MPC Major Research Paper

Campaigning in the time of Twitter: 140 character ethical appeals from the 2012
United States presidential election

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ABSTRACT

This paper looked at the use of Twitter during the 2012 United States presidential campaign and the use of ethos appeals as a strategy to build credibility. As a new communication avenue, Twitter plays an unprecedented role in political discourse today. Both the Barack Obama and Mitt Romney campaigns have engaged in social media strategies and are actively using Twitter to communicate their talking points, and overall political platform. Larry Beason's (1991) categories of *signaled ethos* were applied to examine a collection of tweets from each candidate. Sites like Twitter offer a more personal communication avenue for politicians to use. This paper discusses the strategic messaging on Twitter from politicians, and whether the messages contain ethos. The research questions explored are: to what extent are there ethos appeals on Twitter in the 2012 United States political candidates' tweets? And, to what extent are particular ethos appeals prevalent? Of the 100 tweets examined from Barack Obama, the findings showed that 32% of his tweets contained ethos appeals, while 58% of the 100 tweets from Mitt Romney contained ethos appeals.

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Introduction

The 2012 United States presidential election offers two important online identities, @BarackObama and @MittRomney, the candidates' Twitter feeds, which have acted as important sources of information, promotion, and persuasion during the campaign. As both candidates have significant Twitter followings, their Twitter presence is a valuable tool for the dissemination of campaign information. Four years ago, during the 2008 United States presidential election, Barack Obama implemented one of the first successful social media political strategies, which underscored the importance that political campaigns attach to the use of social media. At the time, Twitter was still considered a secondary communications resource for politicians (Fouhy, 2012). It has been widely assumed that Twitter helped in the success of Obama's 2008 campaign. Using properly formulated 140 character tweets, candidates become influencers of news, responders to real-time questions, and authority figures for the American people. The Internet and social media today have changed the trajectory of the typical political campaign. Though Twitter is just one piece of a politician's overall communication strategy, American political campaigns have now become dependent on social networking as a critical tool that may determine the course of an election. As Twitter serves as a news source for political inquiry, and if people are looking to Twitter as the first source for voting or campaign information, it is necessary to research the technology's connections to political campaigns.

SNS have emerged as a key part of the political landscape and have modernized the traditional aspects of political campaigns. Political communication scholar, Shanto Iyengar (2007), explains how the development of the Internet provided point-to-point forms of communication for the first time and easy access to an unlimited audience (p.105). Unlike conventional forms of media, new social media platforms allow the free transmission of a politician's message. Twitter functions as a computer mediated communication (CMC) tool that disseminates 140-character (or less) messages to various "followers". Often described as the "SMS of the Internet" Twitter generates over 360 million tweets daily with an estimated 225 million users (Bulas, 2011). Within political campaigns it is often speculated that it is not the direct message that holds the power on Twitter, but rather the indirect message that has the ability to conceal meaning (Fouhy, 2012, p.1). Therefore, examining the tweets of current political candidates may provide an understanding of the kinds of persuasive strategies being used by candidates to promote, connect, and establish credibility with audiences on Twitter.

Since 2008, the number of people using social networking sites (SNS) has nearly doubled (Rainie, 2011) and approximately one in five minutes of Internet users' time is spent on a social network (Shaw, 2012). A Pew Internet study suggests that in 2010, one in five online adults used Twitter or a social networking site for political purposes (Smith, 2011c, p.2). Hence, as the 2012 United States presidential campaign season trails on, the role of social media in campaigning will likely be meaningful and memorable.

As Twitter is an increasingly essential tool for campaigns to “test-drive themes,” it becomes more and more important to examine the content of Twitter messages (Fouhy, 2012, p.1). With over 80% of American adults using the Internet, and 66% of those individuals participating on SNS, such as Facebook, Twitter, or Google+ for political purposes, Twitter discussions have the ability to influence opinions, which emphasizes the importance of looking at the kinds of tweets that make up candidates’ messaging (Rainie, 2012).

Twitter plays an unprecedented role in political discourse today. Yet this paper does not evaluate Twitter’s ability to act as an election predictor. Both the Obama and Romney campaigns have engaged in social media strategies and are actively using Twitter to communicate their talking points, and overall political platforms. Beth Fouhy, political reporter for The Associated Press covering the 2012 campaign, considers Twitter a one of a kind technology that has given both “voice and power to millions—and given candidates a real-time way to monitor the effects of their message” (2012, p.1). Larry Beason describes *signaled ethos* as the use of first person pronouns, and self-referential third person pronouns within a text (1991). The communicator, in the case of this study, the politician, aims to move their persona to the forefront of the message in order to suggest things about the communicator as an individual (Beason, 1991). Thus, this paper uses Larry Beason’s (1991) theoretical framework of *signaled ethos* to investigate how credible appeals exist on Twitter.

The underlying motivation for my research is to discover how new media is being used for electoral campaigns and, furthermore, to explore the role of

rhetoric on Twitter. As social media has become an integrated and integral part of Western society, this research provides a valuable and alternative approach to the existing body of Twitter scholarship (Smith, 2012). Also, there is little known about the rhetorical content of campaign tweets. Thus, this study seeks to fill this void by analyzing the types of ethos appeals that are prominent within the selected tweets from both Barack Obama and Mitt Romney. The field of professional communication is constantly evolving and my research highlights how the theory of rhetoric can be combined with Twitter to generate more effective professional forms of communication.

Rhetoric is a fundamental element of politics that dates back to Aristotle. Therefore, this study applies a traditional theory to a contemporary issue. Although I am looking at an American political campaign, my findings give a clear indication of how other countries may also use social media for future campaigns.

Sites like Twitter now offer a more personal communication avenue for politicians to use. The increased access to the Internet has had an impact on the way new forms of “social technology” enable political discourse and mobilize supporters (Iyengar, 2007, p.107). Twitter users have grown in recent years and the micro blogging site has become a hub for information sharing. For example, in 2008 Twitter had only 1.8 million tweets were sent on the American Presidential Election Day. Now, Twitter sees over 1.8 million tweets sent every eight minutes (Fouhy, 2012, p.1).

Having obtained a Bachelor of Arts Honours degree from York University in Communication Studies, I have a natural interest in social media. While gaining a strong background in communication theory, I became especially interested in research on computer-mediated communication (CMC). Additionally, throughout my graduate studies in Professional Communication at Ryerson University, the importance of using practical technologies, such as Twitter, within professional settings sparked an interest into the way that these tools are used for political purposes. I am interested in exploring Twitter's role within the current 2012 American presidential campaign as tool that is now viewed as an essential part of a politician's communication strategy.

Internet based campaigning began in 1992 when Bill Clinton took advantage of online tools by making use of e-mail (Johnson, 2012). Following Clinton, in 2000 the John McCain campaign developed the first fundraising website, but the first notable political campaign to take advantage of the Internet to organize its supporters was the 1998 Jesse Ventura campaign for Governor of Minnesota (Iyengar, 2007). The Ventura campaign launched a website in early 1998. At the time the site was primarily used to develop an e-mail list of volunteers, publicize events and organize meetings (Iyengar, 2007). This was deemed as having a web presence. Fast-forward to 2012 and the Internet has evolved into a social media frenzy, with websites being only one component of an online social media strategy. Politicians have adopted social media and implemented it as a tool for communicating their platforms. The past success of President Barack Obama's 2008 campaign and the thriving nature of the current

2012 campaign demonstrate that the Internet “could and should be exploited for political action” (Iyengar, 2007, p.120). Similar to how the television introduced televised debates and allowed politicians to address millions at one time, Twitter allows candidates to break news, make updates, and communicate with fellow tweeters. Thus, research focused on the messages exchanged on Twitter within a political campaign is essential today as the Western world confines its political messaging to 140-character tweets.

Literature Review

Research shows that there is little known about the rhetorical content of political campaigns, which is thought to be a main component of a political campaign (Jerit, 2004). This study seeks to fill the void of research on the extent of ethos appeals in online political campaign messaging by examining the way that Barack Obama and Mitt Romney are using Twitter in order to establish credibility. Interest in political campaigns and the use of social media has increased following the 2008 Obama campaign. However, applying the theory of rhetoric to the content of the messages exchanged by politicians on Twitter has not been heavily explored.

Research shows that the digital revolution has lead to the creation of a new set of tools for campaigning (Karpf, 2010). Today, as it becomes more common for political discussions to surface online, research looking at the content of messages exchanged online is important (Karpf, 2010). Twitter, as a new online communication technology is said to have been the “biggest change in political reporting” as it provides a possible avenue for politicians and the public to interact (Enda, 2011, p. 19). While looking at the change in political reporting on Twitter, the findings identified three of Twitter’s tactical metrics of success within political campaigns (Karpf, 2010). The first of the three evident metrics was the number of followers an account has. The number of followers one has was found to be an immediate indicator of one’s influence (Karpf, 2010). Second, the use of re-tweets describes how to amplify one’s message and lead to additional followers, and third, the number of tweets one’s account has

indicates the consistency of communication they have with the public (Karpf, 2010, p.153). Karpf's tactical approach relates to how politicians may consider Twitter's affordances for strategic purposes: gaining followers, amplifying a message, and having an influence. This is important, as it explains a politician's motivation for using Twitter as an avenue to promote their particular political platform. Though these metrics may overlook some key affordances such as "mentions" on Twitter, which are likely accounted for under re-tweets. The accuracy of the tactical approach when measuring Twitter's success as a tool in political campaigns may be open to manipulation. First, these tactical measures assume that the number of followers a politician has correlates with the level of influence they have. This idea assumes that all followers are consistently reading the tweets of the specified politician and being swayed by the politician's message. It is not that the number of followers is a bad metric for indicating one's influence, but seeing as tweets can be overlooked due to the abundance of messaging on the network, the number of followers might not be an accurate measure of the ability to sway followers of your opinion. Second, the number of retweets one receives was deemed as a measure indicating one's authority on Twitter. This is an important measure on Twitter, however it too is open to question as it the user that is retweeting the message could have a smaller reach than the politician, thus not benefiting the promotion of the message. The retweet function is thus unpredictable as a tactical metric of Twitter. Though, it is likely a beneficial metric for measuring success if the retweeted message is reaching a larger audience than what it was originally tweeted to. Third, although tweeting is

an important part of getting one's message out there, measuring Twitter's effectiveness for political campaigns based on the number of tweets sent is open to manipulation. For example, tweeting too much, tweeting the wrong message, and tweeting redundant messages leads to a high count of tweets, but could also lead to a poor response on Twitter. Tweeting the same message, tweeting the wrong message, and tweeting excessively may not be received well by followers, thus, measuring the amount of tweets one sends is a metric that presents some possible manipulation when determining success on Twitter.

On the other hand, the approach that my research will consider is not measuring the potential for success using Twitter, but focused on what the content of the messages exchanged say about the construction of the political messages on Twitter. It is important to look at the content of the message, as it will add another area of research to what is already known about how Twitter is being used within political campaigns.

Research during the 2009 Romanian presidential election measured effective Twitter use based on the target audience reached. Similar to Karpf (2010), Paul Adrian (2010) found that maintaining constant activity was an indication of how well a politician was received on Twitter. Adrian's study looked closely at candidates' varied use of social media for political purposes and found that some politicians relied heavily on Facebook, whereas others used a YouTube channel as their primary medium. The findings concluded that politicians who ran a successful campaign were engaged online, and relied on an integrated approach that used multiple social media platforms (Adrian, 2010).

The study found that no Romanian candidate had a positive online presence on all online platforms, but some candidates had more positive presence than others on single online platforms. The findings further illustrate that Romanian politicians relied on Twitter heavily during the 2009 election, and comparisons were made between candidates' Twitter performance based on the number of followers each candidate acquired (Adrian, 2010). Additionally, the findings showed that candidates were influenced by other politicians' use of Twitter. It is logical that politicians are trying to keep up with each other, particularly in the constantly changing media environment. Research shows that simply having a Twitter account is not enough. It is about the number of people reached by the candidate's message, and the degree of interaction that the politician has with other users, for example, the number of tweets sent, is the utmost importance (Adrian, 2010). This is a key idea, as it verifies that it is becoming crucial for politicians to communicate with audiences via Twitter, but does not address the content of the messages being sent, which is what my study will focus on. This is important because by focusing on the content of the message it will inform the public as to how politicians are utilizing new communicative tools in order to build credibility, promote an image, and communicate their platform.

Another way of looking at this topic is by focusing on the communication between politicians and reporters. Research shows that social media tools, particularly Twitter, have altered the political coverage of campaigns (Enda, 2011). Politicians are now communicating directly with the public and bypassing journalists (Enda, 2011). Communication between the politicians and reporters is

becoming obsolete as politicians use Twitter to make announcements, often not alerting the press. By seeking new avenues for communicating their platform, politicians no longer involve the specific journalist or reporter. Enda's (2011) findings emphasize the growing adoption of Twitter within political campaigns for communicating directly to the public. Republican candidates were found to use Twitter to debate, while President Barack Obama was actively responding to tweeters' questions during town hall meetings, avoiding interaction with reporters (Enda, 2011). While my study will look at the content of the message, an important perspective to note is this idea of new social media tools enabling candidates to engage in conversation with journalists directly in ways that were never before possible.

Candidates gain inordinate control over their campaign through social media use, and thus, the messaging becomes increasingly more meaningful to study due to the supposed transparency of the online campaign (Enda, 2011, p.18). Enda's analysis of social media use within political campaigns identifies two particularly interesting occasions. First, Enda refers to the launch of Tim Pawlenty's campaign for the Republican presidential nomination in 2011. Pawlenty posted a video on Facebook and YouTube to announce his candidacy. Twitter was also used during the campaign of Republican Jon Huntsman. Huntsman's campaign set up the "Reality Room" to respond to tweets from the public and postings that may contain inaccurate information about the former Utah governor (Enda, 2011). Twitter in this case was utilized to respond with accurate information to tweeters in rapid time. Enda also found that the "Reality

Room's" use of Twitter was able to determine which tweets were more influential and thus made it a priority to respond to those tweets (2011). The campaign team focused their energy on responding to both journalists and voters on Twitter, and more importantly, the "Reality Room" made rapid response a priority.

Highlighted above is the idea that Twitter functions as a tool to communicate direct, authentic, and real time information, placing the importance on the content of the message. This brings forward the question of authenticity as an issue within online communication. Sites like Twitter present a concern as to whether the entity at the other end of the communication is "real" (Seward, 2009). Apparent in the simple make up of Twitter is the potential to mislead audiences into believing you are someone you aren't. There is a misconception that because the Twitter handle is in the name of the candidate, they are the one tweeting. Important here is the recognition of the campaign staffer. The campaign staffer is often assisting the candidate within the act of tweeting, but the tweets reflect the candidate's platform, and likely have been approved by the candidate. Whether a politician is tweeting or not is hard to prove, but an additional way to identify authenticity is the *verified account* function on Twitter. The *verified account* function aims to prevent identity confusion by visually illustrating that the specific handle is true to who it says it is (Seward, 2009).

While conducting my study it is important to consider Nancy Baym's idea regarding how authenticity online can be determined by the amount of social cues one gives. In the case of determining the voice and tone of a tweet, research suggests that in online settings, such as Twitter, cues given off become

highly informative due to the limited cue platform (Baym, 2010). Thus, within mediated environments, the text of the message becomes a significant indicator of character due to the tone of the message (Baym, 2010). Twitter's 140-character limit leaves the audience with many blanks to fill in about the speaker and the speaker's message, hence the audience has to get as much information as possible out very little cues. The content of the message thus informs the way the tone and voice of the message is received. Within political exchanges online, examining the content of the message in relation to how authentic it is, is important as it may have an influence on how ethos is communicated by a politician.

To be viewed as credible, politicians must be perceived as sincere and trustworthy, two qualities related to how they say things and what they say (Hahn, 1998). This idea is important to my research as it supports my interest into what is being said by politicians on Twitter. Another online platform, blogs, also hold a great deal of communicative power within elections. The popularity of blogs emerged to engage readers and harness support for politicians in 2004 (Acamic & Glance, 2005). The use of blogs during George Bush and John Kerry's campaigns were criticized because their form of blogging did not expand beyond posting formalized press releases (Acamic & Glance, 2005). This idea relates to my research focus on the content of the message, as the unsuccessful use of press releases could be an indicator that the content was not persuasive enough, and perhaps, too formalized, preventing the candidates from building credibility.

The blog appeared as early as the 2004 election as a new medium for communicating political messages, and signaled the initial shift in the political use of the Internet. During that time blogs became an alternative source for political discussion (Karpf, 2009). Blogs surfaced before Twitter, and thus prior to 2008, blogs were considered to be the key feature of the online political landscape (Karpf, 2009). Research on blogs informs my interest in computer-mediated-communication and the use of social media tools, such as Twitter, within political campaigns. Presently, Twitter's role in political campaigns deserves some attention. In particular, the content of the Twitter message and the existence of ethos as a form of strategic messaging. From one-way informational messages, to networked conversation, blogs arguably functioned the same way that Twitter does in the 2012 election season. Communication research shows that blogs are worthy of study due to the changing political space of the Internet. The value of these new online mediums has created a political space online, which Karpf (2009) believes generates some caution, as bloggers should not be seen as independent and undistinguishable groups reporting on political news. Another approach to this idea is my study on Twitter, and the how it is being used by each politician to form messages from an account that is viewed as true to the politician. Finally, Karpf's (2009) findings support the notion that elite political blogs function as spaces for organized political thought. This brought forth my own questions about the possibility of Twitter, as a medium based on organized messaging, being used for the purpose of building credibility.

The studies discussed above dealt with political campaigns and social

media, at this point I'll turn to more specific research done on Twitter. Providing some background knowledge on how Twitter has been used for political purposes is necessary within the scope of this study.

Communication scholars highlight the value of the 140-character tweet within political discussion. Each tweet, strategically constructed in order to communicate a particular platform message, while building a character online, shows that Twitter has become a fundamental part of politics. Lassen and Brown (2011) claim that despite Twitter's growing role in American political discourse, there is little formal research on how and why members of congress use Twitter. My research considers the content of the message and how politicians are using ethos appeals to establish credibility on Twitter. Understanding why politicians use Twitter is important when looking at the intention behind particular tweets. Research suggest that members of Congress leverage their use of social networking services as a part of their constituent communication efforts to maintain their public image and take advantage of the persuasive power inherent in social media (Lassen & Brown, 2011, p.422). Further findings show that Twitter adoption and uses are relatively difficult to predict. However research shows that politicians were more likely to use Twitter if they belong to the minority party, if their party leaders encourage them to, if they are young, or if they are in the Senate (Lassen and Brown, 2011). In contrast to this study, research shows that a politician's use of Twitter during a campaign has minimal effect on the way a politician is received by the public (Tumasjan, 2011).

The use of social media in Barack Obama's 2008 campaign established

Twitter and other social media platforms as integral parts of the “political campaign toolbox” (Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner, & Welp, 2011, p.402). Political campaigns have adopted new online tools; therefore it seems necessary to look at how ethos exists within Twitter messages. Tumasjan’s et al study looked at whether messages on Twitter represent the political landscape offline, and if those messages can be used to predict election results (Tumasjan et al, 2011). The findings support the idea that Twitter is used extensively for political deliberation, while politicians and their advisors are becoming more focused on constructing the message (2011). Tumasjan et al found that Barack Obama’s use of Twitter in 2008 showed that the micro blogging site had become a “legitimate and frequently used communication channel” in politics today (2011, p. 402). Tumasjan et al further highlight that Twitter’s role in political campaigns is evolving and attributes Twitter’s power to the recent adoption rate of the tool by the public.

To conclude, though I have summarized important ideas and approaches to formal research on the Twitter tool, it still remains that there is little research done on the strategic messaging involving ethos appeals found within political campaigns on Twitter. Thus, my research plays an important role, as it will look at the kinds of ethos related messaging found on Twitter exchanged by two candidates in the presidential election.

Theoretical Framework

Rhetoric will be looked to as the main theory to analyze the messages exchanged on Twitter. Aristotle stated that rhetors persuade by effective use of "proofs" or "appeals" (Rhetoric.net, p.1). The basis of rhetoric is the study of conversational techniques that function to provoke or increase the support for an individual (Perelman, 1984). According to Aristotle, acts involving rhetoric are events where political and judicial debaters challenge ideas and seek, by their speech, to gain the support of the audience (Perelman, 1984). Therefore, rhetoric's role is evidently central in political debate. It is almost impossible to eliminate rhetoric from political life, thus the theory of rhetoric will frame this study in order to examine the content of political messages exchanged on Twitter (Perelman, 1984, p.133).

Rhetoric is comprised of three appeals: pathos, logos, and ethos. First, pathos describes the use of persuasion by appealing to the reader's emotions (Ramage, 1998). It is known that language choice affects the audience's emotional response, and thus, an emotional appeal, or pathos, can effectively be used to build an argument (Ramage, 1998). The second appeal, logos, means to persuade through the use of reasoning (Ramage, 1998). An argument may be enhanced through the clarity of the claim and supporting evidence (Ramage, 1998). For the purpose of this study, the concept of ethos, the third persuasive appeal of rhetoric, will be used to examine political messaging on Twitter.

Ethos is described as credibility, or ethical appeals, and involves convincing by the author (Ramage, 1998). Ethos is referred to as persuasion

through “the character of the speaker” (Johnson, 1996, p.243). Similar to the way the traditional campaign speech was used to communicate, persuade, and promote, today, candidates are attempting to persuade through ethos by bringing attention to the writer’s character on Twitter (Rhetorica.net).

The character of the speaker remains the focus of building ethos within a text. Ethos becomes evident when trustworthiness or credibility of the writer is illustrated (Ramage, 1998). This study will focus on ethos, which draws upon the “goodness and excellence” of the speaker as a mode of persuasion to create a larger credible character for particular rhetorical occasions (Johnson, 1996, p.243).

To identify specific categories of ethos I will use the concept of *signaled ethos* (Beason, 1991) to explain the kinds of tweets being exchanged by key political actors in the current United States presidential election (Beason, 1991, p.328). *Signaled ethos* describes the use of first person pronouns, and self-referential third person pronouns within a text (Beason, 1991). This means the communicator’s persona is moved to the “forefront of the message”, and thus, the text aims to suggest things about the communicator as an individual (Beason, 1991, p.328). An example of this could be the use of “we”, “I” and “this writer.” While Beason (1991) applied *signaled ethos* to business speeches, this study will apply *signaled ethos* to the written tweets of two candidates. Within the category of *signaled ethos*, the following are the five sub-categories of *signaled ethos* raised by Beason (1991):

- **Similitude:** When a speaker identifies similarities between themselves

and their audiences.

- **Deference:** Avoiding arrogance and the ability to show courtesy for their audience by not being presumptuous.
- **Self-Criticism:** Admitting to the shortcomings of their claims in order to seem trustworthy.
- **Expertise:** Focuses on the speaker's knowledge of the topic of discussion.
- **Inclination to succeed:** Emphasizing successful past track record or alluding to future success.

The general understanding is that appeals to ethos (also referred to as ethical appeals) stems from the assumption that audiences are disposed to accepting the arguments of writers or speakers who are trusted and respected (Beason, 1991). The content of the message is the focal point to which *signaled ethos* will be applied to in order to conceptualize what is being said within a given text on Twitter.

This study aims to investigate this possibility of ethos appeals on Twitter and provide a further explanation for the five kinds of ethos appeals introduced above.

Research Questions

This research addresses the following questions:

- To what extent are there ethos appeals on Twitter in the 2012 United States political candidates' tweets?
- And, to what extent are particular ethos appeals prevalent within the tweets looked at?

First, I want to acknowledge the possibility of ethos appeals found in two candidates' Twitter feeds and to what extent it occurs. Secondly, I will explore how the two candidates' are using ethos, one of the three appeals of rhetoric, as a communication strategy within their campaign. Larry Beason's (1991) five categories of *signaled ethos* will be looked to as a guide for understanding how ethos can be used and they will be applied to the current United States presidential campaign.

This research explores the communicative value of the Internet within political campaigns. As the Internet "continues to grow in importance as a source of political news," the use of social media for campaign purposes, in particular, is an interest of mine (Smith, 2011c, p. 2).

The technical design of Twitter creates unique communicative potential. The use of retweets, mentions and hashtags exist as different functions to share and streamline content on Twitter. These conventions are worth considering in relation to ethical appeals, however, will not be explored in this paper due to the narrow focus of the project.

I want to address a few possible limitations inherent in my analysis before

moving on. Firstly, works written by Western scholars primarily, but not solely, influence my research. Therefore, in an effort to provide a more balanced perspective, theorists and theories consulted in my research come from non-exclusively American sources.

Second, it is also important to note that the politicians wrote not all of the tweets I am examining. This might impact how credibility statements are interpreted. It is written in Barack Obama's Twitter bio that unless signed "BO", he does not write his own tweets (Obama, 2012). Mitt Romney has not spoken on the authenticity of his tweets. In the case that I refer to tweets as "Obama's" and "Romney's", this is due to the fact that I have gathered tweets from each of their "official verified" Twitter accounts with the assumption that the tweets represent them. The Twitter account of each candidate have been "verified" by Twitter's service that reads:

"Verification is currently used to establish authenticity of identities on Twitter. The verified badge helps users discover high-quality sources of information and trust that a legitimate source is authoring the account's Tweets."

(Twitter.com, 2012)

While this paper does not address how effective the credibility statements are in persuading voters, it takes on a new perspective regarding which types of ethos appeals are most common.

The Method Section

The incentive for this research is to discover how new media is being used for electoral campaigns by looking at the possibility of ethos appeals on Twitter. To understand the nature of rhetorical messaging on Twitter, my study will examine tweets from both a Democratic and a Republican candidate.

This research will take place on the social networking site, Twitter, and will look at tweets sent from each politician to their followers. The study incorporates a theoretical approach based on rhetoric, specifically, ethical appeals. A total of two 2012 electoral candidate's official Twitter accounts will be looked at in order to analyze the possible ethos appeals. The objective of this study is to look at the identified categories of *signaled ethos* according to Beason (1991) within the tweets being sent from the current 2012 political candidates.

A qualitative content analysis based of the collection of Tweets will frame this study. Qualitative content analysis is a research method for the "subjective interpretation of the content of text data" through a classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1278). Through qualitative content analysis, this study will be analytically identifying specific signaled ethos categories of messages. This study will discuss what is known about Twitter, while evaluating the kinds of ethos appeals that originate in each politician's online campaign initiative, particularly on Twitter.

The documents collected for the purpose of the study are tweets from the public Twitter accounts of two current United States electoral candidates, President Barack Obama and Mitt Romney.

A total of 100 tweets will be collected from each candidate's Twitter account for a total of 200 tweets to analyze. Retweets will not be included within the analysis, only original content written by each politician. The data collection took place 6 months before the election date, during the primaries, per the assumption that it will be an interesting time in the campaign with presumably a lot of action on Twitter.

The tweets will be accessed on the social networking site, *Twitter.com*. In order for a tweet to be considered it must (1) be a tweet from a current presidential candidate, and (2) be one of the last 100th available tweets prior to May 7th, 2012. Because Twitter archives tweets, all tweets were collected within one day, but the tweets date back to as far as February 28th, 2012 and are as current at May 7th, 2012.

This research will pursue two sides of inquiry. First, this study will code ethical appeals found within the tweets according to Beason's (1991) description of *signaled ethos*. Second, this study will show how the findings might provide insight about how ethos-based appeals exist within the Twitter environment. This research will offer a new interpretation of what is the most common categories of *signaled ethos* exist within political discourse online.

Larry Beason's (1991) theoretical definition of *signaled ethos* will be used to code the tweets. First, I am coding the 100 tweets for ethos, and then further 5 sub-categories. The following are the five sub-categories that will be used to code and identify ethos appeals: similitude, deference, self-criticism, expertise, and inclination to succeed. Every appeal found will be accounted for and coded.

It is possible that individual tweets can be coded for multiple appeals depending on the content of the tweet. For example, if there are 10 ethos tweets, within the 10 tweets, there is a possibility of finding 13 ethos appeals. If a tweet does not contain an ethos appeal it will not be coded. In this study I chose to count multiple appeals within single tweets to avoid giving priority to one category over the other and to stay true to the data. Thus, coding more than one category in a tweet ensures that I do not overlook a category and allows a fair analysis.

Results

The underlying motivation for this research is to discover how new media is being used for electoral campaigns while looking at the possibility of ethos within political messaging on Twitter. This study looks at the kinds of ethos appeals made from each candidate's Twitter account, and what this means about Twitter's role within political campaigns.

In regards to research question one, out of 100 tweets looked at from each of Barack Obama's and Mitt Romney's Twitter accounts, the results show 32% of Barack Obama's tweets, and 58% of Mitt Romney's tweets fall under one of the 5 categories of *signaled ethos*. *Signaled ethos* is the overall concept, as well as a category under the concept, also referred to as *self-referential*. An overall breakdown of the extent to which *signaled ethos* categories exists in the two candidates tweets are found in Figure1.

Figure 1: Overall ethos related tweets

The following section illustrates the results pertaining to each category of *signaled ethos*, while also providing an example tweet. Out of a hundred tweets looked at from Barack Obama's Twitter account, 21 of 32 (65%) of the tweets were found in the category *self-referential*, which includes the use of "I", "we" or "this writer" (Beason, 1991). In the 100 tweets looked at from Mitt Romney, *self-referential* accounted for 44% out of the total 58 ethos related tweets. Evidently, *self-referential* appeared in the most tweets. An example of an appeal to build ethos through the category of *self referential* is found in the tweet: "*As long as I'm President, I will never allow Medicare to be turned into a voucher that would end the program as we know it*" (Obama, 2012). The use of "President" and "I" in the same tweet reinforces that the person tweeting is the President, which presents the speaker as an authority figure who should be trusted.

Similitude was found in three tweets containing ethos, which makes up for 1% of the 32 ethos related tweets from Barack Obama. Similarly, *similitude* is found in 1% (6) of Romney's tweets as he establishes similarities between him and his audience. The tweet, "*This Easter, we are thankful for our brave men and women in uniform who are serving our country & are away from their families,*" falls under the category of *similitude* (Romney, 2012). It is known that Easter is a widely celebrated holiday, thus Romney mentions the holiday in order to relate with those who celebrate Easter and reinforce that he is similar to the public and therefore, trustworthy. The tweet further establishes *similitude* as Romney recognizes the soldiers fighting overseas. Romney uses a sensitive topic such as the war to communicate to audiences that he shares his support for the troops in

the same way that many Americans do. Finally, the use of “our country,” is used to communicate to audiences that Romney too is a U.S. citizen and because of this similarity audiences should trust him.

Deference describes a lack of arrogance from the speaker and acknowledgment of the audience (Beason, 1991). *Deference* accounted for 1% (1) of Barack Obama’s ethos related tweets, and 17% (10) of Mitt Romney’s. The two criteria of *deference* are, avoiding arrogance, and showing courtesy for the audience (Beason, 1991). Romney avoids arrogance for his audience in the tweet, “@NewtGingrich has brought creativity and intellectual vitality to American political life. Proud to call him a friend” (Romney, 2012). *Deference* is reinforced in the tweet as Romney avoids egotism and compliments Newt Gingrich on his campaign after Gingrich announces that he is out of the republican race. Romney says Gingrich proved to be “intellectual” and “creative”, which makes Romney look modest while also congratulating him. Another tweet that shows *deference* is found in one of Obama’s tweets: “A few thousand votes could decide this election—but millions of eligible voters aren’t registered. You can change that: OFA.BO/b4p9kf” (Obama, 2012). Obama avoids arrogance by not making assumptions about the election results. He also avoids being presumptuous by subtly encouraging millions to register to vote.

Overall, there were no tweets from either candidate that accounted for *self-criticism*, which describes when the speaker admits to shortcomings of their claims in order to build trust and seem credible (Beason, 1991).

Expertise made up 15% (5) of Barack Obama's ethos related tweets and 29% (17) of Mitt Romney's. *Expertise* focuses on the speaker's knowledge of a specific topic (Beason, 1991). An example of an *expertise* tweet is "*Hope is not a foreign policy. My full address to AIPAC this morning mi.tt/zqwCzE #Mitt2012*" (Romney, 2012). Referring to "AIPAC," *The American Israeli Public Affairs Committee*, reinforces the speaker's association with an important international organization, which heightens the speaker's credibility. Romney directs audiences to his "full address" by providing a URL that includes his expertise in greater detail on the topic of foreign policy. This reinforces that the construction of ethos is taking place through Romney providing information and establishing knowledge on a particular topic to influence readers that the speaker is credible.

Inclination to succeed was found in 19% (6) of the 32 ethos related tweets from Barack Obama, and 18% (11) of the 58 ethos tweets from Mitt Romney. The use of *inclination to succeed* in the Twitter message aims to build credibility by referring to past successes as well as future intentions to succeed (Beason, 1991). The tweet, "*I want to stop rewarding businesses that ship jobs & profits overseas, & start rewarding companies that create jobs right here in the USA,*" represents *inclination to succeed* because of the future tense Obama is speaking in (Obama, 2012). The phrase "I want to" implies a projection into the future with the intention of a goal, in this case, to stop "rewarding businesses that ship jobs & profits overseas". Another example of *inclination to succeed* is: "*With @RepPaulRyan's support, I have every confidence that we can begin the hard work of setting our country on a better course*" (Romney, 2012). In this tweet

Romney makes reference to his past success by mentioning @RepPaulRyan, U.S. representative, about his endorsement. In the latter half of the tweet the speaker uses future tense to suggest that he anticipates success within the campaign. He states, “*I have every confidence that we can begin the hard work of setting our country on a better course.*” The use of the word “confidence” reinforces assurance and certainty within the speaker’s claims, and suggests that he should be trusted to set the country on a better course.

In conclusion, considering research question one, the results show that out of the 200 tweets, 45%, (90 tweets) contain ethos appeals within the messaging of two candidates on Twitter according to Beason’s (1991) concept *signaled ethos*.

In regards to the second research question, the findings show specific categories were more prevalent than others. Figure 2 and Figure 3 show a breakdown of the categories found in the tweets looked at.

Figure 2. Number of Obama’s tweets found containing categories of signaled ethos

Figure 3. Number of Romney's tweets found containing categories of signaled ethos

The findings show *self-referential* was the most common category of *signaled ethos* found, making up for 21 of the Obama's 32 ethos related tweets, and 26 of Romney's 58 ethos related tweets. *Expertise* was found in 5 of Obama's 32 ethos tweets and 17 of Romney's 58 ethos tweets, accounting for the second most prevalent category. *Inclination to succeed* was the third most prevalent category, accounting for 6 of 32 ethos tweets from Obama and 11 of 58 ethos tweets from Romney. There were 3 tweets containing *similitude* from Obama's tweets, and 6 containing similitude from Romney's. *Deference* was found in 1 of Obama's 32 ethos related tweets, and found in 10 of Romney's, making it the lowest category represented in the tweets. *Self-criticism* was not found in any of the tweets.

Furthermore, considering the second research question, multiple categories were represented within a single tweet; hence, some combinations of

signaled ethos categories were more prevalent than others. Barack Obama's 32 ethos tweets showed 36 ethos appeals, meaning there are four tweets with multiple categories. *Inclination to succeed* and *self-referential* were found in two tweets. An example of this is found in the following tweet: "*President Obama: 'If people ask you what this campaign is about you tell them it's still about hope. It's still about change'*" (Obama, 2012). The use of "President Obama" reinforces the third person self-reference, and the reference to "this campaign" and "still about hope" highlights the Obama's confidence to succeed. The other overlapping categories were *self-reference* and *similitude*, and *inclination to succeed* and *expertise* each combination having found one tweet within it.

Within 58 ethos tweets of Mitt Romney's, there were 70 ethos appeals found, meaning there are 12 tweets with multiple categories. The most prevalent combination are five tweets found containing *deference* and *self-referential*. An example tweet is: "*Senator Santorum is an able and worthy competitor, and I congratulate him on the campaign he ran*" (Mitt Romney, 2012). The use of "I" represents a self-reference, and by congratulating another candidate (Senator Santorum) on the campaign this tweet reinforces *deference* through the speaker's lack of arrogance and courtesy for the other. The remaining tweets with multiple categories were found in the combinations of: *Inclination to succeed* and *self-reference* with five tweets, *self-reference* and *expertise* with one tweet, and *expertise*, *inclination to succeed*, and *self-referential* with one tweet.

Thus, the results show that on Twitter, for these two candidates, particular categories of *signaled ethos* (1991) are more prevalent than others, and multiple

appeals per tweet exist in combinations of *signaled ethos* categories within the tweets.

Discussion

Extent to which *signaled ethos* appeals appear on Twitter

This study explores how Twitter functions as a new communication tool in national elections, and whether rhetoric, specifically ethos, exists within tweets as it does within traditional campaign speeches. The findings show that ethos appeals according to Beason's (1991) *signaled ethos* are present within the tweets from the current 2012 United States presidential candidates.

It is assumed to be a mark of credibility if politicians appear sincere and trustworthy, which relies on how they say things and what they say (Hahn, 1998). The results show that 32% of Barack Obama's tweets, and 58% of Mitt Romney's tweets fall under the concept of *signaled ethos*, which provide support to Aristotle's view that rhetoric is a fundamental element of politics. Hahn's argument that rhetoric exists within politics as an essential strategy can be applied to the results of this study that show politics online rely on techniques of rhetoric, such as ethos appeals.

Ethos appeals exist within the tweets examined due to the understanding that audiences are disposed to accepting the arguments of writers or speakers who are trusted and respected (Beason, 1991). It is likely that ethos appeals were used on Twitter in connection with what Karpf (2010) describes as tactical strategies on Twitter. Karpf argues that politicians consider Twitter's affordances for strategic purposes: gaining followers, amplifying messages, and having influence. Based on the examined tweets, it is likely that politicians are aware of these affordances and have implemented Twitter use as an overall

communication strategy. Thus, one can infer that based on the number of ethos tweets found, and the general use of Twitter in each campaign, political campaigns have strengthened their messaging through the use of ethos appeals on Twitter to ensure that tweets are; reinforced, disseminated, and trusted. One could speculate that the existence of ethos appeals on Twitter links to the value of the Twitter tool within political campaigning. It is likely that because ethos appeals exist on Twitter, campaign staff and politicians are seeing the value in using Twitter to build strategy. This idea provides further support to Enda's (2011) report that emphasized the growing adoption of Twitter within political campaigns as a means of communicating directly to the public. It is possible that politicians combine Edna's approach with proven results of ethos appeals because they believe the Twitter message will be received and interpreted by audiences directly. Therefore, the inclusion of a credibility statement within the tweets from politicians is worthwhile to their overall campaign goals, As it is understood that to be credible, politicians must be perceived as sincere, which is a factor related to what is said and how it is said (Jerit, 2004).

It is possible that ethos appeals were being used by candidates to establish credibility due to the limited amount of social cues given on Twitter. According to Baym (2010) less social cues leads to a heightened importance of the message. It has been theorized that people read more into messages when they have less social cues. Social cues such as, facial and verbal (voice) cues would contribute to an overall interpretation of a message. On Twitter, neither of those cues exists, so the lack of those cues result in the written message being

the fundamental factor that is interpreted. Politicians using Twitter want audiences to believe their messages are authentic. Accordingly, based on Joseph Walther's approach, ethos appeals can enhance the limited message in the tweet to make the idea of the tweet more meaningful and valid to the reader than if it existed without the ethos claim (Baym, 2010). When reading tweets, the audience makes assumptions about the given text. Therefore, ethos appeals, when present in political tweets, can assist the reader in making judgments about the validity of the given text. If campaigns focus on the idea that people read more into Twitter messages to determine the credibility of the candidate, one could speculate that the existence of ethos appeals in political messaging would be better communicated online, than in person.

As the study was conducted during a focused period of time, the extent to which ethos appeals exist could more or less change throughout the campaign period. The extent to which ethos appeals exist is interesting because of the fact that Twitter is viewed as a "live" feed and depends on timing. Hence, if there were more ethos tweets on a particular day, one could believe there was a strong message trying to be communicated. Additionally, the extent to which ethos appeals exist may be informed by Lassen and Brown's (2011) idea that the content of the 140-character message is significant as each tweet is strategically constructed in order to communicate a particular platform message. It is likely that while building a credible presence online, politicians have utilized Twitter as a fundamental avenue for their messaging. Consequently, it can be speculated

that politicians' Twitter messages are carefully constructed, and ethos appeals appear with a meaningful intention.

Examining how the *signaled ethos* categories are portrayed in the data

This study assumes that the content of the message on Twitter is a focal point for politicians to strategically build a credible image through ethos appeals. The most common category according to Beason's (1991) concept of signaled ethos found was *self-referential*, which accounts for references to "we," "I," or "this speaker." It is likely that politicians used this as a strategy to move their persona to the forefront of the message in order to suggest things about the communicator as an individual, and in the end build credibility. For example, third person pronouns were used in Obama's tweets, such as *President Obama* in order to remind audiences that the speaker is in a position of authority and the message should be trusted because he is the president. This wording likely occurred because on Twitter tweets can be read quickly and are often glanced over. But, by reinforcing the position or name of the speaker, it puts the politician at the forefront of the message and directs audiences to the superiority of the speaker (Johnson, 1996).

The results show the least common category found was *self-criticism*, which describes when the speaker points out faults or shortcomings of their claims in order to seem trustworthy. It is likely that there were no self-critiquing tweets because candidates find little value in claiming their faults on Twitter. One possible explanation as to why this category of *signaled ethos* did not appear in the tweets is because of the way it would be received over mediated

communication. On Twitter, a tweet including a self-critique was not as prevalent, possibly due to the nature of it being read online in an environment that has limited social cues, and thus the critique may not lead to perceptions of trust. The data suggests that specific categories of *signaled ethos* are more common than others within the tweets of two presidential candidates, and therefore, perhaps the most prevalent categories are likely more successful at building ethos in online environments.

Conclusion

The results show support for the assumption that ethos appeals exist as a strategy within the online space of political campaigns. The results show President Barack Obama's and Mitt Romney's Twitter accounts both demonstrate the potential to find ethos appeals under the framework of Beason's (1991) *signaled ethos*.

This study aims to inform previous research focused on strategic messaging within political campaigns, by looking at the extent to which ethos appeals exists on Twitter and which types of ethos appeals most commonly appear. While considering the 200 tweets collected during the 6-week period of data accumulation, the results of Obama and Romney's tweets suggest that Twitter is an appropriate space to look for the possibility of ethos appeals. The use of the 140-character tweet to communicate ethos online is found in 32% of Barack Obama's tweets, and 58% of Mitt Romney's tweets. The findings further show that the ethos tweets could also contain more than one category of ethos appeal within a given tweet.

It is speculated that politician's are using online tools such as Twitter to reach audiences through the content of the message in order to build credibility to support their campaign initiative. The results show minor support for the assumption that Twitter is now a primary tool within political campaigns and could likely be used as a continuous measure to disseminate important messages.

Ethos appeals, one of the three techniques of rhetoric, often described as central within political discussion, were explored in an online space, Twitter.

Further research into how pathos and logos appear within political campaigns on Twitter would further complement this research and provide a larger look at how rhetoric is used as strategy for political campaigns in online spaces.

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