Oral Rhetoric and Digital Media: The Twitter Campaign of the 2016 American Presidential Election
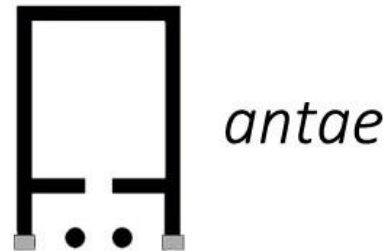
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Introduction

This paper explores the nuances of digital rhetoric in the context of online politics, ultimately arguing that in order to utilise effective rhetoric in the online sphere, it is vital for politicians to recreate and emulate an oral form of delivery, resulting in a more authentic presence with which audiences can engage.

To this aim, this paper will consider how the oral has remained a core aspect of rhetoric throughout its development as an art and practice. The political event that will be discussed as a point of analysis is the 2016 American presidential election—an event which, given the rapid progression of internet politics, may already seem somewhat passé, yet which remains exemplary as a means of demonstrating the function and dynamics of contemporary political rhetoric. In particular, what will be analysed is the utilisation of Twitter by Donald Trump, Hilary Clinton, and Bernie Sanders. Twitter, of course, proved to be an indispensable medium during the election campaign. Trump himself stated that social media was one of the factors that earned him a win, in addition to speeches and interviews.[1]

One consideration before proceeding further with this discussion is that one must be aware that these politicians were, of course, not operating in isolation, but rather with large-scale teams trained to represent, and thus exercise, rhetorical strategies on the social media platforms utilised by said politicians on their behalf. This in itself has various implications that are worthy of discussion in a paper of contemporary oral rhetoric.

However, leaving for now the contemporary political element of this discussion to one side, it is first necessary to contextualise the relationship between rhetoric and the oral.

An Overview of Rhetoric and The Oral

The most basic, yet most persevering definition of rhetoric is the very one coined by Aristotle: that is, 'the ability in each [particular] case to see the available means of persuasion'.[2] Several academics have expanded on this basic definition since, but as a pragmatic and functional definition, Aristotle's remains effective and apt.

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[1] Sean Rossman, 'Hillary Clinton lost the presidential Twitter war, study shows', *USA Today* (13 July 2017). <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2017/07/13/hillary-clinton-lost-presidential-twitter-war-study-shows/473576001/>. [Accessed 17 October 2018].
[2] Aristotle, *The "Art" Of Rhetoric*, trans. by John Henry Freese (London: William Heinemann, 1926), p. xxxii.

The classical understanding of rhetoric, of course, is far more detailed than this basic premise, and there are a number of practices and tropes associated with the practice as a whole. Aristotle notes the modes of rhetoric: *ethos* (the relatability of a speaker), *logos* (persuasion through logical argumentation), and *pathos* (appeal to an audience on an emotive level).[3] The canons of rhetoric are also key concepts in classical texts, appearing originally in Cicero's treatise *De Inventione* and further developed by Quintilian in his *Institutio Oratoria*. The five canons refer to the overall presentation through which a speaker makes his argument, these being: invention (*inventio*), arrangement (*dispositio*), style (*elocutio*), memory (*memoria*), and delivery (*action*).[4]

Rhetorical concepts and approaches, however, are subject to evolution based on the media available at the time as well as the social context of a particular era, among plethora of other factors. Douglas Eyman's work on digital rhetoric, for instance, highlights this idea by documenting how the canons are appropriated online, thereby evolving in their meaning.[5] Despite this, there is one aspect of rhetoric that one would assume would remain central to the practice across history, and that is the human element. The aforementioned modes of rhetoric of *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos* are essential not so much in terms of the way they are delivered, but because of their resonance with the human audience that is in engagement with the speaker.

This paper argues that, in relation to the above point, the notion of the oral is fundamentally important to that human element in rhetoric. Classically, rhetorical delivery primarily occurred through the oratory, which is defined as the application of rhetoric through 'words, speech or discourse'.[6] The oratory, then, embodies the very physical nature of the speaker-audience dynamic: the notion speaker delivering a speech to a crowd. In this traditional sense, it is clear to see how oral delivery is key to rhetoric, and why Walter Ong states that 'the rhetorical world *was* the oral world.'[7]

Of course, it is vital to acknowledge that the oral has never been the sole means of rhetorical delivery. Aristotle himself notes the impact of the visual element in rhetoric, noting that 'the whole business of rhetoric [is] concerned with appearance'.[8] One cannot, then, discount the significance of the way an audience will engage with the speaker's general physical appearance, clothing, and bodily gestures. The encompassing nature of rhetoric is further explained by Wayne Booth, who in *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric* describes it as 'the entire range of resources that human beings share for producing effects on one another.'[9]

What that means, effectively, is that rhetoric has always been multimodal. Multimodality broadly refers to the range of representational resources accessible to a culture at any one time, as according to Bill Hope and Mary Kalantzis. As new resources are created, so do new

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[3] Aristotle, p. 14.

[4] Marcus Fabius Quintilian, *Instituto Oratoria: Books I-III*, ed. by G. P. Goold, trans. by H. E. Butler, 9th ed. (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 387.

[5] Douglas Eyman, *Digital Rhetoric: Theory, Method, Practice* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2015), p. 65.

[6] Quintilian, p. 19.

[7] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 46.

[8] Aristotle, p. 29.

[9] Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004), p. xi.

possibilities arise for the construction of meaning 'in a way which always adds something to the range of available representational resources'.[10] For that reason, multimedia environments are always in flux. As Gunther Kress notes, 'individuals are seen as the remakers, transformers, of sets of representational resources—rather than as users of stable systems, in a situation where a multiplicity of representational modes are brought into textual compositions'.[11]

This is important in a discussion of rhetoric as it becomes clear that, despite these different resources which could all be used for the sake of rhetorical delivery, some will dominate others within any media environment. It may thus be said that the dominating resource of classical rhetoric, to no small degree, was the oral.

Yet new key resources emerge, and sometimes these are influential enough to establish new states of oralities. This essay does not quite afford the space for a detailed discussion of orality, yet it is an important topic to consider for anyone who wishes to explore how communication, and rhetoric alongside it, evolves. Orality is the context of media environments, or, more simply put, a state of orality is a state through which people of a particular culture process, think, store, and relay information. Ong defines orality as the way 'experience is intellectually organised'.[12] In the context of rhetoric, then, a new state of orality would imply new processes through which delivery becomes natural. For a more succinct explanation, one can reference McLuhan's conception of the city as media environment, who states that as Man builds the city, the city so in turn reconfigures Man through providing the landscape that he engages with, processes, and exists within.[13] When turning to notions of orality, identical principles apply.

At this stage, it is important that one distinguish between primary and secondary orality. Primary orality refers to a state in which people process experience uninfluenced by the medium of writing. In such states, riddles and storytelling would be two ways of passing down and remembering information. On the other hand, secondary orality refers to the change of state influenced by the written word. It is not merely a case of a new medium available for people to use, and as such writing is not simply a medium that can co-exist with a prior state of primary orality. David Olson notes that 'writing is not the transcription of speech but rather provides a conceptual model for that speech'—in a state of secondary orality, people think in terms of written structure.[14] Ong himself believes the term "secondary orality" to be sufficient description of the media environments ushered in by technology, and in his work references telephones, radio, and television. However, Ong's work is pre-internet age, and later writers would argue that there is such a distinct shift in orality that it is more apt to now use the term electronic orality.[15]

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[10] Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis, *Multiliteracies* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 221.
[11] Gunther Kress, 'Design and Transformation: New Theories of Meaning', in *Multiliteracies*, ed. by Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 156.
[12] Ong, p. 35.
[13] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (2003: Gingko Press, 2016), p. 136.
[14] David Olson, 'How Writing Represents Speech', *Language & Communication*, 13(1), (1993), 1-17, p. 15.
[15] Sonja K. Foss, Karen A. Foss, and Robert Trapp, *Contemporary Perspectives On Rhetoric*, 4th ed. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 2015), p. 13.

Ultimately, the term used is not as important as the point that when turning to the political scenario here in question—the 2016 American election campaign—it is necessary to explore how conceptions of rhetoric, and specifically oral rhetoric, manifest in the state of orality created through the media environments established at the time.

Digital Emulations of Oral Rhetoric of the 2016 American Presidential Election

Moving on to the more analytical aspect of this essay, it is, at the very least, intriguing to note one particular misconception about the election, which is that Trump was the most frequent user of Twitter. Statistics actually show that Clinton was the most regular poster on Twitter overall, with an average of 27 tweets as opposed to Trump's average of 11 per day. However, there is truth to the notion that Trump was more successful on Twitter. On average, Trump's posts were retweeted almost 6,000 times, while the average number of retweets was 1,500 for Clinton and almost 2,500 for Bernie Sanders.[16] Despite this, Clinton had some of the top-performing tweets of the year, including one instance where she instructed Trump to delete his account.[17]

The question we are left with is simple: what is it about Trump's usage of Twitter and other social media platforms that was effectively louder, more successful than the usage of any other politician? The appropriate conclusion to draw might simply be that Trump was more successful at giving his online presence an oral quality than his rivals. Vincent Raynauld notes that:

> When you read a tweet by Donald Trump you can almost hear Donald Trump's voice, whereas if you're reading tweets by Hillary Clinton from her Twitter account you can obviously see that it's coming from campaign staffers. You have a sense that every single tweet comes out of Donald Trump's mouth to some extent and this has a very persuasive value to the public.[18]

As this idea is explored here, the sense one gets is that there was a definite movement to capture an oral quality of rhetoric during the election. In many ways, this movement retained aspects that are universal to the art of oral rhetoric and classical conceptions of it. One basic example involves the idea of the slogan as oral inscription, which, as Kittler describes, is a consistent aspect of rhetoric; this is why slogans like "Make America Great Again" are fundamentally effective.[19] However, this essay will predominantly focus on how the election displayed

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[16] Pew Research Center, '2. Candidates Differ in Their Use of Social Media to Connect with The Public', *Journalism*, (18 July 2016). <http://www.journalism.org/2016/07/18/candidates-differ-in-their-use-of-social-media-to-connect-with-the-public/>. [Accessed 11 October 2018].

[17] Daniel Victor, 'The Top Political Tweets and Hashtags of 2016', *The New York Times*, (6 December 2016). <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/06/technology/top-tweets-politics-2016.html>. [Accessed 19 October 2018].

[18] Matt Kapko, 'Twitter's Impact On 2016 Presidential Election Is Unmistakable', *CIO*, (3 November 2016). <http://www.cio.com/article/3137513/social-networking/twitters-impact-on-2016-presidential-election-is-unmistakable.html>. [Accessed 13 October 2018].

[19] Friedrich A Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 222.

departures from classical conceptions of oral rhetoric in order to reflect the conversation of today—all the while reinforcing the oral as a vital part of rhetoric.

Take, for example, the fact that social media channels do not lend themselves particularly well to sustained engagement. Twitter, at the time of the election, only allowed 140 characters per post (at the time of writing, Twitter posts can accommodate up to 280 characters). This in itself assumes a departure from classical oratory. Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbretchs-Tyteca note that, traditionally, long speeches was the format preferred by orators, giving them the chance to build sustained engagement with their audience and utilise rhetorical techniques more effectively as a result.[20] On Twitter, this kind of format would obviously not have been possible.

On the other hand, it did give politicians the chance to explore the possibilities of delivery through informal speech, thereby adopting a form of engagement with users through briefer, but more regular, bursts. Consider the examples below:

> Hillary Clinton spokesperson admitted that their [sic.] was no ISIS video of me. Therefore, Hillary LIED at the debate last night. SAD! (Trump, 20 December 2015).[21]

> Obama is, without question, the WORST EVER president. I predict he will now do something really bad and totally stupid to show manhood! (Trump, 4 June 2014).[22]

> @sdcritic: @HighonHillcrest @jeffzeleny @CNN There is NO QUESTION THAT #voterfraud did take place, and in favor of #CorruptHillary ! (Trump, 29 November 2016).[23]

> How does your student loan debt make you feel? Tell us in 3 emojis or less. (Clinton, 12 August 2015).[24]

> "Nobody respects women more than me." – Donald Trump earlier tonight "Such a nasty woman" – Donald Trump just now

> #Debatenight (Clinton, 19 October 2016).[25]

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[20] Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), p. 313.
[21] Donald Trump, *Twitter*, 2015. <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/678720849336250369?lang=en>. [Accessed 14 October 2018].
[22] Donald Trump, *Twitter*, 2014. <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/474719268819308544?lang=en>. [Accessed 14 October 2018].
[23] Donald Trump, *Twitter*, 2016. <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/803423503978532864?lang=en>. [Accessed 14 October 2018].
[24] Hillary Clinton, *Twitter*, 2015. <https://twitter.com/hillaryclinton/status/631538115514007553?lang=en>. [Accessed 14 October 2018].
[25] Hillary Clinton, *Twitter*, 2016. <https://twitter.com/hillaryclinton/status/788931981446877184?lang=en>. [Accessed 14 October 2018].

> I'm running for president. Everyday Americans need a champion, and I want to be that champion. –H (Clinton, 12 April 2015).[26]

It is intriguing to note how the brevity of the tweets results in Clinton and Trump both attempting to establish an ethos through interpersonal, even casual, discourse. One shift in the speaker-audience dynamic on social media is that politicians are addressing audiences, but these audiences are not physically gathered together as a collective. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca conceptualise the 'universal audience'—that is, the idea that when an orator attempts to appeal, they have the audience visualised in mind, and can adapt arguments accordingly to fit the context.[27] In this case, the universal audience takes on a more literal meaning. Trump and Clinton utilise discourse that addresses the mass and the individual simultaneously.

It is also worth pointing out that, in the above examples, the conversational approach also includes a relative lack of consideration for grammatical and syntactical structures, at least in the case of Trump's tweets. Furthermore, Trump capitalises words to create emphasis in an attempt to imitate rising intonation. There is an element of Netspeak here—a term coined by David Crystal to refer to the way language is represented online—where shortened language, acronyms, and the like become part of the natural cognitive flow of internet-users. Netspeak, then, is the equivalent of conversational speech in an oral setting.[28] What Trump 'sacrifices' in typed grammatical accuracy, he gains in effectively projecting an aura of authenticity to the audience—in other words, he conveys the notion that he is having a genuine conversation with his audience.[29]

While it would be absurd to suggest that Clinton's tweets were not successful at engaging her audience—and while also acknowledging that only a miniscule sample has been provided here for the sake of argument—it would seem that Clinton's selected tweets are slightly more detached in tone. The fact that she makes use of the hashtag '#Debatenight' is just one example of this, as it makes it obvious that she is not directly tweeting herself, since at that point of the tweet's publication she would have been at the Debate. She is, paradoxically, removing the suspension of disbelief in her direct attempt to fuel her ethos of relatability.

Another factor as to why Clinton's online presence feels less authentic is that when she attempts to assimilate Netspeak, it is exactly that—an assimilation. It does not translate as fluently adopted language. Her campaign frequently referenced emojis (such as in the referenced tweets above) and memes. On Snapchat, for example, a platform which Katie Dowd, digital director for Clinton's campaign, called a 'platform [they] definitely want to be on', one video attempted

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[26] Hillary Clinton, *Twitter*, 2015. <https://twitter.com/hillaryclinton/status/587336319321407488?lang=en>. [Accessed 14 October 2018].
[27] Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, p. 313.
[28] David Crystal, *The Language of the Internet*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 20.
[29] It is worth noting that this method of online communication persists with Trump even post-election, and various occasions have indicated that his approach (regardless of its effectiveness in engaging with an online audience) is less calculated than one may expect. One such instance is the famous 'covfefe' incident, where Trump tweeted the cryptic word only to delete it a few hours later. He later attempted to play this off as intentional, in a tweet that read 'Who can figure out the true meaning of "covfefe" ??? Enjoy!'. Such instances are important as a means of understanding Trump's online persona. They often break the illusion of genuine conversation he has with his audience, and his attempt to save face, by calling such instances intentional, is his way of trying to reclaim his projected authenticity.

to be explicitly meme-like through the utilisation of the phrase: "More like Chillary Clinton, Amirite?"[30] In another instance—at a live rally—Clinton urged voters to 'Pokemon GO to the polls', in reference to the videogame trend that was popular at the time.[31] The internet audience was not enthusiastic about this. Clinton's approach was, in fact, criticised by analysts for choosing to communicate in the style of the so-called millenial rather than transmitting her own persona.[32] However, for the sake of providing a fair argument, one must concede that Clinton's approach was often successful. The aforementioned 'Delete your account' tweet was somewhat of a meme in itself, given that it copied a viral format of tweeting used by millennials previously, and this, as previously mentioned, was one of the highest-performing tweets of 2016.

Statistical analysis by Pew Research Centre also determines another reason why Trump may have found more success at replicating an oral presence online: his use of Twitter involved substantially less linking than Clinton and Sanders, who would frequently link to their personal campaign websites through social media posts.[33] The effect of excessive linking, it might be stated, is that it may compromise the politician's use of Twitter (or other social media) as a chance to engage directly and more meaningfully with their audience by relying on external sources that direct users away from the moment of that engagement.

The conclusions drawn regarding the provided examples seem to affirm the notion that Trump was more adept at conveying online rhetoric precisely because he was greater at retaining a human element, which correlates directly with the accuracy of the replicated oral delivery.

Lanham notes that this is the kind of representational affordance that was only made possible in a state of electronic and digital orality. He states that in a state of secondary orality (that is to say, the era in which writing became the dominant medium), written and printed text served as a means of recording the oral, and yet audiences could not engage with the oral as they would in a face-to-face setting. The onset of electronic media changed this—audiences could now interact with words alongside acoustic and visual elements—and this in turned served to give text with an oral context.[34] Indeed, Lanham's main point is that electronic and digital media fuse the oral with the literate. He states that 'the oral world stands there in the margin talking to the literate world. Two different worlds slide uneasily against each other like two tectonic plates'.[35] McLuhan echoes a similar point, stating that the electronic age, 'by virtue of

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[30] Ashley Codianni, 'Inside Hillary Clinton's Digital operation', *CNN Politics*, (25 August 2015). <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/25/politics/hillary-clinton-2016-digital/>. [Accessed 10 October 2018].
[31] CNN, 'Clinton Drops a Pokemon Go Reference at Rally', *Youtube*, (14 July, 2016). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jt6riM2aDLk>. [Accessed 24 October 2018].
[32] Amanda Hess, 'Yas We Can: The Curious Social Media Strategy of Hillary Clinton's Campaign', *Slate*, (21 December 2015). <http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/users/2015/12/hillary_clinton_speaks_like_a_millennial_on_social_media.html>. [Accessed 26 October 2018].
[33] Pew Research Cente..
[34] Richard A. Lanham, *The Electronic Word* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1993), p. 74.
[35] Richard A. Lanham, 'What's Next for Text?', *Education, Communication & Information*, 1(1), (2001), 15-36, p. 20.

its simultaneity, has created a universal "acoustic" environment. Having left the Middle Ages by the visual route, we are returning to full medieval awareness by the acoustic route'.[36]

Oren Soffer takes this idea a step further by suggesting that digital and electronic media create a silent form of orality—an idea inspired by McLuhan, who claims that 'print gradually made reading aloud pointless, and accelerated the act of reading till the reader could feel "in the hand of" his author'.[37] In other words, the audio-visual affordances of electronic media resulted in online participants having more of a context through which they could perceive text as having an oral quality. What is classically understood as the oral, then, fuses with the digital space. Soffer notes various linguistic patterns resulting from this silent orality, including 'artful typographic features' such as emoticons. He further notes, similarly to how Crystal conceptualises Netspeak, that on digital media language is seen as liquid; the economising of words by altering them and making them shorter (such as writing "10x" instead of "thanks") becomes representative of flowing communication.[38] The result of this is a unique form of orality that is always associated with acoustic characteristics even when not projected verbally. Digital orality, thus, can be seen a type of evolution that includes the interactive and visual qualities of the primary and electronic cultures with the silence of printed texts. One can note how this silent orality as described by Soffer bares similarity with other bodies of text regarding online communication. Crystal, in fact, notes how online there nonetheless persists 'an atmosphere of spoken words, even if these words are translated into written expression'.[39]

If electronic and digital media, then, set an acoustic environment and establish a silent form of orality, this is precisely why the effectiveness of political tweets are marked by their ability to project a human presence with the audience. A tweet should, in a sense, embody the speaker. One must be able to visualise and hear the speaker through the act of reading. This is why, during the election, candidates would upload images of themselves as part of their rhetorical strategy—it reinforces the text provided in other posts with visual reference points that they can be anchored in. Two notable examples include one instance when Clinton uploaded a picture of herself as a young girl to symbolise that women can reach success,[40] and another when Sanders uploaded a cartoon image that referenced one of his rallies, where a bird landed on his podium, and which he used to synonymise this moment with an implied sense of hope.[41]

This notion of the audio-visual as a necessity for a more complete rhetoric is important to this argument because it suggests once more that multimodality is an integral part of rhetoric—the very thing suggested by Aristotle in his argument that all external factors will affect an orator's success. This is precisely why it becomes possible for one to notice a return to the oral

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[36] Marshall McLuhan, 'The Medieval Environment: Yesterday or Today?', *Listening Journal of Religion and Culture*, 9(1-2), (1974), 9-27, p. 9.
[37] Oren Soffer, '"Silent Orality": Toward A Conceptualization of the Digital Oral Features in CMC and SMS Texts', *Communication Theory*, 20(4), (2010), 387-404, p. 390.
[38] Oren Soffer, 'Liquid Language? On The Personalization of Discourse in The Digital Era', *New Media & Society*, 14(7), (2012), 1092-1110, p. 1101.
[39] Crystal, p. 20.
[40] Twitter, '15 Of Hillary Clinton's Most Popular Tweets', *Twitter*, (7 November 2016). <https://twitter.com/i/moments/795682238461571076>. [Accessed 7 October 2018].
[41] Twitter, 'The top Tweets from Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign', *Twitter*, (13 July 2016). <https://twitter.com/i/moments/753208665373601792?lang=en>. [Accessed 7 October 2018].

capacities of rhetoric as described in classical studies, though these are naturally evolved according to the times and media at hand.

Indeed, when analysing the tweets used by all candidates, it is impossible to not notice the extreme use of judicial and epideictic rhetoric. Aristotle divides rhetoric into three branches or causes: the judicial (forensic), deliberative (legislative), and epideictic (ceremonial) branches. Largely speaking, every kind of rhetorical argument falls under one of these branches. Judicial rhetoric is that of the courts, often used to accuse or defend actions committed in the past. Deliberative rhetoric is used to persuade or dissuade the undertaking of future actions, while epideictic rhetoric is concerned with praise or blame in the present.[42]

All three types of rhetoric feature throughout the campaign, but one cannot easily ignore that the use of Twitter during the election was overwhelmingly centred around the candidates slandering of each other. One observes the following examples of some of the most popular Twitter posts by Trump, Clinton, and Sanders as statistically measured by the official Twitter site:

> The media is spending more time doing a forensic analysis of Melania's speech than the FBI spent on Hillary's emails. (Trump, 20 July 2016).[43]
>
> If Obama worked as hard on straightening out our country as he was trying to protect and elect Hillary, we would all be much better off! (Trump, 4 November 2016).[44]
>
> Hillary Clinton should have been prosecuted and should be in jail. Instead she is running for president in what looks like a rigged election (Trump, 15 October 2016).[45]
>
> America's first black president cannot and will not be succeeded by a hatemonger who refuses to condemn the KKK. (Sanders, 28 February 2016).[46]
>
> Big talk from the same guy who was too afraid to debate Bernie in California. (Sanders, 12 June 2016).[47]
>
> "I never said that." —Donald Trump, who said that. #debatenight (Clinton, 26 September 2016).[48]
>
> A man who can be provoked by a tweet should not have his hands anywhere near the nuclear codes. #DebateNight debatenight (Clinton, 26 September 2016).[49]

This method of negative campaigning dominated the entire Election period, particularly online. Given what has been analysed in this paper, the question becomes whether this emphasis on judicial and epideictic rhetoric was in some form influenced or inspired by the media used. As previously discussed, the effectiveness of Twitter as a rhetorical platform is heavily dependent on the notion of brevity. Twitter is not a portal for sustained speeches, and so politicians must

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[42] Aristotle, p. xxxiii.
[43] Twitter, '15 Of Donald Trump's Most Popular Tweets', *Twitter*, (7 November 2016).
<https://twitter.com/i/moments/795695925566050304?lang=en>. [Accessed 7 October 2018].
[44] ibid.
[45] ibid.
[46] Twitter, 'The top Tweets from Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign'.
[47] ibid.
[48] Twitter, '15 Of Hillary Clinton's Most Popular Tweets'.
[49] ibid.

resort to swift, memorable lines. Jabs aimed towards the opponent clearly fit into this framework. Regarding Trump's tweets in particular, George Lakoff states (on Twitter, no less) that they are tactical rather than substantive.[50] It seems clear, however, that this principle is applicable to tweets by all candidates in the election, as shown in the examples above.

In addition to the fact that the medium itself can propel this form of discourse, there is also reason to believe that the emphasis of this slanderous form of rhetoric was utilised as a means of establishing dominance on the same medium by way of becoming the most authoritative presence from all candidates.

Lanham notes that text 'seeks to monopolise our attention'.[51] On digital media, this becomes an increasingly important notion because of the speed at which information (a term here used to refer to all kinds of content) is distributed online. This also implies that anyone can be a content-creator on the internet, and that anybody wishing to create some form of online presence must work against two factors. The first is the cultural phenomenon termed as "the economy of attention": Lanham notes that because people direct their attention to new content and information at rapid speed, attention becomes a scarce resource compared to the content available.[52] The second factor, related to this, is that because online users shift their focus so frequently, it takes genuine solid authorship or authority to capture that focus. On a related note, Kress states that the digital media age is one which nobody, or very few people, can be considered as having authorship of, and this precisely because there are too many people trying to be authors themselves.[53] Authorship, then, is a form of validity that requires recognition on the part of the audience in order for this validity to exist. Given that the topic of this essay is the 2016 American Election, this may seem like a moot point, at lease to some degree. After all, the point of discussion involves high-profile election candidates. These are people that will, by default, have more online gravitas and more perceived authority than most content-creators on the internet.

Despite this, or rather, perhaps, in spite of this, it makes perfect sense that slanderous rhetoric would be such a key means of establishing authorship through online media. By competing for votes, the candidates had to compete for online attention—and they did so by vocalising how their adversaries were not legitimate authorities, and that their content and rhetoric was not credible, in an attempt to make theirs appear all the worthier of sustained engagement.

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[50] See George Lakoff, (2 January 2018).
<https://twitter.com/GeorgeLakoff?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwgr%5E37393931 3b636f6e74726f6c&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fd-829881771277503045.ampproject.net%2F1535566825959%2Fframe.html>. [Accessed 4 October 2018].
[51] Lanham, 'What's Next for Text', p. 21.
[52] Richard A. Lanham, *The Economics of Attention* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. xii.
[53] Gunther Kress, *Literacy in The New Media Age* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 6.

Conclusion

This study has essentially attempted to make two points at once, the first being that our conceptions of oral rhetoric must adapt—given its development through and dependency on electronic and digital media—and the second being that the 2016 American Presidential Election Campaign is an excellent event to showcase such development. However, the first concluding remark that seems apt to make is rather that the election campaign, even on social media, displays undeniable continuity with classical conceptions of rhetoric.

This is not, however, to the detriment of the purpose of this study. It must be said that discussions about digital rhetoric often focus away from political contexts and away from the way online platforms can re-appropriate the traditional orator-audience dynamic. There are, on the other hand, various essential texts of digital rhetoric as a means of describing user-to-user behaviour, by way of content creation, memes, virality, and other online phenomena. Social media-based election campaigns are a relatively novel event. In America, the first one was the Facebook election in 2008. Less than a decade later came the Twitter election. Eight years may not be much, but the rate at which media has developed in just eight years seems to indicate that there will never be a completed or definitive analysis of digital political rhetoric; behavioural patterns will change as new media create new states of orality, new frames of communication, and new possibilities of delivery.

Yet online election campaigns will always be a fascinating case study from a rhetorical perspective. They are one of the closest reflections of the traditional orator-audience dynamic with which classical rhetoric is concerned, especially since online campaigns will reflect "real-life" scenarios of such interactions through rallies and other physical rhetorical situations that still occur today.

This brings us to the main conclusive point. The candidates of the 2016 election campaign who took to social media did not disregard fundamental rhetorical practices—they embraced them. This paper analysed the twitter posts of Trump, Clinton, and Sanders and discussed only a few of such practices, including the attempt to create *ethos* and a focus on epideictic and judicial rhetoric. The suggestion here is not that there is a conscious effort to keep these practises alive in the dawn of new media. Rather, the implication is that these rhetorical methods are natural gravitations because, fundamentally, they are direct appeals to the humanity of the audience.

This would explain why, on social media, it becomes so important that a politician creates a human, authentic, and bodily representation of himself. Audiences "need" to interact with that body, and speakers will be more effective rhetorically if they can make use of their full range of physical resources. Lanham's works in particular, as discussed, seem to suggest that the audio-visual affordances of digital media make this interaction much more possible than it would have been in previous states of orality, particularly in a print-dominated era when people had much more restricted access to a speaker's physicality.

This makes it easier to explain why the oral quality of rhetoric becomes such a heightened issue on social media. The visual capacities for social media further reinforce a politician's ability to emulate an oral form of delivery. One can "hear" the speaker as they "see" them, albeit silently.

Yet, for this to be possible, the politician must understand the nuances of online representation. Again, Trump was successful during the election due to a number of factors; online, however, he was predominantly successful because his style of communication was a perfect representation of his natural speech. One would read Trump in the same way one would hear him speak during speeches or interviews.

As a final concluding statement, it should be stated that Trump is not unique in this regard. Yet his case is further proof that Twitter, and similar platforms, can create a stage not just for online communication, and not just digital rhetoric in the contemporary user-to-user sense, but digital oratory.

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