirds of Obama's and Romney's social media posts lacked any of the three approaches. Of the 238 total samples, just 51.7% of them employed one of the three functions.

Romney showed the greatest usage of the three functions with 65.2% of his tweets employing one or more of the three strategies. Only 34.4% of his Facebook posts had any of the three functions present.

Obama utilized Benoit’s (1999) functions predominantly on Facebook, with 58.3% of his posts demonstrating at least one of the three strategies. Obama’s tweets employed the functions even less frequently. Less than 50% of his messages Twitter contained an attack, acclaim or defend message.

As discussed in the results in RQ1c, candidates utilized Facebook and Twitter to elicit shows of support and fundraise, leaving many posts and tweets with no references to policy or character, content that often contains one or more of the three functions. See Table 4 for a full comparison across Facebook and Twitter.

Table 4

Percent of Attacks, Acclaims and Defenses by Total Number of Posts

Functions	Romney Twitter	Romney Facebook	Obama Twitter	Obama Facebook
Attacks	40.8	18.8	9.0	8.3
Acclaims	22.4	12.5	40.6	50.0
Defenses	2.0	3.1	0.0	0.0
None	34.8	65.6	50.4	41.7
Total	100	100	100	100.0
	^a n=49	^b n=32	^c n=133	^d n=24

*P<.05

Collective and Self-Reference Language

RQ3 In what ways do political campaigns engage in collective or self-reference language across Twitter and Facebook platforms and how does it differ from strategies traditionally seen in campaigns recorded in legacy media?

RQ3a: Does the pattern established in legacy media of winning candidates exhibiting greater collective language as expressed by the use of the words, “community,” “coalition,” “country,” “family,” “group” or “team,” also appear in Twitter and Facebook postings?

Collective Language

Collective language as expressed by the six words of “community,” “coalition,” “country,” “family,” “group” and “team, including their plural forms and variations as discussed in the methods section, were not used with any frequency by either candidate. The pattern in legacy media of the winning candidate using more collective language than the losing candidate was not established. Combined usage on both platforms by the candidates showed no difference of significance.

Obama made the greatest use of the vocabulary on Facebook with just 1.21% of his Facebook communication employing any of the words as a percentage of word count. Collective language comprised just .67% of the word count on Romney’s Facebook posts. There was no significant difference in usage between the two candidates on Facebook.

On Twitter, Romney edged out Obama in the use of collective language by percentage of word count, .99% to .96%, though Obama had more occurrences of collective language. This variance created a difference of significance between the two candidates on the platform (Chi-square=.01, df=1, $p<.05$).

The most common collective word used by both campaigns was “team.” In Romney’s communication it comprised 42.8% of the collective words used on his Twitter feed, and 66.7% of those used on his Facebook page. For Obama, “team” comprised 11.5% of the collective words used and on Facebook 60.0%.

Both campaigns utilized variations of “team” in their Twitter feeds with Twitter handles and hashtags. Romney used “@teamromney” and “@romneyroadteam,” and Obama utilized “#teamjoe,” “#teamobama” and “#teambarack.” When those forms are included in a grouping of the usage of “team” the percentages leap to 78.6% of the collective language on Romney’s Twitter feed and 76.9% of the usage on Obama’s Twitter feed.

The next most prevalent collective word both candidates used was “country.” It appeared on the candidates’ Twitter feeds; three times on Romney’s, and five times on Obama’s. Both candidates on both platforms mentioned “family or “families.” Only Obama used the word, “community or “communities” on Facebook. For each candidate’s use of collective language as a percentage of the word counts of their Facebook and Twitter communication, see Table 5.

Table 5

Occurrences of Collective Language as a Percent of Total Word Count

	Romney Twitter	Romney Facebook	Obama Twitter	Obama Facebook
Occurrences	14	6	26	10
None	1404	883	2690	819
Total (n)	1418	889	2716	829
Percent	0.99	0.67	0.96	1.21

*p>.05

Self-Reference Language

RQ3b: Does the opposing pattern documented in legacy media of losing candidates utilizing more self-reference language as expressed by the use of the words, I, I'd, I'll, I'm, I've, me, my, mine or myself, also appear in Twitter and Facebook postings?

The use of self-reference language by either campaign on either platform was used even less frequently as a percentage of word count than collective language. On Twitter, Romney, the losing candidate, used self-reference words with greater frequency than Obama did on his Twitter feed and the difference rose to level of significance (Chi-square=6.03, df=1, p<.05). This suggested the pattern found in campaign speech and legacy media of the losing candidate making greater use of self-reference language than the winning candidate. However this pattern was only seen on Twitter.

On Facebook each candidate used a self-reference just once, creating no significant difference between the candidates. Content on the combined platforms also

showed no level of significance. See Table 6 for a summary of the use of self-reference language as a percentage of word count.

Table 6

Occurrences of Self-Reference Language as a Percent of Word Count

	Romney Twitter	Romney Facebook	Obama Twitter	Obama Facebook
Occurrences	13	1	9	1
None	1405	888	2707	828
Total (n)	1418	889	2716	829
Percent	0.92	0.11	0.33	0.12

*p<.05

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Conclusions

This study sought to identify if political communication on social media differs from the political communication in legacy media by examining specific rhetorical tools. The analysis specifically examined the communication of the Obama and Romney campaigns on Facebook and Twitter on seven key dates within 30 days prior to Election Day. The results of this analysis suggest that political communication on social media in the final days of an election campaign employs some of the classic strategies seen in legacy media, in particular, repetition and Benoit's attack, acclaim and defend functions.

Research question 1a sought to identify key words that exhibited the rhetorical strategy of repetition. Repetition was identified in the social media of both candidates. The frequency of a few key words, including those in the form of hashtags, in both campaigns suggested repetition was a tool used with deliberation. The first four most commonly used words on Obama's Twitter feed, "Obama" "president" "vote" and "you," demonstrate how repetition created a clear message to citizens to vote for Obama.

The top ten ranked words on the Obama Facebook page in this study have just four key words in common with the top ten words identified in a study with a larger sample of the candidate's Facebook content (Groshek & Al-Rawi, 2013). The four common words were "Obama," "president," "vote" and "Romney." These variances suggest that while a few of Obama's key words remained consistent, other emphasized language may have changed in the final month of the campaign.

Romney's Facebook communication repeated the words, "Romney," "America" and "president," reinforcing the image of the candidate as president. Romney's Facebook

posts frequently included references to Romney and his running mate by their first or last names. “Romney,” “Mitt,” “Mitt Romney” and “Ryan” each appeared in the top ten most frequent words. The campaign may have deliberately emphasized the names of the candidates to create the impression of a more personal style that names and personal words engender in online users (Thayer, Evans, McBride, Queen, & Spyridakis, 2010).

Six of Romney’s top key words on Facebook identified in Groshek & Al-Rawi’s study (2013) using a larger sample over a longer period of time also appear in Romney’s ten top-ranked words on Facebook identified in this study. The six common words include “America,” “Romney,” “President,” “Obama,” “Mitt” and “Ryan.” This suggests that Romney’s key words may have remained more consistent throughout the campaign.

One interesting observation in Romney’s key words on Facebook centers on the use of the words “stronger,” which appeared four times, and “better,” which was used three times. As noted in the literature review, both of these words were prominently used in Ronald Reagan’s famous television commercial, “Morning in America,” a message of hope that resonated with voters of the time (Weston, 2007).

A variation between the two campaigns appeared in the frequency of the word “vote.” Romney’s Facebook postings only included the word “vote” three times and each occurrence appeared on Election Day. “Vote” appeared more frequently on Romney’s Twitter feed, yet all of the 10 occurrences appeared on Election Day. The word earned only a .95 weighted percentage compared to a weighted percentage of 1.63 on Obama’s Twitter feed. With social media content short in length, these differences in providing a specific call to the desired action of voting may be a key component in successful political communication and would suggest further study.

Each campaign demonstrated tactics in their key words that specifically leveraged characteristics unique to the social media platform. Hashtags and Twitter handles were employed for strategic impact. Obama utilized the hashtag, “#stayinline,” only on Election Day to specifically address voters in real time as they were standing in line to vote. Tweets directed to ten swing states advised citizens when the polls closed and to remain in line. This tactic leveraged the use of social media on mobile devices. Twitter consumers now choose the mobile app over desktop use 86% of the time, (Petronzio, 2014) suggesting that campaigns must accelerate their strategies to reach voters on their phones and tablets.

The Romney campaign used repetition to attack his opponent through the use of the “#cantafford4more” hashtag. The repeated message of “#cantafford4more” and its other variations such as “Can’t afford four more years,” and “cannot afford four more years” was employed to attack the incumbent, Obama, just as the word, “debt” was used to draw attention to the policies of the president.

Where Obama took advantage of the high mobile use of Twitter, Romney also leveraged a key Twitter characteristic through repetition in his Twitter communication. Romney’s use of the Obama’s Twitter handle, “@barackobama,” as the campaign’s third most frequent word on Twitter is interesting to note given that Romney’s Twitter handle did not appear in any of the 100 most frequently used words in Obama’s Facebook or Twitter communication. This use of Obama’s handle suggests a deliberate decision to utilize the conventions of Twitter.

Specifically using this convention with the opponent’s handle is curious. On the Twitter platform, clicking on a handle included in a tweet links directly to that user’s

feed. Without interviewing Romney's social media team, it's unclear why the campaign would help users easily find the @barackobama Twitter feed as a strategy. The technique carries a risk of the campaign ceding control of its messaging to its opponent.

In addition, five of the 13 uses appeared at the beginning of a tweet and included a period before Obama's handle to form, ".@barackobama." This technique resulted in the tweet appearing to all of Romney's followers but not to those who followed both Romney and Obama. In this regard, the Romney campaign spread its message first to its supporters and others interested enough to follow the campaign on Twitter.

Research question 1b analyzed the key words between the two social media platforms of each candidate. Both candidates demonstrated consistency in key words between social media platforms. Five of the top ten words on the Obama Twitter feed also occurred in the ten most frequent words on the campaign's Facebook page. These five words, "Obama," "president," "you," "your" and "vote" reinforced the message to vote for Obama.

Variations in key words below the top ten groupings occurred in Obama's communication in the appearance of the word "women." Three of the dates for analysis were debate dates which generated a large number of the Obama tweets in the total sample. The debates did not contain major discussions on women's issues and this may explain the cross-platform differences.

Thirteen of the 16 words in the top-ten ranked most frequent words on Romney's Facebook page also appeared in the top rankings on his Twitter feed. Romney's message was less direct in reinforcing voting than Obama's. Romney's most frequent words on

Facebook and Twitter included “America,” “president” and “today,” all in the top four rankings.

Below the top ten rankings in Romney’s social media communication, word frequency dropped to four or less occurrences. The key word, “economy” appeared only four times on Twitter and not at all on Facebook. One common word between the two platforms was “energy.”

Word clouds from the combined Facebook and Twitter feeds of each candidate provide intriguing visuals in presenting the dominant key words in each campaign (See Appendices D and E for word cloud representations).

Topics on each of the candidate’s Facebook and Twitter feeds were analyzed in research question 1c. The social media of the Obama and Romney campaigns in the month leading up to the election minimized policy issues in favor of content centered on motivating citizens to action. The focus on motivating users to action is consistent with Bronstein’s (2013) findings on topics expressed on the Facebook pages of the candidates from mid-August through Election Day.

Romney exhibited the greatest effort in mentioning policy with an emphasis on the economy in his tweets. In the month leading up to the election, the national unemployment rate as measured by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, still stood at 7.8% (data.bls.gov). Polls revealed the economy as the leading issue in the campaign (Saad, 2012). The weakness in the economy gave Romney the opportunity to emphasize the topic as a shortcoming for Obama and strength for Romney. Romney took advantage of this weakness by making the economy the single most emphasized policy topic by both candidates on both platforms.

For both candidates the request for a “show of support,” as expressed by the call to watch or attend a candidate appearance, display campaign slogans for the candidate, share or retweet content, follow posts or commit to the candidate was displayed with high importance. For Obama the topic comprised nearly two-thirds of his Facebook posts and nearly one-third of his tweets. For Romney, requests for support appeared in over forty percent of his Facebook posts, the most of any topic. On Romney’s Twitter feed, show of support was the second most frequent topic after content surrounding the economy.

A clear difference between the candidates appeared in content surrounding voting and fundraising. Romney demonstrated a significantly greater emphasis on fundraising compared to Obama in these final days of the campaign (Chi-square=18.65, df=1, $p<.05$). Obama had nearly no fundraising efforts on either platform. Obama exhibited a significantly higher emphasis on voting combined on both platforms (Chi-square=6.04, df=1, $p<.05$). On Facebook, 41.7% of Obama’s posts mentioned voting compared to only 12.5% of Romney’s Facebook posts. On Twitter, Obama posted content surrounding voting in 29.3% of the posts compared to just 18.4% of Romney’s tweets. For all the effort Romney directed at fundraising and shows of support, asking for the vote appeared as an afterthought on social media in the month prior to the election.

In research question 2, mixed results were found in how Benoit’s (1999, 2001) functions of attack, acclaim and defend, strategies documented in legacy media, appeared in the social media of the campaigns. The pattern of attacks having a stronger association with the challenger and the trailing candidate were present, as was the use of the defense function by the losing candidate.

This sample showed the losing candidate employed the attack function to a greater extent than the winning candidate. Benoit's (1999, 2001) research into presidential campaign commercials from 1952-2000 shows no significant relationship in the use of attacks and acclaims between winners and losers (Benoit, 1999, 2001). The emphasis by the Romney campaign in using the attack function over acclaims mirrored the findings that attack functions are employed with greater frequency in web-based political ads in the general election period (Roberts, 2006).

However, unlike television advertising, the candidates in this sample of social media communication often used none of the three functions. From over one-third to nearly two-thirds of Obama's and Romney's communication contained none of the functions. This absence is related to the campaigns' emphasis on topics unrelated to issues and instead concentrating on calls to action. This choice in messaging may be seen as a strategic method to harness the unique power of social media to extend messaging and motivate voters who are already engaged in the candidate's Facebook page or Twitter feed.

Research question 3 explored collective and self-reference language. The use of each type of language drew few occurrences as a percentage of all the candidates' communication. Research question 3a analyzed collective language as expressed by the words, "community," "coalition," "country," "family," "group" or "team." Collective language showed a statistically significant difference in usage only on Twitter, with Romney using the language more as a percentage of word count (Chi-square=.01, df=1, $p < .05$). This did not reflect the pattern found in legacy media in which the winning candidate uses more collective language.

Research question 3b analyzed self-reference language as exhibited by the use of the words, “I,” “I’d,” “I’ll,” “I’m,” “I’ve,” “me,” “my,” “mine” or “myself. As with collective language, the only statistically significant difference between the two candidates appeared on Twitter (Chi-square=6.03, df=1, p<.05). Unlike the findings for collective language however, the losing candidate did follow the historical pattern of using more self-reference language.

Both candidates created more content on Twitter than Facebook. These specific types of language may become more apparent as content increases. Additional research with a larger sample is called for to collect more data on how collective language and self-reference language is used on each of these platforms and whether patterns of winning and losing candidates repeatedly appear.

The most apparent finding from this study relates to how the Obama and Romney campaigns used social media as an overall campaign tool in the month leading up to the election. The 2012 presidential campaigns’ use of Facebook and Twitter primarily centered on activating voter engagement through soliciting acts of support, donations and activities surrounding and including voting. These combined objectives were clearly the focus on the two platforms analyzed in this study. This continued a trend identified in the candidate websites in the 2004 presidential campaign (Vaccari, 2008) and supports the results of other studies of the social media communication over a longer period in the 2012 presidential election (Bronstein, 2013, Adams & McCorkindale, 2012).

This pronounced difference between political communication in legacy media and social media in the month prior to Election Day is less aligned with rhetorical tools and more with the tactic of maximizing the unique capabilities of social media. The

campaigns leveraged their social media platforms to reach out to voters, mobilize them and communicate with them in real time. These tactics cannot be duplicated in any other medium.

Summary

The finding in this analysis that the social media efforts of both campaigns lacked an emphasis on policy issues demonstrates both the unique qualities of social media and a trend in political communication overall to truncate the discussion of issues. Campaigns foster “fandom” politics, (Bronstein, 2013) instead by emphasizing the relationship between candidate and audience and reinforcing existing sensibilities.

This analysis suggests that political campaign strategists de-emphasize content about issues and policy on social media in the final month of the campaign. This may be due to the fact that followers and fans of the candidates deliberately choose to receive content. The audience is already interested and primarily comprised of at least casual supporters of the candidate. The low-information voter and independents, the swing voters, may be more efficiently reached through other means.

The priority effort in the few weeks prior to the election appeared directed at getting out the vote and asking for volunteers and donations. The personal tone, sharable features and instant access of social media allow campaigns to employ these tactics in ways that cannot be duplicated in other media.

There is conflicting research on the matter of content surrounding issues and policy when the longer campaign cycle is studied. While this study found that social media of the two presidential candidates in the month leading up to the election lacked a

focus on issues, a Twitter study during the 2012 primary found that just over half of the candidates' tweets centered on key issues in the campaign (Conway et al., 2013). This suggests that policy issues may be expressed in social media in earlier stages of the campaign and then taper off as the general election approaches.

An interesting variation between the two campaigns was displayed in the duplication in messaging across the two social media platforms. Obama's words in the five highest weighted percentage rankings were nearly identical between Facebook and Twitter. Only six words appeared using these criteria, with five of the six words, "Obama," "president," "you," "your" and "vote," in common between the platforms.

The Romney campaign had more variation in the group of words ranked in the five top weighted percentages. Fourteen words earned appeared in these rankings with only three in common between Facebook and Twitter. This suggests that the Obama campaign exercised greater discipline with its messaging across platforms through the use of repetition. The question is raised of whether winning candidates exhibit greater consistency in their key words and phrases in their social media communication.

In terms of specific forms of language, key words revealed a potentially new use of rhetorical language that warrants further study. One of the most interesting and surprising findings was the prominence of the second-person pronouns of "you" and "your." One or both words appeared in the top-ten ranked word groups for both candidates. The rhetoric of direct-address exceeded that of collective language, with only the word "team" appearing with any frequency. The use of direct-address also exceeded the use of self-reference language.

This strong presence of direct-address may be a deliberate strategy to convey a more equal relationship between the candidate and voter. Personal pronouns may create a perception of a more personal and informal tone (Thayer et al., 2010). In an analysis of consumer attitudes toward brands, consumers reacted differently to the use of “we” or “you” language. Consumers perceived “we” language more positively when the consumer expected a close relationship with the brand, such as banking services. However, with a brand with which consumers expect a more distant relationship, such as a cellular service, consumers reacted more positively to “you” language (Sela, Wheeler, & Sarial-Abi, 2012). Whether candidates are brands with which consumers expect a distant or close relationship may further inform the usage of second-person pronouns.

To advance their objectives both candidates made use of conventions specific to how citizens now consume media. The campaigns asked their Facebook fans to share content to increase the reach of the message. Twitter hashtags reinforced points of view. Twitter handles were employed to respond to search functions.

With consumers increasingly accessing content through their smart phones and other mobile devices, political communication, just as all marketing efforts, will need to adapt to provide information that’s timely, readily accessible and relevant to the platform.

Limitations

The parameters of this study, which included just seven dates for analysis, are a limitation in drawing broad conclusions about political communication in social media. By confining the sample to specific dates and specific key events in the final weeks of the campaign, the results may not be indicative of the communication rhetoric over the entire

course of the campaign. This study deliberately focused on specific dates, yet many of the most interesting communication occurred the day after each debate as well as earlier in the campaign.

The method of saving data for the study as web pages complete limited the number of tweets captured per day to 20. Another method that would preserve all tweets in a 24-hour period at the time of capture would deliver a larger sample and show the entire communication on key dates such as the presidential and vice-presidential debates. Twitter's functionality in advanced search now makes historical retrieval possible.

In delving into collective language, only six key representative words were submitted into the text search function using the NVivo 10 software. With the short length of text in social media posts and the limited number of posts examined, this software and a small number of representative words was adequate for the breadth of this study. However, DICTION software identifies this type of language in much greater depth with an established set of robust dictionaries. Further study using the DICTION software in a larger sample would provide greater detail in seeking out collective language in political communication on social media platforms.

The methodology of seeking out only key words through the use of the computerized word frequency searches excluded the identification of phrases that may have been important in the campaigns. In addition, this quantitative methodology alone does not provide the full context of how words and phrases are used. A qualitative research project would provide greater context of the language used by the campaigns.

Future Research

Several topics for future research may be derived from this study, from expanding the inquiry posed here to a larger sample over a longer period of time, to pursuing new questions suggested in this study. The rapidly changing use and conventions in social media additionally provide research topics pertinent to emerging trends in social media communication.

The extent to which issues are emphasized in candidate social media platforms has produced conflicting results with different phases of the campaign as one possible variable. This warrants further study to determine if there is a relationship between how election issues are presented in social media over the duration of the election timeline.

The prominence of “you” and “your” in the top-ten ranked frequency of use in the word frequencies for both Obama and Romney stood out as one of the most interesting discoveries in this project. This calls for a study of how the rhetoric of direct-address is used in the social media communication of political campaigns and whether any relationship exists in the frequency of use between winning and losing candidates. With professional staffs and consultants that specialize in social media communication, best practices in political communication in social media may specifically limit self-reference while emphasizing second-person pronouns. Qualitative research in the form of interviews with social media political specialists is suggested to discover if political language is deliberately changing on these social media platforms which utilize a more conversational style. Advertising research into the use of “you” and its impact on consumer perception of brands (Sela et al., 2012) may also inform inquiry into the progression of political communication.

In addition to the exploration of the use of second-person pronouns, the study of the use of inclusive language would also reveal trends in how political communication is expressed in social media. Inclusive words focus on “we,” “us” and “our” words. These inclusive words appear with greater frequency in the political speeches of winning candidates (Steffens & Haslam 2013). Whether this pattern is also present in social media communication warrants exploration using large samples with multiple races.

Political campaigns in 2014 and 2016 will need to adapt content to the primarily mobile experience. Increasingly, the use of social media occurs on mobile devices, and this change has accelerated since the 2012 election. Facebook users now spend 68% of their time with the social media platform on their mobile phones. Twitter users engage via their phones 86% of the time (Petronzio, 2014). Will the social media communication in the 2014 midterm elections and 2016 presidential election continue to concentrate on activating donations, volunteer acts and activities surrounding voting increase, and if so, how will they be communicated through an on-the-go experience?

By 2016 the social media story in political communication may be on platforms other than Facebook and Twitter. YouTube is used by nearly twice as many people of age 25-34 than Twitter (Bennett, 2014). A slight downward trend in teen use of Facebook has been detected (Sloane, 2013). Instagram is already more popular than Twitter for the 25-34 age group (Bennett, 2014).

Demonstrating the popularity of this newer social media platform, the official Instagram account of the Ready for Hillary PAC already had 40,000 followers as of March 30, 2014 (Instagram.com/readyforhillary, n.d). Though not a candidate in 2016, Barack Obama’s account, now run by the Organizing for Action PAC, had 2.9 million

followers as of March 30, 2014 ([Instagram.com/barackobama#](https://www.instagram.com/barackobama#), n.d.). How will political communication on social media continue or change from how it's been expressed to this point on Facebook and Twitter?

Of prime importance is the dedication to study these newer and emerging communication platforms and to deliver research quickly. Academic studies are challenged to keep up with the speed of how communication is changing as consumers increasingly gain influence in the conversation.

APPENDIX A

CODE BOOK

The following is a description of guidelines and categories for coding each post on the code sheet. All codes should be recorded in the “enumeration label” column of the code sheet, by filling in the blank space with the appropriate text response or circling the appropriate code.

Sample and coder information

1. Coder: Identify that you are the coder by circling the number corresponding to your name.
2. Date: Record the date you are coding. Record this as six numbers separated by a forward slash in month (02), day (02/16) and year (2014) order.
3. ID number: Each social media post is given a unique number ranging from 001 to 238. All ID numbers should begin with your assigned coder number (i.e., 1-3), followed by the identification number (i.e., 001-238). Record this number in the enumeration label column.
4. Type of post: Circle 1 for an Obama Facebook post, 2 for Obama Twitter post, 3 for a Romney Facebook post and 4 for a Romney Twitter post.

Themes: Attack, acclaim, defend themes. These are three themes that may be present in the posts. Read each post carefully and note which are present or not present. There may be more than one theme in a single post. Some posts may be determined to have none of the three.

5. **Attack posts** question or refute the opponent’s position, record or qualifications for office. Circle 0 if no attack approach is made. Circle 1 if the attack approach is present.
6. **Acclaim posts** put the candidate himself in a positive light through mention of his accomplishments or his policies. Circle 0 if no acclaim approach is present. Circle 1 if the acclaim approach is present.
7. **Defend posts** respond to the opponent’s attacks through refuting or repositioning the opponent’s remarks. Circle 0 if no defense approach is present. Circle 1 if the defense approach is present.

Self-reference, second-person pronouns and inclusive language: Read each post carefully for any words that refer to the candidate himself or for others. Code for if the words appear at all or not at all in the post. You will not count the frequency of how

many times these words may appear in a single post. Posts may have none, some or all types of language present.

8. **Self-reference words:** Look for any of these words in the post: “I, I’d, I’ll, I’m, I’ve, me, my, mine or myself.” Circle 0 if none of them are present. Circle 1 if any or several are present.
9. **Second-person pronouns and inclusive words:** Look for any of these words in the post: “you, your, yours, you’ve, you’ll, our, ours, us, we and we’ve.” Circle 0 if none of them are present. Circle 1 if any or several are present.

Topics: For all the topics below, please choose all that apply. Code all categories according to whether the topic is present, regardless of the topic of the whole post.

10. **The economy:** A post that highlights the economy which would include words such as: the recession, middle class, jobs, job opportunities, job creation, prosperity, employment, unemployment, auto industry, manufacturing, trade, deficit, debt, government spending, labor, wages or business. Circle 0 if no reference is present. Circle 1 if any reference is present.
11. **Taxes:** A post that contains references to taxes with would include words such as, taxes, raising taxes, cutting taxes, tax cuts, tax plan, tax incentives or tax fairness. Circle 0 if no reference is present. Circle 1 if any are present.
12. **Foreign policy:** A post that contains references to foreign policy which could include words such as: the Middle East, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, China, Libya, Benghazi, mentions of U.S. relations with other countries, national security, peace, terrorism, military intervention, Bin Laden, Al-Qaeda or the Taliban. Circle 0 if no reference is present. Circle 1 if any are present.
13. **Energy:** A post that contains references to energy which would include words such as: oil, solar, wind, coal, natural gas, gasoline, pipeline, the Gulf, nuclear, energy independence, hybrids or fuel. Circle 0 if no reference is present. Circle 1 if any are present.
14. **Military:** a post that contains references to the military would include words such as: military, heroes, veterans, troops, commander-in-chief, military or defense spending, military equipment or technology. Mentions of military activity in other countries please also code as “foreign policy.” Circle 0 if no reference is present. Circle 1 if any are present.
15. **Health Care:** a post that contains references to health care would include words such as: affordable health care, Obamacare, health insurance, access to health care, uninsured, cost of medicine or health care. Circle 0 if no reference is present. Circle 1 if any are present.

16. **Women:** a post that contains references to women would include words and phrases such as: equal pay, equal opportunity, qualified women for jobs, binders full of women, health care for women, access to abortions and/or birth control, choice, families, children or child care. References to women and health insurance please also code as “health care.”
17. **Social Security or Medicare:** a post that refers to seniors would include mentions of Social Security or Medicare. Circle 0 if no reference is present. Circle 1 if any is present.
18. **Voting:** a post about voting would include content regarding: voting, voter registration, early voting, volunteering to get out the vote, encouraging people you know to register or vote. Circle 0 if no reference is present. Circle 1 if any is present.
19. **Fundraising:** A post that contains a fundraising message asks for a donation, encourages purchase of an item, or asking others to donate or purchase. Circle 0 if no reference is present. Circle 1 if any is present.
20. **Show of support:** A post that contains a show of support message includes a call to watch or attend a candidate appearance, display campaign slogans for the candidate, share or retweet content, follow posts or commit to the candidate. Circle 0 if no reference is present. Circle 1 if any is present.
21. **Other:** This refers to any other topics identified through observing key words during the coding process that were not identified on the coding sheet. Assess posts for “other” categories based on whether the topic of the post was predominantly about an unlisted topic. If the post had no other topics circle 0 for no. If an unidentified topic was present, please write the name of this newly identified topic on the code sheet and circle 1 for “yes

APPENDIX B
CODING SHEET

Variable name	Variable description/coding question	Enumeration Label
Coder ID #1 #2 #3	Date of coding:	ID NUMBER:
Social media	Social media platform name	1=Obama Facebook 2=Obama Twitter 3=Romney Facebook 4=Romney Twitter
Attack	Does the post utilize an attack theme?	0=no 1=yes
Acclaim	Does the post utilize an acclaim theme?	0=no 1=yes
Defend	Does the post utilize a defend theme?	0=no 1=yes
Self-reference words	Does the post contain “I” or “me” words?	0=no 1=yes
Second-person pronoun and inclusive words	Does the post contain, “you,” “we” or “us” words?	0=no 1=yes
The economy	Does the post contain content that refers to the economy?	0=no 1=yes
Taxes	Does the post contain content that refers to taxes?	0=no 1=yes
Foreign policy	Does the post contain content that refers to foreign policy?	0=no 1=yes
Energy	Does the post contain content that refers to energy?	0=no 1=yes
Military	Does the post contain content that refers to the military?	0=no 1=yes
Health care	Does the post contain content that refers to health care?	0=no 1=yes
Women	Does the post contain content that refers to women’s issues?	0=no 1=yes
Social Security/Medicare	Does the post contain references to Social Security or Medicare?	0=no 1=yes
Voting	Does the post contain content that refers to voting?	0=no 1=yes
Fundraising	Does the post contain a fundraising message?	0=no 1=yes
Show of support	Does the post contain requests for support for the candidate?	0=no 1=yes
Other:	Was there another topic not listed here? If yes, what was it?	0=no 1=yes

APPENDIX C

INTERCODER RELIABILITY

Variable	Average pairwise percent agreement	Average pairwise Cohen's Kappa
Attack	97.76%	0.93285047
Acclaim	92.44%	0.831366781
Defend	100.00%	1.000000000
Self-reference	99.72%	0.984834002
Second person or inclusive	98.32%	0.966081952
Economy	98.32%	0.943571213
Taxes	100.00%	1.000000000
Foreign Policy	98.32%	0.90809698
Energy	99.72%	0.903369874
Military	98.04%	0.842825194
Health Care	99.72%	0.959337092
Women	99.72%	0.947286822
Social Security or Medicare	100.00%	undefined*
Voting	98.32%	0.956378299
Fundraising	99.16%	0.93774529
Show of support	95.24%	0.898065694
Other	96.08%	0.483092504
 Average	 98.29%	 0.905931386

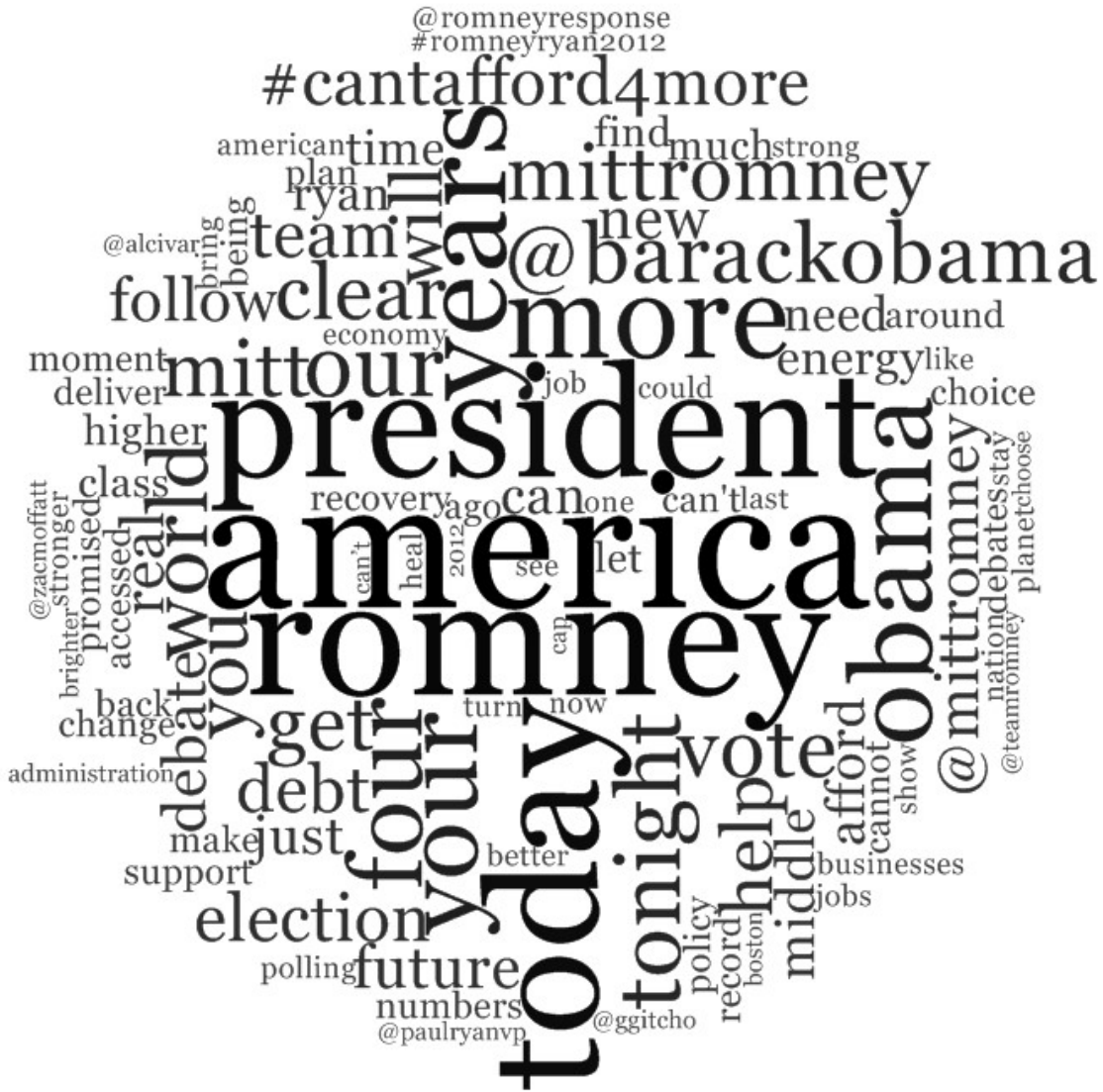
Calculations performed through dfreelon.org, ReCal3: Reliability for 3+ Coders.

<http://dfreelon.org/utis/recalfront/recal3/>

“*Cohen’s Kappa could not be calculated for this variable due to invariant values. This error appears when two conditions apply simultaneously in the data: 1) all of the coders have attained 100% agreement and 2) all coders have all selected the same variable value for every unit of analysis.”

APPENDIX E

ROMNEY FACEBOOK AND TWITTER WORD CLOUD



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