"Uncovering Media Manipulation in the 2016 and 2020 US Presidential Elections: A Comparative Analysis"

Analyzing the patterns of media manipulation through Twitter and News stories

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Abstract

In recent times, the influence of media in people's lives has been readily increasing. As social media usage increases daily, media is often manipulated to serve the purposes of individuals and multi groups. Media manipulation has become common during crises, events, and occasions. In the past two decades, media manipulation during elections worldwide has strongly impacted its result. This study tries to shed light on the media manipulation during the 2016 and 2020 US Presidential elections in America. This study analyzes and compares data records of media manipulation on Twitter and traditional media. This study aims to identify the similarities and dissimilarities between the two elections and find how they influenced the election outcome. As media manipulation is an ongoing issue and a significant threat to future elections, this study can be helpful and a reference for further research.

Keywords: Media manipulation, US Election, Social Media, News stories, Twitter, Russian Interference.

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1. Introduction

The term "media" originated from the Latin word medius, meaning middle ground. It has been used in the English language since the early 19th century to refer to the middle layer of something (Nerone 14.) However, "media" evolved so quickly that it became a multifaceted term encompassing a broad spectrum of communication channels, technologies, and practices to convey information and ideas to a large and diverse audience. At its core, media is a way of transmitting messages from a source to a receiver through various channels, be it traditional or digital. It is now an indispensable part of our lives, influencing our perceptions, beliefs, and behaviours in myriad ways (Roslyng 218- 220). Moreover, "media" has gone beyond its definition to be a phenomenon that shapes and reflects our social, cultural and political realities. (McGovern 617).

The role of media in today's world is becoming more significant as the world moves towards digitalization. Media has become a powerful instrument to communicate, provide knowledge and information, and shape public perception. As McQuail writes, "Mass communication is a necessary condition for the functioning of modern society, as it provides the means of communication with large people and therefore the potential for influencing their opinions, attitudes and behaviour" (McQuail). Media can be a watchdog of governance and administrative actions. It can expose and shed light on corruption while restricting them from abusing their authority. With all these characteristics, the media is known as the fourth estate and legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government.

Additionally, since the media consumption rate is very high, it can influence the public's opinion. For example, the media has brought the public's attention towards climate change and has provided awareness to millions. Similarly, there have been many cases where the media helped people

receive justice, raise funds, donate and much more. However, the true essence of media just being a medium to transfer information has gradually faded.

1.1 The Rise of Social Media

The ability of media to sway the public's opinion has been manipulated on various occasions to hide the truth or spread misinformation. Media manipulation has been in practice for decades; the rise of social media has aggravated the use of manipulative techniques to influence public perception and societal norms in favour of specific interests and agendas. This happens when people tend to forget the actual use/ objective of social media. Social media such as Facebook and Twitter were initially meant to create a space for interaction, sharing personal stories, and connecting with more people. However, soon the true purpose broadened, and people started using social media to read news, understand world events, and listen to international stories. The trust people put in social media information gradually increased. Studies claim that the recognition of social media sites as pure news sources grew during and after the Arab Spring in the early 2010s. During the Arab Spring, Twitter users from Middle East countries flooded their feeds with narratives that countered the government's version of the events; they even proved their story by uploading accurate images that were not officially available. This event hugely influenced the change of perception of social media sites from conversational platforms to trusted news sources (Sample 56).

These social media platforms have been a playground where individuals and organizations play around with misinformation and agendas. Since the restrictions on social media have been lenient till recent times, many active social media users must have encountered fake news at some point.

According to research by the Pew Research Center, nearly two-thirds of America's population says fake news through social media has caused some confusion about current events. (Barthel).

Today, political parties consider media manipulation a tool to win elections. Moreover, politics and media are inseparable until people's trust remains intact. This fact is being considered and violated by political actors during elections for their benefit. Noticeably, there are strategies such as the circulation of fake stories, the creation of computational propaganda, disinformation campaigns, and recruiting cyber troops. Furthermore, elections have shown that these strategies have proven effective and provide an edge for the individual/ parties with an upper hand in media.

1.2 The US Presidential Elections.

Among the long history of US Presidential Elections, 2016 and 2020 (the last two elections) were marred by controversies of media manipulation like spreading propaganda, accusations of fake news, selective reporting, and Twitter manipulation.

The 2016 US Presidential Election campaign was like a flag off for media manipulation. However, the tactics and strategies during the course have been well documented. According to Howard and Woolley, 33 per cent of all the election-related content on Twitter was "junk news" and "propaganda". Their research on "What were Michigan Voters Sharing Over Twitter?" claimed that Donald Trump supporters were prevalent in the circulation of junk news. They were sharing junk news tweets four times more than the supporters of Hillary Clinton. (Howard 3)

The Russian intervention in the US media is one of the most significant events during the campaign. It showed the power of foreign actors in shaping the US public opinion through media. The Russian government-led agency Internet Research Agency (IRA), also known as Glavset, used social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to spread disinformation and raise conflict among American voters. "Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence

campaign in 2016 aimed at the US presidential election, the consistent goals of which were to undermine public faith in the US democratic process, denigrate Secretary Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency" (ICA).

Similarly, the 2020 US Presidential election did not fail to follow the routes of its preceding election. The respective campaign was also marked by allegations and media manipulation controversies, making it congruent to the 2016 campaign. However, this time it was not entirely social media which became the victim of manipulation; the traditional news channels, particularly the cable news networks, acted as the primary platform for manipulation. The news platforms and online media did not hold against fake news and conspiracies as they got more reach and coverage. Many of the channels also committed to selective reporting and biased coverage. Pew Research Center conducted a study which claims that viewers of FoxNews held conservative political views, while viewers of MSNBC held liberal political views. (Walker).

Being a representative of democracy and one of the most developed nations, America's failure to adhere to democratic ideals during elections can be seen as a dangerous phenomenon of the last decade. The repetitive nature of this phenomenon makes it threatening and vitally significant to study, especially when the world is going to witness the 60th US Presidential election in 2024. Moreover, this restricts the people from electing their leader legally and truthfully. Given the prevalence of media manipulation during the last two elections, it is essential to research in greater detail.

As a result, this dissertation aims to study media manipulation during the 2016 and 2020 US Presidential elections, focusing on the role played by Twitter and news channels. It uses discourse analysis to examine the prevalence of propaganda, fake news and other media manipulation during election campaigns. Then it uses the comparative analysis method to conclude the patterns of

resemblance and dissimilarities of manipulation during the two campaigns while including its impact on public perception. By highlighting the need for greater transparency and regulation of media platforms, this dissertation contributes to a better understanding of the challenges facing modern democracies in the age of digital media.

2. Survey of Literature.

2.1 Cultural Aspects of Social Media Manipulation.

It is very significant to track and trace the cultural values associated with media manipulation, because it may reveal many patterns and underlying characteristics. To be precise, in terms of fake news distribution, people of one culture have very similar behavior while people of another culture have another set of behavior. As it's important to understand the relationship between culture and manipulative behavior (spreading of fake news) one of the studies conducted by C Sample, J McAlaney, JZ Bakdash, and H Thackray titled "A Cultural Exploration of Social Media Manipulators" contains theories for the claims mentioned above. Studies around this topic would be theoretical and can act as a background for the behavioral aspects of media manipulation studies.

C Sample and his co-authors have concluded that online social media platforms make it possible to produce and disseminate misinformation quickly and widely. Although propaganda has a long history in combat, the way it is disseminated now via social media is very different from how it was previously disseminated. The authors looked at the connections between national cultural norms and state-affiliated actors who utilize social media to create and disseminate propaganda. The findings revealed that nations that used social media to spread fake news tended to have more traditionally male attitudes. These findings imply that particular cultural values are related to the

dissemination of fake news, which may suggest that culturally sensitive solutions may be more successful against propaganda. The study was organized in a way where the researchers had to finalize six dimensions of cultural values. It is mentioned that these dimensions were taken as per the definition of Hofstede: Power Distance Index (PDI), Individualism versus Collectivism (IvC), Feminine versus Masculine (FvM), Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), Long-term versus Short-term orientation (LvS), and Indulgence versus Restraint (IvR). They chose to take data from 29 countries and had taken observable data that were collected and analyzed for a different research study; this data was re-used to find out the common cultural values. Their findings suggested a connection between cultural values and the usage of social media for propaganda dissemination. Responses to each of their research questions revealed the presence of masculine ideals. This research implies that, in addition to information seeking, masculine society may also influence how information is shaped through social media.

However, the study didn't account for the unconscious social and cultural biases in society. Also, there has been a lack of clarity in the argument. The findings could have been made better with analysis proof and proper explanations. But still, these findings will now act as the base for further research into cultural values related to media manipulation. This study can be further proceeded in finding why the masculine society has more tendency in spreading fake news.

2.2 Technical Manipulative Methods.

During times of elections, political parties and state actors use social media as a final boost for their candidate profile before voting day. They may even create a team to handle their social media statuses or even manipulate reality through it. Studies often happened to reveal the techniques and methods they do to dominate their opposition. A study published by the American Association for

the Advancement of Science, conducted by Panagiotis T. Metaxas and Eni Mustafaraj writes about the technical methods.

It is written that social media search results are something that can be easily manipulated. For example, if an election is happening in India and a voter uses Instagram and search for "Indian election 2022" the suggestions and accounts that come closer to this search result can be manipulated. These are some minute details by which the cyber team works but these minute details offer a big difference. Another technical manipulation is by altering the number of followers of the candidates. Metaxas writes changing the number of followers can affect a viewer's conclusion about a candidate's popularity. It was found that the number of followers of presidential candidates in the United States increased by over 110 thousand within a single day, and analysis showed most of it was automated bots apart from real people (Metaxas 472). Another important terminology in this context is "Web spam". It tries to change the weighted web network by adding connections to support one cause. Web spammers form linkages between anchor words or phrases and linked websites by taking use of the descriptive potential of anchor text. These linkages compel search engines to offer results that would not normally be relevant and high relevance, placing them in the top 10 search results. The google bomb phrase "miserable failure" was first associated with President George W. Bush's web page, and later with those of Michael Moore, Hillary Clinton, and Jimmy Carter. This was a well-known Google bomb. By limiting the top search results that appear when someone searches for a congressional candidate's name. After that Google developed an algorithm to prevent google bombs and it worked perfectly making it an impossible task to launch any successful Google bombs on politicians (Metaxas, 472). A loophole feature was introduced during the time of the Massachusetts Special Election 2010 (MASEN). The propagandists exploited this feature which included real-time information from social networks in

the top ten search results. They repeatedly posted the same tweets so that this tweet was often visible everywhere. It is recorded that one-third of tweets around the time of MASEN 2010 was tweet repeats. This compelled the search engines to remove real-time results from organic results and made them into a separate search category. Another technical manipulative method in Twitter is the "Twitter bomb" which probably starts going off days before the elections. It is the act of sending unwanted Twitter responses to individual people in an attempt to encourage them to pay attention to one's issue is known as a "Twitter bomb." Usually, the bots can automatically send a lot of tweets but Twitter is adept at taking down the majority of them due to their usage habits and user complaints. However, spammers have sent out fake replies to legitimate people who are unaware of them. For instance, political spammers created nine fake accounts during the 2010 MASEN and utilized them to send around 1000 tweets until Twitter blocked them for spamming. However, they deliberately targeted those who had been talking about the elections in the earlier hours with their messages. Similar-minded individuals' retweeting assistance allowed numerous Twitter accounts (more than 60,000) to be reached in a day at almost no expense. And this has become a routine scene on Twitter without a proper solution. Lastly, a method called "astroturf" was created by the prefab tweet factory. It was designed precisely in a sophisticated manner so that it can evade Twitter's spam detection. A spammer tweeted sets of tweets every day targeting journalists and encouraging other people with similar interests. The result of this spam was to give the targeted journalists the idea that their work was being watched and that the general public did not value it. Additionally, it put pressure on the reporters to modify their opinions. There is no specific solution to hold off these low-budget, prefabricated tweets and it should be anticipated during the upcoming elections and anytime there is a chance to exert pressure on journalists.

This well-formulated technical study almost covers all manipulative methods. However, there are many more methods in many dimensions which are still being left out. The research topic is very broad as there is no specification of particular social media; they have considered manipulative methods on many social media fronts.

2.3 Computational Propaganda and Disinformation Campaigns.

Samantha Bradshaw and Philip N. Howard has done research regarding computational propaganda and disinformation campaigns. Their primary source starts with the data collected from Computational Propaganda Project's 2017 investigation. They looked at how political parties and governments use social media to influence discourses and public views both nationally and internationally. By comparing and contrasting the organizational capability and form that these players adopt, they established the phenomenon's global character and wrote about the implications for the future of democracy and power.

They write on what they call "the darker side of political communication": disinformation campaigns, negative campaigning, and information operations. Governments and political parties all over the world are investing a lot of money into creating content, focusing public attention, and shaping the opinions of domestic and international audiences on social media. These "cyber troops" are state-sponsored entities tasked with launching deceptive online propaganda campaigns. Although disinformation can take many different forms, cyber-troop action entails the deliberate dissemination of false, deceptive, forged, or altered content. To manipulate or mislead social media users, these actors rely on "computational propaganda"—the application of automation, algorithms, and big data analytics. Cyber troops are publicly funded and frequently highly coordinated government actors who use social media to spread misinformation and try to create

false consensus, in contrast to lone-wolf coders, hacker collectives, or non-state actors who also use it to express themselves or pursue political objectives (Bradshaw 24).

In their analysis of the Computational Propaganda Project's 2017 investigation report which traces the behavior of global cyber troops in 28 countries, they classify the countries into regime types. Such as countries like Argentina, Australia, Brazil, India, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States, and ten other countries were classified under the democratic regime type. Whereas, Authoritarian countries are Azerbaijan, Bahrain, China, Iran, North Korea, Russia, and four other countries. Two countries, Ukraine and Syria accounted for the crisis state. This was their dissected data for analysis, but this study has a lot of limitations. Firstly, grouping countries based on their regime isn't very appealing in this case as the rules and regulations in the media sector is very unique and different in each country. This will make a difference in the government's approach toward computational propaganda and disinformation campaigns. Secondly, many of the government activities are strictly private and confidential, and the data that gets leaked itself would be manipulated. Thus, these data records never tell the whole story; the extent to which governments and political party actors use disinformation campaigns is never predictable.

However, this study has concluded that cyber troops invest huge sums of money to influence public opinion over social media. Governments and political parties all over the world are increasingly putting money into computational propaganda tools and methods to sway election results, thwart diplomatic efforts, and sabotage peacebuilding initiatives. This is important to know since it indicates that researchers looking at these phenomena have larger study objects. The fact that political actors have a significant new tool for political communication and for sabotaging the political signals of rival actors means that even the most conventional approaches to analyzing the causes and consequences of contemporary peace, conflict, trade, diplomacy, and a variety of other

international processes must take this into account. We can spot new patterns and follow the development of this phenomenon over time by adopting a global view on computational propaganda and the players responsible for disinformation on social media. In the digital era, it is evident that more state actors are aiming to use social media as a tool of power. Since 2017, as more political parties and governments started experimenting with computational propaganda, our sample size has increased. There are several instances of state actors utilizing and abusing social media in domestic and international affairs to further their political objectives (Bradshaw 29-30).

2.4 Future of Media Manipulation.

A futuristic approach to this topic is very relevant as manipulative techniques and methods increase day by day. However, it is unclear how long the predictions will serve in the future because of the media's impulsive nature. Trends in media changes within a fraction of a second thus even if we consider future solutions they can all become useless sometimes. A study conducted by David M. Beskow and Kathleen M. Carley particularly focuses on the future of geospatial disinformation campaigns. Their paper focuses on the vulnerability of the manipulation of social media geospatial data. It states that currently any motivated individual might awaken a dormant bot army to produce Tweets and geo-target them in a way to either:

1. Cover the area with spatial tweets to generate enough noise to obscure the signal of interest (such as genuine requests for assistance during a natural disaster), making the underlying data useless for situational awareness or decision support (most likely).

2. Stage a fake social occasion or fake social signal to foment strife or facilitate a sophisticated deception scheme (most dangerous).

The put forward some of the methods currently employed to clean the data should have the following qualities that would be required for an offensive information campaign to achieve success with geospatial disinformation.

1. Utilize a huge number of accounts that look to be local to the target area (a bot army) (i.e. have reasonable language, time zone, and life patterns).

2. To construct a complex and accurate geospatial pattern, use data sampling and several random distributions.

3. Create information that melds naturally with regional discourse.

4. The duration must be precisely the right amount of time to achieve success, after which the accounts would disappear into the conversation.

This significant study will occupy the gap for solutions for geospatial disinformation but there would be many gaps while looking at media manipulation as a whole. Hence, proper research studies and futuristic predictions are necessary for this realm.

There is room for research in media manipulation studies. And as the influence of media gets stronger each day, it is as vital as ever to research more and reach better conclusions with better findings and results. Elections should happen without malpractices, if political party actors do malpractices using media manipulations then how are they ensuring honesty after forming a government? Different elections should be studied and compared to see how media manipulation varies over the years and in places. It should be recorded and analyzed to achieve optimal findings. The patterns and intentions underlying the manipulations should be shown in light to prevent them from prevailing in the future. Therefore the following research statement is raised: The analysis of media manipulation in elections during the last two decades on Facebook and Twitter.

3. Methodology

A mixed-methods approach has been used to identify the patterns of media manipulation during the 2016 and 2020 US Presidential elections—a combination of discourse analysis and linguistic analysis using LIWC -22. LIWC software extracts nine measures of fundamental linguistic analysis and psychometric properties. For this analysis, data of 30 randomly selected top trending tweets and randomly selected 15 top controversial news stories of both elections were chosen.

The findings of this research were analyzed through a comparative analysis to identify the common elements and differences. In the combination of content analysis and linguistic analysis, this study takes a comprehensive approach to understanding media manipulation during the 2016 and 2020 US Presidential elections. It contributes to a broader theme of understanding the role of digital media in shaping public perception during elections.

3.1 Data Collection

For this research, the data chosen contains 30 top trending tweets and 15 news stories involving controversies. The tweets and news stories were carefully chosen concerning their impact, popularity and relevance to the campaigns. The tweets were collected using the Twitter API and Twitter App, which allows collecting tweets based on the inputs (keywords, hashtags, and time period). The news stories were collected from online news platforms.

3.2 Data Organization

After data collection, it was transformed into an Excel sheet while eliminating the hyperlinks attached to the tweets and the special characters in the tweets. There were two data sheets, one for tweets and one for news stories. The segmented data were arranged in a manner to upload in the

LIWC software. The tweets are classified into groups. The candidate's and their supporters' tweets are labelled as "pro-(candidate name)," i.e., pro-Trump, pro-Clinton, and pro-Biden. Overall, the organization enabled the research to quickly sort and filter the data, making it easier to identify trends and patterns present in the data and to draw meaningful insights from it.

4. Findings and Analysis

4.1 US Presidential Election 2016.

Based on the LIWC-22 analysis, the functions helped analyse the language used in tweets by Trump, Clinton and their respective supporters.
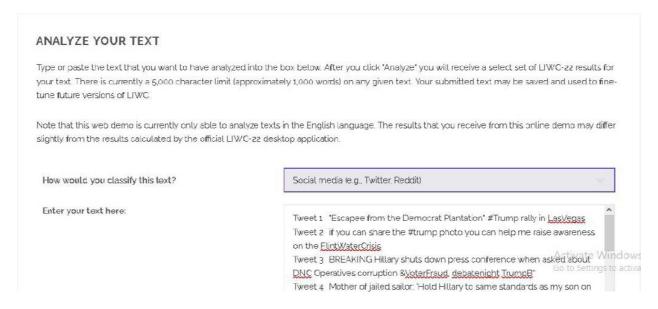

ANALYZE YOUR TEXT

Type or paste the text that you want to have analyzed into the box below. After you click "Analyze" you will receive a select set of LIWC-22 results for your text. There is currently a 5,000 character limit (approximately 1,000 words) on any given text. Your submitted text may be saved and used to fine-tune future versions of LIWC

Note that this web demo is currently only able to analyze texts in the English language. The results that you receive from this online demo may differ slightly from the results calculated by the official LIWC-22 desktop application.

How would you classify this text?   Social media (e.g., Twitter, Reddit)

Enter your text here:

Tweet 1 'Escapee from the Democrat Plantation' #Trump rally in LasVegas
Tweet 2 if you can share the #trump photo you can help me raise awareness on the FlintWaterCrisis
Tweet 3 BREAKING Hillary shuts down press conference when asked about DNC Operatives corruption &VoterFraud, debatenight TrumpB"
Tweet 4 Mother of jailed sailor: 'Hold Hillary to same standards as my son on

Figure1.1 LIWC-22 Interface.

The "I- words" (I, me, my) linguistic function represents self-reference. By analysing the tweets, the average value of I-words for tweets from pro-Trump was 2.8. On the other hand, the average value of pro-Clinton was 1.49. This reveals that tweets from pro-Trump groups tended to use more self-referential language than pro-Clinton. This can be seen as an attempt to project a positive self-image among the audience and make them believe that Trump is a good candidate. In this way, the pro-Trump group introduces Trump well, as their tweets contain information about him.

Another linguistic function identified by LIWC is the tone of the language used in these tweets. The negative tone linguistic function measured the tweets' extent of containing negative sentiment.

For the pro-Trump supporters, the value was much higher than pro-Clinton supporters. The negative tone in pro-Trump tweets has exceeded the social media average of 2.34 identified by the software. Pro-Trump had 2.8, while pro-Clinton had 1.99. This indicates that the tweets from pro-Trump had more negative sentiment; they were unpleasant and depressing. Their strategy of pro-Trump blaming the opposite candidate can be seen under this function.

However, an interesting contrast in the analysis is that the software identified pro-Trump also scored more in a positive tone, 2.8, whereas pro-Clinton only scored 1. This juxtaposition of sentiments in the tweets says that they were targeting Clinton and the Democrats while at the same time positively remarking about Trump and the Republic party.

Thirdly, the cognitive processes' linguistic function measures the extent to which the tweets contain complex thoughts or ideas. As expected, the average value of cognitive processes was higher in both cases than the average value of social media language, indicating that the language used by both sets of supporters was more complex than the language used on average on social media; it was for the election campaigning, and the tweets needed represent the views of the candidates. However, pro-Trump scored 8.96, higher than pro-Clinton 4.98. This indicates the primary differences in how Trump and Clinton planned to campaign through social media. Trump had a better campaign strategy; including complex ideas contributes to the image and knowledge of the candidate. After reading the pro-Trump tweets, Americans could have thought Trump had more political views and knowledge to be the president of the US.

Moreover, the analytic summary variable measure the degree of analytical thinking in the tweets. The pro-Trump group scored only 77.62, whereas the pro-Clinton group scored 82.02. This indicates that the language used by Trump supporters contained less analytical thinking. In a study conducted by Karmvir Padda, he writes on the fake news during the 2016 US Presidential election,

"results showed fake news are less likely to have analytical thinking" (Padda 1). Since the tweets from the pro-Clinton group have more analytical thinking, their tweets are more authentic. On the other hand, pro-Trump tweets can be fake news since they have lesser analytical summary variables.

Finally, the authentic summary variable identifies the authentic language present in the tweets. Although, we analysed that Clinton's supporters were tweeting genuinely from the analytical variable. This function can be considered as an examination of the previous analysis. Pro-Clinton had a higher score of 62.38 than the pro-Trump group, which had just 44.01. This indicates that the analysis is correct; pro-Clinton used authentic and genuine language, while the tweets tweeted pro-Trump were fake and spurious.

Your text sample is 212 words. The LIWC-22 analysis of the text sample you entered is below. Note that LIWC-22 actually produces about 100 different output dimensions. Remember: the more text that you have available for analysis, the more trustworthy and reliable your results will be.

RESULTS

Traditional LIWC Dimension	Your Text	Average for Social Media Language
I-words (I, me, my)	2.83	5.44
Positive Tone	2.83	5.93
Negative Tone	2.83	2.34
Social Words	9.43	6.74
Cognitive Processes	8.96	8.86
Allure	7.08	8.62
Moralization	0.94	0.27

Figure 1.2, LIWC-22 software analysed results of pro-Trump

RESULTS

Traditional LIWC Dimension	Your Text	Average for Social Media Language
I-words (I, me, my)	1.49	5.44
Positive Tone	1.00	5.93
Negative Tone	1.99	2.34
Social Words	5.97	6.74
Cognitive Processes	4.98	8.86
Allure	2.99	8.62
Moralization	1.00	0.27

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Figure 1.3, LIWC-22 software analysed results of pro-Clinton

Regarding the news stories, the selected stories for the discourse analysis revolve around the election campaign and highlight some issues and controversies. However, some of them have been proven fake; they have been chosen because they can offer a glimpse of the actual picture of US media in 2016. By analysing news stories, a better understanding of discursive strategies employed by the media to construct and disseminate particular narratives can be identified.

The fifteen news stories analysed using discourse analysis represented various topics and tones, from sarcastic perception to serious and informative. These news stories had a profound effect on the election and influenced the public perception. Trump's derogatory comments and alleged sexual misconduct towards women have damaged his public image, especially among female voters. News reports on voting problems had spread like fire during those days. Reports of voter suppression, long lines, and malfunctioning voting machines have undermined public confidence and raised concerns about the election's fairness. The news reports against Clinton's foundation and alleged ties to controversial organisations have played a significant role in shaping public opinion. These controversies raised questions about Clinton's integrity and judgement.

Moreover, these reports even raised a question of national security in a few minds. Clinton's email scandal also played a significant role in the election. The constant news coverage of the scandal ignited doubts on Clinton's integrity. It added to the perception of Clinton being dishonest and fake. These news stories and controversies have created a concrete image in voters' minds; Trump was portrayed as sexist and racist, while Clinton was portrayed as corrupt and dishonest. This perception might have driven voters away from both candidates, leading to lower voter turnout and a more polarised electorate.

The fake news, such as the story of Hillary Clinton selling weapons to ISIS, was widely shared on social media, despite being completely false. Similarly, the false story that the Pope had endorsed Donald Trump has been shared on social media platforms more than thousands of times, despite being quickly debunked. This spreading of false information creates a distorted picture of the candidate and the issues at stake in the election. This not only influenced the way people voted, but it also eroded trust in the democratic process itself.

By analysing these news stories, scandals of both candidates were published. However, the depth of the negative impact cannot be identified. However, since Trump won the election, one can interpret that Trump's media team has efficiently handled the news stories against him.

The Russian Intervention

The Russian government-led Internet Research Agency (IRA) influenced the US Presidential elections through multiple interferences in US media. This non-democratic act of interfering in another country's election campaigns ultimately questions the authenticity of the election processes. This interference and intention should be unacceptable for a democratic country like America. "The Special Counsel's investigation established that Russia interfered in the 2016

presidential election principally through two operations. First, a Russian entity conducted a social media campaign favouring President Donald J. Trump and disparaging presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. Second, a Russian intelligence service conducted computer-intrusion operations against entities, employees, and volunteers working on the Clinton Campaign and then released stolen documents" (Mueller 1). This evidence raises questions about foreign entities' ability to manipulate voters' opinions and potentially sway the election outcome.

Furthermore, using fake news and misinformation by foreign actors can create confusion and distrust among voters, leading to a lack of confidence in the democratic process. Moreover, the Russian interference not only aimed to support Trump but also aimed to sow discord and division among the American people. This is evident in how IRA-created content targeted specific groups based on race, gender, and political beliefs. By exploiting existing divisions and amplifying them, the interference created a chaotic environment that would ultimately benefit the Russian government.

Thus, the impact of media on Trump's victory cannot be underestimated, as social media played a significant role in disseminating fake news and propaganda. This highlights the need for greater regulation and accountability in the digital realm, especially regarding political campaigns. Apart from all the threats posed to democracy, this also highlights the importance of media literacy and critical thinking skills in the digital age and the need for stronger regulations to protect the democratic process from foreign interference.

4.2 US Presidential Election 2020.

Based on the LIWC-22 analysis, various linguistic functions can be analyzed and interpreted.

For the I-words (I, me, my) linguistic function, the average value of I- words was 2.01 for Trump and 2.58 for Biden. This suggests both supporters used self-referential language in their tweets, with Biden supporters using slightly more self-referential language. This linguistic function and nature of pro-Biden tweets are sensible as Biden is a new candidate, and he wanted to establish an image among the Americans. In contrast, Trump, the President of the previous tenure, might not have concentrated on this aspect.

And for the tone function, the analysis result was similar to 2016. Pro-Trump tweets had a more positive tone and negative with scores of 2.68 and 3.68, respectively. Whereas Biden only has a 0.94 positive tone and a 1.88 negative tone.

Moreover, Trump is leading in the cognitive processes function. Pro-Trump tweets have a score of 11.04, while pro-Biden have a score of 9.86. This again resembles the pattern of 2016, where Trump scored more than Clinton. All these nuances collectively could have significantly impacted voters' minds to vote for Donald Trump. However, this function suggests that the language used by Trump supporters contained more complex ideas or thoughts than Biden supporters.

Furthermore, pro-Biden-supporting tweets have been found to be more analytical in nature (analytic summary variable), with a score of 80.13. On the other hand, pro-Trump has only scored 67.15. As proven earlier, fake news has been analyzed to have lesser analytical thinking by which we can conclude more fake news might have come from Trump supporters.

For the Authentic summary variable, the average value of authenticity was higher for Biden supporters compared to Trump supporters. This suggests that the language used by Biden supporters contained more authentic language than Trump supporters.

Regarding the news stories, the 2020 US presidential election was marred by a series of controversies and news stories, which might have significantly impacted the election results and public perception. These stories ranged from conspiracy theories about election fraud to allegations of corruption and misconduct against both candidates.

One of the most significant controversies was the claim that Donald Trump had won the election, but the results were being rigged against him. This led to widespread protests and unrest, with some Trump supporters refusing to accept the legitimacy of the election results. Although the claim was thoroughly investigated and debunked, it still created mistrust and division among the American public. This could have also influenced some voters to support Trump or, conversely, to view the election system as corrupt and choose not to participate in the election.

Other stories focused on the personal and political histories of the candidates. There were claims that Joe Biden was hiding a severe illness and would not be able to serve as President if elected and that Kamala Harris was not eligible to run for Vice President because her parents were not US citizens. These claims were also debunked and may have been seen as baseless or unfounded by many voters and may not have significantly impacted the election.

Allegations of corruption were also prevalent during the election. There were claims that Joe Biden's son, Hunter, was involved in a corrupt business deal with a Ukrainian company and that George Soros and other billionaires were funding a plot to rig the election in Joe Biden's favor. These claims may have damaged the public's perception of Joe Biden's character and integrity, particularly among the voters who prioritize ethical behaviour in their elected officials. However, it is unclear how much this story resonated with the wider electorate.

The COVID-19 pandemic was another major factor in the election, with claims that it was a hoax designed to hurt Donald Trump's chances of winning re-election. These claims were widely

criticized and contradicted by scientific evidence, but they may have contributed to confusion and mistrust among the public.

Finally, there were allegations that the Black Lives Matter movement was planning to disrupt the election and cause chaos and that the election was being stolen from Donald Trump by illegal immigrants and dead people who were voting. These claims were also debunked, but they may have contributed to fear and division among the American public. Trump being seen as a racist in many instances might have gotten a severe blow because of the movement, which ultimately aimed at tackling racism.

4.3 Comparision of 2016 and 2020

a. External Interference

Like the 2016 Russian interference in the presidential election, a report was released by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), which concluded that Russian President Vladimir Putin authorised efforts to influence the 2020 US election in favour of former President Donald Trump. The report stated that Russian operatives used various methods, including spreading disinformation through social media and other online platforms, to undermine public confidence in the election process and support Trump's candidacy. However, the report also stated that there was no evidence of any interference that had a material impact on the result of the election and that the election was "the most secure in American history." (CISA) The report further stated that no foreign government appeared to have compromised the voting process or changed vote tallies. Thus, with the evidence currently available, a conclusion can be drawn that Russian influence

could not have impacted the 2020 US Election. Moreover, based on this conclusion, the Russian contribution to the victory of Donald Trump in 2016 may be very relevant.

b. Usage of Social Media

The 2016 US Presidential election paved the way for the rise in social media usage during elections. It is clear that the 2020 elections also followed the same way. According to a report by the Pew Research Center, social media platforms played a significant role in disseminating political news and information during the 2016 election campaign (Gottfried and Shearer). The same report also highlighted the prevalence of "fake news" and conspiracy theories during the 2016 election. Similarly, in the 2020 US election, social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter were widely used to spread political news and information. The spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories was also a significant issue during the election, leading to concerns about the role of social media in shaping public opinion (Wardle). Additionally, the rise of alternative media outlets like Breitbart and Infowars played a crucial role in amplifying partisan narratives and divisive rhetoric during the 2020 election campaign (Edwards). In summary, the role of media, particularly social media, and the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories were major similarities between the 2016 and 2020 US presidential elections.

c. Role of Traditional Media Outlets

In the 2016 US presidential election, many traditional media outlets were accused of providing excessive coverage to then-candidate Donald Trump's controversial statements and personal attacks while neglecting policy issues and substantive coverage of his opponents. A study by Harvard's Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy found that during the primary

season, Trump was given significantly more media coverage than any other candidate and that much of that coverage focused on his personality and controversies rather than his policies. This pattern continued during the general election, with a focus on sensational news and horse-race coverage of the campaigns rather than in-depth policy analysis.

In contrast, during the 2020 US presidential election, traditional media outlets took a different approach, emphasising policy issues and fact-checking. According to a study by the Pew Research Center, media coverage of policy issues in the 2020 election increased compared to the previous election, focusing on issues such as the economy, healthcare, and immigration. Additionally, media outlets played a more active role in fact-checking and debunking false claims made by candidates and their supporters. For example, major news organisations such as CNN, NBC, and the New York Times regularly published fact-checking articles and segments that scrutinised the claims made by candidates during debates and speeches.

d. The Linguistic Analysis

The data analysed by the LIWC-22 has some interesting patterns in both elections. Apart from the I- word function, every other has resonated in every aspect. This suggests that the way the Republicans and Democrats handled Twitter has not changed much. The tone function, which identifies positive and negative sentiments, was high for the Republican candidate Trump in both elections. The cognitive processes function was also higher for Trump in both scenarios. At the same time, the authentic and analytic summaries were higher for the Democrat candidates Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden. These patterns suggest that the pro-Trump supporters have been spreading more misinformation in both elections.

5. Conclusion

The 2016 and 2020 US Presidential elections have been subjects of intense scrutiny and analysis. This comparative study seeks to explore the key similarities and differences between the elections, focusing on different aspects of media manipulation.

The 2016 US Presidential election was characterized by Russian interference in Donald Trump's favour. Similarly, the same effort was authorized to support Trump. However, despite the attempts, there was no evidence of any interference that had a material impact on the election outcome. It is worth noting that the 2020 election was deemed the most secure in American history by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA). Thus, while the impact of Russian interference in the 2016 election remains relevant, it is not conclusive that it impacted the 2020 US election.

The role of social media was another similarity between the 2016 and 2020 US Presidential elections. The rise of social media in both elections led to the dissemination of political news and information. However, the downside of social media was the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories, which was a significant issue during both elections. The Pew Research Center highlighted the prevalence of "fake news" during the 2016 election, while the rise of alternative media outlets like Breitbart and Infowars played a crucial role in amplifying partisan narratives and divisive rhetoric during the 2020 election campaign. The influence of social media in shaping public opinion, especially with the spread of false information and conspiracy theories, underscores the need for greater regulation and accountability.

Linguistic analysis is another approach that this comparative study used to examine the two elections. Using the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) software, the study analyzed the

use of language in the tweets of presidential candidates and their supporters. The data revealed some interesting patterns in both elections. For instance, the tone function, identifying positive and negative sentiments, was high for the Republican candidate Trump in both elections. The cognitive processes function was also higher for Trump in both scenarios. In contrast, the authentic and analytic summaries were higher for the Democratic candidates Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden. These patterns suggest that pro-Trump supporters spread more misinformation in both elections. The role of traditional media outlets in both elections was also a critical aspect of this comparative study as the study analyzed news stories, especially from traditional media. During the 2016 US presidential election, traditional media outlets were accused of providing excessive coverage of Donald Trump's controversial statements and personal attacks while neglecting policy issues and substantive coverage of his opponents. This trend continued during the general election, focusing on sensational news and horse-race coverage of the campaigns rather than in-depth policy analysis. In contrast, during the 2020 US presidential election, traditional media outlets took a different approach, emphasising policy issues and fact-checking.

6. Appendix

Tweets - 2016

Tweet 1	Hillary for Prison 2016. Merica.
Tweet 2	Hillary is proof a woman can work hard, rise to the top of her field & still have to compete against a less qualified man for the same job.
Tweet 3	This will always be remembered as the presidential election in which the KKK, the KGB and the FBI all supported the same candidate.
Tweet 4	If you don't believe this election is important, if you think you can sit it out: you're wrong. #StrongerTogether
Tweet 5	"To those people, who hate the Confederate flag. Didyou know that the flag and the war wasn't about slavery, it was all about money." The tweet received over 40,000 responses."
Tweet 6	"#VoterFraud by counting tens of thousands of ineligible mail in Hillary votes being reported in Broward County, Florida."
Tweet 7	"Detroit residents speak out against the failed policies of Obama, Hillary & democrats . . ."
Tweet 8	The ugliest election in living memory is almost over, but the polls are still open. VOTE, PEOPLE. Do your job.
Tweet 9	There is no US election. There is power consolidation. Rigged primary, rigged media and rigged 'pied piper' candidate drive consolidation.
Tweet 10	"So why aren't the Committees and investigators, and of course our beleaguered A.G., looking into Crooked Hillarys crimes & Russia relations?""
Tweet 11	"Escapee from the Democrat Plantation" #Trump rally in #LasVegas
Tweet 12	if you can share the #trump photo you can help me raise awareness on the #FlintWaterCrisis #LittleMissFlint #Flint
Tweet 13	BREAKING Hillary shuts down press conference when asked about DNC Operatives corruption & #VoterFraud #debatenight #TrumpB"

Tweet 14	Mother of jailed sailor: 'Hold Hillary to same standards as my son on Classified info' #hillarysemail #WeinerGate."
Tweet 15	People hate Trump because the media made them hate Trump. People hate Hillary because they are paying attention.
Tweet 16	"("THANK YOU for your support Miami! My team just shared photos from your TRUMP SIGN WAVING DAY, yesterday! I love you – and there is no question – TOGETHER, WE WILL MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!")."
Tweet 17	"I never asked Comey to stop investigating Flynn. Just more Fake News covering another Comey lie!"
Tweet 18	Donald Trump is the least qualified person to become president in the history of our country. Go vote!
Tweet 19	If you sit this election out and Trump wins by a few votes, many people are going to be dealing with that reality for their entire lives.
Tweet 20	I'm calling for a total and complete shutdown of Donald Trump interacting with women until we can figure out what is going on
Tweet 21	I don't support Hillary Clinton's bid for the White House. But I fully support her bid for the Big House. Hillary for Prison 2016. Merica.
Tweet 22	2016: The year the 4th estate died and the media officially became a PR firm for Hillary Clinton.
Tweet 23	When Ruline was born in 1913, women couldn't vote. In 2016, she'll cast her vote to elect the 1st woman president.
Tweet 24	Hillary Clinton campaign may have had 9 hours of Tump Tapes since March 2016 when they were approached by author
Tweet 25	Hillary Clinton's stats for 2016 Interviews with FBI investigators: 1 Formal press conferences: 0
Tweet 26	"I don't regret anything." —Donald Trump, August 2, 2016
Tweet 27	In 1995 Hillary Clinton went to China to say "Women's rights are human rights." In 2016 Michelle Obama had to tell the GOP the same thing.
Tweet 28	"Redditor "PepeTheRacistFrog" alerted us that @HillaryClinton paid Zulema Rodriguez $1,610.24 on 02.29.2016. Here's the FEC data #HighwayGate"
Tweet 29	It's 2016. A woman's place is...wherever she wants it to be.

| Tweet 30 | Five disturbing things the GOP officially stands for (yes, in 2016): http://hrc.io/29UjTl2 |

Tweets - 2020

Tweet 1	I promise you this: I'll end Donald Trump's chaos and end this crisis.
Tweet 2	How Donald Trump and Mike Pence handled the coronavirus crisis is the greatest failure of any American presidency.
Tweet 3	Donald Trump is the most racist president in modern history.
Tweet 5	How is that NBC News has allowed itself to get conned by Donald Trump and (as of 11 pm Wednesday) continues to abrogate the public trust by not re-scheduling or taping-and-delaying broadcast, or canceling if Trump continues to demand the network's obeisance? (1/7)
Tweet 6	I hope we are able to get Trump out of office in 10 days. But I will never get over how bad it had to get for us to even have a chance of getting rid of him
Tweet 7	The Fake News Media is trying to convince Joe Biden to reveal his secret list of potential court picks. Heck, he can't even remember the name of his own list!
Tweet 8	"It's all about the Election and keeping the President from winning. The Radical Left, Do Nothing Democrats have become the Party of Hate. They are so bad for our Country!
Tweet 9	I was right again! Steve Scully just admitted he was lying about his Twitter being hacked. The Debate was Rigged! He was suspended from @cspan indefinitely. The Trump Campaign was not treated fairly by the "Commission". Did I show good instincts in being the first to know?
Tweet 10	Donald Trump wants to talk about literally anything besides his disastrous response to this pandemic.

Tweet 11	MAIL-IN VOTING WILL LEAD TO MASSIVE FRAUD AND ABUSE. IT WILL ALSO LEAD TO THE END OF OUR GREAT REPUBLICAN PARTY. WE CAN NEVER LET THIS TRAGEDY BEFALL OUR NATION.
Tweet 12	biden is a sexual predator who is responsible for mass incarceration, voted for the the iraq war, has shown no leadership during the pandemic, pandered to republicans for decades and rarely forms coherent thoughts in speeches. i do not know how the dnc expects us to vote for him.
Tweet 13	Trump "might also want to open the US Constitution once in a while. If he did, he'd find a thing called the First Amendment... the right of the people peaceably to assemble," Joe Biden says. "That's America... not using the American military to move against the American people."
Tweet 14	1.3 million black Americans already voted for Trump in 2016. This morning, Joe Biden told every single one of us we "ain't black." I'd say I'm surprised, but it's sadly par for the course for Democrats to take the black community for granted and brow beat those that don't agree.
Tweet 15	"Here and now, I give you my word: If you entrust me with the presidency, I will draw on the best of us, not the worst. I will be an ally of the light, not of the darkness."- Joe Biden
Tweet 16	Scientific American has never endorsed a presidential candidate in our 175-year history—until now. The 2020 election is literally a matter of life and death. We urge you to vote for health, science and Joe Biden for President.
Tweet 17	Scientific American has never endorsed a presidential candidate in our 175-year history—until now. The 2020 election is literally a matter of life and death. We urge you to vote for health, science and Joe Biden for President.
Tweet 18	Joe Biden helped lead the effort for the war in Iraq. He voted for trade deals that cost us millions of jobs. He pushed a bankruptcy bill that has been disastrous for working families. That is not the kind of record that will bring forth the energy we need to defeat Trump.

Tweet 19	If you want any more evidence of how Donald Trump didn't want to run against Joe Biden, check out all the effort he and his surrogates are putting into running against Hillary Clinton again in 2020.
Tweet 20	The survival of Democracy depends on the removal of the most Criminally Corrupt President in our Nation's history. It's time to put our differences aside and celebrate what unites US by coalescing behind Joe Biden. This Nov. let's blow the Sick Liar away.
Tweet 21	I will be a president for all Americans. Whether you voted for me or not, I will represent you.
Tweet 22	"We're going to beat Donald Trump. And when we do, we won't just rebuild this nation — we'll transform it."
Tweet 23	I've never wanted to see a president fail, but I want to see America succeed. It's time for a change
Tweet 24	The President refused to condemn white supremacists tonight. He said 'stand back and stand by.' The most dangerous threat to our democracy is President Trump himself. #VoteNow
Tweet 25	Real leaders don't spread hate. They help to bring people together." This election is not about Democrat vs. Republican. It's about decency vs. indecency. Honesty vs. dishonesty. Integrity vs. lack of integrity. Responsibility vs. irresponsibility. Reality vs. fantasy. The choice is clear
Tweet 26	VOTE HIM OUT
Tweet 27	Trump wouldn't even condemn white supremacists at the debate. He told them to 'stand by.' This is a president who has emboldened white supremacists with his racist rhetoric and policies. We need to vote him out and vote in someone who will stand up against hate
Tweet 28	I've always been proud of what this country represents. Today, I'm proud of my city

Tweet 29	STOP THE COUNT!
Tweet 30	The Senate must vote to remove Trump from office NOW. No excuses.

News stories 2016

Story 1	US Election 2016: Trump 'groped woman like an octopus'
Story 2	Election 2016: Tracking Reports of Voting Problems Across the United States
Story 3	US election 2016: Republican divisions grow over Trump
Story 4	US election: Why is Clinton's foundation so controversial?
Story 5	US election 2016: George HW Bush 'to vote for Clinton'
Story 6	FALSE: Pope Francis Shocks World, Endorses Donald Trump for President
Story 7	Did Donald Trump Transport Stranded Troops on His Own Airplane?
Story 8	#Pizzagate
Story 9	Ireland is now officially accepting Trump refugees from America"
Story 10	"WikiLeaks confirms Hillary sold weapons to ISIS … Then drops another bombshell"
Story 11	"FBI agent suspected in Hillary email leaks found dead in apartment murder-suicide"
Story 12	"FBI director received millions from Clinton Foundation, his brother's law firm does Clinton's taxes
Story 13	"ISIS leader calls for American Muslim voters to support Hillary Clinton"

Story 14	"Hillary Clinton in 2013: 'I would like to see people like Donald Trump run for office; they're honest and can't be bought'"
Story 15	"RuPaul claims Trump touched him inappropriately in the 90s

News Stories 2020

Story 1	US Presidential Elections 2020 HIGHLIGHTS: Biden heads to Florida for campaigning, Trump to preside over historic Arab-Israel deals
Story 2	Democrats were planning to replace Joe Biden with Hillary Clinton as the nominee.
Story 3	Kamala Harris was not eligible to run for Vice President because her parents were not U.S. citizens.
Story 4	1. Donald Trump had actually won the election but the results were being rigged against him.
Story 5	1. Joe Biden was hiding a serious illness and would not be able to serve as President if elected.
Story 6	1. The COVID-19 pandemic was a hoax designed to hurt Donald Trump's chances of winning re-election.
Story 7	1. The Black Lives Matter movement was planning to disrupt the election and cause chaos.
Story 8	1. Joe Biden's son Hunter was involved in a corrupt business deal with a Ukrainian company.
Story 9	1. Joe Biden would raise taxes on the middle class if elected.
Story 10	1. The election was being stolen from Donald Trump by illegal immigrants and dead people who were voting.
Story 11	Nancy Pelosi was plotting to impeach Donald Trump again if he won re-election

Story 12	1. George Soros and other billionaires were funding a plot to rig the election in Joe Biden's favor.
Story 13	1. Joe Biden was planning to defund the police if he was elected.
Story 14	Smoking-gun email reveals how Hunter Biden introduced Ukrainian businessman to VP dad
Story 15	"Trump lawyer Sidney Powell pushes conspiracy theories so extreme that they got kicked off Fox News

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