Make Rhetoric Great Again: Donald Trump's communication strategies during the presidential elections of 2016

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MAKE RHETORIC GREAT AGAIN: DONALD TRUMP'S COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES DURING THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS OF 2016

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Sommaire

Prelude

On 8th November 2016, the businessman Donald John Trump, also known as the former executive producer and host of the reality show *The Apprentice*, won the American presidential elections.

However, when he first announced his candidacy in June 2015, he was met with a lot of skepticism and even mockery. The man who later waged a war on what he repeatedly called "fake news" had to face a cold reception from the news media. Not only was he referred to as a "clown" by the *Daily News*, but he has also been continuously undermined by *MSNBC* reporters. Moreover, a few *CNN* hosts laughed openly at him while commenting on his decision to run as president.[1] Similarly, Donald Trump was distrusted by some members of his own political party, who created the "Stop Trump Movement" for fear that his candidacy would damage the Republican image.

During the entire presidential campaign, Donald Trump has been at the heart of heated debates regarding many politically incorrect comments he made. Such comments include a statement he made on ISIS according to which he would "bomb the shit out of them"[2] but also the allegation that Mexicans are "rapists"[3] and of course his famous comment about beautiful women he "grab(s) by the pussy".[4] Trump's polarizing affirmations have brought the candidate much criticism during his campaign, particularly from immigrant groups, feminist movements and the media. Finally, very few people thought that Donald Trump had a chance of winning the elections according to the *New York Times* presidential poll.[5]

Despite this apparent unpopularity, as early as the year 2015 one man predicted that Donald Trump would win the elections. This man was Scott Adams, better known as the creator of the popular comic strip Dilbert. Far from being a political analyst or even a Trump supporter, Mr. Adams looked into the candidate's power of persuasion and charisma, and he concluded that the businessman would become the 45th President of the United States. The rest is history. How could a man so provocative in his statements, who had so little knowledge in politics and who had a program built on the idea of erecting a wall between Mexico and the United States, how could such a candidate become one of the most important politician in the world? According to Scott Adams' book *Win Bigly, Persuasion in a World Where Facts Don't Matter,*[6] the businessman's success rested mostly on his power of persuasion and his understanding of the

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[1] Youtube, "Flashback: Journalists Mocked Trump's Announcement as a Joke."
[2] Youtube, "Donald Trump on ISIS - 'I would bomb the SHIT out of 'em!'"
[3] Youtube, "Donald Trump doubles down on calling Mexican's rapis."
[4] Youtube, "Trump defends crude language from 2005 as 'locker room' talk ."
[5] Katz, "Who Will Be President?"
[6] Adams, *Win Bigly, Persuasion in a World Where Facts Don't Matter,* 5.

human mind. As societies of the world are growing increasingly interconnected, the human ability to communicate efficiently with peers has become of the major challenges of the 21th century, but could it change the very nature of politics as we know it? Donald Trump's journey in the elections has been quite unique and the methods he employed were unconventional too. In the end, will he make history as a mere anomaly in the American political landscape or will he be remembered as a pioneer who recognized and exploited an emerging paradigm in the population's relationship with power? In short, did Donald Trump become President out of sheer luck or did he conquer the masses thanks to an elaborate style of communication? In the course of our work, we will address that particular question.

As the Republican candidate's popularity grew in America, several experts and reporters looked into specific aspects of Trump's communication to account for his success. Our work will consist of a synthesis of their conclusions supported by our own commentaries and critics. The first chapter will provide a discussion of a few scientific concepts related to charisma, defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as "the ability to attract the attention and admiration of others and to be seen as a leader"[7] and rhetoric, the art of persuading an audience. While Chapter 2 will focus on the non-verbal aspects of Trump's communication, the third will take a look at the linguistic dimension of his speeches. In Chapter 4, we will leave our guiding thread aside momentarily to engage with some key strategies of his communication which, although relevant to our analysis, are more peripheral. Then, in Chapter 5, we will reflect upon the businessman's ambivalent relationship with the media, he who opposed it while greatly benefiting from the free publicity it has provided him with. Having all these elements in mind, we will have enough information to come to a conclusion and answer our initial question.

At the time of writing, President Trump has already announced he would run again for the 2020 elections and we can speculate that his campaign will be similar to the one he led in 2015-2016. However, most of the extracts and examples studied will cover a time span beginning with the businessman's official announcement of his candidacy on 16th June 2015 and ending on the date of his nomination on 8th November 2016. Indeed, the presidential campaign was the period of time he had to rely most on his power of persuasion; therefore it will provide us with more potential instances to analyze. That being said, the vast majority of the features we will study still characterized his communication after he became President; therefore we will not cast aside the several examples we will encounter of Donald Trump as the leader of the country.

This work will be written in American English for the sole purpose of facilitating the insertion and comprehension of Trump's oral and written production. The few extracts borrowed from French articles will systematically be translated or paraphrased so as to make their insertion more fluid. Our audience being polyglot, we will make sure to insert said references in their original version as well. Although this thesis could be read as a self-development book on persuasion skills, it is

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[7] Cambridge Dictionary, "Charisma."

primarily designed as an academic conversation between experts of various fields related to communication, ranging from classic rhetoricians to modern political theorists, through philosophers, reporters and even one hypnotist, namely Scott Adams. The bibliography is rich in extracts taken from Youtube because this platform offered many instances of the characteristics we will present in our work. Moreover, it will give the readers the opportunity to identify themselves the traits we have analyzed in Trump's speeches and debates. It should be noted that our work includes more references to journalistic articles than academic sources, such as canonic books or journals. The reason for this is that a significant part of this thesis is devoted to the relationship between Donald Trump and news media. As we will confirm later, much of his ability to influence voters came from the way he used news and social media to his advantage. Journalistic resources offered us a variety of opinions with regard to the businessman, which we then synthesized and linked with classic theories of rhetoric.

We will deliberately set aside the content of Donald Trump's campaign program, as well as the economic and political situation of the United States at the time of the elections, so as to focus on communication per se. Obviously, we will have to mention a few of his policies but we will always do it with one purpose in mind: analyze how it defines his communication and comment on the desired effect it can have on the audience. Finally, this work will deal exclusively with matters of rhetoric and persuasion techniques and not dialectic; an important distinction to make so as to understand our frame of reference.

According to J. Anthony Blair, co-founder of the Centre for Research in Reasoning, Argumentation, and Rhetoric, the main difference between the two notions is that "rhetoric is the theory of arguments in speeches, dialectics the theory of arguments in conversations."[8]

Therefore, dialectic involves a dialogue between two people with all the counterarguments it implies, while rhetoric is typically uninterrupted. Although the examples we will take into account sometimes derive from debates, in which a monitor frequently interrupts the speaker and other candidates are free to intervene, the instances are more akin to rhetoric in that they aim at influencing large audiences.

As blogger Shanti Rao explained, the difference between speeches and conversations implies both a change in the nature of communication and the type of audience it involves. Whereas dialectic describes an active situation in which the speaker and the listener collaborate to reach truth through a series of logical arguments in a constant back and forth, rhetoric is a matter of *influence* of a speaker on his audience.[9] In the field of politics, it is the assent of the whole audience that is pursued, not a single interlocutor, and this approval does not depend merely on logical and philosophical arguments. To have an influence on his audience, to effectively have an impact on

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[8] Blair, "Rhetoric, Dialectic, and Logic as Related to Argument," 148.
[9] The Difference Between.net, "The Difference Between Rhetoric and Dialectic."

the formation of its opinion and behavior, the politician can also rely on his own credibility regarding a given subject or appeal to the emotions of the listeners. According to the Greek philosopher Aristotle, the appeal to logic, emotions and the credibility of the speaker forms a triumvirate of arguments that he named respectively *logos*, *pathos* and *ethos*.[10] The latter provides us with our first tool of analysis of Donald Trump's rhetoric.

Chapter 1: Theories of Rhetoric and Charismatic Leadership

1.1 Aristotle's triumvirate: Logos, Pathos and Ethos

Professor Anthony F. Arrigo of the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth wrote an article in which he studied Trump's rhetoric in the light of Aristotle's theories on rhetoric. According to the Greek philosopher, detailed logical arguments such as facts, documents and reasoning fell within the category of *logos*.[11] Aristotle believed such arguments were insufficient to persuade an audience. In other words, a speaker also needed to rely on his credibility, or *ethos*, and appeal to the emotions of the listeners, or *pathos*; two strategies Donald Trump excelled at. Credibility, like beauty, lies in the eyes of the beholder; it is not a universal trait but rather the perception of a particular audience regarding the degree of the speaker's trustworthiness.[12] To be credible to the public, the orator has "to appear to have the audience's best interest in mind by sharing and affirming their desires and prejudices, and understanding and amplifying their cultural values."[13] According to Michel Meyer, a Belgian philosopher and teacher at the University of Brussels, the notion of *ethos* is also to be linked to the trust that arises from the degree of authority and expertise the speaker possesses.[14] However, it should be noted that this degree of authority can be either widely acknowledged, such as is the case with an expert addressing an issue that is related to his domain of predilection, or perceived. Prior to his election as President, Donald Trump had no experience in politics but he managed to persuade a significant portion of American voters that he had authority on the running of the country. As we will see in the next section, he did so by diminishing his rivals' credibility to make his own shine in contrast while also insisting on the fact that he was an allegedly competent person in a wide variety of domains.

Before applying the classical theories of rhetoric to Trump's communication, an important clarification needs to be made. Traditionally, rhetoric is seen as "the art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing, especially the exploitation of figures of speech and other compositional techniques."[15] However, in our work we oppose the view according which persuasion is limited to

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[10] Arrigo, "What Aristotle can teach us about Trump's rhetoric."
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Meyer, "Aristotle's Rhetoric", 249-252.
[15] Oxford Dictionary, "Rhetoric."

the oral and written production only. Indeed, other elements such as non-verbal communication and offensive nicknames can function as arguments in that they contribute to sway an audience. Although Aristotle used the notion of *pathos* to describe certain types of oral and written arguments, we will also apply it to the study of Trump's non-verbal communication in Chapter 2. Similarly, the Republican's *ethos* did not depended solely on the content of his speeches, which is why we will take into consideration a plurality of other factors such as his dressing style and the way he addresses his detractors.

When President Trump ranted on Twitter against the "fake news media", which he called "the absolute Enemy of the People and our Country itself", (Donald J. Trump, March 19, 2019) he did not provide any scientific evidence that could prove his point but he affirmed a prejudice some Americans shared: that the media lied to the people. The businessman, who did not wait for the presidential campaign to start using Twitter, infamously claimed in 2012 that "the concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive." (Donald Trump, November 6, 2012) Once again, no scientific evidence supported this statement but the message it conveyed was potent to the people who valued the American manufacture industry and national interests. Similarly, Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania were among the 206 counties in America that voted for Obama in 2012, but they flipped to Trump in 2016, according to a short documentary produced by Youtube channel Learn Something.[16] The film pointed out that what these five Mid-West counties had in common was that the manufacture industry, particularly the auto-mobile industry, had suffered tremendously since the 2008 recession. For instance, 10 major General Motor facilities in Michigan and Ohio were closed down after 2009 and many people found themselves jobless, the commentator explained. Donald Trump gained credibility in these counties because his campaign focused on sanctions to prevent industries from delocalizing to another country as well as job creation. Therefore, his policies and they way he addressed the audience with passion when he referred to the latter issues reflected his public's concerns as well as their cultural values. In other words, his communication in this particular instance rested heavily on *ethos* and *pathos* arguments.

According to Professor Anthony F. Arrigo, Trump's particularity was that, unlike other politicians who often "pivot[ed] from a position that ha[d] earned them intense loyalty from a small group to a position they think will resonate with a larger group in order to get more supporters", the Republican candidate focused almost exclusively on his core supporters.[17] Because he established stronger bonds with his core public than someone with a more moderate message would, Professor Arrigo added, the businessman unleashed passions from both his fans and his detractors.

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[16] Youtube, "Why Trump Won the Election - (ANALYSIS) Learn Something."
[17] Arrigo, "What Aristotle can teach us about Trump's rhetoric."

Over the course of the presidential election, Donald Trump has repeatedly appealed to his audience's passions and emotions, an argumentation that correspond to Aristotle's *pathos*. One particular emotion he often capitalized on was anger. For instance, the candidate waged a war against the American establishment, which he criticized on many occasions. After former American President Barack Obama stated Trump was not fit to succeed him, the businessman notably responded: "he's been weak, he's been ineffective."[18] Similarly, in 2015 the man tackled Hillary Clinton by claiming she was "the worst Secretary of State in the history of the United States",[19] a comment he has made several times during his campaign. During a news conference in the White House, it was brought to the attention of President Trump that his provocative statements may have divided the American people. The comment alluded to the businessman's allegation that "Americans need[ed]to fear Democrats" for they would "unleash a wave of violent crime that [would] endanger families everywhere."[20] In this case, the leader played on people's fears and anxieties, suggesting that because Democrats did not take crime seriously enough it could lead to violence and even murders. If we read this sentence with a logos filter, what Trump claimed was that the American people should not have voted for a Republican candidate because he or she would not address crime properly. However, his dramatic tone combined with the alleged catastrophe a Democrat's nomination would represent was more convincing since it appealed to the audience's emotions. (cfr video, min 3:01 - 3:38)

During the same conference, the President vehemently criticized a *CNN* reporter who wished to address issues that made the American leader uncomfortable. Trump grew impatient with the reporter and he declared that any media reporting "fake news" like CNN was "the enemy of the people."[21] Again, rather than letting the journalist make him look bad in front of the millions of people who followed the event on Youtube, the leader invoked the wrath of the common people against its alleged nemesis, the news media. What is striking here is that not only did he appeal to the population's emotions but he also did this mainly to discredit his opponent, thus increasing his own in contrast.

With his Twitter account, Donald Trump found an adapted format to express his anger and relay it to millions of people in one click. His angry outbursts have involved, inter alia, former Vice President Joe Biden, the FBI, the Obama Administration, Hillary Clinton, the "fake news" media, Iranian President Rouhani, former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, etc[22]. Trump's rhetoric appeared to be infused with the Aristotelian principle according which "the hearer always sympathizes with one who speaks emotionally, even though he really says nothing."[23] As we will

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[18] BBC News, "Trump hits back at 'disastrous' Obama."
[19] Johnson, "Donald Trump Trashes Hillary Clinton, Calls Her 'the Worst Secretary of State in the History of the United States.'"
[20] Youtube, "Angry Donald Trump clashes with CNN reporters at news conference."
[21] Ibid.
[22] Martin, "Trump's best tweets of 2018."
[23] Arrigo, "What Aristotle can teach us about Trump's rhetoric."

see in , not only were the messages he conveyed emotional but they were also accentuated by his expressive body language.

In conclusion of this section, we have seen how the Greek philosopher Aristotle's notions of *logos, pathos* and *ethos* could be applied to describe Trump's rhetoric. He usually discarded arguments based on logic, facts and numbers to focus on his own credibility or appeal to his audience's emotions. Firstly, he derived his credibility from his ability to share his public's desires and prejudices as well as understanding their cultural value; a strategy that was particularly successful on his core supporters. He managed to do that by antagonizing the news media and by focusing his campaign on job creation in the counties that were deeply impacted by the 2008 recession. Secondly, he frequently appealed to the audience's anger and fears, which he then redirected towards his own enemies: the establishment, the "fake news" media, his Democrat opponents, illegal immigrants,... Trump was quite inventive when it came to personally attack an enemy, as we will see in the next section.

1.2 Arthur Schopenhauer and Chaïm Perelman: argumentum ad hominem and ad personam

Over the course of the elections, it has become one of Donald Trump's signature moves to address his political rivals with defamatory nicknames. Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was nicknamed "Crooked Hillary," Texas Senator Ted Cruz was renamed "Lyin' Ted," Republican candidate Jeb Bush was called "Low-Energy Jeb" and the list goes on. Although many critics deemed his mocking aliases beneath the office of the Presidency, Scott Adams, the man who predicted Trump's victory as early as 2015, considered these nicknames to be efficient persuasion tools that helped him discard the other candidates. In this section, we will see how nicknames functioned as rhetorical arguments in Trump's communication during the election. Moreover, we will distinguish nicknames that are meant to undermine an opponent's credibility from the ones that are meant to attack a rival's image or ego. These types of nicknames correspond to different rhetorical categories respectively known as *argumentum ad hominem* and *argumentum ad personam.* While both categories attack the source of information rather than the substance of the matter, the former is arguably more potent in the context of the presidential elections for it undermines the reliability of another candidate whereas the latter is similar to a mere name-calling.[24]

According to Adams, there are five factors that contribute to the power of what the author called a *linguistic kill shot*: its peculiarity, its compatibility with the target, its potential for future confirmation bias, its ability to make the speaker's credibility shine in contrast and what he

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[24] Martini, "Ad Hominem Arguments, Rhetoric, and Science Communication," 151-161.

referred to as the "High-Ground Maneuver" factor.[25] In other words, a nickname is likely to damage the target's image if the phrase used is somehow uncommon in the context of a presidential campaign, if it fits the candidate visually, if the nickname may be supported by evidence in the future, if it reduces the contrast between its creator's credibility and that of his opponent and if the flaw highlighted by the insult can make the target look irrelevant to the Presidency.

For instance, during a heated debate between candidate Donald Trump and Senator Marco Rubio, he called the senator "Little Marco."[26] This was a surprising choice of words from Trump for the adjective is rarely used to describe a politician. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word means "small" in theory but in practice it is often used "to convey an appealing diminutiveness or condescending attitude."[27] Indeed, height is often unconsciously equated with power, with the tall prevailing on the small. This connotation can notably be observed in the English language, in which "to look up to someone" conveys admiration while "to look down on someone" means to feel superior to said person. By calling him "Little Marco," the future President demonstrated that he did not take him seriously. Trump's sense of superiority was even more apparent when we consider that he practically never looked at his opponent during this very debate. It was as if he deemed him an unworthy opponent, whereas during the final debate between Trump and Democrat nominee Hillary Clinton, he regularly stared at her in a challenging manner. Although the Senator is not particularly short, Trump is taller than him and to Scott Adams "That's all that mattered. Anytime you saw them standing together you were reminded of the nickname."[28] Not only did the adjective highlight the difference of height between the two candidates, but it also stressed the age difference. Donald Trump is twenty-five years older than Marco Rubio; therefore the nickname he used on the Senator could also be a reference to his relative inexperience of life. This *linguistic kill shot* was designed to stick on him because of his young looking face; it was visually compatible with the target, Adams noticed. Rather than rejecting the nickname or letting it slid, Rubio stuttered briefly and then called Trump "Big Don," which undermined his image even more because it confirmed that there was a power struggle between the two men and that "Big Don" was on to. Judging by the footage of this event, we can see that Senator Rubio called Trump "Big Don" to mock his own nickname but we can also observe how the businessman's remark destabilized his rival. Although it could appear that this particular nickname was detrimental to Rubio's image only, it questioned his ability as a potential leader of the country above all things for it pointed out his alleged inferiority and inexperience. For all the reasons above, we argue that the nickname "Little Marco" functioned as an *argumentum ad hominem,* an attack on his credibility.

Throughout the campaign, Donald Trump has used insulting nicknames as political weapons and has continuously perfected his craft. Once a rival of his in the race for Presidency, Texas Senator Ted Cruz has repeatedly been referred to as "Lyin' Ted" by Trump. However, after his election as President he was interviewed some time before a rally held by the Senator in Houston and he clearly had changed his mind about Cruz. "To me he's not lying Ted anymore, he's beautiful Ted. Texas, I call him Texas Ted [...] I like him a lot. I actually like him a lot," he stated *to The Washington Post* journalists on 22th October 2018.[29] Unfortunately for Ted Cruz, the nickname "Lyin' Ted" was so well-designed that it stuck to him to the point that Democrat candidate for the 2020 American presidential elections Beto O'Rourke affirmed during a debate that Ted Cruz was dishonest and that it was the reason why President Trump called him "Lying Ted."[30] It should also be noted that the *Politifact Texas* website presents a series of all the false statements involving Ted Cruz and debunks them one by one.[31] With this nickname, Trump damaged the senator's image and credibility in the long run and this is exactly what he intended to do. Knowing that he had little credibility to the general public because of his lack of experience in politics and his status of outsider, the future President undermined the credibility of all of his opponents so as to make his own less of a handicap. Indeed, a list of the various nicknames he used against the people he disliked can be found on a Wikipedia page that we will reference in our bibliography.[32] The list of personalities he has nicknamed include many political figures and foreign leaders but also actors, chief executives and some organizations such as *CNN*. As we can see, the mocking aliases became a political weapon in Donald Trump's hands. In this case, the nickname clearly aimed at attacking the senator's credibility and therefore it functioned as an *argumentum ad hominem.* According to Scott Adams, the success of Senator Cruz's nickname can be explained by its originality to a certain extent. It is not uncommon that politicians accuse one another of lying on specific subjects, but to call Cruz "Lyin' Ted" implied that he was a compulsive deceiver, which as a candidate for the Presidency was almost a death sentence.[33] To the famous cartoonist, even the spelling of the word *Lyin'* was thought strategically.

> But Trump apparently wanted to squeeze some extra juice from the word "lying" and make his branding stand out. So he insisted that Lyin' Ted was the proper spelling, not Lying Ted. This was good branding. It was different from anything you have seen in politics and it gave you a reason to pause and wonder why it mattered if the spelling was "lyin'" or "lying". It did matter, but only because you stopped and wondered about it. This is an engineered mental pause for persuasion. Trump wants you to stop and think about his choice of "lyin'" over "lying". The fact that you spend time thinking about it helps you remember the name. it also uses a trick called "making you think past the sale". In this case the sale is

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29 Kim & Sonmez, "Trump and 'Beautiful Ted' Cruz embrace at Texas rally."

30 Global News, "'That's why the President called him lying Ted': Beto O'Rourke rebuttal Ted Cruz during debate."

31 Politifact Texas, "All False statements involving Ted Cruz."

32 Wikipedia, "List of nicknames used by Donald Trump."

33 Adams, *Win Bigly: Persuasion in a World Where Facts Don't Matter,* p164.

the idea that Ted Cruz lies. You end up accidentally accepting the idea because you spend time thinking about the best way to write "lyin'". That's strong persuasion engineering.[34]

Adams also highlighted that the phrase had high potential for confirmation bias because Ted Cruz, as a candidate in the presidential race, was bound to lie sooner or later. If the senator lied to his audience, which he did on several occasions according to *Politifact Texas*, he would confirm that he was indeed dishonest and therefore could not be trusted with the position of President of the United States. Mr. Adams added that the nickname matched Ted Cruz's physical appearance for he had "an unfortunate beady-eyed-liar look" but we will reject this latter claim because of its subjectivity. Indeed, whereas someone like Senator Marco Rubio can be described as young-looking because of his light facial features and smooth skin, there is no consensus on what a typical liar's face looks like. While the pathological liar could be imagined as seducing and manipulative like *How I Met Your Mother*'s fictional character Barney Stinson or the famous Don Juan, other people might as well picture fallen politicians such as Richard Nixon or Bill Clinton, who both have lied during their mandate and have suffered the consequences of their actions.

As Adams explained in his book, Donald Trump adopted a similar strategy against Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton when he called her "Crooked Hillary" after she had been investigated by the FBI. At the time she was the United States Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton used her family's private email server for official communication rather than using State Department email accounts maintained on secure federal servers, which violated State protocols and procedures.[35] The nickname was particularly powerful considering that, according to a *NBC News* poll published on 16th August 2016, only 11% of Americans believed she was trustworthy.[36] To put things into perspective, *The Washington Post* declared with humor that more American voters believed in the existence of Bigfoot (14%) than on the probability of Clinton telling the truth. Once again, with this nickname Donald Trump conveyed a message that was detrimental to his opponent's credibility by suggesting she was dishonest and should not be trusted. Therefore, we are dealing with yet another *argumentum ad hominem*.

Shortly before the presidential elections, a scandal involving Donald Trump and adult film actress Stormy Daniels arose. She claimed they had had an affair in 2006 and after his personal lawyer Michael Cohen denied the existence of said affair the Republican candidate called the actress: "Horseface."[37] It is improbable that the nickname stick on Stormy Daniels the way "Lyin' Ted" stuck to Senator Ted Cruz or "Crooked Hillary" to Clinton for it possessed none of the characteristics that make a good *linguistic kill shot*. Since the nickname was used outside of the field of politics it lost its originality and was not visually compatible to the target since her

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[34] Ibid.
[35] Knickerbocker, "Are Hillary Clinton's e-mails scandal or mere controversy? New evidence."
[36] Thiessen, "Hillary Clinton, who tells dreadful lies."
[37] Stableford, "Trump coins a new nickname for Stormy Daniels after he wins in court."

"ugliness" was both subjective and quite unlikely to fit a woman who pursued a career in pornography. In addition to that, the phrase had no potential for future confirmation since it depended on the look of the actress and not her behaviour. Finally, the nickname did not increase Trump's credibility by contrast. The nickname he gave Daniels belongs to a rhetorical category that German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer called *ad personam* argument,[38] as opposed to the *ad hominem* Trump usually seemed more fond of. Whereas *ad hominem* arguments undermine the opponent's credibility, the *ad personam* is merely a name-calling based on subjective features such as the other's look or gender.

In the context of the presidential elections, Trump knew he would benefit more from attacking his opponents' reliability than merely tarnishing their image, which is why he favoured *ad hominem* arguments. For instance, in July 2018, President Trump called senior Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren "Pocahontas" after she had claimed to have Native American blood.[39] Not only was the nickname peculiar and original but it was also very visual in the sense that the senator did not come across as a Native American person. The figure of Pocahontas, as she is pictured in the Walt Disney movie, corresponds to the stereotypical representation of a Native American woman: long black hair, a tribal tattoo on the arm, young Asian traits, etc. Elizabeth Warren, as a sixty-nine-year-old Caucasian woman with short blond hair and blue eyes, shared no external features with this ideal of the Native American people. Therefore, Trump's nickname was ironical. By calling her "Pocahontas" he insinuated that she was not to be taken seriously as a potential rival for the 2020 presidential elections. Rather than choosing a nickname that was visually compatible with Warren, he decided to highlight the silliness of her claim by contrasting her physical appearance to a figure that embodied the collective representation of the prototypical Native American person. The Internet loved it and many memes[40] followed this event, most of which represented the Senator with Amerindian attributes such as a feather headdress on her head or an arrow case in her back. Later, Senator Elizabeth Warren fell into the trap that Trump set for her. She took a DNA test to prove she had Native American ancestry but the situation backfired at her. Indeed, in an article entitled "What Elizabeth Warren Keeps Getting Wrong About DNA Tests and Native American Heritage", political writer Mari Uyehara affirmed that "jokes about her fractional Native American ancestry, estimated at anywhere from 1/64th to much lower, abounded."[41] In other words, her Amerindian lineage was too insignificant to be taken seriously and the test damaged her credibility more than it improved it. In addition, the Senator has had to apologize privately to a leader of the Cherokee Nation after she angered some tribal leaders who considered that "using

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[38] Arthur Schopenhauer, "The Art of Being Right," 17.

[39] Higgins, "Trump said he would give $1 million to charity if Elizabeth Warren took a DNA test. Now she wants him to pay up."

[40] The Urban Dictionary defines Internet Memes as "popular quotes, images and real people, which are copied, imitated, and spread all over the internet(s)."

[41] Mari Uyehara, "What Elizabeth Warren Keeps Getting Wrong About DNA Tests and Native American Heritage."

a DNA test to lay claim to any connection to the Cherokee Nation or any tribal nation, even vaguely, is inappropriate and wrong."[42]

Meme illustrating the impact of Trump's nickname on Senator Elizabeth Warren's credibility as politician. (Credit: Monterey Bay Forum)

During the presidential campaign and even after, Donald Trump has made a name for himself into the sphere of American politics by verbally attacking his opponents. He has coined mocking nicknames for his rivals in the race for the Presidency, he has called the media that opposed him "fake news" and has repeatedly taunted television personality Rosie O'Donnell on Twitter since their first altercation in 2006. According to *CNN* reporter Deena Zaru, the latter has become one of Trump's worst enemy, whom he called "a real loser."[43] As we have established, this strategy of attacking a person to invalidate his claims rather than addressing the issue at stake or the substance of the argument put forward is called *argumentum ad hominem.* Because this type of argument avoids the discussion of a given topic, the *ad hominem* is perceived as irrational and fallacious. It is also the second lowest type of argument in a disagreement according to author and essayist Paul Graham's, the first being the *ad personam,* which we will discuss later.[44] If both arguments are situated so low in Graham's hierarchy of disagreement it is because they do not refute the central point of the discussion but rather criticize the opponent, often to silence him or her. It should be noted that in such dynamic the interlocutor is perceived as an enemy, while in other forms of conversation the participants are more akin to collaborators who seek the attainment of truth. While rhetorical arguments usually revolve around logical analogies or causality, the *argumentum ad hominem* and the *argumentum ad personam* are particular in that they focus on the people who take part in the debate rather than the substance of the arguments. Therefore they do not necessarily rely on Aristotle's *logos.* While *ad hominem* arguments undermine the interlocutor's *ethos,* other arguments such as the *ab auctoritate* rely on the *ethos* of the orator himself. If the orator is perceived as competent in the domain of expertise that his

[42] Herndon, "Elizabeth Warren Apologizes to Cherokee Nation for DNA Test."
[43] Zaru, "The Donald Trump-Rosie O'Donnell feud: A timeline."
[44] Wikipedia, "Ad hominem."

speech is concerned with, then his proposal is seen as valid. In both cases, the acceptability of a given thesis depends on the assessment of the person who supports it.
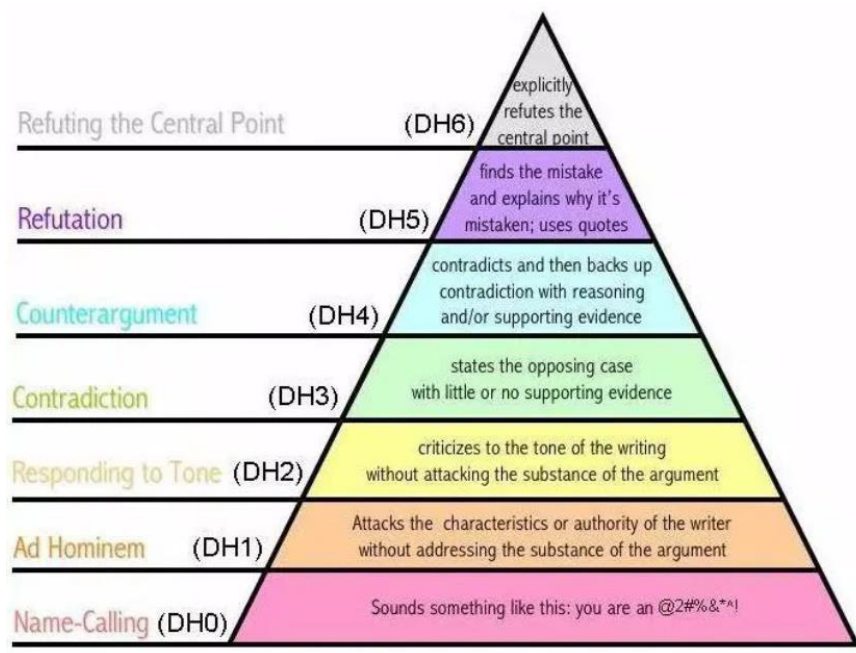
Paul Graham's pyramid of disagreement. The name-calling level corresponds to the argumentum ad personam. (Credit: Wikipedia)

In their book *The New Rhetoric,* Chaim Perelman and Lucille Olbrechts-Tyteca reject the theory advocated by the rationalist paradigm of the Enlightenment according to which argumentation takes place in a depersonalized environment.[45] On the contrary, the authors insist on the impossibility to separate "the claim from the person that makes it." Essentially, whereas the classic and Cartesian rhetoric focuses on the substance of the arguments and their relevance in a debate, Perelman affirms that the theory of argumentation should take into account both the participants and the audience. In our work, we will adopt the views of the postmodern rhetoric tradition, to which Perelman belongs, for it allows us to analyze the *ad hominem* and *ad personam* arguments as strategies of persuasion rather than mere fallacies. Indeed, Donald Trump has often used *ad hominem* arguments throughout the presidential elections as a means to discredit his political opponents with a message that can be summarised by the following formula: "X would be a terrible president because he/she displays Y flaw". For instance, in a political debate with former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, the host of the show stressed the fact that Trump was appreciated by the Republican voters because he was not financed by wealthy donors and he proceeded to quote the businessman: "The 100 million dollars Jeb Bush raised for his campaign make him a puppet for his donors."[46] In this case, the underlying message conveyed by this statement is: "Jeb Bush would

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[45] Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, "The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation."
[46] Youtube, "Donald Trump vs. Jeb Bush Presidential Debate Highlights."

be a terrible president because he represents the wealthy lobbyists and not the people of this country." Trump even increased the contrast with his opponent by claiming that he would not accept the money of anyone during the campaign because he did not want anybody to have some form of control over him "other than the people from this country."[47] Not only did he damage Bush's credibility by pointing at the discrepancy between his rival's behaviour and his implicit claim that he would be a good president but he also highlighted his own virtue as a politician. He achieved a similar result with the nickname he found for Bush, "Low-energy Jeb."[48] In this case, what he criticized in his opponent was not really his lack of vitality but rather his insufficient strength and toughness; he questioned whether Jeb Bush was willing to fight for the Presidency. In the same Republican debate, the former Governor repeatedly attacked the businessman and he interrupted him a few times. His behaviour led Donald Trump to comment with a touch of cynicism: "More energy tonight, I like that."[49] In short, he noticed Jeb Bush was more combative in that debate whereas the former Governor was usually more passive. By calling his Republican rival "Low-energy Jeb," the businessman was implicitly saying that "Jeb Bush would be a terrible president because he was not willing to fight for his country." Therefore, not only did he damage his credibility but he also suggested that he was himself combative and ready to fight for the Presidency.

Very often has Trump used *ad hominem* arguments to criticize the integrity of the people who opposed him in the form of mocking aliases that aimed at tarnishing their *ethos.* "Crooked Hillary" and "Lyin' Ted" are two examples of that strategy but so is calling "fake news" the media that confronted him. That the businessman usually accused his opponents of dishonesty can be explained by the fact that he built much of his campaign on his own transparency and authenticity. With his populist speeches, his disdain for political correctness and the many incendiary tweets he became synonymous with, Donald Trump wanted to be perceived as the politician who said out loud what people were thinking quietly, the vox populi. Therefore he knew his authenticity was an asset he could rely on both to appeal to the masses but also to criticize the other candidates' integrity. The same logic applies to his labelling of Senator Marco Rubio as a little person for, as a 6-feet-3-inches-tall man, Trump knew he would not be ridiculed for his height.

In some cases the line between *ad hominem* and *ad personam* arguments can be thin. Indeed, Trump has repeatedly referred to Democratic candidate Bernie Sanders as "Crazy Bernie." It is yet unclear if the now President believed that Sanders only looked like a crazy person or if he intended to ridicule his policies. In the second scenario, Trump would actually imply that "Bernie Sanders would be a terrible president because he has crazy ideas," which would make it an *ad hominem* argument for it questions his ability to lead. That being said, the Republican often used

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[47] Ibid
[48] Adams, *Win Bigly: Persuasion in a World Where Facts Don't Matter,* p162.
[49] Youtube, "Donald Trump vs. Jeb Bush Presidential Debate Highlights."

the term as an all-purpose word when he coined new nicknames for his opponents. He used the adjective "crazy" to describe various people including former Vice President Joe Biden, Bernie Sanders, CNN Chief White House Correspondent Jim Acosta, former Fox News anchor Megyn Kelly and many more.[50]

In conclusion, although *ad hominem* and *ad personam* arguments are often perceived as invalid and fallacious for they do not address the substance of an issue but rather focus on the other stockholders, we have observed with Donald Trump that they could nonetheless constitute powerful persuasion strategies. As Chaim Perelman argued, it is impossible to separate a claim from the person that makes it, therefore if the speaker's integrity is questioned so are his arguments. During his campaign, the President has had some success in creating unconventional and compatible nicknames for his opponents in the form of *ad hominem* arguments. Some nicknames, such as "Lyin' Ted" or "Crooked Hillary", stuck to their target for a long time because they presented several characteristics of what Scott Adams called a *linguistic kill shot* and others, such as "Horseface", did not for they lacked such characteristics and were examples of *ad personam* arguments. Moreover, a few candidates have worsened the damage done by Trump's labels whether by not addressing it properly in the case of Mr. Rubio who called his rival "Big Don", or by feeling the need to somehow prove oneself like Elizabeth Warren and her DNA test. As Belgian cartoonist Philippe Geluck said through his famous character *Le Chat:* "To be the best sometimes only requires the others to be less good,"[51] and Trump focused his efforts on making the others look "less good." However, *ad hominem* and *ad personam* are usually seen as petty arguments and they should thus be used with caution for they must be combined with some degree of charisma from the orator to be persuasive. The previous concept will be discussed in the next section.

1.3 Max Weber and Arthur Schweitzer: Charismatic Leadership and the New Style

As we previously discussed, when Donald Trump announced his candidacy to the USA elections in 2016, he was mocked by many media outlets. One of the reasons why his credibility was questioned was his lack of experience in politics; he had none. Trump was a businessman involved in the real estate industry and the owner of The Trump Organization in an environment filled with seasoned politicians ranging from governors to senators, and even including a former U.S. Secretary of State. In addition to that, although he often portrayed himself as a successful businessman, six of his companies had gone bankrupt by the time he announced his candidacy.[52] Trump was an outsider in this competition but he was not the only one. The race for the Presidency included Carly Fiorina, CEO of Hewlett-Packard and director of Pediatric

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[50] Wikipedia, "List of nicknames used by Donald Trump."
[51] Ouest France, "Citation Philippe Geluck" (Original version: "Pour être le meilleur, il suffit parfois que les autres soient moins bons.")
[52] Murse, "Why Donald Trump's Companies Went Bankrupt."

Neurosurgeon Ben Carson on the Republican side, as well as Harvard Law professor Lawrence Lessig for the Democrats. Nevertheless the number of votes they gathered during the primaries was insignificant compared to the fourteen million votes Trump received in total. For the sake of comparison, Fiorina gathered 40,577 votes, Carson received 857,009 votes while Lessig had 4 votes.[53] In other words, against all odds, Trump's claim to power appeared legitimate to a majority of American voters and thus he became the new leader of the nation.

According to German sociologist and philosopher Max Weber, some individuals, like Trump arguably, are perceived as natural-born leaders for they display charisma.[54] Weber defined the notion "as a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or exceptional powers or qualities."[55] In his theory, charisma is one of the three different origins of legitimate leadership with traditions and the legal-rational system but in our work we will deliberately ignore both for they are not relevant to an analysis of rhetoric and communication.[56]American political scientist and historian Robert C. Tucker insisted that in Weber's usage, charismatic authority can arise in any type of environment (religious, political, military, etc.) and that it is based on the narrative of the "savior-leader."[57]

> A leader who comes forward in a distressful situation and presents himself or herself in a convincing way to the sufferers as one who can lead them out of their distress by virtue of special personal characteristics or formula for salvation may arouse their intense loyalty and enthusiastic willingness to take the path the leader is pointing out.

The question of whether America was in a distressful situation at the time of the presidential elections is out of the scope of our work. However, we may observe that Donald Trump has continuously depicted the country in a near apocalyptic state. To him, the economy was crumbling, crime and drugs were pouring in the country from Mexico, his predecessors were weak and their international agreements were "the worst deal ever", etc.[58] In this apparent chaos, Trump presented himself as a sort of messiah, the voice of the many people who felt as if they had been cheated by politicians. Trump acted as a sort of spokesperson for what Isabel Sawhill, who is a senior fellow at *The Brookings Institution*, referred to as "the forgotten Americans."[59]The businessman was aware he was an outsider in politics but he decided to convert his uniqueness into an asset and capitalize on the characteristics that made him different from the other candidates. For instance, the real estate mogul was one of the only anti-establishment candidates with Bernie Sanders, in an environment represented by the elites of the nation. Moreover, Trump

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[53] Wikipedia, "2016 United States presidential election."
[54] Epley, "Weber's Theory of Charismatic Leadership: The Case of Muslim Leaders in Contemporary Indonesian Politics," 8.
[55] Ibid. 9.
[56] Ibid. 8.
[57] Ibid.
[58] H. Gordon, "The Worst Deals Ever"
[59] Sawhill, "What the forgotten Americans really want - and how to give it to them."

repeatedly discarded political correctness over the course of the elections. For instance, after being asked whether he wanted to rethink his call to ban Muslims from America, the businessman commented: "we have to stop with political correctness".[60] To him, speaking in that manner "takes too long,"[61] as he claimed during an interview with journalist John Dickerson. This very characteristic of his led him to be at the heart of many controversies such as the scandals following his comment on women he "grab[ed] by the pussy" or on Mexicans who were allegedly rapists. Donald Trump first identified what he viewed as the main problems in America, such as immigration, criminality or unemployment, and then contrasted them with simplistic solutions. To counter illegal immigration he would build a wall at the Mexican frontier, to defeat ISIS he would "bomb the shit out of them,"[62] to stop unemployment he would "bring jobs back to [the] country, etc."[63] His formula for salvation was summarized in his slogan "Make America Great Again". It was the path the leader-to-be was pointing out and it attracted an intense loyalty from his supporters. The singularity he displayed during the campaign echoed Weber's theory according to which "the charismatic leader goes against tradition, generates new things, and changes points of reference or frameworks, but can also be subversive, irrational, and unstable."[64] In our work, we argue that Donald Trump's election as President corresponds to a new framework in rhetoric and the art of persuasion. His victory, although thought to be very unlikely at the beginning of his campaign, was the result of a specific style of communication that relied, among other things, on his charisma and appeal to emotions rather than rational arguments or righteous policies. Our mission will be to dissect the components of this very style of communication, to criticize them and establish in what way they helped Trump become the 45th President of the United States of America.

To the German sociologist and philosopher, charismatic leadership has three components that can be analyzed separately: the psychological, social and relational dimensions. Firstly, the psychological element corresponds to Weber's definition of charisma as the internal and natural qualities attributed to an individual leader.[65] To Weber, what mattered most about charisma was the perception the followers had of their leader, therefore he did not go into detail about the origins of such particular trait. In that respect, charisma would be comparable to beauty in that it lies in the eyes of the followers. Secondly, the social dimension of charismatic leadership refers to external factors that participate in the rise to power of an individual and the nature of his leadership, such as family, school or work.[66] Consequently, charisma is also a skill that can be taught and that is more commonly found in particular circles, such as the upper class and elites who "are usually the ones who have the time and resources to 'cultivate' charisma and leaders."

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[60] Youtube, "Trump: Stop political correctness."
[61] Youtube, "Donald Trump on political correctness: it takes too long."
[62] Youtube, "Donald Trump on ISIS - 'I would bomb the SHIT out of 'em! '"
[63] Youtube, "Why Trump Won the Election - (ANALYSIS) Learn Something."
[64] Epley, "Weber's Theory of Charismatic Leadership: The Case of Muslim Leaders in Contemporary Indonesian Politics," 8.
[65] Ibid. 9.
[66] Ibid.

This aspect of leadership particularly resonates with Donald Trump's life when we consider that the first position of power he assumed was in 1971, when his father became chairman of the board of the Trump Organization and that young Donald became president of the company. As someone who pursued a career in real estate, the businessman had to master the art of persuasion and as the president of the company he also needed to learn how to become a leader. Therefore, part of his charismatic leadership might have been socially acquired. This being said, it would be no easy task to establish to what extent his charisma was natural or socially acquired in his family home and the work place. Thirdly, the relational dimension alludes to the perception the followers have of the leader, from which the latter's authority derives.[67] To Weber, charismatic authority is inherently unstable for if the people stop recognizing the leader as such, he then becomes a mere private person. Doctor Jennifer L. Epley, who wrote an academic work on Weber's concept of charismatic leadership, added that "in this way, charisma may not necessarily be something that an individual leader *possesses* [...]"[68] Regarding the ephemeral quality of charisma, Trump's average approval rating has been critically low compared to his predecessors since the beginning of his presidency in January 2016, which could indicate that he is slowly losing charisma.[69] As the polls have shown, the current president's average approval rating is 40%, which is 13% below the average for U.S. presidents from 1938 to 2019.

Philosopher Arthur Schweitzer has condensed Weber's theory into nine models of charismatic leadership: the natural, the supernatural, the mission, the political types, the revolution, violence, instability, the routinization and the *new style*.[70] While the natural leader was born with a sense of self-belief and magnetic abilities, the supernatural leader developed exceptional capacities after experiencing an inner calling. The mission describes a charismatic leadership based on a community that accepts to follow the political program of an exceptional individual who devoted his life to a particular doctrine. Whereas the political types of charismatic leadership allow an individual to access a position of power within a political framework, the revolution enables a person to rise to power because he expresses the resentment of the disprivileged masses and challenges the status quo. Violence is the model that usually ensues from the revolution paradigm for revolutionary destruction is often met with repressive measures from the existing political system. Instability is a situation in which a charismatic regime is unable to last because the exceptional qualities of its representative dies out or because charisma alone is incapable of maintaining a durable political system. Finally, the routinization describes a situation in which a charismatic movement loses its original purity because it is integrated in a bureaucratic and

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[67] Epley, "Weber's Theory of Charismatic Leadership: The Case of Muslim Leaders in Contemporary Indonesian Politics," 9.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Gallup, "Presidential Approval Ratings -- Donald Trump."
[70] Epley, "Weber's Theory of Charismatic Leadership: The Case of Muslim Leaders in Contemporary Indonesian Politics," 10.

interest-oriented regime. Among the nine models, The *new style* is the one that best matches our definition of Trump's new framework within the field of communication and rhetoric.

> The extraordinary ability expresses itself in exemplary living or a new political style that gives direction to his policies and political symbols, which expressions become the hallmark of a charismatic movement, although it falls short of any distinct political or philosophical doctrine.

Indeed, the current president's new political style, featured, amongst others, by the alienation of the news media, the recurring controversies, the opposition to the establishment and the nationalist agenda, has created a charismatic movement around Donald Trump. Whereas he has often criticized the news media, they have largely contributed to his fame and even his rise in the political landscape, as we will see in Chapter 5. Both as a candidate and later on as President, he has unleashed public passions and has become a central topic of discussion in America and abroad, a phenomenon that can be described as "Trump mania." However, this very charismatic movement lack any distinct political or philosophical doctrine for, although his nationalist agenda has remained fairly constant, Donald Trump has changed his mind about various topics, adopted contradictory postures in several debates and repeatedly forsaken some of his allies.[71] As we will see in Chapter 3, the contradictions are one of his core characteristics, both when it comes to his language and his political stance.

In conclusion, Donald Trump developed charismatic authority by establishing himself as a sort of "savior-leader". He erected himself as a spokesperson for the "forgotten American" that he rallied in his quest to "Make America Great Again" in a period of the nation's history he regularly depicted as distressful. In terms of what Max Weber described as the psychological dimension of charismatic leadership, Trump possessed some internal and natural qualities that contributed to him being perceived as a natural-born leader. Regarding the social dimension, it is highly probable that he learnt a few persuasion and leadership techniques during his career as the chairman of the Trump Organization or through the teachings of his father. Concerning the relational dimension, it should be pointed out that charismatic leadership is inherently unstable for it depends on the recognition of the followers, which in the case of the President appears to be declining, according to the polls. His type of charismatic authority corresponds to what philosopher Arthur Schweitzer called the *new style model* for it created a movement around the persona of the President, a sort of "Trump mania." The latter was largely built around the news media interest for his persona, and since the announcement of his candidacy many people have helped maintain the phenomenon alive by simply commenting on his statements and behavior.

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[71] Monico, "Donald Trump: la communication de crise comme outil de gouvernance."

Chapter 2: Donald Trump's Non-Verbal Communication

2.1 Physical appearance and dressing style

As communication theorist and philosopher Paul Watzlawick famously said "one cannot not communicate."[72] According to him, human communication is not only verbal, it can be expressed through paraverbal and non-verbal signs such as the tone of voice, the stance and even the dressing style.

For instance, senior editor in *Time* Ryan Teague Beckwith wrote an article about what Donald Trump conveyed through his choice of clothing. He pointed out that the President "dresse(d) like a Reagan-era Wall Street mogul,"[73] which might not be a coincidence considering the various similarities between the two men, as we will see in Chapter 4. Donald Trump almost always wore a suit and a tie during the presidential elections, a fashion feature he has associated with a greater political credibility. Indeed, on 15th June 2015, the then Republican candidate mocked one of his political rival, Jeb Bush, when he declared: "he can't even put on a tie and jacket. He's running for president."[74] His dressing style was so consistent throughout the campaign that Beckwith described the candidate's suit and tie as a uniform; it was his trademark look and it allowed him to be visually identifiable by the voters. The senior editor of the Time also highlighted that Trump's choice of outfit corresponded to "an old-school look for a certain type of business leader, especially those in traditional industries like manufacturing, which Trump has promised to revitalize."[75] Therefore, part of the Republican candidate's policies were echoed in his dressing style.

Donald Trump's iconic suit and tie. (Credit: Le Soir)

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[72] Watzlawick, interview. (Original version: "On ne peut pas ne pas communiquer.")
[73] Beckwith, "How Donald Trump's Clothes Reinforce His Campaign."
[74] Youtube, "The best of Donald Trump vs. Jeb Bush."
[75] Beckwith, "How Donald Trump's Clothes Reinforce His Campaign."

Moreover, he favored boxy suits, which typically make the wearer look larger and more broad-shouldered, as Mr. Beckwith argued, thus accentuating his tallness and making him look more masculine. As the author of the article commented, Donald Trump preferred red ties, a color that both reminded of the Reagan-era and was associated with the Republican Party. The real-estate mogul often coupled them with a white shirt and an unbuttoned suit so as to make the tie the focal point of his outfit, Beckwith claimed. This characteristic of his dressing style became so iconic that it ended up being politicized. For instance, after Trump stated that many Mexican immigrants were rapists, the company that had sold his menswear line since 2004, Macy, stopped its partnership with him for fear of being associated with his controversial messages. Similarly, Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton attacked him for selling ties made in China and suits made in Mexico while he claimed he wished to prioritize the American economy.

In terms of physical appearance, Donald Trump has often been mocked for his fake-looking haircut and the orange tan he had at the beginning of his campaign. Many memes on the Internet dealt with his peculiar complexion and haircut, sometimes comparing him to extraterrestrial TV character Alf or to a troll doll. According to Professor Ronald E. Riggio of the Kravis Leadership Institute in an article entitled "Top 10 Lessons From Donald Trump's Body Language," Trump's hairstyle was distinctive and so it might have helped him stand out among his political opponents.[76] However, both Riggio and Adams agreed that it could have prevented him from being taken seriously as a potential leader of the country.[77] However, the businessman progressively fixed his fake tan, which became less orange, and improved his haircut; as a result, by election day the mockeries had virtually ceased. According to Scott Adams, this change was beneficial to the Republican candidate and it helped him secure the win.[78]

Donald Trump in August 19, 2015 and on January 19, 2019. (Credit: Michael Vadon and Manuel Balce Ceneta)

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[76] Riggio, "Top 10 Lessons From Donald Trump's Body Language."
[77] Adams, *Win Bigly, Persuasion in a World Where Facts Don't Matter,* 239.
[78] Ibid. 240.

Nevertheless, there are a few physical traits that cannot be changed and that have an unconscious impact on the perception of the voters. In his book *La communication non verbale*, body language expert Guy Barrier highlighted that some physical traits such as stature, height or the face shape can affect people's judgment on others.[79] For example, as he pointed out, a solid stature like Trump's, which, as we have seen, was accentuated by his boxy suits, is often associated with manual professions rather than intellectual occupations. With his populist speeches and his political agenda focused on job creation, Donald Trump was fundamentally addressing his message to a blue-collar audience and his physical appearance unconsciously reflected that message.

Similarly Mr. Barrier claimed in his book that tall people are often perceived as dominant. As we have previously established, height is often equated to power, which is why by calling Trump "Big Don" after he had referred to him as "Little Marco", Senator Rubio unintentionally communicated that his opponent was dominating the debate.

Finally, according to the body-language expert, square-shaped heads are usually associated with authoritarian individuals whereas oval heads correspond more to calm and collected people. Donald Trump has often been described as an authoritarian person, to the point that some Democrats even labeled him "the next Hitler."[80] Although we argue that the shape of one's head has no impact whatsoever on the person's beliefs and behavior, we are convinced it can have an influence on the public's perceptions and be aligned or not with the individual's personality. In the case of Trump, it did match his dominating temperament and his extreme political ideas.

Donald Trump's square-shaped head, a marker of authoritarianism. (Credit: Jonathan Ernst)

In conclusion, the non-verbal and paraverbal components play an important role in communication, as a few characteristics of Donald Trump's physical appearance revealed. On one hand it contributed to forging his own trademark so that he was visually identifiable by the voters, but on the other hand it led to criticism regarding his haircut and complexion or choice of outfits that did not align with his policies. The analysis of a few key body features indicated that he was usually associated with the blue-collar audience he targeted and that he was

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[79] Barrier, *La communication non verbale,* 23.
[80] Cole, "Top House Democrats compare Trump's rise to Hitler's."

perceived by many as a dominating, even authoritarian, person. The examination of Trump's handshakes in the next section will provide further evidence of his dominant temperament.

2.2 The handshake

Although its origins are unclear, the handshake has existed for thousands of years and has been used in many cultures.[81] It is believed that initially "by extending their empty right hands, strangers could show that they were not holding weapons and bore no ill will toward one another," said Evan Andrews, writer at *History.com*. Nowadays, the handshake is commonly used as a way of greeting someone but, according to Guy Barrier, it can also be used as a tool to establish a power relationship between two individuals.[82] For example, the body language expert pointed out that a very firm grip can be a way to show dominance on the person and to prolong its duration can embarrass him or her. Both as candidate and later on as President, Donald Trump has regularly had to greet other politicians and leaders with handshakes but very often did he do it in a particular manner.

Charlie Houpert, creator of the Youtube channel Charisma on Command and self-development program Charisma University, has listed the characteristics of Trump's unique greetings.[83] Firstly, Trump frequently gives a yank to his interlocutor while shaking hands. To Houpert, he does so to have the other lose his balance and to show that he has control over the interaction. However, it can make the other person suspicious of Donald Trump. On many occasions, he has seen bending his interlocutor's wrist in an uncomfortable angle and lifting it. The effect of such technique is that it puts the other person in an unpleasant position so as to show that it is the businessman who is in control and that he dominates the interaction, the Youtube content creator commented. During a meeting at the Oval Office between President Trump and Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, the American leader was seen tapping softly on Abe's hand after having cranked his wrist and yanked him several times. To Houpert, this was a pacifying behavior from the president, who wished to counterbalance the aggressiveness of his grip with a more friendly and peaceful gesture. In the case of this particular meeting, the duration of the handshake was unusually long, 19 seconds, which, as Guy Barrier explained, can embarrass the person thus forced to prolong the grip. On 17th July 2017, President Trump, who was visiting the Champs-Elysees in company of Emmanuel Macron, shook hands with the French leader for a whole 29 seconds, prolonging the handshake's duration more than necessary while regularly yanking Macron's arm and tapping

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[81] Andrews, "What is the origin of the handshake?"
[82] Barrier, *La communication non verbale,* p16.
[83] Youtube, "Donald Trump: Art Of The Handshake."

softly and his hand.[84] The footage of the event shows that beyond the friendly yet awkward handshake between the two presidents, there was a struggle for power at play.
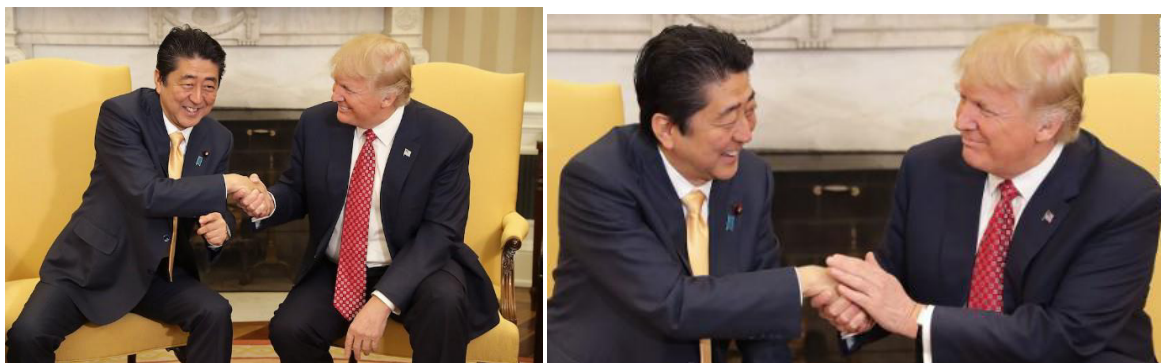
The bending of wrist and the tap (credit: Chip Somodevilla and CNN)

As we have seen, Donald Trump's aggressive handshake style is a way for him to show that he has control over the interaction and that he is dominating. His peculiar grip is featured by yanks, bends of the other's wrist and a few taps on the hand. It is highly probable that a leader such as Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had prepared before his first meeting with Trump on 14th February 2017 for he was seen firmly resisting the American President's techniques and maintaining his balance.[85]Others, such as Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, went as far as to use Trump's techniques against him. Indeed, during a visit at the White House in July 2018, he yanked the USA leader during their handshake, much to the latter's surprise.[86]

2.3 Hand gestures

When addressing a large audience, hand gestures are typically used by the speaker to punctuate and enhance his or her speech. Such movements of punctuation are often referred to as *baton gestures.* The latter are said to be semi-conscious for they support verbal communication without being continuously controlled by the speaker.[87] Moreover, these baton gestures convey various messages to the audience that can inform it of the stance the speaker adopts on a given subject.

For instance, Donald Trump often made use of the "OK" sign, which involves pressing the forefinger against the thumb. According to Professor Geoff Beattie, author of a book entitled *Rethinking Body Language*, not only did this gesture stress the parts of the message that Trump considered important but it conveyed precision and control over the subject at stake.[88] It should be noted that the "OK" sign was often followed by the "L" sign, which consisted of forming a 90 degree angle between the index and thumb. In one of his speeches, the businessman declared that

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[84] Youtube, "Trump's never-ending handshake with Macron"
[85] Youtube, "Trump handshake trolls"
[86] Youtube, "TRUMP'S Arm NEARLY RIPPED OFF In Violent Handshake Battle with Portuguese President."
[87] Barrier, *La communication non verbale,* p99.
[88] Beattie, interview.

he wanted to protect "every last American job" [89] while accentuating the first three words of that sentence with the "OK" gesture and ending on the "L" sign. Adrien Rivierre, vice-president of the francophone Federation of debates, added that the "OK" was the hand gesture Donald Trump used most[90]; a pillar of his non-verbal communication.

Trump "OK" gesture. A sign that that is often used by politicians to put emphasis on parts of their speeches. (Credit: Jeff Wilkerson)

The "L" sign. (Credit: Gage Skidmore)

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[89] Youtube, "Trump - 'The OK'"
[90] Rivierre, "La gestuelle de Donald Trump décryptée par un spécialiste."

To him, the American President also frequently pointed his finger at the public, either to designate or denounce. Although it is not recommended to use this sign for it can be seen as accusatory, Trump often employed it in the course of his campaign. According to Rivierre, when he pointed his finger under or at the level of his shoulders, it was either to highlight a situation that was problematic to him, such as illegal immigration or to accuse one of his political opponents. However, the meaning of such gesture differed when he raised it above his shoulders. In this case, he indicated that what he was about to say was very important; he established himself as "a person that [held] the truth in front of an audience that [listened]," Rivierre argued[91]. In short, pointing the finger is typically associated with a sense of aggressiveness and authority, depending on how it is used.

In politics, hand gestures such as the finger pointing and the "OK" signs are not particularly rare but the "L" sign is quite unique to Trump's non-verbal communication, as Professor Beatie observed.[92] Moreover, when he referred to the wall he wanted to build at the Mexican frontier he often made use of a very unusual hand gesture. In those moments, he physically mimicked the resistance of an invisible wall with both hands moving in unison. By doing so, the then Republican candidate was bringing visual confirmation to his verbal message, which could be seen as a way to convert the idea of the wall into a tangible reality. Professor and leadership expert, Ronald E. Riggio commented thereon that parallel gestures typically create an impression of confidence and authority, which is a good way to influence an audience.[93] When Trump made the invisible wall gesture, he did so by moving both hands in a synchronous and parallel manner, which enhanced the impact of his message.

Trump's visual persuasion with the "wall gesture." (Credit: Evan Vucci)

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[91] Ibid. (Original version: Par ce geste, il indique à l'audience que les propos qu'il va prononcer sont très importants et renvoie à l'image que nous nous faisons d'un professeur donnant un cours devant ses élèves, de celui qui détient la vérité face à une audience qui écoute.)

[92] Beattie, interview.

[93] Riggio, "Top 10 Lessons From Donald Trump's Body Language."

Other hand gestures can reveal the attitude of the speaker regarding a subject without necessarily accentuating parts of the speech, unlike *baton gestures*. As body language analyst Adrien Rivierre observed, Donald Trump would often show his hand palms open when he made a claim he believed would be criticized by his opponents.[94] While he sometimes used it as a defense mechanism, open palms usually convey honesty and are a pacifying gesture, Rivierre added. As Professor Beattie pointed out, this particular gesture can also express inclusiveness and "build a 'we' connection with the audience," a way for Trump to show that "his emotions and their emotions [were] aligned."[95] Indeed, the candidate was appreciated by many for his authenticity and his ability to emotionally relate to his public.

In conclusion, the leader-to-be displayed a few hand gestures that are quite common in the political landscape, such as the "OK" sign and the finger pointing, but he also had some that were unique to his non-verbal communication, such as the invisible wall and the "L" sign. In this section, we have drawn an important distinction between the *baton gestures* on one hand, which accentuate parts of the speech and other hand gestures, which typically help the audience forge an impression around the speaker. Belonging to that last category, the open palms were frequent in Trump's communication and their function was threefold: to build a connection with the audience, to convey honesty or to act as an imaginary barrier against criticism.

2.4 The rule of the 3V's, an analysis of Trump's facial expressions in the light of Mehrabian's theory

As psychologist Albert Mehrabian concluded after a study conducted in 1967, 7% of interpersonal communication is verbal, 38% is vocal and 55% is visual, which means that 93% of communication is non-verbal.[96] Although we argue that non-verbal and paraverbal messages play a major role in communication, these numbers should be put into perspective for the importance of non-verbal communication appears to be exaggerated. In an article entitled "Le mythe du 7% 38% 55%," writer Romain Bisseret criticized these results and showed their limitations.[97] To obtain such percentages, Mehrabian and two of his colleagues conducted two different scientific experiments, Bisseret revealed. In the first, the participants had to guess someone's feelings on the basis of the recording of nine words pronounced with different tones of voice. In the second, the word "maybe" was repeated in different intonations while pictures of various facial expressions were displayed on a screen and the participants' task was to estimate the degree of correspondence between the word and the expressions shown. As Romain Bisseret highlighted in his article, the study had its limitations since it was difficult to generalize these situations of experimentation and apply them in day-to-day life. Indeed, very few human interactions involve repeating the same

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[94] Rivierre, "La gestuelle de Donald Trump décryptée par un spécialiste."
[95] Beattie, interview.
[96] Guld, "Do You Provide Word-Class Service?"
[97] Bisseret, "Le mythe du 7% 38% 55% (le non-verbal rediscuté)

word over and over again, while concealing every body part except the face. Moreover, the sample of participants consisted of only ten people of the same gender, Bisseret pointed out. Therefore it was neither diversified nor large enough to be relevant to the population's everyday life.

Albert Mehrabian was well aware of the limitations of his study and clarified that the *rule of the 3V's*,[98] which refers to the verbal, vocal and visual components of communication, only applied to situations in which a person transmitted his emotions and states of mind. For example, it would be impossible for a speaker to convey the following message with only non-verbal cues: only 11% of Americans believe Democrat nominee Hillary Clinton is trustworthy. Similarly, if our readers were to mute the sound of their television while watching a film, they would only be able to guess the characters' intentions and states of mind, not the content of their speech. In other words, non-verbal communication should not be isolated but rather analyzed in relation to the context that surrounds it. In the light of Mehrabian 's theory, we will analyze Donald Trump's facial expressions in relation to the emotions and states of mind they conveyed in specific scenarios.

The American President has particularly expressive facial traits; during his speeches as candidate or President his face could express a wide range of emotions from joy, to disgust and anger in a short period of time, non-verbal communication expert Darren Stanton claimed.[99] Moreover, his facial traits conveyed sincerity for they appeared to be always under Trump's control, Stanton added. Even when facing an uncomfortable situation such as receiving criticism from a political opponent, he "suffered no acceleration of his respiratory rhythm nor did he display an unusual smirk and his body language stayed unchanged."[100] For instance, Donald Trump repeatedly questioned President Barack Obama's origins and affirmed that by virtue of the territorial principle, he could not qualify for the Presidency if he was born abroad, an issue he also confronted Senator Ted Cruz with. After Hawaii released Obama's birth certificate in 2011, the latter made a few jokes at the expense of Trump at the White House Correspondents Dinner.[101]Although he was mocked and stared at by people in the audience, the businessman appeared to stay calm and collected since his body language and respiratory rhythm were unchanged. Only his smirk gave away his embarrassment, but, as we will see below, one must be used to his particular non-verbal communication style to interpret it properly.

The impact of facial expressions in communication derive primarily from their ability to convey emotions through what neuroscientists call *mirror neurons*, namely neurons that behave similarly

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[98] Teh, "The 3V's Of Communication."

[99] Rivierre, "La gestuelle de Donald Trump décryptée par un spécialiste."

[100] Ibid. (Original version: "En effet, qu'importe ses prises de parole, lorsqu'il avance des idées controversées ou lorsqu'il répond à des attaques adverses, il ne subit aucune accélération de son rythme respiration une absence de rictus inhabituels et sa gestuelle demeure inchangée.")

[101] Youtube, "Watch Obama dig into Trump at the 2011 White House Corres..."

in both the speaker's and the listener's brains during an interaction.[102] In other words, an audience is likely to feel the emotions expressed by the orator's facial traits so if he smiles the public might experience joy and, if he looks confident in his body language, it suggests that he is sincere about his message. Conversely, uncontrolled or unexpressive facial features can convey the speaker's uneasiness, which can unconsciously indicate a lack of self-confidence or even deception. One example of this is the presidential debate that opposed John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon on 26 September 1960. It was the first televised presidential debate and it became a turning-point in the relationship between politicians and their image. In comparison to a smiling and relaxed Kennedy, Nixon looked quite uneasy on the screen; which is why many of the 70 million people who watched the debate on television believed Kennedy was the clear winner[103]. Nixon, who was recovering from a knee operation, was sweaty and pale in addition to displaying a blank expression in his face. It was clear that the candidate was in pain because of the operation but because of his body language he came across as a rather cold and weak person, which made the audience unconsciously distrust him. In the case of Trump, the fact that he has expressive facial traits and that he controls his body language allows him to appear both authentic and confident, two main characteristics of his communication style.

In political debates, each candidate is given a certain time to answer the moderator's questions or to express his or her ideas on specific themes. This implies that the participants can criticize each other during this window of opportunity while their rivals cannot momentarily retaliate. In these moments, Donald Trump would communicate with his body language what he could not verbally communicate. For example, when he heard something that he disagreed with from one of his political opponents, the Republican candidate often rolled his eyes so as to express disagreement. Similarly, during the final presidential debates against Democrat nominee Hillary Clinton, he would also communicate his disagreement by pursing his lips, as body language expert Tonya Reinman revealed.[104] However, it is highly probable that Trump was not even aware of that expression he regularly displayed for it usually lasted for a fraction of second, thus making it what is referred to in synergology as a *micro expression.*[105]

Furthermore, when he tried to deflect criticism he regularly shrugged. According to former FBI Counterintelligence Agent Joe Navarro, the shoulder shrug is a universal gesture that suggests that the person is distancing himself from his interlocutor's message; typically a way to indicate that he "does not know."[106] Other body language analysts, such as blogger Hanan Parvez, pointed

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102 Pineda, "Mirror Neuron Systems: The Role of Mirroring Porcesses in Social Cognition," 43-50.
103 Druckman, "The Power of Television Images: The First Kennedy-Nixon Debate Revisited," 563.
104 Youtube, "Clinton Looked for Attention While Trump Showed Power, Body Language Expert Says."
105 Mandal & Awasthi, "Understanding Facial Expressions in Communication."
106 Navarro, "What the Shoulder Say About Us."

out that this gesture conveys submissiveness and that it is primarily a defense mechanism aiming at protecting a delicate part of the body, namely the throat.[107]

Aside from that, Trump frequently displayed dominant facial expressions such as the snarl or the smirk. "Snarling is used by humans, primates, and canids as a sign of aggression or disgust" while "the smirk shows disagreement or displeasure, but in a dominating way", Professor Riggio commented.[108] The businessman used the snarl to convey hostility and the smirk to mock the speaker but sometimes also to conceal his own awkwardness. For example, the real estate mogul made an appearance on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* for a special episode in which the host, dressed up as Trump, interviewed the candidate as if the latter was talking to himself in the mirror.[109] As a comedian, Fallon made a few jokes about the businessman's notorious narcissism, his mannerism, catch phrases and policies while Donald Trump smirked the whole time. On 24th April 2018, President of the United States of America met with French President Macron and after the latter leaned in for a continental kiss, Trump smirked once again and declared: "I like him a lot."[110] Similarly, on 17th March 2017, the President tried to ignore the journalists' request for a handshake with Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel by not looking at her and simply grinning.[111] In the three examples we have provided, Trump smirked as a response to awkwardness but he did so while attempting to show that he was somehow in control of the situation. If he had lowered his gaze or acted surprised he would not have achieved the same goal. Indeed, he would have appeared less dominant in his interactions.

The smirk, a tactic used to conceal embarrassment. (Credit: NBC & Saul Loeb)

This feature of Trump's body language should be contrasted with Hillary Clinton's response to embarrassment. When she was facing an uncomfortable situation, such as receiving criticism or mockery from her main political rival, the Democrat usually displayed an open and warm smile to keep up appearances. Many instances of this strategy could be observed at the Al Smith Dinner, which provided an opportunity for the candidates to trade jokes in the context of the presidential

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[107] Parvez, "Body language: Shoulder movements and their meanings."
[108] Riggio, "Top 10 Lessons From Donald Trump's Body Language."
[109] Youtube, "Donald Trump Interview Himself In the Mirror."
[110] Youtube, "Trump's most awkward moments of 2018."
[111] Youtube, "Trump appears to ignore requests for a handshake with Angela Merkel."

elections.[112] Clinton had to sit during a fifteen-minute speech delivered by he who had been her main political rival in the campaign and listen to him make several jokes at her expense while being filmed. The situation called for some embarrassment but as an important political figure she could not show her bitterness, therefore she tried to conceal it with wide smiles. On one hand it should be stressed that open smiles are usually interpreted as marks of sympathy and joy, but on the other hand they first and foremost convey submissiveness in humans and chimpanzees alike, Hanan Parvez claimed.[113] In both species, the open smile is a way to express that one is no threat to the others and "at a deep unconscious level, it ensures them safety, survival and well-being, the most primal human needs,"[114] which is why it became a marker of sympathy in human beings. In other words, whereas Clinton's open smiles were more reassuring for the audience and made her appear to be a warmer person, Trump's smirks were meant to show that once again it was he who was in control of the social interaction. It should also be noted that pictures and footage of him displaying an open smile are fairly rare, especially in comparison to former American Presidents such as Barack Obama, John Fitzgerald Kennedy or Bill Clinton.

Trump: "This is the first time ever, EVER that Hillary is sitting down and speaking to major corporate leaders and not getting paid for it." (Credit: CBS News)

In conclusion, as psychologist Albert Mehrabian's study demonstrated, non-verbal communication is fundamental in the transmission of emotions and states of mind to an audience but it has to be analyzed in relation to the context that surrounds it. Body language in particular can affect the audience's perception of the speaker and the public will then judge if he is to be trusted or not

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[112] Youtube, "Trump roasts Clinton at Al Smith charity dinner."
[113] Parvez, "Why do we smile? The puprose of smiling in humans."
[114] Ibid.

accordingly. Donald Trump displays expressive facial features and keeps control over his body language even in embarrassing situations, which projects the image of an authentic and confident man. His facial expressions, such as the snarl and the smirk, typically conveyed that he did not feel threatened by his opponent. They are the reflections of his dominant personality, although his shoulder shrugs can be seen as quite submissive. As we have established, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump differ in their response to awkwardness, the former addressing it with open smiles while the latter favors the smirks. In that respect, the Democrat prioritizes a warmer and more sympathetic communication style whereas the Republican focuses on domination and control of the interaction, which is the subject of the next section.

2.5 Domination and control: a comparative analysis of Trump and Clinton's communication

As we have seen with his handshakes, hand gestures and facial expressions, Donald Trump often attempted to have the upper hand in his social interactions. While other candidates aimed at maintaining a positive and sympathetic image to reach the widest audience possible, the outsider seemed to do the opposite; he tried to be the dominant force in the political debates and addressed his speeches primarily to his core-supporters. Other characteristics of his non-verbal and paraverbal communication converge to the same conclusion.

For instance, according to Guy Barrier, the speaker's gaze is an indicator of his ascendancy in the social interaction.[115] A dominating person, he said, is not afraid to stare at his interlocutor, as a means to "control him or her with the gaze."[116] During the final presidential debate on October 19 2016, Donald Trump's eyes oscillated between two different focuses: his political opponent, Hillary Clinton, and the audience. However, the intention behind the gaze was different in both cases. On one hand, by looking at Clinton in the eyes while she spoke, the Republican nominee showed that he considered her as a worthy political rival. Conversely, when he faced Senator Marco Rubio, Trump barely looked at him, which revealed that he did not judge him to be a threat in the elections. In that respect, the Republican nominee's intense gaze might be interpreted as a sign of challenge, if not intimidation. On the other hand, staring at the audience was in no way a means to defy them but rather a way to demonstrate that he had the qualities of a leader, namely assertiveness and authority.

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[115] Barrier, *La communication non-verbale,* 96.
[116] Ibid. (Original version: Mai d'un autre côté, il semble que lorsqu'un individu désire en dominer un autre, il ne peut se passer de le contrôler du regard.")
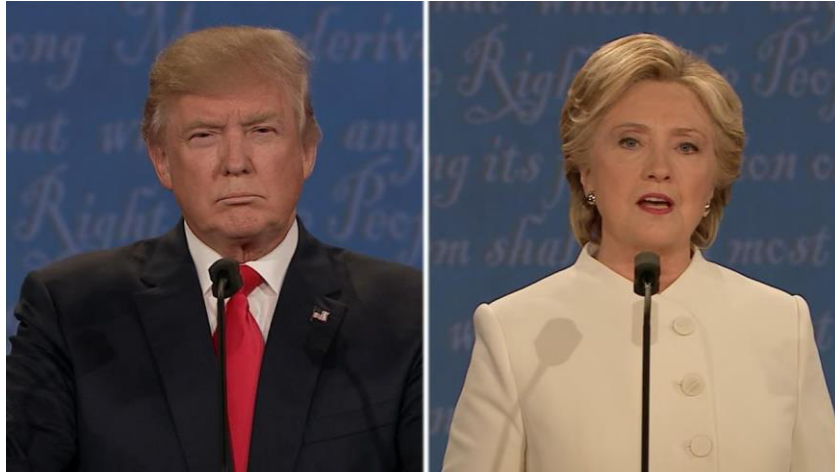
Donald Trump's facial expressions highlight his assertiveness and authority (Credit: ABC News)

During the debates, Clinton also stared at both her political opponent and the public but while Trump's speech was unscripted for the most part, she often had to look at the notes on the desk in front of her. Consequently, she was more prepared to respond to tricky questions or comments made by either the moderator or her rival but it also made her less more authentic than the businessman, who simply spoke his mind as usual.

In terms of paraverbal communication, a characteristic that is sometimes studied to judge someone's ascendency in a social exchange is verbal fluency. To Barrier, "When a speaker displays a large amount of verbal transmission, he then exercises certain control over the relationship."[117] In the case of the final presidential debate, both candidates spoke at length of their policies and opinions every time they were given the occasion and neither of them was afraid to interrupt the other candidate when it was felt necessary. On the basis of that criterion, none of them gained the ascendency on the other for they displayed a similar behavior.

Moreover, as the body-language expert claimed, the frequency and tone of voice can be indicators of an individual's domination. Politicians tend to favor audible and deep voices because they are often associated with authority. For example, former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher has adopted a lower pitch of voice over the course of her career so as to gain credibility, *The Telegraph* reporter Bill Gardner revealed.[118] Neither Trump nor Clinton could be described as having a deep voice but both were audible nonetheless; therefore none of them gained the ascendency on the other if we consider these specific criteria.

In the light of what we have said, we can conclude that Trump aimed at being the dominant force in political debates, as evidenced by his non-verbal communication. He and his main political rival Hillary Clinton shared a few characteristics of dominant personalities such as certain verbal fluency and the audibility of their speech. The main difference between their communication was the

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[117] Ibid. (Original version: "Lorsqu'un locuteur démontre une forte quantité d'émission verbale, il exerce un certain contrôle sur la relation.")

[118] Gardner, "From 'shrill' housewife to Downing Street: the changing voice of Margaret Thatcher."

gaze, with the Republican nominee being focused on the audience and Clinton while she had to rely on her notes. Although Donald Trump appeared more authentic because he was unscripted, this particular choice had its downsides for many political pundits noticed that his speeches were often incoherent and contradictory. Indeed, as we will confirm in the next chapter, the businessman's language relied more on substance than form; in other words he focused on the emotional impact of his words rather than on their construction and style. Once again, we find here echoes of Aristotle's concepts of *pathos* and *logos*.

Chapter 3: Donald Trump's Verbal Communication

3.1 Aggressive language: A double-edged sword

In parallel to his assertive and dominating non-verbal communication, Donald Trump's style of language was often described as aggressive. Professor Arrigo, who studied the President's rhetoric in light of Aristotle's theories, pointed out that "a speaker should first identify feelings that their audience already holds, and then use vivid language that resonates with that specific audience to intensify those emotions."[119] This strategy, which is fundamentally *pathos*-based, has regularly been used by Trump over the course of his campaign. For instance, the Republican candidate, who was referring to the terrorist network called ISIS, declared that he "would bomb the shit out of them."[120] The statement was followed by applause from the audience for it resonated with the public's fear and anger toward the terrorist threat. Conversely, a more moderate and politically correct version of that sentence, for example "we will stop ISIS," would not have had the same impact.

Similarly, when he invoked Hillary Clinton at rallies, Trump exploited the audience's animosity toward her by "encouraging them in the 'lock her up' chant, calling for her to be jailed and describing her election night loss as 'her funeral',itle" Professor Arrigo highlighted. Nevertheless, his aggressive style of language was a double-edged sword. Indeed, because of his extreme claims, Trump's detractors deemed him racist, sexist and authoritarian. The *RationalWiki* website dedicated a whole page to the listing of his controversial statements. These scandals included, amongst others, his claims that "Mexican migrants [were] rapists," that Clinton got "schlonged" in her 2008 Democratic primary loss to Barack Obama and a few ambiguous statements that could be interpreted as calls to assassinate the Democratic nominee.[121] "Even in elementary school, I was a very assertive, aggressive kid [...] The difference now is that I like to use my brain instead of my fists," Trump wrote in *The Art of the Deal*, a book he published in 1987.[122] On one hand, his aggressive style of language allowed him to relate on an

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[119] Arrigo, "What Aristotle can teach us about Trump's rhetoric."
[120] Youtube, "Donald Trump on ISIS - "I would bomb the SHIT out of 'em!"
[121] RationalWiki, "Rhetoric of Donald Trump."
[122] Trump & Schwartz, *The Art of the Deal,* 43.

emotional level with his core-supporters but on the other hand it also intensified his opponents' hate towards him. Consequently, his rhetoric has been described as "fascist" and some have even associated his persona with the Ku Klux Klan because he had received the support of former KKK Grand Wizard, David Duke and seemed hesitant to disavow it.

Other critics pointed out that he incited violence in his political rallies. For instance, on the day of the Iowa caucuses, he declared: "If you see somebody getting ready to throw a tomato, knock the crap out of them, would you? Seriously, OK? Just knock the hell... I promise you I will pay for the legal fees. I promise, I promise."[123] It was not an isolated incident for on numerous occasions during the presidential elections, he suggested hitting protesters and assured he would defend the aggressor in court. When Donald Trump was elected President of the United States, his extreme campaign positions and polarizing communication led a portion of the American population to believe in what we will call the Hitler narrative. In his book *Win Bigly, Persuasion in a World Where Facts Don't Matter*, Scott Adams explained how the leader distanced himself from said narrative:

> But anti-Trumpers had been force-fed, by both the mainstream media and Clinton's campaign, a fire hose of persuasion that said Trump was the next Hitler. [...] The solution to the Hitler movie is to act non-Hitlerish in public until people can no longer maintain the Hitler illusion and it falls apart. And that's how Trump and his running mate Pence played it. They quickly moderated some of their more extreme campaign positions so they looked like they were heading *away* from Hitler mode, not toward it.[124]

Placard spreading the Hitler narrative (Credit: Charlotte England)

As the author added, these changes in Trump's positions included dropping support for waterboarding, avoiding the subject of the terrorists' families, which he had proposed to persecute and focusing his deportation plans on immigrants who committed serious crimes *after* entering the country rather than *before*.

In conclusion, Donald Trump's aggressive language was indeed a double-edged sword. Because it was combined with extreme campaign positions and that it was accentuated by his authoritative

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[123] Keneally, A look back at Trump comments perceived by some as encouraging violence."
[124] Adams, *Win Bigly, Persuasion in a World Where facs Don't Matter, 85.*

non-verbal communication, some have described him a fascist or worse, the next Hitler. As Scott Adams pointed out, this comparison could have been particularly detrimental to his presidency, which is why the real estate mogul adopted a few strategies to contain this growing phenomenon. On the other hand, Trump's language allowed him to relate strongly with his core-supporters on an emotional level. The strategy of capitalizing on people's fear and anger was not novel in politics, but as the results of the elections testified, it was effective. In his language as well as in his policies, the American leader often went from one extreme to another, which, as we will see in the next section, might have been a consequence of his own philosophy of life.

3.2 Truthful hyperboles, idiocracy and the struggle between Good and Evil

One of the most significant communication features of Trump's is his tendency to exaggerate his claims. According to him, America was facing "tremendous problems," its "energy policies [were] disaster," the "country [was] suffering because people like Secretary Clinton ha[d] made such bad decisions"; in short it was "a mess" in his own words.[125] Similarly, as a candidate he promised he would "be reducing taxes tremendously," he spoke of his "unbelievable company" which provided him with "tremendous income."[126] As these affirmations demonstrated, Trump appeared to be fond of hyperboles, which according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, are figures of speech that consist of "extravagant exaggerations."[127] In his best-seller *The Art of the Deal*, the real estate mogul explained that these exaggerations were part of a conscious strategy of promotion.

> The final key to the way I promote is bravado. I play to people's fantasies. People may not always think big themselves, but they can still get very excited by those who do. That's why a little hyperbole never hurts. People want to believe that something is the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular. I call it truthful hyperbole. It's an innocent form of exaggeration, and a very effective form of promotion.[128]

Once again, this very characteristic of his communication was polarizing to his audience. Some people argued that he simply did not "sound like a normal president" but others appreciated him for precisely that reason; he looked unique and, more importantly, authentic.[129] This disparity of attitudes in the American public regarding the use of hyperboles can be explained by what marketing consultant Michel Fortin referred to as its "double-edged nature."[130] To him and to Scott Adams[131], hyperboles are strategies usually employed by businessmen,

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[125] Cooper, "Donald Trump's great, tremendous, unbelievable penchant for hyperbole at the first presidential debate."
[126] Ibid.
[127] Merriam-Webster dictionary, "Hyperbole."
[128] Trump & Schwartz, *The Art of the Deal,* 43.
[129] Leith, "Trump's rhetoric: a triumph of inarticulacy."
[130] Xi, "Examples of Hyperbole in Advertising."
[131] Adams, *Win Bigly, Persuasion in a World Where Facts Don't Matter,* 19.

particularly in the world of advertising. As Fortin stressed, "exaggeration can heighten the emotional resonance of a message, but take it too far and people write it off as sensationalist and unconvincing."

On one hand, hyperboles could be ways to stimulate an audience, as Trump claimed, but on the other hand it could make him appear as a manipulator or as a simple-minded person. In this respect, the authors of the article about Trump's rhetoric on *RationalWiki* leaned toward the latter. Indeed, they suggested that his simplistic vocabulary combined with his numerous hyperboles established him as an advocate of *idiocracy*, which is a form of government run by idiots.[132] While some viewed Donald Trump's election as the 45th President of the United States as the rise of a new dictator, others, such as *The Telegraph* reporter Tim Stanley, argued that Mike Judge's comedy *Idiocracy* was becoming a reality.[133] The movie depicted a future America run by simple-minded people whose President, Dwayne Elizondo Montain Dew Herbert Camacho, was also a porn star and wrestling champion. According to Stanley, many people linked the fictional character with Donald Trump because both figures came from the world of entertainment before going into politics. Moreover, Camacho was represented as the ultimate foolish politician, a standard a few people believed Trump was now challenging with his own presidency.

In one of his analyses of Donald Trump's power of persuasion, Youtube content creator Charlie Houpert observed that the businessman regularly made use of black and white rhetoric.[134] The Republican candidate often displayed a binary vision of life: a situation was either "great" or "a disaster", he was a "winner" while his opponents were "losers," he often opposed the "good" to the "evil people" etc. In short, he often went from an extreme to another and his perspectives of life had an impact on its language in the form of hyperboles. On the occasion of an anti-Iran deal rally in Washington on 9th September 2015, Trump provided many examples of his binary vision of life when he talked about the current situation in America as he perceived it.

> We are led by very, very stupid people. Very, very stupid people. We cannot let it continue. We are a country that owes nineteen trillion dollars. We lose everywhere. We lose militarily. We can't beat ISIS, give me a break. We can't beat anybody. Our vets are treated horribly. It will change. We will have so much winning if I get elected that you may get bored with winning, believe me.[135]

Although some considered his oversimplified approach to reality as childish and immature, political scientist Marie-Cecile Naves objected that Trump's rhetoric was part of a populist strategy of communication.[136] The populist ideology views society as en entity divided in two groups that cannot coexist together: "the pure people" or the "common folks" on one hand and "the corrupt elite" on the other, political scientist Cas Mudde claimed in her book *Populism: A*

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[132] RationalWiki, "Rhetoric of Donald Trump."
[133] Stanley, "Donald Trump for president: Idiocracy is coming true."
[134] Youtube, "Donald Trump's Incredible Powers of Persuasion."
[135] Youtube, "Trump: If I'm president we'll win so much, you'll get bored with winning."
[136] Landon, "Ce que cache la rhétorique enfantine du président Donald Trump."

Very Short Introduction.[137] In that dichotomy, the populist leader claims to represent the people in its struggle against the elite, which is often embodied by the Establishment.[138] As we can see in the extract we have provided, Trump essentially opposed two categories of people: the American people on one hand, symbolized by an inclusive "we", and the "very, very stupid people" that led the country on the other hand, namely the Establishment. It should be noted that in his speech the "we" that first referred to the common folks developed into a "we" that represented the nation as a whole. Trump painted a dark picture of the situation in which the country was while implying that the Establishment was to be blamed for it but he also established himself as a sort of savior that could bring chance if he was elected. Therefore, his speech called for the removal of "the corrupt elite" so as to allow the rise of a new leader who would represent the "pure people" and bring back America's lost splendor: the typical populist narrative.

In a book entitled *The Global Rise of Populism,* author Doctor Moffitt looked into the traits that characterized a populist leader[139] and, as we will argue, Donald Trump shared several of these features. Firstly, the writer pointed out that populist leaders tended to behave in unconventional ways in comparison to other politicians. As a candidate to the Presidency, the real estate mogul was seen as an outsider, someone who had no chance of winning the elections according to many sources. He was often perceived as "not presidential" at best or too extreme at worst by his critics and his whole campaign was built around the uniqueness of his personality and policies in the American political landscape. While most politicians tried to avoid scandals at all costs, Trump derived a substantial amount of publicity from his polemical statements and behavior, and it appeared to have contributed to his election more than it has prevented it. In addition to that, his judgement and even his mental abilities have been questioned by several political pundits because of the peculiar answers he provided to the problems the country was facing. For instance, his idea of building a wall to tackle the issue of immigration control has led to heated discussions regarding the feasibility and ethic of such project, but it remains clear that the idea itself was unconventional. Secondly, Doctor Moffitt indicated that populist leaders tended to "perpetuate a state of crisis," which has been a recurring characteristic of Trump's communication throughout his campaign. Indeed, he often made use of a rhetoric that was near-apocalyptic when he described the current state of America. According to what Trump declared at the anti-Iran deal rally in Washington, the Establishment was incompetent, the country was in serious debt and it was defeated by a growing terrorist organization. Finally, Trump's binary worldviews might be another indication of his populist tendency, *The Guardian* reporters Mark Rice-Oxley and Ammar Kalia argued.[140] As we have established, the man that Rice-Oxley and Kalia described as "arch populist Donald Trump," rarely nuanced his comments but rather expressed worldviews dominated by the dichotomy between Good and Evil. Although some people might object that

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[137] Mudde & Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction.*
[138] Molloy, "What is populism, and what does the term actually mean?"
[139] Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style and Representation,* 51-70.
[140] Rice-Oxley & Kalia, "How to spot a populist."

the businessman's views were simplistic, his binary rhetoric was easy to grasp and it helped the audience identify clearly who the enemies of the nation were. In his January 2017 inauguration speech, the newly-elected President claimed: "For too long, a small group in our nation's capital has reaped the rewards of government while the people have born the cost."[141] This very sentence illustrates the populist assumption that the American people is somehow oppressed by the elite and that the confrontation between the two is a mere reenactment of the endless struggle between Good and Evil.

According to Marie-Cecile Naves, the President's black and white rhetoric might be a consequence of his background as a businessman. Indeed, in Trump's mind the world is divided between "winners" on one side and "losers" on the other, the former making good "deals" while the latter make bad ones.[142] The American leader has repeatedly insisted on the importance of making good deals, even if he kept its meaning quite vague. In his own words, Trump was "different than other presidents" because he was a "deal maker," someone who knew "the best people" and "the best managers," someone who "look[ed] at everything like a deal."[143] Similarly, to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that has been ongoing for a few decades, he affirmed that he wanted to make the "ultimate deal" with both countries.[144] As promising as it sounded, his plan lacked substance for there was no concrete proposition behind this idea of "ultimate deal." This very example prompted Naves to describe Trump's communication as "incantatory," in that he typically attempted to act on an issue with words only, as if potent rhetoric was equated to righteous solutions.[145] This type of communication was really effective in the context of his campaign but, in her opinion, his business reasoning could not apply to politics, particularly when it comes to foreign policy. As political pundit Frank Maxwell highlighted, Trump's protectionist agenda, embodied by his "America First" slogan, demonstrated that the President was playing a zero-sum game.[146] This very slogan could accept two different interpretations: either it meant that the then Republican candidate wished to prioritize American issues over everything else or it meant that he aimed at making the United States the most dominant force on the political chessboard, the number one power. In both cases, Donald Trump would demonstrate that he viewed politics as a game in which for some countries to win, other nations had to lose, a vision that matched his general binary worldviews. Maxwell commented on a few foreign policy decisions the real estate mogul made as President in accordance to the zero-sum game theory. To him, by exiting a number of key cooperation and trade treatises, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Paris Agreement, the leader's administration showed that it "actively attempt[ed] to damage and dismantle the economic competitiveness of its allies." In

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[141] Ibid.
[142] Landon, "Ce que cache la rhétorique enfantine du président Donald Trump."
[143] Youtube, "Trump is the greatest dealmaker. Believe him."
[144] Landon, "Ce que cache la rhétorique enfantine du président Donald Trump."
[145] Ibid.
[146] Maxwell, "Trump's zero-sum game and Europe's response."

other words, while globalism called for increasingly more cooperation between the countries in the spirit of mutual benefit, President Trump took measures to have America return to the front of the international scene, which sometimes implied damaging the economic competitiveness of its "contestants". It is worth reminding that our work does not aspire to analyze the American leader's policies but rather to identify the characteristics of his communication. Therefore, this paragraph aims at providing evidence of Trump's black and white rhetoric; in no means does it attempt to criticize nor praise his presidency.

In conclusion of this section, the businessman's binary worldviews transcended every aspect of his life, from his approach in business to his foreign policies as President, and the way he ran his campaign. This characteristic of his communication has been observed by other commentators, such as comedian and host Jimmy Kimmel who has used it for comical purposes. Indeed, he ghost wrote and published a children's book entitled *Winners Aren't Losers*, which consisted of a satire of the now-President and his black and white rhetoric. One passage of the children's book depicted a cartoon version of the American leader walking on a pile of money and saying that "winners do deals and winners get rich, while sad little losers just sit there and bitch." Although this statement has not been uttered by Donald Trump himself, it provides us with a meaningful summary of his worldviews and rhetoric. The businessman deliberately made use of what he called "truthful hyperboles" because, as he revealed in his book *The Art of the Deal*, he deemed them useful tools of promotion. In this section, we have studied hyperboles in the light of their double-edged nature, for as stimulating as they can be to the audience they are also likely to backfire at their user and make him look either manipulative or simple-minded. Moreover, his black and white rhetoric has led us to question whether his communication style could be described as populist and, as we have established, several characteristics of his rhetoric pointed to that conclusion. Finally, we have showed how his binary worldviews dictated the nature of his foreign policy. His communication and decisions lead us to believe that he viewed foreign policy as a zero-sum game that, at the time of the elections, the United States were currently losing. In the next section, we will correlate his black and white rhetoric to the informality of his register.

3.3 Informal rhetoric: accuracy VS accessibility and the cognitive fluency bias

As we have established, Donald Trump's language is essentially unequivocal because his word choices reflect his worldviews. If someone has made a mistake he must be "stupid" but if another person is competent on a given subject he then becomes "the best." If a news media outlet reports a fact Trump disagrees with then the whole outlet is "fake" and the reporters that work for it become "losers," in contrast to the American leader who sees himself a "winner." These words that the President has used without restraint and in a variety of contexts share two main characteristics: they are emotionally charged and easy to understand. For instance, saying that

someone is poorly educated refers to a specific reality that can be altered; the person in question can get an education later in life and the fact of not having a formation does not directly implies that he or she is incompetent nor lacks intelligence. On the other hand, to claim that someone is "stupid" conveys that the person was born that way and that it is an inherent characteristic of his or her personality. The difference in register is manifest in that "stupid" is unequivocal and almost seen as a fatality for the person displaying that flaw whereas "poorly educated" refers to a more nuanced reality, from which the speaker somehow distances himself. Informal language tends to be more emotional on one hand and accessible to a wider audience on the other, but formal language is typically more nuanced and polite. The same can be said about the dichotomy between "winners" and "losers." While winning an election, for example, corresponds to a specific reality that allows a candidate to reach a higher social status, to be "a winner" in life implies that the person has a set of inherent qualities that makes him or her the victor in any situation.

Conversely, there is certain fatality attached to his use of the word "loser" for, in a tweet that dates back to before his candidacy for the Presidency, he implied that it was a flaw inherited at birth. Indeed, he claimed: "Every time I speak of the haters and losers I do so with great love and affection. They cannot help the fact that they were born fucked up!" (Donald J. Trump, September 28, 2014) Once again, the words "winners" and "losers" are emotionally charged and quite easy to understand, even to an immature audience, as Jimmy Kimmel's children book revealed. In this respect, an analysis of the last fifteen American presidents' level of vocabulary indicated that Donald Trump had the lowest of them all. In an article on the subject, Nina Burleigh explained how the study was conducted:

> The analysis assessed the first 30,000 words each president spoke in office, and ranked them on the Flesch-Kincaid grade level scale and more than two dozen other common tests analyzing English-language difficulty levels. Trump clocked in around mid-fourth grade, the worst since Harry Truman, who spoke at nearly a sixth-grade level. [...] The Flesch-Kincaid scale was developed in 1975 for the U.S Navy to assess the relative difficulty of training manuals.[147]

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[147] Burleigh, "Trump speaks at fourth-grade level, lowest of last 15 U.S. presidents, new analysis finds."

Presidential Vocabulary By Grade Level
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level
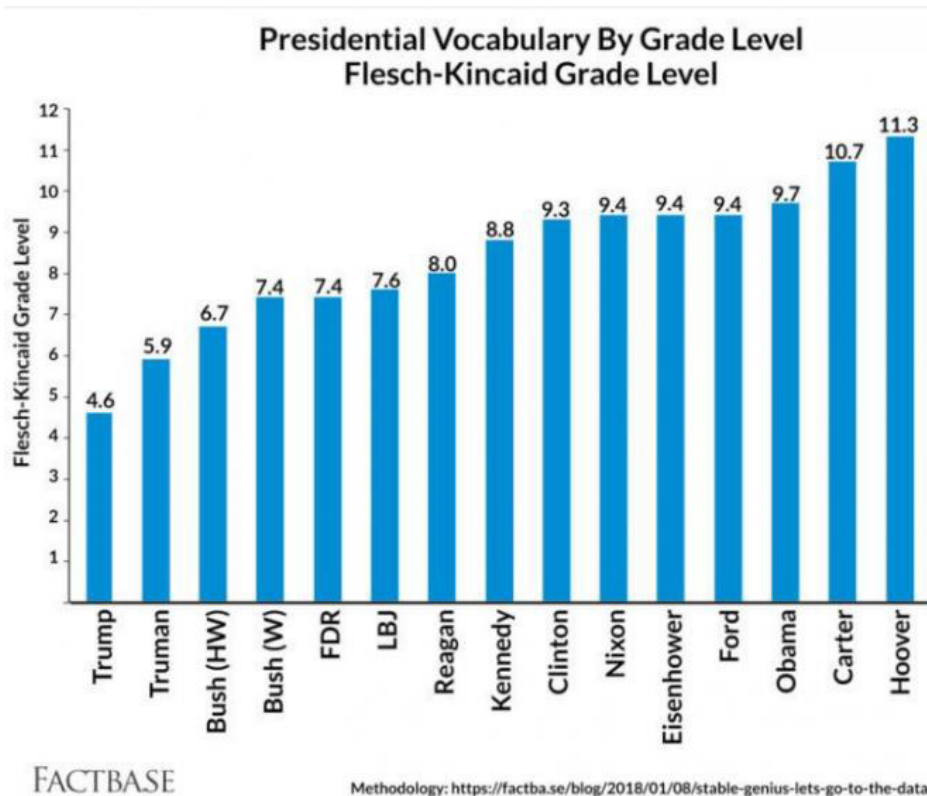
Trump's level of vocabulary: a blessing in disguise? (Credit: Factbase)

As the study concluded, Donald Trump's level of vocabulary corresponded to the comprehension of an average nine-year-old. Many critics have suggested that Donald Trump's use of simple words meant he was foolish, especially after the President's claims that he was "a genius" and "really, really smart."[148] The belief that the American leader was simple-minded was so widespread that, at the time of writing our work, typing "idiot" on Google image resulted in a number of pictures of Donald Trump. According to Google chief executive Sundar Pichai, this association was not caused by political bias in the search engine's algorithms but rather by an Internet phenomenon called "Google bombing."[149] In short, the practice refers to the linking of websites to irrelevant and unrelated topic search terms so as to rank these sites highly in a search engine. Therefore, the phenomenon was caused by a deliberate attempt from Internet users to associate Trump with the word "idiot."

One of the first pictures that appear on Google by typing "idiot' on the search engine. (Credit: Farron Cousins)

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[148] Ibid.
[149] BBC News, "Google hearing sees 'idiot' trending."

In an article entitled "Trump's Rhetoric: A Triumph of Inarticulacy," journalist Sam Leith stressed that not only was Trump's vocabulary quite simplistic but his syntax, spelling and punctuation were "disastrous."[150] As Leith claimed, the American leader was prone to anacoluthon, which is a discontinuity in the discourse that consists in "beginning a sentence in one way and continuing or ending it in another."[151] For instance, when he was asked by Jimmy Kimmel whether he thought that the discrimination of people based on their religion was un-American and wrong, Trump's provided a seemingly confused answer:

> But, Jimmy, the problem... I mean, look, I'm for it. But look, we have people coming into our country that are looking to do tremendous harm. You look at the two... Look at Paris. Look at what happened in Paris. I mean, these people, they did not come from Sweden, okay? Look at what happened in Paris. Look at what happened last week in California, with, you know, 14 people dead. Other people going to die, they're so badly injured. We have a real problem. There is a tremendous hatred out there. And what I wanna do is find out what it... You know, you can't solve a problem until you find out what's the root cause.[152]

In this example, the real estate mogul started by referring to a problem before immediately switching to his answer to the question. He then began a new topic but once again he did not finish his thought and preferred talking about the terrorist attacks on Paris. Right after that, he brought the topic of the perpetrators' origins. On many occasions in Trump's oral production, his grammar collapsed, which revealed that his train of thought was particularly digressive.

Regarding his writing, his Twitter account was filled with misspellings and malapropisms. For instance, he notoriously referred to his once Republican opponent Marco Rubio as a "lightweight choker" but he spelled it "leightweight choker." (Donald J. Trump, February 26, 2016) Similarly, on 4th April 2016, Trump declared he wanted to eliminate the "Department of Environmental,"[153] while he probably wanted to refer to the Environmental Protection Agency. Moreover, one of his most popular tweets ever consisted of an incomplete sentence that ended up with a word never seen before. The tweet, which was soon deleted, read: "Despite the negative press covfefe."[154] Although it might have been a simple misspelling, the mysterious word triggered a large interest from the general public, who tried to decipher the code. Donald Trump seized the occasion to get publicity and challenged the other users to "figure out the true meaning of 'covfefe'." (Donald J. Trump, May 31, 2017) The word became so popular that it was later used as the acronym of a bill introduced into the House of Representatives that aimed at preserving and documenting government members' statements posted on Twitter: the COVFEFE Act.[155] Another characteristic of his writing that was unusual in the political landscape was the way he emphasized some parts of his message. For instance, in a Twitter comment he addressed to Iranian

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[150] Leith, "Trump's rhetoric: a triumph of inarticulacy."
[151] Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory,* 31.
[152] Youtube, "How Donald Trump Answers A Question."
[153] Youtube, "Department Of Environmental, You're Fired."
[154] Estepa, "Covfefe, one year later: How a late-night Trump tweet turned into a phenomenon."
[155] The content of the bill can be accessed on the Internet at the following address: https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2884/text.

President Rouhani, the American leader typed his whole message in capital letters, an attitude that conveyed aggressiveness.

> NEVER, EVER THREATEN THE UNITED STATES AGAIN OR YOU WILL SUFFER CONSEQUENCES THE LIKES OF WHICH FEW THROUGHOUT HISTORY HAVE EVER SUFFERED BEFORE. WE ARE NO LONGER A COUNTRY THAT WILL STAND FOR YOUR DEMENTED WORDS OF VIOLENCE & DEATH. BE CAUTIOUS! (Donald J. Trump, July 26, 2018)

Nevertheless, in most cases, he used the capital letters to emphasize only one particular word in his message, such as when he claimed on Twitter that terrorist Osama Bin laden should have been captured at the time Trump "pointed him out in [his] book just BEFORE the attack on the World Trade Center." (Donald J. Trump, November 19, 2018) While referring to his own background before entering politics, he also claimed that he "went from VERY successful businessman, to top T.V. Star." (Donald J. Trump, January 6, 2018) Finally, to translate his emotional intent in his messages, he would regularly put an exclamation mark at the end of his Twitter comments. In other words, in both his oral and written production, Donald Trump's language could be described as plain and simple, but as writer Sam Leith suggested, it might have been part of an efficient communicative strategy. According to the author, the President's style of communication had the merit to reach the largest possible audience while also making him appear more honest and authentic.[156] Donald Trump appeared to be a man who spoke his mind, with all the mistakes in vocabulary or in style it implied.

Moreover, his style was pretty adapted to the audience he was targeting, namely the "pure people" or "common folks" that we have identified in our previous section. While his messages could be as easily understood by intellectuals as the general public, other candidates at the Presidency would sometimes alienate part of their audience with their more complex communication. Concerning that matter, Youtube content creator Charlie Houpert contrasted Trump's wish to build a "tall, powerful, beautiful, southern border wall" to Democrat candidate Bernie Sander's program of health care:

> I believe that a Medicare for all single-payer program will substantially lower the cost of health care for middle-class families. So instead of paying ten thousand dollars to Blue Cross or Blue Shield, yes, some middle-class families would be paying slightly more in taxes but the result would be that that middle-class family would be saving some $5000 in health care cost. A little bit more in taxes do away with private health insurance premiums; it's a pretty good deal.[157]

Not only was Bernie Sander's program more difficult to understand to the average American citizen but it was also likely to be taken out of context by the news media. In the end, the *Washington Post* wrote an article on this topic and entitled it "Read his Lips: Bernie Sanders is

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[156] Leith, "Trump's rhetoric: a triumph of inarticulacy."
[157] Youtube, "How Trump Manipulates The Media."

Going to Raise your Taxes."[158] However, it should be noted that Donald Trump's plain style of communication has often been rejected by the intelligentsia and the news media.

In an interview broadcast on *MSNBC*, Columbia University Professor of linguistics John McWhorther described the President's language as "oddly adolescent," "linguistically unadorned" and quite "narcissistic."[159] In relation to Aristotle's theories, one of the reasons that could explain the intellectuals' general distrust towards Donald Trump is that they typically respond more positively to *logos*-based arguments, while the Republican candidate focused on the emotional dimension of his communication. As Leith summarized in his article: "You come away from a Trump speech with a feeling, not an argument."[160]

In one of his video analyses of charismatic personalities, Charlie Houpert opposed Trump's word choice to English comedian Russel Brand's, who was renowned for his more flamboyant and complex vocabulary.[161] Houpert observed that the comedian's speech reached a smaller audience than Trump since various words he used were difficult to understand for the average person. On the other hand, he argued, complex vocabulary is typically more accurate and thus, it allows the speaker to convey an idea or to depict a situation with greater precision. For instance, while describing his past as a drug addict during an interview, Brand said that his drug use was part of his "nocturnal, crimson-lit, back alley" world.[162] The terms he selected, if understood by the audience, painted a clearer picture of a given situation than Trump who, in contrast, once claimed he "kn[e]w words" and "ha[d] the best words."[163] However, not only could the leader's messages be understood by a wider audience, but their simplicity made them more convincing according to a principle called the *cognitive fluency bias*. Essentially, what this concept means is that "when a sentence is easy to understand, people tend to believe it", in Houpert's words. Moreover, as mentioned above, the simpler words Donald Trump tended to use had more emotional impact than their complex counterparts. Therefore, the word "stupid" he frequently employed resonated more, emotionally speaking, in his audience than, say, "simple-minded", "obtuse" or "slow-witted."

Finally, as the Youtube content creator highlighted, the use of complex words and adorned rhetoric are commonly associated with intelligence, for their teaching is usually promoted in higher levels of education. Consequently, while employing only complex words can be perceived as pretentious or pedantic, the recurrent use of simple terms can be interpreted as a sign of idiocy. Throughout his campaign, Trump has regularly been mocked by his critics because of the

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[158] Ibid.
[159] Youtube, "Language Expert: Donald Trump's Way of Speaking Is 'Oddly Adolescent' - The 11th Hour - MSNBC.
[160] Leith, "Trump's rhetoric: a triumph of inarticulacy."
[161] Youtube, "Trump vs Brand: The Power Of Word Choice."
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid.

"childish" and "simplistic" nature of his speech but ironically, it has also been one of the most efficient characteristics of his communication in terms of its ability to convince an audience.

In conclusion, Donald Trump's simple vocabulary presented three main assets and two flaws. On one hand, the simple words he chose usually reached a larger audience, they had more emotional impact and were more convincing according to the *cognitive fluency bias*. On the other hand, simple vocabulary lacks accuracy and is often associated with a low level of education. Moreover, Sam Leith observed that the American leader was also prone to digressions, malapropisms, misspellings and many types of emphasis, especially in his written production. Trump's unadorned and informal rhetoric led to the belief shared by many of his critics that he was simply "dumb," although he repeatedly claimed that he was really smart. To evaluate the President's level of intelligence is outside the scope of our work, but we argue that in terms of communication, the simplicity of his language was convincing, mainly because of the wide audience it reached and its emotional impact. However, the lack of accuracy in his language was also the cause of another characteristic of his communication, which will be the topic of the next section.

3.4 Vague allegations and the 27th law of power

Although we have established that Donald Trump made use of unequivocal words, his speeches were often quite vague. Indeed, his terms were emotionally charged and therefore they clearly informed the listeners about the Republican's stance on a given subject. However, his arguments usually lacked substance for he deliberately ignored the details and facts in the stories he told to focus on what he believed were the fundamentals. To illustrate the vagueness of his speeches, we will insert a larger portion of his answer to Jimmy Kimmel when asked whether he thought that the discrimination of people based on their religion was un-American and wrong.

> But, Jimmy, the problem… I mean, look, I'm for it. But look, we have people coming into our country that are looking to do tremendous harm. You look at the two… Look at Paris. Look at what happened in Paris. I mean, these people, they did not come from Sweden, okay? Look at what happened in Paris. Look at what happened last week in California, with, you know, 14 people dead. Other people going to die, they're so badly injured. We have a real problem. There is a tremendous hatred out there. And what I wanna do is find out what it… you know, you can't solve a problem until you find out what's the root cause. And I wanna find out, what is the problem, what's going on. And, it's temporary. I've had so many people call me and say thanks you. Now, if you remember, when I did that a week ago it was like bedlam. All of a sudden… and you watch last night, and you see people talking. They said, "Well, Trump has a point. We have to get down to the problem." These people that are friends of mine that called say, "Donald, you have done us a tremendous service." Because we do have a problem.[164]

In this example, Trump repeatedly referred to "some people" rather than giving the names of the people he was talking about. He did not specify what kind of people entered the country to do

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[164] Youtube, "How Donald Trump Answers A Question."

"tremendous harm," nor did he identify the people that called to thank him. Similarly, he frequently talked about the "problem" America was facing in a vague manner, while the context of his utterance indicated that the issues at stake were crime and terrorism. Moreover, rather than clearly referring to the 2015 Paris and San Bernardino attacks he said "look at what happened in Paris, look at what happened last week in California, with you know, fourteen people dead." Finally, because his answers consisted of almost no factual information whatsoever, it would be difficult to replace his statement into a context for the people, who, like the readers of our work, were deprived of one. Indeed, there is a formula, particularly used in journalism, that aims at assessing the grade of completeness of a story on a subject, the *Five Ws formula*. To depict a situation thoroughly, a journalist needs to address five questions, namely who, what, where, when and why. To paraphrase Trump's answer, what we were led to believe is that "some people that are looking to do tremendous harm" caused a "problem" in America, which was illustrated by an event that took place in California one week before the utterance of his sentence and that the reason of it has something to do with nationality. Since his statement was quite vague, it is difficult for us to reconstruct the context of his message but if we combine the gathered information we can get a clearer grasp of it. Since we know that the event that took place one week before Trump's answer involved fourteen dead people, that Trump talked about something temporary and that he was asked about the discrimination of people based on their religion we can conclude that it was about his call for a ban on Muslims entering the country after the 2015 San Bernardino attack. Once again, the lack of substance in his communication confirmed that Trump's speeches were heavily anchored in the *ethos* and *pathos* forms of rhetorical evidence, rather than the *logos*.

According to Tara Golshan, writer at *Vox* news media, the real estate mogul often made vague implications so as to allow his audience "to reach their own conclusions" and "finish his thoughts."[165] In the example we have given, the public was free to interpret a few key elements in Trump's answers, such as the identity of the people "looking to do tremendous harm" or the origin of the problem at stake. The dangerous people he was referring to might have all been Muslims, it could also be the radical only or even exclusively a few mentally-ill Muslims. The nature of the problem he was pointing to could range from terrorism to cultural shock or ineffective border control. Because of the vagueness of Trump's statement, his message covered a number of potential interpretations each person could select from according to his or her own beliefs.

Finally, according to historian and writer Robert Greene in his well-known book *The 48 Laws of Power*, vagueness could participate in surrounding one's persona in mysticism.[166] In Greene's opinion one should "keep [one's] words vague but full of promise; emphasize enthusiasm over rationality and clear thinking." In Donald Trump's slogan "Make America Great Again,"

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[165] Golshan, "Donald Trump's strange speaking style, as explained by linguists."
[166] Greene, *The 48 laws of power,* 215.

which we will analyze in [Chapter 4](#), we find the embodiment of Greene's 27th law of power. Indeed, the phrase is quite vague since it does not indicate when America was great in the past nor how to restore its lost splendor but it delivers an almost messianic promise to people. In that respect, the slogan gets rid of the rational aspect of the message but it plays on people's pride and nostalgia, thus making it a *pathos*-based form of rhetorical evidence.

In conclusion of this section, we have established that although Trump's word choice was unequivocal, his arguments lacked substance and therefore his speeches were ambiguous and vague. Not only did it allow him to focus on the emotional content of his discourse but it also forced the public to fill the blanks in his communication according to its own beliefs. According to Robert Greene it also endowed his speech with a special mystic quality that we view as reminiscent of a messianic type of communication. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the lack of factual information in his speeches made it difficult to reconstruct the context of its original utterance for the people who have been deprived of one. Moreover, Trump's lack of accuracy in his language sometimes made his speeches incoherent and even contradictory, as we will confirm in the next section.

3.5 Donald Trump's flip-flops: a tale of incoherence

Several linguists, bloggers and journalists who have studied Donald Trump's style of communication, have highlighted how incoherent some of his speeches were. Because of the inaccuracy of his language in combination with the lack of factual information he gave and the many digressions present in his discourses, his messages were often difficult to follow, particularly when studied on a written format. To Tara Golshan, writer of an article entitled "Donald Trump's Strange Speaking Style, as Explained by Linguists,"[167] two main factors account for his incoherence. Firstly, most of the speeches he gave were unscripted while other politicians usually carefully prepare their communication with a team of experts beforehand. Secondly, his speeches were not meant to be read for "Trump's style of speaking [was] conversational, and may even stem from his New York City upbringing." According to her, speaking styles vary from one place to another and in New York, finishing the speaker's sentence is a natural part of conversation, although in other cultures it might be considered impolite to do so.

As we will see, Donald Trump's speeches were often filled with unfinished thoughts; a characteristic that some have even equated with a lack of intellectual capacity. Indeed, Geoffrey Pullum, a linguist at University of Edinburgh, claimed that his digressions were so frequent that they "suggest[ed] a man with scattered thoughts, a short span of attention, and a lack of intellectual discipline and analytical skills."[168] However, in his public appearances and rallies he

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[167] Golshan, "Donald Trump's strange speaking style, as explained by linguists."
[168] Ibid.

effectively signaled the false starts and parentheses he made with body language indications such as particular gestures, postures and gazes. The result of such non-verbal cues was that his speeches were more coherent to a public of listeners than to readers, which is why we argue his style of communication was conversational. To illustrate this latter characteristic, we will provide an example of a comment he made on the Iran nuclear deal during a campaign rally in South Carolina on 21th July 2015. In this speech, Trump's opinion in the Iran deal was interspersed with various anecdotes ranging from his uncle's education to the power of nuclear energy and the intelligence of women:

> But you know what irks me? Look, having nuclear... My uncle was a great professor and scientist and engineer, Doctor John Trump at MIT; good genes, very good genes, okay, very smart, the Wharton School of Finance, very good, very smart... You know, if you're a conservative Republican, if I were a liberal, if, like, okay, if I ran as a liberal Democrat, they would say I'm one of the smartest people anywhere in the world... It's true!... But when you're a conservative Republican they try... Oh, do they do a number... That's why I always start off: Went to Wharton, was a good student, went there, went there, did this, built a fortune... You know I have to give my like credentials all the time, because we're a little disadvantaged... But you look at the nuclear deal, the thing that really bothers me... It would have been so easy, and it's not as important as these lives are... Nuclear is powerful; my uncle explained that to me many, many years ago, the power and that was 35 years ago; he would explain the power of what's going to happen and he was right... Who would have thought? But when you look at what's going on with the four prisoners... Now it used to be three, now it's four... But when it was three and even now, I would have said it's all in the messenger; fellas, and it is fellas because, you know, they don't, they haven't figured that the women are smarter right now than the men, so, you know, it's gonna take them about another 150 years... But the Persians are great negotiators, the Iranians are great negotiators, so, and they, they just killed, they just killed us.[169]

As we can see, Donald Trump's comment is barely understandable when converted to a written format because of his many digressions. Nevertheless, the non-verbal cues he provided clarified his thoughts by indicating when he changed the topic. Firstly, he started with a subject that he said irritated him, but he never finished his thought on the matter and rather moved on to a new topic, i.e. nuclear energy. At this very moment of transition, Trump signaled his false start by pointing his finger to the sky so as to indicate he was correcting it. Then, there was a missing link between the Republican candidate's story about his uncle's education and the fact that he himself had good genes, for the sentence lacked both subject and verb. However, while doing so he pointed to his own head so as to indicate that it was he who had good genes and that he was digressing slightly. A few seconds later, he started talking about conservative Republicans but ended up dealing with liberal Democrats instead. What is striking in terms of his body language is that at the very moment he realized it was a false start his face became very expressive. He raised his eyebrows, opened his eyes wide and his whole head moved back for a second, which suggested he was shocked. In the end, Donald Trump's opinion on the Iran nuclear deal is not clearer to the reader after the examination of the extract but a few pieces of information stood out in his message and resonated on a more emotional level. The most salient elements of his discourse were the ones he repeated several times, such as the fact that he was "very smart," that nuclear

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[169] Slate, "Help Us Diagram This Sentence by Donald Trump."

energy was powerful and that the Iranian "killed [them]." Once again, we can observe that the candidate expressed his ideas in plain language and that the meaning and implications of his words remained quite vague. From this excerpt only, it is impossible to say what his positions on negotiating with Iran were nor how he planned to manage American nuclear energy.

Trump pointing to his own head as he says he has good genes and Trump realizing another digression in his speech (Credit: John JP Patrick[170])

Another characteristic that separated Trump from most American politicians was "his ability flatly and unblushingly to contradict himself,"[171] as reporter Sam Leith claimed. That his positions changed throughout his life is not peculiar but the fact they went from one extreme to another in a short period of time made his political views quite incoherent too. For instance, on 6th October 2015, Trump addressed the issue of the American invasion of Afghanistan:

> We made a terrible mistake getting involved there in the first place. We had real brilliant thinkers that didn't know what the hell they were doing. And it's a mess. it's a mess. And at this point, you probably have to [stay] because that thing will collapse about two seconds after they leave. Just as I said that Iraq was going to collapse after we leave.[172]

Nevertheless, fourteen days later he made a somehow opposite comment when he declared that the big mistake was the American involvement in Iraq and that ""[he] ha[d] never said [they] made a mistake going to Afghanistan."[173]

Aside from that, most of his opinions have drastically changed during his transition from TV show host and businessman to candidate at the United States Presidency. Whereas on 24th October 1999 he claimed that he was pro-choice on matters of abortion, he suddenly became pro-life when he started running for president.[174] Similarly, as a businessman, Donald Trump donated to the Clinton Foundation several times and he even invited Hillary to his third wedding in 2005 but when she became a political rival of his he referred to her as "crooked Hillary" and

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[170] A video of that particular part of his speech can be accessed on the following address:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aaoV4fxFk2Q.
[171] Leith, "Trump's rhetoric: a triumph of inarticulacy."
[172] Keneally, "What Trump has said about Afghanistan."
[173] Ibid.
[174] Youtube, "Five big contradictions of Donald Trump's candidacy."

went so far as to call her "the worst secretary of state."[175] When Jeb Bush pointed out his contradictory attitude towards Clinton, Donald Trump answered that "it was [his] obligation as a businessman, to his family, to his company, to his employees, to get along with all politicians."[176] Moreover, on the 6th November 2012 he called the electoral college "a disaster for a democracy," but he changed his mind in 2016 when he claimed on Twitter that "the electoral college [was] actually genius in that it [brought] all states, including the smaller ones, into play." (Donald J. Trump, November 15, 2016) His changes of heart were so frequent on the social network that a young American named Sam Morrison decided to distribute his own brand of flip-flops on which were printed some of Trump's most iconic contradictions.

Morrison's flip-flops and their witty slogan: "Going back on your word, one step at a time."
(Credit: Lucy Huber)

Regarding the politician's contradictions, Scott Adams preferred to use the term *strategic ambiguity* for he argued in his book that Trump's vague and ambivalent policy preferences were part of his persuasion strategy.[177] To the author, *strategic ambiguities* refer to messages that people will interpret differently depending on what they want to hear in them. In his book, Adams gave a few examples of the Republican's ambivalent political positions:

If you hate socialized health care, you might like Trump because he hates socialized medicine too. Except that he also says he won't let people with no money "die on the street." So if you like socialized medicine, you might like giving free health care to those people, like Trump. That's strategic ambiguity.If you hate illegal immigrants, you might like Trump because he once said he will depot everyone one of them. But if you feel compassion for undocumented immigrants who are otherwise good residents of the country, Trump's administration is focusing only on the ones who

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[175] Ibid

[176] Youtube, "GOP DEBATE: TRUMP, BUSH: CLINTON WENT TO TRUMP"S WEDDING."

[177] Scott Adams, *Persuasion in a World Where Facts Don't Matter,* 265.

committed additional crimes after illegally entering the country. That's strategic ambiguity. If you opposed war, you might like Trump because he claims he opposed the Iraq war and he says he has a history of being reluctant to commit U.S. forces overseas. But if you think the United States should keep bombing other countries, Trump might be your candidate, because he wants to "bomb the shit out of ISIS" and maybe kill some of their families too. That's strategic ambiguity.[178]

In conclusion, Donald Trump's speeches were often incoherent because they were filled with digressions, such as false-starts and parentheses. However, they were easier to understand in person than analyzed on a written format for the President's expressive body language usually compensated for the incoherence of his speeches. Among the reasons that could account for the various digressions he made, Tara Golshan has suggested that it was because most of his speeches were unscripted and that Trump' style of communication was essentially conversational. Nevertheless, in Geoffrey Pullum's opinion, his scattered thoughts were the results of a short attention span and a lack of intellectual discipline. In addition to that, a few political pundits have pointed out how the American leader's political views would often contradict one another, which made his stances on critical issues difficult to grasp at times. According to Scott Adams, these contradictions were part of a persuasion strategy because, as we have discussed in the section on Donald Trump's vague allegations, by being ambivalent in terms of his political views, the Republican candidate led the public to interpret most of his messages depending on what their beliefs on a given subject was. That being said, they are a few beliefs and positions that the Republican candidate has maintained throughout the campaign, which formed his core message. To have his audience memorize it and clearly identify it with his persona, Donald Trump used a technique that has long been known by politicians, which will be the topic of the next section.

3.6 "Constant repetition carries conviction" Robert Collier

As we have established, Donald Trump's communication lacked both clarity and precision but it was persuasive nonetheless. We have often highlighted the emotional content of his speeches to explain how convincing they were but the next characteristic we will discuss is as important, if not more. Trump's repetitive rhetoric was unmatched in comparison to other American politicians and as Scott Adams stressed in his work: "Repetition is persuasion."[179] This principle is one the tenets of the advertising industry, particularly when we consider how in today's society the general public is bombarded by the same brand slogans on television, the Internet and in the street. As someone who dedicated his former career to business, it is not surprising that Donald Trump often made use of the technique of repetition. In one audio interview he gave for *MSNBC,* the then Republican candidate was asked what his strategy to defeat ISIS was and he gave the following answer:

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[178] Ibid. 262.
[179] Scott Adams, *Persuasion in a World Where Facts Don't Matter,* 252.

> Well if I were president we probably wouldn't be in the problems we have right now, because it's incredible, we have an attack, and then all of a sudden **we bomb all these sites**. Why didn't **we bomb the sites** before? **We should have bombed the sites** a long time ago, Mika, These are training camps and training areas largely, and **we didn't take them out...** Why is it that **we take them out now**, after there's this vicious and violent attack? Uh the other thing I'd be explaining the problem to people. We have a president that **doesn't even use the term** and **won't use the term radical Islamic terrorism**. He **doesn't want to use the term** Hilary Clinton the...**Didn't want to use the term** the other day in the debate... Which was a ridiculous and terrible debate frankly, a joke...But she **didn't want to use the term**, she refused to use... All three of them **refused to use the term radical Islamic terrorism**. They... **They just can't say it. They absolutely can't say it.**[180]

By constantly hammering the same messages, Trump made some key parts of his answer more salient and thus, he made them more likely to be remembered. It should be noted that the same technique was used by Martin Luther King in the iconic speech he delivered in 1963 at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. The speech he gave made history under the name "I have a dream," which was the part of his speech he repeated the most, thus making it memorable. In his answer, what the Republican candidate highlighted in particular through his repetitions was that the American establishment had made a mistake not acknowledging the radical Islamic terrorism and not addressing it properly. In his views, the right strategy to defeat ISIS was to "bomb all the sites" that belonged to the terrorist organization and to "take [their members] out now."[181]

If we combine Trump's plain language and his black and white rhetoric, it naturally ensues that he would regularly repeat the same words. Indeed, as Mark Liberman concluded after comparing Donald Trump and Jeb Bush's respective announcement of their presidential run, the former talked far more than the latter but still "Bush [was] using significantly more words than Trump."[182] In other words, Bush displayed a more accurate and diversified vocabulary, while Trump repeated the same words over and over again. His habit of repeating the same phrases and expressions in his public appearances has frequently been pointed out and made fun of on the Internet. For example, a Youtube video with millions of views compiled the real estate mogul's various utterances of the word "China" in his speeches, to illustrate how repetitive it had become.[183]

What is striking in the excerpt we have analyzed is that once again, his oral production translated badly into the written format. If we had had to paraphrase his statement, we would have eliminated the repetitions and used a few synonyms so as to deliver a lighter content. Indeed, repetitions are usually frowned upon when they are found in academic texts, although their use in conversations is not uncommon. However, it should be noted that one particular book that has had a substantial influence on the Western civilization culture also consisted of various repetitions; namely the Bible. To illustrate our point we will provide a short passage from the Book of Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament:

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[180] Liberman, "Donald Trump's repetitive rhetoric."
[181] Ibid.
[182] Liberman, "Political vocabulary display."
[183] Youtube, "Donald Trump says 'China'."

In the beginning **God** created the heavens and the **earth**.
Now the **earth** was formless and empty,
Darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of **God** was hovering over the **waters**.
And **God** said, "Let there be **light**," and there was **light**.
God saw that the **light was good**, and he separated the **light** from the **darkness**.
God called the **light** "day," and the **darkness** he called "**night**."
And there was evening, and there was morning, the first day.
And **God** said, "Let there be a **vault** between the **waters** to separate **water** from **water**."
So **God** made the **vault** and separated the **water** under the **vault** from the **water** above it.
And it was so.
 God called the **vault** "**sky**."
And there was evening, and there was morning, the second day.
And **God** said, "Let the **water** under the **sky** be gathered to one place, and let **dry ground** appear."
And it was so.
God called the **dry ground** "land," and the gathered **waters** he called "seas."
And **God saw that it was good**.

In this sort passage, the word "God" has been used eleven times and has been converted into the pronoun "he" only once. Similarly, we found the repetition of some expressions such as "and it was so" or "and there was evening, and there was morning" to convey a sense of progression in the story. According to theologist and writer Jeffrey W. Hamilton, the repeated words allowed to express emphasis at a time when neither bold letters nor underlined characters were available to the edition of books.[184] In the same way, Trump's repetitive rhetoric allowed him to highlight what he viewed as the most important parts of his speech. Whether intentionally or not, his rhetoric displayed a characteristic rhetoricians have used for a long time, especially in the religious circles. By constantly hammering simple ideas, the leader, who Charlie Houpert jokingly called "the big granddaddy of all repetition,"[185] made his messages both easy to understand and likely to be remembered. In his own rhetoric, here was how candidate Trump attempted to convince people that he would be a good president:

We don't win anymore. We don't win anymore in our country, Shawn. We don't win anymore. We used to win. We don't win anymore. We don't win with trade. We don't win with war. We can't even beat ISIS and we're gonna win. If I win, I will tell you, if I win, we all win because we are gonna win.[186]

In conclusion of this section, we have seen how repetitions are key characteristics of Donald Trump's communication and how they stressed the emotional content of his speeches while compensating for their lack of clarity and overall incoherence. This feature is common in conversations although it is usually discarded in writings, particularly in academic texts; which is another indication that the businessman's style of communication was conversational. Finally, we found that this strategy of persuasion was effective for it helped the general public remember parts of the speech the orator believed to be of importance, whether that it was God

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[184] La Vista Church of Christ, "Answer."
[185] Youtube, "How Trump Manipulates The Media."
[186] Ibid.

who had created the world in the case of the Bible or that radical Islamic terrorism was a threat to the American people in the case of Trump.

3.7 Visual persuasion: The wall, the Pope's murder and the Pussygate scandal

The last characteristic of Donald Trump's language is the visual imagery he conveyed through certain terms he used. For instance, his most iconic promise as a Republican candidate to the Presidency was to improve immigration control, although he did not express it that way. Trump promised the American people that on the first day as President he would "begin working on an impenetrable, physical, tall, powerful, beautiful, southern border wall."[187] While immigration control is an abstract concept, a wall is a physical entity that could be easily pictured, especially after the candidate described it. With that being said, "Trump was also smart enough to be vague about the details of the wall so that each of us could imagine the wall we wanted to imagine," Scott Adams observed.[188] Would it be like Hadrian's Wall or even like the Great Wall of China? Would it be made of stones, cements or barbed wires? Would there be guards? Would they be armed? How many? Trump never specified, for as Adams claimed "there is one kind of wall that is hard to criticize: the one that is entirely different in each person's head."[189] Similarly, when the Republican referred to ISIS he used scary visual imagery, saying that the terrorist organization "chop[ped] off heads,"[190] for instance. Whereas terrorism is an abstract concept, people decapitating their enemies conveyed a strong and visual message particularly to get the attention of the American people on a subject that Trump viewed as critical. He went so far as to say that ISIS had plans to attack the Vatican and kill the Pope, the two main symbols of Christianity.[191]

During the Republican primaries, Doctor Ben Carson received considerable public attention as the candidate began speaking openly about his violent youth. The latter confirmed the veracity of a few episodes he had detailed in his 1990 autobiography *Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story*, which granted him certain publicity.[192] He narrated how he punched a classmate in the face, attempted to attack his own mother with a hammer and how he tried to stab a friend in the abdomen before the blade broke when it hit the boy's belt buckle. Donald Trump doubted this event ever happened and therefore he mimed the attack and mocked it at a rally he participated in. He stepped away from the podium, bended his own belt several times to show that it could not have blocked the alleged attack and extended his arm to represent the thrust.[193] In his book, Scott Adams described how Trump's acting affected Carson's popularity:

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[187] Ibid.
[188] Adams, *Win Bigly, Persuasion in a World Where Facts Don't Matter,* 175.
[189] Ibid.
[190] BBC News, "Donald Trump says he believes waterboarding works."
[191] Adams, *Win Bigly, Persuasion in a World Where Facts Don't Matter,* 177.
[192] Glover and Reston; "A tale of two Carsons."
[193] Youtube, "Donald Trump questions Carson's stabbing story."

Every media outlet carried his acting job. It was deeply visual and disturbing. Carson's numbers dropped at about the same time, and never recovered. I publicly predicted Carson's demise the day I saw Trump's performance about the belt buckle.[194]

Trump explaining to the audience that a belt is no good protection against a knife attack. (Credit: CNN)

Although visual persuasion was rooted in the businessman's communication, it has been used against him at times too. For example, the Hitler myth that started to surround him after he was elected President was deeply detrimental to his image for it was both extreme and visual. Many people associated the leader of the Nazi regime to the atrocities suffered during the Second World War, such as the death camps, the deportation and killing of millions of Jews and an overall atmosphere of fear. If some of his critics compared him to Hitler it was often because of his "demagogic promises, his authoritarianism and various attacks against the press", as was the case with producer Michael Moore.[195] However, what the comparison implicitly claimed was that Trump's election would draw the world into war and atrocities. Conversely, to describe him as authoritarian would have been far less convincing for it would have painted a more vague picture of the leader, whereas there was only one Adolph Hitler and that the memory of the Second World War was still fresh in people's mind.

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[194] Adams, *Win Bigly, Persuasion in a World Where Facts Don't Matter,* 177.

[195] Gillard, "'Fahrenheit 11/9': quand Michael Moore compare Trump à Hitler. (Original version: Fidèle à son sens de la provocation, Michael Moore n'hésite pas à faire un parallèle entre 'accession au pouvoir de Donald Trump, à coup de promesses démagogiques, d'autoritarisme et d'attaques contre la presse, et celle des Nazis d'Adolf Hitler dans l'Allemagne des années 30."

Similarly, the "grab them by the pussy" scandal tarnished Trump's reputation for not only was his statement perceived as confessions of sexual abuse,[196] as Scott Adams observed, but it was also a very visual claim. It described a peculiar sexual practice meant to assert a person's dominance and manliness in an unconventional way but it was easy to picture. The statement was so detrimental to the President's image that he publicly apologized for uttering such a sentence and said that he regretted it.[197] It should be reminded that Donald Trump has been involved in various scandals, but the so-called "Pussygate" is one of the few for which he has had to apologize.

In conclusion, Donald Trump's use of visual persuasion was effective for it relied more on the general public's imagination than their ability to grasp abstract concepts. For instance, while terrorism is a term that conveys a plurality of realities, such as fear, death and sometimes religious radicalism, the visual component of a decapitation made it both easy to grasp and terrifying for the American people. However, as Scott Adams pointed out, visual persuasion is more efficient when combined with certain degree of vagueness regarding the details of the picture that is painted by the orator. We could argue that it is for that reason that Donald Trump did not specify a number of information concerning the wall he wanted to erect, such as its length or materials. However, this technique has sometimes been used against him and it has damaged his image, as the Hitler narrative and the Pussygate scandal revealed.

Chapter 4: Trump's Strategies of Communication

4.1 Make America Great Again and the myth of American exceptionalism

In both business and politics, slogans are useful tools that enable a brand or a party to communicate its core identity in a "short and easily remembered phrase."[198] The word *slogan* itself comes from the Gaelic "Sluargh Ghairm," which means literally: "war cry," i.e. a call made to rally soldiers for battle. Many American candidates have used slogans to rally the masses under their political banner, from George H.W. Bush's solemn "Stand by the President" to Obama's famous "Yes we can". Donald Trump was no exception. When the businessman made his first speech as President on 20th January 2017, he pledged he would "make America great again," a promise that had been his main slogan throughout the campaign. According to Scott Adams, every word in his slogan is active and powerful.[199] Firstly, the word *make* conveys the idea of something that is created or manufactured, therefore something that requires to actively work on, the author commented. Then, *America* appeals to the voter's patriotism and it perfectly fits Donald Trump's nationalist political agenda, Adams added. Moreover, what the phrase suggests is that by choosing him, the voters will contribute to the betterment of the whole

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[196] Adams, *Win Bigly, Persuasion in a World Where Facts Don't Matter,* 237.
[197] Youtube, "Donald Trump apologizes for sexist comments about groping women."
[198] Cambridge Dictionary, "Slogan."
[199] Adams, *Win Bigly, Persuasion in a World Where Facts Don't Matter,* 195.

country whereas, as we will see later, Hillary Clinton's slogans usually focus on her own persona. Thirdly, the use of the word *great* is convincing for any audience because not only does it denote something good, but it also gives free reign to interpretation. In other words, since the slogan does not specify whether Trump wishes for a more prosperous economy, a better infrastructure or even simply less disparity, each person is free to fill the blanks for himself/herself and to attach its own conception of what makes a country great. Lastly, to "make America great again" implies that the country was great at some point in time and that it has the means to regain its past glory, as Adams pointed out. On many occasions, Donald Trump shared his vision of a country that was collapsing, either because of political correctness, Obama's presidency or other reasons, and that he was willing to fix and "make great again." It should also be noted that in his first speech as president, the new leader actually said "*We will* make America great again." Thanks to the use of the first person of the plural, the president included himself into the mass of people he was supposed to represent and by doing so he communicated his wish to work with them side by side. Furthermore, the candidate distributed his own brand of red caps bearing his slogan, which quickly became his symbol. Conveniently, this color is associated with the Republican party but beyond that, Scott Adams stressed in his book that "red means action, dominance, and sex" and that "it was the perfect color for the Trump campaign." As we have seen on many other occasions in this work, when it came to efficient communication the 'Donald' left nothing to chance.

To fully grasp the effectiveness of such slogan, one should not only analyze its form; the context of its formulation is significant too. Although Trump claimed he was not aware of it, the phrase was borrowed from Ronald Reagan's 1980 campaign. By using the same slogan, the candidate was unconsciously associated with a former president of the United States of America and, as a Republican, with a leader who had a similar ideology. More importantly, according to Scott Adams, both Trump and Reagan were political outsiders because of their career in respectively TV shows and cinema. In his own words:

> Although Reagan had political experience as governor of California before becoming president, the public still has a reflex to think of him as an actor who became president, because that's the more interesting story. Reagan's success was the perfect pattern to put in people's head. The pattern reminded us that an outsider *can* become one of the most beloved presidents in American history.[200]

Indeed, just as Ronald Reagan became famous by starring in several movies such as *Love is on the Air* or *Knute Rockne, All American,* Donald Trump started his big-screen career as the host of *The Apprentice* and he also made other appearances on TV at several events held by World Wrestling Entertainment. For instance, on the occasion of WrestleMania XXIII in 2007 the businessman participated in a match referred to as "The Battle of the Billionaires" in which we was seen tackling WWE owner Vince McMahon and shaving the latter's head to celebrate his victory. The event was the fourth highest attended WrestleMania in history, which allowed the future

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[200] Ibid. 192.

candidate to increase his public exposure even more.[201] In parallel, Donald Trump made a series of appearances in TV shows and films such as *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, *Sex and the City* and *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York*. This considerable media coverage helped him be known by the general public but in politics he was still an outsider. To counter that, what the slogan he borrowed from Ronald Reagan conveyed is that an outsider had already won the presidential elections in America and that it could happen again.

Donald Trump on The Apprentice and his cameo in Home Alone 2. (Credit: Jeff Schmitt & Ed Mazza)

Whereas the Republican candidate built his presidential campaign around a well-crafted slogan, his main opponent Hillary Clinton sampled a few political messages before adopting her iconic "Stronger together." According to Conrad F. Smith, Chief Security Officer at Leadershield, some of Hillary Clinton's slogans were so badly designed that they damaged the Democrat's campaign more than they supported it.[202] For instance, the "Love Trumps Hate" phrase was particularly unconvincing because it actually gave free press to her opponent, Smith argued. Indeed, the slogan failed because of the *principle of primacy*, which is a psychological effect that describes the human tendency "to put more value on the beginning of a statement or list than the middle."[203] Although Clinton wanted the voters to pair Trump with "Hate," what the message actually associated him with was "Love." Similarly, Smith claimed that the "I'm With Her" slogan failed because of its phonetic proximity to a very different phrase: "I am wither." To the author, it is likely that because of another psychological effect called *priming*, according to which the mere exposure to a word or idea can influence the way we think, Hillary came to be associated with the idea of decay. In addition, Scott Adams argued that the "I'm With Her" and "I'm Ready for Hillary" slogans were less effective slogans because they focused on one person running for president whereas Trump's "Make America Great Again" was about the country as a whole.[204] During a press conference, leaders of the Democratic Party parodied Trump's iconic slogan into "Make America Sick Again" so as to reject any repeal of the Obamacare, a law the Republican

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[201] Wikipedia, "WrestleMania 23."
[202] Smith, "Why Clinton's Slogans Failed (Hard)."
[203] Ibid.
[204] Adams, *Win Bigly, Persuasion in a World Where Facts Don't Matter,* 196.

candidate often criticized. Although the parody was obvious, the Democrats may have put themselves into a position in which they ended up being associated with this "American sickness," all the more so if we consider that they stood next to a sign containing this very phrase during the conference.[205]

(Credit: Zach Gibson)

In Donald Trump's slogan, we find the expression of a nationalist pride and certain melancholia directed towards an undefined past during which the United States were perceived as a more dominant power, by the American people themselves if not by foreigners. This vision of the country shares a few characteristics with what has been referred to as *American exceptionalism,* which is the assumption that "America's values, political system and history are unique and worthy of universal admiration,"[206] according to Stephen Martin Walt, professor of international affairs at Harvard University. To the author, American exceptionalism is based on a series of myths and narratives its believers tend to relay and in this paragraph we will first look into said myths and then we will see whether Trump echoed them in his communication and political actions. The first belief that is linked to *American exceptionalism* is the uniqueness of the country. Accordingly, the American people would be endowed with a special responsibility towards other nations, they would have "to take on special burdens," Walt explained. Historically, several dominant forces, such as the French and British empire, have invoked such unique responsibility to justify their colonization missions, often by pretending to have the duty to bring civilization to other countries. In short, Walt appears to link this myth to certain interventionism and territorial expansion. However, Donald Trump's political agenda was essentially focused on domestic issues and could even be described as isolationist in that, as President, he has withdrawn from various cooperation treaties such as the Paris Agreement, the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Iran nuclear deal.

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[205] Ibid. 203.

[206] Walt, "The Myth of American Exceptionalism."

Similarly, he has criticized the American military involvement in both Afghanistan and Iraq and, although he has planned to increase military spending,[207] there has been no discussion to occupy or invade a country, at the time of writing that is. Consequently, he cannot be said to have relayed this particular myth in his political actions. Moreover, a month before the businessman announced his candidacy to the Presidency, he spoke at an event hosted in Houston by the Texas Patriots PAC and he was asked what his thoughts on *American exceptionalism* were. Trump answered by saying that he did not like the term, that he did not believe the United States were more exceptional than other nations and claimed that patriotism does not equate with *American exceptionalism*.[208]

Another myth that is linked to *American exceptionalism* is the belief that "the United States behave better than other nations do," according to Walt. Regarding Donald Trump, his communication often left out the American values that exceptionalists see as inherent in the nation, such as freedom, human rights and the rule of law. On the contrary, a few of his political positions contradict any claim to the nation's moral superiority. For instance, Donald Trump has supported a torture practice known as waterboarding, which aims at simulating the sensation of drowning to get confessions from an interrogated individual.[209] In addition to that, the President signed an executive order to keep the Guantanamo Bay detention camp open indefinitely, thus reversing the policy of his predecessor.[210] The latter has been described as a major violation of human rights by Amnesty International because of various allegations regarding the life conditions of its inmates and illegal methods of interrogation.[211] In the light of what has been studied, we can conclude that the Republican behavior is not dictated by a set of values that correspond to *American exceptionalism* but rather by the principle according which necessity knows no law.

A third myth in relation to *American exceptionalism* perceives the nation's success as due to its population's unique virtues, such as creativity and hard work. However, as we have seen in this work, Donald Trump had a more pessimistic perspective on the matter. To him, the country was gradually losing its splendor and greatness, all because of the bad decisions made by his predecessors' administrations. The belief he relayed during his campaign was that the United States were in a disadvantageous position on the political chessboard and therefore, the country was in no way exceptional, but it could be if he was elected. In other words, Donald Trump held the view that the United States were not exceptional but that they could become so with the right administration, namely his.

The same logic applies to another myth linked to *American exceptionalism*, which is the idea that "the United States is responsible for most of the good in the world," in Professor Walt's words.

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[207] Youtube, "Trump advocate for increased military spending."
[208] Corn, "Donald Trump Says He Doesn't Believe in 'American Exceptionalism."
[209] BBC, "Donald Trump says he believed waterboarding works."
[210] Borger, "Donald Trump signs executive order to keep Guantanamo Bay open."
[211] Wikipedia, "Guantanamo Bay detention camp."

In both his communication and his political agenda, Trump appears to disregard matters of international development to focus solely on the prosperity of America. In a 2018 rally in Houston he participated in, Donald Trump opposed his nationalist and protectionist views with a globalist approach to governing:

> You know what a globalist is, right? You know what a globalist is. A globalist is a person that wants the globe to do well, frankly, not caring about our country so much. And you know what? We can't have that. You know they have a word, it sort of became old-fashioned, it's called a nationalist. And I say really? We are not supposed to use that word. You know what I am? I am a nationalist, okay?[212]

As we can see in that excerpt, the American leader appears to be more interested in knowing how the world can benefit the United States than the contrary.

Finally, there is a widespread myth surrounding *American exceptionalism* according to which the United Stated would be on a divine mission to lead the rest of the world. However, as *CNN* reporter Daniel Burke indicated, "for much of the 2016 presidential campaign religion has receded into the background, mainly because the two major party nominees, Trump and Hillary Clinton, rarely talk about their faith."[213] Although the Republican received substantial support from the evangelical community, he was himself quite private about his own faith and did not use it as a means to enhance his rhetoric, unlike Ronald Reagan who often placed America at the centre of a divine scheme. Even when the President provoked the wrath of Palestine by unilaterally recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in 2017, the leader invoked no religious or cultural reason to justify his decision but rather that he was fulfilling a promise made by his predecessors.[214] In the light of what has been said, we can describe Donald Trump's political views as nationalist and protectionist but not as being the reflection of any belief in *American exceptionalism*.

In conclusion of this section, we argue that the now-President slogan's was very effective during his campaign because of the message it stood for and the clever, although possibly accidental, reference to Ronald Reagan, another outsider in politics who managed to become the leader of the nation. Moreover, the quality of his communication was highlighted during the elections by his main opponent's relatively poor persuasion skills when it came to creating slogans. Finally, we have established that Trump held nationalist and protectionist views, as evidenced by his political actions and his declarations, but he did not believe in the myth of *American exceptionalism* for, as he said, patriotism does not equate with *American exceptionalism*.

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[212] Youtube, "Trump: "You know what I am? I'm a nationalist."

[213] Burke, "The guilt-free gospel of Donald Trump."

[214] Le Monde, "Trump reconnaît Jérusalem comme capitale d'Israël, une décision historique et unilatérale."

4.2 Ethos-based arguments: social proof and the appeal to authority

As we have established in the course of our work, Donald Trump's ability to sway an audience relied heavily on the appeal to emotions, often at the expense of logical forms of evidence. His speeches were frequently ambiguous and contradictory, he displayed a low level of vocabulary and he made use of rhetorical arguments that were often seen as fallacies. Yet, because his core supporters understood him on an emotional level, his communication proved very efficient in persuading an audience. This counterpoint between Aristotle's notions of *pathos* and *logos* is at the heart of our work. However, it should be noted that *ethos* played a significant role in Trump's communication too, especially when it comes to two techniques of persuasion he frequently made use of during the presidential elections. The Republican candidate often resorted to social proof and to the appeal to authority. Social proof is a term that was first coined by Professor of psychology and marketing at Arizona State University Robert Cialdini in his best-seller: *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion.*[215] It is defined as the human tendency to be unconsciously influenced by the judgment and behavior of the masses, especially in situations of uncertainty. Each presidential election is a period of uncertainty for the American people because the choice of the nation regarding the new leader will fundamentally impact the future of the United States for at least four years, provided the leader is not impeached during his mandate. It is a pivotal period in which the voters decide what path the country will follow without any real guarantee that the elected leader will fulfill the commitments he has built his campaign around. Moreover, the new president's policies might be at odds with his predecessor's administration, which was the case for Trump since he tried to dismantle Obamacare. In times of doubt such as these, social proof can provide guidance to the American voters who are unsure as to which candidate is to be trusted with such high position of power.

The second technique we will discuss in this section is the appeal to authority, also known as *argumentum ad verecundiam*. It describes the act of quoting a figure of authority or an expert in a given field so as give more validity to the argument that is presented. Once again we address a type of argument that is polemical in that some scholars argue that the appeal to authority is not deductively valid whereas others deem it reasonable. In a journal article on the *argumentum ad verecundiam,* authors John Woods and Douglas Walton argued that this type of argument "committ[ed] a fallacy only where the appeal in question is to an authority that does not exist, to expertise of questionable or debased credentials."[216] As we will see, when Donald Trump had to deal with more technical matters such as law or finance, he would often appeal to the authority of a third party that supported his claims. Moreover, he had the peculiar habit of constantly praising the virtues and qualities of the experts that were in accordance with his positions as a way to further increase the credibility of his claims.

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[215] Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion,* 97-135.
[216] Woods & Walton, "Argumentum ad Verecundiam," 136.

According to Charlie Houpert, creator of the Charisma on Command channel on Youtube, social proof was one of Donald Trump's favorite tactics during the elections.[217] In one interview the Republican candidate gave on *the O'Reilly Factor*, a popular television show broadcasted on *Fox News Channel,* Trump used this strategy repeatedly to assert his dominance in the debates.

> And everybody said I won at the debates, and everybody said I won all six debates, and especially the last one, so everybody said I won that debate. Every online poll said I won every one of the debates, especially the last one.[218]

In this excerpt, we can see that the candidate combined the technique of social proof to his typical plain language and the strategy of repetition we studied in [Chapter 3](). Although he did not provide the audience with specifics with regard to the polls or even proofs that so many people agreed with him, the main idea that he stressed through constant repetition is that he was winning the debates. In this case, the real estate mogul artificially increased his own credibility by relaying what is core supporters allegedly thought of his relevance as a politician, so as to establish himself as a sort of figure of authority in that domain. As Charlie Houpert highlighted in his analysis of Trump's communication tactics, social proof is particularly effective in an environment in which the public is overwhelmed with information, which was the case in the context of the presidential elections. Indeed, during this period, the American people was subjected to almost non-stop coverage of the elections, either in the form of political rallies, news media information, debates or discussions on popular social networks such as Facebook or Twitter. Since the volume of information flows was overloaded, social proof could be used as a way to indicate that Donald Trump was leading in the polls, a strategy that ultimately aimed at converting the undecided voters into new supporters of his.

One of the characteristics of Trump's communication that caught the most attention during the elections and that is related to the notion of *ethos* is his tendency to place himself on a pedestal. As reporter Haley Britzky highlighted in her article,[219] the businessman seemed to think he knew more than anybody about a wide variety of subjects. For instance, in 1999, the real estate mogul claimed that "nobody kn[e]w more about campaign finance than [he did]." Moreover, in November 2015, he declared that he "underst[oo]d the power of Facebook maybe better than almost anybody." He expressed a similar opinion in April 2016 when he said that he "kn[e]w more about renewables than any human being on Earth." (sic) The domains of expertise Trump has claimed to master ranged from ISIS to construction and even drone technology. With these statements, he might have tried to establish himself as a figure of authority in several domains so as to give more credibility to his positions. In other words, he appealed to his own authority rather than on a third party. Similarly, Donald Trump would usually prefer to ask his audience to "believe [him]" rather than to start his statements with "I believe.
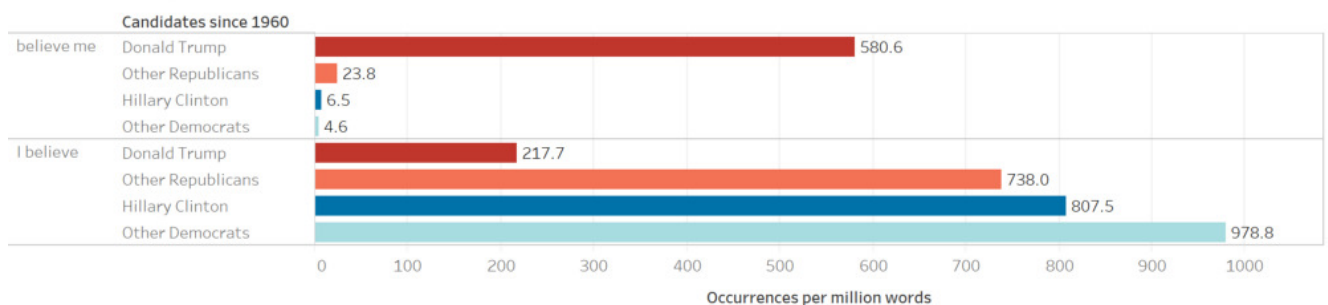
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[217] Youtube, "Donald Trump's Debates: 5 Mental Tricks You Didn't Notice."
[218] Ibid.
[219] Britzky, "Everything Trump says he knows "more about than anybody."

In his article, blogger Tyler Schnoebelen indicated that Trump's use of the injunction "believe me" occurred far more often than any candidate, Republican or Democrat, that has ever run for President since 1960.[220] Conversely, the phrase "I believe" appeared almost four times less in his speeches than in Hillary Clinton's. To Schnoebelen, this is yet another form of appeal to Trump's own authority. Indeed, imperative sentences differ from declaratives in that the former typically express a call for action while the latter only provides information. In the case of Trump's "believe me", the call for action is the act of trusting the competence and authority of the speaker in a given domain.

Occurrences per million words

	Candidates since 1960	
believe me	Donald Trump	580.6
	Other Republicans	23.8
	Hillary Clinton	6.5
	Other Democrats	4.6
I believe	Donald Trump	217.7
	Other Republicans	738.0
	Hillary Clinton	807.5
	Other Democrats	978.8

Occurrences per million words

For one million spoken words, the phrase "believe me" occurs 580,6 times in average in Trump's speeches while "I believe" only occurs 217.7 times. (Credit: Tyler Schnoebelen)

Although the Republican candidate was particularly fond of the tactic of social proof, it has sometimes been employed against him, in which case he was prompt to discard such allegations. For example, in the interview he gave on the *O'Reilly Factor*, the host of the show claimed that many people did not take him seriously when he announced he would run for President because he was seen as "a buffoon." This statement was a direct attack to Trump's *ethos* for it questioned his competence as a politician and his degree of expertise as a potential future president, which is why he interrupted the host:

> I don't think they thought I was a buffoon. What kind of a statement is that? I built a great company. I've had number one best-selling books. I had one of the top television shows in television, and nobody says buffoon. No, they thought I wouldn't run, and then they thought that If I did run, I'd just have a good time for a little while, and then, I'd get out. Unfortunately for them, I'm number one by many, many points.[221]

In this excerpt, we can see that Bill O'Reilly formulated his comment as an *ad hominem argument* and Trump, who did not want the American voters to think of him as "a buffoon", countered the claim by presenting a very distinct narrative. While the host affirmed most people believed the real estate mogul *could not* run for president, what Trump stated is that people thought he *did not want* to run. The distinction is crucial because in the Republican candidate's narrative, he was

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[220] Schnoebelen, "Trump says 'believe me' often but rarely 'I believe.'"
[221] Youtube, "Donald Trump's Debates: 5 Mental Tricks You Didn't Notice."

a highly competent politician and a candidate to be reckoned with, just like he had been a successful businessman, a published author, a television celebrity, etc.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that in this case Donald Trump deliberately omitted a few details in his answer. For instance, whereas he claimed he had built a great company, he avoided addressing the topic of the six others that went bankrupt.[222] Concerning his books, while he was right when he pretended that he had published a few number one best-sellers, only *The Art of the Deal* had a lasting popularity. Indeed, the book stayed at the number one spot on the *New York Times* best seller list for thirteen weeks and it managed to hold a position on this list for a total of forty-height weeks.[223] Other books he co-wrote such as *Trump: Surviving at the Top* and *Trump: The Art of the Comeback* did not come close to being as successful. Moreover, although the television reality show he hosted, *The Apprentice,* had attracted a total of 20.7 million viewers for the first season, its attendance rate has been decreasing until then to reach merely 4.7 million viewers in 2011.[224] It is as if he tried to compensate the damage his credibility suffered because of Bill O'Reilly's statement with an overoptimistic version of his own success.

Even though affirming one has numerous people supporting his ideas can be a way to gain even more supporters, there are cases in which popular opinion is quite insignificant, especially when it comes to complex topics such as constitutional law or the current economy. In such cases, Donald Trump would resort to another strategy: the appeal to authority, or *argumentum ad verecundiam.* Behind this type of argument lies the idea that if a claim is supported by someone whose competence in the given subject is undeniable, then said claim becomes valid and therefore more convincing. To illustrate how the businessman made use of this tactic, we will analyze two different statements delivered by Trump on separate occasions. The first example derives from his answer to criticism regarding the tax plan he had proposed as a candidate for the presidency, which would allegedly cut taxes 10 trillion dollars without increasing the deficit. The second example consists of the real estate mogul's claim that Senator Ted Cruz was not allowed to run for President in accordance with the territorial principle.

> Larry Kudlow is an example, who I have a lot of respect for, loves my tax plan, where reducing taxes to 15%, we're bringing corporate taxes down, bringing money back in; corporate inversions. [...] Larry Kudlow, who sits on your panel, who's a great guy, came out the other day and said "I love Trump's tax plan."[225]

> Lawrence Tribe and... From Harvard, of Harvard, said that there is a serious question as to whether or not Ted can do this, okay? There are other attorneys that feel... and very, very fine constitutional attorneys... That feel that because he was not born on the land, he cannot run for office.[226]

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[222] Murse, "Why Donald Trump's Companies Went Bankrupt."
[223] Mayer, "Donald Trump's ghostwriter tells all."
[224] Wikipedia, "The Apprentice."
[225] Youtube, "Donald Trump's Debates: 5 Mental Tricks You Didn't Notice."
[226] Ibid.

What is striking in these two excerpts is that not only did he insist on the validity of his ideas because they were supported by experts, but he also enhanced the latter's credibility by praise or by stressing the relevance of their views. For instance, to mention that Lawrence Tribe had studied in Harvard was not an insignificant digression. It implied that the figure of authority Trump mentioned was highly competent since he attended one of the most prestigious universities in the United States. When the businessman appealed to the authority of a third party, he usually made sure to praise the person or group he quoted as a means to make its claims more relevant.

In the light of what has been said, we can conclude that Trump's communication relied on *ethos* arguments, since, in the way he presented his opinions, he often equated the validity of his arguments with the personal qualities of the people who supported his views. In the examples we analyzed, he tried to persuade the audience that his tax plan should be implemented because it was supported by "a great guy" and he opposed Ted Cruz's candidacy to the presidential elections because of questions raised by "very, very fine constitutional attorneys." His habit of praising the people who shared his views or himself followed the same logic than the repeated attacks he addressed to his opponents, namely that the persuasive nature of someone's arguments depends on the image the speaker projects of himself to an audience. Consequently, praising a source of information would make its arguments somehow more convincing, whereas criticizing and mocking it would affect its credibility. To illustrate this contrast, we can observe how Trump made use of *ethos*-based arguments such as the *argumentum ad verecundiam* and the *ad hominem*.

4.3 Destabilization, deflection and retorsio argumenti

Although they are not constitutionally mandated in the United States of America, debates are an essential part of the election process. They allow the candidates to answer questions and comment on a series of topics related to the future of the nation so as to sway the undecided voters. While the different formats can vary from one occasion to another, the candidates are usually given certain amount of time to answer questions asked by a moderator, whose function is to oversee the debate. However, it is not uncommon that the politicians interrupt one another either to react on an allegation that has been made by the opponent or to destabilize each other. In this section, we will look into several techniques of destabilization Donald Trump has used during the elections as well as his strategies of deflection when a rival tried to undermine him.

According to Guy Barrier, interruption is a sign of a conflicting interaction between two individuals or more.[227] This method can lead to two situations: either the opponent has to start his argument from the beginning or he has to move on to a new one. In both cases, the speaker is frustrated and it can eventually make him lose self-control.[228] On 19th October 2016, the final

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[227] Barrier, *La communication non verbale,* 34.
[228] Ibid.

debate between Republican nominee Donald Trump and Democrat nominee Hillary Clinton took place in the University of Nevada in Las Vegas. As Clinton was addressing the collusion of the Russian government Trump was accused of supporting, the Republican interrupted her to say that he doubted her claim.[229] Not only did his intervention make it more difficult for the public to hear what his rival wished to express but it also made her lose her temper for a moment. Indeed, her body language changed; whereas she had displayed a relaxed face before, she started to frown while looking at Trump and she pointed her finger at him several times, which, as we established in [Chapter 2](), is a sign of threat.[230] In this particular case, we have an example of what Barrier called *mutual overlap*: a situation in which the two participants talk at the same time, thus interfering with the message of one another.[231]

Nevertheless, Trump more often disrupted Clinton with short and contradictory sentences so as to destabilize her momentarily. For instance, after the Republican nominee had presented his tax plan to the audience, the Democrat started her comment in response to his answer by stating: "Well, let me translate that if I can, Chris."[232] Then, the businessman quickly interrupted her and claimed: "You can't." Similarly, while the moderator reacted to Clinton's plan for the American economy by arguing that a comparable project had been attempted in the past and that it had lead to "the slowest gross domestic product growth since 1949," Trump intervened once more to say: "correct." He has also repeatedly interrupted her throughout the debate to point out that her claims were "wrong," for example after being accused of giving his support to the invasion of Iraq.[233] The Republican nominee's various disruptions were likely meant to provoke his opponent and infuriate her, which is one of the thirty-height stratagems essayist Arthur Schopenhauer listed in his book: *The Art of Being Right.* The idea behind this strategy is to "make your opponent angry,"[234] so as to manipulate him into saying something he will regret later or simply have him contradict himself. In his book, the essayist gave several examples of behaviors that could infuriate the other speaker in the context of an argument, most of which Trump displayed in the debate. For example, he advised to "act in a superior manner," "show disrespect" and even "insult the person."[235] In addition to that, Trump's body language was quite expressive during the final debate, especially when he did not agree with what his political rival was saying. He would sometimes shake his head in disagreement, squint while looking at her or pout. As Guy Barrier pointed out in his work, such dubious mimic can serve the purpose of destabilizing or distracting the interlocutor.[236]

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[229] Youtube, "The Third Presidential Debate: Hillary Clinton And Donald Trump (Full Debate) / NBC News."
[230] This particular passage can be watched via the previous link from the 28:54 minute mark onward.
[231] Barrier, *La communication non verbale,* 40.
[232] Youtube, "The Third Presidential Debate: Hillary Clinton And Donald Trump (Full Debate) / NBC News."
[233] Youtube, "Donald Trump vs. Hillary Clinton: All Debate Interruptions / TIME."
[234] Schopenhauer, "Make Your Opponent Angry," 11.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Barrier, *La communication non verbale,* 40.

Trump and his doubtful smile as Clinton claimed she wanted an energy system that would cross border. On the second picture, a very expressive pout from him. (Credit: NBC News)

During the elections, Trump has been repeatedly attacked by political rivals and critics alike who tried to undermine him. In these cases, the real estate mogul regularly used humor to deflect criticism, thus limiting or, in some cases, nullifying the affect of the attack, as Charlie Houpert pointed out in one of his video analyses.[237] For instance, during a Republican debate broadcast on *Fox Business* channel, a few people in the crowd started booing Trump as he was making a comment, but he was able to regain control over the situation by cracking the following joke:

> Well, let me just tell you something, and you know it because you just saw the numbers yourself. NBC, Wall Street Journal just came out with the poll, headline "Trump Way Up, Cruz Going Down." (boos start)You can't... They don't like the Wall Street Journal. They don't like NBC, but I like the poll.[238]

As soon as he made this humorous comment, people in the crowd stopped booing and, instead, they cheered the candidate up with shouts and applause. As Houpert highlighted in the video, Donald Trump was "using laughter to take control of situations where he [was] starting to lose control." On the occasion of the first Republican primary debate on 6th August 2015, the moderator made a claim that was detrimental to the businessman's reputation but he was able to deflect the attack and reframe the whole situation by cracking another joke, the Youtube content creator added. Former *Fox News* anchor Megyn Kelly claimed that Trump had "called women [he] [did not] like fat pigs, dogs, slobs, and disgusting animals," to which he responded that it only applied to Rosie O'Donnell, his nemesis. Here again, the crowd laughed at his answer and started to applaud, which showed that he managed to nullify the attack by dismissing the point of the argument. Similarly, during the second presidential debate, Hillary Clinton tried to undermine his credibility when she said that she was relieved to know Trump was not in charge of the law in the United Stated, to which he responded: "Because you'd be in jail."[239] Although the moderators of this particular debate had asked several time to the audience to remain quiet so as to show impartiality towards the candidates, the crowd began to shout hysterically and applaud. Trump's witty answer is an example of what Arthur Schopenhauer called *retorsio argumenti,* which is an argument put forward by an opponent which is then turned against himself. In this

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[237] Youtube, "Donald Trump's Incredible Powers of Persuasion."
[238] Ibid.
[239] Youtube, "The Second Presidential Debate: Hillary Clinton And Donald Trump (Full Debate) / NBC News."

case, not only did the businessman manage to deflect criticism but he also redirected it towards his rival who, having not anticipated this turn of event, remained silent after his answer.

What made Donald Trump's communication so dominant, especially in the debates, is that the messages conveyed by his body language were in total alignment with his oral production. Trump's non-verbal communication conveyed his personal views as clearly as his speeches, which allowed him to deny allegations made by his opponents with facial expressions only. As Houpert revealed in a video breaking down the businessman's power of persuasion, the real estate mogul seemed not to take Jeb Bush's attacks seriously during a Republican debate that took place on 15th December 2015.[240] Indeed, Donald Trump shook his head, frowned and smirked as his political rival criticized him, which communicated that he did not feel threatened by the accusations made against him. As the Youtube content creator added, even when a political opponent succeeded in undermining Trump's image, the latter was able to regain control of the interaction and to come on top. For example, during a Republican debate that took place at the Reagan Library in California on 16th September 2015, Jeb Bush was asked what code name he would chose for Trump if he became President, to which he answered "very high-energy Donald."[241] With this code name, Jeb Bush made use of a *retorsio argumenti,* since he implied that his rival was unstable and hysterical while turning the "low-energy Jeb" nickname against its creator. Laughter and applause ensued from Bush's comment while the businessman had no other choice but to take the hit. Nevertheless, he appeared to take it with humor as he smiled at the audience, raised his thumb up in agreement and even slapped his rival's hand. After limiting the damage done by his opponent's intervention, Trump deflected the attack with his own answer when he claimed that Bush's code name would be "humble," which entirely reframed the situation. Indeed, by stating that his opponent was too humble, Donald Trump implied that the code name he was given was a compliment and that having such "very high-energy" was a quality. Not only did the crowd laugh and applaud at his comment but Bush himself smiled at him and said: "That's a good one." The future president's answer is a rare example of a *retorsio argumenti* used to counter an initial *retorsio argumenti.*

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[240] Youtube, "Donald Trump's Incredible Powers of Persuasion."
[241] Ibid.
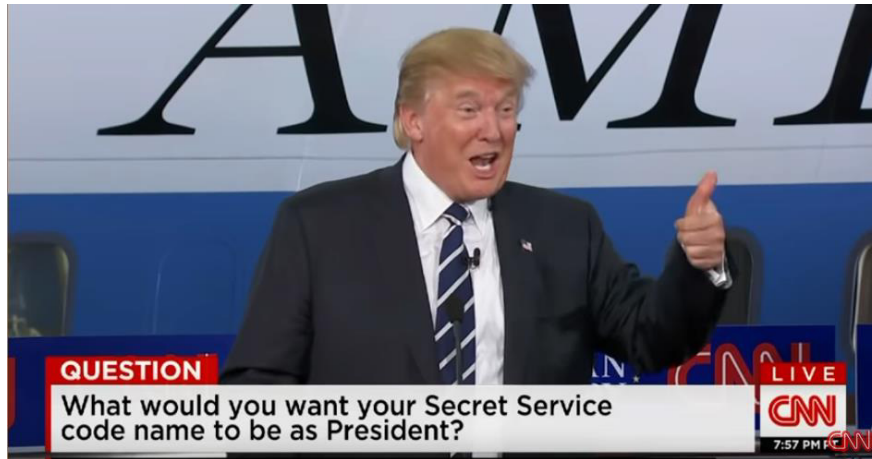
As the audience validated the "very high-energy Donald" nickname with laughter, Trump had to take the hit but he quickly reframed the situation. (Credit: CNN)

To conclude with this section, we will break down the techniques of speech we have analyzed into three categories: the techniques of attack, of defense and of counter-attack. Strategies of destabilization are always meant as ways to attack an opponent's claims by disruption. These strategies include interruptions, mutual overlaps and dubious mimics. Not only do they interfere with the opponent's message but they can also infuriate him, which can in turn make him say something he will regret or contradict himself at some point. When it comes to defending one against critics, humor proves to be a solid tool that allows to limit, if not nullify, attacks made by an opponent. Ideally, the initial claim should be turned against the opponent so as to provide a counter-attack that is likely to undermine him. As we established, this stratagem is known as *retorsio argumenti*. If Donald Trump's communication was so dominant during the elections it is because he favored techniques of attack and counter-attack in the debates he participated in. To Trump, the best form of defense is attack, as his personal style of communication revealed.

Chapter 5: Media Coverage and Publicity

5.1 A love-hate relationship with the media

As we have mentioned several times in our work, Donald Trump had a conflicting relationship with mainstream media during the presidential campaign and he maintained it after being elected. In November 2018, he had an altercation with White House correspondent for *CNN* Jim Acosta. The latter addressed a few political issues, including the possible Russian interference during the 2016 United States elections, but the President did not wish to comment on the reporter's questions. Trump denied the accusations briefly and then refused to take more questions from Jim Acosta, but the correspondent would not give his microphone back to an intern who worked at the White House. The President then declared to Acosta that "*CNN* should be ashamed of itself

having [him] working for them,"[242] and that media that reported "fake news" like *CNN* were the enemy of the people. Following this incident, Jim Acosta got his accreditation withdrawn temporarily. When interviewed by *RTBF* special envoy Aurélie Didier, Jim Acosta suggested that media outlets like *CNN* were regularly the target of the President's attacks and persecutions because they had some form of control over him, in the sense that they methodically double-checked the facts presented by the leader and they had the ethical obligation to contradict them when necessary.[243]

The American leader's relationship with the press has never been peaceful but it seems to have worsened since his election. In a message he posted on Twitter on 17th February 2017, Trump attracted a lot of public attention when he commented that *The New York Times*, *NBC News*, *ABC*, *CBS* and *CNN* were "fakes news" media and that they were the enemy of the American People. (Donald J. Trump, February 17, 2017) Moreover the President has refused to attend the White House Correspondents Association's diner three years in a row, because he deemed it "dull."[244] According to *Washington Post* journalist Paul Farhi, the Republican built much of his campaign on his systematic opposition to the press and often turned reporters into political opponents.[245] This everlasting conflict between the President and the media has worried some, to the point that Arthur Gregg Sulzberger, editor at *New York Times*, warned that the American leader's anger against the media would "lead to violence."[246]

With regard to the media themselves, they have often ridiculed the real estate mogul's claim to the Presidency and the situation only deteriorated when he became head of state for they regularly criticized his decisions or contradicted his views. As Scott Adams claimed in his work, "social media and the mainstream media were in a feeding frenzy. They called him a liar, a con man, and just plain stupid. Some went so far as to question his sanity."[247] Against this constant flow of critics from the media and regardless of the opposition he met, Donald Trump always insisted on the veracity of his claims and his high degree of competence about various subjects. Whenever a media outlet opposed his views he would simply call it "fake news", a method he has employed on many occasions and which was an efficient way to silence the fourth power, as *The New York Times* White House correspondent Julie Hirschfield Davis expressed. As she explained in an article published by *BBC*:

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[242] Youtube, "Trump clases with CNN reporter: 'CNN should be ashamed of itself' ."

[243] Dridi, "Donald Trump et les médias: une relation compliquée."

[244] La Libre, "Donald Trump s'acharne contre les médias: "Ils devront se mettre à genoux et implorer mon pardon."
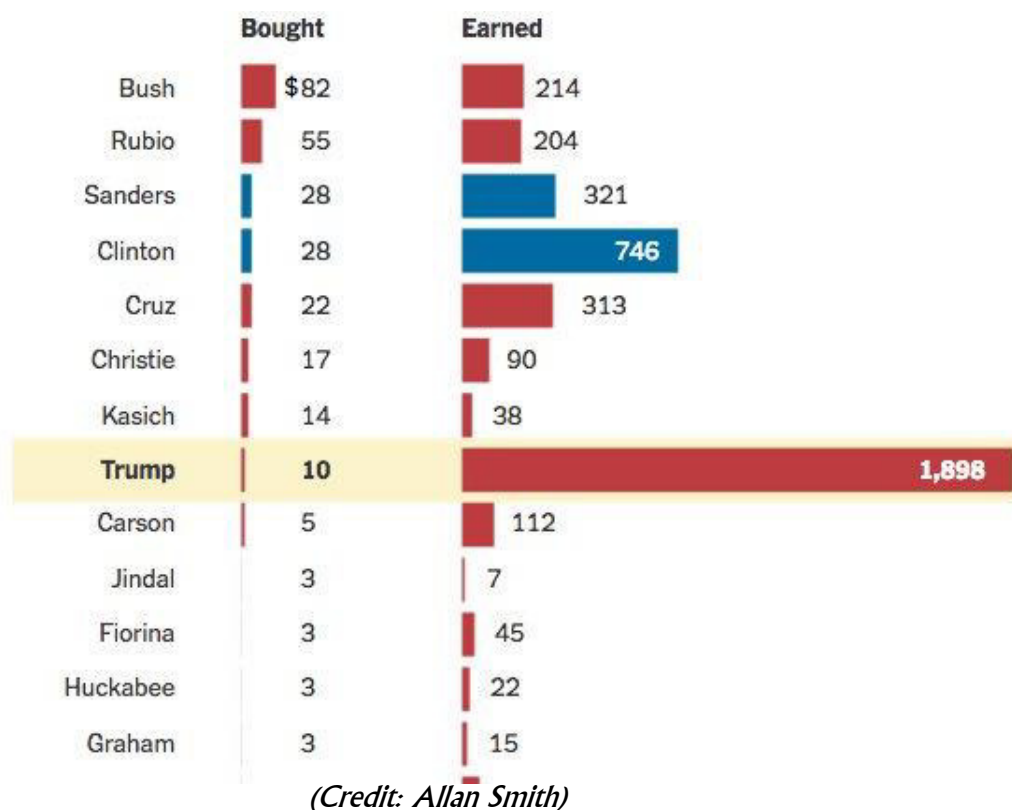
[245] Bourcier, "Donald Trump et les médias, une guerre très rentable."

[246] Wheeldon, "Trump vs les médias, comment chaque camp y trouve son compte." (Original version: "Au point que l'éditeur AG Sulzberger du New York Times a averti le 30 juillet que les attaques de plus en plus colérique et hargneuses de Donald Trump contre les médias 'conduiraient à la violence.'")

[247] Adams, *Win Bigly, Persuasion in a World Where Facts Don't Matter,* 35.

> You do your best to get the actual information out of the White House and you write a story and then they come back at you with "Oh that's fake news". How are you supposed to write anything resembling reality if you're actually not getting their side of the story? [248]

However, as many writers have pointed out, this conflicting relationship was actually beneficial for both parties in that, on one hand, it offered tremendous publicity to Donald Trump when he was a candidate and it provided numerous shocking stories for news outlets to cover on the other. Throughout his campaign, the Republican candidate attracted a lot of mass media attention on him and he knew how to take advantage of today's culture information overload. As Charlie Houpert highlighted, although Donald Trump spent slightly over half what Clinton did on his campaign, he received over two billion dollars in free publicity because of the various controversies and scandals he was involved in. [249] In comparison, the estimated value in earned media was more than double that of Hillary Clinton and six times higher than the second Republican candidate on the list, Senator Ted Cruz. [250]

	Bought	Earned
Bush	$82	214
Rubio	55	204
Sanders	28	321
Clinton	28	746
Cruz	22	313
Christie	17	90
Kasich	14	38
Trump	10	1,898
Carson	5	112
Jindal	3	7
Fiorina	3	45
Huckabee	3	22
Graham	3	15

(Credit: Allan Smith)

While other politicians lost all credibility because of scandals they were involved in, such as Bill Clinton with the Lewinsky controversy or Richard Nixon with the Watergate scandal, Trump's popularity seemed to grow with them. Regarding publicity, Trump wrote in his best-seller *The Art of The Deal* that "good publicity [was] preferable to bad, but from a bottom-line perspective, bad

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[248] Hirschfield David, "Has President Trump changed the media landscape."
[249] Youtube, "How Trump Manipulates The Media."
[250] Smith, "Stunning chart shows how Donald Trump has dominated media coverage of the 2016 race."

publicity [was] sometimes better than no publicity at all. Controversy, in short, sells."[251] This principle seems to have been the core tenet of his campaign, as the many scandals he has been involved in attested.

Similarly, although the businessman's attacks were very frequently directed at *CNN* and *The New York Times*, both news outlets have thrived during the period of the presidential campaign and even after. Indeed, in November 2016, which is the month that saw the election of Trump as President, the *New York Times* gathered 132 000 new paying subscribers, a monthly growth rate that was ten times higher than in November 2015.[252] Even during his mandate, the sales have maintained a high rate of subscribers growth since between 2016 and 2018 the company has experienced an increase of 141% in its share value according to JP Morgan analyst Alexia Quadrani.[253] Concerning *CNN* it has attracted more viewers in 2017 than any other year since its creation in 1980, journalist Thomas Wheeldon added.

According to Charlie Houpert of Charisma on Command channel, Donald J. Trump is merely the latest iteration of a politician who has understood the power that the media can give to someone who knows how to take advantage of it.[254] The real estate mogul, he added, was well aware that to influence the media, he needed to give the outlets the kind of news that their viewers and followers could not resist. In his analysis, Houpert went on to list the five characteristics that define these types of news. Firstly, they need to be sensational and out of the ordinary. Secondly, they are all the more enticing if they can trigger a strong reaction in the viewers, such as anger. Thirdly, the news have bigger impact if they are accompanied by a strong audio and visual component. Then, the news, by definition, need to be novel and it must be as simple as possible. Because Trump integrated these five factors in his communication, he was able to receive more media coverage than any candidate during the campaign. Thanks to that, he progressively gave the impression that he was an important candidate in the presidential race.

In his video on Trump's communication, Charlie Houpert pinpointed three attitudes of the Republican candidate that allowed him to control the media, most of which remind us of previous chapters of this work. To begin with, Donald Trump tended to assert a simple and positive message that he ended up associating with himself. To give even more power of persuasion to his message, he would frequently convey them with vivid imagery. Secondly, when he had to face disadvantageous news such as "the pussy gate" scandal for instance, he did not spend too much time defending himself for he knew that it would only remind people of the charges against him. To Houpert, the denial of personal attacks is more efficient when it is performed through body language and facial expressions only, such as Trump's iconic smirk. Lastly, when Trump was criticized, he often counter-attacked to the allegations made against him with even worse remarks

[251] Trump & Schwartz, *The Art of the Deal,* 88.
[252] Wheeldon, "Trump vs les médias, comment chaque camp y trouve son compte."
[253] Ibid.
[254] Youtube, "How Trump Manipulates The Media."

to the other person, often combining it with vivid imagery. An example of this attitude can be found in the feud that ensued after *Fox News* anchor Megyn Kelly raised questions the businessman deemed "inappropriate."[255] In an interview he gave on *CNN* on 7th August 2016, the Republican candidate counter-attacked by claiming that, when she asked him the question, "you [could] see there was blood coming out of her eyes, blood coming out of her wherever."[256] This last sentence provides us with an example of what is known in rhetoric as *argumentum ad mulierem*, which consists of an *argumentum ad hominem* that is specifically directed at a woman. His allegation implied that, because the anchor was a woman, she was more prone to hysteria and therefore less likely to be professional in a political context. It should be noted that hysteria was originally defined as "a neurotic condition peculiar to women and thought to be caused by a dysfunction of the uterus."[257] According to Houpert, by counter-attacking with shocking statements, Trump provided sensational news that the media outlets could not resist and which would overshadow the initial accusations.

To summarize Houpert's thoughts on the real estate mogul, not only did Donald Trump know how to attract media attention on him but he was also able to take advantage of it and thrive on scandals, in spite of the appearances. This belief was also shared by writer Scott Adams, who commented that "Donald Trump [understood] the value of publicity, and he [knew] how to get it. He [had] spent decades creating controversies and attracting attention to himself and the Trump brand."[258] The businessman understood that, by avoiding scandals at all costs, a politician put his career on the line at the first important controversy he was unable to dodge. However, by embracing them fully, he became almost immune to it and he could get a lot of free publicity from it. Therefore, while Bill Clinton's credibility was greatly undermined by the Lewinsky controversy and Richard Nixon was impeached right after the Watergate scandal, Donald Trump secured the position of President of the United States despite the numerous scandals he was involved in. On a side note, the realization that Trump managed to manipulate the media by drowning himself in controversies is what prompted us to devote our work to his power of persuasion. Indeed, beyond the mere fact that Trump's communication was efficient, we argue that he created a brand new paradigm of influence in the political environment, a model that only applied to reality show celebrities and social media influencers before. In his book, Scott Adams highlighted how the businessman's provocative style of communication allowed him to manipulate the mainstream media:

> If Trump had tiptoed into the election, the mainstream media would have owned him. And they would have treated him like a clown, before moving on to talk about his competition. So Trump didn't tiptoe. He went in so hard, and so provocatively, that the media had no economic choice but to focus on him.

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[255] Youtube, "Donald Trump, Megyn Kelly Feud HIGHLIGHTS"
[256] Ibid.
[257] Online Etymology Dictionary, "hysterical."
[258] Adams, *Win Bigly, Persuasion in a World Where Facts Don't Matter,* 111.

He was pure gold for the press. And because of that, he came to own them, at least in the limited sense of dominating their news cycle.[259]

The beginning of the 21th century has seen the emergence of various celebrities that built their career on this model. In 2003, Paris Hilton became famous thanks to her participation in a reality television series called *The Simple Life* and from that moment on she has not ceased to gain influence through controversies related to sex tapes and uninhibited lifestyle. In France, a young woman called Nabilla Benattia created a buzz on the Internet with her one-liner "Non, mais allô quoi"[260] on reality television series *Les Anges de la télé-réalité.* Much like Paris Hilton, she has used her physical appearance and a series of scandals to increase her fame and influence. According to Charlie Houpert, the best examples of notorious celebrities that excel at attracting media attention to promote their cause are the Kardashians. The members of this family are natural media influencers who have been at the heart of the public interest by playing the shock factor card repeatedly. Kim Kardashian West, who became massively famous in 2007 after the release of a sex tape with her former boyfriend Ray J, appeared in a reality television series called *Keeping Up with the Kardashians,* which allowed the family to gain a lot of media influence. The television show also featured Caitlyn Jenner, formerly known as the retired Olympic athlete Bruce Jenner, who shocked the nation in 2015 when he underwent a surgical operation to become a woman. *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* has become one of the longest-running reality television series in the United States and is still, to this day, highly successful and influential.[261]

One of the pictures of Kim Kardashian that allegedly "broke the Internet." (Credit: Jean Paul Goude)

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[259] Ibid.

[260] Youtube, "Allô! T'es une fille et t'as pas de shampoing !" (The sentence roughly translates in English into: "Seriously, hello?)

[261] Wikipedia, "Keeping Up with the Kardashians."

According to Marlène Dulaurans, researcher in communication and media at the University of Bordeaux Montaigne, not only did Donald Trump understand how to use the media to his advantage, but he has also imposed his own source of information as a channel of substitution in the communication landscape.[262] While Franklin Delano Roosevelt was a president who relied mainly on radio as a means to assert his credibility and John Fitzgerald Kennedy on television, Trump's communication was articulated around social media such as Twitter. To Dulaurans, his use of the virtual platform has changed the world of political communication. Twitter became his favored platform of broadcast for it allowed him to maintain the media on their toes by constantly feeding them with outrageous comments that will guarantee he stays at the heart of the public debates. His storytelling relied on the act of removing distances between him and the citizens, a strategy that reminds us of the populist elements we identified in his campaign. Moreover, it granted Trump a sort of weapon of mass perturbation, widely inspired on the viral model, which allowed him to substitute the information broadcasted on the mainstream media with his own source of information. We could speculate that the businessman favored this social media in particular because of how well it fitted his personal style of communication. Indeed, since Twitter only allowed a limited set of written characters, it was necessary for Trump to be direct and to present his positions in a plain style. As we pointed out in Chapter 3, Trump's verbal and written communication were imbued with these few characteristics, therefore Twitter's format was quite adapted to his needs and his style.

In conclusion of this section, Donald Trump has waged a long-lasting war with the news media in America but, unlike any other war, both parties came out of this conflict as winners. The relationship between the two is one of confrontation in appearance but, in reality, it is one of symbiosis. Indeed, the media thrived economically because of the compelling stories they derived from Trump's provocative behavior while the latter received both influence and free publicity from them. Moreover, the real estate mogul has been involved in such a variety of scandals that his reputation appeared to be hermetic to any sort of new controversy that might have arisen. Lastly, Trump has changed the world of political communication for he was able to impose his own source of information in an environment that was already saturated with it. Twitter offered the real estate mogul a platform that was adapted to his own communication style, which he used both as a weapon of perturbation of the mainstream media and as a means to address the people via his channel of predilection.

5.2 The great entrance in the post-truth era

According to Rui-Long Monico, writer for the independent forum *Jet d'encre*, President Trump's style of leadership favors the emergence of a post-truth era and the constant recourse to

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[262] Dulaurans, "Donald Trump - Le Storytelling des présidentielles en 140 caractères."

alternative facts.[263] At the root of this belief is the observation that, as we have mentioned several times, Trump is able to disarm entirely the "legitimate" sources of information by calling them "fake news". Moreover, he often relies on alternative sources of information, such as the *Breitbart News* network, which is seen by many as one of the most biased and subjective media outlets in the United States.[264] In addition to that, Donald Trump can count on an army of web users to spread his political opinions, Monico wrote. Many other reporters and authors, including Scott Adams, noticed how the President ignored facts when he did not like them and how he always stuck to his claims "even after the media thoroughly debunked them in front of the world."[265]

According to the Collins Dictionary, post-truth describes a situation in which people are less influenced by factual information than by their emotions or by the beliefs they already hold.[266] It should be noted that a post-truth situation does not correspond to a constant state of lying and of falsification but rather a certain blurring of what is true and what is not. According to that definition, the post-truth era describes a period of time when anything can be presented as the truth, although nothing really is. A few observers have pointed out that this type of situation has existed in the political landscape for a long time, but to them, its impact has been growing greatly with the advent of the Internet and the social changes it implied.[267] Indeed, it played such a significant role, both in the US presidential election and the Brexit referendum, that the term "post-truth" was chosen as the Oxford Dictionaries' Word of the Year in 2016.[268]

In her article on Trump's storytelling, Marlène Dulaurans addressed the issue of the post-truth nature of the President's leadership. According to her, his communication presents four characteristics that are connected to the spreading of a post-truth situation: the illusion of control, of knowledge, of correlation and the *complacency bias*.[269] In Dulaurans' words:

> He often resorts to the illusion of control. For instance, he evoked Nice truck attack on *NBC* and condemned France who was "infected with terrorism." He then affirmed that he was able to better protect the United States by reinforcing border control in an "extreme" way, and particularly from the citizens that came from France.[270]

As we can see once again, Donald Trump frequently manipulates people fears and emotions to move his political program forward. The illusion of knowledge has to do with the fact that his

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[263] Monico, "Donald Trump: la communication de crise comme outil de gouvernance."
[264] Wikipedia, "Breitbart News."
[265] Adams, *Win Bigly, Persuasion in a World Where Facts Don't Matter,* 36.
[266] Collins dictionary, "post-truth."
[267] Wikipedia, "post-truth politics."
[268] Ibid.
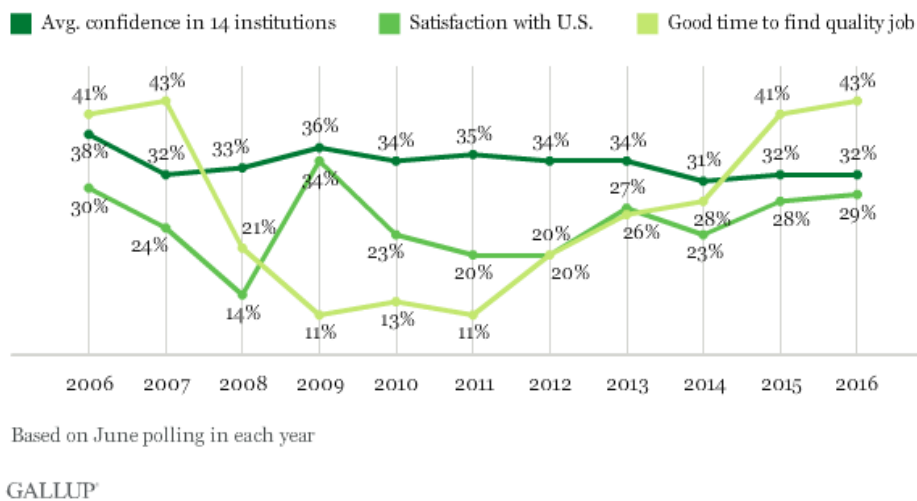[269] Dulaurans, "Donald Trump - Le Storytelling des présidentielles en 140 caractères."
[270] Ibid. (Original version: Il fait souvent appel à *l'illusion de contrôle*, lorsqu'il évoque par exemple les attentats de Nice sur la chaîne NBC et qu'il dénonce une France "infectée par le terrorisme". Il affirme alors qu'il sera en capacité de mieux protéger les Etats-Unis en renforçant de manière "extrême" les contrôles aux frontières, et tout particulièrement des citoyens en provenance de la France.

reasoning is rarely based on facts and logic, but rather on his own impressions and emotions, that he then legitimizes by putting the emphasis on his self-proclaimed competence. Concerning the illusion of correlation, it consists of his tendency to connect two unrelated elements in order to create an alternative reality whose implications confirm his claims. For instance, his tweet according to which "the concept of global warming was created by the Chinese so as to make the American industries non-competitive" (Donald J. Trump, November 6, 2012) pursued two separate goals: to spread the idea that global warming was an hoax on one hand, and to antagonize China on the other. No evidence could support his claim, but it did not really matter since in a post-truth world the validity of a claim does not rest on facts and logic but rather on intuition and feelings. Lastly, the *complacency bias* refer to his lack of impartiality with regards to his own actions. Indeed, he tends to deem his personal successes as a natural corollary of his inherent qualities but he blames it on external factors in case of failure. As Dulaurans concluded in her article, these systematic deviations are part of Trump's style of communication and they allow him to replace the rational explications, usually delivered by the media, with his own views of reality, which then become *the* truth for him and his followers. In other words, the Republican favors a strategy of distortion that encourages the emergence of a post-truth era in the political landscape of the United States of America.

According to Daniel W. Drezner, professor of international politics at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, the post-truth communication featured in Donald Trump's rhetoric resonated in a significant portion of the American population because of a growing distrust in institutions that has been observed in recent years.[271] What is striking to him is the fact that the erosion of the trust in authority and expertise is usually a corollary of the public's dissatisfaction with the economy but, although the economic situation has improved since the 2008 recession, the American people appear to be wary of their institutions nonetheless. Although skepticism towards the establishment can be a rightful behavior, for it allows certain control of the population on the government, Drezner points at an attitude of "willful ignorance" in the American voters. In the end, this post-truth sensibility already existed in America prior to Trump's election but it appears to have played a role in his success and the reception of his communication as President.

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[271] Drezner, "Why the post-truth political era might be around for a while."

U.S. Satisfaction and Job Market Optimism Recover Between 2006 and 2016; Confidence in U.S. Institutions Does Not

■ Avg. confidence in 14 institutions ■ Satisfaction with U.S. ■ Good time to find quality job

Based on June polling in each year

GALLUP

(Credit: Jim Norman)

A few authors such as Jonathan Freedland, columnist at *The Guardian*, have looked into the reasons that could account for such change in people's behavior with regards to institutions.[272] To him, the post-truth era is a consequence of a shift in media culture. In his own words:

> Technology now allows politicians to communicate directly with their followers, with no need to transmit their claims through the fact-checking filter of a news organization. Witness Trump and his Twitter account. Meanwhile, the rise of social media and, in the US, cable TV channels and radio stations defined by political hue, means voters can easily get the entirety of their information from sources tailored to reflect their own views back to them.

As we can see, the businessman seems to doubt the existence of an objective truth, that is one that is undisputable for it relies on facts. On the contrary, his rhetoric is rooted on his personal opinions, which are usually formed either by his intuition or his emotions regarding a particular matter. Since he was not interested in rationality and facts, he could make outrageous claims without ever feel the need to bring evidence to back them up. Similarly, when the media debunked his claims with evidence, he would not reconsider his positions but rather discredit the media outlets with his famous "fake news". Once again, we can see that his communication relies heavily on the *ethos* and *pathos* to compensate for his lack of *logos*-based arguments. In his article, Freedman listed a series of claims made by Trump and that were later debunked on *The Washington Post's* fact-checker blog. For instance, the Republican declared that "thousands of Muslims celebrated the 9/11 attacks in New Jersey." He has also claimed that Barack Obama was not born in the United States and that he had spent 4 million dollars in legal fees to hide the truth about his origins. Moreover, he said that he started his business empire with a "small loan" from his father when in fact he inherited 40 million dollars.

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[272] Freedland, "Post-truth politicians such as Donald Trump and Boris Johnson are no joke."

Although the latter claims have proven incorrect, Harry G. Frankfurt, professor emeritus of philosophy at Princeton University, pointed out that Donald Trump was not the pathological liar some media depicted him to be, but rather what he called bluntly "a bullshitter."[273] (sic) To him, the main difference lies in the fact that a liar knows the truth but decides to hide it in a deceitful manner while the "bull shit artist" blurs the frontier between the true and the untrue by dissimulation and dishonesty as a means to "erase the very possibility of knowing the truth." Accordingly, the post-truth world Trump is building with his rhetoric rejects fundamentally the process of fact-checking to focus entirely on his own subjectivity, which he tries to impose as the ultimate truth. If this type of communication resonates in a significant portion of American voters it is because of a general distrust in the mainstream media. According to reporter Chris Cilliza, when some form of fact-checking is about to cast doubt on one of the businessman's claims, he can immediately play the "fake news" card and thus, the veracity of his position is preserved, despite its subjectivity.[274]

In conclusion of this section, Donald Trump's communication relies on the existence of certain distrust in institutions and the media in America, which he is progressively molding into a post-truth situation. Not only does he disarm the "legitimate" sources of information, but he also substitutes them with alternative "facts" that are often imbued with subjectivity. It is likely that this post-truth situation has existed in the American political life for a long time but it has become more significant with the advent of the Internet and the shift in the media culture. As we highlighted, the post-truth nature of the President's communication derives mainly from the illusion of control, of knowledge, of correlation and the complacency bias. Finally, as Harry G. Frankfurt observed, there is an important distinction to be made between a liar and someone who, like Trump, blurs the line between the true and the untrue so that any position can be hold without having to bear the burden of providing evidence.

Conclusions: A New Paradigm in Communication

When Donald Trump announced his candidacy to the 2016 elections in the United States, his chances of winning were deemed very unlikely, if not inexistent. Mainstream news media in particular mocked his idea because of his atypical persona, which was simply considered "unpresidential" by a significant portion of the American population, and his lack of experience in politics. Donald Trump was already a public figure by that time, having made a name for himself in the real estate business, television entertainment and self-development literature but the conversion from these domains to the presidency seemed improbable to many people. The polemical attention he derived from the announcement of his candidacy gave him momentum,

[273] Heer, "Donald Trump Is Not a Liar."
[274] Cillizza, "Donald Trump's post-truth campaign and what it says about the dismal state of US politics."

and at the early stages of the elections he maintained it by being involved in various controversies. This attitude was generally considered detrimental to his chances of winning but, on the contrary, it granted him a lot of free publicity, and by force of habit he became quite resistant to the negative consequences of these scandals. As the latter became gradually more numerous, the press started to develop a sort of obsession with the Republican candidate for his provocative behavior gave them a lot of attractive material to cover. Mainstream news media and the American intelligentsia criticized him repeatedly but these attacks only increased his sphere of influence for, as he wrote in *The Art of the Deal,* "controversy sells."[275] As the elections unfolded, Trump had to face well-known and seasoned politicians to access to the Republican nomination. Such personalities included Texas Governor Ted Cruz and former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, who, in addition to their experience in politics, spent way more money in their campaign than the real estate mogul. After becoming the Republican nominee, he managed to defeat former First Lady and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, a person who was both well-known and respected in the political landscape. Not only did he secure the position of President of the United States with no previous background in politics, but he was able to maintain it, despite the relative unpopularity of his leadership and even threats of impeachment. Since most of the polls conducted before the elections reported a slight lead for Hillary Clinton over Trump, his victory came as a bit of a shock to the nation. Various reasons were presented to account for his triumph, such as an interference in the elections from the Russians, a general dissatisfaction with the previous Democrat administration, a populist rhetoric that allowed him to sway vast numbers of people, etc. While some of these theories would be worth exploring, we chose to focus on the peculiar style of communication Donald Trump displayed as a candidate and later as the Republican nominee. Indeed, the man who predicted Trump's victory as early as the year 2015 took into account an important consideration about the human psyche to support his fact. More often than not, the human brain acts irrationally because it is primarily controlled by the individual's unconscious. According to hypnotist and cartoonist Scott Adams, Donald Trump won the elections because he was a "master persuader", a person who has developed a style of communication that allowed him to connect with his audience on an irrational and emotional level. Although we do not believe humans are exactly the irrational beings Adams described in his book, we agree with him on the idea that Donald Trump's style of communication played a significant role in his election as President. The businessman was frequently provocative, arrogant, aggressive, atypical and even insulting at times. Yet, he secured the position of 45th President of the United States. In this final part of our work, we will summarize what the characteristics of his communication were before bringing a conclusion to our analysis.

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[275] Trump & Schwartz, *The Art of the Deal,* 88.

Greek philosopher Aristotle identified three components that constituted the rhetorical types of evidence an orator can employ in his speeches: the *logos, pathos* and *ethos.* Donald Trump's personal rhetoric was atypical in that he not only discarded arguments based on logic, facts and statistics, but he also opposed such type of argumentation when an opponent attempted to destabilize him with it. One of the conclusion we can make by observing his style of communication is that, to the businessman, what mattered was not so much the substance of the message but rather how it was articulated and by whom. Consequently, he often relied on *ethos* and *pathos* forms of rhetorical evidence. His messages targeted a specific portion of voters: the "forgotten Americans". He identified their desires, prejudices and cultural values, and he reflected them in his speeches. This strategy allowed him to secure a substantial number of core supporters that were loyal to his cause, but at the same time, his lack of moderation lead many people to reject his message vehemently. This characteristic accounts for the divisive nature of Trump's leadership. Also related to the importance of the *ethos* in his rhetoric, the real estate mogul appeared to equate the validity of an argument with the perceived virtues of the person uttering it. In other words, rather than addressing the substance of said argument, he would often criticize his opponent with *ad hominem* and *ad personam* arguments. While *ad personam* arguments were not particularly efficient in convincing an audience, *ad hominem* attacks, such as the unconventional nicknames he branded some of his political opponents, undermined the credibility of the interlocutor greatly. Conversely, when Trump wished to support his claims by appealing to a third party, he always made sure to praise the person he quoted to stress the relevance and validity of his opinions. This explains why Ted Cruz went from the nicknames "Lyin' Ted" when he was a political rival of Trump's to "Beautiful Ted" when they started working together. Likewise, the businessman tended to praise himself about his so-called competence in a variety of fields. To the people who believed him, his positions on matters concerning these fields would appear more legitimate, for Trump established himself as figure of authority in those domains. When news media outlets confronted his claims with facts and logical arguments, he directly undermined their credibility by calling them "fake news" media. His constant opposition to the press have drastically diminished its sphere of operation for his post-truth communication blurred the line between objective facts, usually presented by journalists and experts, and subjective beliefs that derive from personal emotions. The fact that he described the press as untrustworthy was a direct attack to its credibility, and it allowed him to replace previously legitimate sources of information with alternative facts and personal beliefs.

In terms of *pathos,* he often appealed to strong negative emotions such as anger and fear, which he then redirected towards the things or people he opposed: his political rivals, the establishment, some media outlets, ISIS, etc. It should be noted that his ire towards American institutions and mainstream news media found resonance in a significant portion of the electoral college that distrusted both. To convey such strong emotions, he often made use of an aggressive language and violent visual imagery to inspire fear in the American, such as when he spoke of terrorists that

were "chopping the heads off" Christians. Moreover, his speeches were usually filled with hyperboles. Consequently, the emotional impact of his messages was increased, as he talked of deplorable situations as if they were complete disasters and of promising situations as if they were the best thing that ever happened to the United States. Nevertheless, the lack of moderation in his words has been detrimental to his claim for presidency at times for it has contributed to the spreading of the Hitler myth. Most of Trump's communication was heavily rooted in the *pathos*, which acted as a countermeasure to his lack of clarity and logic, the *logos*. Therefore, although his speeches were frequently vague, incoherent and contradictory, they were understood by his core supporters because they connected to the Republican on an emotional level. The characteristics of his speeches distinguished him from the majority of his political opponents; it was not nuanced, expressed in a simple language and repeated as much as possible. In some instances, he made sure to be vague about certain specifics so that the audience could fill the blanks for him about how his vision for the United States could come to life. In his article, Sam Leith summarized Trump's reliance on *pathos* forms of evidence: "You come away from a Trump speech with a feeling, not an argument."[276]

Many of the characteristics of the businessman's communication were considered unacceptable for a candidate to the presidency. For instance, during a Republican debate, Jeb Bush commented on Trump's aggressive behavior by stating: "You are not going to be able to insult your way to the presidency. That's not going to happen."[277] This statement was followed by applause and cheering from the audience, which seemed to agree with Bush. Nevertheless, the real estate mogul was able to get away with his atypical behavior and the extremism of some of his declarations because he could rely on his charismatic leadership. He offered the narrative of the "savior-leader" to the electoral college, which told the story of a man who established himself as a spokesperson for the "forgotten American", who he rallied in his quest to "make America great again" in a period of the nation's history that he depicted as dark and distressful. As we pointed out, part of his charisma was natural, and part of it was developed as a trait he had to master to become a good salesman. However, charisma is first and foremost a matter of perception, therefore he had to insist on the idea that he was a sort of representative of the common people. To accomplish that he often resorted to populist speech techniques, he refused to finance his campaign through donor's money, and he went to his rallies unscripted to indicate he was authentic. Thanks to his charismatic leadership, the Republican candidate became a real phenomenon, one that attracted most of the media attention on one hand, but also one that was very divisive for the American population on the other. The "Trumpmania", as we called it, was made possible by Trump's peculiar relationship with the press. Although they seemed at odds with each other, the Republican candidate guaranteed interesting material for media outlets to cover on a regular basis

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[276] Leith, "Trump's rhetoric: a triumph of inarticulacy."
[277] Youtube, "Bush to Trump: You can't insult your way to presidency."

and, in return, this mass coverage secured him over two billion dollars in advertising for his campaign.

Finally, in our work, we have looked into the sort of image Donald Trump projected of himself, as evidenced by his verbal and non-verbal communication. The real estate mogul cultivated a style of communication that was characterized primarily by its assertiveness, its domination and its peculiarity. Indeed, some of the characteristics he displayed during the election and as President were oddly atypical in the political landscape. For example, nicknames such as "Little Marco" or "Pocahontas" were quite unconventional, and as Adams highlighted, it was the reason of their success. Similarly, his physical appearance, especially the fake-looking haircut and orange tan he displayed at the beginning of his campaign, distinguished him from the other candidates. Moreover, the extensive use he made of Twitter to keep in touch with his supporters and generate debates was quite unprecedented in American politics. Concerning his assertiveness and domination, what mattered the most to the real estate mogul was to have the upper-hand in every social interaction he was involved in. It started with his unusual handshake, which was both painful and awkward for the person on the receiving hand. He typically made it uncomfortable and unnecessarily long as a means to indicate that he was dominating the social interaction. When Trump faced an awkward situation himself, he usually displayed facial expressions such as smirks and snarls to convey that he did not feel threatened and kept control over his body language. In addition to that, his verbal fluency, the audibility of his speeches and the fact that he was able to maintain his interlocutor's gaze for long periods of time, all indicated a high degree of assertiveness. We also described his style of communication as combative for he employed various techniques to destabilize and provoke his opponents, such as short interruptions, mutual overlaps and dubious mimics. In addition to that, when a political rival of his criticized him, he would almost systematically answer with a counterattack that was more vicious than the initial attack. Finally, he sometimes deflected criticism with humor, which allowed him to nullify the impact of the attack.

In conclusion, Donald Trump has redefined the codes of political communication. He was particularly dominant in his campaign and his style of leadership, although very unconventional, was very efficient for it allowed him to secure the position of President of the United States. Trump was a man of his time who knew how to take advantage of both news and social media. He run his campaign as the businessman he was, rather than the politician he was expected to be. Indeed, his communication relied more on the emotions he was able to create in his audience than on a well-defined ideology or a solid plan to revive the economy. He often made use of hyperboles in his speeches to convince the American voters, he resorted to rhetorical forms of evidence that were almost non-existent in the political landscape for they were deemed petty, he derived a lot of free publicity from the various controversies he was involved in, etc. With regard to many characteristics we identified in his communication, he not only distinguished himself from his political opponents in the presidential race but from the previous men who have assumed that

position in the United States. He violated traditional codes of rhetoric and political communication but was triumphant because he identified a shift of paradigm in the population's relationship with power. In terms of cultural values, he became the spokesperson of a significant portion of American who felt as if they had been betrayed by the previous administrations and he exploited certain distrust in modern institutions and mainstream news media. The narrative of his rise in the elections was peculiar because it did not match the typical story of the experienced and charismatic politician who becomes President. His own narrative shared a few similarities with Ronald Reagan's in that they both were outsider who managed to became leaders of the nation. What is striking is that his narrative also shared various similarities with reality television show celebrities', such as the Kardashians for instance. The latter acquired fame and fortune thanks to their involvement in several controversies that captivated the public's interest. They also made themselves as accessible to the ordinary people as possible with their strong presence on popular social media such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc. Moreover, the programs celebrities such as Nabila, Paris Hilton or Kim Kardashians appeared in have been frequently criticized for their simplicity or "foolishness", an attack that has often been made against Trump as well. It could be that the businessman and these celebrities' charisma was addressed to the more irrational part of the human brain, one that is receptive to the glamour surrounding certain people and emotions.

In the end, it is yet impossible to predict whether Donald Trump will make history as a mere anomaly in the American political landscape or as a pioneer of a new style of communication. However, if we take into account the particularly fertile literature that concerns his election, it appears that the reasons of his victory are not yet fully understood. In our work, we have looked at this phenomenon from the point of view of rhetoric and communication, but we do not pretend that it is sufficient to account for his election on its own. We see his victory as the combination of several factors ranging from his charismatic leadership to gradual changes in people's relationship with modern communication devices and political realities that characterized the United States in 2016. Each of these factors deserves to be explored individually to account for Trump's election. Nevertheless, we do not believe he became President out of sheer luck nor that some foreign interference played a significant role in the unfolding of such events. Like Scott Adams, we believe efficient communication can accomplish great things and that everything happens for a reason.

(Credit: CNN)

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