Donald Trump - Rhetoric in the Era of Social Media

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U Osijeku, _12.07.2023._

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Abstract

Sharing opinions on social networks is a concept that has become part of everyday life. The main goal of this paper is to collect and analyse Donald Trump's Facebook posts in the period between December 9, 2020 and January 6, 2021 and classify them into categories with regard to the content and the intention that these posts seek to achieve. The types of posts and their characteristics were analysed by using the methodology from Enli (2017) through which we classified each post into traditional, non-traditional or mixed post and Hansen (2012), through which the posts were divided into acclaims, attacks, defences or neutral posts. The latter posts were further divided into subcategories. The results show that in the vast majority of his posts Trump attacked the opposing candidates, i.e. most of the posts are of an offensive (attacking) nature, and considering the content of those posts, they are mostly non-traditional posts.

Key words: Donald Trump, Facebook, traditional and non-traditional posts, acclaims, attacks, defences

Sažetak

Dijeljenje mišljenja na društvenim mrežama pojam je koji je postao dio svakodnevice. Glavni cilj ovog rada je prikupiti i analizirati Facebook objave Donalda Trumpa u razdoblju od 9.12.2020. do 6.01.2021. te ih svrstati u kategorije s obzirom na sadržaj i namjeru koju te objave nastoje ostvariti. Vrste objava te njihova obilježja dali su u svojim djelima autori Gunn Sara Enli (2017) pomoću koje smo mogli utvrditi radi li se o tradicionalnoj, netradicionalnoj objavi ili pak miješanoj te Hans V. Hansena (2012) pomoću kojeg smo mogli utvrditi jesu li po namjeri svaka od tih objava klicanje, napad, obrana ili je pak neutralna. Zatim su te iste objave podijeljene u dodatne podkategorije prema Hansenu. Analizom objava zaključeno je kako je Trump u velikoj većini svojih objava najviše napadao protukandidate, tj. većina objava je napadačke prirode te se s obzirom na sadržaj objava radi o uglavnom netradicionalnim objavama.

Ključne riječi: Donald Trump, Facebook, tradicionalne i netradicionalne objave, klicanje, napadi, obrane

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1. Introduction

Social networks are a concept that has been playing an important role in society for some time, so there is hardly a person who doesn't use some of the various social media platforms we have today. There is a multitude of social platforms that exist today, such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, LinkedIn, etc. Since it is obvious that social networks can be used in such a way to address thousands of users with just a few words, people holding important positions in society also saw their opportunity to promote their own views on these platforms. Therefore, it is not surprising that numerous athletes, politicians, and even presidents have their own user accounts through which they express their views and opinions on various topics. Among the prominent presidents in this context, we can certainly mention the former president of the USA, Donald Trump. Donald Trump is very well known for the fact that he used to express different views and address different people in his posts.

It takes at least two people for any type of information to be exchanged. What is meant by "type" is that the information and the message it is carrying may be of different nature and with different objectives. That means that one information may inform, educate, deceive, entertain, arouse emotions, etc.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Rhetoric

The foundations of rhetoric started in ancient Greece and Rome (Jozić and Vančura, 2020) and Aristotle (as cited in Kišiček & Žagar, 2013, p. 388) defined rhetoric as "[...] the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion." As a fundamental concept of communication, rhetoric has been a part of human communication/ interchange of information since the aristocratic times. Aczel (as cited in Kišiček & Žagar, 2013, p. 386) says that rhetoric "[...] has escaped decades – if not centuries – of moral resentment, scholarly rejection, and democratic suspicion and remains ready and invigorated to re-enter the scholarly landscape and to influence practices of social discourse. Undoubtedly, rhetoric has been able to resist the attacks of those who considered it vague; superfluous; manipulative; or outdated. With more than 2500 years of disciplinary history, it gained considerable stamina to answer new challenges be they social; political; technological; or scientific."

When it comes to spoken or written communication, rhetoric takes the main role in influencing the recipient, no matter what the content of that information is. The Oxford dictionary defines rhetoric as "the skill of using language in speech or writing in a special way that influences or entertains people." The second definition by Oxford dictionary defines rhetoric as "speech or writing that is intended to influence people, but that is not completely honest or sincere."

2.2. Digital rhetoric

With the improvement and evolution of peoples' everyday way of life, the way of communication changed too. Nowadays, with technology being omnipresent and the physical interaction between people decreasing, new definitions of rhetoric arise. People are getting into contact with modern technologies basically from the earliest days of their lives and these so-called 'screen generations' (Aczel, 2012, p. 391) are forming a new way of interactions. Consequently, a new form of rhetoric was defined, called the "digital rhetoric" (Aczel, 2012, p. 391).

With the ever-growing importance of the digital rhetoric in todays' world, the clear border between the role of the speaker and the listener, or in this case - a communicator and a receiver, has become

more and more blurred. We do not only have a speaker who is also constantly acting as an audience but, furthermore, the end result of that multi-identical communication is the interaction within and with texts themselves. "Interactivity penetrated the rhetorical situation, the role of the sender and the text which is open to modification, being un-finished, fluid, and trans-medial. New media discourse suggests informality, a characteristic which is unfamiliar with traditional rhetorical practices" (Aczel, 2012, p. 391). Opposed to the formal speech and communication, which always imposed a special set of rules when it comes to style and delivery on the speaker, the interactivity and multi-identical communication of the media communication blur "[...] the situational borders of formality, lessen the importance of rules and positions, and boost the significance of personal identities and side involvements" (Aczel, 2012, p. 392). In the upcoming pages of this paper, the posts written by the formal US president Donald Trump, or someone from the team that supervises the Facebook page, will be viewed, among other things, with regard to the formality or informality of his posts.

2.3. Logos, ethos and pathos

In order to better understand why the digital rhetoric held an important role not only in Trump's political campaign, but even later when he lost the second race for the presidential seat, the terms logos, ethos and pathos must be elaborated and understood.

What is meant under Aristotle's term 'means of persuasion' are the three modes i.e., aspects of persuasion, which are logos, pathos and ethos. For Aristotle (2012), all three modes are equally important. In other words, if all three means are fully covered in one's rhetorical argument, then there is almost no chance for neither the dissenter to disprove one's standpoint, nor the listener not to believe in what is proposed as the truth. For the persuader to have as high of a chance as possible in winning over his audience's beliefs, they have to master over all the skills needed, such as checking response/feedback from the audience, aligning with their beliefs and convictions, and also changing their initial standpoint, if necessary. Pathos "[...] refers to the emotional state of the audience which the speaker has to strive for in order to make the listeners receptive and sensitive to his or her concerns." (Danler, as cited in Kišiček & Žagar, 2013, p. 70) It is oriented towards empathy i.e., emotions or feelings of the audience that could change the way people affect their judgements. The main goal that the orator needs to achieve in order to influence his audience

beneficially is to win them over emotionally. For pathos to appear, the accent should be put on the stylistic structures, such as metaphor, rhythmic patterns, and the syntactic structures, such as fronting, word order, lexis, interrogatives which in combination carry a big role in convincing the audience. (Szczepańska-Włoch, as cited in Kišiček & Žagar, 2013, p. 247) In combination, these enable the speaker to make their listeners receptive and sensitive to their concerns. Even though Trump did occasionally post links to videos in which he speaks to the public or argues with other politicians and which are good examples of pathos taking place, for this paper, such links and videos weren't taken into analysis since the focus was on his written posts.

Next is logos, which is "the capacity of reasoning put into practice in argumentative discourse mainly in the form of enthymemes and examples." (Danler, as cited in Kišiček & Žagar, 2013, p. 70) This act of persuasion can be achieved if "the true" or "apparently true" (Szczepańska-Włoch, as cited in Kišiček & Žagar, 2013, p. 248) can be collected from the different ways of persuasion within that subject discussed. To conclude, logos "[...] is composed of an issue lying at the heart of a debate which needs to be identified, arguments which will support the issue addressed, the structure of thought which underpins the arguments, coherence and logical value." (ibid. p. 249)

Ethos counts as the third mean of persuasion and is often referred to as the "key factor" (Danler, as cited in Kišiček & Žagar, 2013, p. 68) in both argumentative and rhetorical strategies. It relates to ethics, which is why it is often used as a synonym for the speaker's character or personality. The persuader may take a stance which makes the audience perceive the benefits for themselves such as a positive face, seeking approval, positive self-image. But it is imperative not to overdo with this nor to make the audience feel threatened or in an underprivileged position. (Szczepańska-Włoch, as cited in Kišiček & Žagar, 2013, p. 240). Generally, the persuader has to be reliable and trustworthy for the audience to follow the speaker in their argumentation line by determining how much of self-image and personality he or she should implement to win over a listener and not to discourage him or her. Too personal or impersonal stance may be equally bad and of the opposite effect for the persuader.

The three means are very important in today's social media platforms in which the persuader is, for instance, referring to not a single group of people with the same cultural background as it usually used to be in ancient times, but to many different ones with each one with its own standards, morals, values, beliefs, and so on. "It becomes clear that the persuader must acquire

psycholinguistic knowledge i.e., the complexities of the human character, so as to rate the responses of the audience and shape them effectively." (ibid. p. 246)

2.4. Rhetorical argumentation

Once we have established that rhetoric is the process of persuasion through the means of logos, pathos and ethos, another process of persuasion needs to be mentioned and elaborated on. Ducrot (2014, as cited in Danler, 2013, p. 72) gives a view on rhetorical argumentation and linguistic argumentation saying that the "[...] rhetorical argumentation [is] the verbal activity which aims to make somebody believe something whereas linguistic argumentation refers to the different means of linguistically connecting propositions."

Rhetorical argumentation is a process that consists of an arguer presenting their viewpoint and sharing the arguments which support it with the audience i.e., the listeners. Through the strength and legitimacy of the arguments used, one can differentiate good from bad arguers. Related to this paper, argumentation in political rhetoric carries importance every time when a politician states their opinion, presents a viewpoint or a claim. A politician cannot expect from the society to accept all of his ideas without criticism, at least not in a democratic society. A politician has to put a lot emphasis on their argumentation skills since their claims will surely be analysed, evaluated, criticized, or opposed.

2.5. The 'New (social) media'

"'New media' is a convergent notion of convergent and digital media technologies consisting of the computer, the internet, the mobile phone, social media, digital television, and so on." (Aczel, 2012, as cited in Kišiček & Žagar, 2013, p. 391)

Here we can extricate Facebook as the social medium which the former US president Donald Trump used to share his posts. "Electronic technologies have led to electronic consciousness, an awareness or mentality that now changes literacy but in no way diminishes it" (ibid.). With the introduction of new rules of the mentioned screen generations, along came interface as a new way of getting into contact with others. The borderline between the written and oral is as thin as it can get with both the written and oral being dependent on the print literacy. This "print literacy" (ibid.)

and the set of rules which follow it is something that Trump had often had trouble with, since in many of his posts he used informal words and addressing to the public, more of which will be examined in chapters to come.

With the introduction of the 'new media' and its' ever-growing role in todays' society, the characteristics of the earlier mentioned ethos, pathos and logos changed as well. "Now, the intention, to persuade specific audiences, is less important than the ability to reach many audiences." (Aczel, 2012, as cited in Kišiček & Žagar, 2013, p. 392) With the wider amount of people, the persuader can afford losing some members of the audience due to the fact that there are still many people who are ultimately going to agree with what is published in a post. In the earlier days, when mass communication wasn't available, the persuader had to put a lot more emphasis on each of the influenced people. This was so due to the fact that the number of people that could've been reached with the persuaders' ideas was far smaller, which is why each of the listeners was more important individually.

The persuader is no longer addressing to a small number of viewers but, with a single post, the persuader is now referring to a far larger audience of people with far more diverse cultural background, meaning that the persuader now has to find a way on how to get as many viewers as possible to agree with them while taking as many factors as possible in choosing the words which they will use in the post. "In connection with the changes, the traditional one-to-many configuration was modified into many-to-many relationships to enable users to have a democratic reach" (ibid). Furthermore, the more people take your side, the less people there will be for the opposing persuader, simultaneously lowering the opposing persuaders' change of winning against you. This is why Trump rarely missed a chance to scold rival political candidates whenever it was possible (see 4.2.2. Attacks). The collected results from the analysis only confirmed the hypothesis as more than half of the analysed posts were classified under the 'attacking' category.

2.6. Donald Trump's rhetoric

The terms logos, ethos and pathos seem to be a topic very familiar to Donald Trump who, as it will be shown later in the analysis, mastered the use and implementation of the mentioned three means of persuasion. Aswad (2019, p. 58) says that "rhetoric is especially important [in today's presidential election] because of the concept of distance present during modern-day elections: most followers do not have the opportunity to interact with candidates and directly observe them carrying out their daily work." She further claims that, if there were no distance between the candidate and his followers, then the importance of rhetoric would be far smaller than it is today (ibid., 2019). It is no surprise that many works revolving around Donald Trump's rhetoric have been published, as the way he performs and acts out in public is something which many viewed as very unnatural and uncommon, with respect to how a political candidate usually acts in public. Aswad (2019, p. 56) mentions in her work that "[...] Donald Trump was significantly more likely to use hyperbolic crisis rhetoric regarding the intolerable nature of the status quo as well as rhetoric emphasizing a shared social identity, the pursuit of common goal and tangible outcomes." She further states that, in doing so, Trump was able to shift the identity accent from one individual to a collective, which led the people to assimilate and identify more to a collective memory and a national nostalgia (ibid.). "Scholars have identified the crucial importance of charisma in political leadership from as early as the mid-1900s" (Aswad, 2019, p. 57). Many refer to the 2016 presidential election in which Trump fought against Hilary Clinton in the race for the presidential seat. Here, when comparing the two, most people agreed on the fact that Trump possessed another important aspect of rhetoric, which is charisma (ibid.).

The 5 elements which are necessary for a candidate to master over their charisma and leadership are: "[...] (1) outstanding personality traits, (2) a social crisis or time of stress, (3) a vision that promises a revolutionary solution to the crisis, (4) followers who believe in the charismatic leader, and (5) recurrent success and therefore validation of the charismatic leader in dealing with the crisis" (Aswad, 2019, p. 58).

3. The Research Study

3.1. Hypothesis and Aim

There were two hypotheses with which the author started the research. The first one (H1) was that there will be more non-traditional than traditional posts used by Trump and the second one (H2) was that he will be using mostly attacking posts on his Facebook page.

There were more aims in this paper. One aim of the paper was to check what is the relative frequency of traditional, non-traditional or mixed style posts. Next aim was to determine what is the relative frequency of use of the functions of acclaiming, attacking, and defending Trump's posts. Lastly, to subcategorize them and check the relative emphasis on policy (issues) and character (image) and to see how often are the subcategories of policy and character utterances used. The next aim was to divide these posts into further analyse these subcategories.

3.2. Sample

In total, 233 Facebook posts written by Trump in the period between December 9, 2020 and January 6, 2021 were collected and analysed. Next, each post was also marked with the date and time as well as with how many likes, comments and shares each of the posts received. It is also worth mentioning that in that time period there were also reposts from other Facebook users of various background and, in addition, videos, but these were omitted in the analysis part.

3.3. Procedure

The first part of the procedure included collecting and analysing Facebook posts made by Trump in the period between December 9, 2020 and January 6, 2021. His Facebook page is in the ownership of TRUMP FOR PRESIDENT 2024, INC, and was created as an account on April 8, 2008 and is being edited and run by 5 employees. At the moment (July, 2023), the page is being followed by 34 million Facebook users. Then these posts were classified into categories defined by Enli (2017) and Hansen (2012). By following Enli's procedure we categorized Trump's posts

in traditional, non-traditional or mixed style posts. As traditional posts are concerned those who are in line with the established standards for posts posted by a presidential candidate in this case. On the other hand, as non-traditional posts are concerned those who are not following the same standards, meaning they are amateurish. Mixed posts encompass those posts who have both the traditional and non-traditional traits in them, making them neither fully traditional, nor non-traditional. With Hansen's work we were able to determine whether Trump's posts were intended to be those that acclaim, attack, defence or neutral. For the political candidate to appear as the better option, he or she may *'acclaim'* ('engage in self-praise' (Benoit, 1999, p. 250)) certain positive outcomes to make themselves look better. *'Acclaiming'* posts may be divided into 2 main categories, called *'Policy issue'* and *'Character image'* ("[…] involve increased responsibility and the positive evaluation of an act." (Benoit, 1999, p. 250) *'Policy issue'* may be further subdivided into *'Past deeds'*, *'Future plans'* and *'General goals'*, whereas *'Character image'* can be further subdivided into *'Personal qualities'*, *'Leadership ability'* and *'Ideals'*. If considered as the best option due to the circumstances, the candidate may also *'attack'* the opposition by making them look worse and by that simultaneously making themselves more desirable. *'Attacking'* (happens if there is a negatively perceived act for which the responsibility of that act is being attributed to the agent (Benoit, 1999, p. 251)) posts are divided into subcategories the same way as in *'Acclaiming'* posts. Lastly, that same candidate may also be the target of an attack, making him- or herself to fend for their viewpoints and standpoints. In this case, they have to *'defend'* what they stand for and what they promote as guidelines of their campaign. As the third main category of posts by Hansen, *'Defence'* ("[…] a response to persuasive attack and it attempts to restore image or reputation following attacks or suspicions." (Benoit, 1999, p. 251)) posts may be ascribed to one of the following subcategories: *'Simple denial'* ("[…] the rhetor disputes the allegation that he or she performed the offensive act" (Benoit, 1999, p. 252)), *'Shifting the blame'* ("[…] accuses another person of actually committing the offensive act. If someone else really caused the offence, the rhetor should not be blamed." (Benoit, 1999, p. 252)), *'Differentiation'* ("[…] the accused tries to distinguish the offensive act from similar but less desirable actions" (Benoit, 1999, p. 252)), *'Transcendence'* ("[…] attempts to place the offensive act in a different context" (Benoit, 1999, p. 252)) and *'Defeasibility'* ("[…] concerns the lack of information or control of a situation." (Benoit, 1999, p. 252)). Each of the mentioned categories and subcategories will be further elaborated on and exemplified in their own chapters.

The 233 posts were read and then classified as traditional, non-traditional or mixed, according to the definitions and instructions given by Enli (2017). The content in many posts was, for example, traditional in the first part and non-traditional in the second part. Posts such as these were then put into the mixed category but, before that could've been done, it was tried to find a clear border between the other 2 categories, i.e. whether the post or a part of the post was considered to be written in traditional or non-traditional style. That was sometimes hard to determine since the borderline between these 2 categories was in some posts very hard to draw. Lastly, those posts which didn't have a mix of both of the traditional and non-traditional style, were put into either the traditional or non-traditional category.

Then, the same table with the same 233 posts was analysed according to Hansen (2012) which allowed us to determine whether the goal of each of the posts was of an attacking, acclaiming, a defending or of a neutral nature.

Simultaneously, these three categories (attacking, acclaiming, defending) were further subcategorised into their mentioned subcategories. Each category for the posts will be further elaborated on in the following chapter.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Categorization by Enli

First, the results for the Facebook posts, categorized after Enli (2017) as traditional, nontraditional and mixed, will be presented.

Out of the 233 Facebook posts which were analysed, 74 of them were classified as traditional, 123 as non-traditional and 37 as mixed.

Chart 1

Number of traditional, non-traditional or mixed posts

Facebook posts

37
74
123

■ Traditional   ■ Non-traditional   ■ Mixed
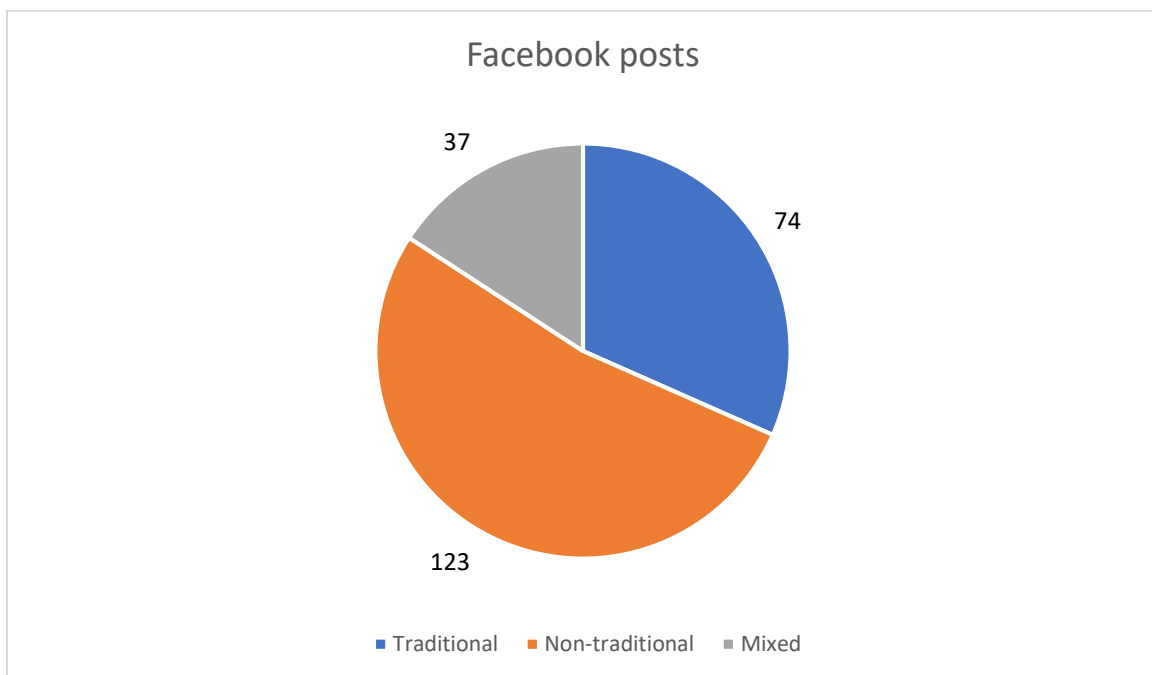
For each of the post categories an example post will be given for the highest and lowest number of likes, comments and shares.

4.1.1. Traditional posts

Out of the 233 Facebook posts which were analysed, 74 of them were classified as traditional. Again, *'traditional posts'* are those which are in line with the established standards for posts posted by a presidential candidate.

4.1.1.1. The highest and the lowest number of likes

On December 25th, 2020 at 15:16 Trump shared a post which had the highest number of likes:

1) *'MERRY CHRISTMAS!'*

The post above received 1.8 million likes, 694000 comments and 27000 shares.

It is a tradition (and also expected) that a president wishes the people Merry Christmas, which, in this case, left many followers flattered and appreciative of president Trump's kind act. Even though the post is written in full capital letters, it is still viewed as a *'traditional post'*, since there is nothing provocative or unusual about it.

On January 2nd, 2021 at 18:07 Trump shared a post which had the lowest number of likes:

2) *'In case you missed it!'*

The post above received only 43000 likes, 4.400 comments and 1.900 shares. Trump shared this post as a repost of someone else. A pattern could be drawn, as posts such as these, which were written by some other person, usually provoked less interest in Trump's followers than those which were written and posted by Trump himself or someone from the team that supervises the Facebook page. This is true not only for when it comes to the sheer number of likes that post would receive, but the same applies to the number of comments and shares regarding such reposts.

4.1.1.2. The highest and the lowest number of comments

On January, 6th 2021 at 21:14 Trump shared the already mentioned post with 1600 likes, 794000 comments and 157000 shares,

3) *'I am asking for everyone at the U.S. Capitol to remain peaceful. No violence! Remember, WE are the Party of Law & Order – respect the Law and our great men and women in Blue. Thank you!'*

This is the last post from the mentioned time period that Trump has posted on his Facebook page. In it, Trump asks his followers not to raid the U.S. Capitol and to remain peaceful. The word 'WE' is written in capital letters to show what the accent is being put on. Also, as an example of pathos, Trump tries to provoke emotions and empathy in people by saying that the consequences of their actions will affect everyone, even those who are remaining peaceful and are not storming the U.S capitol.

The post with the second biggest number of comments was the already mentioned post "MERRY CHRISTMAS!", which had 694000 comments, whereas all the other posts generally had below 100000 comments, with only few posts having more than 100000 comments.

On December 19, 2020 at 02:01 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of comments, being commented only 6600 times, in addition to 46000 likes and 2600 shares:

4) *'WATCH!'*

4.1.1.3. The highest and the lowest number of shares

On January 6th, 2020 at 21:14 Trump wrote a *'traditional'* post with the highest number of shares i.e., 157000:

5) *'I am asking for everyone at the U.S. Capitol to remain peaceful. No violence! Remember, WE are the Party of Law & Order – respect the Law and our great men and women in Blue. Thank you!'*

It is the last post from the mentioned time period which Trump had posted on Facebook and which had also had the highest number of comments (794000).

Only three more such posts in the analysed material received more than 100000 shares:

6) *'BIG NEWS IN PENNSYLVANIA!'*, with 113000 shares,

7) *'"Breaking News: In Pennsylvania there were 205,000 more votes than there were voters. This alone flips the state to President Trump."'*, with 123000 shares and

8) *'Statement by Donald J. Trump, The President of the United States'*, with 389000 shares.

All the other *'traditional'* posts have less than 100000 shares, as shown in a few examples:

9) *'On behalf of two GREAT Senators, David Perdue & Kelly Loeffler, I will be going to Georgia on Monday night, January 4th., to have a big and wonderful RALLY. So important for our Country that they win!'*, which had 18000 shares,

10) *'"Conservatives Call on State Legislators to Appoint New Electors, in Accordance with the Constitution"'*, which had 21000 shares,

11) *'"The President was responsible for those direct payments to Americans in the Covid-19 Relief Bill." Brian Kilmeade, Fox & Friends. And the Moderna vaccine has already started rolling out. Very smooth distribution!'*, with 5.2000 shares.

4.1.2. Non-traditional posts

After analysing all 233 posts, 123 were marked as non-traditional. There are almost as twice as many *'non-traditional'* posts than there are *'traditional'* ones. This is of no surprise since Trump had the tendency of using a rather non-standardized vocabulary with regards to the world of politics. *'Non-traditional'* posts are considered to be those which are not following the established standards for posts written by a political person i.e., they are amateurish.

4.1.2.1. The highest and the lowest number of likes

On December 24th, 2020 at 22:50 Trump shared a *'non-traditional'* post with almost 1 million likes i.e., 998000, next to 123000 comments and 181000 shares:

    1) *'Our embassy in Baghdad got hit Sunday by several rockets. Three rockets failed to launch. Guess where they were from: IRAN. Now we hear chatter of additional attacks against Americans in Iraq...Some friendly health advice to Iran: If one American is killed, I will hold Iran responsible. Think it over.'*

Trump took quite a personal stance in this post, using pathos, threatening Iran to start a war if they do the same move again, saying that he 'will hold Iran responsible'.

On December 24th, 2020 at 21:58 Trump posted a *'non-traditional'* post with the second highest number of likes i.e., 966000 next to 153000 comments and 61000 shares:

    2) *'VOTER FRAUD IS NOT A CONSPIRACY THEORY, IT IS A FACT!!!'*

Trump used capital letters and three exclamation marks to show his anger and dissatisfaction with the election process and believing that ballot fraud was taking place. Just like what was in the mentioned *'traditional'* post about storming the U.S. Capitol, which provoked many conspiracy theories, this post even had the word 'conspiracy' in it and a huge number of followers believed that someone else, was working against their presidential candidate. Even though the post

'MERRY CHRISTMAS!' was written in full capital letters and ascribed to the *'traditional'* posts, this post is viewed as being 'non-traditional' due to the fact it supports something that is not substantiated, which is not something you would expect from a president. Patterns of 'ethos' can also be found as, for example, Trump identifies with his audience's presumptions and belief by confirming that voter fraud really took place.

On December 29th, 2020 at 22:47 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, being the only *'non-traditional'* with less than 100000 likes, receiving above 81000, in addition to 8000 comments and 2800 shares:

3) *'Loeffler, Perdue Support Increasing Relief Payments to $2K - Republicans must support the $2000 payments and must FIGHT the crooked presidential election. We won big!'*

Trump shares an interesting post, writing the word 'FIGHT' in full capital letters, using the word 'crooked' to show his dissatisfaction with the presidential election. Also, it is not a usual way of expressing your victory as a presidential candidate by saying you 'won big!'

4.1.2.2. The highest and the lowest number of comments

On January 6th, 2021 at 20:28 Trump shared the last *'non-traditional'* post from the mentioned time period with the highest number of comments, having being commented 244000 times in total:

4) *'Mike Pence didn't have the courage to do what should have been done to protect our Country and our Constitution, giving States a chance to certify a corrected set of facts, not the fraudulent or inaccurate ones which they were asked to previously certify. USA demands the truth!'*

In addition to the 244000 comments, the post also got liked 765000 and shared 49000 times. At this time, things were coming to an end with Trump being the defeated one and this was one of his last posts and attempts to do something about the, seemingly, inevitable outcome. Here, he scolds Mike Pence for not being brave enough to take a stand and defend "the American people."

On December 29th, 2020 at 22:47 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of comments:

    5) *'Loeffler, Perdue Support Increasing Relief Payments to $2K - Republicans must support the $2000 payments and must FIGHT the crooked presidential election. We won big!'*

The post got only 8000 comments, in addition to 81000 likes and 2800 shares.

4.1.2.3. The highest and the lowest number of shares

On December 24th, 2020 at 22:50 Trump shared a *'non-traditional'* post which had the highest number of shares, being shared 181000 times in total. This same post also got the most likes (998000), next to 138000 comments:

    6) *'Our embassy in Baghdad got hit Sunday by several rockets. Three rockets failed to launch. Guess where they were from: IRAN. Now we hear chatter of additional attacks against Americans in Iraq...Some friendly health advice to Iran: If one American is killed, I will hold Iran responsible. Think it over.'*

On December 29th, 2020 at 22:47 Trump shared an already mentioned *'non-traditional'* post with the lowest number of shares, being shared 2800k, liked 81000 and commented 8000 times:

    7) *'Loeffler, Perdue Support Increasing Relief Payments to $2K - Republicans must support the $2000 payments and must FIGHT the crooked presidential election. We won big!'*

4.1.3. Mixed posts

As previously stated, *'mixed'* posts contain both the elements of a *'traditional'* and a *'non-traditional'* type of posts. Sometimes the first part of the post would be classified as *'traditional'* and the second as *'non-traditional'*, in other cases it was the other way around, and sometimes, the *'traditional'* part of the post was inserted in the middle of the *'non-traditional'* part, and vice versa. There are 37 posts which were classified as *'mixed'*.

4.1.3.1. The highest and the lowest number of likes

On January 2nd, 2021 at 01:13 Trump shared a *'mixed'* post with the highest number of likes, receiving 911000 likes, next to 50000 comments and 98000 shares:

    1) *'Because of the Trump Administration, hospitals are now required, effective immediately, to publish their REAL PRICES, which will create competition and drive downs costs MASSIVELY. Won lawsuit last week. Bigger than healthcare, it's called PRICE TRANSPARENCY! Please remember who got it done!!!'*

The post in this example is placed under mixed posts because Trump writes some words in capital letters and uses many exclamation points to show his dissatisfaction. In internet, using capital letters means shouting and it is not considered to be a 'formal' way of addressing the public. Even though the followers are reading a text, ultimately, the highlighted words and those written in capital letters allowed the readers to imagine how Trump would pronounce those sentences in real life and how he would put accent on and emphasize some of these words written in capital letters.

On December 18th, 2020 at 04:07 Trump shared a *'mixed'* post with the lowest number of likes, receiving 60000 likes, next to 8600 comments and 4500 shares:

    2) *'New Peter Strzok Texts Undermine Official Narrative on Start of 'Russia Collusion' Investigation - Check out last in his class John McCain, one of the most overrated people in D.C.'*

Here, the first part up to the word *'Investigation'* is considered to be a *'traditional'* post with the rest being considered as *'non-traditional'*. In the second part, instead of kindly asking or implying his audience to investigate further into the topic, Trump uses an imperative form of a sentence, in addition to trying to devalue another political person, John McCain, by using ad personam to say that he is the "last in his class" and that he is being "one of the most overrated people in D.C."

4.1.3.2. The highest and the lowest number of comments

On December 21th, 2020 at 15:33 Trump shared a *'mixed'* post with the post being commented 113k times, in addition to being liked 601000 and shared 42000 times, making it a such *'mixed'* post with the highest number of comments in that category:

   3) *'Big news coming out of Pennsylvania. Very big illegal ballot drop that cannot be accounted for. Rigged Election!'*

Again, the first part is considered to be *'traditional'* and the last 2 words ('Rigged election') being classified as *'non-traditional'*. In the post, he refers to the voter fraud that has been going on, saying that an "illegal ballot drop" just came and "cannot be accounted for".

On December 12th, 2020 at 14:15 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of comments, being commented 5.700 times in addition to 71000 likes and 2.700 shares:

   4) *'Georgia GOP Chair Says 'We Are Trusting No One,' Promises 'Eyes on Every Part' of Voting Process - You can't rely on Brian Kemp. Unlike other governors for the many states I won, he lost total control. Signature verification???'*

Trump is using the opportunity to use ad hominem argument to devalue the character of Brian Kemp, saying that he "lost total control." Also, Trump writes three question marks at the end of his post, showing his impatience with the people responsible to verify the signatures.

4.1.3.3. The highest and the lowest number of shares

On January 2nd, 2021 at 01:13 Trump shared a post with the most shares, being shared 98000 times, liked 911000 and commented 50000 times:

   5) *'Because of the Trump Administration, hospitals are now required, effective immediately, to publish their REAL PRICES, which will create competition and drive downs costs MASSIVELY. Won lawsuit last week. Bigger than healthcare, it's called PRICE TRANSPARENCY! Please remember who got it done!!!'*

This is the same *'mixed'* post that was liked the highest number of times, which was already mentioned. In it, Trump starts with a traditionally written post, up until he wrote the words 'REAL PRICES' in full capital letters, among other words such as 'MASSIVELY' and 'PRICE TRANSPARENCY'. This signals Trump's highly emotional state while he was writing the post. The three exclamation marks at the end of the post further support that claim.

On December 12th, 2020 at 14:14 and 14:15 Trump shared 2 posts, both of which got the same lowest number of shares:

   6) *'"We've not gotten any court to judge this (the vote) on its merit." Dan Patrick of Texas. It is a legal disgrace, an embarrassment to the USA!!!'*, with 2.700 shares, 87000 likes and 7.900 comments, and

   7) *'Georgia GOP Chair Says 'We Are Trusting No One,' Promises 'Eyes on Every Part' of Voting Process - You can't rely on Brian Kemp. Unlike other governors for the many states I won, he lost total control. Signature verification???'*, with also 2.700 shares, next to 71000 likes and 5.700 comments.

In the first example, the first part of the post is being classified as *'traditional'*, whereas the last sentence (*'It is a legal disgrace, an embarrassment to the USA!!!'*) is considered to be *'nontraditional'*.

In the second example, the first part of the post is also marked as *'traditional'* and the second part, from *'You can't rely...'* is being marked as *'nontraditional'*.

4.2. Categorization by Hansen

According to Hansen, speeches (in this paper- posts) can be divided into 3 main categories, which are *'acclaims'*, *'attacks'* and *'defences'*, with a fourth category, called *'neutral'*, personally added by the author for posts which couldn't have been ascribed to any of the previously mentioned three categories.

"Political campaign discourse is instrumental, designed to persuade voters to perceive the candidate as preferable to the opponent" said Benoit (1999, p. 247) and although he writes about spoken discourse, we believe, the same can be applied to what is written, or in this case, the Facebook posts.

It is important to mention that each of the mentioned categories have their own additional subcategories, which will also be elaborated and exemplified in the following sections.

Chart 2

Number of posts classified as acclaims, attacks, defenses or neutral
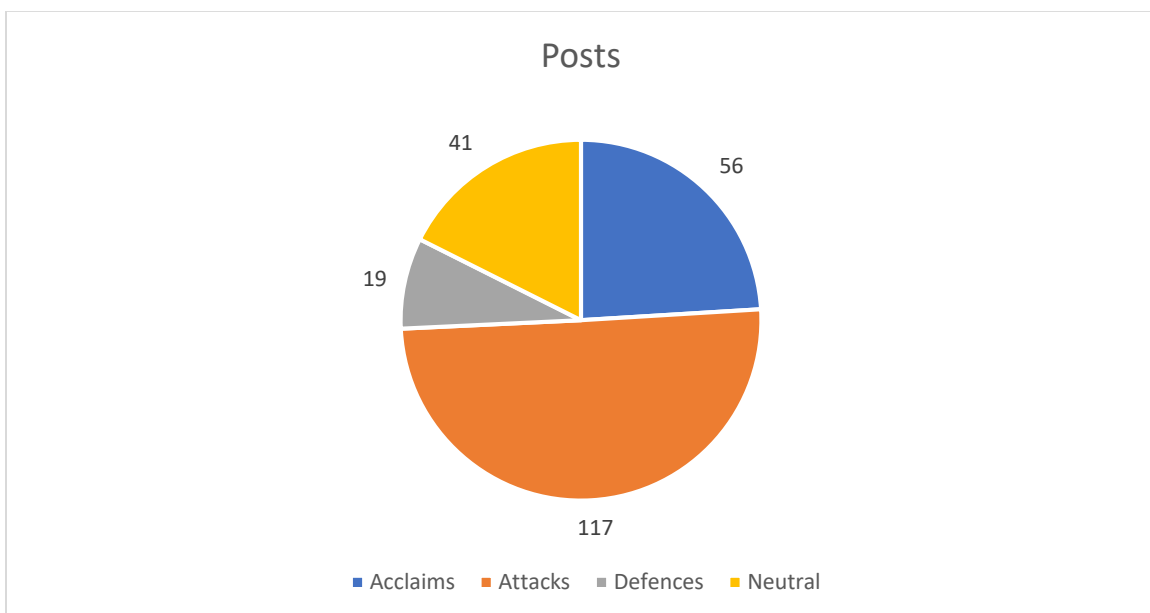
4.2.1. Acclaims

"Acclaims are instances of discourse that function as self-praise. (Benoit, 1999, p. 250). Benoit (1999, p. 250) describes the two major components of acclaiming: acclaims "involve increased responsibility and the positive evaluation of an act". "Acclaiming in political campaigns can occur on two basic topics: policy (issues) and the candidates' and parties' character (image)" (Benoit, 1999, p. 250). Such posts, viewed as 'policy issue' or 'character (image)', can be also subdivided into more subcategories: *'past deeds'*, *'future plans'* and *'general goals'* for *'policy (issue)'*, and *'personal qualities'*, '*leadership abilities*' and *'ideals'* for *'character image'*. *'Policy (issue)'* refers to the candidate's and the political party's issues regarding the deeds and policies (goals) they had undertaken and/or supported in the past, present or will be undertaken and/or supported in the future time. *'Character (image)'* refers, as the name itself suggests, to the image, personality or the character of the political candidate and his administration i.e. political party in general. As the further subcategories of *'character (image)'* imply, the accent is put on personal qualities of the members of that particular political party, their leadership abilities and the ideals which they support and stand for.

Chart 3

Acclaiming posts classified as either 'policy issue' or 'character image'
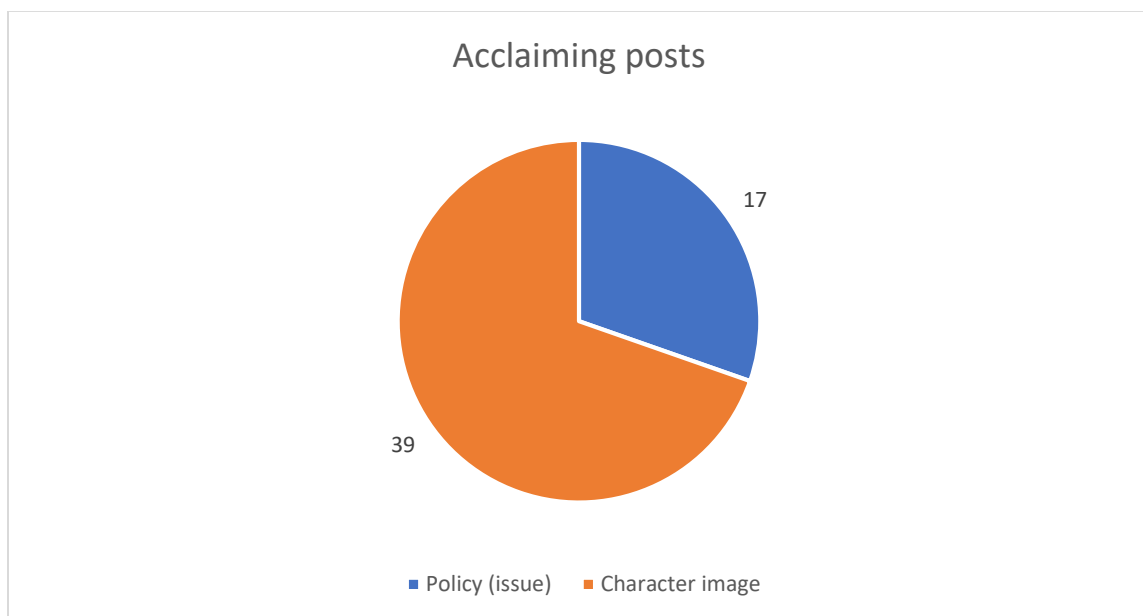
4.2.1.1. Policy (issue)

'Policy (issue)' is the first subcategory of *'acclaims'*. It can be recognized if the core topic of the candidates' posts is revolting around past deeds, future plans or general goals. (Benoit, 1999)

Out of the 56 posts marked as *'acclaims'*, 17 were marked as 'policy issue', 5 of which were marked as *'past deeds'*, 9 as *'future plans'* and 3 as *'general goals'*.

Chart 4

'Acclaiming posts' - policy (issue)
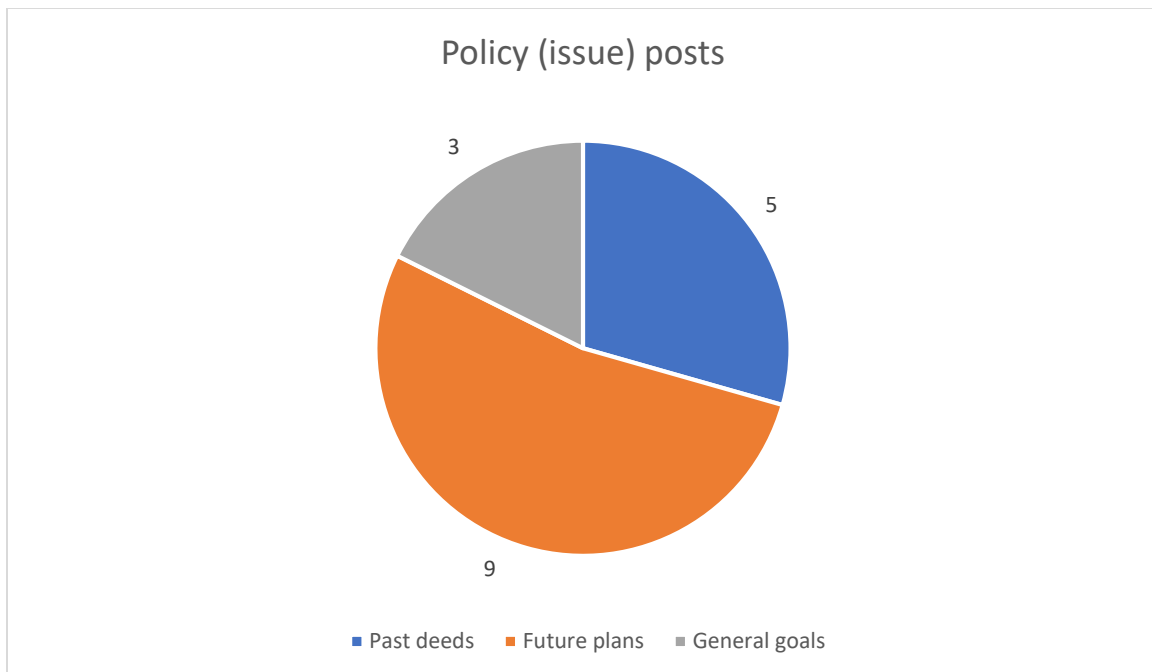
4.2.1.1.1. Past deeds

4.2.1.1.1.1. The highest and the lowest number of likes

On December 10th, 2020 at 00:39 Trump shared a post with the highest number of likes (being liked 759000 times), comments (being commented 79000 times) and shares (being shared 63000 times):

    1) *'Wow! At least 17 States have joined Texas in the extraordinary case against the greatest Election Fraud in the history of the United States. Thank you!'*

Here, Trump thanks the 17 States for joining him in the fight against the election fraud, probably thanks to his efforts in making them join the fight.

On January 2nd, 2021 at 15:39 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, getting liked 238000 times, in addition to 15000 comments and 14000 shares:

    2) *'TRANSPARENCY in medical pricing will be one of the biggest and most important things done for the American citizen. It was just put into service, January 1, against long odds and bitter opposition. Final lawsuits won last week. Enjoy all the extra money you will have!'*

Trump claims the positive results for the past actions that he and his administration had done by stating that the "medical pricing will be one of the biggest and most important things done for the American citizen" and that now they all can "enjoy all the extra money [they] will have."

4.2.1.1.1.2. The highest and the lowest number of comments

On December 10th, 2020 at 00:39 Trump shared a post with the highest number of likes (being liked 759000 times), comments (being commented 79000 times) and shares (being shared 63000 times):

3) *'Wow! At least 17 States have joined Texas in the extraordinary case against the greatest Election Fraud in the history of the United States. Thank you!'*

On December 19th, 2020 at 20:16 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of comments (being commented 10000 times) and shares (being shared 7,400 times), next to 265000 likes:

4) *' Very happy to have helped get Wreaths Across America so beautifully open and operating today. Congratulations to all of those who have worked so hard for this great success!'*

Trump is glad he had the opportunity to help everyone with the act. Also, he congratulates everyone for being a part in making the attempt happen. This way, the American citizen gets a feeling of belonging to a group, making them feel important and of value, which is also a good example of the importance of the previously mentioned logos, ethos and pathos in this topic (see chapter 2.3).

4.2.1.1.1.3. The highest and the lowest number of shares

On December 10th, 2020 at 00:39 Trump shared a post with the highest number of likes (being liked 759000 times), comments (being commented 79000 times) and shares (being shared 63000 times):

5) *'Wow! At least 17 States have joined Texas in the extraordinary case against the greatest Election Fraud in the history of the United States. Thank you!'*

On December, Trump shared a post with the lowest number of shares, being shared 7400 times, next to 265000 likes and 10000 comments:

6) *'Very happy to have helped get Wreaths Across America so beautifully open and operating today. Congratulations to all of those who have worked so hard for this great success!'*

It is obvious that in the mentioned examples Trump praises his past accomplishments or those of his political party, accepting the positive results of their hard work and dedication.

4.2.1.1.2. Future plans

The following example was used by Benoit (1999, p. 250) to show what kind of discourse falls under future plans category. He describes a situation in which Bob Dole, a former US Senate Majority Leader, said that if elected, he *"[...] will reduce taxes 15% across-the-board for every taxpayer in America."*. Future plans deal with situations and remarks about what will happen in the future.

4.2.1.1.2.1. The highest and the lowest number of likes

On December 13th, 2020 at 16.38 Trump shared a post with the highest number of likes, being liked 541000 times. It had 76000 comments and 39000 shares:

1) *'The drug companies are going crazy putting up nasty ads against me asking to "withdraw my Favored Nation's Executive Order". They don't want the U.S. to have the lowest drug prices in the world, but we now will. Big reductions coming. No other politician would do this!!!'*

On January 2nd, 2021 at 01:59 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, being liked 94000 times. The post contained 18000 comments and 26000 shares:

2) *'Some States are very slow to inoculate recipients despite successful and very large scale distribution of vaccines by the Federal Government. They will get it done!'*

This post is interesting in the sense that, even though it is considered to be an *'acclaiming future plans'* post, it can be categorized as a *'attacking'* post. The sentence "They will get it done!" leaves the readers with an impression that this will be done whether the States like it or not. In the first

part, Trump praises the achievements accomplished by him and his administration in quick "distribution of vaccines by the Federal Government."

4.2.1.1.2.2. The highest and the lowest number of comments

On December 13th, 2020 at 16:38 Trump shared a post with the highest number of comments, being commented 76000 times. It had 541000 likes and 39000 shares:

3) *'The drug companies are going crazy putting up nasty ads against me asking to "withdraw my Favored Nation's Executive Order". They don't want the U.S. to have the lowest drug prices in the world, but we now will. Big reductions coming. No other politician would do this!!!'*

Similar to the previous post, this post can also be viewed as a threat, even though it is ascribed to the *'acclaiming'* posts. Trump states that the drug companies "don't want the U.S. to have the lowest drug prices in the world", but thanks to him, they now will. That is why we have placed it into acclaiming post, as the end of it is to praise himself, namely acclaim his capabilities.

On December 18th, 2020 at 15:22 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of comments, being commented 17000 times, next to 117000 likes and 4000 shares:

4) *'Europe and other parts of the World being hit hard by the China Virus - Germany, France, Spain and Italy, in particular. The vaccines are on their way!!!'*

Seems like the American people aren't too interested in what is happening in the rest of the world. They are in enough worry with the current problems that are happening in the USA, due to the voter fraud, lack of vaccines, riots in towns, inflation, immigrants, etc.

4.2.1.1.2.3. The highest and the lowest number of shares

On December 13th, 2020 at 16:38 Trump shared a post with the highest number of shares, being shared 39000 times, liked 541000 times and commented 76000 times:

5) *'The drug companies are going crazy putting up nasty ads against me asking to "withdraw my Favored Nation's Executive Order". They don't want the U.S. to have the lowest drug prices in the world, but we now will. Big reductions coming. No other politician would do this!!!'*

On January 2nd, 2021 at 01:59 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of shares, being shared 2.6000 times, liked 94000 times and commented 18000 times:

6) *'Some States are very slow to inoculate recipients despite successful and very large scale distribution of vaccines by the Federal Government. They will get it done!'*

Trump writes about what the future goals are and that all of it will be possible only due to his commitment and his administration.

4.2.1.1.3. General goals

4.2.1.1.3.1. The highest number of likes, comments and shares

On January 2nd, 2021 at 15:40 Trump shared a post with the highest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked 1 million, shared 26000 and commented 111000 times:

1) *'MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!'*

4.2.1.1.3.2. Lowest number of likes, comments and shares

On December 28th, 2020 at 00:03 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked 437000, commented 63000 times, and shared 17000 times:

2) *'Good news on Covid Relief Bill. Information to follow!'*

Trump briefly informs his followers that good news is on the way. He writes that the long battle with the drug companies is coming to an end, in Trump's favor. With this accomplishment, the *'general goals'* of his administration are being fulfilled.

Trump shares his and his administration's general goals with the public. He mentions what his ambitions are, accomplishments he and his party want to achieve, all for the better of the American people. Of course, he also takes all the praises for being able to do the things which he talks about and enable his people a better life.

4.2.1.2. Character image

Character image is the second subcategory of *'acclaims'*. The shared posts related to the *'character image'* type of posts in which a politician, or someone from his political party, is talking about their personal qualities, leadership abilities or ideals (Benoit, 1999). These three topics are also the subcategories of the *'character image'* posts category.

Out of the 56 posts marked as *'acclaims'*, 39 were marked as *'character image'*, 4 of which were marked as *'personal qualities'*, 28 as *'leadership ability'* and 7 as *'ideals'*.

Chart 5

'Acclaiming posts' - character image

Character image posts

- Personal qualities
- Leadership abilities
- Ideals
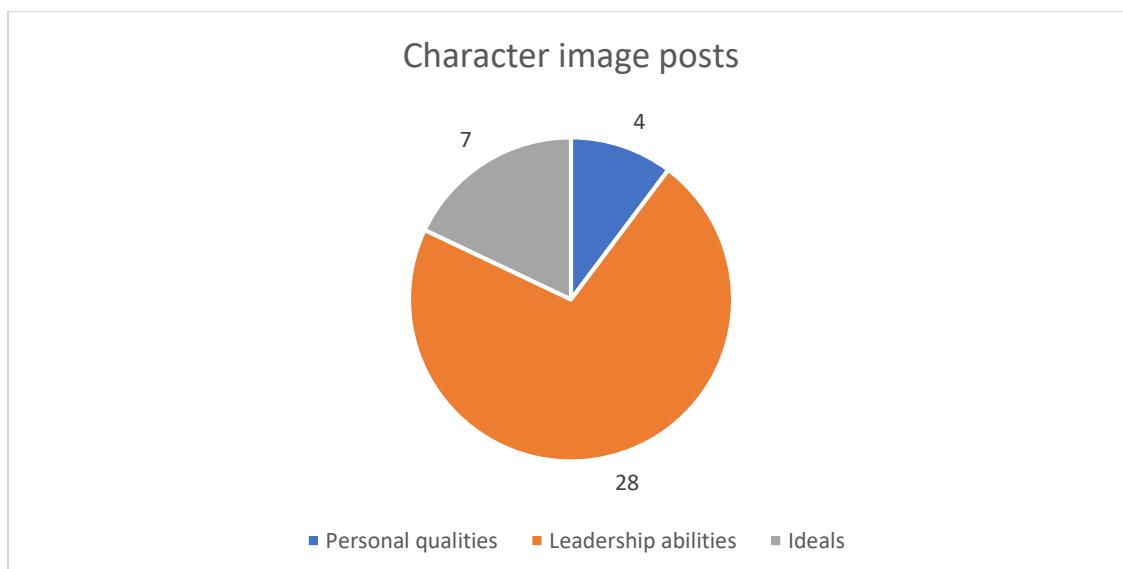
4.2.1.2.1. Personal quality

After analysing all 39 *'acclaiming character image'* posts, only 4 posts were ascribed to the *'personal quality'* type of posts.

4.2.1.2.1.1. The highest and the lowest number of likes, comments and shares

On December 10th, 2020 at 15:35 Trump shared a post with the highest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked 453000, commented 123000 and shared 32000 times:

1) *'"People are upset, and they have a right to be. Georgia not only supported Trump in 2016, but now. This is the only State in the Deep South that went for Biden? Have they lost their minds? This is going to escalate dramatically. This is a very dangerous moment in our history. The fact that our Country is being stolen. A coup is taking place in front of our eyes, and the public can't take this anymore." A Trump fan at Georgia Rally on OANN Bad!'*

On January 4th, 2021 at 16:15 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked 230000, commented 19000 and shared 8.200 times:

2) *'"We've seen in the last few months, unprecedented amounts of Voter Fraud." Sen. Ted Cruz - True!'*

4.2.1.2.2. Leadership ability

After analysing all 39 *'acclaiming character image'* posts, 28 posts were ascribed to the *'leadership ability'* type of posts.

4.2.1.2.2.1. The highest and the lowest number of likes

On January 2nd, 2021 at 01:13 Trump shared a post with the highest number of likes, being liked 911000 times, in addition to 50000 comments and 98000 shares:

1) *'Because of the Trump Administration, hospitals are now required, effective immediately, to publish their REAL PRICES, which will create competition and drive downs costs MASSIVELY. Won lawsuit last week. Bigger than healthcare, it's called PRICE TRANSPARENCY! Please remember who got it done!!!'*

Trump claims the positive results for the work that he and his administration had put in, winning the lawsuit and in doing so, removing the chances for the drug companies to and hospitals in setting their own prices for certain drugs and medical equipment.

On December 18th, 2020 at 17:31 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked only 75000, commented 6300 and shared 2100 times:

2) *'Jared Kushner's scorecard: 24 points for Trump's legacy.'*

In the post, Trump is showing that thanks to their *leadership ability*, Trump's administration won another 24 points towards winning the election.

4.2.1.2.2.2. The highest and the lowest number of comments

On December 11th, 2020 at 04:12 Trump shared a post with the highest number of comments, being commented 155000 times, in addition to 544000 likes and 27000 shares:

3) *'Why didn't the Fake News Media, the FBI and the DOJ report the Biden matter BEFORE the Election. Oh well, it's OK, we won the Election anyway - 75,000,000 VOTES!!!'*

On December 18th, 2020 at 17:31 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked only 75000, commented 6300 and shared 2100 times:

4) *'Jared Kushner's scorecard: 24 points for Trump's legacy.'*

4.2.1.2.2.3. The highest and the lowest number of shares

On December 28th, 2020 at 22:02 Trump shared a post with the highest number of shares, being shared 123000 times, in addition to 848000 likes and 100000 comments:

5) *'"Breaking News: In Pennsylvania there were 205,000 more votes than there were voters. This alone flips the state to President Trump."'*

On December 18th, 2020 at 17:31 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked only 75000, commented 6300 and shared 2.100 times:

6) *'Jared Kushner's scorecard: 24 points for Trump's legacy.'*

4.2.1.2.3. Ideals

After analysing all 39 *'acclaiming character image posts'*, 7 were marked as *'ideals'*.

4.2.1.2.3.1. The highest and the lowest number of likes

On December 30th, 2020 at 20:04 Trump shared a post with the highest number of likes, being liked 934000 times, in addition to 48000 comments and 45000 shares:

1) *'Thank you, a great honor!'*

Here, Trump shared a repost of another post in which he is being praised as being the number one option for the American people. Trump accepts the results with a show of thankfulness to his voters, showing the morals, values and *ideals* of himself and his political party.

On December 10th, 2020 at 17:11 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes and comments, being liked 148000 and commented 8200 times, in addition to 5700 shares:

2) *'Today, I signed a proclamation recognizing Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara. Morocco's serious, credible, and realistic autonomy proposal is the ONLY basis for a just and lasting solution for enduring peace and prosperity!'*

With this act, Trump displayed the ideals of respect and acceptance for foreign countries. He recognizes Morocco as a sovereign nation, all with the aim to have a prosperous and peaceful future for his people and the rest of the world, namely *ideals* everyone strives towards.

4.2.1.2.3.2. The highest and the lowest number of comments

On January 5th, 2021 at 17:42 Trump shared a post with the highest number of comments, being commented 76000 times, in addition to 612000 likes and 27000 shares:

3) *'The Vice President has the power to reject fraudulently chosen electors.'*

Trump shows what *ideals* he values by saying that the "Vice President has the power to reject fraudulently chosen electors". He and his administration do not praise cheating, trickery and foul play in getting what you want to achieve.

On December 10th, 2020 at 17:11 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes and comments, being liked 148000 and commented 8.200 times, in addition to 5.700 shares:

4) *'Today, I signed a proclamation recognizing Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara. Morocco's serious, credible, and realistic autonomy proposal is the ONLY basis for a just and lasting solution for enduring peace and prosperity!'*

4.2.1.2.3.3. The highest and the lowest number of shares

On December 30th, 2020 at 20:04 Trump shared a post with the highest number of likes and shares, being liked 934000, shared 45000 times, in addition to 48000 comments:

5) *'Thank you, a great honor!'*

On January 2nd, 2021 at 15:40 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of shares, being shared 5.100 times, in addition to 171000 likes and 10000 comments:

6) *'Will be in Georgia on Monday night, 9:00 P.M. to RALLY for two GREAT people, David Perdue & Kelly Loeffler. GET READY TO VOTE ON TUESDAY!!!'*

Trump praises David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler as being "GREAT people", someone who has good attitudes, morals and beliefs and is generally a good person. This are the people that he wants to spend time with and have near himself. Fraudulent, dishonest and manipulative people, such as those in the opposing political party, is something that he strongly dislikes and doesn't accept as a part of his team.

The various situations and topics of discussion in which he had the chance to display his and his political party's policies and character images through the posts he wrote, enabled Trump to eventually acclaim even more followers and consequently, make the opposing political party lose some of their followers, or at least make it harder for them to gain new members. Still, considering the fact that the number of *'acclaiming'* posts was half of how many *'attacking'* posts there are,

one can only assume how devoted Trump was in attacking his opponents. After all, he is more familiar for this trait than for the one previously discussed.

4.2.2. Attacks

Benoit (1999, p. 251) claims that an *'attack'* is comprised of two elements: "first, there must be a negatively perceived act, and second responsibility for that act must be attributed to the agent."
'Attacks' put accent more on offensiveness than responsibility, just like it is with *'acclaims'*. Therefore, *'attacks'* have the same subcategories as *'acclaims'*.
As the word itself suggests, attacks come in the form of being hostile and aggressive towards a person or a party and, in this case, the target is usually of the opposing political party. Out of the 233 Facebook posts, half of them were classified under the category *'attacks'*.

Chart 6

'Attacking' posts classified as either 'policy issue' or 'character image'

Attacking posts

46
71

■ Policy (issue)　■ Character image
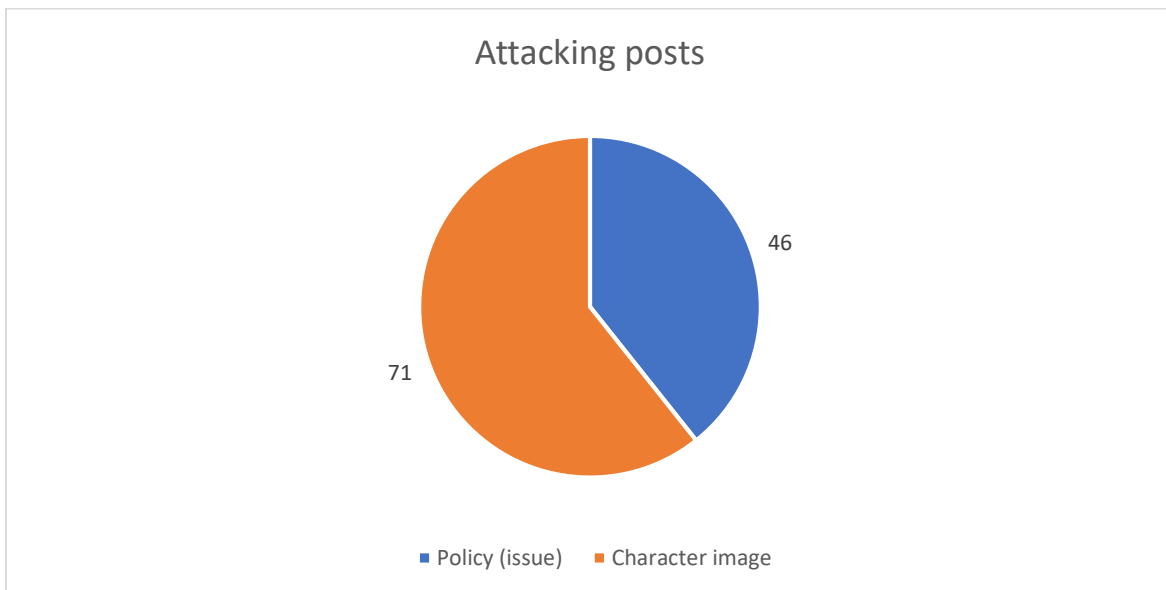
4.2.2.1. Policy (issue)

Out of 117 *'attacks'* that have been read and classified, 46 were marked under the category *'policy (issue)'*, whereas 11 were marked as *'past deeds'*, 4 as *'future plans'* and 31 as *'general goals'*.

Chart 7'Attacking' posts - policy (issue)

Policy (issue) posts

11

4

31

■ Past deeds   ■ Future plans   ■ General goals
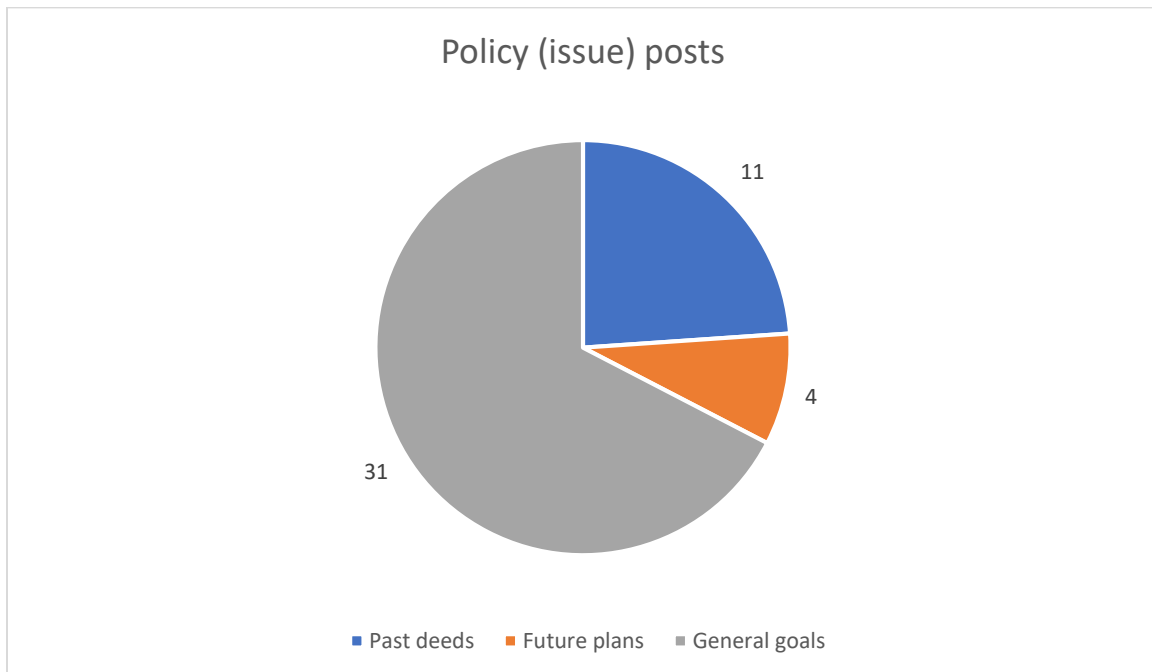
4.2.2.1.1. Past deeds

Benoit (1999, p. 251) used the following example to illustrate what are the traits of a *'past deed'* post in this category:

"When the strongest nation in the world can be tied down for four years in a war in Vietnam with no end in sight—then it's time for new leadership for the United States of America […]."

Here, Richard Nixon, former President of the USA, attacked the failures of the *'past deeds'* of the Democratic Administration in 1968.

4.2.2.1.1.1. The highest number of likes, comments and shares

On December 13th, 2020 at 16:40 Trump shared a post with the highest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked 893000, commented 160000 and shared44000 times:

1) *'MOST CORRUPT ELECTION IN U.S. HISTORY!'*

4.2.2.1.1.2. Lowest number of likes, comments and shares

On December 16th, 2020 at 19:34 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked 162000, commented 27000 and shared 11000 times:

2) *'Former United States Solicitor General Ken Starr: Pennsylvania "Flagrantly Violated" Laws Ahead of Election.'*

Trump accuses Pennsylvania of fragrantly violating the laws ahead of an election. This means that, before the election could've taken place, the state Pennsylvania already violated against the rules of an election. Trump shares an article with the title he wrote in his post.

On December 20th, 2020 at 06:36 Trump shared a post with the highest number of comments, being commented 161k times, next to 819k likes and 40k shares:

3) *'GREATEST ELECTION FRAUD IN THE HISTORY OF OUR COUNTRY!!!'*

Trump shows off his dissatisfaction with some events that recently took place, writing a status in full capital letters with exclamation signs at the end of it, which is a clear indication of how angry he was.

On December 16th, 2020 at 19:34 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, being liked 162k, commented 27k and shared 11k times:

4) *'Former United States Solicitor General Ken Starr: Pennsylvania "Flagrantly Violated" Laws Ahead of Election.'*

4.2.2.1.2. Future plans

Benoit (1999, p. 251) used the example in which Bill Clinton attacked Bob Dole's *'future plans'* by saying that "[…] our opponents have put forward a very different plan, a risky $550 billion tax scheme that will force them to ask for even bigger cuts in Medicare, Medicaid, education, and the environment that they passed and I vetoed last year."

4.2.2.1.2.1. The highest and the lowest number of likes

On December 12th, 2020 at 14:33 Trump shared a post with the highest number of likes and shares, being liked 687000 and shared 38000 times, in addition to 122000 comments:

1) *'Now that the Biden Administration will be a scandal plagued mess for years to come, it is much easier for the Supreme Court of the United States to follow the Constitution and do what everybody knows has to be done. They must show great Courage & Wisdom. Save the USA!!!'*

Trump is satisfied with the fact that, from now on, the Biden Administration will be viewed by everyone as a fraudulent party in the presidential campaign. Furthermore, Trump puts pressure on the Supreme Court, implying that it is now even easier for them to prove the wrongdoings and rightfully condemn the opposing party.

On December 11th, 2020 at 15:17 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked 154000, commented 19000 and shared 8.700 times:

2) *'Now it turns out that the Democrats want the Pack the Court with 26 Justices. This would be terrible, and must be stopped. Even Justice RBG was strongly opposed!'*

Here, Trump attacks the Democrats for the things they want to do in the upcoming days. The Democrats want to be proclaimed as the winners with 26 Justices, while other parts of the election are still not carried out and concluded.

4.2.2.1.2.2. The highest and the lowest number of comments

On December 9th, 2020 at 17:17 Trump shared a post with the highest number of comments, being commented 125000 times, in addition to 631000 likes and 22000 shares:

3) *'#OVERTURN'*

On December 11th, 2020 at 15:17 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked 154000, commented 19000 and shared 8700 times:

4) *'Now it turns out that the Democrats want the Pack the Court with 26 Justices. This would be terrible, and must be stopped. Even Justice RBG was strongly opposed!'*

4.2.2.1.2.3. The highest and the lowest number of shares

On December 12th, 2020 at 14:33 Trump shared a post with the highest number of likes and shares, being liked 687000 and shared 38000 times, in addition to 122000 comments:

5) *'Now that the Biden Administration will be a scandal plagued mess for years to come, it is much easier for the Supreme Court of the United States to follow the Constitution and do what everybody knows has to be done. They must show great Courage & Wisdom. Save the USA!!!'*

On December 11th, 2020 at 15:17 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked 154000, commented 19000 and shared 8700 times:

6) *'Now it turns out that the Democrats want the Pack the Court with 26 Justices. This would be terrible, and must be stopped. Even Justice RBG was strongly opposed!'*

Trump attacks the upcoming plans of the Democrats "[…] to Pack the Court with 26 Justices." He is aware of what consequences that would bring for his attempt to win the election. He mentions the words "terrible" and that it "[…] must be stopped."

4.2.2.1.3. General goals

31 *'attacking general goals'* posts were marked as such, after all 233 posts were analysed.

4.2.2.1.3.1. Highest and the lowest number of likes

On December 24th, 2020 at 22:50 Trump shared a post with the highest number of likes and shares, being liked 998000 and shared 181000 times, in addition to 138000 comments:

1) *'Our embassy in Baghdad got hit Sunday by several rockets. Three rockets failed to launch. Guess where they were from: IRAN. Now we hear chatter of additional attacks against Americans in Iraq...Some friendly health advice to Iran: If one American is killed, I will hold Iran responsible. Think it over.'*

On December 17th, 2020 at 16:50 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked 60000, commented 8.600 and shared 4.500 times:

2) *'New Peter Strzok Texts Undermine Official Narrative on Start of 'Russia Collusion' Investigation - Check out last in his class John McCain, one of the most overrated people in D.C.'*

4.2.2.1.3.2. The highest and the lowest number of comments

On December 12th, 2020 at 14:13 Trump shared a post with the highest number of comments, being commented 210000 times, in addition to 761000 likes and 58000 shares:

3) *'So, you're the President of the United States, and you just went through an election where you got more votes than any sitting President in history, by far - and purportedly lost. You can't get "standing" before the Supreme Court, so you "intervene" with wonderful states that, after careful study and consideration, think you got "screwed", something which will hurt them also. Many others likewise join the suit but, within a flash, it is thrown out and gone, without even looking at the many reasons it was brought. A Rigged Election, fight on!'*

Trump attacks the general goals not only of the opposing candidate, but also the Supreme Court itself and some of his representatives in other states. He says that, even though he got "more votes than any sitting President in history", he lost and even after he wanted to get a "standing before the Supreme Court", he got rejected.

On December 17th, 2020 at 16:50 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked 60000, commented 8.600 and shared 4.500 times:

4) *'New Peter Strzok Texts Undermine Official Narrative on Start of 'Russia Collusion' Investigation - Check out last in his class John McCain, one of the most overrated people in D.C.'*

4.2.2.1.3.3. The highest and the lowest number of shares

On December 24th, 2020 at 22:50 Trump shared a post with the highest number of likes and shares, being liked 998000 and shared 181000 times, in addition to 138000 comments:

5) *'Our embassy in Baghdad got hit Sunday by several rockets. Three rockets failed to launch. Guess where they were from: IRAN. Now we hear chatter of additional attacks against Americans in Iraq...Some friendly health advice to Iran: If one American is killed, I will hold Iran responsible. Think it over.'*

On December 17th, 2020 at 16:50 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked 60000, commented 8.600 and shared 4.500 times:

6) *'New Peter Strzok Texts Undermine Official Narrative on Start of 'Russia Collusion' Investigation - Check out last in his class John McCain, one of the most overrated people in D.C.'*

Trump devalues the importance of certain "incompetent" people such as "[…] last in his class John McCain, one of the most overrated people in D.C."

4.2.2.2. Character image

Out of the 117 posts marked as *'attacks'*, 71 were marked as *'character image'*, 23 of which were marked as *'personal qualities'*, 33 as *'leadership ability'* and 15 as *'ideals'*.

Chart 8

'Attacking' posts – character image
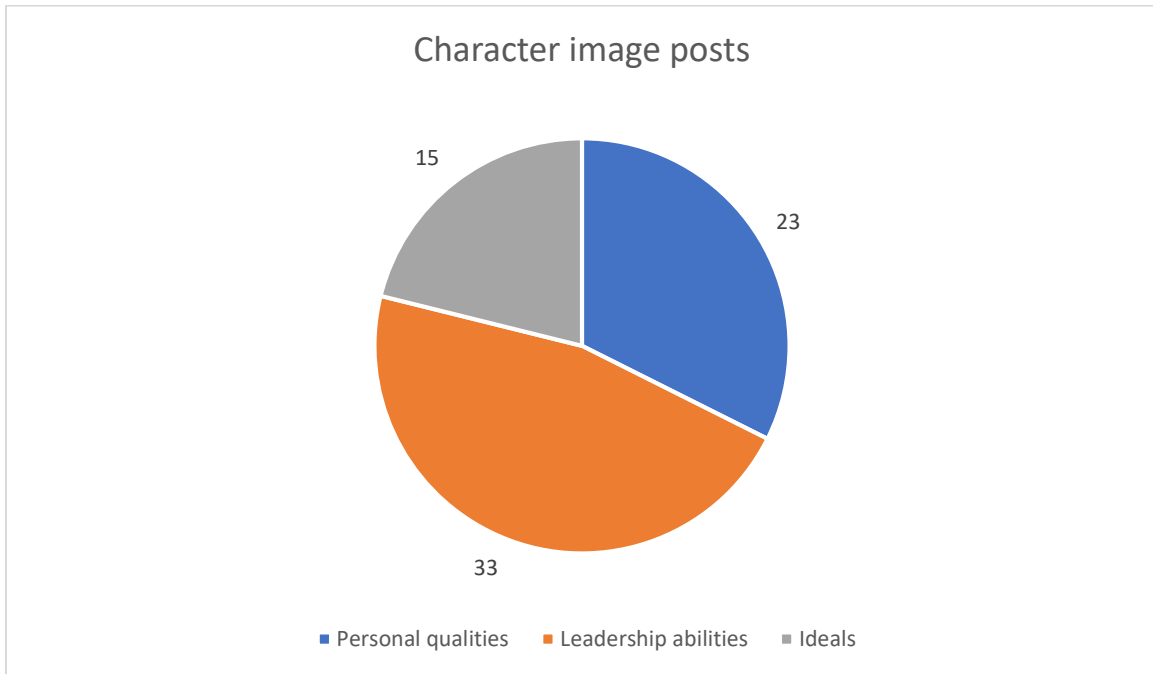
4.2.2.2.1. Personal quality

After the analysis, 23 *'attacking personal quality'* posts were classified as such.

4.2.2.2.1.1. The highest and the lowest number of likes

On January 1st, 2021 at 23:17 Trump shared a post with the highest number of likes, being liked 831000 times, in addition to 100000 comments and 43000 shares:

1) *'Washington is being inundated with people who don't want to see an election victory stolen by emboldened Radical Left Democrats. Our Country has had enough, they won't take it anymore! We hear you (and love you) from the Oval Office. MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!'*
The general goals of the Radical Left Democrats are built on false promises, lies, thievery and trickery, all of which Trump doesn't accept and won't allow to happen to all the people who want

and demand justice. Trump also uses the opportunity to assimilate and equate himself with the general public (See 2.3.).

On December 12th, 2020 at 14:15 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked 71000, commented 5.700 and shared 2.700 times:

2) *'Georgia GOP Chair Says 'We Are Trusting No One,' Promises 'Eyes on Every Part' of Voting Process - You can't rely on Brian Kemp. Unlike other governors for the many states I won, he lost total control. Signature verification???'*

4.2.2.2.1.2. The highest and the lowest number of comments

On January 6th, 2021 at 15:06 Trump shared a post with the highest number of comments and shares, being commented 101000 and shared 61000 times, in addition to 654000 likes:

3) *'They just happened to find 50,000 ballots late last night. The USA is embarrassed by fools. Our Election Process is worse than that of third world countries!'*

Trump is ashamed, claiming that because of the wrongdoings (personal qualities) from the Democrats, their "election Process is worse than that of third world countries!"

On December 12th, 2020 at 14:15 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked 71000, commented 5.700 and shared 2.700 times:

4) *'Georgia GOP Chair Says 'We Are Trusting No One,' Promises 'Eyes on Every Part' of Voting Process - You can't rely on Brian Kemp. Unlike other governors for the many states I won, he lost total control. Signature verification???'*

4.2.2.2.1.3. The highest and the lowest number of shares

On January 6th, 2021 at 15:06 Trump shared a post with the highest number of comments and shares, being commented 101000 and shared 61000 times, in addition to 654000 likes:

5) *'They just happened to find 50,000 ballots late last night. The USA is embarrassed by fools. Our Election Process is worse than that of third world countries!'*

On December 12th, 2020 at 14:15 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked 71000, commented 5.700 and shared 2.700 times:

6) *'Georgia GOP Chair Says 'We Are Trusting No One,' Promises 'Eyes on Every Part' of Voting Process - You can't rely on Brian Kemp. Unlike other governors for the many states I won, he lost total control. Signature verification???'*

4.2.2.2.2. Leadership ability

After the analysis, there were 33 *'attacking leadership ability'* posts marked as such.

4.2.2.2.2.1. The highest and the lowest number of likes

On December 18th, 2020 at 04:27 Trump shared a post with the highest number of likes, being liked 796000 times, in addition to 151000 comments and 27000 shares:

1) *'I am very disappointed in the United States Supreme Court, and so is our great country!'*

The credibility of the United States Supreme Court is problematic, since it didn't manage to justify its authenticity when it was the most important to do so. Trump and, according to what he wrote in the post, the whole country, is very disappointed in it.

On December 12th, 2020 at 14:14 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked 87000, commented 7.900 and shared 2.700 times:

2) *'"We've not gotten any court to judge this (the vote) on its merit." Dan Patrick of Texas. It is a legal disgrace, an embarrassment to the USA!!!'*

The leadership ability by some bodies in the USA is disappointing, since no court could have been established to judge the votes with regard to the topic of discussion.

4.2.2.2.2.2. The highest and the lowest number of comments

On January 6th, 2021 at 20:28 Trump shared a post with the highest number of comments, being commented 244000 times, in addition to 765000 likes and 49000 shares:

3) *'Mike Pence didn't have the courage to do what should have been done to protect our Country and our Constitution, giving States a chance to certify a corrected set of facts, not the fraudulent or inaccurate ones which they were asked to previously certify. USA demands the truth!'*

Trump attacks Mike Pence's leadership ability for not having "the courage to do what should've been done to protect [their] Country and [their] Constitution." In doing so, he enabled some States to avoid checking and certifying the number of votes, doing more or less what they want.

On December 12th, 2020 at 14:14 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked 87000, commented 7.900 and shared 2.700 times:

4) *'"We've not gotten any court to judge this (the vote) on its merit." Dan Patrick of Texas. It is a legal disgrace, an embarrassment to the USA!!!'*

4.2.2.2.2.3. The highest and the lowest number of shares

On December 27th, 2020 at 00:26 Trump shared a post with the highest number of shares, being shared 74000 times, in addition to 736000 likes and 136000 comments:

5) *'Time for Republican Senators to step up and fight for the Presidency, like the Democrats would do if they had actually won. The proof is irrefutable! Massive late night mail-in ballot drops in swing states, stuffing the ballot boxes (on video), double voters, dead voters, fake signatures, illegal immigrant voters, banned Republican vote watchers, MORE VOTES THAN ACTUAL VOTERS (check out Detroit & Philadelphia), and much more. The numbers are far greater than what is necessary to win the individual swing states, and cannot even be contested. Courts are bad, the FBI and "Justice" didn't do their job, and the United States Election System looks like that of a third world country. Freedom of the press has been gone for a long time, it is Fake News, and now we have Big Tech (with Section 230) to deal with. But when it is all over, and this period of time becomes just another ugly chapter in our Country's history, WE WILL WIN!!!'*

On December 12th, 2020 at 14:14 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked 87000, commented 7.900 and shared 2.700 times:

6) *'"We've not gotten any court to judge this (the vote) on its merit." Dan Patrick of Texas. It is a legal disgrace, an embarrassment to the USA!!!'*

4.2.2.2.3. Ideals

Out of the 71 posts classified under the category *'attacking character image'* posts, there are 15 posts shared by Trump which were classified as *'ideals'*.

4.2.2.2.3.1. The highest and the lowest number of likes, comments and shares

On December 30th, 2020 at 20:41 Trump shared a post with the highest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked 561000, commented 92000 and shared 48000 times:

    1) *'The United States had more votes than it had people voting, by a lot. This travesty cannot be allowed to stand. It was a Rigged Election, one not even fit for third world countries!'*

The Democrats are in support of a 'Rigged Election', one which they influenced to happen. Trump is disgusted by the ideals which this party promotes and displays in their actions.

4.2.2.2.3.2. The highest and the lowest number of likes, comments and shares

On December 12th, 2020 at 16:19 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked 135000, commented 9300 and shared 5800 times:

    2) *'There is massive evidence of widespread fraud in the four states (plus) mentioned in the Texas suit. Just look at all of the tapes and affidavits!'*

The foul play by the opposing political party is more than apparent. Trump states that the evidence is "massive", encouraging everyone to "[…] look at all of the tapes and affidavits!" Even though there is more than enough evidence, it seems that there is nothing that Trump, or someone else, can do about it since every political body is corrupted, starting with States and all the way up to the Supreme Court.

4.2.3. Defences

„Persuasive defence is a response to persuasive attack and it attempts to restore image or reputation following attacks or suspicions." Benoit (1999, p. 252)

'Defence' posts may take place in 6 forms: as *'simple denial'*, *'shifting the blame'*, *'differentiation'*, *'transcendence'*, *'defeasibility'* or as *'mortification'*. Just like it was done in previous types of posts, an example of a post with the highest and lowest number of *'likes'*, *'comments'* and *'shares'* will be given for the mentioned types of *'defences'*.

After 233 posts were analysed, 19 of them were classified as *'defences'*.

Chart 9

'Defence' posts classified as 1 of their 6 forms
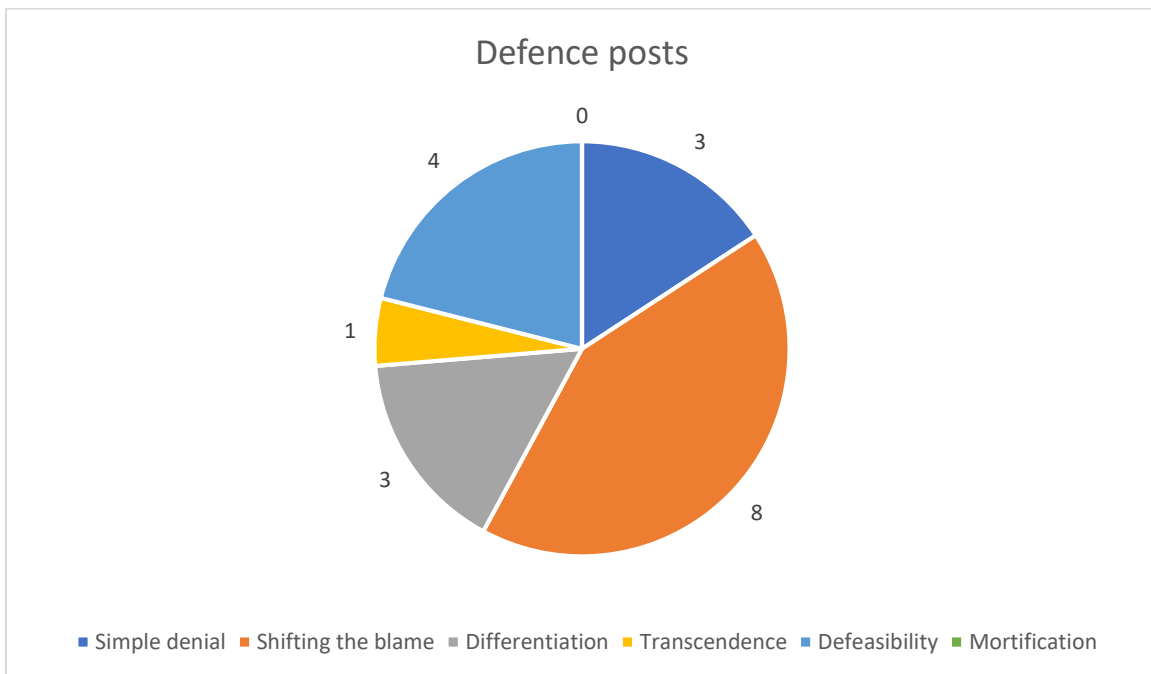
4.2.3.1. Simple denial

In *'Simple denial'*, "[…] the rhetor disputes the allegation that he or she performed the offensive act." (Benoit, 1999, p. 252) In this case, Trump himself often came under pressure from the opposite politicians, being forced to defend himself. In a *'simple denial defence'*, he may dispute

the allegation by denying that the act happened or that he, or someone from his administration performed the act, or simply deny that the act is even offensive at all.

3 of his 19 *'defence'* posts were classified ascribed to the *'simple denial'* category after the analysis took place.

4.2.3.1.1. The highest and the lowest number of likes

On December 16th, 2020 at 07:24 Trump shared a post with the highest number of likes and comments, being liked 327000 and commented 80000 times, in addition to 16000 shares:

1)   *'Trump's allies slam Mitch McConnell for congratulating Biden - Mitch, 75,000,000 VOTES, a record for a sitting President (by a lot). Too soon to give up. Republican Party must finally learn to fight. People are angry!'*

In this post, Trump denies the assertion that Biden had already won. He says that it is "Too soon to give up." There is still time left for things to change, but it seems that everyone but Trump had already given up.

On December 17th, 2020 at 16:09 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked 281000, commented 31000 and shared 13000 times:

2)   *'I have NOTHING to do with the potential prosecution of Hunter Biden, or the Biden family. It is just more Fake News. Actually, I find it very sad to watch!'*

Here, Trump denies the assumption that he had to do something "[…] with the prosecution of Hunter Biden, or the Biden family." The fact that the Democrats are willing to take such measures in order to win against Trump, is just "sad to watch!", claims Trump.

4.2.3.1.2. The highest and the lowest number of comments

On December 16th, 2020 at 07:24 Trump shared a post with the highest number of likes and comments, being liked 327000 and commented 80000 times, in addition to 16000 shares:

3)   *'Trump's allies slam Mitch McConnell for congratulating Biden - Mitch, 75,000,000 VOTES, a record for a sitting President (by a lot). Too soon to give up. Republican Party must finally learn to fight. People are angry!'*

On December 17th, 2020 at 16:09 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked 281000, commented 31000 and shared 13000 times:

4)   *'I have NOTHING to do with the potential prosecution of Hunter Biden, or the Biden family. It is just more Fake News. Actually, I find it very sad to watch!'*

4.2.3.1.3. The highest and the lowest number of shares

On December 21st, 2020 at 22:52 Trump shared a post with the highest number of shares, being shared 20000 times, in addition to 322000 likes and 56000 comments:

5)   *'Two years ago, the great people of Wisconsin asked me to endorse a man named Brian Hagedorn for State Supreme Court Justice, when he was getting destroyed in the Polls against a tough Democrat Candidate who had no chance of losing. After my endorsement, Hagedorn easily won! WOW, he just voted against me in a Big Court Decision on voter fraud (of which there was much!), despite many pages of dissent from three highly respected Justices. One thing has nothing to do with another, but we ended up losing 4-3 in a really incorrect ruling! Great Republicans in Wisconsin should take these 3 strong decisions to their State Legislators and overturn this ridiculous State Election. We won in a LANDSLIDE!'*

Trump starts the post by mentioning how, thanks to his efforts and extra commitment, a person named Brian Hagedorn was endorsed for State Supreme Court Justice. Now, that same person

voted against him in a ruling which made him lose by a narrow margin. This led to him believing that the election was untrue, which is why he simply denied the results of the election.

On December 17th, 2020 at 16:09 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked 281000, commented 31000 and shared 13000 times:

6) *'I have NOTHING to do with the potential prosecution of Hunter Biden, or the Biden family. It is just more Fake News. Actually, I find it very sad to watch!'*

4.2.3.2. Shifting the blame

'Shifting the blame' is taking place whenever someone ''[…] accuses another person of actually committing the offensive act." (Benoit, 1999, p. 252)
After the analysis, 8 out of 19 *'defence'* posts were classified under this category.

4.2.3.2.1. The highest and the lowest number of likes

On January 6th, 2021 at 07:23 Trump shared a post with the highest number of likes and comments, being liked 529000 and commented 87000 times, in addition to 23000 shares:

1) *'If Vice President Mike Pence comes through for us, we will win the Presidency. Many States want to decertify the mistake they made in certifying incorrect & even fraudulent numbers in a process NOT approved by their State Legislatures (which it must be). Mike can send it back.'*

Trump shifts the blame for the unpleasant results on "incorrect & even fraudulent numbers in a process NOT approved by their State Legislatures (which it must be). He shifts the responsibility over on Mike Pence, who "[…] can send it back."

On December 12th, 2020 at 14:16 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, being liked 154000 times, in addition to 23000 comments and 8.200 shares:

2) *'"Justices Alito and Thomas say they would have allowed Texas to proceed with its election lawsuit." Sean Hannity. This is a great and disgraceful miscarriage of justice. The people of the United States were cheated, and our Country disgraced. Never even given our day in Court!'*

Trump blames justices Alito and Thomas for not holding on to their promises, who promised to proceed with the election lawsuit. It is not on Trump to do that, but the people he mentioned, which is why the election results are such as they are.

4.2.3.2.2. The highest and the lowest number of comments

On January 6th, 2021 at 07:23 Trump shared a post with the highest number of likes and comments, being liked 529000 and commented 87000 times, in addition to 23000 shares:

3) *'If Vice President Mike Pence comes through for us, we will win the Presidency. Many States want to decertify the mistake they made in certifying incorrect & even fraudulent numbers in a process NOT approved by their State Legislatures (which it must be). Mike can send it back.'*

On December 12th, 2020 at 14:12 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of comments, being commented 16000 times, in addition to 173000 likes and 8.700 shares:

4) *'"Don't the voters have to know what the Federal prosecutor's know. The establishment failed us. The media, congressional leaders, the Democrat Party? No wonder 74 (a pres. record) million Americans voted for Donald Trump, & they still don't believe the outcome of this election. The American people deserve answers, better late than never." Laura Ingraham'*

"The establishment failed us" for not sharing what the Federal prosecutors know with the voters and that is the reason why Trump lost in the end. So, again, it is not his mistake, but someone else's.

4.2.3.2.3. The highest and the lowest number of shares

On December 29th, 2020 at 15:03 Trump shared a post with the highest number of shares, being shared 50000 times, in addition to 392000 likes and 50000 comments:

5) *'"A group of Republican lawmakers in Pennsylvania say 200,000 more votes were counted in the 2020 Election than voters (100% went to Biden). State Representative Frank Ryan said they found troubling discrepancies after an analysis of Election Day data." Fox News - This is far more votes than is needed by me to win Pennsylvania, not to mention hundreds of thousands of votes in other categories which increase my already big lead into a landslide. All other Swing States show likewise. WE NEED NEW & ENERGETIC REPUBLICAN LEADERSHIP. This can not stand. Can you imagine if the Republicans stole a Presidential Election from the Democrats - All hell would break out. Republican leadership only wants the path of least resistance. Our leaders (not me, of course!) are pathetic. They only know how to lose! P.S. I got MANY Senators and Congressmen/Congresswomen Elected. I do believe they forgot!'*

Another example post in which Trump shifts the blame on other bodies of law and politics saying that, for example, "200,000 more votes were counted in the 2020 Election than voters", out of which all 100% of them went to Biden. He further supports his claim by mentioning that the "State Representative Frank Ryan said they found troubling discrepancies after an analysis of Election Day data." He goes further by mentioning that, if it were the other way around, "[a]ll hell would break out."

On December 12th, 2020 at 20:45 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of shares, being shared only 5.600 times, in addition to 172000 likes and 25000 comments:

6) *'If failing Governor Brian Kemp would allow signature verification, David & Kelly would WIN!'*

All it had to be done for Trump to win the election was for Governor Brian Kemp to allow signature verification.

4.2.3.3. Differentiation

"In ['*differentiation*'], the accused tries to distinguish the offensive act from similar but less desirable actions." (Benoit, 1999, p. 252) While the accused person does not deny committing the act, he or she suggests that his action is less offensive than what the other side is trying to portray as.

After the analysis, 3 posts were classified under this category.

4.2.3.3.1. The highest and the lowest number of likes

On January 4th, 2021 at 16:35 Trump shared a post with the highest number of likes, being liked 234000 times, in addition to 12000 comments and 11000 shares:

1) *'"We are not acting to thwart the Democratic process, we are acting to protect it." Senator Ron Johnson'*

In this post, Trump mentions Senator Ron Johnson who was "[…] not acting to thwart the Democratic process" like everyone allegedly believed but, "[they] are trying to protect it." With this post Trump tries to show that there must be a clear differentiation between the two claims.

On December 27th, 2020 at 16:03 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, being liked 172000 times, in addition to 34000 comments and 14000 shares:

2) *'Michigan AG Dana Nessel Pursues Sanctions Against Lawyers Questioning Election - These lawyers are true patriots who are fighting for the truth and, obviously, getting very close. AG should be sanctioned. Fight on!'*

Unlike what everyone tries to portray them as, Trump claims that the lawyers, who are insisting on checking the election results are "[…] true patriots who are fighting for the truth, and obviously, getting very close." The blame shouldn't be focused on them for insisting on something that should be accepted without hesitating.

4.2.3.3.2. The highest and the lowest number of comments

On December 27th, 2020 at 16:03 Trump shared a post with the highest number of comments and shares, being commented 34000 and shared 14000 times:

3) *'Michigan AG Dana Nessel Pursues Sanctions Against Lawyers Questioning Election - These lawyers are true patriots who are fighting for the truth and, obviously, getting very close. AG should be sanctioned. Fight on!'*

On January 4th, 2021 at 16:35 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of comments, being commented 12000 times, in addition to 234000 likes and 11000 shares:

4) *'"We are not acting to thwart the Democratic process, we are acting to protect it." Senator Ron Johnson'*

4.2.3.3.3. The highest and the lowest number of shares

On December 27th, 2020 at 16:03 Trump shared a post with the highest number of comments and shares, being commented 34000 and shared 14000 times:

5) *'Michigan AG Dana Nessel Pursues Sanctions Against Lawyers Questioning Election - These lawyers are true patriots who are fighting for the truth and, obviously, getting very close. AG should be sanctioned. Fight on!'*

On January 1st, 2021 at 04:45 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of shares, being shared 6.500 times, in addition to 179000 likes and 17000 comments:

6) *'Sen. Josh Hawley Slams Walmart Tweet Calling Him a 'Sore Loser' - America is proud of Josh and the many others who are joining him. The USA cannot have fraudulent elections!'*

Senator Josh Hawley rightfully slams the Walmart Tweet calling him a 'Sore loser', claims Trump.

4.2.3.4. Transcendence

In *'transcendence'*, a person may try to view an act from a different perspective or context. "For example, a politician may claim that an act was technically illegal but morally right to perform […]." (Benoit, 1999, p. 252)

After the analysis, only 1 post was categorized under this category:

    1) *'"Conservatives Call on State Legislators to Appoint New Electors, in Accordance with the Constitution"'*

The post was shared on December, 22nd 2020 at 00:58 and received 261000 likes, 34000 comments and 21000 shares.

4.2.3.5. Defeasibility

"[*'Defeasibility'*] concerns the lack of information or control of a situation." (Benoit, 1999, p. 252) Here, the accused one may often come up with various excuses in order to elucidate his actions. Only 4 posts were marked under this category.

4.2.3.5.1. The highest number of likes, shares and comments

On January 6th, 2021 at 21:14 Trump shared the last post he would ever post on Facebook, getting liked 1.6 million, commented 794000 and shared 157000 times, which is also the highest number of likes, comments and shares that one such post would receive:

    1) *'I am asking for everyone at the U.S. Capitol to remain peaceful. No violence! Remember, WE are the Party of Law & Order – respect the Law and our great men and women in Blue. Thank you!'*

Trump denies the allegations that he encouraged the protestors to storm the U.S. Capitol. He had no control in the whole act, therefore it wasn't his fault for the consequences of other people's decisions. He even kindly asks the protestors to remain peaceful, not to cause any violence.

4.2.3.5.2. The lowest number of likes, shares and comments

On December 29th, 2020 at 22:47 Trump shared a post with the lowest number of likes, comments and shares, being liked 81000, commented 8000 and shared 2800 times:

2) *'Loeffler, Perdue Support Increasing Relief Payments to $2K - Republicans must support the $2000 payments and must FIGHT the crooked presidential election. We won big!'*

If it were up to him, Trump would've introduced the increased relief payments up to $2K. He can't personally influence that decision, which is why he encourages Republicans to support the payments and to "[…] FIGHT the crooked presidential election."

4.2.3.6. Mortification

'Mortification' "[…] accepts responsibility for the offensive act and asks to be forgiven." (Benoit, 1999, p. 252)
None of the 233 posts was classified under this category. Mortification is usually accompanied with an apology, depending on which side the situation is viewed from. Having said that, it is no wonder that no posts were marked under this category as there are generally very few examples of Trump apologizing for the wrongdoings he or his administration have done in the past.

After the analysis took place, there were 0 Facebook posts ascribed to this category.

5. Conclusion

The conducted research aimed to determine the relative frequency of traditional, non-traditional or mixed Trump's posts. The other aim was to determine the relative frequency of acclaiming, attacking and defending posts.

The collected and analysed data shows that, with respect to Enli's (2017) categorization, Trump mostly wrote posts (123 in total) in a non-traditional form, since more than half of the analysed 233 posts were ascribed to this category. This is of no surprise since such result was expected due to the personality, attitude and character that Trump usually had. The number of posts marked as traditional (74 in total) was half in comparison to the number of non-traditional posts. Lastly, there are less than half of posts marked as mixed (37 in total), in comparison to the number of traditional posts.

Analysing the posts according to Benoit (1999), it was concluded that 117 posts were classified under *'attacks'* (which is half of the total number of the analysed posts), 56 posts were classified under *'acclaims'* and 17 under *'defences'*. The results clearly show that the majority of posts were marked as attacks. Trump rarely missed a chance to attack, devalue and scold his opponents, whether it was a single person or a whole political party. Also, he wouldn't miss too often an opportunity to claim praise and show positive feedback for the achievements he or his administration had accomplished. He would often emphasize the fact that the people are enjoying something thanks to his work and sacrifice. Even though Trump would be constantly attacked from not only the opposing political party, but also from many other sources such as the media, he would seldom write posts in which he would try to elaborate or defend actions for which he was accused.

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