

A compendium of dangerous speech: A case of Twitter-discourse between Zimbabwean political actors

Peter Junior Tshetu

Abstract

In recent years, political narratives have dominated the social media platforms globally. In some cases, finding themselves being credited for directing, inspiring or fueling certain political events. In particular, *Twitter* has been at the forefront of platforms dominated, facilitating the genesis of major political discourses and movements. However, *Twitter* has become a stage for the emergence of dangerous speech with the capacity to start online and offline contestations between interactants from different political groups who engage in it as well as those who rely on it for information. Dangerous speech is defined as any form of expression (speech, text or images) that can increase the risk that its audience will condone or participate in violence against members of another group (Benesch, Glavinic & Berger, 2018:5). On *Twitter* the insurgence of weaponized speech used to attack the 'faces' of other interactants, results in the affirmation of the long-held cliché that politics is a dirty game. Such speech stirs up emotions and brings about anger and animosity among those engaged in online interaction. In a country such as Zimbabwe, a polarized nation, political divergence is treated as enmity and in many cases due to the existence of such speech, *Twitter* interactants have been witnessed threatening to unleash violence on each other. Hence, the continued use of dangerous speech in Zimbabwe has been blocking the chances of having harmonious co-existence between political opponents. In turn, this has led to the loss of social capital which emerges out of peaceful cross-pollination of ideas between political opponents. In approaching this study, the researcher assumed the position that it is important to bring about awareness of certain speech which can be considered dangerous and how it is considered so, in the hope that interactants can avoid utilizing it. With this in mind, as guided by the dangerous speech theory propounded by Benesch (2012) this study sought to create a compendium of the dangerous speech terms used on *Twitter* by Zimbabwean political actors. Through the theory's five defining variables which affect the dangerousness of a particular speech, dangerous speech utilized by Zimbabwean political actors was recognizable. The data utilised was *Twitter* interactions which were captured via screenshots and analysis done through critical discourse analysis.

Keywords: Dangerous speech; political actors; face