



“UNPRESIDENTED”

TWITTER AS A TOOL IN DONALD TRUMP'S
SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

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Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek:

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Impressum:

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Ein Imprint der GRIN Verlag, Open Publishing GmbH

Druck und Bindung: Books on Demand GmbH, Norderstedt, Germany

Coverbild: GRIN | Freepik.com | Flaticon.com | ei8htz

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Preface

Presidential elections in the United States are, and always have been, major events in American and world history. They are watched by millions of people not only in the US but all over the world. A circumstance that is often not noticed by less informed viewers is that the most famous part of the elections, namely the presidential inauguration, is preceded by weeks, months and even years of presidential campaigning, where candidates raise and spend vast amounts of money in order to convince the American citizens to give them their vote. These campaigns have commonly consisted of journeys throughout the entire country, rallies, conventions and speeches but lately, another medium has been taking a great role in the competition: Social Media. Especially during the 2016 election cycle *Twitter* became a campaign tool that never has been used during political campaigns to this extent before. Donald Trump in particular has made use of Twitter to such a great extent that it sometimes even seemed like his official speaking tube.

The introductory chapters of this work are dedicated to Obama's social media pioneer work during his 2008 election cycle. Then the *Twitter phenomenon* Trump will be analyzed based on an analysis of recurring patterns in a selection of his tweets. His controversial behavior online as well as offline will be set out as well. Additionally, the *Online Persona* Trump will be examined based on the findings of a data scientist's blog. As not only Trump uses Twitter, the opponents' usage of the platform will be regarded as well. This work does not exclusively focus on his online activities but is always expanded to offline-statements and public appearances. Especially in order to take a look at his rhetorical strategies and the populist tendency of his language, the range had to be expanded. Therefore, this Bachelor's thesis can be considered as a content analysis in terms of an *extended analytical press review*.

The Election Process

Presidential Elections in the US are held every four years. Election is a process, which consists of two crucial steps: a major political party nomination and a general election. Before the citizens can cast their ballots, the major political party nomination takes place where the candidates of each party who are running for presidency and vice-presidency are nominated with a majority of the delegates' votes, also called the *Electoral College*. Each state has a number of delegates according to the state's population, who convene either in primaries or caucuses. Delegates are pledged to support a certain candidate. In states with primaries, voters

go to polling stations to vote for their preferred delegate, while in states with caucuses, party members speak on behalf of the candidate they support for the nomination. Early contests are closely related to the fact that money plays a decisive role in US campaigning. Candidates put great effort into states that hold primaries and caucuses first, as these early contests frequently show which candidate can compete in the run for presidency. This is, for example criticized in Iowa, a state that holds early primaries, and is not representative for the rest of the country but gets comparatively far more attention. Since 2010, individuals have been allowed to spend an unlimited amount of their own money on their campaign. If presidential candidates receive contributions, federal law dictates how much and from whom. These details are also made accessible for the public. The last major-party candidates, for example spent hundreds of millions of dollars on their campaigns in order to hire staff, arrange office space, pay travel cost, advertise on radio, television or newspapers and to host campaign events. Even though the US government provides funds for presidential campaigns, the candidates do not often consider this option because the funds are very limited. Instead, it is much more common that candidates raise money to fund their campaigns.

There have been two major parties in the US political landscape since the 1830s: the Democrat Party and Republican Party¹ - that still dominate the election process now. Since 1852, every president has either been a Democrat or a Republican. There are only few governors or members of Congress who are independent or belong to a third party. One characteristic of the US election process is the *first-past-the-post-system*. The candidate with the most votes wins, even if they have not received the majority of the cast. In countries that give seats according to the proportion of the votes a certain party receives, a multi-party system is more likely (US Elections in Brief; Coleman, Neale, and Cantor).

¹ The Republican Party was founded in 1845. Thomas Jefferson's Democratic-Republican Party inspired the name. The Party is often nicknamed *GOP* what stands for *Grand Old Party*. According to the Republican National Committee back in 1875 the acronym stood for *Gallant Old Party* (History of the GOP; Grace).