Politicians on Twitter: A Rhetorical Analysis

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Abstract:

Politicians in the United States are influential when considering what issues Americans think are important and if any action is taken on those issues. As Politicians moved to Twitter to spread their message, researchers followed to study them. Most research on Twitter has been done on non-traditional politicians such as Former President Donald Trump. Given that traditional politicians make up the majority of politicians, this is an interesting gap in the research. This study will use a rhetorical analysis to analyze how two well known Senators use ethos, pathos, and logos in their Tweets. The outcomes of this study show how Senators attempt to persuade their followers.

Introduction:

Many politicians in America hold a large amount of power. They use their platforms to advocate for ideas they like, collaborate with other powerful people, and vote on bills. However, they first must convince voters and the general public that the changes they want to make are important and necessary. This brings to question; how do they do that? Given that Politicians are the ones driving debate and change, it's important to try to understand how they convince people to adapt their viewpoint.

I will be using a rhetorical analysis to study the prevalence and use of ethos, pathos, logos in politician's tweets. I am using this method because I am interested in studying the persuasion methods used by politicians. Using a rhetorical analysis will help me discover the answers to questions such as: Which rhetorical appeal do politicians use the most? How do they use that rhetorical appeal? Etc.

Not a lot of English research focuses on this topic. Much of the research is from a political science perspective. Those researchers are interested in ideas such as the relationship between the politician and the audience, use of propaganda, etc. While that is important, it is also important to study how the politicians persuade people to care about the ideas the politicians care about.

Literature Review:

Political Marketing

This project is both English and Political Science. While the material being studied is related to Political Science, the material is studied using English concepts. Since the project is related to Political Science, it's important to include background on the Political Science concepts related to political campaigns. The *Routledge Handbook of Political Marketing* edited by Jennifer Lees-Marshment, includes explanations of core techniques used to campaign. First is political marketing. Political marketing is the concept that parties and politicians can be marketed just like goods and services. However, instead of being convinced to buy the product or service, voters are convinced to vote for the party or politician. Political marketing starts with researching the market, identifying a group to market to, making decisions on how to effectively market to that group, and then the process of connecting with that group through campaigning and branding (Lees-Marshment 2). Currently, the trend is to be voter-responsive. As in parties market based on what voters want (Lees-Marshment 80). Another concept is branding. Branding, or political branding, is a political marketing strategy and is used to create identity. Politicians and their teams do this through positioning and differentiation. Politicians make a specific position and highlight the differences between their positions and their opponents position (Lees-Marshment 107). While the book was written in 2004, it predicted that online media will be accepted into the core of campaigns (find page number. It's in the back of the book). This prediction has certainly come true. However, even though the social media of politicians is central to campaigns, it has not been widely studied. Political campaigns are used by politicians to convince people to vote for them and voters make decision on who to vote for based on the campaigns. Therefore, it's important to study how politicians campaign.

Analysis of Twitter

Since Twitter hasn't existed all that long, there aren't that many studies on how politicians use it. The studies that are out there, are largely about Donald Trump since he was so unique. The downside to studying Donald

Trump is that he is so unique that it's only Donald Trump the learned knowledge can be applied to. However, these studies still have lessons that I can learn for my own project.

In *Straight to the People: Donald Trump's Rhetorical Style on Twitter in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election* author Orly Kayam analyzed Trump's rhetorical strategies used for campaigning. Kayam looked at factors such as how often he posted, how often he used certain punctuation marks, and she also did an analysis of the content of Trump's tweets. For the content analysis, Kayam looked at the character, the content, and the main purpose of the Tweet. She then created categories to code Tweets into based on the factors she was analyzing. The results of the analysis shows that most of Trump's tweet were negative or offensive (Kayam 161). Being so negative showed his opponents weaknesses and made himself look strong in comparison. Therefore, the strategy Trump used on Twitter was attacking rivals and glorifying himself (Kayam 166).

In *Political influencers. A study of Donald Trump's personal brand on Twitter and its impact on the media and users,* Concha Perez-Curiel and Pilar Limon-Naharro studied the impact that Trump's Tweets as President had on the media. They selected 51 of Trump's Tweets that were about the topics of immigration, foreign affairs, media, and women to analyze. They found that those tweets had high levels of interaction with users and were at times directly reproduced in headlines (Perez-Curiel and Limon-Naharro 16). Perez-Curiel and Limon-Naharro also looked at a range of propaganda mechanism to see if and how they were used in Trump's Tweets. They found that propaganda mechanisms were used in Trump's tweets.

In *Twitter as an Arena for the Authentic Outsider*, author Gunn Enli compared Trump's use of social media to Clinton's use. Enli said that Clinton used Twitter in a professional manner which is how political campaigns are typically run. She also controlled less of the Tweets by leaving the work of Tweeting to staffers and when she did Tweet, she used a signal to show that she authored the Tweet. As compared to Clinton, Trump was more involved in authoring his Tweets. Enli coded tweets into three categories: traditional, non-traditional, and neutral. Trump's tweets were 38.3% traditional, 54.5% non-traditional, and 7.2% neutral. Clinton's were 81.7% traditional, 12.9% non-traditional, and 5.4% neutral. Importantly, Enli found that Trump and Clinton's Twitter accounts often did not respond to Tweets or engage in dialogue. This is because "the need to control the message and promote the candidate overwhelmed any campaign interest in initiating an open and enlightened public debate." Overall, Twitter had an effect on the way the candidates were perceived and candidates Twitter feeds were "important sources of information and perspective on a given year's election."

Rhetorical analysis of politicians

Since I'm using a rhetorical analysis, I wanted to include studies that used rhetorical analysis. However, I could not find any studies that applied a rhetorical analysis to politicians on Twitter. Instead, I searched more generally for studies which applied a rhetorical analysis to politicians. I looked for studies which specifically dealt with the use of ethos, pathos, logos since that is similar to my project.

In *Survival of the Fittest: Rhetoric During the Course of an Election Campaign*, Jennifer Jerit studied rhetorical strategies used by campaigning politicians. Jerit defined effectiveness as rhetorical appeals the candidates commonly used since an experienced rhetorician would know what is effective and therefore use that strategy more often. She found that politicians commonly used emotional appeals. Politicians "had incentives to evoke emotions such as fear, anxiety, and anger" (Jerit 563). Not only do emotional appeals mobilize their parties base and attract undecided voters, but they also lead to more reporting from the media (Jerit 563).

In *Enoch Powell's 'rivers of Blood' Speech: A Rhetorical Political Analysis*, Andrew Crines studied a controversial speech given in 1968 by Enoch Powell (a British Politician). He studies this speech using a rhetorical analysis looking specifically at the use of ethos, pathos, and logos. For the analysis, Crines looked at where the rhetoric used in the speech came from, then he examined the use of rhetorical devices, and to finish the analysis off he looked at the impact the speech had.

Methods:

The research question I developed to discover how politicians persuade their followers is:
1. How do Senators use rhetorical appeals on Twitter to persuade followers?

This is the research question for two reasons. First, it is narrow, so it has the potential to lead to a solid result in the limited timeframe of the semester. Second, it shows that the goal of the research is to focus on the connection between persuasion and rhetorical appeals in the context of a Politicians' Twitter account.

To answer the research question, I chose to do a rhetorical analysis of the Tweets of two Senators. The analysis was focused on the use of ethos, pathos, logos and how those rhetorical appeals are used to persuade their

followers. To perform the analysis, I first coded Tweets into categories. The definitions for the coding categories are:

Ethos: Displaying credibility. Can be highlighting their position as a Senator or a committee they are on, speaking from a Senator's position, acknowledging their expertise, or mentioning their value system.
Pathos: Intended to provoke emotion. Can be specific words, phrases, or entire sentences. Typically, language that has a negative connotation falls into this category.
Logos: Facts, examples, statistics, etc. being used to support an argument.
Definitions for Combined Categories: One tweet which has multiple rhetorical appeals used in combination to support the overall argument. Categories are Ethos-Pathos, Ethos-Logos, Pathos-Logos, and Ethos-Pathos-Logos.

After coding the Tweets into categories, I then studied how the rhetorical appeals function within Tweets and what type of content tended to fall within each category.

The subject of the research is Tweets by Marco Rubio and Elizabeth Warren. All tweets Tweeted by @ewarren and @marcorubio in the month of February 2023 were analyzed. Warren has two active Twitter accounts. For this study, I chose to study the account labeled as the "official campaign account". Warren's account, @ewarren, currently has 5.9M followers and Rubio's, @marcorubio, has 4.5M. Tweets by Rubio and Warren are good subjects for this because Rubio and Warren are both current, well-known Senators and respected by their political party. They also have both attempted to run for President. Overall, there are many similarities between the two of them besides the fact that they are members of opposing political parties. I chose members of opposing political parties for this study because I was curious if they will use similar methods when it comes to rhetorical appeals. However, since this study is limited to only Warren and Rubio's Twitter accounts, it cannot be generalized to other politicians.

Results

Quantitative:
To start, here are charts with Warren and Rubio's Tweets separated by the category the Tweets were coded into. In addition, there is also a chart with the combined total Tweets. The combined total Tweets is Rubio's Tweets added to Warren's Tweets.
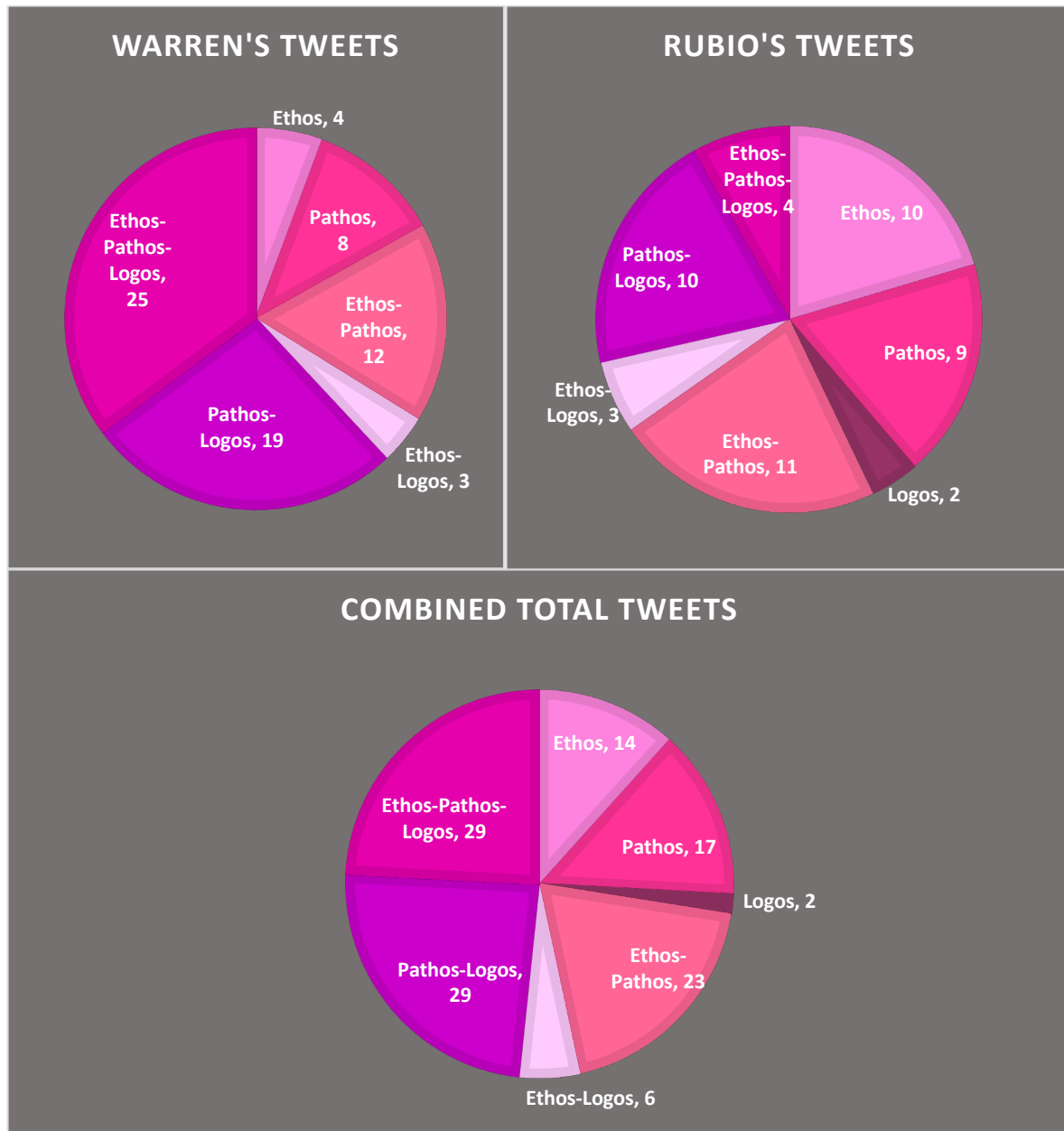
Figure 1. Results of Qualitative Analysis

For combined total tweets, the most used combination is Pathos-Logos and Ethos-Pathos-Logos. The next most used combinations are Ethos-Pathos and then Pathos. A similarity between all four of the categories is that Pathos is used. Altogether, Pathos is used in 98 out of 120 Tweets. Ethos is used in 72 and Logos is used 66 out of 120 Tweets. Pathos is the most used rhetorical appeal by a significant amount.

As for the individual Senators, Warren's most common combination is Ethos-Pathos-Logos, 25 total Tweets, and her second most common combination is Pathos-Logos, 19 total Tweets. Warren uses Ethos-Pathos-Logos most often and I believe that she may have used it even more often. If you think about it all of the Tweets coming from a Senator's account have some level of ethos, it's just unstated in the Tweets that were coded Pathos-Logos. Therefore, I think in Warren's Tweets, the most used combination by far is Ethos-Pathos-Logos.

For Rubio, his most used combination is Ethos-Pathos which is closely followed by both Pathos-Logos and Ethos. The fourth most used category is Pathos. The first to fourth most used categories are used in about 10 or so Tweets each. Warren's most used combination, Ethos-Pathos-Logos, is only used by Rubio in 4 Tweets. That

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combination was used by Warren in 25 Tweets which is a large difference. Overall, Rubio seems to not stick to the Ethos-Pathos-Logos combination like Warren does.

The least popular combination is Logos unaccompanied by other rhetorical appeals. Warren did not have any Tweets that were coded as solely Logos and Rubio only had two.

Qualitative:

After coding, I more closely analyzed the tweets. I was curious about what circumstances the rhetorical appeals are used and how they are combined to impact the overall argument.

To start, I wanted to look at the Tweets that were coded as solely Logos, since it is very rarely used. Here are screenshots of those tweets:
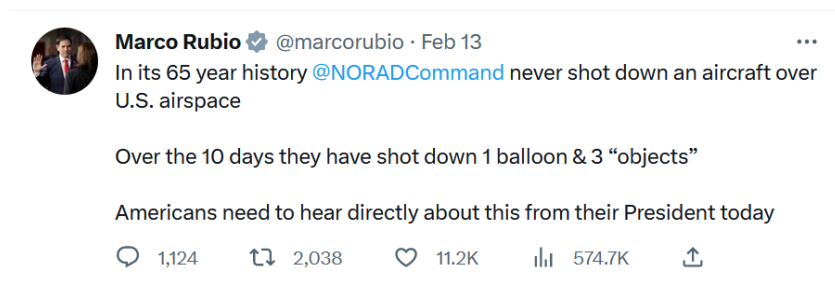

Figure 2. Logos Example 1

To start, this Tweet is an example of how Tweets coming from these Senator's Twitter accounts have inherent ethos. They are Senators and a lot of their Tweets would only come from a Senator's account. However, they don't necessarily fit the code's definition of Ethos. Such as in Logos Example 1, Rubio is advocating for Americans from his position as a Senator and Vice Chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee to call for the President to do something about what he sees as a major issue.

As for how Logos Example 1 using logos, Rubio starts by stating two facts and then follows it up with his conclusion that the President needs to answer to the public. The two facts he states don't directly lead to the conclusion. Therefore, to understand the conclusion, Rubio is relying on his audience's beliefs to serve as the warrant between the facts and his conclusion.
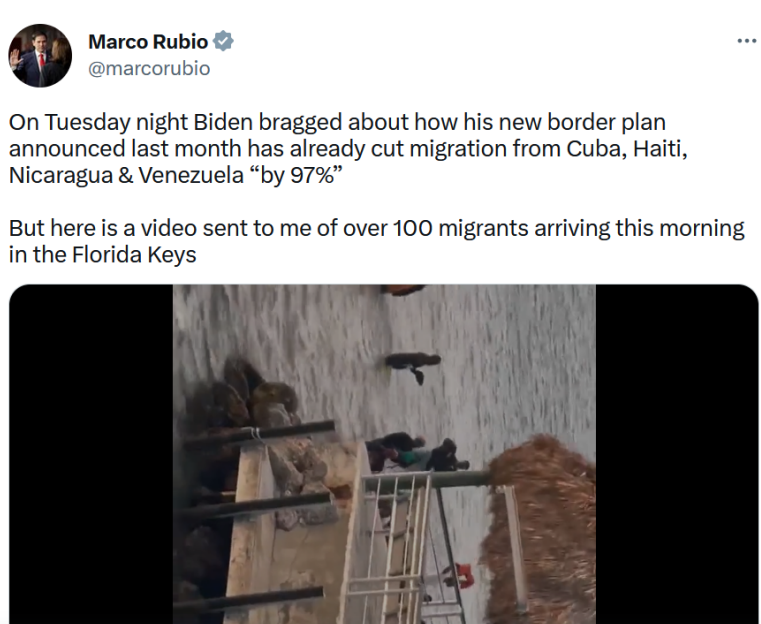

Figure 3. Logos Example 2

For Logos Example 2, Rubio starts off by stating what the President said on Tuesday Night and then counters that claim with a specific example. The conclusion of this argument is not directly stated but one can

assume from reading the Tweet that Rubio means to imply that the President lied when he said that his new border plan cut migration by 97%. An example of someone who understood his conclusion:
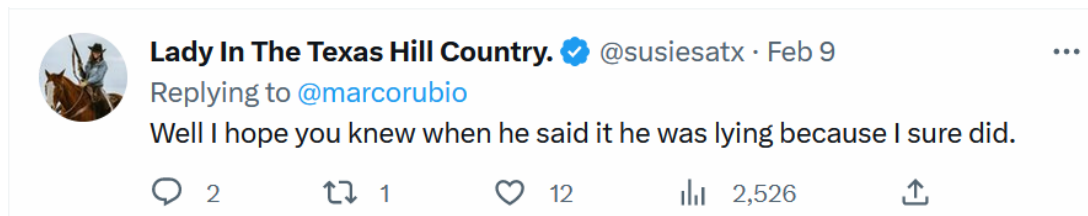

Figure 4. Response 1 to Logos Example 1

Even though this Twitter user understood the conclusion, she seems to be implying that Rubio is gullible which probably isn't a good look for Rubio as a politician. As for Rubio's argument as a whole, it could be considered unsuccessful as the comment section had some people questioning Rubio's logic. An example of someone questioning his logic:
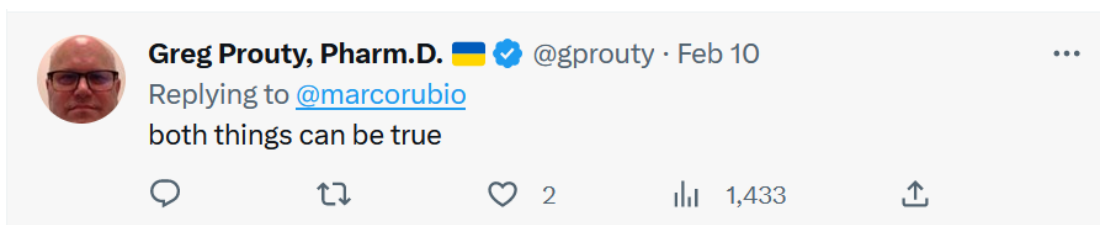

Figure 5. Response 2 to Logos Example 1

As one can see from these Tweets, the arguments created from solely logos aren't the most effective ways to create arguments in the genre of Senator Tweets. The arguments aren't the strongest as they are missing pathos and ethos, which fulfill important roles in an argument. These Tweets also rely too much on the warrant, so they are ineffective for persuading people who don't believe what the Senator believes.

Now to move on to combinations that are used more often and are possibly more successful than using solely Logos. The first combination is Rubio's most used combination: Ethos-Pathos.
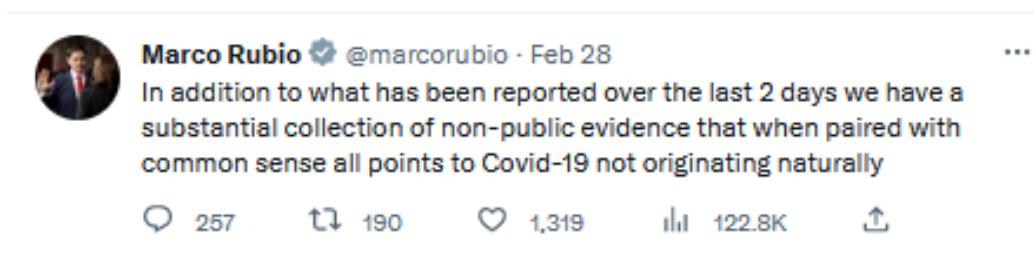

Figure 6. Ethos-Pathos Example 1

In this Tweet, Rubio highlights his position as the Vice Chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee by saying that due to his position, he has information he can't share but the information supports the idea that Covid-19 was not created naturally. This Tweet was coded as Ethos since Rubio is calling attention to his position and it was also coded as Pathos since he's implying the government is hiding information from the people regarding a dangerous foreign threat. The Tweet is meant to scare the audience a bit and ultimately use that fear to encourage them to support Rubio and distrust the political leaders that are in power.

The way Warren uses Ethos-Pathos is similar to how Rubio uses it.

Figure 7. Ethos-Pathos Example 2

In this Tweet, Warren targets the support of the over 65 crowd. She claims that there are some Republicans who get their enjoyment from trying to get rid of Social Security and Medicaid. Warren labels these Republicans as extremists, a word meant to provoke emotion and also places Warren's position as one that is non-extreme or normal. At the end of the Tweet, Warren ties herself in as a Senator who will fight to protect Social Security and Medicare, demonstrating her own values and platform.

Next to look at is Tweets where Ethos, Pathos, and Logos are all used in combination. I would argue that these are the most persuasive Tweets.

Figure 8. Ethos-Pathos-Logos Example 1

In this tweet, there are facts, what Warren wants to do to fix the problem, and the "appalling answer" from Amazon. The facts is the part that's coded as Logos, Warren's ability to ask Amazon how they will improve safety is coded as Ethos, and implying that Amazon doesn't care about employee deaths is coded as Pathos. To get to the conclusion, "it's time for Congress and regulators to step in", the audience must believe that it's the government's job to step in. The intent of the Tweets is not to convince people who already disagree with Warren, it's to hype up those who do agree with her and amplify their belief that more regulation is needed.

There were many comments that were sad for the deaths that occurred but did not accept Warren's conclusion. For example:

Figure 9. Response 1 to Ethos-Pathos-Logos Example 1

This Twitter user is one of the people who don't believe it is the government's job to step in. To these people the conclusion Warren came to is not "clear". There were also comments agreeing with Warren that it's time for the government to step in. For example:
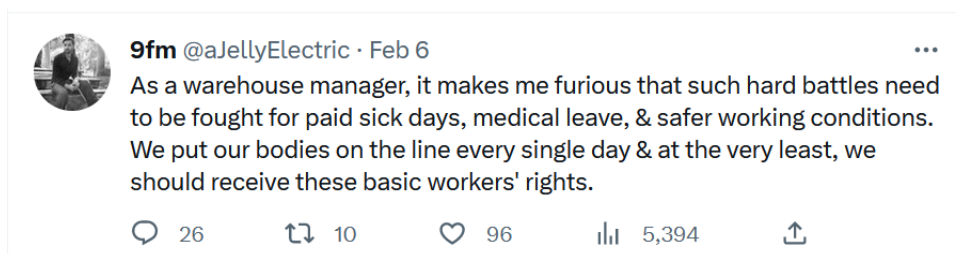

Figure 10. Response 2 to Ethos-Pathos-Logos Example 1

Now compare to how Rubio uses Ethos-Pathos-Logos.

Figure 11. Ethos-Pathos-Logos Example 2:

In this Ethos-Pathos-Logos Example 2, Rubio states a few facts which provoke fear and then ends with his hateful conclusion. The facts are coded as Logos, the intent to use the facts to scare people is coded as pathos, and

the article linked about Rubio introducing a new bill to ban transgender people from the Military is coded as ethos because only people in the House and Senate have the power to introduce bills. Even though this Tweet uses ethos, pathos, and logos, it would not be effective convincing people who don't have hateful opinions on Transgender people since the facts Rubio states to back up his argument have nothing to do with Transgender people being involved in the military.

The second most common combination used by both Warren and Rubio is Pathos-Logos.
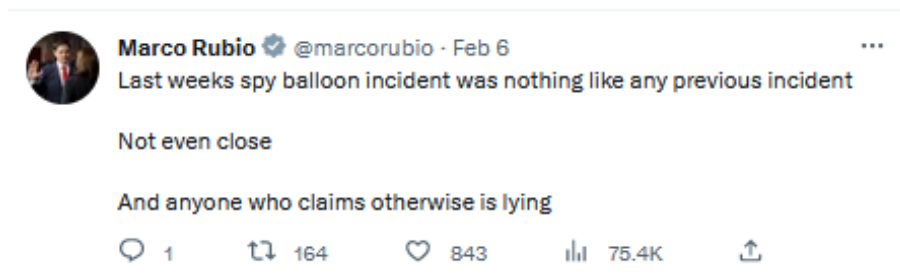

Figure 12. Pathos-Logos Example 1

In Pathos-Logos Example 1, Rubio says that the spy balloon was different from other previous incidents and that if anyone says it's not, then they are lying. The part about this spy balloon incident being different was coded as logos and the part about people claiming otherwise being liars was coded as pathos.

Figure 13. Pathos-Logos Example 2:

In this Tweet Warren discusses Representative Omar being removed from the Foreign Affairs Committee. Warren claims that she was removed in an attempt to silence her, but that her voice on the committee was valuable because she is a refugee. Parts of this tweet were coded as logos since it brings up facts about Representative Omar's background and other parts are coded as Pathos since it uses the phrase "disgusting attempt to silence her" which is meant to provoke emotion. As for how people reacted to this Tweet, most of the criticism was attacking the idea that Representative Omar is qualified for the position, which was a premise for the acceptance of the conclusion. Since they were not accepting the unstated premise, they did not accept the conclusion. Twitter users in the comment section rejected the idea that she is qualified because she is a refugee and some labeled her as antisemite. In other words, the audience did not agree that Representative Omar was removed in order to silence her, but because she was unqualified to be on the committee.

Discussion:
After the analysis it's time to revisit the research question:
1. How do Senators use rhetorical appeals on Twitter to persuade voters?

Senators use rhetorical appeals in many different ways on Twitter, but the trend is that they use logos to state facts or examples which backs up pathos in the form of fear and anger they are attempting to provoke in their audience. Ethos is used in two ways. One is in the form of highlighting their actions to supposedly solve a problem. The other way is ethos in the form of demonstrating their values or positioning themselves against a problem.

One common trend with the use of Pathos was that it was used to provoke fear or anger instead of happier emotions. With Logos, neither Senator utilized the rhetorical appeal as much as they could have. This was also noted by Orly Kayam when studying Donald Trump and Jennifer Jerit when studying political campaigns in general. When Logos was used, it was commonly in conjunction with pathos and the logos was used to back up the fear and anger the pathos was trying to provoke. As for Ethos, Warren and Rubio used that a bit differently. Both Warren and

Rubio used Ethos in the form of links to articles about their accomplishments. Rubio also quoted many bible passages which were coded as Ethos since he's demonstrating his belief system.

Overall, no argument made by a Senator on Twitter is going to persuade everyone. People who disagree with the Senator will find something they disagree with in the argument. Whether that's a different belief leading to a failed warrant, a disagreement with the premise, or a conclusion which just doesn't follow. This shows that the goals of Senators on Twitter aren't to convince people to change their views, it's to gain the support of those who have similar beliefs.

A difference between the Senators that stuck out to me was the difference in the tone of their Tweets. Rubio had negative, fearful tweets as compared to Warren, who had optimistic, action-filled Tweets. For example, Rubio had a significant number of Tweets which were attacking Democrats. Those Tweets are intended to get people out voting because they're scared of what could happen if Democrats stay in power. He creates a lot of us versus them situations. As for Warren, since her political party is currently in power, a lot of her Tweets are about all the amazing things she is doing as a Senator and all that is being accomplished. She uses words like "fighting" a lot.

In conclusion, there were trends with how politicians try to persuade followers. The most important findings were that Senators tend to appeal to negative emotions (this aligns with other research on the topic), Senators are Tweeting to gain support from those with similar beliefs, and there is wide variance with the combination of rhetorical appeals used depending upon the Senator.

LIMITATIONS
Small Sample Size

This research studies a total of 120 Tweets by two politicians. It cannot be generalized to all politicians. It would have been more ideal to include more Tweets and more politicians but given time constraints that did not happen.

Political Bias

I think any researcher approaching this project would see things a bit differently than other researchers, specifically when studying Tweets qualitatively. We all have our own biases and these cause us to perceive things differently than other people will.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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