

Article

“Believe Me”: Authenticity, Federal Social Media Use, and the Problematized Record in the American Digital Public Sphere

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses current issues in authenticating and managing digital-born social media records, with reference to the Twitter output of the sitting President of the United States, Donald J. Trump, and members of his Administration. Focusing on Trump’s considerable corpus of tweets created after his inauguration on January 20, 2017, it employs scholarship from archival studies, legal studies, and communication and media studies to explore conjunctive questions of authenticity and its components of identity and integrity in social media records, as well as those records’ roles as archivable objects, legal evidence, and expressions of American information culture within the digital public sphere. Due to the perpetually changing nature of the subject, this article highlights complexities of and raises questions about governmental creation and management of problematized social media records in the United States more than answers them, with the hope that it can act as a springboard for further research. Ultimately, it aims to lead toward a praxis of information management in the United States that eventually rebuilds public trust in governmental institutions and practices, and most importantly, strengthens the transparency and accountability of political leadership on the federal, state, and local levels.

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In May of 2017, Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller III was appointed by then Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein to investigate alleged Russian efforts to interfere with the 2016 presidential election between Republican candidate Donald Trump and Democratic contender Hillary Clinton, as well as possible connections between foreign operatives and Trump's successful campaign. Mueller subsequently charged former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn in December with lying to the FBI during an interview Flynn had with the agency on January 24, 2017, shortly after Trump and his Administration were sworn into office. Flynn had been forced to resign from his Cabinet position after less than a month in mid-February, once it was revealed that he had misled Vice President Mike Pence regarding conversations Flynn held in December 2016 with former Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak.¹ Flynn quickly pled guilty to Mueller's charges and agreed to cooperate with the colloquially-named "Russia investigation," to the president's chagrin.² Embattled politically and presumably irate that Mueller had arrested yet another close associate – Trump's former campaign manager, Paul Manafort, was charged on October 30, 2017 with conspiracy against the United States, among other crimes³ – the president took to Twitter, his social media platform of choice, and declared,

¹ Specifically, Flynn supposedly promised Kislyak that then president-elect Trump would ease punitive economic sanctions imposed on Russia by the Obama Administration after Russia's military intervention in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea. Jeremy Herb, Katelyn Polantz, Evan Perez and Marshall Cohen, "Flynn Pleads Guilty to Lying to FBI, Is Cooperating with Mueller," *CNN*, December 1, 2017, <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/12/01/politics/michael-flynn-charged/index.html>; "Trump-Russia: Michael Flynn admits lying to FBI," *BBC*, December 1, 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-42192080>; US Department of State, "Ukraine and Russia Sanctions," <https://www.state.gov/e/eb/tfs/spi/ukrainerussia>. Further sanctions were put into place by the Obama Administration once the U.S. Intelligence Community concluded in late 2016 that Russian operatives had likely manipulated the presidential contest. David E. Sanger, "Obama Strikes Back at Russia for Election Hacking," *The New York Times*, December 29, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/29/us/politics/russia-election-hacking-sanctions.html> (accessed December 7, 2017). Flynn has since provided the Special Counsel with "substantial assistance," according to a sentencing memo filed by Mueller on December 4, 2018. Dan Mangan and Kevin Breuninger, "Mueller Says Michael Flynn Gave 'Firsthand' Details of Trump Transition Team Contacts with Russians," *CNBC*, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/12/04/robert-mueller-sentencing-memo-for-former-trump-advisor-michael-flynn.html> (accessed December 8, 2018).

² Herb et. al., "Flynn Pleads Guilty to Lying to FBI."

³ Andrew Buncome, "Trump-Russia investigation: President's Former Campaign Manager Paul Manafort Charged with Conspiracy Against the US," *Independent*, October 30, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/trump-russia-investigation-latest-add-name-charged-conspiracy-us-former-campaign-manager-robert-a8027401.html>, (accessed December 7, 2017).

I had to fire General Flynn because he lied to the Vice President and the FBI. He has pled guilty to those lies. It is a shame because his actions during the transition were lawful. There was nothing to hide!⁴

Problematically for Trump, however, no one thus far has known whether the president or other Administration officials were aware that Flynn misled the FBI at the time of his January interview – a key detail since Trump allegedly urged recent FBI director James Comey to “let go” of the investigation into Flynn, before firing Comey in May 2017.⁵ If Trump’s tweet regarding Flynn is reliable, investigators could argue he had prior knowledge of Flynn’s fallacious testimony before pressuring and then firing Comey during an ongoing federal investigation. As many professional and armchair analysts alike pointed out via Twitter, this would constitute obstruction of justice, an impeachable offense. Though potentially self-incriminating, it was not the first time that Trump or one of his associates has issued tweets into the digital sphere that might be deemed possible evidence against them: Trump’s son Donald Trump, Jr. tweeted a chain of emails related to meeting with a Russian lawyer about political opposition research on Hillary Clinton in June 2016, as well as private messages with a representative of WikiLeaks, who offered further information on Clinton in September 2016.⁶ Mueller’s investigation reportedly began examining Trump’s tweetstorms and similar social media records as of July 2018 “under a wide-ranging obstruction-of-justice law,” according to the *New York Times*, possibly including posts Trump wrote attacking Comey when the latter was due to testify before the Senate Intelligence Committee in June 2017. These tweets could constitute evidence of witness tampering – another impeachable offense of which Richard Nixon

⁴ Donald Trump, December 2, 2017, 9:14 a.m., Twitter, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/937007006526959618> (accessed December 7, 2017).

⁵ “Full Transcript and Video: James Comey’s Testimony on Capitol Hill,” *The New York Times*, 8 June 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/08/us/politics/senate-hearing-transcript.html> (accessed December 7, 2017). The official reason for Comey’s firing was his mishandling of a prior 2016 investigation into former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s purged email servers, a case that did not result in formal charges.

⁶ Donald Trump, Jr., July 11, 2017, 8:00 a.m., <https://twitter.com/DonaldJTrumpJr/status/884789418455953413> (accessed November 13, 2017); Donald Trump, Jr., November 13, 2017, 4:17 p.m., <https://twitter.com/DonaldJTrumpJr/status/930228239494209536>, (accessed November 13, 2017); Julia Ioffe, “The Secret Correspondence Between Donald Trump Jr. and WikiLeaks,” *The Atlantic*, November 13, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/11/the-secret-correspondence-between-donald-trump-jr-and-wikileaks/545738> (accessed December 7, 2017).

and Bill Clinton were both accused – particularly when viewed within the context of Trump’s verbal public statements and ever-growing Twitter oeuvre.⁷

As the chaotic first two years of the Trump Administration have unfolded, the president’s near-daily communications with the public at large have become a fraught facet of American life, and already are the focus of some record-keepers’ concerns about both the necessity and logistics of preserving Trump’s and his subordinates’ social media posts for posterity. Neglecting the official White House Twitter handle @POTUS – established by Barack Obama in 2015⁸ – in favor of his personal Twitter handle @realDonaldTrump, Trump has posted approximately 40,500 tweets and accumulated more than 58 million Twitter followers since beginning the account in 2009, when Trump hosted the NBC reality series *The Apprentice*.⁹ Trump has frequently reiterated that Twitter is an ideal way to circumvent “fake news” outlets, including the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and cable news networks like CNN, and relay information directly to constituents, as part of a concerted effort to cultivate a sense of accessibility and personal authenticity online.¹⁰ Yet, despite Trump’s projected trustworthiness, and Twitter’s

⁷ Donald J. Trump, May 12, 2017, 5:12 a.m., <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/863007411132649473>; Mallory Shelbourne, “Obama WH Ethics Lawyer: Lack of Comey Tapes Example of ‘Witness Intimidation’,” *The Hill*, June 22, 2017, <http://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/339016-obama-wh-ethics-lawyer-lack-of-comey-tapes-example-of-witness>, accessed December 7, 2017; Michael S. Schmidt and Maggie Haberman, “Mueller Examining Trump’s Tweets in Wide-Ranging Obstruction Inquiry,” *The New York Times*, July 26, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/26/us/politics/trump-tweets-mueller-obstruction.html> (accessed July 30, 2018).

⁸ Alina Selyukh, “On the Day of White House Transitions, Twitter Shifts @POTUS To Donald Trump,” *NPR*, January 20, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2017/01/20/510784802/on-the-day-of-white-house-transitions-twitter-shifts-potus-to-donald-trump> (accessed December 7, 2017). For more on social media use during the Obama Administration, see Ines Mergel, “Social Media Adoption and Resulting Tactics in the U.S. Federal Government.” *Government Information Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (April 2013): 123-130.

⁹ The number of tweets and followers, respectively, are accurate as of the time of this writing. “Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump.” <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump> (accessed February 3, 2019).

¹⁰ Donald J. Trump, December 13, 2017, 5:02 a.m., <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/940930017365778432> (accessed December 13, 2017). Note that the program *Fox and Friends* on the conservative Fox News Channel is specifically not construed by Trump as either “fake” or mainstream media. See also: Jessica Estepa, “Trump Has Tweeted 2,461 Times Since the Election. Here’s a Breakdown of His Twitter Use,” *USA Today*, November 7, 2017, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2017/11/07/trump-has-tweeted-2-461-times-since-election-heres-breakdown-his-twitter-use/822312001> (accessed December 7,

intriguing claims that records produced via the site are “self-authenticating,” the technical authenticity of Trump’s tweets – examined through the lens of the InterPARES I Authenticity Task Force’s diplomatic theoretical basis and resultant findings – can be questionable, an increasingly pertinent issue as situations like the Mueller investigation develop.¹¹ Social media posts have been utilized regularly in federal, state, and local legal cases since platforms like Facebook and Twitter were established, and also have comprised a significant portion of government-led investigations like Mueller’s for more than a decade. However, the evidentiary quality of some of Trump’s tweets is compromised by factors including unknown creators of retweeted posts, inaccurate content written and tweeted by the president, deteriorated or absent archival bonds with records that would help substantiate the president’s tweets,¹² and the instability of the Twitter platform itself, which allows users to delete tweets at will, simultaneously erasing the original post’s link from retweets if the reposter(s) did not add a comment.¹³ Particularly challenging for record-keepers is the significant number of Trump’s followers

2017); Gunn Enli, “Twitter as Arena for the Authentic Outsider: Exploring the Social Media Campaigns of Trump and Clinton in the 2016 US Presidential Election,” *European Journal of Communication* 32, no. 1 (February 2017): 51.

¹¹Twitter, Inc., “Guidelines for Law Enforcement,” Twitter.com, <https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/twitter-law-enforcement-support>. “Authenticity” and “authentic” in this article are defined per the parameters set by InterPARES I’s Authenticity Task Force Report, which in turn borrow from the Oxford English Dictionary and Merriam-Webster Online Collegiate Dictionary. “Authenticity” is “the quality of being authentic” and “entitled to acceptance” as such; it is comprised of a record’s integrity (wholeness and soundness) and identity (distinguishing characteristics), both of which can be “threatened whenever the records are transmitted across space...or time.” An “authentic” record “is, in fact, and continues to be, what it purports to be and has not been modified or corrupted in essential respects.” (“Authenticity Task Force Report,” pp. 2, 20, and “The InterPARES Glossary,” p. 1, from *The InterPARES Project Book*, Interpares.org).

¹²This article employs the definition of “archival bond” established by InterPARES in 2001: “The relationship that links each record, incrementally, to the previous and subsequent ones and to all those which participate in the same activity. It is originary (i.e., it comes into existence when a record is made or received and set aside), necessary (i.e., it exists for every record), and determined (i.e., it is characterized by the purpose of the record).” (“The InterPARES Glossary,” p. 1, from *The InterPARES Project Book*, Interpares.org.) One idiosyncratic characteristic of Trump’s tweets is that their contents at times have directly oppositional relationships. See for instance Darlene Superville, “He Said-He Said: 10 Times that Trump Has Contradicted Trump,” Associated Press, January 19, 2018, <https://www.apnews.com/495269c1760c4268b6fa3162dff1eb3> (accessed December 8, 2018).

¹³Twitter, Inc., “How to Delete a Tweet,” <https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/delete-tweets>.

that have been shown to be “bots” created by mostly foreign developers, designed to infiltrate and complicate the American digital public sphere. By compromising the role of at least one diplomatically-defined “creator” (author, writer, and markedly, addressee) of Trump-related tweets, the proliferation of bots in Trump’s online audience arguably undermines his political authenticity in tandem with the authenticity of the tweets he has periodically written in response.¹⁴ Additionally, the president habitually has retweeted multimedia files without essential context or – according to his press secretary, Sarah Huckabee Sanders – knowledge of the provenance of memes, videos, and GIFs.¹⁵ Even some of Trump’s more significant recent contributions to the Twittersphere are not always completely authentic per diplomatics: the tweet Trump sent after Flynn agreed to cooperate with Mueller’s investigation was orally composed by one of Trump’s attorneys, John Dowd, and posted to the @realDonaldTrump account by Trump’s social media director, Dan Scavino.¹⁶

These interwoven issues of identity, integrity, authenticity, and reliability pose significant challenges to record-keepers already tackling the voluminous output of a president who has effectively functioned as a powerful and unreliable narrator, choosing to express himself (and announce public policy changes) on a digital platform that has yet to perfect its internal attempts at records management. In the spirit of working toward long-term solutions to these issues, this article aims to locate useful nexuses between the theory and practice of managing social media records produced by government officials during the Trump Administration, which already have historical and/or legal significance,

¹⁴ Patricia Garcia, “Donald Trump’s Twitter Following Might Include More Than 4 Million Bots,” *Vogue*, August 7, 2017, <https://www.vogue.com/article/trump-twitter-bots-fake-accounts-nicole-mincey> (accessed September 30, 2017); “Authenticity Task Force Report,” p. 5.

¹⁵ As will be discussed further, Trump caused diplomatic tensions with the United Kingdom in November 2017 when he retweeted a series of anti-Muslim videos initially posted to Twitter by Jayda Fransen, the deputy leader of the extreme far right group Britain First. Once Trump was widely criticized for retweeting specious videos of alleged terrorist violence and publicly promoting far right positions, Trump’s press secretary, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, stated that Trump probably did not know who Fransen was and that, despite the inauthenticity of the videos, the president intended to “elevate the conversation to talk about a real issue and a real threat, and that’s extreme violence and extreme terrorism, something that we know to be very real.” David Smith, “Trump Retweeted Anti-Muslim Videos to ‘Elevate the Conversation’, White House Claims,” *The Guardian*, November 30, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/nov/30/trump-tweet-anti-muslim-far-right-white-house> (accessed December 7, 2017).

¹⁶ Kristen Welker and Max Burman, “Trump’s Lawyer Claims Responsibility for President’s Problematic Tweet,” *NBC News*, December 4, 2017, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/trump-s-lawyer-claims-responsibility-trump-s-problematic-tweet-n826036> (accessed December 7, 2017).

and which could form a sizeable collection within Trump's eventual presidential library.¹⁷ (The satirical American news program *The Daily Show* constructed a temporary "Donald J. Trump Presidential Twitter Library" in both New York and Chicago).¹⁸ Furthermore, it will attempt to outline the role of authenticity within America's complicated web of information cultures, and how the concept takes shape within private and public organizations and the public sphere, affecting the way records are perceived, used, and managed by both groups and individuals. Prioritizing authenticity within the interlocking information cultures found in the United States' governmental, entrepreneurial, and socio-political structures could improve management of digital records, even with missing elements usually relied upon for authentication. With America's divisive and rapidly shifting political life being played out on a globally-accessible social media platform, most dramatically through the president's own Twitter account, it is becoming increasingly necessary to establish methods of authenticating digital records that already have had

¹⁷ In a case currently pending appeal after District Court Judge Christopher Cooper ruled in favor of the Department of Justice, the watchdog group Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW), along with the National Security Archive, filed a suit in June 2017 claiming that Trump's Twitter activity is protected under the current Presidential Records Act, and that deleting tweets for any purpose should count as a violation. The lawsuit also points to the Trump Administration's use of encrypted messaging apps, which automatically delete messages, in further violation of the PRA. In response, the Justice Department filed a motion arguing that the sitting president has "near-total authority over the disposition over presidential records" under the PRA, as interpreted in two George H.W. Bush-era cases, and that the president's compliance with the PRA cannot be reviewed by courts nor challenged by private citizens through litigation. The case was initially dismissed in March 2018 and is scheduled to be reviewed by the D.C. Circuit. See Jason R. Baron, "Presidential Tweets and Self-Destructing Messages Under the Records Laws: The New Normal," *Bloomberg Law: Digital Discovery and e-Evidence* 17 (July 20, 2017): 1-4; Adam Mazmanian, "Can Anyone Check the President on Records Management?," *FCW*, October 10, 2017, <https://fcw.com/articles/2017/10/10/lawsuit-pra-trump-crew.aspx> (accessed February 25, 2018); Spencer S. Hsu, "Trump's Argument in Record-Keeping Case: 'Courts Cannot Review the President's Compliance with the Presidential Records Act,'" *Washington Post*, January 17, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/trumps-argument-in-record-keeping-case-courts-cannot-review-the-presidents-compliance-with-the-presidential-records-act/2018/01/17/fb1eb520-fba8-11e7-ad8c-ecbb62019393_story.html (accessed February 25, 2018); "U.S. District Court District of Columbia (Washington, DC) Civil Docket for Case #1:17-cv-01228-CRC, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington et. al. v. Trump et. al.," USCourts.gov, <https://ia600601.us.archive.org/32/items/gov.uscourts.dcd.187444/gov.uscourts.dcd.187444.26.0.pdf> (accessed February 3, 2019).

¹⁸ The Daily Show with Trevor Noah, "Trump Twitter Library," *Comedy Central*, <http://www.cc.com/shows/the-daily-show-with-trevor-noah/trump-twitter-library> (accessed December 7, 2017).

socio-political and legal ramifications, and which can be quickly disseminated among an attentive, charged populace, or suddenly disappear.

AUTHENTICATING THE EPHEMERAL: DETERMINING THE RELIABILITY OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In her seminal 1989 article series “Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science,” Luciana Duranti began exploring the application of long-established diplomatic techniques to contemporary analog and digital records, a project subsequently undertaken in greater depth by the InterPARES I Project and its Authenticity Task Force. Remarking on the difficulties of using a methodology originally employed by early modern antiquarian historians evaluating manuscripts to verify electronic multimedia records that are continuously generated by ongoing processes and events, she writes:

It has often been pointed out that it is extremely difficult to comprehend recent events. Part of the reason is undoubtedly that our society creates sources of information which emerge in forms at the same time manifold and fragmentary. We are engulfed and bewildered by it all.¹⁹

This is particularly true of the Web 2.0 era, in which prominent public figures regularly produce “newsworthy” records, as defined by Twitter, despite their questionable content.²⁰ For a discipline that bridges the record-keeping needs of fields like law, civil service, and historical research, diplomatics increasingly has had to accommodate the complications of potentially fragile or incomplete digital records existing over space and time, dependent on context and metadata to provide

¹⁹ Luciana Duranti, “Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science, Part I,” *Archivaria*, 28 (Summer 1989): 8.

²⁰ Twitter clarified its public policy on “newsworthiness” in September 2017 when Trump issued a threat via tweet against North Korea, which North Korea’s foreign minister took as a “declaration of war.” In response to Twitter users questioning how the president’s tweet did not violate Twitter’s Terms of Service prohibiting harassment and threats of violence, the platform wrote through its @Policy account that posts deemed to be “of public interest” would not be deleted, nor their creators suspended. While Twitter pledged to “do better on this,” it also declared, somewhat vaguely, “Twitter is committed to transparency and keeping people informed about what’s happening in the world.” Twitter Public Policy, September 25, 2016, 3:05-3:08 p.m., <https://twitter.com/Policy/status/912438046515220480> (accessed December 17, 2017). On Trump’s threat against North Korea, see Bill Chappell, “‘Declaration of War’ Means North Korea Can Shoot Down U.S. Bombers, Minister Says,” *NPR*, September 25, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/09/25/553475174/declaration-of-war-means-north-korea-can-shoot-down-u-s-bombers-minister-says>.

authentication as well as reusability. Context for digital records like social media posts also lends essential sense for interpretation; as Duranti writes, “It is often necessary to assemble a panoply of different sources of information in order to understand any given document” created by events, “each of which, by itself, may appear of scant utility.”²¹ While there is no lack of information within the digital public sphere, assembling it to reliably and accurately contextualize a specific record like a tweet can prove daunting, especially when record-keepers already face significant authenticating challenges. Below are some of the most immediate issues in determining authentic social media records, discussed with reference to relevant archival theory and examples of problematic posts.

Absent or Indeterminate Authorial Identification

An intrinsic element of both traditional and electronic documents, the name of the author – defined as “the physical or juridical person having the authority and capacity to issue the record or in whose name or by whose command the records has been issued” – is one of several components of juridical-administrative and documentary form that contribute to a record’s authentication.²² On Twitter, the author’s name is normally coupled with a username (or “handle”) that remains unique even if the account is deactivated, and which serves as part of the web address for that user’s output. This helps to further authenticate a tweet when combined with several related intrinsic elements, including the chronological date and place of origin, and extrinsic features like an automatic timestamp. (However, users can change their display names at will, a feature frequently utilized by online trolls.)²³ The name of addressee(s) as an element of documentary context can also be useful when examining a set of records like Trump’s tweets, considering his distinctive roster of nicknames for prominent American politicians: Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren is frequently referred to as “Pocahontas” (which many consider offensive to Native Americans), Republican Senator Ted Cruz becomes “Lyn’ Ted,” former Democratic Senator Al Franken is rechristened “Al Frankenstein,” and most famously and frequently, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is dubbed “Crooked Hillary” or simply “Crooked.”

²¹ Duranti, “Diplomatics,” 9.

²² InterPARES I (1999-2002) Authenticity Task Force, *Authenticity Task Force Report*, http://www.interpares.org/book/interpares_book_d_part1.pdf, 5. For a fuller description of the findings of this phase of the InterPARES project, see Heather MacNeil, “Providing Grounds for Trust II: The Findings of the Authenticity Task Force of InterPARES,” *Archivaria*, 54 (Fall 2002): 24–58.

²³ Heather MacNeil, “Providing Grounds for Trust: Developing Conceptual Requirements for the Long-Term Preservation of Authentic Electronic Records,” *Archivaria*, Vol. 50 (Fall 2000), pp. 56-59; April Glaser, “How to Use Twitter: Critical Tips for New Users,” *Wired.com*, 6 May 2016, <https://www.wired.com/2016/05/twitter-onboarding-tips-for-new-users> (accessed December 13, 2017).

Though tweets are effectively received by anyone who chooses to read them, Trump habitually addresses his brief digital epistles to individuals currently in the crosshairs of his attention.²⁴

It is worth considering intrinsic, contextual factors like Trump's addressees mainly because doubts have repeatedly resurfaced as to the true authorship of his tweets, as defined by MacNeil and InterPARES I, which could affect their designation as presidential records in the future. Recent data and lingual analyses seem to support the presence of multiple authors. During the 2016 campaign, data analyst David Robinson extracted the source application for 628 tweets posted to the @realDonaldTrump account from an iPhone, and 762 tweets sent from an Android (likely Trump's Samsung Galaxy), concluding that, in addition to being posted at different times of day, "the Android tweets are angrier and more negative, while the iPhone tweets tend to be benign announcements and pictures." Examining the provenance (via mode of transmission) along with frequency of language repetition, Robinson added, "Emotionally charged words such as 'badly,' 'crazy,' 'weak' and 'dumb' are overwhelmingly more common on Android."²⁵ Once Trump was inaugurated and adopted a more secure iPhone, hallmarks like hashtags, @ mentions, multimedia attachments, typos, ellipses, and liberal use of the Retweet feature could respectively help to differentiate tweets issued by the president to circumvent "fake news" from those composed by his social media director, Dan Scavino, who on at least one occasion tweeted the same message from both his and Donald Trump's accounts.²⁶ While Scavino is posting on Trump's behalf, complying with InterPARES I's definition of an author, his shared yet distinguishable use of the @realDonaldTrump handle with the president complicates what might be deemed a personal versus public – and more critically, presidential – record.²⁷

²⁴ *InterPARES I Authenticity Task Force Report*, pp. 5-6; Jasmine C. Lee and Kevin Quealy, "The 394 People, Places and Things Donald Trump Has Insulted on Twitter: A Complete List," *The New York Times*, November 17, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/01/28/upshot/donald-trump-twitter-insults.html> (accessed December 13, 2017).

²⁵ MacNeil, "Providing Grounds for Trust," 65; David Robinson, "Two People Write Trump's Tweets. He Writes the Angrier Ones," *Washington Post*, August 12, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/08/12/two-people-write-trumps-tweets-he-writes-the-angrier-ones> (accessed December 13, 2017).

²⁶ Ashley Feinberg, "How to Tell When Someone Else Tweets from @realDonaldTrump," *Wired*, 6 October 2017, <https://www.wired.com/story/tell-when-someone-else-tweets-from-realdonaldtrump> (accessed December 13, 2017).

²⁷ It also invites further questions about the viability of metadata, particularly descriptive metadata, attached to tweets composed by Trump and staffers like Scavino, which could have legal if not archival implications when identifying a creator. Though tweets and user profiles alike can be fingerprinted with high accuracy by analyzing metadata elements embedded in

Equally problematic is Trump's propensity to respond to so-called "bots," falsified social media accounts created with the intent to influence politics and policy, often originating from outside the United States. Prior to the 2016 election, an estimated 20% of tweets added to the political conversation online were produced by bots, which only gained a stronger foothold in the digital public sphere following Trump's victory.²⁸ Some pro-Trump accounts initially thought to be bots – sharing characteristics like stock photo avatars, stilted word usage, and accounts comprised primarily of memes and hashtags – were later shown to be at least rooted in the identities of real people, in certain cases abandoned Twitter accounts that were illegally obtained and used to disseminate political propaganda.²⁹ Other bots were newly developed identities that most often "displayed the rote behavior of automated Twitter bots, which send out tweets according to built-in instructions." Such bots frequently have claimed residences in swing states like Pennsylvania, which crucially was won by Trump.³⁰ In both situations, the president has

Twitter activity – most often encoded in the ever-evolving, text-based data-interchange format JSON – Twitter itself has commented upon the possible "mutability" of metadata associated with user accounts when it comes to the method of retrieval. "The mutability of a Tweet's profile metadata depends entirely on the historical product used [to access older tweets]. The Search APIs [application programming interfaces] serve up historical Tweets with the profile settings as it is at the time of retrieval. For Historical PowerTrack, the profile is as it was at the time the Tweet was posted, except for data before 2011. For Tweets older than 2011, the profile metadata reflects the profile as it was in September 2011." In this sense, retrieving tweets "as they were" relies heavily upon the search API Twitter makes available to users, and that API's ability to accurately deliver older tweets with potentially fewer or obsolete JSON elements, adding further complexity to accessing and evaluating tweets with possible multiple authors. See "Tweet Metadata Timeline," Twitter.com, <https://developer.twitter.com/en/docs/tweets/data-dictionary/guides/tweet-timeline.html>; Chris Stokel-Walker, "Twitter's Vast Metadata Haul is a Privacy Nightmare for Users," *Wired*, July 9, 2018, <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/twitter-metadata-user-privacy> (accessed December 11, 2018).

²⁸ Abby Phillip, "The Curious Case of 'Nicole Mincey,' the Trump Fan Who May Actually Be a Bot," *Washington Post*, August 7, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/the-curious-case-of-nicole-mincey-the-trump-fan-who-may-actually-be-a-russian-bot/2017/08/07/7aa67410-7b96-11e7-9026-4a0a64977c92_story.html (accessed December 15, 2017).

²⁹ Ben Collins, "I Found Nicole Mincey, Trump's Biggest Twitter Fan. She Isn't a Bot, But She Has a Ton of Secrets," *The Daily Beast*, August 8, 2017, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/i-found-trump-fan-nicole-mincey-and-shes-not-a-bot> (accessed December 15, 2017).

³⁰ Scott Shane, "The Fake Americans Russia Created to Influence the Election," *The New York Times*, September 7, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/07/us/politics/russia-facebook-twitter-election.html> (accessed December 15, 2017).

interacted with users on Twitter who were either grossly misrepresented or did not exist, potentially compromising the identity of his recorded responses and their metadata.³¹

Retweeting Posts with Non-Contextualized Inserts

Such issues of authorial plasticity also lurk within Trump's many retweets of supporters' posts, occasionally without apparently realizing who the originator is. Often these reposts have included media like GIFs and videos stripped of their provenancial data and socio-political contexts: Trump controversially retweeted "a string of unverified anti-Islamic videos posted by far-right group Britain First's deputy leader," resulting in widespread British objection to a planned state visit from the president.³² Attachments, or "inserts," which "constitute precedents of the actions to which the subsequent originals refer," have long been a complicating element in the authentication of electronic records. As Duranti, Terry Eastwood, and Heather MacNeil note in their template for guaranteeing an electronic record's authenticity, a record containing an insert can be established as authentic, but

the authenticity of the insert itself cannot be ensured, as it depends on the reliability of the author of the record containing it and on the authenticity of the record from which the insert is made.³³

This definition begs the critical question: is the author of a retweet reliable if he or she is unaware of the potential inauthenticity of the original record – both the initial tweet and its insert? Furthermore, can an insert and the record that contains it be authentic if its creator is able to be identified through research, but is not immediately explicit? Trump's reposting of material from individual and group far-right accounts is politically and morally questionable, but the authenticity of such tweets thus far has been highly variable; the tweets containing the Islamophobic videos that enraged the United Kingdom were verifiably reposted from Britain First deputy Jayda Fransen's account, but the videos themselves are clips of footage dating from 2013, manipulated to show alleged

³¹ InterPARES I Project, *InterPARES 1 Authenticity Task Force Report*, 20.

³² Patrick Grafton-Green, "Donald Trump 'Barred from Greenwich' after Council Passes Motion to Block US President's Visit over Far-Right Tweet," *Standard*, December 15, 2017, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/donald-trump-banned-from-greenwich-after-council-passes-motion-to-block-us-presidents-visit-over-a3720061.html> (accessed December 15, 2017).

³³ Luciana Duranti, Terry Eastwood, and Heather MacNeil, *Preservation of the Integrity of Electronic Records* (London: Kluwer, 2002), 90-91.

recent violence committed by Muslim immigrants.³⁴ (Since announcing his candidacy, Trump has regularly distanced himself from white supremacist and far-right social media users after initially reposting their tweets – he has also claimed that he is not responsible for the content of the tweets he reposts.)³⁵ While Twitter allows account holders to change their display names at will, journalists have successfully pinpointed the sources of controversial inserts that have been retweeted by the president or, possibly, his social media director. In July 2017, CNN reporters cross-referenced Twitter, Facebook, and the community discussion website Reddit to discover the identity of the creator of a GIF showing Trump victoriously wrestling an opponent with the CNN logo superimposed on his face, which was posted to the @realDonaldTrump account. Once the GIF creator’s name was discovered (though not published) by CNN, he issued an extensive apology through Reddit, claiming that his now-deleted racist and anti-Semitic posts were satire and that he likely would not have given the president permission to reuse his GIF had he been notified. The GIF, seen by many journalists as a threat to their profession and the First Amendment, remains on Trump’s Twitter account, though other GIFs, such as one showing the “Trump Train” running over a personified CNN, have been deleted.³⁶

Instability of Social Media Platforms as ERMSs

As Heather MacNeil writes in her analysis of means for ensuring that electronic records “are created reliable and maintained authentic,” the methods for ensuring a record’s reliability “draw, implicitly, on the notion of a trusted recordkeeping system.”³⁷ In an entirely digital and comparatively unstable system such as Twitter or Facebook, though, record-keepers face ongoing issues of reliability and stability that often result in the

³⁴ Peter Baker and Eileen Sullivan, “Trump Shares Inflammatory Anti-Muslim Videos, and Britain’s Leader Condemns Them,” *The New York Times*, November 29, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/29/us/politics/trump-anti-muslim-videos-jayda-fransen.html> (accessed December 15, 2017).

³⁵ For instance, Trump repeatedly retweeted posts from white supremacist account @WhiteGenocideTM during the presidential campaign, before deleting them. Allegra Kirkland, “Donald Trump Retweets ‘WhiteGenocideTM’ Account—Again,” *Talking Points Memo*, February 11, 2016, <http://talkingpointsmemo.com/livewire/trump-whitegenocidetm-retweet>, (accessed December 17, 2017).

³⁶ Andrew Kaczynski, “How CNN Found the Reddit User Behind the Trump Wrestling GIF,” *CNN*, July 5, 2017, <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/07/04/politics/kfile-reddit-user-trump-tweet/index.html>; Donald J. Trump, July 2, 2017, 6:21 a.m., <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/881503147168071680> (accessed December 15, 2017); BBC News, “Trump Tweets Cartoon of Train Hitting CNN Reporter,” August 15, 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-40940044>, accessed (December 17, 2017).

³⁷ Heather MacNeil, “Methods for Creating and Maintaining Reliable and Authentic Electronic Records,” in *Preservation of the Integrity of Electronic Records*, 39.

alteration or destruction of records which institutions like the National Archives and Records Administration hope and plan to preserve – thus far, with mixed results.³⁸ While Facebook automatically tracks changes to edited posts, there is currently no method embedded within it for retrieving material that might have been accidentally or inappropriately deleted; similarly, there is no tracking process to document the disposition of posts, which are at the mercy of their creators and effectively designed to be ephemeral.³⁹ Twitter meanwhile instituted a search engine within its platform in 2014 to locate tweets dating back to 2006 – a mechanism that has become useful to journalists contrasting Trump’s Twitter statements as president with his previous views expressed as a private citizen. However, it is still possible for a Twitter user to locate, download, and/or delete individual or groups of tweets according to date, subject, or keyword. (Retweets of a deleted tweet are also deleted, if the retweet does not have an additional comment attached.)⁴⁰ Several apps also have been developed since Twitter’s nominal “archive” was instituted to permanently scrub large swaths of a Twitter account.⁴¹ The platform’s public policy prioritizes customer privacy, enabling even bot creators to delete all traces of automated, propaganda-producing accounts as necessary.⁴²

Twitter’s malleable platform and user-focused policy caught the attention of the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee, which has interrogated representatives of Twitter, Google, and Facebook regarding their respective roles in what appears to have been a Russian misinformation campaign during the 2016 election.⁴³ As of January 2018, Twitter admitted to the U.S. Congress that over 50,000 of its accounts were linked to Russian misinformation sources, a significant increase from 36,746 in October 2017; Facebook “estimated that as many as 126 million Americans had been exposed to Russian-backed

³⁸ Matt Raymond, “How Tweet It Is!: Library Acquires Entire Twitter Archive,” *Library of Congress Blog*, April 14, 2010, <https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2010/04/how-tweet-it-is-library-acquires-entire-twitter-archive> (accessed October 2, 2017).

³⁹ Joe Miller, “Facebook Editing Function Raises Concern over Misuse,” *BBC News*, September 30, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-24330771> (accessed October 2, 2017).

⁴⁰ Twitter Help Center, “How to Delete a Tweet,” Twitter.com, <https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/delete-tweets> (accessed December 18, 2017).

⁴¹ Samuel Gibbs, “Twitter Just Made Every Public Tweet Findable ... Here's How to Delete Yours,” *The Guardian*, November 19, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/nov/19/new-twitter-search-makes-every-public-tweet-since-2006-findable> (accessed October 2, 2017).

⁴² Shane, “Fake Americans”; Josh Meyer, “Twitter Deleted Data Potentially Crucial to Russia Probes,” *Politico*, October 13, 2017, <https://www.politico.com/story/2017/10/13/twitter-russia-data-deleted-investigation-243730> (accessed December 17, 2017).

⁴³ Cecilia Kang, Nicholas Fandos, and Mike Isaac, “Tech Executives Are Contrite About Election Meddling, but Make Few Promises on Capitol Hill,” *The New York Times*, October 31, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/31/us/politics/facebook-twitter-google-hearings-congress.html> (accessed December 17, 2017).

material on its platform during the 2016 election campaign.”⁴⁴ In response, Facebook announced it is aggressively tracking and deleting false accounts, and though Twitter is more proactively removing bots – which it formerly did only when such accounts were reported – some analysts have speculated that the company previously had been less motivated to do so due to the user traffic bots help generate. As the *Guardian* reported in October 2017, social media corporations like Twitter “will be protecting a worldview as well as their profit margin,” alluding to but one implication of private social media companies playing a fundamental, participatory role in public discourse.⁴⁵ Adding to the complexity of that role is Twitter’s current campaign to delete thousands of bots without accessible disposition documentation, leading to potentially massive loss of data connected to the 2016 presidential election and subsequent “newsworthy” (to use Twitter’s terminology) political events.⁴⁶ For a platform “founded on a commitment to transparency,” Twitter’s mechanisms and policies do not always allow for appropriate ERMS transparency to be put into action.⁴⁷

THE THRESHOLDLESS “ARCHIVE”: TWITTER RECORD-KEEPING AND SCREENSHOT PRESERVATION

In their 2011 meditation on “continuum consciousness” and “the capture of records, the formation and reformation of archives, and the return of recorded information into situated action” to support social justice, transparency, and accountability, Frank Upward, Sue McKemish, and Barbara Reed note that the central, ongoing task of recordkeeping professionals “is a complex one in the digital era in an archival multiverse.” They add,

⁴⁴ Jon Swaine, “Twitter Admits Far More Russian Bots Posted on Election than It Had Disclosed,” *The Guardian*, January 20, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/jan/19/twitter-admits-far-more-russian-bots-posted-on-election-than-it-had-disclosed> (accessed February 24, 2018).

⁴⁵ Meyer, “Twitter Deleted Data”; Julian Borger, Lauren Gambino and Sabrina Siddiqui, “Tech Giants Face Congress as Showdown over Russia Election Meddling Looms,” *The Guardian*, October 22, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/oct/22/facebook-google-twitter-congress-hearing-trump-russia-election> (accessed December 17, 2017).

⁴⁶ Ben Popkin, “Twitter deleted 200,000 Russian troll tweets. Read them here,” *NBC News*, February 14, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/now-available-more-200-000-deleted-russian-troll-tweets-n844731> (accessed February 24, 2018). As will be further discussed, NBC News is one of several journalistic outlets that has undertaken “archives” of tweets either already deleted or at risk of deletion.

⁴⁷ Twitter Public Policy, “Update: Russian Interference in 2016 US Election, Bots, & Misinformation,” September 28, 2017, https://blog.twitter.com/official/en_us/topics/company/2017/Update-Russian-Interference-in-2016--Election-Bots-and-Misinformation.html (accessed December 17, 2017).

We are losing contact with the need to develop new rules for archiving the exponential expansion of recorded information around us. [...] If we, as a profession, limit ourselves, we will increasingly be marginalized from the formation of archives in online cultures.⁴⁸

This warning is even more prescient given the number of self-described “archives” of social media posts – in particular, Donald Trump’s tweets – that have been quickly assembled by groups and individuals mostly operating outside the archival community. The investigative journalism and activist group ProPublica maintains a “Politwhoops” archive that “tracks deleted tweets by public officials, including people currently in office and candidates for office.”⁴⁹ The comprehensive and searchable site TrumpTwitterArchive.com, designed and run by programmer Brendan Brown, employs an automated Twitter scraper to collect Trump’s Twitter activity and its metadata in real time, which is then sorted into categories like “Personal Superlatives” and “Media Disdain.” Though imperfect – Brown estimates that he failed to capture approximately 4,000 tweets, as well as any deleted tweets from before September 2016 – the site remains one of the most complete collections of Trump’s tweets, if not an “archive” per se.⁵⁰ Major newspapers like the *New York Times* have also cataloged Trump’s tweets for specific purposes, such as analyzing the frequency of his directed insults.⁵¹ The traditional archival threshold has progressively multiplied and transmogrified into digital portals diligently maintained by non-archivists.

Though useful encapsulations of governmental social media activity, these online repositories are informal approximations of managing digital records produced, and sometimes deleted, by Trump and his associates, a task for which the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) is already preparing – although, as Archivist of the United States David S. Ferriero has specified, “records management authority is vested in the President” at this stage, and NARA can only serve in an advisory role to a sitting president. (The White House was cautioned not to erase any of Trump’s tweeted public communications, though Trump later deleted tweets related to his support of

⁴⁸ Frank Upward, Sue McKemish, and Barbara Reed, “Archivists and Changing Social Information Spaces: A Continuum Approach to Recordkeeping and Archiving in Online Cultures,” *Archivaria*, 72 (Fall 2011): 202.

⁴⁹ ProPublica, “Politwhoops,” <https://projects.propublica.org/politwhoops/> (accessed February 25, 2018).

⁵⁰ Brendan Brown, “Trump Twitter Archive,” <http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com/about>, (accessed February 25, 2018).

⁵¹ Lee and Quealy, “The 394 People, Places, and Things,” *The New York Times* (NB, the headline has been updated to match the current tally of 551 targets of Trump’s insults as of December 28, 2018).

defeated U.S. Senate hopeful Luther Strange).⁵² Archiving tweets in general has proven to be challenging for august American institutions like the Library of Congress, which announced in December 2017 that after developing a “secure collection of tweet text, documenting the first 12 years (2006-2017) of this dynamic communications channel [Twitter],” it would be acquiring subsequent tweets “on a selective basis,” focusing on Twitter material that is “thematic and event-based” or that reflects “themes of ongoing national interest, e.g. public policy.”⁵³ The Library of Congress embarked on its ambitious quest in 2010 to archive all tweets generated by Twitter when the social media platform – as a private entity – gifted a portion of its ever-building cache of records. By 2012, that collection included 170 billion tweets, according to a white paper released in January 2013, and, though researchers had yet to be granted access to the archive, the objective of establishing “a secure, sustainable process for receiving and preserving a daily, ongoing stream of tweets through the present day” and organizing tweets by date was on the verge of being completed.⁵⁴ However, the Twitter archive remained incomplete and unavailable to vetted researchers as of 2015, mired in complications of practice and policy.⁵⁵ Moreover, it has not included a complete set of contextual information from the outset: former Library of Congress Director of Communications Matt Raymond clarified on the Library’s website, “Twitter is donating an archive of what it determines to be public. Private account information and deleted tweets will not be part of the archive.” Tweets also would not be deemed archivable until at least six months after their creation, leaving plenty of time for Twitter users to delete potentially significant tweets. Furthermore, “Linked information such as pictures and websites is not part of the archive, and the Library has no plans to collect the linked sites” – a policy continued under the

⁵²David S. Ferriero to Sen. Claire McCaskill and Sen. Tom Carper, March 30, 2017, <https://www.archives.gov/files/press/press-releases/aotus-to-sens-mccaskill-carper.pdf>; Alana Abramson, “President Trump Just Deleted Tweets About Luther Strange. Is He Allowed to Do That?” *Time*, September 27, 2017, <http://time.com/4958877/donald-trump-deletes-tweets-legal-implications> (accessed December 18, 2017).

⁵³ Laurel Wamsley, “Library of Congress Will No Longer Archive Every Tweet,” *NPR*, December 26, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/12/26/573609499/library-of-congress-will-no-longer-archive-every-tweet> (accessed February 24, 2018). The Library of Congress announced its changed acquisition policy on December 26, 2017 in a public blog post (<https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2017/12/update-on-the-twitter-archive-at-the-library-of-congress-2/>) and white paper (https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/files/2017/12/2017dec_twitter_white-paper.pdf).

⁵⁴ Library of Congress, “Update on the Twitter Archive at the Library of Congress,” January 2013, https://www.loc.gov/static/managed-content/uploads/sites/6/2017/02/twitter_report_2013jan.pdf (accessed October 2, 2017).

⁵⁵ Michael Zimmer, “The Twitter Archive at the Library of Congress: Challenges for Information Practice and information Policy,” *First Monday* 20, no. 7 (July 6, 2015), <http://firstmonday.org/article/view/5619/4653> (accessed October 2, 2017).

revamped collecting practices.⁵⁶ These elements of the Library of Congress's Twitter acquisition policy have become more dubious as Trump frequently retweets material that includes visual media like videos, GIFs, and memes. Without the essential context provided by media or original tweets, future research on the Trump era could be hamstrung by a lack of relevant material and data, especially if Trump decides, as records creator, to designate his Twitter output as private documents that may or may not remain in public view.

Both professional archivists and their amateur counterparts in related fields have determinedly worked toward building complete collections of social media items that promote transparency and accountability during a turbulent period of American politics. One method that record-keepers and social media users alike have utilized is screen capture, or screenshotting. Effective and immediate, screenshots are frequently taken on face-value as authentic, yet are questionable as a viable means for preservation. As NARA notes in its 2013 white paper on "Best Practices for the Capture of Social Media Records," screenshots "only creates [sic] a picture of content and do not preserve the metadata and functionality of the content, which does not comply with NARA's transfer guidance for permanent web content records."⁵⁷ Nonetheless, it is a practice that has been put into record-keeping use by the Coast Guard and U.S. Navy, among other federal agencies, and is utilized in some court cases to capture and authenticate digital evidence gleaned from social media accounts.⁵⁸ More popularly, screenshotting has been employed by journalists to contradict political figures on Twitter, preserve controversial tweets ripe for deletion, and capture evidence of online harassment. It also has been used in the United

⁵⁶ Matt Raymond, "The Library and Twitter: An FAQ," *Library of Congress Blog*, April 28, 2010, <https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2010/04/the-library-and-twitter-an-faq> (accessed October 2, 2017); Wamsley, "Library of Congress Will No Longer Archive Every Tweet," *NPR*.

⁵⁷ National Archives and Records Administration, "White Paper on Best Practices for the Capture of Social Media Records," May 2013, <https://www.archives.gov/files/records-mgmt/resources/socialmediacapture.pdf>, 21.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 5-7; on screenshots and legal authentication of social media evidence under U.S. Federal Rule of Evidence 901, see for example John G. Browning, "Digging for Digital Dirt: Discovery and Use of Evidence from Social Media Sites," *SMU Science and Technology Law Review* 14 (2011): 479-481, and Justin P. Murphy and Adrian Fontecilla, "Social Media Evidence in Government Investigations and Criminal Proceedings: A Frontier of New Legal Issues," *Richmond Journal of Law and Technology* 19, no. 3 (2013): 21-25. Although – similar to NARA's criticism – screenshots themselves do not always fulfill the requirement of *prima facie* genuineness and generally necessitate circumstantial indicia and/or witness testimony to be authenticated, the admissibility of such evidence varies significantly. As Murphy and Fontecilla write, "[C]ourts largely seem to be erring on the side of admissibility and leaving any concerns about the evidence itself, such as who authored the evidence or whether the evidence is legitimate, to jurors to decide what weight to give that evidence." Browning notes, "Social networking is all about establishing connections – and so is authentication."

States and elsewhere by supporters of right-wing politicians to retaliate against critical journalists and shape political narratives, participating in what religion scholar Sahana Udupa calls “archiving as history making,” and which Gilles Deleuze might recognize as a mechanism adopted in an information-obsessed control society.⁵⁹ Though perhaps a “picture of content” and not a true copy, a screenshot could theoretically fall under the umbrella of Ken Thibodeau’s observation that “it is not possible to preserve an electronic record,” but “only possible to preserve the ability to reproduce an electronic record,” especially when institutions like NARA will be forced to reckon with untold numbers of screenshots of deleted presidential and governmental tweets.⁶⁰

Screenshotting is also one of few, albeit problematic methods for capturing social media posts usable by observers, when the creator him- or herself fails or refuses to request a personal “archive” from Twitter and rather expunges tweets, lest that user be expunged by the platform. To make Twitter a “safer place,” the company has altered its “guidelines to reduce abusive and violent content,” and swiftly banned figures like Britain First leader Jayda Fransen, who enjoyed Trump’s retweeting attention online.⁶¹ Trump himself appears to rank among the “military and government entities” who generate “newsworthy content,” and who thus far remain exempt from Twitter’s “ban on advocating violence against civilians.” However, tweets issued by members of the Trump Administration are presumably also subject to Twitter’s policy that “[c]ontext matters when evaluating for abusive behaviour and determining appropriate enforcement actions.”⁶² Though intended to improve the online experience of its users, Twitter’s strengthened rules against hate speech and harassment could lead to similar data loss as when the platform decided to delete thousands of Russia-linked bot accounts disseminating pro-Trump, white supremacist, and/or politically divisive content, in a simultaneous effort to respond to public criticism and polish its brand. Twitter’s actions, and the current lack of a usable, accessible, publicly-held Twitter archive, is yet another

⁵⁹ Sahana Udupa, “Archiving as History-Making: Religious Politics of Social Media in India,” *Communication, Culture, and Critique* 9 (2016): 213, 217. Udupa notes that growing social media support for right-wing leader Narendra Modi might include a significant number of fake Twitter accounts; Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” *October* 59 (Winter, 1992): 4.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Heather MacNeil, “Providing Grounds for Trust,” 53.

⁶¹ Emily Sullivan, “Twitter Says It Will Ban Threatening Accounts, Starting Today,” *NPR*, December 18, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/12/18/571622652/twitter-says-it-will-ban-threatening-accounts-starting-today> (accessed December 18, 2017).

⁶² Robinson Meyer, “Does Twitter’s New Hate Policy Have a Trump Exception?” *The Atlantic*, December 18, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2017/12/the-trump-exception/548648> (accessed December 18, 2017); Twitter Help Center, “The Twitter Rules,” *Twitter.com*, <https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/twitter-rules> (accessed December 18, 2017).

reminder of Anne Gilliland's 2014 observation of our contemporary networked society, that

if archivists are not prepared to move into this [information retrieval] realm, with or without assistance from colleagues in computer and information science, commercial developers will do so instead.⁶³

ARCHIVAL AND PERSONAL AUTHENTICITY IN AMERICAN INFORMATION CULTURE

In December 2017, following an apparent re-election rally held by Donald Trump in Pensacola, Florida, where the president praised both his Administration and then-U.S. Senate candidate Roy Moore, *Washington Post* reporter Dave Weigel tweeted a picture of the rally that showed the venue to be mostly empty, adding the comment, "Packed to the rafters." Weigel then deleted the tweet when another reporter noted that the photo was taken before Trump and most of the rally-goers had arrived, but not before a screenshot of the tweet was obtained by Trump and his staff.⁶⁴ Already stung in January 2017 by a National Park Service employee tweeting a side-by-side comparison of the crowds at Trump's Inauguration and Obama's well-attended 2009 swearing-in – leading to a media blackout of Department of Interior Twitter accounts and the formation of the Alt National Park Service social media group⁶⁵ – Trump demanded an apology and retraction from Weigel, labelling his deleted tweet "fake news." Weigel complied, clarifying that he deleted the tweet soon after realizing his mistake, and that it was not

⁶³ Anne Gilliland, "Reconceptualizing Records, The Archive, and Archival Roles and Requirements in a Networked Society," *Knygotyra: Book Science*, 63 (2014): 30.

⁶⁴ Chas Danner, "Trump Thinks People Should Be Fired for Misrepresenting the Truth on Twitter," *New York Magazine*, December 9, 2017, <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/12/trump-thinks-people-should-be-fired-for-lying-on-twitter.html> (accessed December 23, 2017).

⁶⁵ Michael D. Shear and Maggie Haberman, "Trump Called National Park Chief Over Twitter Post on Inaugural Crowd," *The New York Times*, January 26, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/26/us/politics/trump-inauguration-crowd-size-park-chief.html> (accessed December 23, 2017); Wynne Davis, "It's Not Just the Park Service: 'Rogue' Federal Twitter Accounts Multiply," *NPR*, January 27, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2017/01/27/512007632/its-not-just-the-park-service-rogue-federal-twitter-accounts-multiply> (accessed September 30, 2017).

an official story for the *Post*. Trump continued to accuse Weigel of promulgating “fake news,” and declared online, “He should be fired.”⁶⁶

Though an alarming exchange when considering the president’s routine conflicts with an (as yet) free press, the irony of Trump calling for a reporter’s termination after supposedly spreading “fake news” was not lost on many Americans. As of mid-November 2017, Trump had made a reported 1,628 false or misleading statements over the first 298 days of his presidency, an average of 5.5 per day, whether in speeches, during press conferences, through his press secretaries, or on Twitter.⁶⁷ (The *New York Times* observed that “[o]n days without an untrue statement, [Trump] is often absent from Twitter, vacationing at Mar-a-Lago in Florida, or busy golfing.”)⁶⁸ Tweets packed with untruths that are on track to be acquired by the Library of Congress or NARA pose an intriguing challenge to archivists, who might determine them to be diplomatically authentic though historically false, per Luciana Duranti’s definitions.⁶⁹ More immediately, despite being easily disputed, Trump’s misleading and untrue statements are still received positively by a core, loyal base.⁷⁰ This minor yet vocal audience and its responses to Trump’s disprovable assertions invites deeper consideration of the way authentic information is determined, disseminated, and received in the United States, and the growing international influence American information culture appears to possess.

As Gillian Oliver notes at the outset of her analysis of national culture and its relationship with information management, it is crucial to consider “the diversity of values and attitudes of people” participating in (or, significantly, being excluded from) a country’s discourse, and to remain careful to avoid stereotypes and frame interpretation according to likelihood rather than hard and fast rules.⁷¹ Oliver draws upon the work of

⁶⁶ Danner, “Trump Thinks People Should Be Fired,” *New York Magazine*.

⁶⁷ Glenn Kessler, Meg Kelly and Nicole Lewis, “President Trump Has Made 1,628 False or Misleading Claims over 298 Days,” *Washington Post*, November 14, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2017/11/14/president-trump-has-made-1628-false-or-misleading-claims-over-298-days/?utm_term=.492ee4430616 (accessed December 12, 2017).

⁶⁸ David Leonhardt and Stuart A. Thompson, “Trump’s Lies,” *The New York Times*, December 14, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/06/23/opinion/trumps-lies.html> (accessed December 12, 2017).

⁶⁹ Duranti, “Diplomatics,” 17-18.

⁷⁰ Tom McCarthy, “Trump Voters See His Flaws but Stand by President Who ‘Shakes Things Up,’” *The Guardian*, December 24, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/dec/24/trump-voters-see-his-flaws-but-stand-by-president-who-shakes-things-up> (accessed December 24, 2017); Yoni Appelbaum, “A Twitter Tirade on Christmas Eve,” *The Atlantic*, December 24, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/12/a-twitter-tirade-on-christmas-eve/549170/> (accessed December 24, 2017).

⁷¹ Gillian Oliver, *Organisational Culture for Information Managers* (Oxford, UK: Chandos, 2011), 34, 62.

Dutch social psychologist and anthropologist Geert Hofstede, who examined national cultures along dimensions of “power distance,” “uncertainty avoidance,” “collectivism / individualism,” “masculinity / femininity,” and “long-term / short-term perspective.”⁷² The United States is one of the most individualist countries on the Hofstede matrix. Marked by “a view of withholding information as an attribute of organizational success,” “low context communication,” and “vertical integration in society,” information in the United States tends to be explicit rather than implied, when it is provided by superiors.⁷³ The US is also identified as moderately avoidant of uncertainty, oriented toward short-term goals, and (along a problematic binary) “masculine” in its approach to professional life: societal expectations are that “career ambitions are compulsory for men, optional for women”; conflicts are resolved “through denying them or fighting until the best ‘man’ wins”; and those in managerial positions are “culture heroes.”⁷⁴ Moreover, individualist countries like the United States “will not as a matter of course maintain links with their past,” affecting both attitudes toward management of archived items, and application of historical context to information about current events given by authoritative sources.⁷⁵ Oliver writes,

Concern for preservation in itself seems to indicate looking both backwards and forwards in time. In other words, recognising the need to preserve information created in the past so that it can be accessed in the future.⁷⁶

Oliver’s research by way of Hofstede provides useful insights into how federally-generated social media posts might reach different corners of a nation that Thomas Frank described in 2004 as “a panorama of madness and delusion worthy of Hieronymus Bosch,” shaped during a decades-long, conservative “Great Backlash” built upon a varied coalition of individuals mostly voting against their best interests.⁷⁷ The United States’ deep, at times nearly inscrutable, socio-political fissures have opened ample opportunity for the inauthentic parading as authentic to take hold of the public imagination in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, often by playing upon America’s cultural affinity for powerful, allegedly self-made (white) men deftly attuned to using the media – or rejecting it when personally beneficial. In his history of hoaxes, hucksters, plagiarism, and bunkum in the United States – in short, the country’s fraught, ongoing relationship with

⁷² Ibid., p. 38.

⁷³ Hofstede Insights, “Country Comparison: What About the USA?” <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/the-usa/> (accessed February 25, 2018); Oliver, 53.

⁷⁴ Oliver, p. 59

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 56.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 57.

⁷⁷ Thomas Frank, *What’s the Matter with Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2004), 5, 10.

truth, information, success, and spectacle – Kevin Young writes that the nation is experiencing a “millennial narrative crisis” in an “Age of Euphemism” dominated by “truthiness,” “the dishonesty of words,” and, fittingly, “faction – fact meeting fiction.”⁷⁸ Typified by Trump (who Young likens to a modern P.T. Barnum with less respect for the public) telling a throng like the one that recently gathered in Pensacola, Florida, “Believe me” while disseminating disprovable falsehoods, the crisis is perpetuated in part by what Young describes as “the comfort of the crowd filled with a wildness that seems peculiarly American.”⁷⁹ That affinity and wildness is heightened by employing “the ghosts not just of truth but of actual people: dead Muslim soldiers, desirous women, professional protesters, the blacks.”⁸⁰ The ideological phantoms that serve as rallying touchstones in Trump’s online and in-person rhetoric have come to have real counterparts in the international community as well: the president’s most prevalent catchphrase “fake news” has been adopted by Syrian president Bashar al-Assad in reference to extrajudicial murders reported by Amnesty International, and members of Myanmar’s government, including civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, have designated photographs of state violence as “fake news” and misinformation. One government official told the *New York Times* in late 2017 that not only are Rohingya Muslims not being persecuted in Myanmar, but that the Rohingya themselves do not exist; “It is fake news.”⁸¹

In a decade that has witnessed populist, social media-driven phenomena like the Arab Spring, in which participants throughout the Middle East and North Africa maximized the connectivity potential of Twitter to reclaim the public sphere from state-sponsored media and deliver continual feeds of citizen journalism, it can be difficult to fathom how a figure such as Donald Trump could be seen as “authentic” by his base of support.⁸² However, Gunn Enli posits that the professionalization of social media use demonstrated by Hillary Clinton’s campaign in the 2016 presidential election only served to highlight the “amateurish yet authentic” style Trump’s campaign adopted and which Trump has continued into his presidency, positioning him as a “genuine outsider” who nonetheless belongs to the upper one percent of American society.⁸³ Capitalizing on the disparity

⁷⁸ Kevin Young, *Bunk: The Rise of Hoaxes, Humbug, Plagiarists, Phonies, Post-Facts, and Fake News* (Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 2017), 432, 436.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 444, 446.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 443-444.

⁸¹ Uri Friedman, “The Real-World Consequences of ‘Fake News,’” *The Atlantic*, December 23, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/12/trump-world-fake-news/548888> (accessed December 24, 2017).

⁸² Sara Salem, “Creating Spaces for Dissent: The Role of Social Media in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution,” in Daniel Trottier and Christian Fuchs, eds. *Social Media and the State: Protests, Revolutions, Riots, Crime and Policing in the Age of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), 180-181.

⁸³ Enli, “Twitter as Arena for the Authentic Outsider,” 50, 56.

between the two approaches, Trump and his campaign issued tweets bearing emotional “authenticity markers” (not to be confused with diplomatic elements of authenticity), including capital letters, exclamation points, name-calling, and impoliteness.⁸⁴ (When Clinton broke from her traditional style to post “unexpected and informal content” on Twitter, telling Trump to “delete his account,” she was retweeted half a million times.)⁸⁵ The Trump campaign also actively engaged with the public by reposting more tweets created by his followers, and took risks to repost uncontrolled content, a tactic that has become problematic during his Administration. These strategies bolstered what Enli describes as the amateur’s “rhetorical claim to authenticity”; “without Twitter or an equivalent social media platform,” it would have been difficult for a candidate like Trump, who was not supported by the Republican Party until shortly before his nomination, “to come across as viable.”⁸⁶ It is also the basis for a believable, relatable public persona that Trump and his associates now work strenuously to maintain during his presidency. “Trump’s Twitter campaign might critique the mainstream media,” Enli notes, presaging the presidential Twitter feed, “but is also in itself a mass media channel.”⁸⁷

The balance between “personal authenticity and audience expectations” that Trump’s 2016 campaign managed to maintain is critical to building a broad Twitter audience, media studies researchers Alice E. Marwick and danah boyd argue, and depends upon a sense of constructed authenticity that emerges in contrast to an inauthentic counterpart. In the case of the 2016 election, Trump was perceived as authentic in contrast to Hillary Clinton, a false dichotomy of equally performative authenticity shaped by imagined “unknown audiences” on social media flattened into one vague entity through “context collapse.”⁸⁸ Heather MacNeil and Bonnie Mak similarly write that “authenticity is sensitive to differences in individual cases and contexts.” Like the records produced by individuals deemed to be more or less demonstrably “true” to themselves depending upon the context and audience, “authenticity is itself in a process of becoming.”⁸⁹ Hillary Clinton might have adopted professionalism to more ably navigate the vagaries of Erving Goffman’s “impression management” on social media, but the Trump campaign’s willingness to be perceived as “clumsy and imperfect” does not, of course, necessarily make the digital records it produced more authentic.⁹⁰ However,

⁸⁴ Ibid., 58.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 56-57.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 56, 59.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁸⁸ Alice E. Marwick and danah boyd, “I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience,” *New Media and Society* 13, no. 1 (2010): 114, 122, 124-126.

⁸⁹ Heather MacNeil and Bonnie Mak, “Constructions of Authenticity,” *Library Trends* 56, no. 1 (Summer 2007): 29-30.

⁹⁰ Marwick and boyd, p. 123; Enli, p. 58.

those records are evidently easier to internalize as “true,” even (and especially) when available information directly contradicts their contents.

This schism between diplomatic and perceived personal “authenticity” is an opportunity for record-keepers, as nonneutral “active agents” of preservation and management, to collaborate with library and archives users and the public at large to newly assess “the nature and degree of trustworthiness” in traditional and, particularly, digital materials, born into and existing within a public sphere that itself is experiencing “context collapse.”⁹¹ Both records and people have multiple “authenticities” with innate biases and intentions – as Randall Jimerson recognizes, these limitations can be difficult for archivists and records managers, like anyone, to overcome. However, it is possible to do so through a “renewed commitment to democratic values” at the heart of record-keeping practice:

Let us commit ourselves to preventing the archival profession’s explicit or implicit support of privileged elites and powerful rulers at the expense of the people’s rights and interests. Let us commit ourselves to the values of public accountability, open government, cultural diversity, and social justice.⁹²

Or, as Michael Moss succinctly writes, “The archivist has a duty to prevent the destruction of the records that may be used to hold those responsible for the abuse of power to account.” Especially during periods of observable, effective manipulation of information, “[T]he archive must have the power and courage to resist.”⁹³

Yet, how trustworthy would those records be, generated by possibly unreliable creators on unstable platforms that do not help guarantee their authenticity? What would the resistant archivist be archiving? Arguably, record-keepers should maintain and preserve records like Trump’s tweets even if they are examples of how insecure the president’s medium of choice to debate and announce policy has been. More importantly, however, is that Trump’s Twitter activity affords the record-keeping community an opportunity to submit both their theoretical tools and their evidence to what Anne Gilliland has called “truth tests,” or rigorous reviews of the authenticating methodologies record-keepers use, to

⁹¹ MacNeil and Mak, p. 47.

⁹² Randall Jimerson, “Archives for All: Professional Responsibility and Social Justice,” *The American Archivist* 70, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2007): 281.

⁹³ Michael Moss, “Is It a Question of Trust, or Why Are We Afraid to Go to Nineveh?” *Archival Science* 11 (2011): 421.

achiev[e] a better understanding of the means by which archivists can ensure that the copy of the electronic record held by the archives or delivered to the user is authentic.⁹⁴

By “develop[ing] more finely grained instruments” that could “extract specific aspects of different contexts and tie them to the record in ways that establish the archival bond,” for instance, record-keepers could establish a common, technologically-current framework for assessing complex digital records like social media posts, improving their management and developing a method of authentication that goes beyond Twitter’s assertion that Tweets are “self-authenticating.”⁹⁵ Though the cause of daily stress for many Americans, the advent of @realDonaldTrump as a potential source of presidential records is a chance for record-keeping professionals and institutions – especially the Library of Congress and National Archives and Records Administration – to reconsider and improve their best practices.

It is also a crucial point at which record-keepers can, as Kate Theimer writes, begin “aggressively documenting ‘the now.’” While “digital is ephemeral by its very nature,” shifting focus to sources currently being produced would create a role for archivists and records managers in a networked society that enables them to “educate and inform people about the importance of understanding the context of information.” It would also “make us [record-keepers] relevant and useful *now* [author’s emphasis],” encouraging collaboration with information technology and journalism professionals who are already performing de facto archival functions. Focusing on “the now,” as Theimer argues, would “make people understand their own role in documenting [their] society.” In a socio-political moment in which energetic populism coexists and clashes with reactionary policy, documentation by the people – such as is practiced imperfectly with screenshotting – could halt data loss caused by social media platforms and their “newsworthy” users, and engage with those “who don’t yet know they want to engage.”⁹⁶ This emphasis on community learning, aligned with record-keepers as public-facing experts, can bolster the democratic values Jimerson argues are the basis for archival resistance. By improving records authentication through “truth tests,” and undergirding public engagement with information in a digital society, record-keepers can serve as essential guides to determining real evidence and “fake news,” and re-center transparency and accountability in American information culture by educating and

⁹⁴ Anne Gilliland, “Testing Our Truths: Delineating the Parameters of the Authentic Archival Electronic Record,” *The American Archivist* 65, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2002): 196-215.

⁹⁵ Ibid, pp. 211-212; Twitter Help Center, “Guidelines for Law Enforcement,” Twitter.com, <https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/twitter-law-enforcement-support>, accessed 26 December 2017.

⁹⁶ Kate Theimer, “The Role of Archives in a Digital Society: Now Is What Matters,” *Archivaria* 78 (Fall 2014): 145-147.

positively impacting those who inhabit it, short-circuiting atomized control mechanisms – such as presidential tweets – produced and employed by both governmental and citizen actors in the United States, and potentially cutting short the present Age of Euphemism.

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