

**The Functional Theory of Political Campaign
Discourse in Social Media**

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The Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse in Social Media

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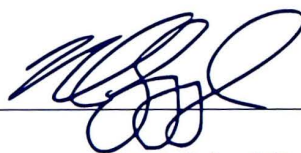
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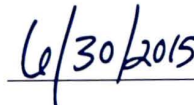
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Abstract

JOHN E. DUGGER. The Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse in Social Media
(Under the direction of DR. ROBERT J. BARON).

This paper extends the functional theory of political campaign discourse to include communication through social media, specifically communication through social networking sites (SNSs). Research linking social media and political campaigns is presented, and previous functional analyses of political campaign discourse through other media are considered. Using traditional functional analysis methods, tweets from a 2014 US senate races are examined by two coders, in conference, to determine how the already understood functions of political campaign discourse (acclaims, attacks, defenses) relate to social media communication, and to determine if political campaign messages through social media serve any previously not described functions. The expanded theory is tested using tweets from 2 different 2014 US senate races. Theoretical bases for the five new functions are outlined and directions for future research into the role social media messages play in political campaign discourse are presented.

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Chapter I

Introduction, Literature Review, and Relevant Theory

The democratic process is nothing new. Politicians have been seeking votes for centuries. As times change, politicians are forced to adapt their campaign methods in an attempt to win the most votes. One of the most recent channels through which politicians have begun to communicate is social media. According to NBC News, “More than 90% of [candidates in the 2014 midterm elections were] on Twitter and Facebook” (Wagstaff, 2014, October 28). NBC News goes on to cite a Twitter spokesperson as saying that, “92% of [incumbents and challengers were] on Twitter,” and a Facebook spokesperson as saying that, “Every single incumbent [was] on Facebook, along with 94% of their opponents” (Wagstaff, 2014, October 28).

Political candidates are flocking to social media for a reason; while there have been both social and media aspects to political campaigns for many years, politicians are now able to disseminate more intimate messages to a larger number of people. Monica Anderson of the Pew Research Center reported that a survey from October 15-20, 2014 showed that, “Overall, 16% of registered voters follow candidate for office, political parties, or elected officials on a social networking site”. Anderson goes on to note that, “That is a 10 percentage point increase from the 2010 midterms, when only 6% of registered voters did so” (Anderson, 2015, May 19).

Like other messages found in other forms of political communication, the messages politicians disseminate through social media fulfill several functions. As the television did in the mid-20th century, social media has allowed politicians a new way to connect to their supporters, and through this connection, politicians are able to fill their discourse with messages that fulfill more functions than previously understood, functions that still lead to the overall goal of a campaign – winning.

In Chapter I, research that involves political communication through social media and research employing the Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse will be analyzed. Research linking social media and politics is still new and broad. Research specifically in the area of political campaign discourse through social media is still in the beginning stages. In Chapter II, preliminary directions for theory building will be established by a review of tweets from one selected 2014 midterm election senate race. The aim of this, the first phase of the project, is to gain an understanding of how political communication functions on social media. This understanding will be used to expand the Functional Theory of Political Campaign discourse. In Chapter III, the expanded theory created in the first phase of the project will be tested through a functional analysis of tweets from other 2014 midterm election senate races. The goal of this, the second phase of the project, is to test the expanded theory with both different coders and different messages. This will indicate how well the expanded theory works to describe campaign discourse and could show areas for further expansion.

Previous understandings of political communication don't explain political communication through social media. By establishing an expanded theory of political campaign discourse and applying that theory to political messages found in social media, this project pushes the study of campaign discourse into the 21st century. This project is an important step toward campaign discourse theory that describes all avenues of political communication.

Review of Literature

Defining Social Media

For many people, the term “social media” is synonymous with Facebook. The Internet giant has become the face of the social media revolution – for good reason. Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, and Madden (2015) found that 71% of American adults who use the Internet

use Facebook. Nevertheless, scholars have yet to establish a specific yet inclusive definition of the term social media. Carr and Hayes (2015) attempt to do that by submitting a formal definition of social media: “*Internet-based, disentrained, and persistent channels of masspersonal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content*” (p. 49). Throughout their work, Carr and Hays (2015) unpack the definition and explain it piece by piece, but their ideas can quickly be best understood in what the authors call a

rephrased, slightly more verbose, but potentially more accessible explication: *Social media are Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others* (pp. 49-50).

This definition is general enough to apply to media traditionally considered to be social and specific enough to eliminate non-social media not always eliminated by other definitions of social media (Carr & Hayes, 2015, pp. 52-53). Carr and Hayes (2015) present several examples of social media based on the definition they offer, including, but not limited to: “Social network sites (e.g., Facebook, QQ, Google+, YouTube, Yelp, Pheed), Professional network sites (e.g., LinkedIn, IBM’s Beehive), Chatboards and discussion fora” (p. 53).

According to Carr and Hayes (2015) Social Network Sites (SNSs) are normally social media. However, and this distinction is important, SNSs are not the only social media. boyd and Ellison (2008) define SNSs as:

Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a

connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (p. 211).

Using the definitions presented by Carr and Hayes (2015) and boyd and Ellison (2008), this project will specifically evaluate SNSs in an attempt to better understand political communication messages disseminated through social media.

Social Media Use

The collision of social media and politics is undeniable. Yet, Harvey (2014) writes, “A unique and ubiquitous aspect of the social media/politics relationship is the degree to which theory is vastly outstripped by practice” (p. xxxv). Undoubtedly, the expeditious rise of social media as a cultural phenomenon and everyday reality left researchers little time catch up. Nevertheless, research, such as this, that attempts to link social media practice to established theories of communication must ground itself in an understanding of social media use. The subsequent sources provide important insights into the social media user and his or her activities.

Using data collected through the Princeton Survey Research Associates International Omnibus in September 2014, Duggan et al. (2015) of the Pew Research Center and the University of Michigan found that Facebook is still the leader in SNS usage (p. 2). Showing no change from 2013, 71% of US Internet users report using Facebook (Duggan et al., 2015, p. 2). That is compared to 28% of US internet users who report using LinkedIn, 28% who report using Pinterest, 26% who report using Instagram, and 23% who report using Twitter (Duggan et al., 2015, p. 2). All four of the latter sites saw user share increases in 2014 (Duggan et al., 2015, p. 2).

When examining the entire US population instead of just Internet users, 58% of all US adults report using Facebook (Duggan et al., 2015, p. 4). This is compared to 23% of US adults

who report using LinkedIn, 22% who report using Pinterest, 21% who report using Instagram, and 19% who report using Twitter (Duggan et al., 2015, p. 4).

Duggan et al. (2015) also examined engagement and found that, “Fully 70% [of Facebook users] engage with the site daily (and 45% do so several times a day),” noting that this is, “a significant increase from the 63% who did so in 2013” (p. 3). This is the highest level of usage reported among the four sites used in the survey (Duggan et al., 2015). Twitter also saw a major change in daily usage with 36% of Twitter users reporting at least daily usage in 2014, a drop of 10 percentage points from 2013 (Duggan et al., 2015).

The last major finding from this research is that “52% of online adults use multiple social media sites, a significant increase from the 42% who did so in 2013” (Duggan et al., 2015, p. 3). “A significant majority of Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and LinkedIn users say they also use Facebook. [From 86% of LinkedIn users to 94% of Instagram users]” (Duggan et al., 2015, p 11). Duggan et al. (2015) also report that, “Facebook remains the most popular platform for those using just one social media site—fully 79% of those who use just one site report using Facebook” (p. 11).

This data, the most recent examination of social media use in America, repeatedly shows the importance of Facebook. While other SNSs can allow communication with large numbers of people, Facebook is the only SNS that allows communication with a majority of the American public (Duggan et al., 2015). The importance of communication through SNSs, specifically Facebook, but increasingly others, cannot be denied.

The Pew Research Center’s November 2014 report entitled *Cell Phones, Social Media, and Campaign 2014*, provides an in-depth look at the role Social Media played in the 2014 mid-term elections. In a survey conducted between October 15 and 20, 2014, Pew (2014) found that

16% of registered voters follow candidates for office, political parties, or elected officials on social networking sites (p. 3.). This is up from the 6% of registered voters who reported the same in 2010 (Pew, 2014, p. 3). In the same survey, Pew asked the people who follow candidates for office, political parties, or elected officials why they do so (Pew, 2014, p. 4). In response to this question, “41% say that *finding out about political news before other people do* is a ‘major reason’ why they follow political figures on social media. In 2010, just 22% said that this was a major reason” (Pew, 2014, p. 4). Next, “35% say that *feeling more personally connected to political candidates or groups* is a ‘major reason’ why they follow political figures on social media. This is unchanged from the 36% who cited this as a major factor in 2010” (Pew, 2014, p. 4). The final response to the prompt shows that “26% say that *getting more reliable information than what is available from traditional news organizations* is a ‘major reason’ why they follow political figures on social media. This is also statistically indistinguishable from the 21% who cited this as a major factor in 2010” (Pew, 2014, p. 4).

Aaron Smith (2014, July), a Senior Researcher at the Pew Research Center, provides several interesting statistics regarding social media use and relates them specifically to political communication. According to Smith (2014, July), “Data for this [presentation] is from nationally representative surveys (both telephone and online) of U.S. adults” (slide 2). First, Smith (2014, July) reports that Facebook is a bipartisan platform (slide 16). In contrast, “[Democrats] are more likely than [Republicans] to use Twitter . . . Liberal [Democrats] are [twice] as likely to use Twitter as Conservative [Republicans]” (Smith, 2014, slide 16). Smith (2014, July) also reports that “Democrats [are] a bit more likely to say social media is important to their political activity,” with 48% of Democrats saying, “SNS [are] very/somewhat important for keeping up [with] political activity,” while only 34% of Republicans said the same thing (slide 17).

Smith (2014, July) also reports several indicators of political engagement on social media.

These include:

- 38% - Like or promote political content
- 35% - Encourage others to vote
- 34% - Post own comments on politics
- 33% - Repost others' political content
- 31% - Encourage others to take action
- 28% - Post links to political articles
- 21% - Belong to a political group
- 20% - Follow candidates/elected officials (Smith, 2014, July, slide 25).

Smith (2014, July) also contrasts statistics for several social media political activities between the 2008 and 2012 elections (slide 26). In 2008, 11% of social media users posted political news, in 2012, 28% of social media users posted political news (Smith, 2014, July, slide 26). In 2008, 12% of social media users friended/followed political figures, in 2012, 20% of social media users friended/followed political figures (Smith, 2014, July, slide 26). Finally, in 2008, 13% of social media users started or joined a political group, in 2012, 21% of social media users started or joined a political group (Smith, 2014, July, slide 26).

Smith (2014, July) then reports that, "People on the 'edges' are more likely to be politically active on social media" (slide 44). 73% of Conservative Republicans and 82% of Liberal Democrats are "politically active on social media," while only 60% of Moderate/Liberal Republicans and 56% of Moderate/Conservative Democrats report the same (Smith, 2014, July, slide 44). Smith (2014, July) uses this information to justify the assertion that, "[Conservative

Republicans/Liberal Democrats] want to be part of the team and convert their friends – if you let them” (slide 48).

Social Media and Politics

Several scholars have explored the broad link between social media and politics. D’heer and Verdegem (2014) explored the use of twitter during election cycles by politicians, media, and citizens in Belgium. D’heer and Verdegem (2014) specifically analyzed conversation patterns between the three groups of people to map the twitter conversation surrounding elections by tracking @replies and mentions. D’heer and Verdegem (2014) collected 43,447 tweets representing 11,658 users using yourTwapperKeeper. D’heer and Verdegem (2014) found that the network of political conversation was not well linked and contained mostly private citizens.

Using the grounded theory approach, Morin and Flynn (2014) examined Facebook comments that probable tea party supporters made on the Facebook pages of tea party associated candidates to find repeated themes. Morin and Flynn (2014) found that citizens routinely used attacks and encouragements in their responses to the tea party candidates. Morin and Flynn (2014) evaluated these themes as discourse that constructs polarization.

Through in-depth interviews with professional journalists, Parmelee (2014) explored how politicians’ tweets affect journalists’ news coverage. Parmelee (2014) found that journalists use tweets throughout the journalistic process, and that journalists rely on tweets that can most contribute to their stories. Parmelee (2014) theorizes that the public nature of tweets make them more important to journalists than press releases.

Sancar (2013) evaluated the Twitter use of Turkish political leaders. Rather than evaluating the messages the politicians sent through Twitter, Sancar (2013) evaluated the

frequency and efficiency with which the politicians used Twitter as an avenue for symmetrical communication. Sancar found that only two of the five evaluated political leaders were using Twitter as an effective means of two-way communication.

Storsul (2014) examined, through personal interviews, how young people in Norway use social media for political purposes. Storsul (2014) found that social media was an important avenue for political mobilization among his interviewees but that his interviewees were hesitant to use social media for political deliberation. Storsul (2014) noted that his pool of interviewees was not large enough to draw general conclusions about the political use of social media by young people.

The body of research examining social media in politics is broad, both geographically and theoretically. Many researchers have begun exploring how citizens are using social media politically or to become politically active, but few have explored how politicians are using social media. No research was found that evaluated political communication through social media against any standing theory of political communication, including the functional theory of political campaign discourse. This project will add to the body of research by expanding the field to explore how politicians are using social media.

Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse

In *Persuasive Messages: The Process of Influence*, Benoit and Benoit (2008) list three functions of political messages – Acclaims, Attacks, and Defenses (p. 240). The first function, acclaims, refers to political messages that tout positive aspects of a political candidate (Benoit and Benoit, 2008, p. 240). The second function of political messages, attacks, refers to messages that attempt to tear down an opponent (Benoit and Benoit, 2008, p. 240). The third function of political messages, defenses, refers to messages that respond to attacks directed at the political

candidate (Benoit and Benoit, 2008, p. 241). These functions form the base of the functional theory of political campaign discourse (Benoit, 2007). Examples Benoit (2007) presented for each function of political campaign discourse can be found in Table 1. The three examples progress through the first debate of the 2000 presidential campaign.

Table 1. Examples of Acclaims, Attacks, and Defenses.	
Function	Example
Acclaim	“George W. Bush declared that ‘I want everybody who pays taxes to have their tax rates cut’” (Benoit, 2007).
Attack	“[Al] Gore attacked Bush’s tax proposal: ‘Under Governor Bush’s tax cut proposal, he would spend more money on tax cuts for the wealthiest one percent than all of the new spending that he proposes for education, health care, prescription drugs, and national defense all combined. Now I think those are the wrong priorities’” (Benoit, 2007).
Defense	“[Gore said] ‘The governor used the phrase ‘phony numbers,’ but if you – if you look at the plan and add the numbers up, these numbers are correct’” (Benoit, 2007).

William Benoit and several of his colleagues developed the functional theory of political campaign discourse over time. Benoit (2007) explains and defends the theory in detail in *Communication in Political Campaigns*. Benoit (2007) lists, as examples, three works where the functional model of political campaign discourse was used (p. 32). These works (Benoit, 1999b; Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998; and Benoit, McHale, Hansen, Pier, & McGuire, 2003) include large functional analyses of political campaign discourse.

Benoit (2007) strongly defends the advantages the functional model provides over other theories of political campaign discourse. Benoit (2007) states that “the functional approach can readily be applied to a variety of political campaign messages [including Web pages]” (p. 58). Although published in 2007, this book uses statistics from the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections (Benoit, 2007). These statistics tend to downplay the importance of communication via

the Internet (Benoit, 2007, p. 26). As Internet use and importance has increased since 2007, the importance of these messages has also increased.

Topics of Political Campaign Discourse

Benoit and Benoit (2008) also discuss two topics that political candidates use in messages to appeal to voters (p. 241). The first, policy issues, address actions the candidate may take if elected to office (Benoit and Benoit, 2008, p. 241). The second topic of political messages, character, involves messages that address “personal characteristics of the candidate” (Benoit and Benoit, 2008, p. 242). The topics of campaign discourse are also analyzed as part of the functional theory of political campaign discourse. The topics of political campaign discourse provide an additional layer to the theory. New functions of political campaign discourse may address the same topics as traditional political communication, or new topics could address previously unrecorded topics. This study will attempt to expand this area of the theory as well.

The Five Axioms of Functional Theory

Benoit (2007) goes on to outline “five important Axioms [that Functional Theory is founded on]” (p. 32). These axioms, or assumptions, flow logically from one to the next, forming a solid base for the theory. The first axiom is that, “Voting is a comparative act” (Benoit, 2007, p. 32). Benoit (2007) states:

A citizen’s vote choice represents a comparative decision that one candidate appears *preferable* to the other candidate(s) on whatever basis is most important to that voter. The word ‘appears’ is used to stress that this preference is a perception held by the voter (p. 33).

Benoit (2007, p. 33) notes that voter choice is becoming increasingly important in the evolving political climate (e.g. decrease in party influence and increase in primary contests). The second

axiom, that “Candidates must distinguish themselves from opponents,” flows naturally from the first (Benoit, 2007, p. 34). Voting is comparative, thus, candidates must be different from one another.

The third axiom is that “Political campaign messages allow candidates to distinguish themselves” (Benoit, 2007, p. 35). These messages are disseminated through a variety of sources and are important sources of information for voters (Benoit, 2007). The fourth axiom is that “Candidates establish preferability through acclaiming, attacking, and defending” (Benoit, 2007, p. 36). Benoit (2007) then states that, “Functional Theory makes two predictions about the functions of political campaign discourse: F1. Candidates will use acclaims more frequently than attacks. F2. Political candidates will use attacks more frequently than defenses” (p. 43). These predictions have consistently been supported by the literature (Benoit, 2007, p. 43).

The fifth axiom is that “Campaign discourse occurs on two topics: policy and character” (Benoit, 2007, p. 44). According to Benoit (2007), functional theory breaks both policy and character into three subgroups. “Policy remarks can be divided into three subforms, past deeds, future plans, and general goals,” (p. 52) and, “Character can be divided into three subforms . . . personal qualities . . . leadership ability . . . [and] ideals,” (p. 54). Here, Benoit (2007) presents a third prediction, “Policy comments will be more frequent than character comments in presidential campaign discourse” (p. 47). After presenting the subforms, Benoit (2007) then presents the final three predictions of the functional model:

F4 General goals will be used more often to acclaim than to attack . . . F5. Ideals will be used more often to acclaim than attack . . . and F6. General goals will be used more frequently than future plans (pp. 54-55).

As the five axioms Benoit (2007) outlined support a functional approach to social media communications, a functional approach to social media communication should support the six predictions that stem from the functional model. Expansion of this theory may require alteration of these axioms. As this theory changes, these axioms may need revision.

Functional Theory Applications

The functional theory of political campaign discourse has been related to several types of campaign communication from a variety of U.S. and non-U.S. political campaigns. Traditional communication media (e.g. TV ads, newspaper ads, debates, nomination convention speeches) have been evaluated many times (see: Benoit & Pier, 1997; Benoit, 1999a; Benoit, 2000; Benoit, Henson, & Sudbrock, 2011). These analyses have evaluated both domestic (see: Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 2000; Benoit, Brazeal, & Airne, 2007) and international (see: Herrero & Benoit, 2009; Benoit & Benoit-Bryan, 2013; Choi & Benoit, 2013; Benoit & Benoit-Bryan, 2014) races. The functional model of campaign discourse has even been used to evaluate historical campaign messages (see: Benoit & Harthcock, 1999; Benoit & Brazeal, 2002; Benoit & Delbert, 2009).

Functional analyses of non-presidential races are comparatively rare. Benoit and Benoit (2001) conducted a functional analysis of congressional television spots from 1986-2000. Benoit and Airne (2009) evaluated the functions and topics of political messages in non-presidential races in 2004. This work is important, because it points to the importance of research that investigates non-presidential races (Benoit & Airne, 2009, p. 93). This sentiment is shared by Perloff (2002, p. 621), and it is logical considering how often presidential races happen in relation to other races for political office. Benoit and Benoit (2006) widened their previous study to include congressional television spots from 1980 to 2004. Benoit, Delbert, Sudbrock, and Vogt (2010) conducted a similar study of television ads in 2008 senate and gubernatorial races.

As the Internet began to play an increasingly important role in the United States, Benoit and Benoit (2000), evaluated candidate websites and outlined where campaigns were weak and where campaigns were strong with web usage. Benoit and Benoit (2005) then established criteria for evaluating political campaign webpages. Before evaluating the webpages of presidential candidates from the 2000 election, Benoit and Benoit (2005) again evaluate the usefulness of the web in political campaigns. Many of the website features Benoit and Benoit (2005) evaluated (navigation, readability, accessibility, etc. . . .) are consistent for all users of any given social media platform. For example, navigation of a Twitter profile is the same for political candidates' profiles as it is for the profiles of other users. Several of Benoit and Benoit's (2005) classifications of identification, irritability, interest level, information breadth and depth, issues, support, adaptive to audience, and interactive can be applied to social media messages. While these classifications can be related back to the function of political messages, Benoit and Benoit (2005) do not conduct a functional analysis of the sites. Appropriately, one of the limitations mentioned by Benoit and Benoit (2005) is that their evaluation is mostly focused on design and not content (p. 246).

Wicks, Bradley, Blackburn, and Fields (2011) conducted a functional evaluation of political blogs during the 2008 presidential election. Wicks et al. (2011) analyzed both blogs from candidates and blogs that were not aligned to a specific party or candidate. Wicks et al. (2011) expanded the functional theory of political campaign discourse to blogs. This study attempts to similarly expand the functional theory of political campaign discourse to communication through social media.

Research Questions

The masspersonal nature of SNSs is unprecedented. Social media sites provide political candidates opportunities never before imagined. Through SNSs, voters have more of an opportunity than ever to connect with political candidates. The drastic and rapid changes social media has wrought on the American political system point to several areas for future research. In seeking to determine how the functional model of political campaign discourse interacts with the social media presence of candidates for political office, this research seeks to explore:

RQ1a: Are all three functions (acclaim, attack, and defense) of the functional theory of political campaign discourse utilized in the social media messages of candidates for elected office?

RQ1b: Does the use of each function correspond to previous understandings of function frequency (i.e. more acclaims than attacks, more attacks than defenses, topically)?

RQ2a: Do the social media messages of candidates for elected office serve any other functions?

RQ2b: How do these functions help establish preferability?

General Methods

Functional analysis research methods

Both stages of this project will use coding based on the traditional functional analysis approach. Benoit (2007), who describes this process in detail, describes the four steps used in functional analyses. "First, the candidates' statements in a message were unitized into themes, the unit of analysis" (Benoit, 2007, p. 247). In larger messages (e.g. television ads, debate answers), multiple themes are normally present (Benoit, 2007). To use functional theory terminology, it is possible for an ad to contain any combination of attack, acclaim, and defense

(Benoit, 2007). By coding themes of messages separately rather than coding one whole ad in one way, the functional model provides more detail and an advantage over other models of political discourse analysis (Benoit, 2007). While fewer themes will be present in social media messages, the combination of themes is still possible. Benoit (2007) then outlines the second and third steps of the process:

The second step in the procedure codes (classifies, content analyzes) each theme's function, using these rules: *Acclaims* portray the candidate in a favorable light. *Attacks* portray the opposing candidate in an unfavorable light. *Defenses* respond to attacks, attempting to repair the candidate's reputation. Third, coders classified the topic of each theme: *Policy* statements concern governmental action (past, current, or future) and problems amenable to governmental action. *Character* statements address characteristics, traits, abilities, or attributes of the candidates (p. 249).

The fourth step in the process involves determining "which of the three forms of policy (past deeds, future plans, general goals) or the three forms of character (personal qualities, leadership ability, or ideals) was used in each theme" (Benoit, 2007, p. 249). This project employs a two-step process of investigation. First, in order to best evaluate the applicability of the Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse to social media, the social media messages of the two candidates from one race are evaluated in conference by two coders. This process allows the coders to achieve complete agreement concerning the coding of each message. Second, the social media messages from candidates from two other races will be coded to determine how well the Expanded Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse fits social media messages. General guidelines and methods that apply to both steps of this project are outlined here;

additional method and sample information for each step of the project can be found in that project's respective chapter.

Twitter

The social media messages used for both steps of this process were all pulled from the Twitter profiles of selected candidates. Twitter, a microblogging site, allows users to send and receive messages that consist of up to 140 characters. This study focuses on the social media messages users can see on their own Twitter feeds. Thus, by pulling tweets from the profiles of selected candidates, it can be ensured that only tweets that would show up in the Twitter feeds of users who follow these candidates are coded.

Though Twitter is focused on the dissemination of text, users are also able to post pictures, hyperlinks, both linked and embedded videos, and hashtags. As the Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse only allows for the analysis of text, review of these messages will be limited to visible text. Many users take advantage of the photo feature on Twitter as a way to increase message size. In these cases, text present on pictures will be coded as any other textual message. Because this project focuses on social media messages, hyperlinks will not be coded and the pages linked to through hyperlinks will not be explored. Again, the review of this communication focuses on what users can see when scrolling through their Twitter feeds. Thus, videos will not be watched or coded from transcripts. Instead, only text visible in the display frame of an embedded video will be coded.

Hashtags

The last special feature of Twitter, the hashtag, was created to easily identify or catalog messages that share a common theme. A hashtag is made by combining the pound sign (#) and text. Hashtags cannot include any punctuation or spaces. Thus, “#thesis” would be one

functioning hashtag, whereas, “#Jed’s thesis,” would only help you find things with the “#Jed,” marking. For further example, the average Twitter user could probably tell you that the hashtag “#tbt” refers to “throw-back-Thursday,” a common practice that involves a user sharing an image of himself or herself from the past. Any tweet sent from a non-private Twitter account that includes, “#tbt,” can then be found by searching for that hashtag on the Twitter site. Since each hashtag appears as a link within one’s tweets, similar messages can be found with a simple click.

Hashtags are incorporated into tweets in two main ways. First, users can incorporate the hashtag into their messages. Second, users can add hashtags to the end of tweets to simply link the tweet to a larger conversation on a subject or to catalog it for later use. Examples of both of these instances can be found in Figure 1, where the first two hashtags, #GOTV and #Aurora, are

Figure 1. Example of hashtags used both within text and after text.



found within the content of the tweet. The last hashtag, #copolitics, is found between the text of the tweet and the link to an image. In this example, the first two hashtags would be coded as part of this tweet's message and the third hashtag would not be coded. For this project, hashtags that are included within a message will be coded as part of the message. Hashtags that are added to the end of a tweet will not be coded as part of a message.

The races from which candidates were selected were chosen based on their competitiveness as reported by CNN on the Key Races to Watch in 2014 page last updated on

September 22, 2014. In an effort to catch as many tweets as possible before deletion, the Twitter feeds for the month of October for candidates from all ten of the races listed as “Up For Grabs,” on CNN’s Key Races to Watch page were downloaded on November 2, 2014. The feeds from the same candidates were downloaded again on November 11, 2014 so that any tweets from November 2, 2014 through November 4, 2014 could be captured. The two feeds for each candidate were then combined and duplicate tweets were deleted resulting in one continuous Twitter feed for each candidate.

Four specific races were then selected for evaluation through this project. The chosen races are representative of the 2014 midterm elections. In the first race, Colorado, a Republican challenger defeated a Democratic incumbent. In the second, Georgia, the Republican candidate defeated the Democratic candidate (the incumbent did not run). In the third race, New Hampshire, the Democratic incumbent defeated the Republican challenger. In the fourth race, North Carolina, the Republican challenger defeated the Democratic incumbent. These results are consistent with the strong Republican showing nationwide in the 2014 midterms.

Chapter II

Functional Analysis of Social Media

The first step of this project was a functional analysis of the tweets from the Colorado race for the U.S. Senate. This part of the project was focused on finding preliminary answers to the research questions by first investigating the extent to which acclaims, attacks, and defenses are being used in social media messages, and second, finding whether or not the messages serve any other functions.

Methods

As the Functional Theory has not previously been applied to social media communication, the first step of this project is to evaluate the themes present in the tweets from selected candidates and code them as they would be coded in a functional analysis while critically discussing any themes that are not judged to fulfill an established function of political communication. By coding the themes based on the established functions from the functional theory of political campaign discourse and discussing any themes that do not fit into the established categories, it is possible to reach complete agreement amongst coders as to which themes fulfill which functions.

As with traditional functional analyses, the first step in this process is to separate the messages into themes (the unit of analysis). According to Benoit (2008), “Themes are the smallest units of discourse that are capable of expressing a complete idea” (p. 280). As with other investigations employing the functional theory, by evaluating each tweet for smaller, more specific themes, rather than treating each tweet as one message, it is possible to get a more holistic view at how Twitter is being used by political candidates.

Next, the themes are coded for both the understood functions and topics of political communication and new ideas not previously represented by the functional theory. To achieve complete agreement amongst coders, this is done in conference. Any discrepancy between the coders in regards to the function or topic of a theme results in a discussion that ends with the coders in agreement as to the classifications of each theme. To save time, the separate steps of this process (sorting tweets into themes and coding themes for functions and topics) are done tweet by tweet. This resulting process is a seamless one in which the coders can evaluate tweets for themes and themes for functions and topics quickly and efficiently.

The coders start with a numerical coding scheme based on the current understanding of the functional theory of political campaign discourse and add new numbers throughout the process whenever a theme is encountered that does not fit the original or already newly created functions or topics of political campaign discourse. The initial coding scheme can be seen in Figure 2. As new functions or topics of political communication emerge, they are added to the coding scheme and assigned a number

For this first step of the overall project, tweets from the two candidates from the US Senate race in Colorado were used. Of the total themes (N=611), 202 themes could be classified

Figure 2. Initial coding scheme.				
	Acclaim		Attack	20 Defense
0	Past Deeds	10	Past Deeds	
1	Future Plans	11	Future Plans	31
2	General Goals	12	General Goals	32
3	Personal Qualities	13	Personal Qualities	33
4	Leadership Ability	14	Leadership Ability	34
5	Ideals	15	Ideals	35
6		16		36
7		17		37
8		18		38
9		19		39
Figure 2. Coders begin with a coding scheme based on the current understanding of functional theory. There are blank spaces and numbers so that new functions and/or topics can be coded throughout the process.				

under one of the three previously understood functions of political campaign discourse (acclaim, attack, or defense) and 190 themes could be classified under one of the 6 sub-topics of political campaign discourse (past deeds, future plans, general goals, personal qualities, leadership ability, or ideals). 12 themes function as campaign discourse has been previously understood to function, *but* do not address a previously understood topic of campaign discourse, and 409 themes function in ways not previously described by the functional theory of political campaign discourse. Therefore, 421 themes were not adequately described by the functional theory.

Results

The initial analysis yielded 14 new coding categories comprised of two new topics of political campaign discourse (one was used as both an attack and a defense) and 11 new functions of political campaign discourse. The new coding categories and their frequencies can be found in Table 2. The names given to each category were assigned during the coding process and will be further developed throughout this paper.

Table 2. Distribution of all new coding categories.	
Category	Count
Acclaim - Not Specified	5
Attack - Not specified	2
Attack on Election Strategy	5
"Come see me"	38
"Other people fired up"	37
Voter/Volunteer Mobilization	169
Non-political	9
Visualization	10
Showing appreciation for support	64
Policy support	8
Campaign Updates	61
Question to opponent	2
Opponent policy statement	3
Endorsement appreciation	8
Total	421

After the initial review, the themes representing the new coding categories were examined critically to confirm that the themes couldn't be classified by a preliminary category. The seven themes that were said to be sub-topic non-specific could all fit into other topics of political campaign discourse. For example, one of the themes that were coded as a non-specified attack stated:

You get a sense why the House of Representative does nothing by listening to Rep. Gardner. (Udall, 2014f)

While not overt, this is an attack on then Representative Cory Gardner's leadership ability. The second non-specified attack found in this was also from then Senator Mark Udall. Udall retweeted @leslieherod who said:

... Cory Gardner just avoided more questions. {Herod, 2014}

Here, Udall is attacking Gardner's personal qualities. Udall's argument is that Gardner is avoiding questions, thus, not telling the whole truth. Although these themes could be accurately redistributed, to make sure that all acclaims and attacks are coded as such, the categories of Other Acclaim and Other Attack will be retained in the second stage of this project.

Themes initially classified as non-specified acclaims could also be classified under other categories. Four of the five themes initially classified as non-specified acclaims were parts of retweets, and all five themes initially classified as non-specified dealt with debate performance. For example, one theme coded as a non-specific acclaim came in a tweet Udall retweeted from @clay_harding on October 7, 2014. The non-specific acclaim read:

@MarkUdall2014 rocked that debate! (Harding, 2014)

This theme could be classified as an acclaim of campaign strategy/performance (the other new topic of political campaign discourse), or it could be classified as a theme showing that other people are excited (a new function of political campaign discourse). Similar reclassification

could be made for the one theme initially classified as a non-specific acclaim that was not from a retweet where, in a tweet from October 7, 2014, Udall stated:

The @DenverPost debate clearly shows which candidate stands up for ALL Coloradans. (Udall, 2014b)

Here, Udall is clearly acclaiming his debate performance. This could easily fit into the topic of campaign strategy/performance.

The topic of campaign strategy was addressed several times in the themes from the Colorado elections. Aside from the already mentioned acclaims and attacks that addressed debate performance, there were also blatant attacks on each candidate's campaign strategy. On October 15, 2014, Cory Gardner, Udall's opponent, retweeted @tankcat who said:

So @MarkUdall2014 goes for the 'I'll have seniority' argument for his reelection. Not a strategy that screams confidence. (Hanson, 2014)

Here, Gardner is blatantly attacking Udall's campaign strategy by way of a retweet. Udall used a similar approach on October 10, 2014 when he stated:

Rep. Gardner's campaign is marked by his personhood dodge . . . (Udall, 2014e)

This again shows an attack on the opposing candidate's campaign strategy. This is a natural extension of campaign communication resulting from the more partisan nature of politics on social media (Smith, 2014, July).

The remaining 11 coding categories created through this process were not identified as acclaims, attacks, or defenses. Instead, the remaining 11 new coding categories were deemed to function in ways not previously described by the functional theory of political campaign discourse.

The first newly created category was, "Come see me." Themes from this category functioned as publicity messages. For example, on October 15, 2014, Gardner tweeted:

Getting ready to kickoff our final debate – tune in here 9news.com. (Gardner, 2014e)

This tweet is not acclaiming anything, is not attacking anything, and is not defending anything. It is simply asking supporters to watch a debate. Later, themes were found that could be categorized under this idea sought other action from supporters. On October 29, 2014, Udall tweeted:

... Read about my work on behalf of #CO veterans [link to campaign page] ... (Udall, 2014m)

Again, this tweet does not function as an attack, acclaim, or defense. Instead, it is trying to drive traffic to the campaign website.

The next new category was “Other people are fired up.” Themes from this category show that other citizens are excited about a candidate. On November 4, 2014, Election Day, Gardner tweeted:

Lone Tree is fired up to see @CoryGardner out sign waving on Election Day. (Gardner, 2014h)

Again, this tweet isn't acclaiming, attacking, or defending anything. Instead, it is simply showing that other Colorado voters are excited about Gardner. This theme was also used to show excitement for the campaign, not just the candidate. On October 27, 2014, Udall tweeted:

Crowd is fired up and excited to hear President @billclinton speak at a #GOTV rally in Aurora. (Udall, 2014k)

This theme shows that other people are excited about hearing former President Clinton at the Udall campaign's event, but it does not acclaim, attack, or defend.

The next category created in this analysis was Voter/Volunteer Mobilization. This theme was the most prevalent in the entire content analysis (see Table 2). These themes seek specific

action from supporters. For example, On November 4, 2014, Gardner retweeted @Reince who said:

... Get your ballots in! (Priebus, 2014)

This tweet is aiming to get out the vote. While this type of communication is common in political communication, it was not previously categorized by the functional theory. This theme can also be found in a tweet from Gardner on Election Day. On November 4, 2014, Gardner tweeted

... Let's get this done! (Gardner, 2014i)

Here, Gardner is trying to motivate Colorado voters to elect him as their next senator. This theme is not limited to Election Day. Udall attempted to motivate supporters to help the campaign by volunteering when he tweeted on October 7, 2014:

... Volunteer now: [link to volunteer sign up on campaign site]. (Udall, 2014b)

This theme isn't acclaiming, attacking, defending, or even attempting to get people to vote; it is trying to get people to volunteer.

The next new category created in this analysis was Non-political. These themes are not related to politics or the campaign at all. Instead, they link the candidate to the area or party.

These tweets could show support for things like sports teams or charities, they could be condolences for loss, congratulations on achievements, or they could simply be random tweets.

For example, Udall tweeted on October 8, 2014:

Fall colors outside of beautiful Westcliffe in Custer County. Colorado at this time of year simply can't be beat. (Udall, 2014d)

This tweet, while possibly connecting with voters over a love for Colorado, can't really be seen as functional. Similarly, Gardner attempted to connect with voters over his support of the Denver Broncos when he tweeted on November 2, 2014:

Let's go @Broncos! (Gardner, 2014g)

Again, this tweet is not functional. It is simply a tweet aiming to connect with Coloradans over their NFL team.

The next category created in this analysis was Visualization. These themes tend to be vague and ask the reader to visualize the future. For example, on October 27, 2014, Udall tweeted:

.@billclinton: I see Colorado as a state of the future. Vote so we can build this future together (Udall, 2014j)

The first sentence of this tweet was coded as visualization. This theme is referring to Colorado as a “state of the future.” The theme is paired with a theme falling under the voter mobilization category. Thus, readers are asked to first see Colorado as a state of the future and second vote to make Colorado a state of the future. Another example of the visualization theme in practice can be found in a tweet from Gardner on October 7, 2014 when he tweeted:

... We need to pass on a stronger nation to our children and grandchildren (Gardner, 2014c)

Here, Gardner is not acclaiming his general goals of making the nation stronger for the children or attacking Udall’s general goals, he is simply saying that we need a stronger nation. This asks the reader to visualize a “stronger” country. In subsequent review, it was determined that these themes could be combined with the Campaign Update category. These tweets, while encouraging readers to imagine a better future, do so by informing them of the present.

The next category created in this analysis was Showing Appreciation for Support. These themes thank supporters for volunteering, voting, or supporting the candidate in another way. For example, on October 29, 2014, Gardner tweeted:

Thanks to @JebBush and all of our great supporters who rallied in Castle Rock tonight! (Gardner, 2014f)

This theme is clearly thanking both Jeb Bush and supporters of the Gardner campaign, and, again, it stops short of acclaiming, attacking, or defending. Another example can be found in a tweet from October 16, 2015 when Udall tweeted:

. . . Thanks for coming out to volunteer (Udall, 2014i)

The thanks in this theme are directed to volunteers for the Udall campaign. Thus, under this theme, we find thanks directed to public figures who joined the campaign trail, volunteers, and supporters of a campaign.

The next category created in this analysis was Policy Support. These themes show that the candidate supports a certain policy, but they were initially viewed as stopping short of really acclaiming a candidate's future plans or general goals. For example, on October 13, 2014, Udall tweeted:

It's time to pass comprehensive immigration reform (Udall, 2014g)

This theme is simply stating that something should be done. It does not say that Udall will take any action or strive for a general goal. After subsequent review, it was determined that these themes could fit into other categories. While these themes are stating policy stances, it is important to remember that these messages are direct at voters, primarily supporters, who follow the candidate on Twitter. By remembering the context of the theme, it is logical to assume that these themes are meant as acclaims of general goals. Thus, this coding category will not be used in the second stage of this project.

The next category created in this analysis was Campaign Updates. These themes may be related to politics or the campaign, but they are not tweets that try to persuade voters. Instead, these themes aim to inform people of campaign news or events without asking them to come to an event or take an action. For example, on October 15, 2014, Udall tweeted:

Today we kick off our #MarkYourBallot Bus Tour that will crisscross the state until the election (Udall, 2014h)

This tweet is not acclaiming, attacking, or defending. It is not even persuading. This tweet is simply informing Coloradans that the campaign is starting a bus tour.

The next category created in this analysis was Question to Opponent. These themes ask the candidate's opponent a question, but they were not initially viewed to be attacks. For example, on October 6, 2014, Gardner tweeted:

Gardner to Udall: Why did you vote to make undocumented individuals felons? (Gardner, 2014b)

Upon further review, it was determined that this is an attack on Udall's past deeds. The only other theme that was initially coded as a question to opponent was a similar question that could also be deemed an attack. In this case, Udall tweeted on October 6, 2014:

Cory directly asks Senator Udall "what is the price you would put on carbon? (Gardner, 2014a)

Thus, this theme will not be used in the coding for the second stage of this project.

The next category created in this analysis was Opponent Policy. These themes state one of the opponent's policies, but they are not overt attacks. For example, on October 7, 2014, Gardner tweeted:

Mark Udall's Felony Strategy on Immigration [link] (Gardner, 2014d)

This theme was initially seen to be referring to a policy stance of Udall's without attacking it.

After further review, it was determined that these themes could be classified as attacks on policy.

Thus, this coding category will not be used in the second stage of this project.

The final category created in this analysis was Endorsement Appreciation. These themes show appreciation for endorsements. For example, on October 5, 2014, Udall tweeted:

I'm honored to receive the Durango Herald's endorsement (Udall, 2014a)

This theme is very similar to the Showing Appreciation for Support theme, and after further review, it was determined that these two themes will be coded as one.

This analysis yields one new topic of political campaign discourse, Campaign Strategy, which will be used in the coding for step two of this project. This analysis yields five new functions of political campaign discourse that will be used in the coding for step two of this project:

- Voter/Volunteer Mobilization
- “Other people are excited”
- Non-political
- Appreciation for Support
- Campaign Updates

This analysis also validates the inclusion of categories for acclaims and attacks that do not address one of the topics of political campaign discourse and the inclusion of a non-political category for themes that do not function as campaign discourse. The distribution of all themes can be found in Table 3.

Under the original understanding of the functional theory of political campaign discourse, messages that fall into these new categories would have been considered “other” or non-functional. However, these new categories represent a majority of the coded themes. It is not logical to assume that so many of the messages disseminated by politicians through social media are non-functional. For example, three of the four most coded categories were created as part of this project. Tweets related to voter/volunteer mobilization in particular seem to be particularly utilized by politicians on social media. Tweets showing thanks to supporters and providing campaign updates were also found with some frequency. Together, these three categories

represent 294 of the 611 coded themes. The functionality and importance of these messages should not be discounted because they do not conform to a more mass media oriented theory of political campaign discourse. This expanded view of the functions of political campaign discourse is essential to the application of this theory to social media messages.

Table 3. Distribution of all coding categories.	
Level	Count
Acclaim - Past Deeds	5
Acclaim - Future Plans	11
Acclaim - General Goals	12
Acclaim - Personal Qualities	9
Acclaim - Leadership Ability	8
Acclaim - Ideals	5
Acclaim - Not Specified	5
Attack - Past Deeds	61
Attack - Future Plans	5
Attack - General Goals	10
Attack - Personal Qualities	24
Attack - Leadership Ability	20
Attack - Ideals	20
Attack - Not specified	2
Attack on election strategy	5
"Come see me"	38
"Other people fired up"	37
Voter Mobilization	169
Non-political	9
Visualization	10
Showing appreciation for support	64
Policy support	8
Campaign Updates	61
Question to opponent	2
Opponent policy statement	3
Endorsement appreciation	8
Total	611

Chapter III

Testing the Expanded Theory

The second stage of this project involves a functional analysis of three 2014 races for the US Senate, the races in Georgia, New Hampshire, and North Carolina. The goal of this phase of the project is to test the expansion to the functional theory that was established through the first phase. Because the functional theory focuses on broad themes that apply to all politicians, this phase of the project utilized a different set of texts. After the tweets were sorted into themes ($n=1667$), coders followed the same procedures as the previous step, coding the function and topic of each theme simultaneously. Coders examined the themes for the three previously established functions of political campaign discourse and the new functions discovered in the previous section of this paper. Intercoder reliability was calculated using the complete, cleaned data set ($n=1664$) in JMP yielding a *kappa* of .54 indicating moderate, but not reliable agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). To compensate for low intercoder reliability, the coding categories were combined into 4 categories – one each for acclaims, attacks, defenses, and other functions. Intercoder reliability was calculated for this data set using JMP yielding a *kappa* of .78 indicating substantial agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). Table 4 shows the distribution of each function by coder. The coding categories were then combined into eight categories – one each for acclaims, attacks, defenses, and each new category (Voter/Volunteer mobilization, “Others are excited,” Non-Political, Appreciation for Support, and Campaign Updates). Intercoder reliability was calculated for this data using JMP yielding a *kappa* of .72, again indicating substantial agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). Table 5 shows the distribution of the five new categories by coder (distributions for acclaims, attacks, and defenses are the same as those found in Table 4).

Table 4. Distribution of original functions by coder.		
	Coder 1	Coder 2
Acclaim	344	290
Attack	352	362
Defense	9	7
Other	959	1005
Total	1,664	1,664

Table 5. Distribution of new functions by coder.		
	Coder 1	Coder 2
Voter/Volunteer Mobilization	456	471
“Others are Excited”	130	38
Non-Political	48	62
Appreciation for Support	137	113
Campaign Updates	188	321
Total	959	1,005

This analysis confirmed the need for an expanded functional theory of political campaign discourse. Over half of the coded tweets were described by the new coding categories. More specifically, this phase of the project confirmed the prevalence of tweets related to voter/volunteer mobilization and, to a lesser extent, tweets showing appreciation for support and campaign updates. This expansion of the functional theory is an important step in better describing political communication through social media.

The coders were asked to make notes for any theme that they did not understand or were confused about. Only one theme had notes from both coders. This theme read:

NH college grads have 2nd highest debt in nation, hurting their ability to buy a home, get married & start families #nhsendebate. (Shaheen, 2014)

This tweet occurred during a candidate debate that the Shaheen campaign was live-tweeting. Both coders noted that this theme doesn't really belong to any other category. 29/61 notes related to themes from tweets that occurred during live-tweeted events. When read out of context, these tweets are confusing. Without knowledge that this tweet came from a live-tweeting event, the statements do not always come across as functional. In context, these it is likely that these

themes function as campaign updates. These tweets seem like small messages that the campaigns are using to connect with supporters who are following the debate (or other live-tweeted event). The politically informed New Hampshire voter, Jeanne Shaheen follower or not, would have understood this tweet in context on October 21, 2014.

The remaining notes referenced a variety of tweets, and no other patterns were found. This step of the project, while not as conclusive as hoped, provides strong support for expansion of the functional theory. While the topicality of political campaign discourse through social media is still less understood, the functionality of political campaign discourse through social media is becoming clearer.

Chapter IV

Conclusion

Summary of Findings

Each research question will be discussed in the order they were presented. Research questions 1a and 1b explored the three established functions of the functional theory.

RQ1a: Are all three functions (acclaim, attack, and defense) of the functional theory of political campaign discourse utilized in the social media messages of candidates for elected office?

RQ1b: Does the use of each function correspond to previous understandings of function frequency (i.e. more acclaims than attacks, more attacks than defenses, topically)?

In response to research question 1a, yes; all three established functions of the functional theory of political campaign discourse are utilized in the social media messages of candidates for elected office. While no defenses were found during the first stage of this project, the coders in step two recorded defenses.

Moving forward, in response to research question 1b, we find that the usage of the three functions does not correspond to previous understandings of function frequency. Coders in both steps one and two found attacks more frequently than acclaims, and coders in step two found acclaims more frequently than defenses. While defenses remain the least used function, it is interesting that attacks are noted more frequently than acclaims, as these results stand in opposition to a large body of work that supported the idea that acclaims are used more frequently than attacks (Benoit, 2007, pp. 43-44). It is important to note that this analysis only reviewed communication through social media (specifically Twitter). While attacks were found more often than acclaims on this platform, candidates may still be using acclaims more often than attacks

when looking at all platforms and/or media outlets. Benoit (2007, p. 37) notes that attacks may be less frequent than attacks, because voters dislike, or say they dislike, attacks. However, since “people on the edges” are more likely to be politically active on social media, it could be assumed that attacks would receive a kinder reception on social media platforms (Smith, 2014, July). For example, when an attack ad is aired on television or printed in a newspaper, the ad is likely to be seen by people with views of varying conviction that cover the political spectrum. The ad is likely to be seen by people who want to see it and people who do not. However, when an attack message is disseminated through social media, it can be safely assumed that those who agree with the candidate and his or her portrayal of the opposing candidate will see the message more often than those who disagree. It can also be noted that those who follow candidates on social media sites seek exposure to the candidate or campaign, thus they are less likely to be turned off by negative ads. Social media has created a safer venue for the dissemination of attack ads.

Research questions 2a and 2b seek to find and understand functions that were not previously noted by the functional theory.

RQ2a: Do the social media messages of candidates for elected office serve any other functions?

RQ2b: How do these functions help establish preferability?

In response to research question 2a, yes, the social media messages of candidates for elected office serve other functions. The five new functions observed through the first phase of this study, voter/volunteer mobilization, “others are excited,” non-political, appreciation for support, and campaign updates, were all found in phase two of this study. In addition, the coders for phase two of this study identified the need for a category that classifies live-tweeting events. Due to

their informative nature, these themes meet the criteria for campaign updates. Future studies should include live-tweeting events in the explanation and examples for the campaign updates category.

In response to research question 2a, the newly identified functions of political campaign discourse do not establish preferability in the traditional sense. Instead, these new functions function in somewhat hidden persuasive manners. First, the theme, “Others are excited,” helps establish preferability by relying on the principle of social proof. The principle of social proof says that, “We view a behavior as correct in a given situation to the degree that we see other performing it,” (Cialdini, 2009, p. 99). When candidates show how excited other people are about the prospect of the candidate winning, they are relying on this principle. While this argument relies to some extent on the bandwagon fallacy, few people would approach social media messages with the active processing needed to notice the logical gap.

For example, on October 7, 2014, David Perdue, a candidate for senate from Georgia, tweeted:

Huge turnout for #TeamPerdue today in Perry! (Perdue, 2014a).

This tweet is saying, “Look how many people support this campaign!” This message, that other people are supporting this campaign, can help subconsciously persuade other people to support the campaign. The goal of this tweet then is to convince new people to support the Perdue campaign, by showing them that they will not be alone.

The next two functions are informative. The non-political function informs people about things completely unrelated to politics or the campaign, and the campaign updates function informs people about campaign stops and life on the road. These messages seem inherently non-persuasive. They fill in the social media feed, and help the candidate connect to his or her

supporters on a more intimate level. But that connection is important. Tweets about things like sports teams seem trivial, but to a diehard sports fan, that tweet is a similarity. Cialdini (2009) states that, “Even small similarities can be effective in producing a positive response in another” (p. 149). The goal of these informative tweets is not immediate persuasion, but connection. Connection then becomes the first step in the persuasive process that the candidate hopes results in one or more votes in his or her favor.

For example, Scott Brown, a Senate candidate from New Hampshire, tweeted on October 18, 2014:

Gail and I enjoyed meeting everyone who came out to the Keene Pumpkin Festival this afternoon (Brown, 2014a).

This tweet is not trying to persuade anyone to vote for Scott Brown. In fact, this tweet is only loosely related to politics. It reads, and was coded, as a nonpolitical, personal update. Instead of aiming for persuasion, Brown is trying to connect with voters. Brown hopes that this tweet opens the door to new and stronger relationships with the people of New Hampshire – particularly those who enjoy the Keene Pumpkin Festival.

Michelle Nunn relied on this philosophy in a campaign update coded theme when she tweeted on October 26, 2014:

I stopped by our headquarters yesterday with a special guest, @HillaryClinton! (Nunn, 2014c).

Again, this tweet is not persuading anyone. This tweet is showing Nunn’s followers what happened “inside” the campaign. This theme is aiming to connect with people, particularly those who held a favorable view of Hillary Clinton, by giving them an inside look at the campaign. Nunn hopes that this association with Clinton will initiate or strengthen relationships with campaign supporters.

The next function, appreciation for support, establishes preferability in a similar, discreet way. For example, on October 7, 2014, Nunn tweeted;

Thank you #TeamNunn for cheering us on so loudly tonight! (Nunn, 2014a)

This theme is simply thanking supporters for their presence and support at a debate. This tweet goes further than simply stating that people were there supporting Nunn and thanks them.

The power of a simple thank you is enormous. Rind and Bordia (1995) found that servers could increase their tips simply by writing “thank you” on the bottom of a customer’s receipt. Social media has allowed politicians to send more messages for less money. 20 years ago, it was not feasible to disseminate thank you messages to large numbers of supporters. Since social media messages are unlimited, politicians can now send thanks to a large number of people regularly.

The final new function of political campaign discourse is voter/volunteer mobilization. This function does not help establish preferability for the candidate with the person who sees the message. Instead, these messages seek action. These themes were prevalent on Election Day. For example, on November 4, 2014, David Perdue tweeted:

Still 1 hour left! As long as you’re in line by 7pm, you can vote . . . (Perdue, 2014b).

This theme is not just trying to persuade people to vote for Perdue, it is urging them to vote for Perdue. This tweet is trying to get people to the polls. According to Nonprofit VOTE, a nonpartisan group dedicated to voter engagement, only 36.6% of eligible citizens voted in the 2014-midterm elections, the lowest turnout since World War II (Pillsbury & Johannesen, 2015, p. 3). With voter turnout so low, voter mobilization is more important than ever before, and social media has allowed candidates to disseminate voter mobilization messages more easily, accessibly, and affordably than ever before. This function is not limited to voter mobilization. Candidates also seek action from supporters in the form of volunteering. Volunteers are vital to

the success of political campaigns, and social media makes large-scale volunteer recruitment affordable. For example, on October 24, 2014, Michelle Nunn tweeted:

It's the weekend of 1,000 volunteers! Get involved at [\[link to volunteer sign up page\]](#) (Nunn, 2014b).

This tweet is trying to get people to volunteer for Nunn's campaign. A "weekend of 1,000 volunteers" becomes much more feasible when contact can be made with thousands so easily.

In conclusion, the functional theory of political campaign discourse consists of three functions of political campaign discourse. These functions – acclaims, attacks, and defenses – can all be found in political messages disseminated through social media. Interestingly, these attacks are used more often than acclaims on social media. The three original functions of political campaign discourse are bolstered by five other functions – voter/volunteer mobilization, "others are excited," non-political, appreciation for support, and campaign updates. These new functions help establish preferability in a variety of ways, relying on both active and passive persuasive techniques. Above all, the functional theory is founded on the axiom that voting is a comparative act (Benoit, 2007, p. 32). The five new functions of political campaign discourse outlined herein help to establish preferability and help to turn that preferability into action.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Study Specific

This project was a big undertaking. Obviously, more coders could have handled more tweets. While the small sample size used in this study was appropriate for this initial expansion of the Functional Theory, the ideas presented herein should be tested with a larger sample that includes more than one type of race. This study only focuses on tweets from the general elections for US Senate seats; social media messages from primary campaigns for senate and campaigns for other offices could be very different. The scope of political communication through social

media is large and seemingly ever increasing. Rather than creating one TV ad that is run many times, candidates are creating multiple tweets a day. While traditional ads have more themes than a tweet, they are also much more limited in number. The sheer volume of political communication through social media requires larger projects in the future.

During both stages of this project, an attempt was made to collect data regarding the topics and subtopics of the coded messages. While this information was collected in step one, it was not the focus of the research. Intercoder reliability for the data on topics and subtopics in step two showed that the data was not reliable. The topics and subtopics of political communication through social media should be researched in a similar manner to how the functions of these messages were reviewed herein.

The coders in step two of this project also noted that some themes were obviously one category due to the words used. For example, many tweets that include videos have multiple themes. Many times, the first theme is something to the effect of “Watch this:” or even just “Video.” These themes are often followed by separate themes that can be seen as functioning differently. This can be seen in a tweet from November 1, 2014 when Scott Brown, the Republican candidate from New Hampshire, tweeted:

VIDEO: @JeanneShaheen’s record can be summed up in one single number: 99. [link to video] #nhpolitics. (Brown, 2014b)

Consistency was the goal when separating tweets like this into themes. Following the rules for coding videos outlined at the beginning of this paper, only tweets with phrases like “Watch” or “Video” were separated into multiple themes (based solely on video presence). Since different people can interpret these key words differently, a more clear explanation of this theme is needed to eliminate this problem. At the same time, while it may be wise to have the messages sorted

into themes and coded by the same people to avoid differences in interpretation, this approach will not always be feasible (as was the case with this project).

The Bigger Picture

One idea became apparent throughout this project; each politician seems to use his or her own “social media voice.” This could make finding consistent relationships between functions and topics of political campaign discourse through social media hard or impossible. Table 6 shows the distribution of function and intercoder reliability by candidate. This shows that the use of each category, and Twitter as a whole, is very different by candidate. Going further, Table 7 shows function popularity by candidate using the average of the two coders. The only function ranked the same for each candidate is defense (ranked last). The only function ranked the same by three candidates is voter/volunteer mobilization (ranked first for candidates A, B, and D). The remaining six functions are all ranked the same for two of the four candidates, but the similar candidates vary from function to function.

This research exposed many questions that are vital to a further understanding of social media and continued research in the field. Many parts of social media are not understood academically. While social media users may have a working understanding of these tools or ideas, research does not exist to investigate these functions as individual parts of the social media whole. While it is possible to garner a basic understanding of social media without the answers to these questions, the future of research in this field will be shallow. These questions seem basic, because they are – simultaneously basic concepts for users and complex concepts for researchers.

The use of Twitter for this project presented questions regarding hashtags, retweets, modified tweets, images and videos, links, and replies. For example, how should hashtags be treated? Should hashtags always be considered an organization tool? Should hashtags always be

Table 6. Distribution of functions and intercoder reliability by candidate

	Coder A	Coder B	<i>kappa</i>
Candidate A			.75
Acclaim	43	44	
Attack	95	85	
Defense	0	0	
“Do Something”	175	172	
“Others are excited”	18	10	
Non-political	16	15	
Appreciation for support	56	43	
Campaign updates	54	88	
Total	457	457	
Candidate B			.68
Acclaim	123	107	
Attack	96	103	
Defense	0	0	
“Do Something”	118	132	
“Others are excited”	48	7	
Non-political	6	4	
Appreciation for support	18	20	
Campaign updates	23	59	
Total	432	432	
Candidate C			.66
Acclaim	66	34	
Attack	68	76	
Defense	0	2	
“Do Something”	41	46	
“Others are excited”	22	5	
Non-political	17	34	
Appreciation for support	18	17	
Campaign updates	54	72	
Total	286	286	
Candidate D			.75
Acclaim	112	105	
Attack	93	98	
Defense	9	5	
“Do Something”	122	121	
“Others are excited”	42	16	
Non-political	9	9	
Appreciation for support	45	33	
Campaign updates	57	102	
Total	489	489	
Total	1,664	1,664	.72

Table 7. Function popularity using candidate average from both coders				
	A	B	C	D
Acclaim	5	2	3	2
Attack	2	3	1	3
Defense	8	8	8	8
Voter/volunteer mobilization	1	1	4	1
“Others are excited”	7	5	7	6
Non-political	6	7	5	7
Appreciation for support	4	6	6	5
Campaign updates	3	4	2	4

considered part of the message? Should hashtags always be considered both? Should the treatment of hashtags vary from tweet to tweet, or even hashtag to hashtag? Similar questions can be asked of the other topics listed. How does a retweet function? Should a retweet be considered a message from the original tweeter, the retweeter, or both? What about modified tweets? The idea of social media research gets cloudier when one considers images, videos, and URLs. Should images and videos that only appear if a tweet is clicked on be considered part of the tweet (or message)? Should a page linked through a URL be considered part of the tweet? It would be easy to write these questions off as unimportant, but these functions can be found across the social media spectrum in many different forms.

These specific questions all flow out of larger, more fundamental questions. The communication process is based on messages that are sent by a sender and processed by a receiver. In the case of social media, what is the message? Who is sending it? Who is receiving it? These are complex questions that lie outside the scope of this project. While focused research, like this project, is important, a thorough, consistent, and adaptable understanding of social media is essential for the academy moving forward.

Previous understandings of political communication don't explain political communication through social media. This study has expanded one theory, the functional theory

f political campaign discourse to apply to political messages through social media. After
discovering new functions of political campaign discourse in one campaign, the presence of
these new functions was confirmed in a subsequent functional analysis. While political social
media messages may still take on new functions, the five new functions presented herein take a
large step in the direction of better understanding the use of social media by political candidates.

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Coding Instructions

Thank you so much for agreeing to code for this project! I have compiled some definitions and examples here to help you out along the way. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED].

For this project, you will be coding themes. A theme is a single statement about a single subject (Holsti, 1969). I have organized the tweets that you have received into themes. Many tweets contain multiple themes. When multiple themes are present in a tweet, the themes are color coded to signify difference. The colors are only there to help you distinguish between the separate themes. If there is only one theme in a tweet you will find that theme underlined in one color or that the tweet has been bracketed in one color. If there are multiple themes in one tweet, you will find the themes underlined in separate colors. Basically, every time you see multiple colors associated with one tweet, that tweet has multiple themes. Each theme has been numbered. If you find any discrepancies in numbering (other than the one that I will tell you about today), please let me know immediately.

General Definitions – These general definitions provide a basic understanding of the Functional Model of Political Campaign Discourse. The majority of the codes you will be using come from this theory.

Acclaims	"Acclaims portray the sponsoring candidate favorably" (Benoit & Airne, p. 102, 2009).
Attacks	"Attacks portray the opposing candidate unfavorably" (Benoit & Airne, p. 102, 2009).
Defenses	"Defenses explicitly respond to a prior attack on the sponsoring candidate" (Benoit & Airne, p. 102, 2009).
Policy	"Policy remarks concern governmental action and problems amenable to government action" (Benoit & Airne, p. 103, 2009).

Policy - Past Deeds	"Past deeds concern the outcomes or effects of actions taken by the candidate [(for acclaims) or the opponent (for attacks)], usually actions taken as an elected official" (Benoit, 2007, p. 52).
Policy - Future Plans	"Future plans are a means to an end, specific proposals for policy action" (Benoit, 2007, p. 53).
Policy - General Goals	"Unlike future plans, goals refer to ends rather than means. Cutting taxes, without specifying which, how much, or which taxes to cut would illustrate a general goal" (Benoit, 2007, p.54).
Character	"Character remarks address properties, abilities, or attributes of the candidates" (Benoit & Airne, p. 103, 2009).
Character - Personal Qualities	"Personal qualities are the personality traits of the candidate, such as honesty, compassion, strength, courage, friendliness" (Benoit, 2007, p. 54).
Character - Leadership Ability	"Leadership ability usually appears as experience in office, the ability to accomplish things [or not accomplish things for attacks] as an elected official" (Benoit, 2007, p. 54).
Character - Ideals	"Ideals are similar to goals, but they are values or principles rather than policy outcomes" (Benoit, 2007, p. 54).

Based on a thorough review of the themes used in the Twitter feeds of the candidate from Colorado in the last election, I have added several codes. To better understand these new codes, I have provided general descriptions of the new categories below. Please note, these are working titles that best function as short descriptions of the functions they indicate.

"Do something"	These themes attempt to get the reader to do something. The message could ask the reader to watch a video, volunteer, vote, etc...
"Others are excited"	These themes show that other people are excited about this candidate or his/her ideas or goals.
Non-Political	These themes can be related to anything but politics.
Showing appreciation for support	These themes are used to express thanks for support from voters and/or other politicians. Gratitude for endorsements could fall under this category.
Campaign Updates	These themes are related to politics/the campaign, but are informative, not persuasive, in nature.

In addition to these new categories, you will also see that codes for acclaims and attacks on campaign strategy have been added. In this case, campaign strategy can refer to the strategy, organization, and/or success of a campaign.

All of the categories have been assigned a code. As you read through the themes, you will assign **one** code to each theme. If you think that one theme could fall under multiple categories, code the theme based on the category that you think best describes the theme. Feel free to leave a note in the “Notes” column of the spreadsheet to explain any especially hard choices. You should record the code for each theme in the spreadsheet. Please make sure that you record the code for each theme on the appropriately numbered line on the spreadsheet.

	Acclaim		Attack		20	Defense
1	Policy - Past Deeds	11	Policy - Past Deeds			New Categories
2	Policy - Future Plans	12	Policy - Future Plans		30	Do something
3	Policy - General Goals	13	Policy - General Goals		31	Others are excited
4	Character - Personal Qualities	14	Character - Personal Qualities		32	Non-Political
5	Character - Leadership Ability	15	Character - Leadership Ability		33	Showing appreciation for support
6	Character - Ideals	16	Character - Ideals		34	Campaign Updates
7	Campaign Strategy	17	Campaign Strategy			
8	Other Acclaim	18	Other Attack			

Examples

These are just a few examples of how you may find these principles in practice. Actual use of each category will vary in the themes you code. Some of these examples were pulled from the twitter feeds of candidates from the 2014 Senate Race in Colorado, and I created some of them.

Code	Classification	Description	Example
1	Acclaim - Past Deeds	Acclamation of the past deeds of the candidate. As past deeds concern policy, these themes should concern previous work in office, but may include work in the private sector.	"Mark has led the fight in Washington to stop the #NSA from overreaching in our private lives."
2	Acclaim - Future Plans	Acclamation of a specific plan of action that the candidate plans to take in office. Remember, future plans are a means to an end.	1. "I will fight to repeal Obamacare." 2. "I will fight to simplify the tax code."

3	Acclaim - General Goals	Acclamation of the goals for the end result rather than the means through which those ends will be achieved.	"@MarkUdall2014 is determined to defeat ISIS."
4	Acclaim - Personal Qualities	Acclamation of personality traits of the candidate, such as honesty, compassion, strength, courage, friendliness	"I fight for what I believe in."
5	Acclaim - Leadership Ability	Acclamation of the candidate's experience or ability to accomplish things.	1. "@MarkUdall2014 has a history of working across the aisle." 2. "During my time at Company A, 5,000 jobs were created."
6	Acclaim - Ideals	Acclamation of values or principles. Remember these are similar to General Goals, but they are character, not policy, related.	"I believe that men and women should receive equal pay for equal work."
7	Acclaim - Campaign Strategy	A remark acclaiming the campaign strategy of the candidate.	1. "We are ahead in the polls!" 2. "@USNews called us one of the top 10 campaigns of 2014!"
8	Other Acclaim	Any acclaim that does not fall under categories 1-7. Remember, acclaims portray the sponsoring candidate favorably.	
11	Attack - Past Deeds	Attack on the past deeds of the opponent. As past deeds concern policy, these themes should concern previous work in office, but may include work in the private sector.	"In 1999 @MarkUdall2014 suggested moving NUCLEAR WASTE to the Eastern Plains."
12	Attack - Future Plans	Attack on a specific plan of action that the opponent plans to take in office. Remember, future plans are a means to an end.	1. "Candidate A wants to raise the Estate Tax." 2. "Candidate B wants to repeal Obamacare."
13	Attack - General Goals	Attack on the goals for the end result of the opponent rather than the means through which those ends will be achieved.	"Candidate A does not support equality for all."
14	Attack - Personal Qualities	Attack on personality traits of the opponent, such as honesty, compassion, strength, courage, friendliness	"Candidate A lies about his past."
15	Attack - Leadership Ability	Attack on the opponent's experience or ability to accomplish things.	"Candidate A only does what the president tells him to do."

16	Attack - Ideals	Attack on the values or principles of the opponent. Remember these are similar to General Goals, but they are character, not policy, related.	"Candidate A doesn't believe that women deserve equal pay for equal work."
17	Attack - Campaign Strategy	A remark attacking the campaign strategy of his/her opponent.	"News Agency A called Candidate B's campaign one of the worst of 2014."
18	Other Attack	Any attack that does not fall under categories 11-17.	
20	Defense	Refutation of a previous attack against the candidate.	"Opponent A said _____ about my record. This is a blatant distortion of the truth."
30	"Do something"	These themes attempt to get the reader to do something. The message could ask the reader to watch a video, volunteer, vote, etc...	1. "Looking forward to joining @ThisWeekABC & @FoxNewsSunday tomorrow morning. Be sure to tune in!" 2. "Get your ballots in!" 3. "New video . . . WATCH:"
31	"Others are excited"	These themes show that other people are excited about this candidate or his/her ideas or goals.	1. "Lone Tree is fired up to see @CoryGardner out sign waving on Election Day." 2. "[Retweet of a person] Excited to cast my ballot for @MarkUdall2014!"
32	Non-Political	These themes can be related to anything but politics.	1. "Let's go @Broncos!" 2. "Sorry to hear of the death of John Doe. My thoughts are with his family."
33	Showing appreciation for support	These themes are used to express thanks for support from voters and/or other politicians. Gratitude for endorsements could fall under this category.	1. "Beyond grateful for the many dedicated volunteers working towards a brighter future for all of Colorado." 2. "Honored & humbled to receive the @reporterherald's endorsement."
34	Campaign Updates	These themes are related to politics/the campaign, but are informative, not persuasive, in nature.	1. "@MarkUdall2014 starts Election Day at CU Boulder." 2. "Here are 14 facts you probably didn't know about me."

*The definitions, examples, and codebook can all be found in the Excel spreadsheet I sent you.