

DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES AND LANGUAGE DYNAMICS IN PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN VIDEOS ON YOUTUBE

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Abstract

This study explores the discursive strategies and language choices employed by presidential candidates in YouTube campaign videos, focusing on their contribution to persuasive communication. Recognizing YouTube as a critical platform for political messaging, the research aims to analyze how candidates utilize rhetorical techniques to engage and mobilize diverse audiences. The study specifically examines speeches by Barack Obama and Joe Biden, renowned for their effective use of language to inspire and connect with voters. Using a qualitative methodology grounded in critical discourse analysis, the research investigates key linguistic and rhetorical elements, including inclusive language, storytelling, repetition, and emotive appeals. Campaign videos were transcribed and analyzed for textual and multimodal features, highlighting how language interacts with visual and auditory components to enhance persuasive impact. The findings reveal that inclusive language fosters unity, storytelling establishes relatability, and repetition reinforces central themes, ensuring clarity and retention. Emotive appeals evoke hope and urgency, motivating audiences to act. The integration of multimodal elements amplifies these strategies, creating compelling narratives that resonate on both cognitive and emotional levels. This study contributes to the understanding of digital political communication, emphasizing the importance of strategic language use in campaign settings. Future research could explore cross-cultural variations and audience reception to further elucidate the dynamics of persuasive political discourse.

Keyword: Discursive Strategies, Persuasive Communication, YouTube Campaign Videos, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

INTRODUCTION

Language plays a pivotal role in human interaction, serving as the primary medium through which ideas, emotions, and intentions are communicated. In the realm of political communication, language is not merely a tool of expression but a strategic mechanism for influencing public opinion, building trust, and mobilizing support. With the proliferation of digital platforms, the dynamics of political discourse have undergone a significant transformation.

YouTube, as a platform with a vast and diverse audience, has emerged as a critical medium for political campaigns, offering candidates the ability to craft messages that resonate across cultural and demographic divides. Studies such as those by Shulman et al. (2022) demonstrate that the strategic simplicity and accessibility of language in political messages are instrumental in shaping voter engagement, highlighting the growing importance of linguistic choices in the digital era.

Research in this domain underscores the nuanced interplay between language, power, and ideology in political discourse. Bischof and Löffler (2023) emphasize that effective political language not only conveys information but also serves as a heuristic device, signaling alignment with voters' values and aspirations.

Similarly, Hackenburg et al. (2023) illustrate how moral and ideological framing within political language influences voter attitudes and behaviors, making linguistic strategies a central focus in campaign messaging. These findings underline the need for a deeper understanding of how language functions as a persuasive tool, particularly in the context of digital media, where visual and verbal elements interact to shape public perceptions.

The central research problem addressed in this study revolves around the discursive strategies and language choices employed by presidential candidates in their YouTube campaign videos. These videos are not mere repositories of information but are carefully constructed artifacts designed to persuade, inspire, and mobilize audiences.

Existing literature points to the effectiveness of rhetorical devices, such as repetition, metaphors, and emotional appeals, in enhancing the impact of political communication (Tukvasibwe & Musungu, 2022). However, there remains a lack of comprehensive analysis on how these strategies operate within the multimodal framework of YouTube videos, where language interacts with visual and auditory cues to create persuasive narratives.

A general solution to this research problem involves applying critical discourse analysis (CDA) to dissect the layers of meaning embedded within campaign speeches. CDA, as discussed by Fairclough (1995), provides a robust framework for understanding how language constructs and reflects power dynamics, ideologies, and social realities. In the context of political campaigns, CDA enables researchers to examine how candidates strategically use language to frame issues, construct identities, and connect with audiences. This approach has been widely employed to analyze political speeches, revealing the underlying structures and strategies that shape public discourse (Van Dijk, 1998).

Specific solutions to the problem of analyzing political language in digital campaigns can be found in studies focusing on the speeches of prominent figures such as Barack Obama and Joe Biden. For instance, Obama's use of inclusive language and hopeful slogans, such as "Yes, we can," has been widely analyzed for its effectiveness in fostering unity and collective action (Khajavi & Rasti, 2020). Similarly, Biden's emphasis on moral and ethical themes, as seen in phrases like "a battle for the soul of the nation," demonstrates the power of emotionally resonant language in mobilizing voter support. These examples highlight the critical role of linguistic strategies in constructing persuasive messages that align with voters' values and aspirations.

Further insights into the effectiveness of these strategies can be gleaned from examining the multimodal nature of YouTube videos. Studies by Addo-Danquah et al. (2023) and Cha & Choi (2023) explore how non-verbal elements, such as visuals and body language, interact with verbal communication to enhance audience engagement. These studies reveal that the integration of linguistic and non-linguistic elements creates a more immersive and impactful communication experience. However, the interaction between these elements and their collective contribution to persuasive communication remains an area ripe for further exploration.

An overarching review of literature indicates that while substantial work has been done on rhetorical strategies in political speeches, there is a notable gap in understanding how these strategies are adapted to and transformed by digital platforms like YouTube. The ability of candidates to craft messages that are not only linguistically effective but also visually compelling is a critical aspect of modern political communication. This study aims to bridge this gap by examining the specific discursive strategies and language choices used in YouTube campaign videos, focusing on their contribution to persuasive communication.

The objectives of this study are twofold: first, to analyze the discursive strategies and linguistic choices employed by presidential candidates in YouTube campaign videos, and second, to assess how these strategies contribute to their overall persuasive impact. By applying a critical discourse analysis framework, this research seeks to uncover the intricate dynamics of language and its interplay with visual elements in digital campaign settings. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the multimodal nature of YouTube videos, offering a comprehensive understanding of how language, visuals, and auditory elements converge to influence voter perceptions. The scope of this research is limited to analyzing selected speeches from Barack Obama and Joe Biden, providing a focused lens through which to examine the broader implications of linguistic strategies in digital political campaigns.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design, employing a critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework to investigate the discursive strategies and language choices used by presidential candidates in YouTube campaign videos. The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of linguistic patterns, rhetorical devices, and contextual nuances embedded in the speeches. As outlined by Fairclough (1995), CDA provides a comprehensive method for analyzing the interplay between language, power, and ideology, making it particularly suitable for examining the persuasive elements of political communication.

The research focuses on the YouTube campaign videos of two prominent American presidential candidates, Barack Obama and Joe Biden. These candidates were selected due to their effective use of language in shaping political narratives and mobilizing voter support. The analysis is limited to campaign videos available on YouTube, a platform that has become a central medium for political messaging in the digital era. The study emphasizes the verbal and multimodal elements of these videos, investigating how language and accompanying visuals contribute to persuasive communication.

The primary data for this study comprises campaign speeches delivered by Barack Obama and Joe Biden, sourced from their official YouTube channels. These videos were selected based on their relevance to the research objective, focusing on instances where candidates explicitly sought to persuade their audiences. Secondary data includes existing literature on political discourse, rhetorical strategies, and the role of digital media in political campaigns, providing a theoretical foundation for the analysis.

The data collection process involved the following steps:

1. **Video Selection:** Campaign videos were identified and selected based on criteria such as view count, thematic relevance, and the presence of discernible discursive strategies.
2. **Transcription:** Selected videos were transcribed verbatim to facilitate textual analysis. Non-verbal elements, such as gestures and visual cues, were also noted to provide a holistic understanding of the multimodal discourse.
3. **Documentation:** Supplementary materials, including comments and metadata, were collected to contextualize the speeches within their digital environment.

The analysis follows Van Dijk's (1998) model of critical discourse analysis, which integrates three dimensions: textual analysis, social cognition, and social context. This framework allows for a multi-layered examination of how language operates within broader social and political structures. The study focuses on the following analytical dimensions:

1. **Textual Analysis:** This includes identifying and categorizing discursive strategies, such as the use of metaphors, repetition, and inclusive language. Attention is paid to how these linguistic features are structured to convey specific messages.
2. **Social Cognition:** The analysis examines how candidates' personal and cultural backgrounds influence their language choices and rhetorical approaches, drawing on insights from sociolinguistics.
3. **Social Context:** This dimension situates the speeches within the broader political and cultural landscape, exploring how contextual factors shape and are shaped by the candidates' discourse.

Analytical Procedures

1. **Coding and Categorization:** Transcribed texts were coded to identify recurring themes, linguistic patterns, and rhetorical devices. The coding process was guided by the research objective, ensuring alignment with the study's focus on persuasive communication.
2. **Thematic Analysis:** Identified themes were analyzed to uncover underlying narratives and ideological constructs. Particular attention was given to how language was used to frame issues, evoke emotions, and construct candidate personas.
3. **Comparison and Interpretation:** The discursive strategies of Barack Obama and Joe Biden were compared to identify similarities, differences, and their respective contributions to persuasive communication.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the study employs triangulation by cross-referencing data from multiple sources, including primary campaign videos and secondary literature. Peer review and iterative analysis further enhance the credibility of the results. Additionally, the transcription process was meticulously conducted to preserve the authenticity and integrity of the speeches. The research adheres to ethical standards in academic inquiry, ensuring that all sources are properly credited and data is used responsibly. As the study

involves publicly available content, there are no privacy concerns. However, care was taken to contextualize the analysis within the candidates' intended messages, avoiding misrepresentation. While the study provides a comprehensive analysis of discursive strategies and language choices, its scope is limited to the campaign videos of Barack Obama and Joe Biden. Consequently, the findings may not be generalizable to other political figures or contexts. Additionally, the study focuses primarily on verbal communication, with non-verbal elements serving as supplementary data. By employing a rigorous methodological approach, this research aims to contribute to the understanding of how discursive strategies and linguistic choices function in digital political campaigns, offering insights into the evolving nature of political communication in the digital age.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of Barack Obama's and Joe Biden's YouTube campaign videos reveals a sophisticated use of discursive strategies designed to persuade and engage audiences. These strategies include inclusive language, storytelling, repetition, and direct appeals to shared values and emotions. Such strategies are integral to crafting messages that resonate deeply with diverse audiences, reflecting the candidates' intent to foster trust and inspire action. One key strategy is the deliberate use of **inclusive language**, as demonstrated by frequent references to collective pronouns like "we" and "our." This rhetorical choice fosters a sense of unity and shared responsibility, effectively aligning the audience with the candidates' vision. Obama's iconic slogan, "Yes, we can," epitomizes this approach, encapsulating a message of collective empowerment that transcends demographic boundaries (Khajavi & Rasti, 2020). Similarly, Biden employs inclusive language in phrases such as "we are in this together" and "our fight for the soul of the nation," emphasizing solidarity and collective action.

The candidates also employ **storytelling** as a core rhetorical device. Narratives drawn from personal experiences or relatable societal challenges humanize their messages and create emotional connections with their audience. For example, Obama frequently recounts stories from his multicultural upbringing to emphasize inclusivity and diversity, while Biden often shares anecdotes highlighting his working-class roots and family values. These stories not only establish relatability but also serve to underline the moral and ethical dimensions of their policy priorities. The study highlights the candidates' strategic use of linguistic devices to evoke emotional resonance and reinforce their core messages. **Repetition** emerges as a significant feature in both candidates' speeches, serving to solidify key themes and ensure message retention. Obama's repeated use of "Yes, we can" and Biden's consistent framing of the election as "a battle for the soul of the nation" illustrate how repetition creates memorable slogans that underscore their overarching campaign narratives.

Another prominent linguistic device is the use of **emotive language**, which serves to evoke hope, urgency, and inspiration. Obama's speeches often include phrases like "the audacity of hope" and "our brighter tomorrow," which resonate with audiences by projecting optimism and determination. Biden's language, on the other hand, frequently invokes themes of moral responsibility and urgency, using expressions like "we cannot wait any longer" to inspire

immediate action. These emotive elements are instrumental in mobilizing voters by appealing to their values and aspirations. Both candidates strategically employ **framing** to contextualize issues and guide audience perceptions. Framing allows candidates to present their narratives in ways that highlight their strengths while addressing voter concerns. Obama often frames policy discussions within broader themes of hope and change, while Biden uses moral framing to position his campaign as a fight for justice and equity.

Rhetorical questions are another effective tool used to engage audiences and provoke reflection. For instance, Obama frequently asks, “What kind of country do we want to be?” prompting audiences to envision a collective future aligned with his vision. Biden employs similar techniques, asking questions like, “How can we look our children in the eye if we fail to act?” These rhetorical questions not only stimulate critical thinking but also strengthen the emotional impact of the candidates’ messages.

The multimodal nature of YouTube videos—combining visual, auditory, and textual elements—amplifies the effectiveness of the candidates’ discursive strategies. Visual elements, such as imagery of diverse audiences, family interactions, and symbolic locations, reinforce verbal messages by providing contextual and emotional cues. For example, Obama’s campaign videos often feature footage of community gatherings and grassroots initiatives, visually embodying his message of inclusivity and hope. Similarly, Biden’s videos frequently incorporate scenes of working-class communities and empathetic interactions, underscoring his focus on shared struggles and collective resilience. Auditory elements, including background music and voice modulation, further enhance the persuasive impact. Uplifting music paired with emotionally charged speech segments intensifies the audience’s emotional engagement. Both candidates use changes in tone and pace to emphasize critical points, ensuring that their messages resonate with viewers on a deeper level. The integration of these discursive strategies and language choices contributes significantly to the persuasive impact of the candidates’ campaign videos. By combining inclusive language, emotional appeals, and compelling narratives, Obama and Biden effectively construct relatable personas that align with the values and aspirations of their audiences. These strategies not only enhance the candidates’ credibility but also foster trust and inspire collective action.

The findings suggest that the success of political messaging in digital platforms like YouTube hinges on the interplay between linguistic, visual, and auditory elements. The candidates’ ability to adapt their language to the multimodal context of YouTube ensures that their messages are not only heard but also felt, creating a lasting impression on voters. The results of this study underscore the importance of linguistic and rhetorical strategies in digital political campaigns. The strategic use of inclusive language, storytelling, repetition, and emotive appeals highlights how candidates craft messages that resonate deeply with diverse audiences. Additionally, the role of multimodal communication in enhancing the persuasive impact of campaign videos warrants further exploration, particularly in understanding how visual and auditory elements interact with language to shape voter perceptions. Future research could expand on these findings by examining the discursive strategies of other political figures across different cultural and political contexts. Comparative studies could provide a broader

understanding of how language functions as a tool for persuasion in varying sociopolitical environments. Furthermore, exploring audience reception and the cognitive impact of these strategies would offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of digital political communication.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the discursive strategies and language choices employed by presidential candidates Barack Obama and Joe Biden in their YouTube campaign videos, focusing on how these elements contribute to persuasive communication. Key findings reveal that the strategic use of inclusive language, emotive appeals, storytelling, and repetition are central to constructing compelling narratives that resonate with diverse audiences. Inclusive language fosters a sense of unity, while emotional appeals and storytelling humanize the candidates and establish an emotional connection with viewers. Repetition reinforces key themes, ensuring message retention and clarity. The multimodal nature of YouTube videos amplifies these strategies by integrating visual and auditory elements that complement verbal communication. This synergy enhances the persuasive impact, making the messages not only heard but also felt. The findings underline the importance of adapting rhetorical strategies to the digital context, demonstrating how candidates effectively leverage language to engage, inspire, and mobilize audiences. This study contributes to the understanding of political communication in digital media, offering insights into the interplay between language and multimodal elements. Future research could explore the effectiveness of these strategies across different cultural and political contexts or examine audience reception to provide deeper insights into voter engagement and decision-making processes.

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