An Ideological Criticism of 2020 Presidential Campaign Ads on YouTube

by Ilea Farrall, Cosumnes River College
Mentor: Georgine Hodgkinson

Abstract

This study's purpose was to analyze and interpret the messages found in 2020 Presidential Campaign advertisements posted on the Democratic and Republican candidates' YouTube channels. It used ideological criticism to analyze the most viewed political ads on that site. This researcher found that Republican candidate Donald Trump's ads were aggressively negative and referenced elements found in various forms of entertainment. In contrast, Joe Biden opted to show personal artifacts and ordinary people. This paper reveals that Donald Trump embraced an ideology that saw politics as cutthroat entertainment while Joe Biden utilized a relational ideology that appealed to the plights of ordinary American citizens.

Introduction

The 2020 election season pitted Republican Donald Trump against Democrat Joe Biden and was host to a slew of new political media contributions. It boasted the highest turnout rate in over a century and led to a dramatic aftermath in the days following November 4th (Schaul et al.). Interesting angles from which such a historic election could be analyzed are endless. However, I believe that political advertising in particular has the potential to reveal a valuable story about this election and the ideologies that drive candidate rhetoric. Advertisements connect and rally voters in the age of the internet. This study looks at advertisements that are disseminated through each candidate's YouTube channel, a political medium that affords them the opportunity to "easily, effectively, and affordably target and distribute advertisements and fundraising videos and reach demographics who are no longer profoundly reliant on mainstream media" (Ricke 60). It considers the messages behind advertisements that have achieved popularity online by engaging with viewers.

The theoretical framework of ideological criticism is used to rhetorically analyze advertisements on each candidate's YouTube channel. This study enters into relatively uncharted territory as ideological criticism is not commonly used to analyze political advertisements in America, instead being used more extensively in analyzing films, plays, and other mediums of popular culture. Like other forms of persuasion considered by ideological critics, political ads tell a story about the candidates and contribute to a larger campaign narrative. Ideological criticism is a powerful way to uncover rhetorical strategy and salient elements within a political party platform. This study is notable for endeavoring to approach political advertising from an underused but valuable theoretical perspective. Evidence gleaned from this analysis allows for the assertion that Donald Trump holds an ideology of politics as being cutthroat entertainment while Joe Biden concentrates on an ideology of politics as a relational exercise between candidates and citizens.

The ideologies that influence political narratives crafted during the 2020 presidential election are linked, at least in part, to the ideologies and beliefs of the candidates themselves. Before taking office in 2016, Donald Trump was a prominent New York businessman who was well known for real estate projects such as skyscrapers, hotels, casinos, and golf courses. His dynamic personality and business acumen in the 1980s granted him a sense of celebrity (Geist). He would emerge into public consciousness once more with the reality-tv show, The Apprentice, in 2004 (Grynbaum and Parker). Before becoming president, Trump cycled through different political parties, but never ended up holding a political office. By contrast, Joe Biden's career before the 2020 campaign was saturated with formal political positions. He served in the United States Senate for 36 years before becoming vice president under the Obama administration. He operated consistently as a lifelong moderate Democrat and was characterized by his willingness to be "available and approachable" to constituents (Palmer).

Literature Review

This study relies on ideological criticism to identify and explore the deep-seated philosophies or ideologies embedded in each candidate's political ads. Ideological criticism focuses on dominant groups—in this case the candidates of the Democratic and Republican parties—and the ways in which they demonstrate a particular ideology or value system in their rhetoric (Payton and Hahn). In order to accomplish this, I analyzed a series of political ads noteworthy for their heavy viewing. Given the extensive audience cultivated by these ads, as well as their high accessibility and interactivity, these artifacts prove worthy of analysis.

A seminal work in the field of ideological criticism is "The Ideological Turn in Modern Criticism" by Philip Wander. This article addressed how ideology was absent in rhetorical criticism and warranted return. In particular, Wander critiqued 20th century rhetorical criticism, explaining that it necessitated that a researcher approach an artifact objectively to identify whether it was persuasive or not. He argued that this approach was dispassionate and by ignoring values, ended up missing a great deal about an artifact. Instead, Wander suggested, criticism should take a step back to look at power structures, not just persuasion, and to make a value judgement as to whether the ideology behind these were good or bad. My ideological criticism of YouTube ads will look at the ideologies held by powerful political figures and make a value judgement as to what parts of the ideology are good or bad, as well as asserting which ideology is ultimately better for democracy. It seeks to identify a candidate's hidden belief system, rather than analyzing their persuasive techniques. References to Aristotelian concepts of ethos, pathos, and logos are used to identify factors in a larger ideology.

In her book Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice, Foss gives a detailed explanation of what ideological criticism is and how it should be conducted (242-248). Foss defines ideology as "a system of ideas or a pattern of beliefs that determines a group's interpretations of some aspect(s) of the world" (237). Ideologies, according to Foss, manifest as beliefs that have possible alternatives and motivate groups of people to act in a particular way (237-238). The revelation of ideologies behind artifacts "identifies existing arrangements and the ideology behind them, calls attention to them, and opens the way for envisioning alternatives to create a better world" (Foss 242). In my ideological criticism, I focus on the beliefs behind the way that candidates participate in politics. These candidates serve as the face of the party in presidential campaigns and set the agenda for the way in which a political party will act. As Foss suggests, the results of the criticism that I employ will be used to call attention to certain ideologies and open up the possibilities for change in American political discourse.

Another helpful resource for ideological criticism, especially as it relates to politics, is Political Researcher Michael Freeden's "Ideology and political theory." This article reviews the way in which ideological studies have been conducted and viewed throughout history, chronicling its evolution and varying acceptability among the scholarly community. Freeden argues that all messaging, in any form, has an ideology behind it that can be analyzed. Furthermore, he asserts that the ideological families apparent in artifacts are not necessarily good or bad and that ideologies can be context-specific and not universal. (Freeden 14-17). Finally, he suggests that ideological analysis consists of "observation, analysis, and interpretation" without an ethical evaluation of truth (Freeden 18). These are considerations that validate the ideological study of political advertising, confirm that ideologies can be good or bad, suggest that a plurality of ideologies should be embraced, and confirms that ideological criticism is a valid process for study. While Freeden makes the assertion that an ethical evaluation should not be made when identifying ideology, I disagree with this statement while agreeing with his other claims. I will make value judgements about ideologies as Wander and Foss suggest. These sources discuss the definition and use of ideological criticism and suggest how ideological criticism should be viewed by practitioners and political researchers at large.

Given the limited number of studies that address broader cultural ideologies behind political advertisements, sources that offer helpful information on political advertising in general are relevant. One such source is the article “Political Advertising” by Lynda Lee Kaid found in the Handbook of Political Communications Research published in 2004. It provides a helpful reference for many of the considerations that go into political advertisements. Providing background to my analysis, Kaid offers an explanation of relevant ways in which to interpret the content of political advertising. It separates advertisements into issue or image ads and negative or positive ads. An issue ad involves a speaker elaborating on the policy positions of a candidate, while an image ad focuses on the personality of a candidate (Kaid 160-165). A negative ad is one that primarily focuses on the issues and image of an opponent, while a positive ad focuses on the issues and image of the candidate (Kaid 163). Another related article useful for this study is “Image Ads and Issue Ads in U.S. Presidential Advertising: Using Videostyle to Explore Stylistic Differences in Televised Political Ads From 1952 to 2000” by Anne Johnston and Lynda Lee Kaid. This study analyzes ad trends using a Videostyle methodology, which involves quantitative analysis of various “verbal, production, and nonverbal components” of television advertisements (Johnston and Kaid 285). This study is relevant for its application of Videostyle, which uses elements that have been adapted in order to conduct this research project. YouTube ads occupy a similar visual medium as the television ads that Videostyle is used for, and YouTube advertisements are often postings of television advertisements. Keeping these political advertising categories in mind, it is appropriate to discuss the methodology of this research project.

Methodology

Before diving into the methodological considerations applied to this study, it is helpful to give a brief overview of internet advertising and the way in which YouTube as a platform operates. YouTube is a popular internet video-sharing service that features free user-generated content that provides a cheap, yet widely trafficked alternative to television advertisements (Ricke 60). A distinct YouTube feature that I take into account during my analysis are thumbnails. Videos on the website all have a “thumbnail,” a graphic representation of the content of a video. This thumbnail can be an image from the content of the video itself, or it can be custom-designed by the user who uploads it onto the site. It provides users with an image representative of the video associated with it and can demonstrate what the owner of a channel wants a viewer to take away from the video itself.

As stated earlier, I used the principles of ideological criticism in order to conduct my study. This study involved looking at artifacts and determining their ideology through a four-step process outlined in Foss’s Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice (243-248). First, I identified the presented elements within the artifacts. These are the basic, objective, and easily observable features of an artifact. Secondly, these presented elements were then analyzed to find the suggested elements that an artifact was trying to portray by its choice in observable elements. Thirdly, an ideology was developed by seeing how the suggested elements came together to form a cohesive belief. Lastly, the ideology was critiqued and analyzed to see how it interacted with its audience. The artifacts in this case were the top three most popular advertisements from each candidate’s YouTube channel. These were the advertisements that received the most views on the channel. Because views are indicative of popularity, this ad selection represented the most consumed and relevant material for determining what sorts of messages resonated with the viewers of the advertisements. This study did not engage with a large breadth of studies, instead choosing to concentrate intensely on the rhetoric and meaning behind a smaller sample. A more expansive view of the composition of political ads could be an interesting consideration in future studies.

This study adapted the various types of content utilized in Videostyle. This includes verbal components like ethos, logos, pathos, and whether or not the content was positive or negative. Nonverbal components take into account who the dominant speaker was, whether there was sound from a voiceover or live source, where the location was, and the way a candidate was dressed. Production components include the length, format

(testimonial, documentary, etc.), and the way something is edited (refer to “Image Ads and Issue Ads in U.S. Presidential Advertising” for a more in-depth look at how Videostyle is utilized). To be clear, the method I used cannot accurately be considered Videostyle. Videostyle is a quantitative method of research, not a rhetorical one. Rather, I used the content suggestions of Videostyle as a basis for the four-step analysis process described in Foss’s work. Videostyle helps in suggesting what elements should be paid attention to, aiding in the first step of the methodological process.

Ad Analysis

This section describes findings derived from the analysis of each of the 2020 candidates’ advertisements. I begin by identifying the elements found in three of Donald Trump’s advertisements and then explain how they suggest the ideology that politics is entertainment that necessitates cutthroat competition. Likewise, the process is repeated with Biden: I identify the elements found in his advertisements and demonstrate that Biden views politics as a relational construct that is best illustrated through a focus on people.

Donald Trump

Donald Trump’s most popular advertisement was titled “Trigger Warning.” The ad presented a speaker who was identified as “Jorge Masvidal UFC Champ,” and talked about how Trump was worthy of the Latino vote. It featured strong verbal components of ethos and elements of both positive and negative appeals. The speaker was a Latino celebrity surrogate who used his experience in sports to outline how Trump was America’s “head coach, and before the global pandemic, [America] was winning Super Bowls” (01:20–01:24). He contrasted Trump’s success with Biden’s, who he compares to “another head coach who’s been in the business for 47 years at every level and never won a… super bowl” (01:37–01:43). The ad did not have any music, instead choosing to feature the sound of a live audience in the background that cheered and booed in appropriate places as the speaker talked. The ad featured bold white text in all-caps that occasionally appeared on-screen to punctuate some of Masvidal’s points. The most significant effect applied to this advertisement occurred when there was a jump-cut to footage of Joe Biden listening to “Despacito.” As it lingered on this footage, the screen faded to black and white. At the end of the ad, the campaign logo was displayed along with the words, “Not Tired of Winning?” (01:46–01:50). The video had a colorful thumbnail that said “Despacito (Gone Wrong)” next to a picture of Biden and a sequence of emojis.

Trump’s second most popular video was “With Joe Biden, China Is In Charge.” This advertisement focused on how American jobs were diminishing due to the rise and stratagems of China. It portrayed China as a direct enemy of American prosperity. After establishing this initial premise, it then went on to suggest that Biden was a supporter of China and would sell out America to China if elected. The ad was negative and focused extensively on Biden and his actions. It did not show any images of Trump; the candidate was only mentioned once in the ad. The advertisements had strong ethos appeal. It was composed of many videoclips and voiceovers of Biden, Biden’s son—Hunter, news reporters, and a testimony by an ordinary citizen. All of these were credible primary and secondary sources. It used pathos by talking about the sorry state of American factories to get viewers to empathize with the plight of people who were losing their jobs. It used logos in giving information about exactly how people were affected and the current trajectory of China’s economy. In the background of the ad there was sad, despondent music. The ad noted that Hunter Biden may have been involved in corrupt business dealings with China and that Joe Biden may have known about these things. The thumbnail shows a moment from the video in which Biden was standing next to the President of China with the words “Watch Now” added onto it.

The last Trump ad I analyzed was “Watch: Past vs Present.” This ad appeared to be composed of two separate ads which had been stitched together into one. The first part of the ad, started from black as the words “Did something Happen to Joe Biden?” slowly faded onto the screen (00:00–00:03). This question presented the central premise of the first part. The ad went on to show comparative footage of Joe Biden in the past and Joe Biden as he appeared in 2020. Biden appeared charismatic and well-spoken in past footage, but

seemed confused and stumbled over words in present footage. Bold, white words were used to display the date and whether it was past or present. A distortion of the words on-screen marked a transition between past and present footage. All of the footage from the present had a dark filter, making the past footage seem bright by comparison. The advertisement featured low, dramatic music that became subdued once the words “What Happened to Joe Biden?” and a black and white picture of a confused-looking Biden faded into place (01:08–01:18). The second part of the advertisement was introduced with an abrupt segue into an image with an American flag and the words, “Commander in Chief” (01:19). This part of the ad featured readable text accompanied with a lens flare effect and had an anonymous announcer. The announcer mentioned the various ways in which Trump had helped America’s defense, stating that he has “rebuilt our military, repaired a broken VA, and eliminated… the world’s deadliest terrorists” (01:25–01:35). The ad featured images of Trump saluting, interacting with members of the military, and staring off into the distance. Some of these actions were edited to be in slow motion. Flags, soldiers, and military vehicles were displayed to the sound of bold and exciting music. The thumbnail of the video featured a picture of a disoriented Biden staring off-camera with the words “Watch Now.”

Collectively, Donald Trump’s advertisement content carries an ideology that suggests that politics are entertainment and cutthroat competitions against opposing forces. In “Trigger Warning,” a sports celebrity, Jorge Masvidal, was introduced to represent Trump’s interests. In the ad, Masvidal used a sport analogy that presented Trump as being the head coach of America who had won the country many super bowls. These comparisons emphasize the entertainment value of politics. Just as one can enjoy the fierce competition and root for their favorite team in football, one can also root for the Republican or Democratic side and argue over which head coach, or candidate is better. The choice of celebrity surrogate suggested that those in sports entertainment are qualified to give opinions on political matters, perhaps because they are able to appreciate the value of winning and see politics as another competition.

Pulling away from the sports comparisons, “Trigger Warning” and the first part of “Watch: Past vs Present,” featured bold white text that looked visually similar to popular internet memes that feature a joke or an interesting or inspirational phrase. These memes serve as a form of entertainment. In addition, the thumbnail of “Trigger Warning” portrayed images that were misleading to the main content of the ad (they did not largely feature Biden having trouble with the song “Despacito”). This falls into the common YouTube trend “clickbait,” in which a thumbnail is loud and attention grabbing, but may not accurately represent the ad. Clickbait thumbnails are often associated with videos whose purpose is entertainment. Thus, the campaign adopted popular internet entertainment trends in order to engage with its audience and show that politics and entertainment can be effectively linked.

“With Joe Biden, China Is in Charge,” continued the trend of linking politics to entertainment. The ad acted similarly to tabloid news, framing Biden as being part of a scandalous relationship with Chinese interests. It featured different news segments and statements made from Biden and his son Hunter in order to track down and reveal these ultimately speculative accusations, sensationalizing Biden’s actions and statements in order to pursue this line of reasoning. This way of organizing ideas created more of an entertaining or shocking story than one that was necessarily substantial.

“Watch: Past vs Present” presents the most compelling case for an entertainment-focused ideology. The first part of the ad resembled a horror movie trailer with the frequent ominous fade-ins from black and reveal of a confused black and white image of Biden near the end of the section. The music was subdued and a bit sinister, and the black filter over Biden’s present-day footage suggested that something horrible had happened to Biden. The distortions when the ad transitioned were reminiscent of the flickering lights or distortion of technology that occur in horror films. By contrast, the second half of “Watch: Past vs Present” presented a much more optimistic and uplifting tone. It used images and transitions that would feel at home in an action movie. Trump stared resolutely off into the distance like an action hero might, and was shown walking and

interacting with the military in slow motion, similar to how an action hero might be portrayed after a particularly exciting scene. Exciting music perfectly accompanied the protagonist of the ad, just as it would accompany an action hero running into danger. The words that appeared on screen were surrounded by a lens flare, a pattern of scattered light that occurs when using camera lens and is found in photographs and films. The decision to artificially insert a lens flare points to the desire of the campaign to associate itself with elements found in film entertainment. This ad associated itself with entertainment by connecting itself to film genres.

All of the advertisements displayed attachments to entertainment in one form or the other, signaling that the Trump campaign perceives political discourse and policy to be like entertainment. What all this entertainment signaling has in common is that it is distinctively negative. In all three of the ad's thumbnails, Biden is portrayed, not Trump. The content of the ads themselves spent much of their time launching negative attacks. This demonstrates the secondary ideology that politics is a cutthroat competition. Trump's particular strategy is to participate in the political competition with the idea that "offense is the best defense." Therefore, in his political advertising he chose to mudsling and tear down the opponent's character (whether they be senile or a traitor) in order to gain the upper hand. Trump is willing to be uncivil and lob harsh accusations in order to secure the win, revealing that his ideological belief is that the particular programming of politics rewards sabotage, much like in reality-tv shows. This focus on politics as entertainment and the use of ruthless cutthroat tactics makes sense in the context of Trump's past experiences. Instead of a past steeped in public service, Trump gained a reputation through his business practices and harsh television persona, logically setting up politics as the next stage in which those values could be expressed.

Joe Biden

Joe Biden's most popular ad was called "Backbone." This ad began with a shot of industrial buildings in Scranton, Pennsylvania, accompanied by an anonymous announcer declaring that "Scranton is a long way from Wall Street" (00:00–00:02). The ad continued to show shots of industrial and suburban areas and then showed a couple of shots of people with masks as the narrator says, "You won't find skyscrapers or big city bankers, just hardworking people that make this country work" (00:03–00:10). The ad then talked about how Joe Biden grew up in middle-class Scranton and showed old footage from Biden's past with labels like "Joe's Childhood Home" and "Joe's Father" (00:12–00:19). The ad declared that Biden entered public service in order to help working-class families. All the while, positive, inspirational music was played in the background. The music dropped to low melodious chords once the ad introduced Donald Trump, who the ad said, "ran for president for himself and for his friends on Wall Street" (00:27–00:32). This narration was accompanied by older footage of Donald Trump standing in front of front of a casino, dancing, and sitting in an office surrounded by advisors, some of which were labeled by their net worth. The ad than segued into a shot of Biden wearing a mask and then images of workers as the announcer said that "For Donald Trump, it's about those at the top. For Joe Biden, it's about the backbone of this nation, working families" (00:33–00:41). The music picked up again when the ad declared that more must be done for workers and small businesses (00:44). The ad continued to show images of workers with masks and footage of Biden interacting with them until the advertisement ended.

The second most popular ad, "Personal," began with an image of Joe Biden getting sworn into the Senate in a hospital. The advertisement was narrated by Biden himself and was made up completely of black and white pictures. The ad went through pictures showing Biden interacting with his family members as Biden narrated personal tragedies in which his wife and daughter were killed in a car accident and his son, Beau Biden, died from Cancer. After he went through these stories, Biden said, "the fact of the matter is, health care is personal to me" (00:36–00:39). He then said that "when he sees the president of the United States trying to eliminate this health care in the middle of a public health crisis, that's personal to me too" (00:43–00:50). When it referenced Trump, the ad showed the White House, rather than any pictures of the Republican candidate. The

picture of the White House was followed by an image of a health worker in a mask and then pictures of Biden wearing a mask in public functions.

The third most popular ad on Biden's channel was "Crossroads." The ad started by showing empty malls, hospitals, and protests as an anonymous announcer declared that "Right now, we're at a crossroads" (00:00–00:03). The ad then showed Trump looking relatively nonchalant as the ad labeled him as someone who is "determined to divide us" (00:06–00:08). Both this footage and the footage of gassed protestors that followed had a dark filter applied to them. Colors got more vibrant as footage switched to Joe Biden walking down stairs in slow motion to the reception of enthusiastic supporters. The ad pivoted to showing manufacturing workers, small business owners, a nurse, a mom and her child on a computer screen, and a family biking. The ad ended with a shot of a suburban skyline as the viewer's perspective moved to the right and the words "Opportunity for Us All" were displayed (00:24–00:27).

The elements portrayed in these advertisements came together to reveal an ideology that suggests that politics should be a relational affair that serves primarily to connect ordinary people. "Backbone" started by showing middle-class buildings from Scranton to assert that Joe Biden is a layperson who is just like the average American. It showed pictures of Biden's childhood and past in order for the viewer to get acquainted to Biden as a person. The advertisement's labeling of "Joe's Childhood Home" and "Joe's Father" used Biden's first name in order to doctor a sense of familiarity and closeness. By contrast, it positioned Trump as being rich and far removed from the concerns of ordinary people, and thusly, unable to connect with and understand the average person. Similarly, "Personal" also went through and exposed Biden's past and struggles, granting viewers an inside look into Biden's personal life. Biden was surrounded by his loved ones in this ad, while the mention of Trump only showed the White House from the outside, stripping away all references to Trump as a person and relational human being and replacing it with the sterile picture of a building. This helped to create the impression that Trump is distant from the average person, and unable to perceive that they need health care. Biden's choice to be the speaker for "Personal" demonstrates further the need to create a sense of intimacy and closeness between himself and the watchers.

All three of the ads liberally displayed people, whether they were looking directly into the camera or actively in motion. These people all wore casual clothing and masks. The casual clothing showed an informality that is associated with occasions that are more light-hearted and fun, such as the type that might occur near well-known friends and family. Both Biden and these ordinary people all wore masks showing that Biden has the same pandemic health concerns as them, and thus acts in the same way. This was contrasted by the ad's depictions of Trump that never showed him wearing a mask.

The advertisements function in such a way as to not merely make it appear as if Biden cares about ordinary people, but to imply that he is one of the ordinary people, growing up and being willing to share that he has the same problems and concerns as them. The advertisements were full of pathos. The emphasis on people is what makes Biden's ideology of relational politics apparent.

Results

These disparate ideologies inevitably affect the way that viewers and campaigners are encouraged to think about politics. Trump's entertainment-focused ideology means that his political material is more accessible and desirable for the masses. It encourages participation in political movements because they are presented in a way that is competitive and fun. However, while this may be the case, it also trivializes the gravity of governance. By making the battle for the White House seem like it is just a fun competition where you root for your favorite team, less formal conduct and a willingness to bend rules is justified as governance is divorced from public service. Trump's particular brand of entertainment involves utilizing cutthroat tactics that scandalize and utilize any semblance of weakness in an attempt to bring down competitors and win. This brutality in politics may glean results and attention in the media since it is distinct and attention-grabbing in and of itself,

but it also encourages people to stretch the truth for novelty and may lead to increased polarization as groups attack each other. Trump's ideology has the potential to increase political accessibility and attention, arguably encouraging citizens to participate more or be more informed in governance, but this benefit is offset by the potential dangers that such an ideology could hold on the integrity and cooperation important to politics. Overall, the cutthroat entertainment ideology that Trump practices is dangerous to democratic institutions.

Biden's ideology of relational politics takes Lincoln's declaration that governments should be "of the people, by the people, for the people" to heart by placing a heavy focus on ordinary people and the way that a politician should relate to them ("The Gettysburg Address"). He aims to appease the majority of the population by forming connections with middle-class groups, but his dedication to understanding the median of Americans prevents him from crafting policies that take into account those different from the archetypal constituent. Biden's advertisements claim to champion the needs of the middle-class who are the "backbone" of America, but this excludes the interests of the rich and the poor. Richer citizens may be dissatisfied with the state of governance and take their assets elsewhere, while poorer citizens may find themselves oppressed as their petitions fall on ears that are not attuned to them. Arguably, what citizens want the most may not be the best for them, so by emphasizing politics as relational, and then potentially breaking those contracts in an effort to do what is best for the country, a politician could breach public trust in politics and create an environment of cynicism. This ideology has its flaws and potential pitfalls, but notably, its aims serve to ensure a majority rule, an important feature of participatory democracy. The potential danger of future cynicism is something that could be avoided should the ideology adapt to be something that is not purely relational or should the candidate effectively convince the public that certain policies are in their best interests. Biden's ideology is a safer and more responsible one for the conservation of democracy. Its potential problems can be more easily resolved and it requires a proximity to people that necessitates transparency in order to be effective. Thus, its problems can be kept in check by the American public.

Conclusion

This analysis of the ideologies behind the 2020 candidates' YouTube videos found that Donald Trump displayed an ideology that embraced politics as cutthroat entertainment, while Joe Biden displayed an ideology that embraced politics as a relational exercise designed to connect to average American people. This information allows for the assessment of future political discourse based on revealed ideologies. In light of election results, this study is also able to point out which of the ideologies most resonated with the American people. This knowledge enables political participants to advocate for ways in which the political system might improve.

The research conducted in this paper builds upon the theoretical groundwork of ideological criticism by expanding the reach of previous research to a new medium. Further research could use ideological criticism to look at third party political advertisements or compare the ideologies found in this paper to ideologies from the same candidates that may be apparent in different advertising mediums. It is hoped that this analysis will ultimately help democratic citizens recognize behaviors in the candidates that are consistent with the revealed ideologies and appropriately adapt their discourse in response.

Works Cited

Biden, Joe. “Backbone | Joe Biden for President 2020.” YouTube, 30 July 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_dxotPTrXE . Accessed 28 Nov. 2020.

---. “Crossroads | Joe Biden for President 2020.” YouTube, 23 July 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=_zwKa1tfxxE . Accessed 28 Nov. 2020.

---. “Personal | Joe Biden for President 2020.” YouTube, 3 Sept. 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=4WMRz5fmgIw . Accessed 28 Nov. 2020.

Foss, Sonja K. Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and practice. 5th ed., Waveland Press, 2017, Google Books, https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=zJ4vDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR1&dq=rhetorical+criticism+foss&ots=JN2AbInGBU&sig=1iyZVTrcriucuwjYCPUzBewc9wU#v=onepage&q=rhetorical%20criticism%20foss&f=false. Accessed 13 Nov. 2020.

Freeden, Michael. “Ideology and political theory.” Journal of Political Ideologies, vol. 11, no. 1, 8 Aug. 2006, pp. 3-22, Taylor & Francis Online, https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.losrios.edu/doi/full/10.1080/13569310500395834. Accessed 14 Nov. 2020.

Geist, William E. “The Expanding Empire of Donald Trump.” The New York Times, 8 Apr. 1984, https://nytimes.com/1984/04/08/magazine/the-expanding-empire-of-donald-trump.html?pagewanted=3. Accessed 13 Nov. 2020.

“The Gettysburg Address.” History, 18 Nov. 2019, www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/gettysburg-address. Accessed 29 Nov. 2020.

Grynbaum, Michael and Ashley Parker. “Donald Trump the Political Showman, Born on ‘The Apprentice.’” The New York Times, 16 July 2016, https://nytimes.com/2016/07/17/business/media/donald-trump-apprentice.html. Accessed 13 Nov. 2020.

Johnston, Anne and Lynda Lee Kaid. “Image Ads and Issue Ads in U.S. Presidential Advertising: Using Videostyle to Explore Stylistic Differences in Televised Political Ads From 1952 to 2000.” Journal of Communication. Vol. 52, no. 2, 10 Jan. 2002, pp.281-300, Web.standford.edu, https://web.stanford.edu/class/comm1a/readings/johnston-image-issue.pdf. Accessed 14 Nov. 2020.

Kaid, Lynda Lee. “Political advertising.” Handbook of political communication research, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004, pp. 155-202, Google Books, https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=2q-PAgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA155&dq=political+advertising+kaid&ots=ToWfOHG_WW&sig=SAsdTbEFFfZQT8vHSq6eaScckqA#v=onepage&q=political%20advertising%20kaid&f=false. Accessed 14 Nov. 2020.

Palmer, Nancy Doyle. “Joe Biden: ‘Everyone Calls Me Joe.’” Washingtonian, 1 Feb. 2009, www.washingtonian.com/2009/02/01/joe-biden-everyone-calls-me-joe/. Accessed 29 Nov. 2020.

Payton, Scott T. and Linda K. Hahn. “6.4: Rhetorical Methodologies.” Introduction to Communication, Humboldt State University, 15 Aug. 2020, LibreTexts, https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Communication/Book%3A_Introduction_to_Communication_(Paynton_and_Hahn)/06%3A_Communication_Research/6.04%3A_Rhetorical_Methodologies. Accessed 14 Nov. 2020.

Ricke, LaChrystal D. The Impact of YouTube on U.S. Politics. Lexington Books, 2014, EBSCOhost, https://ezproxy.losrios.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=860070&site=ehost-live&scope=site. Accessed 13 Nov. 2020.

Schaul, Kevin, et al. “2020 turnout is the highest in over a century.” The Washington Post, 15 Nov. 2020, www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/elections/voter-turnout/. Accessed 13 Nov. 2020.

Trump, Donald J. “Trigger Warning.” YouTube, 19 Oct. 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPZkdhubStI. Accessed 15 Nov. 2020.

---. “Watch: Past vs Present.” YouTube, 17 Aug. 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5y8QA1wCcc. Accessed 28 Nov. 2020.

---. “With Joe Biden, China Is In Charge.” YouTube, 19 Aug. 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kwhnao15rmI. Accessed 28 Nov. 2020.

Wander, Philip. “The Ideological Turn in Modern Criticism.” Central States Speech Journal, vol. 34, no. 1, 1983, pp. 1-18. Taylor & Francis Online, https://doi.org/10.1080/10510978309368110. Accessed 29 Nov. 2020.