

4-22-2020

## Twitter Politics: The Effect of Language and Source Credibility on Public Perception

Grace Wasinger

*Fort Hays State University*, gmwasinger@mail.fhsu.edu

Brooke Mann

*Fort Hays State University*, bmmann@fhsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholars.fhsu.edu/sacad\\_2020](https://scholars.fhsu.edu/sacad_2020)

---

### Recommended Citation

Wasinger, Grace and Mann, Brooke, "Twitter Politics: The Effect of Language and Source Credibility on Public Perception" (2020). *2020 SACAD Entrants*. 91.

[https://scholars.fhsu.edu/sacad\\_2020/91](https://scholars.fhsu.edu/sacad_2020/91)

This Poster is brought to you for free and open access by the John Heinrichs Scholarly and Creative Activities Day (SACAD) at FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in 2020 SACAD Entrants by an authorized administrator of FHSU Scholars Repository.

# Twitter Politics: The Effect of Language and Source Credibility on Public Perception

Grace Wasinger, Ashley Lockwood, Haley Jones, & Brooke Mann

## Abstract

Social media sites are instrumental in influencing public perception (Lawson & Strange, 2015). Social media sites, such as Twitter, have provided millions with constant news coverage. Modern social media usage has allowed for public figures, such as President, Donald Trump, to influence public perception through his Twitter account. Because of the influx of information, coming from various sources on social media, it is imperative to consider the implications different types of information sources will have on individual perceptions. Individuals may be more influenced by high-credibility sources when searching for news. The current study attempts to investigate the relationship between language and authority and its effect on media viewer's perception. Participants were shown one of four Tweets, varying by language used and account type. Participants were then asked questions to assess their views on the message. Results suggest a difference in perception based on language used, level of perceived intelligence, source authentication, and source's level of knowledge on the topic.

## Introduction

- Twitter is a microblogging service that allows individuals to share messages in 280-characters.
- Every month approximately 330 million individuals log into Twitter (Twitter.com, 2020).
- Modern Twitter accounts extend beyond personal use and into professional usage.
- Researchers have concluded that individuals are more influenced by high-credibility sources (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Kelman & Hovland, 1953).
- Additionally, high-credibility sources are more likely to cause individuals to go against their preexisting views (Aronson, Turner, & Carlsmith, 1963; Hovland & Weiss, 1951).



FORT HAYS STATE  
UNIVERSITY

Forward thinking. World ready.



## Methodology

- A 2 (language style: informal or formal) x 2 (Source: personal or professional account) between-subjects design was used to look at the aforementioned research question.
- Participants read a vignette that outlined a news story covering the Israel-Palestine peace plan.
- The formal source was The White House, while the personal Twitter account came from a source called Taylor Smith. After viewing one of the four Tweets, participants were asked to complete a survey.

## Participants

- One hundred and thirty-six participants (52 females, 80 males, 1 other;  $M_{age} = 29.79$ ,  $SD = 6.97$ ) were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk.

## Results & Discussion

- A series of one-way ANOVAs showed a difference in perception based on language used,  $F(3, 130) = 8.07$ ,  $p = .000$ , level of perceived intelligence,  $F(3, 130) = 3.40$ ,  $p = .02$ , how real/fake the source appeared,  $F(3, 130) = 4.14$ ,  $p = .008$ , and source's level of informed on the topic,  $F(3, 130) = 3.06$ ,  $p = .031$ .

## Discussion

- When more formal language is used on Twitter for a professional source, participants view the source as more informed.
- Regardless of source type, when sources use more formal language on Twitter, the participants view the source as more intelligent.
- The account that was viewed as the most real was the personal Twitter account that used informal language.
- Participants viewed the White House formal condition to be more informed than the White House informal condition.

Grace Wasinger: gmwasinger@mail.fhsu.edu  
Ashley Lockwood: avlockwood@mail.fhsu.edu  
Haley Jones: hrjones2@mail.fhsu.edu  
Brooke Mann: bmann@fhsu.edu

Contact Information