

An Analysis of the 2016 American Presidential Nominees' Tweets: A Magical Realism Perspective

Completed Research Paper

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Abstract

Twitter is the latest social networking tool said to be reshaping presidential political campaigns. In order to maximize the influence of their messages to voters, presidential nominees often use various techniques to transmit their campaign messages in the most effective way to the electorate. However, there is little scholarship on the use of Twitter as a strategic tool for presidential political campaigns. Using a nuanced magical realism theoretical perspective, this paper seeks to fill this gap through a content analysis of several of the presidential campaign nominees' tweets, Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton and Jill Stein, in the six months leading up to election day on November 8th, 2016. Consequently, this study provides a methodological contribution pertaining to the utilization of magical realism to understand how Twitter is shaping the new political landscape. Furthermore, it provides an illustration of the application of specific techniques which underpin the magical realism concept and how they can be applied by other information system researchers.

Keywords: Twitter, social media, presidential political campaign, narrative, credibility, magical realism.

Introduction

“TODAY WE MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN”

@realDonaldTrump, November 6, 2016

The focus of our study examines the manner with which presidential election candidates can use Twitter as a tool for strategic storytelling and create specific narratives for their electorate. Donald Trump, a billionaire property developer and a republication candidate, was elected the president of the United States (US) on November 8th, 2016. For many, this was a surreal moment and was a far cry from the 2008 presidential election result when Barack Obama famously tweeted “This is history...” following his victory. A celebrity businessman who frequently courted damning controversy during the presidential campaign and who had little to no political experience, was now the president of one of the world’s primary superpower nations. Even more astounding was that 61% of exit polls indicated that voters considered him unqualified for the position. But what the pundits decried “his contempt for conservative orthodoxy, his dystopian vision, bigotry, anti-intellectualism and egomania—now looks like a fully formed, stunningly successful campaign which, if it has not rewritten the rules of electioneering, got away with flouting most of them” (The Economist, 2016). His prolific and often vocal use of Twitter during the presidential campaign has also been identified as a key differentiator by many analysts. Following the idea “one must be where the people are” Donald Trump used his own Twitter account (@realDonaldTrump) encompassing 27.2 million followers as a launchpad to not only criticize rival candidates but also to communicate what he would do in terms of his policies if he was elected as president. These tweets often garnered global attention when they were covered in news reports by various media outlets. According to Lomas (2017) “the 140-character tweet has never been considered a great vehicle of nuance, but is arguably facing its toughest test yet under President Trump - who has amply demonstrated during his presidential campaign he’s capable of tweeting insults, tweeting vitriol, and tweeting in a way that weaponizes his supporters - especially when he feels under critical fire”. Furthermore, a recent study revealed that despite Mr Trump’s “tendency to use his Twitter account in the manner of a celebrity - by adopting an "off-the-cuff style" in the tweets he publishes - was a contributing factor in the billionaire's presidential victory” (Robinson, 2017). Tweeting like an entertainer rather than a stereotypical politician enabled Mr Trump to garner the interest of the American electorate. His strategic use of Twitter is further evidenced by the fact that he allowed his aides assume control of his personal Twitter account in the days before Election Day in an attempt to present “him as a confident and viable candidate” (Bulman, 2016).

While suggestively signifying the mix of the mysterious and the mundane, the widely used literary mode of magical realism has itself been absent from most academic discourse pertaining to social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter which enable users to post content and interact with other users’ messages. The main contribution of this paper is the application of a magical realism theoretical perspective in the analysis of the use of Twitter in the most recent US political presidential. Specifically, we use a widely cited framework to sign post magical realism elements contained within the Tweets of several American presidential nominees from three of the main political parties in the United States: Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton and Jill Stein in the months leading up to Election Day on November 8th, 2016. The electoral campaign is the time period preceding elections where political parties conduct an organized effort to garner support for their nominated candidates. In order to maximize the influence of their messages to voters, presidential nominees use various techniques to transmit their messages in the most effective way to their potential voters via various channels. According to Borondo et al., (2012) “understanding and exploiting in a more efficient way the available resources for information flow than your opponent can make the difference”. Twitter may be the ideal medium for linking together “logics of the real and the unreal, the objective and the out of this world” (Joyrich, 2009). Thus, in this paper, we present a case for using magical realism as a tool for exploring the ‘realities’ of presidential nominees’ tweets during electoral campaigns.

This paper is structured as follows. The next section presents this study's theoretical underpinning. Then, the research method adopted and the data collection and analysis techniques used are discussed. Next, the results and analysis of the research are presented. This is followed by a discussion. Finally, we elucidate our theoretical contributions, limitations, future research directions and conclude the paper.

Theoretical Underpinning

(Ab)Use of Twitter in Politics

The growth of digital technology and Web 2.0, which is now evolving into Web 3.0, has seen an increase in the use of social media among politicians. Social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook and political networking sites have enabled “users with diverse news choices regarding what to consume, while traditional information providers are experiencing a lesser role as gatekeepers” (Kwon et al. 2011). Twitter “is a social media flourishing with diverse information sources, ranging from the full-fledged mainstream media to the individual online public” (Kwon et al. 2011). Twitter has also become a dominant social reporting tool for strategic communication (Li et al. 2010). The recent positive use of Twitter by concerned citizens as a vehicle for providing insights to a global audience into political unrest in countries such as Russia, Tunisia, Turkey, Romania Egypt and Libya have been coined as revolution 2.0 (Attia et al. 2011). Twitter has also been used by governments (e.g. Iran and Russia) to track down the ringleaders who are accused of inciting revolution. This evolution of citizen communication is necessitating traditional political structures to migrate towards digital social media platforms. For instance, political actors “are now eager to catch Twitter users’ attention, because they not only produce word-of-mouth effects but influence other online users’ informational choices. In this sense, Twitter users are not just passive information recipients. Rather, they are conceived as power shareholders who control information flow through their interaction with mainstream media” (Kwon et al. 2011). Twitter have also recently updated their concise tagline to incorporate the word politics to describe its online service “From breaking news and entertainment to sports and politics, get the full story with all the live commentary”. According to Wattal et al. (2012) “politics and most notably political elections have become big business...prominently in countries such as the US, where more than \$2.1 billion dollars was spent on the 2008 presidential election”. In May 2015, the white house launched the @POTUS Twitter handle for the US President Barack Obama, until then the commander in chief had been using his own @BarackObama account. This was seen as a major development for the US government administration who were for the first time recognizing the significance of embracing social media platforms as strategic political tools. And for good reason as evidenced by the electorate engagement statistics where 61% of the US population used the internet and social media platforms as a means of acquiring news and information pertaining to the 2016 election with 16% of registered voters following their respective political party or official on a social networking site (PewResearch, 2016).

Credibility of the Twitter Political Narrative

Nobel prize-winning economist Herbert Simon (1971) stated that “a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention” (p. 40). Twitter has been referred to as an attention-gathering online environment where in lieu of the fact that “audiences’ time and cognitive capacity to consume information remain relatively the same as the past, the quantity of information sources has remarkably grown” (Kwon et al., 2011). This phenomenon had added complexity to the manner with which social media users view messages posted as credible. Credibility can be understood as believability where individuals perceive someone or something to be credible, they believe in that someone or something (Tseng and Fogg, 1999). Thus, in the context of Twitter, credibility refers to the extent to which the users believe in the postings that they read. Extant research suggests that users’ experiences of the credibility of a social media platform affect their perceptions pertaining to the quality of the message being conveyed (Flanagin and Metzger, 2007). Given the brevity and the ambiguous nature of information contained within a 140 limit Tweet, users often have to rely on the credibility of the Twitter platform to interpret the extent of the credibility of the Tweets being pushed out by the individuals they are following. The recent emergence of the fake news concept has threatened to negatively impact social media platforms such as Twitter’s credibility as a valid source of information. This is concerning given the power a single political Tweet can wield. For instance, when Donald Trump Tweeted in January 2017 that Toyota would face a “big border tax” if the company went ahead with plans for a new

plant in Mexico, Toyota's shares subsequently plummeted resulting in a loss of \$1.2 billion in a mere five minutes following the posting of the Tweet. However, it should be noted that there has been intense debate pertaining to just how influential certain Twitter "influencers" really are. For instance, according to Bakshy et al. (2012), "in light of the emphasis placed on prominent individuals as optimal vehicles for disseminating information, the possibility that ordinary influencers - individuals who exert average, or even less-than-average influence - are under many circumstances more effective, is intriguing". For instance, "ordinary individuals" Tweets often go viral reaching a global audience. To illustrate just how much politics has changed over the last decades, it is useful to juxtapose modern politicking with late 1940's politicking. A seminal piece of research conducted by Lazerfeld and Berelson (1968) identified that most people during the 1948 presidential campaign had no interest in politics and never read any political manifestos or newspaper articles. It was a family member or colleague who was interested in politics (an opinion leader) who influenced them to vote a certain way. Fast forward 60 years and perhaps in today's world influencers such as 'Trump the celebrity' are capable of influencing the electorate with short tweets and subsequently eliminating the need for the traditional opinion leader. Thus, he uses twitter to cut out the middle man and influence the electorate directly.

Recent salient political elections have also increasingly incorporated the use of big data and other novel scientific methods as a means of communicating their political agendas via online channels to specific electorate cohorts. For example, Donald Trump enlisted the services of an analytics company called Cambridge Analytica who used big data and psychographic techniques during his 2016 presidential campaign. This company had previously been employed by the 'out' political representative campaigners during the 2016 Brexit referendum in the UK. According to Grassenger & Krogerus (2017) "a revolution in politics is underway and is being fought 140 characters at a time...every social media message that Trump put out during the 2016 presidential election campaign was data - driven". Moreover, reporters and journalists now use political Twitter accounts as a resource to "collect data, enhance audience reach, and follow the activities of high-profile news sources, the latter working to fulfil an agenda-building function" (Conway et al. 2015). Thus, given the increasing ambiguity pertaining to the credibility of the information communicated in conjunction with influence political candidates can wield (e.g. Barack Obama is the third most followed member of the Twitter community), research pertaining to how the political narrative is focalized via Twitter presents itself as an avenue ripe for further investigation. In the next section, we introduce the concept of magic realism and outline how this perspective can be used as a novel lens with which to analyze Tweets.

Magical Realism

The term magical realism originated in the 20th century to "describe a new, neo-realistic style in German painting, then applied to Latin American fiction and now designates the most contemporary trend in international fiction" (Faris, 2002). According to Warnes, (2009) "magical realism has appeared in print with increasing frequency over the last few decades, appearing in a vast number of university course descriptions, dissertations, academic articles, television advertisements and in the popular press". The marketing industry has also begun to increasingly use magical realism visual techniques as a nuanced method to market products. Magic realism "combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvellous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them" (Faris, 2002). Magical realism "strives to contest polarities, captures the paradox of the unity of opposites" (Cooper, 2004) and provides insights other rational-scientific paradigms cannot offer (Hegerfeldt, 2002). Ultimately magical realism "is an oxymoron, an appropriate condition that it designates a narrative strategy that stretches or ruptures altogether the boundaries of reality" (Warnes, 2009). The following extract taken from 100 years of solitude (Marquez, 1973) is an example of magical realism where the author uses an example of the arrival of the telephone as a humorous miracle:

"It was as if God had decided to put to the test every capacity for surprise . . . to such an extreme that no-one knew for certain where the limits of reality lay. It was an intricate stew of truths and mirages that convulsed the ghost of José Arcadio Buendía with impatience and made him wander all through the house even in broad daylight."

The above quote is an example of how the author frequently uses miracles in the book to express the duplicity he finds with Latin American social constructs and religion. Throughout the book, seemingly miraculous happenings occur that to the citizens are normal and accepted, and yet they concurrently find

new technological discoveries perplexing. While magical realism narratives have been “praised for founding a new multicultural artistic reality, it has been denigrated and shallow and even been accused of being underpinned by pernicious ideologies” (Warnes, 2009). Conceptualizing magical realism is also challenging as the concept flouts philosophical conventions of non-contradiction. For the purposes of this study, we use a framework (Table 1) which delineates magical realism in terms of five core widely cited techniques. These techniques “contribute to a central project, namely to ask about the possibilities of, as well as the limitations to, the human endeavor to know the world. Paradoxically, the mode reaches the same conclusion on both counts - its answer is fiction” (Hegerfeldt, 2002). Magical realism narratives are told from the perspective of people who live in our world and experience a different reality from the one we call objective (Rodgers, 2012). The magic realist techniques outlined in Table 1 are often “(ab)used merely to produce literary fireworks that pander to the readers’ taste for the exotic” (Hegerfeldt, 2002). In the next section, we present an overview of the methodology operationalized in this study.

Magical realism technique	Definition
Realist mode to fantastic elements	The realistic mode is in conflict with non-realistic events portrayed in the text
Literalization	Emphasis on reality of fictions based on linguistic and conceptual violations - metaphor becomes true and figurative language acquires the status of literal language
Ex-centric focalizer	Adoption of a marginalised or peripheral point of view thereby endorsing their worldview as an alternative to the dominant outlook
Knowledge and knowledge production	A critique of scientific rationalism that unmasks how knowledge is produced and created
Fantastic Reality	By taking a matter of fact attitude towards the fantastically implausible or impossible incidents, ordinary reality appears incredible, marvellous or fantastic

Table 1. Research Framework Adapted from (Hegerfeldt, 2002)

Methodology

According to Indulska et al. (2012, p. 49), “unstructured text data, such as emails, blogs, contracts, academic publications, organizational documents, transcribed interviews, and even tweets, are important sources of data in Information Systems (IS) research.” Various forms of qualitative analysis of the content of these data sources exist and have revealed important insights. Given the efficacy and suitability of this approach to the nature of the research, we employed content analysis as the methodological mode of analysis. Content analysis has been defined as “a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding” (Stemler, 2001). Further, “research using qualitative content analysis focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text” (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). This approach is uniquely suited to the analysis of political tweets as “reality can be interpreted in various ways and the understanding is dependent on subjective interpretation” (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004). As such, we chose to engage in conceptual rather than in relational analysis as conceptual analysis allowed us to examine the tweets for “presence, frequency, and centrality of concepts. Such concepts can represent words, phrases, or more complex constructs” (Indulska et al. 2012).

Data Collection and Analysis

We conducted an empirical analysis of a total of 7,414 archival Tweets produced by the candidates of the three main political parties in the United States: Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton and Jill Stein in the six months leading up to the 2016 US presidential election day. This time period was deemed “a critical winnowing point during which the media shape perceptions of the candidates and their associated parties” (Wattal et al., 2010). For each candidate, we obtained the complete set of tweets from their individual date

of candidature nomination for their respective parties, until the day before the election (See Table 2). We used the Twitonomy platform which provides analytics and insights into Tweets to capture the data. The original datasets downloaded contained nine identifying variables that included the date of the tweet, the twitter handle of the tweeter, the name of the tweeter, the body of the tweet, the URL, the platform (e.g. Twitter for iPhone), the type of tweet (e.g. new, reply, retweet), the retweet count and the favourite count. As seven of the nine identifying variables were irrelevant to the purposes of this research, the data was cleaned leaving the date of the tweet and the body of the tweet for analysis. The Twitter data was imported into NVivo and coded using a schema encompassing the five magical realist techniques identified previously in Table 1. NVivo enabled us to “import and code the textual data, edit the text; retrieve, review and recode coded data; search for combinations of words in the text or patterns in the coding; and import from or export data to other quantitative analysis software” (Bandara, 2006, p. 7). To ensure reliability, the 7,414 Tweets were coded independently and each Tweet was analyzed in isolation from previous Tweets. Where perfect agreement between the researchers was not reached, an arbitrator was used to facilitate a discussion until a final coding was agreed upon by consensus. We also used data triangulation as a means of determining the context of each Tweet where appropriate.

Candidate	Donald Trump	Hillary Clinton	Jill Stein
Dates Selected	26/05/16 – 07/11/16	06/06/16 – 07/11/16	06/08/16 – 07/11/16
Number of Tweets	1,904	2,906	2,604

Table 2. Study Dataset Sources

Results

Descriptive Analysis

Figure 1 provides an overview the high-level issues which emerged from our analysis of the several presidential candidates’ Tweets. This illustration shows a distinct dichotomy in how the candidates used the Twitter platform to focus on core issues. Some of the issues were consistent with the narratives which are typically used to engage each political parties’ supporters. For instance, as shown in figure 1, Donald Trump focused on conservative issues (e.g. employer based-health insurance, jobs, free speech) which are key election issues which resonate with Republican voters. Similarly, the data highlighted how the other two candidates focused on themes which resonated with their conventional voters. For example, Hillary Clinton focused on core Democratic party policies such as women’s equality, affordable health and the minimum wage. Finally, Dr Stein steered along traditional Green party-political issues such as climate change, the environment, patriot act repeal. However, we would like to point to the fact that in conjunction to these traditional party issues, figure 1 highlights how Donald Trump’s Tweets contained additional core issues which would not be typically associated with the political leanings of the party (e.g. War on Terror, Fox news, Immigration, Big League Truth). Akin to 1950s McCarthyism and the anti-Communist and anti-progressive hysteria of the time, Mr Trump’s Tweets were underpinned largely by negative sentiments and sensationalism. According to Osborne and Roberts (2017) “the 140-character Twitter message was perfect for Mr Trump. It was ideal for painting pictures of a black-and-white world. In the hands of Mr Trump, it became a lethal political weapon...enabling him to create a personal epistemology...using his Twitter account to keep the world hooked on his version of events”.

Many political commentators (e.g. Kirchick, 2016; Leonhardt and Thompson, 2017) went as far as to attribute a “post-truth” label to describe Mr Trump’s presidential campaign Tweets which were used strategically to stoke electorate interest and attention (e.g. invoke anger, mistrust, fear). Barack Obama has also opined that “the lens through which people understand politics and politicians is extraordinarily powerful. And Mr Trump understands the new ecosystem, in which facts and truth don’t matter. You attract attention, rouse emotions, and then move on. You can surf those emotions” (Remnick, 2016). In comparison, Mrs Clinton’s and Dr Stein’s core issues were isolated, narrow in focus and ultimately may not have resonated effectively across all of the electorate demographic base (e.g. women’s equality, middle class, student loans). Both candidates rarely deviated from the traditional party-political lines. It was interesting to note that when Clinton deviated from the party’s core issues, it was largely in response to specific

accusations made by Mr Trump towards her (e.g. email scandal). Mr Trump repeatedly invoked personal reactions from the other candidates during the six months to distract voters from specific scandals (e.g. Trump University, sexist comments) or from the fragilities of some of his proposed policies (e.g. replace Obamacare, close US borders). Ultimately, Mr Trump “exploited Twitters ability to express raw sentiment instantly, without nuance or subtext, and its ability to blur, even extinguish, the boundary between sentiment and fact (Osborne and Roberts, 2017). Finally, it is interesting to note that Mr Trump Tweeted just 1,904 times when compared to Mrs Clinton (2,906) and Dr Stein (2,604). Whilst both other candidates may have been more active on Twitter, the divisive, incendiary and almost unfiltered nature of Mr Trump’s Tweets were more successful in generating global media news coverage.

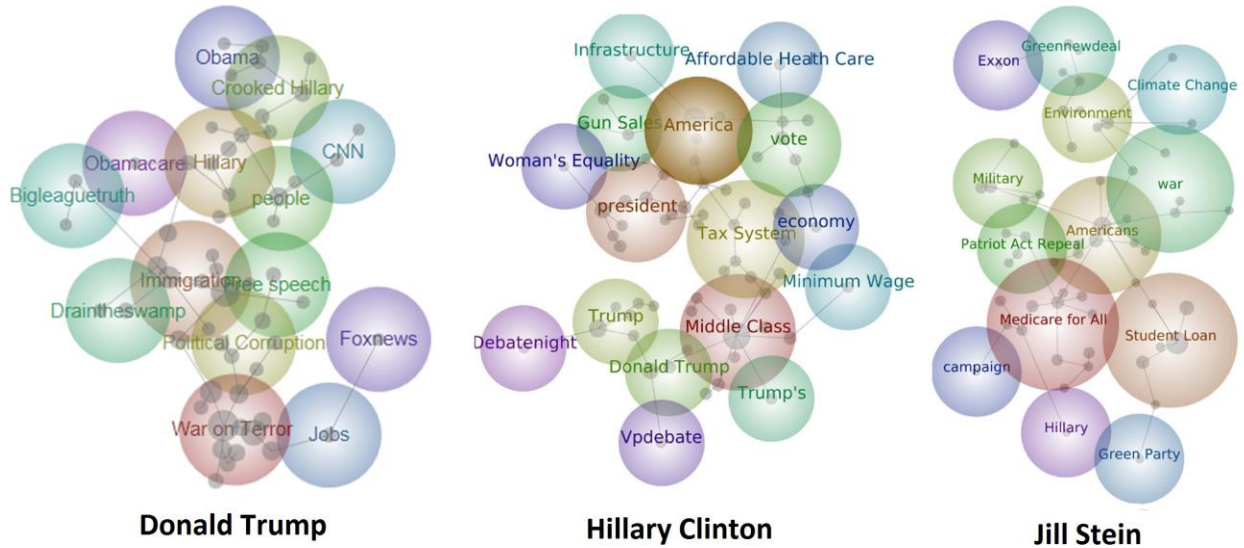


Figure 1. Summary of the Core Issues Emerging from Tweets

In this section, we use the magical realism lens adopted in the research to illustrate how the five techniques defined in Table 1 permeated the several presidential candidates’ Tweets in the six months running up to the election day. Firstly, the *realistic mode to fantastic elements* magical realism technique encompasses a realistic mode which is in conflict with non-realistic events portrayed in the text. Table 3 illustrates exemplar Tweets from the presidential candidates which embody this technique. According to Hegerfeldt (2002) “this realist technique is used to give fantastically absurd events a façade of factuality, while any bid for realism is progressively undermined by exactly these elements: always keeping a deadpan expression, the narrator piles on increasingly extravagant and fantastic items, straining credibility to the point where the narrative finally collapses under its sheer absurdity”. Our analysis identified that the candidates’ Tweets regularly strained credibility. At the start of the campaign, both Hillary Clinton’s and Jill Stein’s Tweets displayed consistent rationality however as the campaign progressed their Tweets began to increasingly employ this magical realism technique. However, it was Donald Trump who consistently employed this method in his Tweets. For instance, his second Tweet displayed in Table 3 was retweeted more than 9,000 times and liked over 37,000 times. In reality, there is a plethora of media evidence which highlighted that the party was extremely divided and remained so. Many senior republican political party members such as Jeb Bush, Paul Ryan, and Ted Cruz were vocal in their opposition and disdain for Mr Trump’s presidential run. Mr. Trump’s response to these criticisms was to go on the offensive and employ a heightened use of this magical realism technique. For example, when Ted Cruz failed to endorse Donald Trump at a republican convention forum and made a pointed remark about the necessity for Supreme Court justice to follow the constitution explicitly and not solely dictate policy, Mr Trump responded with the following Tweet: “Ted Cruz talks about the constitution but doesn’t say that if the Dems with the Presidency, the new JUSTICES appointed will destroy us all!” This event must be contextualized by reference to the ongoing dispute between the democratic and republican parties over the nomination for the empty seat on the

supreme court. The narrative in the aforementioned Tweet serves a dual purpose. The first is to deride Ted Cruz’s credibility as a future presidential nominee. The second purpose is to stoke the fears of conservatives by insinuating that a democratic win would run the risk of a liberal being placed on a seat in the supreme court thus tipping the balance of future voting patterns. However, in reality, a liberal orientated supreme court would not be feasibly capable of destroying extant conservative tenets such the second amendment of the constitution (e.g. right to bear arms).

	Donald Trump	Hillary Clinton	Jill Stein
Realist mode to fantastic elements	1. In my administration, EVERY American will be treated equally, protected equally, and honored equally #Debate #BigLeagueTruth	1. We can’t cozy up to dictators; we have to stand up to them. We can’t contain ISIS; we must defeat it. And we will.	1. Corporations were originally chartered to serve the public good, but they’ve become monsters that dominate our government. #GreenTownHall
	2. Other than a small group of people who have suffered massive and embarrassing losses, the party is VERY united. Great love in the arena!	2. We're going to make sure the wealthy pay their fair share in taxes for a change: https://t.co/p7J6Ab1Agq	2. For WWII, we transformed the economy for war in 6 months. Climate change makes Pearl Harbor look like small potatoes #GreenPartyForum

Table 3. Realist mode to fantastic elements Tweet examples

	Donald Trump	Hillary Clinton	Jill Stein
Literalization	1. #CrookedHillary is nothing more than a Wall Street PUPPET! #BigLeagueTruth #Debate	1. Instead of dark and divisive, our vision for America is hopeful and inclusive. Big-hearted, not small-minded. It's about lifting people up.	1. The manufactured choice between a member of the billionaire class and a servant of the billionaire class is a lose-lose for working people.
	2. Elizabeth Warren, often referred to as Pocahontas, just misrepresented me and spoke glowingly about Crooked Hillary, who she always hated!	2. Leading the birther movement is deplorable. Attempting to say it "did a great service" to the president who Trump attacked is asinine	2. We need to build a world where women don't have to fear scumbag misogyny from #BadHombres like @realDonaldTrump. #debatenight

Table 4. Literalization Tweet examples

The *literalization* magical realism technique reveals the exploitation of metaphor by “endowing figures of speech with the referentiality of literal language” which “have a decidedly real influence on human perceptions of the world” (Hegerfeldt, 2002). Figures of speech may employ an exaggeration of hyperbole to give further emphasis or effect to meaning while also transgressing “semantic constraints governing linguistic usage” (Hegerfeldt, 2002). Our analysis uncovered numerous examples of this technique emanating from each candidate. Again, the Grand Old Party candidate employed this technique the greatest

number of times and to the greatest effect. The first example in Table 4 provides a clear example of the aforementioned transgression of semantic constraints and emphasizes the reality of fictions based on linguistic violations. By deeming his opponent “crooked” and a “wall street puppet”, Donald Trump enacted real influence over perceptions of his rival. This is especially relevant given he has more than 27 million followers on Twitter potentially representing over 13% of registered voters. While the republican candidate may be guilty of producing the most extreme examples of literalization, he was not unique in utilizing this technique. The key difference between the candidates use of this technique was in the resulting message they were attempting to portray. For example, Hillary Clinton’s use of literalization was mixed in the sense that she utilized it to spread both positive and negative messages. This is evident in the examples provided in Table 4. Dr Stein’s use of this technique may be characterised as confrontational. The use of terms such as “billionaire class” and “scumbag misogyny” had the dual purpose of literalizing hyperbole and as a differentiating technique evoking a negative feeling in her supporters towards her political rivals.

Ex-centric focalizer represents a key feature of the magical realist mode. The intention of the technique was to engage in a form of abstraction as a means of shining a light onto issues that formed the makeup of those hitherto marginalized. As Hegerfeldt (2002) points out “the use of a marginalized perspective to project a “magical” world view is a literary technique, not a mimetic reproduction of an extratextual reality”, thereby employing non-transgressing literary constraints while also conforming to the textual reality of the mode. Through our analysis, it became evident that each candidate utilised this literary technique to portray themselves, their supporters and the issues their supporters cared about as marginalised and oppressed. For example, Donald Trump’s relentless attacks on what he and his supporters saw as the mainstream medias unfairness in relation to its’ reporting of his campaign, (see Table 5), was an attempt to portray himself as marginalised. This belies the fact that the very same mainstream media that he so railed against through his Twitter account enabled him to garner anywhere between 1 and 5 billion dollars of free media during the campaign. Hillary Clinton’s use of the technique was similar to the republican candidate, while representing a different cohort of the marginalised. She adopted the role of spokesperson for somewhat marginalised issues such as women’s rights and for those who consider themselves outside the mainstream of power in America such as ethnic minorities (see Table 5). In so doing, she placed herself as defender of the oppressed and situated herself as leader of a greater movement of people who fall outside the dominant discourse of elite politics. The Green party candidate utilized this technique to criticise the structural nature of power in the United States while, similar to her opponents yet representing seemingly everyone not part of the “establishment”, attempting to subvert orthodox views of where and how power is produced and held. By using terms such as “manufacture consent” and “oligarchs” she attempted to speak to and for those who believe themselves to be outside of mainstream politics thus representing the marginalised.

	Donald Trump	Hillary Clinton	Jill Stein
Ex-Centric Focalizer	1. Very little pick-up by the dishonest media of incredible information provided by WikiLeaks. So dishonest! Rigged system!	1. Every employee, from the CEO suite to the factory floor, contributes to a business' success, so everybody should share in the rewards.	1. The establishment manufactures consent... and hopelessness. Media, polls, debates are all designed not to upset the elite power structure.
	2. It is being reported by virtually everyone, and is a fact, that the media pile on against me is the worst in American political history!	2. Let's put ourselves in the shoes of young black & Latino people who face the effects of systemic racism and feel their lives are disposable.	2. The oligarchs have a tight grip on power in our country. We need mass collective action to take power for the people. #GreenPartyForum

Table 5. Ex-centric focalizer Tweet examples

The magical realist technique of *knowledge and knowledge production* attempts to uncover how perceptions of the world are formed by examining different strategies of knowing and how reality is constructed. Further, enlightenment archetypes of knowledge are critiqued while at the same time forms of narrative are employed for contrast (Hegerfeldt, 2002). Our analysis of this technique threw up some quite surprising results. Firstly, Jill Stein’s critique of “scientific” polls was somewhat surprising given that she holds a doctorate from Harvard University. However, in the second example given, she defends science by critiquing the federal government. This amounted to a clever utilisation of this technique and had the consequence of communicating to those who fall on either side of this debate. Secondly, Donald Trump underutilised this technique. Surprisingly, given his irrational pronouncements in the media regarding walls and Mexicans, he did not use his Twitter account (in the time period examined) to further anti-scientific rationalism in a substantial way, instead relying on press conferences and speeches perhaps for greater reach and effect. However, the second example contained in Table 6 represents an exemplar of the form. By tweeting about the supreme court and “real legal opinions” he both builds a narrative about how he/his supporters view knowledge production while criticising the scientific rationalism of a supreme court justice.

	Donald Trump	Hillary Clinton	Jill Stein
Knowledge and knowledge production	1. "@AnnCoulter: "I believe in science" Dem code for "we're shutting down coal mines, steel plants and any other remaining manufacturing"	1. "Donald Trump? Well, like most Republicans, he chooses to reject science. He believes that climate change is a 'hoax.'" — @BernieSanders	1. Here's how "scientific" polls reinforce the establishment by undercounting young, independent & low-income voters: https://t.co/afGpZjUjaL
	2. If I win the Presidency, we will swamp Justice Ginsburg with real judges and real legal opinions!	2. You oppose reproductive rights, support "conversion therapy," and proposed a Muslim ban. https://t.co/H04wanQIub	2. The Vioxx case shows how the hierarchy in the FDA and other regulatory bodies sacrifices science for vested interests. #GreenPartyForum

Table 6. Knowledge and knowledge production Tweet examples

Addressing the technique of *fantastic reality*, Hegerfeldt (2002) makes clear that “what individuals and groups will think of as “reality” depends to a not inconsiderable extent on social and cultural factors, causing expectations and assumptions about the world to differ with time and place”. This quote perfectly sums up the willingness of each candidates’ supporters to believe the “reality” of “fictions”. For instance, despite the existence of recorded evidence of Mr Trump’s controversial remarks pertaining to women, he brazenly tweeted that “nobody has more respect for women than me” (Table 7, example 1). As we now know, his outrageous statements did not affect the result of the election. One must therefore conclude that many of his supporters did not believe the “reality” of his aforementioned statements, their support was based on “social and cultural factors” and their “assumptions about the world” differed to the mainstream consensus and orthodoxy. Hegerfeldt (2002) continues this theme of contested and contingent reality by pointing out that “another effect of applying a “fantastic rhetoric” to elements from the extratextual world is to suggest that, in this day and age, life has in fact become “stranger than fiction””. This is evinced clearly in all the examples contained in Table 7. For example, Hillary Clinton’s tweet about the Ku Klux Klan’s endorsement of the Republican candidate and Jill Stein’s suggestion that she would pardon Edward Snowden and hire him as an advisor in her administration. The idea that Edward Snowden would be pardoned let alone become an advisor within the government runs contrary to the treatment of whistle-blowers throughout modern US history.

	Donald Trump	Hillary Clinton	Jill Stein
Fantastic reality	1. Nothing ever happened with any of these women. Totally made up nonsense to steal the election. Nobody has more respect for women than me!	1. Donald Trump just got one of his only newspaper endorsements of this election...from the Ku Klux Klan. https://t.co/kT4BZFuSPJ	1. I would pardon Edward @Snowden & welcome him as an advisor to balance national security with privacy & Constitutional rights. #GreenTownHall
	2. From day one I said that I was going to build a great wall on the SOUTHERN BORDER, and much more. Stop illegal immigration. Watch Wednesday!	2. Trump on Alicia, 1996: "Miss Piggy." This morning: "She gained a massive amount of weight...it was a real problem." https://t.co/owrISjJe6z	2. #ThingsHillaryGoogles: "next best place to sell fracking", "where to start a war", and "which corporations give the biggest donations?".

Table 7. Fantastic reality Tweet examples

Discussion

The 2008 US presidential election has been identified as being a cornerstone moment with regards to the effective use of social media in political campaigns (Wattal et al., 2010). Political candidates “had recognized the role of user-centred and user-generated media, by 2008, social networking sites such as Facebook already had 21 million registered members and generated 1.6 billion page views each day” (Ellison et al., 2007). However, Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez (2011) point out that the 2008 campaign was not the first to utilize information and communication technologies in a political campaign and make reference to Al Gore’s Blackberry usage during the 2000 presidential election and Howard Dean’s creation of numerous blogs during the 2003 Democrat candidate selection. However, studies examining the use of rhetorical techniques by political candidates through social media are very much at the early stages and represents an avenue ripe for scrutiny (Gerodimos and Justinussen, 2014). Gerodimos and Justinussen (2014) study of Obama’s 2012 Facebook campaign threw up some interesting results pertaining to techniques employed to foster voter engagement. Similar to our analysis, they found that political messages that make use of emotive language resonate with voters. Emotional acclaims “received on average 50,000 more likes than non-emotional ones...while words such as *care*, *trust*, *cheer on*, *fired up* and *fighting for* were seen as appealing to emotions” (Gerodimos and Justinussen, 2014, p. 126).

Addressing the contingent nature of language, Rorty (1989, p.3) argues that “about two hundred years ago, the idea that truth was made rather than found began to take hold of the imagination of Europe.” It is fair to say that this idea has now taken hold of the United States as well, with terms like ‘alternative facts’ and ‘post-truth’ entering the political lexicon. The makers of these (un)truths are to be found lurking behind every political campaign of the modern era. What has become evident over the course of our study is that magical realism has become a modern form of political rhetoric which is now being amplified through social media channels such as Twitter. In the case of Donald Trump, this was achieved mostly through negative sentiment. All three candidates’ use of magical realist techniques can be equated to a form of pre-Aristotelian rhetoric which was used as a means of blurring the reality of political discourse. Pre-Aristotelian theorists of rhetoric taught how to slander, arouse emotions and distract the attention of the audience. This style of rhetoric encourages a situation where audiences no longer form rational judgments about the given issues under discussion. This is in sharp contrast to Aristotelian rhetoric which was focused on rhetorical proof as a means of persuasion. From this viewpoint, there is no need to distract the audience

through emotion as most people will be convinced of an argument when they believe it to be proven (Rapp, 2010).

We also observed a shift in the tweeting patterns of the candidates, particularly Mrs Clinton and Dr Stein, in the time period examined. We can only speculate as to the reasons behind these shifts. However, it is reasonable to assume that the influence of backroom players such as advisors, campaign managers, social media managers etc., played a significant role in each candidates' tweeting strategy. It is common knowledge that individuals such as Steve Bannon, Robert Mercer and Dan Scavino (the White House Director of Social Media) held a significant influence over the campaign strategy of the GOP candidate. Steve Bannon is the executive chairman of Breitbart News, a far-right news and opinion website, and the now former White House Chief Strategist. Robert Mercer is a libertarian, hedge fund billionaire and a major investor behind the previously identified Cambridge Analytica. His role was mainly that of financier through his analytics company. However, as a self-proclaimed proponent of libertarianism and small government, ideas that have influenced Donald Trump more than traditional Conservative tenets such as social conservatism, his role may be unquantifiable but was nonetheless significant. These individuals helped to shape the rhetorical narrative of the campaign in varying ways. For example, Mr Bannon's former role as Chief Strategist and current role as executive chairman of Breitbart afforded him a deeply influential role in shaping the narrative of Mr Trump's social media campaign by tapping into populist, conspiracy theory and anti-science sentiment that his news organisation thrives on and which was clearly mirrored in a large proportion of the tweets examined. In addition, these sentiments had a clear triggering effect on certain electorate demographics. Dan Scavino flew under the radar somewhat during the campaign owing to the public's fascination with Steve Bannon. In contrast to the other candidates examined, Mr Trump's Twitter account did not experience a shift in the use of magical realism techniques in the six months examined because their strategy was more than likely pre-defined. In the case of Hillary Clinton, her digital operations were committee led. Jenna Lowenstein, the campaign digital director, supervised a team of over one hundred people working across social media platforms. As the campaign progressed, Mrs Clinton's Tweeting increasingly engaged the use of magical realism polemics, which as discussed earlier, was out of kilter from their routine party-political messaging. Jill Stein mostly relied on volunteers to run her campaign with a very small full-time team in comparison to the other candidates. Her Director of Communications, Dave Schwab held responsibility for her social media strategy. Once again as the campaign progressed, the tweets emanating from her account became more reactionary and were underpinned by magical realist techniques. However, we would like to point out that her use of these techniques paled in comparison to the other two candidates. We can only postulate that she used these techniques as a means garnering attention for her own party whose message was being drowned out by the posturing of both Mr Trump and Mrs Clinton.

Conclusion, Limitations and Future Research

In this paper, we presented a case for using magical realism as a tool for exploring the 'realities' of presidential nominee's tweets during political electoral campaigns. This study is one of the first to use a magical realism perspective to examine how three US presidential election candidates 2016 used Twitter as a tool for strategic storytelling and creating specific narratives for their electorate. Wattal et al. (2010) describe how "ancient Greek agora was seen as an open place for gathering, a free market both literally and in terms of ideas. It is associated with the utopian ideal of a direct democracy where citizens listen and share ideas and govern directly". By no means is the Twitter platform any form of an agora and may never reach that ideal. However, it is a "compelling tool to enable a large-scale movement of the free market of ideas and mutual influence from place to space" (Wattal et al., 2010). Further, our novel analysis of the period leading up to the 2016 presidential Election Day has revealed insights of how politicking on Twitter has the potential to be a game-changer. Our study provides some early indication that Twitter may serve as an effective power knowledge transfer medium for creating political narratives which are underpinned by specific magical realism techniques. According to Osborne and Roberts (2017) the 45th United States President was the first modern politician to have grasped Twitter's full potential to: "define issues in his own terms, simplify complex ideas, remove nuance and subtext, create a world of belief impervious to reality and, above all, remove any boundary between assertion and fact". As a final reflection, Twitter was a novelty in American politics in 2009, a necessity in 2012 and predicted as a medium for facilitating a more progressive and inclusive politics for the 2016 Presidential campaign (Pearson and O'Connell, 2012). However, our findings demonstrate that in the 6 months prior to the 2016 US election day, Twitter was used

as a powerful tool to deliver messages which were underpinned by magical realism elements aimed at eliciting partisan animosity and widespread popularization. The following questions then arise: what role will Twitter play in 2020 Presidential campaign and in more immediate election cycles? Will the 2016 Presidential election serve as a blueprint for future politicians on how to use Twitter to engage the emotions and the attentions of the electorate? We hope that future IS studies will be able to build upon our findings to not only identify magical realism and the context where appropriate, but move us ever closer to a more comprehensive understanding of how Twitter affects the electorate, and thus the intricacies of political engagement overall.

As with any other empirical research, the present study is subject to a number of limitations. However, at the same time, we view these limitations as avenues which are ripe for future research. First, the study only focused on Twitter. This limits the generalization of our findings to other online news and social-networking services such as Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn. We encourage researchers to use the magical realism concept as an anchor to provide theoretical analyses on how these social networking services are used for politicking. Second, while the researchers acknowledge that we cannot prove with certainty that each of the candidates strategically and purposively used magical realism techniques or are even familiar with the term our analysis has identified the prevalence magical realism in their Tweets during the 2016 US presidential election campaign. Another area of future research could be investigating other presidential candidates Tweets (e.g. Gary Johnson, Darrell Castle, Evan McMullan). Additionally, it would be worth conducting a retrospective analysis of the 2012 and 2008 US presidential election campaigns to ascertain the use of magical realism techniques underpinning the candidate's Tweets. Third, the study only focused on the US presidential election 2016 campaign. Future research could extend the application of the magical realism concept to investigate the use of Twitter for other political campaigns. For instance, political campaigns which are underpinned by populist, nativist and isolationist ideologies (e.g. the 2016 Brexit referendum and the 2017 French presidential election campaign) merit further scrutiny. Finally, we would also like to acknowledge the potential for researcher bias. From the initial study design, through to the development of the methodology and the reporting of the findings, the study made use of an audit trail and audit process (Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba, 2007). This ensured that the study was underpinned by rigor, authenticity and neutrality. We have provided sufficient details on the nature and source of our sample Tweets and our analyses of them, so that IS researchers can either replicate our study or consider the extent to which our findings can be compared to or transferred in other contexts. Ultimately, these aforementioned future studies will serve to validate our findings.

In summary, this paper offers the following contributions to the emerging IS Literature on the use of Twitter for political campaigns: (1) it applies the concept of magical realism to a new research domain. This nuanced perspective presented in this paper has not only provided new insights but is also intended to serve as a springboard for further IS investigation, (2) it provides a methodological contribution pertaining to the utilization of magical realism to understand how Twitter is shaping the new political landscape, and (3) it provides an illustration of the application of specific techniques which underpin the magical realism concept, their context and how they can be applied by other IS researchers.

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