Article

Do Foreigners Count? Internationalization of Presidential Campaigns

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Abstract

The U.S. presidential elections always attract the attention of foreign audiences—who, despite not being able to vote, choose to follow the campaigns closely. For a post that is colloquially dubbed as the "Leader of the Free World," it is not unexpected to see such an interest coming from nonvoters. Mimicking almost hosting a megaevent, the elections increase the media coverage on the United States, thus making the elections a platform to communicate with the rest of the world and to influence the reputation of the country, or its nation brand. This study postulates that the increasing adoption of social media by campaigns as well as ordinary users, increase the symbolic importance of presidential elections for foreign audiences in two ways. First, foreign audiences no longer passively follow the campaign but rather present their input to sway the American public opinion through social media campaigns. Second, foreign audiences are exposed to a variety of messages ranging from official campaigns to late-night comedy shows to local grassroots movements. The audiences both enjoy a more in-depth understanding of the elections campaigns and are exposed to alternative political views. In this study, the 2016 U.S. presidential elections are positioned as a megaevent that can influence the American nation brand. Through a comparative content and network analyses of messages disseminated over social media in the United Kingdom, Turkey, Canada, and Venezuela, the nation branding–related impacts of election campaigns are investigated.

Keywords

2016 presidential elections, foreign audiences, national reputation, public opinion, social media

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Introduction

The campaigns to become the 45th president of the United States were intriguing for pundits and scholars. Hillary Clinton's candidacy and eventual nomination were not unexpected. Secretary Clinton has already expressed her interest in becoming the president and ran a long-term campaign. On the side of the Republican Party, however, Donald Trump's candidacy, as well as his success in securing the party's nomination and eventually winning the elections, was surprising to many, including presidential election experts and pollsters. The presidential election issues of *American Behavioral Scientist* include various works that discuss the domestic aspects of the presidential election. In this article, we highlight the role of the elections in influencing the perceptions of the international audiences, and ultimately of the American nation brand.

The starting point for this article is not entrenched in conspiracy theories looking for foreign intervention in the election results (such as Times Editorial Board, 2016). Rather, we investigate the communicative aspect of the presidential elections. International audiences, despite the fact that they cannot vote in an American election, showed an astonishing level of interest in the 2016 elections. For instance, in Canada, a grassroots movement called "Let's Tell America It's Great"[1] launched a series of videos to provide moral support to American citizens who were worried about the election process. It was apparent that the Canadian audience was aware of not only the election-related news but also the reaction of the American people. Save the Day, a political action committee led by Joss Whedon, produced a video which explicitly stated the international aspect of the presidential elections. An actor with a British accent called Americans to vote for Trump so that "Europe will be far too busy vomiting in horror to think about our little blunder," referring to the Brexit vote earlier the same year (Save the Day, Vote, 2016). In other words, the presidential elections mediate two types of communicative process between the U.S. and international audiences. First, these audiences closely monitor the developments and produce their own messages to contribute to the political discourse. Second, the elections themselves are seen as a communicative action. The image of the United States is influenced by the discourse and the actions surrounding the elections.

Given the fact that the presidency is colloquially dubbed as the "Leader of the World," international audiences have always shown interest in American presidential elections. What makes the latest election noteworthy is the augmentation of this interest through digital communication technologies. Digitalization of news outlets ensured the availability of television and newspaper content that were previously available exclusively to local audiences to international audiences. Besides, social media made it possible for individuals to create and disseminate their own content. Therefore, the audiences are not passive recipients of the messages but take active part in forming the image of the country.

Our main research puzzle lies in this intersection of interest in and ability to produce content about presidential elections. We position the presidential elections akin to hosting megaevents as they increase the level of attention paid to the country. We then investigate how the image of the United States, also known as its nation brand, is

influenced by the digital chatter. We focus on four specific countries—the United Kingdom, Turkey, Canada, and Venezuela—chosen based on their geographic locations and local public opinion toward the United States. To explain the impact of presidential elections on nation brands, the rest of the article is structured in five sections. First, we introduce social media as a platform for civic and political engagement. Second, we demonstrate the potential of the American presidential elections in influencing the country's national brand. Third, we introduce our research design and methodology. Fourth, we discuss the results of our analysis. We conclude the study by sharing our recommendations for American international outreach during and after presidential elections.

New Media and Globalization of Civic and Political Engagement

Civic political engagement is at the center of political science research, especially of those concentrating on voting behavior and traditional forms of political participation such as demonstrating, contacting elected representatives, or joining political organizations (Karolina, Lilleker, & Vedel, 2016). The term *civic engagement* is defined as individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern. Within the contours of this study, we use civic political engagement in reference to the attempts of individuals to communicate their political views and agendas.

Existing literature in the field has already established that people who consume traditional news from different media platforms are expected have a greater probability of being civically and politically engaged (Delli, n.d.). In the age of new media, unsurprisingly, such news consumption pattern is no longer limited to traditional media. Rather, new digital platforms and social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, became the rising instruments of political engagement for broader audiences. Papacharissi (2009, p. 244) described this process as emergence of a "virtual sphere 2.0" where consumers whom he also defined as citizens participate and express their political opinion on blogs, viewing or posting content on YouTube, or posting a comment in an online discussion group, while Burgess and Green (2009, p. 77) argued that YouTube is a cultural public sphere because "it is an enabler of encounters with cultural differences and the development of political 'listening' across belief systems and identities."

Especially observable in the election campaigns of former President Barrack Obama in 2008 and 2012, and in the spread of protests started with the Arab Spring in 2011, political uses of new media by states, nongovernmental organizations, and individuals for political purposes became more frequent, popular, and globally recognizable. Technological innovations of new media age triggered the emergence of mechanisms for facilitating broader and time/space independent political participation. While role of digital technologies such as seeking information, discussing politics, and participation in campaigns became more vital digitalization also caused a debate opportunity for broader audience and more widespread participation.

Recently, we observed how some national political agendas such as Brexit in United Kingdom, Oxi Referendum in Greece, and the U.S. presidential elections triggered international interest and international public debate. On one hand, cultural, political, and geographical characteristics determine the level, quality, and context of civic and political engagement in policies or politics of other countries (Fuchs, 2014). In more contemporary debates, a new variable should also be added, the structure of the social networks, as it affects nature of debate and people's level of participation to debates and internationalization of political agendas. While social media triggered new forms of activism and new approaches to activist behavior, it also enabled new public spheres providing debates open to contribution of actors without any time and space barriers (Castells, 2015; Gerbaudo, 2012). Internet undermined the territoriality of the nation-state and global communities have become more powerful (Poster, 1996).

Opportunities provided by new media technologies also triggered users from various cultural and national backgrounds to come and act together through a common language. People created international media networks that aim to provide technological and practical infrastructure for alternative political culture (Fuchs, 2014). But this internationalization and increasing level of civic engagement was not limited to activists and was not a source of concern for specific nations where these activist practices were already domestically available.

In a single decade, while world's networked population has grown from low millions to billions; debate over uses of social media for political purposes has been an obvious question for the American government regarding how the ubiquity of social media will affect the American interests and how the U.S. policy respond to it. Conversely, it should be asked how this raise will affect people's—whether they are actively included in political campaigns—knowledge and interest in governmental policies of the United States and its political agenda. Therefore, it should be stated that internationalization of national political agendas can not only be observed through activist networks engagement in debates but also through a content analysis on content produced by whole users who was involved in international debate through different channels.

Returning to some of the popular global political trends of 2016 such as Brexit, we can observe many users from various countries produced content on Twitter with various motives—not just for professional reasons. For instance, Moritz Deutschmann from Brussels posted a tweet including a gif about how leaving European Union decision will kick back United Kingdom,[2] while Jo Presta from Italy posted another tweet[3] including a gif for commenting on Britain's decision of leaving European Union. People's engagement to international political debates through social networks are not limited to commenting on them but also it enabled them to be part of conversation and argue with holders of different opinions from various geographies. They obtain chance to contribute political debate with their original political opinions and their senses of humor.

Such an engagement to international political agenda also delivers users a broader understanding of country's political culture and perception of mediascapes of the country in which they are interested. Therefore, the involvement of foreigners in elections or electoral debates are not limited to debates such as labor market competition,

antiforeigner sentiments, immigration, or advocacy of minorities (Semyonov, Raijman, & Gorodzeisky, 2008) any more. Foreigners, more than passive actors or outsiders of the election, are active political commentators and subjects of the political debate especially when there is no language barrier.

An almost unique aspect of the internationalization of American politics stems from the country's prominent entertainment industry. From Hollywood movies to music albums, the industry has always managed to reach a global audience. Recently, late-night comedy shows also joined the list of entertainment available for foreign consumption. American citizens have already been following politics through late-night comedy shows (Cao & Brewer, 2008). The influence of such shows has been high enough to sway voting behaviors (Young, 2004). Known as the "Daily Show Effect" (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006), the potential of these comedy shows to change the public opinion has been established among domestic audiences. One of the important, if not the most important, reasons for limited audience was the broadcasting platform. As these shows were not widely exported,[4] foreign audiences were not necessarily exposed to the messages. When generic video-sharing websites, such as YouTube, and official websites, such as the websites of the shows or television stations, started to be used for content sharing, it became possible to reach a larger audience. Foreigners had the opportunity to have a closer understanding of American political culture by interacting with the content—let it be through consuming, discussing, or sharing the content (Baym & Shah, 2011).

Political debates are becoming more and more international. The dissemination of content through new media platforms increases the awareness of global audiences and bestows a new sense of responsibility on them. The prominent position enjoyed by the United States in global politics, combined with the attractiveness of its entertainment industry, makes the country and its political scene prone to the involvement of foreign audiences[5] as they can closely follow the developments in the country and even present their personal contributions through social media. The next section positions the 2016 U.S. presidential elections as such an event that attracts a high volume of international attention.

A Unique Experience: American Presidential Elections

The U.S. presidential elections always attract the attention of foreign audiences—who cannot necessarily vote but due to various reasons choose to follow the campaigns closely. For a post that is colloquially dubbed as the "Leader of the Free World," it is not unexpected to see such an interest coming from nonvoters. When the Global Country Index launched its Global Vote project and asked non-Americans to cast their hypothetical votes, users from over 130 countries participated, compared with 39 countries for Brexit referendum and 26 countries for Zambian presidential elections.

This is why we posit that American presidential elections mimic a megaevent. Similar to the international attention on Germany during the 2006 FIFA World Cup or on the United Kingdom during the 2012 Summer Olympics (Grix & Houlihan, 2014), the elections received worldwide coverage. Countries compete with each other to host

such megaevents with the objectives of projecting their soft power and improving their reputation through media coverage (Grix & Lee, 2013). Chinese government, for instance, saw the Olympics as a way to share the recent economic and social development in the country with the world (de Kloet, Chong, & Landsberger, 2011). Brazil, likewise, wanted to portray itself as an emerging power by hosting the FIFA World Cup in 2014 and the Summer Olympics in 2016 (Grix, Brannagan, & Houlihan, 2015). As these events reach a considerably large number of people, they have the potential to influence the way a country is perceived by audiences.

A new yet rapidly growing field of study, nation branding, is devoted to the study of these perceptions of nations and their impacts. Fundamentally, a nation brand is defined as "the unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that provides the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences" (Dinnie, 2008, p. 6). While this brand is rooted in what the nation has to offer, it is ultimately the reflection of the perceptions of the audiences. The brand is what is left in the minds of target audiences after the nation communicates its brand messages (Zenker & Braun, 2010). This particular process to influence the views of audiences is known as a nation branding campaign.

The impacts of nation branding were first seen in exporting goods. As the country-of-origin studies demonstrate, certain countries are known for high-quality production of certain goods (Andehn, 2013), such as Swiss watches, German cars, and Italian suits. The attitudes and actions of consumers were observed to be influenced by where a given product is produced (Dinnie, 2004). Nation branding studies acknowledge that this particular impact might go beyond just goods. A variety of decisions, ranging from where to go for vacation (Benedetti, Çakmak, & Dinnie, 2011) to which country to study in (Lowe, 2015), is influenced by how a nation is perceived by audiences. This is why more and more countries invest on communication campaigns to improve their images in the eyes of the international audiences as nation brands have not only economic but also social and political impacts.

Megaevents, within this perspective, help countries communicate with target audiences. A host country welcomes thousands of people who participate in or watch the events. Moreover, the concentrated media attention amplifies the outreach. This particular branding related communication should not be deduced to verbal communication. In nation branding, communication takes places in three different yet interrelated levels (Kavaratzis, 2004, 2005). The primary communication is based on the actual actions of a country. Qatar, the host country for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, is accused of not providing the necessary workplace safety regulations while building up the infrastructure for the upcoming event (Ingraham, 2015). This policy action influences the country's brand. The secondary communication is the official communication channels—let it be the advertising campaigns or official declarations. Tokyo, the host city for 2020 Summer Olympics, builds its entire communication strategy on positioning itself as an innovation hub (Jackson, 2016). "Connecting to Tomorrow," one of the three priority communication areas, envisions campaigns that highlight Japan as a country "to promote future changes throughout the world, and leave a positive legacy for future generations" (Tokyo 2020, 2016). The tertiary communication is the word of

mouth, or what other actors say about a place. An individual's perception of a nation might be influenced by what his or her friends might say or what other Internet users also share.

Spanning over almost a 1-year period, the U.S. presidential elections is, in terms of nation branding, a megaevent that the country gets to host every 4 years. During a presidential election campaign, the American national brand is influenced at all three communication levels. From national conventions to candidate debates, the events surrounding an election season stand as the primary communication. The secondary communication involves how the candidates portray the United States. Other mediated communication, including social media chatter and comedy shows, constitute tertiary communication.

This is why we argue that the impact of 2016 presidential elections on the American nation brand cannot be deduced to official messages. By looking at the digital chatter in different countries, we identify how and what type of messages were created and/or circulated among users. In other words, we position digital media as a platform that best shows the involvement of international audiences in American presidential elections as they are presented with the opportunity to easily interact with the messages. The next section describes our research design in more detail.

Some Vote, Some Tweet: Research Design

Our research analyzes the digital chatter on one specific platform—Twitter. The reason for selection Twitter is four-fold. First, as a microblogging social network, Twitter makes it easier for individuals to interact with each other. With default privacy settings, the content created on Twitter can be seen by other Twitter users. Second, users can interact with other users and this interaction can be observed publically. A *mention* or a *retweet* does not require the existence of a prior research. Thus, unlike other social networks—such as Facebook—where individuals can interact only with content and users that they previously started following or friended, Twitter has an open network. Third, the system of hashtags and trending topics, in addition to mentions and retweets, allows the creation of publics around specific discussions without the need for group creation, and users can follow a particular account without asking the permission of its owner (Colleoni et al., 2014). Trend topics and hashtags have an important role to observe an ongoing debate or to see numerous tweets sent about a specific subject no matter they interact with each other or not. Mostly, Twitter trend topics and regularly used hashtags are important signifiers of hot debate topics. Fourth, data about an entire network can be scraped on Twitter through hashtag-based research.

We created search strings based on the national trending topics and popular hashtags about the U.S. elections used by Twitter users from four different countries. We scraped all tweets sent by users located in four different countries included in the study between September 1, 2016, and October 31, 2016.[6] We then identified the 200 most interacted (retweeted) tweets from each country.

The study is limited to the political debates in the United Kingdom, Turkey, Canada, and Venezuela. Our case selection was based on two criteria: geographical distance to

and public opinion toward the United States. As it was seen in the Brexit and Oxi debates, geographical distance can influence the interest of an individual in a foreign political issue. Introducing variance in terms of public opinion ensured that the tone toward and the coverage of issues would not be swayed by the existing attitudes toward nation brands. The United Kingdom and Turkey are relatively further away with Turkey having a less favorable opinion of the United States (Poushter, 2014). Canada and Venezuela are geographically close countries, with Canada having a more favorable opinion of the United States (Wike, Stokes, & Poushter, 2015).

The main objective of our research is to investigate the impact of American presidential elections on the country's nation brand. To reach this objective, we pose two descriptive aspects of the data collected. One of these aspects pertained to the content of the tweets. We went through all 200 tweets per country and categorized them by whether they were about Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, both of the candidates, or neither of them. Tweets were also categorized in terms of their themes such as candidates' personalities, candidates' policies, election process, and more controversial topics of the election such as e-mail leaks and sexual harassment allegations. Last, tweets were marked as by two different researchers based on Krippendorff's (2004) discourse analysis method. Values were defined as positive, negative, neutral, and nonavailable. The other descriptive aspect was about the structure of the networks. We restructured mention and retweet relations as dyadic relations, in other words, as an interaction between two users. Subsequently, we looked at the degree centralities of actors and modularity groupings of each country's Twitter-sphere network. The former measures identify the most important actors in a network (Wasserman & Faust, 1998), while the latter shows the smaller groups within the larger network (Newman, 2006). Calculations and visualizations of the networks were carried out using Gephi software (Bastian, Heymann, & Jacomy, 2009). The next section outlines the findings of our analyses.

Findings

Our descriptive analyses were carried out separately for each country. All four countries had two different data sets. The first data set included the texts of 200 tweets that were most interacted (retweeted) tweets. The second data set included dyadic relations or the interaction with the content creator user and the user who retweeted.

In the *United Kingdom* data set (Table 1), out of the 200 most interacted tweets, 127 were on Hillary Clinton, 46 on Donald Trump, 17 on both, whereas 10 were related to issues other than the personality or campaigns of these candidates. While 102 of the 127 tweets related to Hillary Clinton were negative, most of the negative tweets related to Clinton were seen to be shared by astroturfers[7] or Trump supporters who were connected to each other or tweeting on similar topics (cf. Figure 1, purple and green modularity groups). When we look at the tweets about Trump, 33 of the 46 tweets are negative, 6 were neutral and 7 were positive. The number of negative tweets that interest both candidates were 7, while the number of neutral tweets is 10. In this regard, 15 of the 200 tweets we examined from the United Kingdom were about election polls, 8 with Trump-related sexual harassment statements, 7 with DNC leaks, 32 with Clinton's

Table 1. Discourse Analysis Results for the U.K. Data Set.

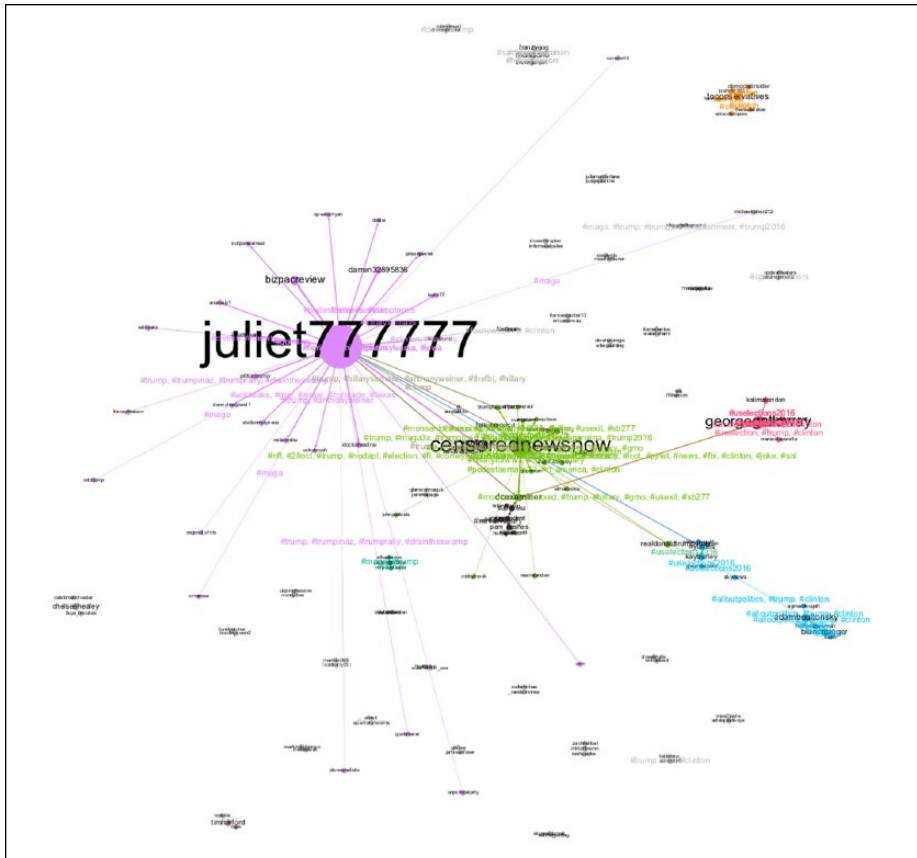| UK	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Clinton	13	12	102	127
Trump	7	6	33	46
Both		10	7	17
None				10
Total	20	28	142	

Figure 1. Social Network Analysis Results for the U.K. Data Set.

e-mails and FBI investigation, 16 Clinton's personality, and 20 was related to Trump's personality. Apart from this, there were also reports of neutral election or news reports about nonspecific news or routine news, or tweets that are taken from two leading candidates' personalities or campaigns.

Table 2. Discourse Analysis Results for Turkey Data Set.

Turkey	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Clinton	31	12	16	59
Trump		13	62	75
Both		9	29	38
None				28
Total	31	34	107	

Figure 1 shows the network structure of British tweets with each circle, or node, representing a Twitter user and each line, or edge, representing a retweet/mention relationship. The edges use the hashtags of tweets as their labels where applicable. A larger node means a higher degree centrality, or an actor that has engaged in more retweet/mention relationships. The colors show the modularity groups, or actors that engage with each other more often than with the other actors in the network. The most active user in the network was *Juliet777777*. According to report retrieved from Botornot application created by Indiana University, Juliet777777 is 72% likely to be a bot user.[8] There is little to no interaction between different modularity groups. The groups also present interest, and at certain times, support, solely to one candidate. The larger modularity groups in purple and green were Trump supporters, with the orange and gray groups presenting their support to Clinton.

In *Turkey* (Table 2), 59 out of the 200 most interacted tweets were on Hillary Clinton, 75 on Donald Trump, 38 on both, and 28 of them are related to issues other than the personality or campaigns of these candidates. While 33 of the most interacted tweets in Turkey were coming from a variety of known news sources, 52 were on debate nights, and 7 were in election polls. Of the 59 tweets sent by users in Turkey regarding Clinton, 31 were negative, 16 were neutral, and 12 were positive. Seventeen of the negative tweets about Clinton were on her foreign policy and nine included references to Turkish President Erdoğan's statements about her record as the Secretary of the State and outcome of her potential presidency. In terms of subject, 8 of these 17 negative tweets were about Clinton's health, while the remaining 9 were about Clinton's e-mail leaks. A total of 62 of 75 tweets about Trump were negative, while 13 were neutral. In terms of subjects, 31 were about Trump's personality, 3 were on his policies, 6 are related to the election process. Robert De Niro's statements about Trump appear to be some of the reference points in negative tweets.

Figure 2 shows the Turkish social network and portrays three important points. First and foremost, the major players—illustrated by larger nodes—are predominantly non-Turkish news resources, including Hillary Clinton's official account. Turkish twitter users rehashed foreign news items and presented them into their national digital sphere. Second, there is very limited interaction among different modularity groups shown by colors. The larger modularity groups, ones that include a higher number of members, focus on less controversial topics. Third, parody accounts, such as *sputnik_not* and *DarthPutinKGB*, are welcomed by Turkish users. Given the country's
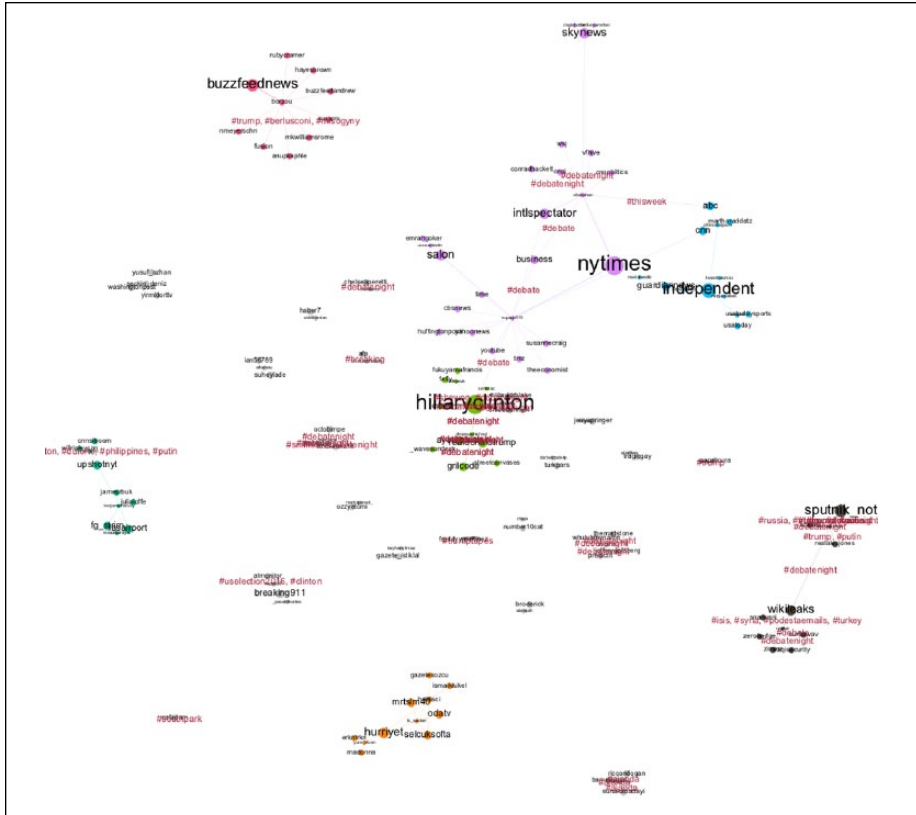
Figure 2. Social Network Analysis Results for the Turkey Data Set.

embracement of humor as a political activism tool in its recent history (Dağtas 2013), it is not unexpected to observe a similar approach.

Canadian Twitter users were more actively engaged with tweets about Hillary Clinton (Table 3) with 101 out of 200 tweets, while only 63 tweets were on Donald Trump, 10 on both, and 27 of them on the issues other than the personality or campaigns of these candidates. Tweets regarding both candidates were dominantly positive (seven positive, three negative tweets), while tweets about Hillary Clinton were mostly negative and sent by self-defined Trump campaigners or supporters. Most of the negative tweets about Clinton referred to her time as the Secretary of State, and the e-mail scandal that was going. The debate on Weiner scandal seemed to be one of important factors lying under negative Clinton tweets. Several users, and tweets, accused Clinton of being a pathological liar. On the Trump front, negative tweets included sexual harassment allegations and racism. It should be noted that a number of accounts were deactivated after the elections even though their high levels of activity in September and October 2016.

Table 3. Discourse Analysis Results for Canada Data Set.

Canada	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Clinton	10	23	68	101
Trump	9	10	44	63
Both		5	5	10
None				27
Total	19	38	117	

Figure 3. Social Network Analysis Results for Canada Data Set.

Figure 3 shows the network structure for Canada. Similar to the previous networks, there is limited interactions between different modularity groups. For instance, *wikileaks*, *darren32895386*, and *Danielleduches* interacted with each other in our dyadic analysis, while *JamesToupin* and *pqpolitics*—who were important content producers in terms of negative tweets about Trump did not have a direct connection. Wikileaks, once again,

Table 4. Discourse Analysis Results for Venezuela Data Set.

Venezuela	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Clinton	4	11	14	29
Trump	1	80	70	151
Both		17	2	19
None				
Total	5	108	86	108

was an important resource. Compared with Turkey and the United Kingdom, Canadian audiences positioned Wikileaks in a more prominent position.

The last country included in our study, Venezuela, was more interested in Donald Trump with 151 tweets, while Hillary Clinton had 29 tweets (Table 4). However, 19 tweets were relevant to both candidates, while 1 was related to issues other than the personality or campaigns of these candidates. Tweets regarding both candidates are mostly neutral with 17 neutrals and only 2 negatives. Tweets about Hillary Clinton mostly ranged from negative to neutral. Most of the negative tweets about Clinton referred to her track record at the State Department and the e-mail leaks. Most of the neutral news about her were tweeted through local or international news agencies without further comments included by users. However, 70 of 151 tweets about Trump were negative, while 80 were neutral and only 1 of them was positive. While most of the negative tweets refer to Osmel Sousa's desire of Trump's presidency some of the negative tweets about Trump included references to sexual harassment allegations. Meanwhile tweets referring to both candidates were dominantly neutral.

The Venezuelan network is particularly uncrowded with a few important actors and modularity groups (Figure 4). The most important actor, *lucioquincioc*, is a self-proclaimed citizen journalist that transfer content from English resources, such as *The New York Times* and *The Economist*, to the Spanish-speaking Venezuelan part. Glenn Greenwald *(ggreenwald)* was also identified as an influential user. Greenwald is a reporter that is best known for his work on unveiling the American and British global surveillance programs. Other local journalists, such as Nelson Bocaranda Sardi *(nelsonbocaranda)* and Miguel Otero *(miguelhotero)*, also held prominent positions in the network structure and in their respective modularity groups.

The analysis summarized in this section describe the digital chatter on presidential elections. To understand the impacts of this particular megaevent on American nation brands, we looked at who was sharing what type of content in different countries. The next section concludes our study with a discussion of our findings.

Discussion and Conclusion: Implications for Nation Brands

The findings of case descriptions highlight five important point, all of which are relevant to how hosting this particular megaevent might affect the American national

Figure 4. Social Network Analysis Results for Venezuela Data Set.

brand. Before moving onto the discussion, it should be noted that this study is not without its limitations. First of all, our criteria for case selection—albeit appropriate for increasing between-case variation were limited by technical, logistical, and linguistic capabilities. Future research could and should include additional case countries and digital platforms in their design. Second, even though gender was not one of the variables we were interested in, we realized that most negative content about Hillary Clinton—with virtually all negative content about her from Venezuela—were coming from male users. Introducing additional variables, including but not limited to gender, race, age, and education, might yield more illustrative results.

The first cross-case finding was on the relation between public opinion and incumbency. The countries with more favorable public opinion toward the United Kingdom and Canada, the United States tweeted more about Hillary Clinton, the candidate of the incumbent party, while Turkey and Venezuela preferred to discuss Donald Trump. However, the reactions toward both candidates were mainly negative, except for Venezuela. Even though the cone of coverage does not change, the attention paid to candidates seems to be influenced by existing public attitude.

Second, new media makes material accessible to a wider audience but there is still the need for gatekeepers. Both in Venezuela and Turkey, content from American

Table 5. Theme Distributions by Country.

Themes	UK	Canada	Venezuela	Turkey
Trump's policies or personality	21	20	126	35
Clinton's policies, health, or personality	16	19	9	31
E-mail scandal	33	31	6	12
Sexual harassment	8	5	10	6
Other	122	125	49	116

sources were shared. However, gatekeepers included comments in Spanish and Turkish to increase their accessibility to a larger number of people.

Related with the second point, the local communities tend to find similarities between their domestic agenda and the American elections. From the use of humor in the Turkish case to the dominant role of Brexit hashtag in the British sphere, individuals make use of local events and political traditions to understand American elections.

Fourth, we witnessed the use of bots and disposable accounts in our analysis. In various instances, when we wanted to further investigate an influential user or a tweet that was widely shared by other users, we realized that the accounts were deactivated. We also labelled a number of accounts as possible bots. At least in one case, a bot account was the most active account.

Last, all four networks were sparse network. The interactions across modularity groups were almost nonexistent. Moreover, the interactions within a group were mostly not repeated. In other words, an interaction between two users was not repeated. Therefore, instead of talking with each other, users were talking at each other. They were using same hashtags and discussing the same topics. But they were not engaging in meaningful conversations with each other.

Yet what does this all mean for the American brand? In terms of primary communication, there seems to be two potential pitfalls. First of all, the attitude toward the candidates was largely negative. Foreign users question the motives and attitudes of the candidates. Second, the election results might create further issues. When Internet-savvy users from over 130 countries casted their votes on Global Vote, Hillary Clinton received 52%, followed by Jill Stein at 19%, while Donald Trump remained at 14% (The Good Country, 2017). Global Vote is a digital project that is based on voluntary expression of interest, but, observing a third-party candidate earning more votes than the president elect is an illustration of how foreign audiences might have completely different expectations from the American president than the American citizens. The act of presidential campaigning has the potential to be detrimental to American brand.

In terms of secondary communication, the themes discussed across all four countries were in line with the official rhetoric of campaigns (cf. Table 5). However, these themes—together with the negative tone of coverage—is closer to negative ad campaigns. Moreover, none of these themes has the potential to generate desirable social, economic, or political impacts.

    The prominent positions of accounts, not necessarily in line with government poli-cies, such as Wikileaks, as well as the role of gatekeepers underline the importance of tertiary communication. All four networks had modularity groups that did not interact with the official resources. In other words, content creation happens without the input coming from official sources. Unlike official sources, mainstream media organizations and political campaigners were effective on users. While content produced by main-stream media seemed to set agenda for users in those four countries, astroturfers or campaigners seem to have the ability to create speculative and polarizing content that is influential. Therefore, we cannot talk about a grassroots effect in tweets from those four countries. Especially in terms of e-mail scandal, the discourse get radicalized and campaigners get aggressive.

    Succinctly stated, in today's global economy and political arena, nation brands should be seen as a strategic resources. New media makes it possible for international audiences to actively involve in domestic policy issues and establish their own percep-tions of these brands. For the United States, the presidential election gathers a high level of interest, similar to a megaevent. Yet as our analysis of digital chatter surround-ing the 2016 presidential elections demonstrate, such a high-level interest might not be beneficial for the American brand.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

Notes

1. Further information about the movement can be found at https://www.tellamericaitsgreat.com/
2. Tweet is available at https://twitter.com/MoDeutschmann/status/744885581847666688/
3. Tweet is available at https://twitter.com/JoPresta/status/746239696901025794/
4. Late-night comedy shows have been and are being exported to non-American television channels. However, compared with the outreach of Hollywood movies, or to their own outreach on social media, the export was only minimally influential in expanding the audience.
5. Given the recent debates on foreign infringement in the presidential elections, we find it obligatory to once again explicitly state that such accusations are not within the scope of our research. We are solely interested in communicative aspects of the elections, and in how the elections can change the way United States is perceived internationally.
6. We initially focused on the past 8 weeks leading to the elections. However, our preliminary analysis on that particular data set revealed that tweets sent in November 2016 were sent by users that were not necessarily involved in the discussions earlier during the election cycle and did not include any new material. Consequently, we decided to limit our research to the months of September and October.

7. Astroturfer is a name given to an account that, on the surface, looks like an unaffiliated individual user but is in fact supported by an organization. Astroturfing is the practice of hiding the true affiliation of the users.

8. See http://truthy.indiana.edu/botornot/?sn=Juliet777777/

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