

"THE ORANGE EMPEROR, THE BITCH, AND THE SLUT": MEME ATTACKS ON TRUMP, CLINTON, AND HARRIS

Kevin A. Stein :: Matthew H. Barton

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE / DOI: 10.20901/ms.17.33.7 / SUBMITTED: 4.12.2025.

ABSTRACT *This study examines the gendered meme attacks against Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, and Kamala Harris during their 2016 and 2024 presidential election campaigns using William Benoit's Theory of Persuasive Attack. This unique message form, often consisting of visual parody and satire, utilizes a variety of attack strategies. The most prominent attacks were those targeting character, including references to race, gender, and morality. Specific strategies included the following: accused has performed acts consistent with the trait, accused has made statements consistent with the trait, accused associates with people who share the trait, accused is contrasted with people who do not share the trait, and exemplifying the trait with a particularly offensive example. Attacks on actions were also present. These included accused committed the act before, accused benefited from the act, extent of damage, and inconsistency. Each strategy is discussed along with implications for the future study of the rhetorical influence of memes within the context of presidential politics, gender, and race.*

KEYWORDS

DONALD TRUMP, HILLARY CLINTON, KAMALA HARRIS, MEMES, BENOIT, ATTACK

Author's note _____

Kevin A. Stein :: Southern Utah University :: stein@suu.edu

Matthew H. Barton :: Southern Utah University :: bartonm@suu.edu

INTRODUCTION

The 2016 and 2024 presidential elections were two of the most distinctive in the history of the United States (Beschloss, 2016; "UConn scholars," 2024). In 2016, Hillary Clinton became the first woman to win a major-party nomination. Prior to that time, two women – Geraldine Ferraro in 1984 and Sarah Palin in 2008 – had been selected as presidential running mates for Walter Mondale and John McCain, respectively (Kelly, 2016). The 2016 general election featured two candidates from very different backgrounds. Hillary Clinton was a career politician, having promoted her own policy agendas as First Lady between 1992 and 2000, serving as a senator in New York between 2001 and 2009, and assuming the role of Secretary of State under Barack Obama between 2009 and 2013 (Merica, 2016). Donald Trump, on the other hand, had almost no political experience prior to his campaign in 2016 (Crockett, 2017), although he had considered running in 1988, 2000, 2004, and 2008 (Waterhouse, n.d.). Additionally, there were notable differences in gender, ideology, and public presentation style. Despite their perceived differences, Clinton and Trump shared unusually low favorability ratings (Yourish, 2016) and demonstrated a willingness to use political ads and social media to engage in a vitriolic campaign of attack discourse, often focusing on the character attributes of their opponent (Zompetti, 2019).

The 2024 election was also historically distinctive. The campaign represented only the second time in U.S. history that a former president was seeking reelection after losing as the incumbent. The other was President Grover Cleveland, who served as both the 24th and 26th presidents of the United States (Desilver, 2022). Most presidents long for a second term in office, but Donald Trump was perhaps even more motivated to secure a second term after the "Stop the Steal" scandal of 2020 (Kim et al., 2024), in which he claimed his loss to Joe Biden was the result of widespread ballot and election site fraud. Others argued that his interest in the presidency was rooted in his desire to create immunity for himself against numerous state and federal charges (Wendling & Fitzgerald, 2025). The 2024 election set up a rematch between incumbent President Joe Biden (age 81) and Former President Donald Trump (age 78), the two oldest presidential candidates in history. The issue of age-related cognitive decline did not seem to dog Trump as much as it did Biden. Republican pundits and media personalities would frequently make the case that Biden was not fit to run for reelection (Yang, 2024). Even Biden's staunchest supporters would eventually concede the point after their candidate's widely-criticized performance at his one and only debate with Donald Trump during the 2024 election cycle, wherein Biden struggled to articulate his thoughts (Elliott, 2024). At one point, Trump asserted, "I really don't know what he said at the end of that sentence. I don't think he knows what he said, either" (Sforza, 2024, para. 2). After the debate, key figures in the Democratic Party started to publicly and privately share their doubts about Biden's ability to beat Trump in the election (Bolton, 2024). After several weeks of resistance, Biden stepped aside and threw his endorsement behind his vice president, Kamala Harris. In an unorthodox process for selecting a replacement nominee, Biden's pledged delegates switched their support from the president to Harris (Kelly & Ward, 2024). Not only were the events preceding her nomination historically unique, but Harris would also become only the second woman ever to run in a general election as the nominee of a major political party.

Today's voters have access to a historically unprecedented number of information sources, yet memes continue to be a popular source of social media capital for those wanting to stay informed and connected to others. In fact, the global meme industry was valued at \$2.3 billion in 2020 and has grown to \$7.8 billion in the first quarter of 2026 (Beganovich & Beganovich, 2026). In fact, recent findings confirm that of people aged 18 to 36, 30% will share at least one meme every single day (Nash, 2025). Memes are a popular outlet for communicating and consuming ideas about important contemporary events because they are easy to create and distribute. Online web and phone applications used to create memes, such as KnowYourMeme, MemeGenerator, Imgur, Troll.me, Make a Meme, and Meme Creator, are free and readily available to users. According to MemeGenerator, the only technical skills required of the user are the ability to upload an image, type text, and share content (Barton et al., 2020). Semiotics experts argue that the most viral memes gain traction because they "stick to a three-step blueprint. They're cheeky, they're funny and they're relatable" (Mosanya, 2016, para. 5). Memes appeal to the widest possible audience because the audience can digest and appreciate them on a range of levels, from the simplest to the most complex.

In addition to their popularity and reach, memes have also been shown to have a measurable impact on political campaigns and campaign issues. For example, some research supports the fact that meme exposure leads to greater levels of online political participation (Zhang & Pinto, 2021), politically-oriented anger, and ideological polarization (Halverson & Weeks, 2023). Another study found that memes foster in-group identity among online communities, generate "straw man" arguments in place of substantive interaction, and "play a very worrying role in removing nuance from complex political debates" (Anderau & Barbarrusa, 2024, p. 1536). Most noteworthy for this investigation is that satirical memes, in particular, played a greater role in making politics more attractive to audiences. In fact, people exposed to satirical memes consumed complex political information from other sources following their initial exposure to memes (Chmel et al., 2024).

Consequently, this study examines meme attacks against Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, and Kamala Harris during their 2016 and 2024 presidential election campaigns using William Benoit's Theory of Persuasive Attack. The analysis is focused squarely on the strategies used and not the veracity or truth of arguments made in any of the memes. For example, one meme in our sample shows a picture of Donald Trump with a quote that reads (in part), "If I were to run, I'd run as a Republican. They're the dumbest group of voters in the country." The meme creator intended to make an argument that Trump is playing his supporters for fools, secretly harboring negative feelings for conservative voters, whose support he needs to win. In reality, Trump never made this statement and numerous fact-checking organizations confirmed it was a fabrication (Farley, 2015; Reuters, 2020). In short, we analyzed numerous memes for their attack discourse but did not attempt to verify the claims made therein.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section examines three key areas of research: (1) how women are treated in politics, (2) the role that memes play in public discourse, and (3) how memes perpetuate gender imbalances in politics.

Gender and Politics

Historically, women have been relegated to the private sphere, where they were expected to embrace nurturing and supportive roles for men, especially in politics (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Shiraev et al. (2022) provide a host of examples of gendered attacks against women designed to discourage their participation in public politics. For instance, they highlight ridicule against Margaret Thatcher (e.g., shrill voice, masculine appearance), Eleanor Roosevelt (e.g., a lesbian, too outspoken about her husband's White House), and Hillary Clinton (e.g., married only for political convenience). In sum, these scholars argue that women in politics are traditionally framed as unlikeable, masculine, fake, and morally suspect. This conundrum, often called a "double bind" or "mixed stereotype," traps women in a space where they face conflicting judgments about their gender. They are admired for their capability, but disliked for violating gender norms (Fiske et al., 2002). News coverage reflects this gender bias (DuBosar, 2022). As Teresa (2020) noted, unless women are willing to reinvent themselves in masculine terms by joining the "boys' club," there is little hope of being taken seriously as political contenders for the nation's highest offices. News coverage of women in politics has been myopic and brutal. For example, in examining the normal discursive tenor of news interviews where laughter is often appropriate, Hillary Clinton's laugh was painted as a "cackle," suggesting that it was not only entirely inappropriate, but it was reminiscent of a wicked witch, a personality that does not belong in the White House (Romaniuk, 2016). Clearly, there is evidence that women are left in an unenviable position in the political arena.

Memes and Public Discourse

The term "meme" was originally conceived by British evolutionary scientist Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene* (1976) to refer to a biological unit that propagates and spreads. The term was later used to describe how information can become ubiquitous through its constant dissemination. In recent literature, memes have been described by media theorist Limor Shifman (2013) as "pieces of cultural information that pass along from person to person, but gradually scale into a shared social phenomenon" (p. 18). This phenomenon functions as a kind of "swarm logic" that compounds small acts of mockery into a definitive tapestry of public opinion that inflicts maximum reputational damage (Seiffert-Brockmann, 2020). Although meme culture can be dismissed as a kind of inside joke, memes are surprisingly common tools for providing commentary on a host of public events. Moreover, despite the amount of time users spend navigating online material and the seemingly limitless control that content creators have in online spaces, memes resonate among even the most casual of online observers. In fact, memes have been called the *lingua franca* (common language) of online culture (Milner, 2016), dominating

online message boards and websites like Reddit, Tumblr, and Imgur. Memes, in short, are the new language of contemporary cyberspace.

Every major political or cultural event seems to trigger an abundance of memes (Shifman, 2013). Many of these events have garnered the interest of academic researchers, who have explored the content, form, and impact of memes in different cases. Some studies have examined memes as political discourse (Benoit et al., 2024; Bebić & Volarevic, 2018; Howley, 2016; Lalancette & Small, 2020; Lukianova et al., 2019), social activism (Barton et al., 2020; Davis et al., 2016; Moussa et al., 2020; Ross & Rivers, 2019), gender framing (Nee & Maio, 2019), marketing (Sharma, 2018), entertainment (Perreault & Ferrucci, 2019), and the link between traditional news coverage and meme generation (Taylor et al, 2023). In many cases, these memes can be used as a tool for culture jamming, a subversive means of undercutting dominant consumer narratives with a counterculture message (Harold, 2007; Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2017, p. 485). Memes can also use humor as a rhetorical weapon, either through benign situational humor or "biting social commentary" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007; Wiggins & Bowers, 2015).

Memes, Gender, and Politics

As Icks et al. (2020) suggest, character assassination is far from a new phenomenon: in fact, they claim that it is as "old as Mississippi mud" (p. 1). Implicit in this observation is the notion that assassinating another's character is primarily an exercise in power acquisition, an easily identifiable historical fact. They argue that "if anything, character attacks seem only to have increased in frequency and harshness in recent years, especially in the domain of politics" (p. 1). One channel that has caused a proliferation of attacks is memes. Nee and Maio (2019) examined the memes directed at Hillary Clinton during the 2016 presidential campaign. They found that the memes reflected sexist narratives. For example, "Clinton was portrayed as too weak, unhealthy, and unattractive to be a leader. These attributes are incongruent with the role of the presidency" (p. 313). Other attacks from political memes went beyond biological observations into racist stereotypes. Bland et al. (2024) noted depictions of Kamala Harris as "Jezebel," "the angry black woman," and "tragic mulatto." Each one of these labels works rhetorically to simultaneously demean her gender, her race, and her morality. Bland et al. (2024) suggest that "The Jezebel stereotype that is often reserved for women of color was also used in memes that emphasized Harris's sexual history" (p. 11).

Unfortunately, the destructive power of memes is not limited exclusively to character assassination. In Drakett et al.'s examination (2018) they found evidence of traditional roles for women, depicting them as "emotionally unstable, irrational, and indecisive" (p. 23). Even more troubling, they argued that some memes normalized violence against women by framing abhorrent behavior as ironic humor. They noted, "...violence within a meme renders it socially acceptable" and therefore not malicious (p. 35).

Our work goes beyond the scope of the research reviewed here by focusing more directly on memes as an evolving attack strategy and examining the way character attacks

influence audience conclusions about candidate behavior as well as existing character features that are outside of their control. In spite of a developing body of literature and its contributions on the importance of memes as a channel for message dissemination, it is too often dismissed as a superficial avenue for political information as opposed to debates, speeches, town hall forums, advertisements, and TV interviews. Since many of these studies focus on one woman, one case, or even one campaign, little research examines the unique function of memes to disseminate attacks focusing on the target's gender, race, and morality. Moreover, existing research does not adequately compare attacks made against multiple candidates across different election cycles. The 2016 and 2024 U.S. presidential elections are particularly appropriate contexts for examining how memes are uniquely used to discredit political figures, such as Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, and Kamala Harris, by emphasizing gendered personal qualities. Therefore, we propose the following research questions to guide our analysis:

RQ 1: What attack strategies were used in memes during the 2016 and 2024 presidential elections to attack Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, and Kamala Harris?

RQ 2: How effective were the meme attacks in raising the issue of race and gender in the campaign?

METHOD

In order to answer these research questions, we applied Benoit et al.'s (2024) expanded theory of attack to examine the key strategies used in the memes. This framework argues that there are six rhetorical strategies for increasing perceived responsibility for a harmful act: 1) argue that the accused committed the act before; 2) argue that the accused planned the act; 3) claim that the accused knew the likely consequences of the act; 4) show that the accused benefited from the act; 5) claim that others do not act this way; and 6) show that the behavior appears aimed at the victim. The authors also argued that there are six strategies for increasing the offensiveness of a particular act: 1) emphasize the extent of the damage; 2) illustrate the persistence of negative effects; 3) show the effects on the audience; 4) argue that there is an inconsistency on the part of the offender; 5) claim the victims are innocent or helpless; and 6) show an obligation to protect the victims. We note that Legge et al. (2012) established a seventh category: victims are dignified, honorable, or noble.

The expanded typology also adds strategies for persuasive attack on character. It provides four strategies for enhancing perceptions that the target possesses a trait: 1) accused has performed acts consistent with the trait; 2) accused has made statements consistent with the trait; 3) accused associates with people who share the trait; and 4) accused is contrasted with people who do not share this trait. The typology also lists two strategies for enhancing perceptions that the trait is offensive: 1) exemplify the trait with a particularly offensive example; and 2) observe that the audience or people they care about can experience the negative effects of this trait. Further illustrations of these strategies can be found throughout the analysis as we review the attacks in this unique context.

The sample of texts included what we hope is an exhaustive collection of the most popular memes attacking Trump, Clinton, and Harris during their campaigns. We gathered 198 memes from the most popular meme websites. These included *Google Images*, *Imgur*, *Reddit*, *Tumblr*, *Imgflip*, and *X* (formerly *Twitter*). Although it is somewhat difficult to determine a meme's origin, we believe that search terms integrating the candidates' names, the year of the campaign, and "presidential election" were sufficient to narrow the timeframe of these memes to the desired sample.

ANALYSIS

Our analysis found that meme creators attacked Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, and Kamala Harris on both actions and character. Since the attacks on actions were noticeably less frequent than attacks on character, the majority of this analysis focuses on the latter.

Attacks on Actions

Attack strategies focusing on a candidate's responsibility for an action included: 1) accused committed the act before and 2) accused benefited from the act. Attack strategies focusing on the level of offensiveness of a candidate's actions included: 1) extent of damage and 2) inconsistency.

Accused Committed the Act Before

The most common strategy for increasing responsibility for an act was arguing that the accused committed the act before. For example, one meme with a standard two-frame design shows Hillary Clinton in front of an American flag with a caption that reads, "I've been doing this for 40 years!" The other panel shows a frowning cat, with a response, "That's one hell of a crime spree." This meme implies that Clinton's behavior should be more highly scrutinized because of how long the pattern of behavior has been occurring. Another meme in this category shows Kamala Harris laughing, with the title, "Failing Upward: The Kamala Harris Story" and a subheading of "A blow-by-blow account from her knees to the White House." This sexually suggestive meme attacks Harris for an alleged history of inappropriate workplace behavior. These memes are piggybacking on news headlines such as this one from *Newsweek* magazine which reads, "Megyn Kelly says Kamala Harris 'slept her way' into politics" (Dunn, 2024). The Australian Broadcasting Corporation reported that former Trump aide Sebastian Gorka referred to Kamala Harris as a "disaster whose only qualification is having a vagina and the right skin colour" before being cut off by interviewer Mark Dolan [of British channel GB News] who reminded him that Ms. Harris was an "accomplished lawyer" and an experienced politician (Nguyen et al., 2024, para. 11).

Accused Benefited from the Act

Another common attack strategy for increasing responsibility for an act was to argue that the accused benefited from the act. One example of this type of meme showed Kamala Harris photoshopped into a Biden press conference in which he is whispering the following caption in her ear, "Let's see that special qualification you have been bragging about" with the expression on her face intended to imply oral sex (see Picture 1).



Picture 1.

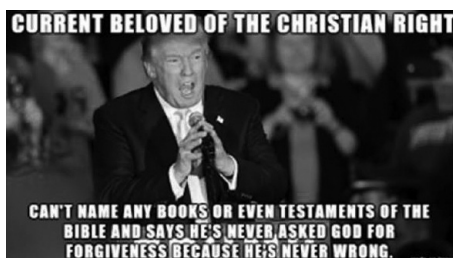
An accused individual is thought to carry more responsibility for an action if they benefited from it, so here Harris is viewed through a much more negative lens for engaging in these acts in order to further her career.

Extent of Damage

One common strategy for increasing the offensiveness of the act was to emphasize the extent of the damage. A memorable meme demonstrating the extent of damage shows Donald Trump standing at a podium with a gun in his right hand with a caption that reads, "If Trump wins I need to accept the fact that I will have probably killed another person for food and resources by the end of 2016." The argument goes beyond simply suggesting Trump will make a bad president that he is going to usher in a real-life "purge" where the population will be left with no choice but to kill each other for scarce resources.

Inconsistency

This category featured memes that showed an inconsistency between candidate statements and candidate behavior. For example, one meme attacked Kamala Harris for championing gender fluidity, asserting that she cannot advocate for the issue, while simultaneously being praised as achieving a historic first for women. The caption reads, "When you're the first female vice president of the United States, but your party doesn't recognize genders." Another meme demonstrating inconsistency was an attack on Donald Trump's claims of religiosity (see Picture 2). The caption reads, "Current beloved of the Christian right. Can't name any books or even testaments of the Bible and says he's never asked God for forgiveness because he's never wrong."



Picture 2.

The attack highlights the ironic nature of inconsistency with the mainstream Christian belief that all people are imperfect and should look to God to reconcile behaviors that are inconsistent with beliefs.

Intensifying Attacks on Character

Attacks on character included: 1) accused has performed acts consistent with the trait; 2) accused has made statements consistent with the trait; 3) accused associates with people who share the trait; 4) accused is contrasted with people who do not share the trait; and 5) exemplifying the trait with a particularly offensive example.

Accused Has Performed Acts Consistent with the Trait

This attack strategy was the most common representing approximately 30% of the total memes. All three candidates were targets of these types of attacks. Attacks against Hillary Clinton depicted her as a criminal. For example, one meme depicts Hillary in front of five faceless characters in black suits and ties. In place of their faces are green dots with the names of high profile investment companies (e.g., Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, etc.) with which she and her husband were alleged to have questionable business dealings. Attacks against Kamala Harris tended to follow one of two argumentative paths. The first questioned her morality implying that she is openly promiscuous. For example, one meme used a scientific reference of Hydrogen and Oxygen to spell out the word "HO." The second path emphasized the point that only losers lose elections. One characteristic meme showed Kamala Harris positioned adjacent to YouTube star and boxer Jake Paul with the caption, "To pay back \$20 million campaign debt, Kamala Harris agrees to fight Jake Paul." Critics also attacked Donald Trump in two different manners. First, they levied accusations for being dishonest, impulsive, and criminal. One meme shows Trump smirking with a caption playing on a famous Disney song from the film *Mary Poppins*: "Super, Callous, Fascist, Racist, Extra Braggadocious." Second, attacks clustered around his seemingly haphazard process for choosing people to lead his cabinet. Such selections included: Gob Bluth as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development; Baron Harkonnen as Head of Spice Production on the planet of Arrakis; Roman Roy as Deputy Administrator of NASA; Davros, Dark Lord of Skaro and Creator of the Daleks, to lead the Department for Peace and Compassion; AJ and Big Justice [father/son YouTubers] to head the Department of Defense; Leatherface as the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture; and Charlie Kelly, Bird Lawyer [a fictional reference to a specific type of law], as US Attorney General. Each choice in these memes suggests that Trump's judgment is flawed and should not be trusted.

Accused Has Made Statements Consistent with the Trait

These attacks demonstrated parity between candidate statements and undesirable traits. For instance, one meme shows Hillary Clinton defending her decision to delete official emails from her government issued device: "I did not delete emails. They were ... well ... it's complicated. Trust me" (see Picture 3).



Picture 3.

The meme implies that she had something to hide as part of the email server controversy, reinforcing the suspicion that she is dishonest. Memes attacking Kamala Harris focused on her inability to speak clearly. For example, one meme shows a smiling and composed Harris with the caption, "Today is today, yesterday was today yesterday. Tomorrow will be today tomorrow. So live today, so the future today will be as the past today." These "word salad" references attempt to undercut her capacity to convey ideas in this important leadership role. Donald Trump was attacked for being an abrasive person. Memes attempted to show this quality by referencing offensive statements he has made off the cuff: "I don't always run for president, but when I do, I try to offend as many potential voters as possible." Other memes attacked Trump for lying in general as well as about issues like his knowledge of the Bible. For instance, a charred Trump is pictured holding the Bible with the caption, "And may lightning strike me down if I lie" (see Picture 4).



Picture 4.

These memes suggest a truly flawed character is at his core.

Accused Associates with People Who Share the Trait

These memes attempted to smear candidate character by showing that they associate with bad people. Hillary Clinton was attacked for her associations with her husband and former President, Bill Clinton. These memes make specific reference to the president's sexual indiscretions. For example, one meme plays on the famous defense line, "I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Ms. Lewinsky," changing the text to read,

"I did not have textual relations." Clearly, if Hillary still associates with questionable people, regardless of status, her character is also tarnished. Attacks against Kamala Harris functioned similarly, but the comparison was to the fictional pop culture villain, Hannibal Lecter. The meme displays Harris wearing Lecter's highly recognizable mask and the words "Hannibal Harris" (see Picture 5).



Picture 5.

The implication here is that she is too dangerous to be unleashed. Memes designed to attack Donald Trump focused on the intelligence level and homogeneity of his followers, who are often characterized by their evangelical (Rotolo & Smith, 2026) and highly authoritarian inclinations (MacWilliams, 2016). For instance, a meme from a rally photo shows a crowd of people who all have the same face. One individual is hoisting a sign which reads, "Thank you Lord Jesus for President Trump." All of these memes, regardless of candidate, attempt a guilt-by-association strategy to diminish the character of the accused.

Accused is Contrasted with People Who Do Not Share the Trait

Many of the memes in this category went after both candidates in the race in a single portrayal. One example shows a side-by-side view of Trump with disheveled hair and Clinton with a contorted face. The caption reads, "323 million people in the US ... and they bring it down to this." Another meme that is similar, although the candidates photos are more composed reads, "If Donald and Hillary are together on a boat in the middle of the ocean and it sinks. Who survives? America." Clearly the implication in these memes is to demonstrate that neither candidate is representative of the best America has to offer. Harris and Clinton were also attacked using this strategy for being out of touch with the poor, despite claiming otherwise. For example, Harris is pictured in the top half of a split screen format where the lower half shows an economically disadvantaged child. Her caption reads, "I actually lived in a poor neighborhood," while his caption reads, "How do you define poor...?" Attacks against Clinton depict her as dispassionate and privileged with the words, "Silly Americans. Laws are for poor people" (see Picture 6).

Together such attacks inoculate people against the "I'm just like you" arguments which attempt to relate to voters on a personal level. Attacks against Trump position him as the antithesis of the everyman by highlighting deficiencies in his personal appearance,

specifically his hair and skin. Two memes focus on the unkempt look of his hair with clever reappropriation of familiar phrases like, "We shall over comb" (see Picture 7) and "There will be hell toupee."



Picture 6.



Picture 7.

Another meme draws an analogy between Trump and an orange pumpkin. It states, "What do Donald Trump and a pumpkin have in common? They're orange on the outside, hollow on the inside, and should be tossed out in early November". Together these memes create negative associations for the accused by communicating to voters a contrast to what is normal.

Exemplify the Trait with a Particularly Offensive Example

These memes throw caution to the wind as they depict behaviors that would often be considered socially unacceptable to even discuss. For example, Hillary Clinton is pictured in a nine-square of individual images with her fisted hand by her mouth as if attempting to cover a cough; however, the innuendo of what she is "actually" doing is made clear with the text reading, "Have you seen Hillary Clinton's Monica Lewinsky impression?" (see Picture 8).



Picture 8. _____

Kamala Harris was pictured from her viewpoint as the speaker looking at a capacity crowd in a Chicago sporting arena with a giant Soviet Union hammer and sickle flag (see Picture 9).



Picture 9. _____

All people are dressed as either soldiers or workers with the clear implication that she will usher in a communist state. The memes against Trump go far beyond a simple distaste for a candidate and wish for their untimely demise. For instance, "One day it will be over. Just be patient" (see Picture 10).

The caption surrounds a headstone with the name Trump in big letters and writing at the base of the monument which reads, "Please wash hands after urinating." Not only does this meme suggest that America would be better off if he passed, but death alone is not sufficient to rid the nation of his characteristics.



Picture 10.

DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals three key insights: (1) the memes tend to have a reductionist quality, confining each candidate to the most base stereotypes; (2) memes often act as an extension of the news cycle, reflecting content discussed within the mainstream media; and (3) the relationship between attacks on character and attacks on actions uncovers a surprising enthymematic structure, where the audience is invited to take character attacks and map them onto actions.

First, a relatively expected observation about memes is that they tend to oversimplify the complexity of candidate qualifications because memes need to be easy to construct, easy to share, and cannot “bury the lead” so to speak. Second, these memes display a number of reductionist tendencies which orbit around traditional conceptions of gender roles; the first of which is morality. For example, Kamala Harris was depicted as successfully advancing in her career only as a result of her questionable relationship with a supervisor (e.g., Willie Brown). Although not often referenced for her beauty, Hillary Clinton is also attacked in a tasteless nine-square portrayal of covering a cough that alludes to much more (see previous Figure 8). What these memes reveal is an outdated trope that suggests women should be confined to subservient private roles. The broader implication is that when women choose to enter into public political life, they are forced to either take on masculine qualities or embrace an historically applied perception of “public woman as prostitute.” Attacks suggesting that women are only qualified if they exhibit behaviors that please men create a no-win situation where women are only qualified to fulfill roles in private spaces (Cerja et al., 2024). They clearly imply that women have no business running for president. Memes oversimplify candidates’ character and qualifications. By their nature campaigns are meant to establish a variety of skills and experiences that contribute to leadership ability. By simplifying their character and reducing them to base stereotypes, memes are neutralizing the primary function of campaign discourse.

The combined analysis of one man and two women of different races provides some interesting ways of comparing norms. Some studies focus on the intersectionality of race and gender. For example, Harris’ race and gender intersect to create different forms of

oppression, and looking at how these attacks compare to attacks against Clinton might illuminate how intersectional attacks are compounded and therefore more impactful. These memes are contrasted with those against Donald Trump, where his alleged immorality is buried inside of a list of other behaviors or not mentioned at all. Women are usually reduced to one quality, while Trump is reduced to a handful of negative qualities. Because Trump is defined by several undesirable traits, he still appears to be a complicated man versus his female counterparts who are portrayed as so simple-minded that they are reduced to a role like homemaker or sex object. The variety of attack topics against Trump provide an avenue for his supporters to make claims that he is a complicated, well-meaning man and his errors come from a misunderstanding of his true nature, which is obfuscated by the overlap of these various perceptual lenses (Diamond, 2016).

Presented as a conglomerate, these attacks imply that not only are men uniquely qualified for complex public roles, their actual character is allowed to be much less virtuous, offering them the equivalent of a free pass on certain types of character flaws and associated behaviors. With Trump, his masculinity is sometimes examined, but not in contrast with the feminine stereotypes. For example, memes addressing Trump's masculinity focused on his unilateral decision-making, his affinity for guns, and his threatening language toward those who oppose him. These are markedly differently topics than stereotypes addressed in memes targeting Clinton and Harris. This blind spot with meme creators is important because his characteristics and/or mannerisms might start to serve as the baseline for future leaders about what constitutes presidential behavior. Specifically, this hyper-masculine persona pushes the gender divide wider for women, making it nearly impossible for them to ascend the political ladder because they do not embody these masculine qualities.

The second attack on gender roles comes in the form of observations about physical appearance. These memes attack both men and women. For instance, Donald Trump is ridiculed for looking less presidential because of his often-disheveled hairstyle and orange skin tone. Hillary Clinton is attacked by visual depictions more than with the punchline contained in the text. She is portrayed as tired, old, and sickly. Kamala Harris memes often show her as a smiling, well-manicured professional woman because images of a beautiful Harris make the other memes about her sexualized nature more credible. Typically, meme creators would seemingly attempt to find the most unflattering images of the candidates to enhance comedic value, while also denigrating their character, but this clearly was not the case with Harris.

The second interesting finding in this analysis is the evidence that there is a connection between gendered memes and the news cycle, meaning that memes are disseminating a familiar public agenda about candidate character and behavior. Although previous research has established the link between news and memes more generally (Taylor et al., 2023), our analysis shows that the connection is especially prominent with news coverage and memes addressing gender in a campaign. This connection was particularly apparent in memes attacking Kamala Harris. Cerja et al. (2024, p. 88) note that:

Within 24 hours of Ms. Harris' campaign kickoff, some critics were bringing up her one-time relationship with a powerful California politician, Willie Brown – a common tactic faced by women that sexualizes them and reduces their successes to a relationship with a man ... Social media (particularly memes and hashtags) have intensified these vitriolic, misogynoir attacks.

Several of the more popular hashtags floated by prominent media personalities included, #HeelsUpHarris (appearing in 35,479 Twitter posts) and #JoeAndTheHoe (appearing on Twitter, blogs, bumper stickers, t-shirts, patches, flags, yard signs and even on a car dealership billboard in Massachusetts) (Cerja et al., 2024, p. 88). The Clinton research specifically focuses on how she was vilified in a variety of ways through non-meme channels. Our study shows that some of the same old tropes get resurrected and re-expressed through memes. They become sort of a visual shorthand, such as "remember when Hillary used to get mocked for her laugh or her pant suits back in the day. Now we've got a meme about it with no context required to 'get the joke.'" The jokes are old, but the channels are not and memes give them new life.

The final argument of interest is understanding why character attacks are more prevalent in this sample than attacks on action. The reason character attacks are more prominent in memes is that gender and race are generally considered character traits and outside of people's control. They are packed with a set of cultural assumptions defining appropriate behavior. Although morality is often equated with behavior, that behavior is a byproduct of both gender and race. The most common categories of meme attacks (e.g., accused has performed acts consistent with the trait, accused has made statements consistent with the trait, and accused associates/is contrasted with others who share the trait) point to a preconceived public perception about the nature of politicians. The notion is that politicians behave poorly, lie to get ahead, and associate with others who do the same. When gender and race are added to the standard politician archetype, the person embodying those qualities is naturally more vulnerable to attack.

Surprisingly, these negative attributes portrayed in the memes feed naturally into the Aristotelian notion of an enthymeme because they provide a ready-made premise for the audience to use in drawing an inference about the candidate. For example, several memes attempted to argue that Kamala Harris used fellatio as a tool for political advancement. One of these memes referred to the "Kamala Harris story" and claimed to offer a "blow by blow account from her knees to the White House." Another showed Harris with her cheek protruding and asked, "Let's see that special qualification you have been bragging about" (see previous Figure 1). Both of these memes are highly suggestive in making inferences about how Kamala Harris was able to ascend to her party's presidential nomination. What they fail to do is to spell out each element of a typical syllogism (major premise, minor premise, conclusion). In the memes, the audience is left to supply the really consequential conclusion, which is not only that Harris is simply promiscuous, but that she brings no other qualifications to the table and therefore should be excluded from being the president. Another enthymeme is used in a meme showing a confused-looking Harris with the text, "When you're the first female Vice-President of the United States, but your

party doesn't recognize genders." This meme provides the major and minor premise of a hypothetical syllogism, but not the conclusion:

>The major premise is, "If you want credit for being the first woman to do something significant..."

>The minor premise is, "but you do not actually believe there is such a thing as a woman..."

>The conclusion is naturally, "Then, you and every other woman are not in a position to accomplish anything of importance."

An enthymeme is powerful because it requires the audience to be active participants in embracing the assumptions in an argument as well as working to construct its very foundation (Madden, 1952). We acknowledge that memes are often treated as sort of a "one off" joke that has little political impact. However, as Wiggins and Bowers (2015) claim that memes can be better understood as "remixable cultural artifacts," that operate both as unique texts as well as a running archive of recurring gender stereotypes. The authors focus heavily on the "structure" of the meme and how it provides an instructional manual for how to reproduce it; the ability to recreate content quickly lends itself exceptionally well to meme culture. We note that memes are abbreviated arguments that fit comfortably within the abbreviated structure of enthymemes. People who use political memes that function as gendered or racist attacks may not even realize they are drawing from a very well-established meme playbook of misogynistic drivel that tells them essentially what to say and how to say it.

CONCLUSION

In looking back on the attack memes of the last two presidential election cycles, it is clear that memes are supplying the public with a sense of which issues about candidates are most important, namely gender, race, and morality. While not a direct linear relationship, what the news reports about the candidates' gender is also reflected in the online stratosphere. Benoit (2017) argues that rhetors can destroy reputations by choosing only to target character or behavior and not always both. This is because audiences will assume a poor character based on harmful behavior or that harmful behavior is likely to occur based on poor character.

We would argue that character attacks lend themselves quite clearly to a stronger argument about the behavior we can anticipate and this relationship is clearly reflected in gendered political memes. The reason that character is more consequential than action is that poor behavior is often, but not always, a sign of poor character, but poor character functions innately and often drives actions – thus creating a logical fit between the two.

What is disturbing about the nature of political discourse, as demonstrated in these attack memes, is the antiquated presentation of what women are capable of accomplishing in national politics. Such juvenile portrayals of Kamala Harris as a "HO" or

labeling her life story as a "blow by blow" tale might be expected in the lowbrow humor of memes. However, due to their often biting social commentary (Barton et al., 2020), these memes may contribute to an uneven communicative environment for female candidates and normalize an unsettling new rulebook for acceptable campaign decorum (Anderson, 2011).

As we lean further into the online world with the rise of digitally synthesized images, it is likely that identifying the legitimacy of claims about candidates and other political issues will become even more challenging. After all, we are already experiencing the onslaught of AI-generated visual content. One estimate reveals that 71% of images on social media come entirely from AI (Elad, 2025). Alarmingly, research also demonstrates that memes which were fully generated by AI were rated higher overall in humor, creativity and shareability than those created by humans alone or humans with AI assistance (Wu et al., 2025). The writing on the wall is that attack memes in the future will be pumped out at such a high volume that it will be almost impossible to address them with a counter-narrative, unless those defending against attacks adopt a similar strategy. Additionally, an enormous volume of machine-generated meme attacks in the future would likely function to further suppress voter turnout. We know from previous studies of attack discourse in campaigns that traditional message forms, such as advertisements, social media posts, and debates can have a negative effect on voter attitudes and engagement (Galasso et al., 2023). Therefore, it should not be a huge inductive leap to suggest that exponentially increasing the sheer volume of attack would consequently increase the intensity of the effects previously seen in the academic literature. At the risk of running too far afield, it may lead us to a futuristic battle of bot versus bot in the meme arena. One thing remains clear, if healthy political discourse is to survive, perhaps voters will need to be more involved and more educated than at any other time in political history.

References

- >Anderau, G., & Barbarrusa, D. (2024). The function of memes in political discourse. *Topoi*, 43, 1529–546. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-024-10112-0>
- >Anderson, K. V. (2011). "Rhymes with blunt": Pornification and U.S. political culture. *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 14(2), 327–368. <https://doi.org/10.1353/rap.2010.0228>
- >Barton, M. H., Stein, K. A. & Church, S. H. (2020). The disruptive power of memes: The carnivalesque and Kevin Spacey's place in the Weinstein Moment. *Relevant Rhetoric*, 11, 1–21.
- >Bebić, D. & Volarevic, M. (2018). Do not mess with a meme: The use of viral content in communicating politics. *Communication & Society*, 31, 43–56. <https://doi.org/10.15581/003.31.35689>
- >Beganovich, A. & Beganovich, E. (2026). *Top 10 meme statistics 2026 that expose viral power shifts*. <https://www.amraandelma.com/best-meme-statistics/>
- >Benoit, W. L. (2017). Criticism of actions and character: Strategies for persuasive attack extended. *Relevant Rhetoric*, 8, 1–17.
- >Benoit, W. L., & Dorries, B. (1996). Dateline NBC's persuasive attack on Walmart. *Communication Quarterly*, 44(4), 463–477. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463379609370032>
- >Benoit, W. L., Stein, K. A., & Barton, M. H. (2024). *Persuasive attack: Threatening reputations in public discourse*. Peter Lang. <https://doi.org/10.3726/b21906>
- >Beschloss, M. (2016, November 8). What makes the 2016 election unique in history. *PBS News*. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/makes-2016-election-unique-history>

- >Bolton, A. (2024, July 9). Senate Democrats vent doubts Biden can beat Trump. *The Hill*. <https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/4762856-senate-doubts-biden-beat-trump/>
- >Cerja, C., Nave, N. D., Winfrey, K. L., Palczewski, C. H., & Hahner, L. A. (2024). Misogynoir and the *public woman*: Analog and digital sexualization of women in public from the Civil War to the era of Kamala Harris. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 110(1), 74-100. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630.2023.2192262>
- >Chmel, K., Savin, N., & Delli Carpini, M. X. (2024). Making politics attractive: Satirical memes and attention to political information in the new media environment. *International Journal of Communication*, 18, 2639-2660. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3289145>
- >Crockett, Z. (2017, January 23). Donald Trump is the only US president ever with no political or military experience. *Vox*. <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2016/11/11/13587532/donald-trump-no-experience>
- >Davis, C. B., Glantz, M. & Novak, D. R. (2016). "You can't run your SUV on cute. Let's go!": Internet memes as delegitimizing discourse. *Environmental Communication*, 10, 62-83. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2014.991411>
- >Dawkins, R. (1976). *The selfish gene*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0376892900025200>
- >Desilver, D. (2022, November 16). Few former presidents have run for their old jobs—or anything else—after leaving office. *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/11/16/few-former-presidents-have-run-for-their-old-jobs-or-anything-else-after-leaving-office/>
- >Diamond, J. (2016, August 8). *Trump supporters and opponents see the same traits—but arrive at different conclusions*. Medium. https://medium.com/@julie_diamond/trump-supporters-and-opponents-see-the-same-traits-but-arrive-at-different-conclusions-e7735f5e6b9
- >DuBosar, E. (2022). Assessing differences in the framing of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump during the 2016 presidential election. *Society*, 59(2), 169–180. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-021-00659-8>
- >Dunn, B. S. (2024, July 23). Megyn Kelly says Kamala Harris 'slept her way' into politics. *Newsweek*. <https://www.newsweek.com/megyn-kelly-kamala-harris-slept-way-politics-1928922>
- >Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109(3), 573–598. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.109.3.573>
- >Elad, B. (2025, December 15). *AI in social media tools statistics 2026: Uncover what's shaping the future*. SQ Magazine. <https://sqmagazine.co.uk/ai-in-social-media-tools-statistics/>
- >Elliott, P. (2024, June 28). Inside Biden's debate disaster and the scramble to quell Democratic panic. *Time*. <https://time.com/6993760/joe-biden-debate-disaster-democratic-panic/>
- >Farley, R. (2015, November 25). Bogus meme targets Trump. *FactCheck.org*. <https://www.factcheck.org/2015/11/bogus-meme-targets-trump/>
- >Fiske, S. T., Cuddy, A. J. C., Glick, P., & Xu, J. (2002). A model of (often mixed) stereotype content: Competence and warmth respectively follow from perceived status and competition. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82(6), 878–902. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.82.6.878>
- >Galasso, V., Nannicini, T., & Nunnari, S. (2023). Positive spillovers from negative campaigning. *American Journal of Political Science*, 67(1), 5–21. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12610>
- >Halverson, A., & Weeks, B. E. (2023). Memeing politics: Understanding political meme creators, audiences, and consequences on social media. *Social Media + Society*, 9(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231205588>
- >Harold, C. (2007). *OurSpace: Resisting the corporate control of culture*. University of Minnesota Press. <https://doi.org/10.5749/9780816654345>
- >Helens-Hart, R. (2015). Heeding the call: Hillary Clinton's rhetoric of identification and women's human rights at the Fourth World Conference on Women. *Ohio Communication Journal*, 53, 70–86. https://www.ohiocomm.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Helens-Hart-Proof-FINAL_v53.pdf
- >Howley, K. (2016). "I have a drone": Internet memes and the politics of culture. *Interactions: Studies in Communication*, 7, 155–175. https://doi.org/10.1386/iscc.7.2.155_1

- >Icks, M., Samoilenko, S. A., Keohane, J., & Shiraev, E. (2020). Introduction. In S. A. Samoilenko, M. Icks, J. Keohane, & E. Shiraev (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Character Assassination and Reputation Management* (pp.1-8). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315150178-1>
- >Kelly, A. (2016, June 6). Hillary Clinton becomes first woman to top major-party ticket. *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/2016/04/27/475765145/clintons-road-to-the-nomination-was-paved-by-other-women-who-ran>
- >Kelly, S., & Ward, J. (2024, August 2). Kamala Harris secures delegate votes needed to become Democratic nominee. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/kamala-harris-receives-necessary-number-delegate-votes-become-democratic-nominee-2024-08-02/>
- >Kim, S. R., Ibssa, L., & Hensley, S. B. (2024, April 12). Fact checking Trump's claims about 'election integrity'. *ABC News*. <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/fact-checking-trumps-claims-election-integrity/story?id=109171415>
- >Lalancette, M., & Small, T. A. (2020). "Justin Trudeau—I Don't Know Her": An analysis of leadership memes of Justin Trudeau. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 45, 305–325. <https://doi.org/10.22230/cjc.2020v45n2a3445>
- >Lukianova, N., Shteynman, M., & Fell, E. (2019). Political memes in the 2018 presidential campaigns in Russia: Dialogue and conflict. *Empedocles: European Journal of the Philosophy of Communication*, 10, 71–86. https://doi.org/10.1386/ejpc.10.1.71_1
- >Legge, N. J., DiSanza, J. R., Gribas, J., & Shiffler, A. (2012). "He sounded like a vile, disgusting pervert ..." An analysis of persuasive attacks on Rush Limbaugh during the Sandra Fluke controversy. *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, 19, 173–205. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19376529.2012.722468>
- >MacWilliams, M. (2016, January 17). The one weird trait that predicts whether you're a Trump supporter. *Politico*. <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/01/donald-trump-2016-authoritarian-213533/>
- >Madden, E. H. (1952). The enthymeme: Crossroads of logic, rhetoric, and metaphysics. *The Philosophical Review*, 61(3), 368–376. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2182321>
- >Merica, D. (2016, February 29). Who is Hillary Clinton? *CNN*. <https://www.cnn.com/2016/02/10/politics/who-is-hillary-clinton/index.html>
- >Milner, R. M. (2016). *World made meme: Public conversations and participatory media*. MIT Press. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9780262034999.001.0001>
- >Mosanya, L. (2016, November 23). Why Kermit the Frog memes are so popular, according to science. *BBC*. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/38051653/why-kermit-the-frog-memes-are-so-popular-according-to-science>
- >Moussa, M. B., Benmessaoud, S., & Douai, A. (2020). Internet memes as "tactical" social action: A multimodal critical discourse analysis approach. *International Journal of Communication*, 14, 5920–5940.
- >Nash, B. (2025, October 16). *Meme marketing statistics 2025: 98+ stats & insights*. Marketing LTB. <https://marketingltb.com/blog/statistics/meme-statistics/>
- >Nee, R. C., & Maio, M. D. (2019). A "Presidential Look"? An analysis of gender framing in 2016 persuasive memes of Hillary Clinton. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 63(2), 304–321. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2019.1620561>
- >Nissenbaum, A., & Shifman, L. (2015). Internet memes as contested cultural capital: The case of 4chan's /b/ board. *New Media & Society*, 19(4), 483–501. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815609313>
- >Nguyen, K., Workman, M., Purtill, J., & Martino, M. (2024, July 22). How Kamala Harris's run for the US presidency has reignited old racist and sexist tropes. *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-07-23/kamala-harris-us-president-racist-sexist-tropes/104127680>
- >Perreault, G., & Ferrucci, P. (2019). Punishing Brady, redeeming Brady: A fantasy theme analysis of memes from the 2015 Deflategate controversy. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 27(3), 153–168. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15456870.2019.1610761>

- >Reuters (2020, May 28) Fact check: Trump did not call Republicans "the dumbest group of voters." *Reuters*.<https://www.reuters.com/article/world/fact-check-trump-did-not-call-republicans-the-dumbest-group-of-voters-idUSKBN2342DH/>
- >Ross, A. S., & Rivers, D. J. (2019). Internet memes, media frames, and the conflicting logics of climate change discourse. *Environmental Communication*, 13(7), 975–994. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2018.1560347>
- >Rotolo, C., & Smith, G. A. (2026, February 9). *White evangelicals remain among Trump's strongest supporters, but they're less supportive than a year ago*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2026/02/09/white-evangelicals-remain-among-trumps-strongest-supporters-but-theyre-less-supportive-than-a-year-ago/>
- >Seiffert-Brockmann, J. (2020). *Character assassination by memes: Mosquitoes versus elephants*. In S. A. Samoilenko, M. Icks, J. Keohane, & E. Shiraev (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of character assassination and reputation management* (pp. 402–421). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315150178-30>
- >Sforza, L. (2024, June 27). Trump jabs Biden: 'I really don't know what he said at the end of that sentence'. *The Hill*. <https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/4744753-trump-jabs-biden-really-dont-know-what-he-said/>
- >Sharma, H. (2018). Memes in digital culture and their role in marketing and communication: A study in India. *Interactions: Studies in Communication & Culture*, 9(3), 303–318. https://doi.org/10.1386/isc.9.3.303_1
- >Shifman, L. (2013). *Memes in digital culture*. MIT Press. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9429.001.0001>
- >Shiraev, E. B., Keohane, J., Icks, M., & Samoilenko, S. A. (2022). *Character assassination and reputation management: Theory and applications*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429466267>
- >Taylor, J. R., Stein, K. A., & Barton, M. H. (2023). Say it like you meme it: Looking back on COVID-19 memes as an extension of the news cycle. *Northwest Journal of Communication*, 50(1), 59–110.
- >Teresa, C. (2020). Steeled for the challenges: A critical discourse analysis of gendered news frames of Hillary Clinton in battleground coverage of the 2016 Democratic National Convention. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 44(4), 355–375. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859920958023>
- >UConn scholars consider 'historic firsts' of 2024 election. (2024, October 14). *UConn Department of Social and Critical Inquiry*. <https://social-critical-inquiry.uconn.edu/2024/10/14/uconn-scholars-consider-historic-firsts-of-2024-election/>
- >Waterhouse, B. C. (n.d.). *Donald Trump: Campaigns and elections*. UVA Miller Center. <https://millercenter.org/president/trump/campaigns-and-elections>
- >Wendling, M., & Fitzgerald, J. (2025, January 14). Trump would have been convicted if not elected, DoJ report says. *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cpql79pxeqo>
- >Wiggins, B. E., & Bowers, G. B. (2015). Memes as genre: A structural analysis of the memescape. *New Media & Society*, 17(11), 1886–1906. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814535194>
- >Wu, Z., Weber, T., & Müller, F. (2025). One does not simply meme alone: Evaluating co-creativity between LLMs and humans in the generation of humor. In *Proceedings of the 30th International Conference on Intelligent User Interfaces* (pp. 1082–1092). <https://doi.org/10.1145/3708359.3712094>
- >Yourish, K. (2016, June 3). Clinton and Trump have terrible approval ratings. Does it matter? *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/06/03/us/elections/trump-and-clinton-favorability.html>
- >Yang, M. (2024, March 3). Majority of voters think Biden is too old to be effective president, new poll says. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/mar/03/poll-biden-too-old>
- >Zhang, B., & Pinto, J. (2021). Changing the world one meme at a time: The effects of climate change memes on civic engagement intentions. *Environmental Communication*, 15(6), 749–764. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2021.1894197>
- >Zompetti, J. P. (2019). Rhetorical incivility in the Twittersphere: A comparative thematic analysis of Clinton and Trump's tweets during and after the 2016 presidential election. *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric*, 9(1/2), 29–56.

„NARANČASTI CAR, KUČKA I KURVA”: POGRDNI MEMI O TRUMPU, CLINTON I HARRIS

Kevin A. Stein :: Matthew H. Barton

SAŽETAK Ova studija analizira rodno obilježene napade putem mema usmjerene protiv Donalda Trumpa, Hillary Clinton i Kamale Harris tijekom njihovih predsjedničkih kampanja 2016. i 2024. godine, primjenjujući teoriju persuzivnog napada (engl. theory of persuasive attack) Williama Benoita. Taj specifičan oblik poruke, koji često uključuje vizualnu parodiju i satiru, koristi različite strategije napada. Najzastupljeniji su bili napadi usmjereni na samu osobu, uključujući referiranje na rasu, rod i moralnost. Primijenjene strategije uključivale su tvrdnje da je napadnuta osoba počinila djela koja su u skladu s nekom pripisanom osobinom, da je iznosila tvrdnje koje potvrđuju tu osobinu, da se povezuje s osobama koje dijele istu osobinu, da se uspoređuje s osobama koje tu osobinu nemaju te da se osobina prikazuje posebno uvredljivim primjerom. Zabilježeni su i napadi usmjereni na postupke. Oni su uključivali tvrdnje da je napadnuta osoba već ranije počinila određeni čin i da je od njega imala koristi, naglašavanje opsega nastale štete te ukazivanje na nedosljednost. Svaka se strategija zasebno razmatra, zajedno s implikacijama za buduća istraživanja retoričkog utjecaja mema u kontekstu predsjedničke politike, roda i rase.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI

DONALD TRUMP, HILLARY CLINTON, KAMALA HARRIS, MEMI, BENOIT, NAPAD

Bilješka o autorima

Kevin A. Stein :: Sveučilište Southern Utah :: stein@suu.edu

Matthew H. Barton :: Sveučilište Southern Utah :: bartonm@suu.edu