

Donald trump's use of uncivil discourse through twitter

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Along with a changing society comes changes in communication. The age of television is segueing to the age of social media with the rise of platforms such as Twitter. No longer are the thoughts and ideas conveyed being guided, regulated or fact-checked by any overseeing organization or body, and nor is there any delay between the occurrence of a thought and that thought being shared publicly.

Anyone with a smart phone has the ability to share their opinions directly and immediately with the world at large. This would not be a concern if all Twitter content was harmless, but this is not the case. Through the tweets of its users, Twitter often presents itself as a conveyer of important cultural conversations addressing topics such as politics, religion and education. When this happens, Twitter destroys conversation and contemplation, fosters mockery and fanaticism, and contributes to apathy and scorn. This may be demonstrated by examining the platform of Twitter and reflecting upon the Twitter practices of the President of the United States, Donald Trump.

Trump successfully utilizes Twitter as a forum for his uncivil discourse. Trump's misogyny and sexist attitudes towards women are expressed and presented through this uncivil discourse on Twitter. Twitter ultimately trains us to devalue others, thereby cultivating mean, malicious and uncivil discourse such as President Trump using Twitter as a means to devalue women. This cultivating of uncivil discourse is achieved through the three main attributes of Twitter posts. According to Brian L. Ott, professor of Communication Studies at Texas Tech University, these three main attributes are: simplicity, impulsivity and incivility (NCA). Trump also possesses and exemplifies these three attributes of Twitter, ultimately <https://assignbuster.com/donald-trumps-use-of-uncivil-discourse-through-twitter/>

making Twitter the perfect form of uncivil discourse to express his misogynistic views.

In an age of increasing relevance of social media like Twitter, civil discourse is being increasingly violated. This is inversely proportionate to the increasing relevance of uncivil discourse. By nature, both civil and uncivil discourse are entirely subjective - for discourse to be determined as civil or uncivil is entirely dependent on the eye of the beholder. Civil discourse may be defined as a means of communication with attributes including being polite, organized, reasoned, calm, orderly, etc. In contrast, uncivil discourse can be understood as a communication that is unorganized, impulsive, aggressive, one-sided, insulting, etc. By definition, Twitter is a means of communication that cultures an ideal environment for uncivil discourse. This is due to a few attributes of Twitter.

Firstly, Twitter is designed to require simplicity. Due to Twitter's limited number of 280 words, the content of a tweet must be concise, which suggests it lacks in complexity. While brevity may be adequate for many topics, for more complicated subject matters such as politics, racism, religion, sexism and more it is not only inadequate but irresponsible to pose ideas and opinions without any rational or justification. In the word limit imposed by Twitter, tweets can express feelings or opinions but cannot explain, analyse or assess those feelings or opinions (NCA). Simply stating ones opinions and feelings without justification or reason provides nothing to discuss or deliberate, so inhibits the possibility of meaningful, constructive dialog between individuals or groups of people.

For example, Trump tweeted his feelings towards Hillary Clinton, saying, “ If Hillary Clinton can't satisfy her husband, what makes her think she can satisfy America? @realDonaldTrump #2016president.” In this example of Trump utilizing Twitter as a means for uncivil discourse, he expresses his feelings on a topic, in this case Hillary Clinton, but fails to provide a logical reason (or any reason at all) as to why he feels that way. As well, he does not express these feelings with any intent of having a dialog with Clinton or anyone else.

Secondly, Twitter promotes impulsivity. Our phones are always within arms-reach and turned on so we can have a thought one moment and share it with the world via Twitter just a few seconds later. This inhibits the user from examining and considering the possible result of sharing their feelings and motives, proving the sense of urgency and contributing to the idea of Twitter promoting impulsiveness. For example, as seen on the time stamps on many of Trump's tweets, he often is choosing to express his opinions on important issues at very early hours in the morning, proving just how readily available Twitter is. This immense convenience that Twitter provides allows for this sense of impulsivity, perhaps even encourages it. The immediacy of Twitter leaves no time for reflexivity which leads to many emotionally charged tweets being posted in spite of how the user might have expressed those feelings in person, without the comfort of the distance associated with social media. This is clearly a common occurrence when one considers how often tweets are later deleted and/or apologized for once reflected upon.

Thirdly, Twitter fosters and encourages incivility through its informality and depersonalization of interactions. Twitter's "lack of concern with proper grammar and style undermines norms that tend to enforce civility" (NCA). As well, much like other forms of social media, the anonymity and feeling of safety from the distance that social media is perceived to provide, Twitter creates space for "depersonalized interactions" (NCA). This perceived anonymity provided by social media allows individuals to post an opinion without considering the effects on another person. It is far more difficult, for example, to share an insult about someone when they are in front of you.

Trump's natural style of speaking and Twitter are perfectly suited to each other. According to the Flesch-Kincaid readability test, Trump tested at a fourth grade reading level, explaining his avoidance of multisyllabic words and his overuse of adverbs like very (PoliticoMagazine). He speaks simply, impulsively and uncivilly and perhaps some of Trump's popularity is due, at least in part, to the fact that he is so perfectly suited to the social media technology of our age. As such, it may be suggested that Twitter had a significant impact on Trump being elected president in spite of his being unqualified and temperamentally unfit for the role (NCA). Such a global position of power comes with an enormous amount of influence and President Trump's simple, impulsive and uncivil tweets do more than merely reflect his own views. His tweets teach others to see people as less-than and embolden society as a whole to descend into uncivil discourse along with him. His position as a world leader paired with his popularity on Twitter (55.8 million followers) ensures the spread of his ideology like a plague.

Trump's position as a world leader provides him a certain level of authority. This authority contributes to the reasons his use of uncivil discourse is successful. The use of uncivil discourse is dependent and related to power or lack thereof. When an individual holds a certain amount of authority, their uncivil discourse may be accepted by the general public. This may be because people generally assume that along with authority comes the qualification for that authority, which therefore makes the individual with the authority considered trustworthy, appealing or knowledgeable; their reputation provides them credibility which, in turn, allows their uncivil discourse a level of credibility. This being said, although uncivil discourse may be accepted due to someone like Donald Trump's authority, it does not mean that the uncivil discourse is necessary or right.

Uncivil discourse should be reserved for those who are in a lesser position of power, like historically marginalized groups. When someone is in a position of power such as Donald Trump, they do not need to grab someone's attention, therefore they do not need to utilize uncivil discourse. In other words, civil discourse is dependent or restrictive to the power dynamics of the parties involved. So, for example, Donald Trump should not utilize uncivil discourse, as he does, towards groups of traditionally and historically lesser power like females and marginalized races. This evokes questions regarding who has power and what power looks like.

The idea of power is very subjective, but there are some objective aspects. Society is a historically patriarchal society. In most cultures around the world, and throughout most of human society, men have held more power

than women. In spite of all the progress we have made, this is still the case today. This dynamic of power between men and women affects most all aspects of society and therefore leads to many men being selected for roles which hold more power. For example, every US president has been male. As well, men on average still make significantly more money in the work place.

According to Josh Zumbrun, writer for The Wall Street Journal, "The U. S. Census Bureau finds that the median earnings of men working full-time, year-round, is \$49, 398. The median for women was \$37, 791" (The Wall Street Journal). As well, according to Dalton Conley in You May Ask Yourself, there are certain types of power and authority that possess their own attributes. For example, a traditional position of authority includes hereditary monarchies which possesses positions of authority that are provide to someone based on their heredity and who they are as an individual (Conley 578). That is to say, this type of authority position is dependent on the individual that holds that position rather than the qualification that individual may possess. In contrast, a legal-rational position of authority is dependent on the individuals qualifications and is independent of the status of the individual occupying that position (Conley 279).

When one individual leaves a position of legal-rational authority, that individual will lose the power and the next individual will resume the authority associated with that position. An example of this is the position of president currently occupied by Donald Trump. Once he leaves presidency, he will lose a certain amount of power. This will, in turn, affect his credibility which will impact the success of his regular use of incivility as a means of

communication. This idea of legal-rational authority may also explain why Trump's uncivil discourse is successful in regard to its intent. Although Trump's position of authority makes it unnecessary for him to use uncivil discourse, it also makes possible his use of uncivil discourse and may in fact be the only reason it is successful.

Regular use of incivility as a means of communication has its own negatives. Uncivil discourse should be considered a temporary means of communicating, not as a means of communicating on a regular basis. Uncivil discourse is a means to grab someone's attention. Once the individual or group utilizing uncivil discourse has gained the attention they sought, it is critical that they immediately return to using civil discourse through the presentation of intelligent, well-thought-out arguments as prolonged use of uncivil discourse will detract from the credibility of the user. Donald Trump has been using Twitter as a forum for uncivil discourse for years, long before being elected president. His failure to utilize uncivil discourse sparingly ultimately detracts from his credibility.

In addition, uncivil discourse should be considered a last resort. When civil discourse has been exhausted, then uncivil discourse may be necessary. Civil discourse should always be the first tool in fighting for a cause or voicing one's opinion because it can often be very effective in achieving one's goals. If we had a conversation about the topic where both sides listened to each other and made an open and honest effort to understand the other's perspective, many issues could be resolved through civil discourse. If uncivil discourse is used as the first tool in trying to achieve

one's goals, it is not only likely to be met with resistance but will detract attention from the issue being fought for or the opinion being shared. It creates a starting point of anger and immediately encourages the recipient to either go on the defence or offense due to the dynamics of the uncivil discourse, and this only detracts attention from and perhaps undermines the issue one is arguing for. This is not so much an issue for Donald Trump because, as mentioned before, he does not tweet in attempt to start a dialog with anyone. He posts more for the attention aspect of uncivil discourse but has no real purpose or reason for his act of uncivil discourse.

Social media's accessibility allows an immense amount of people to connect and share opinion, civil and uncivil, with ease. Therefore, it is now more important than ever that institutions continue to educate people to be independent, critical reasoners who will remind the world that people's opinions on platforms such as Twitter are just that; opinions. Educated, independent, critical thinkers will hold accountable those who utilize platforms like Twitter to share their opinions about important social and cultural issues, constantly pressing and requiring them to back-up and justify their tweets with facts and figures. Informed critical thinkers and writers will also be the ones who continue the invaluable task of conducting serious investigative reporting, calling out and challenging false and misleading information. They will be the ones who will not allow society to descend into the politics of division and degradation through uncivil discourse with impunity.