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Have You Heard this Juicy Rumor?

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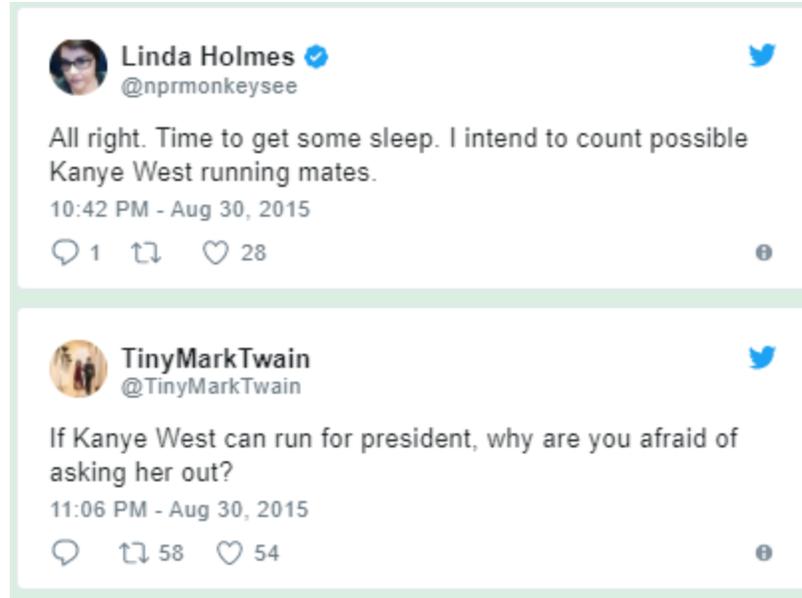
Have Your Heard this Juicy Rumor?

We grow up learning that rumors are bad. So why do we fall for rumors on social media now? Rumors can be so juicy, that they are hard not to spread. The same goes for jokes—especially at someone else’s expense. We’ve all been there. Instead of turning to your best friend to whisper the newest gossip or laugh, we now click Retweet and share it with hundreds of our closest friends. We’ve seen this a lot recently in the political world and with upcoming candidates. In 2012, Waka Flocka Flame tweeted that he was “deadass running for president in 2016.”



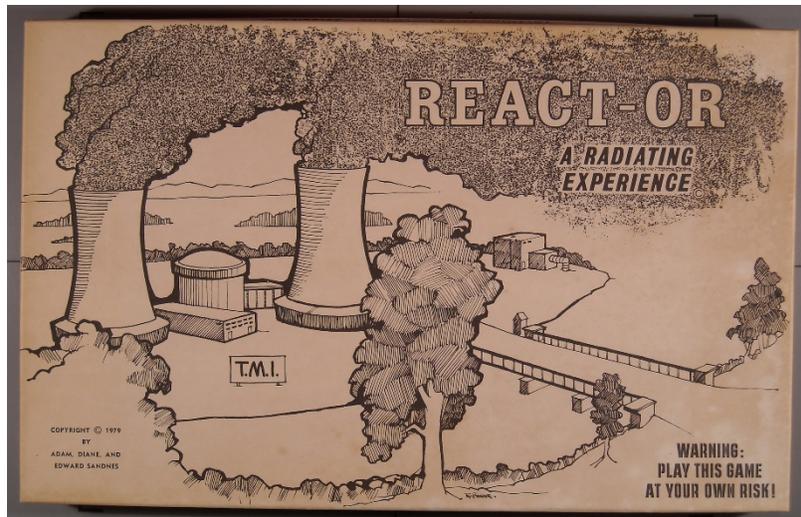
It quickly came to terms that Waka Flocka did not pass the requirements to run for president and yet, there was a lot of social media movements retweeting and talking about his impending presidency. This came again in 2015 when Kanye West started #Kanye2020. He planted the seed at a victory speech at the VMAs, and then the rumors hit Twitter, hard.





The rumors of his announcement turned into a laughing matter; people tweeting about the very little experience West had and how this couldn't possibly end well, yet the retweets did not stop. The rumors and jokes continued, spiraling through one Twitter user after another. Again, we found that West was a little ahead of himself and did not join the presidential race. Which brings us to 2016—when Donald Trump [announced his plans to run](#). But here's the catch—what Twitter users and voters thought was just another “celebrity turned president” joke, turned out to be reality. So why are we treating following celebrity presidential nominations as jokes in the same way? In December and January of this past year, Twitter buzz started circulating around Oprah and The Rock getting their share of presidential talk and the retweets and reactions are soaring. Why is it that these presidential rumors spread so easily through Twitter?

Trevor Blank talks about the evolution of humor and what that looked like with the emergence of the Internet. [In his book](#), he explores how humor has been used in response to current events. Before the internet, people made posters and hung them around town and spread jokes about current events to all their closest friends, like this poster responding to the nuclear reactor on Three Mile Island in 1979.



"From the Three Mile Island Collection. Archives and Special Collections at the Penn State Harrisburg Library, Pennsylvania State University Libraries."

When the World Wide Web was introduced, those spoken jokes turned into text-heavy email chains. Blank says that it was much easier to comment on these big happenings through the web than one-to-one communication. Now, the humor is on Twitter. These fast-spreading, wide-audience platform allows for humor to travel fast in many ways: Trump tweets, for example.





[Talk of Oprah](#) and The Rock becoming president started on Twitter. People saw their friends posting about this and searched thoroughly. They saw more opinions, more news articles, and more tweets.

It started a conversation--one rather publicly, that brought more voices into a conversation and a community. Jeffrey P. Jones [explores](#) audiences, interactions with the media, and the difference between information and entertainment messages. The informational content is the “dominant normative conception;” people need to hear all the possible information to be rational in their decision-making for their community and country, while entertaining content is supposed to entertain us. Rarely does it give us a spark to a stance on important issues; that’s what the informative content is supposed to do. The presidential rumors were ones that confused users—giving both entertainment and what has been ingested as informational. Seeing both politics and celebrities in a short Tweet creates questions of what we can do with this content. We take it in as entertainment and produce an “informative” opinion or ignore the information part and just see it as entertainment; ignoring all the warning signs of a rumor spreading throughout friends, as we were taught.

We can appreciate this humor, but we still don’t know how to separate it from important decisions in politics. We need to hold conversations about possible presidential candidates and start talking about the impact of the future. Knowing when we need more informative data over entertainment will change the level of importance we put politics at. There’s nothing wrong with entertainment, if we know that’s what it is. We need to look deeply into politics with an informative lens with greater intent than an entertaining one. Once that happens, big decisions won’t be made based on the number of retweets below it, but the impact those decisions could make.