

Long-Term Effect of Donald Trump's Usage of White Supremacist Rhetoric on Public Discourse: A Content Analysis of Comments to a Tweet About Donald Trump's Dinner with Nick Fuentes on Twitter

Ethan Simmons

MacEwan University

Abstract

This qualitative study performed a content analysis of the top 50 comments on a tweet about Donald Trump and his dinner with white supremacist Nick Fuentes. This study aimed to see if any long-lasting effects were caused by Trump's utilization of white supremacist dogmatic rhetoric. The comments were coded for relationships with each other and prevalent themes; five were apparent 1) Criticism of the media, 2) Mention of Trump's base, 3) Use of the term white supremacist, 4) Use of term antisemitism, 5) and Criticism of Trump or Republican Party. The most pervasive themes explored were the sentiment that Trump is associated with white supremacy, a notion that tarnished him and his base, according to the findings of this analysis.

Introduction

Donald Trump is a highly charismatic individual; he is loud, boisterous, and able to captivate millions, but these qualities that made him a television celebrity carry with them the potential to be extremely harmful. His charisma is appealing to some but disgusting to others, making him a very divisive candidate for the Republican Party, yet he persisted in a presidency. Trump was able to win over the Republican Party, which had previously deemed him an unfit choice. Some members of the party even levied insults toward him; regardless, he was able to win over the Republican Party and the American people.

So how did this volatile businessman become president of the United States of America? A couple of areas of interest culminate towards one central theme: Trump was very systematic and effective at harnessing a specific kind of voter. To draw on the voter pool

necessary to capture the presidency, Trump needed to play into specific themes that would spark outrage among some and support among others. Scholars in the fields of political science, sociology, and psychology attribute Trump's effectiveness at harnessing the white vote as what led him to his success. Some call on his ability to draw a "psychological wage" (Inwood, 2019, Psychological wage of whiteness) into consideration as a factor that led to his success, while others make a note of "white nationalist postracialism" (Maskovsky, 2017, p. 434). Whatever the case may be, it is clear that Trump utilized racial tensions and racial undertones pervasive in the American social sphere to propel himself toward the presidency, which will be analyzed further in this review.

The key concepts that play a part in the dissection of Trump's campaign hedge around racial tensions that already existed in America that Trump merely played

upon to elicit his desired outcome. One of the most prominent themes prevalent throughout the scholarly bodies of work I analyzed in crafting this analysis was that Trump played into race to harness white votes. This was a systematic and calculated effort by Trump and his staff to prey on minority and disenfranchised groups to become more appealing to the voting class that he needed support from to be elected. This was done through various methods starting with the economy, Civil Rights politics, tweets, fearmongering, psychological wage, and appeal to narcissism, the collective of these things rooted in white supremacist tendencies.

In times of economic downturn, white supremacy tends to rise (Maskovsky, 2017, p. 434), and Trump utilized this tension caused by the economy to persuade white voters. This was done through anti-immigration rhetoric that made white voters resentful of minority groups (Pulido et al., 2019, p. 529). This resentment could then be harnessed to push back against policies now framed as anti-white. By contrasting policies as benefitting one race over another, we can speculate towards alienation among the population leading individuals to be driven towards certain camps that portray their beliefs. If a leader can portray that they will benefit a group, they will become the head of it, which is precisely what Trump did. He sparked a divide that further entrenched individuals in their own belief set, driving them farther from common ground and closer to radical beliefs. "By nurturing the white nation via spectacular racism, Trump has shifted the racial formation so that overt white supremacy is increasingly normalized" (Pulido et al., 2019, p. 522).

The fragility of whiteness in America can be found in what is referred to as psychological wage, referenced by Inwood. *Psychological wage* is a concept that establishes the thought that White Americans are compensated for lack of wage with social standing or position based on the colour of their skin (Inwood, 2019, Psychological wage of whiteness). By compensation, White Americans are provided better positions in their social class than non-whites. Furthermore, this keeps them subordinate because they do not wish to lose their position and become equal to non-whites who occupy the same social class (Inwood, 2019, Psychological wage of whiteness). *Psychological wage* is a critical theory that focuses on the racial

divide to ensure that class solidarity is not easily attained. This means that White Americans will support a racialized system to keep their position within the system because they do not wish to fall in standing and become treated the way they treat non-whites. When a charismatic authority like Trump then tells those individuals who possess these worries that supporting him will alleviate their fears, that is how he comes to win them over. It is demonstrable in tumultuous times when there is uncertainty that "there is a return to white supremacy and the white supremacist foundations of the United States." (Inwood, 2019, Race and the US political economy). Donald Trump harnessed the chaos caused by his fearmongering of Mexican immigrants (Inwood, 2019, The crisis of white (biological) reproduction) to attract the white supremacist inklings that persist in America.

Another integral theme in garnering support in Trump's favour was done through a process Maskovsky describes as the reappropriation of Civil Rights-era politics. He describes this as the progressive and reformative policies ushered in by the Civil Rights era being used to attack their very foundations (Maskovsky, 2017, p. 434). By asserting that there are no longer racial discrepancies prevalent in society, advocates of the erosion of Civil Rights era policies are able to make claims for their removal. They argue that affirmative action protocols are unjust and require removal because they disparage hard workers who miss opportunities because they are looked over for affirmative action hires (Maskovsky, 2017, p. 434). However, this is not the case because institutional racism and bias still affect individuals, and because of this. At the same time, more people have access to similar opportunities, but they still are not equal. However, by bringing up these points, Trump was able to spark outrage among racist voters who believe that the white populace is being disenfranchised in order to support minority groups who benefit from these programs or policies.

The whole of these strategies relies on a base of white supremacy and far-right political ideology. The farther a political party moves toward the right, the more closely it resembles authoritarianism, according to Hart and Stekler. Who found a link between narcissism and political conservatism that were specific to Donald Trump (Hart & Stekler, 2021, p. 386); they reflect

insecurity and predispose individuals to authoritarianism. All that needed to be done was drum up enough fear and insecurity that Trump could play into those fears and again harness the vote of scared authoritarian predisposed individuals. It is important to note that authoritarian belief are also rooted in white supremacist anti-immigration rhetoric. That is how, through many different streams, Trump grasped onto white supremacy to bolster his position and garner support.

Following the above literary analysis, the principal researcher has laid an appropriate foundation to produce an adequate understanding of Trump and knowledge about his use of white supremacy during his election and presidency. Moving forward from this literature, the content of this paper will be fixated on an analysis of a specific topic prepared by the principal researcher. The specific area of interest is investigating white supremacy on Twitter to see the long-term effect that Donald Trump has had on public discourse.

Methods

Sample and Sample Selection

The sample collected for the purpose of this study was the top 50 comments made in response to a tweet about Trump. The original tweet the selected comments were from was regarding Donald Trump and his unwillingness to disavow a white supremacist whom he had dinner with out of fear of alienating a part of his political base. Twitter was used to gather this sample because of its ease of access and widespread use, enabling a large sample pool for comments to be drawn from. The comments drawn upon were the top 50 available when scrolling down from the original tweet. This ensured that the comments chosen were not biased or chosen because of relevance and that they expressed a random sample of the comment section. Ideally, this expressed as many points of view among the relatively small sample size of 50 comments as possible to represent as closely as possible public sentiment.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this study was the written responses in the form of tweets to the original source tweet referencing Trump. Of these tweets there were a small sample of memes or picture responses which

were not included in results because they were not of significance when coding occurred.

Setting and Materials

This content analysis took place in lecture room 6-153 at MacEwan University as well as the principal researcher's home office. A specific location was not required because the principal researcher was analyzing social media content, which could take place anywhere with an internet connection. The materials required for this content analysis were a laptop, iPhone, Twitter account, and printer. The laptop was used to research and gather academic data and literature. The iPhone was used to scroll on Twitter, looking for the content that would be analyzed in this report. The Twitter account was used to access Twitter so that content could be gathered, and finally, the printer was used to print off the comments on the tweet so that they could be marked up for use in coding.

Coding Scheme

The 50 comments were gathered and then separately evaluated to investigate the individual nature of each item. Each comment was individually inspected for keywords, sentiment, and overall content. This provided a general sense of the contents of the comments and revealed areas of interest. During the second coding stage, the same comments were evaluated a second time with the areas of interest in mind to see if there were any re-occurring themes. The secondary analysis was also done to reveal any overarching themes that could have been missed in the initial overview or general similarities between the 50 comments.

Results

Five general themes emerged from the analysis 1) Criticism of the media, 2) Mention of Trump's base, 3) Use of the term white supremacist, 4) Use of term antisemitism, 5) and Criticism of Trump or Republican Party.

Criticism of the media

This was an unexpected theme that appeared in 16% of the tweet comments. What was unexpected about this theme was that the content of the comments primarily interacted with criticism of Trump or the Republican Party. However, some chose to criticize the media for

their relationship with Trump. What was further interesting was that of the 50 comments, the 16% that made up criticisms of the media were equally split. Four of the comments criticized the media for giving Trump too much attention and, therefore, a voice for his outbursts that incite his base. "I think he knows that not criticizing men like him gets him articles like this in the media and his base reacts". In comparison, the other four comments criticized the media for not bringing more attention to Trump and his antics while also failing to denounce his actions. "Donald Trump continues to align with, embolden and unabashedly support white supremacists and antisemitism bc [because] the media doesn't hold him accountable at all." Either for doing too much or too little, the media caught flack for its relationship with Trump. This was a surprising finding because it was not something that was expected to be found in the comments of a tweet concentrated on white supremacy. (n=50)

Mention of Trump's base

This theme was not unexpected as the original tweet that the comments were pulled from were discussing Trump not wanting to lose a part of his base [white supremacists]. However, occurring at a rate of 32% in a sample of 50 comments, it expresses that a significant number of people hold the sentiment that Trump capitulates to white supremacists or is associated with them. One commenter described the shared belief exceptionally well "If your base is white supremacists, Nazi's, and antisemites... there is something wrong with your base.". Also found as a theme in this trend of comments regarding Trump's base as white supremacists was the idea that he was indentured to them. Four comments were made insinuating or outright expressing that Trump is in servitude to white supremacist parties because of campaign donations "If he can't criticize them, they own him." "Plus if he did the free money would stop flowing". (n=50)

Use of the term white supremacist

This refers to how many instances in the comment replies to the original tweet the term was mentioned. White supremacy or another variation in the same capacity appeared in 24% of comments regarding Trump or those linked to him. This was not shocking because of the origins of the original tweet that these comments were gathered from. It was expected to see

the term used frequently, but although it was expected, it does show that of this random sample, 24% of comments were comfortable using this term in the discussion of Trump. What is notable, however, is the use of other similar terms in the comments regarding the tweet about Trump and his dinner guest Nick Fuentes. The term "Nazi" was used four times, "racist" three times, and "bigot" three times as well. Indicating an overarching theme that 44% of the comments associate Trump with these labels. (n=50)

Antisemitic

The use of this term or of a variation of the same meaning was used to track and indicate the usage of this word across the comments. It was found that 16% of the comments utilized this term when engaging with content about Trump or those with whom he keeps company. Added to the already accounted for 44% of comments utilizing other terminology labelling hateful ideology, this now marks 60% of commenters associating Trump and company with these labels. This was shocking because it indicates that over half of this random sample feels as if Trump envelopes these ideologies or that he interacts in spheres with individuals that do, making him guilty by association. Showing an overarching theme that there is public belief in Trump's affiliation with the terminology used to define hate speech. (n=50)

Critical of Trump, GOP, and Republican Party

This section marks comments that were critical of Trump, the GOP, and the Republican Party. A common theme of the comments was to lump these three things together in certain instances, which is why they were collected as a group rather than individually. As a result of this, 74% of the comments were found to be critical of Trump; the GOP referred to as the "GQP" by a commenter jabbing at far-right QAnon beliefs engulfing the GOP and the Republican Party. The consensus from the random sample of comments was that "The Republican Party is lost" and there is an overarching theme of distrust and resentment towards these three groups. However, a notable finding relevant to this was that of the 50 comments and the 74% that lobbied criticisms, only two comments were constructive in nature, offering solutions or methods to build upon. For example, stating that to be a part of the solution, one can "Initiate conversation, Cultivate a

new way of thinking, Take action” whereas the majority of critiques did not offer up any constructive methods: “To that thought. “crickets” for the rest of the GOP for not calling Trump out (again/J6) for hosting trash at MAL. Their silence is deafening and shameful, but on-brand.”. (n=50)

Table 1. Themes

| Themes Prevalent in Comments | Example Quotations |
|---|---|
| Criticism of the media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too much attention • Not enough attention | <p>“This supports the idea that everything in a narcissist’s life is transactional and devoid of moral substance. Whether he understands the moral issue is irrelevant. He says things to attract attention to himself and we can all see how the media have always played into his hands”</p> <p>“The failure of every media outlet to denounce and disavow Trump and state clearly he is disqualified from ever seeking or holding office again is a FAILURE”</p> |
| Mention of Trump’s base | <p>“Trump had Fuentes there because his base was unhappy with him. If anyone doesn’t think this helps him reel in his base, I don’t know what to say anymore. When Trump won the election in 2020, we got rejoicing Nazis and anti-Semitic hate unleashed on us. His base ❤️s this meeting.”</p> <p>“Trump doesn’t want to alienate his white supremacist base.”</p> |
| Use of term white supremacist | <p>“Trump doesn’t denounce white supremacists because he is a white supremacist—he likes and agree with their bigotry, he ran on a platform of bigotry. He appropriated “America First” from the American nazi party.”</p> <p>“His “outrage” at not knowing he dined with a known white supremacist is as phony as his thin orange skin. He’s a proven racist who didn’t like the backlash.”</p> |
| Use of term antisemitism | <p>“So he’s admitting that his base consists of white supremacists and antisemites. Got it. 👍😬”</p> |
| Criticism of Trump or Republican Party (GOP) | <p>“Someone needs to ask all Republicans why they would WANT racists and bigots to be</p> |

a part of their base. Don’t they have anything else to run on that would appeal to a larger portion of the population?”

“The stench of racism and bigotry envelops the Republican Party”

“So he’s gonna serve white supremacists in hopes of winning re-election? That’s @GOPLeader’s strategy too.”

Discussion

The purpose of this content analysis was to see if there were long-term effects caused by Trump's alignment with white supremacist beliefs and the utilization of white supremacist dog whistles to harness votes from individuals who could be susceptible to these beliefs or methods. There were five main themes found to be prevalent in analyzing the top 50 comments left on a tweet regarding Trump's continuing relationship with individuals labeled as white supremacists. These five main themes were 1) Criticism of the media, 2) Mention of Trump's base, 3) Use of the term white supremacist, 4) Use of the term antisemitism, 5) and Criticism of Trump or the Republican Party. Of these themes, the most surprising finding was a general sentiment of blame directed at the media. Of the comments, 16% were critical of the media, and the blame was two-fold in nature. Half of the 16% of commenters either expressed upset that the media was providing Trump with too much attention or that the media was not providing him with enough attention. Regardless of the type of blame, the mere fact that the media faced criticism was not an outcome that was expected and therefore was of interest.

Apart from this outlier, the remaining results of this content analysis show that public sentiment toward Trump has a negative connotation. Based on the random sample made up of the comment section of a tweet, we can see that 32% of the tweets spoke negatively about Trump and his base. With commenters associating his base with hateful ideologies such as white supremacy or antisemitism. This theme is also prevalent in the scholarly literature that was gathered for the sake of this content analysis. Pulido and contributors had this to say about Trump's base "Trump understands the power of his base and seeks to nurture it, as it allows him to continue to function as an

authoritarian. The white nation is the fulcrum that enables Trump's agenda" (Pulido et al., 2019, p.523). They came to the conclusion that Trump's base is made up of the "white nation" and that he has harnessed white supremacy to advance his own goals (Pulido et al., 2019, p.523). This was also a belief held by a commenter in response to the tweet, saying, "So he will back anyone who backs him, no matter how despicable they are."

Among the criticism of Trump's base was a criticism of Trump as well as his companions or those associated with him. From this random sample, 60% of comments narrowed in on the topic that Trump and his cronies were tied to hateful ideologies corroborating what was seen in the academic literature (Inwood, 2019, The crisis of white (biological) reproduction). What can be taken from this is that Trump may have a long-term effect on public discourse. As evident by the over half of commenters fostering beliefs of Trump and those close to him as being proponents and involved with hateful ideologies showing that these sentiments do not reside only among academia but make up a majority of the discourse in the public sphere.

Limitations

However, there were multiple limitations of this study, primarily the size of the sample from which the content analysis was done. The sample was made up of the top 50 comments made in reply to a tweet, and because of this, the sample size was small. This made the size of the sample a limiting factor because it was relatively small. Therefore, a larger generalization about the population cannot be made regarding the findings of the content analysis. This is because it is too small to be reflective of a larger population and limits the external validity of the findings. Going forward, a much larger sample size would have to be drawn to more accurately express the multitude of viewpoints held by individuals in the public domain.

Another limitation of this study central to the sample is the original source from which the comments were gathered. Due to the origins of the original tweet, it is likely that only a certain demographic who maintains that social circle would have come in contact with the original tweet meaning that the comments could be skewed. This could explain why a large amount of criticism was levied against Trump, where, in contrast,

only one comment supported his actions. Likely, those who do not find Trump problematic do not spend time in Twitter spaces that are critical of him, causing them not to be represented in this sample. This could be remedied in the future by a larger sample size and by evaluating comments from multiple sources regarding the same topic.

In continuing with the possibility of skewed results, these findings can also have been skewed through coding errors caused by the internalized bias of the researcher. The researcher's own bias could potentially influence the findings caused by their interpretation of the comments not being an accurate depiction of what was expressed.

Going forward, based on the limitations mentioned above, future research in this area should be conducted with a few alterations to ensure more reliability in the findings. They can accomplish this by utilizing larger sample sizes so that the findings can then be generalized to a larger population because they will possess the necessary external validity. In combination with the larger sample size, this will also limit the bias or skew seen in the comments section's replies because drawing a larger sample will show a greater expression of contrary viewpoints more expressive of the larger population. Future studies would also find it beneficial to extract this larger sample size from various sources to ensure they cast a wide enough net that encompasses as many areas of social interaction as possible. By doing this, they can ensure they are gathering data from various demographics rather than unintentionally targeting a specific one. With the larger scale analysis that will have to be taken by future research, more individuals will be required to do the coding as opposed to the single researcher utilized in this study. By implementing multiple researchers in the coding process, they can limit as best as possible the influence caused by any one researcher's internalized bias in the data coding process.

It would be interesting to see future researchers continue in this field with a similar analysis to this done on a larger scale. In a larger-scale analysis, it would be intriguing to see a comparison of general content and content that came from the Trump camp. Ideally, the content from Trump and his base would be compared to the general public, who possess different opinions. By comparing the groups and their differing opinions, we

could shed light on the diverse sentiments of the content and the type of dogma and rhetoric utilized by the groups.

References

- Hart, J., & Stekler, N. (2021, July 27). Does personality “Trump” ideology? narcissism predicts support for Trump via ideological tendencies. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 162(3), 386-392. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2021.1944035>
- Inwood, J. (2019, June). White supremacy, White counter-revolutionary politics, and the rise of Donald Trump. *Politics and Space*, 37(4), 579-596. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654418789949>
- Lowell, H. [hugolowell]. (2022, November 28). NEW: Trump ultimately made clear that he fundamentally did not want to criticize white supremacist and antisemite Nick Fuentes after dinner at Mar-a-Lago – over fears that it might antagonise a devoted part of his base. @GuardianUS [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/hugolowell/status/1597226901512548353>
- Maskovsky, J. (2017, July). Toward the anthropology of white nationalist postracialism. *Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 7(1), 433-440. <https://doi.org/10.14318/hau7.1.030>
- Pulido, L., Bruno, T., Favier-Serna, C., & Galentine, C. (2019, February 13). Environmental deregulation, Spectacular racism, and White Nationalism in the Trump Era. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 109(2), 520-532. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2018.1549473>