TWEETING TO THE TOP:

TRUMP, TWITTER, AND THE 2016 ELECTION

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ABSTRACT

This project examines Donald J. Trump's use of the social media platform Twitter during the 2016 presidential election through the present day in Trump's presidency. Specific case studies include: "fake news", CNN, and Trump's campaigns against Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz, Hillary Clinton, Russia, China, and Iran. The case study evaluates narrative control using branding, baiting, trolling, "stickiness" and nicknaming.

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INTRODUCTION

The 2016 Presidential election was a turning point in American politics. The election was fought on new platforms and in new spheres. Social media continued to expand in terms of political usage, especially the platform of Twitter which is the focus of this study. Donald Trump used Twitter as a tool to win the election, and continues to use Twitter as a narrative control device to this day. Trump's Twitter, @realDonaldTrump, has become an ever-present part of our news cycle. This project maps certain areas of Trump's use of Twitter providing an understanding of the strategies that Trump employs and analyzing the effects of these strategies. To even begin this work, there is a certain amount of background knowledge needed. To assist the reader, it is appropriate to include that information as a part of my introduction in the form of a literature review.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An influence for this research was all the talk about Russian propaganda during

the 2016 election. While this paper does not focus on Russian propaganda, it does focus

on propaganda pushed by the Trump team. With a limited number of studies on Trump's

Twitter itself, the sources addressing Russian propaganda were rather useful. These

sources addressed the nature of social media and the modern internet along with how the

spread of false narratives directing information worked and all of the sources referenced

the 2016 election cycle specifically. A second useful aspect of these types of sources,

which was discovered well into the project, is that Russia bot accounts mirror the

activities of the communities they are trying to impersonate. The analysis of these bot

accounts led to looking for trends on Donald Trump's Twitter page.

The first source deals with Russian bots and is called "Computational

Propaganda: If You Make It Trend, You Make It True" by Renee DiResta. The article

addressed the current state of the internet. In the early phase of the internet, or "Web 1.0"

as it is commonly called, most of the internet's users needed administrative permission to

post information. Outside of things like internet forums, one would need their own

website to post information on the internet. Jump forward to the mid-2000s and there are

platforms like Myspace and Friendster that start to pop up. These self posting platforms,

Web 2.0, expanded the internet and made platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter

possible. These platforms allowed users to connect to each other without really knowing

each other. Picture the 1999 internet. In order to contact someone or a group of people,

one needed email addresses. Communications between people or groups of people were

private. That is Web 1.0. In Web 2.0, that same email can be turned into a Twitter post

which opens the audience from just friends to anyone willing to look on a Twitter page or search a topic. DiResta lay all this out in the paper, then went on to explain the mechanism used to spread this information. DiResta identified "Virality Engines" as the source that spreads information on social media (18). These are mechanisms built into these platforms that allow information to be spread. An example would be the retweet or share buttons. Both buttons are simple keystrokes that allow information to be spread and are dependent on the action of users. Someone has to share or retweet the post for more people to see. The second mechanism is the hashtag, which originated on Twitter. You can search a hashtag and see tweets that contain that tag from people around the world. Twitter also allows for the search of tweets that have no hashtags using key words contained in the tweet.

The underlying point for DiResta was that with enough bad actors tweeting, posting and sharing bad information consistently and with effort, false statements start to feel real (15). The existence of Web 2.0 made Donald Trump, a Twitter personality, possible. Trump was able to tweet real time thoughts to his audience and they, in turn, shared or liked these tweets and drove a tweet's presence up. The existence of Web 2.0 made it possible for Trump's Twitter to be a narrative control device.

The second part of what DiResta's research illustrated was information on Russian bots and the tactics they used in the 2016 election. DiResta showed that these bots worked in two ways, one being the outright promotion of Trump (24). These were right wing leaning pages that supported Trump, retweeted pro Trump messages, and actively tried to control the narrative surrounding the election. The second part of what these bots did was attack left wing voters. These bots started liberal leaning pages (Black

Lives Matter and LGBTQ to name a few) and promoted anti-Hillary Clinton messaging

(DiResta 23). This was done to suppress a base of voters that would lean toward Hillary

Clinton. These bots mirrored communities' propaganda influence. Pro Trump bots

tweeted on topics Trump tweeted about. These bots were amplifying devices. DiResta's

findings, when looking at these bots, provided a roadmap for what to look for in research.

The strategies used were: promote Donald Trump, suppress left leaning voters (along the

lines of race), support democrats that are not Hillary Clinton (Jill Stein, Bernie Sanders),

and control the overall narrative of the election by dominating Twitter. Trump was able

to accomplish all of the same things.

DiResta's point about bots was with enough of them, one can control the narrative

on social media platforms. When there is a volume of people sharing, liking and

reporting, the post moves to the top tier of opinions on the platform. The approach in this

research takes the bots out and only looks at Trump's account to see how he tried and

was able to control the narrative. These bot accounts had the same goal and were able to

parrot the same messages as Trump, magnifying the voice. DiResta's theoretical base led

to the validity of looking at Trump's Twitter as a narrative control device because these

bots were an extension of Trump's Tweets and dependent on Trump.

The other paper on Russian propaganda was called, "The Russian "Firehose of

Falsehood" Propaganda Model: Why it Might Work and Options to Counter" by

Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews. Like DeRista's work, Russia's use of

propaganda in the 2016 election was analyzed. This paper introduced two new ideas

about propaganda: high volume and multi channeled (Matthews 1). High volume refers to

the constant flow of information while multi channeled refers to seeing this information

from multiple sources. Trump is single channel, but the use of the high-volume idea within this research still worked. This concept fostered the idea of tallying these tweets in the first place to determine which topics were getting the most mentions on Trump's Twitter. Paul and Matthews discussed how these propaganda campaigns push, "partial truth or outright fictions" to control the narrative of the election (1). The source described Russian propaganda as "rapid, continuous, and repetitive" (Matthews 4) and discussed the lack of commitment to consistency (Matthews 7). These accounts offered what actions needed to be taken and when in order to control the narrative of the election. Although not exactly how Trump's account functioned, it modeled the investigation: looking for rapid, continuous patterns that dictated the narrative around the election.

In *The Tipping Point: How Little Things can make A Big Difference* by Malcom Gladwell, a series of case studies on how trends develop are studied. Gladwell takes the perspective of trends being like infectious diseases in the way they spread. To understand why some trends are successful and others are not, Gladwell points out a few factors. One of the most important factors in the successfulness of a trend is the idea of "stickiness." Stickiness is an idea's ability to stay in someone's mind. This is not just how memorable something is, but how easily something is recalled and reactivated.

A good way to think about this is using the example of a catch phrase or a jungle. These types of things are made to be sticky. Gladwell says the difference between a phrase that is sticky and one that is not sticky can be very small (91). Once you find a sticky idea or phrase, it is good to be consistent in its use. This is a branding tool used by companies. The name "Trump" in itself has become sticky; he tends to put that name on his buildings or anything he is involved in. Trump has been building up his stickiness for

years through reality television, late night talk shows, and business practices. Stickiness is applied when looking at Trump's Twitter. The phrase "fake news" or any of the nicknames Trump used for opponents have become sticky. The goal was to track Trump's stickier phrases. This concept of methodology was pulled from the idea that Trump used these phrases and nicknames like branding and his Twitter is the vehicle for delivery.

Chiaoning Su's "China is Laughing at Us. Sad!: Trump's use of Twitter Diplomacy" counted and analyzed every tweet Trump had written about China. The study used the same methodology: counting tweets to get a frequency and generating a graph showing the volume of Trump's tweets about China plotted against time. After generating graphs, Su analyzed the tweets based on content. The research for this paper works the same way, but takes a broader view, not limiting data to tweets about China, but rather the use of Twitter to control any narrative. The goal is not to understand tweets on one topic, but how Trump used his Twitter to control the narrative, overall.

Narrative control involves deliberate manipulation of reality through speeches, interviews, and Twitter which is the topic Brooke Gladstone addressed in *The Trouble with Reality: A Rumination on Moral Panic in Our Time*. Gladstone's analysis, while valuable to understanding the methodology in this research, clearly comes across as an anti-Trump text. The premise was that Trump was trying to control narrative and create what the author calls a "full service universe" (Gladstone 44). This is vital to understanding Trump's Twitter usage. Gladstone illustrated that for every question raised, Trump presented a version of events he wanted you to believe. The reality he projected suits Trump's base and frightened his opposition. In this way, Trump's Twitter

was and is a reality bending technique and, ultimately, gives him more narrative control. This research continues the work that Gladstone produced but from a more objective position.

METHODS

All charts and figures in this study are frequency-based tallies of public tweets. The time frame begins in June 2015, when Trump made his formal announcement that he was running for president, through January 2019, the last month before the data was collected. All data was collected using Twitter's advanced search tools. These tools allowed tweets to be searched from specific accounts, during a specific time, and with or without specific words. The following example explains the approach. The Hillary versus Crooked Hillary chart was produced by searching tweets on Donald Trump's account using the words "Crooked Hillary" and then "Hillary" without "Crooked." Those tweets were plotted on a spread sheet. Trump is consistent in his phrasing. Trump is known for his ability to brand and, therefore, he uses the same words or phrases over and over. This paper focuses on those "brand" words.

Once the chart was generated, there was a base level of analysis mainly looking for patterns or things that looked out of place. The contents of Trump's tweets were then compared with the news cycle from that period of time. Block quotes were used for all tweets quoted for ease of reading. Time stamps were also included, and the tweets were all left in their original form. This project works as a mapping of a large data set. This mapping is not comprehensive, but rather it focuses on more interesting aspects of this account. There is more work that can be done with the massive data set. This work focuses on Trump's Twitter as a tool used to win the election and offers a greater understanding of this win.

CHAPTER ONE: MAKING NEWS FAKE

Narrative control is advantageous for any administration at any level of public office and the use and manipulation of technology is common. Controlling narrative gives the ability to shift public opinion, dictate topics of conversation, and push agendas. The desire to control narrative is not a new phenomenon. President Richard Nixon controlled his narrative with the use of direct mail, sending millions of letters out over the course of just a few days (Weaver). This allowed him to bypass the press and speak directly to supporters much like Trump did in his tweets. Another great innovator in narrative control that used new technology was President Franklin D. Roosevelt with his use of radio and the Fireside Chat. FDR disputed previously published stories, insulted reporters, and engaged in battles with the media. It is said:

> "President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who carried on a longitudinal war with *Chicago Tribune* publisher Robert R. McCormick, once admonished a reporter by giving him a dunce hat and instructing him to sit in the corner. At the close of a 1942 press conference, FDR handed a Nazi Iron Cross to a reporter and asked him to award it to a *New York Daily News* columnist who was in attendance and whose work he disliked." (Shafer).

FDR and Trump share the same strategy: admonish the press as liars and enemies of the truth and dictate your own narrative using a media outlet you control. Trump's "Fireside Chat" comes in the form of tweets. Trump, Nixon and Roosevelt all used new technology to bypass the current media structure.

Trump had been attacking the press on Twitter since long before he ran for president, but most of those attacks had to do with negative stories written about him. There was a shift to a more general opposition to the press when he started his campaign for president.

Trump's has a great propensity for branding. President Trump often uses specific phrases repeatedly when talking about certain topics. His phrase for attacking the media is "fake news" followed by the variant "fake news media." In order to analyze the use of this phrase, Trump's Twitter account was searched for the phrase "fake news" and the variant. All the occurrences were counted noting the time stamp when he started using the word or phrase, how often he is used it, and what issues were related to the word or phrase.

The theory is that Trump is trying to make phrases stick in peoples' minds. Paul claimed that the sheer volume of the messaging is a key aspect of how Russian bot accounts function. Specifically, Paul suggests "…messages received at a greater volume and from more sources will be more persuasive." (3). This is called the firehose method. Trump's messaging fits with regard to the volume of messages but he does not fit the multisource aspect, unless you consider the fact that he retweets other people that support his ideas and Trump is then parroted by his supporters and these bot accounts. Trump pairs this firehose method with "stickiness." A phrase like "fake news" repeated over and over and over becomes quite sticky.
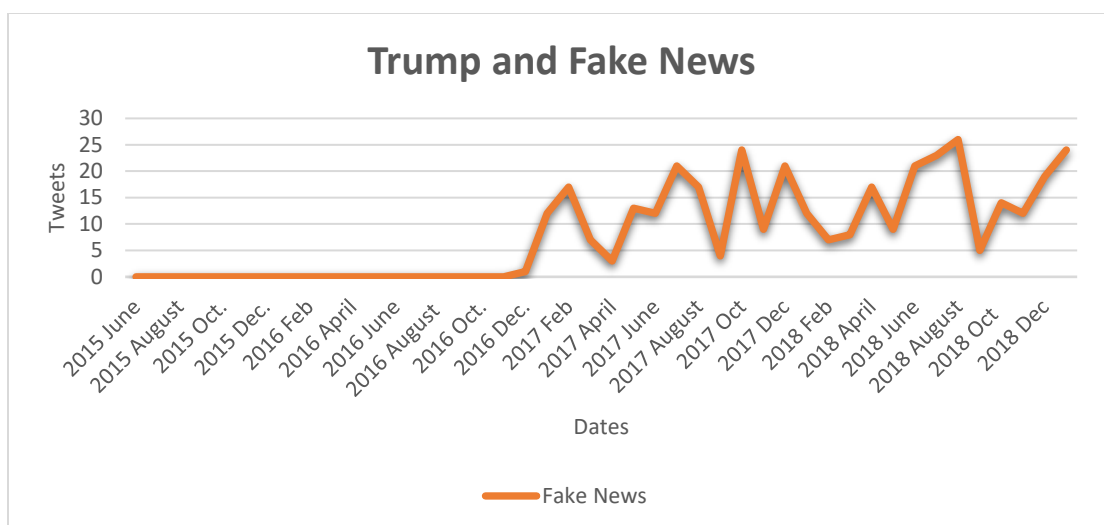
Fig. 1. Trump and Fake News

The first example of coining the phrase "fake news" came in December of 2016:

> "Reports by @CNN that I will be working on The Apprentice during my
>
> Presidency, even part time, are ridiculous & untrue - FAKE NEWS! (Trump)"
>
> 4:11 AM - 10 Dec 2016

Trump directly commented on a story about himself during the campaign in real time. He attached this catch phrase, this searchable label, used much like a hashtag. Trump will sometimes use a hashtag, but it is rare. Instead he uses the phrase itself within a sentence or at the end of a tweet. The story he commented on was from an interview given by Kelly Anne Conway on *CNN* on December 9th of 2016 in which she said he would work on The Apprentices in his spare time (Wright). It is interesting to note that Trump was refuting a statement made by someone in his campaign who should be speaking on his behalf. Therefore, either Conway misspoke, or the Trump campaign decided to change their stance after public blow back. In either scenario, *CNN* was not at fault for misreporting as implied by the tweet. Trump took his surrogate's mistake of saying he

would continue to work with reality television if he won the presidency and turned it into something completely different: a report from *CNN* he brands as "fake news." This took all the blame away from him or anyone associated with him and redirected it at the media. This "fake news" moniker is Trump's trump card, if you will. This pattern continues through the present day with any number of examples. Here are some interesting examples:

> "Social Media Giants are silencing millions of people. Can't do this even if it means we must continue to hear Fake News like CNN, whose ratings have suffered gravely. People have to figure out what is real, and what is not, without censorship! (Trump)" 1:34 AM - 24 Aug 2018

This tweet occurred during Trump's most prolific month of using the term fake news. He used the term for a different purpose at this point. Rather than saying *CNN* was fake news for reporting a specific story that Trump claimed to be false, he simply labeled *CNN* as "fake news" in general. This is part of a longstanding opposition to the news media, and *CNN* in particular, not uncommon for presidents. *FOX NEWS* and President Obama had a semi-public feud for years. Trump, however, was direct in his approach. He had over 60 tweets using the words "fake news" and "*CNN*." The tweet above addressed a narrative of social media censorship, a concern of right-wing voices. Trump tied *CNN* to the seemingly unrelated topic of social media censorship to correlate distrust of all these platforms (mainstream media, Twitter, Facebook) for his right-wing base. The message was that you cannot trust anything you see, media and social media are editing content, so look to me for the truth. In this way, a world was set up where, if you believe Trump

to be correct, he was the only one that can be correct. He managed his full-service reality

through this device. Here is a second example referencing *CNN* from the same month:

> "Wow, @foxandfriends is blowing away the competition in the morning ratings.
>
> Morning Joe is a dead show with very few people watching and sadly, Fake News
>
> CNN is also doing poorly. Too much hate and inaccurately reported stories - too
>
> predictable! (Trump)" 1:04 AM - 2 Aug 2018

Again, he was not pointing out any specific news stories in this tweet. He was, instead,

labeling two media outlets fake, *Morning Joe*, an *MSNBC* show, and *CNN* in general. At

the same time, he guided his followers to his preferred news network, *Fox*, and

specifically *Fox and Friends*, a show he regularly called into with comments. He has

control over the narrative at *Fox*, or at least he feels he does. As of late, some *Fox*

personalities have questioned his decisions (Lewis) but for the most part, *Fox News* is a

Trump friendly network. One part about that tweet that is particularly interesting is the

use of "Fake News *CNN*" in all capitals. In this way, he is tying the phrase "fake news" to

CNN as if it is a title.

Overall, the "fake news" creation was an ever-present theme on Trump's Twitter

page. This is an example of stickiness. The phrase has bled its way to other places. It is

not uncommon for a non-Trump supporter to label a news story as fake news. It is now a

part of the lexicon and Trump, in large part, is the reason. Google trends show a massive

increase, 20-fold, in the search rate for the term "fake news" from October 2016 to

January 2017. Once again, if you believe Trump, he is the only one you can trust, and if

you do not believe him, that phrase is still in the air.

According to Gallup polling, media trust dropped to around thirty percent in late 2016. To compare, in 2012, post-election media trust, already on a decline, was at forty percent. It is fair to say Trump damaged the trust of the media in the public eye.

CHAPTER TWO: DONALD TRUMP AND NICKNAMES

Trump's propensity for branding extends beyond the term "fake news." In fact, giving out sticky nicknames is one of Trump's better skills. Trump gives most of his major political opponents a derogatory nickname. Not all the names start on Twitter, but he uses them frequently on Twitter for the stickiness effect. Twitter is his way of driving the nickname home. There are some interesting linguistic patterns in the choice of Trump's nicknames in addition to the method of delivery. The names looked at are: Lyin' Ted, Little Marco, and Crooked Hillary. There is a clear pattern of "negative adjective + first name." Trump finds a suspected character flaw with his opponent and stacks that in front of their first name. The use of the first name is casual, informal, and jocular. In the following examples, frequency and consistency of use of the nickname on Twitter are addressed. The stage of the campaign when Trump accelerates the use of nicknames, meaning when he takes a lead or when he is behind, before a significant vote or after, etc., are examined. Finally, did the strategy influence the outcome? While it is unclear that the nicknamed caused an opponent's undoing, the task is to look for correlation.
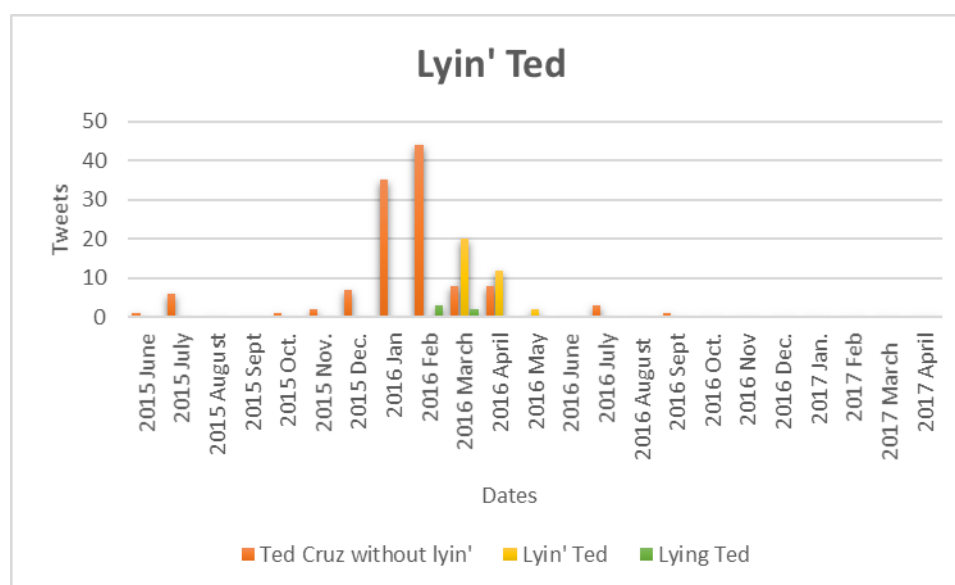
SECTION 1: Lyin' Ted

Fig. 2. Lyin' Ted

Trump's tweets about Ted Cruz have an interesting evolution. The nickname

started off as "Lying Ted." He soon made the transition to "Lyin' Ted." The two phrases

say basically the same thing, but "Lyin' Ted" is more colloquial, and in ways, stickier. At

least Trump thought so; he became very consistent with the dropped "g" in lying. He

started out referring to Ted Cruz as "Lying Ted" then dropped the "g" as a tweak, not a

total change. The first example on Twitter was on February 20th, 2016 and reads:

> "Lying #Ted Cruz just (on election day) came out with a sneak and sleazy
>
> Robocall. He holds up the Bible but in fact is a true lowlife pol! (Trump)" 3:59
>
> AM - 20 Feb 2016

An *NBC News* article published the day before gives us better context for what Trump

was talking about. The article was titled "Pro-Cruz Robocall Attacks Trump over South

Carolina Confederate Flag." The robocall was made by a pro Cruz Super PAC and

addressed the issue of the Confederate flag that flies at the South Carolina state capital.

The call played audio of Trump saying they should take that flag down and put in a

museum (Hillyard). This context is interesting. While Trump managed to call Cruz a liar

in the tweet, Trump did not address the content of the call. The content of the call, Trump

advocating putting racist symbols in a museum, would offend some voters. Omitting

parts of a story to satisfy his base is common practice for Trump. The last two

appearances of "Lyin' Ted" occurred on May 3, 2016, just six minutes apart. The first

tweet read:

> "Wow, Lyin' Ted Cruz really went wacko today. Made all sorts of crazy charges.
>
> Can't function under pressure - not very presidential. Sad! (Trump)" 1:02 PM - 3
>
> May 2016

This tweet addressed comments made by Cruz in an interview on that same day about

Trump. During the interview, Cruz said, "This man is a pathological liar, he doesn't know

the difference between truth and lies ... in a pattern that is straight out of a psychology

text book, he accuses everyone of lying." At the time, Indiana voters were headed to cast

their ballots (Wright). The *CNN* article said, "The epic takedown of [Cruz's] opponent on

an all-important voting day was extraordinary even by the standards of the 2016

campaign -- and quickly drew a scathing response from Trump (Wright)."

An important part of this this story is what drove Ted Cruz to the point of calling

Trump a liar. The story began with an early tweet containing an insult against Ted Cruz's

father pulled from the *CNN* article:

"And (Ted Cruz's) father, you know, was with Lee Harvey Oswald prior to Oswald's, you know, being shot. I mean the whole thing is ridiculous," Trump said in an interview on "Fox and Friends." "I mean what was he doing with Lee Harvey Oswald, shortly before the death? Before the shooting? It's horrible (Wright)."

Yet again, although there is reference to the "charges" Ted Cruz made in Trump's response on Twitter, Trump is not really acknowledging anything that Cruz says in the interview. Ted Cruz's response to Trump is carefully messaged when considering the charges made. Trump's response is less "messaged" but has the desired effect. This is a situation where Trump is "baiting" Cruz. The bait is the accusation that Cruz's father may have killed a president, and the prize is getting a quote from an angry, offended Ted Cruz. The second tweet from this day read:

"Lyin' Ted Cruz consistently said that he will, and must, win Indiana. If he doesn't he should drop out of the race-stop wasting time & money. (Trump)" 1:08 PM - 3 May 2016

Trump is setting the stage for a scenario that is already in the works. The decision had been made by the Cruz campaign that Cruz would drop out of the election if he lost Indiana. Trump is making it seem like he is calling the shots and telling Cruz what to do, when in fact Trump's tweet have nothing to do with the decision that has already been made. It is a tactic used at the end of an opponent's run to claim responsibility and even oversight of the opponent's decision.

Early March was the month with the closest primary victories between the two candidates. Trump got 140 delegates to Cruz's 137 from March 5 to March 12. Trump's

attacks toward Cruz peeked during this month. By the time Trump started calling Cruz "Lyin Ted," Trump had already won two out of three states in the primary. He was not yet considered the front runner, but he did have a lead. Trump was punching down at his rival in the Republican primary despite his lead. The nicknaming tactic seemed to be as much to boost Trump's brand as to downgrade Cruz. Trump did not let up until the Cruz dropped from the race.
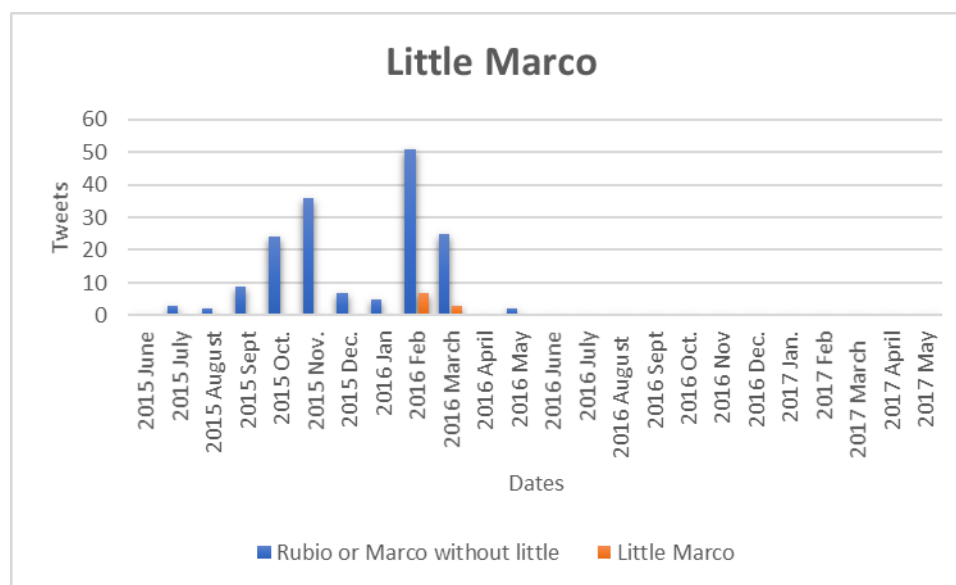
SECTION 2: Little Marco

Fig. 3. Little Marco

Marco Rubio proved to be a less formidable opponent than Cruz. After the primaries started, Rubio's candidacy never took off. Still, Trump lampooned him on a repeated basis although he did not focus near the attention on Rubio that he did on Cruz. Rubio is called "Little Marco" on Twitter 12 times compared to Cruz's "Lyin Ted" which Trump mentioned 37 times. Trump's first tweet about "Little Marco" came on February 28, 2016. Two days before, he was testing out nicknames and tweeted:

> "Lightweight choker Marco Rubio looks like a little boy on stage. Not
>
> presidential material! (Trump)" 6:16 AM - 26 Feb 2016.

In this tweet, Trump did not use the phrase "Little Marco" but the idea was born. He emasculated Rubio, discounting his experience as a politician. Seven out of 12 of

Trump's "Little Marco" tweets occurred on the same day: February 28, 2016. Here is the
cause of this tweet storm:

> "Rubio accused rival Donald Trump of being a con artist in a marathon day of
> campaigning across Virginia. At his final stop in southwest Virginia, he mocked
> the GOP front-runner for "small hands" and pores clogged with spray tan
> (Nirappil)."

Rubio countered with a similar kind of insult that Trump leveled. It is hard to know
whether there would have seen many more tweets about Rubio from Trump if it were not
for the comment about Trump's hands. Trump typically targeted his most threatening
opponent and Rubio was not on that list. Rubio's little hands comment stuck in Trump's
craw. It has been a topic of parody since that time on shows like Saturday Night Live. It
clearly got under Trump's skin which most likely caused the tweet storm on the 28th of
February. First, Trump baited Rubio by calling him a "little boy." Then, Trump had his
own trick used against him: he was baited by Rubio's "small hands" comment. Unlike
Cruz or Rubio, name calling is on brand for Trump, so his counter attack on Rubio was
not strange behavior. In every situation, Trump is rubber, his opponent is glue.
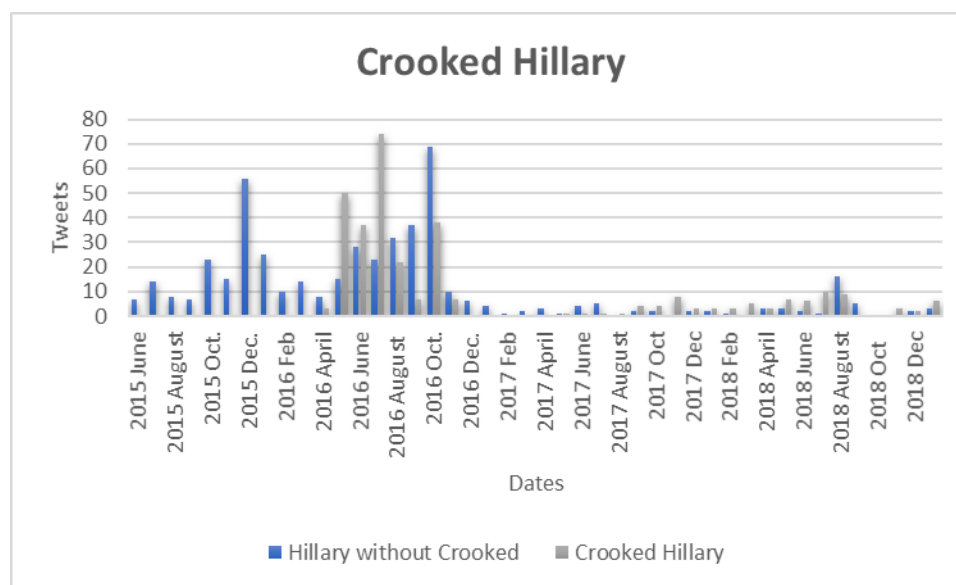
SECTION 3: Crooked Hillary

Fig. 4 Crooked Hillary

Hillary Clinton received the most attention from Trump of any of his opponents. Clinton was always in Trump's sights, even during the primaries. The nickname for Clinton did not occur until after Trump was the clear front runner on the Republican side, and Hillary Clinton the front runner for the Democrats. During the months from February to April of 2016, all these opponent nicknames were born. The first example of "Crooked Hillary" is as follows:

> "Crooked Hillary Clinton is spending a fortune on ads against me. I am the one person she doesn't want to run against. Will be such fun! (Trump)" 3:41 AM - 17 Apr 2016

Trump was already looking forward to the general election in this tweet. He was making a claim that was hard to dispute. The idea that Clinton would not want to run against Trump cannot be fact checked.

This is, again, an example of Trump setting a narrative on something that is unverifiable. Trump pits himself against Clinton at this early stage. This is not unusual. Once a politician's work in the primary is nearing the win, it is time to move on to the general election. The April 16th tweet about Clinton fell two days before the New York primary, an important location for both Trump and Clinton. Both candidates considered New York their home states and hard-core bases. At this point, Trump was a clear front runner, and while Clinton was still the front runner for the Democrats, her lead was nowhere near that of Trump's. Trump's strategy here is not readily apparent. Trump thought Clinton had the election in the bag and it was time to start directing attention toward her. Trump would have rather run against Sanders according to his tweets, and attacks on Clinton pushed people towards Sanders. Intention is hard to understand, but what is clear is Trump's attempt to paint Clinton a certain way before their campaign against each other even began in earnest. Trump acted as a provoker for the rest of the primary season and in that role, a few clear patterns are found. One was linking Hillary Clinton to the mistakes of Bill Clinton in less than savory ways. Mainly, Trump tried to remind his Twitter audience of the public affair Bill Clinton had.

Here are a few examples:

> "Crooked Hillary Clinton, perhaps the most dishonest person to have ever run for the presidency, is also one of the all-time great enablers! (Trump)" 3:46 AM - 29 Apr 2016

This reads as a shot about Bill Clinton's affair while staying ambiguous. Ambiguity is something that can be seen in many of Trump's tweets. The second example was Trump's next tweet with the term "Crooked Hillary" and it read:

"Crooked Hillary Clinton said she is used to "dealing with men who get off the reservation." Actually, she has done poorly with such men! (Trump)" 1:12 AM - 2 May 2016

Here, Trump highlighted Clinton's use of a dated and insensitive phrase, "off the reservation," while taking a clear shot at Hillary Clinton's relationship to Bill Clinton. The second pattern in these early tweets against Clinton was a tepid support of Bernie Sanders. Trump tweets:

"What a great evening we had. So interesting that Sanders beat Crooked Hillary. The dysfunctional system is totally rigged against him! (Trump)" 11:25 PM - 3 May 2016

This tweet came on the heels of Sanders winning the Indiana Democratic Primary. Trump casted doubt on the results of election and connected corruption to Clinton. We, again, saw him make general claims of corruption without bothersome evidence. Trump was trying to split the Democratic base. There can also be a case made that Trump was trying to draw a parallel between himself and Sanders in relation to the fear that if either won the nomination for their respective party, the super delegates may pick a more mainstream candidate despite the final vote tally. In a tweet less than a half hour later, Trump iterated this point:

"I would rather run against Crooked Hillary Clinton than Bernie Sanders and that will happen because the books are cooked against Bernie! (Trump)" 11:44 PM - 3 May 2016

In this tweet, Trump claimed Clinton was not a good candidate and that Sanders would be a more difficult opponent. He threw support behind the candidate expected to lose and

disparaged the apparent winner. This was an attempt to bring some Sanders' voters over

to his side. According to an *NPR* article, 12 percent of Sanders voters ended up voting for

Trump in the general election (Kurtzleben). Trump and Sanders did share some opinions

on trade and were both seen as different sides of the populist coin (Kazin). Trump was

also discouraging Democratic enthusiasm. The tweets likely had both effects on some

marginalized voters. Through July of 2016, Trump stayed consistent in his nicknaming of

Hillary Clinton. From May to August of 2016, he mentioned the phrase "Crooked

Hillary" in 183 separate tweets as opposed to just the word "Hillary" in 98 of his tweets

from the same period. Then the pattern flipped and Trump started just using the word

"Hillary" more often. The nickname completely died for a period of five months after

Trump won the election, December 2016 to April 2017. Something interesting happened

in May of 2017: the nickname popped back up. It was not as prevalent, but Trump started

using the "Crooked Hillary" term again and by August of 2017, Trump used "Crooked

Hillary" more often than "Hillary." From May of 2017 until January of 2019, Trump

mentioned "Crooked Hillary" 80 times with 54 mentions of just the word "Hillary." From

the time "Crooked Hillary" was born until January 2019, there were 292 mentions of

"Hillary" on Trump's Twitter, and 318 mentions of "Crooked Hillary." That is consistent

branding. The following is Trump's first presidential tweet using the phrase "Crooked

Hillary":

> "Crooked Hillary Clinton now blames everybody but herself, refuses to say she
>
> was a terrible candidate. Hits Facebook & even Dems & DNC. (Trump)" 2:40 PM
>
> - 31 May 2017

Trump was referencing his victory in the election over Clinton. This seemed personal and not much more than an uncalled for shot at Clinton. Trump also attacked comedian Kathy Griffin on Twitter earlier that day (Nussbaum). To understand why this mention resurfaced on this day, it is important to look at other news about Trump on May 31, 2017, the day of the tweet. Trump planned the controversial move of pulling out the Paris Climate Agreement (Siddiqui). The now famous tweet went out, "Despite the constant negative press covfefe." This was a tweet that would later be deleted because it clearly contained spelling errors. A *New York Times* headline from that day read, "What's a 'Covfefe'? Trump Tweet Unites a Bewildered Nation." May 31, 2017 was not Trump's best day in office. Several negative stories about Trump came out that day. A tweet about Clinton served as a welcome distraction. When you look up stories from that day, the Clinton tweet is not the first thing that comes up. The other stories mentioned were in the forefront of the news cycle. A tweet about Clinton served to shift that focus. When a band is having a bad set, they go to the old favorites. This is what it seems like "Crooked Hillary" is used for now. It falls into the category of greatest hits in the Trump catalog.

In politics, it is rare to find a permanent enemy. Most politicians find common ground across the aisle after bitterly fought elections like Obama and McCain, able to work together after the 2008 election.

Although Clinton seems to be done with her political career, there continues to be animosity between Clinton and Trump with Clinton as Trump's permanent punching bag. Trump uses Clinton as a distraction, a rallying cry to his base, or as an impulsive pick me up. Clearly, all three motives are in play at varying times.

CHAPTER THREE: COUNTRIES

Candidate Trump and President Trump vary in the way countries are addressed on Twitter. This is important because Trump is, once again, setting the narrative; the more he talks about a country, the more that country is present in his base's awareness. There is a natural ebb and flow to Trump's comments on each country. When countries are in the news, Trump talks about them more. Trump is actively trying to set the narrative on these topics. It also displays how Trump's pre-presidency tweets differ from tweets after he won the election.

The second and bolder aspect to look at has to do with correlation, or: which two countries does Trump lump together and mention in the same tweet. When Trump mentions two countries in the same tweet, he is linking them in concept. Sometimes these links are clear and relevant, and sometimes merely suggestive without real correlation. There are also a few examples of what could be called "super tweets," or tweets that address many countries at once.
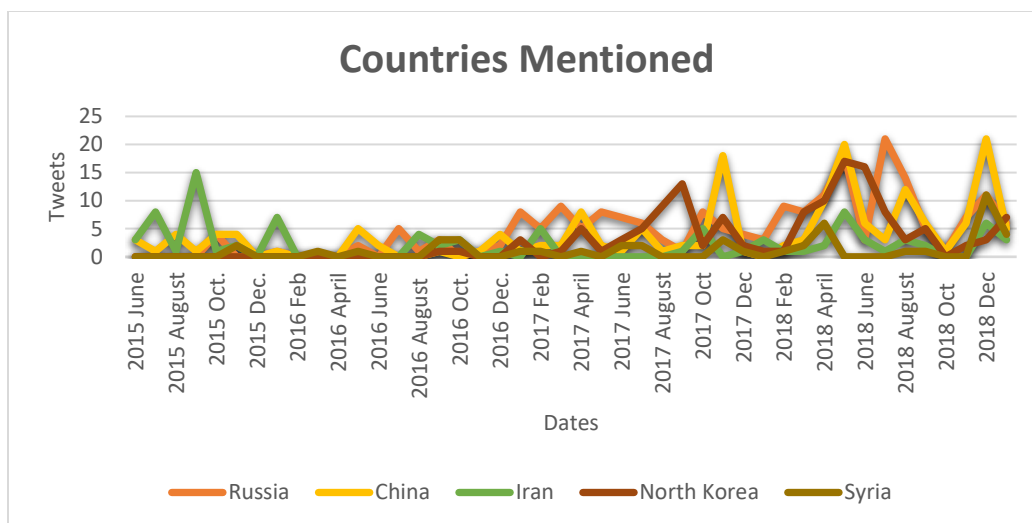
Fig. 5. Trump's Countries Mentioned

To break down this chart, first, focus on the peaks. Iran was Trump's early focus on his timeline. From June, 2015 to January, 2016, Trump mentioned Iran on Twitter 37 times. The country in second place during this time was China with 18 total mentions. With almost twice the mentions, it is fair to say that Iran was Trump's focus during the early part of his campaign. This was around the time the Iran Nuclear Deal was being finalized. Trump was highly critical of the Iran deal and made it clear that he thought he would do a better job of president through his tweets. Here was one of his comments:

"The deal with Iran will go down as one of the most incompetent ever made. The U.S. lost on virtually every point. We just don't win anymore! (Trump)" 4:35 PM - 2 Sep 2015

This tweet brought up two points Trump used for the rest of the campaign: America does not win anymore, and it is because we lose at the negotiation table. Trump used the Iran deal to hammer this point home. In a tweet that reinforced these ideas, Trump said:

"Who would you rather have negotiating for the U.S. against Putin, Iran, China,

etc., Donald Trump or Hillary? Is there even a little doubt? (Trump)" 2:57 PM -

20 Jun 2015

Trump linked Clinton to the current administration's policies and set himself against

Clinton as early as the summer of 2015. Trump had built a reputation for himself as a

negotiator through publications of his "auto" biography, *The Art of the Deal,* and by

playing the boss on *The Apprentice*. This tweet on an unrelated topic reinforced that

shrewd negotiator reputation:

"I will be in Wisconsin until the election. Jobs, trade and immigration will be big

factors. I will bring jobs back home - make great deals! (Trump)" 4:21 PM - 1

Apr 2016

The focus on Iran was an early campaign strategy to paint Trump as a different politician.

Trump saw a deal he thought was bad and railed on the current administration. This was

an easy tactic for Trump to execute. Trump was someone outside the world of politics.

He was not bogged down with the details of the deal from an international and strategic

political perspective. Trump's viewpoint was much simpler: are we winning or are we

losing. The equation for this is simple, in the final outcome of the deal who gains more.

No matter what your opinion is on the Iran Nuclear Deal, it is clear that when sanctions

are being lifted on Iran, the total sum of the net win is going to be in favor of Iran. The

United States was lifting sanctions, therefore lightening up from a previously hard and

fast position. The deal was about making the world a safer place in relation to nuclear

war, but that was not the math Trump is using.

Trump likes the tangible win noted on the ledger at the bottom of the deal. The deal was

something he claimed he could do better and became part of the lore Trump built around

himself with his reputation as a deal maker. The topic of Iran had a clear dip in

conversation when the primary season picked up and the news cycle moved on.

The graph stays rather muddled until January 2017 when there was a spike in

tweets about Russia. From January of 2017 to July of 2017, Trump mentioned Russia 51

times as opposed to 19 mentions in the 19 months prior. The difference in content

between those two periods explains the spike. The following are a few examples of early

tweets concerning Russia from the less frequently mentioned time period:

"The arrogant young woman who questioned me in such a nasty fashion at No

Labels yesterday was a Jeb staffer! HOW CAN HE BEAT RUSSIA & CHINA?

(Trump)" 1:39 AM - 13 Oct 2015

"How can Jeb Bush expect to deal with China, Russia & Iran if he gets caught

doing a "plant" during my speech yesterday in NH? (Trump)" 5:52 AM - 13 Oct

2015

"Black Lives Matter protesters totally disrupt Hillary Clinton event. She looked

lost. This is not what we need with ISIS, CHINA, RUSSIA etc. (Trump)" 1:27

AM - 31 Oct 2015

"Crooked Hillary has zero imagination and even less stamina. ISIS, China, Russia and all would love for her to be president. 4 more years! (Trump)" 11:47 PM - 19 May 2016

There was a clear pattern in linking China, Russia and Isis as threats to the American people. It harkens back to the "Axis of Evil" presented in George W. Bush's State of the Union address. Trump claimed he would deal with these issues better than Clinton. Trump also linked Clinton to the policies of the Obama administration. To be fair, there were tweets where Trump only mentioned Russia during this time frame, but for the most part, he followed a pattern of Russia being a topic that needed addressing as a foreign policy issue in the same way China did. This was his campaign principle. The next series of tweets show a spike from January 2017 to July 2017, during the first 6 months of Trump's service as president:

"Russia just said the unverified report paid for by political opponents is "A COMPLETE AND TOTAL FABRICATION, UTTER NONSENSE." Very unfair! (Trump)" 2:13 AM - 11 Jan 2017

"Russia has never tried to use leverage over me. I HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH RUSSIA - NO DEALS, NO LOANS, NO NOTHING! (Trump)" 2:31 AM - 11 Jan 2017

"It is the same Fake News Media that said there is "no path to victory for Trump" that is now pushing the phony Russia story. A total scam! (Trump)" 3:02 AM - 1 Apr 2017

"After 1 year of investigation with Zero evidence being found, Chuck Schumer just stated that "Democrats should blame ourselves, not Russia. (Trump)" 12:52 AM - 24 Jul 2017

The focus clearly shifted away from foreign policy issues and toward Trump's assertion that Russia had nothing to do with his victory. The pattern of pairing Russia with China as two countries that were one problem was gone. Six of Trump's 19 tweets about Russia contained the word China from June 2015 to January 2017. Zero of his 51 tweets about Russia from January 2017 to July of 2017 contained the word China. The concerns about Russia had shifted. Trump's handling of the concerns through Twitter was the question. The explanation appeared to be repeated denial. It is an odd paradox that the more Trump talked about Russia, the more meat there was on the bone of the story. Trump added to the momentum of the story. One must ask whether in this case, control of the narrative was more beneficial than giving more life to this story. Trump's peak month for mentioning Russia was July 2018 and is easily explained by the summit held in Russia with Trump and Putin. Along with Trump's usual tweets defending himself from the Russian investigation, there were a myriad of additional tweets about the success of the summit.

Most of the rest of the rise and fall of Russia as a topic can be explained by events that happened in the news. Summits with China and North Korea spiked Trump's mentions of those two places. Attacks in Syria caused Trump to talk about problems in Syria more. An interesting time on the graph is when Trump mentioned almost none of these countries, October of 2018.

Trump had one tweet about China and one tweet about Russia and no tweets about the other countries in the study. The lull is explained by Trump's busy schedule that month campaigning for the congressional midterm elections. Trump spent 23 days speaking around the country in October of 2018. A simple explanation is that he just did not have the time to tweet about other countries. The idea that Trump did not have time or was not involved in foreign policy during the month of October in 2018 is an interesting look into the job of a sitting president as a midterm campaigner. Looking at Trump's Twitter as an extension of his thought, foreign policy was not on his mind during this time period. Twitter is a way of shaping reality and perception. Trump stayed out of the weeds of foreign policy and focused on more pertinent issues that mattered to people running for congressional and senate seats. Trump was in full campaign mode the month of October and talked about other countries did not have a benefit equal to a senator or congressman that would support his agenda. Things like taxes, boarder security, and other domestic issues dominated a midterm cycle.

CHAPTER FOUR: COUNTRIES MENTIONED TOGETHER

Trump draws relationships and connections between countries and that can be seen in the tweets that mentioned more than one country.

Countries	Mentions
China North Korea	34
Russia and China	16
Iran Syria	10
Russia Syria	9
Russia and Iran	8
Russia North Korea	5
Syria North Korea	4
China Iran	3
Iran North Korea	3
China Syria	2

Table 1. Trump's Overlapping Countries

The top countries on the list mostly make sense: China and North Korea are intertwined issues. Russia and China have earlier been discussed as an example of linking issues in the context that they are global super powers, and Iran and Syria have overlapping issues. The bottom of the list is very interesting. What two times did Trump link China and Syria and why?

The first tweet was from November 11, 2017 and read:

"Met with President Putin of Russia who was at #APEC meetings. Good

discussions on Syria. Hope for his help to solve, along with China the dangerous

North Korea crisis. Progress being made. (Trump)" 2:16 PM - 11 Nov 2017

Trump set up the analogy here: Russia is to Syria as China is to North Korea. Syria and

North Korea are not mentioned as the same issue, but rather the same type of issue.

Trump had already set up the relationship between Russia and China as global

superpowers. In this tweet, he added a little nuance. Trump said Russia and China should

help us, as fellow global super powers, with these smaller countries, Syria and North

Korea. Trump wanted China and Russia to act as mediators and saw the two issues as

similar. The tweet lets us know how Trump viewed the situation. He believed other

superpowers should help each other where they have shared interests. This goes back to

the idea that Trump presents himself as a deal maker, willing to work with anyone if it

facilitates a winning outcome.

The second tweet containing China and Syria read like this:

"So much Fake News about what is going on in the White House. Very calm and

calculated with a big focus on open and fair trade with China, the coming North

Korea meeting and, of course, the vicious gas attack in Syria. Feels great to have

Bolton & Larry K on board. I (we) are … [a second tweet continues]"..."doing

things that nobody thought possible, despite the never ending and corrupt Russia

Investigation, which takes tremendous time and focus. No Collusion or

Obstruction (other than I fight back), so now they do the Unthinkable, and RAID

a lawyers office for information! BAD! (Trump)" 12:47 AM - 11 Apr 2018

These two tweets, which were actually one tweet, approached the topic differently. Russia was not a policy issue in this tweet. Instead, it was the Russian investigation that Trump talked about. Trump made the claim that he was getting a lot done on a laundry list of foreign policy issues despite the pressure put on him and his administration as a result of the Russia investigation. The fact that he mentioned China and Syria was just because they were in his focus at that moment, which does lump them into the category. China, Syria, and North Korea were issues Trump claimed he should be focusing on, but instead he was having to spend time clearing his name. This further reinforced how Russia and the issue of the investigation reshaped how Trump talked about Russia on Twitter.

CHAPTER FIVE: CLINTON ATTACK PLAN

Clinton is, by far, Trump's most frequent individual target on Twitter. One would think the Clinton attacks would have stopped after the election was won, like previous candidates. This level of decorum is normal and somewhat expected in presidential politics. In the case of President Trump, the criticism continues even now, over two years into his term. These continued criticisms are, once again, rallying cries for his base, a tool for misdirecting from current topics that damage Trump, and narrative setting tools. Trump is setting up a culture war. Clinton represents more than a person; Clinton is an idea that represents everything not Trump. Clinton represents established politicians with controversial pasts. Clinton is a part of the old guard. Trump's comments about her were some of the more successful parts of his campaign. Trump used this negative narrative around Clinton from well before he ran against her to well after and he had several methods of attack. This chart takes some of the more prevalent attacks and maps them out which is a vehicle for reverse engineering Trump's attack playbook.
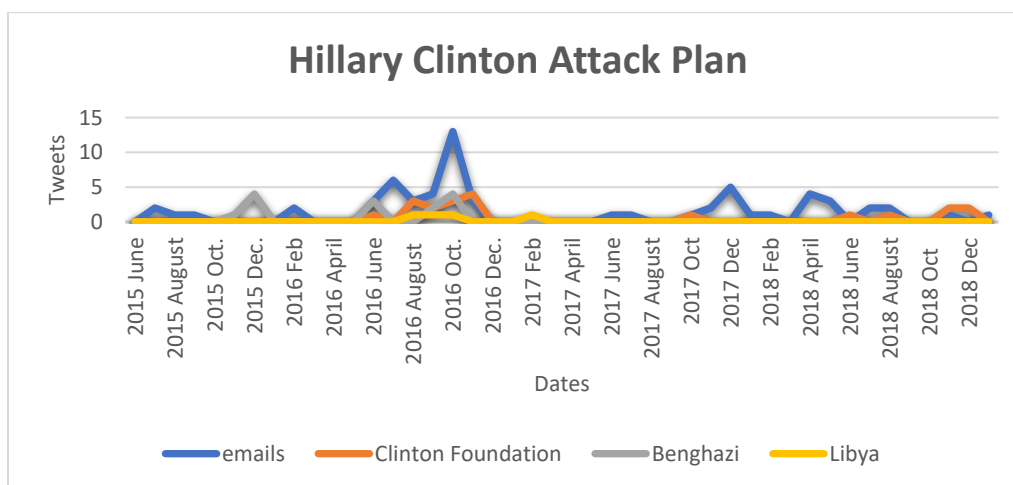

Fig. 6. Trumps Attacks on Hillary Clinton

In looking through Trump's Twitter, there were three identifiable methods of attack. First, the email scandal and handling of classified servers was obvious; it is thought James Comey's investigation hurt the Clinton campaign's chances significantly. The second was "The Clinton Foundation": a charitable/fundraising organization that received criticism from Trump and other right-wing actors during the campaign. Finally, issues surrounding Benghazi and Libya and her handling of those situations addressed Clinton's time as Secretary of State. These were not the only attacks against Clinton on Trump's Twitter, but they were certainly the issues that garnered the most concerted attacks. As discussed before, Trump is often very general on Twitter. His tweets and attacks are often based off opinion and emotion rather than hard facts and logic. Many of the attacks related to Clinton's age, her fitness, and her ties with previous administrations. These attacks were more difficult to find in a search. Instead of charting them, the following are a few examples of these types of attacks:

> "Hillary Clinton didn't go to Louisiana, and now she didn't go to Mexico. She
> doesn't have the drive or stamina to MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!
> (Trump)" 2:40 PM - 31 Aug 2016

This tweet is an example of a common theme seen throughout the Trump campaign. The message was that Trump was in better heath and more suited to put in the long hours it takes be president. This next tweet suggests a similar theme,

> "I think that both candidates, Crooked Hillary and myself, should release
> detailed medical records. I have no problem in doing so! Hillary? (Trump)"
> 1:24 PM - 28 Aug 2016

This tweet referenced the tax return controversy during the election. Most people running against Trump during the primary or general election wanted him to release his tax returns. Trump drew a parallel here in a trolling kind of way. Trump turned the focus to health rather than finances. This added to the narrative that Trump set up: Clinton was feeble and unable to handle the pressure of the office.

The next example served two purposes. One was saying that Clinton was not smart, and the other played Clinton's own party against her. The tweet read like this:

"Crooked Hillary's brainpower is highly overrated. Probably why her decision making is so bad or, as stated by Bernie S, she has BAD JUDGEMENT (Trump)" 3:30 AM - 29 Aug 2016

He plainly said Clinton is not very smart. Trump also offered a sympathy card to disheartened Sanders' voters.

Trump referenced a quote from someone in Clinton's party, a current supporter of hers, out of the context of the current election. Trump used this same tactic with a quote from Obama:

"We agree @POTUS-

'SHE'LL (Hillary Clinton) SAY ANYTHING & CHANGE NOTHING. IT'S TIME TO TURN THE PAGE-President Obama' (Trump)"

4:20 PM - 9 Oct 2016

The quote was from the 2008 primary season. This was an attempt to swing undecided voters, show party inconsistency, and point out Hillary Clinton's long history in Washington. Obama's belief in Clinton's ability cannot simply be measured in statements

made when they were engaged in an active election. After Obama won, Clinton served as his Secretary of State. This was a better reflection of how Obama felt about Clinton's capabilities. For Trump, this context did not matter.

The fact that Clinton has been in Washington for a long time and has worked with or against everyone on Capitol Hill gave Trump plenty of ammo to use against her. There was a slight trend in Trump's tweets about Clinton in the phrase "30 years." Here is an example:

"Crooked Hillary Clinton likes to talk about the things she will do but she has been there for 30 years - why didn't she do them? (Trump)"

2:59 AM - 12 Oct 2016

A second example:

"Hillary's been failing for 30 years in not getting the job done - it will never change. (Trump)" 4:49 AM - 27 Sep 2016.

The message of these tweets, in summation, was that Clinton was weak, not very smart, her friends did not like her, and she had too much history in Washington.

Moving back to the issues covered in the chart, they follow a predictable pattern. The more an issue was in the news, the more it was tweeted by Trump. Trump's attacks on Clinton were present during the primary season and escalated as the election approached. They, of course, dropped off to almost zero after Trump won, but as discussed earlier in the analysis of "Crooked Hillary" as a nickname, the attacks picked back up once Trump had been in office for a few months on an as needed basis. Emails are, by far, the most frequently used method of attacking Clinton to this day. Overall, his

attacks were framed around the issues listed on the chart, but at its core, Trump's attacks were based on the premise that nobody liked Hillary Clinton.

This project presents a set of individual points that, when taken as whole, give a greater understanding of how Trump used and continues to use Twitter to control narrative. Branding, baiting, trolling, and stickiness are some of the factors that made Trump successful in his bid for president. The other factor that cannot be discounted is timing. Platforms like Twitter and Facebook were so entrenched in mainstream culture by 2016, there was no ignoring that these platforms were going to matter. Trump was the best at using these platforms for his own purpose. While his strategies may not seem typical, they actually worked very well on a modern platform.

CONCLUSION

The thing Trump did differently than politicians before him was authoring his own tweets. The fact that Trump used tweets in his own voice based off his own thoughts in real time made and continues to make him effective at Twitter. Other politicians have used press release style tweets since the platform began. Trump, on the other hand, used his own words to attack media, rally support, test opinions and create options for disenfranchised voters. This makes for a very noisy involvement. Noise creates the market for coverage and coverage helps control the narrative, inside or outside of Trump's base. This all feels strange in this moment in time, but will become the new normal.

Trump is not a typical politician, but he is using this platform in a way that future politicians will have to. It will become standard for politicians to call out negative press, voice their opinions, and generally interact with people on Twitter. It is an advantageous way to reach masses. When a new media for communication comes along, it takes a while for it to manifest itself into full form. Trump pushed the use of Twitter to what many Americans believe is the furthest limit in a political sense in the last four years. Trump has probably only found the edge of what this platform is capable of doing.

There was a large concern over Russian interference on Twitter during this election cycle and the concern was valid. Trump, however, did a lot of the work himself when it came to spreading his message across social media platforms. Trump was tactical in the way he uses the platform. This may be planned out by campaign officials, but it is more likely that Trump was a natural at it. Trump's bombastic, reality television, business mogul persona groomed him for a platform like Twitter.

Trump's "in my head and out on Twitter" is not the only way to effectively shift an election. Picture a politician with a different personality and viewpoint than Trump using Twitter to bypass the media and deliver a message directly in his or her own words. The basic level of what Trump does would look different for Beto O'Rourke or Ted Cruz. It could be the tweets would be politer and less extreme, but just as effective if done correctly. There is more than one way to skin this cat and that will be seen in the future.

The final conclusion is that Trump's use of Twitter is worth studying. Trump has essentially created an artifact with his Twitter page with thousands of tweets to look at on any given topic. You can glean as much from this space as any press release, interview, or State of the Union. These tweets are the leader of the free world's real thoughts, unfiltered and in real time. The number of studies that could be done are endless. History books will print tweets from Trump just as they have printed hand written documents from the founding fathers. This is a new frontier, and it is important to keep our eyes on it as it evolves and changes, as it surely will.

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