



DONALD TRUMP'S COMMUNICATION STRATEGY: "MESSAGE" AND CHARISMA

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Donald Trump is the 45th and current president of the United States of America; elected on the 20th of January 2017. Trumps' life in the public eye did not start with his presidency, but years before. Trump started his career as a Manhattan developer in the late 1970's after building and purchasing multiple properties. After finding success in the real estate business he published his first book in 1987, which became a best seller and put Trump in the spotlight. With the early 1990's came bankruptcy for Trump but he doesn't give up. The late 1990s and early 2000s is when Trump becomes more politically active. In 2004-2017 Trump stars in a reality TV show where aspiring entrepreneurs compete for his approval and ultimately a job within his organisation. In 2015 Trump officially announces that he will be running for president (CNN Editorial Research, 2020; Duignan, 2020).

It is evident that Trump unlike other political figures has been in the public eye for the vast majority of his working life. With a diverse career as an entrepreneur and a reality TV star, the American public were already familiar with Trump before his run for presidency. This could be the reason why many did not take his run for presidency all that seriously. An example of this can be seen on an episode of the satirical *Saturday Night Live* aired in May 2016 where they nicknamed Trump "The Tangerine Tornado" (Kreps, 2016). Satirical and comedic comments towards Donald Trump became a norm, especially from his opponents, they did not seem to consider him a real political threat. However, he certainly proved them wrong when he became the president of one of the most powerful and influential countries in the world.

Trump is a politically controversial figure, one with a big following. His impact on a new social and political phenomenon is undeniable. It is thus, not surprising that there are many academic studies with Donald Trump at the epicentre. Trump is a widely controversial figure with the unique ability of attracting a lot of attention from the public as well as the traditional news media networks. What are the qualities that makes Donald Trump so noteworthy? Many of the studies focus on his 2016 presidential campaign (Mohammadi & Javadi, 2017), others on his prominent media strategy (Francia, 2018) and some even on his psychological and cognitive capabilities (Drezner, 2020). Even though Trump is seen as a new political phenomenon, the success, visibility and symbolic power of a political leader can be analysed by resorting to some earlier sociological concepts. This study will apply a multidisciplinary perspective; one that combines a more traditional sociological concept and modern media theories to review Trumps current success.

Trump has created a new political culture where; political correctness is something to look down upon and where opinion is regarded as more important than facts because – at least he: tells it like it is (Markovits, 2016). This phenomenon of alternative political language will be studied with the guidance of Michael Silverstein's (2003) theory of the "message", with a focus on discursive strategy. Silverstein explains that ultimately a politician should "inhabit message", meaning that a politician absolutely embodies their political persona. Celebrification, "the process in which ordinary people or public figures are transformed into celebrities" (Driessens, 2013, p. 643), will be introduced as a supportive concept and perceived as one of Trump's strategies of political "message". Lastly, Max Weber's (1946, 1978) sociological concept of the charismatic leader will be used to further understand Donald Trump's strategy of political communication. For Weber, a charismatic leader is able to break traditional forms, rise to power in a time of crisis and revolutionise the public, creating a strong following. With the aid of the above theories, this thesis will attempt to answer the following Research Question: *How does Trump's political "message" contribute to his charismatic leadership?*

The study aims to better understanding Trump's political message and what facilitates his political success. In order to answer the research question the study will collect and analyse tweets from Donald Trump's official Twitter account posted in the past three months. The research objectives unfold from three aspects:

1. Analyse Trumps tweets in light of Silverstein's linguistic analysis
2. Identify the charismatic aspects of his tweets
3. Identify his celebrification strategy in political communication

This study contributes to the better understanding of President Trump's controversial success through the analysis of his political online persona.

In chapter two, the concepts of the "message", celebrification and charisma will be explained in order to lay down the theoretical framework of this thesis. Following, chapter three will explain the digital ethnographic methodology followed in this paper. Chapter four will be the analysis of the data collected in the past three months with a direct reference to the theoretical framework. Lastly, chapter five will answer the research question and will be a general discussion of the findings and the overall conclusion of this thesis.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

The election of the Republican candidate of 2016, Donald Trump, as the president of the United States was achieved as he “carried thirty states and won the Electoral College Vote by a 304-to-227 margin” (Griffin et al., 2017, p. 1) against Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton. Donald Trumps’ presidential victory in 2016 sparked an intense multi-disciplinary debate that aimed to understand what the crucial factors that determined his presidential success were.

This chapter will discuss two main theories that will aid in the understanding and analysis of Donald Trump’s political success. The first theory is the one of “message” that will be mainly guided by Michael Silverstein’s (2003) discursive strategy of political communication. The theory of celebrification will be used to aid the above theory and treated as an example of Trump’s strategy of his political “message”. The second main theory discussed will be, Max Weber’s (1946; 1978) theory on charismatic leaders.

2.1 “Message”

Silverstein (2011), defines message in the context of political life as “the characterological aura of a persona” (p. 204), it has the connotation of the past actions and words used by the character, but most importantly, it has the potential of the future, which is powerful as it allows for the imagination of actions in situations yet to happen. In order to better comprehend “message” the simplified definition can be said to be parallel with the marketing term “brand” (Silverstein, 2011, p. 204). Silverstein (2003) further explains “message” as an insiders technical term that is “moving from what we call a count noun, that denotes a specific individuable thing, to one that denotes a locus or place in a containing space, realm or condition of being” (p. 5). The key to understanding “message” is that it is inhabitable, ones “message” is like one’s house (Silverstein, 2003, p. 5). “If successful, a person comes to inhabit “message” in the act of communicating” (Silverstein, 2003, p. 6) and as language can change and take many stylistic forms, so can presidential communication styles as there are multiple ways we communicate using language (Silverstein, 2003, p. 3).

2.1.1 Indexical Traces

It is easy to make the mistake of thinking that someone’s “message” is the point, theme or topic they are trying to communicate. Silverstein explains that this is because, we identify ourselves to be sending and receiving language forms made up of “words and expressions we speak, write or otherwise get across” (Silverstein, 2003, p. 6). However, descriptive

language can be shaped into a tool that can construct sharable, meaningful knowledge in the very occurrence of communication (p. 9). Descriptive language is thus one of the greatest instruments public figures are given. This is because through discourse public figures, can reach a wide audience and can influence and shift the public's understanding of an intersubjective identification of things that aligns with their own (p. 8). According to Silverstein (2003), discourse "is always being evaluated as description for how it achieves a kind of cumulative coherence as information" (p. 8).

In order to be a master of political "message" one needs to understand and use indexical traces; such traces indicate to the audience the "who-what-where-when-why of discourse by subtle loading of the "how"" (Silverstein, 2003, p. 9). An example of indexical values is the distinction between Democratic versus Democrat. "Republican Party operatives" (p. 9) tutor politicians to avoid the first older name ending with "-ic" and to use the second form without it. This is because it is hard to distinguish between the upper case Democrat-ic and the lower case democratic, and a mix-up could form a real political danger to the speaker (pp. 9-10). This is due to the different indexical traces of the two terms, the Democratic political system versus the democrat political party. Adhering to the desired indexical values is of great importance to politicians, applying the above "rule while speaking self-identifies the very speaker of the form as being in one political party category rather than the other" (Silverstein, 2003, p. 10). In order to create a true rhetorical art form one must sufficiently use the "cumulative indexical poetry of properly arranged words" (Silverstein, 2003, p. 10).

2.1.2 Social Arrangements

When communication occurs people rely on social arrangement that are already in place. This solidifies the temporary as well as the lasting arrangements of communication in the manner we position ourselves in space and time as well as the way people classify each other in social settings. New social arrangements are created every time we position specific forms of language (Silverstein, 2003, p. 11). Moreover, communication with others depends on established suppositions about the people we are communicating with (Silverstein, 2003, p. 11). An example Silverstein brings to mind are of the personas "constructed and imagined on the internet" (p. 11). This concept will be used to analyse President Donald Trump in an attempt to identify the tones of his written speech through his use of capitalised letters and his use of indexical traces.

However, Silverstein (2003) points out that there are other principles, apart from descriptive language, that organise our communications in a meaningful manner that are always present but not always recognised (p. 6). Two of those principles are, spoken language, meaning the tone of voice of the speaker and, body language, as in, the gestures, movements, body

posture and facial expressions (Silverstein, 2003, p. 14). According to Silverstein (2003), in order for someone to inhabit “message” one must master image, style and “message” (p. 15). Silverstein (2003) does not limit image to a visual representation, rather it is an abstract portrait of identity. Image combines motifs of compatibility across all ways of indexical signs, that the audience can experience using their imagination (p. 15). Style is the manner in which image is communicated, it is the embodiment of a specific communicative style. Style has an organisation aspect and can remain consistent throughout a person’s public life (p. 15). ““Message,” then, strategically deploys style to create image in a consequential way” (Silverstein, 2003, p. 15). Ultimately, “message” is something constructed by a team of stylists that work to create an effective and lasting “message” which is perceived as providing someone a better chance in the market. Consequently, being “on message” is especially important for political figures as it gives rise to the significance of consistency of their image they portray to their addressed audience. According to Silverstein (2003) a really powerful “message” has the power to ascribe the audience their reality, it enables them to visualise “a whole set of plausible stories in the fictive universes of the must-have-been, the could-be, and, especially, the sure-as-hell-will-be” (p. 16). It is therefore interesting to analyse how Donald Trump is able to ascribe reality as well as draw in the audience through the different tones evident in his written language.

2.1.3 Thinking in Complexes

Silverstein identifies, that political success comes when a politician is able to be placed as the embodiment, the very essence of all the right issues advocated, seeming that the only person able to hold these issues together is themselves, making them personally a necessity for the betterment of the future. The key to such political success is expository communication, or as Silverstein puts it; not being a “single-issue candidate” (Silverstein, 2003, pp. 17-18). Politicians that will probably not find political success rely too much on by-the-book civic imagery, relying solely on discussing “the issues”, with a rigid insistence of retracing all steps in an argument. This kind of discourse has the effect of repulsion from the audience, it makes them feel like they are being evangelised. This kind of political “message” only manages to portray the politicians rigidity and narrowness to their addressed audience. Political figures that are issue-consumed are perceived as lacking “message”, or confuse “message” with the issue they continuously speak about and as seen above that is one of the crucial mistakes a political figure can make. Politicians that confuse “message” with their advocated issue are labelled as “single-issue candidates” which hurts a politician’s public image as the audience will only associate them (label them) with a single issue, even if the politician is advocating for more (p. 18).

In addition, Silverstein (2003) points out that the social issues a politician is advocating for are also part of a political strategy that can be tactically used for “message” appeal as well as for diminishing the competition (p. 20). For a politician, not to be labelled “single-issue candidate” it is important for them to be able to form an accessible reserve of targetable issues. As Silverstein (2013) explains, a reserve of targetable issues might also be “a package of issue-emblems” (p. 20), the politicians moral offenses disguised as “message”; standing against all that is bad and by that standing as representative of all that is good. Once such reserve is available to the politician, when one issue is spoken about it mobilises the rest and it spontaneously gives the impression of a totality of “message”, thus projecting the politician as one that “inhabits message” (Silverstein, 2003, p. 21).

Silverstein (2003) uses the psychological theory “thinking in complexes” by Lev Vygotsky to show how the above political strategy plays into our innate human intuitions. According to Vygotsky (1986), complex is different from a full rational concept, but both are characterised by the psychological process of grouping things, of classifying them as the same or equal in principle. Thinking in complexes, is being able to indiscriminately aggregate and arrange a series of things together, ultimately a chain–complex aids in the formation of a concept. It is important for politicians to spark our thinking in complex. This is because if any two things from the complex are paired they will always have a “family resemblance”. However, when taking a step back these series of things can still generally be very diverse (Silverstein, 2003, p. 21). Vygotsky (1986) observed that the thinking process of adults; in the expressions of private discourses, as well as their everyday use of language, tend to have chain-complex meanings as opposed to conceptual ones (Silverstein, 2003, p. 22). Politicians are able to maintain this complex by bouncing from one thing to the next by the use of “analogies and other kind of term-by-term similarity” (Silverstein, 2003, p. 22). Each bounce is strategically positioned in a sort of “direct or inverse parallel- a kind of equivalence- to those of the previous segment of discourse” (Silverstein, 2003, p. 22) by the use of chained analogues.

In politics it is particularly important to use complexes of issues; as issues are the unembellished semiotic material that have a direct connection with reality (Silverstein, 2003, p. 24). In order for a politician to emerge with a “message” “issues must be brought together – given plot and characters, rhyme if not reason” (Silverstein, 2003, p. 24) which also comes in use in the creation of political image. In a display of good politics, the resonance and connection of verbiage and additional recognisable cultural symbols are of great importance.

Furthermore, Silverstein (2017), explains that the use of a common word or phrase can be used as a political strategy by a politician on a certain targeted group. This can be amplified through the use of indexical traces and values a politician uses, and the manipulation of

already in place, as well as new social arrangements that a politician creates. The application of a common word or phrase is used in order to make it seem that the group is in alignment with the politician's views and thus, targeting them as like-minded people, this kind of metapragmatic caption is called "dog whistle" (p. 408).

2.1.4 Ritual Speech

Silverstein (2003) also explains the political strategy of the epideictic quality of ritual speech, meaning that rituals are entirely subordinate of the context in which they occur, managing to extract the context into themselves. Ritual symbols have the ability to change the substance of ordinary stuff and make it into something different that suits and serves a particular context (pp. 37-38). An example Silverstein (2003) provides for understanding symbolic ritualistic loading is; what you externally see as bread and wine comes to symbolise the Body and Blood of Christ within a specific ritual spacetime and that, in the consuming succession, represents the sacrifice made by Christ for the people (p. 37). "A ritual symbolically creates contextually experienced chain-complexes of ideas" (Silverstein, 2003, p. 38), these are intuited ideas, "laden with affect or emotion as they hit us" (Silverstein, 2003, p. 38) and can be measured in how effective it is to those who experience it.

Moreover, ritual text appears to be autonomous to its physical, external context because of the "principles of dense internal organisation of its symbolic elements" (Silverstein, 2003, p. 40). A recurring example of ritualistic political speech throughout presidencies that transcends the physical context is the metaphor of the "wall". The symbolism of the "wall" is often used as a metaphor for the free democratic ideals, which in turn makes it ritualistic. The most famous line of President Ronald Reagan's 1987 Brandenburg Gate speech is: "Tear Down This Wall". By this line Reagan was not only speaking to "the people directly in front of him but to the people battling communism everywhere", it was a fundamental "cry for democratic action" (Skoniecki, 2004, p. 18). Similarly, President Richard Nixon on a private dinner toast in Peking, 1972 said: "A wall can protect us. Or a wall can divide us, and we believe that this new relationship that we have begun with this meeting will help to protect us, but will not divide us" (Yang, 2011, p. 18). President Nixon used the Great Wall of China as "a metaphor for the nations' potential to reach their shared goal of peace" (Yang, 2011, p. 20). Politicians paint the ritual picture by using the ritual medium of spoken words, as seen in the above example the "wall" has become a ritual symbol in political speech. These metaphorical chains of ritualistic symbols contribute to the overall "message" of a successful politician (Silverstein, 2003, pp. 38-41).

2.1.5 Image Shapers

What is also important when it comes to understanding “message” is that even if a political figure says things that can resemble political parody, in what Silverstein (2003) calls Homer Simpson’s kind of language, they can still be “inhabiting message” (pp. 72-73). Politicians, especially presidents, also have what Silverstein (2003) calls the “image-shapers” (p. 88), whose job is to regulate the presidents image and always have it align with the presidents “message”. Image shapers like the team of stylist, and Party operatives mentioned above, are all part of a large presidential management team. Under the management teams direction the unintended political parody can be manipulated in a way to make it self-serving, part of the “message” and they can also control the exposure of it to the public. This can be done by sometimes controlling public access to parts of the presidency (eg. access to spontaneous speech) (p. 113).

To summarise, “message” is “a coherent, brand-like biographical chronotope” (Silverstein, 2017, p. 407). “Message” as mentioned above is not build around a politicians stance on issues of public policy, on the contrary, when a politician manages to “inhabit message”, such issues become practical constituents for the creation of the politicians “message” (Silverstein, 2017, p. 407). Silverstein provides five key points for political success, the use and understanding of indexical values, the understanding of social arrangements, the significance of having a reserve of complexes of issues, the importance of ritual speech and lastly having a great team of image shapers. Ultimately, political identity is “message” embodied (Silverstein, 2003, p. 132).

2.2 Celebrification

According to previous studies Donald Trump has applied the media strategy of celebrification as part of his political “message” which helped him gain political public favour and become president. Murguía (2019) states that Donald Trump “as a former reality television star and internationally known name brand is... (an) example of... the apex of this evolution of the role of the public persona in politics” (p. 183) and thus a clear example of the celebrification of politics. Successful politicised persona constructions, like other public figures, need to utilise the dynamics of celebrity self-branding or “message” as a political and commercial strategy and a big part of it is interacting with the audience on social media (Usher, 2020). Celebrities work to draw publicity to the constructed public image of themselves, which will, if successful, grasp the attention of both the public and the media. To draw publicity to the

construction of the “self”, many celebrities choose to embody the concept of mediocracy. Meaning, that their success is a combination of their talent and their hard work that allowed them to “rise to the top” (Littler, 2017, p. 1). The celebrified embodiment of mediocracy is also something evident in the case of President Trump. Donald Trump; even though his fame is very closely interconnected to his riches, chooses to “offer a corporate justice narrative of mediocracy” (Littler, 2017, p. 213). One that represents the voice of the working middle class. President Trump is only able to represent this celebrification concept through inhabiting the “anyone can make it” (Littler, 2017, p. 214) kind of “message”. Celebrities gain their prominence through the promotion of their public persona, this is an aspect very apparent in Donald Trump way of “inhabiting message”. For this reason celebrification will be used as a supportive concept in the aid of further understanding of how President Trump “inhabits message”.

There is a distinction that needs to be made between celebrification and celebritization. Celebrification is defined by Driessens (2013) as “the process in which ordinary people or public figures are transformed into celebrities” (p. 643), celebrification is thus change at an individual level. On the contrary, celebritization does not occur on an individual level but rather should be viewed as “societal and cultural changes implied by celebrity” (Driessens, 2013, p. 643), it is a long-term structural development, comparable to concepts such as globalisation and mediatization. In this thesis the focus will be on celebrification.

Political figures employ the strategy of celebrification by increasing “their visibility across media and shaped public spheres around self-performance as opinion spectacle” (Usher, 2020, p. 2). The domain of the digital public sphere enables the transformation of political persona constructions into a performance of self-as-brand, what Silverstein calls “inhabit message”. Like “message”, branding demands “consistency of narrative and image” (Khamis, 2017, p. 11). To develop self-as-brand, like celebrities, politicians commodify the ‘self’ to promote opinions, rather than consumer goods and use the persuasive method of rhetorical art form in their “attempt to colonize the lived experience of the audience” (Usher, 2020, p. 4; Khamis, 2017). According to Edelman (1988) political figures are constructed in two ways, firstly, through their actions and discourse, they create their public persona. Secondly, political figures “are symbols to other observers: they stand for ideologies, values, or moral stances and they become role models, benchmarks, or symbols of threat and evil” (Edelman, 1988, p. 2).

In addition, Edelman (1988) observes that political authority is maintained by the spectacle construction, by the dissemination of news by the traditional media (p. 123). With the modern

concept of celebrification, the dissemination of news is also created by the political figures themselves through their personal social media platforms (Usher, 2020). The exposure to news evokes different emotions in the audience such as “anxieties and aspirations” and elicits “unexpected threats and gratifying victories”, ultimately the content of the spectacle is unpredictable leaving the audience feeling vulnerable (Edelman, 1988, p. 123).

Political figures, can use the strategy of celebrification, through their direct speech and by utilising rhetorical discourse on social media to construct and popularise their public persona and gain media attention. According to Usher (2020), social media platforms are unique as they offer a fusion of panopticism: where the few observe the many, and synopticism: where the many observe the few (p. 5; Ellaway, 2014). Social media allows the audience to break free from their observer status and allows for the potentiality of agreement, disagreement and debate, making them “synoptic and critical (micro) publics” (Usher, 2020, p. 5). At the same time, politicians use panopticism to view the actions of the public and can then “modify messages, policy or behaviours” (Usher, 2020, p. 5) which is integral to the construction of a public persona. Thus, politicians can use social media platforms to “amplify spectacles of opinion as they unfold” (Usher, 2020, p. 5) and in doing so invoke the above emotions and vulnerabilities in the audience. Moreover, online disagreements and name-calling from political public figures can “provide focal points and amplification” (Usher, 2020, p. 10) and can be compared to celebrity catfights, which tend to attract more media attention. According to Strömbäck (2005), it is “through media and journalism that citizens mainly access political discussions” (p. 38) and citizens also are the main circulators of “message and processes of celebrification” (Usher, 2020, p. 14).

Because of this direct access the audience has to political discussions on social media, politicians are able to bypass the factual checking of journalist which traditionally had the role of news gatekeepers. Campbell and Jamieson (2008) explain that precedential rhetoric is a source of executive power that is amplified by the use of social networking services as it allows presidents “to speak when, where, and on whatever topic they choose and to reach a national audience” (p. 6). In addition Phillips (2018) argues that through generations of precedencies a rhetorical convention has been established on the expected behaviour and objectives in shaping current and future presidents. Some of these ethical standards that are expected of presidents are, “respect for democratic values, human rights, the exercise of prudence, and ensuring that just policies will prevail” (Medhurst, 2008, p. 331).

An article by Forbes stated that “as of early April, Trump has told 23.3 lies per day in 2020” (Markowitz, 2020). In addition, the Fact Checker database of The Washington Post in late

May published an article stating that in the “1,226 days, President Trump has made 19,128 false or misleading claims” (Kessler et al., 2020). However, the tendency for the president of the United States of America to lie or make misleading remarks is not isolated to just his presidency. According to Politifact, in the 2016 presidential race over seventy percent of the statements he made were “mostly false”, “false” or “pants on fire false”, with his presidential opponent Hilary Clinton making twenty-six percent of misleading or false statements (Jordan, 2016). These misleading kind of presidential behaviour does not represent prudence and does not fall under Philips (2018) presidential rhetorical convention as described above.

The peculiar presidential behaviour of President Trump, his tendency to hyperbole, his compulsive lying and his need to mislead the public, are signs that he breaks free from the carefully constructed presidential alignment of his image-shapers. Yet, his followers seem to allow him an uncharacteristic radical freedom, evident in them voting for him, which is very characteristic of charismatic leaders. For these reasons the tools provided by the theory of “message” by Silverstein and the additional theory of celebrification, in light of the above, does not fully allow me to answer my research question. For this reason the theory of charisma by Max Weber will be explored in order to have a better understanding of the ascension of Donald Trump’s political success.

2.3 Charisma

Max Weber, was the first to introduce the, originally Christian, concept of charisma into sociology, in an effort to understand and analyse the esoteric content of the charismatic character within a social context (Lindholm, 2018, p. 28). Importantly, Weber was the first to argue that “charisma implies a relationship between the great man and the followers” (Lindholm, 2018, p. 28).

Weber wrote about two opposing forms of charisma. The first, is institutional charisma, one which can be inherited or passed on. Institutional charisma does not have to do with an individual’s personal characteristics, on the contrary it is a “force for the legitimization of powerful institutions and individuals” (Lindholm, 2018, p. 28). For example, it is like the aura of sacred power that is passed on to “whomever has the right to wear the bishop’s robe or sit in the king’s throne” (Lindholm, 2018, p. 28). In the case of institutional charisma, the public believes that such individuals have a direct connection with the sacred and thus have charisma (Lindholm, 2018, p. 28). The second form of charisma proposed by Weber, is the genuine type of charisma which “is opposed to all institutional routines, those of tradition and

those subject to rational management” (Weber, 1946, p. 52). Meaning, that this type of charisma is primal and has no rigid lines of authority, it is “revolutionary and creative, occurring in times of crisis” (Lindholm, 2018, p. 29). It is this second form of charisma that this thesis will focus on.

Weber (1946), understood this kind of charisma as:

“an extraordinary quality of a person, regardless of whether this quality is actual, alleged, or presumed. "Charismatic authority," hence, shall refer to a rule over men, whether predominantly external or predominantly internal, to which the governed submit because of their belief in the extraordinary quality of the specific person” (p. 295).

In addition, Weber (1978) defined charismatic leaders as those who are:

“considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities” (p. 241).

The above means that to the audience views whatever the charismatic leader says as correct, even if it is self-contradictory (Lindholm, 2018, p. 29). Once the followers ascribe such extraordinary qualities to a leader, they grant the leader certain radical freedoms (Joosse, 2018, p. 4). According to Weber (1946) the devotion of the followers is “born of distress and enthusiasm” (p. 249). Charismatic leaders tend to emerge in times of social distress which challenge traditional morality, usually caused by eruptions within the sphere of the cultural and social values (Joosse, 2018, p. 7).

A charismatic leader, through the use of moral panic discourse has two distinct qualities. The first quality is the ability to outwit traditional leaders in an “extraordinary (and therefore charismatic) extreme” (Joosse, 2018, p. 1). Secondly, a charismatic leader, has the creative ability to undermine the authority of traditional conventions, invalidating the already in place values with the aim of bedevilling traditional leaders (Joosse, 2018, p. 1). In this way a charismatic leader is positioned as someone that not only stands against traditional conventions but also against legal-rational legitimacy (Joosse, 2018, p. 7). A charismatic leader, thus has a dual representation, one that is a threat to the existing traditions but also as a forerunner for new cultural forms (Joosse, 2018, p. 9).

Joosse (2018) explains that charismatic political figures are able to combine the phenomenon of rhetorical deviance to amplify moral panic while simultaneously attacking the traditional leaders and the wider establishment with a rhetorical dramatic flare. This “combative political style” results in “outraging and enthralling audiences while ensuring maximum press coverage” (Joosse, 2018, p. 4) and most importantly it embellishes the

charismatic leader “with a sort of convulsive self-importance” (Weber, 1905, p. 182).

According to Weber, part of the charismatic leaders allure is that they have a “unique and innate capacity to display highly colored emotions, of whatever kind... they appear to exist in an altered and intensified state of consciousness that is outside of mundane patterning, and that is more potent than ordinary emotional life” (Lindholm, 2018, p. 30). Importantly, this enhanced expressiveness of the charismatic leader is transferred automatically to the audience, “infecting them with enthusiasm and a feeling of vitality” (Lindholm, 2018, p. 30). Subsequently, the charismatic leader through this distinct magnetism is regarded as the emblematic spokesperson of the new revitalized morality and a symbol of hope by offering his followers a vision of a better society (Lindholm, 2018, p. 30; Joosse, 2018, p. 11). Remarkably, Weber’s charismatic leader has the ability to come across as a defender of the traditional conventions, proposing a purist and idealistic restoration of society to a prelapsarian past, without losing sight of the political power game at hand (Joosse, 2018, p. 13).

To conclude, Weber’s charisma comes with potential hazards, the “charismatic leader goes against tradition, generates new things, and changes points of reference or frameworks, but can also be subversive, irrational and unstable” (Epley, 2015, p. 8) which ultimately makes it self-destructive and can thus, not last forever.

Chapter 3: Methodology

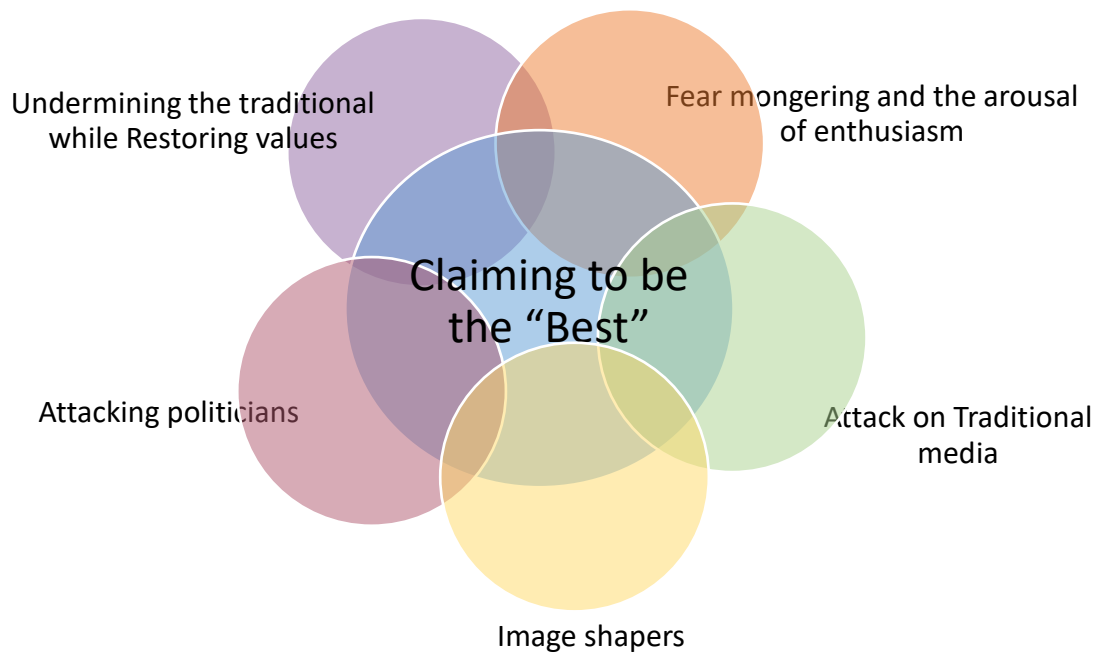
The methodological approach of digital ethnography was used in this thesis. Digital ethnography as explained by Varis (2016) is an approach for grasping the shape and nature of the communicative practices of locally specific digital practices. I used digital ethnography in order to gain insight and analyse the online political message, of the current US president Donald Trump, on Twitter. This was done with the aim of discovering how his online political approach on Twitter is part of his “message” and a contributing factor to his charismatic leadership.

Twitter, is a social networking service which was launched in 2006, and has gained prominence within the political arena. Twitter, is unique from other social networking services due to their more lenient access rules; meaning that mutual sharing is not required, one can access anyone’s post, unless there is a specific user block in place (Talip et al., 2017). Twitter’s connecting factor for its users is a shared interest in a particular matter (Talip et al., 2017). In this paper, my research field was Twitter as Donald Trump seems to favour Twitter over any other social network and often tweets highly controversial and impulsive rants (Phillips, 2018).

The data collection method I used, in order to have a good understanding on Trump’s use of Twitter is observation. I have conducted observation by reading all of Donald Trump’s tweets and retweets from the past three months (April-June) from his official Twitter account: @realDonaldTrump. This was done by browsing the President’s tweets from the 1st of April, 2020 until the 30th of June, 2020. According to the “Trump Twitter archive” (2020), he tweeted and retweeted more than 3000 times during the above three months. I went through the process of reading all the tweets and retweets of Donald Trump, in order to have a better understanding of the digital atmosphere and culture he creates through his online persona and ultimately to become an insider. Then, I went back to read the tweets of April-June again and sampled some of his tweets based on popularity. Popularity, in the current study, means more than one hundred thousand likes. This was done in order to create an elimination method. I thus choose to only screenshot tweets with over one hundred thousand likes, which yielded around 490 entries.

After sampling the tweets, I began to categorize them according to the thematic content. This yields six distinct categories. Some tweets overlapped with at least another of the categories but all of them had one category at its epicentre. The categories and their relationships are visualized through figure 3.1:

Figure 3.1 Six Categories



The following chapter, Chapter four: Data Analysis will follow the six categories. The categories are as followed:

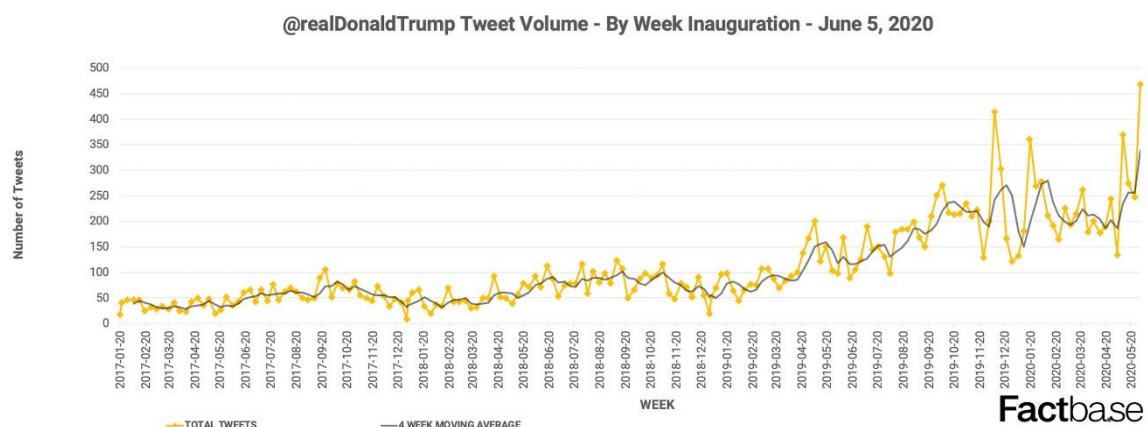
1. Attacking politicians
2. Undermining the traditional while Restoring values
3. Fear mongering and the arousal of enthusiasm
4. Claiming to be the “Best”
5. Attack on Traditional media
6. Image shapers

In regards to the ethical concerns, Donald Trump is a public figure. According to former White House Secretary Sean Spicer the presidents tweets are “considered official statements by the President of the United States” (Jenkins, 2017) and thus should be treated with the same importance as comments directly from his press office. Importantly, I did not track any of his followers’ Twitter accounts and made sure that all other names, from people liking or commenting on the presidents tweets were anonymized.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Trump favours using Twitter over other social media networks and is known to tweet and retweet throughout the day. On June the 5th, 2020, in light of the ongoing protests that were taking place against police brutality, he created a new Twitter self-record. Factba.se is a database with the aim of containing everything Donald Trump says or tweets since 2017 and it is a publically available website. According to Factba.se, president Trump tweeted and retweeted a total of 200 times, the highest ever before and during his presidency (Perrett, 2020).¹ Furthermore, Factba.se; which tracks the president's Twitter usage, shows that president Trump is using Twitter more than ever before, this year, which might have to do with his re-election strategy. Figure 4.1 displays Trumps Twitter usage since his presidential inauguration on January 20th 2017 until the 20th of May, 2020 (Perrett, 2020).

Figure 4. 1 Trumps Twitter usage



Throughout Trump's presidency he used Twitter as a weapon to hurl abusive statements on individuals and institutions (Phillips, 2018). One of the reasons Trump likes the use of Twitter so much as means of communication might be because it allows him to deviate from traditional forms of media. Traditional forms of media have a different dynamic, they are a two sided communication often covering multiple perspectives of a single issue. Trump with the use of Twitter removes the mediating role traditional forms of media have, resulting in an

¹ Factba.se is a publically available website. Source: <https://twitter.com/FactbaseFeed/status/1269117600417615873> Retrieved June 10, 2020

altering of information flow (Phillips, 2018). This independence from traditional media forms presents politicians the unique ability to mould online content that their addressed audience can receive directly without mediation or censorship (Phillips, 2018). This form of direct, uncensored communication allows for a new unconventional presidential rhetoric and in the worst scenario it “permits the dissemination of inappropriate, misleading, or factually incorrect content”, which is “uncharacteristic of traditional presidential rhetoric” (Phillips, 2018, p. 9). Trump can be used as an example of the worst case scenario quoted above.

Twitter becomes part of Trumps “message” as it is used by the President as a political communication strategy. Through tweeting the president creates a more direct kind of communication with his addressed audience, his tweets seem unfiltered, something that comes directly from the president to his people. This concept is one that plays a major role in Trumps “message”. When Trumps followers are asked why they support him one of the most common responses is “That he says it like it is”. Thus Trumps rhetoric has taken a different route from the traditionally presidential discourse which creates a new kind of appeal. Trumps supporters embrace the fact that he seems to be unfiltered in his speech, even if he is perceived as offensive. People seem to be tired of political correctness, they feel that Trump gives them raw honesty and they are willing to support that even if his rhetoric is often petty and aggressive.

For Trump his outrageous tweets seem to have a strategic place, not only in helping him “inhabit his message” but it is also used to attract traditional media to write or comment upon his tweets which ultimately results in an increase of press coverage. “The increasing reliance on political information through the one sided information flow characteristic of Twitter results in extreme attitudes and divided opinions, potentially creating an ill-informed public” (Phillips, 2018, p. 7) and ultimately play a part in creating political polarization.

The analysis of president Donald Trump will follow the six categories mentioned in Chapter three, with the aid of the concepts explained in Chapter two, throughout the months of April, May and July. It will attempt to identify and display directly how he “inhabits message” through his Twitter use as well as his charismatic approach.

4.1 Attacking politicians

Donald Trump is a master at publicly diminishing his opponents. He does this by consistently following a three step process. Firstly, by giving his political opponents diminishing nicknames. Secondly by criticising their political achievements as failures; while

simultaneously elevating his own achievements in a comparative manner. This will be displayed below through two of Trumps tweets.

The first tweet, from April 16th, 2020, shown in Figure 4.2,² was strategically accommodated by a video of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and had 265 thousand likes, in which she says:

"You should come to Chinatown. Precautions have been taken by our city. We know that there is concern about tourism, traveling all throughout the world, but we think it's very safe to be in Chinatown and hope that others will come."

Figure 4. 2 Crazy Nancy Pelosi



It is publically known that Donald Trump and Nancy Pelosi are not political allies, on the contrary the House Speaker has been known to "has closely managed President Trump's impeachment from the beginning" (Fandos, 2020). Furthermore, Pelosi became a public sensation on February 4th, 2020 during the President's third State of the Union address. While Trump was speaking she was sitting directly behind the him, in the chair reserved for the Speaker of the House of Representatives. As soon as he finished his speech she tore the copy of the presidential text in half in direct view of the cameras, she later explained that she deemed it a "manifesto of mistruths" (Coll, 2020).

In the above tweet, Trump does not lose the opportunity to create a diminishing but catchy nickname for his opponent, namely "Crazy Nancy Pelosi". This nickname undermines her

² Source: <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1250852583318736896> Retrieved: June 11, 2020

authority to the public as someone who is not trust worthy and even delusional. The tendency for him to create such nicknames for anyone who opposes him, is part of his political “message”, and falls under the strategy of celebrification. Name-calling is not traditional to presidential behaviour but often seen in celebrity culture, where two stars conduct catfights in the public view. In the case of the tweet shown in figure 4.2, it is used as a strategy to amplify the opinions of Trump over those of Pelosi. Through this kind of rhetoric Trump uses the word “crazy” as a “dog whistle”. This means that he insinuates that anyone who disagrees with Nancy Pelosi in matters of politics thinks she is crazy and thus, aligns them as like-minded people. In addition, through the indexical pronouns “she” and “I” Trump creates a distinction between “she” as the enemy and “I” as the saviour. In doing so he designs a new social arrangement, one of Pelosi versus Trump and the people of America.

Simultaneously, through this tweet Trumps charismatic leadership comes to light. Trump in this tweet uses, the already in place, public moral panic discourse of the corona virus to directly blame Pelosi for “many deaths”. Not only does he put blame on Pelosi, he makes sure to further place himself as the saviour, the symbol of hope. He includes in his tweet that he was faster to react for the safety of his people with the use of “long after I closed the BORDER TO CHINA”. Moreover the use of capital letters display Trumps highly coloured emotions, ones of anger and despair which is part of a charismatic leaders allure.

Furthermore, this tweet by president Donald Trump is misleading as he claims that Pelosi tweeted, then, deleted the specific video from her Twitter account. “Politwoods, (is) a project of ProPublica, (that) tracks deleted tweets by elected officials” (Valverde, 2020). According to the tracker Pelosi’s last five deleted tweets were from February 22nd until April the 13th and none of them where related to Chinatown (Valverde, 2020). The White House and the President’s re-election team have provided no further evidence of his claim that Pelosi deleted the above video from her account (Valverde, 2020).

The following tweet, Figure 4.3 posted on June 7th, 2020, has 282 thousand likes, showing that it is quite popular with Trumps followers.³

Joe Biden, the 47th vice president of the United States under the Obama administration is now running for president and is the “presumptive Democratic nominee” and thus a political threat to Donald Trump who is also aiming for re-election (Glueck, 2020).

³ Source: <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1269617458354282502> Retrieved: June 14, 2020

Figure 4. 3 Sleepy Joe Biden

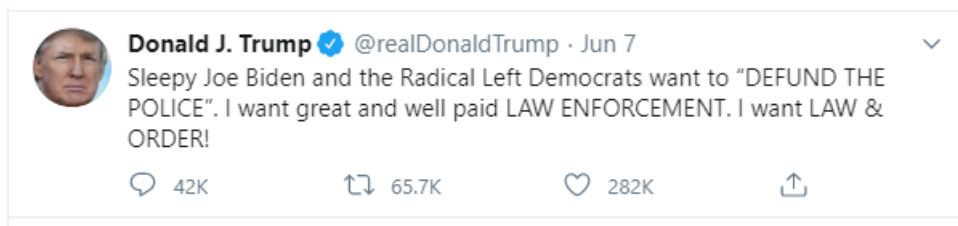


Figure 4. 3, displays Trumps consistency with the three step process outlined above. Firstly, he appoints Joe Biden with a diminishing nickname, namely, "Sleepy Joe Biden". The nickname alludes to Biden's age of 77, Trump being younger than him at age, 74. The nickname further implies that due partially to his age Biden is slower, less capable, mentally unreliable and ultimately someone not fit to be a president.

Secondly, Trump created a direct link between "Sleepy Joe Biden and the "Radical Left Democrats". This is a clear example of indexical values, a strategy used in the creation of message strategy (Silverstein, 2003), explained in Chapter two. By calling Biden a Democrat, without the "-ic" at the end, he creates a clear distinction between the political party he represents versus the political party Biden represents. Not only does Trump create the distinction, by using the term "radical", he creates moral panic, making Biden seem dangerous. In doing so, it becomes clear that he is actively attempting to shift the social arrangements of the association of the word and the image of Joe Biden from "Democrats" to one that essentially symbolises the "Radical Left". In this way, Trump is adding on to his reserve of complexes of targetable issues. The social shift of the word "Democratic", and the association it has to Biden, is now one that insinuates the "Radical left" and becomes part of his package of issue-emblems. When the President will speak of "Democrats" or Joe Biden, the human intuition of thinking in complexes will classify it as "radical". This will further project him as a politician who "inhabits message" in a way that he stands against all that is bad, in this case Joe Biden, by representing all that is good. By using this kind of rhetorical deviance, he proceeds to amplify moral panic by stating that Biden wants to "DEFUND THE POLICE". Donald Trump's charismatic persona is strategically evident in his use of all capital letters to state the above, as an additional dramatic flare which conveys highly colored emotions, those of anger and disbelief in the intentions of his political re-election threat.

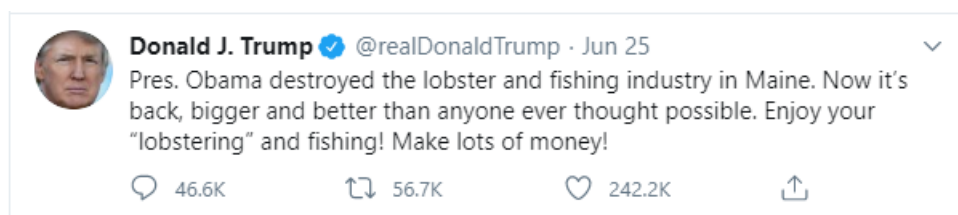
Lastly, Trump concludes his tweet by bringing the audience's attention back to himself. The current US President does this in the characteristically charismatic manner of comparative political style, making himself the defender of the traditional policing conventions. Trump states "I want great and well paid LAW ENFORCEMENT. I want LAW & ORDER!". In this section of his tweet, the use of all capital letters are used as emphasis for what he wants the

public to believe he stands for; “LAW ENFORCEMENT” and “LAW & ORDER”. The use of capital letters, in this concluding section have a dual aim. Firstly, to arouse the feeling of distress in his audience, due to his opponents “Radical left” views which are a threat to the existing traditions of the country. Secondly, to stimulate the feeling enthusiasm in his audience as Trump places himself as the forerunner and defender of the traditional conventions. As explained by Weber (1946), it is important for a charismatic leader to arouse the feelings of both distress and enthusiasm in his audience as it is the environment charismatic leaders thrive in. This is a strategically charismatic way of Trump to conclude his tweet, because he places himself as the emblematic spokesperson representing the betterment of society and becoming the symbol of hope for his followers. With using the indexical trace “I” in the above comparative political style, Trump ascribes to himself a “convulsive self-importance” (Weber, 1905), one making him seen as the solemn saviour.

4.2 Undermining the traditional while Restoring values

The following tweet, Figure 4.4 posted on June 25th, 2020 has 242 thousand likes.⁴ It is a clear example of the ability of President Trump to undermine the traditional and conventional forms of presidencies while concurrently placing himself as the defender and restorer of the moral standards of the country through his tweets. According to Phillips (2018), Obama’s use of Twitter is one representing presidential professionalism, while his represents a counter-trend. “Trump positions himself as a genuine outsider on Twitter by choosing to tweet from his personal account and often writing his own tweets, establishing a distinct voice recognizable to followers” (Phillips, 2018, p. 11). For this reason, Obama represents a more traditional and conventional presidential form of communication which is contrary to Trump’s.

Figure 4. 4 Vendetta against former Pres. Obama



President Trump seems to have an ongoing vendetta against former President Barack Obama and everything his administration stood for in the years of his presidency between 2009 and 2017 (Biography.com Editors., 2020). He heavily criticized Obama during his presidential campaign in 2015 and 2016 and continued to do so during his presidency, as it is evident in the above tweet.

⁴ Source: <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1275951862269829121> Retrieved: June 27, 2020

Donald Trump, in the tweet seen in Figure 4.4, introduces his tweet by making the following statement: “Pres. Obama destroyed the lobster and fishing industry in Maine”. Through this opening statement it is evident that he fits in three of the qualities ascribed by Max Weber (Joosse, 2018) to charismatic leaders. Firstly, the charismatic and creative ability to undermine the past presidential conventions, as well as bedevil past presidential leaders that represent traditional presidential behaviour. In this case, past presidential conventions is “the creation of the Atlantic Ocean’s first marine national monument”, in 2016 (McDermott, 2016), and bedevilling Obama, a traditional presidential figure, by stating that he is to blame for the destruction of the lobster and fishing industry in Maine.

After his tweet opening statement follows: “Now it’s back, bigger and better than anyone ever thought possible”. With this statement, he qualifies for the second quality of Weber (Joosse, 2018) the ability to appear to outwit traditional leaders in an extraordinary extreme, and hence a charismatic way. Trump shows that he is able to outsmart Obama in such a grand extraordinary manner that no-one could ever have foreseen it. With “now it is back” he claims to have corrected a problem created in the past presidential administration by making the “lobster industry eligible for bailout funds” (Yglesias, 2020).

Trump ends the tweet shown in Figure 4.4 by saying: “Enjoy your “lobstering” and fishing! Make lots of money!”. By this, he displays the third ability of Max Weber’s (Joosse, 2018) charismatic leader, as the defender. Through the above tweet he places himself as the defender of the simple fishermen, and thus embodies meritocracy. A defender who is willing to take action to restore their livelihood to how it was in the past, before Barack Obama. A defender who is projecting a purist idealistic restoration of the past and is even willing to go the extra mile and make it even “bigger and better” so the fishermen can “make lots of money!”.

Even though it is not evident in the wording of the above tweet, Donald Trump fits in a fourth quality of a charismatic leader (Joosse, 2018), which is based on the above three. Specifically, that a successful charismatic leader never loses sight of the political game at hand. President Trump is aiming for re-election and knows that rural voters are really important for his success, as 35% of his 2016 voters were from rural areas (Pew Research Center, 2018). Joe Biden, who is now also campaigning for president, was Obama’s vice-president and thus, closely related to the failures of the administration. By attacking Obama, he is simultaneously attacking his political rival, and thus outsmarting him too.

Donald Trump has been in a trade war with China since 2018, imposing and increasing heavy tariffs on Chinese imported goods in the USA. China in return retaliated by placing heavy tariffs on many imported US food products, including lobsters. The US lobster market has seen a nearly 80% drop in their lobster exports to China since the Chinese tariffs were put in place (Whittle, 2019). Thus the gesture from Trump to make bailout funds available to the lobster industry is more symbolic than economical. It seems that this gesture towards the rural lobster industry comes at a time where he needs them to think that he is still on their side and their defender.

4.3 Fear mongering and the arousal of enthusiasm

An important tactic used by President Donald Trump which is important for his appeal to the public as well as his followers devotion to him is, fear mongering. He uses fear mongering in his tweets, which not only creates distress and anxiety to the public, it also strategically places himself and his administration as the protectors. This will be shown through two different examples of fear mongering from his official Twitter account.

Figure 4.5 displays a very popular phrase President Trump tweeted and retweeted a total of ten times in the month of June.⁵ These tweets had a very high popularity rating with the most popular getting 433.2 thousand likes and the least popular getting 246.4 thousand likes. This phrase is also seen at the end of the tweet analysed in Figure 4.3 Sleepy Joe Biden.

Figure 4. 5 LAW & ORDER



In order to analyse the above phrase used repeatedly on Twitter by Donald Trump it is of great importance to understand the political and social atmosphere of the month of June in the USA, an overview will follow. The month of June was a challenging one for the United States of America and consequently a hard one for President Trump. The death of George Floyd, while in police custody, on the 25th of May sparked a wave of protests against police brutality and for the Black Lives Matter Movement (Bettis, 2020). The protests were spread throughout the country and continued throughout the whole month of July. In addition,

⁵ Sources: <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1267227396341669889> ;
<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1268140310762336256> ;
<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1268497398239842307> ;
<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1269400770472001539> ;
<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1270903949038694401> ;
<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1271780302151696384> ;
<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1272534307303755776> ;
<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1275871808261107712> ;
<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1276207454888448001> Retrieved: June 26, 2020

protesters in Seattle took over several blocks and transformed it into the Capital Hill Autonomous Zone or “Chaz”. This autonomous zone was used to “amplify nationwide protests while offering a real-world example of what a community can look like without police” (Golden, 2020). Furthermore, the cases of coronavirus were on a continues rise in the month of June. By the end of the month there were more than 2.5 million Americans infected with Covid-19 and more that 125 thousand deaths (Andrew, 2020).

The analysis of the phrase used in the above tweet by Donald Trump, in Figure 4.5 will combine the social context and the theoretical framework of Chapter two. This will enable the understanding of the meaning behind the phrase “LAW & ORDER!” when used by the President. To begin, it is remarkable that just two words by him can amass over 430 thousand likes from the public, as shown in the first picture from the above collage. It places this tweet in the top ten most popular tweets from the official Twitter account of President Trump in the month of June, not including retweets. One of the reasons the tweets shown in Figure 4.5 are so popular are due to the words indexicality which are contributing to the social meaning the public assigns to the words (Moore & Podesva, 2009). Law and Order are words that weigh heavily within society, ones which shape the values of the countries culture as well as keep those very values in place. The words “law” and “order” can have multiple social meanings. These meanings are “constructed as speakers rationalize correlations between linguistic features and social information” (Moore, & Podesva, 2009, p. 450) and then relay those to the public. Due to the social context explained above, Trump is using the heavy indexicality of the words “law” and “order” within the uncertain atmosphere of June to create fear and anxiety in the public sphere. This is an example of what Silverstein (2003) calls “symbolic ritualistic loading”. It is important to understand ritual speech within the context in which they occur, in this case a chaotic one, filled with uncertainties. Ritual speech is important for Trump as he is creating “contextually experienced chain-complexes of ideas”, these are the indexical associations that without law and order the country will fall in to a helpless chaos. He makes sure to keep reminding the public of the dangers by tweeting and retweeting the same phrase. These kind of ritual speech is laden with emotion as they reach the public (Silverstein, 2003), ones of fearmongering.

Moreover, he uses the common phrase “LAW & ORDER!” as a “dog whistle”, which contributes to his political “message” (Silverstein, 2017). It is undeniable that the vast majority of the public wants law and order, whether that is in the traditional way or in a reformed, alternative manner. Due to the commonality of the phrase, by just posting “LAW & ORDER!” President Trump is strategically targeting a bigger audience by upholding them as like-minded people in this kind of metapragmatic manner.

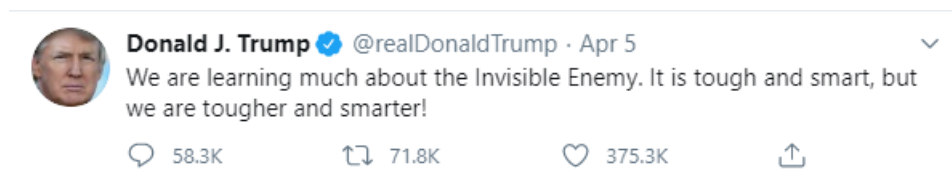
To summarise, Trump, through painting this ritual picture, using the metaphorical chains of the symbolism behind the words “law” and “order” and using the phrase’s commonality as a “dog whistle”, is also contributing to his overall message which is one of the saviour of the people, making him “inhabit message”.

The ability to amplify moral panic is characteristic of the charismatic leader as explained by Max Weber (1946). Trump is able to create a distressful situation for the public with just the use of two words. With this kind of distress he is simultaneously arousing a kind of

enthusiasm in the public. This enthusiasm is created because he is placing himself as the saviour of the cultural values of the country. As the one that is ready to fight for the public in order for them to have “LAW & ORDER!”. The use of all capital letters and the exclamation mark are signs of how passionate he is about the topic, showing his high emotions. In this way Trump is proposing a purist, idealistic restoration of law and order. Through this, he places himself at the epicentre of the conservatism surrounding the topic of policing in the country, and ultimately making himself the defender of traditional conventions in the country. This kind of repetitive fear mongering enables Trump to draw attention back to himself as a strong determined leader ready to fight for the values of his people.

The tweet shown below, Figure 4.6 Ritual Speech – The Invisible Enemy, was published in April 5th, 2020 and has 375.3 thousand likes.⁶ Figure 4.6 will be used as the second example of illustrating President Trump’s political strategy of fear mongering.

Figure 4. 6 Ritual Speech - The Invisible Enemy



Firstly, President Trump has branded the coronavirus as the “Invisible Enemy” in an attempt to personify the virus as something evil with intent; the intent to harm humankind. He continues by stating that the “Invisible Enemy” “is touch and smart”. In this way, President Trump attributes intelligence to the virus, a quality usually ascribed to people. This kind of charismatic rhetoric is used as fear mongering, in the creation of distress and the amplification of moral panic. Nevertheless, his charismatic leadership does not end there. In order for him to be a successful charismatic politician he needs to prompt the feeling of enthusiasm in his audience. President Trump achieves this by concluding his tweet with “but we are tougher and smarter!”. Through this line, he implies that he will be able to outwit and ultimately defeat this “Invisible Enemy”. Placing himself as the defender of the people against the enemy and essentially as the symbol of an idealistic restoration of society to the times prior to coronavirus.

Figure 4.6 is also an example of Donald Trump’s use of ritual speech as he uses words with symbolic ritualistic loading. Silverstein (2003) explains that ritual speech can be used as a political strategy due to its epideictic quality. With epideictic, Silverstein (2003) means the quality of ritual speech to extract the context into itself creating a “contextually experienced chain-complexes of ideas” (Silverstein, 2003, p. 38). In the case of the above tweet, President Trump uses language heavily laden in symbolic militaristic rhetoric. He is thus, strategically choosing to frame the coronavirus pandemic in military terms, as an analogy of war (Serhan, 2020). By utilising military symbolism he is declaring himself a wartime

⁶ Source: <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1246884203419099137> Retrieved: June 1, 2020

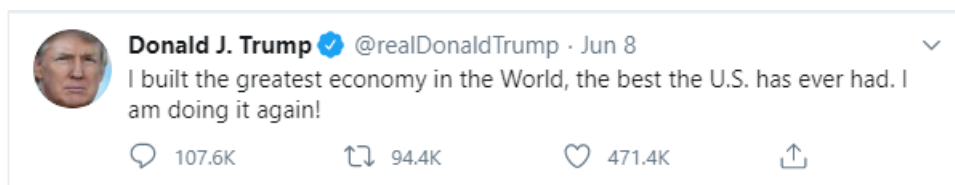
president (Shafer, 2020). This kind of ritual speech, invokes a “rally-'round-the-flag effect” in the public. This effect is usually associated with “an emerging military crisis- especially if it is sudden, dramatic, and international in scope” (Lambert et al., 2011, p. 343). The “rally-'round-the-flag effect” usually has the effect of triggering an increase in the public's presidential support (Lambert et al., 2011).

Moreover, with the use of the word “Invisible” President Donald Trump strategically implies that he cannot be held accountable for not foreseen the arrival of the virus in the country (Shafer, 2020). With the use of the indexical plural pronoun “we”, he is creating a clear distinction between the “Invisible Enemy” and the people of America with him in the leading role. In addition the indexical value of “we” also promotes a kind of national cohesion, one of the people against the common “Invisible Enemy” (Serhan, 2020). The symbolic ritualistic military language used by Donald Trump in Figure 4.6 is self-serving. It is predominantly used to amplify enough moral panic and distress in the public in order for him to be seen as their protector and defender.

4.4 Claiming to be the “Best”

The fourth distinct categorisation of President Trump's tweets is his ability to elevate himself as the best president with the best administration; a kind of not so subtle self-boasting. This will be conveyed in the tweet of Figure 4.7 The “Best”!.⁷

Figure 4. 7 The “Best”!



The above tweet, Figure 4.7, was tweeted on June 8th, 2020 and has 471.4 thousand likes, it is an example of how Trump efficiently uses the strategy of celebrification to “inhabit message”. As explained in Chapter two, celebrification is an important strategy for political figures because it allows for the increase of visibility especially through social media networks, in this case, Twitter. This increase of visibility enables Trump to enhance his opinion spectacle in order to shape the public sphere in an a beneficial light of his self-performance. In order for him to “inhabit message” he commodifies himself to promote opinions that are in his favour. Through this kind of discourse he attempts to “colonise the lived experience of the audience” (Usher, 2020, p. 4) and create a favourable public persona. Trump in the above tweet puts a focus on the indexical pronoun “I” in order to have total attention on himself when it comes to his presidential achievement. As seen in Figure 4.7, he states “I build the greatest economy in the World, the best the U.S has ever had”. In this manner he is using the strategy of celebrification to amplify his achievement as something

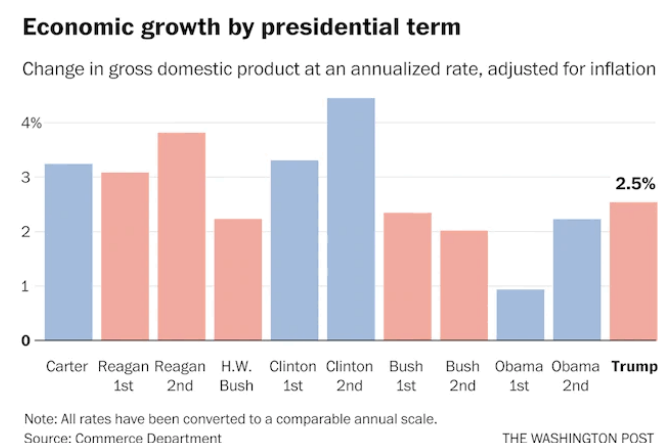
⁷ Source: <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1269753231355371521> Retrieved: June 14, 2020

that he, himself is fully responsible for. In turn this kind of linguistic connotation invokes emotion as well as vulnerability in the audience. The emotion of gratefulness and the vulnerabilities of an economic decline, in this way he, is placed on a pedestal of success, which is evident in the more than 471 thousand likes this tweet got.

The strategy of celebrification, as used above by Trump is also in alignment with some of the characteristics of a charismatic leader. As Weber (1946) explains, charisma is understood as an extraordinary quality a person possess, regardless whether this quality is actual, alleged or presumed. Moreover, due to Trump's charisma the audience is prone to believe everything he says as the truth, even if that is not the case (Lindholm, 2018). Furthermore, he is able to invoke the feeling of enthusiasm, which is critical to a charismatic leader's success, by ending his tweet with "I am doing it again!". In this last sentence, the indexical pronoun "I" is one more put to focus. Trump places himself once again at the epicentre of the country's economic success while simultaneously leaving the audience with an enthralling sense of hope for an even brighter future.

Trump in the above tweet is making a statement that the economy of the US has been the best the country has ever seen. The use of social media, as seen in the theory of celebrification, enables him to bypass the factual checking of journalists, which previously had the role of news gatekeepers. Trump employs the strategy of celebrification by taking advantage of this newly found gap in fact-checking. According to chart 4.8 Economic growth by presidential term, shown below by the Washington Post, even though the economy is doing better than under the Obama administration, it is definitely not the best ever.⁸ The economy was undeniably better under both the presidencies of Reagan and Clinton (Long, 2020). However, due to the tweet of Figure 4.7 popularity it is evident that the public believes and supports the claims made by the current President of America.

Figure 4. 8 Economic growth by presidential term



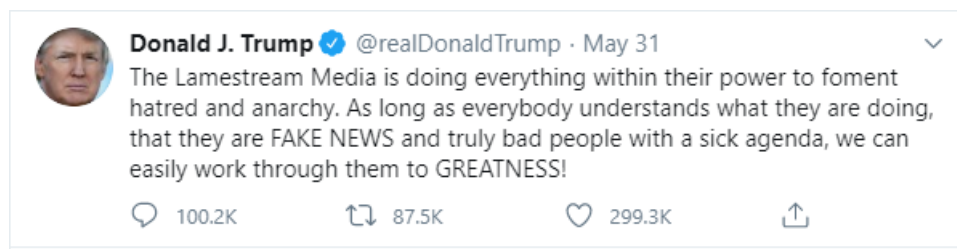
⁸ The Washington Post is an American daily newspaper. Source: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/02/04/trump-touts-his-economy-best-ever-data-is-mixed/> Retrieved: June 9, 2020

4.5 Attack on Traditional media

Trump, through the use of Twitter is able to attack, dismiss, belittle and bedevil traditional media outlets. This in turn creates insecurities in the public leading them to mistrust the information provided by the traditional media.

The tweet displayed in Figure 4.9 was tweeted on May 31st, 2020 and has 299.3 thousand likes.⁹

Figure 4. 9 Lamestream Media & Fake news



What is remarkable about the above tweet is that Donald Trump views news media, in a similar manner as his political opponents, seen in Section 4.1, as a form of competition. As Silverstein (2003) explains the social issues a politician is advocating for are part of their political strategy and are tactically used for “message” appeal and for the diminishment of their competition. The above tweet by Trump is strategically bedevilling traditional media as the enemy of the people.

In Figure 4.9 Trump is using the strategy of celebrification, through name-calling, by altering the word mainstream media to “Lamestream Media” and by labelling traditional media networks as “FAKE NEWS”. In addition, the feeling of celebrity catfight is heightened because he makes it personal by tweeting that the journalists working for news media are “truly bad people with a sick agenda”. This kind of rhetoric simulates celebrity catfights, aiming to amplify the focal point that news agencies are not to be trusted and to create public negativity towards them. In this manner, he is encouraging and promoting bypassing the journalistic role of factual checking, the traditional role of journalists as news gatekeepers. With the help of the above communicative strategy, as Silverstein (2003) explains, Trump is altering the already in place social arrangements between traditional media networks and the public. He is creating new social arrangements, ones that fit his political “message” and belittle the role of traditional news media. Through this kind of discourse, Trump is attempting to alienate the public with the traditional news media, creating a feeling of mistrust. He is utilising the celebrification persuasive method of rhetorical art form in an “attempt to colonize the lived experience” (Usher, 2020, p. 4) the audience has towards traditional media networks with the political aim of promoting his opinion. With the implementation of celebrification as a political strategy directed towards news media, President Trump is attempting to have total presidential executive power. He is developing self-as-brand or in Silverstein’s words (2003) “inhabits message”, by attacking media networks and journalists in

⁹ Source: <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1267132763116838913> Retrieved: June 1, 2020

order to create his public persona in the light he chooses versus the one the media projects on him.

Furthermore, the above tweet, is exhibiting his charismatic qualities. Donald Trump is using the above rhetorical deviance to amplify moral panic and public distress; a crucial skill in a charismatic political figure. President Trump tweeted “The Lamestream Media is doing everything within their power to foment hatred and anarchy”. With this statement, he is bedevilling traditional media networks and in turn creating fear in the public sphere. Trump is claiming that the media is no longer just reporting facts but are going out of their way to instigate “hatred and anarchy”. In this manner, he is singling out traditional news media as the enemy of the people and a direct threat to the peace of the country. He reinforces the above kind of rhetoric by claiming “that they are FAKE NEWS and truly bad people with a sick agenda”. By this claim he is dismissing the role of media as an unbiased entity of reporting facts, by stating that they are instead working “with a sick agenda”, one that is towards the destruction of the country. Moreover, he takes the role of the protector of the people, the one that is informing them of the true evil nature of news media networks by saying “As long as everyone understands what they are doing”. By claiming this protective role, Trump is positioning himself as an extraordinary person with the exceptional quality of being able to see through traditional news media and alerting the public to the danger of trusting them (Weber, 1978).

Additionally, Donald Trump through the strategic use of the plural indexical traces of “they”/“them” and “we” is creating a clear distinction between the traditional news media networks and the public. He is mastering his political “message” through the indexical values of the above quoted pronouns. Trump, by using “we” self-identifies as one with the people and by the use of “they”/“them”; representing the traditional news media, he creates a clear division between the two. The use of the above kind of “cumulative indexical poetry” (Silverstein, 2003, p. 10) creates both distress and moral panic, as seen above, but also generates enthusiasm within the public sphere. The ability of a charismatic leader to elicit enthusiasm in the public is of great importance, because it creates follower devotion (Weber, 1946). Trump, strategically leaves the evoking of enthusiasm as the concluding statement in his tweet. As seen in Figure 4.9, he ends his tweet with “we can easily work through them to GREATNESS”. By using all capital letters for the word “GREATNESS”, he is displaying “highly coloured emotions” (Lindholm, 2018, p. 30), which is characteristic in charismatic leaders. Through this kind of emotional display, he is able to enthrall the attention of the public and invoke the feeling of enthusiasm. President Trump empowers the public and more importantly himself, he becomes a symbol of hope and the peoples defender. He is able to establish the above at the expense of the media news networks.

4.6 Image Shapers

As seen in Chapter two, Silverstein (2003) explains, “message” is something that is also constructed by a team of stylists that work to create an effective and lasting “message”. In

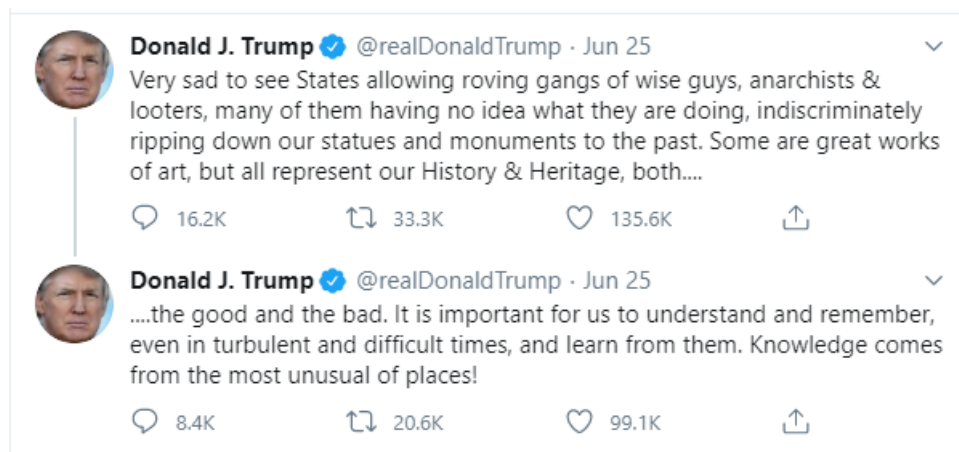
this section, these stylists will be called “image shapers”. Image shapers are tasked with providing the politicians they work for, a better chance in the political market. Politicians have a better chance within the political market if their political image is in alignment with their political “message”; image shapers make sure that this is the case.

As seen in figure 4.1 Trumps Twitter usage, found in the introduction of Chapter four, has been on an overall spike in the Presidents use of Twitter in the last year, 2020. Moreover, Figure 4.1 shows that in the beginning of the month of June, he created a new Twitter self-record in his number of tweets and retweets. This sudden spike in the number of tweets by President Trump, in 2020 could also be related to his re-election strategy. For these reasons it is very possible that he is not the only one tweeting from his official Twitter account: @realDonaldTrump.

Trump’s team of “image shapers” probably also sometimes tweet on his behalf with the aim of the betterment of his political image and in alignment with his overall political “message”. This will be demonstrated by the analysis of the bellow tweet thread, Figure 4.10, published on June 25th, 2020. A Twitter thread is series of connected tweets from one person.

The first tweet of Figure 4.10, has 135.6 thousand likes and the following connecting tweet has 99.1 thousand likes.¹⁰ As explained in Chapter three, I decided not to include tweets with less than 100 thousand likes, this tweet is an exception as the first tweet met the requirement and the thread will be more coherently understood if the Twitter thread is shown in its complete form.

Figure 4. 10 Knowledge is key



To fully understand the above tweet, keep in mind the explanation of the challenging social atmosphere of the month of June outlined in Section 4.3. Figure 4.10 is probably written by President Donald Trump’s team of “image shapers”. It is likely that this is the case because the language and rhetoric used in the above tweet is uncharacteristic of his charismatic communicative mannerism. However, whether the above tweet was written by him, or his team of “image shapers” cannot be proven, unless confirmed by the President or his team. It

¹⁰ Source: <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1275998584551374849> Retrieved: June 27, 2020

is non the less important to study Figure 4.10 because it is an example of how Trump breaks away from his traditionally charismatic political persona.

'Trump tweet track' is a website that aims to create a complete data analysis from @realDonaldTrump using a unique scoring algorithm with the aim of separating tweets written by President Trump and tweets likely written by his staff members.¹¹ The main criteria used by 'Trump tweet track' is whether the tweet was posted by an Android or an iPhone. The tracking website, explains that tweets by an Android phone are most likely from Trump while the ones posted by an iPhone are most likely by his staff (Robinson, 2016). This is because, the tweets from the Android and the iPhone are posted during different times of the day and their use of hashtags, links, and retweets are very different from one another. Moreover, "the Android tweets tend to be angrier and more negative, while the iPhone tweets tend to be benign" (Robinson, 2016). According to the algorithm of the 'Trump tweet tracker', the specific Twitter thread shown in Figure 4.10, scores very high on the probability that it was not written personally by Donald Trump.

The criteria used in the analysis of this tweet will not follow the ones mentioned above used by the algorithm of 'Trump tweet tracker'. Without claiming the authenticity of this tweet, the current study tries to analyse it from the linguistic features of charismatic leadership.

As seen in the previous sections of Chapter four, Trump's charismatic leadership is very evident through his tweets. He frequently displays highly coloured emotions, often expressed through his tendency of using capital letters. Furthermore, he regularly places himself as the emblematic spokesperson of the issue at hand with the underlying promise of a better future. This results in the birth of enthusiasm in the public which originates from a place of distress. All of the above qualities are one of a charismatic leader, ones that are displayed in the previous Sections of Chapter four, 4.1 – 4.5. What is remarkable about the above tweet, Figure 4.10 is that these charisma is missing. Instead the tweet follows a more rational way of thinking and is more explanatory in nature versus enthralling. In this sense, no matter who wrote this tweet, it breaks out from the charismatic leader role.

It is also important to see the strategies of "message" in the above tweet. In Figure 4.10 the strategic use of the indexical pronouns "them" and "they" in contrast to "us" can be observed. The use of these indexical pronouns are employed to create a distinction between the "roving gangs of wise guys, anarchists & looters" and President Trump, his administration and the rest of the people of America. In this way the above tweet is attempting to ascribe the audience their reality, which results in the creation of a powerful political "message".

¹¹ Source: <http://trumptweettrack.com/tweetboard.html> Date accessed: July 15, 2020

Furthermore, Figure 4.10 is utilising the importance of ritual speech by advocating for the representation of “our History & Heritage”. History and heritage are words with symbolic ritualistic loading, they represent the foundation of a country’s existence and status. Ritual speech is “laden with affect or emotion as they hit us”, thus, these words are strategically used in the above tweet, in order to create a direct and personal connection with the people of America. By using the words “turbulent and difficult times”, Figure 4.10 is maintaining President Trump’s complexes of issues, insinuating at his previous opinions on the riots. As Silverstein (2003, p. 24) explains, issues are the unembellished semiotic material that have a direct connection with reality.

President Trump’s tweet shown in Figure 4.10 ends with “Knowledge comes from the most unusual of places!”. The ending of this tweet is contradicting of Trump’s charismatic leadership qualities. This is because a charismatic leader is born not through rationality and knowledge but rather, through the amplification of moral panic and distress. The above tweet does not arouse enthusiasm in the public, but on the contrary asks for the public to “understand and remember”. For the above reasons, I believe the tweet shown in Figure 4.10 was written not by Trump himself but by his team of image shapers in an attempt in the creation of a powerful political “message”. However, this attempt has a countering effect to Trump’s ability to “inhabit message”, this is because it is out of character. To conclude, whether the above tweet was written by President Trump himself, or whether it was written by his team of “image shapers” is not of the upmost importance and is not something we can be certain about. What is important is to recognise that the tweet displayed in Figure 4.10 is an example of Trump breaking free from his distinguished charismatic online political persona that is most prominent and recognizable in his use of Twitter.

Chapter 5: Conclusion & Discussion

The present study has explored Donald Trump's political communication on Twitter from a multidisciplinary perspective by focusing on his political "message" (Silverstein, 2003), celebrification strategies and the charismatic features in his leadership (Weber, 1946; 1978). This was accomplished through the methodological approach of digital ethnography with Twitter as the research field. A collection of President Trump's most popular tweets from his official account: @realDonaldTrump were gathered and categorised thematically in six distinct categories. The tweets were then analysed in the light of the above three theories to answer the research question: *How does Trump's political "message" contribute to his charismatic leadership?*

The results of this study show that Donald Trump is able to project his charismatic political leadership persona through the use and application of "message" through his tweets, in the following ways. Trump is very strategic in his use of indexical traces and their assigned values (Silverstein, 2003, pp. 9-10). He uses indexical traces to create the distinction of the political concept "us vs. them", in doing so he shifts, alters and ultimately designs new social arrangements. The shift of already in place social arrangements are an attempt to ascribe the audience their reality, one that is most favourable to the image of Donald Trump (Silverstein, 2003, pp. 11-16). In doing so he sparks the human intuition of thinking in complexes which allows him to create "contextually experienced chain-complexes of ideas" (Silverstein, 2003, p. 38) and add to his reserve of targetable issues. This reserve of targetable issues also serve as a package of issue emblems used by the President to demonstrate to his audience that he stands against all that is bad while representing all that is good (Silverstein, 2003, pp. 20-21). Moreover, Trump strategically uses words with symbolic ritualistic loading which are laden with emotion as they reach his audience (Silverstein, 2003, pp. 37-38). This is done in a tactical manner, by creating a "dog whistle" through the use of common words with the aim of targeting a bigger audience as like-minded people in a metapragmatic manner (Silverstein, 2017, p. 408). Furthermore, Donald Trump uses the method of celebrification as a further strategy of political communication aiding him to embody "message". Trump often conducts catfights in the form of name-calling with his political opponents and the traditional news networks, a behaviour often observed in celebrity culture (Usher, 2020, p. 10). This adds a dramatic flare to his online presidential persona, which in turn increases his visibility and enhances his opinion spectacle in an attempt to shape the public sphere in a self-promotional and beneficial light (Usher, 2020, pp. 2-10). Trump actively employs celebrification by stating his superiority and the extraordinariness of

his achievements in an attempt to have total presidential executive power and to construct his political public persona in the light of his choice.

The data analysis determined that the President's political communication strategy cannot be fully understood through the above theories and discursive strategies. But rather, the above are tools used by Donald Trump to project and amplify his political charismatic leadership persona through his use of Twitter. What is evident through the data analysis is that Trump has the charismatic ability to create and amplify moral panic and distress in his audience (Joosse, 2018). While creating fears and amplifying the crowds anxieties he has the ability to use them to his advantage, by prompting the feeling of enthusiasm in the audience (Weber, 1946, p. 249). This is done by the promotion of an idealistic restoration of society while undermining and bedevilling the past traditional leaders and the conventions they represent (Joosse, 2018, pp. 1-13). This kind of combative political style has a rhetorical dramatic flare and strategically places Trump at the epicentre, leaving the audience with an enthralling sense of hope for the future (Joosse, 2018, p. 4). The creation of a political environment laden with rhetorical deviance aiming at the amplification of public distress, and Trumps ability to use them to arouse enthusiasm in the audience creates an environment ideal for a charismatic leader to thrive in. This is because the audience then ascribes extraordinary qualities to the charismatic leader (Weber, 1978, p. 241). This follower devotion leads the public to accept everything Trump says as the truth, even if that is not really the case (Lindholm, 2018, p. 29). Trump uses this to his advantage, and actively takes the role of the protector, the defender as well as the, restorer of the values and traditions of the country. He does this through the projection of highly coloured emotions, typical of a charismatic leader, and displayed on Twitter usually with the use of all capital letters and exclamation marks (Lindholm, 2018, p. 30). Trump through the use of his charismatic political leadership persona, the use of the tools of "message" and the strategy of celebrification, manages to place himself as the emblematic spokesperson of the people of America. He becomes their saviour with the idealistic promise of the restoration of society towards a better and greater future.

On the whole, this new way of presidential behaviour and communication amplified by the use of social networking services is a complex phenomenon. With the development of new ways for presidents to directly reach their audience, it is of great importance for studies to continually explore this field. As seen in Chapter one, Trump is an interesting persona, with a diverse career as an entrepreneur and a reality TV star, which he used to his advantage in order to rise to his current role as President. It is thus understandable that previous studies on President Donald Trump have predominantly focused on his presidential campaigns and his overall media strategies of becoming president (Mohammadi & Javadi, 2017; Francia,

2018). However, this field of research is in great need to understand what follows after the Inauguration, the everyday applications of Trump's presidency. For this reason this study contributes to this field of research by analysing and focusing on his everyday presidential online communication practices. This study applies the discursive strategies of "message", while understanding that one of his political strategies is celebrification. These theoretical and practical tools are then used to identify the charismatic aspects of his leadership in order to further comprehend the success of the current President.

Further research is needed in order to understand the complexity of presidencies due to the freedom ascribed to them through the use of social networking services. Importantly, future research needs to investigate the rights of social networks to penalise public figures and censor the public statements made by them on their platforms. This is a new phenomenon which emerged on May 29th, 2020 when Twitter, for the first time concealed one of President Trumps tweets with a grey click-through banner which stated that it "violated the Twitter Rules about glorifying violence" (Wiener, 2020). This raises many questions on the future of online speech, the censorship of political public personas, like the President, and the right of online social networks to make the choice of who and what should be censored to the public. Future research can build on to this study by analysing whether this new form of political censorship will be a hindrance to future charismatic leaders in reaching their audience in the same kind of raw emotional manner displayed by President Trump.

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