Rhetorical evaluation of president trump's attack on the four congressional women...

Abstract

President Trump recently came under fire due to some controversial tweets made July 14, 2019, in which he insinuated that four Democratic Congresswomen of color, three of them being Americans by birth and one naturalized as a legal citizen at the age of 13, ought to go back and help fix their crime infested countries of origin. The tweets were met with mixed reactions from Americans of all political affiliations. Some harshly condemned the tweets as racist, while others argued that the tweets were taken out of context.

The president's tweets were sparked by a group of congresswomen who are openly critical of the current administration. These 4 first-year congresswomen namely: Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Presley and Rashid Tlaib, have in stark contrast to not only Republicans, but also to some Democrats, championed progressive policies and have hence gained popularity with not only liberal Democrats, but across a wide cross-section of the American public. Some of their policies have ranged from " The Green New Deal, increasing the top marginal tax rate to 70%, student debt cancellation, and Medicare for All" (Leifer, 2019) . Recent polls have shown overwhelming support for these policies leading to political friction between the president and the four congresswomen.

The purpose of this research paper is to critically analyze President Trump's tweet attack on the four Congressional Women impartially providing a balanced discussion on both sides of the issue and arriving at a conclusion.

The paper will also shine a light on the influence of rhetorical devices, gatekeepers, and cultural and/or personal biases.

The Rhetorical Devices Applicable to the Situation

Rhetorical devices are linguistic tools that use particular forms of sentence structures, sounds, or patterns of meaning with the end goal being to elicit a certain reaction from an audience. This paper will analyze the use of rhetorical devices ethos and pathos in President Trump's tweet and to analyze how the media presented the issue to their audience.

Pathos

Pathos appeal is based in emotion or passion. Pathos tries to evoke an emotion from the audience such as pity, anger, sympathy, and/or hope with the aim of changing their opinion or viewpoint about something.

Following Trump's tweets, the media was quick to jump on the story, showing an out of control racist Trump. This included political satire shows, newspapers, and big T. V. news channels like CNN and MSNBC, there was a massive outcry condemning the president's tweets. Whereas other media syndicates washed over Trump's tweets or referred to the congressional women as American and Israel hating communists. All the media houses reported the news with strong headlines, quotes, and sound bites while presenting the news to their audience. For instance, the president's twitter post translated in such a manner that lead any reader to understand that if one was an American-born brown/black female and a congresswoman, Trump is of the opinion that she belongs to a third world crime infested

country (Sample, 2019). These were the opinions of a Bloomberg article published in the wake of the tweets. The article concluded with the reporter stating that,: any doubts that Trump was a racist and bigot willing to pander to those with similar beliefs to his should be laid to rest after reading the tweets (Sample, 2019).

It therefore becomes easy to understand that for individuals who only read, listened to or watched left leaning or right leaning news exclusively, based on the emotional manner of reporting would be moved.

Ethos

This is also known as an appeal to ethics. It endeavors to persuade the listeners, viewers, and readers that the individual speaking has credibility as a source and that what they speak about is weighty and must be taken seriously due to their experience and possession of the necessary judgment to decide just from unjust. The office of the United States Presidency holds such weight. In addition, after Trump's tweets created political controversy, the Republican Party leaders were quick to come to the president's defense. Reputable politicians spoke out and awkwardly tried to explain away why the president's tweets were not racially motivated. In a CNN article, Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnel begun by calling on Americans to stop the rhetoric and that the president was not racist. When asked how he'd react if his wife was the subject of those tweets, he replied, " Well, the secretary of transportation came here at age eight, legally, not speaking a word of English and has realized the American dream…" (Killough, Foran & Rimmer, 2019). A statement interpreted as evading the question.

Gatekeepers Influence on Audience Understanding of the Tweets Situation

Gatekeeping can be described as a process through which information is filtered for distribution geared towards publication, broadcasting, the internet or other modes of communication. Simply put, it involves deciding which piece of information to send to others and how to shape it for impact. In the current political climate, the gatekeeping can be said to be between the Democrats and Republicans. These media organizations choose the political side to back and shaped the news according to their political beliefs and keep pandering to their audience leading to a limited point of view.

The Influence of Cultural and Personal biases

In a perfect world, the abundance of different cultures in the U. S. would make it the ideal place for cultural exchange, learning and understanding which unfortunately this isn't the case. Culture shapes the core of which people are ranging from dressing, talking, and religion to creating biases. To illustrate this, it is important to remember and think about the words, " The eye is finicky discerning only what the mind is ready to understand" (Davies, 1951). In a political context, cultural biases have a great influence on personal politics. For instance, a big percentage of white Americans have a belief that the white race is being attacked by minorities. There remains a large possibility that if a white American were to see news about a minority person migrating or committing a crime he or she is bound to believe it without much fact checking. For those reasons it was easy to understand the uproar with which minorities received Trump's tweets and the lack of support from the Republican congressmen.

On the other hand, minorities have a culturally and personally biased view of the right. One such example is the belief that white Americans have a privilege and do not understand the struggles of being a minority in America. Further, there is the belief that because of this privilege minorities are kept from achieving full equality. In this context, dismissive reactions to the president's twitter attacks on the four congresswomen can be better understood.

Fallacies

In the political arena where public opinion is king, many fallacies abound in an attempt by politicians to one up each other. Taking a cross-section of the president's tweets and the ensuing backlash, some fallacies were clearly evident. In the days following the " go back home" tweets, the president continued and took to twitter to express his doubts in whether the four congresswomen were capable of loving their country (Swaine, 2019). This was an example of the Faulty Causality Fallacy as it implied that if they were critical of the government, they were incapable of loving the country, which is incorrect and untrue. Another example of a fallacy was a statement by Senator Lindsey O. Graham (R-S. C.) who had the idea: While conceding, unlike Mr. Trump, that the women were indeed democratically elected citizens of America, Mr. Graham charged that these were a group of women who were Israel hating communists, who despised their own nation (Editorial, 2019). This was a Straw Man Fallacy because there is no evidence that these women held these terrible opinions. A third fallacy Loaded Language was used by the president when he used loaded words such as " loudly and

viciously" to describe the congressional women's critique of the administration. Ad Hominem Fallacy can also be found in the president's tweets when he stated the congresswomen should go back to their crime infest countries. The term crime infested is derogatory and linking it with the congressional women can place their characters into question.

The opinions of President Trump and Mr. Graham expressed in the article are also typical of the Hasty Generalization Fallacy. He appears to have arrived at the conclusion that the congresswomen in question have a deep hatred for America, due to their criticisms. Mr. Graham however fails to provide sufficient evidence to support the claims. Further, he neglected to remember the job of these Congress women and men alike is to critique, fix, and speak out on behalf of their constituents.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is now more than ever the time for consumers of news to exercise prudence whenever a shocking bit of news hits the airwaves. In this era of multiple news sources, most of which are pushing an agenda, people are encouraged to check their news before resulting to outrage. It is important for organizations in the news business to be impartial because of the influence they wield. The impact of cultural and personal bias, fallacies, gatekeepers, and the use of rhetoric should be taken into serious consideration by consumers and producers of news content. As a critical thinker, it's now more important than ever to consider multiple viewpoints and the intent behind each piece of news before a conclusion is reached.

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