

The Effectiveness, Defect and Limitation of Political Communication under Social Media

-- Take Donald Trump's Performance in the 2016 and 2020 Us Elections as An Example

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Abstract

Throughout Donald Trump's use of social media in the two US elections in 2016 and 2020, there is no doubt that it has pioneered a very influential political communication strategy in the new media era, and his full use of social media has achieved remarkable results in shaping his political image and attracting public attention. It is certain that his political communications strategy has played a crucial role in helping him won the 2016 election, but even so, its defeats of the 2020 election is indisputable. The former's victory and the latter's defeat undoubtedly formed a sharp contrast. Combined with the different social backgrounds of the two elections, this paper will synthesize all kinds of data to analyze the effect of Trump's political communication on social media. While affirming its certain effect, this article will point out the defect (negative effect of its communication effect) and the limitation of its effect (inconclusive).

Keywords

Social media; Political communication (political propaganda); Donald Trump; Twitter; u.s. general elections; Communication effects; Defect; Limitation.

1. US Election 2016

Donald Trump, as one of the most successful businessmen, took part in the 2016 general election with almost blank political background. Trump has almost ignored the traditional election propaganda strategy, and has not invested a lot of money in the political propaganda of traditional media like his final competitor Hillary Clinton. Instead, he has used social media, especially Twitter (140-word social network), to match its direct, vulgar, inflammatory tone, to create its strong political image and create strong political and social influence. By January 2016, Donald Trump had more than 5.5 million Twitter followers, Hillary Clinton had more than 5 million Twitter followers. Till 8 November, Trump's Twitter followers have grown to 13 million, Clinton was 10.3 million, the former has gained an advantage for 2.7 million followers. At the end of November 2016, Trump had more than 16.3 million followers and Clinton had more than 11.4 million followers. At the same time, Trump used social media to create a lot of free or free political propaganda for himself, creating greater benefits at lower costs than his competitors. In particular, he often publishes articles on Twitter, producing important news reports. This free media exposure has given Trump huge public attention without requiring his campaign to spend millions of dollars on paid media such as advertising. In terms of communication process, A tweet can reach millions of people directly, without relying on any third party propagandists. And at the 2016 election, About 21% of Americans use Twitter (Greenwood, The U.S Perrin, & Duggan, 2016). [1] Thus, Trump's use of social media, especially Twitter, is one of the important

factors driving his victory. Brad Parscale, Trump's digital director, commented after the election that Twitter was one of the "reasons we won this thing" (Lapowsky, 2016). [2] In the 2016 general election, Donald Trump chose a strategy better described as "amateurism", rather than imitating the social media strategy of the Democratic Party's professional campaign. His image as a candidate is largely shaped by his widely disseminated tweets, Frequently cited and debated (Enli, 2017). [3] Among them, Social media's influence in the 2016 US presidential election has been stronger than it has ever been before and has led to a loss of 'dominance' of traditional media on public opinion (Ramona Kreis, 2017).[4] It can be said that for this year, it is not only Trump's personal victory over Clinton, but also the victory of free media political communication mode with social media as the core and traditional media political propaganda mode. Not only that, because of its wide influence and attention through the free media created by social media, it has even driven the gains of traditional media ——CNN and Fox News, for example, reported record profits in 2016, undoubtedly in no small part due to Trump's campaign (Stewart, 2016). [5] With such incentives, Trump's campaign may have done more than shock the world with his victory. His use of social media and his ability to generate free media may end up changing the way future presidential campaigns are conducted in the years to come (Peter L.Francia, 2018). [6]

2. 2016-2019 in Office

For nearly three years after the 2016 election, President Trump has given full play to his "Twitter governance" model, a free media political communication model with social media as the core. Despite his foreign policy, such as "launching a Sino-US trade war ", " suppressing Huawei ", " successively withdrawing from international organizations" and a series of "exceptional" actions, Even for its allies," tariff increases ", Measures to increase military spending. But essentially, This series of actions is a defence of American interests (at least temporarily), Although the consequence is that the U.S. has been declining in the international community, But the domestic economy is growing, And in keeping with the biggest tax cuts in American history, And further increase government spending and other economic stimulus policies, By the third quarter of 2018, American GDP grew 3.4%, The highest level since 2014, The unemployment rate in the United States was 3.7% in the same period, The lowest in 50 years. Thus, In terms of achievements, The Trump administration, economically, At least in the short term, With good results, And a lot of Americans, Especially the support of the bottom people of the United States. And Trump himself, With his Twitter statecraft model, Especially the number of Twitter followers, From more than 5.5 million in 2016 to more than 88.86 million by the end of 2020, Nearly 16 times. Again, Trump's "Twitter statecraft" does have its powerful influence.

3. United States Election 2020

Like all propaganda tools," Twitter governing "is not everything. This is evidenced by the Trump fiasco in the 2020 election. From the reason of Trump's defeat, there is no doubt that it is multifaceted and comprehensive, but the scope of discussion in this paper will focus on the level of political communication, mainly from the perspective of macro communication effect analysis and argumentation. From the data mentioned above, we can think that the Trump administration's achievements are not "ugly ", or even overall good. In that case, we can think that the lack of performance during the 2016-2019 period is excluded, and the main problem is obvious —— The key led to Trump's defeat in 2020 are the outbreak of the new crown at the end of 2019 and the ensuing series of policy, economic, and immigration and ethnic problems in the United States (the Mexican Wall, Freud incident), Has triggered social unrest in the United States —— all of which highlight Trump's defeat. The Trump administration's economic-

promotion policy, faced with a new crown epidemic that requires a relatively conservative response, does not have enough responsiveness to control it. Trump, trying to keep the economy alive for a second term, played down the severity of the virus and refused to take further precautions, such as a blockade, but it turned out that the move has greatly increased the epidemic in the United States, which in turn increased the burden on society and the health care system, further triggered social unrest and ultimately hit the economy. As a result, neither the economy nor the epidemic is well under way.

From the communicator's point of view, The United States' slow response to the coronavirus pandemic is partly due to President Trump's captivating self-promotive reliance on digital media—especially Twitter—that are instantaneous, visual, and personal. During the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, President Trump engaged in attention-based politics, or the use of media to draw attention of the largest audience to himself, at the expense of an efficient response to a major public health crisis (David L. Altheide, 2020).[7] Attention-based politics describes the process in which politicians use their communication to draw the attention of the biggest possible crowd of the audience (voters) to themselves or to the themes they propose in the multitude of information or news flows (Merkovity, 2017).[8] President Trump claims that economic frustration is the most serious problem, while the epidemic is less serious and secondary. His attention-based politics continues to weaken the seriousness and threat of the epidemic, and to block as much as possible all possible epidemic prevention measures at the expense of the economy. And the consequence is that the United States with the new crown epidemic as the cause of a series of serious social problems.

The succession of major failures has directly led to Trump losing a large part of his "swing voters" support, and more fatally, his usual social media political propaganda model has not become a weapon to turn the tide this time. Instead, it turned into a stab in the back. President Trump engaged in attention-based politics, use the media to draw attention of the largest audience to himself, and in the face of his multiple failures, the high level of attention brings not only supporters, but also opponents. According to a general election poll released by News-YouGov on 2020.9.6, "49% of Biden supporters said they voted mainly against Trump in November." Thus, Trump's attention-based social media political propaganda has aroused widespread social concern and aroused a large number of opponents.

On the ballot, As of 19 November 2020, Trump gets 73, 599, 393 votes, Compared to the 62% he won in the 2016 election, 979, 636 votes, Trump got 10% more this time, 619, 757 votes; And in the meantime, Against Trump (Hillary Clinton in 2016 and Joseph Biden in 2020), From 65% of the 2016 general election, 844, 610 up to 79% by 2020, 510, 915, 13% increase, 666, 305. In contrast to the two sides, Trump's opponent is still up 3% from him, 046, 548, That is to say, Relatively speaking, In the 2020 election, With Trump's usual propaganda, his relative approval rating has not improved since four years ago, On the contrary, more than 3 million opponents have been added. Besides, More importantly, Biden and Trump won the first and second largest votes in American history, And in Biden's vote, And there's a lot of opposition to Trump, This is all the more proof, Although Trump's political propaganda model does attract a lot of supporters, But it also attracted an unprecedented number of opponents. Thus, In the complex situation of 2020, his attention-based political propaganda model is counterproductive, as its defect.

In contrast, in the 2016 election, when businessman and politician Trump preached his idea of governing with a clean and near-blank political background and made good promises, his propaganda model did effectively expand his positive influence because of little negative influence. But by 2020, defeats, a public attention-based political propaganda model, while attracting more attention, undoubtedly expanded his negative influence. To some extent, it worsened the situation and made some undecided voters more firmly on Biden's side.

Through the results of the 2020 US election, it can be seen that after adapting to Trump's political propaganda model, the public has also been "immune" to it, and voters (audiences) will no longer be easily and passively affected by the irrational influence of his communication strategy. So, in the final analysis, voters' intentions are determined by the real benefits that political leaders can bring to them, not by political propaganda on social media. Its communication effect can not determine the choice of social rationality, can not change the social trend of voters' rational choice based on their own interests, as the limitation of its communication effect.

In addition, while President Trump's Twitter followers grew by more than 83 million from 2016 to 2020, his 2020 election is only 10 million more votes than the 2016 election. It can be seen that not all Twitter followers have contributed their votes to President Trump, and at least 73 million Trump Twitter followers have not voted for him in terms of their growing number of followers and votes. Followers under social media have a large number of "moisture", voting rate is not high, is also the embodiment of its limited communication effect.

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