Spring 2024

Exploring Demagoguery and Political Rhetoric's Impact Through Social Media

Avery Palsma

Exploring Demagoguery and Political Rhetoric's Impact Through Social Media

by

Avery Palsma

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the

University Honors Program

_____

Department of Communication Studies

The University of South Dakota

May 2023

The members of the Honors Thesis Committee appointed
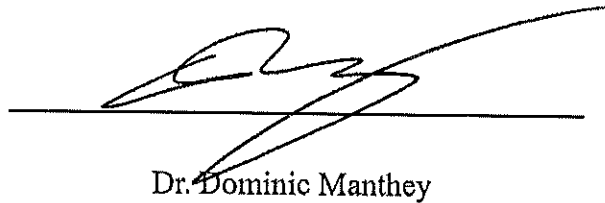
to examine the thesis of Avery Palsma

find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.
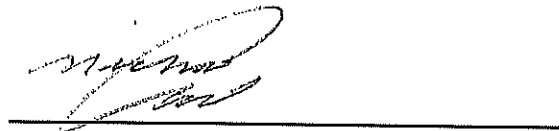
_____

Dr. Kristina Lee

Assistant Professor of Communication Studies

Director of the Committee

_____

Dr. Dominic Manthey

Assistant Professor of Communication Studies

_____

Dr. Michael Card

Professor Emeritus of Political Science

Abstract

Citation: Palsma, Avery, "Exploring Demagoguery and Political Rhetoric's Impact Through Social Media" (2024). *Honors Thesis.*

Demagoguery refers to political rhetoric and activity that seeks support by appealing to the desires and prejudices of ordinary people. Demagogues are political leaders, such as Donald Trump and Adolf Hitler, who gain power by using a destructive approach to popular discourse. They influence culture by perpetuating and influencing ideologies, allowing them to take advantage of and fuel a dominating culture. Demagogues are present in today's culture as the political divide becomes greater. This study aims to explain why demagogues are so influential and how social media might be contributing to their growth. In order to do this, three communication theories are analyzed, the gratification theory, the parasocial interaction theory, and the cultivation theory. Each theory explains how humans interact with media and how demagogues are able to use media to their advantage. Additionally, Twitter is analyzed as a social media platform greatly used by demagogues. Lastly, a case study of demagoguery during the COVID-19 pandemic is provided, analyzing how demagogic rhetoric was used during that time and what impact it had. In response, a summary provides the next steps to overcome and make sense of demagoguery.

Keywords: demagoguery, democracy, media, rhetoric, populism, cultivation theory, gratification theory, parasocial interaction theory

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Political rhetoric and communication have always dominated society. Both impact

media intake, belief systems, and overall political culture. In the United States, it is

widely known the hot topics dividing political parties and what narratives surround them.

In today's day and age, the political divide is growing and the political climate is

concerning. Trust in government and political officials is decreasing while polarization

and anger in politics seem to be increasing (Pew Research Center, 2023). Demagoguery,

for some politicians, has become the dominant approach to public discourse as a way to

polarize politics. Demagoguery refers to "a discourse that promises stability, certainty,

and escape from the responsibilities of rhetoric through framing public policy in terms of

the degree to which and means by which (not whether) the outgroup should be punished

for the current problems of the ingroup" (Roberts-Miller, 2016). Politicians or other

leaders who are referred to as demagogues gain power by arousing emotions and creating

a destructive approach to popular discourse while undermining the chances of a

community to effectively solve problems (Roberts-Miller 2016). The increased use of

social media has allowed the influence of demagogues rhetoric to spread as the spread of

both true and false information across media has increased (Allen, 2023; Muhammed &

Mathew, 2022). Social media has played a part in creating recent demagogues and

influencing the use of a divisive, or us vs. them, culture. Our society has seen

demagogues all throughout history, Adolf Hitler, Joseph McCarthy, and arguably, Donald

Trump. The demagogues of today have all been able to create a following using media.

Whether it be through public speeches, news outlets, or social media demagogues have

been transforming existing ideologies and creating their own culture. Many of them have created their own way of thinking and participating in the political setting which has influenced and created certain groups.

The way of taking in information has increased the demagogic ways of politicians. Everyone takes in information about impactful world events and each person receives information in multiple different ways, through the news, social media, or in casual conversation. Social media is crucial for the spread of that information with 43% of Americans saying social media is the most common way they get political and election news (Pew Research Center, 2020). Social media, in particular, is a great way for people to stay in touch and spread ideas but it is also a platform for conspiracy theories, lies, and disruptive calls to action (Ramey, 2022). People often think that we are aware of the impact social media and political discourse have on our opinions, but it can be hard to overcome confirmation bias. We unknowingly fall into confirmation bias, viewing information that supports our beliefs and opinions and ignoring any information that does not (Nickerson, 1998). We often find influences that speak to our needs and over time it can lead to a fascination (West & Turner, 2021). In communication studies, three theories can help explain why undemocratic political rhetoric created by demagogues has such great appeal. The gratification theory explains how media meets audiences' specific needs, parasocial interaction theory helps develop an understanding of one-sided media relationships, and cultivation theory is a theoretical framework for the impacts of media consumption. These three communication theories showcase how demagogues can use social media to their advantage as well as how they create a following while oftentimes spreading misinformation, polarization, and fallacies. Demagogues use the media to

perpetuate an us vs. them culture, creating disruptions within the political environment and society as a whole.

Additionally, social media's rise in popularity has continued to impact society and plays a part in the political environment. As more political figures join social media outlets, like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, their influence grows. Social media creates cultures and influences how many people make decisions and intake information. For some, social media is their main source of news, causing a one-sided approach and proliferation of confirmation bias (Ciampaglia et al., 2024; Nickerson, 1998). As social media grows, so does demagogic rhetoric coming from politicians. The most used social media apps, like Twitter, create an easy way to reach a widespread audience and build a following from them (Ott & Dickinson, 2020). This study will specifically look at Twitter and how it is used as a medium for demagogic rhetoric. The study will end with a dive into an influential event that created a high amount of demagogic rhetoric, the COVID-19 pandemic. The event broke the world into two sides, creating opposing positions and many demagogic tendencies.

Through an in-depth literature review of demagoguery and three different communication theories, this study will create an understanding of the role media plays in the creation of a demagogue. Using a case study, this paper will explore how demagogues maintain power and influence societies. The evidence and research will support the argument that social media has a part in creating demagogues and influencing audiences to perpetuate an us vs. them culture.

Organization of Literature Review

This literature review is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 contains the introduction and an overview of some key terms used throughout the study. Chapter 2, the literature review, discusses three separate theories of communication and their relation to demagoguery and media. Additionally, the chapter defines demagoguery and covers how the concept is used by individuals through social media. Chapter 3 is a case study of unfolding demagoguery during the Covid-19 pandemic. Chapter 4 provides a summary and conclusion of the study as well as providing the next steps to overcome and make sense of political rhetoric.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Defining Demagoguery

Critics have been calling out the dangers of demagoguery to democracy for over 2500 years (Skinnell & Murphy, 2019). Demagoguery refers to political activity that seeks support by appealing to the desires and prejudices of ordinary people (Ramey, 2022). Demagogues are the leaders who use divisive political rhetoric to gain a following. Our political scene is dominated by demagogues. They are seen in everyday life engaging in arguments and creating claims about ideology, culture, identity, and other factors that make up society. Demagogues are able to dominate our society because they create passion, emotionalism, and populism, and attract attention from crowds (Roberts-Miller, 2020). The basis of demagoguery is identity. Identity is made up of values, opinions, and one's sense of self, all things that are challenged and exploited by demagogues. Creating different groups, such as the in-group and the out-group is the main goal of demagogues. This tactic encourages the audience to think entirely in terms of who is like us and who isn't. Demagoguery says that complicated policy issues can be broken down into us, (the good), vs them, (the bad). The polarized way of thinking is seen in American politics, Democrat vs. Republican. One group is always in the right while the other group is always in the wrong. Compromise and reasonable policy decisions are limited while the promotion and justification of violence are happening. While the rhetoric is being pushed, demagoguery isn't all about what politicians do, it is about how citizens reason, vote, and argue (Roberts-Miller, 2020). At some point, demagoguery becomes the normal way of thinking and that is when a demagogue will

rise. It can be argued that demagoguery is becoming a part of American political discourse, changing how our society views politics and politicians. A culture of demagoguery can be relied on since it is used to build cultures but it is up to society to decide when it becomes a problem and how to solve it.

Criteria of Demagoguery

A true demagogue can be hard to identify but it is easy to look back at history and discover a few because persuasion is not always identifiable in the moment. Audiences don't initially recognize demagoguery when it is happening so that is why it can be so persuasive. Take for example the defense for slavery or the creation of Japanese internment camps during World War II. It is easy now to look back and criticize that behavior. It is easy to say that imprisoning a whole ethnic group because of bias was irrational and wrong but at the time, it was rational and right. Those events happened because people were persuaded by demagoguery (Roberts-Miller, 2020). They fell into the trap of good vs bad to justify violence. Demagoguery is a complicated concept because of the issue of identification blurred by persuasion. Patricia Roberts-Miller gives us certain criteria and characteristics to identify both demagogues and demagoguery. The best way to identify a demagogue isn't to ask whether or not the person is bad or if they are spewing misinformation because ultimately, rhetoric is subjective. Our own perception is what answers those questions, leading audiences to be blind to their own judgment since demagoguery is only persuasive when we perceive it as such. In turn, it is best to identify the characteristics that makeup demagoguery.

Firstly, demagoguery creates polarization. It makes a complicated issue into an us vs. them mindset that tells us "they" are irredeemably different and wrong. It also insists

10   ·

that we should determine policy, not argue politics, but instead argue identity and motive (Roberts-Miller, 2020). Demagoguery says that the out-group is wrong, not because of their policy but because of their identity. In the same way, demagoguery claims that the in-group's actions are justified while values like fairness are unnecessary. The main reason for this belief is that the truth is presented as easy to perceive so complexity and deliberation are framed as only preventing action, not improving decision-making. Demagoguery also relies heavily on fallacies, like the straw man and projection fallacies. The straw man and projection fallacy are arguments used as a way to distract from logical arguments. The straw man fallacy is an argument made by exaggerating or distorting the opposing argument and only addressing the distorted argument instead of engaging (Shatz, n.d.). It is like a politician saying that universal free healthcare could be costly to the economy and the response back being that the politician doesn't care if people die from not having healthcare. Projection fallacy is making an argument based on your own beliefs, like saying someone should have the same opinion on climate policy as you only because your opinion should be everyone's opinion. The consequence is that others become seen as irrational or misinformed if they don't share the same perspective (Taliaferro, 2018). Politicians use fallacies often because they allow for poor reasoning to seem logical and accurate. Lastly, demagoguery places emphasis on the need portion of policy argumentation like economic problems and crime often with threats that the in-group is faced with extermination or emasculation. The in-group feels as if they are being threatened while the out-group is seen as causing fear. The basis of demagoguery is the creation of this in-group and out-group dynamic. It is what perpetuates the culture and influences the ideologies, allowing demagogues to take advantage of and fuel a

dominating culture. In order to challenge demagoguery we must understand why it is so effective. There are several communication and media theories and concepts that can help us understand why demagogic rhetoric is so effective, three of which are gratification theory, parasocial interaction theory, and cultivation theory.

Gratification Theory

Gratification theory provides a framework for understanding when and how individuals consume media. The theory focuses on giving a reason as to why media is so captivating and for some, plays a big part in their lives. In the political world, media can impact ideologies and choices (Atkinson, et al., 2020). In the basic sense, media provides information or entertainment and the audience chooses how to interpret it. One of the main assumptions of gratification theory is that audience members pick and intentionally choose among different media and make these choices based on individual goals they wish to accomplish (West and Turner, 2021). Audiences choose media that correlates and speaks to their beliefs (Hmielowski et al., 2020). Similar to confirmation bias, media that supports an already established ideology will be the media that is consumed the most. Media fills cognitive, affective, and integrative needs. Audiences acquire information, experience emotions, and possibly strengthen confidence. Gratification theory also says that media compete with other sources for need satisfaction. Cultural context affects media selection since both are part of the larger society and the relationship between audiences and media is influenced by society (West and Turner, 2021). People turn to the media when society is telling them to. For example, someone may turn to the media with greater frequency during a national political election (Kozman and Melki, 2018).

In the case of demagoguery, politicians use media to amplify rhetoric to address needs that society may have. Individualist societies, like the United States, tend to want a populist leader who portrays a message of freedom and power to the individual (Beasley, 2011). Demagogues can appeal to what a society needs, gaining them more power. Societal needs could be anything from a leader who promises to fix the economy to a leader that relates to an everyday citizen. Demagogues promise to fix the issues society is having to improve their lives for the better. They use media to garner support and gain a following. Since audiences tend to follow media that support their ideologies, demagogues have to appeal to those ideologies and in some cases morph them into their own. The messages they send, while oftentimes dangerous, create a following because they fulfill a need that certain members of society want someone to satisfy. Demagogues speak to the needs that feel as if they are not being satisfied by the existing regime. When Adolf Hitler rose to power in Germany he pledged to restore prosperity, create civil order, and make the country a world power again (The National World War II Museum, 2017). All of these factors were societal needs that the citizens craved. People followed him because of his empty promises to satisfy their needs which led to him earning an audience.

Parasocial Interaction Theory

Another communication theory that highlights the work of demagogues is parasocial interaction theory. Parasocial interaction theory refers to the development between a public figure and a viewer (Hartmann, 2008). The viewer tends to expend emotional energy, interest, and time on the public figure while the public figure is unaware of the relationship (Paravati et al., 2020). The consumer of rhetoric feels a

personal link to this person but the degree of interest can differ. Parasocial relationships are not always unhealthy but can be a healthy mechanism. These types of relationships can lead to violence or they can inspire, like a favorite athlete leading someone to take up healthier habits. Social media plays into this phenomenon because it allows for the relationship to be closer and feel more personal for the viewer or audience (Lu et al., 2023). Mainstream media is a constant in everyday life so the relationship can grow from the continued content that is being displayed (Hartmann, 2008; Lu et al., 2023).

When politicians have a strong media message with the constant advertising of their image, parasocial relationships are easily created. Social media presence and community engagement make them available. Additionally, some politicians' rhetoric fuels parasocial relationships. Their populist and personal messages create a personal link between the viewers and themselves. They make viewers feel as if they are the person who will fix all, creating a persona that appeals to many people. There is a sense of a "face-to-face relationship" between the average citizen and the politician (Hartmann, 2008, p. 7). Politicians are able to construct ethos, using their authority as a way to gain a following.

Demagogues create such a following because they are able to create a connection that other, more ethical politicians are not. At the core, parasocial relationships are a form of attachment relationships. The figure is a safe haven for the viewer (Paravati et al., 2020). They make the viewer feel secure and heard. Many demagogues campaign on the fact that politicians don't make their choices for the people, but a demagogue would. They make themselves come across as an everyday person, one that will advocate and fix

issues that everyday citizens are having. This message grows parasocial relationships, in turn, growing connections and garnering support.

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory is another relationship development theory focused on media and the way people interact with media. This theory attempts to explain the effects that media has on audiences, specifically television such as news, dramas, and comedies. In the political environment news outlets and news shows impact viewers in a similar way. The main assumption of the cultivation theory is that television shapes society's way of thinking and relating. Television paints a picture of what the world is like (Riddle, 2010). It can also be argued that most of the stories in current society come from television (Gerbner, 1998). Television creates the messages and those messages can contribute to societal beliefs. The theory was originally found to explain when or not violence on television transfers into real life but it can be relevant to all types of messages. Cultivation theory tells us that repeated exposure to prominent themes can cause people to overestimate and influence their perceptions on certain topics (Gerbner, 1998). While television has a limited scope and isn't the main reason why people act the way they do, it can still have an influence on perceptions (West & Turner, 2021).

In the case of demagogues, television is used to amplify those insecurities and scary themes present in society. Demagogues appeal to the fact that there is so much unknown when it comes to the United States government and society in general. Certain events are magnified to make a point, certain actions are framed as one-sided, and certain people are made to look incompetent (Sienkiewicz & Marx, 2021). Demagogues use fear as a tactic to gain support and influence people's perspectives. Television, news outlets,

and news shows are influential to some people so the use of those mediums strengthens their power. The same can be said for social media as the influence users have on their audience continues to grow. Societal beliefs can be changed through television and news media. Demagogues can use such outlets to create a new culture based on the ideologies of an in-group.

Heroic vs. Dangerous Demagoguery

While demagoguery in nature seems to entail only rhetoric that is harmful there is an argument to be made that not all demagoguery rhetoric is weaponized. Jennifer Mercieca (2019) in her article "Dangerous Demagoguery and Weaponized Communication" makes the argument that the defining criteria between a heroic demagogue and a dangerous demagogue is the ability to be held accountable for their words and actions. Obvious dangerous demagogues use degrading rhetoric. They use invalid argumentation and highlight polarizing propaganda to create a following and a culture. The tactics they use allow them to avoid accountability while still accomplishing their goals. We usually view dangerous demagogues as villains, someone who is a fake leader using power for personal gain (Mercieca, 2019). A true leader is a demagogue who is heroic, fighting for the people and using power for overall societal growth. Both versions of demagogues may use the same rhetorical tactics to gather support, but what sets them apart is accountability. Both can weaponize communication but a dangerous demagogue does it as a way to avoid accountability.

Mercieca makes the argument that political accountability is necessary because rhetoric and political power are so easily abused. Without it, leaders become a danger to democracy. A just leader has to be accountable and transparent while an unjust leader is

16

dangerous to any political community. Only an unjust leader would seek power as an authoritarian because it shows a lack of consideration for the democratic process. Instead, dangerous demagogues disregard political opposition, encourage violence, and disrespect civil liberties (Mercieca, 2019). In order to gain power, they weaponize communication. Weaponized communication is another way to separate heroic demagogues from dangerous demagogues. Communication is used as a tool to be aggressive and avoid accountability. Weaponized communication forces compliance, denies consent, and allows for avoidance. Examples like propaganda, conspiracy theories, fake news, and disinformation are ways that weaponized communication is spread. Everything from hate speech and threats to intentionally ignoring contradictory information and distorting public sentiment are tactics used by unjust leaders. The tactics are used to overwhelm the news cycle, reject democratic rules, and prevent interrogation of their words. Dangerous demagogues use these tactics to gain power and avoid accountability while heroic demagogues don't.

Dangerous demagogues' messages tend to use threats and disregard ethics. There are dangerous demagogues in the political environment of history today such as Adolf Hitler and Donald Trump who have used those strategies. Merciera uses the example of Trump, highlighting his history of shifting messages and denying knowledge of events. Throughout multiple times in his career, he refused to hold himself and his followers accountable, tolerating violence that was done in his name and denying the legitimacy of any opposition (Merciera, 2019; Ott & Dickinson, 2020). He weaponized communication to gain compliance and avoid accountability. Merciera ends the essay by touching on the reality of the power that dangerous demagogues have.

In theory, citizens have the ability to hold dangerous demagogues accountable. Analyzing and critically thinking about their rhetoric is a way to do it but many weaponized communication tactics can't be easily identified. Even the most vigilant citizens struggle to hold leaders accountable because weaponized communication prevents citizens and institutions from holding dangerous demagogues accountable for their actions and words. The reason for this difference is that dangerous demagogues gain compliance, while heroic demagogues gain consent (Merciera, 2019). Consent requires permission, holding similar opinions, and allowing for the adoption of feelings and perceptions of others. Actual, true consent is impossible with weaponized communication (Mercieca, 2019). On the other hand, compliance doesn't require permission. Compliance is forced and gained through aggression. Individuals are not allowed to decide for themselves, leaving dangerous demagogues hard to spot. Heroic demagogues use rhetoric to persuade, dangerous demagogues use weaponized communication to gain compliance. The difference between the two types of demagogues comes down to how rhetoric is used. Demagogues who weaponize communication for personal gain without accountability are dangerous while a heroic demagogue gains power by ethical persuasion.

Social Media and Demagoguery

With the rise of media, comes the rise of demagoguery. As social media becomes an influential medium for information, campaigns, and overall rhetoric, it becomes a useful tool for demagogues. Social media has a wide range of users and easily creates cultures. Certain platforms encourage global connections, foster interactions between people, and spread new ideas and opinions (Ramey, 2022). People connect with others

who share similar backgrounds and opinions, allowing cultures to grow. Even new cultures are created as more people become connected and new ideas are shared. Social media is a great breeding ground for demagoguery because of the ability to spread ideologies and social media platforms are not held to the same standard mainstream media is. Mainstream media is held to the standard of broadcasting accurate information, and while it may be biased, is still true (Hmielowski et al., 2020; Sullivan, 2019). In social media, not all information is accurate and the information is catered to personal opinions (Ramey, 2022). Information is also easily spread because it is at most people's fingertips. There is a lack of, whether it be ability or ignorance, to verify information and be media literate (Suciu, 2024). This standard is influential in the spread of demagogic rhetoric. Demagogues can easily create new cultures, expand on new ones, and cater information to specific groups.

Twitter's Impact

One social media platform that stands out compared to the rest for its ability to amplify demagogues is Twitter. Twitter, the common name for the current app X, is one of the world's largest social networks and the fifth most visited website in the world. The basis of the app is that audiences can write short 280-character public messages, or tweets, for anyone to see. Since its start in 2006, the app has grown to allow direct messaging, videos, and communities. On average, the app boasts over 500 million tweets posted each day and over 230 million daily users (Business of Apps, 2024). Because of its ease and reach, Twitter has become an important app for celebrities, media outlets, and politicians. Politicians use Twitter to share campaign information, highlight their actions, and share their opinions. Twitter is also used by politicians for a lot of discourse

and targeting. Some politicians directly call out other politicians on their votes or certain quotes using videos or just making a tweet as a way to highlight their successes. Other politicians use Twitter as an outlet specifically for creating discourse, using it for mostly harming others' image. Demagogue's main focus is to create discourse and turn certain groups against each other (Roberts-Miller, 2020). Twitter is useful in this aspect because of its ability to be simple, promote impulsivity, and foster incivility.

Simplicity

A recent study done by Brian Ott and Greg Dickerson in 2020 looks at the ability of Twitter as a medium for politicians, specifically former President Donald Trump. The authors found that Twitter is so powerful because of its simplicity, impulsivity, and incivility. First, Twitter is simple because it offers much to say in a small amount of words. Since tweets are only 280 characters, messages can be witty and fun but they can't be complex (Ott & Dickerson, 2020). They have to be short and to the point to make an impact on an audience. Users can capture emotions, events, or opinions but cannot analyze or explain those feelings. The structure prevents philosophical thinking. Ott and Dickerson (2020) cover the idea of linking on Twitter. Users can post links to videos, news articles, and other texts that are too long to be explained without the link. Even the most beneficial and informational texts have to be broken down greatly. The culture of the internet has shifted into shallow information processing behaviors to adhere to the shift to limited attention spans and simple-mindedness. Since Twitter has demanded a way of simplicity, it has undermined our ability to talk and think about issues in complex ways (Ott & Dickerson, 2020). For demagogues, this shift in mindsets that Twitter has created has greatly eased the way of creating cultures. With the combination of the

inability to give details and the lack of an attention span most Twitter users have, demagogues' messages are being heard and are being believed. There is no need to expand on complex messages because users most likely won't listen and won't find the need to analyze. Their simple but direct messages about creating in-groups and out-groups adhere to shallow information processing behaviors, and then demagogues are followed. Twitter doesn't allow for deep thinking which demagoguery relies on. The more open-minded and effort one is putting into complex messages the more likely one is to not fall victim to persuasion but Twitter's structure is not made for that mindset (Ott & Dickerson, 2020; Roberts-Miller, 2020).

Impulsivity

Another characteristic of Twitter that Ott and Dickerson (2020) noted in their study was the ability of Twitter to foster impulsivity. There is not a lot of effort required for messages to be sent and to be seen. Twitter, for the most part, does the work for the user, supplying algorithms that cater information to already known likes. As the previously explained theories tell us, people are drawn to information catered to their ideologies. Twitter shows users what they already like and so in turn users will continue to engage with that type of information. The ease of Twitter is also appealing to most people because mobile devices and technologies make it so that tweets can be seen from anywhere. There is also limited forethought or consideration that goes into messages because of the limited effort needed (Ott & Dickerson, 2020). Anything can be said and there is limited effort needed for persuading the user to read the short messages. For most politicians and demagogues there is some consideration needed before messages are out on the internet but with so few words, there is limited effort needed. From scrolling to

posting, the app is a highly impulsive activity, and since impulse is sparked by effect, tweets often carry an affective charge that they transfer through the social network. Emotionally charged messages tend to be retweeted the most and more quickly compared to neutral ones (Ott & Dickerson, 2020). For some people, Twitter inhibits reflexivity, causing people to tweet what they might not normally put out for millions of people to see. For demagoguery, the impulsive nature of Twitter supports the use of radical ideas. Twitter is an easy way to get their ideology across with minimal effort and minimal consideration of consequences. Their controversial messages are more likely to be seen and more likely to be seen by people with the same ideologies. Messages like that are also pushed to people who may not have the same beliefs but could be easily persuaded. The messages can also be sent out with no limit and control, causing endless information to be tweeted. Demagogues thrive on impulsivity because they are impulsive in nature (Ott & Dickerson, 2020). Their messages and use of Twitter are persuasive because they are simple, cause controversy, and can be seen by a wide range of audiences.

Incivility

The last characteristic that is covered by Ott and Dickinson (2020) is the incivility that Twitter is prone to. Not all tweets and users use uncivil, impolite, and offensive language but there are sides to Twitter that do. About 80 percent of tweets and other activity in the app don't get much attention. There are limited consequences from said activity but about 20 percent of activity on Twitter does have some sort of repercussion (Ott & Dickerson, 2020). When issues of social, cultural, and political stances are posted with demagogic rhetoric, that rhetoric can undermine civil communication. There are certain elements of proper writing like grammar, style, and formal language usually

22

identify that the communication will not be uncivil and demeaning. Since tweets don't have certain ethical requirements it is more likely that demeaning language will happen. Twitter also has "depersonalized interactions" causing people to "not consider how their interactions will affect others" (Tait, 2016). It is much easier to attack others on the internet when physical interactions aren't happening. Social norms support civility but Twitter has its norms that support divisive communication. Much of Twitter is about getting attention.

Users who use uncivil discourse tend to be motivated by a sense of self-interest and self-promotion, which are exactly the traits of demagogues (Ott & Dickerson, 2020; Ramey, 2022). Demagogues have a need for attention and post more emotionally charged tweets which breed dark, degrading, and dehumanizing discourse. Twitter gives these people the attention needed and finds an audience that will listen. The norm of uncivil discourse allows for demagogues to put in place their rhetoric of putting blame on others and shaping a culture of a polarized state. The hate and violence that is oftentimes used is not called into question on Twitter like it may be in other media outlets. Additionally, because language is often casual on Twitter it can have a populist appeal. Audiences can feel as if they are on the same level as demagogues and demagogues are speaking what "normal" people believe. Demagogues are believed to be the brave ones. They are believed to be the ones who are not afraid to stand up and speak their minds but in reality, their rhetoric supports hatred and polarization. Demagogic rhetoric on Twitter is so persuasive because it lacks a filter and supports uncivil discourse, the perfect place for a demagogue to grow.

CHAPTER 3

Case Study: Demagoguery During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Demagoguery is often present throughout many aspects of politics, including interviews, debates, and social media. One part of society that brings out demagoguery is divisive events. Divisive events cause polarization, many times breaking society into in-groups and out-groups. Many politicians can project using the changing culture, advancing their agenda and ideology (Atkinson, et al., 2020). One contemporary event that has dramatically changed the political environment and every walk of life is the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic brought a crisis to the United States as it spread across the nation in early 2020. Stay-at-home orders were announced, schools closed, and the economy was affected greatly. The pandemic called into question many aspects of our political environment and how discourse is used for political argumentation. During the pandemic, there was a lot of demagoguery and many demagogues rose into the spotlight. There was blame, polarization, and the creation of the in-group and out-group mindset that many politicians found themselves involved in. The discourse stemmed from and profited from discrimination and misinformation, much of which the media helped push (Wang et al., 2022). Demagoguery was a big part of this event and demagogues were created because of it.

Cause of the Outbreak

How the story of the pandemic was told was a major opportunity for demagoguery to start. The story has different perceptions and is shaped by different contexts. The historical, cultural, social, and political contexts all impact how the story is told and interpreted. Everything from how the pandemic started to pointing fingers to

who caused it impacts how the story is told. In the political context, the discourse around the story usually comes with some sort of tension. Normally, it can be seen in deciding the treatment of people infected, the government-driven health response, the public's perception, and the us vs them narrative (Barker et al., 2020). In the narrative, there was a group who caused the disease to enter the normally healthy community, in the Covid-19 pandemic that group was the Chinese community. This narrative creates demagogic rhetoric that blames the out-group for creating the crisis. Demagogues during this time took advantage of the many uncertainties as a way to create nationalistic sentiments. The rhetoric was centered on group identity, making it seem to be rational. In some cases, misinformation was produced that was based on logical fallacies. A group was still scapegoated and marginalized for the public good and the complexity of the issue garnered little attention (Barker et al., 2020). The polarizing narrative of demagogues promoted uncertainty and created a distrust in a certain identity. This narrative had effects in real life because there was an increase in physical violence and harassment toward Asian Americans (Gover et al., 2020). Evidence of this was also present online. Demagogues were spreading misinformation to a widespread audience, creating an in-group that blamed the out-group for the pandemic (Wang et al., 2022). Social media and news outlets constantly were making arguments based on identity and victim blaming (Wang et al., 2022). The in-group, out-group narrative wasn't just present with the argument of who started the pandemic, it was also present on other divisive factors like vaccines, public closings, and mask mandates. Consistently, there were two groups, one group was wrong while the other group was right. The polarizing narrative was coming from both sides of the political spectrum, both arguing that their opinion was better while

the other side was wrong solely based on their identity. The pandemic caused a lot of discourse, much of it being demagogic rhetoric and much of it being present online. The rhetoric at the time shifted the culture, creating a deeper polarization between individuals.

Presidential Input

At the time of the Covid-19 pandemic, President Trump was at the end of his first term and facing an election in the fall. He was also placed with being a leader during the critical first months of the pandemic. As president, he was looked upon for guidance and reassurance (Beasley, 2011). Throughout literature, he has been framed as a demagogue because of his consistent use of demagogic strategies that carried into the pandemic. He was rebuked for stowing divisive xenophobia, mixed messages about the seriousness of the issue, and spoke evasively about the government's duties during the pandemic (Youmans & Bahador, 2020). He also tended to frame the pandemic as a scheme to undermine him and his success. All of these factors led to the classification of a demagogue. Through his social media accounts, the former president had a direct line to the people and the ability to spread his message.

Specifically on Twitter, he used language that directly blamed the Chinese people. For example, his early 2020 tweets stated "We are at war with an invisible enemy" and branded the virus as a "Chinese virus" indicating the Chinese community, not necessarily the disease. He blamed a virus that impacted and was spread by the whole country on one group of people. His consistent use of the phrase ultimately created an in-group and out-group, the out-group being the Chinese community. The Chinese community was the cause of the pandemic therefore they should be blamed. The in-group, anyone not a part of the Chinese community, was unblamable. Through Twitter, he is more likely to have

26

demagogic rhetoric than through speeches or statements, often referring to the virus as the "kung flu" and threatening national agencies (Kelland & Nebehay, 2020). He even placed blame on W.H.O. calling them "China-centric" and their recommendations "faulty" while claiming to reject their advice (Kelland & Nebehay, 2020). Because of the uncivil and impulsive nature of Twitter as stated earlier in this study, his tweets were able to have a great impact and create a culture based on demagoguery. The demagogic rhetoric also influenced the public trust in the government. The language at the time undermined the scientific authorities and spurred prejudice (Youmans & Bahador, 2020). There was constant confusion, rumors, and misinformation. A typical demagogue aims to undermine liberal democracy for political benefit, which the language used by President Trump did (Roberts-Miller, 2020). His sustained reliance on demagogic rhetoric created a following that supported his efforts. Demagoguery at this time had great polarizing effects and led to a society that was divisive during a time when that mindset was very costly.

Based on the previously stated communication theories, there are multiple reasons why the former President's demagogic language had such an effect during the pandemic. Not only his status but his devise language was used to create parasocial relationships and speak to certain people's needs. His status as the president left room for possible parasocial relationships. The constant media presence and populist language he used made the audience feel connected to him. Many people believed he would be the one to fix the issue at hand. At the time, citizens needed someone to take control during the chaotic time, and for some, that was the president. For others, what was needed was someone to be blamed, and President Trump was able to provide that. He created an

"enemy" out of certain groups and blamed them for the creation of the pandemic and any setbacks that occurred (Kelland & Nebehay, 2020). His demagogic rhetoric spoke to people's needs while it was damaging to certain groups. He engaged in incivility but still was able to create a connection with citizens. Ultimately, he had to position himself to have a following and he spoke to their personal beliefs even if it was divisive and unethical.

Republican vs. Democrat Input

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, multiple different divided messages were being spread by both the Republican and Democrat parties. Based on their political ideology, each party had a separate idea of how to handle the spread of the virus. Democrats believed in slowing the spread by wearing masks, closing public facilities, and supporting vaccines. Republicans had a low belief in the effectiveness of those measures. Politicians during this time framed their messages differently, Republicans tended to frame their messages based on purity and loyalty while Democrats framed their messages based on fairness and protection from harm, while some still used demagogic rhetoric to prove their points (Gelfand et al., 2022). During this time some Democrats spread the message that people who don't use masks or don't participate in the vaccine do not care about others and are ultimately the cause of the years-long pandemic. They created an idea that any person who does take those measures is slowing the spread. Some Democrats framed the in-group as being overall morally better than the outgroup, blaming the others. Democrats' message was based on the fact that Democrats are moral because they care about fairness and protecting others. On the other side of the spectrum, Republicans spread the message that anyone who does not participate in those measures

is superior because they value their independence and freedom. They are protecting themselves and not falling for unnecessary precautions. The measures being taken by Democrats were ultimately hindering the nation from getting rid of the pandemic. Again, an ingroup was made while placing blame on the outgroup (Rodriguez et al., 2022). In this case, the ingroup was superior because they were being pure and loyal. Both parties differed on multiple aspects during the pandemic. Their opinions on how to stop the spread, the effectiveness of vaccines, and even the cause of the pandemic differed.

While some politicians used demagogic language and some did not the messages they spread still created an in-group and out-group, placing blame on a certain group while the other group's actions were justified. Both sides created a culture of what was ethically right in the complicated situation (Rodriguez et al., 2022). Based on the criteria of demagoguery, both sides of the political spectrum made the complicated pandemic into a simple scenario with one right answer for a resolution. For Democrats, it was taking steps to protect others at the cost of some freedom while for Republicans it was based on protecting personal freedom and societal norms (Gelfand et al., 2022). While there were many layers to the situation, demagogues during this time shared their one right answer while attacking others that didn't correlate. When attacking others they degraded policies created by certain parties based on ideology, another sign of demagoguery (Gelfand et al., 2022). Certain policies towards protecting the economy and supporting new welfare measures were said to be taking taxpayers' hard-earned money or policies towards national control were said to increase the spread, leading to a higher number of deaths. Republican policies were framed as a way to hurt the people while Democratic policies were taking away freedoms. Any demagogic argument made during

29

the pandemic was two-sided and partisan, attacking an outgroup based on ideology (Rodriguez et al., 2022). While no specific person or party in the political environment was correct in how to handle the pandemic, as it was a wicked problem with no perfect solutions, each side had demagogic rhetoric backing up faulty arguments. The COVID-19 pandemic became divisive, partisan, and demagogic because of the rhetoric spread by various groups.

Social Media's Impact

One of the main ways to spread information on the pandemic to politicians was social media. It allowed for easy access to an audience, limited effort, and most importantly, allowed for incivility. Demagogues could easily spread their messages while placing blame on others. Twitter, as studied earlier, was one of the main media platforms to use as a way to use demagogic rhetoric. Tweets criticizing vaccines, masks, and social distancing were communicated to the people oftentimes creating divisive discourse (Engel-Rebitzer et al., 2022). Demagogues were able to easily put the blame on others while highlighting the in-group actions. The actions the ingroup was taking were the right ones to end the pandemic while any actions the out-group was taking were the wrong actions. Demagogues were placing blame on the outgroup while also undermining the impact of the pandemic. During the pandemic, there was divisive xenophobia, mixed messages about the seriousness of the issue, and a debate about the involvement of the government (Rodriguez et al., 2022). All the controversial topics led to one group being blamed with the other group was nowhere near being in the wrong. There was also an easy spread of misinformation that was used as an advantage by demagogues (Wang et al., 2022). Social media, like Twitter, spread information without sources to an audience

with limited media literacy (Polanco-Levicán & Salvo-Garrido, 2022). That information can also be framed as a way to support certain arguments that are being created. Messages, like tweets, supporting demagoguery are oftentimes overlooked as demagoguery which in turn creates persuasion. Audiences see a politician as lining up with their beliefs on the controversial topics leading to more support and a following. As the previous communication theories explain, people are more likely to follow others who have similar ideologies and beliefs. Twitter is all about easy access with limited work and often audiences won't double-check the information that is being spread by demagogues. Political demagogues like Donald Trump were able to use Twitter as a way to grow their following as well as promote their ideology during the pandemic (Ramey, 2022). Information easily spread and easily believed which created an environment for the demagogic rhetoric to foster.

The impact that social media had on the public during the pandemic speaks greatly to the cultivation theory as described earlier. Cultivation theory is defined by the fact that people will engage with media that projects their perception of reality as well as the media impacting that perception (West & Turner, 2021). In the case of Twitter during the pandemic, viewers were able to see any information that mirrored their existing beliefs. They were also given the opportunity to see information that might have shifted their beliefs. The depth of Twitter and social media as a whole allowed viewers to base their reality of the pandemic solely on social media posts which demagogues were able to take advantage of. Any misinformation or faculty arguments could be seen with limited critiques and a loyal audience. Demagogues shared their beliefs online, encouraging a certain audience to follow. Their rhetoric spoke to certain people because it appealed to

31

their beliefs and their needs. The constant viewing of that certain rhetoric that Twitter

allows for started to create the group's reality and in turn their culture.

CHAPTER 4

Discussion and Conclusion

Demagoguery sounds like a scary topic, one that is only amplified by the use of

media and dividing events but there are ways to be aware of persuasion and the effect that

it has. The simple, demagogic solution would be to purify the group and get rid of the bad

people causing the problem (Roberts-Miller, 2020). While the basis of demagoguery is to

get rid of the out-group that is causing the problems to solve the problems, this way does

not change the culture and ultimately creates more demagogues. The complex problem

doesn't come with a simple solution, instead, Roberts-Miller (2020) offers four steps that

can be taken to reduce demagoguery in a culture. First, the profitability of demagoguery

needs to be reduced by consuming less of it. Being more aware of demagoguery in

media, what outlets spew the most, and checking our own confirmation biases are ways

to reduce our intake. In this case, avoidance is the best option to limit the impact of

influence and reduce the chances of falling into a demagogic culture. While avoidance

isn't always possible, especially with how widespread mainstream and social media is,

being conscious of and knowing how to spot demagoguery can help balance information

intake.

Secondly, Roberts-Miller (2020) suggests we can choose who and how we argue

with others about the political environment. Family or friends who repeat demagogic

talking points are basing their assumptions on generalizations and the best way to make

them aware of their biases is to open them up to diversity and pluralism. Arguing with

someone who believes in the in-group culture wouldn't be open to arguing about the out-

group belief because of their created prejudice. Most of the time "demagoguery about

them is undone by empathy" (Roberts-Miller, 2020, p. 99). Sharing experiences, telling stories about friends, or even getting to know a member of the out-group can help shatter the barriers and humanize people. In some cases, refusing to argue is the best option but when choosing to argue there are different strategies involved. Learning how to argue effectively takes time and practice but could be helpful in deterring others from repeating demagogic talking points. Using strategies like kindness and confrontational argumentative styles is useful depending on the type of person, but also shifting the argument away from group identity and creating productivity instead of just round-about arguments convenient.

Another useful tip Roberts Miller provides is to be able to identify common fallacies like straw man and projection, which only lead to more holes in arguments and can be used to break them down. Encouraging people to engage in more deliberation and less demagoguery can persuade them to realize their prejudices. By understanding and being aware of our prejudices, we can adjust our mindset to be more inclusive.

Lastly, she argues that supporting and arguing for democratic deliberation can be a valid way to avoid demagoguery. Insisting on rhetorical fairness, responsibility, constituency, and staying focused on the true issue that is being argued are all ways to rightfully engage in political rhetoric with others. In today's polarized political environment and rising use of media, it is important to be aware of and use tactics to limit exposure to demagoguery. Demagoguery is inevitable because disagreements are inevitable but being able to call out the misuse of rhetoric can lead to a stronger, more united culture.

34

Demagoguery is a hard concept to understand and it is even harder to realize when it is impacting our beliefs but understanding the communication theories described earlier can help. Knowing why we engage with the type of content that we do, understanding how it plays into our needs, and being aware of when a fascination with a public figure goes too far can help limit our exposure to persuasive demagoguery. Being aware of our own biases and actions online are the first steps in being literate in media. Media literacy is an essential set of tools that can help us navigate the online world and determine what is true or not (Suciu, 2024). Having the skills to fact-check, interact with others, and have an understanding of how media creates our reality is important for overcoming demagoguery. We don't always have the choice to limit media exposure so knowing the impacts it has is essential (Suciu, 2024). As shown in this literature review, demagoguery can have dangerous impacts if we let it but understanding how and when it influences us can help prevent them. Social media has implications in everyday life and being aware of the impact it has can help understand the influence it has (Polanco-Levicán & Salvo-Garrido, 2022).

The purpose of this literature review was to help provide information on demagoguery and the way that something that seems so simple like rhetoric can have dramatic effects on society. Demagoguery can lead to genocide, mass incarceration, and segregation. The effect that a culture based on us vs. them standard can have is hard to imagine but a threat that is present in our society. Media is one way that demagoguery gets spread and it works because of the nature of understanding and interpreting communication. How people take in information and present it in their lives can change cultures and ideologies. Demagoguery is simple while democracy is hard

35

(Roberts-Miller, 2020). Arguing deliberately, allowing for diversity, and creating fairness is hard while, unfortunately, creating blame and jumping to conclusions is easy. While it may be hard, choosing democracy is the right path and the best path to overcome demagoguery.

REFERENCES

Allen, J. (2023, March 14). *Misinformation amplification analysis and tracking*
dashboard. Integrity Institute.
https://integrityinstitute.org/blog/misinformation-amplification-tracking-dashboar
d

Atkinson, J., Hoque, R., McWan, B., & White, J. (2020). Activism's sweet embrace:
Political advertisements, audiences and interpretive strategies. *Democratic*
Communiqué, 29(1), 62–77. doi:
https://doi.org/10.7275/democratic-communique.212

Beasley, V.B. (2011). *You, the People: American National Identity in Presidential*
Rhetoric. College Station: Texas A&M University Press.

Barker, H., & Chen, C. (2022). Pandemic Outbreaks and the Language of Violence:
Discussing the Origins of the Black Death and COVID-19. *Chest, 162*(1),
196–201. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chest.2022.03.010

Ciampaglia, G. L., Menczer, F., & US, T. C. (2024, February 20). *Biases make people*
vulnerable to misinformation spread by social media. Scientific American.
https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/biases-make-people-vulnerable-to-mis
information-spread-by-social-media/

Engel-Rebitzer, E., Stokes, D. C., Meisel, Z. F., Purtle, J., Doyle, R., & Buttenheim, A.
M. (2022). Partisan differences in legislators' discussion of vaccination on Twitter

during the COVID-19 ERA: Natural Language Processing Analysis. *JMIR Infodemiology*, *2*(1). https://doi.org/10.2196/32372

Gelfand, M., Li, R., Stamkou, E., Pieper, D., Denison, E., Fernandez, J., Choi, V. K., Chatman, J., Jackson, J. C., & Dimant, E. (2021). Persuading Republicans and Democrats to comply with Mask Wearing: an intervention tournament. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *101*. https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/6gjh8

Gerbner, G. (1998). Cultivation analysis: An overview. *Mass Communication and Society*, *1*(3-4), 175-194.

Gover, A. R., Harper, S. B., & Langton, L. (2020). Anti-Asian Hate Crime During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Exploring the Reproduction of Inequality. *American journal of criminal justice : AJCJ*, *45*(4), 647–667. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-020-09545-1

Hartmann, T. (2008). Parasocial interactions and paracommunication with new media characters. *Mediated Interpersonal Communication*, 191–213. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203926864-18

Hmielowski, J. D., Hutchens, M. J., & Beam, M. A. (2020). Asymmetry of partisan media effects?: Examining the reinforcing process of conservative and Liberal Media with political beliefs. *Political Communication*, *37*(6), 852–868. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2020.1763525

Kelland, K., & Nebehay, S. (2020, May 15). *Caught in Trump-China Feud, W.H.O. leader under siege*. Reuters Investigates.

https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/health-coronavirus-who-tedro s/

Kozman, C. & Melki, J. (2018). News Media Uses During War. *Journalism Studies*, *19*(10), 1466-1488. DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2017.1279564

Lu, Y., Liu, X., Hu, Y., & Zhu, C. (2023). Influence of livestreamers' intimate self-disclosure on tourist responses: The lens of parasocial interaction theory. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management, 57*, 170–178. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2023.10.003

Mercieca, J. R. (2019). Dangerous demagogues and weaponized communication. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly, 49*(3), 264–279. https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2019.1610640

Muhammed T, S., & Mathew, S. K. (2022). The disaster of misinformation: a review of research in social media. *International journal of data science and analytics, 13*(4), 271–285. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41060-022-00311-6

Nickerson, R. S. (1998). Confirmation Bias: A Ubiquitous Phenomenon in Many Guises. Review of General Psychology, 2(2), 175-220. https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.2.2.175

Paravati, E., Naidu, E., Gabriel, S., & Wiedemann, C. (2020). More Than Just a Tweet: The Unconscious Impact of Forming Parasocial Relationships Through Social Media. *Psychology of Consciousness (Washington, D.C.), 7*(4), 388–403. https://doi.org/10.1037/cns0000214

Pew Research Center. (2023, September 19). *Public Trust in Government: 1958-2023*.

Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy.

https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/09/19/public-trust-in-government-195

8-2023/

Pew Research Center. (2020, July 30). *3. U.S. adults who mostly rely on social media for*

political news are often less knowledgeable about current events. Pew Research

Center's Journalism Project.

https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2020/07/30/u-s-adults-who-mostly-rely-

on-social-media-for-political-news-are-often-less-knowledgeable-about-current-e

vents/

Polanco-Levicán, K., & Salvo-Garrido, S. (2022). Understanding Social Media Literacy:

A systematic review of the concept and its competences. *International Journal of*

Environmental Research and Public Health, *19*(14), 8807.

https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19148807

Ott, B. L., & Dickinson, G. (2020). The twitter presidency: How Donald Trump's tweets

undermine democracy and threaten us all. *Political Science Quarterly*, *135*(4),

607–636. https://doi.org/10.1002/polq.13129

Ramey, C. (2022, March 9). *Social media provides appealing platform for budding*

demagogues. Gainesville Sun.

https://www.gainesville.com/story/opinion/2022/03/09/carl-ramey-social-media-i

ntensifies-our-political-dysfunction/9411127002/

Riddle, K. (2010). Always on My Mind: Exploring How Frequent, Recent, and Vivid Television Portrayals Are Used in the Formation of Social Reality Judgments. *Media Psychology, 13*(2), 155–179. https://doi.org/10.1080/15213261003800140

Roberts-Miller, P. (2016, September 27). *Characteristics of demagoguery - patricia roberts*. Patricia Roberts-Miller. https://www.patriciarobertsmiller.com/characteristics-of-demagoguery/

Roberts-Miller, P. (2020). *Demagoguery and democracy*. The Experiment.

Rodriguez, C. G., Gadarian, S. K., Goodman, S. W., & Pepinsky, T. B. (2022). Morbid Polarization: Exposure to COVID-19 and Partisan Disagreement about Pandemic Response. *Political psychology, 101*. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12810

Shatz, I. (n.d.). *Strawman Arguments: What They Are and How to Overcome Them.* Effectiviology. https://effectiviology.com/straw-man-arguments-recognize-counter-use/

Suciu, P. (2024, January 3). *How media literacy can help stop misinformation from spreading*. Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/petersuciu/2024/01/02/how-media-literacy-can-help -stop-misinformation-from-spreading/?sh=54cb2c3e3da7

Sienkiewicz, M. & Marx, N. (2021). Appropriating irony: Conservative comedy, trump-era satire, and the politics of television humor. *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies, 60*(4), 85–108. https://doi.org/10.1353/cj.2021.0046

Sullivan, M. (2019, May 26). *'Birthing centers for polarizing rhetoric': The outsize influence of Fox, CNN and MSNBC*. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/birthing-centers-for-polarizing-rh

etoric-the-outsize-influence-of-fox-cnn-and-msnbc/2019/05/23/2bcc429a-7cbe-11
e9-8ede-f4abf521ef17_story.html

Tait, A. (2016, August 4). *The strange case of marina joyce and internet hysteria*. The
Guardian.
https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/aug/04/marina-joyce-internet-hyst
eria-witch-hunts-cyberspace

Taliaferro, C. (2018). Mind projection. *Bad Arguments*, 369–370.
https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119165811.ch89

The National World War II Museum. (2017, June 22). *How did Adolf Hitler happen?:
The National WWII Museum: New Orleans*. The National WWII Museum | New
Orleans.
https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/how-did-adolf-hitler-happen#:
~:text=Hitler%20pledged%20to%20restore%20prosperity,once%20again%20a%2
0world%20power.

Twitter revenue and Usage Statistics (2024). Business of Apps. (2024, February 22).
https://www.businessofapps.com/data/twitter-statistics/

Youmans, W., & Bahador, B. (2022). Framing Covid-19: Constitutional Versus
Demagogic Rhetoric in Presidential Messaging. *International Journal Of
Communication, 16*, 24. Retrieved from
https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/17107/3625

Wang, X., Zhang, M., Fan, W., & Zhao, K. (2022). Understanding the spread of

    COVID-19 misinformation on social media: The effects of topics and a political

    leader's nudge. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and*

    Technology, 73(5), 726–737. https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.24576

West, R. L., & Turner, L. H. (2021). *Introducing communication theory: Analysis and*

    application (7th ed.). McGraw-Hill.