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Amy B. Becker 

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## Alec Baldwin's appearances on *Saturday Night Live*: tangerine wig, Twitter backlash, and the humanising of President Donald J. Trump

Amy B. Becker

Department of Communication, Loyola University Maryland, Baltimore, MD, USA

**ARTICLE HISTORY** Received 17 October 2019; Accepted 12 December 2019

For more than three years, Alec Baldwin, comic actor and recurring *Saturday Night Live* host, has been making regular guest appearances on the NBC variety programme clad in a tangerine wig and business suit (Nir 2016). These appearances, which began in October 2016 when Donald Trump was still just the Republican candidate for the US Presidency, have continued well into Trump's first term as president (Politi 2016). In fact, since the fall of 2016, the cast of *SNL* has taken great pains to mock key figures in the Trump administration and the surrounding Republican orbit with special guests and cast regulars. (Brice-Saddler 2018).

Many have compared this *SNL* effort to the Tina Fey/Sarah Palin parodies from the 2008 election that had a clear effect on perceptions of the McCain/Palin ticket and the likelihood of voting for the Republican party (Baumgartner *et al.* 2012). The central argument is that *SNL* has again moved away from light-hearted parody to more satirical and pointed political caricatures (Robinson 2018). Rather than simply mock when it comes to Trump and his presidency, *SNL* is in full-on attack mode (Itzkoff 2017).

Despite *SNL*'s efforts to paint a broad picture of the Trump administration, Baldwin's continued portrayal of Trump truly stands out as historically significant. What began as an engaging comic exercise for Baldwin has turned into a bit of a political and professional burden (Jones 2017). Buoyed by the initial public reaction to the sketches, Baldwin has certainly earned critical acclaim and accolades for his multiple performances as the faux Commander-in-Chief – including a 2017 Emmy award (Otterson 2017).

At the same time, Baldwin also bore the brunt of Trump's criticism of *SNL* on Twitter (Nir 2011). The increasing vitriol of the online attacks by @RealDonaldTrump not only led Baldwin to start to fear for the safety of his family (Stelter 2019), but also made the comic actor publicly lament that his impersonations may be helping rather than hurting Trump, bringing beneficial media attention to a very image conscious president (Barbaro 2016; Evans 2019). With the Trump presidency an established political reality, it is now apparent that Baldwin's satire has morphed into Trump's strategic communication advantage as the comedic appropriation of Trump has come to bolster the President's public persona (Canellos 2019).

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**CONTACT** Amy B. Becker  [abbecker@loyola.edu](mailto:abbecker@loyola.edu)

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## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Additional information

Amy B. Becker

Amy B. Becker is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication at Loyola University Maryland in Baltimore, MD. Her research examines public opinion towards controversial issues, the implications of new media technologies, and the political effects of exposure and attention to political entertainment including late night comedy.

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