

# An Analysis of the Association Between Dialogue, Rhetoric and Engagement in President Trump's First 100 Days on Twitter

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN DIALOGUE, RHETORIC AND  
ENGAGEMENT IN PRESIDENT TRUMP'S FIRST 100 DAYS ON TWITTER

by

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ABSTRACT  
AN ANALYSIS OF THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN DIALOGUE, RHETORIC AND  
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President Donald Trump's use of Twitter to primarily communicate with the public is unprecedented and demonstrates a simplistic and informal style of presidential communication. The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not this online presidential communication strategy successfully implements traditional public relations strategies, specifically Kent & Taylor's (1998) Dialogic Communication Theory and rhetorical strategies. A content analysis was used to examine the use of Dialogic Communication Principles and rhetorical strategies in tweets sent from @realDonaldTrump within his first 100 days in office. It was then determined whether or not the use of these principles and strategies have an effect on engagement (the total number of retweets, likes and comments) on tweets. Key findings of this study suggest that the use of pathos (emotional and patriotic appeals) within tweets positively affects engagement totals on tweets, and the use of various dialogic communication principles within tweets negatively affects engagement totals received on tweets.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

One of the main purposes of public relations (PR) is to “develop and cultivate relationships with strategic publics,” which adds value to PR for an organization (Grunig, 2006, p. 158). PR tactics and strategies can be applied to and used by anyone or any entity – a celebrity, an athlete, a politician, a local thought leader, an organization or a corporation, and even a larger institution such as a state or a country – in order to develop relationships with key strategic publics.

The creation of Web 2.0 allows for new media and social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to be utilized as or with PR strategies and tactics (Berthon, Pitt, Plangger, & Shapiro, 2012). Consequently, PR tactics and strategies are constantly developing and adapting to the new ways in which publics communicate with one another on these platforms. Now that our nation’s leaders are taking advantage of social media platforms to reach their constituencies, social media strategy can potentially have an effect on political communication.

The 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, had utilized Twitter during his 2008 presidential campaign, and can be considered “the social media president” because of how strong social media played a role in his election win (Katz, Barris & Jain, 2013, p. 15). As President, he assimilated with the rise of social media with the first formal @POTUS Twitter account created in 2015. The President set precedent and utilized this social media platform to communicate with citizens. It could have then been expected that the leaders of the United States would continue with this new tradition of having a formal and professional social media presence.

Donald J. Trump, the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America, has set a *new* precedent of presidential communication by using his *personal* Twitter account to communicate with U.S. citizens and the rest of the world. Even more unprecedented is his style of communication used on the platform, which has been criticized for demonstrating simplicity, impulsivity and incivility (Ott, 2016).

While a more unfiltered, informal, public use of social media is not typical for high-profile political leaders, something can be said about the way this style of communication can either help or neglect to build, or injure, relationships between a nation and its leader. If deemed effective, will this style of presidential communication be the new norm?

Using social media to communicate with publics and build relationships is common for many high-profile individuals and entities, such as athletes, universities, corporations and media organizations, nonprofits and others (Watkins, 2017; Linvill, McGee & Hicks, 2012; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Sundstrom & Levenshus, 2017; Bortree & Seltzer, 2009). Although it is a common PR practice, are social media platforms effective ways of communication and relationship building for political leaders? What communication strategies are used on these platforms to help build a relationship, create dialogue, persuade and engage with stakeholders?

This research hopes to address these questions by examining the contents of the personal Twitter account of the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America, Donald J. Trump, and observe the ways in which he utilized dialogic communication strategies and rhetorical strategies in the tweets sent during his first 100 days in office. This period is chosen because according to Dominguez (2005), presidents “have higher success rates

during the first 100 days of their first year than they do later during their first year or during the first hundred days of noninaugural years” (p. 63). Examining the usage of these communication strategies and the subsequent engagement levels received on his individual tweets can help illuminate how a political leader communicates with his stakeholders and constituents, and which communication styles and rhetorical strategies generated robust engagement from his followers and readers.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This research looks into the possible association between the use of both dialogic communication principles and rhetorical strategies within and across tweets, and the subsequent engagement levels received on these individual tweets. Specifically, this research will focus on the Twitter account of the current President of the United States, Donald J. Trump, and the tweets sent from his account during his first 100 days in office. Previous research examined separately the topics of Twitter, dialogic communication principles and rhetorical strategies. This study, however, examines these three concepts together to ascertain their effects on engagement. To set the foundation for this research study, the scholarship in each area will be discussed separately. The gaps within the current research will also be discussed.

### **Twitter and the Presidential Communication Style of Trump**

Trump's announcement of his presidential candidacy in 2015 was unprecedented. From his candidacy announcement to his first year in office, Trump's main avenue for communicating with his publics has been through Twitter, a social media platform and microblogging site.

Twitter allows for instantaneous message delivery and tweets can reach worldwide audiences (Small, 2011, p. 874). Twitter offers political candidates a special online platform for engaging with their audiences in a direct and dialogic way, since Twitter has the potential for "enhancing political participation" (Small, 2011, p. 877). However, research on U.S. campaigns and social media over the past decade have found that "U.S. campaigns do not prioritize dialogue and interactivity" because the one-way communication pattern is mostly used as the social media campaigning strategy (Enli,

2017, p. 53-54). Trump was able to defy this norm in 2016. He was very easily able to interact with his audiences on Twitter during his campaign because he used interactive functions on the platform. He also utilized an unprofessional and more “real” communication style (Enli, 2017; Kreis, 2018).

The 2016 Trump campaign “was more willing to engage with the general public and thus also to take the risk of retweeting content it did not control,” which strays away from the one-way communication model often used by other candidates on social media (Enli, 2017, p. 54). Trump’s Twitter strategy was defined by Enli (2017) as “amateurism,” a form of “de-professionalisation” that focused solely around the goal of gaining media coverage, something Trump was already familiar with as a celebrity (p. 55). To gain media coverage, Trump wrote many of his own tweets from his Twitter account (Enli, 2017, p. 57). He wrote tweets that were uncharacteristic of how presidential candidate communication should look and sound.

Trump’s tweets during the 2016 election campaign were more likely to mock or criticize other candidates, the media or the government than his opponent Hillary Clinton’s tweets (Lee & Lim, 2016). He was the “most atypical of candidates in terms of Twitter usage,” in that “Trump frequently used the social network to attack those media and journalists who criticized him” (Galán-García, 2017). His election opponents, on the other hand, generally focused more on campaign issues and policy (Galán-García, 2017). Focusing on current and forward-thinking policy ideas are usually the normal topics discussed among candidates during a presidential election, however, Trump addressed these topics in a very informal and, as many may consider, inappropriate manner. Trump retweeted users’ tweets, which was a bold move as this gave the Trump campaign less

control over their own messaging (Enli, 2017, p. 54). This unprofessional, informal, critical style of communication demonstrated Trump's "authentic style" that helped himself and his audience "view [him] in relation to the people" (Kreis, 2017, p. 615). As different and unprecedented as this style of communication was, some may argue that his communications over Twitter ultimately benefited the 2016 Trump campaign and may have garnered him the win (Stolee & Caton, 2018, p. 156-157).

Since his inauguration, President Trump has continued to use his personal Twitter account, @realDonaldTrump, instead of the designated, official @POTUS account that former President Barack Obama primarily used to communicate to citizens and the world. During his first year in office, Trump posted an average of six tweets per day and received around 98,000 likes/retweets per post (Sunley, 2017). He was most active on Twitter between 6 a.m. and 9 a.m. ET, and the top three individuals mentioned in his tweets were Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and James Comey. The top words and phrases used were 'country,' 'election,' and 'Make America Great' (Sunley, 2017).

Trump's communication patterns during the 2016 election reflected informality, attack, criticism and defense have continued since Trump's presidency began, with tweets that have even raised concerns of national security (Azari, 2017). Scholars who have analyzed President Trump's tweets during the beginning of his presidency have found that "his language is simple and direct and his messages are succinct and polarizing," (Kreis, 2017, p. 615).

While this style of communication may have been the winning strategy during the 2016 campaign, Scacco & Coe (2017) examined what and how the American people expect the president to communicate. They found that citizens at the 2016 Iowa Caucus

expected “frequent communication that is informative, relational, and transparent,” however these “individuals’ beliefs that presidential communication should inform the public assume or ignore notions of accuracy” (p. 310). This means that the researchers found the participants in the study either assumed that presidential communication is accurate, or they ignored the idea that accuracy should be questioned. Thus, the public expects accurate information from a president as well. Trump’s communication methods may or may not fall into this expectancy from the public. These findings illuminate larger questions regarding the future of presidential communication: we must ask whether truthful information can be easily identified by the public, whether this identification of truthful information is affected by the platform used to communicate the information, and the overall reliability of presidential communication (Scacco & Coe, 2017).

Does this new style of presidential communication, when paired with the method of online social media platforms to communicate it, allow the President of the United States to engage in relationship building and real dialogue with his or her publics? Are retweets enough to engage with an audience? This study proposes that the Dialogic Communication Theory presented by Kent and Taylor (1998) provides a framework that may illuminate how presidential online communication helps foster dialogic communication and relationship building with citizens.

### **Theoretical Framework: Dialogic Communication Theory**

Over time, PR has adapted to become a strategic management function that emphasizes the value of relationships with strategic publics (Grunic, 2006). The surge in the use of the Internet in the 1990s by organizations for public relations purposes opened up a new door for both the academic and professional parts of the field. Using the

Internet to disseminate messages and have a presence online with a web page demonstrated to PR practitioners and researchers that there was also a possibility to use the Internet to further engage with publics and enhance relationship building.

Kent and Taylor (1998) posited that PR efforts and strategies could benefit from the relationship-building characteristics of the World Wide Web. They apply the Theory of Dialogic Communication, often associated with Martin Buber, Jurgen Habermas and Johannesen, to PR and suggest that relationship building is the foundation of PR and dialogue is a key product of that process. Within this theory, dialogue refers to “any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions” (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 325). An important aspect of this definition is that the individuals who are engaging in dialogue do not necessarily have to agree, but share a “willingness to try to reach mutually satisfying positions” (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 325).

For the Internet to be able to foster relationship building, it must be able to provide the necessary environment for dialogue. Kent & Taylor (1998) established five different principles of dialogic communication aimed at providing guidelines for “the successful integration of dialogic public relations and the World Wide Web” for organizations to implement within their webpages (p. 326). They are: the dialogic loop, the usefulness of information, the generation of return visits, the intuitiveness/ease of interface, and the conservation of visitors.

**The dialogic loop.** The first principle, the dialogic loop, “allows publics to query organizations, and more importantly, it offers organizations the opportunity to respond to questions, concerns, and problems” (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 326). The dialogic loop must be complete, meaning that there must always be someone to respond to a query

from a member of the public. Being online is more than just presence – organizations who wish to engage in dialogue and build relationships with their publics must stay committed to responding to individuals based on their needs. Response is a critical part for relationship building (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

**The usefulness of information.** The second principle is the usefulness of information, meaning that an organization’s web page or online presence should “make an effort to include information of general value to all publics” (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Individuals will visit a website if it contains useful and trustworthy information that is organized and ready for consumption. Useful information that is readily available for members of the public will allow for more dialogue between the organization and its key publics.

**The generation of return visits.** The third principle is the generation of return visits, which refers to the ability for an organization to design a webpage that provides enough attractive features that result in the return of users to the site. This principle also suggests that the consistent updating of valuable information on a webpage will encourage users to visit the webpage again in the future (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

**The intuitiveness/ease of the interface.** The fourth principle, the intuitiveness/ease of the interface, broadly states that an organization’s webpage should be easy to use by an individual. The information should be organized and related to the topic of the website.

**The rule of conservation of visitors.** Finally, principle five, the rule of conservation of visitors, suggests that organizations include only relevant and essential web links that help a visitor to either stay within the site or to return to it later. These

links could lead to other parts of the organization's webpage, or related webpages that eventually bring the visitor back. Links that lead visitors away from the organization's webpage could cause them to not return. The key here is to keep the public engaged with the organization for as long as possible.

These five principles formed a framework that was created in the 1990s to address ways in which organizations could engage in dialogic communication on the Internet through the strategic design of their webpages. If these principles were to be applied, it was assumed that the organization could continue to build and strengthen relationships with its publics on the web.

Today's fast-paced technology has brought a more complex Internet with new emerging media and platforms. Not only are organizations still utilizing webpages to interact with their audiences, but they are using a variety of Web 2.0 and social media platforms to engage and stay connected with virtually anyone in the world. There are essentially no more boundaries for communication with the help of Web 2.0. How can Kent and Taylor's (1998) theory of dialogic communication work with these newer aspects of the Internet, when webpages are no longer the only tool for relationship building on the web?

With the creation of social media and the new opportunities it provides for research, Kent and Taylor's (1998) framework of the five principles of dialogic communication has been adjusted by communications scholars to fit various studies that look into dialogic communication strategies on social media platforms. Many of these studies are similar in nature in regards to their methodology and findings.

## **Dialogic Communication Theory in Modern Research**

Researchers recently have applied Kent and Taylor's theoretical framework to several social media platforms (Watkins, 2017; Linvill et. al., 2012; Sundstrum & Levenshus, 2017; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Bortree & Seltzer, 2009). However, the framework's five principles and each of the principles' definitions have been adjusted by researchers in order to make the theory a more relevant and applicable framework for new communication methods on the Internet. This present research will focus on how the framework was adjusted and applied in Twitter usage.

The principles of dialogic loop and usefulness of information have been interpreted as the same regardless of which web-based platform is observed. Twitter provides options for the dialogic loop (e.g. asking and responding to questions or comments) through comments and @reply capabilities (Watkins, 2017). Twitter users and account holders can ask and respond to tweets easily within its platform. For the usefulness of information principle, users can determine the usefulness of the information on a tweet directly from reading it, and the information should meet the public's need. According to Watkins (2017), the public should find value in this information that is provided by the account. The generation of return visits principle as it relates to Twitter can also be interpreted similarly to its original framework, however looking at how often an account tweets can help determine the probability of a return visit. The more updated information that exists, the more likely an individual will return to the account.

For recent dialogic communication research related to Twitter, there was a trend of leaving out the fourth principle, "ease of interface," because individual social media profiles are consistent in terms of design and layout, unlike individual, customized

webpages (Watkins, 2017; Linvill et. al., 2012; Sundstrum & Levenshus, 2017; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). Last, the fifth principle, conservation of visitors, can apply to social media when we think of the integration of multiple social media platforms for one organization or individual (Watkins, 2017). Twitter users can provide links to their corresponding websites, or even link to their other social media accounts in order to keep followers closer for longer.

Research that has studied the implementation of the five principles of dialogic communication on Twitter has focused on the Twitter accounts of many for-profit and non-profit organizations, governmental organizations, and even athletes. As Watkins (2017) has summarized for scholars in this field, the overwhelming majority of studies that focus on dialogic communication on social media show that organizations are underutilizing the dialogic capabilities of social media pages due to their usage of more one-way communication and dissemination of information. Waters and Williams (2011) found that “public affairs practitioners have a strong preference for using the public information model of public relations” when utilizing Twitter to communicate with its publics, again suggesting that one-way communication is the preferred tactic on social media (p. 358). The consistency of this finding that “so little conversations are being attempted in this medium” sounds some alarms for PR scholars and practitioners (Waters & Jamal, 2011, p. 323). How are organizations able to use social media to its full potential to encourage dialogue and relationship building? Is this platform more useful for individuals rather than organizations?

There is a large gap in the studies that draw on Kent & Taylor’s (1998) dialogic communication theory when analyzing tweets of politicians and individuals in general.

While a more recent study examined athletes' Twitter accounts through the lens of dialogic principles (Watkins, 2017), the results of the single study may not be generalizable to other well-known, individual thought-leaders on Twitter. They may be addressing different publics that perhaps politicians and athletes may be reaching, and the intent of this communication via Twitter may differ as well. It is important that we understand the way our governmental leaders utilize social media accounts to communicate and build relationships with their constituents because social media has become a leading source for news and updates for citizens across the globe.

### **Political Communication and Dialogue**

Dialogic communication theory can also be applied to political communication. Local governments and cities have been implementing more interactive platforms, such as social media, in order to interact and engage with citizens since citizens are more likely to participate at the local level (Mossberger, Wu & Crawford, 2013). When looking at individual politicians or candidates, Adams & McCorkindale's (2013) research discovered that candidates in the 2012 presidential election were "not using Twitter create meaningful dialogue with their constituents" because none of them answered questions or addressed concerns directly (p. 359). This demonstrates a lack of two-way communication which ultimately does not help to create dialogue between the candidate and the audience. However, indirect answering and acknowledging of questions through retweeting does "provide for some level of engagement with the followers" (p. 359). Therefore, this research demonstrates that while two-way dialogue may not be explicitly seen between a candidate and a Twitter user, there may be some other indirect ways in which engagement can take place between them both.

Research has also been aimed at answering the question of whether or not voters or constituents expect politicians or candidates to be interactive on social media. Tromble (2018) writes that while “citizens are used to top-down communication, and though they may desire reciprocity – even believe it warranted – they are unlikely to expect it from their politicians” (p. 681). However, the more interactive and responsive a politician or candidate is on social media, particularly Twitter, the more positive an individual will view the politician or candidate (Lee & Shin, 2012). Therefore, while research has shows that two-way dialogue and interactivity on social media from politicians and/or candidates is not necessarily expected, it might end up being beneficial for the politician and/or candidate’s image.

### **Rhetorical Strategies: Ethos, Logos, and Pathos**

Another theoretical framework, persuasion and rhetorical strategies, is also used in this study. Politicians who want to inform and persuade their audience can use new rhetorical media like Twitter to “develop relationships and effectively communicate with the electorate” (Johnson, 2012, p. 54). Rhetoric has its origins in the work of Aristotle, who “proposed that persuasion had three main ingredients: ethos (the nature of the communicator), pathos (emotional state of the audience), and logos (message arguments)” (Perloff, 2010, p. 28).

Ethos is used when the communicator uses his or her own credibility as the persuasive aspect of the message. Aspects such as speaker “charisma and control” are related to ethos (Auguer, 2014). Pathos is used when the communicator works an emotional appeal into the message to the audience as a form of persuasion, and logos utilizes facts and logic as persuasion.

Ethos, pathos and logos are more traditional and fundamental rhetorical techniques that can be found within various forms of communication messages. To date, there is a paucity of recent research that analyzes online social media communication and its usage of ethos, pathos and logos. However, a few recent studies that analyzed rhetoric on Twitter can provide some insight and background that can support this notion.

Johnson (2012) examined the rhetorical strategies of Mitt Romney's Twitter account during the 2012 presidential election. She considers Twitter a "rhetorical media" in the sense that it can offer a new type of sound bite – a "Twitter bite" (Johnson, 2012). Politicians and candidates can form their own sound bites through text on Twitter and craft their own strategic and rhetorical messaging, utilizing ethos, logos and pathos (Johnson, 2012). These "Twitter bites" would allow the politician or candidate to "publish more complete and accurate messages and thus "speak" directly to the audience," which can be more persuasive than a traditional media sound bite that may often be taken out of context and have no true argument (Johnson, 2012, pg. 56). Politicians are able to utilize social media to be more persuasive simply because social media offers an immediate message dissemination straight from the source itself. While this research focused on rhetorical campaign strategies, many of these findings can apply to a Twitter account of a current politician in office.

Another recent research article that analyzed rhetorical strategy usage on Twitter focused on non-profit Twitter account tweets. Auger (2014) found that pathos was the rhetorical strategy used most often out of the three strategies, "particularly in messages structured to provide motivation or a sense of community" (Auger, 2014, p. 246). Ethos was used the second most frequently, and logos was used the least. The non-profits

utilized these strategies to “garner support and promote action,” (Auger, 2014, p. 247) which can also be a goal of a politician who is using Twitter to communicate with its audience. Since publics today are often skeptical of persuasive messages, utilizing strategies like ethos, pathos and logos can assist to persuade.

An overall gap in rhetorical research exists in the area of online political communication. Even though social media is mainly utilized to connect with others and engage in a more conversational way, the Internet is a great space to implement rhetorical strategies and engage in persuasion. This opportunity and space for persuasion can help politicians to garner support either on the campaign trail or during their term when pushing legislation or other action. Furthermore, there is a gap in the research that looks into presidential communication on Twitter, simply because Twitter is such a new social media platform, and because presidential term limits have led us to have only two presidents that have had Twitter readily available to them since the beginning of their terms – Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump.

### **Presidential Speeches and Rhetoric**

Although a gap exists in current research about online presidential rhetoric and persuasion, another area of research can help in the effort to explore this phenomenon – presidential speeches and rhetoric. Presidential speeches are relevant when observing presidential online communication in the form of tweets because traditionally, presidents have used public speeches as their platform for mass communication and rhetoric. “Speeches offer presidents an opportunity to set the agenda, signal their policy preferences, and...strike an emotional chord with the public” (Erisen & Villalobos, 2014). Communication from the leader of a nation via the web and social media is slowly

becoming the new norm, as a huge portion of our daily social lives takes place on these platforms. Through these platforms the public can now be reached easily. Therefore, it is important to examine the new communication method of social media and tweets through the lens of historical presidential speeches and their rhetoric, because both platforms offer the same opportunity for a president to communicate with its nation and the world. Presidential speeches must be compared, regardless of the medium used to communicate.

Whether the president is communicating in-person at a rally or through a post on social media, the persuasiveness of the communication is extremely important. It has been argued that presidential rhetoric can play the role of shaping reality (Zarefsky, 2004). Many citizens look to the president of the country when seeking the truth, comfort, and assurance, and the more persuasive a president, the more likely a president can hold the power to define the reality for others.

**The power of definition.** Zarefsky (2004) theorized that the power of a president to “define” something is, in a way, indirectly rhetorical, because defining a situation or event sets the way in which we interpret the reality of that situation. “To “define” is to assert without argument that something is “true” or “real”” (Maggio, 2007).

The result of persuasion is action or attitude change. Zarefsky (2005) wrote how presidential speeches can be used as data for scholars, who “may regard them as independent variables and measure their consequences for opinion and attitude change” (p. 608). However, “attitudes seldom [change] on the basis of a single message,” therefore it can be hard to measure the effects of presidential rhetoric (p. 608). There are more parts to a rhetorical message than the message-audience relationship.

When it comes to presidential speeches that are meant to persuade, the rhetor makes choices about how to persuade, including argument selection, framing, phrasing, evidence, organization style, staging, choreography, and more. Zarefsky (2004) provides four additional rhetorical strategies that can be used by presidents. The first, association, is used when linking two terms together, and Zarefsky (2004) provides the example of how President George W. Bush defined September 11 as “war,” “by linking it to the specific attributes of that term that were indisputably present in the situation, thereby extending the reach of the term.” Second, dissociation, can be described as the exact opposite, when a concept is broken into parts “in order to identify one’s proposal with the more favored part” (p. 612). Third, condensation symbols, are symbols used to condense meanings, which is useful when defining an ambiguous situation. Fourth, frame shifting, is used to help a public see a situation “in a different light” and change their attitudes accordingly (p. 613).

In addition to a president’s ability to define, emotion (pathos) can also play a very large role in presidential rhetoric because emotions can influence voting decisions, candidate evaluations, and policy preferences (Erisen & Villalobos, 2014). Presidents frequently use emotion-inducing remarks in their speeches, but this emotion can vary depending on the speech (fear, anger, hope, etc.) (Erisen & Villalobos, 2014).

### **Social Media Engagement**

Social media platforms each have their own individual way to measure how effective and engaging a user’s posts are. These metrics, often referred to as engagement, track the ways in which one’s users interact with one’s posts. The concept of user “engagement” on social media has been difficult for scholars to define due to the many

proposed, different definitions and measurements, as well as the different contexts in which the term can be used, such as advertising, marketing and social science research. A definition that builds off of prior work suggests that “engagement is a multilevel, multidimensional construct that emerges from the thoughts and feelings about one or more rich experiences involved in reaching a personal goal” (Calder, Isaac & Malthouse, 2016). Interaction, transportation, discovery, identity, and civic orientation are categories of experiences that may constitute engagement (Calder, Isaac, & Malthouse, 2016). Hootsuite, a social media dashboard program, defined social media engagement as “the acts of talking to, messaging or otherwise interacting with other people on social networks” (Fontein, 2016). “At its simplest, social media engagement is any interaction you have with other users” (Fontein, 2016).

Specifically related to digital communication methods, Katz et. al. (2013) define “digital engagement” as “people using integrated circuit (computer chip) based-devices to send, receive, or interact with data concerning societal or governmental matters” (p. 12). “Engagement includes one-way, bilateral, and multilateral interactions and responses. It refers as well to the co-creation of new insights, information, attitudes, organizations, and relationships that stem from the use of digital resources” (Katz et. al., 2013, p. 12).

Social media engagement on Twitter can be measured via the number of @replies from users (comments), retweets, mentions and favorites, as suggested by Simply Measured (n.a., n.d.), a social analytics program. These interactions can be taken separately or measured all together. Depending on what an organization or individual is seeking, learning these metrics can help to measure engagement, and strategize for engagement improvement.

## **Purpose of Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to determine whether or not President Trump utilizes any of Kent & Taylor's (1998) dialogic principles or any rhetorical strategies within his tweets sent during his first 100 days in office. The study will also examine whether there is any association between the usage of these principles and strategies and the subsequent engagement levels received on these tweets. Finally, observing what topics President Trump tweeted about during his first 100 days in office can also assist in determining what types of content pose better for engagement levels received on tweets. It is only fitting to look at the communication strategies of the first United States President who chooses to primarily use a personal Twitter account to communicate with his constituents, even with the formal @POTUS account readily available as a communication tool since the beginning of the presidential term. President Trump is a perfect politician to focus in on for this study, due to his different nature of communicating via social media. Based on the previous literature discussed earlier, this study addresses the following research questions:

**RQ1:** On what topics did President Trump tweet about during his first 100 days in office?

**RQ2a:** Which of Kent & Taylor's (1998) dialogic communication principles are demonstrated in President Trump's tweets during his first 100 days in office?

**RQ2b:** Which of the dialogic principles (Dialogic Loop, Usefulness of Information, Generation of Return Visits, Conservation of Visitors) evident in President Trump's tweets during his first 100 days in office affect the subsequent engagement levels among Twitter users who read his tweets?

**RQ3a:** Which rhetorical strategies are reflected in President Trump's tweets during his first 100 days in office?

**RQ3b:** Which rhetorical strategies (ethos, logos, pathos, association, dissociation) demonstrated within President Trump's tweets during his first 100 days in office affect the subsequent engagement levels among Twitter users who read his tweets?

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study used a deductive, semantic, quantitative content analysis methodology to examine dialogic principles and rhetorical strategies reflected in President Trump's tweets during his first 100 days in office, and to compare the use of the principles and strategies with the subsequent engagement levels resulting from these tweets. A deductive content analysis was used because theories were used to frame the content categories. Scholar Stemler (2001) summarized this methodology's definition as "a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding" (p. 1). The methodology "is indigenous to communication research and is potentially one of the most important research techniques in the social sciences" (Krippendorff, 1989, p. 403).

### **Data Collection**

All tweets sent from the Twitter account @realDonaldTrump during President Trump's first 100 days in office, Jan. 20, 2017 through April 29, 2017, were collected using Twitter's own Advanced Search function. A total of 474 tweets were collected over the five-day data collection period of Dec. 6, 2017 to Dec. 11, 2017. Screenshots were taken of each tweet, which included the content of the tweet and the engagement levels received. Thus, it is important to note that the engagement levels analyzed during this research are the engagement levels listed at the time of the data collection period.

The screenshots of these tweets were compiled into a list and numbered in order of date and time, starting on Jan. 20, 2017 and ending on April 29, 2017. To identify whether or not a dialogic communication principle or a rhetorical strategy was used within a single tweet, these principles and strategies were broken up into individual

characteristics and operational definitions, those of which are included in the created codebook and were coded for (see Appendix B). The methodology allowed multiple elements, and thus principles and/or strategies, to be coded per tweet. At the same time, the method revealed that some tweets did not contain any principles or strategies.

**Coding for dialogic communication principles.** Specifically, the two coders searched for elements of four of the five dialogic communication principles outlined in Kent and Taylor's (1998) theory: the dialogic loop, the usefulness of information, the generation of return visits, and the rule of conservation of visitors. Similar studies involving content analysis of Twitter have typically removed the fourth principle, the intuitiveness/ease of interface, from their research because Twitter profiles contain the same design and interface across its entire platform, thus this principle is not applicable (Watkins, 2017).

**Operational definitions.** For the dialogic loop, total of six characteristics were determined to exemplify the qualities of the principle. These six characteristics included: (1) an @reply, (2) a retweet, (3) the mentioning or tagging another Twitter user, (4) asking a question to the Twitter-sphere, (5) answering another user's question, or (6) encouraging users to continue engaging using another platform or method.

To identify the usefulness of information principle, tweets were coded on the basis of four characteristics, including if the tweet was: (1) timely, (2) trustworthy, (3) valuable, and (4) of the general public need. These characteristics for this principle were chosen based on how Kent and Taylor (1998) defined the principle. They state that there should be "an effort to include information of general value to all publics," and the site should "provide useful and trustworthy information" (p. 327-328).

To identify the generation of return visits, the date and time of each tweet sent from @realDonaldTrump was noted during coding. The more often the user tweeted, the more often individuals would stay engaged.

Last, to identify the conservation of visitors principle, five characteristics such as (1) the inclusion of White House or Government social media account links or web links, (2) President Trump social media account links, (3) a request to engage on a different internet/web platform or website, (4) the inclusion of a web link, or (5) contact info for the White House or the Government, were all coded for.

**Coding for rhetorical strategies and operational definitions.** Rhetorical strategies such as ethos, logos, and pathos were analyzed and coded. To identify ethos, seven characteristics were coded for that exemplified this rhetorical strategy, including (1) the mention or praise of a Trump family member, (2) the mention of the 2016 presidential election or an electoral mandate, (3) mentioning a campaign opponent (including name-calling), (4) a self-compliment, (5) discrediting a news source or mentioning “fake news,” (6) criticizing those who criticize the user, and (7) name-calling of other politicians or foreign leaders.

To identify logos, two characteristics were coded for to identify the rhetorical strategy, which were (1) the inclusion of facts and (2) sources cited. It is important to note that these “facts” did not necessarily have to be valid. The sheer inclusion of a statistic or a number can be persuasive to some extent.

To identify pathos, three characteristics were coded for to identify the rhetorical strategy, including in the inclusion of (1) emotional appeals, (2) patriotic appeals, and (3) fully-capitalized words and exclamation points. Fully-capitalized words and the use of

exclamation points have been noted to issue exclamation, communicating an emotion to the public (Perry & Joyce, 2017). To identify association, tweets had to be analyzed for whether or not the user was associating one concept or idea with another. Similar with dissociation, any indication of separating a concept or idea from another was coded for.

Additional typical rhetorical strategies that have been used within presidential communication speeches were analyzed and coded as well, including association and dissociation (Zarefsky, 2004; Erisen & Villalobos, 2014). Each of these strategies were operationalized, and a complete list of these chosen strategies' operational definitions can be found on the coding sheet (see Appendix B).

**Coding for additional items.** To answer RQ1, coders coded for the topic of each tweet, such as foreign policy or the president's 2016 campaign opponents, for example. A complete list of the topics coded for are listed in the coding sheet attached (Appendix B). Other important aspects of Tweets such as image, video, hashtag and emoji usage were coded, as these items could potentially apply to a dialogic or rhetorical strategy depending on the content shared or could show an effect on engagement levels received on the tweet. It is worth the observation of these items because the inclusion of them on a tweet could affect engagement levels on their own or in addition to the dialogic principles and/or rhetorical strategies used within a tweet.

**Coding and intercoder reliability.** The independent coder of the tweets trained a second coder, who coded 10 percent of the tweets (48 tweets) that were randomly selected in the data set. This ensured intercoder reliability and further validated the results of the content analysis.

Kappa coefficient was used to assess the level of intercoder reliability within 34 of the variables listed on the coding sheet (Appendix B) that were coded for. Out of the 34 variables coded for, Kappa values ranged from 0.645 to 1.0, with 33 of the values falling within 0.717 and 1.0. The lowest value of Kappa coefficient was found for the Inclusion of Facts variable (Kappa .645). The coders discussed the discrepancy: the coders should have considered any fact, truthful or not, included in a tweet to be coded as the inclusion of a fact, as this can be a persuasive strategy to an audience regardless of validity, as it normally should be assumed that a President is spreading truth. The coders also discussed other variables such as the asking and answering of questions in a tweet and clarified that these variables meant the literal asking of questions or the direct answering of a Twitter user's question.

**Measuring social media engagement.** Measuring social media engagement varies depending on the social media platform. According to Simply Measured, a social analytics program, Twitter engagement includes the total number of @replies from users (comments), retweets, mentions, and favorites ("Twitter Engagement," n.d.). Mentions were not counted in this research because mentions are not part of the engagement levels *received on* individual tweets coming *from* the President. Mentions are when one user tags another user in a tweet. The total number of engagement levels on the individual tweet were noted both separately and combined (i.e. number of retweets, number of likes, number of comments, and the total of these three numbers.) When running tests on the collected data, the combined total of engagement was used as the dependent variable.

**Using STATA to run tests.** After the 474 tweets were analyzed and coded for the individual characteristics and operational definitions for each dialogic communication

principle and rhetorical strategy, each characteristic's variable was recoded as a dichotomous variable (characteristic included: 1; characteristic not included: 0). Then, separate variables for each inclusive principle and strategy were created in order to include each of their characteristics in a lump sum variable. Thus, in the end it possible to view how many principles or strategies were used within a single tweet because the characteristics were added together within one principle/strategy. The raw data of engagement totals were also recoded as an interval variable based on frequencies (e.g. 1 = 0 through 50000, 2 = 50001 through 100000...11 = 500001 through highest) in order to run the regression tests.

These variables were then used to run results. STATA program was used to run descriptive statistics, such as general frequencies to determine the frequency of each principle or strategy used within tweets, as well as independent-samples t-tests for additional results. STATA was used to run a robust multiple regression analysis to determine which independent variables (dialogic communication principles and rhetorical strategies) have the highest and lowest effects on the dependent variable (engagement levels from President Trump's followers).

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to examine dialogic principles and rhetorical strategies reflected in President Trump's tweets during his first 100 days in office, and to compare the use of the principles and strategies with the subsequent engagement levels resulting from these tweets. After running statistical tests on STATA with the collected data and newly created variables, the five posed research questions were able to be answered. The results of each research question will be referenced and are located in Appendix C.

**RQ1:** On what topics did President Trump tweet about during his first 100 days in office?

As seen in Table 1, of the 474 tweets that were sent from @realDonaldTrump during President Trump's first 100 days in office, four main topics dominated the subject of tweets. Fifty-eight tweets (12.2 percent) focused on the topic of fake news or discrediting news sources. Forty-three tweets (9.1 percent) were on the topic of immigration policy (including the controversial immigration ban policy, the building of "the wall," or the mention of terrorism and immigration together). Thirty-four tweets (7.2 percent) were on the topic of rallies or speaking opportunities/events in which the President was present, and another thirty-four tweets (7.2 percent) were on the topic of healthcare policy and/or Obamacare. Table 1 shows all of the topics that were coded for along with their frequencies. It should be noted that the categories and topics of the tweets to be coded for were determined ahead of time, after a brief scan of the President's tweets, in order to best organize the data and make the coding process simpler. Therefore, thirty tweets were listed as "other" because their topic did not fit any of the descriptions

of the pre-determined categories. These tweets with “other” variables focused on a wide range of topics, such as the March for Life, congratulating the New England Patriots on their Superbowl win, or the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture.

**RQ2a:** Which of Kent & Taylor’s (1998) dialogic communication principles are demonstrated in President Trump’s tweets during his first 100 days in office?

Within the 474 tweets sent from @realDonaldTrump during President Trump’s first 100 day in office, all four of the analyzed dialogic communication principles were demonstrated within various tweets. A total of 171 tweets (36 percent) contained characteristics of the dialogic loop principle (See Table 2); a total of 371 tweets (78.3 percent) contained characteristics of the usefulness of information principle (See Table 3); a total of 110 tweets (23.2 percent) contained characteristics of the conservation of visitors principle (See Table 4); and there were only two days out of the 100 (2 percent of the time) in which President Trump did not tweet from his account, March 12 and April 7, 2017, implying that the generation of return visits principle was well utilized.

For this study, it is important to note that no frequencies were run for the generation of return visits principle, due to the modern application to this principle to social media accounts. As Watkins (2017) mentions, the more often a user tweets or posts information, the more likely a user will be returning to the account or site. Thus, the best way to measure this principle was to observe how often the President tweeted from his account, specifically if he tweeted at least once per day. President Trump only did not tweet two out of the 100 days measured in this study, meaning that he tweeted 98% of the time during his first 100 days in office, confirming that this principle was utilized.

**RQ2b:** Which of the dialogic strategies (dialogic loop, usefulness of information, generation of return visits, conservation of visitors) demonstrated within President Trump’s tweets during his first 100 days in office affect the subsequent engagement levels among Twitter users?

To test for this research question, an OLS multiple regression with robust standard errors was used. Results were based on White’s heteroscedastic robust standard errors (or Huber-White estimators of variance) because the Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg test revealed that there was heteroscedasticity with a chi-square value of 49.28. Heteroscedasticity “means unequal scatter,” or when there is “a systematic change in the spread of the residuals over the range of measured values” (Frost, 2017). Independent variables were not in a violation of multicollinearity (VIF (variance inflation factor) of each variable  $< 10$  and T (tolerance) of each variable  $> 0.10$ ). The dependent variable of engagement was tested against the independent variables of each dialogic principle. Three of the four dialogic strategies that were found within President Trump’s tweets during his first 100 days in office significantly *negatively* affected the subsequent engagement levels among Twitter users who read his tweets (See Table 5). One unit change in the dialogic loop principle results in a -0.29 change in the total engagement when controlling for the effect of all other independent variables ( $b = -0.29$ ,  $t = -3.35$ ). One unit change in the conservation of visitors principle results in a -0.18 change in the total engagement levels when controlling for the effect of all other independent variables ( $b = -0.18$ ,  $t = -3.61$ ). And lastly, one unit change in the usefulness of information principle results in a -0.33 change in the total engagement levels of that tweet when controlling for the effect all other independent variables ( $b = -0.33$ ,  $t = -8.09$ ).

**RQ3a:** Which rhetorical strategies (ethos, logos, pathos, association, dissociation) are reflected in President Trump's tweets during his first 100 days in office?

Within the first 100 days of President Trump's presidency, all five of the rhetorical strategies coded for were identified within various tweets. A total of 314 tweets (66.2 percent) contained characteristics of ethos (See Table 6), 128 tweets (27 percent) contained characteristics of logos (See Table 7), 374 tweets (78.9 percent) contained characteristics of pathos (See Table 8), 100 tweets (21.1 percent) contained association (See Table 9), and twelve tweets (2.5 percent) contained dissociation (See Table 10).

**RQ3b:** Which rhetorical strategies (ethos, logos, pathos, association, dissociation) demonstrated within President Trump's tweets during his first 100 days in office affect the subsequent engagement levels among Twitter users?

To determine which rhetorical strategies used within tweets affected the subsequent engagement levels, an OLS multiple regression with robust standard errors was used. Results were based on White's heteroscedastic robust standard errors (or Huber-White estimators of variance) because the Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg test revealed that there was heteroscedasticity with a chi-square value of 49.28. Independent variables were not in a violation of multicollinearity (VIF (variance inflation factor) of each variable  $< 10$  and T (tolerance) of each variable  $> 0.10$ ). The dependent variable of total engagement was tested against the independent variables of rhetorical strategies. Among the rhetorical strategies found within President Trump's tweets during his first 100 days in office, pathos ( $b = 0.28$ ,  $t = 3.78$ ) was found as the most significant rhetorical strategy to *positively* affect engagement levels among Twitter users (See Table 5). One

unit change of pathos results in a 0.28 change in engagement levels received when controlling for all other independent variables.

Four other rhetorical strategies, logos ( $b = 0.10$ ,  $t = 1.24$ ), ethos ( $b = -0.07$ ,  $t = -0.94$ ), association ( $b = 0.28$ ,  $t = 1.79$ ), and dissociation ( $b = 0.22$ ,  $t = 0.63$ ) were not significant when controlling for other variables in affecting engagement levels received on tweets in which their characteristics were present (See Table 5).

### **Additional Results and Useful Information**

**Content usage.** Additional information was accounted for during the coding process of tweets, including @realDonaldTrump's usage of images, videos, hashtags and emojis (See Table 11). Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare engagement totals of tweets with the usage of these types of content. There was a significant difference in scores for the usage of an image in a tweet ( $M = 2.62$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ) and no usage of an image in a tweet ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ). There was a significant difference in scores for the usage of a video in a tweet ( $M = 2.26$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ) and no usage of a video in a tweet ( $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ). There was a significant difference in scores for the usage of a hashtag in a tweet ( $M = 2.37$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ) and no usage of a hashtag in a tweet ( $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ). Finally, there was a significant difference in scores for the usage of an emoji in a tweet ( $M = 2.24$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ) and no usage of an emoji in a tweet ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ). Thus, when an image, a video, a hashtag or an emoji were used within a tweet, the mean engagement total of that tweet was less than when those types of content were not included in the tweet.

### **Tweets with the Most and Least Engagement Totals**

The last piece of useful information to discuss is which tweets received the highest levels of engagement and which received the least. Six tweets will be shared: three that received the highest levels of engagement during the President's first 100 days in office, and three tweets with the least amount of engagement. The top tweet with the highest engagement total (533,234) was sent on Jan. 22, 2017 and said, "Peaceful protests are a hallmark of our democracy. Even if I don't always agree, I recognize the rights of people to express their views" (realDonaldTrump, 2017a). The tweet with the second highest engagement total (441,080) was sent on Feb. 9, 2017 and read, "SEE YOU IN COURT, THE SECURITY OF OUR NATION IS AT STAKE!" which referenced the President's proposed immigration policies (realDonaldTrump, 2017c). The tweet with the third highest engagement total (370,828) was sent on Feb. 4, 2017 and read, "MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!" (realDonaldTrump, 2017b).

The tweet with the least amount of total engagement (36,160) was sent on April 27, 2017 and included a video, web link, and tagged two users, saying "Presidential Memorandum for the @CommerceGov, @SecretaryRoss re: Aluminum Imports and Threats to National Security: 45.wh.gov/rGqJES" (realDonaldTrump, 2017f). The tweet with the second lowest amount of total engagement (41,498) was sent on April 23, 2017 and read, "Thank you Lake Worth, Florida. @foxandfriends" (realDonaldTrump, 2017e). Finally, the tweet with the third lowest amount of total engagement (41,911) during President Trump's first 100 days in office was sent on March 30, 2017 and included a link to an article, and read, "Great op-ed from @RepKenBuck. Looks like some in the Freedom Caucus are helping me end #Obamacare." (realDonaldTrump, 2017d).

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This study examines dialogic communication principles and rhetorical strategies reflected in President Trump's tweets during his first 100 days in office and compares the use of the principles and strategies with the subsequent engagement levels resulting from these tweets. The results of this study allow for several important discussion points that can influence the ways in which we view basic PR and mass communication practices within a governmental and political setting and context.

### **Dialogic Communication Principles: Who Should They Apply To?**

Within the Dialogic Communication Theory, Kent & Taylor (1998) suggest that the usage of the six dialogic communication principles by an organization or a user online will help to foster an online environment that will lead to more dialogue between the user and its audiences, which is an end goal of public relations practice. As a reminder, studies that have analyzed the use of these principles on modern social media platforms have generally suggested that organizations and high-profile social media users were not using the dialogic communication principles to their full potential (Watkins, 2017). Contrary to these studies and within this research, it was evident that @realDonaldTrump was in fact implementing the principles within his tweets, whether it was *intentional* or not. However, as the results show, the implementation of these principles did not necessarily translate into increased engagement levels and two-way dialogue as a result. This contrast to the Dialogic Communication Theory poses some questions to its applicability to government officials' online presence.

The reason intentionality is mentioned is because from a comparison standpoint between President Trump's tweets and other politicians' and former President Obama's

tweets, a good amount of President Trump's tweets, both during the election and during his presidency, appear less professionally structured and pre-planned (Stolee & Caton, 2018; Enli, 2017; Kreis, 2017; Ott, 2016). Enli (2017) described Trump's strategy as "amateurism," one that did not copy "the social media strategies of the professionalized campaigns run by the Democratic Party" (p. 55). Now, this does not necessarily mean that there is no strategy behind the tweets sent from @realDonaldTrump. As a former celebrity, Trump had knowledge of basic media strategy prior to his election run (Enli, 2017, p. 55).

It has been suggested that the informal structure of his tweets may be strategic, as the informality of the candidate's communication across all platforms may have been a contributing factor to the President's rise to power and 2016 election win because it resonated with his base (Stolee & Caton, 2018). "By using an informal and conversational language style in his tweets, he has been successful in reaching large audiences and appearing closer to people" (Kreis, 2017, p. 611). This idea is demonstrated within a few of the tweets that were referenced in Chapter Four as having the most or least total engagement. The tweets that received the most total engagement within President Trump's first 100 days in office can be described as simplistic and unstructured (realDonaldTrump, 2017b;realDonaldTrump, 2017c), and the tweets that received the least total engagement can be described as more structured, including links, mentioning users, and using videos (realDonaldTrump, 2017d;realDonaldTrump, 2017f). This idea that less structured tweets perform better for President Trump is also supported by the results of the decreased means of engagement totals among tweets that included images, videos, hashtags and emojis (Table 11).

If the President is already aware of what type of content his main audience and supporters want from his tweets, then he will likely continue this strategy into his presidency in order to maintain favorability. This would explain why tweets that contain strong patriotic appeals, are less structured and are simple and informal perform better than tweets that are more structured, such as those that provide a link to read an article, include an image and mention another Twitter user. As Kreis (2017) theorized, his authenticity “might be a reason why he has continued to use his personal Twitter account instead of the official account of the President of the U.S. He thus leverages the technological and communicative affordances of Twitter” (Kreis, 2017, p. 615).

Regardless of the strategy behind the tweets, or how many dialogic principles can be identified within a single tweet, it is a given that the President of the United States is going to receive tens of thousands of engagement totals on a tweet. The current research did find that the usage of dialogic communication principles within Twitter communications would decrease the engagement level of a tweet for @realDonaldTrump, but does this matter when engagement totals are still skyrocketing? As a leader of a nation, it can be expected that any tweet will be received with thousands of retweets, likes and comments. Dialogue will arise, if not between the user and the audience, but among the audience members themselves.

Therefore, we can begin to question whether the Dialogic Communication Theory as outlined by Kent and Taylor (1998) can be practically applicable to someone with such high position in society. It is nearly impossible for someone like a national leader to be engaging in two-way dialogue on social media at all times. The results of this study

showed that Trump did not literally engage in two-way dialogue with any other Twitter users, other than merely mentioning another Twitter user in a tweet to get their attention.

This brings up both the question and the argument of whether or not Twitter's 140-character limit and hashtags are "conducive for interactive exchanges" (Small, 2011, p. 889). The "practicality and allocation of resources to carry on two-way conversation with potentially millions of followers" is one of many reasons as to why high-profile users do not often engage in two-way communication on social media (Watkins, 2017, p. 169). One-way communication may be the only way this type of individual can communicate with its audience, but one-way communication may still be able to include dialogic principles, as we saw within @realDonaldTrump's tweets. Thus, "there may not be enough research to fully support abandoning one-way messaging" (Watkins, 2017, p. 169). Is the Dialogic Communication Theory more applicable to smaller organizations, or even solely organizations and not an individual, those of which have the capabilities to engage in dialogue on a daily basis through a social media platform?

### **The Usefulness of Information Principle: An Expectation from a Presidential Figure**

As stated previously, a total of 371 tweets (78.3 percent) coded contained characteristics of the usefulness of information principle, meaning that this dialogic communication principle was by far the most evident within the tweets sent within President Trump's first 100 days in office. This high value raises questions about the validity of coding and testing for this dialogic communication principle within tweets from a President's Twitter account. Both coders found that a good majority of the tweets coded contained an aspect of the principle, whether it was timely, trustworthy, valuable or of the public's need, simply because the message was coming straight from the

President of the United States. Historically, it has been expected that any information coming from the nation's leader would be useful and of some importance. Should this idea change based on the communication platform used, the manner of communication (formal v. informal), or the President in office him/herself? Topics of President Trump's tweets varied from healthcare policy debate to immigration reform, to the Russia inquiry to criticism of major news networks of the nation. All of these topics can have some sort of importance to citizens of the United States because the simple knowledge of knowing what the President is communicating to the world is important to have.

Based on the results of this research and the high level of implementation of the usefulness of information principle within tweets, it can be questioned how to approach this principle within the Dialogic Communication Theory as it applies to a governmental and political context. Regardless of the various, polarized political opinions of constituents of the United States, the information coming from the nation's leader *should* be considered useful to some extent, meaning that there may not need to be any form of strategy behind the implementation of this principle on social media and online communication platforms, because this implementation should occur naturally.

If this is the case, then this Dialogic Communication principle may not need to be applicable to social media accounts of high-profile politicians and governmental leaders moving forward. Regardless of the information sent and the strategy (or lack thereof) behind it, it will be viewed as important to the public and will generate dialogue among the public. This, again, highlights the importance of one-way communication from a governmental leader, and how this one-way communication can still exhibit dialogic principles and characteristics.

### **Rhetoric & The Positive Impacts of Patriotism**

Out of the five rhetorical strategies tested for within this research, logos, ethos, association and dissociation were not statistically significant for affecting engagement totals among tweets (Table 5). It should be noted that logos, association and dissociation were three characteristics that had low levels of frequencies within tweets, which ultimately could lead to this insignificance. President Trump's power to define (Zarefsky, 2005) was limited due to the lack of association, dissociation, and logos usage. Ethos was widely evident as there were several operational definitions and characteristics of ethos that were coded for, however these appeals did not affect total engagement levels in a significant way. These findings might elude to what types of content the readers of President Trump's tweets want to see from the President. Additionally, the lack of engagement on tweets that included characteristics of ethos could potentially elude to the fact that Twitter users do not find the President credible. Perhaps the rhetoric of ethos is not persuasive enough as pathos when both are used by President Donald Trump?

One of the most important findings from this research is that tweets which included pathos, most notably patriotic appeals and emotional appeals, significantly influenced Twitter users to engage more with that tweet, including retweeting the tweet, liking the tweet, or commenting on the tweet more (Appendix C, Table 5). This finding is not surprising, given the fact that the President of the United States is expected to be outwardly supportive of his or her country. Furthermore, in context to this research, President Trump's rhetoric often revolved around patriotic appeals during his 2016 election campaign (#MAGA), which appealed to his very supportive base (Stolee &

Caton, 2018). We can assume that his followers and the readers of his tweets on social media will enjoy this type of content more.

The lack of logos, and the insignificance of logos appeals' effects on total engagement on tweets, brings about more questions regarding President Trump's strategy and his base's preferences of his content. As a reminder, tweets that included facts (whether truthful or not) and/or citations of sources of any facts or claims were coded as including logos. The overall lack of logos within tweets similarly supports the notion that President Trump's tweets are simplistic in nature and lack a traditional structured strategy. Furthermore, the insignificance of the logos appeals used within tweets also supports the idea that President Trump's base would rather read and interact with tweets that are simplistic and patriotic, not necessarily ones with the inclusion of facts and supporting arguments. Other areas of research may be able to make sense of these ideas, such as political sophistication and political information efficacy.

The political sophistication "equation" includes aspects such as one's interest in politics, education, exposure of information in the print media, intelligence, and occupation (Luskin, 1990, p. 335-336). The ways in which we are exposed to political information influence our sophistication and interest in politics. Perhaps individuals who engage with President Trump's more simplistic tweets and not the ones with an inclusion of facts and supporting arguments are individuals who are not as politically sophisticated or have an interest in politics. Political information efficacy "focuses solely on the voter's confidence in his or her own political knowledge and its sufficiency to engage the political process (to vote)" (Kaid, McKinney & Tedesco, 2007, p. 1096). A voter's confidence in his or her own political knowledge can affect political participation, and

potentially how one engages with political information on social media (such as President Trump's tweets). Therefore, more research could be done on political information efficacy and political sophistication to make more sense of how and why or why not users interact with President Trump's tweets.

The finding that only certain rhetorical strategies appeal to the readers of President Trump's tweets can bring about further questions on whether or not the President of the United States is able to successfully change his or her rhetoric or style of communication over time. If the politician has established a rhetoric and a communication style that strongly resonates with a supportive base, is that politician able to adjust that rhetoric and style as he or she rises to more powerful positions such as the Presidency? After President Trump was inaugurated into office, it was evident within his tweets sent during his first 100 days that he was attempting to change his rhetoric, tone and style of communication. Some tweets sent were more traditionally structured and contained more dialogic communication principles, but simply did not reach the engagement levels that the unstructured and informal tweets did, as seen in the results. This observation could suggest that politicians, especially Presidents, may not be able to change their rhetoric even as their roles in government change. This could potentially lead to consequences in terms of how a leader acts and what is expected from the leader of a nation.

## **CHAPTER SIX: LIMITATIONS & SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

### **The Influence of the Leader of the United States: Do Engagement Levels Matter?**

When adding together total engagement levels on each individual tweet, it became evident that almost each and every tweet sent by the President of the United States reached high levels of engagement. Numbers frequently totaled in the tens of thousands, with some extending into the hundreds of thousands. @realDonaldTrump is not listed as one of the top ten Twitter users with the highest number of followers from 2017, and thus his engagement levels may not be comparable to other high-profile individuals on Twitter (Bruner, 2018). However, it is still worth noting that his high levels of engagement on the observed individual tweets did not majorly fluctuate on a day-to-day basis.

This notion brings up the question of whether the difference of a few thousand retweets, likes or comments matter when analyzing the effectiveness of each individual tweet. In order to truly gauge whether or not a President or political leaders' tweets are being successful among social media users, it may be more beneficial for a study to conduct a content analysis where engagement totals are placed on a larger scale difference, or if a study conducted a content analysis on the comments that are received among tweets in order to measure favorability or disapproval (attitudes) among Twitter users who read and interact with his/her Tweets. A true sense of dialogue and two-way communication could be better viewed through the comments section of a tweet. Thus, in conclusion, using the measurement of engagement on Twitter to track the effects of the usage of the Dialogic Communication principles and rhetorical strategies may have been a good measurement, but this study could have been strengthened if attitudinal responses among the public were considered as well.

### **Twitter's Switch from 140 to 280 Characters on a Tweet**

Months after the President's 100<sup>th</sup> day in office, on November 17, 2017 Twitter adjusted the total number of characters allowed within a single tweet from 140 to 280 characters. With this new capability in Twitter, it is likely that the interpretations from the results of this study could be different if tweets were collected within a different time frame after this character-count change on Twitter. More characters within a tweet could allow for more usage of dialogic principles and rhetorical strategies, thus possibly resulting in a stronger effect on engagement levels in either a positive or negative way. This limitation can lead into a possible future research opportunity if this study were to be replicated and analyzed tweets that allow for a longer character count.

### **Twitter's Removal of Automated Bots and Fake Accounts in February 2018**

It was reported by the Washington Post and various other news sources on February 21, 2018 that Twitter took initiative to suspend and remove thousands of suspected automated bot accounts, resulting in a large drop in followers for many right-wing, pro-Trump Twitter users (Rosenberg, 2018; n.a., 2018; Scola, 2018). As a result of this suspension and removal of automated bot accounts, many real Twitter users complained of a large drop in their number of followers, which consequently resulted in a drop in engagement levels on tweets if those removed users were engaging on said tweets. Upon hearing this news, the author of this study curiously re-observed a few of @realDonaldTrump's tweets that were collected prior and compared the real-time engagement as of February 26, 2018 to the collected engagement total from December 2017. It was easily noticeable that engagement levels on tweets have dropped on tweets since they were collected during the data collection period, sometimes by a thousand or

so retweets, likes and/or comments. Further research and tests were not run in order to confirm these claims that automated bots were affecting engagement totals on @realDonaldTrump's tweets, but this news of automated bots raises valid questions and could be a potential limitation of this study. This limitation exists because if fake users and automated accounts were being accounted for within total engagement levels on tweets (this study's dependent variable), then this study may not have been tabulating results based on real Twitter users and real two-way engagement between two real users. Moving forward in research on this topic, researchers must be aware and cautious of the potential affects of fake accounts when measuring engagement on social media.

### **The Subjectivity of the Usefulness of Information Principle**

When coding for the usefulness of information principle, it was noticeably difficult to determine whether a tweet could actually be determined as trustworthy, useful, or of the public need. The coders may not have been able to objectively determine if a tweet could be coded for this principle, therefore it was a safer bet to code any questionable tweet as including this principle rather than not. As a result, it became evident that almost every tweet sent from the President of the United States' Twitter account could be classified as useful or of the public need (78.3 percent of tweets). Not all tweets that were sent from @realDonaldTrump within the President's first 100 days in office were considered timely, however a very high number of tweets sent included some sort of characteristic of this dialogic principle. As mentioned prior, it is still a relatively new concept for the American public to primarily receive updates and communications from their nation's leader from a social media platform. However, if this is the trend that presidential and political communication is moving toward, it does not necessarily matter

in which format the communications are being sent through for the information to be considered useful and of the public need. If the President is choosing this platform as the primary communication method for day-to-day interaction with the public, then the public will likely go to this platform to receive updates from the individual who is in charge of their government because that information is useful to them.

Therefore, it was somewhat limiting in a sense to code for the usefulness of information principle at all, because it could be argued to conclude that all tweets coming from a President or political leader are in fact useful to some extent. It can be hard to be objective in the sense that one tweet from a political leader could be important to one person and not to another. This can help to explain why the engagement levels for President Trump on social media are consistently at an incredibly high rate – he is an influential leader not only in the country but in the world, thus users are going to engage regardless. Especially in a democracy where our leaders are chosen by the public, it is likely that a large amount of the public will view these government leaders' tweets as of the public need. Chances are, the tweets will apply to these individuals in some capacity.

With this idea in mind, the results of this study which demonstrated that the usefulness of information principles is not significant could be flawed because this principle should be a given. It may not be applicable in future research to analyze this dialogic principle among political leaders on social media or the Internet if these individuals are choosing a social media platform or the Internet as the primary way of communicating day-to-day updates to their constituents.

### **Future Research Opportunities**

The results of this study elude to several opportunities for future research surrounding the topics of the Dialogic Communication Theory, rhetorical strategies and the Twitter accounts of high-profile political leaders.

First, this study could be extended and could track the usage of dialogic communication principles and rhetorical strategies and how they affect engagement totals over time. As shown in Chapter Four, three tweets were listed as the top in terms of engagement totals, and three tweets were listed as receiving the least amount of engagement. When looking at these tweets from a timeline standpoint, the tweets with more engagement were posted in the earlier days of President Trump's days in office, while the tweets with less engagement were posted later in his days in office. This hints at the possibility of engagement totals decreasing over time within the President's time in office. Thus, it could be suggested that future research tracks the engagement totals on President Trump's tweets throughout his term(s) in office and compare this to overall approval ratings over the same time period. Use of dialogic communication principles and rhetorical strategies could also be tracked for the purpose of determining if the usage of these principles and strategies have an effect on maintaining engagement regardless of approval ratings increasing or decreasing. This could be an interesting way to look into how the public interacts with a President over his/her preferred platform for communication, and how the public chooses to interact based on approval ratings that are reported by the media and their feelings toward the President's job in office.

Second, this study could be replicated to account for Twitter's switch from 140 to 280 characters in a tweet. Analyzing a similar sample size of tweets from

@realDonaldTrump during a similar 100-day time period after the tweet character limit switched could allow for the researcher to analyze whether or not the switch in character count on a tweet could allow for different results. This study could discover whether a longer tweet allows for more use of any dialogic communication principles or rhetorical strategies, and whether more use of them differently affects engagement levels on tweets.

Furthermore, this study could be replicated either at the same scale or at a smaller scale in terms of which Twitter profile is used for the content analysis. To further validate the results of this study, it could be suggested that future research replicates this study with another high-profile leader from a different country, preferably one who additionally is quite active on Twitter. However, since it was argued that the Dialogic Communication Theory may not be applicable to such a high-profile political leader who communicates via Twitter, it is worth researching whether or not the theory could still apply to political leaders but do not receive as much engagement from Twitter users who read his/her tweets. For example, this study could be replicated with a content analysis of a U.S. senator, a U.S. representative, a state governor, or a local mayor, to determine if the implementation of the Dialogic Communication Theory and rhetorical strategies has any sort of significant effect on subsequent engagement levels received on tweets from Twitter users who read their tweets.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

This research is one of few studies that examines the use of two theoretical concepts, Kent & Taylor's (1998) online dialogic communication principles and rhetorical strategies, as independent variables, and compares them to the dependent variable of total engagement received on a tweet on Twitter. Furthermore, this study is not the first, yet one of the many to come, that analyzes President Donald Trump's presidential communication strategies on Twitter using his personal Twitter account and their effects on engagement.

Results of this study found that the use of Kent & Taylor's (1998) dialogic communication principles significantly decreases engagement totals for President Trump's tweets during his first 100 days in office. This study also found that the use of pathos, or emotional appeals, significantly increases total engagement on tweets sent from President Trump during his first 100 days in office. Thus, the less structured and more emotional or patriotic a tweet is, the more likely a Twitter user who reads his tweets will engage with the tweet with a retweet, like or comment.

While this research suggests that less professionally structured tweets performed better for the President of the United States, it must be remembered that President Donald Trump is only the second President to have Twitter readily available at the beginning of his first term. He also prefers to use his *personal* Twitter account as his primary method of online communication. It must also be remembered that his communication style is known for being simplistic and informal. This idea of online presidential communication is new, and generalizations should not be made about online presidential communication until more presidents' online communication strategies are analyzed and compared.

The world is still beginning to understand the use of social media as the primary way of receiving information from the President of the United States and governmental leaders. It is a new concept that comes with surprises and conflicting expectations. As researchers Scacco and Coe (2017) mention, “as the ubiquitous presidency unfolds, it is likely that a Tweet or a humorous YouTube video might become more typical than an Oval Office address” (p. 310). With the quick advancement of technology and Web 2.0 platforms for communication, only time will tell what the future holds for our communication methods online. Future research that addresses online presidential communication will help not only communications and political science scholars, but the public of the nation to understand the short-term and long-term benefits and consequences of this type of communication from a high-profile governmental leader.

## APPENDIX A: OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

### Dialogic Communication Principles

1. **Dialogic loop: “allows publics to query organizations, and more importantly, it offers organizations the opportunity to respond to questions, concerns and problems”** (Kent & Taylor, 1998)
  - a. @replies
  - b. A retweet of another user’s tweet
  - c. Asking question(s) to audience
  - d. Answering question(s) from audience
  - e. Any sort of interaction or the encouragement of interaction with another user
2. **Usefulness of Information: user “[makes] an effort to include information of general value to all publics”** (Kent & Taylor, 1998)
  - a. Timely information relevant to the audience
  - b. Trustworthy information
  - c. Valuable information
  - d. Information that meets public’s need (think – does this tweet contain information that the *general public* would seek out from the President of the U.S.?)
3. **Generation of return visits: Frequent tweeting can help to determine the probability of a return visit** (Watkins, 2017).
  - a. How often does the user tweet? (take note of date/time of current tweet and prior tweet)
  - b. Is the Twitter account updated often? (complete evaluation after all date/times are recorded)
4. **Rule of conservation of visitors: the integration of multiple social media platforms for one organization or individual** (Watkins, 2017).
  - a. Tweet contains web links to government and/or White House websites/resources
  - b. Tweet contains web links to the user’s other social media accounts
  - c. Tweet contains requests for public to contact/engage with the user
  - d. Tweet contains some sort of web link or request that would maintain the audience interaction with the user (after an audience member leaves the tweet, he/she is still engaging with the user in some other fashion)
  - e. Tweet contains contact information to get in touch with user/government/White House

### Rhetorical Strategies

1. **Ethos (Credibility appeals)**
  - a. Tweets that mention Trump family members

- b. Tweets that mention an electoral mandate/campaign promise
  - c. Self-complimenting
  - d. Any mention of “fake news” or discrediting other institutions/sources
  - e. Any sort of criticism on others who have criticized the user
2. **Logos (Factual appeals)**
    - a. Using facts within Tweets
    - b. Citing a different source for an argument
  3. **Pathos (Emotional appeals)**
    - a. Implementing emotion into the tweet (think fear, anger, sadness, pity, sympathy/empathy, apology, comforting, etc.)
    - b. Patriotism appeals
    - c. The usage of capitalization and punctuation
  4. **Association**
    - a. Associating one concept with another concept (i.e. the association made of 9/11 with war by George W. Bush (Zarefsky, 2004))
  5. **Dissociation**
    - a. Breaking a concept into parts, and identifying the topic with the more favored part (i.e. Kennedy’s arms control program as “real peace” (Zarefsky, 2004).

### **Engagement Levels**

1. **Retweets**
  - a. The total number of retweets that are counted on an individual tweet/RT
2. **Likes**
  - a. The total number of likes that are counted on an individual tweet/RT
3. **Comments**
  - a. The total number of comments that are counted on an individual tweet/RT
4. **Total engagement**
  - a. Adding together the total numbers of retweets, likes and comments on an individual tweet/RT

## APPENDIX B: CODING SHEET

Tweet No. \_\_\_\_\_ Tweet Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Tweet Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Code Date: \_\_\_\_\_

@realDonaldTrump Tweet Code Sheet
<b><i>Topic/Issue</i></b>

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The 2016 Election, MAGA</li> <li>2. Health Care/Obamacare</li> <li>3. Meetings with Guests/Leaders @ WH</li> <li>4. Foreign Relations/Policy, Leaders</li> <li>5. Immigration/The Ban/Terrorists</li> <li>6. War/Defense/Military/Veterans</li> <li>7. Budget</li> <li>8. Senate/House of Representatives</li> <li>9. Supreme Court</li> <li>10. Natural Disasters/Relief</li> <li>11. Crises (i.e. terrorist attacks, shootings)</li> <li>12. Constitutional amendments</li> <li>13. Acknowledging Holidays</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>14. News/Fake News</li> <li>15. Russia</li> <li>16. Tax Reform</li> <li>17. Tax Returns</li> <li>18. Cabinet Members</li> <li>19. Opponents (past, present, future)</li> <li>20. Trump Family Members</li> <li>21. Jobs/Economy</li> <li>22. The States/Governors</li> <li>23. Predecessors (Obama, Bush, Clinton)</li> <li>24. Interviews</li> <li>25. Rallies/Speaking Events</li> <li>26. Inauguration</li> <li>99. Other: _____</li> </ol> |
|---|---|

<b><i>Dialogic Strategies</i></b>	
<b>1. Dialogic Loop: “allows publics to query organizations, and more importantly, it offers organizations the opportunity to respond to questions, concerns and problems.”</b>	
@reply	1. Yes 2. No
A retweet of another user’s tweet	1. Yes 2. No
Tagging another user in the tweet	1. Yes 2. No
Asking question(s) to audience	1. Yes 2. No
Answering question(s) from audience	1. Yes 2. No
Any interaction or encouragement of interaction with another platform/communication method	1. Yes 2. No
<b>2. Usefulness of Information: user “[makes] an effort to include information of general value to all publics.”</b>	
Timely information relevant to the audience	1. Included 2. Not Included

Trustworthy information	1. Included 2. Not Included
Valuable Information	1. Included 2. Not Included
Information that meets the public's need (does this tweet contain information that the general public would seek out from the President of the U.S.?)	1. Included 2. Not Included
<b>3. Generation of Return Visits: Frequent tweeting that can help to determine the probability of a return visit.</b>	<i>*take note of date and time of tweet*</i> 1. Early Morning (2 – 6 a.m.) 2. Morning (6 – 10 am.) 3. Late Morning (10 – noon) 4. Early Afternoon (noon – 2 p.m.) 5. Afternoon (2 – 5 p.m.) 6. Evening (5 – 8 p.m.) 7. Night (8 – 11 p.m.) 8. Late Night (11 – 2 a.m.)
<b>5. Rule of conservation of visitors: the integration of multiple social media/web platforms for one organization.</b>	
Web links to government and/or White House websites/resources/social accounts	1. Included 2. Not Included
Web links to the user's other social media accounts	1. Included 2. Not Included
Requests for public to contact/engage with the user on the web	1. Included 2. Not Included
Web link or request that would maintain the audience interaction with the user	1. Included 2. Not Included
Contact information to get in touch with user/government/White House on the web	1. Included 2. Not Included
<b><i>Rhetorical Strategies</i></b>	
<b>Ethos (Credibility Appeals): Ethos is used when the communicator uses his or her own credibility as the persuasive aspect of the message</b>	
Mention/reference to Trump family members	1. Included 2. Not Included
Mention/reference to an electoral mandate/campaign promise, mention of 2016 election, campaign, winning, etc.	1. Included 2. Not Included
Mention/reference to Hillary Clinton or any former/future <i>campaign</i> opponent. This can include name-calling (e.g. "Crooked Hillary,")	1. Included 2. Not Included
Self-complimenting	1. Included 2. Not Included
Mention/reference to "fake news" or discrediting other institutions/sources	1. Included 2. Not Included
Criticism on others who have criticized the user	1. Included 2. Not Included

Name calling of any other politicians/leaders and/or foreign leaders (example “Rocket Man”)	1. Included 2. Not Included
<b>Logos (Factual Appeals): Logos utilizes facts and logic as persuasion</b>	
Facts are referenced/used	1. Included 2. Not Included
Citing a different source (for an argument, to make a point, etc.)	1. Included 2. Not Included
<b>Pathos (Emotional Appeals): Pathos is used when the communicator works an emotional appeal into the message as a form of persuasion</b>	
Implementing or commenting on emotion (fear, anger, sadness, pity, sympathy, apology, etc.)	1. Included 2. Not Included
Patriotism (Examples include references to MAGA, using an American Flag emoji, referencing America or the United States in a positive and proud manner)	1. Included 2. Not Included
Usage of capitalization or punctuation (i.e. “HUGE,” “!” or “!!!”)	1. Included 2. Not Included
<b>Dissociation: when a concept is broken into two separate parts in order to associate the concept with a more favored part (i.e. Russia &amp; Hillary Clinton (not Trump))</b>	1. Included 2. Not Included If yes, describe the dissociation:
<b>Association: linking two terms together that were not initially related in order to further extend the term to mean something else (i.e. 9/11 and war)</b>	1. Included 2. Not Included If yes, describe the association:
<b>Does the Tweet include an image?</b>	1. Yes 2. No If yes, describe the image:
<b>Does the Tweet include a video?</b>	1. Yes 2. No If yes, describe the video:
<b>Does the Tweet include a Hashtag?</b>	1. Yes 2. No If yes, what is the hashtag?
<b>Does the Tweet include an Emoji?</b>	1. Yes 2. No If yes, what is the emoji?
<b><i>Engagement Levels</i></b>	

Retweets	Total #:
Likes	Total #:
Comments	Total #:
Total Engagement	Total #:

## APPENDIX C: TABLES

Table 1  
*Frequencies of Topics of Tweets*

Variable	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
News/Fake News	58	12.2	13.1	13.1
Immigration/The Ban/Terrorists	43	9.1	9.7	22.7
Foreign relations/policy, leaders	36	7.6	8.1	30.9
Healthcare/Obamacare	34	7.2	7.7	46.2
Rallies/Speaking Events	34	7.2	7.7	46.2
Meetings with Guests @ WH	32	6.8	7.2	53.4
Jobs	32	6.8	7.2	60.6
The 2016 Election/MAGA	23	4.9	5.2	65.8
Russia	18	3.8	4.1	69.8
Opponents (past, present, future)	18	3.8	4.1	73.9
Interviews	16	3.4	3.6	77.5
Acknowledging Holidays	13	2.7	2.9	80.4
Cabinet Members	13	2.7	2.9	83.3
Inauguration	12	2.5	2.7	86.0
War/Military	10	2.1	2.3	88.3
Senate/House	10	2.1	2.3	90.5
Predecessors (Obama, Bush, Clinton, etc.)	9	1.9	2.0	92.6
Supreme Court	8	1.7	1.8	94.4
Crises (terror, shootings)	7	1.5	1.6	95.9
Tax Reform	5	1.1	1.1	97.1
Trump Family Members	5	1.1	1.1	98.2
The States/Governors	4	0.8	0.9	99.1
Budget	2	0.4	0.5	99.5
Constitutional Amendment	2	0.4	0.5	100.0
Total	444	93.7	100.0	
(Missing) 99	30	6.3		
Total	474	100.0		

Table 2  
*Frequencies for Dialogic Loop Principle*

Inclusion	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not Included	303	63.9	63.9	63.9
Included	171	36.1	36.1	100.0
Total	474	100.0	100.0	

Table 3  
*Frequencies for Usefulness of Information Principle*

Inclusion	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not Included	103	21.7	21.7	21.7
Included	371	78.3	78.3	100.0
Total	474	100.0	100.0	

Table 4  
*Frequencies for Conservation of Visitors Principle*

Inclusion	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not Included	364	76.8	76.8	76.8
Included	110	23.2	23.2	100.0
Total	474	100.0	100.0	

Table 5  
*Regression analyses for the relationship between dialogic communication principles and engagement*

Variables	b	t
Constant	3.86	20.81***
Dialogic Loop	-.29	-3.35**
Usefulness of Information	-.33	-8.09***
Conservation of Visitors	-.18	-3.61***
Logos	.10	1.24
Ethos	-.07	-0.94
Pathos	.28	3.78***
Association	.28	1.79
Dissociation	.22	0.63
<i>N</i>		474
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		0.28
<i>F</i>		33.81***

Note: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$ . Results were based on White's heteroskedastic robust standard errors (or Huber-White estimators of variance) because the Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg test revealed that there was heteroskedasticity. Independent variables were not in a violation of multicollinearity (VIF (variance inflation factor) of each variable  $< 10$  and T (tolerance) of each variable  $> 0.10$ ).

Table 6  
*Frequencies for Ethos Strategy*

Inclusion	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not Included	160	33.8	33.8	33.8
Included	314	66.2	66.2	100.0
Total	474	100.0	100.0	

Table 7  
*Frequencies for Logos Strategy*

Inclusion	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not Included	346	73.0	73.0	73.0
Included	128	17.0	27.0	100.0
Total	474	100.0	100.0	

Table 8  
*Frequencies for Pathos Strategy*

Inclusion	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not Included	100	21.1	21.1	21.1
Included	374	78.9	78.9	100.0
Total	474	100.0	100.0	

Table 9

*Frequencies for Association Strategy*

Inclusion	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not Included	374	78.9	78.9	78.9
Included	100	21.1	21.1	100.0
Total	474	100.0	100.0	

Table 10

*Frequencies for Dissociation Strategy*

Inclusion	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not Included	462	97.5	97.5	97.5
Included	12	2.5	2.5	100.0
Total	474	100.0	100.0	

Table 11

*Independent-Samples T-Test for Content Usage*

Variable	Group	Engagement Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Image	Included	2.62	1.04	.001
	Not Included	3.42	1.47	
Video	Included	2.26	0.83	.000
	Not Included	3.38	1.44	
Hashtag	Included	2.37	0.99	.002
	Not Included	3.40	1.44	
Emoji	Included	2.24	0.79	.001
	Not Included	3.33	1.44	

Table 12

*Frequencies of Dialogic Communication Principles: Dialogic Loop Characteristics*

Variable/Characteristic	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Dialogic-@reply	0	0	0
Dialogic-Retweet	4	.8	.8
Dialogic-Tagging a User	110	23.2	23.2
Dialogic-Asking a Question	27	5.7	5.7
Dialogic-Answering a Question	3	.6	.6
Dialogic-Engage on Another Platform	77	16.2	16.2

Table 13

*Frequencies of Dialogic Communication Principles: Usefulness of Information Characteristics*

Variable/Characteristic	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Useful-Timely	137	28.9	28.9
Useful-Trustworthy	236	49.8	49.8
Useful-Valuable	216	45.6	45.6
Useful-Public Need	187	39.5	39.5

Table 14

*Frequencies of Dialogic Communication Principles: Conservation of Visitors Characteristics*

Variable/Characteristic	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Consv-WH/Govt Links	65	13.7	13.7
Consv-Trump Social Links	17	3.6	3.6
Consv-Request to Engage	66	13.9	13.9
Consv-Web Link	79	16.7	16.7
Consv-Contact Info WH/Govt	10	2.1	2.1

Table 15

*Frequencies of Rhetorical Strategies: Ethos Characteristics*

Variable/Characteristic	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Ethos-Trump Family Members	15	3.2	3.2
Ethos-Electoral Mandate	181	38.2	38.2
Ethos-Opponent Name Call	19	4.0	4.0
Ethos-Self Compliment	82	17.3	17.3
Ethos-Fake/Bad News	75	15.8	15.8
Ethos-Criticize who Criticized	107	22.6	22.6
Ethos-Name Call Politicians/Leaders	16	3.4	3.4

Table 16

*Frequencies of Rhetorical Strategies: Logos Characteristics*

Variable/Characteristic	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Logos-Facts Used	112	23.6	23.6
Logos-Source Cited	52	11.0	11.0

Table 17

*Frequencies of Rhetorical Strategies: Pathos Characteristics*

Variable/Characteristic	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Pathos-Emotion	117	24.7	24.7
Pathos-Patriotism	130	27.4	27.4
Pathos-Capitalization or Punctuation	304	64.1	64.1

Table 18

*Frequencies of Rhetorical Strategies: Association and Dissociation*

Variable/Characteristic	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Association or Linking Terms	100	21.1	21.1
Dissociation Broken Term	12	2.5	2.5

Table 19  
*Frequencies of Inclusion of Types of Content*

Variable/Characteristic	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Image Included	92	19.4	19.4
Video Included	46	9.7	9.7
Hashtag Included	60	12.7	12.7
Emoji Used	29	6.1	6.1

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