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President Trump’s Manipulation of Digital Rhetoric to Maintain His Presidential Status

During the 2020 Election.

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Introduction

Rhetoric is the driving force fueling every persuasive, informative speech or message relayed by an individual or institution. It has had a momentous influence and effect on our world history and the way that events of both positive and detrimental value have unfolded within the timeline of human existence. As society and our world have advanced, so have our discoveries and usage of technology. In order to assimilate to these advancements however, society has inevitably found new ways to integrate everyday actions with the technology that has been created. This unification has brought forth a new wave of technological platforms and modes that have altered the way we communicate, such as social media and the web, ultimately bringing forth the term ‘digital rhetoric.’ In congruence with these platforms, prominent, influential figures have seized the opportunity to rhetorically communicate with this online audience. The most recurrent individuals to utilize these social platforms to connect with their audience are political figures; especially when political upheaval or campaigns are in effect.

To fully understand rhetoric as it is used by these powerful figures online, it is then necessary to discern how digital technology and platforms have created a new space for rhetorical communication. It is then crucial to narrow our view toward decorum and its major role within rhetoric. Upon examining these two ideas separately, it is then appropriate to conduct a full analysis on the correlation between these two topics in application towards Trump’s online discourse. By studying the ways in which Trump embraces the powerful tools of rhetoric, we can gain a more well-rounded, deeper understanding of how digital rhetoric operates on social platforms, such as Twitter, to effectively reach and influence a community.
Defining Rhetoric and Decorum as they Apply to the Digital and Political Landscape

The study of rhetorical devices can be traced back to as early as Aristotelian times. Through his studies, Aristotle provided a scholarly backing towards how rhetoric is used to convey messages. In simple terms, rhetoric can be defined as a communicative device and art form used for persuasive purposes in speeches, writing, or alternative art forms. Scholar James Jasinski (2001) has examined the operative wheels powering rhetoric’s epideictic discourse at its core by breaking down the term into smaller, more distinct outlets. He describes that there exists,

“Three common and distinct types of oratory into one larger generic category: the *ecomium* (speeches of praise of blame for a person or an institution), the *panegyric* (the “festival oration”), and the *epitaphios logos* (the eulogy or funeral oration), and the *epitaphios logos* (the eulogy for funeral oration”)” (p. 210).

Rhetoric ultimately is the extent to which an orator delivers a message through persuasive discourse by means of convincing the audience to align their views with his or hers. There are numerous ways and outlets in which one can achieve this, however, as society and time have progressed, so has technology. Accordingly, the way in which we communicate via the devices that advanced technology has brought forth to us subsequently invites new ways to display rhetoric across not only a targeted group of people, but an enlarged audience across the globe.

Perhaps the best way to introduce the marriage of the terms “digital” and “rhetoric” is through scholar Elizabeth Losh’s selection, “Hacking Aristotle.” Losh (2009) introduces the idea of digital rhetoric by providing four different angles that define it in relation to today’s technological age and society. She explains how digital rhetoric is first, a culmination of digital genres used online in everyday discourse, and second, how public rhetoric is expressed through political and government talk. Succeeding this, Losh then transitions to the third viewpoint on
digital rhetoric, stating how there is a growing concern for “rhetorical interpretation” of online-media, and lastly, how mathematics is being used to provide numerical backing to statements being made by a rhetor (Losh, 2009, p. 47). She further discusses how digital rhetoric is *paradoxical*, saying “You don’t always need a computer to do computer rhetoric” (p. 47). In conjunction with her exploration on rhetorical components, Losh discusses how digital platforms have restricted the traditional view and understanding of rhetoric, noting how, with the Internet, “the narrow Aristotelian definition that focuses on persuasion is disputed, even by some traditionalists” (Losh, 2009, p. 49).

Decorum is one aspect of discourse that plays a major role in rhetoric, as it is the way in which we behave online, and the propriety of what we discuss and say in the digital and virtual public sphere. According to Bengtsson and Bengt (2018) “Decorum refers to a set of behaviours where an actor presents him / herself in the visual or audio range of others” and is considered as practicing “aspects of decency in social interactions on the Internet” (Bengtsson & Bengt, 2018, pp. 99-103). Stemming from this, decorum matches one’s behavior to meet the norms and unspoken expectations that are appropriate given the circumstances and environment one is in. This understanding is reiterated in Jasinski’s explanation of decorum, when he states that “the concept of decorum, and the cluster of closely related terms that include *appropriateness* or *propriety* (from the Greek to *prepon*) and timing or the “opportune moment” occupies a central place in the history of rhetorical theory” (Jasinski, 2001, pp. 146-47). In terms of Trump’s display of decorum through digital rhetoric, the “circumstance” and “environment,” in which Trump finds himself in is the online platform of Twitter.

Jasinski (2001) further explains how Aristotle specifically broke down this rhetorical term into “three key aspects of Aristotelian decorum: appropriateness with respect to subject matter,
audience and occasion, and the rhetor’s character or ethos” (p. 147). In terms of appropriateness with respect to subject matter, the rhetor must find a topic that resonates with their targeted audience by means of successful persuasion. The second aspect, audience and occasion, alludes to how the rhetor must select the appropriate audience and occasion to convey their message so that their delivery is effective. Thirdly, the character or ethos of rhetoric refers to maintaining an image that is powerful, affirmative, and that matches the subject matter and common ground in which the rhetor is speaking in favor of (p. 147).

Decorum undeniably lays down the boundaries and rules that people abide to when creating and engaging in discussion in differing settings and with varying audiences. The ways in which this rhetorical concept and tool explicitly influences political behavior is examined by Robert Hariman (1992), who states that decorum provides “both the major stylistic code for verbal composition and the social knowledge required for political success” (p. 152). He furthers this analysis by distinguishing compliance to decorum as something that demonstrates character and the ability to appropriately behave oneself in the environment they choose to verbally engage in. Specifically, he states that decorum presents itself “as a grammar of self-control,” that goes against “the natural forces of impulse and irrationality which threaten always to bring one to self-destruction” (Harriman, 992, p. 155). From a political perspective, politicians and other figures of power need to elevate and portray themselves as professionals who are capable of proactively leading the country towards further success and prosperity. Arguably of most importance, however, is that they maintain themselves and their image as a proponent representing the professionalism, civility and rectitude that their respective society expects of them on a national and international scale.
Relating Rhetoric and Decorum to Trump’s Online Twitter Presence

With a foundational understanding of the interworkings of rhetoric and decorum as they pertain to the digital landscape and political discourse, it is now appropriate to apply them towards Trump’s language displayed on Twitter. President Trump is one of the most notorious political figures to incontestably display their rhetorical messages on digital, social platforms, most notably, Twitter. Despite the upheaval he currently and historically has caused through his digital rhetoric on Twitter, Trump undeniably calls a significant amount of attention towards his name, thus, serving as a leading candidate to study in examining how digital rhetoric is successfully used and interpreted in this day and age.

Scholar Joseph Zompetti provides a thorough analysis of Trump’s rhetorical display on Twitter beginning with his 2016 election through to 2019. He conducts this effort by strategically breaking down a timeline of Trump’s Twitter engagement to demonstrate three rhetorical tactics he has employed to defend himself online as a presidential figure. The first strategy which he refers to is the way in which Trump bashes the media to vindicate and protect himself against the criticism he receives from the way he chooses to behave (Zompetti, 2019, p. 41). The tweet below written by Trump is an example that can be referred to in order to develop a basic understanding and connection between this view of rhetorical language and Trump’s strategy which attacks the media, as outlined by Zompetti. On September 25, 2019, the president explicitly wrote that:
This tweet demonstrates how Trump is quick to use the tactic of attacking mainstream media dignitaries as a way to present himself to the world as accessed through the Internet. Here, Trump initiates his post by referencing his impeachment scandal. Immediately following this, he calls out Fox News host Steve Doocey and the entire Fox News station for proactively covering and fueling this topic. These at-signs to both sources’ Twitter handles are added as cutting remarks with the intention to call these figures out and discredit them by means of aggrandizing himself. This is confirmed when he lists off the “great success” experienced in this country, such as with “the Economy, Military, Vets, Tax and Regulation Cuts, Healthcare, and so much more!” (Trump, 2019).

This tweet is also an effective example that embodies both the second and third building blocks of rhetoric that Losh refers to in her definition of this topic. First, Trump is using digital rhetoric to publicly address the political talk and tension between him and Fox and Friends news host Steve Doocey. Secondly, the ‘rhetorical interpretation’ of Trump’s tweet is one that is suggestive, as he is using sarcasm and an almost unprofessional, childish manner to convey the message to his online audience that Steve Doocey is wrong since Trump is bringing such success
to the United States. This is especially emphasized when Trump states that Fox and Friends News is attacking him for no reason while he continues to implement “the great success we are having with the Economy, the military, Vets, Tax and Regulation Cuts, Healthcare, and so much more!” (Trump, 2019). In essence, Trump is using Twitter as a digital platform where he can not only rhetorically convey his messages and ideas on politics, but where he can fight for and defend his name. Nonetheless, the way in which he implements his display of rhetoric raises some concerning flags.

Another example that illustrates one of basic ways that Trump tends to violate standards of decorum is in one recent tweet published in the fall of 2019, Trump went *against* decorum through his display of digital rhetoric by inappropriately name calling, blaming, and using unpresidential sarcasm to elevate himself while putting down others:

![Twitter screenshot](https://example.com/tweet-screenshot)

“*The very thing that they are accusing President Trump of doing (which I didn’t do), was actually done by Joe Biden. Continues to be a double standard.*** @RepDevinNunes @foxandfriends These people are stone cold Crooked. Also, who is this so-called “whistleblower” who doesn’t..."

11:29 AM · Sep 23, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone

18.1K Retweets 77.2K Likes

Elaborating upon this rhetorical concept of decorum, in the words of Jasinski (2001), this device ultimately “occupies a central place in the history of rhetorical theory,” as it analyzes and examines the value conduct and behavior” (p. 147). Relating this to the President’s tweet displayed above,
Trump is using inappropriate, unpresidential behavior to condemn and blame the individuals who are against his political actions and stance. Trump’s statements on this platform represent his digression from decorum, as he uses harsh language and makes rather discriminatory remarks that go against society's agreement to maintain formality, civility, and respect. Furthermore, this sort of rhetoric displayed in the tweet above that’s framed around politics is influenced by the open, instantaneous nature of the web. Jasinski, who is aware of this idea, explains how:

“Political ideology might be a key factor in shaping the worldview of a particular community. Whatever its sources, a community’s worldview enables its members to understand the meaning of the events that surround them” (p. 212).

Through a social platform such as Twitter, Trump is able to successfully execute this exact point made by Jasinski: to use digital rhetoric as the ‘source’ and ‘worldview’ to display his message and persuade the audience that he is not guilty through placing the blame on someone else, Representative Devin Nunes, and on something else, Fox and Friends News.

Another particular rhetorical tool that Trump embraces within his digital rhetoric is epideictic speech. Epideictic, in short, either praises or blames something or someone by means of persuading the audience to align their beliefs with the orator’s. Specifically, as Jasinski (2001) outlines, epideictic is a rhetorical device used when addressing someone with praise, or to blame an individual or institution (p. 210). By using epideictic discourse an orator can further reframe and position a certain viewpoint, idea, or deflect praise or blame for their personal benefit. Trump thoroughly uses this type of rhetoric in his tweets; especially when he is targeted by outside groups, individuals, or when he is held accountable for a wrongful action. As a result, when analyzing Trump’s tweets, it is often found his engagement of epideictic speech to breach political decorum
to consequently obtain a larger audience. This can be seen in the following tweet that was formerly used in the example above provided in light of analyzing decorum.

In addition to using digital rhetoric in this tweet to discuss politics and the government as scholar Losh (2009) suggests, Trump uses epideictic in this same post to blame Joe Biden instead of accepting that he was in the wrong for a controversial event that unfolded. This is yet another example that demonstrates how Trump’s Twitter content library is a principle source of breaches in traditional, professional decorum in politics and presidency.

In this particular tweet, Trump uses digital rhetoric to defend himself by integrating the usernames of the individuals targeting him to call them out in front of a digital audience. Another part of digital rhetoric that further places the blame directly on another institution and individual is the ‘@’ symbol. By using one’s username with the @ symbol in front, the rhetor can instantaneously call that individual out and showcase blame or praise on their account for the world to see at a simple press of a button. Ultimately, Trump seeks to defend his image and his presidential, professional reputation in light of the 2020 campaign. In order to preserve this image in a time
where he is being publicly attacked, Trump takes to digital rhetoric through Twitter to deflect this blame directly onto his biggest campaign rival and political party opponent.

Deflection and denial are two other components of rhetoric that are abundantly used by Trump on Twitter. Specifically, they can be used to disrupt decorum by allowing an individual to refrain or hide from any sort of accusation or wrongdoing placed on them. This leads us into the second rhetorical strategy that is outlined by Zompetti. In a tweet published in September of 2019, Trump directly refers to the whistleblower who called him out in a Ukraine scandal:

> Like every American, I deserve to meet my accuser, especially when this accuser, the so-called “Whistleblower,” represented a perfect conversation with a foreign leader in a totally inaccurate and fraudulent way. Then Schiff made up what I actually said by lying to Congress......

Here, Trump embraces the tactic of deflection by turning the blame onto the whistleblower, and then calling out Adam Schiff for “lying to Congress” (Trump, 2019). He also victimizes himself by saying “I deserve to meet my accuser.” Through this, he turns the table to reframe the situation to look as though he is the one being attacked by an outside figure of power (Trump, 2019).

Rhetoric has undeniably shifted to meet the demands and nature of online, social platforms. This change has inevitably created the term ‘digital rhetoric,’ which is the way in which orators interact with an audience online that extends far beyond targeting a specific group of people or
institution. In short, digital rhetoric is displayed and shared across the entire globe to those who have access to the Internet or social platforms and is a popular way for prominent leaders and individuals to display their messages and gain a mass following. Trump is an exemplary figure who embraces the nature and essence of digital rhetoric to display his views, maintain a large follower base, and preserve both his identity and presidential image for everyone to see. Although the way in which he utilizes digital rhetoric breaches the decorum of the Internet, he most certainly uses traditional rhetorical forms, such as epideictic speech, to persuade his audience that he is still worthy of being a political, presidential figure. The following case studies will offer a more in-depth, detailed analysis of his tweets stemming from major arguments and scandals within his presidency, to provide an encompassing perspective of his misuse of rhetoric and breach of online decorum.
Case Study No. 1: Key Words Used by Donald Trump that Disrupt Presidential and Online Decorum

One of the leading traits that distinguishes President Trump from other presidential figures and politicians is his selective vocabulary and the way that he articulates himself to various audiences through his accusing tone. Explicitly, President Trump is both currently and historically known for his tone and immoderate comments conveyed through the media. This discourse has only been heightened through his utilization of social media platforms such as Twitter, and digital news sources that both publish written coverage and broadcast live footage of Trump. The president has gained a tremendous amount of traction since the early stages of his participation in the 2016 Presidential Election. What made Trump so interesting in the public eye was that, unlike his opponents who were well adept and accomplished within the realm of politics, Trump was predominantly known as a media dignitary and business figure. To reconstruct this image into the mold of a political leader, Trump went to great lengths to grasp the American audience’s attention. This was ultimately achieved by using a significant number of rhetorical and linguistic devices within his argumentative statements as a way to position himself as the ultimate candidate best fit to run the Oval Office. He has carried this theme of public display and rhetorical discourse with him through his presidential term and into the 2020 election campaign that is currently underway. Taking this into consideration, this case will address how Trump has continued to use rhetoric not only as a way to maintain his presidential and political image under the controversial spotlight, but how his engagement on digital platforms such as Twitter, and the attention he has received from digital news sources, have only enhanced his rhetorical objectives.

Indisputably, Trump’s colorful language is not confined to his public addresses and profound involvement in both the press and the presidential campaign, as he incorporates the same
type of discourse and tongue into his social media platforms. Stemming from his perpetual presence online, it is easy to identify and subsequently enumerate the repeated use of certain words in his vocabulary due to the archival nature of the Internet. In particular, there exist 234 tweets with the word “loser,” in them; making it the most commonly used key word by Trump (Trump Twitter Archive, n.d.). This repetitive usage of key words further plays into the rhetoric of epideictic speech, as a rhetor uses this device through written or oral speech to persuade, blame or praise a situation, belief, another person, or institution in order to gain attention and support. In light of this paper’s subject, Trump embraces epideictic speech to place blame on someone else, to call them out for going against old, traditional community morals that have prompted Trump to “Make America Great Again.” This employment of epideictic speech also leads to other rhetorical devices that will be explored in this opening case study, such as the stickiness factor, the violation of both political and professional decorum, and strategic political incorrectness. In order to maintain the relevance of the 2020 Presidential Election, the tweets that will be examined all fall under 2019 and 2020 timeline to best capture how he uses rhetoric to appropriate himself during the presidential election.

In the opening example that follows, Trump harnesses epideictic speech to place blame on three individuals; all within the breadth of Twitter’s 250-character limit. He specifically does not refrain from calling out Amazon WP, U.S Representative Adam Schiff and the Ukrainian scandal all in one.
Here, it is evident how Trump is not afraid to voice his rather strong feelings towards the two workers mentioned above, calling them “stone cold losers” (Trump, 2020). Immediately following his “loser” remark, Trump then shifts his focus towards Adam Schiff, calling him a “corrupt pol” and employing the nickname “Shifty Schiff.” This tweet offers numerous examples of not only how presidential decorum is debased by Trump, but how he takes advantage of rhetoric to defend his image amid the 2020 elections. His employment of colloquialisms such as “pol,” “stone cold” and “losers,” stray far from the conventional, dignified language and presentation that someone of his standing would harness in an online platform that can be accessed by an international audience. Nonetheless, when examining the underlying connotations associated with these specific words and phrases, it is evident that they serve a purpose in the president’s rhetoric. Specifically, the sharp and ambiguous nature of these belittling words stand out to the viewer, prompting the audience to remember these Tweets long after having viewed them. Accordingly, Trump’s name-calling tactic used to defend himself is repeatedly ingrained in the minds of those engaging with his tweets; in doing so, he thus demonstrates the deployment of epideictic speech, where he places
blame on an outside entity and individual to enhance his reputation and attract both recognition and support from the American population amidst a scandal he is directly involved in. This leads us to consider the “stickiness factor” of rhetoric, which is the propensity to grasp and sustain an audience’s attention long after a message is delivered.

Scholar Malcom Gladwell analyzes and subsequently breaks down this concept in a way that is digestible across all audiences with varying understandings of rhetoric. Gladwell explains how something is considered rhetorically “sticky,” when by nature it is capable of making an audience become attracted and transfixed on a message or an oral, visual, or written delivery of words. He further specifies how “stickiness should be straightforward. When most of us want to make sure what we say is remembered, we speak with emphasis” (Gladwell, 2000, p. 92). This clearly applies to Trump’s rhetoric; he uses certain, powerful words and sentence structures that are straightforward and concise in their message. Emanating from this, Trump, is able to obtain a sort of power and command through his tweets.

To provide a full understanding of the rhetorical wheels of the stickiness factor, Gladwell explains how it is the culmination of simplistic elements that end up making something stay in our memory. Specifically, he notes how “If you look closely at epidemic ideas or messages, as often as not the elements that make them sticky turn out to be small” (Gladwell, p. 96). In this case, the simplistic elements of Trump’s Tweets are words that stray far from presidential, professional decorum, such as the word “loser.” This leads us to consider how Trump’s infringement of online, professional decorum also breaches political correctness.

The concept of political correctness in today’s digital age is thoroughly examined by scholars Kirsten Theye and Steven Melling, who take into consideration how Trump’s digression from diplomatic appropriateness has paradoxically worked to elevate him. They explain how,
“If Trump has a single salient conviction, it is that things must be done differently. This argument has allowed him to prosper from his unconventional political style, rather than treat it as a liability. From the outset, Trump’s weakness has been his lack of political experience and skill, but by elevating the presence of the political correctness to exigence, this weakness can come to be viewed as a strength” (Theye & Melling, p. 325).

Theye and Melling’s analysis of the rhetorical framework behind Trump’s language and presentation online demonstrates how rhetoric can be used to reframe one’s public image and reputation. Specifically, it supports the conviction that standing out against accustomed standards and notions of society incontestably draws attention to that individual, in this case, Trump. This corresponds to the president’s use of epideictic speech by means of placing blame on those who practice political correctness, and therefore have ignored traditional needs and beliefs of the American population. On account of this, Trump is able to draw a large assemblage of people who pay attention to his messages. This is a frequent theme carried through the majority of tweets posted by Trump.

In the second example that follows, Trump once again deploys these rhetorical devices and uses the word “loser” to denounce Tim O’Brien, who wrote a book about him titled “TrumpNation: The Art of Being Donald Trump,” by means of salvaging his reputation.
Here, Trump callously calls O’Brien a “world class loser,” and proceeds to explain how “he wrote a failed hit piece book” on the president before he took office (Trump, 2019). Once again, Trump uses the deflection tactic of rhetoric to go against a figure who poses a threat to his reputation and candidacy. This is reiterated when Trump elevates himself by countering O’Brien’s own credibility, stating how he was “fired like a dog” (Trump, 2019). Continuing with this statement, his comparison of Tim O’Brien to “a dog” and “a world class loser” falls in line with the stickiness factor, as these statements capture and maintain a reader’s attention - regardless of where they fall on the political spectrum. Continuing this thread of conversation, Trump posted a follow-up tweet that reproached MSNBC and CNN news stations; calling those against him “haters and losers” (Trump, 2019).
In this succeeding post, Trump puts down the “Haters and Losers” who have been against him since the 2016 election. He also asserts that “people have no idea what [he is] all about,” regardless of the expertise and knowledge that they claim to possess (Trump, 2019). Once again, we are brought back to consider just how epideictic speech plays a pivotal role in Trump’s rhetoric articulated through his tweets. Specifically, the **adherence** and **identity** values of epideictic are employed in this tweet as well as the others that have been previously examined. Beginning with adherence, according to scholar James Jasinski (2001),

> “Epideictic discourse reinforces adherence to certain values (e.g., liberty, charity, hard work); epideictic reinforcement preserves an existing a foundation for subsequent advocacy based on the reinforced values” (Jasinski, 2001, p. 210).

In application to this paper, Trump adopts the adherence quality in his epideictic speech to demonstrate his congruence with traditional, American values such as “liberty, charity” and “hard work,” which Trump believes has been neglected by the political structure and political correctness
currently in effect (Jasinski, 2001, p. 210). Through this, Trump incontestably attempts to reinforce these values and thus increase his follower base (Jasinski, p. 210). Using epideictic discourse, Trump tries to regain and preserve the respect, credibility and dignity he still has while under the negative spotlight that MSNBC and CNN guest speakers have placed on him, by trying to find similar ground through supporting a commonly held belief or concern. This is demonstrated when he frames his adversaries as “Haters and Losers,” thus positioning himself as someone who stands as an advocate to those who are feel voiceless in today’s political landscape.

In this same example, Trump also utilizes the *identity* aspect of epideictic speech, which, in the words of Jasinski (2001), is a rhetorical application where “members of a community see themselves as possessing certain characteristics or as being a particular type of ‘people’” (Jasinski, 2001, p. 212). Specifically, Jasinski focuses on identity as it applies to a community’s values. Noting how this topic is prevalent across the United States, Jasinski states how,
“Contemporary public discourse in America is saturated with ‘values talk.’ Different individuals and groups see substantial threats to the nation’s moral standards, our attitudes regarding the centrality of the family, and our commitment to personal responsibility” (Jasinski, 2001, p. 212).

As this passage suggests, identity in epideictic speech can be used to alter the shaming by deflecting it back on to the person delivering the shame. By doing so, the person employing this rhetorical tactic not only justifies their standpoint by making themselves appear victimized, they also use identity to resonate with the audience by making the accuser appear to be the wrongdoer. In correspondence to the tweet above, Trump blames MSNBC and CNN for featuring people who are not credible in discussing his efforts and actions, claiming they “have no idea what I am all about,” and how they have created a track record of inaccurate claims about him since before the 2016 election, which he subsequently won in favor of the greater American population (Trump, 2019). Although he breaches decorum by straying from political correctness through calling out his “Haters and Losers,” Trump reframes himself through rhetoric to appear as the victim who has worked hard to give back the voice of the American population; as reiterated in his tweet when he reminds his audience about how he overcame his doubters by winning the 2016 election (Trump, 2019). The culmination of these rhetorical devices places Trump at an angle where he can be viewed as someone who is standing up for the greater good of the country and its people. This is once again supported by Jasinski (2001), who states how we inevitably “encounter a substantial amount of epideictic discourse - from speeches by the president to sermons at our local churches and synagogues - that encourage a reaffirmation of core values” (Jasinski, p. 212).
Epideictic speech and its rhetorical implications can further be examined in the following Tweet, where Trump places blame on the downfall of American politics on Tom Steyer, who recently dropped out as a candidate in the presidential race.

In this particular tweet, Trump calls Tom Steyer “a joke,” who is “laughed at by everyone, a total incompetent.” Through this, Trump navigates his way around the shaming and criticism thrown at him by reconfirming his adherence to the country’s shared value of strong leaders, therefore promising to be better, as “epideictic praise of another can also indirectly enhance the ethos of the speaker or writer” (Oravec, qtd. In Jasinski, p. 211). He also employs the identity aspect of epideictic speech, as he addresses this tweet “To the people of South Carolina,” the state where Steyer channeled a significant amount of money into while he was running for presidency (Summers & Schapitl, 2020, para. 2). Through this example specifically, Trump uses rhetoric to position Steyer as someone who goes against the American needs and values, further stating how he made money from something he now hates” (Trump, 2020). This implies that his interests only lie with his own personal gain, and therefore not for the right reasons that would
benefit the American population. This is an excellent opening for Trump to demonstrate and indirectly imply in his tweet why Americans should re-elect him, as he is in this for the best interests of the people. In essence, President Trump deflects the blame and negative feedback placed on him by reminding the country that his actions are all performed for the greater good of the American population, thereby aligning these actions to the same identity and morals that Americans have. Through this, he is able to fully grasp the rhetorical reigns to redirect his course and navigate through a time where he must once again defend his image and elevate himself in order to be re-elected as President of the United States.

In sum, the colorful language used by Trump allows him to defend his image through the strategic usage of powerful rhetorical devices such as epideictic speech, the acknowledgement of decorum, the stickiness factor, and the rhetoric behind political incorrectness. An additional recurring rhetorical device that is wielded throughout Trump’s tweets explored above and throughout this paper is the particular use of labels for each person that Trump targets in his tweets. Accordingly, this particular assignment of nicknames and abbreviations are subsequent rhetorical theme that will be explored in the later sections of this paper.
Case No. 2: Trump’s use of name calling as a response towards his Impeachment in the wake of the 2020 presidential election

Shifty Schiff

Name calling is a device long used as a deflection strategy to divert attention or blame onto an outside entity or individual. According to scholar Michael Sproule (2001), name calling falls under the seven propaganda devices outlined in a 1937 *Propaganda Analysis* article originating from the Institute for Propaganda Analysis (IPA), and has been employed for rhetorical purposes in speech and writing (Sproule, 2001, p. 135). Specifically, name calling is understood to be a tactic wherein “The propagandist conjures hate or fear by attaching unattractive labels ‘to those individuals, groups, nations, races, polices, practices, beliefs, and ideals which he would have us condemn and reject’” (*Propaganda Analysis*, 1937, as qtd. in Sproule, p. 136). President Trump is well known for his frequent usage of name calling, with his invented names including Do Nothing Dems, Crooked Hillary, Lyin’ Ted, Shifty Adam Schiff, and Nervous Nancy Pelosi, to name a few examples. Through this act of mockery and the explicit assignment of particular names, Joseph Zompetti (2019) explains how,

> “Using a platform like Twitter to convey these sorts of messages also reinforced their toxic nature since they were disseminated in curt, truncated soundbites for the sole purpose of creating a spectacle to generate more attention – even if negative – toward Trump” (p. 49).

Through this statement, Zompetti conveys how the usage of Twitter, its communication of politics, and the online circulation of political content are interwoven and coincide with one another, thus, demonstrating how this platform’s structure ultimately promotes incivility within modern political communication (Zompetti, 2019). This exact rhetorical implication of name-calling and deflection
is echoed in the majority of not only Trump’s tweets, but in his overarching public discourse. Equivalently, Melling and Theye (2018) argue that,

“Trump’s rhetoric is simple in its lack of familiar tropes like alliteration or anything of the sort. Phrases like “Crooked Hillary” and “Lyin’ Ted” do not seem particularly artful. This is because Trump’s rhetoric is designed for quantity, rather than quality; he does not count on a phrase like “Lying Ted” to stand on its poetic qualities. These labels are so inartful that they somehow seem authentic” (p. 326).

Name calling can be directly linked to the breaching of decorum, as it calls out other entities in a way that is childish and accordingly fails to abide to the professionalism of political decorum online. To better understand how Trump strategically nicknames to gain attention and advance within the election, tweets utilizing these nicknames that have been published strictly within the timeframe of the 2020 election will be examined. By analyzing the most relevant tweets pertaining to the current presidential race, I strive to demonstrate how Trump uses the rhetoric behind name calling to his advantage in order to propel himself further into the 2020 election.

One politician Trump has repeatedly labeled and defamed on social media is Congressman Adam Schiff. Navigating through various media coverage and Twitter, it is evident that Trump has used the social platform as a way to denounce and hash out his feelings of averseness towards the politician without holding back from abiding to professional and political decorum. This act of straying from propriety on the global platform does a number of things for Trump. In hindsight, various officials, politicians, and prominent figures have taken to Twitter to call out the president for either the scandals, misbehavior or wrongdoings that he is responsible for. In response, Trump has assertively fired back at the culmination of these accusations in effort to defend his name and credibility. Trump’s efforts to protect and promote his image amid the online heat he has received
has escalated during the 2020 Presidential Election. Beginning with as recent as October of 2019, Trump publicly addresses the impeachment scandal by calling out Schiff as one of his involved accusers. Rather than calling it a scandal, however, he labels it as a “hoax,” thereby rhetorically framing it in a way that downplays the severity of the situation being addressed and defending his image.

In this tweet, it is evident that name calling and other various rhetorical devices are at play. At the onset of the first sentence, Trump immediately uses deflection as it relates to epideictic speech to reframe the situation and shame being placed on him. As a result, he goes right into defending his name and thereby protecting the presidential image that he strives to maintain as he navigates through potential re-election during the 2020 political landscape. Within this same sentence, Trump also refers to Schiff using the nickname “Shifty Schiff,” which he notoriously made up for him. The play on words and alliteration not only position the situation back towards Schiff, but the nickname “Shifty” also emplaces Schiff as someone who is duplicitous. According to Sproule
(2001), the underlying goal when using name calling is “to make people form a thoughtless judgement under the influence of an emotional impression” (p. 136). In this particular case, the strong connotation of the word “shifty,” coupled with Adam Schiff, immediately signals that the politician is untrustworthy. This is a theme that is interwoven throughout the majority of Trump’s tweets targeting Schiff.

To further portray himself as innocent by deflecting blame away from him, Trump responds with a follow-up tweet of how the wrongdoings of the impeachment scandal fall entirely on Schiff. Building upon his deflection tactic, another rhetorical strategy that Trump employs is what Zompetti (2019) refers to as playing the “victim” (p. 45). Taking primarily to Twitter to defend his name, Trump uses “the childish sandbox argument of ‘but what about you!’” to claim victimhood (p. 45).

Continuing with this theme, the succeeding tweet also references the whistleblower scandal as it relates to Trump and Adam Schiff. Specifically, Trump calls out Schiff for wrongfully engaging in the “Impeachment Hoax” using the nickname “Shifty Schiff,” claiming that his words are “made
up garbage,” (Trump, 2019). The name-calling technique is once again at play when Trump calls those who do not support him “Never Trumpers” (Trump 2019). The use of the nickname “Never Trumpers,” places Trump in a position that characterizes him as a victim to those who are against him, ultimately framing him to be the innocent, commendable figure in this position, while the “Never Trumpers” and “Shifty Adam Schiff” are in the wrong (Trump, 2019). According to Christian Fuchs (2018), this technique falls in line with intertextuality of rhetoric, as “he frequently links to other online material,” and repeats certain ideas “to talk about himself, thank his voters, allies and followers, and rant about his enemies” (p. 204). In this particular tweet referenced below, Trump specifically “rants about his enemies” by referencing the “Never Trumpers” and the “garbage” manufactured by “Shifty Schiff” (Fuchs, 2018; Trump, 2019).

As previously referenced, Zompetti (2019) emphasizes how referring to someone else in an exaggerated manner, regardless of whether it is positive or negative, ultimately draws in more traffic and attention towards the person making the claim. Specifically, this assignment of “a childish name” ultimately “exacerbated an already extremely tense situation” (Zompetti, 2019, p. 49). This coupled with “using a platform like Twitter to convey these sorts of messages,” inevitably
draws attention towards the individual making these claims; in this case, Trump (p. 49). As a result, Trump is able to depict himself as a victim through name-calling and by using epideictic speech to blame Schiff and praise himself.

In December of 2019, Trump once again refers to Adam Schiff as “Shifty Schiff,” and includes both former FBI Director James Comey and the Twitter handle for Fox News into his tweet. Explicitly, he is highly undiplomatic in his descriptions of the three entities that are all being condemned.

It is evident that Trump uses colorful language to portray the individuals referenced above, calling Comey a “sleazebag and totally discredited,” and Adam “Shifty” Schiff a “corrupt politician” (Trump, 2019). Zompetti (2019) offers an analysis on this discursive strategy often employed by Trump to better understand how its rhetorical nature further elevates his standing in terms of the 2020 election, as well as how it allows him to gain further traction and attention from a highly popular social platform. Tracing back to Trump’s political tweets during the 2016 election, Zompetti notes how, just as he continues to do online today, “Trump frequently tweeted comments
about how the political system was rigged in general, and unfairly slanted against him in particular” (p. 46). By doing so, Trump employs the rhetorical tactic of epideictic speech where he voices blame to sway his audience into siding with him. This is directly seen in the tweet above, as Trump positions himself as the victim of a biased system operating against him by stating how an accredited news source such as Fox News is “interviewing sleazebag and totally discredited & totally discredited former FBI Director James Comey, & also corrupt politician Adam ‘Shifty’ Schiff” (Trump, 2019). Building upon this same concept, Trump also places himself as a figure who is unfairly attacked by others in the political landscape due to his non-political roots. This falls parallel to the ecomium attribute of epideictic speech, in which Jasinski (2001) outlines as “speeches of praise of blame for a person or an institution” with the intention of acquiring support from a targeted audience” (p. 210). Trump’s use of blame to victimize himself as an outsider who is unfairly targeted by other politicians and institutions allows him to appear innocent while drawing attention to himself. His continuous use of nickname assignments to those that pose a threat to his current and future presidential status allows him to strengthen his rhetorical strategy to further propel him forward in his re-election. The rhetorical implications of this specific employment of name calling and its repetition on social media will be further explored in the next example: Trump’s nickname for Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi.

**Nervous Nancy Pelosi**

Nancy Pelosi is another prominent politician who has fallen victim to Trump’s notorious name-calling tactic. Pelosi, who represents San Francisco California’s 12th district, is the 52nd Speaker of the House of Representatives and the first woman to hold a Speaker position, is undoubtedly accredited within American politics. Nonetheless, Trump has predominantly taken to Twitter to denounce her within the online sphere due to the line of history and the adversarial
relationship they share. Just as with Schiff, Clinton and other political opponents of Trump, Pelosi has also been caught in the crossfire of the president’s substantial use of name-calling; her sobriquet being Negative Nancy Pelosi. Just as with “Shifty Schiff,” the alliteration between the politicians’ names and the word used by Trump to denote them factor into his rhetorical strategy of using epideictic speech to blame others. In the example that follows, Trump reproves of Pelosi’s position not only as a politician, but in relation to his Impeachment Scandal.

The principal usage of rhetoric can be found at the outset of the tweet when he calls Pelosi “Nervous Nancy.” Specifically, his employment of name-calling and alliteration further contribute to the stickiness factor of rhetoric, as, according to Gladwell (2000), “stickiness should be straightforward. When most of us want to make sure what we say is remembered, we speak with emphasis” (p. 92). Inarguably, the concise words he chooses, as well as the connotation and meaning of the words themselves, pushes onto the American people Trump’s views regarding the individuals who threaten his reputation and his ability to be re-elected in the ongoing presidential
race. This ultimately benefits his rhetorical strategy of reframing the situation to make him appear as the victim in order to increase his supporters. The stickiness of his name-calling strategy is evident in the smooth yet compact manner of addressing her as “Nervous Nancy;” the term “nervous” specifically used to hinder her reputation and position her views as uncertain and tentative. This viewpoint is immediately confirmed when he states how she is “a disgrace to herself and her family,” for making “such a disgusting statement,” as it pertains to the situation with leaders outside of the U.S. (Trump, 2019). By ending with this statement that he “was with foreign leaders overseas,” and that “there is no evidence for such a thing to have been said,” Trump reframes the situation to appear as though Pelosi made her statement without any supportive facts or evidence, and that she is trying to blame him while he was conducting presidential duties with other leaders to serve his country (Trump, 2019). To further victimize himself by means of gaining attention and support, Trump concludes his tweet by putting down and discrediting the work of not only Pelosi, but the entire Democratic Party, finishing with “Nervous Nancy & Dems are getting Zero work done in Congress….” (Trump, 2019). By beginning and concluding with “Nervous Nancy,” Trump aims to drive in and sway the American population into supporting his stance by making himself appear to be the one working for the country’s greater good; thus, employing the stickiness factor of rhetoric. In addition to deploying this device, Trump further uses the ecomium of epideictic speech to rhetorically reframe the situation so that he appears to be the victim of other political individuals who are against him. This is indicated by Zompetti (2019) who explains how, “Trump’s tweets suggest how they buttressed a larger narrative about how he was not a typical politician and, as an outsider, the political system was ganging up against him” (p. 46). Accordingly, by tweeting how Pelosi and the Democratic Party have done “Zero work” and that Pelosi herself is disgraceful for making “such a disgusting statement,” about him while
he was performing his presidential obligations, Trump positions himself as innocent and hardworking, while his opponents are in the wrong (Trump, 2019).

In the following tweet, Trump begins immediately with his name assignment for Pelosi, once again calling her “Nervous Nancy,” then proceeds to condemn her for trying to obstruct the Republican Party. Specifically, this example can be rhetorically examined alongside Trump’s name-calling as it pertains to Adam Schiff, as he concludes with calling Schiff a “corrupt politician” (Trump, 2019).

This tweet is unequivocally rich in rhetorical devices. Just as the preceding tweet, Trump kicks off this post by starting with “Nervous Nancy Pelosi,” and immediately pairs her nickname with how she seeks to “destroy the Republican Party” (Trump, 2019). Continuing with victimizing by means of rhetorically driving in a particular message, Trump makes it clear that, despite Pelosi and others who counter his work and beliefs, the Republican Party’s “Polls show that it is going to be just the opposite” (Trump, 2019). Interestingly enough, Trump refrains from using numerical proof to back up this statement. Nonetheless, he follows this by reiterating the faults of the opposing party,
stating how “The Do Nothing Dems will lose many seats in 2020” (Trump, 2019). By following his claim about the success of his polls with one that places the Democratic Party in a negative light, Trump is employing rhetoric by praising his own party and efforts while simultaneously placing blame on the others. This leads us to consider the authenticity of Trump’s tweets as it applies to rhetoric. To clarify on how authenticity factors into Trump’s rhetorical strategy, Theye & Melling (2018) explain how his attacks and metonyms further full his intentions. They explicitly state how,

“Trump’s simple ad hominem attacks are rhetorical in the sense that they create metonyms through their perceived authenticity and dogged repetition. The abstract concept of crookedness, or corruption, was firmly attached to Clinton. And the notion of untruthfulness was attached to Ted Cruz. By creating these making metonyms, Trump was able to deflect salient criticism that he was actually the corrupt candidate and/or a liar” (p. 326).

Applying this analysis to the tweet above, the concise metonyms that Trump employs are “Polls,” and “Dems.” Additionally, his repetition of nicknames throughout his tweets during the 2020 election, such as “Nervous Nancy,” and “Shifty Schiff,” allow him to press his views onto the public sphere to “deflect salient criticism” by means of appearing as the innocent candidate while the recipient is portrayed as “the corrupt candidate and/or liar” (Theye & Melling, 2018, p. 326).

With this knowledge and understanding, more insight and clarity is provided on how Trump specifically uses certain rhetorical techniques to build his audience base, have his messages remain with those interacting with his social platforms, and subsequently accelerate his stance within the 2020 Presidential Election.
The Do Nothing Dems

Along with assigning nicknames for Schiff and Pelosi, another reoccurring name Trump often employs is when he references the Democratic Party as the “Do Nothing Dems” (Trump 2019). In the tweet referenced below that was previously used to examine the name-calling tactic as it applied to Pelosi, Trump asserts how “the Do Nothing Dems will lose many seats in 2020” (Trump, 2019). By using the name-calling tactic as well as creating a metonymy for the Democratic Party, Trump is able to denigrate the opposing party to appear as weaker and trifling to the greater good of the American population; thus, elevating his own stance and credibility in the political realm.

Carrying on with this thread, Trump refers to the opposing party with his assigned metonymy and refers to Pelosi in the tweet below in a condemning way for his advantage.
In both examples, it is important to note how Trump is rather confident and assertive in his statements. This particular strategy is clarified by Theye and Melling (2018) who affirm how, “From the outset, Trump’s weakness has been his lack of political experience and skill, but by elevating the presence of the political correctness to exigence, this weakness can come to be viewed as a strength” (p. 325). As provided in the explanation above, Trump does not have the same amount of experience in politics as those who have continue to run against him, such as Hilary Clinton, Ted Cruz, Adam Schiff, Nancy Pelosi, and much of the Democratic Party. In order to reframe this inevitable position to become more appealing to the public eye than his counterparts despite his lack of political exposure, Trump’s ability to employ this rhetorical strategy allows him to gain authenticity within the line of candidates he is running against, which consequently separates him from those who all abide to a particular decorum that has been historically used to present oneself in the political spotlight. As Theye and Melling (2018) suggest, by refraining from the “vague language used by many politicians,” Trump’s “utterances are devoid of the couching terms that permeate public political discourse” (p. 326). Therefore, this deviation from political
correctness allows him to appeal to those who are confused and feel mislead by politicians and the decorum to which they abide (p. 329). Namely, Trump’s errant discourse on Twitter, coupled with his various rhetorical strategies such as epideictic speech, the employment of the stickiness factor, and both metonymies and name-calling tactics, work together to completely separate Trump from those who both accuse him or are against him. This type of frank and uncensored discourse further allows him to achieve an audience that inevitably remembers him; regardless of how relentless he presents himself in his delivery. Undoubtedly, “Trump’s tendency to engage in politically incorrect rhetoric is just one way that he proves his authenticity by violating political norms,” and that “for those who are exasperated by political correctness, Trump getting caught in the occasional fabrication or exaggeration helps prove his authenticity” (Melling and Theye, 2018, p. 330). This seamlessly transitions into political incorrectness, which is the final integrant of Trump’s political strategy that allows him to standout and gain authenticity to excel in his re-election.
Case Study No. 3: Trump’s employment of genre and nationalist populism to enhance his rhetorical strategy and separate himself from political correctness and decorum on Twitter

One of Donald Trump’s most distinguishing characteristics is his augmented style of nationalist populism and digression from the discursive structures employed by others within the sphere of American politics. As previously noted, Trump originally built his career and reputation around becoming a media dignitary best known for his performance and acquired dollar worth as an American businessman. To atone for his lack of political experience, Trump has strayed away from behaving and communicating in the same manner that other political figures have done both currently and in the past. Specifically, Trump deviates from adhering to standardized, common political decorum and political correctness by tapping into the rhetorical power of genre as it pertains to nationalist populism. To best understand how rhetoric comes into play here, it is important to acquire an understanding of both discursive strategies independently before merging the two together under a single rhetorical lens.

At first glance, transgressing from proper decorum and embracing political incorrectness appears injurious to one’s success within the landscape of politics and a candidate’s progression during an election. In Trump’s case explicitly, it was anticipated that going against political correctness and expected decorum would hurt Trump’s ability to achieve presidency in the 2016 election, as it would be another reason, alongside his lack of political qualifications, why he is not fit for the Oval Office. However, in lieu of his political correctness, Trump strategically uses genre to rhetorically reframe himself into a character that the American people will shift their focus on to and subsequently support. As simply defined by Jasinski (2001), genre “refers to the various types, classes, or categories of discursive practice that can serve as objects of study” (p. 268). In other words, genre covers a variety of categories and styles of written, visual, or verbal work that
distinguishes a specific subject or topic. Jasinski (2001) furthers his exploration by elaborating on the simple yet diversified nature of this rhetorical device, noting how,

“The basic assumption guiding most genre scholarship is that humans are inherently categorizers or classifiers. Whenever we encounter an object in the world (e.g., a rock, another person, a text), our apprehension of the object at some point will involve locating it within some larger class or category” (p. 269).

Accordingly, genres can be rhetorically used to reframe a message, conversation, or situation that is in favor of the orator. The orator and categorizer, in this case, is Trump, and the predominant platform of choice he uses to rhetorically conveying his message through genre is Twitter. In particular, the specific type of genre that Trump employs is nationalist populism.

At its fundamental core, “Nationalist populism is an affective genre that provides emotional release in a situation in which a large group, in this case primarily white working-class Americans, experiences both economic loss and the sense that their position in the culture is threatened” (Rowland, 2019, p. 349). It also centralizes around “the need for an emotional response when a nation’s economic and political system no longer seems to function effectively for working-class voters” (p. 346). In application to the 2020 presidential race and his past campaigns, Trump employs the umbrella-like structure of the nationalist populism genre to further his rhetorical strategy of employing name-calling tactics, metonymies, the stickiness factor, and both epideictic and deliberative speech to tailor the criticism he receives from his political counterparts into blame that highlights their inability to uphold nationalist beliefs, such as the American Dream. In corroboration, this concept is echoed by Rowland (2019), who emphasizes how this specific genre that Trump employs,
“Is not built around a coherent ideological agenda but a rhetorical practice that fulfills an affective function by providing scapegoats to blame for loss of cultural status and a charismatic outsider who promises to return the nation to an earlier Edenic time, in this case to “Make America Great Again” (p. 346).

Condensing this into a more simplified statement, rather than allowing his political incorrectness to hinder his popularity, Trump uses the nationalist populism genre to rhetorically reconstruct himself as a figure who is on the side of the American people who have been misled and let down by the leaders who have stayed within the lines of political correctness.

In the tweet below, Trump embraces the nationalist populism genre to rhetorically position the Democratic Party as working in retrograde for the American people. As explored in the preceding case study, Trump also uses his name-calling tactic to further fuel his intended message and rhetorical initiatives, calling his opposing party “The Do Nothing Democrats” (Trump, 2020).
In this tweet, Trump specifically accuses the “The Do Nothing Democrats” for consistently bringing up “the same old ‘stuff’” relating to the impeachment scandal, which he rhetorically downplays by calling it a “Hoax.” Trump then transitions into his nationalist populism genre by claiming how investing time into what he calls the “Impeachment Hoax” “is the wrong thing to do” (Trump, 2020). By explicitly stating this, Trump renders the Democratic Party as working in a way that is detrimental to the success and wellbeing of the country. He further drives home this message by relating it directly to Americans by saying how the Democrats should “go back to work for our great American people!” (Trump, 2020). Through this, Trump embraces the rhetorical power that is embedded in the marriage of nationalist populism and genre, as he makes it relatable on a personal level, positioning it in a way where the American people are being wrongfully guided by the efforts and focus of the Democratic Party.

Another characteristic of genre that is exemplified in this tweet is its ability to combine different rhetorical approaches. Jasinski (2001) specifically states how, through implementing genre, “an advocate can shift from epideictic praise to deliberative advocacy, or can blend the two, by means of increased emphasis and other strategies” (Jasinski, 2001, p. 270). Trump successfully merges both epideictic and deliberative speech, using epideictic to place blame on others in defense of his name and social standing, as well as uses deliberative speech to persuade the American population that he is best suited for presidency due to his ability to relate to and advocate for them. Specifically, he uses epideictic speech to blame how the Democratic Party’s focus on the “Impeachment Hoax” is “the wrong thing to do,” while simultaneously employing deliberative speech to persuade his audience that they are not working in a way that benefits the country, and therefore they “ought to go back to work for our great American people!” (Trump, 2020). It is also important to note how in this example, Trump structures his tweet in a way that separates him from
the topic at hand. This same theme can also be traced in the tweet below, where he reiterates his allegiance to the American people by separating himself from the work that his political, Democratic counterparts are conducting against him.

I’m fighting for the American people, but the Democrats’ sole focus is fighting against ME with their fraudulent Witch Hunt. Go to StopTheMadness.GOP and tell Democrats in Congress that Enough is Enough!

Stop the Madness
The Democrats have officially lost it. The Democrat-led impeachment inquiry is not based on facts, it solely stems from their political vendetta against ... stophemadness.gop

6:19 PM · Oct 16, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone

20.6K Retweets 65.2K Likes

This tweet in particular is rich in rhetorical devices and the nationalist populism genre. Trump immediately portrays himself as an outsider from American politics through stating how “the Democrats’ sole focus is fighting against ME with their fraudulent Witch Hunt,” and how we
must “tell Democrats and Congress that Enough is Enough!” (Trump, 2019). His separation from other American politicians and institutions is explicitly emphasized in his capitalization of “ME” and his statement of how the Democratic Party is “fighting against.” The capitalization of “ME” also emphasizes his victimization; thus, portraying himself as the innocent one. To further cast the opposing political party and those against him in Congress as the enemy, Trump refers to their initiatives that counter towards him as a “Witch Hunt” (Trump, 2020). The component of this tweet that drives this rhetorical message home is when Trump mentions the “StopTheMadness.GOP” campaign that targets the Democratic Party at large for the wrongdoings that have unfolded in American politics. This is once again reiterated in this tweet with the inclusion of a visual aid representing the campaign, which prompts viewers to “Text ‘madness’” to a specific line to stop them according support both Trump’s and the Republicans’ cause (Trump, 2020). While directing a significant amount of blame towards these political figures in such a forward, uncensored way may appear as detrimental towards Trump’s own public image and success, in hindsight it has gained a significant amount of traction. Rowland (2019) touches upon this, explaining how, despite the assumption that Trump’s disruption of decorum would hinder his success, “In retrospect, it seems clear that many of the statements that the press labeled as “gaffes,” played a role in activating Trump’s core supporters” (p. 344). By associating his political counterparts with fraudulence and a “Witch Hunt,” Trump ultimately portrays them as damaging to the country while also positioning himself as an outsider who understands and resonates with the American people who have become discontented with the way politics have been conducted. As noted by Robert Schertzer and Eric Taylor Woods (2019), Trump,

“Consistently depicted a virtuous white majority that was under threat by several groups of immoral outsiders. In the process of creating this binary, the content of Trump’s
communication was structured by – and restructured – long-standing ethnic myths and symbols of American identity” (p. 2).

This is undoubtedly seen with his association of “madness” and “Witch Hunt,” with American politics (i.e., the Democratic Party in Congress), as the connotation associated with these words are injurious and counteractive to the country’s prosperity. This outcast representation that Trump conjures for himself is successfully implemented through manipulating the rhetorical nature of genre and nationalist populism to appear to be removed from the corrupt political landscape and accordingly an advocator for the prosperity of the American people and the American Dream.

In the following tweet, Trump continues his thread of genre intertwined with a nationalist populism tone; this time he targets the media rather than strictly the Democratic Party.

With this particular tweet in mind, it is important to also consider the rhetorical implications of political incorrectness and how it can be used to enhance a rhetorical statement to gain an audience’s attention; especially in reference to Trump’s engagement online as the current President.
of the United States who is up for re-election. Specifically, Trump is both currently and historically known to use the deflection tactic coupled with persuasive, deliberate speech to place the fault on those who oppose or threaten his views in order to defend his position. He frames his accuser to appear as though they are the ones to be blamed for the obstructions and gaps in the country’s political landscape, thereby justifying his harsh language displayed on Twitter and the media, as well as his infringement of political and professional decorum. In accordance with nationalist populism, Trump embraces the rhetorical capabilities of this technique to render himself as “a charismatic outsider who promises to return the nation to an earlier Edenic time, in this case to ‘Make America Great Again’” (Rowland, 2019, p. 346). This type of rhetoric is undeniably woven into the sentence structures and undertones of his tweets. For example, in the tweet mentioned above, Trump’s opponents are those who call themselves “experts on ‘Trump,’” that are featured on MSNBC and CNN, as well as the “Haters and Losers” (Trump, 2019). Explicitly, he uses the principle and meaning of nationalist populism to make his adversaries appear as though they are the ones who challenge the rights and common good of the people. This is demonstrated when he states that these two news stations repeatedly feature people who proclaim to know Trump yet portray him in a false manner. Specifically, referring to himself in quotations further fuels his rhetoric, as this grammatical usage discredits these broadcasted “experts” that are against him. This is reiterated when he claims how these are the “Same people since long before the 2016 Election, and how did that work out for the Haters and Losers. Not Well!” (Trump, 2019).

Perhaps the best approach towards analyzing Trump’s adoption of both rhetorical strategies of genre and nationalist populism is to view his Twitter behavior and discourse through three distinct angles. Specifically, Rowland (2019) takes the rhetorical nature of genre as it is used by Trump and breaks it down into three distinct points to analyze, first clarifying how,
“Trump created an affective genre based in nationalist populism and a charismatic outsider persona. This genre tapped into the alienation and sense of lost opportunities so common among the white working class to create a sense of group solidarity and support for the charismatic outsider. It functioned as a form of emotional work in three ways” (Rowland, 2019, p. 349).

Subsequently, Rowland (2019) begins by describing how Trump’s employment of a nationalist populism genre “created solidarity by providing enemies to both hate and blame for their misfortune” (p. 349). This is applicable to the tweet discussed above, where Trump simultaneously addresses and blames the Democrats in Congress for the wrongdoings in the country by removing himself from the “madness” stirred in American politics and thereby emphasizing how he is “fighting for the American people” (Trump, 2020). Rowland subsequently transitions into the last two points of Trump’s increasing traction through wielding genre and nationalist populism, explaining how, “Second, it provided a hero who would take them back to an imagined heroic past filled with opportunity” and “Third, it solidified group identity by depicting core supporters as the “real Americans” who were the heart and soul of the nation and as unfairly oppressed by elites and Others, who were not “real” Americans” (Rowland, 2019, p. 349). Both points are reflected and duly supported in the tweet below, where Trump utilizes the rhetorical, inherent features of genre with specific regards to nationalist populism to depict himself as a hard-working leader amid the aversion toward him voiced by the media.
At the outset of this particular tweet, Trump asserts one of his most foundational claims embedded in the roots of his candidacy and campaign, which is his interrelation with the American people as an outsider to the country’s political institution, stating how “The people that know me and know the history of our Country say that I am the hardest working President in history. I don’t know about that, but I am a hard worker and have probably gotten more done in the first 3 1/2 years than any President in history. The Fake News hates it!”

In this sentence alone, Trump performs a number of rhetorical actions that feed into his nationalist populism genre and his “for the people,” character. First, he directly corresponds his supporters and thus the people who know him with the individuals who know the history of the country. By placing these two groups within the same playing field, Trump delineates himself as a presidential figure who aligns with the same stratum and classification of the hard work, virtue and propriety associated with the history and ethos of the United States of America, as well as the leaders who initiated and maintained this image. By doing so, he also renders himself as a leader who, just like the history of the country, is grounded in the desires for prosperity, justification and the strength to go against oppressive governments and institutions. This genre and employment of nationalist populism subsequently provide a base where he can position himself as a “hard worker” who has
“gotten more done in the first 3 ½ years than any President in history” (Trump, 2020). This falls parallel to Rowland’s second emotion conjured through Trump’s use of genre that “provided a hero who would take them back to an imagined heroic past filled with opportunity” (Rowland, 2019, p. 349). In this case, the hero figure is Trump himself, and the “imagined heroic past filled with opportunity” that he brings his supporters back to is America’s history that fought for freedom, unity and prosperity.

In light of designating himself as “the hardest working President,” Trump ends this tweet by claiming how “The Fake News hates it!” (Trump, 2020). The “it,” in this case, specifically references Trump’s self-claimed work ethic and insinuated success. As previously discerned, this deflection of blame falls under the ecomium aspect of epideictic speech, where one places blame on another for their own personal gain and preservation of public image, while also incorporating deliberative speech to persuade his audience that he is “the hardest working President in history” (Trump, 2020). This relates to Rowland’s third emotional key point of genre, as this last sentence regarding Fake News “solidified group identity by depicting core supporters as the “real Americans” who were the heart and soul of the nation and as unfairly oppressed by elites and Others” (Rowland, 2019, p. 349). In hindsight, the employment of Rowland’s emotional points of genre rooted in nationalist populism, coupled with other tactics such as name-calling, epideictic and deliberative speech, orchestrate a rhetorical performance that allows Trump to render himself as the ultimate candidate suited to lead the country for the second time around.
Conclusion

Rhetoric has undeniably shifted to meet the demands and nature of online, social platforms. This change has inevitably created the term ‘digital rhetoric,’ which is the way in which orators interact with an online audience that extends far beyond targeting a specific group of people or institution. In short, digital rhetoric is displayed and shared across the entire globe to those who have access to the Internet or social platforms, and is a popular way for prominent leaders and individuals to display their messages and gain a mass following. Trump is an exemplary figure who embraces the nature and essence of digital rhetoric to display his views, maintain a large follower base, and preserve both his identity and presidential image for everyone to see, with his primary platform of choice being Twitter. As examined by Melling and Theye (2018), “One way that Trump constantly proves his authenticity is through his personal Twitter account, which he has tweeted from more than 38,500 times since opening it in 2009” (p. 331). In addition, with a current Twitter follower base of 79.7 million, Trump’s rhetoric displayed throughout this platform undoubtedly reaches a vast audience and a wide range of those who both support and are against his political endeavors and outlooks. Despite his popularity on Twitter and his presidential status to maintain, Trump’s colorful language counters traditional, political decorum and thus disrupts the public sphere as it exists today online. Subsequently, although the way in which he utilizes digital rhetoric breaches the decorum of the Internet, he most certainly uses traditional rhetorical devices to persuade his audience that he is still worthy of being a both a political and presidential figure.

The first tactic of rhetoric explored within the frameworks of this paper that Trump employs is epideictic speech, as he blames either his non-supporters or those who are either running against him for the negativity that he is associated by trying to convince his audience that
he is innocent while those who threaten his reputation are actually the ones at fault. In doing so, he also persuades his audience into defending his position. This transitions into the rhetorical devices of name-calling and nationalist populism that Trump weaves together to further his rhetorical intentions through digital discourse.

Rather than let his non-political background that sets him apart from other politicians characterize him as unqualified and unfitted for presidency, Trump takes this quality to render himself as an outsider of American politics who has once again entered the race to combat the corruption and wrongdoings of the current political system in the United States. This message and its rhetorical undertones are first emphasized through Trump’s usage of nationalist populism genre, which touches upon the emotion that he is the outsider who is bravely entering the political landscape to fight for the American people to re-establish the country’s spirit, tradition, and according “Make America Great Again.” By pairing this tactic with epideictic and deliberative speech, Trump uses the animosity and accusations berated to him by his political counterparts and assailants, even when he is at fault for certain allegations or the way his discourse strays far away from professional decorum. This rhetorical ramification is only exacerbated through the stickiness factor that is implemented through Trump’s adoption of name-calling and assignment of nicknames to the individuals and institutions who explicitly threaten his reputation. The culmination of these rhetorical devices work together in a way that draws attention towards Trump, as they characterize him as the outsider and subsequent victim of the politicians who abide to political decorum yet are to blame for the abruptions in American politics.

Rhetoric is a powerful tool that can transform discourse to adapt and accommodate to a particular need, agenda or audience that caters to an orator’s success or intention. With presidential
discourse, rhetoric can be employed to align a candidate or political figures’ vision with those who they are presenting to and accordingly seek to lead. The capabilities and nature of the Internet and social platforms such as Twitter have augmented the ways that rhetoric can be used in a social sphere as well as has proliferated the number of individuals and groups of people accessing and digesting the discourse displayed digitally. As this paper has explored, President Trump adopts various rhetorical devices in his tweets in order to propel himself further into the race to be re-elected and accordingly demonstrate why he is the best candidate to once again lead the United States.

The thematic structure of this paper has allowed us to break down the diverse and wide range of rhetorical characteristics associated with Trump’s discourse online during the 2020 presidential election into various, more distinct topics that explicitly analyze each device that is at play. These topics include his repetitive use of key words and epideictic speech, his employment of name-calling tactics to target those who threaten him, and his use of a nationalist populism genre; all of which breach decorum. By acquiring a foundational understanding of these rhetorical tactics, comparing and subsequently piecing them together side by side, we are able to understand how Trump embraces the powerful capabilities of rhetoric and weaves them into one common thread that is continuous throughout his messages that he publishes on Twitter. This opens up a new realm of opportunity to rhetorically examine the discourse of other political figures, and how the existence of the Internet and subsequent implementation of digital discourse have altered the way these figures convey their rhetoric online, as well as how all audiences across varying backgrounds now digest rhetorical messages within a digital setting.
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