

Donald Trump's Usage of Cult Rhetoric on Truth Social

Cadence Sharpe
cadencesharpe812@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study seeks to identify the presence of common cult rhetorical strategies in Donald Trump's 2025 Truth Social posts and analyze for potential trends within the usage of those rhetorical devices. Though previous research has discussed the variables of Donald Trump, social media, and cult rhetoric separately and suggested potential parallels between them, there were no studies analyzing how all three of these variables intersect in a practical manner. Thus, a conceptual qualitative content analysis was conducted to directly study the social media posts made by Donald Trump from the perspective of cult linguistics. This study used twenty-four original, text-based posts from Donald Trump's Truth Social account in 2025, and created a deductive coding rubric based on rhetorical strategies that were found in previous literature to be used by cults and cult leaders as manipulation tactics. Twenty-three of those posts contained at least one instance of the aforementioned cult rhetorical strategies, with 160 instances found overall. Frequency of a rhetorical device tended to be dependent on its generalizability, or ability to be used in multiple different contexts. Thus, cult rhetorical strategies were found in Donald Trump's 2025 Truth Social posts, directly addressing the previous gap in the literature regarding the intersection between Donald Trump, social media, and cult rhetoric. As politicians increasingly use social media platforms to reach millions, awareness of potential rhetorical and linguistic strategies that could be used to alter the opinions, emotions, and votes of citizens is imperative for the integrity of the democratic process.

INTRODUCTION

Everyone loves a good cult story. A single Google search will lead to thousands of results for cult-related documentaries, TV shows, podcasts, books, and films, all seeking the answers to the ever-pervasive questions: How do cult leaders manipulate their followers? Why do people join cults, and why do they stay? Though they have been dramatised through mainstream media and culture, the answers to these questions have nothing to do with supernatural brainwashing or mind control, and instead have everything to do with a deceptively simple variable — language. As stated by New York Times bestselling author Amanda Montell in her 2025 book *Cultish: The Language of Fanaticism*, “Language is the key means by which all degrees of cultlike influence occur” (Montell, 2025, p. 12). The rhetorical strategies that cult leaders use play a substantial role in their ability to manipulate followers, but usage isn't confined to that

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specific scenario. Rather, cult rhetoric has the potential to seep into other aspects of society and culture — including workplaces, religions, social media, and politics.

This study was designed to analyze the presence of cult rhetoric in a specific niche: the modern digital sociopolitical climate. More specifically, the study seeks to determine if there is evidence of rhetoric and linguistics reflective of common cult rhetorical strategies in the social media posts of a current prominent politician, Donald Trump, on his personal digital platform Truth Social. This had never been done before in an academic or professional setting. A conceptual qualitative content analysis was conducted on twenty-four original, text-based posts from Donald Trump's Truth Social account in 2025. A deductive coding rubric was created to analyze these posts, with each code based on a rhetorical strategy used by cults and cult leaders, as determined in previous studies. Using this rubric, one hundred and sixty total instances of cult rhetorical strategies were found across twenty-three out of the twenty-four posts. All rhetorical strategies were used at least once, but the frequency of a strategy's usage was found to be correlated with its applicability in multiple contexts. This data analysis led to the conclusion that cult rhetorical strategies were used in Donald Trump's 2025 Truth Social Posts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Donald Trump is currently serving his second term as president of the United States. During both his presidential terms, there have been comparisons made in the academic field between Trump and cult leaders (Franks, 2021; Montell, 2025; Tharoor, 2022). Notably, cult psychologist Dr. Steven Hassan's book *The Cult of Trump* argues that Trump shares actions, opinions, and rhetoric similar to that of previous cult leaders (Hassan, 2019). Trump is known to use social media as a primary form of rhetorical communication to the public (Burga, 2025; Gabbatt, 2019). This, too, relates to cults, as frequency of cult rhetoric and cult-related activity has risen substantially due to the rise of social media. Cults use social media as a tool to expand existing cult groups, create new groups, and recruit new members on a widespread scale (Artus, 2026). Previous research on these variables — Trump, cult rhetoric, and social media, draw potential connections between the three that suggest a need for further inquiry. Therefore, the goal of this literature review is multifold: to analyze linguistic strategies used by cults in order to define and quantify cult rhetoric, to establish academic precedent for the likelihood of a connection between Trump's language and cult rhetoric, and to understand how social media impacts these variables.

Cults and Cult Rhetoric

What a cult is, and what groups are defined as cults, has been a heavily contested topic throughout scholarly history. For the purposes of this study, the Merriam-Webster definition was referenced, which describes a cult as “a group (such as an organization or religious sect) with tenants and practices regarded as coercive, insular, or dangerous” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). According to this definition, what sets a cult apart from other, more “conventional” or “accepted” social groups is not necessarily a group's belief system, but instead the promotion of practices that are ultimately harmful and/or isolating to members.

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Cults use specific rhetorical and linguistic strategies to manipulate and coerce members to participate in the aforementioned harmful and isolating practices (Montell, 2025).

There are a plethora of academic sources on cult rhetoric, all exploring different facets of the complex subject using different terminologies. I have identified three separate categories of rhetoric that will be most useful for the organization and understanding of the rhetorical strategies used by cults. These categories are as follows: group identification, negating the opposition, and positive self-presentation. It is important to note that there is no specific chronological order to which I have organized these categories, and that these categories are deliberately general, as they are meant to encompass many different terms and facets of cult rhetoric.

Group Identification

The first category is group identification, which involves use of language and rhetoric to create a shared identity, taking advantage of humans' innate desire to be part of a group (Erikson, 2019). Through many forms of this weaponized rhetoric, they recruit new members, separate them from the outside world, and push their agenda onto them. For example, cults use a rhetorical strategy called othering, employing language that intentionally separates members from larger society (Palayon et al., 2020). Cults will also use positive and flattering language to draw a new member into the group, but will cease use of this language as soon as a member does something going against the standards or rules of the cult, motivating the member to keep in line with the cult's rules (Hassan, 2020). Frequently, cults emphasize collective language and action through use of plural pronouns (Ex: "We think, we believe, we will") and by associating positive rhetoric with the collective good of the cult, rather than the good of the individual (Erikson, 2019; Hassan, 2020; Vadai, 2016). Cults will also often invoke specialized jargon, creating new words and acronyms and changing definitions of familiar ones, in order to further separate followers from outside language and to establish a sense of community among those who use the cult-specific language (Montell, 2025). This strategy often coordinates with another form of cult rhetoric: creating new names and identities for both those inside and outside the cult. This can consist of anything from a legal name change to a derogatory nickname given to an outsider (Montell, 2025).

The rhetorical strategy for group identification with the most consensus among scholarly studies is called "us vs them." Us vs them language specifically places the speaker/group/cult on one side of a divide and anyone who opposes them on the other, forcing an individual to choose between them. When us vs them is used in tandem with the rhetorical strategies mentioned above, individuals are increasingly motivated to side with the cult. (Erikson, 2019; Hassan, 2020; Montell, 2025; Vadai, 2016). All of these strategies intentionally use language and rhetoric to identify the member as part of the group/cult and separate them from larger society, encouraging that member to then agree with all of the group's opinions.

Negating the Opposition

The second category of major rhetorical strategies used by cults is negating the opposition. Negating the opposition involves emphasizing that everyone opposing the cult is both morally and factually incorrect,

encouraging members to reject criticism and alternative ideas. To prove the opposition is morally wrong, cults use fearmongering; they rhetorically present those outside the cult as evil, irrelevant, or less than, which creates further motivation for those in the cult to never leave it in fear of moral consequence (Erikson, 2019; Hassan, 2020). Cults also display opposing opinions as factually incorrect, portraying all media that has a critical view of the cult as false, untrustworthy, and dirty (Hassan, 2020; Lonelodge, 2022). If information is publicized that causes the cult to be received negatively by the general population, cults will utilize a multitude of strategies to suppress it, including but not limited to discrediting the source of the information, sometimes to the point of directly targeting individuals who have publicized it, and delegitimizing the information itself (Lonelodge, 2022). Through the rhetoric that cults use to describe and counter the opposition, they establish both moral and factual objection to critical viewpoints.

Positive Self-Presentation

The final category of cult rhetoric usage is positive self-presentation, which revolves around creating a strong foundation of information that portrays the cult as ideologically correct, and repeating and sharing that information consistently to establish long-lasting positive images. Cults will first create a large body of media exhibiting their ideologies, referred to as “Groundwork” in one study focused on the Church of Scientology (Lonelodge, 2022). This pro-cult information is emphasised, richly lexicated, and uses strong, emotional language (Palayon et al., 2022). This is called loaded language, and the emotional charge associated with it can be used to manipulate those on its receiving end (Montell, 2025). Cults might also present their leaders and ideals with strong metaphorical and religious undertones or direct allusions as a form of loaded language (Erikson, 2019; Montell, 2025; Postoutenko, 2022; Sundahl, 2022). Once the foundation of pro-cult rhetoric is established, it is repeated consistently and spread widely, so members of the cult are constantly being exposed to this body of information (Hassan, 2020). Also spread widely is a series of catchphrases and cliches created to shut down opposing arguments and eliminate cognitive dissonance, called thought-terminating cliches (Montell, 2025). By creating a large body of information positively presenting specific ideologies, often with emphasized and detailed language, and then spreading and repeating this information — leaving no room for criticisms or oppositional thinking — cults manufacture a rhetorical situation in which they are always right.

Trump

Throughout both of Donald Trump’s presidential terms, there has been criticism and debate regarding his actions and rhetoric, including speculations on him and his supporters exhibiting signs of being a cult. For example, the number of New York Times articles containing the terms “cults,” “personality cults,” and/or mention both Trump and cults in the same paragraph have increased significantly since Trump announced his candidacy in June 2015 (Goldsmith, 2024). Academically, researchers are debating whether Trump and his followers classify as a cult. For instance, while one journalist created a model to identify cults of personality, concluding that Trump and his supporters fit the criteria for this model (Sundahl, 2022), another argues that Trump’s voters support of his actions of their own accord instead of being

manipulated or coerced, and therefore do not fit criteria of a cult (Crockford, 2023). The preceding information and academic discourse sets precedent for further research on a potential connection between Trump and cult behavior and/or rhetoric.

Intersection of Cult and Political Rhetoric

Throughout United States political history, the types of rhetoric used, particularly revolving around individual candidates, have shifted. Personality and charisma have become key factors in presidential terms and campaigns as well as emphasizing the influence and power of an individual leader — largely because of precedent set by Franklin Roosevelt (Milkis, 2023). Researcher Kata Vadai developed a model to analyze these new political tactics, particularly in verbal and written communication, called the Power, Ideology, and Manipulation Identification Model, or PIMI Model. There is consistent overlap between political tactics identified in the PIMI Model and tactics discussed previously regarding cult rhetoric, most notably use of us vs them language, delegitimization of information that does not align with a particular viewpoint, and positive self-presentation (Vadai, 2016). As United States political rhetoric has shifted to intersect with similar cult rhetorical strategies, a connection can logically be established between the two that justifies the need for further research.

Social Media Usage

In the digital age, a multitude of groups, including both cults and political groups/figures, have used social media to promote themselves and their ideals to millions of followers. Many different cults and cultic fandoms use social media to promote extremism (Artus, 2026; Newcombe et al., 2023). Social media can be an ideal place for cults and cult-associated language to congregate, as the nature of social media algorithms is often to exclusively show the content and rhetoric that a viewer agrees and interacts with (Montell, 2025). Global political figures also communicate through social media, including Twitter, a popular text-based social media platform (Aharony, 2012). Donald Trump is known to extensively use social media platforms to communicate with the American people, specifically favoring Truth Social, a text-based platform similar to Twitter that his personal company owns (Burga, 2025; Gabbatt, 2025). There has been previous analysis regarding Donald Trump's use of Twitter in his first term of presidency (Flores, 2018), but never from the perspective of cult linguistics or analyzing the content of his posts on Truth Social. Therefore, there is precedent for both cult and political rhetoric being used and academically analyzed online.

Synthesis

Though the independent variables of cult rhetoric, political rhetoric, social media, and Donald Trump have all been discussed separately, and occasionally with one or two of these variables being analyzed together (Aharony, 2012; Artus, 2026; Burga, 2025; Crockford, 2023; Franks, 2021; Gabbatt, 2025;

Hassan, 2020; Hassan, 2019; Montell, 2025; Newcombe, 2023; Sundahl, 2022; Vadai, 2016), there is no current research combining all of these variables. Furthermore, there has been previous analysis of Trump's social media (Flores, 2018), but never studied from the perspective of cult rhetoric and manipulation, and there is little to no data analyzing his social media at all during his second term of presidency. Therefore, there is a clear gap in the literature regarding the potential similarities between the rhetorical strategies of Trump's social media and cult rhetoric, which leads to the question — is there evidence of rhetoric and linguistics reflective of common cult rhetorical strategies present in Donald Trump's social media posting, specifically on Truth Social in 2025?

METHOD

This study used qualitative content analysis in order to determine whether Donald Trump's Truth Social posts share rhetorical and linguistic strategies commonly used by cults. Content analysis allows for direct study of the data to identify communicative patterns and the presence, absence, and/or frequency of certain concepts (Content Analysis Method and Examples | Columbia Public Health, 2026). In this case, content analysis will be used to analyze Trump's Truth Social posts for cult rhetoric, therefore making it the most viable method for this study. This content analysis was approached qualitatively, rather than quantitatively. Qualitative content analysis involves analyzing data for frequency of complex themes and rhetorical devices, and is highly dependent on the context surrounding them. In contrast, quantitative analysis would not have been optimal for this study as it focuses merely on counting frequency of fixed words or phrases (Ho & Limpaecher, 2024; Kleinheksel et al., 2020).

Specifically, this qualitative content analysis was conceptual, rather than relational. Conceptual content analysis involves analyzing data for presence and/or frequency of pre-determined concepts, while a relational content analysis involves analyzing for relationships between concepts. A conceptual content analysis was determined to be best because this study analyzed the data for pre-determined concepts and theories. Conceptual content analysis is also proven to be optimal for preventing political bias (Content Analysis Method and Examples | Columbia Public Health, 2026; Ho & Limpaecher, 2023).

Conceptual content analysis involves deductive coding. Deductive coding begins with predetermined codes that will be specifically analyzed for in the data, rather than creating codes based on what was found in the data, as is done in inductive coding (Ho & Limpaecher, 2024). This was best for the research as cult rhetoric had already been determined and quantified by previous literature, and the study's purpose was to analyze whether or not it existed in the data.

Ethics

This study was exempt from requiring full IRB approval, as all data was pre-existing and derived from publicly available Truth Social posts, but was still reviewed for ethics and approved (see Appendix A).

Specific definitions of codes were kept and referred back to often to prevent interpretive bias. Algorithmic bias was prevented through use of strict, fixed criteria for all posts chosen to be analyzed.

Design Criteria

Though previous analyses of Donald Trump's social media have largely focused on his Twitter account (Flores, 2018), this research project collected data from Truth Social in order to provide a more accurate view of Donald Trump's posting habits and communication; Trump posts more frequently on Truth Social, posting 327 times in December 2025 compared to 4 Twitter posts in the same time period. Criteria was formed in order to choose which specific posts to analyze for the research project. The posts collected for data must be the most-liked, original, fully text-based (meaning no reposts, images, videos, news links, or otherwise quoting others) Truth Social posts, as text-based posts most closely resemble Trump's own words.

These posts must be from the 7th and the 21st of each month in 2025. Specific dates were chosen randomly to prevent bias. All posts are from the year 2025, as it was both the first year of Trump's second presidential term and the most recent full calendar year, and no data regarding Trump's social media in this recent timeframe had been analyzed by previous researchers. Two dates per month were used to provide equal timeline representation throughout the entire year so that the data was undisturbed by any particular political events, holidays, etc. that might result in different posting patterns or communication styles. Trump generally posted multiple times a day, so the most-liked post from each relevant date was used as a consistent and unbiased method of choosing which post from each day to analyze. This resulted in 24 total posts — the most liked Truth Social text post from January 7th, 2025, January 21st, 2025, February 7th, 2025, etc. If a text-based post was not available on the date listed, the most-liked post from the 8th, rather than the 7th, and/or the 22nd, rather than the 21st, were used.

Data Collection Procedure

Both Trump's Truth, a searchable public archive of Donald Trump's Truth Social posts, and Truth Social were utilized to collect the data. Truth Social lacks advanced search functions, so the search function of Trump's Truth was used to search for the data posted on the relevant dates (the 7th and the 21st of each month). All text-based posts from these days were copied and pasted, and compiled onto one document (see Appendix B). The most-liked post from each relevant date was found using Truth Social, as Trump's Truth does not have a function that displays like count while Truth Social does. The posts fitting the criteria were highlighted in yellow on the original document and then transferred into a separate document, becoming the collection of official data to be analyzed (see Appendix C).

Coding

A short word or phrase was created to represent each individual rhetorical strategy defined in the Literature Review under the three pre-established categories: Group Identification, Negating the

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Opposition, and Positive Self-Presentation. These strategies became the codes for the content analysis, listed in the following tables.

Table 1: Group Identification

Code:	Description:
Identification and Separation	Identifying and separating members from non-members and/or intentionally separating members from larger society
Conditional rhetoric	Positive rhetoric for those in line with group beliefs contrasted with negative rhetoric for those who are not in line with group beliefs
Collective pronoun usage	Using plural pronouns when describing a goal, an action, or a belief to emphasize collective action and/or values
Positive collective emphasis	Positive rhetoric associated with the collective good of a group rather than the good of the individual
Us vs them	Rhetorically placing the speaker or group on one side of an argument/divide and the opposition on another side, forcing an individual to choose between the two.
Specialized Jargon	Creating new words and acronyms or changing the definitions of common words and acronyms for usage by those in a group.
New Names	An alternate name or nickname given to those in or outside a given group.

Table 2: Negating the Opposition

Code:	Description:
Moral Refutation	Presenting those outside a group or opposing a group as morally wrong or irrelevant, fearmongering
Factual Refutation	Presenting alternative opinions as factually wrong

	or irrelevant
Discrediting Negatives	Presenting a source of negative information as not credible

Table 3: Positive Self-Presentation

Code:	Description:
Groundwork	Large bodies of media exhibiting ideologies supporting a group
Thought-Terminating Cliches	Series of catchphrases and cliches created to shut down opposing arguments and eliminate cognitive dissonance
Metaphorical Allusions/Undertones	Leaders and ideals presented with strong metaphorical undertones or direct allusions
Religious Allusions/Undertones	Leaders and ideals presented with strong metaphorical undertones or direct allusions
Loaded Language	Emphasized, richly lexicated, and emotional language
Repetition	Messaging and media repeated consistently and spread widely

This study had 16 total codes. In order to avoid potential bias, political or otherwise, the posting data could not influence or change the codes, which were derived from previous literature. Google Spreadsheet was used to organize these codes. Each individual post (24 in total) was represented in the vertical far-left column, with the posts descending in the column chronologically (from January- December). Each vertical column afterwards contained a different code, appearing as listed in the tables above, and each code represented a different cult rhetorical strategy. The red, yellow, and blue colors in the vertical columns signified the broader categories that each code belonged to: Group Identification (red), Negating the Opposition (yellow), and Positive Self-Presentation (blue). These colors were chosen randomly for organizational purposes. For ease of coding, the document containing all of the posts was printed out and manually read through, with instances of cult rhetoric highlighted under each categories' color for ease of identification (see Appendix D). This process was completed twice to validate the credibility of the coding. Each time a code appeared, it was marked numerically in the appropriate column on the Google Spreadsheet. For example, if "conditional rhetoric" appeared 2 times in the post for January 7th, 2025, then a "2" would be put in that column, and it would count as two instances of cult rhetoric (see Appendix E).

A primary factor to consider when conducting a content analysis is presence and/or frequency. This study primarily sought to determine the presence of cult rhetoric, but if presence was established, meaning that if a single post contained any instance of cult rhetoric, then all data would be switched to being coded for frequency in order to provide a more in-depth analysis.

RESULTS OF CONTENT ANALYSIS

Twenty-four total posts, two from each month, were coded and analyzed for this study. Table 4 represents the amount of times any code, each code representing a cult rhetorical strategy, was present in each post. This table was used to determine presence, which is defined as a single post with an instance of cult rhetoric.

Table 4: Instances Per Post: Presence

Date	Total Instances
1/8/25	4
1/21/25	7
2/7/25	7
2/21/25	11
3/7/25	1
3/21/25	3
4/7/25	9
4/21/25	1
5/7/25	22
5/21/25	0
6/7/25	5
6/21/25	4
7/7/25	13
7/21/25	2
8/7/25	1

8/21/25	6
9/7/25	2
9/22/25	9
10/7/25	1
10/21/25	10
11/7/25	6
11/21/25	7
12/7/25	21
12/21/25	8

At least one instance of cult rhetorical strategies was found in each post except on May 21, 2025. This resulted in 23 out of 24 posts containing cult rhetoric, or 95.83% of posts. In total, 160 instances were identified in the 24 posts, with a mean of 7 instances per post (rounded to the nearest whole number, as in this case having a fraction of a rhetorical strategy is not possible). This meets and exceeds the requirement for establishing presence.

After presence was established, all data was coded for frequency. Tables 5, 6, and 7 display the findings for how many times each rhetorical strategy was used across all posts. It details both the number of separate posts that a rhetorical strategy was found in, and the total instances that the strategy was used. It was important to make a distinction between the number of separate posts and the total number of instances because often a rhetorical strategy was used multiple times in the same post.

Table 5: Group Identification: Frequency

Code	Number of Separate Posts	Total Instances
Identification and Separation	3	3
Conditional rhetoric	17	31
Collective pronoun usage	10	23
Positive collective emphasis	4	4
Us vs them	5	5
Specialized jargon	5	6

New names	4	4
Total Group Identification	N/A	76

Table 6: Negating the Opposition: Frequency

Code	Number of Separate Posts	Total Instances
Moral Refutation	12	23
Factual Refutation	7	11
Discrediting Negatives	2	4
Total Negating the Opposition	N/A	38

Table 7: Positive Self-Presentation: Frequency

Code	Number of Separate Posts	Total Instances
Groundwork	8	11
Thought-Terminating Cliches	5	7
Metaphorical Allusions/Undertones	1	1
Religious Allusions/Undertones	1	1
Loaded Language	10	22
Repetition	4	4
Total Positive Self-Presentation		46

While Group Identification initially appears to be the category with the most instances, it also has the largest amount of codes, resulting in more data overall. Therefore, in order to compare the data most accurately, the mean number of instances for each category was calculated by dividing the total instances by the number of codes used. Table 8 displays the mean for each category, rounded to the nearest whole number (as justified previously).

Table 8: Mean instances for each category

Group Identification	11 instances per code
Negating the Opposition	13 instances per code
Positive Self-Presentation	8 instances per code

Without taking categories into account, all codes had a mean of 10 instances per code, meaning that every code was used an average of 10 times. In regards to the number of separate posts, each code was found to have a mean of 6, meaning that every code was found in an average of 6 separate posts.

DISCUSSION

Identifying Presence

The data overwhelmingly suggested the presence of cult rhetorical strategies in these specific Truth Social posts. As previously mentioned, 23 out of the 24 posts contained an instance of a cult rhetorical strategy, while the minimum requirement for presence was 1 out of 24 posts.

There was no correlation found between the date of a post and the amount of codes identified in it — in this data set, cult rhetoric usage is spread throughout the year, rather than concentrated in a single time period.

Identifying Frequency

After presence was established, all data was coded for frequency. This allowed for a more nuanced analysis of what rhetorical strategies were being used and when.

Every code was identified in the data at least once. The tables below display the codes with the top three highest and lowest frequencies.

Table 9: Codes With Highest Frequencies

Codes	Highest Frequencies
Conditional Rhetoric	31 instances
Collective Pronoun Usage Moral Refutation	23 instances
Loaded Language	22 instances

Table 10: Codes With Lowest Frequencies

Codes	Lowest Frequencies
Religious Allusions/Undertones Metaphorical Allusions/Undertones	1 instance
Identification and Separation	3 instances
Positive Collective Emphasis Repetition Discrediting Negatives New Names	4 instances

These rhetorical devices lack a common theme or group tying them together, as both the most-used and least-used codes represent all three overarching categories of analysis. When comparing the mean of instances in each category, Negating the Opposition had the highest number of instances per category, but by a small margin, with a range of 5 between the highest and lowest number of instances. Specific categories of cult rhetoric, therefore, are seemingly not more significantly prevalent than others. Instead, these findings led to the conclusion that the most frequently used codes were those that were able to be generalized. For example, while the definition of conditional rhetoric is more broad and can be applied in multiple situations, a code like religious undertones has a narrower definition that isn't as widely applicable. This would explain why conditional rhetoric is used more frequently than religious undertones in the data.

Supporting this conclusion is the data regarding the number of separate posts each code was found in. The tables below display the codes that were identified in the highest and lowest number of separate posts.

Table 11: Highest Number of Separate Posts

Codes	Highest Number of Separate Posts
Conditional Rhetoric	17 separate posts
Moral Refutation	12 separate posts
Loaded Language Collective Pronoun Usage	10 separate posts

Table 12: Lowest Number of Separate Posts

Codes	Lowest Number of Separate Posts
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Metaphorical Allusions/Undertones Religious Allusions/Undertones	1 post
Discrediting Negatives	2 separate posts
Identification and Separation	3 separate posts

The codes found in the highest and lowest number of separate posts correlate with the highest and lowest frequency codes discussed previously. The high frequency codes were also the codes used in the highest number of separate posts, and vice versa. Thus, this data further indicates a probable connection between the amount of times a rhetorical strategy is used and its applicability to multiple situations/posts.

CONCLUSIONS

Donald Trump, Cult Rhetoric, and Social Media have all been analyzed separately, or with relation to one other variable. Cult rhetoric has been previously defined by researchers analyzing the vernacular of cult leaders and manipulative language in general (Erikson, 2019; Flores, 2018; Hassan, 2020; Lonelodge, 2022; Montell, 2025; Postoutenko, 2022; Sundahl, 2022; Vadai, 2016). The relationship between cults and the age of social media is an emerging topic, with general academic consensus that social media has increased the amount of cults/cult activity (Artus, 2026; Montell, 2025; Newcombe et al., 2023). Finally, Donald Trump's connections to both cults (Franks, 2021; Goldsmith, 2024; Hassan, 2019; Sundahl, 2022; Tharoor, 2022) and social media (Burga, 2025; Flores, 2018; Gabbatt, 2025) have also been discussed in various academic studies and articles. These sources were all formerly explored in the literature review.

However, there have been no previous academic studies connecting all three of these variables — that is, there were no studies looking at Donald Trump's social media posts from the perspective of cult rhetoric. There were also no academic studies analyzing Trump's Truth Social data or any social media data from 2025. The clear gap in the scholarly conversation led to the following research question: is there evidence of rhetoric and linguistics reflective of common cult rhetorical strategies present in Donald Trump's social media posting, specifically on Truth Social in 2025?

Considering the data establishing presence and the more detailed analysis regarding frequency, it can be concluded that cult rhetorical strategies are present in Donald Trump's 2025 Truth Social posts. All strategies were used at least once, and most were used several times. The strategies used most frequently tended to be more generalizable to a multitude of circumstances, while the strategies used less frequently tended to be more specific and context-dependent. This data directly answered this research question, forming a new understanding regarding the presence of cult rhetoric in Trump's social media communications.

Limitations

Though every effort has been made to ensure this project is academically and ethically sound, there are some potential sources of error to be recognized. The first is sample size. This study used 24 posts, which is a very small fraction of the total number of Trump's posts in 2025. To mitigate this error, 2 posts from each month of 2025 were used in an attempt to provide a sufficient distribution of data across a longer timeframe. Regardless, the criteria for gathering data was narrow, and a larger sample size with less criteria would provide more data and potentially impact general trends and findings. Another potential limitation was human error regarding reliability of coding. Though a coding sheet with very strict definitions was kept and referenced back to repeatedly, and data was coded twice to ensure consistency, subconscious personal bias may have altered the results of the coding. The nature of the research project as an individual assignment eliminated the possibility of using multiple coders to prevent this bias. Finally, for the purposes of this study, it was assumed that the "normal" amount of instances of cult rhetoric in a post would be zero, and any amount above zero would be significant enough to warrant analysis. However, there is a lack of previous research regarding the amount of cult rhetoric in an average person's vernacular — meaning, there is an unexplored possibility that everyone could be using a certain amount of cult rhetoric. Furthermore, there is a lack of research regarding the amount of cult rhetoric used in political speech specifically, and how that compares to the amount used by a citizen. This study would be more impactful if there was an amount of cult rhetoric deemed "typical" or "average" in both an individual's and a politician's vernacular. Particularly, comparing the amount of cult rhetoric used in political speech to the amount of cult rhetoric used by Trump specifically would be a more direct and fair comparison than comparing Trump's rhetoric to that of the average citizen. This data could then determine whether the amount of cult rhetoric used by Trump is regular or irregular when compared to these averages.

Implications and Future Research

As this study is a qualitative analysis, these results are not able to be generalized, as they apply specifically to the set of posts sampled. However, the research still has significance for future research and consideration. This study determined that a certain sample of posts contains instances of cult rhetoric, opening a field of inquiry as to where else this rhetoric might be used, and to what degree. First, this study should be compared to a study with a larger sample size to determine whether the data results and analysis of this study are more widely applicable. Additionally as discussed previously, inquiry into the "typical" or "standard" amount of cult rhetoric in both an average citizen's vernacular and in political speech is needed to produce more accurate and impactful data results. Furthermore, this content analysis was analyzed conceptually, and looked solely at the presence and frequency of variables. Future research could focus on relational analysis and consider connections between different types of cult rhetoric used and how they interact with one another to provide a more detailed analysis.

Along with this analysis, results of this study could be compared to results of other content analysis with different variables to develop a deeper understanding of usage of cult rhetoric, particularly in political

situations. Examples include a comparison of amounts of cult rhetoric used by Donald Trump throughout his years as a political figure, a comparison of Donald Trump's rhetoric from social media to in-person speeches and communications, or a comparison to a different politician's social media rhetoric. In an age where politicians are able to utilize social media platforms to reach millions, it is important to develop an understanding of the rhetorical strategies that could be used to potentially manipulate the opinions and emotions of a large number of citizens.

While the data supports the hypothesis that cult rhetoric is present in Trump's 2025 Truth Social posts, it must be emphasized for ethical purposes that this data alone does not support claims that Trump is a "cult leader," that he used cult rhetoric purposefully, or that his supporters are part of a cult. While other academic sources (Crockford, 2023; Franks, 2021; Goldsmith, 2024; Hassan, 2019; Tharoor, 2022) have discussed the validity of this claim, this study is not one of them. Applying the specific findings of this research project to such a broad claim would not be accurate or ethical. As with all research, the results of this study and any further research must be handled in an unbiased, nuanced, and considerate manner.

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APPENDIX A

The following appendix contains the full IRB Exemption Notice for this study.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Approval Notice- Exemption
Date: December 15, 2025 [REDACTED]

TO: Cadence Sharpe
RE: IRB EXEMPTION APPLICATION SECTION 1 & 2

Your **Exemption Application** was reviewed and approved by the Oswego High School Institutional Review Board on December 15, 2025. Please note the following information about your exempt research proposal:

Exemption Approval Period: Spring 2026 Semester

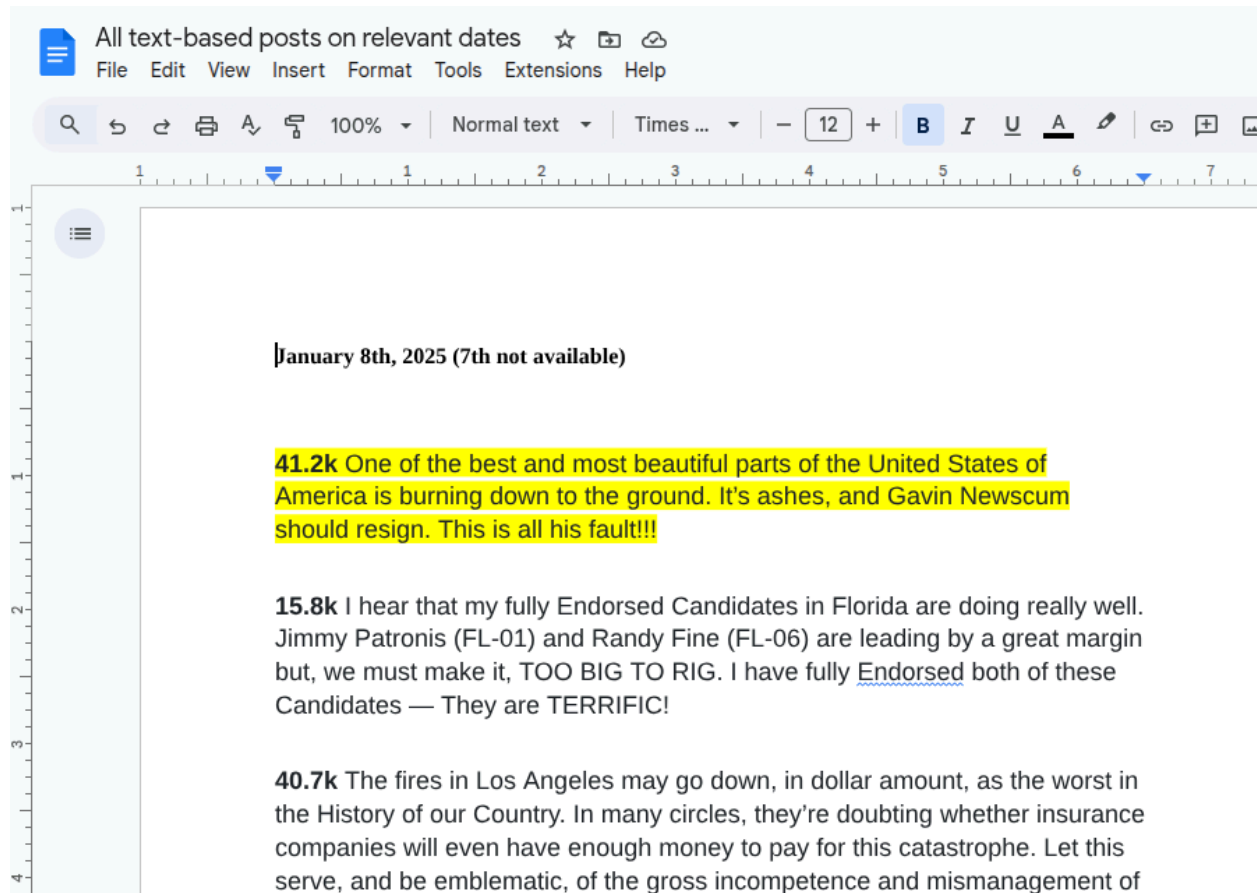
Please note that the IRB has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

If applicable: This notice includes a date-stamped copy of the approved consent form for your use. OHS IRB policy requires that informed consent documents given to subjects participating in non-exempt research bear the approval stamp of the OHS IRB. This stamped document is the only consent form that may be photocopied for distribution to study participants (unless electronic version is being used).

It is important for you to note that as a research investigator involved with human subjects, you are responsible for ensuring that this project has current IRB approval at all times, and for retaining the signed consent form obtained from your subjects for a minimum of three years after the study is concluded. If consent for the study is being given by proxy (guardian, etc.), it is your responsibility to document the authority of that person to consent for the subject. Also, the committee recommends that you include an acknowledgement by the subject, or the subject's representative, that he or she has received a copy of the consent form. In addition, you are required to promptly report to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated problems or risks to subjects and others. The IRB extends best wishes for success in your research endeavors!

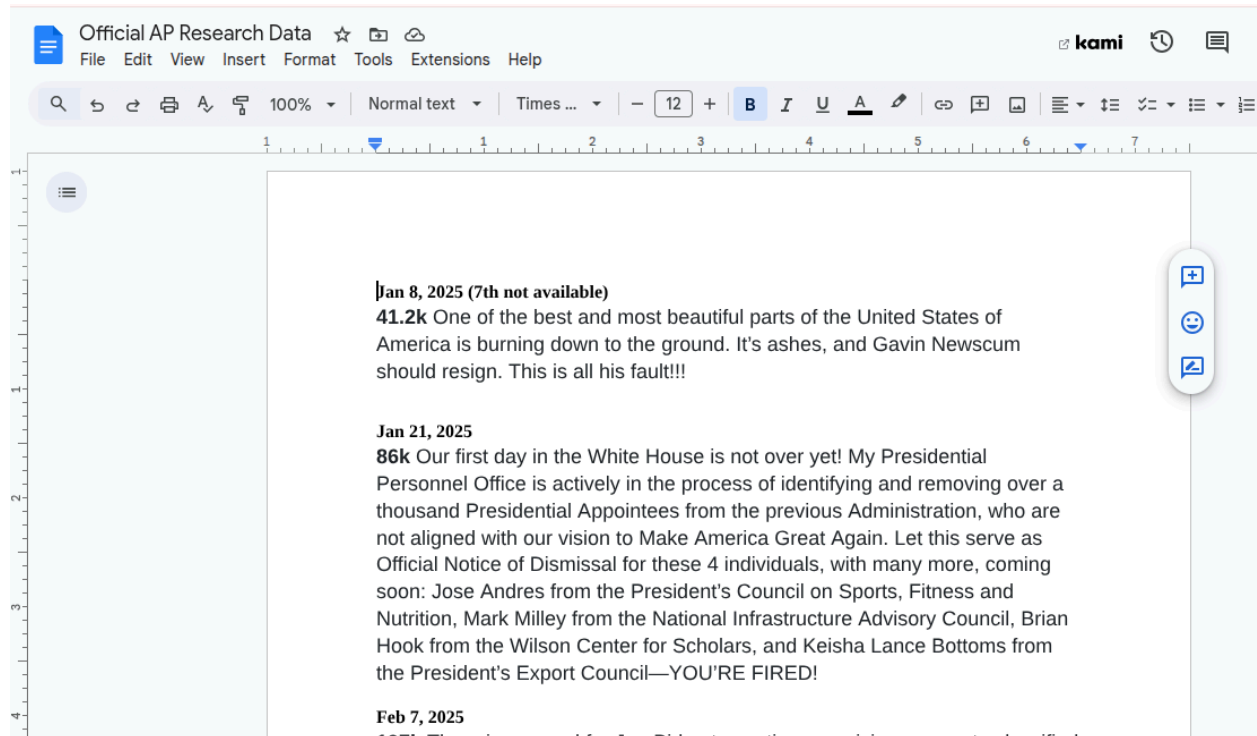
APPENDIX B

The following appendix contains a screenshot of the document containing all posts found on relevant dates, along with their like counts. The most-liked posts were highlighted in yellow to be transferred onto another document.



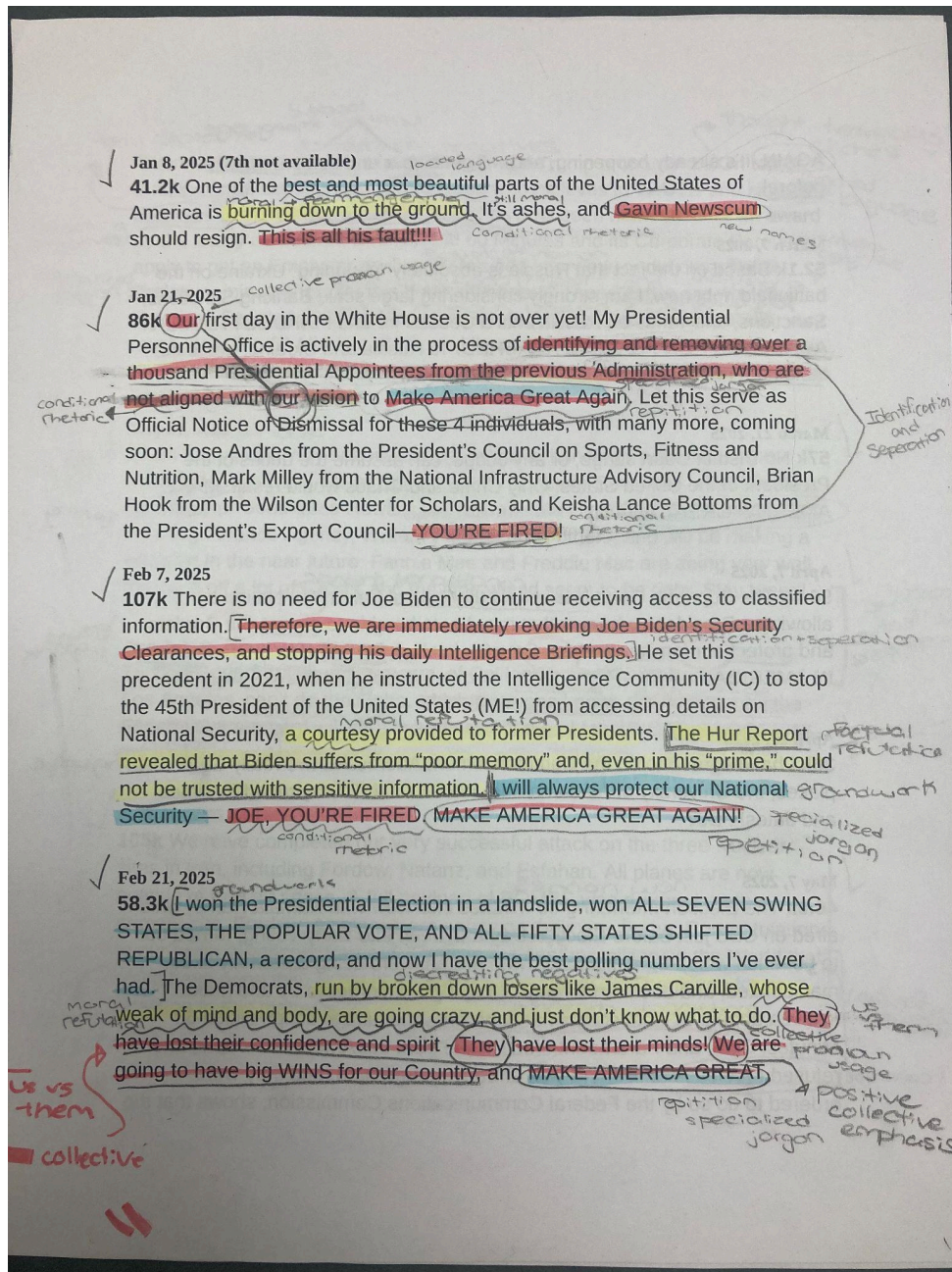
APPENDIX C

The following appendix contains a screenshot of the document containing the data that meets all analysis criteria.



APPENDIX D

The following appendix includes a photo example of the physically printed and fully coded data.



APPENDIX E

The following appendix contains a screenshot example of the coded data inputted into the Google Spreadsheet.

The screenshot shows a Google Spreadsheet titled "Instrument Design" with a menu bar (File, Edit, View, Insert, Format, Data, Tools, Extensions, Help) and a toolbar with various icons. The spreadsheet is displayed in a grid with columns A through G. A table is embedded in the spreadsheet, with the first row serving as the header. The data rows contain dates, post excerpts, and numerical codes for different rhetorical categories.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Date	Post	Identification and Separation	Conditional rhetoric	Collective pronoun usage	Positive collective emphasis	Us vs them
2	1/8/2025	One of the best and i		0	1	0	0
3	1/21/2025	Our first day in the W		1	2	2	0
4	2/7/2025	There is no need for		1	1	0	0
5	2/21/2025	I won the Presidentia		0	0	3	1
6	3/7/2025	Based on the fact the		0	1	0	0
7	3/21/2025	No District Court Jud		0	0	0	0
8	4/7/2025	The Supreme Court I		0	1	4	1
9	4/21/2025	I have agreed to do t		0	0	0	0
10	5/7/2025	The Election Interferi		0	4	2	0
11	5/21/2025	I am giving very seric		0	0	0	0
12	6/7/2025	If Governor Gavin Ne		0	1	1	0