

Twitter (X) as a Political Propaganda Tool; A Comparative Analysis of the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election*

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of Twitter (now known as X) as a political propaganda tool during the 2020 United States presidential election, specifically focusing on the communication strategies of Donald Trump and Joe Biden. Through a comparative content analysis of 400 tweets—200 from each candidate—posted between November and December 2020, the research investigates how the platform was used to shape narratives, influence public opinion, and mobilize voters. By utilizing both quantitative engagement metrics and qualitative thematic analysis, the study identifies key rhetorical patterns and campaign strategies employed on Twitter. The findings reveal that Biden's tweets emphasized themes of unity, democratic values, and policy proposals, while Trump's posts were more confrontational, often focusing on election integrity and personal attacks. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of hashtag usage, timing, and emotional appeal in increasing visibility and engagement on the platform. The results demonstrate Twitter's dual function as both a communication medium and a propaganda vehicle, capable of amplifying both cohesive and divisive messaging. Furthermore, the research underscores Twitter's influence on voter behavior, illustrating how real-time interactions and strategic messaging contributed to shaping political discourse during the election. Ultimately, the study emphasizes the evolving significance of social media in modern electoral politics and advocates for a more ethical and regulated approach to its use within democratic processes.

Keywords: Political Communication, Twitter (X), Propaganda, US 2020 Presidential Election, Social Media Management.

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Siyasi Propaganda Aracı Olarak Twitter (X); 2020 ABD Başkanlık Seçimlerinin Karşılaştırmalı Analizi

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, 2020 Amerika Birleşik Devletleri başkanlık seçimleri sırasında Twitter'ın (günümüzde X olarak bilinen) siyasi propaganda aracı olarak oynadığı rolü incelemekte ve özellikle Donald Trump ile Joe Biden'ın iletişim stratejilerine odaklanmaktadır. Kasım ve Aralık 2020 tarihleri arasında her iki adaya ait toplam 400 tweet'in (her adaydan 200) karşılaştırmalı içerik analizi yoluyla değerlendirildiği bu araştırma, platformun söylemleri nasıl şekillendirdiğini, kamuoyunu nasıl etkilediğini ve seçmenleri nasıl harekete geçirdiğini araştırmaktadır. Nicel etkileşim ölçütleri ile nitel tematik analiz yöntemlerinin bir arada kullanılması sayesinde,

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adayların Twitter üzerinden benimsediği temel retorik kalıplar ve kampanya stratejileri ortaya konmuştur. Elde edilen bulgular, Biden'ın tweet'lerinde birlik, demokratik değerler ve politika önerileri gibi temaların öne çıktığını; Trump'ın paylaşımlarının ise daha çatışmacı bir nitelik taşıdığını ve sıklıkla seçim güvenliği ile kişisel saldırılar üzerinde yoğunlaştığını göstermektedir. Ayrıca çalışma, görünürlük ve etkileşimi artırmada hashtag kullanımının, zamanlamanın ve duygusal söylemlerin önemine dikkat çekmektedir. Sonuçlar, Twitter'ın hem bir iletişim aracı hem de bir propaganda aracı olarak çift yönlü işlev gördüğünü; hem birleştirici hem de ayrıştırıcı mesajları yayma kapasitesine sahip olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Araştırma, gerçek zamanlı etkileşimler ve stratejik mesajlaşma yoluyla Twitter'ın seçim sürecindeki siyasi söylemi nasıl şekillendirdiğini vurgulamakta; sosyal medyanın modern seçim siyasetindeki artan önemine dikkat çekmekte ve bu platformların demokratik süreçler içinde daha etik ve düzenlenmiş bir çerçevede kullanılmasını önermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Politik İletişim, Twitter (X), Propaganda, US 2020 Başkanlık Seçimi, Sosyal Medya Yönetimi.

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INTRODUCTION

Social media provides a virtual environment providing an important space for social interaction by maximizing interpersonal relationship skills (Selçuk 2022). Social media has significantly transformed the landscape of political discourse. Particularly in the context of the 2020 American elections, Twitter, which was rebranded as X by Elon Musk in 2022, has served as a critical platform where narratives, opinions, and propaganda shape public perception and directly influence voting behavior. The evolution of digital communication has enabled political actors to utilize the instantaneous reach of social media to spread messages, challenge opposing views, and effectively mobilize voters (Ologunbe & Taiwo 2025). For Elon Musk, occasionally referring to it as “X” underscores that it is not merely a part of one digital space but encompasses a broader digital landscape (X, Consumer Social 2025). Social media, especially Twitter, has recently offered a venue for disseminating political information and forming public opinion. Politicians depend on Twitter to mold their policy agendas. This interactive feature of Twitter fosters a conducive environment for social progress. Twitter has become a powerful instrument for shaping public opinion and driving social change (Phillips 2024). Despite its benefits, Twitter also poses risks, including the creation of echo chambers and political polarization (Pariser 2012).

This study investigates Twitter's role in political propaganda during the 2020 election. Specifically, it aims to:

- Analyze how Twitter was used as a propaganda tool.
- Examine its role in shaping public opinion.
- Assess its influence on voter behavior.

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- Examine how Twitter algorithmic changes impact the dissemination of propaganda.

The relationship between Twitter's rebranding to "X" under Elon Musk and the 2024 U.S. presidential election illustrates the evolving potential of social media platforms as tools for political propaganda. Following Musk's acquisition of Twitter, concerns about political neutrality intensified, particularly in response to public interactions and algorithmic shifts that appeared to favor right-leaning content (Ye et al. 2024). Although the 2024 U.S. presidential election has recently concluded, this study's focus on the 2020 election remains highly relevant. The 2020 election was historically significant as it was the first U.S. election profoundly influenced by social media and real-time political propaganda, particularly during a global pandemic and amidst widespread misinformation about electoral fraud. In contrast, research on the 2024 election is still emerging, with limited peer-reviewed data available. By providing a detailed comparative analysis of Donald Trump and Joe Biden's use of Twitter during the 2020 election, this research offers crucial insights into the rhetorical foundations and engagement strategies that continue to shape contemporary political discourse.

Studies emphasize the significance of understanding how Twitter operates, particularly in political communication (Tumasjan et al. 2010; Álvarez-Peralta et al. 2023; Gearhart et al. 2024). This involves examining how messages are created, gain popularity, the extent of audience interaction, and the analytics that measure tweet engagement (Muñoz et al. 2022). Social media sentiment analysis is crucial for grasping the broader dynamics of political discourse in the digital era (Nip & Berthelie 2024). The 2020 U.S. presidential election exemplifies these dynamics, demonstrating Twitter's ability to shape narratives and drive real-time political conversations.

Bennett and Segerberg (2013) further highlight Twitter's transformative digital potential, emphasizing its role in shaping public opinion and facilitating political debates. They argue that Twitter has redefined political engagement using metrics and analytics to influence public discourse and reshape perceptions. Regardless of its author, a viral tweet can become central to public dialogue based solely on its visibility and traction, underscoring the platform's power to set the agenda (Park & Kaye 2019). In this context, political candidates can leverage Twitter to project their messages, connect with supporters, and influence electoral outcomes (Afonso et al. 2024).

Previous studies on the 2020 U.S. presidential election have explored various aspects of social media's influence, such as the spread of misinformation, sentiment dynamics, and overall platform toxicity. However, few have provided a direct, comparative analysis of the communication strategies used by Donald Trump and Joe Biden. This study addresses that gap by combining quantitative metrics—such as likes, retweets, and posting frequency—with qualitative thematic and rhetorical analysis of 400 tweets collected during the crucial post-election period of November to December 2020. This timeframe was chosen because it marks the peak of political communication activity on Twitter, during which both candidates ramped up their messaging strategies.

Literature Review

From Broadcast to Tweets: The Transformation of Political Communication

Political communication is an essential area of political science that has undergone significant changes over time, reflecting shifts in societal structures and technological advancements. Scholars from various disciplines have long sought to understand its complexity and importance. In his influential work, "Politics", Heywood (2013) explores how political communication serves as a tool for people to create, maintain, and modify societal laws. He emphasizes the interconnectedness of communication theories with broader social structures, advocating for a more integrated approach to understanding political dynamics.

The media's role in shaping political landscapes is central to studying political communication. It determines which political issues receive public attention and influences how citizens perceive political actors and ideologies. McCombs and Shaw (1972) discuss the agenda-setting theory, which explains the media's ability to prioritize topics, thus steering public discourse and impacting political legitimacy and acceptance.

Modern political campaigns have adapted to this media-centric environment, especially with the rise of social media platforms that facilitate direct interaction between politicians and constituents (Geise et al. 2024). The media's power to shape public narratives reinforces its indispensable role in the political process.

Traditional political communication has always played a crucial role in shaping public opinion and fostering political discourse worldwide. Historically, broadcast media such as television and radio have been the dominant channels for spreading political information to large audiences (Hallin & Mancini 2004). Despite the rise of digital platforms, traditional media

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remains highly relevant in political communication due to its established credibility, adherence to journalistic standards, and wide accessibility.

New media integrates digital technologies that allow users to interact with, produce, and distribute content, fundamentally changing the nature of political communication. Unlike mainstream media, which traditionally relies on one-way information dissemination through established platforms like television, radio, and newspapers, new media emphasizes immediacy, global reach, and user participation (Godwin 2023). Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube lead this transformation, creating a participatory culture where users not only consume information but also actively engage with it. These platforms can be described as virtual town squares that enable real-time discussions on social and political issues, facilitating direct interaction between political figures and the public (Brumby 2025). The rise of social media has significantly altered how political messages are crafted, shared, and received, presenting both opportunities and challenges (Bennett W. L. 2012).

Social media fosters news consumption, civic participation, and political engagement by bridging the gaps in accessibility and immediacy left by traditional media (Z'ũniga et al. 2012). Bennett & Segerberg (2013) highlight how this evolution contributes to “connective action”, where individuals are empowered to coordinate and participate in collective political action through digital platforms. Platforms like Twitter have proven to be powerful tools for gauging public sentiment and predicting electoral outcomes. While new media enhances civic engagement and the flow of information, it also raises concerns about misinformation and fragmented public discourse. The brief and real-time communication style of social media allows for rapid information dissemination, while its interactive nature promotes political dialogue and mobilization.

Reframing Elections: Twitter's Role in Political Propaganda and Polarization

Twitter began as a platform for individuals to share brief messages called tweets, which were initially limited to 140 characters. Its simplicity and immediacy made it appealing to a wide range of users, setting it apart from other social media platforms in terms of content sharing and engagement. Since 2007, political communication has taken center stage on Twitter, thanks to its real-time capabilities, which allow politicians to share their views and respond promptly to audience comments (Mcgregor et al. 2019). This immediacy encouraged politicians to adopt Twitter. The platform's concise messaging and instant communication became essential for

political campaigns and voter engagement. During the 2008 US presidential elections, political leaders recognized the value of this medium for connecting with their supporters on a more personal level (Payne 2009).

Twitter has evolved from being merely a microblogging site to playing a significant role in political communication and democratized this process by breaking down traditional barriers between individuals and politicians. With its interactive nature, Twitter allows for the sharing of opinions, enabling politicians to engage with their supporters without delays, unlike traditional media, which often lacks immediacy. The significance of Twitter is not confined to American elections; countries worldwide have recognized its potential to influence political communication. Consequently, many politicians globally have embraced Twitter during election seasons. Understanding Twitter as a tool for election propaganda, politicians use the platform to draw attention to their viewpoints and policy positions, fostering engagement from their constituents.

As a result, there has been a growing interest in investigating Twitter's impact on political discourse, exploring which topics are trending on the platform and whether social media users are more politically divided (Masroor et al. 2019; Yaqub et al. 2017; Pal & Gonawela 2017; Vosoughi et al. 2018). These studies investigate how individuals navigate the overwhelming influx of information on platforms like Twitter and offer insights into its impact on the political landscape during election campaigns. They also emphasize Twitter's dual role in promoting significant political discussions and disseminating misinformation, while recognizing the difficulties associated with information overload. In recent years, the discussion has broadened to include the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on political content. This ranges from messages amplified by algorithms to propaganda generated by AI (Islam et al. 2024). As social media platforms rely more on algorithmic personalization and automated content production, their role in political communication and propaganda becomes increasingly complex and challenging to regulate. This evolving media landscape introduces new ethical and strategic questions regarding how political narratives are created, targeted, and consumed in digital environments (Jain & Mitra 2025).

Recent scholarship has examined various aspects of Twitter's influence on the 2020 U.S. presidential election, primarily focusing on public reactions, contextual influences, and behavioral outcomes. Dey and her colleagues (2025) studied hostile discourse directed at election administrators, finding a significant increase in toxicity and partisan animosity following the release of the election results. Fujiwara and his colleagues (2023) from the

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University of Warwick employed a behavioral approach, analyzing how differences in Twitter access affected county-level voting patterns and concluding that exposure to Twitter slightly reduced the Republican vote share. Baccini and his colleagues (2021) examined how the COVID-19 pandemic transformed electoral dynamics, highlighting the impact of health crises and lockdown conditions on voting behavior and public sentiment. While all three studies provide valuable insights into audience reactions, emotional volatility, and large-scale trends, they frequently neglect the intricate ways in which Twitter acts as a tool for election propaganda. The existing research often lacks in-depth comparative studies on how various political actors strategically utilize Twitter to shape narratives, sway voter perceptions, and rally supporters in real time.

This article aims to fill these gaps by presenting a comparative, data-centric analysis of Donald Trump's and Joe Biden's Twitter activities during the 2020 U.S. presidential election. Unlike earlier studies, it merges quantitative engagement metrics (such as likes, replies, and retweets) with qualitative thematic analysis to understand each candidate's tone, objectives, and rhetorical techniques. Additionally, it places Twitter's influence within a broader socio-political framework, showcasing its potential as a campaigning tool and a driver of political polarization and civic engagement.

Recent research on the 2024 U.S. presidential election emphasizes a surge in the use of AI-driven propaganda techniques, coordinated misinformation networks, and emotionally manipulative media strategies across social media platforms (Papageorgiou 2025; Stockwell et al. 2024). These studies illustrate the growing complexity of digital influence operations, which include AI-generated memes, algorithmically targeted messaging, and manipulation across various platforms (Chang et al. 2025; Luo et al. 2024). While the 2024 election highlights these technological trends, foundational comparative studies of 2020 are essential for understanding the origins, evolution, and rhetorical strategies of social media-based propaganda in democratic systems.

This research deepens our understanding of propaganda theory, rhetorical framing, and digital political communication. It offers a systematic analysis of dual candidates, which remains rare in existing literature, including recent studies. The findings supply empirical evidence on how Twitter functions as a tool for propaganda, improving our grasp of digital political communication. By merging agenda-setting and framing theories with observed social media behaviors, this study links theoretical concepts to practical political strategies. This

comprehensive approach enhances the research's value for scholars, policymakers, and political communicators interested in the evolving role of social media in democratic systems.

Research Methodology

This study employs a methodology that combines content analysis with simple random sampling to investigate how Twitter (now X) functioned as a propaganda tool during the 2020 U.S. presidential election. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research integrates quantitative content analysis with qualitative discourse analysis to identify patterns in messaging strategies, emotional tone, audience engagement, and the broader ethical implications of political communication on the platform.

A total of 400 tweets-200 from Donald Trump and 200 from Joe Biden-were systematically analyzed. These tweets, collected in November and December 2020, include both original posts and retweets, focusing specifically on interactive content that generated significant user engagement. The primary methodological framework is content analysis, which facilitates an in-depth examination of the dataset's recurring themes, rhetorical strategies, and propaganda techniques. This study also utilizes public engagement metrics-such as likes, replies, and retweets-as measures of interaction. However, these forms of engagement should not be seen as direct indicators of audience support or approval.

Tweets were collected using Apify, a web-scraping tool, and organized into Excel spreadsheets. A simple random sampling technique was then applied to this dataset to ensure that each tweet had an equal chance of being selected. This approach minimizes selection bias and enhances the generalizability of the findings.

The sample was restricted to tweets from the official Twitter accounts of Trump and Biden, selected for their topical relevance, political content, and audience engagement. The mixed-methods design allowed for integrating quantitative techniques, such as frequency counts of keywords and hashtag usage, alongside qualitative narrative structure and framing analyses.

Ethical considerations were rigorously upheld throughout the research process. The study followed Twitter's terms of service and prioritized user privacy by ensuring that only publicly available and ethically appropriate content from verified accounts was analyzed. By adhering to these ethical standards, the study maintains the integrity and reliability of its findings, contributing meaningfully to the discourse on digital political communication.

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Results and Findings

Up to this point, this study has focused on Twitter as an election propaganda tool. The bedrock of this study is the 2020 American Presidential Election guided by a representative sample of 400 tweets which are evenly divided between Joe Biden and Donald Trump. Through analyzing these tweets in detail, many clarifications about the two candidates' approaches, public participation dynamics, and the general effect that Twitter has had on the political process will be made. This chapter therefore aims at carrying out findings using the study sample. The results will expose Twitter's diversified influence over political communication and propaganda diffusion during the 2020 US presidential elections, which stood out as one of the most remarkable elections ever.

Twitter Account Overview

During the 2020 U.S. presidential election, both Donald Trump and Joe Biden actively used their official Twitter accounts to engage with voters and share their campaign messages. As can be seen in the Table 1, Trump's account, @realDonaldTrump, had a significantly larger following, with approximately 87.4 million followers, compared to Biden's account, @JoeBiden, which had 37.8 million followers. Despite this difference in audience size, 200 tweets from each candidate were analyzed in this study to ensure a balanced comparison. This approach allows for an objective evaluation of how each candidate utilized the platform, regardless of their follower counts, and provides insights into their political communication styles, engagement strategies, and use of Twitter as a tool for propaganda.

Table: 1. Donald Trump and Joe Biden Twitter Account Information

Handle (@)	Total Relevant Tweets	Followers	Date joined
realDonaldTrump	200	87.4M	March 2009
JoeBiden	200	37.8M	March 2007

Tweet and Retweet Count

Between November and December 2020, during the peak of the U.S. presidential election period, Biden and Trump exhibited different activity levels on Twitter. Biden posted and retweeted 325 times, while Trump was significantly more active, with 413 tweets and retweets (Table 2). This difference underscores Trump’s more aggressive and frequent use of the platform during the campaign, illustrating his strategy of maintaining high visibility and constant engagement with his audience. In contrast, Biden’s comparatively moderate activity suggests a more restrained and targeted communication approach. Analyzing the quantity and nature of these posts provides valuable insights into each candidate’s digital campaigning style and their use of Twitter to influence public opinion and shape election narratives.

Table: 2. Number of Candidates’ Tweets

Number of Biden’s Tweets (during November and December 2020)	325
Number of Trump’s Tweets (during November and December 2020)	413

Hashtag Usage

The use of hashtags by both candidates during the 2020 U.S. presidential election highlights their distinct strategic priorities in digital communication. Trump and Biden used hashtags like #election2020, #Vote2020, and #USpresidentialelection to situate their messages within the broader electoral conversation and enhance discoverability.

However, their candidate-specific hashtags revealed contrasting campaign tones. Donald Trump often used assertive and declarative hashtags such as #VOTETRUMP and #WE#WON, reflecting a combative approach to reinforce loyalty among his supporters. In contrast, Joe Biden focused on unifying and forward-looking messaging, illustrated by hashtags like #BidenHarris2020 and #ourbestdaystilllieahead, which promoted hope, collaboration, and national healing (Table 3).

These patterns indicate that while both candidates utilized hashtags for visibility, they employed them to promote different rhetorical strategies and emotional appeals.

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Table: 3. Hashtag Usage Comparison: 2020 U.S. Presidential Election

Hashtag Category	Donald Trump	Joe Biden
Common Hashtags	#election2020 #Vote2020 #USpresidentialelection	#election2020 #Vote2020 #USpresidentialelection
Candidate-Specific Hashtags	#VOTETRUMP #WE#WON #USA	#BidenHarris2020 #ourbestdaystilllieahead #slogan#ourbestdaystilllieahead #Votersuppression

Interaction Metrics

Tweets from both candidates were categorized into five thematic areas: Campaign Updates, Policy Discussions, Election Analysis, Personal Statements, and Campaign Events. Table 4 presents a comparative analysis of tweet themes and engagement metrics for Joe Biden and Donald Trump during the 2020 U.S. presidential election. The data shows that Biden’s tweets primarily focused on Campaign Updates and Policy Discussions, both of which garnered exceptionally high engagement. His posts in these categories received over 1.5 million likes and over 2.7 million retweets each, indicating strong public resonance with his forward-looking and informative messaging.

In contrast, Trump heavily emphasized Personal Statements, having posted 28 tweets in this category alone. Although he tweeted less frequently about Election Analysis, those tweets generated significant interaction, partly due to their controversial nature, as many questioned the integrity of the election process. Notably, Trump posted significantly fewer tweets in the Policy Discussion category, which received relatively low engagement.

Biden did not post any tweets categorized under Personal Statements or Campaign Events. At the same time, Trump also had minimal activity in those areas, with only one tweet classified under Campaign Events. This thematic and quantitative analysis reveals a clear difference in their campaign communication strategies: Biden’s approach focused on structured

political messaging. Trump relied more on emotionally charged and reactive content that often sparked debate and polarization.

The analysis of Table 5 reveals that Joe Biden’s tweets garnered higher overall engagement, particularly in the “Policy Discussions” and “Campaign Updates” categories. His messages promoting unity and actionable agendas resonated with a broad audience. In contrast, Donald Trump’s tweets focused more on Election Analysis and Personal Statements, often emphasizing election fraud claims and directly attacking his opponents. These posts frequently generated controversy, leading to significant interaction through retweets and replies. It's essential to acknowledge that likes, replies, and retweets do not always signify genuine support. Engagement can also stem from criticism, disagreement, or intentional promotion. This variance in themes and public responses underscores the differing rhetorical strategies and communication styles employed by the two candidates during the 2020 U.S. presidential election.

Table: 4. Examination of Tweet Contents of Both Candidates

Tweet Theme	Number of Biden’s Tweets	Number of Trump’s Tweets	Number of Biden’s ReTweets and Interactions	Number of Trump’s ReTweets and Interactions
Campaign Updates	9	2	Likes (1,564,091) Replies (1,098,991) Retweets (2,773,724)	Likes (432,079) Replies (443,986), Retweets (324,280)
Policy Discussions	10	1	Likes (1,617,569) Replies (1,102,461) Retweets (2,769,896)	Likes (87,649) Replies (134 542) Retweets (141,263)
Election Analysis	12	9	Likes (322,662) Replies (224,184) Retweets (557,191)	Likes (598,273) Replies (768,141) Retweets (125,871)

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Personal Statements	-	28	-	Likes (37,940) Replies (141,145) Retweets (89,016)
Campaign Events	-	1	-	Likes (69,310) Replies (350,786) Retweets (174,232)

Table: 5. Tweet Themes and Engagement Comparison

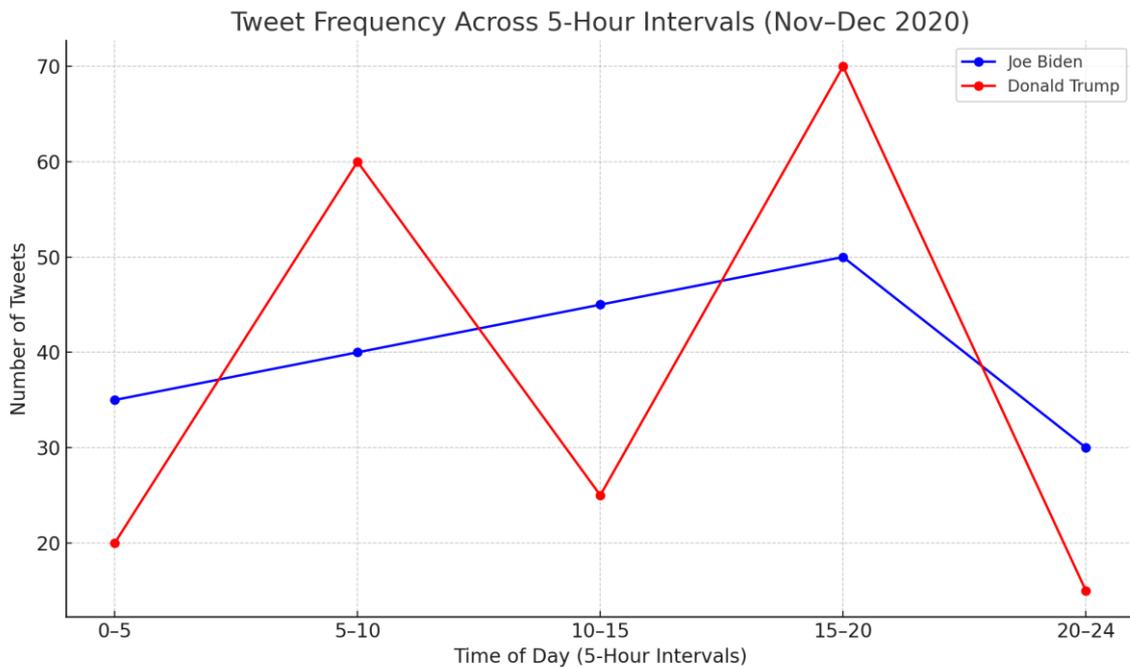
Tweet Theme	Joe Biden - Engagement Focus	Donald Trump - Engagement Focus
Campaign Updates	High engagement through unity and updates	Lower volume, focused on rallying
Policy Discussions	Strong engagement via agenda promotion	Minimal focus on policy
Election Analysis	Moderate engagement, factual tone	High engagement, often controversial
Personal Statements	Few personal tweets	Frequent, used for emotional or provocative messaging
Campaign Events	Limited references to specific events	Occasional event-driven posts

Tweet Timing and Frequency

An analysis of tweet frequency in 5-hour intervals during the 2020 U.S. presidential election revealed contrasting engagement strategies between the candidates. As seen in the Figure 1, Joe Biden maintained a steady and consistent posting pattern, suggesting a deliberate approach aimed at sustaining audience interaction throughout the day. His strategy emphasized ongoing visibility and regular engagement with his followers. In contrast, Donald Trump’s tweeting behavior displayed noticeable spikes, often corresponding with significant political developments or controversies. These bursts of activity indicate a more reactive and event-

driven strategy, using moments of high public interest to maximize impact and engagement. This comparison highlights the strategic differences in how each candidate utilized Twitter to influence public discourse.

Figure 1. Tweet Frequency Analysis: Biden vs. Trump



Thematic Content Analysis

The thematic content analysis of tweets from the 2020 U.S. presidential election highlights distinct rhetorical priorities between Donald Trump and Joe Biden. Trump’s tweets were predominantly focused on attacks, which made up 40% of his total posts. This confrontational communication style aimed to discredit his opponents and energize his support base. Additionally, 30% of his tweets addressed election-related content, often questioning the legitimacy of the electoral process, while 20% emphasized leadership, portraying him as a decisive and authoritative figure. The remaining 10% of his tweets covered miscellaneous themes (Figure 2).

In contrast, Biden’s tweets were more focused on unity and policy. Approximately 38% advocated for national unity, reflecting his campaign’s emphasis on healing political divisions. Another 31% addressed election integrity and democratic values, highlighting his commitment to ensuring a fair electoral process. About 23% of Biden’s tweets centered on establishing a political agenda through policy proposals and campaign goals, with 8% categorized under other topics (Figure 3).

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This thematic breakdown illustrates the candidates' divergent communication strategies: Trump relied on provocation and polarization, while Biden emphasized stability, institutional trust, and collective progress.

Figure 2. Thematic Content of Trump's Tweets

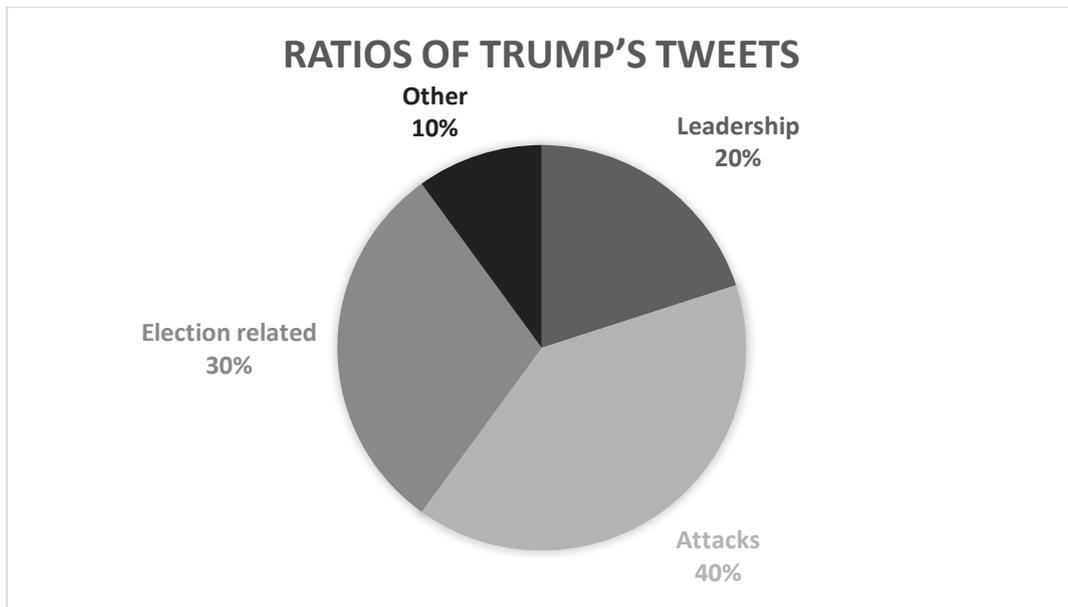
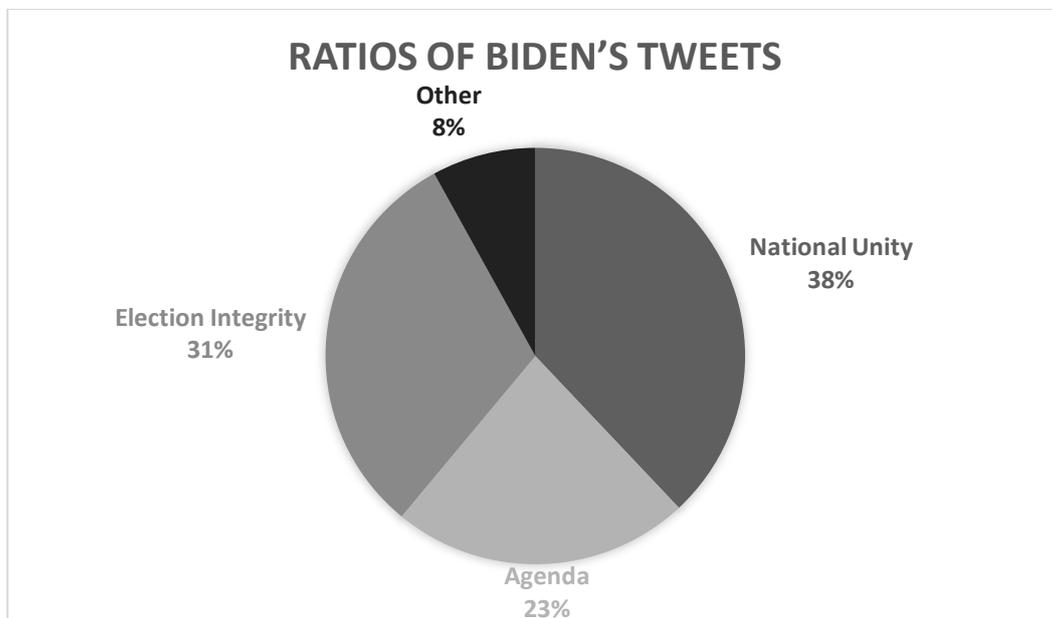


Figure 3. Thematic Content of Biden's Tweets



DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate Twitter's role as a political propaganda tool during the 2020 U.S. presidential election. It focused on three main objectives: how Twitter was used as an

instrument of propaganda, its impact on shaping public opinion, and its influence on voter behavior. The findings demonstrate that Twitter was more than just a communication platform; it served as a strategic environment for amplifying messages, engaging emotions, and forming opinions.

First, the study examines how both Donald Trump and Joe Biden used Twitter as a propaganda tool to promote their political agendas, though they did so in very different ways. Trump frequently employed aggressive and polarizing language, particularly in attack-oriented and election-focused tweets. This approach highlights how he used the platform to maintain narrative control and mobilize partisan support. Hashtags like #VOTETRUMP and #WE#WON helped rally his base and reinforce his campaign themes. In contrast, Biden's use of Twitter focused on themes of unity and democratic integrity, using hashtags such as #BidenHarris2020 and #OurBestDaysStillLieAhead. His messages centered on policy, hope, and national recovery, indicating a more constructive approach to Twitter's potential as a propaganda tool.

Second, the study's thematic and engagement analyses reveal that Twitter significantly influenced public perception of each candidate. Biden's consistent engagement and focus on policy and unity were well-received, as shown by the high number of likes and retweets in those areas. In contrast, Trump's strategy provoked strong reactions, especially regarding election fraud claims. These posts heightened public skepticism and contributed to increased political polarization. The ability of both candidates to shape trending topics and online discussions highlights Twitter's considerable power in influencing public narratives.

Lastly, Twitter's impact on voter behavior is clear, mainly due to the platform's real-time interactivity and emotional engagement. The timing and frequency of tweets, especially during crucial campaign moments, created immediate feedback loops between candidates and the electorate. Trump's reactive tweeting style—often linked to controversies—led to spikes in user interaction, while Biden's steady approach kept his base consistently informed and mobilized. The volume and responsiveness of audience engagement illustrate how Twitter not only informed users but also motivated voter sentiment and participation.

In summary, the study confirms that Twitter had a complex and significant impact on the 2020 election. The platform was intentionally used for propaganda, significantly influencing public opinion and actively affecting voter behavior. These findings highlight Twitter's crucial role in modern political communication and emphasize the necessity for continued examination of how social media influences democratic engagement.

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CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study demonstrates that Twitter (now X) played a crucial role in shaping the political landscape of the 2020 U.S. presidential election. By comparing tweets from Donald Trump and Joe Biden, it becomes clear that the platform served as a medium for political communication and a powerful tool for propaganda. The strategic use of hashtags, rhetorical framing, and real-time engagement allowed candidates to amplify their messages and influence public perception. Biden adopted a tone of unity and focused on policy-driven messaging, while Trump leaned towards emotionally charged and often polarizing content. These differing strategies highlight the platform's ability to support constructive dialogue and divisive propaganda.

The study's findings indicate that Twitter significantly affected public opinion and voter behavior. Candidates engaged directly with millions of users, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers and crafting tailored messages. This underscores the increasing importance of digital platforms in modern political campaigns and highlights the urgent need for media literacy and regulatory frameworks to mitigate the risks of misinformation, algorithmic bias, and digital echo chambers.

While this study concentrates on content from the official Twitter accounts of Donald Trump and Joe Biden within a defined post-election period, we recognize that this approach may not fully reflect the broader dynamics of political discourse on the platform. Future research could expand the dataset to include activity from grassroots movements, third-party accounts, and coordinated networks, as well as examine algorithmic amplification and misinformation flows. Incorporating network or sentiment analysis would also reveal valuable insights into the structural and emotional dimensions of political influence.

Recommendations may be as follows:

- **For Political Campaigners:** Campaign teams should adopt transparent and inclusive communication strategies, prioritizing factual information and respectful dialogue. Emphasizing policy over personal attacks can foster healthier public discourse.
- **For Social Media Platforms:** Twitter/X and similar platforms must strengthen their content moderation efforts, especially during election periods. It's essential to implement more robust mechanisms for flagging misinformation and limiting the spread of unverified claims to preserve the integrity of democracy.

- **For Policymakers:** There is an urgent need for policy frameworks that address the ethical use of social media in politics. Legislation should promote platform accountability, ensure political advertising transparency, and protect against digital manipulation.
- **For Researchers:** Future studies should move beyond analyzing single platforms and consider cross-platform interactions to understand digital political communication comprehensively. Longitudinal studies tracking public sentiment across election cycles would offer valuable insights into the lasting effects of social media propaganda.
- **For the Public:** Improving media literacy is essential. Voters need to be equipped with the skills to evaluate digital content, recognize biased narratives, and make informed decisions in today's digital age.

As post-election data from 2024 becomes more available, future studies may build on this research by examining how the evolution of AI tools, influencer dynamics, and platform moderation policies have changed digital propaganda strategies. The comparison between the 2020 and 2024 elections will be particularly informative in assessing whether social media platforms, particularly Twitter/X under Elon Musk's ownership, have become more transparent and accountable. Alternatively, it may reveal whether changes to algorithms and a reduction in moderation practices have exacerbated political polarization and misinformation. Key factors distinguishing the 2024 election from its predecessor include Elon Musk's rebranding of Twitter as "X", the reduction in content moderation staff, and shifts in policies regarding verification and algorithmic amplification. In this context, the 2020 election serves as a valuable baseline for understanding how political communication and digital propaganda have evolved across two radically different models of platform governance.

In conclusion, Twitter's role in modern electoral politics is both powerful and complex. While it presents unique opportunities for civic engagement, it also introduces significant challenges that require careful navigation by all participants in the democratic process.

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